

## INTRODUCTION

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The image in figure 1 is a screenshot of the hacking of the website of the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water responsible for the country's electricity in April 2012 by a group called Raise Your Voice, a self-proclaimed offshoot of the global hackers collective Anonymous.<sup>1</sup> Protesting poor living conditions and inadequate social services, the hackers not only crashed the government agency's site but also substituted one text for another. Reenacting an electric cut, they transformed the cursor into a flashlight that needs to be moved around in order to light up an otherwise dark screen. This act of hacking defaces the ministry website through a textual and technological performance that involves viewers as active participants who need to move the cursor in order to reveal the text. But what is being exposed through this hacking? Is it the text itself, the reading practice directed toward it, or the failing nation-state unable to fulfill its duties vis-à-vis its citizens? What writing genre, aesthetics, and critique of power does the flashlight make legible?



Figure 1. "Electricity is cut off." Ministry of Energy and Water, April 16, 2012, <http://www.energyandwater.gov.lb/>.

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The cursor-turned-flashlight conjures up the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). The flashlight was the invariable war fetish, always close by, always at hand to confront the absence of the state, the unpredictability of darkness. Affecting the eyes' sensitivity to light and obscurity, the act of hacking forces the pupils to dilate and contract to access more light, more text, and more memory. The intervention has specific physiological effects that knock down and open up, shut down and light up, revealing multiple experiences and calls for action. Understanding this process requires an engagement with the question of affect, which characterizes these acts of writing and performance. The “affective” hacking exposes and brings to light texts and histories arising from the intersection of the metaphorical and the material; the body and the screen; and the act of contestation both as a writing practice and as a cyberattack that crashes a website and forces the eye to adjust in order to expose a new text, an old one.

Involving acts of infiltration and reading, the digital performance draws in the viewer as a victim of governmental neglect and war violence, and as a compulsive subject who cannot but click and move the cursor. Hacking intervenes not by enlightening citizens or by providing them with hitherto unavailable information that would heighten their political consciousness, but rather by enticing them to shed a light that comes from the present and from the past, and to experience this information as something unacceptable, linked to war trauma and the ongoing withdrawal if not collapse of the state. Shedding light as opposed to enlightening, the flashlight as opposed to electric light, constitutes a visual and affective exposure (*fadh*)<sup>2</sup> that shames, makes a scene, causes a scandal, and reveals in the process new codes of writing. What are these codes and who are their authors?

The code writers or hackers in this example “are simply a group of people who could not bear sitting in silence, watching all the crimes and violations.”<sup>3</sup> These people are viewers who transcend their condition of spectatorship in order to hack and write, introducing a new way of seeing, showing, and exposing. As the act of hacking turns off the screen, it puts the light at the fingertips of other viewers or browsers who now discover but also activate the scene of scandal online. This interplay between hackers and browsers constitutes an economy of writing and contestation that requires a set of conceptual tools that account for processes of simultaneity, compulsion, and commitment. Specifically, how do we begin to theorize this inability to remain silent and not to expose, hack, leak, click, and share? Is this a strategy of confrontation or an in-

ability not to confront that goes viral, mobilizing more and more viewers and hackers who cannot but see, show, share, and expose?

The political intervention arises from a digital condition affecting bodies, texts, and models of consciousness wherein “silence is a crime,” and breaking the silence is staged through modes of exposure and circulation taking place “whether in the streets or the Internet.” It is the “group of people” such as the one discussed above who act both by design and by compulsion, both voluntarily and involuntarily, that the book investigates, examining how their acts, examined collectively against the backdrop of technological development, political upheavals, and cultural tradition, are redefining the meaning of Arab culture. Drawing on literary studies, media studies, and digital humanities, and focusing on the Arab world in a transnational context, *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* examines the radical transformations affecting the way stories are told, dissent is expressed, and canons are produced in the new millennium.

## WRITING CODES

The Internet unleashed scandal and exposure—mediated by acts of hacking, leaking, and whistleblowing—both in the Arab world and beyond. The Arab practice of *faḍḥ* (exposing, making a scene, shaming, causing a scandal) is an act of last resort, performed in the street by people reduced to using their bodies to fight back, as happened in Egypt’s Tahrir Square and elsewhere in the Arab world starting in 2010. While talk shows on satellite TV, starting in the mid-1990s,<sup>4</sup> have showcased this embodied scene of *faḍḥ*, traditionally associated with the vulgar and depicted in works by the great Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006), the Internet transformed it into a new stage for political confrontation involving acts of hacking and leaking but also violent confrontations on social media, with insults and outbursts violating traditional codes of civility (*adab*). The overlapping of traditional scene-making (*faḍḥ/faḍīḥa*)<sup>5</sup> with what could be referred to as the scandal.com culture (WikiLeaks, YouTube, etc.) characterizing “the digital age” that I refer to in the subtitle has ushered in a new generation of activists and bloggers, and hackers and leakers, who are increasingly occupying the position of the “intellectual speaking truth to power.” This book sheds light on the scene of the hacker and leaker’s “truth” by examining the toll that its speaking takes on the body. What new models of

commitment are emerging from this affective economy? What is the role in this new environment of the traditional intellectuals who produced literature, established the canon, and confronted power at earlier times? What literary and political anxieties are playing out in this new landscape?

With the Arab uprisings starting in 2010, intellectuals (*muthaqqafūn*) who saw it as a part of their commitment (engagement, *iltizām*) to intervene and speak truth to power were disoriented, unable to foresee, engage, or understand who this “group of people who could not bear sitting in silence” were or where they had come from, much less how they were able to mobilize or what affective “truths” they were speaking. While these intellectuals were trying to find their bearings in a precarious environment, Arab bloggers and activists on the ground mounted campaigns to shatter the silence in the face of violations and atrocities, organizing street protests and leaking images and videos of abuse predating if not precipitating the uprisings.<sup>6</sup> Practicing exposure (*faḍḥ*) against authoritarian regimes, this “group of people” also confronted the disorientation and at times complicity of intellectuals with power. Egyptian activist and blogger Rasha Azb denounced and lamented the generation of author Bahaa Taher, which, despite its long history of activism, ended up supporting military rule and defending the “despotic state” in 2013.<sup>7</sup> A new model of contestatory politics and affective writing tied to acts of leaking, hacking, and exposure has put in question the role of intellectuals and of their corresponding media platforms and material culture from newspapers to novels.<sup>8</sup>

For this older cadre of thinkers, the novel was at the center of the production of political consciousness. This interpretation has traditionally drawn on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*; Taha Hussein’s and Tawfiq al-Hakim’s notions of *adab* (literature, culture, civility) and *udabāʾ* (authors-intellectuals); and Jean-Paul Sartre’s *littérature engagée* or Souheil Idriss’s *iltizām* (commitment).<sup>9</sup> The valuation of individual privacy and the narrative of modern subjectivity more generally have been traced to the rise of the novel from the eighteenth century onward. Nancy Armstrong argues that the “self-enclosed and internally coherent identity” of the modern subject is intimately tied to “eighteenth-century epistemology and moral philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> Examining the British novel’s role in producing this identity, she argues that “the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same.”<sup>11</sup> In this vein, Anderson famously argues that modern subjects started imagining themselves as members of the same national community that stretches into the past through reading practices and the circulation of novels and newspapers in the

nineteenth century. “The novel and the newspaper,” writes Anderson, “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.”<sup>12</sup> The reading practices that Anderson identifies give rise to homogenous secular time at the basis of national consciousness. This book examines the constellation of modernity that Anderson and others theorized, explaining what happens to the subject of modernity, and of Arab modernity specifically, in the digital age. How are interconnected concepts such as nation, community, power, intellectual, author, and novel recoded or hacked in the Arab world in the twenty-first century?

