Enacting Open Scholarship in Transnational Contexts

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This essay addresses the question of emerging open scholarly practices in Arab countries. It provides a context for the regional development of globalized higher education and offers some starting points for those interested in collaborating transnationally towards digital knowledge creation.[1] Crossing borders into different knowledge cultures can be confusing business, indeed. We often read in the media about blacklisting of non-western governments and institutions for non-compliance with political norms, insufficient safety measures in aviation or industry, or intellectual property infringement in domains such as music or software. The issues surrounding such sanctioning can be political and the complexity on the ground can be easily misunderstood.

　　Teaching in the Arab region for more than fifteen years has provided me with a unique perspective from which to consider the situation of the local production and consumption of knowledge. [2] Let me begin with one example that I hope might provide some insight. In all my years teaching in the oldest English-language university in the Arab countries (the American University of Beirut, founded in 1866), we faced a recurring problem with respect to a normal part of every educator's semester: ordering books for classes. Months after a book order was placed—and sometimes days before classes would begin—books would simply not show up, or only a fraction of the number we ordered would be available at the university bookstore. One

might think this happened due to the growing popularity of e-books, except that the problem pre-dated their wide appearance online. One might also attribute this problem to insufficient demand for books in English, but, in reality, the university is one of twenty English-language universities in the small country purchasing books from abroad.

Mind you, we thought we were playing by the book by ordering hardcopies instead of allowing students to purchase pirated photocopies on the illegal market. The situation with respect to copyright infringement is flagrant in Lebanon—and not only with books, but also software, music, and other forms of intellectual property—so much so that publishers in other parts of the world simply write off the country, and, as educators, we were caught in a bind. For sure, one of the main concerns with such books were their cost. There were even special *for export* versions of textbooks designed for the international market that cost less, but with an unregulated bootleg market, *real* books always lost out. Finally, one might think that in such a situation, educators at the most prestigious universities of the region would turn to free, open educational content, even begin to create such content themselves, building on the the trend of massive open online courses (MOOCs), of the sort that appeared in many prestigious North American universities to bring accessible knowledge online to wider publics. Indeed, there have been experiments with the latter, and some day regional open knowledge might actually catch on. For the moment, however, trust in open content such as wiki books, open textbooks, or other open educational resources (OER)—what appears in the west to be innovative practice—has not yet been garnered. Likewise, the means for creating and disseminating academic content have not been set up and generalized. In many Arab states, it is easier to buy illegal copies of imported books, or software, for that matter, in an unregulated market. For those with the means in wealthier countries, they buy them from abroad.

The phenomenon of intellectual property in Arab countries is usually explained as poor enforcement of an established legal framework.[3] Combined with the high price of foreign-authored IP in local markets, this means that piracy and copyright infringement are rampant. While these reasons are true to a different extent in the various Arab countries, another explanation for the lack of an emergent local knowledge economy, I believe, is to be found in what I would call *the regional lack of knowledge infrastructure*. Let me be clear: I do not believe that the Arab countries are lacking in learned persons or in regional-specific knowledge, nor do I believe that the institutions to which they belong are only passive consumers of information of foreign creation. To the contrary, the years I have lived outside the United States have been full of invigorating and challenging intellectual dialogue in multiple languages, including English. The situation is truly paradoxical in the sense that in many Arab countries, the universities are full

of researchers who have "been trained on par with their western counterparts" and yet knowledge infrastructures remain notoriously weak.[4] Perhaps not unsurprisingly, it is also in this environment that predatory journals seemed to have flourished.[5]

When I evoke the notion of a knowledge infrastructure, I use the term to mean the practical capacity of knowledge actors in a society to produce information, original or in translation, in such fields as science, humanities, and the arts, to create regional scholarly communication venues and to disseminate that information openly and sustainably for the use and benefit of society. Knowledge production in the Arab region has been deemed by some "the impossible promise," but it would seem that in certain locales of the region, nascent conversations about knowledge production and open scholarly practices have begun.[6]

The Infrastructural Gap and a Regional Emergence of Digital Humanities

A quick search of the postings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for "international" faculty and administrative positions reveals a whole spectrum of non-US institutions with jobs on offer, some of which are located in the Arab countries discussed in this essay. If we filter out the positions listed in the UK, Canada, and Australia, what usually remains is a number of repeat advertisers: countries of the Caribbean, *countries of the Middle East (Lebanon, Egypt,* and especially those of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar), and Asian countries (Singapore, China). The blanket term "international" in the *Chronicle*'s search engine offers little more than a negative definition, putting geographical situation outside of the US above any other aspect of the job. The job listings obviously do not reflect the entire global academic market—the world is, after all, full of nations that do not advertise their academic positions in the *Chronicle*—but rather the sign of an openness to—some might even say a need for—foreign doctorate holders in the globalized educational systems of their countries.

