6. Cautious Enactments: Interstitial Spaces of Gender Politics in Saudi Arabia[1]

Susana Galán

> Thursday night after a social obligation, she tucked her kids into bed and waited until they fell asleep. At about 1:30 am she put on one of her husband's shmaghs (Saudi head-dresses), opened the garage door and drove out! And this is not some reckless teenager; she's a working mother in her thirties. She told me that it was the most liberating feeling she had ever experienced.
> —Eman al-Nafjan, 31 October 2009[2]

On 17 June 2011 a group of activists organized the Women2Drive campaign to demand the lifting of the ban on women driving in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Inspired by the affective wave that shook the region with promises of social change in the winter and spring of 2011, organizers aimed to capitalize on the revolutionary momentum to push for a very concrete gain for Saudi women: the right to drive. This initiative built upon a legacy of driving activism that went back to the 1990s as well as upon individual, often spontaneous transgressions of the ban that had been documented for years in Saudi women's blogs and on YouTube. Acknowledging this past, activists opted for staging a decentralized protest in order to avoid the legal and social reprisals that had historically followed any attempt to challenge the prohibition to drive; unlike in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, or

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[2] Eman al-Nafjan, "Saudi Shewolf," Saudiwoman's Weblog, 31 October 2009, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2009/10/31/saudi-shewolf.

Morocco, there was no occupation of squares, no waving of banners, no chanting of slogans, no meeting point or time. Each participant decided on her own when and where to drive, videotaped it, and shared it on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or her personal blog.

In this offline-online configuration the action was conceived to operate on multiple scales: At the individual level participants could take over the driving and lay claim to the streets and roads, while the dispersed character of the protest allowed them to maintain a low profile to avoid detention. At the collective level women across the country, from the capital, Riyadh, to Jeddah in the west and Khobar in the east, could bridge the distance that separated them through a coordinated use of social media. While the physical acts of dissent remained practically invisible to Saudi publics and authorities, in cyberspace the multiplication of YouTube videos showing Saudi women driving produced a visually suggestive performance that articulated a demand for the lifting of the ban directed to a wide audience in the KSA and beyond.

The Women2Drive campaign is an example of cautious enactments staged by Saudi women activists to defy state and clerical control over women's mobility while minimizing the risk of repression and social condemnation. Similar tactics are implemented by women and girls in the KSA for a variety of actions, from flirting with strangers within the strictures of gender segregation to contravening the prescribed dress code and norms of appearance. Through the informal adoption of micropractices such as *targim* (described later) and nail polishing, Saudi women and girls erode conservative and religious systems of control aimed at disciplining their bodies and regulating their inhabitation of space. These careful explorations of the limits of dissent do not take place in the open space of the public square, nor do they remain confined to the private space of the home, but they are often enacted in the interstitial spaces that emerge between the public and the private.

The architect Aldo van Eyck conceptualized the *interstice* in 1961 as "a place of two spatial programmes, often indicating a meeting of private and public spaces."[3] Similar to other spaces and places, interstices are not pre-existent but are brought into being, often as a

[3] Mattias Kärrholm, "Interstitial Space and the Transformation of Retail Building Types," in *Urban Interstices: The Aesthetics and the Politics of the In-Between,* edited by Andrea Mubi Brighenti (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 136.

result of an always temporary arrangement of "interactions and affections" between individuals.[4] In the KSA, where many fundamental freedoms are limited by a sexist gender regime, interstices offer a "possibility for action," where Saudi women and girls can enact "potentially new and atypical performances."[5] The interstitial space of the private car, the shopping mall, and online platforms like personal blogs and YouTube have become places where activist and non-activist women and girls in the KSA have individually and collectively contested a range of prohibitions, transforming these regulated and surveilled mediums of mobility, consumption, and expression into sites of cautious resistance. Rather than simply reflecting existing sensibilities, these ongoing and multiple enactments produce emergent embodiments, subjectivities, and communities. While prudent and often paradoxical, the outcomes of these transgressions are not controllable or predictable. Indeed by performing such cautious acts women and girls in Saudi Arabia open up new spaces where they can jointly imagine radical futures and, in the process, stage less restrictive presents.

Controlling Bodies and Space

The KSA was founded in 1932 by Abdulaziz bin Saud (popularly known as Ibn Saud) from an amalgamation of tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. The state was established as an absolute monarchy in alliance with Wahhabi religious authorities, who applied a restrictive interpretation of Islam. According to Wahhabi ideology, women are "icons for the authenticity of the nation and its compliance with God's law," a conception that fit well with the patriarchal traditions of tribal cultures.[6] With the discovery of oil in the 1930s, existing structures of social control were replaced by a centralized bureaucratic apparatus that institutionalized state scrutiny of women's movement and

[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Andrea Mubi Brighenti, introduction to Brighenti, *Urban Interstices,* xviii; Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, "Spatial Justice in the Lawscape," in Brighenti, *Urban Interstices,* 89.

[5] Luc Lévesque, "Trajectories of Interstitial Landscapeness: A Conceptual Framework for Territorial Imagination and Action," in Brighenti, *Urban Interstices,* 23; Kärrholm, "Interstitial Space and the Transformation of Retail Building Types," 137.

[6] Madawi al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17.

appearance.[7] The development of the oil industry required massive inflows of foreign expertise and guest labor, particularly men, a demand that became acute during *tafra,* the period of high oil production between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s.[8]

The control of Saudi women's mobility and visibility intensified as national religious discourse concentrated on "protecting" women from the gaze of foreigners. As Madawi al-Rasheed notes, the ultimate aim was to "guard" the honor of men and limit "the possibility of 'shame' being inflicted on [them] as a result of female behaviour or the violation of females by outsiders."[9] To that end the Saudi government devoted part of its oil profits to enforce and promote a costly system of gender segregation and regulation that included duplicated schools, workplaces, and health care systems.[10] As Amélie Le Renard remarks, these regulations were not traditional or conservative remnants of tribal systems but the materialization of a Saudi version of state-led urbanization and modernity.[11] Instead of confining women to the domestic sphere, Le Renard argues, the oil revenue was used to create a parallel "'female sphere' consisting of a mosaic of new female spaces where entry is forbidden to men."[12] Yet in this gendered partitioning of space and bodies, men are usually allotted the best areas or most convenient hours.[13] In addition women's employment opportunities are severely constrained by this logic: until

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[7] S. F. al-Ghamidi, *Structure of the Tribe and Urbanization in Saudi Arabia* (Jeddah: Al-Shrooq Press, 1981), 32–35.

[8] Hélène Thiollet, "The Ambivalence of Immigration Policy in Saudi Arabia: Public and Private Actors in Migration Management," in *Migrant Labor in the Gulf: Working Group Summary Report,* edited by Center for International and Regional Studies (Doha: Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar, 2011), 23, https://repository .library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/558543/CIRSSummaryReport2 MigrantLaborintheGulf2011.pdf ?sequence=5.

[9] Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 164.

[10] Al-Rasheed, *Masculine State,* 24; Roel Meijer, "Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Gender- Segregation Debate," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 4 (2010): 81.

[11] Amélie Le Renard, "'Only for Women': Women, the State, and Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal* 6, no. 4 (2008): 610.

[12] Le Renard, "'Only for Women,'" 610.

[13] Eleanor A. Doumato, "Saudi Arabia," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress amid Resistance,* edited by Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York: Freedom House, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 432.

