

## How Saudi Media Covered the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi: The Case of Arab News

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### Abstract

Evidences show that Saudi agents killed prominent journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate on October 2, 2018. As the Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman was blamed for the murder, *Arab News* newspaper took a defensive position to defend the crown prince and the Saudi regime through news reports and columns. This study has analyzed 36 articles of ten columnists of *Arab News* to learn how Saudi journalists defended their regime and the Saudi officials charged for the murder. This research indicates that they received the concerning statements of the Saudi regime as true and tried to justify them in their columns. On the other hand, columnists blamed Turkey, Qatar, and other critics for clamping down Saudi Arabia. When columnists' attitudes are examined, it can be seen that they look furious, closed to opposite views, and biased. Their columns also give some idea about the press freedom in Saudi Arabia. This study is expected to reveal how media operates in Saudi Arabia via the content analysis of columns of Arab News regarding Khashoggi's murder.

**Keywords:** Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Journalism, Arab News

### Suudi Medyasının Cemal Kaşıkçı Cinayetini Veriş Şekli: Arab News Gazetesi Örneği

#### Öz

Bu çalışma, medyanın basın özgürlüğü bağlamında zorluklar yaşadığı otoriter rejimlerde nasıl çalıştığını anlamak için Suudi *Arab News* gazetesinin Cemal Kaşıkçı'nın katli karşısındaki tutumunu içerik analizi yaparak öğrenmeye çalışmaktadır. Delillere göre Suudi Arabistanlı ajanlar meşhur gazeteci Cemal Kaşıkçı'yı 2 Ekim 2018 tarihinde İstanbul'daki Suudi konsoloslukunda başını kesmek ve vücudunu asitle yok etmek suretiyle öldürdüler. Araştırmamız gösteriyor ki cinayetten velihaht prens Muhammed Bin Salman sorumlu gösterilince, *Arab News* gazetesi onu ve Suudi rejimini köşe yazıları ve haberlerle savunmak için harekete geçti. Çalışma on yazar tarafından yazılmış söz konusu köşe yazılarından 36'sını incelemiş ve gazetenin rejimi ve Suudi yetkilileri nasıl savunduklarını ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmıştır. Köşe yazılarından anlaşıldığı kadarıyla yazarlar Suudi hükümetinin demeçlerini sorgulamamışlar ve bunu köşelerinde savunmuşlardır. Diğer yandan aynı yazarlar bilhassa Türkiye'yi, Katar'ı ve diğer ülkeleri ülkelerini köşeye sıkıştırmakla itham etmişler ve onlara karşı suçlayıcı ve saldırgan bir



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tutum sergilemişlerdir. Yazarların öfkeli, taraflı ve Suudi rejimine yapılan eleştirileri kabullenmedikleri gözlemlenmiştir. Köşe yazıları Suudi Arabistan'daki basın özgürlüğü hakkında da fikir sahibi olunmasına yardımcı olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cemal Kaşıkçı, Suudi Arabistan, Türkiye, Gazetecilik, Arab News

## 1. Introduction

On October 2, 2019, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul while trying to obtain the document of divorce. The order to kill him is believed to be given by Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman (hereafter MBS) since Khashoggi was a staunch critic of him and allegedly organizing an opposition movement against him. Khashoggi's remains were never found, probably because they vanished with chemical acid. His close friends argue that his head was taken to Saudi Arabia by murderers. Regarding repercussions, Turkey got furious as the brutal murder happened in Istanbul. Turkish government saw the incident as a Saudi plan to humiliate Turkey and a message to Turkey-based Arab expatriates that escaped from their authoritarian regimes, assuming that the country was a safe haven for them (Telci, 2018: 11). Turkish government pursued a drop-in policy, releasing evidence one by one to show that Khashoggi was killed by Saudis. Turkish authorities also gave tape records of the last moments of Khashoggi to the media.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia denied allegations. When Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz announced that he did not come out of the consulate, the Saudi regime said he already left on October 2, 2018. Yet, two weeks later Saudis admitted that Khashoggi was killed by Saudi agents. However, the Saudis denied that it was a premeditated murder ordered by MBS. While the Saudi government arrested eighteen people for the murder, only five of them were sentenced to death while three were given 24-year imprisonment each. However, head actors like Suud Al-Qahtani (advisor of MBS), Ahmed Al-Asiri (former deputy head of intelligence), and Muhammad Ul-Utaibi (Consular General to Istanbul when Khashoggi was killed) were all acquitted. As for worldwide reactions, the whole world condemned the heinous killing but states hesitated to sanction Saudi Arabia for it. For example, the US sanctioned only some Saudi nationals believed to be involved in the murder (Sultoon, 2018).

