Charity in Saudi Arabia

In this innovative study of everyday charity practices in Jeddah, Nora Derbal employs a "bottom-up" approach to challenge dominant narratives about state–society relations in Saudi Arabia. Exploring charity organizations in Jeddah, this book both offers a rich ethnography of associational life and counters Riyadh-centric studies that focus on oil, the royal family, and the religious establishment. It closely follows those who work on the ground to provide charity to the local poor and needy, documenting their achievements, struggles, and daily negotiations. The lens of charity allows rare insights into the religiosity of ordinary Saudis, showing that Islam offers Saudi activists a language, a moral frame, and a worldly guide to confronting inequality. With a view to the many forms of local community activism in Saudi Arabia, this book examines perspectives that are too often ignored or neglected, opening new theoretical debates about civil society and civic activism in the Gulf.

Nora Derbal is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She holds a DPhil in Islamic Studies from Freie Universität Berlin and has studied Islamic Studies and Modern History in Oxford, Berlin, and Jeddah. This is her first book.

Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cambridge Middle East Studies

Editorial Board

Charles Tripp (general editor)
Julia Clancy-Smith
F. Gregory Gause
Yezid Sayigh
Avi Shlaim
Judith E. Tucker

Cambridge Middle East Studies has been established to publish books on the nineteenth- to twenty-first-century Middle East and North Africa. The series offers new and original interpretations of aspects of Middle Eastern societies and their histories. To achieve disciplinary diversity, books are solicited from authors writing in a wide range of fields including history, sociology, anthropology, political science, and political economy. The emphasis is on producing books affording an original approach along theoretical and empirical lines. The series is intended for students and academics, but the more accessible and wide-ranging studies will also appeal to the interested general reader.

A list of books in the series can be found after the index.

Published online by Cambridge University Press

Charity in Saudi Arabia

Civil Society under Authoritarianism

Nora Derbal

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published online by Cambridge University Press

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316513477
DOI: 10.1017/9781009072656

© Nora Derbal 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Derbal, Nora, 1984– author.
Title: Charity in Saudi Arabia: Civil Society under Authoritarianism / Nora Derbal, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
Description: 1 Edition. | New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2022] | Series: Cambridge Middle East studies | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021061457 (print) | LCCN 2021061458 (ebook) | ISBN 9781316513477 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009073790 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009072656 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Charities – Saudi Arabia. | Saudi Arabia – Social policy. | Saudi Arabia – Social conditions. | BISAC: POLITICAL SCIENCE / World / Middle Eastern
Classification: LCC HV380 .D47 2022 (print) | LCC HV380 (ebook) | DDC 361.809538–dc23/eng/20220209
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021061457
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021061458

ISBN 978-1-316-51347-7 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Published online by Cambridge University Press

To all social workers, philanthropists, volunteers,

and civil society activists,

in admiration.

Published online by Cambridge University Press

Like the wind, civil society may lack tangible form;
but when it blows, its effects may be readily observed.

Sheila Carapico, "Yemen between Civility and Civil War"

Published online by Cambridge University Press

Contents

List of Figures — *page* x
List of Tables — xii
Acknowledgments — xiii
A Note on Conventions — xvii

1 Introduction: Civil Society Theory, Charity, and Inequality in Saudi Arabia — 1
2 Meanings of Welfare: The First Women's Welfare Association in Jeddah — 39
3 Managing Poverty and National Development: The Society of Majid bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz for Development and Social Services — 121
4 Negotiating Citizenship and Belonging: The Young Initiative Group — 197
5 Fun, Freedom, and Personal Growth amid Rising Repression: The Hikers — 245
6 Conclusion: Civil Society Activism and Everyday Islam in Saudi Arabia — 295

Select Bibliography — 307
Index — 339

Published online by Cambridge University Press

1 Introduction

Civil Society Theory, Charity, and Inequality in Saudi Arabia

This is a book about Saudi Arabian civil society. This might sound like an oxymoron. Saudi Arabia is widely considered an authoritarian Islamic state with little space for any civil initiative to maneuver in or to flourish. Indeed, the Saudi Arabian state monitors and controls the lives of its citizens with a rigid iron fist and does not allow for autonomous civil society organizations with any democratic undertones. Yet this book presents a different perspective from which to view and understand Saudi Arabian society, not from a top-down vantage point – of how the state plans and controls complex social and political situations – but bottom-up, from the point of view of "on the ground" civil society initiatives, such as charities and other volunteering groups, and the ways they act and react in the face of diverse social events, governmental power, and politics. With a focus on the social and what is occurring in society, my research leads me to suggest a more nuanced picture of state–society relations and the agency of ordinary Saudis and non-Saudis in the kingdom. I began pondering these issues following my experience with the aid campaign after the Jeddah floods in 2009. It was this experience that led me to seek different analytical and conceptual tools for understanding Saudi Arabian society than the ones currently in use in academic research of this unique country, where royal power, Wahhabi religious scholarship, and enormous oil wealth set up an opaque facade, behind which lies a complex and vibrant social life.

My research in Saudi Arabia began at a time of heightened activism in the civic sphere. On the eve of the annual Islamic pilgrimage, the hajj, on November 25, 2009, heavy rainfall flooded the city of Jeddah, the "gate to Mecca." At the time, I was a visiting student at King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University, Jeddah's largest public university. It was the first day of the hajj holiday, and no students were on campus when the area was flooded. In the impoverished neighborhoods in the south and east of Jeddah, however, houses built from poor-quality materials collapsed under the mud carried

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by the water currents. Bridges and electricity lines fell. Cars and buses were carried away by waves of mud.

I spent the first days of the hajj holiday couchsurfing in Jeddah with my boyfriend (he had come to Saudi Arabia for the vacation). Our host, a Saudi citizen with Iraqi roots who was in his mid-thirties, lived in a spacious villa in the north of the city. He lived at home with his parents, four younger siblings, a driver, a gardener, and a maid, and he invited us to stay with him while his parents were gone for the pilgrimage. He was keen to host us because he had never been approached before by couch-surfers (though he had couchsurfed himself around the world), but he feared that his parents would not approve because of our nonmarital relationship (eventually his parents found out, met us, and approved nonetheless).

Together with our host, in the family parlor we followed the devastation on TV and on social media. The "Jeddah floods" (*suyūl Jidda*) were all over the headlines. Local newspapers stressed the fact that Jeddah, nick-named the "bride of the sea" (*ʿarūsat al-baḥr*), had drowned in what seemed a relatively small amount of water.[1] On November 25, 2009, the rainfall was measured at 90 mm (90 ml/m^2) or 9 cm.[2] Out of disbelief and curiosity, our host drove his Jeep to the south and east of the city to see the sites of the flooding with his own eyes. He shot pictures and short video clips of the flooded streets, impoverished neighborhoods, and families navigating this urban tragedy. Later, in his living room, he shared the footage with us and his online followers. He was not the only one doing so.

Within the first hours of the emergency, a bank employee by the name of Riyad al-Zahrani – who described himself as not having been politically or socially engaged before the floods[3] – created an Arabic-language Facebook group, The People's Campaign for the Contribution to the Rescue of the City of Jeddah (al-Ḥamla al-Shaʿbiyya li-l-Musāhama fī Inqādh Madīnat Jidda). The group encouraged Facebook users to share

[1] Khālid Ḥamad al-Sulaimān, "Shibr Jidda! [An inch, Jeddah!]," *ʿUkāẓ*, November 28, 2009; Ṣāliḥ Ibrāhīm al-Tariqī, "Yaumiyyāt madīna ghāriqa [Days of a sinking city]," *ʿUkāẓ*, November 28, 2009.

[2] It should be noted, however, that this was far more than the average rainfall that Jeddah received per year, which stood at 56 mm; see "Jidda, Saudi Arabia, Weather History and Climate Data," World Climate 2011, www.worldclimate.com/cgi-bin/data.pl?ref=N21E039+2100+4102401G1 (accessed January 12, 2016).

[3] Hagmann interviewed al-Zahrani in February 2010 in Jeddah; see Jannis Hagmann, *Regen von oben, Protest von unten. Eine Analyse gesellschaftlicher Mobilisierung in Jidda, Saudi-Arabien, anhand von Presse, Petitionen und Facebook* [Rain from the top, protest bottom-up: An analysis of societal mobilization in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, based on the press, petitions and Facebook], Working Paper Series 4 (Freie Universität Berlin: Arbeitsstelle Politik des Vorderen Orients, 2012), 39–40.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

videos, photos, and any other documentation about the catastrophe. The Facebook campaign attracted more than 40,000 followers within a few days. Upon hearing of the floods, members of the grassroots organization Muwāṭana began collecting donations in their homes for those affect. The welfare associations based in the south of Jeddah were among the first to reach out to flood victims. Within days, Muwāṭana, the welfare associations and numerous small, informal youth groups gathered under the umbrella of al-Zahrani's Facebook campaign. The group coordinated and sent volunteers to assist the welfare associations in their efforts. With their decades-long history of aiding the poor, the welfare associations knew the flooded areas better than most of the youth organizations did. The welfare associations could count on existing networks of families from the affected neighborhoods as well as connections with the local authorities. Upon the initiative of Fatin Bundaqji, cofounder of Muwāṭana and member of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (al-Ghurfa al-Tijāriyya al-Ṣināʿiyya bi-Jidda, JCCI), the JCCI supported the mobilization with emergency appeals, directed at Jeddah's business community. With a growing stock of donations and increasing numbers of volunteers, Muwāṭana approached the city council (*amānat muḥāfaẓat Jidda*) and asked for a space where the volunteers could operate. The city council, however, pointed to a lack of space on their part.[4] In light of the fast-growing campaign, the JCCI eventually set up a volunteer space at the Jeddah Center for Forums and Exhibitions (Markaz Jidda lil-Maʿāriḍ, JCFE).

Since the women's side of the campus of King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University was still closed after the hajj holiday due to the damage caused by the floods, I joined my fellow classmates at the JCFE. Between 1,500 and 2,000 young men and women volunteered daily at the JCFE during the weeks following the catastrophe.[5] When I arrived at the site in early December 2009, one large exhibition hall had already been turned into a provisional aid center run by volunteers. The hall was loosely divided into male and female sections. On the women's side, we received household utensils and food donations in large quantities, including staples such as pasta and rice as well as sugar, tomato sauce, cereals, and sweets. For hours, we repacked sacks of wheat into small baskets and made up family-sized food boxes, which the young men then distributed among the flood victims. The work was tedious and tiring. Some women who joined the men in distributing aid boxes in the devastated neighborhoods

[4] Interview with Rasha Hifzi (cofounder of Muwāṭana), Jeddah, January 2013.
[5] For a visual impression of the aid center activities, see "Special Feature 25.11.09," *Destination Jeddah*, January 2010.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

afterward shared their shock from the scenes they witnessed on these missions. Yet the overall atmosphere was also often jolly. Young men and women joked around or bumped into acquaintances and friends who were similarly following the social media calls for action. Others, like me, made new friends. The volunteers came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. I also met students from King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University and from the private women's colleges Dar al-Hekma and Effat University. To my surprise, I even noticed among the volunteers some young princesses of the royal family Al Saʿud, who were studying at Effat University and now joined their classmates.

The volunteers' aid center at the JCFE brought together a diverse range of actors involved in the field of aid in Saudi Arabia. Both registered charity organizations and informal community initiatives coordinated their efforts at the aid center. The campaign operated in plain sight of state authorities. This posed a particular challenge to those unregistered community initiatives, like Muwāṭana and the youth organization Fainak, that transgressed and pushed certain sociopolitical norms, for instance by directing aid to noncitizens or through gender mixing of unrelated men and women (*ikhtilāṭ*). Gender segregation played a subordinate role for many youth initiatives in Jeddah; however, at the JCFE volunteers continuously reminded themselves of state authorities and the need "to behave appropriately."[6]

The different initiatives, which convened under the umbrella of the JCCI, soon formed the "Committee for the People of Jeddah," gathering the heads of the organizations in an attempt to offer coordinated relief. Among the nine registered charity organizations listed in the committee were the First Women's Welfare Association, the Faisaliyya Women's Welfare Society, the Albir Society, the Majid Society, the Neighborhood Centers' Association (Jamʿiyyat Marākiz al-Aḥyāʾ), the Saudi Environmental Society, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. Among the informal and youth groups at the JCCI were, in addition to Muwāṭana and Fainak, Rescue Jeddah (*Inqādh Jidda*), Change Your Life, and the official volunteer association of the Jeddah municipality, Friends of Jeddah (*Aṣdiqāʾ Jidda*).[7] Different groups engaged in different tasks: for instance, the First Women's Welfare Association, with the help of numerous youth volunteers, offered immediate assistance, including food, clothes, and blankets, but also medical care, a safe space for children, and transportation to health centers and hospitals.