The novel as edifice and main framework for interpretation shaping the microcosmos of the public sphere and generating political consciousness is no longer central to the landscape that this book examines. A new consciousness—a digital consciousness—is emerging from coded, fragmented, viral, and hard-to-read texts. *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* examines novels that become cropped, marked, and circulated online, often used as incriminating evidence against their authors, warranting jail or death. It investigates the ways in which the notion of online “followers” who leak, hack, and raid transform our understanding of “public” and “readership” and of the effects of reading practices, given the models of circulation that Anderson identified. The viral and fragmented texts and their reading practices online have drastic implications on models of writing and contestation, and literary meaning and canon formation, both in the Arab world and beyond.

In Ahmed Naji’s *Using Life (Istikhdām al-Ḥayāt)* (2014), it is not only the case that “[t]he city branches out. The city beats, the city bleeds,” but also that the author function and the work and its reception proliferate and burst at the seams.<sup>13</sup> The launching of this graphic novel by Egyptian blogger, author, and journalist Ahmed Naji took the shape of a vernissage—a literary and artistic event showcasing books but also T-shirts and mugs featuring the illustrations of Ayman Al Zorkany. Set in a dystopian Cairo following the 2011 uprising, the novel depicts a landscape of street closures and repression and traces the emergence of secret organizations and a new generation engaging in graffiti art and subversion tactics. Less than two years following its publication, a selection from the novel published in the literary journal *Akhbār al-Adab* triggered a lawsuit by a reader, who accused the author of violating public morality. When reading Naji’s sexually explicit passages, this reader experienced a “drop in blood pressure.” The lawsuit landed the author in jail; it also earned him the Pen Award and international solidarity that started on social-media platforms

before moving to the op-ed pages of international newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*.<sup>14</sup> Literary critics who engage Naji's work thus have to contend with new writing genres, art practices, affective collapse, lawsuits, imprisonment, online activism, and global literary systems.<sup>15</sup> This book examines the intertwining of those events and practices that are recoding the literary in the digital age.

While Naji's narrator in *Using Life* is involved with hacker groups seeking to produce something akin to WikiLeaks, Abdo Khal's narrator in *Throwing Sparks* (*Tarmī bi-Sharar*) (2014)<sup>16</sup> leaks gruesome torture and abuse videos. The narrator in this Saudi novel, which won the Abu Dhabi-based International Prize for Arabic Fiction, also known as the Arabic Booker,<sup>17</sup> acts like activists or jailers who leak videos of detainees being beaten and tortured. While the novel points to a mimetic relation between leaks and literature, the author function is further recoded by the hacking of Khal's own Twitter account in 2012, engulfing the author in the fiction that his work embodies. By going online, the author has permanently entered his text, thereby revealing a new entanglement between fiction and reality, literary production and online circulation. This requires an investigation of the fiction of scandals and leaks playing out within the text and conditioning the text's production, circulation, and reception.

With online writing and circulation, and the preponderance of Gulf-based prizes dedicated primarily to the Arabic novel, the novel is being celebrated, yet its "literary" value is being established in completely new ways. *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* examines the meaning of Arab culture as it arises from the breakdown in canon formation due to lawsuits by disgruntled readers and due to new prizes, global market trends, and the decentralization of cultural production. How significant is the fact that the most sought-after prizes are situated in the Gulf? Does this geographical and economic shift herald a change in the meaning of Arab culture as the product of the *Nahda* (the Arab Renaissance)—a process that shaped political and ideological models in the region?<sup>18</sup> This book tries to answer that question by focusing on examples from Egypt and the Gulf and by examining the effects of economic, technological, and political developments on new definitions of literature and culture.

Khal and Naji's works reveal new ways of writing and of "being public" that no longer correspond to a literary model of *Nahda bildung* or to a subversive model of *jīl al-sittīnāt* (the 1960s generation).<sup>19</sup> This new novel enters into a global literary system yet remains untranslatable, carrying over a materiality that could not be fully subsumed or fully represented.<sup>20</sup> A new writing emerg-

ing from leaking and the fiction of scandal as well as untraceable tweets and data mining, online fights and trolling campaigns, and flickering texts that appear and disappear, can no longer be studied under a microscope or in a lab. It has become impossible to engage these texts and political practices by trying to identify their origin, commonality, structure, and essence, thereby reproducing the old-fashioned encyclopedic study and nomenclature imposed on literature, culture, and politics. Moments of crossing (translation, world literature, readership) are adopting alternative pathways and producing different effects and relations that resist through untranslatability what Emily Apter identifies as a liberal economy of literary circulation that crosses borders yet keeps them intact.<sup>21</sup> Examples such as those of Naji and Khal force us to begin to chart the characteristics not of a *literature 2.0* but of *literary studies 2.0*. It is within this new model of literary studies, shaping and being shaped by technological shifts and political developments that arise from the Arab world yet also occur globally, that this book is situated.

Approaching hacking (*tahkīr*, *ikhtirāq*), leaking (*tasrīb*), revealing (*ifshāʾ*), proliferation (*tafashshī*), and exposure and scene-making (*faḍḥ*) as writing and political practices, as well as conceptual tools for understanding Arab culture in the digital age, *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals: Arab Culture in the Digital Age* explores contemporary writing practices and activism against the backdrop of new media and the Arab uprisings. Moving beyond the “codes” of modern Arabic literature, culture, and politics, it theorizes a new intertwining of aesthetics and politics by exploring affective forms of protest, incivility (*qillat adab* or “lack of *adab*”), digital consciousness, hacking and cyber-raiding, and knowledge and fiction as leaks and scandals. While *adab* has been examined as a comparative practice that could be traced to the nineteenth century,<sup>22</sup> this book contests the association between Arab subjectivity and the project of *adab* (as *bildung*) and *taʿdīb* (disciplining, punishing, rendering civil).<sup>23</sup> To exploit the instability of *adab*—to explore its security holes and identify its leaks—is to disentangle it from *taʿdīb* (disciplining) and from the emphasis on Arab literary and technological borrowing from the West—starting with the rise of the novel and the modern subject to the entrenchment of colonial institutions and the more recent advent of satellite TV and the Internet. In this light, this book examines the intersections between the digital and the subversive in the Arab tradition, tying Twitter to the classical genre of *akhbār* (news, anecdotes, lore), leaking and hacking to practices of exposure (*faḍḥ*), and contemporary leakers and hackers to mystics and jinn. I explore comparatively Arabic registers of

leaks and scandals as they shape and are shaped by transnational contexts and the classical tradition. The focus on the Arab world in dialogue with hacking and leaking scandals and the history and theories of leaking and scene-making makes the Arab world not so much a case study but rather a framework to reflect theoretically on new definitions of literature and culture, on their relation to the political and the digital, and on their genres and critiques.

## DIGITAL WORLD-MAKING

In “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” Gilles Deleuze argues that technology and new media in the age of corporations accelerated models of circulation that made resistance impossible.<sup>24</sup> Deleuze ties in the rise of the corporation with a “soul” and marketing apparatuses to new media’s role in forging post-subjects. Deleuze writes: “We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become ‘*dividuals*,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘*banks*.’”<sup>25</sup> These new societies of control have undermined the modern institutions of the family, the army, and the school, theorized by Foucault as the sites for the production of modern subjectivity, and cast doubt on the ability of unions to resist through traditional means. From the *individual* and the Deleuzian *dividual*, we move with the practices of digital, literary, and political *fadh* explored in this book to the *outdividual*, wherein the inside could never be veiled, and the subject’s interiority could never be maintained. This “inside” is compulsively shown and must be shown<sup>26</sup> as part of an affective economy of hacking, leaking, and scene-making.

