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Islamic Charity in the State of Kuwait: Between Regulation, Local Understanding, and Practice

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Executive Summary

This thesis explores how Kuwaitis express their Kuwaitiness (social/cultural identity) through charitable activities in Kuwait, in respect of Kuwaiti society’s transformation into a renowned centre for charitable works, focusing on a range of individuals and organisations active in Kuwait’s charitable domain. The thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with people from a range of backgrounds in Kuwait.

Contemporary charity in Kuwait involves innovative and sustainable projects, both local and international. In recent years, Kuwait has become very prominent as a charitable nation. Kuwaiti citizens are actively involved in many different forms of charity, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan, the key charitable month in most Muslim countries. While Kuwait is a wealthy country and has taken a global charitable position, it nevertheless faces considerable social and economic inequality, such as stateless people in the country and low income levels among migrant workers. This is a result of the population demographic that Kuwait has, as well as being the outcome of certain historical incidents that Kuwait has experienced. Among the most prominent and influential of these were the Iraqi invasion of 1990 and 11 September 2001. These historical incidents affected charity in Kuwait in a variety of ways.

This thesis argues that charity has become a central part of Kuwaiti identity. The diversity of charitable engagements in Kuwait – by young people, individuals, collectives, and organisations – together express ‘Kuwaitiness’ and combine dimensions of giving that scholars have previously seen as opposed, such as giving to God, and giving as a means of socio-economic/moral development. This research contributes to scholarship on charity within and beyond the Muslim world by investigating local practice and religious understanding of the contemporary role of Islamic charity within the State of Kuwait. There are seven chapters: the Introduction (1) describes the place of charity in Kuwaiti society, together with a review of key literature relating to charitable activity and the details of the study’s methodology. Context (2) outlines the situation in Kuwait in respect to charitable behaviour and activity. Then there are five empirical chapters detailing different aspects of Kuwaiti charitable activity. The first of these (3) gives an overview of charity in Kuwait during the holy month of Ramadan. Then there are four more chapters focusing on charitable activities by different players engaged in charity in Kuwait: young people (4), individuals (5), NGOs (6), and the government (7). The thesis concludes with the Conclusion (8), which discusses the key themes explored in the thesis.

Keywords: Kuwait, Kuwaitiness, charity, philanthropy, giving, Islamic charity, anthropology, Iraqi invasion, identity, national identity, ethnonationalism, charitable engagement, NGOs, young people, youth, children, fun, trust, autonomy social media, Ramadan, zakat, sadaqa, charitable tourism, DIY charity, Do it yourself aid, development photography
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When I was twelve years old, in the early months of the Iraqi invasion, I vividly remember my father taking me and my younger siblings to a house in the neighbourhood near a school that Iraqi soldiers had used as a military base. A man came out of this house to open the door, wearing a Kuwaiti thobe (dishdasha) with a ghutra (traditional men’s head covering), but he spoke English and had blonde hair! I learnt that he was a British man who was stuck in this house with his wife, while a circular had been distributed by the Iraqis to kill anyone who hides, covers up, or helps any foreigner! My father used to take him food that had been prepared with the residents of the neighbourhood because he was unable to go to the supermarket while the Iraqi soldiers were everywhere. My father told me to show my little brother Abdullah, who completed his first year at the beginning of the Iraqi invasion, to show the Iraqi soldiers that there were children in the car so they would not come to inspect the car. My eyes were looking left and right, fearing that one of the soldiers would discover what we were doing; this fear faded away thanks to a red lollipop that the British man gave me and my siblings.

I have always loved giving, thanks to the way my father involved us as a family in charitable work since we were young. When my university budget was used up quickly, as usual, I used a simple trade trick to find money. As Atia (2013) names it, a business with Allah! I was trying to find workers nearby – in the university or next to the supermarket – so I could give them small amounts, because I knew that God would give me back immediately, and every time God amazed me. We grew up, and I have passed this on to my children.

When I chose the topic of charitable work, I was eager to learn more about what people hide about their intentions and ideas in this field, things they have always kept secret to be pure for God. The results exceeded my expectations – although I know that there are still many things that informants did not unfold. I enjoyed every talk and interview at every level, and I learned a lot from observation; I understood more thanks to this research, it was not just an academic degree! It was a new understanding in the school of life.

My PhD journey was not easy. Moving abroad with my whole family was very challenging, with children of different ages, and having to make sure each member of my family was coping with the new environment of living in Brighton. Then came Covid-19, at the beginning of the writing-up stage, with many lockdowns and school closures. Passing through all of these situations, I am happy to have had this whole experience, which has made me stronger, and to have achieved my goal, overcoming all obstacles.

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Declaration

Chapter 4 was adapted from the paper “Engaging Youth in Charity in the State of Kuwait”, presented at the Tenth Gulf Research Meeting (GRM) organised by the Gulf Research Centre Cambridge at the University of Cambridge, 15–18 July 2019. The original paper is © 2019 Gulf Research Centre Cambridge. This paper was published in Buscemi, E., and Kaposi, I. (Eds.), 2021. Everyday youth cultures in the gulf peninsula: Changes and challenges, Youth, young adulthood and society. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores the intersections between charitable giving and national identity in Kuwait. It focuses analytical attention on the ways in which Kuwaitis express their national identity through engagement in the field of charity, and on the manner in which a diverse range of modes of being charitable in Kuwait combine piety and development.