[6] I visited, for instance, the offices of the youth organization Fainak in 2009, which were not gender segregated. The young women and men assured me that their families were in the picture and did not mind the practice.

[7] For an overview of informal youth groups in Jeddah, see Enas Hashani, ed., "Jeddah's Pulse: Dedicated Volunteers and Activists," *Destination Jeddah* 23 (December 2010): 20–31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Faisaliyya Women's Welfare Society, together with the youth organization Friends of Jeddah, conducted a field survey to ascertain the number of flood victims and their needs. The Majid Society launched a campaign to refurbish homes destroyed by the floods.

The volunteers at the JCFE were driven by a diverse range of motivations. Some followed the religious imperative to aid the poor and needy. Others came out of curiosity, triggered by social media representations of the place. In early 2010, I came across an interview in the local lifestyle magazine *Destination Jeddah* in which Khalid Muhammad al-Dahlawi, one of the leaders at the JCFE, described the volunteers' motivation by saying, "We didn't see anyone trying to help those people. From that we decided to do something because we have an obligation – we are Saudis."[8] Al-Dahlawi's words exemplify how the flood campaign contributed to a strong feeling of national identity. The young men and women came together as Saudis and acted on the obligation that this sense of belonging brought with it. In return, the strong dynamics of mobilization produced a sense of "pride and inner satisfaction" that became tied to their identity as Saudis.[9] The youth activist and blogger Ahmad Sabri, who was also among the flood volunteers at the JCFE in 2009, described the aid efforts in poetic form: "I took a step back and tried to see how the volunteering situation [*al-ʿamal al-taṭawwuʿī*] was going on." The poem ends with the words "I saw a whole community coming together, and I thought to myself: I saw Jeddah, I saw Islam being practiced, and I saw us . . . Viva civil society [*ʿāsh al-mujtamaʿ al-madanī*]!"[10]

Following the floods, Saudi Arabia witnessed political criticism and mobilization at an unprecedented scale. Out of the aid campaign, a movement developed that questioned the poor municipal management of Jeddah, which became the focus of an anti-corruption campaign.[11] The cause of the devastation was seen to lie not in the weather conditions but in mismanagement. Media reports suggested that it was the rainfall, which gathered in the dried river valleys in the vicinity of the city, which developed into the strong currents of water that flooded parts of the city.[12]

[8] "Special Feature 25.11.09," 7.

[9] "Pride" and "satisfaction" were recurring themes in the description of the relief campaign. For instance, the Jeddawi journalist Fatany wrote: "Our youth demonstrated its willingness and proved their capabilities in volunteer work during the devastating Jeddah floods . . . We need to capitalize on this new movement that has given our young people a sense of pride and inner satisfaction." See Samar Fatany, *Modernizing Saudi Arabia* (Jeddah: self-published, 2013), 74.

[10] Published in English, in "Special Feature 25.11.09," 13; for Arabic, see Ahmad Sabri, "ʿĀsh al-ʿamal al-madanī!," *Ahmad Sabri* (blog), accessed December 16, 2020, http://ahmadsabri-jeddah.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html.

[11] For an analysis of the mobilization, see Hagmann, *Regen*.

[12] ʿAlī al-Fārisī, Walīd al-ʿAmīr, and Yāsir al-Jārūshah, "al-Suyūl fī Jidda taqtul 44 shakhṣan wa-tasquṭ kibārī wa-usquf manāzil wa-taḥtajiz al-sukkān [Floods in Jeddah kill 44 people,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Local media heavily relied on eyewitness reports from locals and on information provided by the social activists involved with the aid campaign. The debate was particularly outspoken in al-Zahrani's Facebook group, "The People's Campaign for the Contribution to the Rescue of the City of Jeddah." Numerous commentators questioned the lack of urban planning, building activity on unsuitable ground and with questionable concessions, and the insufficient drainage system of the city. Soon a consensus emerged among social media users that corruption, which fueled all of these problems, was the real root cause of the devastation.[13]

It was the patriotic framing of the campaign, Jannis Hagmann has argued, that enabled Jeddah's population to articulate its claims as an acceptable form of protest.[14] Al-Zahrani's Facebook group, which coordinated the volunteers, also became a platform where individuals shared their opinions and outspoken criticisms of the situation. Facebook users vented their frustrations about the failure of the state's relief services (*al-Difāʿ al-Madanī*), the absence of the Red Crescent Society (*al-Hilāl al-Aḥmar*), the lack of warning from the national weather services (*Hayʾat al-Irṣād*), and the reporting of the state news agency, SPA (*Wikālat al-Anbāʾ al-Saʿūdiyya*).[15] The volunteers understood their work as a reaction to the lack of state assistance and to the refusal of state relief services to help "noncitizens" and Saudi women in need.[16] However, most accusations raised in the wake of the floods were phrased in vague and general terms, addressing "government authorities" (*al-jihāt, jihāt ḥukūmiyya*) at large rather than specific individuals involved with the government. Social activists were particularly careful not to criticize the king, and they only barely criticized other members of the royal family (like the governor of Mecca region, Khalid al-Faisal, or the governor of Jeddah governorate, Mishʿal bin Majid bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz). Criticism seldom pointed to the political system of Saudi Arabia at large, whether online, in person, or off the record. Instead, the mismanagement of *local* authorities – above all, the local city council (*amāna*) and, following an interview with the local newspaper *ʿUkāz*, the person of the

bring down bridges and roofs of homes and trap residents]," *Alriyadh*, November 26, 2009, www.alriyadh.com/477336; al-Tariqī, "Yaumiyyāt madīna ghāriqa."

[13] For a detailed media analysis of public discourse in the wake of the 2009 floods, see Hagmann, *Regen*, 51–76.

[14] Hagmann, *Regen*.

[15] Instead of an account of the catastrophe, the SPA published a report on their website on November 25, 2009, stating that "the SPA reporter found the people, particularly children and women, enjoying the heavy downpour . . . Many of them headed to the Corniche beach to enjoy this happy and wonderful weather." Cited after Turki al-Dakheel, "SPA Makes Jeddawis Dance with Anger," *Arab News*, December 2, 2009, www.arabnews.com/node/330580.

[16] Hagmann, *Regen*, 45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

mayor, Engineer ʿAdil Faqih – became the focal point of the protest movement.[17]

The political elites reacted to the local protest movement with cooptation. King ʿAbdallah took over the movement and presented himself as the main antagonist of corruption. On December 1, 2009, the king took a public position on the events by means of a royal decree that condemned the catastrophe and demanded an investigation into the conditions that had led to it. The king decreed that the governor of Mecca region, Prince Khalid al-Faisal, should head the commission. The reactions to the king's decree were almost unanimously positive, and many praised his clear words, including social media users and volunteers.[18] In March 2010, Khalid al-Faisal reported back to the king on the devastation (123 deaths, 30 people missing, 10,785 homes devastated, 10,850 vehicles destroyed).[19] In May 2010, newspapers reported that fifty men were prosecuted due to their role in the flood disaster, including for crimes involving financial and administrative corruption.[20] The fight against corruption was institutionalized in March 2011 in the Nazaha, the official Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority (Hayʾat al-Raqāba wa-Mukāfaḥat al-Fasād). Fighting corruption has become a central element of the political narrative of the Saudi government.

Charity for Change

When I wrote my PhD thesis about charity in Jeddah and began to systematically reflect on my experiences among the volunteers and charities in Saudi Arabia between 2009 and 2013, I realized that what I had seen from my perspective contradicted much of the dominant literature on Saudi Arabia. The activism, which I analyze in this book, challenges an established body of academic writing that describes rentierism, tribalism, and Islamism as the dominant forces shaping social structures in Saudi Arabia. For decades, the canon of works on Saudi Arabia focused on oil,

[17] For the controversial interview, see ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ghazāwī, "Naʿm . 70% min aḥyāʾ Jidda bi-lā taṣrīf [Yes, 70% of Jeddah's districts without drainage]," *ʿUkāẓ*, November 28, 2009, www.okaz.com.sa/article/300974; Abdulaziz Ghazzawi, "Mayor Grilled over Poor Planning for Floods," *Saudi Gazette*, November 29, 2009, www.sauress.com/en/saudigazette/55721; blaming the municipality, ʿAbduh Khal, "Musāʾala al-masʾulīn [Hold those responsible accountable]," *ʿUkāẓ*, November 27, 2009, www.okaz.com.sa/article/300934; speaking of the "Jeddah file," filled with problems, ʿAbduh Khal, "Nurīduhum wāḥidan wāḥidan! [We want them one by one!]," *Okaz*, December 2, 2009, www.okaz.com.sa/article/301478.

[18] Hagmann, *Regen*, 46–47.

[19] "King Presented Flood Report," *Arab News*, March 6, 2010.

[20] Muhammad al-Sulami, "King Orders Prosecution in Jeddah Flood Disaster," *Arab News*, May 11, 2010, www.arabnews.com/node/344709.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the royal family Al Saʿud, and Wahhabism.[21] From this top-down and state-centric perspective, scholars inferred that Saudi Arabia had no noteworthy civil society. Augustus Richard Norton's standard work *Civil Society in the Middle East* covered most of the region but did not include a chapter on Saudi Arabia.[22] Norton's volumes describe civil society as a realm of organized social life that is voluntary, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.

Saudi Arabia is a deeply authoritarian state with little tolerance for autonomous collective activism of the kind described by Norton. The kingdom lacks the legal and constitutional grounds that would enable free civil society institutions, such as the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. The Saudi state does not allow for political parties and unions. The country effectively banned unwanted nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and, until 2015, had no NGO law. Scholars interested in civil society in Saudi Arabia have documented the struggle of human rights organizations, like the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), or the top-down and undemocratic character of institutions like the National Dialogue Initiative and the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry.[23]

Why then did the volunteers and activists, whom I interviewed in the wake of the flood catastrophe in Jeddah in 2009 and 2010, describe themselves as part of a Saudi civil society? What is the relationship of charity, social activism, and sociopolitical reform? Rereading the Jeddah flood events prompted me to question the larger social and political significance of charity work in Saudi Arabia. The many informal, non-registered groups and collective charity initiatives that I encountered in Saudi Arabia during my fieldwork have largely been overlooked by the literature outside of the peninsula.[24] Historically, registering as a charity

[21] See Fred H. Lawson, "Keys to the Kingdom: Current Scholarship on Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 4 (2011): 737–747.

[22] Although a comparative chapter on the Arabian Gulf includes a few observations about Saudi Arabia, see Jill Crystal, "Civil Society in the Arabian Gulf," in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, edited by Augustus Richard Norton, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 259–286.

[23] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2015), 55–74; Mark Thompson, *Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Hendrik J. Kraetzschmar, "Associational Life under Authoritarianism: The Saudi Chamber of Commerce and Industry Elections," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 184–205.