In the *Chronicle* and on the *Modern Language Association* Job Information List since 2016, a handful of institutions in the wealthiest nations of the Gulf Arab states and Southeast Asia have advertised positions listing a desired academic specialization in digital humanities (DH). Whereas interdisciplinary DH practices have been evolving in Group of Twenty (G20) countries for decades, they have now suddenly become desirable skills for hires in the universities of Gulf and Asian knowledge capitals. It is hard to pinpoint what precipitated this regional trend, and it is far too early to tell what the impact of DH practices will be on their countries. Let us hope

that DH will usher in a conversation about open scholarship—its values, its platforms, and its public engagement—to changing environments of national knowledge production.

With the introduction of DH into university environments, an important opportunity has emerged for theorizing and introducing new models for knowledge infrastructures linked to the globalized academic environment. Whereas the first decade of the twenty-first century in Arab countries focused on e-learning—the delivery of academic material from the outside inwards—in this paper I would like to address the emerging question of knowledge production from within, in the service of local and regional environments and in partnership with transnational actors.[7] In developing such partnerships, however, we need to remain acutely aware of infrastructural difference across the different collaborating institutions.

A rich critical literature exists about the challenges—rank, gender, language, and culture—of interdisciplinary work and the need for finding languages for collaboration to bridge the gaps of difference.[8] I strongly agree with recognizing and increasing diversity in our research, but the *discussions of diversity in digital humanities so far have focused on cultural difference within educational environments that largely resemble each other from an infrastructural perspective, rather than on global infrastructural difference itself.* Some pushback to this *one world fits all* perspective has come recently from digital humanists in Latin America and India, encouraging us to nuance the question of knowledge production. Their arguments suggest that going global should not only mean adopting the perspective of the post-industrial world looking outside its borders, but ideally would be decentered, such that it apprehends, even collaborates and learns from, different actors around the globe.[9]

The context of open scholarship, with its emphasis on "sociality and openness," seems like the perfect place to question what embracing collaborative research practice in very different public contexts might look like.[10] It is one thing to recognize difference in knowledge creation environments, but it is another to foster inclusion and equity in them. In other words, advocates of open scholarship might also want to think about how to move beyond the question of access to knowledge to the questions of what know-how is required to create knowledge anywhere in the world and by what means can that knowledge be disseminated to anyone else in the world.[11]

Three waves of regional higher education development

As new forms of digital engagement with the public appear in the region in question, it is useful to contextualize this emergence within the different stages of globalization of higher educa-

tion that it has witnessed. The universities mentioned above that recruit via the *Chronicle* are diverse and they need to be considered in their historical context. Among them are long standing universities such as the American University of Beirut (1866) and the American University in Cairo (1919), both founded by Protestant missionaries around the end of the Ottoman Empire. In a second wave after World War II, institutions such as the American University of Paris (1962); the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (1993); the American University of Sharjah (1997); and the American University of Afghanistan (2006) came into being. These universities were some of the first—if not the first—private institutions in countries with only state university systems. Their appearance signalled moments of significant societal and political change.

