CyberResistance: Saudi Opposition Between Globalization and Localization

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The information society, late capitalism, and globalization raise serious questions about many tidy categories through which the world has conventionally been understood. Resistance, the subject of this essay, is one of these categories. The proliferation of globalizing means of communications such as the satellite dish and the internet has added new dimensions to our world. One is the collapse of premodern conceptions of space and time. Our phenomenological world is one that compresses time and in turn annihilates space, as Harvey suggests,[1] or delineates space and time and liberates them from their local markers, as Giddens argues.[2] As space shrinks phenomenologically, people in different places experience the same events at the same time.[3] In light of the confusion stemming from the increase in global political, economic, and social activities, the world seems beset by the paradox of homogenizing and fragmenting impulses. Complicating this picture even further is our increasing dependence on the media[4] to bring world events to our homes, giving us the illusion that we were taken there to witness these events. In this heavily mediated

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[1] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989).

[2] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 21.

[3] The globalized world and modernity and their impact on our understanding of the social phenomenon are not tied to the works of Harvey and Giddens alone. Other theorists such as Roland Peterson, Ulrich Beck, and Scott Lash are central to the globalization debate. For a good summary of the Globalization debate, see Malcolm Walters, *Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[4] For a debate on the media, information society, and globalization, see Karamjit S. Gill, ed., *Information Society: New Media, Ethics and Postmodernism* (London: Springer-Verlag London Limited, 1996); Lance Starte, Ronald Jacobson, and Stephanie B. Gibson, *Communication and Cyberspace* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1996); Sandra Braman and Annabelle Mohammadi, *Globalization, Communication, and Transnational Civil Society* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1996); and Andrew King (ed.) *Postmodern Political Communication: The Fringe Challenges the Center* (Westport, CT: Braeger, 1992).

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world, the "signs for the real,"[5] text and image alike, seem more real than the real itself. Nowhere has the impact of globalization been felt more intensely than in the Middle East. Data from the Gulf states in particular raise new questions about our understanding of resistance, national boundaries, and territoriality as well as other social science concepts such as sovereignty, the nation state, and citizenship.

To begin with, the occupation and subsequent liberation of Kuwait has shown that in the age of globalism, physical space is not central to the state's survival. If it can change its passwords in computers and the world of finance and exist on television screens, then the state continues to function. When a territory is occupied, the state can become diffused in the financescape[6] and the mediascape or transformed into what might be called, following Baudrillard,[7] a "hyperreal state." "Hyperreal Kuwait" survived as a state in the global flow even when it was occupied physically.[8] This essay explores whether or not this global flow, effectively used by the state, can also be used by the opposition. To this end, I will examine resistance in Saudi Arabia, a society similar to Kuwait in culture, in the rentier nature of the state, and in its access to the global flow of information and money.

PECULIARITIES OF SAUDI STATE AND SAUDI OPPOSITION

However, the Saudi opposition and the Saudi state have their own peculiarities, at least in the imagination of Western social scientists. Saudi Arabia appears in most Western writings as a traditional society, a misconception that must be dispelled before we can examine the highly complex and sophisticated structure of Saudi resistance. Saudi Arabia is a very complex mixture of the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern, depending on the region and the sociocultural formation.[9] For example, the eastern province is dominated

[5] This is Baudrillard's argument. For more, see Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Mark Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166–84.

[6] Arjun Appadurai uses this formulation of a world dominated by five distinct scapes as landscapes: the ethnoscape of global migration, the technoscape of information and technology, the finanscape of global capital, the mediascape, and finally the ideaoscape of political discourses. For more, see Sandra Braman, ed., *Globalization, Communication and Transnational Civil Society* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996), 7.

[7] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," in Mark Poster, *Jean Baudrillard*, 166–84.

[8] For more, see Timothy W. Luke "The Discipline of Security Studies and the Codes of containment: Learning From Kuwait," *Alternatives*, 16:3 (1991), 315–44; and Timothy W. Luke, "Security, Sovereignty, and Strategy: Reinterpreting Desert Storm," *Crossroads*, no. 33 (1991), 1–14. Luke also published an important work on resistance in the information age, although it focuses on television in the Western experience (Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society* [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989]).

[9] For more on the debate of the coexistence of the "modern" in the "traditional" and the traditional in the modern and even the postmodern, see Timothy Luke, "Identity, Meaning, and Globalization: Detraditionalization in Postmodern Space Time Compression," in Paul Heelas, Scott Lash, Paul Morris, *Detraditionalization* (Cambridge, MA, Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1996), 109–33.

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by a Shi'a population, an oil industry, and an obvious American influence. Highways, shopping malls, and expatriate communities give the impression that one is in an American city, especially when one sees the number of American soldiers and civilians in Dhahran, Damam, and Khobar. Except for scattered and sometimes diffuse native cultural practices of closing shops for prayers and veiling women, these cities are a microcosm of global creolization. Even when one examines the local, one discovers that hijabs and abayahs (local dress) are made in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as designer abayahs prepared in Paris and London. Prayer rugs with a compass indicating the direction of Mecca are made in Japan. Moreover, the local Shi'ism transcends Saudi territories to reach Bahrain, Lebanon, and Iran. Even the holy places in Mecca and Madina are not immune to the global effect. Almost all religious icons sold outside the Prophet's mosque in Madina are made outside the country and sold to foreigners as if they were Saudi. Foreign workers, estimated to equal the population of natives, add to the peculiarity of the Saudi state. Saudi children are raised by Asian and European nannies and are frequently bilingual. Saudi culture also varies from one region to the other, a few examples being the liberal Sunni cosmopolitan in the Western Region, Shi'i liberal and Western in the East, conservative but Westernized in the center. Moreover, like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia is not concentrated only in its physical and geographical space but, rather, diffused financially and informationally in the various global scapes.

Saudi Arabia is peculiar in that the state usually presents itself as the defender of the faith in the face of a cultural and religious onslaught from the West. Thus, in macropolitical or global terms, the state presents itself as an opposition group. The state's allocation of resources to take care of the holy places and its insistence on being an Islamic state that applies Islamic law further confirms Saudi Arabia's image as a country at the forefront of the global struggle against Western corruption. Moreover, Saudi opposition groups are different from those in other states both because of the extreme limitations on conventional expressions of dissent within the country and because of the opposition's access to cash and the global flow of information. They are the first of the opposition groups in the Middle East to make extensive use of new technologies in communicating their message to their followers.

Because of the conservative nature and the closure of the political order in Saudi Arabia, movement in intermediate spaces is central to the politics of the state and the opposition alike. As we will see in the following discussion, domination and resistance have not only moved from real to virtual space; but the Saudi political struggle has relocated to a different site, namely London. Currently the British capital hosts both resistance leaders, such as Dr. Mohammad al-Mas'ari and Dr. Sa'd al-Faqih, as well as Saudi establishment newspapers such as *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, weekly magazines such as *al-Majalla*, and the *Middle East Broadcasting Corporation*, all of which are completely or

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partially owned by members of the Saudi royal family.[10] Giddens' idea of disembedding as "'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of timespace."[11] gains special significance in the case of the Saudis, as do many concepts associated with the globalization literature.