[24] Notable exceptions are Amélie Le Renard, "Pauvreté et charité en Arabie Saoudite: La famille royale, le secteur privé et l'état providence [Poverty and charity in Saudi Arabia: The royal family, the private sector and the welfare state]," *Critique Internationale* 41 (2008): 137–156; and Caroline Montagu, "Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 1 (2010): 67–83; but a growing number of local and regional studies address the phenomenon. Most important for my research,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has constituted one of the rare avenues for collective organization in the kingdom. Giving alms and showing beneficence to the poor and needy are lifelong obligations for Muslims, commanded by the Qurʾan and referenced in traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (hadith). The royal family Al Saʿud has drawn legitimacy from its self-projection as the guarantor of a society adhering to God's laws, thereby positioning itself as the protector of the Muslim community. In fact, Saudi Arabia's quasi-constitution,[25] the Basic Law of Governance (al-Niẓām al-Assāsī li-l-Ḥukm), upholds "maintaining solidarity" (§11) and explicitly "encourages organizations and individuals to contribute to acts of charity" (§27).[26]

This book describes how ideas and ideals of charity, rooted in religious tradition and politically sanctioned, have been translated into everyday associational practices in support of the poor in Jeddah. I argue that, under the umbrella of charity, diverse spaces rich in social and symbolic capital have emerged in Saudi Arabia that

Suʿād ʿAbūd Bin ʿAfīf, "al-ʿAmal al-taṭawwuʿī fī 'l-mujtamaʿ al-madanī: Dirāsa li-daur al-marʾa al-taṭawwuʿī fī muḥāfaẓat Jidda bi-l-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya [Voluntary work in civil society: The role of women volunteers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia]" (PhD Thesis, Jeddah, King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University, 2008); Suʿād ʿAbūd Bin ʿAfīf, "Mujtamaʿ al-ribāṭ: Dirāsa waṣfiyya li-asālīb al-riʿāya al-ijtimāʿiyya fī buyūt al-fuqarāʾ bi-madīnat Jidda, al-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya [Shelter community: A descriptive study of social welfare services in poor-housing in the city of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia]" (MA Thesis, Jeddah, King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University, 1993); and Laylā ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad Jamāl, "al-Ḥayā al-ijtimāʿiyya wa-l-riʿāya fī 'l-masākin al-iwāʾiyya. Dirāsa ithnūghrāfiyya ʿalā al-masākin wa-l-sākinīn fī madinat Jidda [Social and welfare life in residential housing: An ethnographic study of housing and inhabitants in Jeddah City]" (PhD Thesis, Jeddah, King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University, 2011); see also Zayd bin ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Zayd, *al-Jamʿiyyāt al-khayriyya bi-l-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya fī ʿahd khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn* [Welfare associations in Saudi Arabia in the era of the custodian of the two noble sanctuaries] (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya athnāʾ al-Nashr, 2002); ʿAbdallāh bin Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Maṭūʿ, *al-ʿAmal al-khayrī al-muʾassasī. Dirāsa waṣfiyya maidāniyya ʿalā muʾassasatayn khayriyyatayn fī 'l-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya* [Institutionalized charity: A descriptive study of two charity organizations in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia] (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad Ibn Saʿud Islamic University, 2008); Saʿd Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥajjī, *al-Jamʿiyyāt al-nisāʾiyya al-ijtimāʿiyya bi-duwal majlis al-taʿāwūn li-duwal al-khalīj al-ʿarabiyya* [Women's welfare associations in the countries of the Cooperation Council of the Arabian Gulf States] (Kuwait City, 2000), 301–500; Amāl bint Ramaḍān Ṣadīq, *al-ʿAmal al-khayrī fī Makka al-Mukarrama fī ʿahd al-malik Fahd bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd* [Charity in Mecca during the era of King Fahd bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz] (Mecca: Umm al-Qura University, 2015).

[25] The Basic Law of Governance declares the Qurʾan and the sunna, the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, as the sole constitution (*dustūr*) of the country (§1), see also Abdulaziz H. al-Fahad, "Ornamental Constitutionalism," *Yale Journal of International Law* 30 (2005): 375–396.

[26] "Basic Law of Governance (Niẓām Assāsī li-l-Ḥukm) promulgated by royal decree no. A/91 dated 27.08.1412 h. (March 1st, 1992)," www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/sa/sa016en.pdf (accessed June 15, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

allow for a certain degree of self-governance under authoritarianism. Social activists have managed to carve out spaces of autonomy from which they have challenged and pushed the boundaries of sociopolitical norms. Charity activism often addresses forms of marginalization that are sanctioned, or even *produced*, by state policy, and I argue this renders such issues "political" and not just "societal" concerns. By focusing on agency, however, I do not mean to deny the authoritarian nature of the Saudi state. Charity and social activism are regularly surveilled by, coopted by, or entangled with the state and/or the royal family Al Saʿud, often in complex ways. Both Saudis and non-Saudis in Saudi Arabia encounter a system of domination by the state that takes various forms – symbolic, economic, political, and gender-based. Yet the aim of this book is to present an account of state–society relations that pays attention to the strategies by which ordinary men and women navigate these limits set down by the authoritarian state.

Civic activism is intimately tied to questions of citizenship in ways that point beyond the state. The empirical account presented in this book invites us to reconsider citizenship and see it not only in terms of legal status and the political, civil, or social rights it provides (or denies).[27] Considering citizenship "from below" allows for a view of citizenship as social practice[28] – a sense of belonging that comes from *what one does with others*. This approach challenges the dominant binary drawn between citizens of the Gulf (imagined as "pure" Arabians) and "noncitizens" (labeled by the state as "illegal aliens,"[29] foreigners, expats, or migrant

[27] Conceptualized in the seminal work by T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Citizenship and Social Class*, edited by T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, rev. ed. (1st ed. 1950) (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 3–54, which is largely reproduced in academic work on the Arab Gulf states; see, for example, Ida Nicholaisen Almestad and Stig Stenslie, "Social Contract in the Al Saʿud Monarchy: From Subjects to Citizens?," in *The Crisis of Citizenship in the Arab World*, edited by Roel Meijer and Nils Butenschøn (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 203–223.

[28] A perspective also put forward, for instance, in Simon McMahon, "Introduction," in *Developments in the Theory and Practice of Citizenship*, edited by Simon McMahon (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1–20; and Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "Effective Citizenship, Civil Action, and Prospects for Post-Conflict Justice in Yemen," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52 (2020): 754–758, who speaks of "civil action."

[29] For example, in "Nomination Text: Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Mecca" (Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2013), 37, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1361/documents/, "the social and economic conditions of the residents of the old city and of the nominated property are far from being satisfactory as a considerable number of the residents are *illegal aliens* that entered the country without permit or remained after the expiration of the hajj visa, that cannot find regular works and live of meager resources and mean jobs." My emphasis.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

workers).[30] The growing wealth gap in Saudi Arabia, confronted by many of the charities mentioned in this book, calls into question the reality of the status of equality afforded to members of the national citizenry. The work of the charities highlights that social realities in the Gulf are complex, and so are the biographies of the protagonists discussed in these pages. This approach reveals forms of belonging without legal citizenship status[31] and sheds light on alienation and segmentation among citizens. Volunteers, social workers, donors, and philanthropists – Saudis and non-Saudis – work together to achieve goals, and in doing so they create community and some form of political subjectivity.

State–Society Relations through the Lens of Charity

Two years after the 2009 flooding, Fatin Bundaqji, cofounder of the grassroots organization Muwāṭana, explained her strategy with the following words: "Confrontation and defiance do not usually work, so the challenge here is for women to understand the system of the country and work within it in a manner that maintains order yet pushes the issues systematically and consistently."[32] Following King ʿAbdallah's announcement in 2011 that women – for the first time in the history of the kingdom – could participate in municipal elections, Fatin Bundaqji founded the advocacy group Baladi in order to prepare women to participate in those upcoming in 2015.[33] The other cofounder of Muwāṭana, Rasha Hifzi, was among the twenty-one women who were elected to the municipal councils in December 2015. The biographies of the two women activists highlight their attitude of changing the system from within rather than confronting it. Bundaqji's words reflect the complex and delicate strategies that many social activists and philanthropists cultivate vis-à-vis the state in Saudi Arabia.

[30] For a reconceptualizing of citizenship in the region, see also the roundtable "Citizenship and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2020), 52, 719–770; and Roel Meijer, "Citizenship in Saudi Arabia. Book Reviews," *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 4 (2016): 667–776.

[31] Seminal in this regard is Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[32] Yousra Elwi, "Jeddah's Who's Who Fatin Bundagji: A Lady with a Message," *Destination Jeddah*, June 15, 2011, https://archive.vn/20130928180437/http://www.destinationjeddah.com/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1056:jeddahs-whos-who-fatin-bundagji-a-lady-with-a-message&catid=143:business&Itemid=531 (accessed January 5, 2020).

[33] Caroline Montagu, "Civil Society in Saudi Arabia: The Power and Challenges of Association," Research Paper (London: Chatham House, March 2015), 32, www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150331SaudiCivil.pdf.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Disentangling the interwoven and, at times, intimate relationship that many charities maintain with the state in Saudi Arabia is one of the aims of this book.

Understanding charity as a prism of state–society relations challenges the distinctions drawn between state and nonstate, public and private, that continue to inform much of the debate on civil society in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. The empirical account presented in this book suggests that the view of state–society relations as comprising two distinct spheres – often conceptualized as a civil society dominated by the authoritarian state – does not grasp the historically grown, everyday realities of charity. In Saudi Arabia, charities and the state maintain a relationship that resembles – borrowing a phrase from Paul Aarts – an "asymmetric interdependence."[34] The state has benefited from the positive symbolism associated with charity, as well as from the material contributions and services that welfare associations have historically offered to the poor. In turn, for decades welfare associations have benefited from the state's financial subsidies, royal patronage, and provision of a legal framework (as intrusive and narrow as this framework has been). This does not mean that charities necessarily shy away from critical engagement with their environments. Instead of criticism or confrontation, many charity organizations seek royal patronage and see in members of the royal family a back door through which they can make their claims heard. The symbiotic relationship that welfare associations maintain with the state has constituted the grounds for vibrant associational life.

This book uses charity as a lens to examine state–society relations and civic activism in Saudi Arabia from the bottom up. The conception of civil society has developed dynamically in recent years. In the wake of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, civil society has reemerged in academic works on the region, fueled by its mobilization and initial enthusiasm.[35] Yet Aarts and Cavatorta point out that "the protagonists of the Arab Spring

[34] Paul Aarts, "Maintaining Authoritarianism: The Jerky Path of Political Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Orient* 52, no. 1 (2011): 39.

[35] See, for example, Justin Gengler et al., "Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab Gulf," *Foreign Policy*, July 25, 2011, https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/25/civil-society-and-democratization-in-the-arab-gulf/; Benjamin Isakhan, Fethi Mansouri, and Shahram Akbarzadeh, eds., *The Arab Revolutions in Context: Civil Society and Democracy in a Changing Middle East* (Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing, 2012); Paul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta, eds., *Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013); Karim Fathi and Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, "Civil Society in a Transcultural Comparison," in *The Arab Revolution of 2011: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 217–250; Omar Bortolazzi, ed., *Youth Networks, Civil Society and Social Entrepreneurship* (Bologna: Bononia University Press,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are not to be found in mainstream civil society."[36] The uprisings supported a shift in perspective toward "informal and unofficial loci of dissent and activism . . . potential actors and milieus of dissent production that might marginally exist under the 'official' surface . . . and the dynamics that occur outside formal groups."[37] Today, many scholars of the Gulf assume that some kind of civil society exists in the Arab Gulf monarchies.[38] The general tenor of research on Saudi Arabia continues to assume, however, that some kind of "true" civil society is measured by its capacity to participate in the formal political system, through the promotion of democracy. In light of the authoritarian nature of the Saudi state, most writers conclude either that associational life in Saudi Arabia is essentially "too fragmented, or simply too wedded to the status quo, to exercise any serious and sustained reform pressure"[39] or that civil society is "too weak" and "survives only in so far as it does not make any immediate democratic claims and prohibits itself from having a direct influence on Saudi Arabia's political life."[40]

Can we consider nongovernmental organizations "civil" if they help maintain the (authoritarian) status quo – though maybe a different version of the status quo? The debate about civil society in the Middle East is intimately tied to the idea of democracy and the democratization paradigm, which assumes a linear development of societies from

2015); Carmen Geha, *Civil Society and Political Reform in Lebanon and Libya: Transition and Constraint* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[36] Paul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta, eds., "Civil Society in Syria and Iran," in *Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 3.

[37] Aarts and Cavatorta, "Civil Society in Syria and Iran," 3.

[38] Bin ʿAfīf, "al-ʿAmal al-taṭawwuʿī fī 'l-mujtamaʿ al-madanī"; Toby Matthiesen, "Diwaniyyas, Intellectual Salons, and the Limits of Civil Society," in *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1979–2009: Evolution of a Pivotal State*, Middle East Institute Viewpoints (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2009), 13–15; Montagu, "Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector"; Mariwan Kanie, "Civil Society in Saudi Arabia: Different Forms, One Language," in *Saudi Arabia between Conservatism, Accommodation and Reform*, edited by Paul Aarts and Roel Meijer (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2012), 33–56; Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 170–173; Mamdūḥ al-Shaykh and Saʿd al-Qaḥṭānī, *al-Mujtamaʿ al-madanī al-saʿūdī* [Saudi civil society] (Beirut: Fikr Center for Studies, 2015); Claudia Ghrawi, "In the Service of the Whole Community? Civic Engagement in Saudi Arabia (1950s–1960s)," *Jadaliyya* (blog), 2015, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21479/in-the-service-of-the-whole-community-civic-engage; Hasan Hafidh and Thomas Fibiger, "Civic Space and Sectarianism in the Gulf States: The Dynamics of Informal Civil Society in Kuwait and Bahrain beyond State Institutions," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2019): 109–126; Jessie Moritz, "Re-Conceptualizing Civil Society in Rentier States," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 136–151.

[39] Kraetzschmar, "Associational Life under Authoritarianism," 188.