In a third wave of higher education development, what has been dubbed the creation of the *globalized university*, universities from post-industrial countries with well-established academic systems (USA, UK, France, Australia, and Germany) embarked on an expansion of their education model. The process, known as *internationalization*, led to the opening of branch campuses or study abroad satellites across Western and Southern Asia. Unlike the first two waves of higher education development, the third usually stems from specific, government-led collaborations in emergent states.[12] For example, Education City was established by the Qatar Foundation in 1997, and is now composed of seven branch campuses of foreign universities and a national university. Other notable so-called educational free zones have been created in Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Incheon, and Jeju, Korea.[13]
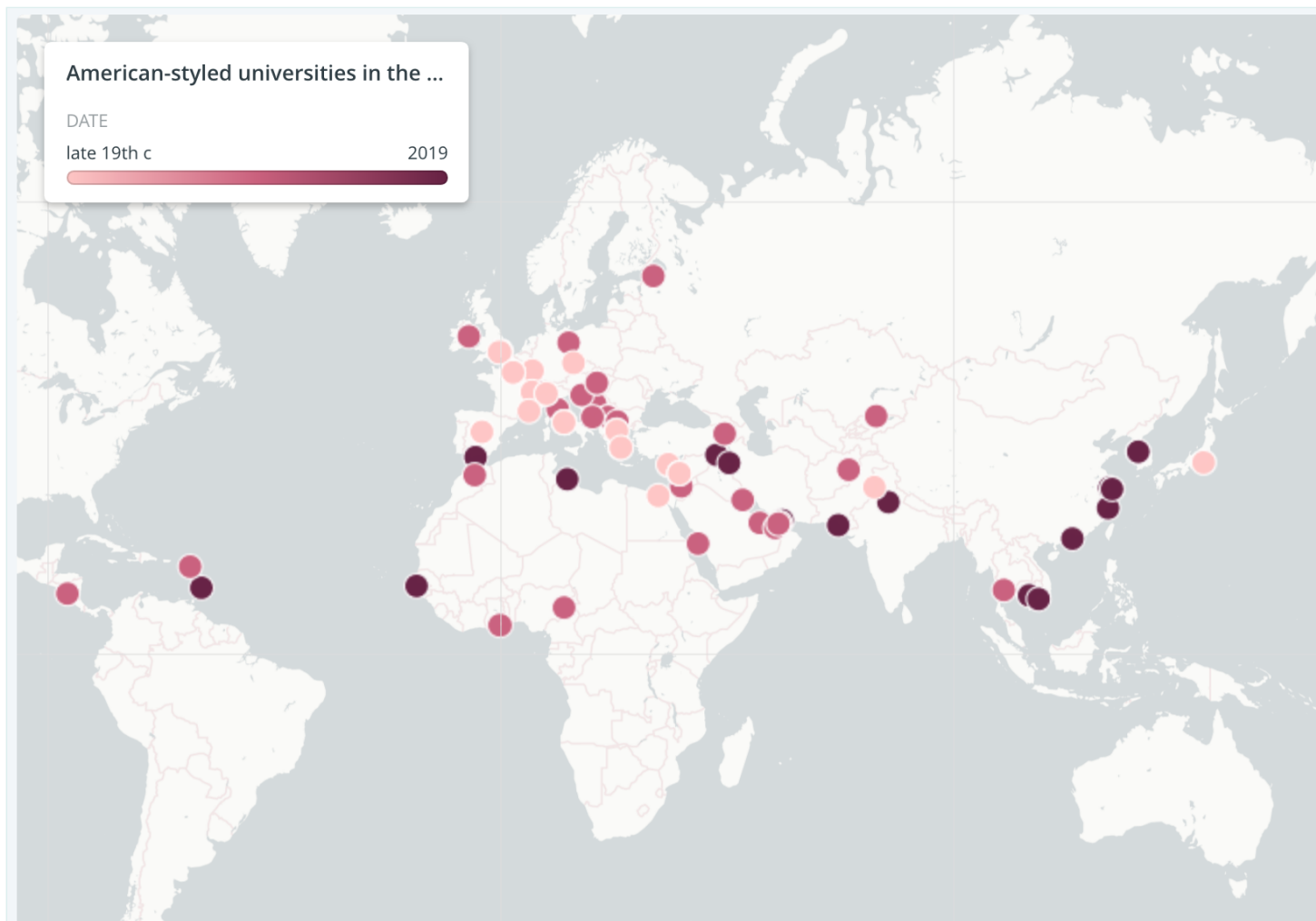
Figure 1: A Map of American-style institutions in the world. Data sources: Wikipedia and amicalnet.org. The map is styled in three "buckets" representing the three waves of global higher education described here, (1) from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s (2) from 1960 to 2000 and (3) after 2000. There are notable absences in the data, including most of the institutions of Education City, Qatar and the global network sites of New York University. An open, interactive version of this map can be found at http://umap.openstreetmap.fr/en/map/american-style-universities-abroad_364892. This figure is visualized in Carto, with an OpenStreetMap base map.

Examples of internationalized US-based university campuses that have emerged in this decade include NYU Abu Dhabi (2010) established in cooperation with the government of the UAE, NYU Shanghai (2014) in collaboration with the Chinese government, Yale-NUS College in collaboration with the National University of Singapore (2011), and Duke Kanshan University in collaboration with the Wuhan University in Wuhan (2013). These well-funded institutions are developing as important regional sites of innovation, yet not without criticism of being elitist and westernizing.[14] Perennial debates also emerge from these globalized universities as to what

extent they are able to uphold academic freedom the way that notion is understood in the west. An important point to ask ourselves at the outset of all transnational collaborations is whether the same open scholarly practices carried out in places like North America or Europe will flourish in environments where both the importance of scholarship and the social qualities of knowledge production are very different.

A few important points about these academic institutions are in order. In the examples from the first and second wave, the designation *American* in the university name does not designate a common administration, affiliation, or curriculum. Being independent of each other, these institutions often evoke the spirit of the American liberal arts college and a commitment to open, democratic values and academic freedom as their founding philosophy. This does not mean, however, that they have an uncomplicated political relationship with America and the west. These institutions embrace their role as cultural mediators between American and western educational systems and the countries in which they are located. They are a part of local realities and languages, and yet operate in English, and at the same time are quite structurally legible to researchers in the west. They also actively seek accreditation with American bodies, while also being regulated by national educational bodies.[15] They are, in effect, third spaces.