2011 they were restricted to working in education and health care; it was not until 2011 and 2012, respectively, that they were allowed to work in lingerie shops and retail stores, such as supermarkets.[14]

The dominant ideology in the KSA considers men and women to be complementary or "equivalent" to each other rather than equal.[15] Although Saudi Arabia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 7 September 2000, the government reserved the right to negate any article that contradicts "the norms of Islamic law."[16] Inside the country the institution of male guardianship reduces women to the status of minors subordinated to the authority of a father, husband, son, or other male relative in questions affecting their own and their children's lives. This institution particularly impacts women's mobility and their ability to marry, divorce, or seek employment.[17] Husbands are the legally designated heads of household and control key decisions, such as choosing the family residence and applying for official documents. Saudi women cannot confer citizenship on their children, obtain a national identity card, or travel outside the country without the permission of their legal guardians.[18]

In Saudi Arabia women's bodies are considered "a source of *fitna* (chaos)" that must be concealed.[19] For that reason, women's appearance and their visibility in public are regulated by an official dress code that requires them to wear a full black cloak (*'abaya*) and a face veil (*niqab*). To ensure compliance, streets and other mixed-gender spaces are policed by the infamous Committee for the

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[14] Doumato, "Saudi Arabia," 426; Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2013: Saudi Arabia," accessed 24 June 2015, http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/saudi-arabia; Katherine Zoepf, "Shopgirls," *New Yorker,* 23 December 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/12/23/131223fa_fact_zoepf.

[15] Sanja Kelly, "Hard-Won Progress and a Long Road Ahead: Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa," in Kelly and Breslin, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa,* 19.

[16] UN Women, "Declarations, Reservations, and Objections to CEDAW," Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, accessed June 22, 2015, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm.

[17] Doumato, "Saudi Arabia," 427.

[18] World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* 2014 (Washington, DC: World Bank, Bloomsbury, 2013).

[19] Al-Rasheed, *Masculine State,* 116.

Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also known as the religious police (*mutawwiʿin*), who control "public moral behavior, including proper dress and the interaction between men and women."[20] As a general rule, according to Eleanor Doumato, it is considered "shameful" and "dangerous for women" to be in public, even when veiled.[21] The blogger Saudi Stepford Wife confirms this point: "There's no public transportation and a lone woman takes a chance with her safety and moral standing any time she takes a taxi alone."[22]

As part of these gendered restrictions on mobility, Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world where women are not allowed to drive. Although there is no written law stating the prohibition, government clerics have issued fatwa rulings that ban such driving, the Department of Traffic refuses to grant driving licenses to women, and police officers and religious policemen customarily arrest women caught driving. The driving ban is not enforced everywhere, however; women drive in the ARAMCO complex, the Saudi national oil and natural gas company in Dhahran, as well as on the campus of the coed King Abdullah University for Science and Technology, founded in 2009.[23] Moreover Bedouin women are known to drive trucks and other farm equipment in the desert and countryside, as the blogger Sabria Jawhar documents: "I remember as a child my uncle in one of the Yanbu villages going to work at 4 each morning, leaving the management of the house, the family and the harvesting of their crops to my aunt. She drove all over the region to make sure not only her kids but the extended family were cared for."[24]

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[20] Doumato, "Saudi Arabia," 427.

[21] Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Women in Civic and Political Life: Reform under Authoritarian Regimes," in *Political Change in the Arab Gulf States: Stuck in Transition,* edited by Mary Ann Tetreault, Gwenn Okruhlik, and Andrzej Kapiszewski (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011), 202.

[22] Saudi Stepford Wife, "Sorry, Can't Help Ya," *Saudi Stepford Wife,* 2 October 2007, http://www.saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com/2007/10/sorry-cant-help-ya.html.

[23] Doumato, "Women in Civic and Political Life," 194.

[24] Sean Foley, "All I Want Is Equality with Girls: Gender and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century Gulf," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2010): 25. See also "Rising Number of Bedouin Women Enter Work Force," *Al Arabiya,* 1 July 2012, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/07/01/223783.html; Sabria Jawhar, "Let Rural Women Drive, as They Always Have in Past," *Saudi Gazette,* 14 October 2009,

The right to drive is a very practical concern for women in the KSA. A report published by Human Rights Watch in 2011 found that public transportation is insufficient in the country and that women's everyday dependence on cab rides, costly full-time drivers, or male family members seriously hinders their "ability to study, work, and participate in public life."[25] Far from popular representations in the KSA and abroad of Saudi women as pampered queens chauffeured around by their South Asian drivers, personal bloggers attest to the economic and practical difficulties they encounter to secure their daily transportation needs.[26] As the activist Manal al-Sharif stresses in a YouTube video, some women devote "90% of their salary" to pay for a driver. She recounts the experience of a friend: "She wakes up at 5am, though her work starts at 7am. When the driver picks her up, he has to go and pick up other women. She gets home at 5pm though her house is only 10 minutes from her work. If she is five minutes late [the driver] will leave her."[27]

While lifting the ban on women driving would immediately solve many of these problems and radically improve Saudi women's lives, conservative sectors strongly oppose this step, arguing that freedom of movement would lead to the disintegration of the system of

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http://web.archive.org/web/20150328144324/http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=2009101451500; "To Drive or Not to Drive . . . the Gender Debate Continues in Saudi Arabia," *Asharq Al-Awsat, 20 June 2005, http://www.aawsat.net/2005/06/article55271101; Sabria Jawhar,* "Saudi Rural Women's Freedom to Drive Cars and Trucks under Renewed Threat," *Sabria's Out of the Box,* 13 October 2009, http://www.saudiwriter.blogspot.com/2009/10/saudi-rural-womens-freedom-to-drive.html.

[25] Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Free Woman Who Dared to Drive," 23 May 2011, http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/23/saudi-arabia-free-woman-who-dared-drive.

[26] Ordinary Girl, "It Is Going to Be O.K.!!," *A Girl Who Is Trying,* 21 August 2008, http://ordinarygirl9.blogspot.com.es; Omaima Al Najjar, "What Is It Like to Be a Saudi Woman?," *Omaima Al Najjar,* 27 April 2010, https://omaimanajjar.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/whats-like-to-be-a-saudi-woman-2; Sabria Jawhar, "Let Women Drive!," *Sabria's Out of the Box,* 25 September 2007, http://saudiwriter.blogspot.com.es/2007/09/let-women-drive.html.

[27] See Manal al-Sharif 's video in "Saudi Woman Driver Faces Jail Again—'This Is against Religion and Logic'—Video," Guardian, 26 May 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2011/may/26/saudi-arabia-woman-driver-video.

gender segregation and, ultimately, to immorality.[28] Blogger Rasha explains this reasoning: "If a woman drives she will be free to go where ever and see who ever she please[s], and that scares them."[29] The blogger Eman al-Nafjan explains that the fear that women driving could be used as "a tool of rebellion against husbands and families" may explain why any attempt to defy this prohibition has received exemplary punishments.[30] In particular, driving activism in the KSA is haunted by memories of the harsh repercussions that followed the first Saudi women's driving protest, on 6 November 1990. On that day a group of women met in the parking lot of a supermarket in Riyadh, distributed themselves into fourteen cars, and drove around the city for half an hour until the religious police stopped them. In response to their act of defiance, forty-seven women—among them university professors and public school teachers—were arrested, publicly vilified, and suspended from their jobs.[31]

This disproportionate response occurred in an important political context. Several months before the driving action, in August 1990, King Fahd requested the deployment of U.S. forces on Saudi soil to protect the territory and oil fields after Saddam Hussein's troops invaded Kuwait. U.S. women military personnel became, Doumato remarks, a "highly visible— though controversial—presence" as they openly drove military vehicles in the kingdom.[32] Possibly feeling the pressure, the Saudi government issued an edict promoting the enrollment of women volunteers in social and medical positions in government agencies.[33] Saudi women's rights activists interpreted

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[28] Eman Al Nafjan, "The Saudi 'Study' That Finds All Women Drivers on the Road to Immorality," *Guardian,* 6 December 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/06/saudi-study-women-drivers.

[29] Rasha, "Saudi Girls Involved with Their Drivers," *Mideast Youth,* 4 May 2007, http:// www.mideastyouth.com/2007/05/04/saudi-girls-involved-with-their-drivers.

[30] Eman al-Nafjan, "The Reasoning behind the Ban on Women Driving," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 27 June 2008, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2008/06/27/the-reasoning-behind-the-ban-on-women-driving.