[40] Kanie, "Civil Society in Saudi Arabia," 54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

authoritarianism toward democracy. In his opus magnum, Norton observes that "if democracy – as is known in the West – has a home, it is civil society."[41] In liberal belief, civil society stimulates democratization,[42] and civil society forms "the bedrock of good democratic governance."[43] Yet, the findings of a growing body of research on civil society in the Middle East challenge these normative assumptions.[44] Building on these insights, Aarts and Cavatorta suggest that "a more neutral definition [of civil society], stripped of its liberal normative content, can be a more useful tool to analyze what the reality of activism is on the ground in authoritarian systems ... A more neutral definition of civil society is the space between the state and the family, where citizens on a voluntary basis engage with issues of societal relevance."[45]

To be clear, the benevolent activism discussed in this book does not engage with the political system of Saudi Arabia. It rarely employs a language of rights. It does not openly address social justice or the sociopolitical dimensions of poverty and inequality. Rather, some of the initiatives, which I discuss, decidedly distance themselves from politics. They do not want to be framed as a movement or a mobilization, despite the large concerted action(s), which they have been able to stage. Yet I contend that the notion of civil society activism should not be limited to forms of outward political participation or to those associational practices that address "politics" or exhibit impact on the political system of the country. The account presented in this book highlights that "apolitical" social activism, with grassroots ties in the local population, can be more influential than opposition actors who "talk politics" and raise more radical claims. What does "politics" and "political" mean in the context

[41] Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 7.

[42] Saʿd al-Din Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World," in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, edited by Augustus Richard Norton (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1994), 27–54; Sean L. Yom, "Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2005): 14–33.

[43] Michaelle L. Browers, *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 5.

[44] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control: State Power in Jordan," *Comparative Politics* 33, no. 1 (2000): 43–61; Maha Abdel Rahman, "The Politics of 'Uncivil' Society in Egypt," *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 91 (March 2002): 21–35; Maha M. Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004); James N. Sater, *Civil Society and Political Change in Morocco* (London: Routledge, 2007); Amaney A. Jamal, *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Andrea Liverani, *Civil Society in Algeria: The Political Functions of Associational Life* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2008); Gengler et al., "Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab Gulf."

[45] Aarts and Cavatorta, "Civil Society," 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of an authoritarian state that is not interested in sharing the political arena? One of the central arguments of this book is that, while political participation is central to Western democracies, in authoritarian contexts seemingly "nonpolitical" activity, such as charity, might be more meaningful and more effective in pushing sociopolitical norms and in changing societal structures than contestations directed at the political system.

The book moves the debate about civil society in Saudi Arabia from a focus on its *form(s)* toward a focus on its *functions*. Thirty years of research on Yemen's civic realm allow Sheila Carapico to conclude "civil society is not a binominal element, either there or not, but a variable that assumes different forms under different circumstances."[46] Carapico encourages us not to equate civil society in the Middle East with a set (or lack of a set) of institutional arrangements. Her account encourages a perspective wherein "the modern civic realm … is the public arena for certain sorts of quite modern behavior."[47] Carapico's study identifies four characteristics in which "modern civic" behavior differs from "traditional" communal practices: First, civic participation is manifest in the form of membership. Second, civic activism makes material contributions to private or cooperative nonprofit social services. Third, civic activism constitutes an outlet for the dissemination of ideas and the creation of public opinion. Fourth, civic activity includes organizing or attending public nongovernmental noncommercial events. In the context of my research, these practices are referred to by their protagonists as *juhūd ahliyya*. In contemporary Saudi legal and public discourse, "civil society" organizations are referred to as *jamʿiyyāt ahliyya*. The term *ahlī* alludes to the realm of the domestic and the family, the Indigenous and residential; while *al-mujtamaʿ al-ahlī* is the local society. In civil society debates of the past, the term *al-mujtamaʿ al-ahlī* was identified with the idea of a (traditional, parochial) Islamic citizens' society as opposed to an (enlightened, modern) "Western" idea of civil society, *al-mujtamaʿ al-madanī.*[48] In contemporary Saudi Arabia, these two terms appear increasingly conflated. The research at hand

[46] Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12.
[47] Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*, 11–12.
[48] Wajīḥ Kawtharānī, "al-Mujtamaʿ al-madanī wa-l-daula fī ʻl-tarīkh al-ʿarabī [Civil society and the state in Arab history]," in *al-Mujtamaʿ al-madanī fī ʻl-waṭan al-ʿarabī wa-dauruhū fī taḥqīq al-dimuqrāṭiyya* [Civil society in the Arab state and its role in democratization], edited by the Center for Arab Unity Studies (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1992), 119–120; Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*, 6–8; Amr Hamzawy, "Normative Dimensions of Contemporary Arab Debates on Civil Society," in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, edited by Amr Hamzawy (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2003), 10–46; see also the discussion of the politics of translating civil society into Arabic in Browers, *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought*, 58–91.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

demonstrates that today proponents of the idea of civil society in Saudi Arabia no longer think of the concept *al-mujtamaʿ al-madanī* as Western but rather claim it as a global and universal human condition.[49]

What is the utility of both past and more recent formulations of civil society as an analytical tool for the study of the Arabian Peninsula? Today, civil society is both a heuristic term for the study of state–society relations in the Middle East and a battle cry against the authoritarian states of the region. Understanding the different functions of the term helps to explain why some civil society activists, international commentators, and academics stress the lack of civil society in Saudi Arabia. Yet this perspective neglects the voices of those Saudis and non-Saudis in Saudi Arabia, who consider themselves part of a Saudi civil society. Many youth activists who joined the flood aid campaign in Jeddah in 2009 – and whom I interviewed during the crisis – announced the rise of civil society in Saudi Arabia. While international commentators wondered whether Saudi Arabia was "immune" to the so-called Arab Spring in 2011,[50] youth activists in Saudi Arabia described the period 2009–10 as their "Jeddah Spring."[51] Whether civil society exists in Saudi Arabia (or rather, how it can survive despite an increasingly repressive authoritarian state) is a debate that is taking place in the kingdom. In January 2020, when I discussed my research with the same men and women in Jeddah and Riyadh ten years

[49] Similarly, Al-Rasheed found that the Saudi "Islamist modernist" behind the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA) "reinvented Islamism as civil society activism," which manifested itself in "serious calls for *al-mujtama al-madani* [civil society]"; see Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 55; see also Pascal Menoret, *Graveyard of Clerics: Everyday Activism in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 85–86; this resonates with "Islamist Conceptions of Civil Society" in Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 51–69.

[50] Stéphane Lacroix, "Is Saudi Arabia Immune?," *Journal of Democracy* 4, no. 22 (2011): 48–59; for a discussion of the "Arab Spring" and Saudi Arabia, see Toby C. Jones, "Counterrevolution in the Gulf," Peacebrief (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, April 15, 2011), www.usip.org/publications/counterrevolution-in-the-gulf; F. Gregory III Gause, "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East," Council Special Report (Council on Foreign Relations, December 2011), https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2011/12/Saudi_Arabia_CSR63.pdf; Mary Ann Tétreault, "The Winter of the Arab Spring in the Gulf Monarchies," *Globalizations* 8, no. 5 (October 1, 2011): 629–637; Mehran Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution," *Orbis* 56, no. 1 (2012): 96–104; Madawi Al-Rasheed, "No Saudi Spring," *Boston Review*, March 1, 2012, www.bostonreview.net/madawi-al-rasheed-arab-spring-saudi-arabia.

[51] The 2009 flood events and the weeks following the floods were an extraordinary time for the city of Jeddah – but only to a degree. The modern history of the Hijaz has known many destructive floods after heavy rains. On January 26, 2011, rainfalls in Jeddah reached again 11 cm; parts of the city were flooded, electricity was cut, and thousands of cars and households were damaged. The 2011 floods claimed the lives of ten people. The poor infrastructure of the city and the state's inability to protect its citizens stirred a new wave of criticism, and volunteers mobilized to rescue the flood victims.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

after the 2009 flooding, they were disillusioned. They felt that Saudi Arabia lacked civil society because groups were not allowed to talk about human rights, politics, and democracy. Outside of the spotlight and largely unnoticed, on the other hand, the charity groups, which I have followed since 2009, continue their work for the poor and needy.

Working with the analytic concept of civil society invites a comparative perspective within the region and beyond, with countries like Egypt, Syria, Iran, or China and Russia, where civil society is deeply circumscribed by repressive authoritarian states. This can open a fresh perspective on state–society relations under authoritarianism, its actors, strategies, and negotiations. Above all, this perspective can help counter the stereotypical gaze on the Arabian Peninsula, which continues to portray Saudi society and the Saudi state as exceptional.[52] Although Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has become mainstream reading around the world in the humanities and social sciences, in mainstream discourse (media and journalistic writing, think tank reports, security studies, Western governments' statements) Saudi Arabia is still held to be the exotic "Other" per se. The "Kingdom" evokes images of the desert and the Bedouin, the land of oil wealth, rich and despotic Arabian princes, extremist Islam, and the breeding ground of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. How far Orientalism also continues to penetrate academic knowledge production is a contentious debate. On the one hand, scholars of the Arabian Peninsula emphasize the effects of "a secondary Orientalism"[53] and argue that "remnants of Orientalism are recuperated in much of the literature about the Arabian Peninsula."[54] According to Rosie Bsheer, for example, "persistent Orientalism" produces "the typical popular and scholarly depiction of Saudi Arabia [which] is flat and two-dimensional."[55] Other scholars, on the other hand, perceive the criticism of persistent Orientalism as "a bit of a stereotype in the early 21st century"[56] and stress that "self-reflexive paradigms and research built around the idea that the societies of the Peninsula are diverse and engaged in multiple dynamics ... have existed for decades."[57] In the words of Laurent

[52] For a critical analysis of what exceptionalism does, see Ahmed Kanna, Amélie Le Renard, and Neha Vora, *Beyond Exception: New Interpretations of the Arabian Peninsula* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

[53] Nathalie Peutz, "Theorizing the Arabian Peninsula Roundtable: Perspectives from the Margins of Arabia," *Jadaliyya* (blog), April 22, 2012, www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28474.

[54] Kanna, Le Renard, and Vora, *Beyond Exception*, 6.

[55] Rosie Bsheer, *Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 8.

[56] Philippe Pétriat, "Rosie Bsheer, Archive Wars: The Politics of History in Saudi Arabia (Review)," *Arabian Humanities* 14 (December 30, 2020).

[57] Laurent Bonnefoy, "Ahmed Kanna, Amélie Le Renard, and Neha Vora, Beyond Exception. New Interpretations of the Arabian Peninsula (Review)," *Arabian Humanities* 14 (December 30, 2020), https://journals.openedition.org/cy/6471.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bonnefoy, "post-Orientalist reflections ... exist and just need to be made more accessible or visible."[58] Few countries in the world polarize opinion to the same extent as Saudi Arabia.

Charity, Activism, and Saudi Everyday Islam

I use the term "charity" interchangeably with "philanthropy" to refer to forms of assistance and care for the needy – what my interlocutors call *ʿamal al-khayr*, literally "doing good deeds." As in the biblical tradition, the Qurʾan and hadith frequently call upon believers to care for the needy in their community. Religious tradition differentiates between *ṣadaqa*, the so-called freewill offerings (*ṣadaqāt al-taṭawwuʿ*), and the obligatory payment of zakat, which is considered one of the five pillars of Islam. Whereas the zakat is an annual payment of a specific amount established in relation to a Muslim's income, the concept of *ṣadaqa* is very flexible. *Ṣadaqa* encompasses notions of volunteering, making an effort and giving one's time. The Qurʾan explicitly praises those "who voluntarily give alms," even if they have "nothing but their efforts" to give (Q 9:80). A special form of "ongoing" charity (*ṣadaqa jāriya*) is the waqf (plural *awqāf*), the so-called pious foundation.