Some scholars have characterized the race in higher education to globalize in recent decades as grounded in a fear of being cut out of the lucrative, international market, and have called upon DH to examine imbalances in the global production of knowledge.[16] While this perspective is fully legitimate, I would encourage us also to look, with an action-based agenda, at how open scholarly practices in transnational sites such as the American university abroad might create spaces of discovery and innovation. Transnational collaborations, I would argue, allow us to explore what kinds of knowledge production are possible in different parts of the world, tapping into subjects and perspectives that are otherwise inaccessible from home. They require, however, a special sensitivity to the multiple frames of reference and infrastructural realities in which collaborating scholars work. It might even be desirable to work toward a global charter for open scholarly collaboration to assure principles of inclusion and equity in such collaborations.[17]

Open scholarly practices and the global

Certainly the globalized academic institutions evoked above in the Arab region have witnessed first-hand the last decade's massive changes with the rise of social media. These changes are often understood as a part of increased information access and dissemination.[18] The changing

media landscape is also linked to initiatives in creating open knowledge. Some key institutions have championed open access publication and knowledge dissemination in Arab countries, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, also known as the Gulf Arab states, but nonetheless many challenges persist in enacting open knowledge. In particular, there is a long way to go in articulating effective access, state- and regional-centered policy frameworks, and providing guidance and infrastructure for local researchers to publish openly and to share research data.[19] In Arab countries, we are quite a long way from realizing the beneficial relationship between open knowledge, transparency, and civil society that the open data community celebrates.[20] Researchers are also divided over the question of open access in the Global South and to what extent it serves as a either a "catch-up" or a "neocolonial" tool. [21] Does it only provide access to knowledge created elsewhere, or does it encourage people to create new knowledge infrastructures?

The creation of a knowledge society remains an explicit priority, however, among the most prosperous of the Arab states. An annual knowledge summit was founded in 2014 by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Knowledge Foundation in Dubai. An Arabic translation of Peter Suber's *Open Access* has also been published in Doha in 2016. In fields related to the humanities, it is large scholarly initiatives that have produced the most visible open knowledge imprint in the region. Arabic Collections Online is a free digital library of public domain Arabic-language content aiming to bring some 23,000 Arabic books to the general Arabic-reading public.[22] A Dubai Digital Library is under construction.[23] The Qatar Digital Library is a large collection providing historical archival materials about the Gulf region online with IIIF compliance and creative commons licensing.[24] Cooperation and coordination between the regional states remains, however, both a practical and a political challenge. These projects are most often realized in transnational cooperation between local foundations and external actors, in the case of Arabic Collections Online with an international consortium of universities led by New York University in New York and with the Qatar Digital Library in cooperation with the British Library.

If open knowledge practices have been successful and visible in the case of large, public initiatives, openness in individual researchers' practice remains a more elusive goal.[25] Individual scholars, especially those in North American-style institutions, aim to publish (and co-publish) largely in venues outside of the region. Some of them might be able to join the pay-to-publish open access model, but certainly not all can. Given that local environments are not fully convinced by the open access publishing model (both its quality and its impact), and that local models for peer-review are for the most part not available, they continue to embrace offshore

models of subscription-based publication. This translates into a regional toll access barrier, particularly challenging for the transnational scholar who can be assessed for academic promotion by metropolitan scholars who may have significantly greater access to scholarly infrastructure. Arab institutions provide, therefore, a significant counterexample to countries in which open access has developed post-Budapest, such as Latin America or Africa.[26]

Taking a cue from the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab (ETCL) and Instituting New Knowledge Environments (INKE)'s co-authored *Open Social Scholarship Annotated Bibliography*, let us turn our attention, however, "beyond academic contexts to encompass the multifarious manifestations of community-based research, including citizen science and citizen scholar projects." There are many instances in which non-expert or volunteer audiences have participated in data creation, enrichment, and analysis. Crowdsourcing is not unknown in Arab countries, however, projects that apply it to specifically humanities scenarios are limited in number, many of which focus on the Arabic language. My own modest group-sourced project ("Linguistic Landscapes of Beirut" shown below in Figure 2) carried out in the context of a history of language course at the American University of Beirut a study of the multilingual character of the streets of the Lebanese capital using smartphones for distributed, geotagged human tasking.[27] It was carried out with minimal university infrastructure and with a team of approximately fifty undergraduates. On another front, great potential exists with existing initiatives at NYU Abu Dhabi such as the Hackathon for Social Good in bringing together industry, undergraduates, and community for rapid prototyping of socially beneficial applications. A notable example that would interest the open scholarship community was that of a team of students who built a prototype for crowdsourcing corrections of snippets of scanned Arabic text via a smart phone app. It was piloted in refugee camps, bringing together much needed human effort for improving Arabic optical character recognition (OCR) with income opportunities for the regionally and internationally displaced as a result of the Syrian conflict.[28]

Figure 2: An overview of the geo-data collected in the Linguistic Landscapes of Beirut (LLB) project (http://llbeirut.org) visualized in Google Earth. Each pin on the map represents a photograph taken of a sample of multilingual public language. One of the interesting observations of the LLB project is how multilingualism varies by altitude. Basemap Credit: Data SIO, NOAA, US Navy, NGA, GEBCO; Image Landset / Copernicus; Image © 2019 Maxar Technologies; Image © 2019 CNES / Airbus.