In the context I use to examine resistance to the Saudi state, it is no longer analytically useful to think of Saudi Arabia as a closed system. New technologies and new means of communication have provided opposition groups as well as the state with an intermediate space and a new means of disseminating information in a "virtual space" beyond their limited conceptual and physical spaces. But more for the opposition than for the state, the Internet and other media, such as fax machines, cellular phones, satellite dishes, and cassette tapes, provide a new space for airing grievances with minimal risk. However, the absence of risk is not the result of what James C. Scott,[12] in an influential analysis of resistance, refers to as an offstage discourse of whispers and rumors in safe zones inaccessible to the ruling elite. Sites of resistance are no longer the secret nooks and crannies within Saudi society but internet nodes, specific web sites, and offices outside the country that transmit information to sympathizers inside. Neither the hidden transcripts nor the social sites of resistance conform to earlier formulations concerning resistance literature. The transcript of resistance, especially on the World Wide Web, is hidden only to those who choose not to read it or who have no access to the language.[13] Furthermore, the opposition shares this space with the government on equal footing. The transcripts of both the opposition and the government allow for multiple discourses depending on the language used and the audience targeted. Thus, the binary formulations of hidden transcript and public transcript require reformulation in light of the new means of communication, the new relations of mediated social phenomenon, and the dialectic of the local and global.[14]

Saudi Arabian Resistance from the Audio World to Cyberspace

To have a clearer understanding of the current resistance in cyberspace and how the opposition that supports it evolved to its current state of sophistication, I will begin the discussion with the Hawali-'Auda Group, a group that emerged during the Gulf War period and that depended mainly on audio and video tech-

[10] For more on the Saudi role to capture a greater share of the global media market, see Stephen Franklin, "The Kingdom and the Power," *Columbia Journalism Review,* November/December, (1996), 49–51.

[11] For a discussion of the concept see, Anthony Giddens *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 21–29.

[12] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1990).

[13] Most websites are currently written as English text. Arabic texts, for example, are scanned as images.

[14] These concepts form the corner stone of Scott's formulation to understanding resistance. For more, see James C. Scott, *Domination*.

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nology to communicate its message. The second group to be discussed is the Shi'a Reform Movement, a group that depended on various media including cassette tapes, faxes, and limited use of electronic mail. The other two groups, the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) and the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA), are Sunni groups that have made extensive use of the World Wide Web and other technology to elaborate a discourse of resistance both outside the Kingdom and inside it. These are the two groups that I refer to as cyberspace resistance. I will describe how these groups have circumvented state institutional control through the use of modern technology. Thus, I will show the degree to which the nature of resistance has changed as well as the practical and theoretical implications of these new forms of resistance beyond the Saudi case.

In Saudi Arabia, the impact of the media on culture, politics, and society is at the forefront of the national discourse. To appreciate the complexity of this debate about Saudi society and the intrusion of these new means of communication, one has to understand the situation prior to their introduction. Discourse on the media, coupled with that of the state ulama (clergy), is central to the hegemony of the Saud family over competing tribes by establishing the legitimacy of the Saudi political order through a hegemony of Islamic and traditional discourse. The state must maintain itself through a web of religious and tribal discourse. If this web is weakened, the stability of the state is likely to be compromised. The preaching of the state ulama and the traditionalists' tribal discourse are mediated and propagated through mosques, state radio, television, and newspapers. This hegemony weakens during times of crisis that expose the disjunction between the legitimizing discourse of the state and the practices of the rulers. This was the case when the Saudi rulers allowed foreign troops into Saudi Arabia during the 1990 Gulf Crisis. Then, the government-owned television and radio had to broadcast the fatwas (religious edicts) of the ulama sanctioning the importation of troops to protect the holy places. The discourse of the opposition focused on a critique of the ulama's edicts and propagated its message via different means, namely books, faxes, cassette tapes, and later email and web sites. For the continuation of a strong hegemony, the state has to control this alternative dissemination of information (both religious and secular) to ensure that citizens comply with the dominant order.

In this context, the Saudi state devotes a great deal of money and effort to regulate the flow of information. Some of the state's strategies to regulate information include building institutions responsible for censorship and maintaining state ownership of both radio and television. Telecommunication is also kept under state control, so the government monitors international phone calls and faxes. However, opposition forces and other social forces frequently circumvent censorship and regulatory institutions in order to acquire or transmit alternative messages. Furthermore, state control of press, radio, and television

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can be circumvented through the use of satellite dishes, the internet, and cassette tapes.

Institutions of Information Regulation

In addition to controlling radio and television and strictly limiting the press, the Saudi state has devised a system of information control for alternative media, foreign publications, and other information deemed a threat to the hegemony of the ruling elite and their ideology. An understanding of the existing Saudi system of censorship is important to understanding the opposition and their attempts to resort to alternative means, since the choice of alternative media suggests a strategy to circumvent the existing system.

Current Saudi institutions of information regulation include: the Supreme Information Council, the General Directorate of Publications, and the Department of Domestic Press Censorship. The Supreme Information Council, established in January 1977, is the highest press and information authority in the country. Before the council was created in 1977, the Minister of Interior appointed censors for every Saudi newspaper and magazine. The duties of the council include controlling and supervising all audio and visual broadcasting services as well as censoring the contents of books, magazines, newspapers, films, recordings, bulletins, commercials, and virtually every other means of communicating with the public. In addition, in 1981, the Ministry of Information issued a booklet in which it defined the duties of the General Directorate of Publications. Its functions include the "censorship of all books, magazines, audio and video cassettes, newspapers, newsletters and bulletins."[15] It also grants licenses to publishing and distribution outlets.[16]

Another organization responsible for regulating what Saudi citizens see, hear, and read is the Ministry of Information's Department of Domestic Press Censorship. Its functions include: censoring the domestic press in accordance with the press code, informing domestic publications of government press policies, and investigating journalists. Thus, through this agency, the Ministry of Information censors the domestic press by transmitting information concerning appropriate items to be reported and the approved interpretations of events, by determining the punishments for journalists who violate those guidelines or who attempt to investigate unapproved matters, and by regulating the establishment of new magazines and newspapers.[17] In addition to the central authority of the information ministry, local governors also have the right to censor and regulate the public discourse in their domains.[18]

The foreign press is regulated by the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Interior. Concerning the necessary distribution license for foreign publications, the government reviews the previous three months' worth of editions

[15] Article 19, *Silent Kingdom* (London: Article 19 Country Report, 1991), 12.
[16] Ibid. [17] Ibid., 14–16. [18] Ibid., 34–38.

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for dailies and weeklies and twelve issues for monthlies. The license is subject to being revoked whenever the publication "offends the sensibility of the Saudi society. " Not only are newspapers and magazines regulated, but journalists can be banned from entering the Kingdom.[19] All of these agencies have proved fairly effective in controlling traditional means of communication in Saudi Arabia.

However, new means of communication and the global information revolution pose new challenges to the regime's ability to control electronic dissent. Saudi Arabia is currently engaged in an ambitious plan of building an information infrastructure that can be used by business and the state. However, this infrastructure can also be used by the opposition. For instance, the Saudi state took steps to upgrade its current telephone system by signing a $4 billion contract with American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T). This contract allows AT&T to upgrade the Saudi system from traditional telecommunications to digital wireless telephones and to upgrade existing networks and satellite links. A Saudi can connect with the internet through Gulfnet, which allows for dialup connections with other online services through a local network (al-Waseet). King Abd al-'Aziz City for Science and Technology and other Saudi universities are at the center of these activities.[20] Yet while the system will obviously serve state interests, Saudi attempts to integrate computers will also serve the opposition by opening up another media space for alternative discourse. Although currently Saudis have limited access to the World Wide Web, they can gain greater access by dialing up servers in neighboring countries, and many Saudis are wealthy enough to do so.[21] This may change the nature of Saudi opposition over time from an Islamist resistance that crosscuts many social classes into an elite opposition available only to those who can afford an international call. Currently, however, the Islamists make information available to local Saudis by providing toll-free numbers, as will be demonstrated below.