Instead of presuming a literal definition or single practice based on normative Islamic texts, this research considers the concepts of charity contextually, according to their usage, before assigning them meaning. This means, for instance, that I do not begin with an inquiry into the meanings of zakat in contemporary Islamic theology or economic thought in Saudi Arabia. Rather, I ask what does a Saudi charity do when it says that it "uses zakat" for the poor? In the association's everyday routine, who determines what is zakat and what is done with the donation? Whom do charity organizations and their protagonists, social workers and social activists, consider an authority on these questions? This approach highlights the elasticity of the terms of charity. Whereas the ideals of charity appear rather steady over time, a close study of the actual everyday practices of "doing good" shows that religious practices, like donations, pious endowments, and the care of orphans, have changed considerably with time. Many Saudi charities have relied on the same themes for decades, which have changed little throughout Islamic history.[59] Yet when studying day-to-day practices of aid, we see that the beneficiaries and formats of charity show remarkable change, flexibility, and adaptability.[60]

[58] Bonnefoy.
[59] See, for instance, Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); for a historic overview, see Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[60] This strongly resonates with the findings of Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society*, 169.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

To put it another way, religious concepts of aid can be expanded (one could cynically say "bent") to include groups of beneficiaries who appear in need at the particular historic and political moment. How aid is provided in Saudi Arabia mirrors currents of thought and the specific intention(s) of a particular time. This adaptability is also a reaction to the day-to-day challenges that many charity organizations encounter. The struggle between religious ideals and day-to-day realities is most visible when the idea and ideals of the waqf are put into practice (see Chapter 2).

In contemporary Saudi Arabia, many social activists are highly critical of the notion of charity. For instance, the activists behind Muwāṭana, the volunteering initiative that took the lead in the aid campaign in 2009, did not want to be understood as a charity. In an interview in 2010, Bundaqji and Hifzi explained that Muwāṭana's goal was empowerment, not beneficence, and that they did not want to register as a charity organization with the Ministry of Social Affairs.[61] The philosophy of the community organization rested on the notion of awareness building and lobbying for the common good of the city.[62] Muwāṭana began in 2007 in response to a call by the municipality of Jeddah, which asked citizens to participate in the development of the city. Bundaqji thus created the Facebook group "Save Corniche Jeddah." The site invited others – and especially the youth of Jeddah, though Bundaqji herself was born in 1958 – to create a photo documentary on the dire state of the coastline and also to collect successful examples of urban renewal.[63] The campaign mobilized a few hundred individuals. In 2009, Muwāṭana issued a fifty-page report, which they presented to the governor of Mecca region. Muwāṭana's aid campaign in the wake of the 2009 floods did not only mobilize charity for the flood victims. It equally engaged in documenting the devastation, in raising awareness about the situation of the victims, and in their legal representation.[64] These different forms of assistance highlight the variety

[61] Hagmann, *Regen*, 40.
[62] The name of the group Muwāṭana was a symbol of that commitment. In Arabic, *muwāṭana* means citizenship, but the group also understood the term as an acronym, pointing to *mushāraka* (participation), *walāʾ* (loyalty), *amāna* (trust), *ṭumūḥ* (ambition), *numū* (growth), and *taṭwīr* (development). See Fatin Bundagji, "Save Corniche Jeddah: A Collective Responsibility," *Arab News*, June 6, 2008, www.arabnews.com/node/312613.
[63] Aṣwāt Bāriza, "MUWATANA," Aswat Blogs, February 9, 2009, www.aswat.com/en/node/1328 (accessed January 13, 2016).
[64] The legal assistance was headed by the lawyer Walid Abu al-Khayr; see also Hassna'a Mokhtar, "Outpouring of Citizen Action after Flooding," *Arab News*, December 1, 2009, www.arabnews.com/node/330553. Al-Kayr has been held in jail as a political prisoner since 2014 for charges including breaking allegiance to the ruler, disrespecting the authorities, and establishing an unauthorized association (the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia). He is the husband of Samar Badawi, sister of Raif Badawi,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of practices falling under the umbrella of charity in contemporary Saudi Arabia.

The community organizations discussed here are not necessarily established in the name of charity or in the name of Islam. Charity and volunteering are always an expression of a bundle of motives.[65] Reciprocity – that is, the logic of the mutuality of giving, both receiving and returning – shapes every form of the gift.[66] Understanding philanthropy as a form of exchange highlights the fact that giving not only benefits others; charity generates what Pierre Bourdieu terms "social capital," including personal relations and networks, and "symbolic capital," which can contribute toward defining the social status of donors.[67] Charity forms such an integral part of status formation in contemporary Arabian society that generous and pious families "are known" in the community, despite the recurring emphasis on secret giving. In other words, donors and donor families build a reputation that transgresses the specific charitable act and is reflected in the beneficiaries' talk of "the charitable people" of Jeddah (literally "the people of excellence and beneficence," *ahl al-khayr*). Mutual recognition among donors and donor families manifests their status among the local community. We can differentiate the reciprocal effects of Islamic charity into three dimensions: a horizontal dimension (reciprocity in the form of status and prestige, or a sense of fulfillment, a sense of belonging, and networks); a vertical dimension (reciprocity that reflects loyalty or obedience, which becomes particularly pronounced in the analysis of royal charity and the state's claim for zakat); and a transcendental dimension (rewards associated with the afterlife and returns in this life, *thawāb fī 'l-dunyā*).

Studying day-to-day practices of charity challenges mainstream ideas about Saudi Islam, which is usually pictured as rigid, uncompromising, and radical. Much has been written about "Saudi Islam" as officially represented and enforced by the Saudi-Wahhabi project of the state, for instance the religious establishment, legal structures, and the education system. If we focus on these official representations, Islam in Saudi Arabia appears above all dominated by (old) male scholars, whose views appear

both of whom also featured in high-profile court cases that highlighted the repressive authoritarian nature of the Saudi state.

65 For an overview of the extensive research on motivations for charity in European and North American societies, see Frank Adloff and Steffen Mau, eds., *Vom Geben und Nehmen: Zur Soziologie der Reziprozität* [Giving and taking: On the sociology of reciprocity] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005), 213.

66 Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'Année Sociologique*, Second Series (1923): 30–186.

67 Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques: Sur la théorie de l'action* [Practical reason: On the theory of action](Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

often static and detached from modern day-to-day realities. By contrast, charity opens a window into the practices of everyday Islam in Saudi Arabia. The lens of charity offers a rare view onto the religiosity of ordinary (male and female, young and old) Saudis. One of the themes explored throughout this book is how Saudi philanthropists and social activists find in Islam a (worldly) guide – ethical values and a moral frame that motivates and legitimizes their engagement. Islam offers Saudi activists a language, an orientation, and an ethical approach to inequality, which invites constant reflection and adaptation in light of the changing social and political environments.[68]

The strength of this moral compass is most visible in practices that challenge and compete with the values of the nation-state. It is this moral compass that inspires social activists and philanthropists to creative adaptations. With its intention to please God, Islamic charity is at odds with the demands of the modern bureaucratic nation-state, which requires the registration and monitoring of aid flows. Philanthropists claim that Islam, their ultimate point of reference, would command them to secrecy out of respect for the dignity of the beneficiaries. Whereas the Saudi nation-state frames welfare as a privilege of citizenship, many charities continue to assist Saudi Arabia's poor and needy in disregard of their nationality. Many of my interlocutors stressed the fact that they would not differentiate between a beneficiary "with or without papers," especially if this person is considered a fellow Muslim. In view of growing waves of nationalist populism, philanthropists and social workers continue to emphasize that Saudi Arabia is above all "the land of Islam." The Islamic ethics of care, mobilized by the philanthropists examined in this book, rest on the notion of Islamic solidarity (*taḍāmun islāmī*), which invokes the idea of a more or less global Muslim community (*umma*), united in faith, that worships the one God.[69] A colleague in

[68] This resonates strongly with Bamyeh's conception of Islam as a modern faith, "a pragmatic compass of meaning in ordinary, transactional life"; see Mohammed A. Bamyeh, *Lifeworlds of Islam: The Pragmatics of a Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 6.

[69] The term *umma* appears in the Qurʾan some sixty-two times; see Frederick M. Denny, "Umma," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., edited by P. J. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. J. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 12 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2015), doi.org/10.1163/1573–3912_islam_COM_1291 (accessed June 21, 2020). Neither "Islamic solidarity" nor the community encompassed by the term *umma* are natural facts or mechanic equations. As socially constructed concepts, they reflect an understanding of belonging of a specific historic moment, which can equally be the result of the mobilization of particular group interests, see Reinhard Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert* [Islamic internationalism in the twentieth century] (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1990), 47–86, 104–148; and Peter Mandeville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Riyadh told me, "You call it civil society, we call it *takāful ijtimāʿī*" – a concept we could translate as "mutual social solidarity." Most Saudis understand that "pilgrims to Mecca are 'Guests of God' [*ḍuyūf bayt Allāh al-ḥaram*], not of Saudi Arabia or any other nation-state."[70] This, according to many philanthropists, leaves those who, for numerous reasons, decide to overstay their hajj visa, and whom the state considers illegal, in an ethical limbo. At the end of the day, they argue that "Muslims are welcome to stay in the land of Islam; *islamically* speaking they are entitled to live on the land of Islam; *islamically* speaking, they are not illegal." This also explains why Saudi government authorities – addressed in their role as fellow Muslims – might appear tolerant of practices, or turn a blind eye to practices, that challenge and disrespect state policies but manifest the rich ethical landscape of Islam.

Charity in the History of the Hijaz

The spotlight of this book is on contemporary practices of charity. The focus lies particularly on the period after 1961, when the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was established, which reconfigured the relationship of charities and the state in the kingdom. The creation of the ministry marks a critical turning point in the history of community practices in Saudi Arabia. The involvement of the state in the domain of public welfare redirected patterns of community, solidarity, and care. In order to grasp the self-understanding and aspirations of those involved in the contemporary field of charity in Saudi Arabia, it is important, however, to recognize the long history of charity on the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi charity was not brought about by the oil boom. Rather, the oil wealth catalyzed existing practices.

The Hijaz, home to the two cities holiest to Muslims, has a long history of charity. Beginning in the medieval period, there is ample documentation of the charitable activities of Muslims, who endowed religious trusts and philanthropic institutions in Mecca and Medina.[71]

[70] Robert Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4; for a local perspective on the concept, see Ulrike Freitag, *A History of Jeddah: The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 6–9.

[71] For instance, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Sultan Qaytbay's Foundation in Medina, the Madrasah, the Ribat and the Dashishah," *Mamluk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 61–71; Richard T. Mortel, "'Ribāṭs' in Mecca during the Medieval Period: A Descriptive Study Based on Literary Sources," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61, no. 1 (1998): 29–50; Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Shāfiʿī, *al-Arbiṭa fī Makka al-Mukarrama. Mundhu al-bidāyā ḥattā nihāyat al-ʿaṣr al-mamlūkī* [Shelters in Mecca: From early

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

These endowments constituted fountains, bridges, schools, mosques, hospices, shelters (*arbiṭa*), and public soup kitchens to support the inhabitants of the holy cities, to assist pilgrims and those who settled there. As in other parts of the Muslim world, endowments formed the basis of libraries in Mecca.[72] Other endowments were established in faraway places like Algeria and Egypt with the intention of serving the poor in Mecca and Medina.[73] Unlike the historiography of the holy sites, there is no comprehensive examination of these practices in neighboring Jeddah. However, one of the early European travelers to the Hijaz, the German Orientalist Heinrich Freiherr von Maltzan (1826–74), suggested that the people of Jeddah "took beneficence [*Wohlthätigkeit*] even farther than in other Islamic cities."[74] His travel accounts describe "pious foundations" (*fromme Stiftungen*)[75] and "hospices" (*Spitäler*) for the poor;[76] local historians have documented Jeddah's *awqāf*, constituting public fountains, mosques, shelters, hospices, public kitchens, and education facilities.[77]

Historically, Jeddawis have considered charity, generosity, and piety "one dimension of elite status."[78] In the manner of noblesse oblige, Soraya Altorki's ethnography asserts that upholding a family's good reputation *required* an open and generous house.[79] Until today, the "luminaries of the Hijaz" (*aʿlām al-ḥijāz*) are also remembered for their

beginnings until the Mamluk Period] (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya athnāʾ al-Nashr, 2005); Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Shāfiʿī and ʿAbbās ibn Ṣāliḥ Ṭāshkandī, *al-Arbiṭa bi-Makka al-Mukarrama fī ʾl-ʿahd al-ʿuthmānī: Dirāsa tārīkhiyya ḥaḍāriyya, 923–1334 hijrī* [Shelters in Mecca in the Ottoman Period: A historical and cultural study 1517–1915] (Riyadh: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2005).

72 The most important library in Mecca, the Haram Library, which counted 500,000 volumes when it was founded in 1931–2, evolved from a book collection donated by the Ottoman Sultan ʿAbd al-Majid (1823–61); see also Yaḥya Maḥmūd Ibn Junayd, *al-Waqf wa-bināyāt al-maktaba al-ʿarabiyya: Istibṭān li-mūrūth al-thaqāfī* [Endowments and the structure of Arabic libraries: Reflections on cultural inheritance] (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyya athnāʾ al-Nashr, 2008).

