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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

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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 couchsurfers (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 Ǧidda*) were all over the headlines. Local newspapers stressed the fact that Jeddah, nicknamed 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 Ǧidda, 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.

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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 li-l-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.

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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.

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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,

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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.

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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/saudi gazette/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.

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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,

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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 fi '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-Ǧamʿiyyāt 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-Ǧamʿiyyāt 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).

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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.

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