Foucauldian notions of political subjectivity but also of discursivity, power, representation, and surveillance and the primacy of the gaze that informed readings of modern literature and culture, along with postcolonial theory and *Nahda* studies starting with Timothy Mitchell,<sup>27</sup> need to be questioned in the new landscape I identify.<sup>28</sup> Foucault’s disciplinary model obscures the new scenes of writing, performance, and acts of contestation and violence leaking out of novels (and making novels leak) and videos analyzed in this book’s various chapters. Cyberspace has resuscitated if not amplified the Place de Grève<sup>29</sup> and its spectacle of cruelty, as seen in leaked videos of torture and humiliation, from Khal’s depictions in *Throwing Sparks* and the Abu Ghraib pictures during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the gruesome performances of ISIS’s head- and limb-severing starting in 2012. This violent staging of the body of the condemned



with which Foucault inaugurates *Discipline and Punish*, and which allegedly moved behind closed doors with the march of modernity and the suturing of its coherent subject, has now escaped from—leaked out of—secret prisons and police stations. Likewise, the public festivals controlled and tamed by British colonialism and a complicit bourgeoisie, as Mitchell argues in *Colonizing Egypt*, have returned to center stage as Arab productions on social media and streets and in new writings. This return thus requires a critical attention to the untamed as such, which is unfolding in confrontations online, in literature, on the street, and on TV screens, recoding in the process the meaning of literature and culture.<sup>30</sup> From the demise of the ocularcentric or visual order of modernity and its unified and all-seeing gaze we move in the digital age to flickering screens and dilating pupils.

Political and epistemological notions of modernity as theorized by Foucault and taken up by Mitchell have been too quickly applied to cyberspace and new media in light of recent Arab political developments. The Internet, given its inception as a closed environment for communication experts and enthusiasts, became identified as a Habermasian public sphere,<sup>31</sup> namely a forum for sharing and debating ideas intrinsic to democratizing processes. Assessing the success of political change but also evaluating the “causes” of the so-called Arab Spring led to questions such as: Was democracy achieved or did the revolution fail? Is the absence of a clear political agenda on the part of activists to blame for the failure of the Arab uprisings? These questions and their underlying assumptions and interpretive models moved us away from the nondiscursive, the uncivil, the unruly, the scandalous, the affective, and the leaking and fleeting texts, words, and images. Understanding new texts and practices requires a theorization that would confront both the Orientalist reading of the unruly mob<sup>32</sup> or the irrational oriental Other, as well as the projection of a particular model of the liberal democracy onto contemporary Arab culture and politics in an allegedly post-Orientalist framework. How can we read other spheres and publics that neither grow out of the eighteenth-century salons nor fit Habermas’s model of the rational and ethical subject?<sup>33</sup> And could we think of political configurations and dissent that arise from untamed spaces of interaction and affective writing practices without forgoing, altogether, the “subject” as a historical, philosophical, and psychological narrative of the self?

In *Publics and Counterpublics* Michael Warner critiques Habermas and redefines his model, specifying that the public sphere is an ideal that was, from the start, fraught with contradictions, and that Habermas himself never tried to

recuperate it fully but rather sought to hold contemporary culture to its ideals.<sup>34</sup> These ideals, however, perpetuate a fantasy of social and political change that cast intellectuals as its project makers.

Publics are conjured into being by characterizing as a social entity (that is as a public) the world in which discourse circulates; but in the language ideology that enables the public sphere, this poetic or creative function of public address disappears from view. Rather than help to constitute scenes of circulation through style, intellectuals are supposed to launch transparently framed ideas into the circulation of an indefinite public. Of course, if intellectuals thought of themselves as involved in world-making projects, it is not clear that intellection would be more effective than, say, corporeally expressive performances. It is not clear that intellectuals would have a naturally leading role in the process at all. And hence it is perhaps not surprising that the professional class of intellectuals should seem reluctant to abandon the conception of public discourse whose inadequacy they continue to discover.<sup>35</sup>

Warner's critique of the intellectual class and of the public-sphere argument as its framework and assumed ideal entertains alternative models of engagement and cultural production involving performance but also models of circulation and simultaneity occurring at the intersection of the street and the Internet, as I argue in this book. More radically, the very notion of the intellectual who operates within a public sphere that has now allegedly moved online is also questioned in Warner's critique, as we will see in chapter 2, with activists in Egypt, and in chapter 4, when established authors go on Twitter to expand their readership.

Warner's notion of counterpublic as "poetic world-making" takes into account the kinds of performances and affective economies explored in this book. Drawing on the binaries of center and periphery, men and women, upper and lower class, queer and hetero, and theorizing spaces of subversion and viscerality that are constitutive of publicness, Warner argues that counterpublics "are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status."<sup>36</sup> This model is fundamental to my interpretive framework,

up to a certain point. The scenes and sites of exposure I investigate and the fiction of scandal I analyze could not be reduced to the position of the margin that Warner theorizes. In Arab cyberspace the marginal and the mainstream constantly intersect, decentralizing power as one coherent regime of oppression and the activist as its site of resistance. When tweeters gain thousands or millions of followers, marginal groups or a tech-savvy generation have thus gone mainstream, bringing authors and intellectuals as well as the general public into their realm, seeking information, news, and entertainment. The same applies to politicians and media outlets that go on Twitter to make statements, and that get their news from leakers and scene-makers on social media, such as the Saudi tweeter Mujtahidd, the subject of chapter 3.

Risking hacking and humiliation, the intellectual and ruling class experience great anxiety on social-media platforms. Saudi critic and public intellectual Abdallah al-Ghadhdhami aptly captures this anxiety when describing his experience on Twitter. Acknowledging its potential for new communication and political change, al-Ghadhdhami expresses fascination and deep anxiety about this threatening realm of the scandalous, leading him to revert to a recognizable interpretation upholding the coherent subject, the public sphere, and *adab* as the necessary code of civility. In the digital landscape I describe, a new configuration of public, language, communication, power, and subjectivity emerges. I argue that an engagement with the affective, the compulsive, and the sensorial is necessary to theorize the producers and followers of leaks and scandals. This engagement allows us to reconstitute and make legible those narratives and practices integral to a new form of subjectivity that breaks with the models developed by Althusser (interpellation) and Foucault (subjectivation), to name a few. The event of the leak and the scene of exposure, both online and off-, create a new subject through processes of contestation, circulation, and writing.

With the accessibility of the Internet via inexpensive, handheld devices that operate as bodily extensions, and that make conversation and confrontation in colloquial Arabic accessible to all, the idea that the Internet is a product of the West that makes its “users” complicit in Western identities, if not political projects (as traitors or foreign agents), no longer holds. A new relation to technology and language ushers in epistemological frameworks that allow us to gauge the kinds of consciousness, subjectivity, and political contestation emerging from street and online performances of leaking and scene-making in the Arab digital age. In this context scholar Milad Doueïhi argues that “the polyphonic

dimension of digital identity has the *potential* to embed diverse cultural specificities within digital culture and thus possibly relativize and minimize its universalist tendency.”<sup>37</sup> Citing the examples of Iran, China, and Saudi Arabia and the Arab world more generally, Doueihi goes on to reflect on particular uses of technology for specific social and political conditions. Doueihi writes: “Another important aspect of blogs, less visible in the United States and in Europe, is their growing political use against oppressive regimes and the ensuing censorship.”<sup>38</sup> Arab or Chinese cyberpractices are not simply acts of translation and adaptation: they recode and remake the function of the digital in relation to specific cultural and political contexts. This recoding then radiates, moves, and informs other systems and uses, as we have seen during the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movements. When we begin to consider the digital as a condition, or as a landscape, that enables certain connections and intersections, then the engagement with specific examples from the Arab world or elsewhere informs our understanding of digital practices and phenomena in a transnational context.