Turkish media was quite active in disseminating breaking news about Khashoggi's killing. There was also an evident synchrony between Turkish authorities and media. The government gave information in parts to the media in order to keep the case hot. In addition, Turkish media could not digest the murder committed on Turkish lands, and thus, attacked MBS and Saudi Arabia. Regarding the press coverage of Saudi Arabia about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate located in Istanbul, they did not accept that Khashoggi was killed in the consulate at first and blamed Turkish and Qatari media for insulting Saudi Arabia (Omar, 2019: 6). As a response to the allegations about the murder, they published stories about human rights abuses in Turkey and how Qatar funds terrorism. When the Saudi government admitted that Khashoggi was killed, they revised their coverage but did not criticize the Saudi government (see below).

This study aims to analyze the coverage of Saudi media about the murder of Khashoggi by examining columns written in *Arab News* newspaper after Jamal Khashoggi was killed. As will be seen below, the columnists avoid criticizing the Saudi regime but try also not to demonize Khashoggi. On the other hand, they continuously respond to Turkish, Qatari, and other foreign media, which are critical of Saudis. The analysis shows that *Arab*

*News* does not question the involvement of the Saudi regime in the murder. The case of *Arab News* implies that the Saudi media has freedom problems and seems to be under the pressure of the government. While columns are analyzed, it can be seen that columnists relentlessly defend their government. By analyzing *Arab News*' stance regarding Khashoggi's murder, this study aims to reveal how authoritarian regimes wield media and how journalists, whether voluntarily or due to fear, react when there is a threat to their regime.

In terms of methodology, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to realize the purpose of this study. While the literature was reviewed for particularly the theoretical section, some interviews were made with concerning people. However, their names were kept anonymous on their request. Regarding *Arab News*, only those columns mentioning the murder of Khashoggi were analyzed while news reports were kept out of scope. Columns were accessed on arabnews.com. In total, 36 columns mentioning Khashoggi between October 11, 2018, and December 24, 2019, were examined. The content of articles was analyzed to unveil (1) how the developments affected columnists' views, (2) whether authors were biased or unbiased, (3) how the regime and MBS were mentioned, (4) whether there was the regime pressure on the Saudi media or not, and (5) how foreign media and allegations were received.

## 2. Media and Politics

The word media is the plural form of medium, which can simply be defined as a means of communication between people. Such components as newspapers, printing, broadcasting (radio and television), advertising, cinema, internet, etc. are basic instruments of media. Historically, primitive communication models such as Chauvet cave paintings, smoke signals, and theatre plays are regarded as early forms of media. Regarding printed media, the first sample is supposed to be the publication of the book called *Vajracchedika-Prajnaparamita-Sutra* in China in 868 (Karataş, 2017: 8). Then comes Gutenberg's printing machine in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, it could not become widespread until the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to printing costs. Thanks to dropping costs and the publication of newspapers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the era of modern journalism began. When we come to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we see that radio and television joined newspapers, thereby components of media increased. The term 'media' in contemporary meaning was first used by Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian communications theorist, in 1954 (McLuhan, 1954). Particularly his words 'medium is the message' drew much attention about the influence of media.

With the invention of the internet, a new term called the 'new media' was begun to be used. In the new media, information is distributed via computers or computer-like devices such as smartphones and iPads. The new media, including social media, is cheap, fast, accessible from anywhere, and can turn everyone into a journalist. To give an example, a person can create an account on Twitter free of charge and inform all people across the world. The cost will only be a \$5- internet package for/her his phone. In addition, one can open a news portal with an affordable cost and publish news. For instance, the Huffington Post was founded by four people in 2005 and sold for \$315 million in 2011. A similar website can be founded for \$300 on the condition that it uses a ready-made news template.