The Audio Resistance. Islam-based dissent in Saudi Arabia dates back to the state's formation. The Saudi government with its traditional institutions effectively limited the appeal of its opponents by censoring their message. Groups that rebelled openly, such as those who seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, were crushed militarily.[22] The absence of a communication structure for this group limited its supporters. Since Saudi Arabia is a very big country, revolutionaries need to disseminate their message throughout this wide space. With

[19] Ibid., 20–21.

[20] For more on the information infrastructure of the Arab world in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, see C. Bryan Gabbard and George S. Park, *The Information Revolution in the Arab World* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996). See also Hamad al-Saloom, *Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia* (Washington, DC: The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1995).

[21] Interview with a Saudi professor who has used this method (Washington, November 26, 1996).

[22] For more on these incidents, see Mordichai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government Society and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 79–89.

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the advent of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the cassette tape as a new means of political communication was introduced.[23] The dissemination of Khomeini's message by tape inside and outside Iran contributed to an uprising in the Shi'a area of Saudi Arabia. However, Shi'a audiotapes did not reach the Sunni areas because of sectarian differences.

The cassette tape as a means of communicating political messages became popular in the Sunni regions of Saudi Arabia only in the mid-1980s, intensifying in 1988 and after. The debate between the modernists and Islamists prefigured the verbal war that arose between the Saudi state and its Islamist opposition during and after the Gulf War by using cassette tapes as a means of attacking the written word. The most intense debate over the role of Islam in Saudi Arabia took shape in 1989, when two major trends emerged: the liberal trend and the Islamic trend. The debate centered around the issue of modernism and its impact on Saudi society. The liberals disguised their protest in literary texts that criticized the dominant religious discourse in the country.

Islamists responded to these provocations with books, leaflets, and cassette tapes denouncing the liberal trend and asking the government to dismiss some of these writers from their positions as columnists in Saudi newspapers and magazines. Said al-Ghamidi distributed two cassette tapes representing the Islamic view of modernism and modern literature and attacking the views of modernist authors. The cassette tape selected quotes from Saudi writers such as Muhammad al-'Ali, Sa'id al-Baz'i, and Sa'id al-Suraihi. For example, it quotes al-Suraihi, a modernist writer, as saying, "Modernism means a critique of Arab tribal tradition, the static world, and it encourages us to open up to Western and international traditions." In an emotional reply, using the advantage of the voice on tape against a written statement, al-Ghamidi tells his audience, "Brothers! Judge for yourself. They suggest that our Islamic tradition is rigid and they want to get rid of it. . . .These people have nothing but contempt for our religion."[24] In this tape, al-Ghamidi identifies two cultural trends in Saudi society: the hardline modernists and the Islamists. The purpose of distributing these two tapes is to "win over the silent middle to the side of the believers."[25] 'Awed al-Qarni's *Modernism on an Islamic Scale* contains an introduction by Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti, Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aziz bin Baz, lending the book and the preexisting anti-modernist tendency in the society greater credibility. Al-Qarni's book is similar to the tapes distributed by al-Ghamidi; in fact, in some instances they quote the same authors they are attacking.[26] These tapes and books gal-

[23] For more on cassette tapes and the Iranian Revolution, see Annabelle and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[24] Based on my translation of two audiocassette tapes by Sa'id al-Ghamidi entitled, "Al-Hadatha (Modernism)."

[25] Ibid.

[26] 'Awad al-Qarni, *Al-Hadathah fi Mizan al-slam* (Modernism on an Islamic Scale) (Cairo: Hajr Publishing Company, 1988).

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vanized the two dominant cultural discourses of the Islamists and the modernists.

The Hawali-'Auda Group. The Gulf War and the arrival of American troops in the "holy land" intensified the debate. New voices emerged, many of whom were embraced by large segments of the Saudi public. Two preachers who later became leaders of the Islamic movement in the kingdom, Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-'Auda, gained prominence during the Gulf crisis as a result of their daring criticism of the deployment of American troops on Saudi soil. Due to the state monopoly of radio, television, and newspapers, the preachers used cassette tapes and occasional video tapes to propagate their messages. The tapes provided the Saudi public with wellargued religious position papers objecting to the presence of foreign troops on the holy land.[27] The Islamists were thus effective in mobilizing support against the foreign intervention and in threatening the regime. Copying machines were central to the propagation of these groups' message through print. One Saudi dissident explained,

> We used to give copies of these speeches to Indian and Pakistani workers to Xerox by the hundred and ask them to put them in the mail boxes of government officials and ordinary citizens. Since these workers didn't read Arabic, they didn't know that they were used in a political campaign.[28]

The activists also sent their messages by fax to their supporters. The Saudi government responded to all this activity by making it illegal for al-'Auda and al-Hawali to preach in the mosques. The two opposition leaders then resorted to cassette tapes as a way of circumventing the royal decree.

Existing institutions of censorship have had limited success in controlling the cassette tape phenomenon. The regulation of cassettes and the shops that sell them is covered by the Press and Publication Code, which puts the matter under the responsibility of the General Directorate for Publications. The Directorate has sought to counteract the influence of cassette tapes mainly by raiding the shops that sell them, but this has proven ineffective and tape distribution has continued to increase. In response to government raids, activists have turned to underground networks to distribute their tapes. These networks were based on the existing structure of the clandestine Muslim Brotherhood organization, the Hizb al-Tahrir (Liberation Party), and the Salafi network. These underground networks have been central to the distribution of cassettes. Faxes make the texts of these tapes available to everyone.[29]

The cassette tape resistance continued even after the arrest of Salman al-'Auda and Safar al-Hawali in December of 1994. Al-'Auda managed to record tapes from his prison cell, which were then smuggled out to his followers. In fact, one of the most recent al-'Auda tapes, publicized by CDLR, describes his

[27] For translation of these tapes and analysis of their contents, see Mamoun Fandy, "The Hawali Tapes," *The New York Times (*November 24, 1990); see also my translation of Hawali in "Infidels Without, and Within," *New Perspectives Quarterly,* 8:2 (Spring 1991).

[28] Telephone interview with Sa'd al-Faqih (December 30, 1996). [29] Ibid.

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situation in prison. Furthermore, when al-'Auda disappeared, other preachers such as Nasir 'Umar became more prominent, although they are not of al-'Auda's stature or charisma.

Before the Gulf War, the Islamists lacked an organization but had an ideology. In fact the Islamic discourse of al-Hawali and al-'Auda is not new to Saudi Arabia; what is new is the vast increase in distribution through cassette tapes, faxes and copying machines. Technology has created the new leadership of the Islamist movement in Saudi Arabia. The widespread discourse and the rise of new charismatic preachers, ripe for use by any organized group, is what has led to the rise of the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), a group that went beyond the use of tapes to use the internet and other means to communicate its message. However, before we turn to CDLR and cyberspace resistance, we need to discuss another group within the category of audio resistance, the Shi'a Reform Movement.