In a similar vein scholar Brian Edwards moves beyond the “American Century” as a fixed historical and epistemological center of the global and of the transnational to ask: “Should cultural critics who are attentive to the rapid and transnational circulation of images, ideas, and public forms focus on the circulation itself—how it happens, what circulates, and so forth—or on the more local meanings that adhere to or emerge from or are hidden by these forms in motion?”<sup>39</sup> This question identifies a cultural sphere and a critical intervention emerging from specific traditions and locales that are in constant dialogue with—in fact, shaping—a transnational context. Edwards extends this to culture and literature in the Arab world, arguing that “global flow of cultural forms across national literatures—fueled by digital technologies that allow easy and rapid transport of literary texts and of visual and aural material—must be attended to without ignoring or occluding more local (i.e., national) contexts, literary traditions, and meanings.”<sup>40</sup> Edwards thus creates a comparative framework that examines global flows in relation to specific literary and cultural traditions. This is precisely the direction I take and develop in this book, without reducing these phenomena to either a networked public or to an Arab exceptionalism.

Edwards’s argument that circulation disturbs the unidirectionality (from the West or America to the Middle East) of meaning and power is particularly relevant at a time when critique seems to stop at the identification of the source or center of this power and at listing its misdeeds. In this context Edwards writes:

“I extend Warner and Said to a circumstance that their own considerations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts quite reasonably do not address, the digital age and the digital circulation of texts, which produce a different means of summoning a public—a more complex circumstance for the text—than the means used in the analog age.”<sup>41</sup> I, too, push against Warner, not only to liberate the meaning-making potential of object circulation, as Edwards argues, but also to situate this meaning in the media that shapes and is shaped by circulation as such, namely, by the digital as such as a condition of *outdividuality*, scene-making, and leakage. Emerging from the intersection of media studies and Arabic literary studies, the framework I propose opens up new interdisciplinary possibilities that question the forms of textuality and processes of circulation, the nature of publics, canon formation, and political contestation emerging from the scenes and sites of Arab culture in the digital age.<sup>42</sup>

Henry Jenkins argues that new media foster nonhierarchical forms of interaction, leading us to “anticipate that digital democracy will be decentralized, unevenly dispersed, profoundly contradictory, and slow to emerge.”<sup>43</sup> In *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Jenkins et al. develop this argument further, coining the term “spreadable media” as the condition for the possibility of staking political claims and effecting change in an environment often deemed closed, top-down, and controlled by corporate interests and machinations. Jenkins presents the circulation that Edwards identified in this way: “As material spreads, it gets remade: either literally, through various forms of sampling and remixing, or figuratively, via its insertion into ongoing conversations and across various platforms.”<sup>44</sup> This spreadability, mediated by a participatory logic, “leads to audiences using content in unanticipated ways as they retrofit material to the contours of their particular community. Such activities are difficult for creators to control and even more difficult to quantify.”<sup>45</sup> Following a logic of continuity with older media, Jenkins et al. argue that, “rather than looking at platforms such as YouTube and Twitter as ‘new,’ we consider these sites where multiple existing forms of participatory culture—each with its own historical trajectory, some over a century old—come together, which is part of what makes such platforms so complex to study.”<sup>46</sup> According to Jenkins these not-so-new media are used by groups “who seek to build a base to bolster alternative forms of cultural expression; enthusiasts for particular brands that have become signposts for people’s identities and lifestyles; bloggers who seek to engage others about the needs of local communities; collectors and retro audiences seeking greater access to residual materials;

members of subcultures seeking to construct alternative identities; and so forth.”<sup>47</sup> And finally, distinguishing spreadable media from viral media, these authors write: “Yet the viral metaphor does little to describe situations in which people actively assess a media text, deciding who to share it with and how to pass it along. People make many active decisions when spreading media, whether simply passing content to their social network, making a word-of-mouth recommendation, or posting a mash-up video to YouTube.”<sup>48</sup>

Decision making and agency distinguish the communication model upon which Jenkins’s work rests. Whereas virality bypasses the subject, according to Jenkins, spreadability affirms the notion of the participating subject within the context of a public sphere transposed online: “We feel that it very much matters who sends the message, who receives it, and, most importantly, what messages get sent.”<sup>49</sup> The emphasis on “who” is key; notions of sender, recipient, and message are still invested in models of integrality and wholeness. Beyond the Derridean theorem that the message (the digital letter) does not always reach its destination, the subject I examine in this book makes decisions and has agency yet is also not entirely in control of these decisions and their intended meanings and recipients. The model I present doesn’t do away with agency yet could not be reduced to it.

Jenkins’s movement from centralization to decentralization in the digital age is reversible, making it all the more difficult to entertain the emergence of a new democratic public sphere, however unstable and contradictory it might be. It is the very idea of democracy and of its fundamental constituents (participation, ethics, equality, intersubjectivity) that needs to be rethought beyond the public-sphere paradigm. Scholar Mohamed Zayani critiques the democratization thesis associated with the perception of the Internet as public sphere. He argues that in the absence of institutions necessary for Habermas’s public sphere, it is impossible to reduce all audiences to a public with an identifiable teleology of democratization as the only path to social and political change.<sup>50</sup> Media and communications scholar Marwan Kraidy takes this critique further to examine the artistic practices and performances emerging from the Arab uprisings in *The Naked Blogger of Cairo*, reading the body as a key site of cultural, artistic, and political production.<sup>51</sup> Kraidy tells the story of the Arab uprisings by focusing on creative insurgency, examining the representation of the body as instrument and medium, symbol and counter-icon that could be broken up, reconstituted, mocked, and staged. For Kraidy performance as art practice and as bodily nudity (in reference to Egyptian blogger Aliaa Elmahdy who posted naked

pictures of herself online to the shock of the entire Egyptian political spectrum including civil-society activists) becomes key in thinking about processes of dissent and aesthetic and cultural production. Kraidy's analysis makes possible a debate about the digital as a site and a stage, and not only as a sphere. On this stage unfold artistic performances but also, I argue, acts of hacking and raiding that need to be analyzed in order to understand the development of Arab culture in the digital age.

Theorizing new formations of social and political bonds tied to specific media and reading practices beyond the public-sphere model devised by Habermas, in *Affective Publics: Sentiments, Technologies, and Politics*, Zizi Papacharissi engages Massumi, Deleuze, and Protevi to argue: "The construct of affective publics builds on the idea of networked publics to explicate what publics look like when all they render and are rendered out of is the sharing of opinions, facts, sentiment, drama, and performance."<sup>52</sup> These affective publics, suggests Papacharissi, are "networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment."<sup>53</sup> She claims: "The technologies facilitating affective formations are technologies that facilitate networked circulations of affective flows produced, distributed, and further remixed through mediated communication channels ... It is fitting that affect resides in the fluidity presented by the convergence of actual and virtual, as it is aided by the confluent weave of reality and fantasy presented as technology suggests what is and what could be made possible."<sup>54</sup> The notion of affective publics operating both online and off- is crucial but, as in my critique of Warner, I do not consider them to be an isolated phenomenon. *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* identifies the sites through which Arab culture in the digital age is performed. Far from identifying a specific phenomenon, the book examines those practices, attacks, and hacking and leaking events that make up a new mainstream.