73 Miriam Hoexter, *Endowments, Rulers and Community: Waqf al-Ḥaramayn in Ottoman Algiers* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Husam ʿAbd al-Muʿti, "Piety and Profit: The Haramayn Endowments in Egypt (1517–1814)," in *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World*, edited by Pascale Ghazaleh (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 41–72.

74 Heinrich von Maltzan, *Reise nach Südarabien und Geographische Forschungen im und über den südwestlichen Theil Arabiens* [Travels to southern Arabia and geographical exploration in and about the south-western part of Arabia], electronic archive (Braunschweig: Friedrich Bieweg und Sohn, 1873), 55, https://archive.org/stream/reisenachsdarab00maltgoog#page/n6/mode/2up.

75 Von Maltzan, *Reise nach Südarabien*, 55.

76 Von Maltzan, *Reise nach Südarabien*, 53.

77 Muḥammad Yūsuf Muḥammad Ḥasan Ṭrābulsī, *Jidda: Ḥikāyat madīna* [Jeddah: Stories of a city] (Jeddah: History of a City), 2nd rev. ed. (1st ed. 2006) (Riyadh: Distributed by Maktabat Kunūz al-Maʿrifa, 1429), 298–299.

78 Soraya Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 14–17.

79 Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 66–77.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

generosity.[80] Ulrike Freitag's account of the history of Jeddah suggests that *awqāf* marked "the public presence" of the city's distinct families (*ʿawāʾil*).[81] Charity here emerges as "one important way of becoming a recognized Jeddawi family, and a member of the elite."[82] Through charity, the wealthy elite participated in community life and shaped the public sphere to a considerable extent. Jeddah's famous Falah School, for instance, was established in 1905 on the basis of an endowment. The school, which combined religious with modern education, became a hub for student cultural and sporting activities, where the children of local elites formed long-lasting bonds and loyalties throughout subsequent generations.[83]

In the early twentieth century, traditional charitable practices like pious endowments and almsgiving were expanded by the new associational format of the welfare association (*al-jamʿiyya al-khayriyya*).[84] In reaction to the Saudi-Yemeni War in 1934, a group of men approached the Saudi king to establish the National Emergency Medical Association (Jamʿiyyat al-Isʿāf al-Ṭibbī al-Waṭanī) in Mecca in order to provide humanitarian aid in the borderland war zone.[85] Among the founders were Muhammad Surur Sabban (1898–1971) and Muhammad Salih Jamal (1920–91), who later became known as leading social activists in the Hijaz.[86] After the war, the association continued to operate, modeled after the Islamic Red Crescent Society in Egypt and similar organizations in the region. The society offered medical services to pilgrims in Mecca and Medina and later collected donations for the national hospital in Taʾif city. Other than medical services, it also

[80] See, for instance, the accounts of Zaynal ʿAli Riza (d. 1929/30), Muhammad Surur Sabban (1898–1971), and Muhammad Salih Abu Zinada (d. 1968/9), in Muḥammad ʿAlī Maghribī, *Aʿlām al-Ḥijāz* [The luminaries of the Hijaz], 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1981), vol. 1, 4 vols. (Jeddah: Maṭābiʿ Dār al-Bilād, 1985).

[81] Freitag, *A History of Jeddah*, 167.

[82] Freitag, *A History of Jeddah*, 163.

[83] Ulrike Freitag, "The Falah School in Jeddah: Civic Engagement for Future Generations?," *Jadaliyya* (blog), May 6, 2015, www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21430/the-falah-school-in-jeddah_civic-engagement-for-fu.

[84] In today's meaning, the term *jamʿiyya* came into general use first in Lebanon and then in other Arabic-speaking countries in the middle of the nineteenth century; see Albert H. Hourani, "Djamʿiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., edited by P. J. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. J. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, 12 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2015), doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0182 (accessed July 20, 2021); Beth Baron, "The Advent of Associations," in *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 168–187; Lisa Pollard, "Egyptian by Association: Charitable States and Service Societies, circa 1850–1945," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 239–257.

[85] King Khalid Foundation, "Saudi Nonprofit Trends Report 2018" (Riyadh, 2018), 12–13, https://kkf.org.sa/media/ctbb4fi5/4-saudi-nonprofit-trends-report-2018.pdf.

[86] And main characters of Aḥmad ʿAdnān, *al-Sajīn 32: Aḥlām Muḥammad Saʿīd Ṭayyib wa-hazāʾimhu* [Prisoner 32: The dreams of Muhammad Saʿid Tayyib and his defeats] (Beirut: Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

organized lectures and cultural events in Jeddah and Mecca. In 1935, Muhammad Surur Sabban was also behind the opening of the Penny for Palestine Society (Jamʿiyyat Qirsh li-l-Filisṭīn), which helped Palestinian refugees in the Hijaz and collected donations for the Palestinian national cause.[87] In 1951, Muhammad Salih Jamal opened Saudi Arabia's first office of Albir Society (Jamʿiyyat al-Birr)[88] in Mecca.[89] While the actual practices of these *jamʿiyyāt khayriyya* seem a relatively familiar continuation of earlier Islamic philanthropy, those who provided charity in them differed. The new founders belonged to a new generation of urban society (including, beginning in the 1960s, their wives and daughters); they were not notable elders, nor political or religious authorities. Besides service provision, the early welfare associations also offered a collective space where individuals could assume leadership roles. They organized themselves in the context of the breakdown of traditional societal arrangements and in the face of the state's inability to adequately provide.

Private and community resources filled a large gap that existed between government infrastructure and social needs. During the late Ottoman Empire, poverty was widespread among nomads and townspeople in the Hijaz.[90] Even after the conquest of ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn Saʿud and the declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, the nascent Saudi state did not immediately assume the responsibility to provide social services to its subjects. Despite receiving some revenue from pilgrimage royalties, the Saudi state was initially established on scarce financial resources. Before oil revenues allowed for foreign-capital-financed modern infrastructure, in the first half of the twentieth century hospitals, schools, water supplies, and other public services were provided by semi-public, semi-private initiatives rooted in communal and religious mechanisms.

While the nascent Saudi state depended upon the services offered through charitable initiatives, growing oil wealth opened a new chapter in the political economy of the Saudi state. Saudi Arabia became a rentier state par excellence, alimenting its population through rents gained from

[87] According to ʿAbdallāh bin Saʿd Rushūd, *al-ʿAmal al-khayrī aḥad awjih al-riʿāya al-ijtimāʿiyya fī ʿahd khādim al-ḥaramayn al-sharīfayn al-malik Fahd bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz* [Charity – one aspect of social welfare in the era of the custodian of the two noble sanctuaries King Fahd bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz] (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad Ibn Saʿud Islamic University, 1999), 10, with reference to *Umm al-Qurā* newspaper, July 6, 1928, and February 5, 1937.

[88] The name of the society literally translates to "Charity Society," though the Arabic term *birr* carries multiple connotations of piety, kindness, and benevolence.

[89] Ṣadīq, *al-ʿAmal al-khayrī fī Makka*, 35.

[90] William Ochsenwald, *Religion, Society, and the State in Arabia: The Hejaz under Ottoman Control, 1840–1908* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 18–23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its tremendous natural resources.[91] The welfare model of the rentier state, which emerged under the government of Faisal, redefined the state as the prime guarantor of social welfare for its subjects, legitimizing its encroachment upon local forms of community care and solidarity. In 1964, upon ascending the throne, King Faisal (1964–75) issued the first laws governing charity associations.[92] The Framework for Local Welfare Associations and Foundations (Niẓām al-Jamʿiyyāt wa-l-Muʾassasāt al-Ijtimāʿiyya al-Ahliyya) made it mandatory for communal initiatives to register with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Only registered charities were eligible to government support. In 1976, new legislation banned organizations from collecting donations without explicit permission from the ministry – permission that was only granted to registered welfare associations.[93] Through legal intervention, the state has come to increasingly define and regulate charity practices in Saudi Arabia.

The Charity Scene of Jeddah

Since the turn of the century, charities have been registered at an accelerated pace in Saudi Arabia. In line with wider trends in the Middle East, Karim Shalaby suggested already in 2008 a "quiet revival" of philanthropy in Saudi Arabia.[94] The city of Jeddah is a case in point. In the nearly forty years between the first welfare association's registration in 1962 and 1999, only five welfare associations registered in Jeddah. From the year 2000 onward, associations were registered almost annually. In 2012, a total of 617 welfare associations (*jamʿiyyāt khayriyya*) and 89

[91] The rentier state paradigm was first conceptualized in Hossein Mahdavy, "Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, edited by Michael A. Cook (1st ed. 1970 by Oxford University Press) (London: Routledge, 2014), 428–467; Lisa Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa," *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 1 (1987): 1–18; Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987).

[92] Al-Zayd, *al-Jamʿiyyāt al-khayriyya bi-l-mamlaka*, 38.

[93] Al-Zayd, *al-Jamʿiyyāt al-khayriyya bi-l-mamlaka*, 41; Lāʾiḥat Jamʿ al-Tabarruʿāt li-l-Wujūh al-Khayriyya (Regulations for Collecting Donations for Charitable Purposes), by ministerial resolution (*qarār majlis al-wuzarāʾ*) no. 547, dated 30.3.1396 h. (March 31, 1976); see Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, *Majmūʿat nuẓum wa-lawāʾiḥ wikālat al-wizāra li-l-shuʾūn al-ijtimāʿiyya* [Collection of rules and regulations of the ministry's Department for Social Affairs], 4th ed. (Riyadh: Department for Social Affairs, 2003), 267–270.

[94] Karim Shalaby, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," in *From Charity to Social Change: Trends in Arab Philanthropy*, edited by Dina H. Sherif and Barbara Ibrahim (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 65; Amy Singer, in "Special Issue Introduction (on Islamic Charity in the Middle East)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 227–238, points to the growing number of charities worldwide.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

foundations (*muʾassasāt khayriyya*) were registered in Saudi Arabia with the Ministry of Social Affairs.[95] With forty-eight welfare associations in the city of Riyadh, the number of welfare associations registered in the Saudi capital exceeded the number of welfare associations registered in Jeddah, which stood at twenty-six in 2012.[96]

Until the introduction of an NGO law in Saudi Arabia in 2015, Saudi laws formally recognized two kinds of collective charity organization: welfare associations (*jamʿiyyāt khayriyya*) and charity foundations (*muʾassasāt khayriyya*).[97] Welfare associations could only be established by a minimum of twenty individuals of Saudi nationality (§1). The aims of an association were defined to be "social service [*khidma ijtimāʿiyya*] through financial or material assistance, educational, cultural or health service if it shows a relation to humanitarian service [*khidma insāniyya*] (§2)." Unlike associations, charity foundations could be set up by a single individual (§19). Like welfare associations, foundations were not allowed to generate profit. In contrast to associations, however, foundations were also not allowed to claim membership fees and were denied the right to collect donations.

When King ʿAbdallah died in 2015, Salman bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ascended the throne and shortly thereafter issued Saudi Arabia's first NGO law by royal decree.[98] The new legislation changed the status of the 734 welfare associations (*jamʿiyyāt khayriyya*) that the Ministry of Social Affairs counted in 2016. Within a period of one year, the new legislation turned the charities into NGOs (*jamʿiyyāt ahliyya*).[99] In January 2020, the

[95] Ministry of Social Affairs, *Dalīl al-jamʿiyyāt al-khayriyya fī ʾl-Mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya* [Directory of welfare associations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] (Riyadh: Ministry of Social Affairs, 2012), 9.

[96] We might assume that the numbers reflect the higher number of inhabitants, suggested in the capital around 5.7 million, in comparison to 3.5 million in Jeddah around 2012.

[97] Lāʾiḥat al-Jamʿiyyāt wa-l-Muʾassasāt al-Khayriyya (Regulations of Welfare Associations and Foundations), ministerial resolution (*qarār majlis al-wuzarāʾ*) no. 107, dated 25.06.1410 h. (January 23, 1990); see Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, *Majmūʿat nuẓum wa-lawāʾiḥ*, 233–240; al-Qawāʿid al-Tanfīdhiyya li-Lāʾiḥat al-Jamʿiyyāt wa-l-Muʾassasāt al-Khayriyya [Implementing regulations for welfare associations and foundations], by decision (*qarār*) of the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs no. 760, dated 30.01.1412 h. (August 11, 1991); see Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, *Majmūʿat nuẓum wa-lawāʾiḥ*, 243–257. In addition, there are charity organizations set up by royal decree that are outside of the sphere of the Ministry of Social Affairs and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

[98] Niẓām al-Jamʿiyyāt wa-l-Muʾassasāt al-Ahliyya [Statute governing civic associations and foundations], royal decree (*marsūm malakī*) no. M/8, dated 19.02.1437 h. (December 1, 2015). Lower-ranked regulations (*lāʾiḥāt*) address further procedures, which were passed in March 2016; see al-Lāʾiḥa al-Tanfīdhiyya li-Niẓām al-Jamʿiyyāt wa-l-Muʾassasāt al-Ahliyya [Implementing regulations for the statute for civic associations and foundation], by ministerial decision (*qarār wizārī*) of the Minister of Social Affairs, dated 11.06.1437 h. (March 21, 2016).