According to Craig (2004: 3), there are two types of media, namely news media and entertainment media. While news media refers to journalism, entertainment media comprises cinema, music, TV series, advertisements, and so on. Media is also classified as mainstream media and alternative media. Although the former addresses to all people, the latter has a small audience such as ideological communities, religious groups, and

ethnic groups. There is also thematic media writing/broadcasting about specific issues such as sports, music, news, and women. On the other hand, Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1963) suggest four theories of the press, associated with the type of political administration. According to the first theory, namely the Soviet theory, all media organs are owned and controlled by the communist state. Journalists are actually public clerks, whose outputs are checked by a censorship committee. On the other hand, in authoritarian theory, there might be private owners of media outlets but they have to get a license from the government, a procedure making media dependent on the state. Any anti-governmental news might lead to the closure of the media organ and severe punishment of the owner and journalists. Regarding libertarian theory, it argues that media is independent of pressure and censorship of any government, bureaucracy, business world, aristocracy. The media's duty is supposed to provide a free flow of information without any intervention. Finally, social responsibility theory is a derivative of libertarian theory, conversely suggesting that the state should sometimes intervene media to remind its responsibilities so that it will not cross the line.

However, since media has transformed thanks to the internet, a new theory that I call individualization theory can be suggested here. Individuals are now able to distribute information through their social media accounts and blogs. It is difficult to track all people and apply the rules of media on them. In other words, censorship has never become so difficult as information is flowing through millions of ports. It is correct that the internet is provided by states, thus they can cut the connection whenever they want but the advanced internet technology mostly enables users to hide their IPs. Particularly if users are abroad, it is almost impossible to catch them. On the other hand, since not all individuals are opponents of governments, those acting in legal ways may have unprecedented successes. For example, former American president Donald Trump's Twitter account is no different than a newspaper or TV in terms of accessing and influencing society. Besides, there are social media users with tens of millions of followers that determine the agenda and earning large amounts of money thanks to advertisements they share in their accounts. It can be argued that individual media is more independent, incurs less censorship, cheap, fast, and more influential. However, this study argues that individualization of media is the further partition of the sector among individuals and empowerment of media against states but the latter still holds the largest portion of power.

As for media and state relations, media elements are assumed as the agents representing people against the state, and vice versa. As the above theories assert, the regime type is vital for the freedom of media. While liberal countries give more freedom to media, authoritarian regimes try to control it. In this respect, Jebiril, Stetka, and Loveless (2013) argue that media is freer in democratic countries. Complementarily, a survey shows that when media is free, then people's eagerness to political participation increases (Leeson, 2008). On the other hand, it can be witnessed that there is a continuous relation between media and politicians, which can be explained as 'compelling dependency'. While politicians benefit from newspapers, TVs, the internet, and radios to make their PR, media outlets support or oppose the political world due to reasons such as economic benefits, ideological alignment/opposition, and national issues. In this regard, for example, media may sometimes remain silent against important issues of the agenda and corruption to save politicians (Rohlinger, 2006; 539). In addition, as per the *CNN Effect* theory, it may set the agenda and force politicians to take action (Wolfsheld, 2014). As an example, it was media that propagated the necessity of invading Iraq in 2003. On the other hand, it might be used as a propaganda tool even in America, where media is supposed to be free (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007: 1). Indeed, outlets like BBC World Service, Radio Free

Europe, Deutsche Welle, and Voice of America were founded to wire Western propaganda in the Soviet bloc during the cold war.

Finally, regarding the Middle Eastern and particularly Saudi media, it is hard to say that there is a free flow of information. The region's media fits well with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1963) authoritarian theory as media is state-controlled. Even if there are privately owned media companies, they hardly criticize the regime since owners and journalists might be sentenced, as in the case of Khashoggi. Almost all states have the Ministry of Information that controls the flow of information (Bedri, 2015: 32). Yet, Lebanon might be an exception as there is not much pressure on media there. On the other hand, Qatar was the first that abandoned its Ministry of Information and allowed press freedom by establishing Al Jazeera TV Network. Yet, although Al Jazeera broke censorship in the region, it does not criticize the Doha government. Regarding the Saudi Arabian media, our subject in this study, no criticism of the regime and the royal family seems to be tolerated. Besides governmental control via the Ministry of Media, self-censorship is also pervasive (BBC, 2019). Although private TVs are not operated on Saudi soil, Saudis own many media giants such as MBC, OSN, Rotana, and Al-Arabiya. Intolerance against journalists has peaked since Muhammad Bin Salman became the Crown Prince in 2017. Besides killing Jamal Khashoggi, some low-level dissident journalists were found dead in various countries. In addition, Saad Al-Jabri, a former Saudi official, said the crown prince had sent an elite squad to assassinate him two weeks after Khashoggi's death (Bostock, 2020). Moreover, Omar Abdulaziz in Canada and Iyad Al-Baghdadi (originally Palestinian) in Norway are under police protection against likely assassinations. An anonymous Qatari official also said that a Saudi female journalist was invited to the Saudi embassy in Washington probably to be kidnapped or even killed after Khashoggi's death but she refused to meet the ambassador in the embassy building.