A broad engagement with new models of critique and subjectivity is necessary to understand the erosion of the modern associated with the industrial age, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism, including the Marxist and Freudian systems of meaning and critique to which the latter two gave rise.<sup>55</sup> In this light the book investigates assemblages, rhizomes, digital consciousness, virality, and affective forms of knowledge that jolt the public and prevent it from not knowing. Viewers cannot look away from scandals and leaks: they are drawn to the unfolding narrative of the secret that *must* be revealed, and to the embodied exposure performed in viral videos and acts of hacking. The knowledge production that interests me is precisely the leakers' and hackers' knowledge. This



knowledge is the outcome of processes that break in and break down; stretch the limits of the knowable, the law, the body, and the forbidden; and imagine a complicit audience moved by its desire to *know more* and attend, if not take part in, a gruesome and titillating spectacle. The public is not a “closed organism” but rather a porous one, clicking and sharing online. This affective power reengages an apathetic reader and consumer of news, redirecting his/her compulsions to bring about a different kind of awareness and political engagement.

The interpretive framework I offer in this book emerges primarily from the events I examine in the Arab world and beyond. The theory emerges through close readings of these events, taking into account cultural history, political context, technological development, language, media, and genres. My work raises the question of subjectivity online, specifically how hacking and leaking force us to rethink the Arab subject of modernity, or more specifically, the subject of *adab* in the digital age. Through the prism of the subject who communicates, protests, and writes through hacks and leaks, I reflect on Arab culture in the digital age.

From Plato to Descartes to Hegel, the history of the subject has informed and grounded social and political narratives of identity and models of Otherness. The Hegelian subject, upholding its contradictions, has also been read as the European and Eurocentric subject par excellence.<sup>56</sup> Contesting the coherence of the narrative of subjectivity as a Eurocentric and teleological history of consciousness and progress, enlightenment and emancipation, I examine breaches and fissures through which information leaks and connections are made. In this context I critique as well the Lacanian split subject associated with lack, recoding lack and symptom as political and aesthetic affects that unsettle the relation between the subject and the body, lack and gender. Hacks, fragments, and leaks are productive connections mediated through digital and literary networks that resist or need not be veiled and suppressed by the imago at the mirror stage. The political affects I identify unsettle the lacking or Oedipal subject and its structure of desire that encompasses the political and its cultural spheres, from the nation-state and its forms of authority (leader/father) to literary canons (the novel). Specifically, I argue that the collapse of a particular Arab symbolic order associated with *adab* and the project of modernity gives rise to new definitions of the modern subject’s realm and constituents (novel, public sphere, etc.) emerging online and on the street from violent rituals including raids, hacks, and leaks. This collapse is tied to political developments, technological transformations, and economic shifts within the Arab world that are precipitating new definitions of culture.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE LEAKING SUBJECT

The first Gulf War (1990), which roughly coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, marked the advent of neoliberalism in the Middle East,<sup>57</sup> undermined traditional leftist and pan-Arab movements and co-opted large swaths of the Left into new cultural institutions and media platforms, from newspapers to TV channels, funded by Gulf states. The second Gulf War (2003) brought about the material dismantling of the Arab nation-state and its institutions in Iraq, unleashing sectarian tensions into a full-blown explosion ending with ISIS. With the advent of the Internet and the decentralization of literary production, a generation of dissidents and cultural agents filled a critical void, practicing new forms of writing and contestation that played key roles in precipitating the Arab uprisings that started to emerge in the new millennium. Thus, the years 1990, 2003, and 2011 mark the acceleration of foreign intervention and sectarianism at the political level, thereby eroding the already beleaguered modern projects of the nation, and of the subject, that could be traced to the *Nahda*, and that took different shapes and forms, from Nasserism to Baathism. The events I examine in this book result from an alignment of various historical, economic, political, technological, and cultural phenomena that created the necessary conditions for a new way to understand Arab culture in the digital age.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 not only toppled a dictator but also put in question the viability of the nation-state as a political and social model emerging from *Nahda* discourses and practices. This material and symbolic collapse of the Arab nation mirrors another symbolic collapse at the heart of the liberal democracy. A new generation of transnational dissidents, who considered this invasion an example of shameless and vindictive imperialism beyond the purview of international law, sought to expose the abuse and violations of this war and its effects on the citizens of the liberal state. Figures such as Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, and organizations like WikiLeaks and Anonymous, practiced new forms of contestation, seeking to expose a corrupt and excessive political power but also to restore, in some instances, a lost liberal ideal and social contract that could be traced to the eighteenth century.

Emerging from the Middle East, yet shaped by and shaping global transformations, the events I examine in this book take 2006 as a watershed year that marked the advent of a constellation involving political developments, digital activism, and new writing practices both in the Arab world and beyond. This was also the year in which WikiLeaks was founded, partially in response to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and the year in which the first torture video in Egypt

was leaked and uploaded on YouTube by activist and journalist Wael Abbas. Both of these events inaugurated a new form of activism confronting authoritarian regimes and governments skirting international laws. They were launched by “a group of people who could not bear sitting in silence, watching all the crimes and violations,” as I discussed regarding the Lebanese ministry hacking in the opening lines of this introduction. These two events happened independently of each other and involved different actors and practices, scopes, and technologies. Yet they unleashed hacking and leaking practices that embarrass, shame, and expose, and, in doing so, engaged a transnational public with accounts of political abuse and scandal as it unraveled online and in major newspapers. Tied to hacking and scene-making, the leak as forbidden text and as information, as political drama and tell-all fiction, exposes a new relationship between the aesthetic and the political that took on a new meaning and relevance with the Arab uprisings from 2010 onward.

Julian Assange, WikiLeaks’ founder, took credit for the events of the Arab uprisings, which culminated in mass demonstrations and regime change across the region, starting in Tunisia in 2010.

In relation to the Arab Spring, the way I looked at this back in October of 2010 is that the power structures in the Middle East are interdependent, they support each other. If we could release enough information fast enough about many of these powerful individuals and organizations, their ability to support each other would be diminished. . . . When you shake something up, you have a chance to rebuild. But we’re not interested in shaking something up just for the hell of it. I believe that if we look at what makes a civilization civilized, it is people understanding what is really going on. When Gutenberg invented the printing press, the end result was that people who knew something of what was going on could convey that information to others. And as a result of the Internet, we are now living in a time where it’s a lot easier to convey what we know about our corner of the world and share it with others.<sup>58</sup>

In this passage Assange situates his intervention in continuity with the Gutenberg project, which produces a civilizing effect on those in other corners of the world. Slavoj Žižek reads this “hacktivist” narrative as part of a global enlightenment project as well, comparing Assange to d’Alembert, WikiLeaks to the “Encyclopédie.”<sup>59</sup> However, this enlightening and civilizing process, moving from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment to the digital age, is also put in question—in fact, mined—by the actions and observations of Assange and Žižek themselves.