[99] The implementing regulations (§89) of the new statute demanded that all existing associations had to implement and adjust to the new legislation by April 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ministry counted 1,221 *jamʿiyyāt ahliyya* in all of Saudi Arabia, of which 58 organizations registered or engaged in Jeddah.[100] The kingdom's new national development strategy, "Vision 2030," launched in 2016 by the son of the king, Muhammad bin Salman, who became Saudi Arabia's crown prince in 2017, defines the "nonprofit sector" as a key arena of development. "Vision 2030" strongly promotes volunteering.[101] Among the goals to be reached by the year 2030, the strategic paper describes the government's will "to rally one million volunteers per year."[102]

Many social activists are highly critical of the legal framework governing associational life in the kingdom. They condemned specifically the intrusive practices of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (after 2004 named the Ministry of Social Affairs, in 2016 the Ministry of Labor and Social Development, and in 2019 the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development; see discussion in Chapter 5). Through legal intervention, the ministry has had a firm grip on Saudi charities. The regulations issued in 1990–1 consolidated a status quo in which the ministry could intervene in the internal affairs of charity organizations extensively (§7, §8), from the composition of board members to decisions taken by associations. If an association diverged from the ministry's regulations or its activities were not deemed to be in accordance with "the traditions complied with in the kingdom" (*al-taqālīd al-marʿīyya fī ʾl-mamlaka*), the minister could dissolve the association without further justification (§15). Numerous community initiatives in Saudi Arabia, like Muwāṭana and the charity groups discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, refrained from registering with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Although Muwāṭana was born without a legal status or official registration, it operated in plain sight of the authorities. This is important insofar as the literature on Saudi Arabia often stresses that the government would enforce a "ban on unlicensed civil society."[103] Cases like that of Muwāṭana highlight that the state turns a blind eye toward nonregistered initiatives that remain within, or successfully negotiate, unspoken red lines.

Although there are important differences between registered charities and informal community initiatives, the different organizations often

[100] In January 2020, during an interview at the Ministry of Labor and Social Development in Riyadh, the employee produced the PDF file "Bayān al-Jamʿiyyāt al-Khayriyya Ḥasab al-Minṭaqa" from his computer data (which he later shared with me via WhatsApp) containing comprehensive information on every registered nongovernmental organization in Saudi Arabia. I counted all those organizations in the file whose address was registered in Jeddah and/or who operated in Jeddah (*minṭaqat al-khidamāt*).

[101] Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, "Vision 2030," 2017, 28, 73, 75, 77, https://vision2030.gov.sa/sites/default/files/report/Saudi_Vision2030_EN_2017.pdf.

[102] Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, "Vision 2030," 75.

[103] Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 60.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

work together on the ground and maintain important networks. Cooperation between different charity organizations is seldom institutionalized and instead based on personal relations. For example, the intimate cooperation between Muwāṭana, the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI), and al-Zahrani's Facebook campaign rested on the fact that one of the founders of Muwāṭana, Fatin Bundaqji, was herself a member of the JCCI. To a certain extent, the JCCI was later accused of stealing credit for the work done by the numerous charities. The coordination and cooperation in the wake of the 2009 flood catastrophe is an example of the strong horizontal linkages within Jeddah's charity scene, in spite of a considerable degree of competition and mutual criticism. The value of these local networks reflects cooperation but also competition for status, money, and recognition among charities, donors, and authorities. The lack of formal cooperation is articulated in complaints about beneficiaries, who abuse a lack of information exchange between charities and claim assistance from various organizations. Because of these networks and interrelations, which I describe in this book, I speak of a "charity scene" in Saudi Arabia.

Poverty in a Land of Plenty?

Like a magnifying glass, the 2009 floods in Jeddah highlighted the stark inequality characteristic of Saudi Arabian cities today. While the north of Jeddah was barely affected by the flooding, neighborhoods in the south and east of the city – above all Abruq al-Rughamah, Quwaizah, al-Rawabi , al-Muntazahat, and al-ʿAdil – were devastated. Young Saudis whom I interviewed in 2009 and 2010 described their surprise and shock at the extent of infrastructural neglect and poverty that they encountered in the south of Jeddah after joining the work of a charity organization. Despite enormous riches from the country's outstanding natural resources, poverty is a growing phenomenon among some of the inhabitants of the kingdom. Few countries in the world experience a disparity in wealth as extreme as that which exists in Saudi Arabia. How can there be poor in Saudi Arabia? What are the reasons for the growing pauperization among specific segments of society? How is poverty measured in the kingdom? What does the state do to assist the poor in Saudi Arabia? These are questions that drive the charity initiatives studied in this book.

Through the efforts of those organizations that address Saudi Arabia's poor, I explore how various structural processes and social policies have accelerated pauperization among specific groups in Saudi Arabia. The analysis explores the importance of understanding how poverty is (re) produced. Poverty is the result of specific social groups being actively

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dispossessed and exploited rather than being simply "left" on the margins or "overlooked" by processes of wealth-sharing. In Saudi Arabia, where poverty is a systemic problem, the poor struggle to find support and to make a living on state welfare. This is where charity organizations intervene. The book's focus on organizations and the protagonists of charity, however, means that this study cannot provide a comprehensive account of the beneficiaries of aid or of Saudi Arabia's poor at large. Despite a wealth of research, our understanding of what it means to live a poor life and what keeps the poor in their situation is still limited.[104]

The growing wealth gap that has become visible in Saudi Arabia challenges the rentier state paradigm that has dominated much of the discussion of state–society relations in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. The rentier state paradigm assumes that the authoritarian, oil-rich states of the Gulf buy their citizens' acquiescence through the strategic investment of hydrocarbon revenues into welfare and high living standards.[105] According to rentier theory, citizens of oil rentier states, who are not subject to taxation, demand little (political) participation.[106] These assumptions feed into the idea of a "Saudi social contract" – also called a "system of largesse," "mutual benefits" or "authoritarian bargain" – namely the idea that government spending on public social welfare and infrastructure has created widespread legitimacy, while at the same time co-opting and fragmenting dissent.[107] Some have gone so far as to suggest that the rent system contributed toward a "rentier mentality"[108] or apathy in society.

[104] Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).
[105] Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani's edited volume catalyzed the debate on the rentier state in the Arab world; see Beblawi and Luciani, *The Rentier State*.
[106] Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in *The Rentier State*, edited by Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), 53; in a similar vein, more recently Ross argued that "oil has kept autocrats in power by enabling them to increase spending, reduce taxes, buy the loyalty of the armed forces, and conceal their own corruption . . . Oil and democracy do not easily mix"; see Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 176, 175–281.
[107] Steffen Hertog, "A Rentier Social Contract: The Saudi Political Economy since 1979," in *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1979-2009: Evolution of a Pivotal State*, edited by the Middle East Institute (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2009), 16–19; for a critical discussion of the term in contemporary Saudi Arabia, see Mark C. Thompson, *Being Young, Male and Saudi: Identity and Politics in a Globalized Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 57–63; a "system of largesse," in Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 77; "mutual interests," in Toby C. Jones, "Seeking a 'Social Contract' for Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Report*, no. 228 (2003): 44; an "authoritarian bargain," in Nicholaisen Almestad and Stenslie, "Social Contract in the Al Saʿud Monarchy," 208.
[108] Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World."

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Researchers have gone a long way to revising the rentier state paradigm and offering a more nuanced understanding of the rentier politics of the Gulf monarchies.[109] Building on this trend, the empirical account presented in this book challenges the idea of the "Saudi social contract" from two angles.[110] First, the "Saudi social contract" explains (sociopolitical) acquiescence as a result of shared wealth. By following charity organizations in their daily encounters with the poor of Jeddah (see Chapters 2 and 3), this book turns to those whom historical processes of nation building and social policies have marginalized, as well as those who fall through the safety nets established by the state. Wealth-sharing and rent distribution were always nonegalitarian in Saudi Arabia and have excluded diverse societal groups; not only those without citizen status but equally those Saudis living in rural areas, rural migrants to the urban centers, and Saudi women – in short, all those without access to the clientelist networks and (privileged) channels ("brokerage"[111]) of resource distribution. Second, the idea of a "Saudi social contract" disregards the elaborate mechanisms of repression involved in muting dissent and in silencing those who have highlighted issues like poverty or unequal access to the country's resources. Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that this tendency has grown under the government of King Salman in recent years.

In an unprecedented move, since October 2021 Saudi authorities have been tearing down entire poor neighborhoods in the south of the city of

[109] Early critics had already pointed out that in Saudi Arabia – as in other rentier countries like Algeria, Iran, and Nigeria – the correlation between the flow of oil wealth and (political) mobilization or depoliticization is not straightforward; see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 26–29, 253; Gwenn Okruhlik, "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (1999): 295–315; Steffen Hertog, "The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 2 (April 2010): 282–318; Gregory F. Gause, "Oil and Political Mobilization in Saudi Arabia," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, ed. Bernard Haykel (New York: Cambridge University Pres, 2015), 13–30; Jessie Moritz, "Reformers and the Rentier State: Re-evaluating the Co-optation Mechanism in Rentier State Theory," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 8 (December 6, 2018): 46–64; Courtney Freer, *Rentier Islamism: The Influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gulf Monarchies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Jessie Moritz, "Oil and Societal Quiescence: Rethinking Causal Mechanisms in Rentier State Theory," in *The Politics of Rentier States in the Gulf* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2019), 40–43.

[110] Others have criticized the Eurocentric implementation of the concept. The literal Arabic translation, *al-ʿaqd al-ijtimāʿī*, is not understood in the same way; see Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 48; the findings of Thompson support Ayubi's criticism and highlight the lack of a clear understanding of the concept among young Saudis; see Thompson, *Being Young, Male and Saudi*, 59–63.

[111] Hertog, "The Sociology of the Gulf Rentier Systems."

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jeddah, in a campaign framed as urban development.[112] According to the municipality, these areas constitute *ʿashwāʾiyāt*, or slums, that host "illegal immigrants" and are hotbeds of drugs and prostitution. The demolitions include areas such as Ghulail, Qarantina, Petromin, al-Kandara, and al-Hindawiyyah, in which the charity organizations discussed in this book have been active for many years. Historically, these neighborhoods attracted African and Asian migrants, some of whom have settled and lived in the country for generations without citizenship status. In the wake of the demolitions, tens of thousands of residents have been evicted on short notice. At the time of writing, outraged residents and dissidents describe the visual state of these neighborhoods as war zones and the intent of the campaign as ethnic cleansing. The municipality's redevelopment plans for the south of Jeddah include the construction of Saudi Arabia's first opera house, an oceanarium, a sports stadium, a marina, and a large public beach. With an emphasis on attracting tourism and on the diversification of the economy, the campaign is considered part of the country's socioeconomic long-term strategy "Vision 2030."

Approach and Sources

Charity is an omnipresent phenomenon in today's Saudi Arabia. While the focus of this book on questions of civil society privileges an approach that centers on organizations and collective practices, I do not mean to diminish the importance of private and individual forms of giving. The same considerations explain why I sideline the charity projects of individual merchants as well as corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSR), although the latter has been a booming phenomenon in Saudi Arabia in recent years. The aid campaign in the wake of the 2009 Jeddah floods highlights the contributions of Jeddah's merchants and the importance of individual, often short-lived and spontaneous, practices of charity, which stood at the beginning of the mobilization. Individual and spontaneous gestures of charity often support – and at times sustain – the collective forms of activism that I discuss in this book.