Moving such projects beyond the proof of concept stage to greater implementation requires not only infrastructure and resources, but also a commitment to the idea that such public knowledge is socially beneficial. This gap has been filled again largely by the commercial and governmental sectors. In particular, the crowd has been harnessed for Arabic language content creation. A digital content community building initiative known as Taghreedat ("chirping" or "tweeting") provides a space for those working between Arabic and other world languages particularly in the domain of translation and language resources.[29] Another successful public

knowledge effort was spearheaded by the abovementioned al-Maktoum foundation. The foundation's Translation Challenge achieved a goal—the crowd-translating of eleven million words dealing with science and math into Arabic in a single year![30] Such approaches have promise when they are supported by governmental sectors with a research-oriented frame of mind. The data management practices of such initiatives can be further enhanced, however, such that knowledge is not only created, but is also actionable and reusable by all.

Realities and Challenges for Open Digital Scholarship

The previous section described some general societal trends in the prosperous GCC region that point to emergent open, social practices of knowledge production. I suspect that they are not well known outside the region since they are language- and culture-specific. If we look to lesser resourced regional countries, there are no doubt other initiatives that go unmentioned because they have escaped our attention. Certainly, much more needs to be achieved in terms of establishing knowledge-building capacity in schools and universities as well as in community organizations and the galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) sector. With very high smartphone penetration rates in the Gulf Arab states, accessing information in a digital format will not be the main barrier, instead it will be important that information is mobile friendly. In other Arab countries, access to reliable internet will continue to be a rate determining step.

DH on the international campus, I believe, will grow as one of the access points for societies developing open scholarly practices. There is a small literature on the growing information literacies at the international campus, such the American University of Beirut, American University of Sharjah, or NYU Abu Dhabi. It has largely focused on domains already institutionalized in the universities: writing centers, media studies, digital library delivery, and e-learning.[31] Much less has been written about the creation and management of the data of open scholarship in these environments. It is a conversation that will emerge in the coming years.

Open access advocates stress how under-resourced the Arab university and its library can be, lacking the funds to buy into the most fundamental of western journal subscriptions.[32] From the perspective of journal access, I could not agree more. There are other sides of the question of access, however, including the complex relation of culture and infrastructure. I would like to outline a few of the challenges of open knowledge production in universities and cultural institutions in the larger Arab region that take us beyond a focus on the toll access barrier. They draw on years of experience in practicing digital humanities where they are very new. I list these points below, not to insist that the gap is unbridgeable, but rather to make my readers

aware of some of the points of infrastructural difference that I evoked at the beginning of this article. Some of them might surprise you, others might provoke empathy. I suspect that one can find in them also the partial reflection of realities in other parts of the world, including in some developed countries. Hopefully, such realities can be kept in mind if we choose to cooperate with colleagues from *foreign* institutions.

i. Open digital scholarship training events.

Technical facilities are essential when we think about hackathons or open scholarship training events, and yet across the larger region, we really need to recognize the *continuum of infrastructural lack*. Some very basic services that one might take for granted in personal and scholarly communication in developed countries like electrical power, reliable internet bandwidth, open internet, Skype, videoconferencing facilities, up-to-date hardware (scanners, projectors, printers), and networked services can be intermittent, or even altogether missing. In the case where there may be a lab set up for open scholarly training on campus, if students and faculty return to their homes, they often face significantly weaker infrastructure for study or research. Glitches in such basic infrastructure also make teaching with even simple technological stacks problematic, limiting how we can expand our pedagogy. Imagine trying to carry out a course or a Wikipedia-a-thon and the power or the internet can go off at any moment. Recognizing this infrastructural gap and planning for it in our projects are particularly important if we are going to imagine public knowledge creation projects that go beyond the walls of our institutions. A particular agility is required to engineer them so that they achieve success in infrastructurally diverse environments.

ii. Open knowledge sharing for research.

Having a relatively low barrier and accessible content means that knowledge and research data sharing can exist in the world (GitHub, Wikimedia Commons, OSM, Zenodo, etc). I use these environments on a regular basis and make a point of explaining their benefits, although their use among regional peers could still be increased. Even though students are aware of their existence, it is rare that I have students who know how they can work to their benefit. If they do know about GitHub, for example, they might use our institutional Enterprise account or Google Drive, almost as they would post work behind a wall in yesterday's learning management system (LMS). The idea that you would create data or code and that you would just give it away for free has been a recurring point of misunderstanding, even hesitation. I wonder if the

hesitation could not also be related to the design of the platforms themselves. After all, across the globe we confront very different opinions about knowledge sharing.

Scholars in organizational behavior and management studies have critiqued the universalizing tone in theories of knowledge sharing and management in particular in their application to Asian and Arab cultures. In these cultural contexts, it has been argued that networks of interpersonal relations come before cultural transactionality. In a nutshell, "the sharing of knowledge cannot be taken for granted outside [the] context of trustful relationships." [33] Whereas these cultural opinions can be interpreted by westerners as a kind of nepotism, they are fundamental to cultural transactions. I would argue that it clashes with the marketplace-like construction of platforms for open knowledge sharing. In our open knowledge practice, it is worth pausing to wonder: if we meet on well-known platforms created and hosted in the global north, how might our community suffer from a self-selection bias? I am not suggesting that it is impossible to use such open knowledge sharing in Arab countries and in Asia, but it will require adjustment and acculturation. It is interesting to note that the abovementioned al-Maktoum foundation of Dubai has even argued for a knowledge management theory reflective of Arab culture to be articulated.[34]