The Shi'a Reform Movement. Although it used means similar to the Hawali-'Auda group in transmitting its message, the Shi'a Reform Movement exceeded the Sunnis by taking its message to global and borderline spaces outside the Kingdom. The Shi'a, as a minority in Saudi Arabia, started to organize earlier and communicated effectively through the print media. Since this organization was launched in 1975, it has changed its name three times—from, in 1975, al-Thawra al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Revolution); to, in 1990, the International Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula (ICDHR-GAP); to, in 1992, the Reform Movement. Reform is the common theme among Saudi oppositions, both Sunni and Shi'a, since the experience of resistance in Saudi Arabia has taught the opposition that Saudi society is less impressed by a radical overhaul of the system and prefers reform over revolution. Until 1993, ICDHR-GAP had two major offices, in London and in the National Press Building in Washington DC, from which they published their influential monthly, *al-Jazirah al-'Arabia*, and their English weekly, *Arabia Monitor*. Outside Saudi Arabia, the group used regular mail to distribute both the magazine and the newsletter. They also used the fax machine to send the newsletter to Saudi Arabia and news clippings critical of Saudi Arabia to their supporters at home. By 1992, the group was considered a major supplier of news about Saudi Arabia from the United States and Britain. Their chosen media included print, copying machines, and computer-based faxes used to transmit their messages to the Western media and to gather news from inside the kingdom.

There is no evidence that the government succeeded in intercepting the committee's steady stream of information to the kingdom. The government coped with the group's media influence in two ways. First, the Saudi government increased its own media presence, especially in the West where the information disseminated by this group seemed most damaging to the kingdom's image. Thus, we have witnessed the mushrooming of Saudi-owned media such as

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United Press International (UPI), Arab Network of America (ANA), and the London based Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). However, this appropriation seems to have been only partially successful. On September 27, 1994, the Saudi government, including the king himself, met with representatives of the Reform Movement to discuss the group's demands. Both sides reached an agreement, and most members of the Shi'a opposition are now in governmental positions in the Kingdom.[30] The Shi'a's media activities and the government's sensitivity to its image in the West seem to have taught other opposition groups that electronic resistance pays off. Although on a formal level, the Shi'a opposition reconciled with the government in 1993, their activities did not cease completely. However, in spite of rumors about one homepage, there is no evidence of the group using email or the internet. The home-page in question is called the Committee Against Corruption in Saudi Arabia (CACSA) which will be discussed in a special section later.

CYBERRESISTANCE

The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR)

"Everything appeared to be in place: charismatic preachers, thousands of enthusiastic followers, and a religious public. What was missing was an effective organization to channel this energy and pose a serious challenge to the regime." says Sa'd al-Faqih, one of the founding members of CDLR. Five men—Mohsen al-'Awaji, Khalid al-Hmeidh, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qasim, 'Abd al-Wahab al-Trairi, and Sa'd al-Faqih—formed the basic committee and met in Riyadh to devise a plan to use these forces. In May 1991, after 30 meetings, the group drafted a letter of demands to be sent to the king in the name of the Islamic leaders. The letter was signed by many Saudi Islamists and intellectuals. Although the Islamists' demands came after a letter was submitted to the king by the liberal forces demanding codification of the laws of the country, the Islamists' letter appeared independently and not as a response to the liberals.[31] It addressed various issues ranging from corruption in the bureaucracy to the codification of laws to human rights.[32] In September of 1992, the Islamist group's philosophy emerged clearly in a 45-page pamphlet known as the Memorandum of Advice, which was addressed to the ulama and the king.[33] Copying machines and faxes played a very significant role in propagating the group's ideas.

The activities of the Islamists provoked both the regime and the liberals. Al-'Auda entered into a debate with Ghazi al-Qusaibi, the Saudi ambassador to

[30] For a detailed discussion of the Shi'a Reform Movement, see Mamoun Fandy, "The Shi'a Oppositional Discourse in Saudi Arabia, " *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, no. 9 (Fall 1996), 1–27.

[31] Interview with Sa'd al-Faqih, December 30, 1996.

[32] For a summary of the letter, see Hriar Dekmejian, "The Rise of Political Islam in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, 48:8 (Autumn 1994), 630–1.

[33] Ibid, 633–5.

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Britain. In his cassette tape, al-Shareet al-Islami (the Islamic cassette), al-'Auda responded harshly to al-Qusaibi's critique of the Islamists.[34]

The government response to the Islamists was harsher. Government forces not only arrested activists as they distributed the letter, the Memorandum, and the cassette tapes, but also raided shops selling tapes. However, the Saudi public's response to the letter and the Memorandum encouraged the group to formally launch the organization known as the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) on May 3, 1993.[35]

The group's awareness of the importance of alternative media such as cassettes, faxes, and later the internet in their fight against the regime and in their attempt to attract more followers to the movement was very clear in the first issue of their newsletter, *Huquq* (Rights):

> Honest and responsible media are a very important alternative to the distorted view given to our people by the official media. This alternative media will be received by a nation thirsty for sincere words and real news. Although we don't have the money that the government media has, our followers will do their best to distribute our message and this message will reach the hearts and minds of millions.[36]

The government's response to the announcement of CDLR was to arrest its main spokesman, Muhammad al-Mas'ari. Later al-Mas'ari escaped from prison and established new headquarters for the movement in London.[37] From London, the leaders of CDLR have sent a steady stream of information critical of the Riyadh government. "Every week, via CompuServe, the CDLR faxes its newsletter to 600 distribution points in Saudi Arabia."[38] They also transmit the same information through e-mail and their World Wide Web homepage. The group uses similar means to gather news about the kingdom. According to the leaders of CDLR, their informants include "disaffected Saudi businessmen, clerics, military officers, and intelligence officials."[39]

CDLR's homepage targets those interested in Saudi affairs in the West, namely policy makers, journalists, scholars, and Saudi students studying in the West. The latter group includes potential members of the movement whenever they return to the Kingdom, according to one CDLR activist.[40] The homepage, published in both English and Arabic, consists of four parts: the *Monitor,* a weekly publication also available in print; *ash-Shar'iyyah,* a monthly magazine, also available in print; communiques, which respond to specific events and essentially act as press releases; and other publications, which include

[34] This is based on the author's review of Salman al-'Auda's tape, "The Islamic Tape."

[35] Interview with Sa'd al-Faqih, December 30, 1996.

[36] CDLR's Newsletter *Al-Huquq,* no. 1, p.1.

[37] Al-Mas'ari's prison story is also recorded on a cassette tape entitled, "Al-Mas'ari and Imprisonment," (Arabic) publicized by CDLR.

[38] Louise Lief, "Waging War by Fax Machine," *U.S. News & World Report,* November 27, 1995, p. 51.

[39] Telephone interview with Muhammad al-Mas'ari, December 30, 1996.

[40] Interview with a CDLR activist, December 18, 1996.