Regarding our case study, *Arab News*, it is the first English-language daily newspaper published in Saudi Arabia, was founded by Hisham Hafiz in 1975. With 51.000 circulations in various countries, it has been one of the most influential newspapers in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. It is criticized by political observers as being the propaganda tool of the Saudi regime. Particularly its coverage about the Yemeni Civil War and the murder of Jamal Khashoggi is much condemned. Khashoggi was the deputy editor-in-chief of Arab News between 1999 and 2003.

As for Jamal Khashoggi, he was born in Medina in 1958. He is of Turkish origin from the paternal side and nephew of arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi. He worked as a correspondent, columnist, and editor in various Saudi newspapers. Yet, he was dismissed several times for criticizing the Wahhabi creed. He also worked as an adviser to various high-level Saudi officials including Turki Al-Faisal, who served as the director of intelligence and ambassador to the US and the UK. Complaining about the lack of freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia, he left the country in 2017 and began to live in the US. Before being killed, he worked as a columnist for *The Washington Post*. He was targeted by the Crown Prince due to his criticisms. Khashoggi was criticizing the Saudi regime especially for implementing fundamental Wahhabi traditions, which even prohibit women from driving cars and going somewhere without a male relative. In other words, he was favoring a more open and secular society similar to that of Turkey. Khashoggi was also a defender of the free press and had to self-exile himself due to his views that were not welcomed by the establishment.

Regionally, he supported popular uprisings during the Arab Spring and accused his government of being narrow-minded. Besides supporting the Palestinian cause, he also harshly criticized the Qatari blockade, which led to the Saudi government claiming that he was supporting the Qatari-Turkish stance. After leaving Saudi Arabia and beginning to write for *The Washington Post*, his anti-regime activities and articles

increased. According to some news, he was organizing an anti-MBS movement among diaspora Saudis. When MBS allegedly learned it through spyware loaded into his mobile phone, the Crown Prince waited for an opportunity to silence him. The common rumor about his death is that when he did not accept to go back to Saudi Arabia, agents surrounding him in the Consulate choked him and then dismembered his body. His close friends, who wanted to remain anonymous, said that his head was taken to Saudi Arabia while his body was dissolved in acid. The killing order is believed to be given from Saudi Arabia at the time when he refused to return. Overall, Khashoggi was killed for his opposition to a regime. It should also be noted that he was not a hard-line opponent of the Saudi regime and did not want to be known as an exiled opponent (Khashoggi and Cherkaoui, 2018: 7).

### **3. The Arab News Coverage of the Murder of Khashoggi**

While there are more than thirty columnists writing for *Arab News*, only ten of them wrote about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Why others did not write about the murder is a matter of question but it is hard to learn the reason. These ten columnists writing articles about Khashoggi are; Faisal J. Abbas, Abdulrahman Al-Rashed, Frank Kane, Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, Cornelia Meyer, Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor, Ray Hanania, Baria Alamuddin, Dr. Abdellatif El-Menawy, and Dr. Hamdan Al-Shehri. As will be seen below, the chief-in-editor Faisal J. Abbas wrote more than anyone.

Beginning with Faisal J. Abbas's views about the murder of Khashoggi, he writes his first article on October 11, 2018, at a time Khashoggi's murder was not confirmed yet (Abbas, 2018a). He writes that he is concerned about Khashoggi's sudden disappearance in Turkey, which he blames for being hostile to media. Thus, he fingers out Turkey for Khashoggi's vanishing and advises the Turkish state to look at its own backyard for abuses of freedom of expression. On the other hand, Abbas praises the silence of the Saudi government and contends that it will not be correct to respond to wild claims while the investigation continues. He then criticizes Khashoggi for changing the side at a time "the Anti-Terror Quartet" (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt) began to impose a boycott on Qatar. In addition, he claims that Khashoggi was not only a journalist but also a political activist supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar. After accusations about Khashoggi, he expresses that Saudi authorities will resolve the mystery behind Saudi journalist's vanishing. It can be contended from his first concerning piece that he sees Khashoggi and Turkey as evils and the Saudi government as innocent.