iii. Divergent cultural norms around public content creation and reuse

Another domain used for open knowledge production worldwide is that of Wikimedia. Perhaps due to the fact that fully ported Creative Commons licenses are rare in the Arab countries (the only one belonging to Egypt) and the legal framework known as freedom of panorama (FP) is not legally established, Wikimedia Commons has a shockingly small collection of open cultural data about the region. Several open public initiatives have been launched to remediate this data deficit about the United Arab Emirates within Wikipedia. A #wikigap edit-a-thon was held in May 2018 and a photo contest was launched for Fall 2018, encouraging amateur photographers to document the country.[35] Since sites newer that 75 years old are not allowed in the absence of freedom of panorama (FP), photographers participating in the contest for the most part had to go far outside of urban areas where the majority of the population lives to a number of 18th century forts in far flung parts of the country. The contest was a solid beginning, but could also, in my opinion, have focused on visual data of other aspects of cultural life besides architecture, for example: jewellery, objects of traditional culture, or unique natural landscapes.
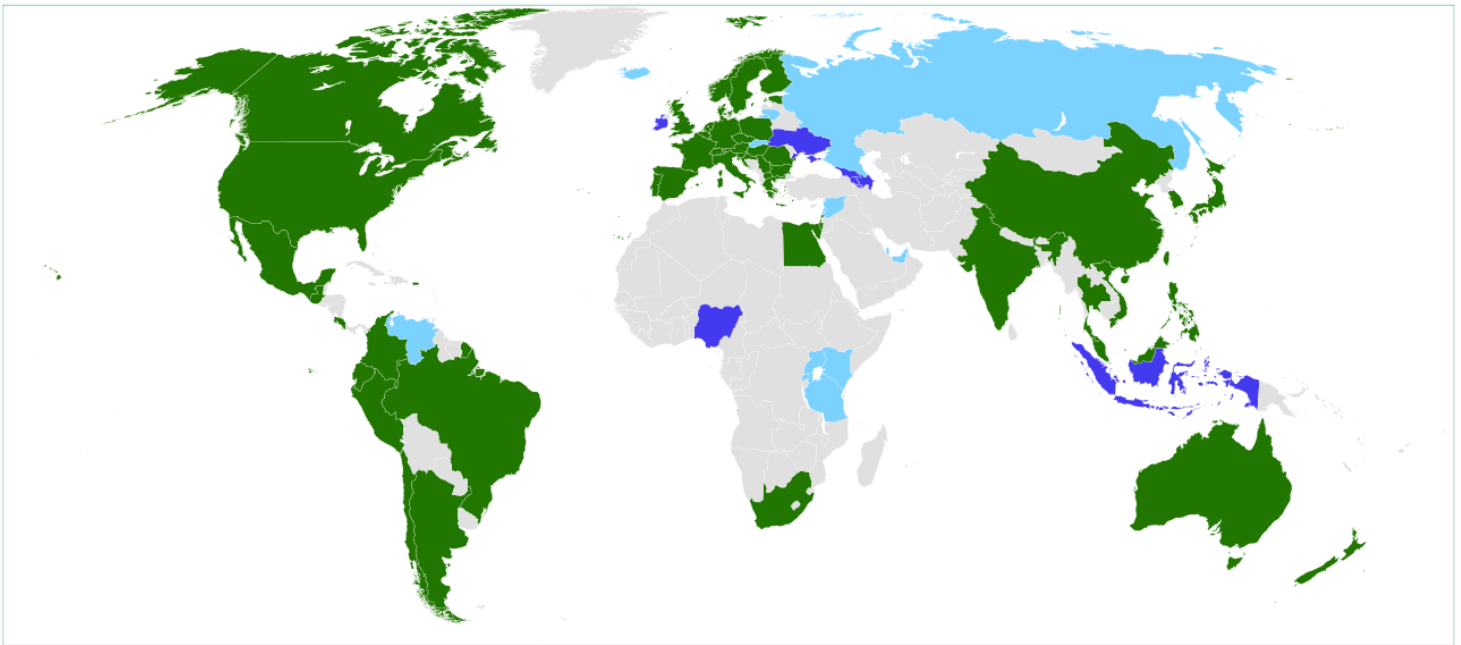
Figure 3: A map of countries to which [Creative Commons International]

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_Commons_International) has ported CC licenses from 2008.