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country reports and yearbooks. These publications differ in tone and discourse depending on the language used. For example, references to human rights in the English edition become references to Shari'a rights in Arabic. Of course, the two terms relate to two different frames of reference: the first to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the second to the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. Certainly, there are differences between the two. In fact, in one of his Arabic books, CDLR leader Muhammad al-Mas'ari condemns the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as anti-Islamic since it calls for absolute equality between men and women. This is, of course, in keeping with the general discourse he adopts in addressing his audience back home, while his English discourse is designed to win the support of Western audiences.[41]

The structure of the CDLR *Monito*r resembles that of a newspaper. For example, CDLR *Monitor* no. 86 (September 7, 1996), leads with a story concerning the detention of Hassan as-Suraihi, a Saudi national who was extradited by the Pakistan government in connection with the June 1996 Riyadh bombing. The CDLR *Monitor* report seems to respond to articles in the Saudi and Arab media. In this particular issue, the *Monitor* pointed out that the name of the person extradited was misspelled and attempted to cast doubt on the validity of reports in the Saudi media, which tried to link as-Suraihi with the Afghan fighters (Mujahidin) and the Riyadh bombing. In the same issue, the group provides news analysis of issues such as "royal feuds" over the succession of King Fahd during the time of his illness. The *Monitor* also documents human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and lists the names of those detained by the Saudi authorities. Another component of the newsletter is an attempt to counter rumors about the CDLR. The last section of the newsletter is usually devoted to an opinion article. *Monitor* analysts tend to exaggerate basic facts and appeal to those who would like to believe that the kingdom is on the verge of collapse. However, in spite of some credibility gaps, the *Monitor* is nevertheless an important data source for those interested in studying the Islamists of Saudi Arabia because it contains statements made by the CDLR leaders and other activists which are not readily available elsewhere.

Ash-Shar'iyyah is the name of the group's monthly Arabic publication. The contents of the first issue, published in June 1995, reflect the organization's agenda and the kind of news it attempts to provide or analyze. The first chief editor of the magazine, Dr. Sa'd al-Faqih, quit because of a split in CDLR. In spite of al-Faqih's departure, the magazine continued to publish in the same format. What is interesting about most publications of CDLR is that they usually include a detailed description of how to contact the group and receive their publications or provide them with information. This is aimed specifically at those who support the group inside Saudi Arabia. CDLR instructs its supporters to

[41] This is based on a comparison of a random selection of CDLR Arabic and English publications.

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contact its London office through MCI, AT&T, or Sprint. One can use a toll-free number or a collect call either from the kingdom or outside it. Inside the kingdom, for instance, CDLR instructs its supporters to call MCI by dialing a specific number and then entering the credit card number of the organization. CDLR supporters can also make collect calls at times of emergency. These numbers change every two or three months for security.[42]

Although it exploits almost all available means of communication, CDLR is limited by the existing communication structure. For instance, most of CDLR 's information is distributed either through the United States or Britain. This is because the internet facilities in the Gulf area are still very limited. The only existing nodes in the Gulf area are Gulfnet and Emirates Net. Although these nets are government controlled, universities in the Gulf in general have email so that one person with access to the internet can relay information to other e-mail users. However, earlier government reaction to the CDLR suggests that the group has some influence inside Saudi Arabia.

The Movement for Islamic Reform (MIRA)

The Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, the group most sophisticated in using electronic resistance, is very recent. It emerged in March 1996 as a result of a split in CDLR. MIRA's director, Dr. Sa'd al-Faqih, sees the breakaway as a result of differences over "policy and methodology."[43] Al-Faqih wanted CDLR to focus on Saudi Arabia only, while al-Mas'ari wanted to forge alliances with other Islamic movements in the region. This, according to al-Faqih, is "a breach of CDLR's policy by individuals whose names had become synonymous with the organization."[44] The split, however, does not represent a crack in the movement inside the kingdom. The loose nature of the Islamic organizations inside Saudi Arabia and the insistence by leaders there on containing differences have made this split less significant. However, there is an apparent change in discourse. Unlike the ambitious al-Mas'ari, al-Faqih is very clear about his limited mission and sees himself as committed to the group that started with the Letter of Demands and the Memorandum of Advice. As one of the five founding members of the domestic Islamist movement, al-Faqih abides by the discourse of the movement. He considers MIRA as the "media arm of the (Sunni) reform movement" inside the country.[45] The contents of MIRA's homepage are very sophisticated. Aside from the basic introduction about who they are and the aims of the organization, the homepage provides analytical articles on relevant subjects such as royal succession, the economic crisis in the Kingdom,

[42] This is based on a review of CDLR's homepage and the eight issues of their monthly magazine that appeared prior to the writing of this essay.

[43] This is based on e-mail exchanges between the author and Dr. al-Faqih. This particular quote is taken from a message sent on December 13, 1996.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Telephone interview with Sa'd al-Faqih, December 30, 1996.

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and the history of dissent in Saudi Arabia. The Arabic version of MIRA's weekly newsletter, *al-Islah*, provides news from the kingdom, foreign media reports about Saudi Arabia, and an analytical article about the current situation. Because *al-Islah* is designed to address a local audience, its discourse has the Islamic coloring of the movement but is more organized and more moderate in tone than CDLR. MIRA is trusted by the local leadership to the degree that Salman al-'Auda and Safar al-Hawali send their writings from prison to be published in MIRA's newsletter.[46]

One may reach MIRA both by e-mail and by telephone. The homepage also provides downloadable information; some of this information is very similar to what one would download from CDLR's database. The country report is but one example of this similarity. However, MIRA provides its own information. One can also get the MIRA newsletter by dialing a telephone number in the United States. When one dials this number, one gets step-by-step instructions in Arabic concerning how to get the newsletter automatically. When asked about how MIRA gets its information, al-Faqih stated that e-mail, faxes and telephone calls from individuals were his main source. MIRA also advises its members in the kingdom on how to use the internet. In its May 20, 1996 issue, MIRA instructed its supporters on how to get on-line through universities and research institutions or through commercial servers like CompuServe.

> One can also avoid being detected by the Saudi intelligence, if one subscribes to a server in a neighboring Gulf country such as Kuwait or the Emirates. Visiting our homepage is not a security risk. Those who use the internet can also talk to each other free of charge as long as your computer has a microphone and the special software needed for this activity.[47]

Saudis may also dial MIRA through its toll-free numbers not only from inside Saudi Arabia but when they travel to neighboring countries such as Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Egypt. MIRA is also entertaining the possibility of providing a broadcast version of their electronic resistance via one of the satellite channels that beams radio broadcasts directly to Saudi Arabia. So far the group has met some difficulties in securing a channel due to the "nervousness of satellite companies."[48]

"Virtual Saudis" Opposition. The presence of "virtual opposition" in cyberspace raises the problem of identifying participants in this discourse. Are the members of this opposition "real" Saudi citizens, non-Saudis genuinely engaged in the Saudi opposition discourse, or individuals in an unrelated category who seek, by masquerading as Saudis, to manipulate the discourse of opposition in the pursuit of ends unrelated to that discourse? These three categories (real Saudi citizens, virtual citizens, and masqueraders) overlap, to some extent. "Real" Saudi citizens may also be virtual citizens—in fact, cyberspace

[46] For a letter from Salman al-'Auda, see *al-Islah*, no. 3 (April 1, 1996), 1.
[47] *Al-Islah* (May 20, 1996), 2. [48] Interview with Sa'd al-Faqih, December 30, 1996.

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may provide the only place in which they can act as participatory citizens at all. The population of virtual citizens, however, is not restricted to "real" citizens with internet access; it also includes non-Saudi participants who are engaged in and shape Saudi opposition. The possibilities are endless: It could be the state itself is masquerading as opposition; liberals as Islamists; another state; or any other interested party.