In his article named "You don't honor Khashoggi by insulting his country" written on October 21, 2018, one day after the confirmation of Khashoggi's death, he begins with reminding that Khashoggi was a fellow journalist, friend, a former deputy editor of *Arab News*, soft-spoken, kind-hearted and a consummate professional (Abbas, 2018b). He also criticizes Saudi media for unfairly insulting Khashoggi. Aftermath, he warns the Saudi government to make official statements in order to make people not believe Turkish and Qatari media. Besides, Abbas blames BBC, Reuters, and Twitter for their anti-Saudi coverage. Thus, for Abbas, the Saudi regime is under an unfair attack of international media. Regarding Abbas' third article concerning Khashoggi's murder, he says that it is one of the worst times for Saudi Arabia since the September 11 attacks (Abbas, 2018c). While he argues that the international community did not expect such behavior from the Kingdom, he also reproaches to foreign countries for their reaction to Saudi Arabia. He claims that if a similar murder had been committed in Syria or Iran, the world would not react so harshly. Finally, he praises MBS and his statement that "war on extremism is ongoing." Abbas lists what reforms MBS did such as allowing women to drive and enter sports stadiums, reopening cinemas, and relaxing rules on gender-mixing and dress.

However, he does not mention about allegations that MBS killed a journalist struggling for reforming the Saudi society for decades. Besides, Abbas is angry for harsh criticism of foreigners and expects them to see the murder as a banal incident.

Abbas writes in his fourth concerning article dated December 16, 2018, that mega international events held in the Kingdom after Khashoggi's murder give the message that unlike Turkish and Qatari media outlets may insinuate, Saudi Arabia is not isolated (Abbas, 2018d). In other words, he contends that the world still comes to the Kingdom, make business there, and does not cut relations with Saudis. Abbas argues in his fifth article that male guardianship and other outdated practices should be abolished as they are discriminatory and wrong (Abbas, 2019a). He also points out another reform, lifting the ban on women driving, and says it took too long to implement but still better than never implementing it. He then ties the topic with Khashoggi and says that security forces should not detain women for baseless reasons but be just as they did for the Khashoggi case. This means that Abbas relies on Saudi jurisprudence.

In the sixth related article dated January 21, 2019, Abbas criticizes American people's condemnations after Khashoggi's death and praises visits of Western celebrities such as American football coach Jay Paterno, Enrique Iglesias, David Guetta, and the Black Eyed Peas (Abbas, 2019b). He sees such visits as proof of the confidence of celebrities in Saudi Arabia. He also compares Khashoggi's murder with the massacre of Native Americans and the nuclear attack on Japan and asks Americans how they would feel if they were judged for these two incidents. In other words, Abbas wants the murder not to be judged and be forgotten. In the seventh article, Abbas claims that relations with the US and generally the West are good despite the 'awful' murder of Jamal Khashoggi without mentioning about perpetrators and the investigation process (Abbas, 2019c). In the eighth article dated August 26, 2019, he opposes those Americans trying to sanction the Saudi population for Khashoggi's murder, which he says was committed by a few (Abbas, 2019d). In the ninth article, Abbas starts with writing his personal views about his friend Khashoggi. After saying Jamal was a generous and gentleman, he attacks Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan who he claims jailed more than 50.000 people including 250 journalists (Abbas, 2019e). He then targets Qatar and Al Jazeera for their coverage about Khashoggi and Saudi Arabia in general. He also quotes from Jamal's son Salah, who complains about the exploitation of his father's death.

In the tenth article dated December 6, 2019, the columnist responds to former Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian for criticizing Saudi Arabia in his op-ed article (Abbas, 2019f). While Abbas claims *Arab News* did its best for the justice for Khashoggi, he refuses incriminations to the Saudi regime. Abbas also argues that "Such crimes are simply not in the DNA of our government. In other words, Saudi Arabia is the victim of its own good record on this front (nobody around the world would have blinked if this had happened in Turkey or Syria, for example.)". In the eleventh and final article, the author comments on the court decision about the murderers of Khashoggi (Abbas, 2019g). He cheers the conviction and sentencing of eight people for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Nevertheless, he does not question why the main instigators were acquitted. Instead, he claims that Qatar, Iran, and Turkey will not be happy as they expected that Saudi justice will convict none. In addition, he claims that Turkey did not submit shreds of evidence to the Saudi court despite endless courts. One of Khashoggi's Turkish friends said, had Turkey had evidence, Turkish authorities would give them to the International Criminal Court, and probably to Saudi authorities as well.