[31] Doumato, "Women in Civic and Political Life"; Foley, "All I Want Is Equality with Girls."

[32] Eleanor A. Doumato, "Gender, Monarchy, and National Identity in Saudi Arabia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (1992): 31.

[33] Foley, "All I Want Is Equality with Girls," 26.

these shifts as signs that the Saudi monarch was open to reform. Yet, the activists did not anticipate that the regime, criticized for its alliance with the United States, would find in the punishment of women drivers an opportunity to divert attention from the regional conflict while pleasing religious and conservative voices critical of Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with the West.[34]

The severe repression of the participants in the 1990 driving action shaped subsequent actions—and inactions—related to women's driving rights and inflected blog discussions on this issue. In the years that followed, activists continued to ask for an end to the ban by petitioning the king, a tactic that presented less risk.[35] Reflecting these sentiments, the blogger Hala al-Dosari objected to the strategy used by the Saudi activist Wajeha al-Huwaider, who posted a video of herself driving in March 2008.[36] Al-Dosari criticized al-Huwaider's "individual" solution: "It's not only me who would be harshly punished if I challenge the authority, it's my old father as well, this is what happened with the women who demonstrated for the right to drive before." She proposed instead "other meaningful, and less confrontational methods to reach the decision makers, without inciting negativity."[37] At the same time, and despite the risk of reprisals, Saudi bloggers continued to use blogs and other online platforms to discuss and explore ways of pushing for what they considered to be a reasonable demand and to experiment with actions that maintained a delicate balance between legality and trespass.

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[34] Doumato, "Gender, Monarchy," 44.

[35] On 23 September 2007 the Society for Protecting and Defending Women's Rights, founded by Wajeha al-Huwaider and Fawzia al-Ayouni, launched a petition addressed to the king to lift the driving ban. For more information, see Ebtihal Mubarak, "Saudi Women Petitioning Govt for Driving Rights," *Arab News,* 16 September 2007, http:// www.arabnews.com/node/303391. To read the full text in Arabic, see www.web.archive.org/web/20071219024436/http://www.womengateway.com/arwg/News/2007/Sep/saudinews.htm.

[36] See Yes2WomenDriving, "Wajeha Al-Huwaider for Women's Day 2008" (Arabic), YouTube, 7 March 2008, www.youtube.com/watch?v=54pRJkJ6B6E. See also Amira Al Hussaini, "Arabeyes: Rebelling the Saudi Way," *Global Voices,* 18 March 2008, https://globalvoices.org/2008/03/18/arabeyes-rebelling-the-saudi-way/.

[37] Hala al-Dosari, "Claiming Women's Rights [I Don't Need Support]," *Hala in Wonderland,* 29 June 2009, http://www.hala1.wordpress.com/2009/06/29/claiming-women%E2%80%99s-rights-i-don%E2%80%99t-need-support.

Moving Alone and Together

On 17 June 2011 around fifty women took part in the Women2Drive campaign by driving in the KSA, many of them in the company of women friends and relatives, fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons.[38] The drivers were aware of the dangers associated with their action: less than a month before, the police had detained al-Sharif, one of the leaders and the face of the campaign, for posting a video of herself driving.[39] The blogger al-Nafjan did not yield to intimidation and participated in the protest as a passenger. Shortly afterward she shared her impressions on her blog, highlighting the affective connections established between the participants through social media: "I was fortunate enough to be able to be a part of it, even though I've never learned to drive. I got into a car with another Saudi woman, Azza Al Shmasi. As I videotaped, she drove for 15 minutes close to a main street in Riyadh. When I got home I excitedly shared the video with my followers on Twitter, as did all the women who drove that day."[40]

[38] Ahmed Al Omran, "'A Historical Moment': The Saudi Women Challenging a Government by Driving," *NPR,* 19 June 2011, http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/06/19/137271964/a-historical-moment-the-saudi-women-challenging-a-government-by-driving.

[39] Manal Al-Sharif, a computer security consultant at ARAMCO, posted a YouTube video publicizing the protest on 18 May 2011: "Questions and Answers about June" (Arabic), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLOjlG59GYU. Four days later she was arrested for driving and uploading the video of her drive online (see "Saudi Woman Driver Faces Jail Again").

[40] Eman al-Nafjan, "English Version of Piece Published in Stern," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 6 October 2011, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2011/10/06/english-version-of-piece-published-in-stern.

Figure 6.1. Azza Al Shmasi drives during the Women2Drive action, recorded by the blogger Eman al-Nafjan. ScarceMedia, "Driving in Saudi with @saudiwoman," YouTube, 17 June 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rb77qKZseI.

While the action explicitly defied the driving prohibition, it was staged in a way to avoid confrontation and assure the anonymity of the participants. To stress its legitimacy, organizers limited participation to women who already had an international driving license and urged drivers to buckle up, obey traffic laws, respect the dress code, and "not challenge the authorities."[41] Ironically the strict adherence to religious rules on women's dress allowed those preferring to remain anonymous to participate without being recognized, tactically using the ʿabaya and the niqab as protection against identification. Despite precautions two drivers were stopped by the police and released after signing a pledge that they would not reoffend. Those who published their names on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, or a blog were contacted by the Ministry of Interior and their male guardians were summoned to sign the pledge.[42]

The mild reaction of the authorities to the rather faceless protest starkly contrasts with the repression of the drivers in 1990 and al-Sharif 's detention on 22 May 2011. Al-Rasheed reads this "indifference" toward the driving action as a sign of the state's effort to maintain the "loyalty of women" in the turbulent context of the 2011 Arab revolutions, a strategy that aims to "feminize the masculine

[41] Al-Sharif listed the instructions in "Questions and Answers about June."
[42] Al-Nafjan, "English Version of Piece Published in Stern."

state" in a controlled manner to limit internal dissent and international embarrassment.[43] Following this line of action, the Saudi press ignored the campaign or denied it had occurred, quoting traffic police officers saying that "no women driving incidents have been reported at all." This statement was readily challenged by one of the drivers, who posted on her Twitter account a picture of a ticket she had been issued for driving without a Saudi license, thereby proving that the protest had actually taken place.[44]

The dispersed acts of defiance would have gone largely unnoticed were it not for their virtual presence and magnification online. The participants uploaded the videos of their drives on the YouTube channel "SaudiWomen2Drive" and commented on them on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #Women2Drive. In many aspects the action resembled "smart" or "flash mobs" in how it mobilized strangers through social media to perform in concert in the physical space.[45] However, unlike these online-offline interventions, in this case the online presence was not a mediated echo of the action but the political act itself, as it was only in virtual space where the singular transgressions—some of them carried out and video-recorded in the middle of the night to avoid detection—became visible and legible as protest. Taken individually these videos seemed to be rebellious anecdotes, but together they brought "into being" a space of politics that was promptly filled with images of Saudi women behind the wheel.[46]

The introduction of the Internet in 1994 and its spread in 1999 opened new avenues of dissent and multiplied the spaces from which Saudi women could negotiate their "loyalty" to the state.[47] Moreover since the mid-2000s, when Web 2.0 and social media platforms

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[43] Al-Rasheed, *Masculine State,* 292–93.
[44] Al Omran, "'A Historical Moment.'"
[45] Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002), xii; Almira Ousmanova, "Flashmob: The Divide between Art and Politics in Belarus," *Art Margins Online,* 15 July 2010, http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/2-articles/588-flashmob-divide-between-art-politics-belarus.
[46] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, last modified September 2011, http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en.
[47] Communication and Information Technology Commission, "Internet in Saudi Arabia," accessed 22 June 2015, http://www.internet.sa/en/?s=internet+in+saudi+arabia &x=0&y=0.

became available in the kingdom, women and girls in the KSA have increasingly used the blogosphere, YouTube, and other digital forums to communicate, share grievances, express dissent, and constitute new forms of consciousness and community within and beyond the country's boundaries.[48] According to unofficial statistics, women represented two-thirds of Internet users in Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s.[49] More recent figures indicate widespread Internet use among both men (56.6 percent) and women (45.6 percent).[50] The estimated number of Internet users in the KSA in December 2011 was 13 million, or 49.0 percent of the population, an increase partly fostered by the multiplication of smartphones and other individual and private access points favored by Saudi women over cyber cafés.[51]

On the other hand, cyberspace is heavily surveilled in Saudi Arabia in ways that evoke Foucault's panopticon, the "all-seeing place" used to discipline individuals by manipulating their

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[48] Web 2.0 and social media platforms are "web-based platforms that predominantly support online networking, online community-building, and maintenance, collaborative information production and sharing, and user-generated content production, diffusion, and consumption." Christian Fuchs et al., *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3. This includes, among others, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogger, Wordpress, and Wikipedia.