At the heart of the analysis presented in this book are four detailed case studies of community organizations in Jeddah, which represent different cultures of aid, summarized in Table 1.1. Building on the theoretical reflections of Carapico, I am particularly interested in those associational

[112] Jannis Hagmann, "Abriss in Saudi-Arabien: Die Bulldozer des Prinzen [Teardown in Saudi Arabia: The prince's bulldozers]," *Die Tageszeitung: TAZ*, February 14, 2022, https://taz.de/!5830979/; Sebastian Usher, "Jeddah Demolitions Provoke Rare Display of Dissent in Saudi Arabia," BBC News, March 11, 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-60691503.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1.1 Overview of the case studies

Initiative/Motto	Budget	Members/Staff	Activities
First Women's Welfare Association (since 1962) Women help women; what you love for yourself; helping families to break the cycle of poverty.	Zakat, *ṣadaqa* (cash and in-kind), state support, income-generating projects, commercial real estate, waqf. Total revenues in 2009–10 more than SR 11,000,000 (EUR 2,300,000).	Ca. 150 individuals in 2012; 30 in 2020; sophisticated, hierarchical structures, permanent leadership: volunteers, members, paid employees, board members, honorary presidency, director.	Food banks, distribution of in-kind donations, shelters, medical assistance, lectures, "productive families programs" (*barāmij al-usar al-muntija*), student support, orphanage.
Majid Society (since 1998) Development; do not give a man a fish, teach him how to fish instead.	Financial donations from individuals and companies, zakat, state support. Overall donations in 2013: more than SR 15,600,000 (EUR 3,300,00).	Ca. 25 employees and 40 members in 2012; 16 employees and 25 members in 2020; hierarchical structures, permanent leadership: paid employees, board members, honorary presidency, director, members.	Training and education, "productive families programs," microcredit schemes, literacy program, volunteer program, cafeteria initiative (*al-maqṣaf*), hospitality training.
YIG (2009–15) We are one community; make a positive change; the more you give, the happier you become.	Private zakat and *ṣadaqa*, corporate donations.	Inner circle of friends (*shilla*), nonpermanent volunteers: closed Facebook group with 3,700 followers in 2015.	Distribution of in-kind donations, food banks, *ifṭār ṣāʾim* campaigns (breaking the fast in Ramadan), environmental awareness campaigns collecting garbage, mentoring orphans.
The Hikers (2010–17) Together we grow; self-development through physical and emotional activity.	Through profit-generating activities; SR 100–300 (EUR 20–60) per person, per activity.	Charismatic leader, "improvisation among friends," nonpermanent "like-minded" participants: secret Facebook group with 3,400 followers in 2013.	Hikes, sportive and recreational activities, campaigning for awareness and various causes, mentoring orphans.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discourses and practices that she identifies as constitutive of civic behavior: membership, contributions to social services, the dissemination of ideas, and the organization of events.[113] What are the criteria for membership, and how is membership manifested? How do norms and regulations of gender affect the everyday practices of associations and their members? What kinds of social services do the initiatives offer? Who is considered poor and a legitimate recipient of aid? How do the associations address poverty? How and what kind of events do they organize? What ideas do their projects disseminate? Through an interpretive approach, thick description, and rich detailed studies, I seek to generate a nuanced view capable of capturing the complex processes of meaning construction in each particular case. I have not chosen the cases because they are "average" or "representative" of charities in Saudi Arabia. Rather, I selected them on the basis that they would provide the most information, the richest narratives, and the broadest range of characteristics.

This approach of concentrating on Jeddah has the advantage of decentering our understanding of Saudi Arabia. Most books on contemporary Saudi Arabia tend to reproduce the Riyadh-centric point of view of the Saudi state. The capital Riyadh here becomes synonymous with Saudi Arabia. Jeddah is different, as Saudis like to stress. With more than 4 million inhabitants (2017), Jeddah is Saudi Arabia's second-largest city after Riyadh. Jeddah's location at the Red Sea, some 70 km from some of the holiest sites of Islam, has historically shaped the distinct, cosmopolitan identity of the city and contributed to its ethnic diversity.[114] Does this render the charity landscape of Jeddah, which this book describes, specific to Jeddah? Neither the organizational formats nor the themes adopted by the charity groups discussed here are specific to Jeddah, but this book cannot offer a systematic comparison with other parts of the country.

The data presented in this book has been gathered in three rounds of fieldwork, between 2009 and 2020, and several short visits to Saudi Arabia in between. From August 2009 to March 2010, I lived in Jeddah as a visiting student at King ʿAbd al-ʿAziz University. While participating in flood relief work for several weeks in December 2009 and January 2010, I met numerous welfare associations and some informal volunteering groups. The shared experience facilitated contacts to charity organizations and led to my MA thesis, which presented an overview of the charity landscape of Jeddah. Between September 2012 and May 2013, I returned to Saudi Arabia for eight months of fieldwork as

[113] Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*, 11–12.
[114] For a discussion of the claim to differ, see Freitag, *A History of Jeddah*, 1–39.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

part of my PhD research, this time with a focus on charity for the poor and based at Effat University. From 2015 until 2020, I lived and worked in Egypt. I was struck by the familiarity of charity practices and groups, particularly among the youth initiatives, which I met around the American University in Cairo. When Saudi Arabia started issuing tourist visas in 2019, I returned to Jeddah for a short summer trip. Struck by the changes that I saw, I was motivated to return for a final round of fieldwork in January 2020, based this time at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, from where I visited Jeddah.

My data collection strategy was intentionally broad to counter the unpredictable visa situation, which shaped my fieldwork experience. First, I collected documents published by charities in Saudi Arabia. For the welfare associations, this includes annual reports, application forms, financial statements, brochures, and project documents, as well as online information. Informal initiatives often lacked printed documentation; instead, many offer a rich corpus of online documentation from websites and social media, including Facebook, blogs, and YouTube. The documentations are official representations insofar as they are public and are intended for the public. Even when social media groups are closed, the operators usually assume their infiltration by the state or other cyber activists. In order to capture the voices of those who engage inside the charity organizations, I conducted semi-structured interviews in Arabic and English, covering a wide hierarchical spectrum of both male and female interview partners. In order to capture the everyday charitable practices of the initiatives, I relied on nonparticipant observations and informal conversations with individuals working within them. These interactions include communication on social media, text messages, and emails.

The depth and extent of my observations vary greatly. The welfare associations, which I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, invited me to formal visits to their headquarters, during which I conducted interviews with their managing directors and was shown the different project sites. Following the initial visit, I joined one or more social workers on their daily activities for a number of weeks between 2009 and 2013. Furthermore, I attended member meetings and cultural events organized by the associations, such as annual celebrations and charity bazaars. The informal groups, which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5, were more difficult to access because they lacked headquarters or other stable, physical meeting grounds. Members of the groups met online or in coffee shops, restaurants, malls, and private homes. Their campaigns were irregular and often spontaneous. (In the bibliography I list the materials I used for each individual case.)

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In order to locate the case studies in the wider context of charity, the data collection extended beyond them. At the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh (Maʿhad al-Idāra al-ʿĀmma bi-Minṭaqat al-Riyāḍ), I found files from government bodies that have monitored and engaged with charity organizations. Through snowball sampling, I arranged more than eighty expert interviews with individuals involved in charity, such as donors and volunteers, but also intellectuals, academics, journalists, political activists, and government bureaucrats from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and the Ministry of Economy and Planning. In total, I visited around fifty charity projects in Jeddah and Riyadh – including shelters, orphanages, food banks, project offices, ateliers, bazaars, and charity shops – and participated in events that brought together individuals involved in charity, such as the annual Productive Families Forum in Jeddah, the International Volunteer Day in Riyadh, and the International Humanitarian Forum in Riyadh.

When I started interviewing at one organization, I was often asked whom I had already met at other organizations. I was given advice about whom I should meet. Many of the people I encountered were active in more than one charity or had changed affiliations but maintained friendly relations with their former groups. Events that gather individuals of different associations, such as workshops and conferences in Jeddah and Riyadh, strengthen the close web of networks among Saudi Arabia's charities. In December 2012, I participated in the workshop "al-Qiyāda wa-l-ḥukūma al-faʿāla li-majālis idārat al-munaẓẓamāt ghair al-ribḥiyya" (Leading Effective Nonprofits: Board Governance) organized by King Khalid Foundation in Riyadh.[115] Over a period of three days, the workshop gathered about forty members of various welfare associations from across the whole kingdom. As happened during the flood relief campaign, the shared experience and the closed space fostered intense discussion and helped establish friendly relations with numerous members of charity organizations, who invited me to their organizations, arranged interviews, and remained helpful throughout my stay(s) in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the *ʿumda* (a kind of local mayor) of the historic city districts of al-Mazlum and al-Sham in Jeddah, Malak Mahmud Ba ʿIsa, followed my research progress closely and shared advice as well as contacts among charities. I met the *ʿumda* on a historic tour in his neighborhood. Motivated by his strong belief in the religious imperative to good deeds, the *ʿumda* met me outside his

[115] I thank Inken Wiese for establishing the contact to the workshop facilitator.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

office hours, but he also invited me to join his working routine when it touched upon issues of poverty and charity. In this regard, the *ʿumda* is exemplary of many of the donors and actors in the charity scene who engaged with me as private individuals with a keen interest in charity while de facto representing the state.

The Chapters

The book is divided into four chapters, with each centering on one of four case studies. Chapter 2 begins with an account of the First Women's Welfare Association in Jeddah (al-Jamʿiyya al-Khayriyya al-Nisāʾiyya al-Ūlā bi-Jidda). Founded in 1961–2 as a women-only initiative (*jamʿiyya khayriyya nisāʾiyya*), the First Women's Welfare Association counts among the oldest extant welfare associations in the kingdom, enlisted with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In 2012, kingdom-wide thirty-eight welfare associations were registered as women's welfare associations (*jamʿiyyāt khayriyya nisāʾiyya*), four of which registered in Jeddah.[116] Within the charity scene of Jeddah, the First Women's Welfare Association has been considered a "traditional charity" with an "Islamic aid" approach. However, the focus of the association on single women and female-headed households transgresses traditional norms in multiple ways. The case study highlights the different meanings of welfare and the shifting frames of reference that the association has mobilized over the decades in order to legitimize and support its efforts. The longdurée perspective adopted in the chapter pays attention to the changing aspirations of different generations involved with the charity organization.

Chapter 3 looks at the approach of the Majid Society (short for Jamʿiyyat Mājid bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz li-l-Tanmiya wa-Khidamāt Ijtimāʿiyya). When I conducted interviews at the Majid Society in 2013, the First Women's Welfare Association served as a point of reference of "how not to do things." Instead of charity, the Majid Society aspires to offer development. The development approach has not, however, replaced a religious culture of aid. Instead, I explore in the chapter how development can be expressed through the language of Islam. The Majid Society was launched in 1998 at the initiative of Prince Majid bin ʿAbd al-ʿAziz (1938–2003). The welfare association has ties to the royal family as well as to the business community of Jeddah. With a focus on national development and capacity building, the Majid Society resonates strongly with the public discussion of poverty, as initiated and moderated by the Saudi state. The chapter critically looks at state approaches to poverty

[116] Ministry of Social Affairs, *Dalīl al-jamʿiyyāt al-khayriyya*, 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and how the Saudi state has come to dictate the ways in which poverty is discussed in public. More than the other case studies, this raises the question of how far charity organizations act in support of the state, complementing state efforts, rather than challenging the status quo.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 discuss two informal youth initiatives that position themselves as alternatives to welfare associations. The rise of youth activism in Saudi Arabia is tied to the rise of social media. Both chapters discuss how Islamic charity has functioned as an umbrella that gives legitimacy to all kind of youth practices in contemporary Saudi Arabia. Charity here emerges as lifestyle and liberty, as a safe space, which has allowed Saudi youth to test the boundaries, to experiment with lifestyles, and to enjoy sociability and autonomy outside of the family. Chapter 4 looks at the Young Initiative Group (Majmūʿat al-Shabāb al-Mubādirīn, or the YIG) and how the group negotiated alternative forms of belonging and community through charity work. The YIG grew out of the efforts of a group of youth who distributed meals during Ramadan 2009 and were then at the forefront of the 2009 flood campaign. Chapter 5 looks at the Hikers,[117] a group that began in 2010 by promoting hiking, sports, and other cultural events for a social cause. A dominant theme that emerges from the chapter is the tension between an aspiration for fun and the need for secrecy due to the fear of intervention from "the authorities." However, rather than confronting unlicensed and nonregistered groups, the state has succeeded in co-opting youth activism. The "Third Sector" has been high on the agenda of Saudi Arabia's new political elite. I suggest that this shift – from a loosely connected scene of youth activists, which became widely visible in the wake of the Jeddah floods in 2009, to a sector that is tightly regulated and monitored – empowers the state to the detriment of civil society. As I write these lines in early 2021, it is more delicate than ever to speak about poverty and the fate of the poor in Saudi Arabia.

[117] "The Hikers" is a name I chose for the organization for reasons of anonymity. Similarly, the names of members of this particular group as mentioned in this book are not their original names.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072656.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press