An example of these overlapping categories, and the complexity of "virtual citizenship," is found in the website of the Committee Against Corruption in Saudi Arabia (CACSA), who maintain the best opposition homepage. No one knows who operates this site. The Saudi government claims that this site is created and operated by a Lebanese journalist who attempted to blackmail the Saudis by offering to remove the site for a million dollars.[49] However, the state would have an obvious interest in portraying its opponents as non-Saudis. Nonetheless, this group could be any of the other possibilities mentioned above. Although the homepage has many elements of Shi'a discourse, none of the Shi'a whom I interviewed both inside Saudi Arabia and abroad claimed to have any connection to this homepage. In fact, many of them have not seen it. Sunni opposition groups that I interviewed maintained that they have no connection to those who run this site and cannot ascertain their identity. Then who is running this site? According to its mission statement, the group was initiated by "people with strong ties to the business community in the U.S. and Saudi Arabia."[50] The committee's main goal is to expose corruption, human rights abuses, and lack of freedom of expression under "the Sudairi Seven," a branch of the royal family who are the seven sons of King 'Abd al-'Aziz's favorite wife, Hussah bint al-Sudairi.[51]

Another important component of this web site is its rich database, which contains continually updated news centers, copies of books about the kingdom, and an e-mail system connected to the King's Palace and Saudi ambassadors for those who wish to send their comments. CACSA messages aim at recruiting students worldwide and urging them to spread the message concerning the corruption and human rights abuses of the royal family. The issue of women's rights is central to this group and its attempt to reach out to non-Saudis and pressure the regime from the outside. The target audiences of this group are the Saudi elite, journalists, scholars, and policy makers. What is important about this site, however, is that one needs not be a Saudi to be part of the opposition, and Saudi "netzenship" rather than citizenship is what is important here.

Government Responses to New Forms of Resistance. The Saudi government has used various strategies to cope with its opponents, be they "virtual" or real. These strategies include accommodating some of the popular demands for re-

[49] Interview with Saudi official, Riyadh, July 12, 1997.

[50] For more on the goals and objectives of the group, See "Mission Statement Page," at that website.

[51] These sons are Fahd, Sultan, Abdul Rahman, Turki, Nayif, Salman, and Ahmed.

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form; competing with opposition in cyberspace and the "hyperreal" world of television screens; and using its financial and diplomatic power to limit the impact of opposition, both inside and outside the national boundaries.

There is no denying that the kingdom has reformed since the Gulf War. On March 1, 1992, the Saudi government inaugurated the Shura Council, a 60-member consultative council appointed by the king rather than elected by the people. The king for the first time decided to codify the shari'a laws and release them in a form known as the basic laws that deal with administration, local government, and many other issues. The reforms represent a direct response to the demands of the opposition articulated in their Letter of Demands, Memorandum of Advice, and the cassette tapes.[52] In 1997, the Saudi government further expanded the Shura Council by one third, increasing it to 90 members instead of 60. This time, the choice of members comprised important spokesmen for major tribes and major interest groups, including, significantly, one of the most radical Islamists, Ahmed al-Tuwaijri.

To combat the opposition's media war outside the kingdom, the Saudi government either directly or indirectly has purchased major media outlets in different world capitals. Currently, Saudi Arabia dominates the Arabic visual and print media. The Arab media conglomerates such as Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), Orbit Communications, and Arab Radio and Television (ART), are not run or controlled directly by the government but are owned either by Saudi princes or by Saudi businessmen with close relationships to the royal family. MBC is part of ARA Group International, a media conglomerate that includes several radio and television companies covering the whole Arab world. MBC and ARA's chairman, Sheikh Walid A1 Ibrahim, is a brother-in-law of King Fahd. Orbit Communication is a three-year-old multichannel pay television service owned by Prince Khalid Bin Fahd Bin Abullah Bin Abd al-Rahman A1 Saud, another member of the royal family. ART is a three-year-old, entertainment-oriented channel directed by Sheikh Salih Kamil, a wealthy Saudi businessman, and Prince al-Waleed Bin Talal Bin Abd al-'Aziz A1 Saud, a nephew of King Fahd. On these channels, sensitive issues such as the CDLR and criticism of friendly regimes have been carefully avoided.[53] As owners of these media outlets, the Saudis control the content by punishing those who are critical of Saudi Arabia or who beam in programs offensive to Saudi social mores. For example, Saudi Arabia cancelled its 150 million-dollar contract with the Arabic BBC television because it aired a Panorama program critical of Saudi treatment of foreign workers.[54]

In addition to the policy of purchasing sites of criticism or media outlets, the Saudis have also struck deals with the actors themselves. In the case of the Shi'a

[52] For an analysis of these reforms, see Mamoun Fandy, "Saudi Arabia's Political Reforms Fall Short,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 16, 1992.

[53] Stephen Franklin, "The Kingdom," 49–51.

[54] *Ibid.*, 50. See also CDLR's weekly *al-Huquq*, no. 95 (April 17, 1996), 3.

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Reform Movement, the king agreed to release members of the movement from prison and offer them jobs in Saudi Arabia. Although this approach has not yet been used with either MIRA or CDLR, the Saudi government did not hesitate to use its diplomatic leverage to pressure Britain to deport al-Mas'ari, the CDLR leader, from Britain.[55]

Except for having its own homepage, the Saudi government has done very little to counter the effect of the internet-based resistance.[56] Inside the country, the government has made it difficult and expensive for Saudis to have access to the internet. Those who want to have access to the internet have to register with the Saudi telecommunications company which allows dial-up connections with a foreign service provider. However, like the opposition, the Saudi state is likely to learn from others dealing with the internet as a new playing field. China is one model that the Saudi government is likely to emulate. The Chinese government managed to partially limit internet use by ordering all internet users to register with the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication. This "paved the way for web site blocks."[57] Chinese internet users are also required to register with the police. Moreover, users of China's government-controlled internet services, Chinanet, are required to sign a statement saying that they will respect China's laws and do nothing to harm the state.[58] Chinese law forbids "dissemination of information damaging to public order."[59] However, the Chinese situation is very different from Saudi Arabia, since in China few people can afford the internet or personal computers. In contrast, many more Saudis have private telephones and the means to buy computers. They are also able to afford to pay internet fees to servers outside Saudi Arabia, either in the West or in neighboring Gulf countries.

Analysis and Implications. Analysis of the relations between the Saudi state and the opposition in the context of globalization, informatics, and late capitalism raises new questions for the state and related concepts such as sovereignty, citizenship, territoriality and resistance. In addition to the analytical concepts, the new means of communication and the local/global dialectic have implications for the substance of the debate: the nature of Islam and Islamic governance. The interaction between the Saudi state and its opponents show that both are forced to bargain with different audiences in different scapes and contend with different hegemonies. In this process of bargaining, both the state and its opponents lose and gain ideologically and politically, at least at the level of discourse, as the analysis of the opposition homepages and government response to them shows.

[55] "Saudi Dissident Vows to Fight Expulsion," *The Daily Telegraph*, January 5, 1996, p. 15.

[56] The Saudi government has its homepage maintained by its embassy in Washington, DC.

[57] Renee Schoof, "China Tightens Control of Internet, Blocks 100 Web Sites," *Associated Press*, September 9, 1996.