[49] Joshua Teitelbaum, "Dueling for Daʿwa: State vs. Society on the Saudi Internet," *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 2 (2002): 234.

[50] Asbar Center for Studies, Research and Communications, "Uses of the Internet in the Saudi Society," accessed 22 June 2015, http://web.archive.org/web/20150626192904/http://www.asbar.com/en/studies-researches/social-research-studies/350.article.htm.

[51] Internet World Stats, accessed 23 June 2015, http://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#sa; Sunila Lobo and Silvia Elaluf-Calderwood, "The BlackBerry Veil: Mobile Use and Privacy Practices by Young Female Saudis," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 3, no. 2 (2012): 193. At the same time, however, women in impoverished and rural areas with poor telecommunications infrastructure are "at a higher risk of being marginalized" due to a traditionally male-dominated ICT sector, unequal access to training, and scarcity of Internet content in Arabic. Ayman Elnaggar, "Towards Gender Equal Access to ICT," *Information Technology for Development* 14, no. 4 (2008): 280. According to the Asbar Center for Studies, Research and Communications, 91.1 percent of women (82.0 percent of men) prefer to use the Internet at home, and only 10.4 percent of women (53.3 percent of men) access the web from an Internet café ("Uses of the Internet in the Saudi Society").

presumption that they are under observation.[52] The department responsible for providing Internet services in the country, the Internet Services Unit, states on its website that it filters the web and blocks "pages of an offensive or harmful nature to society, and which violate the tenants of Islamic religion or societal norms."[53] According to the OpenNet Initiative, the KSA also targets web pages that discuss reformist or oppositional issues, human rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, family planning, Christianity, or Shiʿa Islam. Over the years Saudi Arabia has detained a number of bloggers and cyber activists for their online activities and regularly appears on the list of the "most net-repressive countries."[54] Despite such close monitoring, online platforms offer a space for mobilization around common causes.[55] Unlike texting, a medium used for political activism in Gulf countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s,[56] the Internet enables complete strangers to take part in concerted actions without communicating with each other. By mobilizing a "negative collectivity" of people who are not members of an established group and do not know each other, social media allows participants to remain anonymous even to the organizers, reducing the risk of identification

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[52] Rheingold, *Smart Mobs,* 189; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Random House, 1977).

[53] Internet Services Unit, "Introduction to Content Filtering," http://web.archive.org/web/20150813041026/http://www.isu.net.sa/saudi-internet/contenet-filtring/filtring.htm.

[54] OpenNet Initiative, "Internet Filtering in Saudi Arabia," last modified 2009, http://www.opennet.net/sites/opennet.net/files/ONI_SaudiArabia_2009.pdf. See also Reporters without Borders, "Attacks on Journalists and Media in Iraq and Yemen, Two Bloggers Freed in Saudi Arabia," 1 June 2011, http://en.rsf.org/saudi-arabia-attacks-on-journalists-and-media-01-06-2011,40389.html; Reporters without Borders, "Beset by Online Surveillance and Content Filtering, Netizens Fight On," 29 March 2012, http://en.rsf.org/beset-by-online-surveillance-and-13-03-2012,42061.html. The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked the KSA eighth on the list of the ten most censored countries in 2012: "10 Most Censored Countries," 2 May 2012, http://www.cpj.org/reports/2012/05/10-most-censored-countries.php.

[55] Serpil Yuce, Nitin Agarwal, and Rolf T. Wigand, "Mapping Cyber-Collective Action among Female Muslim Bloggers for the Women to Drive Movement," *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 7812 (2013): 331.

[56] Steve Coll, "In the Gulf, Dissidence Goes Digital," *Washington Post,* 29 March 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A8175-2005Mar28.html.

or co-optation.[57]

The participatory nature of Web 2.0 also encourages computer-literate users to create content online by publishing texts or uploading their own images and videos.[58] In addition, through these platforms Saudi netizens can gain access to information that may not be available in the kingdom and interact with strangers across gender lines, circumventing family and governmental control.[59] As Loubna Skalli has noted for women in the Arab region, bloggers and users of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube also use these sites to create "alternative discursive spaces" that contest or qualify dominant political and religious views.[60]

Yet these portals not only reflect and communicate but also dialectically constitute new embodied counterhegemonic subjectivities, as exemplified by the suggestive video performance "Flowing through Saudi Arabia—A Hoop Dance," by the Saudi visual artist Balqis AlRashed.[61] The fifteen-second YouTube clip shows AlRashed in her ʿabaya and niqab, swinging a hula hoop, her body swirling freely "through Saudi Arabia" in what appears to be the intimate space of her home. Like the moving images, the accompanying English-language text, titled "A State of Play," explicitly challenges a range of hegemonic embodied restrictions, using evocative spatial language to constitute her identity on her own terms:

> I am not gender. I am not religion.
> I am not expectations.
> . . .
> I am movement and growth,
> A series of expansions and contractions. I am opposition and

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[57] Ousmanova, "Flashmob."
[58] Rheingold, *Smart Mobs,* 197.
[59] Deborah L. Wheeler, "Blessings and Curses: Women and the Internet Revolution in the Arab World," in *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power through Self-Expression,* edited by Naomi Sakr (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 156.
[60] Loubna H. Skalli, "Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (2006): 39.
[61] Balqis AlRashed, "Flowing through Saudi Arabia—A Hoop Dance," Order Out of Chaos, blogger.com, 4 October 2014, http://www.balqis-alrashed.com/2014/10/hooping-in-saudi-arabia-flow-dance.html.

sameness.
. . .
But, I am not what you think of me, I am what I think of myself.
I am not what you made of me, I am what I make of myself.
. . .

Figure 6.2. Still of Balqis AlRashed's "Flowing through Saudi Arabia—A Hoop Dance," Balqis AlRashed, 4 October 2014, http://www.balqis-alrashed.com/2014/10/hooping-in-saudi-arabia-flow-dance.html.

Interventions like AlRashed's coexist and often converge with other "microrebellions proliferating in the fluidity and interwoven pathways of cyberspace," as Zakia Salime has described these individual acts of defiance online.[62] Another example is the video

[62] Zakia Salime, "New Feminism as Personal Revolutions: Microrebellious Bodies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 1 (2014):

posted by the twenty-four-year-old student Loujain Al Hathloul on 24 January 2013 on the social network Keek. The otherwise inoffensive clip, which shows Al Hathloul mocking Saudi ultraconservatives with her face and hair uncovered, caused "a commotion" when it went viral, as al-Nafjan recalls on her blog.[63] Several months after her "unveiling" Al Hathloul became the face of a second driving action, organized on 26 October 2013, and participated in the protest by driving in the company of her father and posting the video of her drive online.[64] The confluence of Al Hathloul's "personal revolution" and the activism of the Women2Drive campaign illustrates one of the many ways in which these singular gestures that are proliferating in Saudi cyberspace re-produce and propagate themselves, interact with each other, and coalesce around common causes.[65]

Blogs as Sites of Cautious Interstitial Politics and Radical Imaginings

Blogs are personal online spaces whose particular architecture facilitates and even promotes the interaction between author and readers through the comments section. While open to judgment and critique, these sections are often perceived as safe spaces for debate, as bloggers can moderate comments and retain control over published content. Scholarship on women's blogging in Egypt and Iran indicates that blogs facilitate a largely "unregulated narrative, which counters hegemonic norms without directly confronting the state."[66] In the KSA, blogs such as al-Nafjan's *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* Jawhar's *Sabria's Out of the Box,* al-Dosari's *Hala in Wonderland, Saudi*

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[63] Eman Al Nafjan, "Loujain Al Hathloul," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 9 November 2013, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2013/11/09/loujain-al-hathloul.