While Assange frames his leaks as a “release of information” that has the effect of “shaking something up,” Žizek claims that the information associated with the leak is always already known: “We didn’t really learn from Snowden (or from Manning) anything we didn’t already presume to be true—but it is one thing to know it in general, and another to get concrete data.”<sup>60</sup> What is the difference between “knowledge” and “concrete data,” between “enlightening” and “releasing,” between bringing about awareness or consciousness and “shaking something up”? What are the implications of these distinctions on our understanding of the nature and framework of acts of hacking and leaking in a transnational context? Is “concrete data” a reference to a material and affective expression of hacks and leaks that shake systems and viewers by forcing pupils to dilate and pushing people to click, share, and demonstrate?

Moving beyond the liberal reading of leaks and hacks as spreading knowledge in order to raise consciousness and awareness and fix the empire or reform the state, this book focuses on knowledge and texts that shake up and unsettle, that recode the relationship between aesthetics and politics by offering new critiques of power, author function, and public engagement. Leaks do not just flow across borders in some transnational utopia of information and circulation, but rather break down, expose, shatter, submerge, wound, and destroy. It is the effects of the leaks, and their dangerous and threatening pathways, I trace and examine, focusing on key examples from the Arab world that inform our understanding of digital-age writing and activism in the region and beyond. I argue that the leak is both translatable and untranslatable, emerging from transnational spaces of hacking, writing, and contestation, and from local traditions of shaming and scene-making such as *faḍḥ*. Assange is not an author or political critic in the tradition of the intellectual speaking truth to power but rather a scene-maker and a function of leaking—an imagined origin of a new genre and a model of contestation that shapes local and global politics, information flow, and fiction.

Approaching leaking as an affective condition, media scholar Wendy Chun argues that leaking is the way information circulates, and meaning is produced in the digital age. The leak is not the exception or the isolated event, but instead the default of communication, storage, and relationality in the age of machines.

[F]rom WikiLeaks to Facebook disasters, we are confronted everywhere with leaks. This leaking information is framed paradoxically as both securing and compromising our privacy, personal and national. Thanks to these leaks, we now

understand the extent to which we are under surveillance; because of these leaks, we are exposed. This leaking information and the problems/solutions it exposes/provides are often presented as oddly personalized and humanized. Snowden is a hero or a rogue agent; Anonymous are advocates or vigilantes; slanegirl is a victim or a slut. But to what extent is leaking information an issue of personal human agency? . . . *[N]ew media are not simply about leaks: they are leak.*<sup>61</sup>

Wendy Chun (along with co-author Sarah Friedland) removes the leak from the liberal narrative that ends in civilization and redemption according to Assange and Žižek's explanations (read, justifications). Instead, Chun reads leaking as a habit and a condition that disperses the author and his or her intentions. By uncoupling the act from the teleological outcome in the liberal narrative, Chun opens up the leak to the transnational, undercutting the romantic narrative of digital subversion as heroic ethos that only seeks to reform the broken system. This articulation requires an exploration of the involuntary, the visceral, and the habitual as practices and aesthetics with particular histories that are yet to be acknowledged as political and literary in the digital age. Given this articulation, how do we read the body, which is now embedded with machines, as a leaking body that is both threatening and threatened, unable to control its flows, language, narrative? Is the inability to "sit in silence" tied to leaking as a digital condition that produces or reveals new texts and models of consciousness? What conceptual and historical trajectories must we draw on to decipher the flows, narratives, and contestations of the leaking body and the leaky text in the digital age?

The digital condition that Chun identifies allows us to read modes of involuntarism as political affects coming from the present and the past, and arising from new technologies and their effects on bodies, writing practices, activism, and acts of leaking, hacking, and scene-making both online and off-. Multivalent fields of interaction and models of confrontation, chaotic freedoms, fluctuations, and disturbances could not be made to coalesce into a neat rubric of the subject and of its corresponding liberal state achieved with the expulsion of the colonizer, with the fall of the dictator, or with the advent of democracy. The leak as discharge, release, and insurgent text flowing through multiple digital and bodily ports and portals relies on a regime of privacy and secrecy, containment and security, but also on a digital regime of circulation and exposure. The leak is both the result of the circumstances of disclosure (its context) and the result of the formal, informational properties of the disclosure (its substance).

Exploring the relation between different modalities of leaking, I argue that the leak is a political intervention, an overflow, and a condition all at the same time. *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* engages leaking as a reconfiguration of the subject and of the public, and as a new literary and political practice that fundamentally breaks with traditional models of writing and the critique of power (*engagement*, novel, author, public, intellectual, etc.) tied to the project and theorization of modernity. Whereas leaks have been associated with WikiLeaks and hacktivism, I push this association to include embodied, affective, and involuntary yet political acts tied to the inability not to click, share, respond, or tweet. Activists and authors leak, hack, and expose through storytelling, swearing online, and demonstrating, thereby refiguring writerly and political traditions and cultures of debate, and displacing or recoding the position of the traditional intellectual.

The leaking subject, I argue, is a figure and a theoretical framework, a history and a code of writing, a condition and an array of political practices. In this sense Wael Abbas's swearing at rivals on Twitter and his compulsive uploading of videos of abuse and violation are also tied to his own body: wounds, limbs, and an uncontrollable tongue, heart, and fingers that prevent him from "sitting in silence," as I discuss in chapter 2. As for Chelsea Manning, she is described as compulsively grabbing files and leaking them to Julian Assange in a state of overflow and as a critique of power, as I discuss in chapter 1. The leaking of information, images, and emotion forces us to reflect on the "subject" as a theoretical category and historical construct referring to a coherent self with a particular model of subjectivation. *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* thus refers to specific authors and activists but also to a history and a narrative of subjectivity associated with *adab* that is being recoded in the digital age.

The leak exposes fictions of power, making a scene of their porousness and spills. Acts of hacking and revelation, "releases" and "leaks," form multiple trajectories: trickles and tsunamis, flash floods and flash mobs. Such is the language and register of the leak that I explore in this book. The practice and condition of the leaking subject consists of body fluids, stories, narratives, secrets, and fragmented texts. Scholar Laura Marks examines the leaking body in the work of Egyptian filmmaker Sherif El Azma, reading fluids as affects that try to give meaning to that which is not discursive.<sup>62</sup> Leaks make legible forms of knowledge, writing, and affective interventions. Thus, tracing the narrative of the leak requires an engagement with "affects," enacting and exposing breaks and fractures in discourse and in subject positions, and thus creating the possibility for new connections, movements, and significations. Affects characterize acts of

writing and performance yet form a new readership looking for meaning and operating along different models of desire that move people to follow, share, and rebel. These affective acts expose, inscribe, and bring to light texts and histories that shock and titillate, and engulf and overwhelm. The reader or viewer is drawn to follow the trickle of revelation, to desire the rupture, to be submerged by it, and to expose the misdeeds of those in power. Following the narrative of the leak involves a process of desacralizing power and delegitimizing its founding myths or fictions (religious, political, literary). Far from appealing to a passive viewer, leaking involves a digital performance that unsettles yet seduces viewers and readers to click and follow the serialized and sensational text that shames and exposes. Leaking encourages and manipulates this reader to experience information as scandalous, linked to corruption and abuse, but also to sadistic forms of pleasure. Leaking involves a process of exposure (*faḍḥ*) that makes a scene, causes a scandal, and brings to light the affective economy that threatens and gives pleasure. In this light I examine images of limbs and texts cropped online, engaging the return of the archaic as a genre in Arabic literature and as a temporality and fantasy of death and enslavement. In this context I argue that the narrative of a modern Arab subjectivity is leaking. This subjectivity depends on a particular constellation tied to the *Nahda*, including the citizen of the liberal Arab state-to-come that Albert Hourani theorized,<sup>63</sup> and the novel as the central element that enlightens and civilizes this citizen.