[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Joshua Gordon, "East Asian Censors Want to Net the Internet," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 12, 1996, p. 19

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The new technology and the "compression of space" have drastically altered the nature of resistance to the state by expanding the domain of political activities beyond national territories. The greater flexibility and extraterritoriality of the new modes of resistance resulting from the mobility of the site of resistance create a marked difference between this new and "postmodern" resistance and that of the "premodern" era. This is obvious in the case of cassette tapes and cellular phones and of the global flow of information on the internet. These new developments have accorded the opposition an opportunity to communicate with similar groups and to learn new strategies from opposition movements elsewhere. The similarity of the information on the homepages and the sources of this information suggest that these new spaces allow the opposition greater coordination and communication not available at home. Even if this is not direct communication among the groups, the information is available for anyone to see, copy, or download. This information and the debate around it have the potential to provide a basis for a new "imagined community. " To be part of such an imagined community, one does not have to be a "real" Saudi—a "virtual" Saudi can be as much a part of this process as the real Saudi, as the analysis of CACSA shows. Saudis also inform or learn from resistance elsewhere. For example, the CDLR interacts with other groups that maintain data bases such as Muslim Brotherhood and the Bahraini Freedom Movement. Currently, the CDLR e-mail list has been used by a Bengali Islamic group.

A review of the cyberspace resistance homepages (CDLR and MIRA) shows that the structure of the internet as an environment of communication, the language used, and the diversity of audience affect the substance of the message. "We have to talk to everybody, including Western governments, journalists, and academics, " says Sa'd al-Faqih the leader of MIRA.[60] Like al-Faqih, al-Mas'ari also sees other Islamic groups from the larger Islamic world as a target audience.[61] Yet the two organizations are keen on delivering a suitable message to their local audience in Arabic through their regular faxes. The dilemma of addressing two different audiences with different concerns complicates the job of both MIRA and CDLR.

Both al-Mas'ari and al-Faqih are convinced that the way they can pressure the Saudi government into accommodating their demands is to address its Western allies and patrons. In doing so, both groups anchor their criticism of the Saudi government in the discourse of metropolitan globalization. This global influence is evident in CDLR's reformism, neoliberal economics, and human rights discourse. Saudi opposition discourse on the homepages generally does not question the regime's neoliberal economics but instead the government's mismanagement of the Saudi economy. Thus, the homepage technoscape engages both the global ideaoscape and the financescape, to name but two.[62] In

[60] Interview, London, June 11, 1997. [61] Interview, London, June 12, 1997.

[62] For more on the specialized reports critical of the Saudi government's mismanagement of the economy, see CDLR special report, *Saudi Arabian Airlines: Prospects and Impacts of Privatiza-*

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the human rights sphere, as they move between these multiple discourses, these two groups sacrifice certain components of their Islamic message in favor of a hybrid discourse that attempts to reconcile Islam with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In the process, they become an agent for globalization by introducing global discourse to a local audience.

Of course, selectivity in the use of discourse is evident in the disparity between the Arabic publications and the English ones. The Arabic message of CDLR's homepage represents an Islamic criticism of the Saudi government, which attempts to hold the Saudi elite to their publicly proclaimed Saudi and Islamic standards. By pointing out the corruption, the abuse of power, and the dependency of the Saudi state on "infidel" states to protect it, al-Mas'ari concludes his book-length discussion with an argument that, as it stands, Saudi Arabia is not an Islamic state and thus the ruling elite should not be obeyed in any Islamic sense.[63] Yet while the frame of reference of the Arabic material is Islam, the frame of reference in the English material is the discourse of Western-dominated globalization. However, to benefit from the global discourse and the protection it provides, CDLR is forced to sell some of the global discourse to its local audience.[64]

Although selectively defined, the global reflects itself locally, nonetheless. Reform, in the sense of structural adjustment rather than revolution, is a general global mood. Any opposition group or state that deviates from this is considered either a "rogue" state or a group that is "out of touch." A review of MIRA's weekly newsletter, *al-Islah*, and its homepage from April 16, 1996 to December 9, 1996, reveals that the movement is concerned with reform rather than a radical overhaul of the system. The issues raised in the Memorandum of Advice and the Letter of Demands represent the core demands of MIRA. All the requests in these two documents are reformist. They ask for an independent judiciary, freedom of expression, independence of the ulama, the establishment of an independent Shura council, guarantees of human rights, accountability, and elimination of corruption.[65] The reformist platform of MIRA was also obvious in its third communique to the Saudi people, in which it called upon the government to "allow for political participation, listen to the advice of the representative of the people . . . and to learn that the language of political dialogue (with the opposition) is the only language that will be effective for everyone."[66] Furthermore, in a letter to the G-7 economic summit participants in France,

tion, an Overview (London: CDLR Publications, 1995); also see, *Ash-Shar'iyyah*, no. 5 (November, 1995), 26–31.

[63] The full critique can be found in Mohammed al-Mas'ari, *The Conclusive Evidence about the Illegitimacy of the Saudi State* (Arabic) (London, Ash-Shar'iyyah Publishing House, 1995).

[64] For an example of these books, see 'Abd al-Allah al-Hamid, *Human Rights between Islamic Justice and the Tyranny of the Rulers* (Arabic) (London: CDLR Publishing House, 1995).

[65] See MIRA's weekly newsletter, *al-Islah*, issues between April 16 and December 9, 1996. Also see MIRA's homepage.

[66] MIRA communique, December 7, 1996.

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MIRA criticized Western governments, especially the United States, for not standing for freedom of expression and human rights in Saudi Arabia. The group asked the United States in particular to "review the file of American-Saudi relations in light of the oppressive policies of the royal family."[67] The group reiterated that it abides by the democratic rules and "civilized dialogue" and that it has not yet chosen armed resistance as a course of action.[68] Thus, instead of confronting the regime, MIRA and CDLR also have chosen to present the regime's Western patrons with detailed and reformist demands consistent with the metropolitan global agenda. The groups' programs are not for revolution but, rather, for regime change. Moreover, in the context of the global/local dialectic, Islamic discourse is forced to deal with global questions of human rights, democracy, and the environment. Similarly, metropolitan state and global civil society are forced to ponder the value and the perils of Islamic concepts such as Shari'a (Islamic law) and hijab (headdress).

Although text-based messages via the internet and faxes have proven effective in the "media war" between the opposition and the government, at least abroad, cassette tapes remain the most effective tool inside. This is because of the Saudi oral culture and the limited literacy of the Saudi public. The dominance of the cassette tape in the region as an alternative media forces both Saudi government and Saudi opposition to engage the various discourses of the Islam of other movements and governments. Salman al-'Auda, for example, had responded to the writings of the late Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali of Egypt and his interpretation of the Islamic tradition. Cassette tapes are a well-integrated phenomenon throughout the region,[69] but they are also important because they are accessible to both the elite and the disadvantaged. Although they may or may not be literate, at the very least the poor have access to radical preaching via tape-recorded messages. On the other hand, the disadvantaged in economic terms are also disadvantaged because of their limited access to higher forms of media, that is, satellite transmissions and the internet. The elite have full access to the new global media and to the global space. Restricted to local networks, the poor find it difficult, even impossible, to partake of the globalism of concepts and systems of beliefs.