The second columnist writing most about Khashoggi's murder is Abdulrahman Al-Rashed. In his first column dated October 11, 2018, Al-Rashed claims that Saudis' enemies try to exploit Khashoggi's disappearance to portray Saudi Arabia as an evil country like North Korea and Russia (Al-Rashed, 2018a). Thus, he sees discussions as an attempt to

attack Saudi Arabia. He adds that if Khashoggi is killed, it will be an international crime. Yet, he still believes that allegations are propaganda of Qatar and Turkey. Besides, he assumes criticisms as an attempt to impede Saudi reforms. In his second article, he condemns the excessive reaction to Saudi Arabia for Khashoggi's murder (Al-Rashed, 2018b). He argues that campaigns targeting Saudi Arabia are more shocking than the disappearance of Khashoggi. He also believes that exaggerated attacks and the overexploited Khashoggi case will not hurt Saudi Arabia but culminate in the disappointment of anti-Saudi axes. Al-Rashed argues in the third article that Khashoggi's murder is; a gift to Iran from heaven; the weakening of Saudi Arabia in the region; the continuing hegemony of Iran in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria; and finally a Turkish diplomatic attack on Saudi Arabia (Al-Rashed, 2018c). He does not mention justice for Khashoggi nor criticizes the Saudi regime for it.

In the fourth article dated October 24, 2018, the author sees it ironic that the boycott for Khashoggi's murder target programs related to economic development, women, youth, and social development rather than military industry or political relations (Al-Rashed, 2018d). He also argues that *the Wall Street Journal* belongs to a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the fifth article, Al-Rashed thinks that Saudi Arabia is in an existential war after Khashoggi's murder (Al-Rashed, 2018e). He categorizes countries into three and names Qatar and Turkey as adversaries. In the second category, there are Saudi friends like Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, the UAE, and some others. The third category consists of neutral countries such as China and Russia. His sixth article dated November 16, 2018, lists several of his perspectives about Khashoggi murder such as (1) its being a political crime, (2) being associated to a peaceful country (Saudi Arabia), (3) Khashoggi's not being a threat to national security, and (4) the commitment of the crime in an unfriendly country (Al-Rashed, 2018). In the seventh and final article, the columnist accuses Turkey, Qatar, and some other countries of politicizing the G20 summit held in Argentina, to which MBS participated, too (Al-Rashed, 2018g).

Regarding Frank Kane's economy and finance-related columns where he also mentions about Khashoggi's murder, while he says in his first article that the investment scene has been rather good in spite of Khashoggi's murder, he argues in his second article that there has been a good appetite for Saudi financial offerings despite the international storm over the murder (Kane, 2018; Kane, 2019a). In the third article dated April 10, 2019, he praises Saudi economy affected by the murder while in the fourth one he heralds that foreign banks are back to Saudi Arabia (Kane, 2019b; Kane, 2019c). The fifth and the sixth articles relate to Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) with the murder of Khashoggi (Kane, 2019d; Kane, 2019e). He informs that foreign interest in Aramco was quite high but it could be higher, had Khashoggi not been killed. As for Abdul Aziz Aluwaisheg's columns, he praises Khashoggi in his first article and says that people misunderstood his views about political Islam, none of which were malicious (Aluwaisheg, 2018a). In the second article dated October 30, 2018, he argues that close and strategic relations with the US are imperative despite Khashoggi's murder (Aluwaisheg, 2018b). In the third concerning article, Aluwaisheg again praises Khashoggi and unjust reactions against him. He also praises freedom of expression in the US and writes about its necessity in Saudi Arabia (Aluwaisheg, 2018c). In the final article, he explains how the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) supported Saudi Arabia during harsh criticism of the country over Khashoggi's murder (Aluwaisheg, 2018d). Aluwaisheg is the only columnist whose views about Khashoggi are positive. Yet, after four positive articles, he stopped (or was stopped) writing about Khashoggi.