(Dark green: ported; light green: being ported.) Source: Wikimedia Commons. License: CC

As I have previously argued, open data about culture would be a boon to the burgeoning cultural heritage sector in the Gulf Arab states, and yet the know-how for producing such data—and perhaps more importantly, the motivation to create such data for public consumption on the open web—has not been fully established.[36] In a recent experiment carried out in my Digital Curation undergraduate course, we did an environment scan of the commons for content about the region and attempted to populate WikiCommons with some image content that represented an alternative view of Abu Dhabi than the typical tourist photographs of famous sites.[37] We observed some rather odd things, including the fact that a German-language Wikimedian was systematically deleting images of the most iconic structures in Abu Dhabi posted by visitors and residents alike. He was citing the lack of freedom of panorama that allows for such pictures to be disseminated publicly as the reason for deletion (and this is the strict condition for posting images), it is unclear whether the enthusiastic contributors of those same photos were even aware of the necessity of such a legal condition!
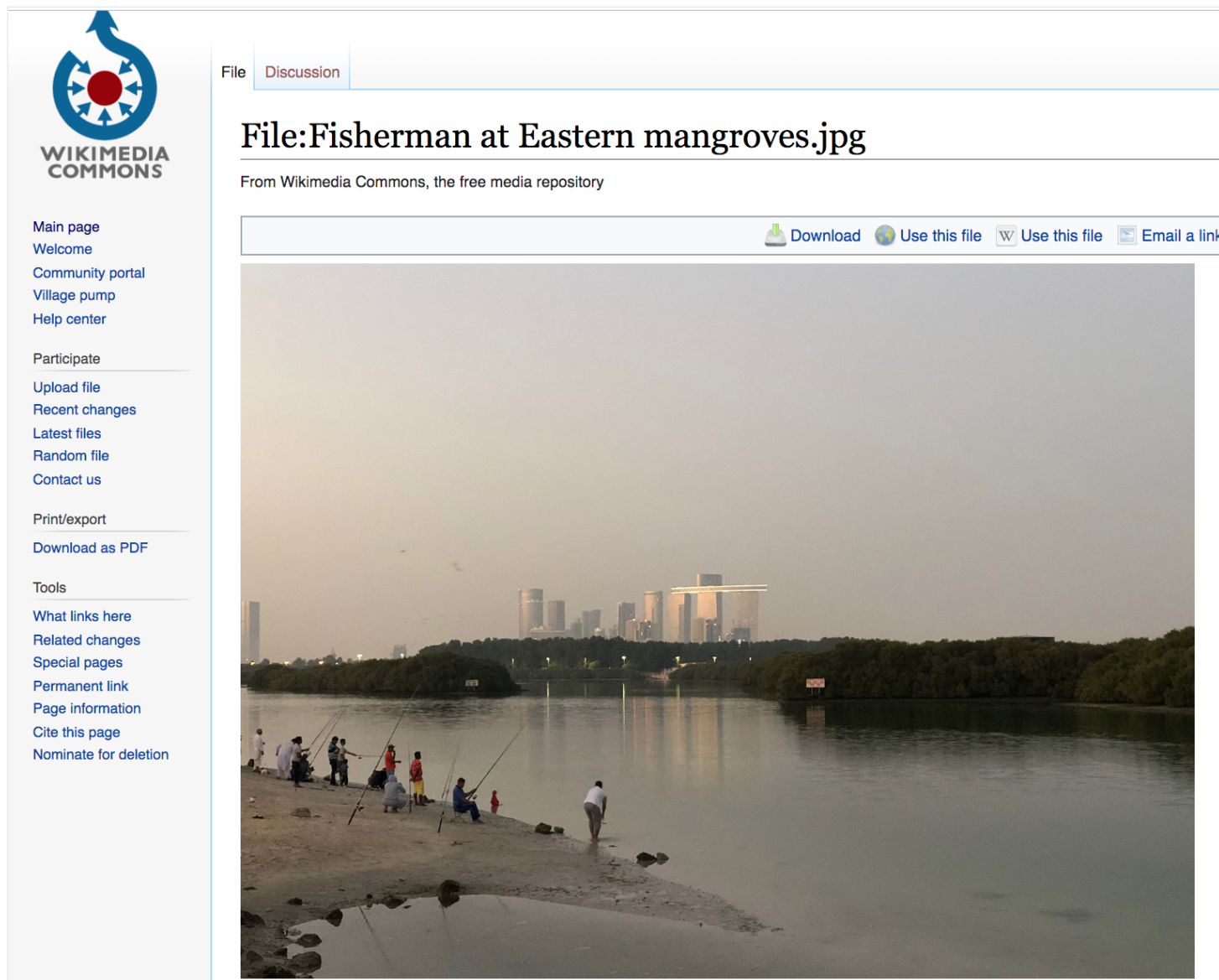
Figure 4: A sample of alternative Wikimedia Commons image content, depicting the Eastern mangroves of Abu Dhabi island with the skyline of Reem Island in the background created in 2018. The photo was taken within the context of a class on digital curation and open data creation. It seems to satisfy the principle of de minimis while also providing a provocative contrast of worlds that one can find in the Gulf region. License: CC BY-SA 4.0 International.

On the other hand, the world of social media in Arab countries is full of cultural curators that are effectively carrying out forms of public history.[38] If one of the principles of open scholarship is to follow the public to the places where they are communicating and creating, more thought needs to be given to whether it is possible, or even desirable, to woo those creators away from commercial platforms such as Facebook or Instagram to others that have less regional audience at present. One of the domains in which open scholarship practitioners can continue to contribute to public dialogue in the region is through advocacy about expanding

open knowledge environments, creating projects and initiatives that make a public aware of their constraints and rules.