[64] See Loujain Al Hathloul's video announcing the 26 October driving campaign: Keek, 19 September 2013, http://www.keek.com/keek/4uRkdab. See the video of Al Hathloul's drive during the protest, recorded by her father: Keek, 23 October 2013, http://www.keek.com/keek/Og6udab.

[65] Salime, "New Feminism as Personal Revolutions," 16.

[66] Yasmine Rifaat, "Blogging the Body: The Case of Egypt," *Surfacing* 1, no. 1 (2008): 51. See also Sharon Otterman, "Publicizing the Private: Egyptian Women Bloggers Speak Out," *Arab Media and Society* 1 (February 2007): 2; Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi, "Transgression in Narration: The Lives of Iranian Women in Cyberspace," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 3 (2008): 101.

Stepford Wife, and *Omaima Al Najjar* have been some of the sites used by Saudi netizens since the mid-2000s to discuss the driving ban, "get [their] viewpoint out," and "express [their] opinion" on many social and religious questions.[67]

Constituted as hybrids between personal diaries and online forums, blogs encourage informal expression in ways that, for Saudi Stepford Wife, resemble "any typical bitching session I have with my friends when we get together."[68] In addition the possibility of writing anonymously allows bloggers to communicate more freely and create spaces for controversial discussion. While al-Nafjan, Jawhar, al-Dosari, and Al Najjar write under their real names, others are well aware of the risks associated with expressing certain opinions online in Saudi Arabia and prefer to use a pseudonym. This is the case with Saudi Stepford Wife, who states in her first post, from 2007, "I will try to remain as anonymous as possible so in case I get too vocal on touchy subjects, it won't impact my life negatively (I can only speculate as to how)."[69]

At the personal level blogs represent for many of these authors one of the few available outlets to release steam and voice their frustrated responses to various restrictions on their lives and mobility. At the social level the comments section provides an "opportunity for dialogue between the genders" that is otherwise infeasible in gender-segregated physical spaces and facilitates the creation of cross-gender alliances.[70] For example, in response to one of al-Nafjan's posts,

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[67] Eman al-Nafjan, *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* http://www.saudiwoman.me; Sabria S. Jawhar, *Sabria's Out of the Box,* http://www.saudiwriter.blogspot.com; Hala al-Dosari, *Hala in Wonderland,* http://www.hala1.wordpress.com; *Saudi Stepford Wife,* http://www .saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com; Eman al-Nafjan, "Hello World!," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 1 February 2008, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2008/02/01/hello-world; Omaima Al Najjar, "About Me," *Omaima Al Najjar,* http://www.omaimanajjar.wordpress.com /about.

[68] Saudi Stepford Wife, "Stay Tuned," *Saudi Stepford Wife,* 27 February 2007, http:// www.saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com/2007/02/stay-tuned.html.

[69] Saudi Stepford Wife, "Stay Tuned."

[70] Yeslam Al Saggaf, "The Effect of Online Community on Offline Community in Saudi Arabia," *Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries* 16, no. 2 (2004): 9. A study conducted by Al Saggaf in Saudi Arabia in 2001–2 showed that participants in an online community (seven men and eight women) gained self-confidence and became more open-minded, more aware of the characteristics of individuals in their society, and

several Saudi men expressed their solidarity with the driving cause, disrupting the hegemonic masculinist discourse articulated by state and religious authorities and conservative publics:

> Haitham: I await the day when women in Saudi Arabia will be . . . issue[d] driving licences and drive freely. As for my part, I will personally teach my mother and sister how to drive and help them [get] driving licences.
> Abdullah: Same here.
> Saudimajix: My friends and I were talking about this, and one of my friends said, if each one of us is whiling *[sic]* to let his wife, sister or mother drive and sit by her said *[sic]* no one could say anything about it.[71]

In the KSA, as in most parts of the world, bloggers are educated and relatively privileged people. As we learn from their posts, al-Nafjan is a lecturer at King Saud University, where she teaches English as a foreign language, and lived in the United States when she was a child. Jawhar is an assistant professor at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University and got her PhD and driving license in Newcastle, in the United Kingdom.[72] Al-Dosari studied in the United States, where she learned how to drive.[73] According to her blog profile, Al Najjar is a "nurse becoming a doctor" who "appreciate[s] good classical & Baroque music, good Italian food and comedy movies/ shows."[74] Saudi Stepford Wife is an "American/Saudi" graduate student who writes in English to establish a "dialogue with the world" that can be read "in the furthest reaches of the planet."[75]

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less inhibited about and more appreciative of the opposite gender as a result of these interactions (13).

[71] Eman al-Nafjan, "Women Driving Cars . . . How Do We Start Its Implementation," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 18 April 2010, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2010/04/18/women-driving-cars%E2%80%A6how-do-we-start-its-implementation/#comments.

[72] Sabria Jawhar, "Jeddah's 'Lord of the Flies' Driving Habits," *Sabria's Out of the Box,* 23 September 2012, http://www.saudiwriter.blogspot.com/2012/09/jeddahs-lord-of-flies-driving-habits.html.

[73] Hala al-Dosari, "I Can Drive!!!," *Hala in Wonderland,* 16 February 2008, http://www.hala1.wordpress.com/2008/02/16/i-can-drive.

[74] Al Najjar, "About Me."

[75] See Saudi Stepford Wife Daisy, "About Me," Blogger,

By addressing an international audience, these bloggers weave transnational networks of solidarity that support their cause and put further pressure on the Saudi regime to improve women's situation in the KSA. Jawhar notes, "If Saudi Arabia wants to be a player in the international business community, it's going to have to make some dramatic changes … Westerners observe, and, yes, judge our society … by how we treat our own citizens, the expatriates that work here, and whom Saudi society thinks [of] as our national treasure—women."[76] These English-language blogs also serve as a megaphone with which these authors challenge Orientalist stereotypes that portray them as passive victims. As al-Nafjan notes in her post "Why do we stay the way we are?," "Outsiders looking in think to themselves why do Saudi women put up with all this oppression. The guardianship system, the ban on driving and all our other societal peculiarities draw looks of pity, shock and for some a fixation. Why don't we all just go out into the streets without *abayas*? Why don't we just get behind a wheel and drive? Why don't we run away? The short answer is we don't want to." She concludes, "Before you judge us, relate to us. This is what we are born into and we would feel lost without our community's approval and backing. And just like every individual in this world, Saudi women are just trying to find their way."[77]

These contextualizing remarks, however, should not be confused with compliance. As a matter of fact, bloggers are very critical of Saudi society and discriminatory norms. With regard to the prohibition to drive, their posts often take the form of bitter complaints about the necessity of hiring a driver, its cost, the negative impact of the ban on working women, and the driver's bad driving. By narrating specific problems and grievances, authors "relate to one another and generalize experiences."[78] Not unlike feminist consciousness-raising practices, Saudi bloggers in conversation with each other develop a critical perspective that links individual lived experiences to a larger social and political context. By expressing "individual sentiment" in

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http://www.blogger.com/profile/09934386285333242262; Saudi Stepford Wife, "Stay Tuned."

[76] Jawhar, "Let Women Drive!"

[77] Eman al-Nafjan, "Why Do We Stay the Way We Are?," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 3 April 2010, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2010/04/03/why-do-we-stay-the-way-we-are.