On the other hand, Khashoggi's murder is referred to in two articles of Cornelia Meyer. In both articles, she focuses on the impact of the 'awful' murder on international markets and oil prices but does not comment on Khashoggi's personality and his views



(Meyer, 2018a; Meyer, 2018b). Regarding Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor's two concerning articles, his first article written before the confirmation of the death of Khashoggi blames almost everyone, particularly Turkey, for acting like prosecutors, demonizing Saudi Arabia, and insulting MBS (Al-Habtour, 2018a). Al-Habtoor also threatens the US with finding new friends like Russia and China as the US Congress decided to sanction Saudi Arabia due to the murder. In the second article dated November 18, 2018, he staunchly defends King Bin Salman and the Crown Prince MBS and denies that they gave the order for murder (Al-Habtour, 2018b). Instead, he attacks Turkey and Recep Tayyip Erdogan for politicizing the case and dripping the information about the murder in order to keep it on the world agenda. Al-Habtoor seems to be the staunchest defender of Saudi Arabia and opponent of Turkey's stance.

On the other hand, Ray Hanania mentions Khashoggi's murder in two articles. In his first article dated February 14, 2019, he defends how Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir defended the Crown Prince against foreign media (Hanania, 2019a). In the second one, this time he praises how MBS defended himself in an interview he gave to CBS News (Hanania, 2019b). Regarding Baria Alamuddin's single article dated October 28, 2018, she says all attacks against journalists must be condemned including Jamal Khashoggi (Alamuddin, 2018). On the other hand, Dr. Abdellatif El-Menawy appreciates Egyptian leader Al-Sisi's support to the Crown Prince against allegations that he ordered to kill Khashoggi (El-Menawy, 2018). Finally, Dr. Hamdan Al-Shehri insults Turkey for not cooperating with Saudi authorities and using the murder for its political goals (Al-Shehri, 2019). He also argues that defendants were judged fairly and convictions are just.

#### **4. Assessments**

After analyzing columns, it can be assessed that all *Arab News* columnists, except for non-Saudi columnists and Abdul Aziz Aluwaisheg, who used good words about Jamal Khashoggi, defend the Saudi regime and attack those critics of the murder, particularly Turkey and Qatar. It seems that the first strategy of authors is to whitewash MBS and the Saudi regime. No authors imply that the Saudi regime is behind the murder. They argue that their country is respectful to human dignity, and does not commit such a crime. Despite that murderers turned out to be Saudi citizens, they protected the royal family and asserted that murders will be punished by the just Saudi courts. It can be understood from columns that they immune the House of Saud from criticism. Whether it is because authors really believe in the innocence of MBS or they just pretend is not clear but a beheaded journalist may frighten other journalists not to write against the regime.

Second, the authors avoid insulting Khashoggi much. One reason might be that they could not approve the brutal punishment of the dissident journalist and saw the murder as an excessive response to his actions. In addition, harsh criticism of Khashoggi means that they support the execution, which may also make people think that the Saudi regime is behind the murder. Third, they claim that the investigation process is fair and justice will prevail in the end. Authors do not want to discuss the Saudi role, particularly MBS' involvement, and give a message to readers that the case is a legal issue, thus lit should be left to judges. They are also firm that the Saudi judiciary is independent and will eventually sentence offenders.

Fourth, while authors never criticize MBS and other Saudi officials, they continuously insult Turkey, Qatar, and other countries that blame Saudi Arabia. It is correct that Turkey kept the murder on the agenda continuously but any country would probably do the same, had Khashoggi been murdered on its soil. Besides, it was not an ordinary incident that could be forgotten in a few days. Furthermore, the Turkish government assumed the murder as a challenge of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, giving the

message that they can humiliate Turks by killing dissidents in Turkey. For Turks, another message was to Arab dissidents living in Turkey. Saudis, Egyptians, and the UAE officials indirectly told anti-regime people that they are not safe in Turkey. Thus, Ankara tried to prove that nobody can make operations on its soils and humiliate Turkey. It can be argued that the Turkish government also wanted to take revenge from MBS and his allies for daring to commit crimes in Turkey. Regarding Qatar, the small Gulf country was already blockaded by the Saudi-led coalition and suffering from it. Therefore, it seems that it used this opportunity to smear its adversaries. As for international media and other countries, they clamped down Saudis because the crime was not something to be ignored. Beheading a journalist writing for *The Washington Post* in a consulate would not be tolerated, and indeed it was not. On the other hand, fifth, authors wanted Western media and other countries to turn a blind eye on the murder. It seems that they see it as an ordinary incident and want everyone to suppose it so. Some authors even threatened America with terminating the friendship and find new friends. Besides, columnists reminded Americans of their past and wanted them not to overreact. However, overall, neither Arab News nor other Saudi media outlets could not clear their regime from accusations.