In this new global/local relationship, state media have to compete with alternative media made possible by cassette tapes, internet connections, and the satellite dish. The Islamic message of the state ulama currently competes with other Islamic messages coming from neighboring countries or from intermediate and border line space. No authoritative discourse or hegemony is likely to

[67] MIRA's letter to the G-7 economic summit in France, June 16, 1996. [68] Ibid.

[69] These tapes are popular in Egypt, Kuwait and Jordan. In many cases, cassette tapes sell more than popular songs. For instance, Sheikh 'Abd al-Sabour Shaheen of Egypt sells 4,000 cassettes a week, each of which costs $1.50. One shop keeper reported daily sales of 200 religious cassette tapes. For more, see Mirfat Dayab, "Religious Cassettes in Egypt: Half a Million Cassettes Preach Extremism," *Al Majala*, no. 874 (November 10–16, 1996), 20–24.

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convince every Saudi citizen that the moral vision of the state elite is superior to theirs, since there are so many discourses on being broadcast, on tape, on the internet that may prove superior. These alternative media will certainly have implications for the functions of traditional means of communication in Saudi society. For example, the agenda-setting impact of the news media will no longer be entirely in the hands of state officials. An alternative agenda can be set by messages coming from abroad via these alternative means of communication. The interpretation of news will no longer be the monopoly of state or government journalists but will be shared by contending forces in widening circles.

Although the intertwining of global communication structures and the discourse of globalization enhances the cause of the opposition by multiplying its access, voices, and channels, it would be a mistake to assume that cyberspace is exclusively oppositionist. In fact, the global space is still dominated by states, albeit with limited sovereignty and limited control over what their citizens are exposed to. The global space in the Saudi case also complicates the task of opposition. This is because in macropolitical terms, the Saudi state can cast itself as being an opposition to the "Western cultural imperialism" that threatens Islam and Muslims. In this sense the state can hijack the rejectionist mood and easily portray its opponents as agents of the West. Nonetheless, it is very important to review the ways in which these new means have affected the message of opposition both in substance and in form.

Furthermore, it is also easy to exaggerate the impact of CDLR's information dissemination on Saudi society. For the last year, CDLR has suffered tremendous losses of credibility and membership inside the kingdom. Several factors account for this loss. First, the split with the organization has led to a confusion among the local supporters.[70] Second, almost all Saudis interviewed inside the kingdom attested to the popularity of CDLR faxes during the first year, even as they argued, in the same breath, that these faxes have lost their charismatic appeal and became routinized over the years, especially after some issues of the newsletter degenerated into gossip about the royal family.[71] Third, those who receive CDLR messages represent a limited segment of Saudi society. Information sent over the internet or by e-mail reaches those who are computer literate and English speaking, since English is the lingua franca of the internet. In short, it reaches the technologically adept segments of Saudi society, a group unlikely to rebel openly because of its relatively privileged position. Moreover, this segment of Saudi society has never been deprived of information, since its members could previously listen to the radio broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America (VOA) while at home and read English language newspapers when outside the kingdom. With the intro-

[70] Interview with Sa'd al-Faqih, London, June 12, 1997.

[71] This information is based on interviews conducted during my field visit to Riyadh, Jeddah, Madina, Khobar, Qaseen, and the eastern province between July 10 and August 1, 1997.

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duction of the satellite dish, the English-speaking segment of Saudi society can now get news from the BBC and Cable News Network (CNN) television and from other sources on the World Wide Web (WWW), instead of CDLR or MIRA's newsletter or homepage. Tellingly, both groups, but especially CDLR, have suffered financially; CDLR's homepage has not been updated for at least six months.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the opposition's setbacks in reaching the local audience directly, such factors as cyberspace, the mobility of the resistance site, the compression of space, and the collapse of time pose serious challenges to our understanding of the site of resistance in the age of globalization. The militant preacher or organization no longer speaks from a fixed pulpit in a local mosque. The cassette tape provides him and his listeners with a mobile platform, whether mosque or pulpit, to network with similar-minded preachers and organizations. Furthermore, the absence of hierarchy on the internet complicates the picture even more. In the world of the internet, a homepage supported by an entire regime competes with a homepage maintained by perhaps only one college student. This has to do more with the nature of the internet as a means than with the ability of the opposition. The homepage of a state has no more claim to truth than that of the opposition. Both state and opposition vie for the same audience. Furthermore, the philosophy of the internet is consumer-driven rather than producer-determined. The consumer retrieves what he or she wants; nothing is imposed. The consumer is also interactively connected and can have his or her own homepage and become a producer as well. These changes force social scientists to reconsider their concepts, their analytical frameworks, and the explanatory power of these concepts and frameworks in relation to new globalized local phenomena.

The Saudi case reveals problems with the conventional understanding of resistance. It is not enough to explore hidden transcripts to "grasp potential acts."[72] One has to surf the internet and homepages of opposition groups. The Saudi case also reveals that those who are enamored with the totalizing and homogenizing effects of modernity and globalization should take into account the local impulse that replaces grand narrative with multiple and local narratives as a way of resisting a metropolitan globalization. Nor is this the whole story, for domination and resistance in nonWestern social formations such as Saudi Arabia show that, even as local society engages different trends of the global modes, some are part of the internet and globalization; while others are part of the world of cassette tapes and faxes. Although it resists the global narrative, the local impulse simultaneously addresses the global arena by adapting the language and narrative of dominant global trends. Thus, the discourses of opposi-

[72] James C. Scott, *Domination*, 16.

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tion and government interact concomitantly between the phenomenally global and the local. Here it becomes obvious that as the world "opens up, " the struggle between governments and opposition is no longer merely local and that even the local is tremendously mediated.[73] The struggle for hegemony is exported to other venues beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, that is, both state and opposition speak to powerful nodes in the international system, namely Washington and London, just two of the many Western capitals that have become targets of the discourses of both government and opposition.

In the same way that the dialectic of the global and the local problematizes the category of resistance, it is bound to have implications for other social science concepts such as political culture and civil society, to mention just two. Traditional political culture studies have to justify where the cutoff point is between the local and the global and between what is "a sign for the real" and what is real. Civil society studies will also have to distinguish between local and global civil societies. Concepts such as the specific territory of the state will have to be reconsidered. In an era in which the discourse of the "sovereign" is simply one among many discourses and in which these conversations transcend traditional notions of geographic boundary and the physical contours of the nation-state, political scientists will have to reconsider their fixed understanding of the sovereign state. Today's electronic media and satellite systems virtually dissolve traditional barriers that once separated states and nations. Although the local population of Saudi Arabia can vehemently oppose the physical presence of foreign troops on Saudi soil, they cannot prevent the cyberspace presence of foreign, global ideas and trends. And while Western governments can prevent the physical immigration of foreign peoples with foreign ideas, they also, cannot prevent the cyberspace presence of foreign thought and opposition rhetoric. Geographic boundaries and notions of state sovereignty, traditionally definers of individual states, seem to dissolve in the cyberspace formed from an overriding globalization of local concepts and localization of global concepts. Mediation of the local and the global at the level of discourse, image, and lived experience poses serious challenges to such old concepts, challenges that must be taken seriously. Saudi opposition may be virtual thus far, but the dialectic of the local and the global is real, not virtual.

[73] On the impact of mediation on hegemony, see Jesus Martin-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From Media to Mediations* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993).

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