[78] Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar, "The Rhetorical Functions of Consciousness-Raising in Third Wave Feminism," *Communication Studies* 55, no. 4 (2004): 535.

blogs, bloggers make their sensibilities communal and open the way for "collective action."[79] For example, in response to a post by al-Nafjan on 28 October 2010 expressing frustration about the ban, Al Najjar wrote, "2 months ago I was driving the car on the beach and there was this voice inside of me [that] whispers . . drive in the main street Omaima. . Man . . . couldn't helpt *[sic]* it. . I turned right on to the main street—and it was day time, windows open . . . I drove 80km\h and I felt so good. Perhabs *[sic]* you should do the same." To that confession a second commenter replied, "Omaima, what do you mean you drove on the main street? What city? What happened? No one said anything? Maybe that's what has to happen. A collective 'intifada' where all women that can drive, agree on the day and just do it!! Can you imagine!!!!!!!" A third commenter added, "If you could gather 3,000 women to protest . . . really what will the Saudi men do? I think what needs to happen is a good old fashioned large number protest. There is strength in numbers and the small handfuls of 100 here 20 there isn't enough to overwhelm. Are there enough Saudi women willing to be brave and organize for something this big?"[80]

The Women2Drive campaign of June 2011 was the materialization of online reflections of this kind. As a commenter to one of al-Nafjan's posts noted, discussions such as these are "like the single drops accumulating" and, over time, creating a "ripple effect" that can produce change.[81] Indeed the protest succeeded in raising international awareness of the driving ban and set a precedent that served as a reference for subsequent actions, organized on 26 October 2013 and 2014. While the Saudi state has continued to monitor and silence this activism by blocking the website of the campaign and the mirror websites created to circumvent censorship,[82] women's blogs discussing this question have not been subjected to comparable tactics of state intervention, possibly because they are understood as personal spaces where women share concerns not considered political. The

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[79] Yuce et al., "Mapping Cyber-Collective Action among Female Muslim Bloggers for the Women to Drive Movement," 332.
[80] Eman al-Nafjan, "My Favorite Daydream," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 28 October 2010, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2010/10/28/my-favorite-daydream/#comments.
[81] Al-Nafjan, "My Favorite Daydream."
[82] Osama Khalid, "Saudi Authorities Block Women Driving Websites," *Global Voices,* 8 October 2013, http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/2013/10/08/saudi-authorities-block-women-driving-websites.

framing of the driving issue in terms of lived experience and the fact that bloggers use the familiar and informal language of social life camouflage the degree to which blog conversations radically challenge fundamental contradictions of the Saudi state.

"One day it will rain cars and I'll drive my own," wrote al-Nafjan in a post of 5 September 2012 titled "Optimism."[83] By envisioning and sharing an alternative reality, and by enacting it in the present time through clandestine interventions like the Women2Drive protest, activists create a sort of virtual heterotopia, Foucault's "other space" that is "in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that [it] happen[s] to designate, mirror, or reflect."[84] In this real place, located at the interstice between private and public space, where the personal and the political meet and the individual becomes collective, Saudi women drive, interact with like-minded strangers from around the world, engage in conversations with unrelated others, and, by imagining radical futures, pave the way for the desired present.

Paradoxes of Interstitial Spaces and Enactments

> For your information the video is on its way to Twitter and Facebook!
> —Saudi Nail Polish Girl, 23 May 2012

In *Feminism and Geography* Gillian Rose discusses the subversive potential of occupying a "paradoxical space," a location imagined by the subject of feminism to contest dominant masculinist spatial thinking and articulate a more productive relation between dichotomous notions of self and other, inside and outside, or power and resistance. As she provocatively suggests, paradoxical sites can emerge in any context through "partial and strategic" yet potentially radical emancipatory action.[85] In "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, the Television" Margaret Morse contends that highly regulated and predictable places can offer

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[83] Eman al-Nafjan, "Optimism," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 5 September 2012, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2012/09/05/optimism.
[84] Michel Foucault and Jay Moskowitz, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.
[85] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 159.

conjunctural spaces where "kinks in the road" unexpectedly appear.[86]

In Saudi Arabia, shopping malls promote private consumption while safeguarding "public decency" by means of a double security presence: private security personnel protect businesses from theft while religious police patrol the walkways, shops, and entrances to ensure that men attend the mosque and vendors close shops for prayer times. The CCTV surveillance system is used to monitor women's dress practices as well as interactions between unrelated men and women.[87] In addition many malls enforce family-only policies that ban (at all times or on particular days and hours) single men from entering shopping centers by themselves.

Yet the shopping mall also generates productive possibilities in the KSA. Despite surveillance and control, malls in Saudi Arabia have become one of the few spaces where unrelated men and women have opportunities to mingle.[88] Saudis use different strategies to communicate with each other in malls, including targim, whereby one person discreetly drops a note containing their mobile number in front of another person, and more recently by using Bluetooth.[89] In the absence of bars, movie theaters, and other entertainment facilities, Saudi single men resort to different tactics to gain access to these spaces of consumption and leisure, including disguising themselves as

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[86] Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 121.

[87] Ibrahim Alhadar and Michael McCahill, "The Use of Surveillance Cameras in a Riyadh Shopping Mall: Protecting Profits or Protecting Morality?," *Theoretical Criminology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 315.

[88] The only exception is the shopping mall of the Kingdom Centre in Riyadh, which features a women-only floor. For a discussion of this "space liberated from the constraints of social control—and consecrated to consumption," see Amélie Le Renard, "The Ladies Kingdom and Its Many Uses: A Shopping Mall in Riyadh for Women Only," *Metropolitics,* 30 March 2011, http://www.metropolitiques.eu/The-Ladies-Kingdom-and-Its-Many.html.

[89] Alhadar and McCahill, "The Use of Surveillance Cameras in a Riyadh Shopping Mall," 324. For more information, see Kevin Sullivan, "Saudi Youth Use Cellphone Savvy to Outwit the Sentries of Romance," *Washington Post,* 6 August 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/05/AR2006080500930.html; Associated Press, "In Saudi Arabia, a High-Tech Way to Flirt," *NBC News,* 8 November 2005, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8916890/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/saudi-arabia-high-tech-way-flirt/#.UhoVqhtSiAg; Rajaa Alsanea, "My Saudi Valentine," *New York Times,* 13 February 2008,http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/13/opinion/13alsanea.html?_r=0.

women, bribing security personnel, and persuading female customers to enter with them.[90] Saudi women and girls visiting these spaces frequently transgress dress practices—for example, by letting their headscarves fall on their shoulders or showing their makeup, thereby pushing social boundaries and redefining "gendered norms of conduct in public."[91]

On 23 May 2012 a self-recorded video by a young Saudi woman con- fronting the religious police in a shopping mall went viral after she posted it on YouTube.[92] For approximately four minutes she argues with the officers who ask her to leave the premises because she is wearing nail polish and showing her hair. While this episode has been downplayed by al-Rasheed as a "futile disconnected" incident "grounded in sensationalism and imagined heroism,"[93] it should not be dismissed out of hand. Indeed the online reproduction of this act of defiance speaks to other personal transgressions, like those performed by AlRashed and Al Hathloul. Moreover its occurrence in a shopping mall and the Nail Polish Girl's audacious remark "I am free to walk around this mall as I like!" reveal the paradoxical perception of this privatized space as a place where women, as consumers, are entitled to freedom of movement, a right that is denied to them in public space.

Like in many other cities and countries, political activities are prohibited in Saudi shopping malls. Yet in the absence of suitable alternative venues, organizers of petitions for the right to drive have gathered signatures on their premises, and malls have occasionally

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[90] For more information, see Nadia al-Fawaz, "Young Saudis Invent Ploys to Enter Family-Only Malls," *Arab News,* 29 December 2011, http://www.arabnews.com/node/402436. The family-only regulations were lifted in the emirate of Riyadh in 2012. See "Riyadh Eases Ban on Single Men in Shopping Malls," *Gulf News,* 23 March 2012, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/riyadh-eases-ban-on-single-men-in-shopping-malls-1.998695.