As a side effect (or maybe the main effect), MBS' rebranding efforts turned out to be a disappointment. While he was being praised for his reforms such as allowing women to drive cars and opening cinemas, which are ordinary basic rights across the world, his personal and country's image suddenly vanished. He is no longer embraced by the Western world and harshly criticized by media. Probably, even more radical reforms might not change his image in the future. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's reformation process deformed with the murder of Khashoggi. This set-up can be called 'de-branding' as it waned even the available image of the country.

## 5. Conclusion

This study analyzed views of *Arab News* columnists writing about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. It revealed that Saudi columnists defend their regime against all criticisms without any backpedaling. They do not question the Saudi government nor call for a fair and quick investigation, believing that the Saudi jurisdiction will hold a fair trial. The regime and the Crown Prince are immune from criticism in *Arab News*, a sign that the newspaper is staunchly pro-regime. On the other hand, they roughly attack Turkey, Qatar, and international media for keeping the case on the agenda for a long time. For authors, not killing a journalist in the consulate but asking for justice seems to be a crime. Authors relentlessly defended the regime and the royal family but since the instigator and hitmen were Saudis, their attitude as journalists is hardly acceptable in terms of journalism and human rights. The case of *Arab News* also shows how the state and private media are not so much different from each other in Saudi Arabia. It can be contended that they failed to convince the world audience about the innocence of the regime and MBS. Besides, the Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman lost all his rising reputation and destroyed Saudi Arabia's image. The rebranding process collapsed and it may not revive as long as MBS is in power.

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## Özet

*Ortadoğu medyası ya tamamen devletin kontrolündeki ya da bir kısım özel şirket veya şahıslara ait gazete, TV ve radyolardan oluşmaktadır. Ancak özel medyaya rağmen haberlerin sansürlü ve özgürce yayınlandığı pek vaki değildir. Çünkü otoriter rejimler medya organlarını baskı altında tutmakta ve aleyhlerine olabilecek herhangi bir haberin yayınlanmasına engel olmaktadır. Söz konusu olumsuz haberler sadece rejime zarar vermekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda ülkenin imajını da zedelemektedir. Çalışmamız bu bağlamda Suudi Arabistan medyasını düşünce özgürlüğü ve dış politika bağlamında ele almış olup medyanın rejime nasıl boyun eğdiğini ve nasıl yanlışlarını örtbas etmeye çalıştığını ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır.*

*Malum olduğu üzere, Suudi Arabistanlı ajanlar meşhur gazeteci Cemal Kaşıkçı'yı 2 Ekim 2018 tarihinde İstanbul'daki Suudi konsolosluğunda başını kesmek ve vücudunu asitle yok etmek suretiyle öldürdüler. Cinayetle ilgili olarak Muhammed Bin Salman sorumlu gösterilince, Arab News gazetesi onu ve Suudi rejimini köşe yazıları ve haberlerle savunmak için harekete geçti. Çalışma on yazar tarafından yazılmış söz konusu köşe yazılarından 36'sını incelemiş ve gazetenin rejimi ve Suudi yetkilileri amansızca savunurken ithamların tümünü gözardı ettiğini ortaya çıkarmıştır. Yazarlar Suudi hükümetinin her söylediğini doğru kabul etmişler ve bunu köşelerinde savunmuşlardır. Diğer yandan aynı yazarlar bilhassa Türkiye'yi, Katar'ı ve diğer ülkeleri ülkelerini köşeye sıkıştırmakla itham etmişler ve onlara karşı suçlayıcı ve saldırgan bir tutum sergilemişlerdir. Yazarların öfkeli, kibirli, taraflı ve gerçeklerden kaçtığı gözlemlenmiştir. Köşe yazıları ayrıca yazarların otoriter bir rejime karşı özgür olmadıklarını ve gerçeği savunamayacaklarını göstermektedir. Arab News yazarları her ne kadar rejimi amansızca desteklemiş olmalarına rağmen ülkenin imajının menfi etkilenmesinin önüne geçememişlerdir.*