## TRIALS OF ADAB IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* picks up where my previous book left off. Ending with the analysis of the work of a new generation of Arab authors such as Ahmed Alaidy, *Trials of Arab Modernity* (2013) identified a vulgar, angry, and violent narrative targeting Arab modernity, history, and *adab*—the site of the civilizing process through high culture and perfectibility as theorized by Mathew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, and critiqued by Sonallah Ibrahim in his novella *The Smell of It*.<sup>64</sup> The new author, I argued, explodes like a “sewer pipe” in the text. In *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* I explore the reference in *Trials* to “[u]pdating and upgrading one’s server [as] forms of *prise de conscience*”<sup>65</sup> as constitutive of a digital consciousness, or what Wael Abbas calls *al-wa‘ī al-miṣrī* (Egyptian consciousness or awareness), produced by activists and authors who not only broke with Alaidy’s 1967 “generation of Defeat”<sup>66</sup> but also with subsequent generations

of defeat following 1990 and 2003 and who were taken by surprise by the Arab uprisings.

Exposing porous boundaries of languages and genres, narratives of the subject and of power, the leak as new fiction breaks the association between “literature” and the novel that is meant to produce privacy/interiority and national identification. In the new landscape I explore, the literary is tied to digital models of awareness, information, knowledge production, and entertainment. In this light Assange and WikiLeaks can and should be read in relation to new Arabic writing and tweeting, emerging from and responding to the collapse of a political and social ideal—a symbolic in the Lacanian sense. This symbolic made possible or fostered a particular kind of interiority or the private that emerges in relation to an overarching community, a community of the privates, a multiplicity of singularities engaged in collective reading practices centered on the novel and the newspaper as edifices.

The collapse of interiority and privacy, which I began theorizing in *Trials of Arab Modernity* and that I fully develop in this book, coincides with a larger ideological collapse: the liberal narrative of the state as an egalitarian and transparent structure, and of Arab modernity as a cultural and national project embodied in the nation-state—a structure that was physically and symbolically dismantled by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, for instance. These national narratives, tied to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary genres, reading practices, and political models, are no longer capable of interpellating subjects who read novels and print-media to develop political consciousness and experience secular time. Instead we are witnessing the resurgence of the tribal, the sectarian, the vindictive, and the mythological, both online (cyber-raiding, trolling, video games) and off- (the Iraq invasion, ISIS). In this new landscape a portal has opened up, unleashing the fantasies of archaic violence and group formation, and further eroding idealized models of community, justice, and the law.

This book starts with a theoretical history, reading leaks as a form of embodied release of data and stories that conjures up classical storytelling genres. I argue that the leaking subject is both erased and inscribed through a *mise en abîme* in an open text attributed to a Scheherazade-like figure, a fictional character posited as author, to be celebrated or shunned, exiled or imprisoned. In this context social-media platforms become stages for literary texts and live performances that reproduce the traditional cafés of Arab storytellers.<sup>67</sup> I also examine hashtag campaigns on Twitter as forms of tribal mobilization that call on followers to partake in a scene of archaic violence. Specifically, I show how the



process of “tagging” or “hashtagging,” which is meant to call into discourse particular topics for discussion online, ultimately reenacts models of warfare and street scenes wherein fights and confrontations take place in the *ḥāra* (traditional neighborhood) of Naguib Mahfouz’s novels and among the flash mobs of the Arab uprisings. Throughout the book I examine the intertwinement of and the mimetic relation *between* fiction and digital culture, the Arab tradition and cyberculture, online exchanges and street protests, and the local and the global.

*Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* focuses on new writing from Egypt and the Gulf, exploring these writings’ fascination with and appropriation of digital media. Recent transformations in literary cultures and digital technology make me particularly interested in Egypt—the old “center” of Arab nationalism and literary production—and in the Gulf, which is giving rise to a new subjectivity tied to the global and the digital, with literary prizes and dating apps supplanting the traditional cafés and meeting places of Baghdad and Beirut. This book does not seek to be comprehensive, covering cyberphenomena across the Arab world. The examples I focus on from Egypt and the Gulf chart a particular redefinition of what Arab culture *means* in the digital age, pointing to the changing meaning of Arab culture (novels, authors, education, etc.) and of *adab* as a model of subjectivity in a context shaped by technological development and political upheaval. This meaning, which was tied to *Nahda* (Arab modernity) models and shaped by pan-Arab discourses and ideologies associated with Egypt and the Levant, changed as a result of new media, prize culture centered on Gulf countries, and the like. The scope of the argument is not historical or ethnographic but comparative and theoretical. Specifically, the book argues that even Egypt, the site most associated with the Arab modernity project or *Nahda*, is undergoing fundamental changes that are not simply due to the rise of the Gulf as economic, political, and cultural sponsor from the 1990s onward. Thus the subtitle “Arab Culture in the Digital Age” is meant to showcase the transformations in the very notion of “Arab” (secular, pan-Arab, Nasser, *Nahda*) and “culture” (*adab*, education, civility, the novel) in the age of leaks, hacks, uprisings, the rise of fundamentalism, and Gulf cultural sponsorship.

The Arab cultural production I examine cannot be reduced to specific historical events, such as the Arab uprisings and their ensuing turmoil. The digital, I argue, is not a medium that simply expands or makes available unchanging texts or events that could now simply be downloaded or watched through live



streams online for wider reach while remaining *essentially* intact.<sup>68</sup> Rather, I investigate how the Internet operates as a space of confrontation and exposure that breaks down and reconstitutes the text, and refigures its author function, reading practice, literary-critical significance, and reading public against the backdrop of radical displacement of the traditional sites of Arab modernity around which theories of aesthetics, of the political, and of the subject have been developed. Examining scenes of shaming and exposure alongside their specific histories both online and in classical Arabic sources, my work sheds light on tactical moments of disturbance that open up, make possible, and reveal a new reading of the aesthetic-political relation.<sup>69</sup> I explore acts of last resort that confront literary opportunism, authoritarian practices, and the fantasmatic as perverse reenactment of an imagined past.

*Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals* confronts the question of digital vulnerability and porousness that connect author to character and author to text. I investigate the text's imagined unity when it is reduced to fragments online, cropped and annotated by various users. I understand fiction as consisting of the multiple forms of storytelling including the novel, but also of sites for thinking the literary and the fantasmatic. The proliferation of writing and speaking through icons and avatars—leaking, as Wendy Chun would argue—leads to the amplification of the capacity to partake in fiction. Specifically, I argue that cyberspace and cyberwriting do not bring about the end of literature but instead its activation. Fictionalization and reading fiction stage the power of these new media as they operate alongside traditional models from Aristotle's *Poetics* to Mieke Bal's *fabula*.<sup>70</sup> This framework presents leaks and social media not only as the field of media and cybernetics experts, but of literary and cultural critics as well.

My book engages digital humanities by examining how a digital configuration of knowledge could not simply reproduce an encyclopedic epistemological ideal (or knowledge/power model) transposed online, but also signal an alteration in the meaning and experience of knowledge.<sup>71</sup> Scholar and digital artist Laila Sakr examines the Tahrir hashtag (Twitter debates centered on the January 2011 revolution in Egypt) by developing a framework for studying social media against the backdrop of Arab uprisings and beyond. Sakr writes that “social media platforms served as the database architectures for the accumulation of data on a scale heretofore unknown. This over-proliferation of data challenges one's research methodology—the impossibility of knowing or representing such a mass of information requires new ways of investigating and interpreting.”<sup>72</sup>

Sakr's call to rethink traditional methodologies emphasizes new forms of knowledge production centered on the "over-proliferation of data" that leads to an impossibility to "know" and "represent."