[91] Amélie Le Renard, "Young Urban Saudi Women's Transgressions of Official Rules and the Production of a New Social Group," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (2013): 113.

[92] YouTube video of the Nail Polish Girl incident: MEMRITVVideos, "Saudi Woman Defies Religious Police: It Is None of Your Business If I Wear Nail Polish," YouTube, 24 May 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpUUOYRLW3k.

[93] Madawi al-Rasheed, "Imagined Heroism of the Saudi 'Nail Polish Girl,'" *Al-Monitor,* 30 May 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/imagined-heroism-of-the-saudi-na.html.

become sites of protest, especially after the 2011 Arab revolutions.[94] Far from being *nonplaces* that create "neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude,"[95] malls are places of intense sociability in the kingdom. By disrupting their "predictable and schematized" character,[96] Saudis of all genders produce malls as interstitial spaces for unauthorized interaction and expression, albeit with some limitations. Commercial hubs are often located in suburban areas with limited connections to public transportation, and therefore shopping malls are not accessible to Saudis across the economic spectrum, particularly women who cannot afford a full-time driver or cab fare.

Like shopping malls, automobiles are linked to notions of freedom. Ironically, cars require the fossil fuels that allowed the ruling Saud family to consolidate its political control in alliance with Western corporations and imperial interests. Moreover, the oil-based rentier economy funds the current system of gender segregation in KSA. Nevertheless, having a car and being able to navigate Saudi roads fulfill "symbolic and affective functions" and can elicit feelings of autonomy, safety, and sociability as well as anxiety.[97] Within the mosaic of "aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses" associated with the automobile,[98] driving their own cars is imbued with special significance for many Saudi women. While sitting in the backseat

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[94] For more information, see Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Saudi Women Petition for Right to Drive," *Washington Post,* 24 September 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/23/AR2007092300862.html; Saudi Jeans, "Protest to Release Detainees in Riyadh Mall," *Saudi Jeans,* 6 June 2012, http://saudijeans.org/2012/06/06/protest-in-riyadh-mall.

[95] Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 103.

[96] Kärrholm, "Interstitial Space and the Transformation of Retail Building Types," 140.

[97] Linda Steg, "Car Use: Lust and Must. Instrumental, Symbolic and Affective Mo- tives for Car Use," *Transportation Research Part A* 39, nos. 2–3 (2005): 147. See also Mimi Sheller, "Automotive Emotions: Feeling the Car," *Theory, Culture and Society* 21, nos. 4–5 (2004): 221–42; John Urry, "Inhabiting the Car," *Sociological Review* 54, no. s1 (2006): 17– 31; Kai Eckoldt et al., "Alternatives: Exploring the Car's Design Space from an Experience-Oriented Perspective," proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Designing Pleasurable Products and Interfaces, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013, 156–64.

[98] Sheller, "Automotive Emotions," 222.

reproduces relations of domesticity and dependence, taking the wheel represents "the materialization of fantasies and desires for independence," while providing a certain sense of safety.[99] As al-Sharif affirms in a video recorded by the activist al-Huwaider while she drove in the city of Khobar, "No one dares to humiliate me or bother me [in my own car]."[100] Saudi women bloggers frequently write about driving and their desire for increased mobility. Walking involves several dangers; in Saudi Stepford Wife's words, among these is the risk of becoming a "moving target for this country's unskilled drivers" because there are no sidewalks. In addition women who venture alone on the streets "may be apprehended by the religious police on accusations of soliciting sex," as Doumato remarks, or subjected to violence.[101] In fact an incident of this kind catalyzed al- Sharif 's driving activism: "I almost got kidnapped trying to find a taxi in the street. In Saudi Arabia, it's not normal for a woman to walk in the street alone, and I don't cover my face, so I am an open target. I was walking at 9 p.m. trying to find a taxi for a ride home, and someone followed me and I had to throw a stone at this guy to protect myself."[102]

At another level those bloggers who have an international driving license, like Stepford Saudi Wife, find a sense of autonomy and competence in the driver's seat: "I make it a point to renew my driver[']s licence every time I go to the States, even if it hasn't expired yet. I use it in Bahrain and the Emirates when we go. My hubby know[s] as soon as we cross the border I'll tell him to scoot over." Conversely, her inability to drive in the KSA is a "core issue which sinks its razor-sharp, rank teeth into almost every aspect of [her] family life," as she depends on her husband to run daily errands.[103] For Saudi women who rely on hired drivers, the safety usually identified with the "secluded, highly structured space" of the car is

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[99] Urry, "Inhabiting the Car," 23; Eckoldt et al., "Alternatives," 156.
[100] See al-Sharif 's video at "Saudi Woman Driver Faces Jail Again."
[101] Saudi Stepford Wife, "The Flirty-Go-Round," Saudi Stepford Wife, 3 May 2007, http://saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com.es/2007/05/flirty-go-round.html; Doumato, "Saudi Arabia," 432.
[102] Cited in "Manal al-Sharif May Be Saudi Arabia's Most Awesome Woman," *Saudi Women Driving,* 15 March 2014, http://www.saudiwomendriving.blogspot.com/2014/03/manal-al-sharif-may-be-saudi-arabias.html.
[103] Saudi Stepford Wife, "Sorry, Can't Help Ya."

relative.[104] Jawhar remarks, "I depend on a stranger driving his own less-than-safe vehicle to get me around [on] time. I am at the mercy of his whims and moods."[105] The lack of privacy in the interior of the car and the permanent physical proximity of the driver add a "suffocating" layer to women's lack of autonomous mobility, as illustrated by al-Nafjan: "When my husband cannot reach me on my cell phone, he contacts the driver because wherever I am, the driver will of course be there too."[106] In other cases bloggers see in their chauffeurs a potential threat to themselves or their children.[107]

Although the state justifies the driving ban on the grounds of preventing gender mixing between unrelated men and women, the inability to drive forces many women in the KSA to spend significant amounts of time with an unrelated male. Al-Nafjan attributes this paradox to the ways class, race, and citizenship interarticulate with gender and sexuality in Saudi Arabia. Most hired drivers are of South Asian origin, and their work and living conditions resemble those of other low-status migrant workers in the Gulf. For these "guest" workers, "being considered a human being" is not self-evident, as Rhacel Parreñas has amply documented.[108] Al-Nafjan candidly explains this matter in a post titled "Saudi Women's Man-O-Meter": "To completely understand how this came about you have to go back in history to when slavery was the norm. Back then, women did not stringently cover from their male slaves and in some families they did not cover at all. The neutering of some male slaves was socially acceptable. This attitude somehow transferred to the modern day drivers. Women who are religious strictly cover from their drivers but the majority treat drivers like a little less than a man."[109]

Yet despite the socially constituted boundaries that designate

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[104] Eckoldt et al., "Alternatives," 156.
[105] Jawhar, "Let Women Drive!"
[106] Eman al-Nafjan, "Saudi Women and Their Drivers," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 12 September 2008, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2008/09/12/saudi-women-and-their-drivers.
[107] Manal al-Sharif discusses how she used to be harassed by her driver ("Saudi Woman Driver Faces Jail Again"). See also Saudi Stepford Wife, "Sorry, Can't Help Ya."
[108] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 180.
[109] Eman al-Nafjan, "Saudi Women's Man-O-Meter," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 27 September 2008, https://saudiwoman.me/2008/09/27/saudi-women%E2%80%99s-man-o-meter.