D. Uneven web publishing and dissemination

There are famous stories of bloggers during the Egyptian revolution or the Syrian conflict of earlier this decade, but for the most part, open web publishing and web-based knowledge dissemination remains an untapped resource in the the Arab region. Kulesz has argued that for the size of the readership in the region, electronic publishing is far smaller than one might expect. Also, given the potential of restrictions on publication in such a politically diverse and divided region, knowledge production and printing sometimes takes place in "neutral" countries such as Germany, the US, or France.[39] Basic blog platforms such as WordPress indeed now support right-to-left directional languages such as Arabic, but other basic infrastructural elements that have facilitated the expansion of online publishing cultures elsewhere—e-readers, XML for publishing or digital critical editions, print on demand, electronic payment systems—are shockingly underdeveloped.[40] This situation can be attributed, in part, to complexities of the language and lack of software and platform development for Arabic-language content. No doubt lack of demand is another part of the vicious circle.

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The previous four sub-sections enumerated some of the many cultural and infrastructural issues that plague online content and activity in Arab countries, inhibiting the development of widespread open knowledge practices. Others could be mentioned, including the effect of the high degree of mobility of knowledge workers, including people working in academia, the GLAM, and cultural sector, impacting the local sustainability of open knowledge capacity.

Generally speaking, the notion of the transnational invoked in the title of my paper involves a shift in scale from a single state, or single region, perspective to that of the world. The perspective I have attempted to provide here is that of a view from the field, by which I mean my sharing thoughts from within the Arab region as a digital humanist working currently in the capital city of the UAE. Many of the points made here no doubt can be extrapolated beyond the specific scenario of the Arab region. Since the modern university has expanded beyond the nation, with the establishment of satellite or branch campuses that I have discussed above in detail, it is very important to recognize that local attitudes and infrastructural challenges play an important role in determining the current and future state of knowledge production.[41] We need to keep them in mind when we are collaborating across borders. Digital scholarship can provide some of the answer, but open scholarship is not beyond the constraints of place. The success of

both depends on finding culturally appropriate solutions that bridge the infrastructure gap of the various locales.

If collaboration with partners around the globe is indeed important to us within the framework of open scholarship, we need to reflect on how can we move beyond a conversation mostly about diversity of partners, to also ones about inclusion and equity in the field. To be clear, this means that, despite the obvious infrastructural difference and historical gaps in access to the means of knowledge production, leaders in open scholarship need to take an active stance to address that imbalance, through providing training in the region, thinking creatively and creating sustainable infrastructures for carrying out such work, even rethinking some of the *givens* in the world of open access and open platforms.[42]

Just as researchers are asked to submit applications to their local Institutional Review Board to make sure that our research does not cause harm any of our research subjects, it is worth considering how ethical we are being when we deal with our colleagues in far-away places. Especially when the goal is open, digital scholarship, we ought to pause to consider our collaborator's local relationships to, and awareness of, know-how of knowledge production. Not all cultures are permeated with devices and have people of all ages reading online. Nor do all cultures share the same idea of ultimate openness as a universal, social good, and certainly many of them are growing aware of how openness can negatively impact the more vulnerable in our societies. As a prelude to the partnership agreements that we sign with future collaborators, it is worth pausing to ask ourselves from both sides what local notions of sharing and privacy we commonly value. The conversation will not only be one of clarification and agreement across nations, but I would suggest, of mutual discovery.

Notes:

. My primary academic employment has been in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region since 2002, first in Lebanon, and now in the United Arab Emirates (with intermittent academic research work in Tunisia and Algeria over a four year period). I have been actively involved in the creation of communities of digital practice between some of the institutions mentioned in this essay. My current institution is well resourced in library and computing resources com-

pared to others in the region, without which this essay and my professional practice in a global field would not be possible. ↵

. Nabila Shehabeddine. "Intellectual Property Copyright and Fair Use: Lebanon as a Case Study." Lecture, MelCome International Annual Conference, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, July 18-22, 2018. ↵

. Daniele Cantini. "Review of HANAFI Sari and ARVANITIS Rigas, *Knowledge Production in the Arab World. The Impossible Promise*, London & New York, Routledge, 2016, Xvi + 354 p." *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée* 145(2017). https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/9779. ↵

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Citation:

Abstract:

This essay addresses emerging open scholarly practices in transnational contexts, in particular in the Eastern Arab countries. It also describes some of the larger contours of the globalization in higher education in the regions of Middle East/North Africa (MENA) and Asia. Drawing upon work in the field in Lebanon and the Gulf States, it discusses some of the opportunities and challenges for open scholarship in the region, notably a gap in knowledge infrastructure. Finally, it argues that an important opportunity has emerged for the region's globally connected institutions of higher education to shape and enact new knowledge environments.

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