Questioning the modes and implications of digital knowledge extends to such scholarly projects as the digitization of medieval manuscripts and multi-volume compilations. This process not only subjects them to contemporary rules of searchability and accessibility, but also unsettles our contemporary disciplinary divisions and nomenclatures such as authorship and copyright, literature and history, thereby requiring a new approach to thinking about classical and modern genres and the very notion and division of classical and modern. In his introduction to the anthology *The Digital Humanities and Islamic and Middle East Studies*, Elias Muhanna poetically captures the possibilities that this new field offers: "Databases collapse time and space in dramatic ways. The trope that persists, hidden, through the centuries can now be traced effortlessly, as though one were fanning through an old manuscript and spotting the tunnels grooved into its pages by bookworms."<sup>73</sup> This description mimics a burrowing that captures the materiality of the digital, breaking down temporality and setting the critic on a trail under and above ground, requiring different movements and contortions of the body to access new meaning. The movement alters the text and the object of inquiry, intervening in the genre and in the body of the old text and that of the virtual rendering that pretends to represent it whole, with its pages ungrooved by bookworms. The "dramatic ways" in which the "collapse of time and space" occurs bring forth an event that alerts us that something from those classical knowledge production and writing genres has reappeared and materialized through a portal opened in cyberspace that now affects and shapes our current practices. The digital forces us to engage the classical tradition and its rhizomatic genres that—due to this engagement with the predisciplinary and premodern—change and shape our contemporary reading and critical practices.

Twitter is one of the key sites of investigation in this book. Discussing the coverage in January and February 2011 of the Arab uprisings, Zizi Papacharissi argues that Twitter is the new platform for news storytelling: "The storytelling infrastructure of the platform facilitated a hybridity of news values that blurred personal with objective, emotion with meaning, opinion with reporting, and affective with cognitive flows of information."<sup>74</sup> Twitter is thus a framework that brings together narrative genres and political contestation, transforming the nature of publics and public spheres, and the nature of knowledge as such. To

anchor a new experience of knowledge, to capture the tunnels grooved into social networks and computer screens, Laila Sakr produces a visual simulation of the encounter with the digital, depicting a person going through Twitter's fields and fibers and fully inhabiting this platform.<sup>75</sup> In his turn, Abdallah al-Ghadhdhami describes Twitter in the Saudi context as an "unsafe house" and a "glass house," where everything is exposed.<sup>76</sup> Breaking the coherence of the subject in this digital landscape, al-Ghadhdhami argues that the fingers of the tweeter move on their own, shattering the framework of writing and editing associated with debates in the public sphere, and collapsing the human/machine distinction. In this new environment users and activists leak, write, respond, share, reveal, expose, and gossip through the machine as it leaks and reveals through them. The activist and author on Twitter are thus unable not to click, hold anything back, or keep their mouths shut when they see abuse and violation, or when they feel attacked or offended.

## BOOKMARKS

While the first part of the book focuses on the making of the leaking subject as critic of power and performer of scandal, the second part examines the narrative of the leak. Specifically, the first two chapters deal with the body and affect, while the last three chapters deal with fiction and how it is affected by the consciousness of the leaking subject. Chapter 1, "On Leaking: From *The Arabian Nights* to WikiLeaks," offers a theoretical reading of the leaking subject, showing how the leaker's body, which produces flows and narratives, is marked as threatening and contaminating, and thus needs to be excluded from the community and placed in solitary confinement. Starting with *The Arabian Nights* and moving to contemporary leaking events involving Aliaa Elmahdy, Rupi Kaur, Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and Edward Snowden, this chapter traces the transformation of the leaker into superstar traitor and hero, and the making of the leak as encyclopedic knowledge in the digital age, adding *wiki* to leaks. I argue that acts of leaking are bodily, literary, and political, thereby exposing the porousness of national boundaries, fictions of power, security systems, and gender codes. From leak as symptom or lack associated with an unsettled symbolic that needs to be reactivated through redemption and ritual purification, we move to leak as affect that exposes both the leaking subject's body and the excesses of the body politic: abuse, secrets, jouissance.

Examining the leaking subject as leaker of torture videos and images of abuse, but also as a scene-maker gushing invectives and insults that burst out and knock down rivals online, chapter 2, “What Is in My Heart Is on My Twitter,” examines the confrontational practices of Egyptian activist Wael Abbas. Focusing on the production of publics from street mobs to online followers, I read comparatively the Arab cultural tradition of exposure and scene-making (*fadh*), and explore the production of a new digital consciousness that upholds states of bodily and political fragmentation, fusing the heart with Twitter as in Wael’s motto, which is reproduced as this chapter’s title. I engage the notion of *adab* as both literature and model of civility tied to power’s fiction and instruments of suppression, and explore its productive violation online. Twitter remains the stage of leaks and scandals in chapter 3, “The Infinite Scroll,” in which I analyze the intersection of the revelation of political news and scandals with literary genres such as classical *akhbār* and contemporary ones such as celebrity gossip. Focusing on Saudi tweeter Mujtahidd who boasts two million followers, I compare his revelation of “state secrets” to otherworldly revelations that draw on Sufi concepts of sight and knowledge, producing a constant trickle and an infinite text that engulf and bewilder readers. I argue that Mujtahidd moves beyond a marginal phenomenon online to designate instead a mainstream model for the production and consumption of fiction and news. I explore how the leaker and technology become intertwined, sharing, embodying, and reproducing each other’s functions and texts that are simultaneously informational and literary, affective and scandalous.

Moving from leaking subjects as activists and critics of power, in chapter 4, “Fiction of Scandal Redux,” I read new Arabic writing through the prism of hacking, leaking, and scandal. I argue that the literary fascination with the digital betrays the unsettling of the edifice of the novel as the traditional generator of political consciousness. Leaks and hacks transform the new literary text into a scandalous stage that reproduces street and online scenes and practices, affectively drawing in the reader. In this context the fiction of scandal is tied to obsessive browsing practices online, transforming the work into a bestseller and thereby intervening in the formation of the canon.<sup>77</sup> New technologies have permanently inhabited the novel, recoding its political potential and literary value. Continuing with the exploration of the meaning of literature in the digital age, chapter 5, “Cyber-Raiding,” examines a Twitter campaign against Saudi author Badriah Albeshr. Contesting her views and literary production, Twitter activists mobilized to exclude her from a public forum, accusing her of apostasy

for a few passages in her novel, *Hend and the Soldiers*. Circulating online, the blasphemous passages become sites of attack, tagging, and consumption, fragmenting the body and the novel of the Arab female author. I argue that this recoding of the text and of the author function is tied to a model of tribal warfare that erupts through a portal into the archaic in cyberspace. The digital in this chapter is explored both structurally and fantasmatically, given the current political state of the Arab world and the nature of the Internet, as a stage for the unraveling of certain forms of authority. Whereas Foucault and Althusser have located subjectivation in discourse, power, and the state, subjectivity in this context—leaking subjectivity—arises from the activation of *Jahiliyya*-like rituals that herald new forms of community, public, and political order.

In the conclusion, I reflect on my argument and ask what it would mean to move from the leaking subject to a postsubjective moment wherein the archaic no longer peeks through a portal on Twitter, but rather has returned with its beasts and monsters to permanently inhabit Arab cultural and political landscapes.