South Asian men as not quite human, "just another auto part," the relatively intimate interior of the car allows for "multiple socialities."[110] In particular it is conducive to the development of relations that violate such boundaries, as driver and passenger share an important part of their everyday lives alone together in that "quiet spot, removed from the world outside."[111] Stories of romance and marriage between Saudi women and their drivers are common and feed anxieties regarding miscegenation between Saudi citizens and these "perpetual outsiders."[112]

Adding to these social concerns, reports of women driving have multiplied in Saudi blogs, as have authors confessing their transgression of the driving ban. These disclosures sometimes appear as fleeting references in a comments section, as when Saudi Stepford Wife replied to a reader, "Personally, I've driven veiled in the east and in the west (I've even driven in saudia- Shhhh!)."[113] Sometimes women offer detailed descriptions of their clandestine rides. For example, in response to al-Nafjan's blog post "Saudi Shewolf," where she shared the story of a friend's driving escapade in the middle of the night, several readers disclosed similar experiences produced by a variety of circumstances, ranging from family emergencies to adventurous outings.[114] Describing these episodes as "hilarious," "great fun," or "very liberating," bloggers set a joyful and playful tone that contrasts with the stern admonitions of state and religious authorities regarding women's driving. By sharing these experiences and bringing together complaints and confidences with humor and

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[110] Al-Nafjan, "Saudi Women and Their Drivers"; Urry, "Inhabiting the Car," 19.

[111] Eckoldt et al., "Alternatives," 160.

[112] Rasha, "Saudi Girls Involved with Their Drivers"; Wafa Sultan, "The World of Fatwa in 2009," *My World and More,* 20 December 2009, http://www.wafagal.com/2009/12/world-of-fatwa-in-2009.html; Karen Leonard, "South Asian Workers in the Gulf: Jockeying for Places," in *Globalization under Construction: Governmentality, Law, and Identity,* edited by Richard Warren Perry and Bill Maurer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 131.

[113] Saudi Stepford Wife, "Women Can't Drive If She Wears a Veil . . . Bull!," *Saudi Stepford Wife,* 2 April 2007, http://www.saudistepfordwife.blogspot.com/2007/04/women-cant-drive-if-she-wears-veilbull.html.

[114] "30 Responses to 'Saudi Shewolf,'" *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* http://www.saudiwoman.me/2009/10/31/saudi-shewolf/#comments.

irony, Saudi bloggers recognize commonalities in the spaces they inhabit and build the necessary trust to establish common ground for engagement and community. It is in the paradoxical space that emerges that they can collectively ponder existing closures and potential openings within the limits of the strict system of gender segregation.

Conclusion

The Arab uprisings that swept the region in 2011 left toppled governments and disrupted regimes. As the contributors to this volume demonstrate these ruptures went beyond the realm of formal politics, affecting gender and sexual orders in fundamental, though not always emancipatory ways. In the KSA, King Abdullah's royal decree to grant Saudi women the right to suffrage in 2015, announced on 25 September 2011, was read as a symbolic gesture of the monarch in response to "Saudis' restlessness to pick up the pace of reform" in the context of the so-called Arab Spring.[115] While women's rights activists have welcomed this step, the contradictions of this legal advance have not escaped them, as al-Nafjan pointedly observed in a post of September 2011: "In 18 months' time a Saudi woman can be a member of parliament providing that her male guardian allows her to and she finds a man to drive her there."[116]

Yet beyond this formal—and highly publicized—development that offers limited potential for the advancement of women's rights in the less-than-democratic KSA,[117] activist and nonactivist Saudi women

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[115] Sabria Jawhar, "Gaddafi's Death May Bring Tribal Warfare before Democracy," *Sabria's Out of the Box,* 27 October 2011, http://saudiwriter.blogspot.com/2011/10/gaddafis-death-may-bring-tribal-warfare.html.

[116] Eman al-Nafjan, "Life for Saudi Women Is a Constant State of Contradiction," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 29 September 2011, http://saudiwoman.me/2011/09/29/in-the-guardian-life-for-saudi-women-is-a-constant-state-of-contradiction.

[117] King Abdullah's 2011 royal decree allowed Saudi women to become members of the consultative Shura Council and to participate in elections for municipal councils. In January 2013, thirty women were appointed to the Shura Council. See Sara Hamdan, "Women Appointed to Saudi Council for First Time," *New York Times,* 16 January 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/17/world/middleeast/women-appointed-to-saudi-council-for-first-time.html. On 12 December 2015 Saudi women

and girls continue to push in informal and less visible ways to enact change in quotidian life. The interstitial spaces of automobiles, shopping malls, and cyber sites such as personal blogs and YouTube have become particularly productive for this modality of cautious politics that unfolds where public and private, and by extension personal and political, become "intermeshed."[118] As individual expressions of resistance against state- and religiously dictated restrictions on movement, appearance, and interaction or as a collective articulation of a demand for the right to drive, these interventions should be understood to be in dialogue with each other. Indeed if we consider them separately, we risk seeing these ruptures as a mere compilation of anecdotes. Collectively they constitute a repository of cumulative resistance. The sum of these single contributions in conversation with each other creates what Ananda Mitra calls a "hypervoice" that emerges from the "numerous voices all connected together." Jointly they articulate the narrative of a diverse and complex collectivity, calling "in unison . . . for recognition within the public sphere of cyberspace" and beyond.[119] The combination of these voices and actions in online and offline spaces helps generate new forms of consciousness, community, and politics.

The outcomes of these performances, moreover, are not easy to control or delimit. The mediated resistance that came into being during the 2011 driving campaign did not vanish once the action concluded. It has been sustained by regular feeds in the blogosphere, on Facebook, and on Twitter using the hashtag #Women2Drive. Blogs and social media persistently address and challenge the driving ban,

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participated in the municipal elections for the first time. According to official sources, 130,000 women and 1.36 million men cast their ballots. Women candidates won 21 of the 2,100 seats. Although municipal councils have limited power and one-third of their members are appointed, historian Hatoon al-Fassi regards Saudi women's performance of their "right of being a citizen" as a defining moment for women's rights in the kingdom. See Ian Black, "Saudi Arabia Elects up to 17 Female Councillors in Historic Election," *Guardian,* 13 December 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/13/saudi-arabia-elects-up-to-17-female-councillors-in-historic-election.

[118] Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "Mobile Transformations of 'Public' and 'Private' Life," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 116.

[119] Ananda Mitra, "Voices of the Marginalized on the Internet: Examples from a Web- site for Women of South Asia," Journal of Communication 54, no. 3 (2004): 503.

follow the detention of women caught driving, and express solidarity with initiatives fostering this cause.[120] In 2013 and 2014 these platforms were reactivated for similar driving actions, and they will continue to function in future driving campaigns. The next protest is scheduled for the nonexistent date of 31 November, a move that actualizes an indefinite demand and encourages Saudi women to take the wheel any day and every day, tactically producing the paradoxical time of an imminent future for Saudi women.[121]

[120] See, for example, Mona Kareem, "Saudi Arabia: Outrage over 10 Lashes for Female Driver," *Global Voices,* 15 November 2011, http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/11/15/saudi-arabia-outrage-over-10-lashes-for-female-driver; Eman al-Nafjan, "Cornering Saudi Women," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 8 June 2012, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2012/06/08/cornering-saudi-women; Eman al-Nafjan, "My Attempt to Break the Driving Ban in Saudi Arabia," *Saudiwoman's Weblog,* 28 February 2013, http://www.saudiwoman.me/2013/02/28/1793. Al-Nafjan was detained on 10 October 2013 while she filmed another activist driving in preparation for the 26 October action; see Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: End Driving Ban for Women," 24 October 2013, http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/24/saudi-arabia-end-driving-ban-women.

[121] Other hashtags used in relation to women's driving activism in Saudi Arabia are #SaudiWomenRevolution, created on 7 February 2011 as a reaction to the successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, and #Oct26Driving, created on 25 September 2013 to coordinate the 26 October action. The website of the 26 October 2013 campaign is no longer available but can be found at https://web.archive.org/web/20130923225331/http://www.oct26driving.com. See also "Saudi Women Drivers: Leading Female Campaigner Stopped," *Saudi Women Driving,* 29 November 2013, http://www.saudiwomendriving.blogspot.com/2013/11/saudi-women-drivers-leading-female.html.