Giving in Muslim societies is generally taken for granted. Charity is considered an integral part of everyday rituals for Muslims, whether it is the obligatory alms, *zakat*, or optional giving, *sadaqa* (Singer, 2008; Mittermaier, 2019; Atia, 2013). In what ways do people in Kuwait engage with the field of charity?

There has been a significant transformation in charitable practices in Kuwait in recent years. Charity is no longer limited to religious people or charitable organisations (whether non-profit or governmental). There has been a noticeable shift in charitable work in Kuwait that includes a high level of charitable engagement from different ages and orientations and different people in Kuwaiti society in different ways. Charitable giving as a field has expanded both demographically and in terms of the range of activities it incorporates. This thesis investigates the contemporary understanding of charity in Kuwait and the ways in which, for many people in the country, engaging in charity is an expression of a collective Kuwaiti national identity.

Charity in Kuwait has undergone a transformation: the role of charitable ‘giver’ has shifted to a different level of engagement in which people act as ‘fundraisers’ and charitable ‘distributors’. For instance, donating an amount to buy *iftar* (breakfast) meals for distribution during Ramadan (the Muslim fasting month) has expanded to include *iftar* preparation workshops and the distribution of *iftar* directly to the needy. Rather than donating to charitable organisations for a certain cause, some prefer to travel with these organisations in order to see for themselves the projects that they support. The locus of charitable giving in Kuwait has transformed from a focus on families and neighbourhoods to working with unknown strangers and as part of charitable teams that are formed not on the basis of kinship or residence but the shared concerns of a particular charitable cause. In the past, most donors made charitable donations in secret. In the current context, by contrast, there is a vast and vibrant field of public fundraising within which individuals promote their activities to circles
of relatives and friends, and more publicly via social media platforms. Instead of formerly 
ordinary forms of giving, such as recurrent giving to the same people for the same cause, in 
Kuwait today sustainable giving that changes people’s lives is regularly emphasised, such as 
 attempts to create for the needy sources of income that provide them with their daily needs. 
The idea of giving to people aqreba’a (literally ‘nearby’) has expanded to giving to people 
‘far away’, for instance to communities in Africa that lack essential daily needs such as 
water. New charitable fatwas (Islamic scholarly opinions) have been issued in relation to the 
adaptation in Kuwait of these contemporary charitable methods, discussing their acceptability 
or otherwise within Islamic regulations.

I became fascinated in particular by the number of charitable appeals on social media 
platforms during the month of Ramadan in Kuwait. These charitable appeals are not limited 
to the social media accounts of charitable organisations, influencers, or religious people; 
ordinary people also make and promote charitable appeals and causes. All these charitable 
participants are practicing charity at the same time, yet in a complex and diverse range of 
ways.

I suggest in this thesis that there has been a diversification in the nature of charitable 
engagements in Kuwait. The term diversification as I use it here means that there are diverse 
modalities within different levels of engagement by different charitable participants, i.e. 
diversity in modes of practicing charity, in the charitable causes people support, in levels of 
engagement, in the scope of practicing (locally and internationally), and in the motives 
inspire people to give to charity. For instance, in a single charitable appeal you can finds 
multiple layers of giving, each with different aspects; that is, charitable appeals can be 
conducted by different charitable participants, such as an interested individual or a group of 
youths, or they can be well-planned campaigns by NGOs, or maybe just a classic charity 
project by the government. It could be that there is a connection between giver and recipient, 
or just a virtual connection via social media. And there will be different motives behind each 
of these approaches.

The role of charitable organisations and the charitable functions they specialise in are well 
documented in the literature (Alshaheen, 2015; Alshatti, 2017, Alshatti, 2002). However, the 
new and specific charitable participants (young people, individuals, charitable teams) in the 
Kuwait charitable scene need specific attention. While there is a great deal of diversity in 
charitable giving and engagement in charity, which is conducted in many different ways by
different participants on different levels, all these charitable participants, I argue, are also actively engaged in expressing, in one way or another, their national identity ‘Kuwaitiness’.

When examining national identity, it is inevitable to address ethnicity and consider its relationship with nationalism and its implication in forming the national identity. 'To study nationalism without relating it to ethnicity is to ignore the historical origin of the doctrine' (Yun, 1990, p.528). Ethnicity was and remains a significant concern since the 1960s in socio-cultural anthropology (Eriksen, 2002). The anthropological approach is distinguished in that it is able to glean knowledge from daily interactions, where ethnicity is produced and reproduced gradually - in historical and sociological senses- through everyday social interactions and in the ways that people approach life’s demands and difficulties (Eriksen, 2002).

The term 'ethnicity' refers to the relationships between a group of people who consider themselves distinct in some way within their broader society. Yun (1990) stressed that ethnicity 'provided an important source of personal and group identity' (Yun, 1990, p.527). Nationalism is ‘primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (Gellner, 1983 cited in Eriksen, 2002, p. 119). While nationalisms are often considered to be ethnic in character, this is not always the case, with debates about the relationship between ethnicity and national identity.

Max Weber was the first who attempted to theorize national identity and linked nationality with ethnicity, where there is an assumption that everything that is perceived as being distinctively common must have common ancestry (Conversi, 2003). The term 'ethnonationalism', originally coined by Walker Conner, defined the nation as ‘a self-aware ethnic entity’ (Dahbour, 2002, p. 20). The belief in and self-awareness of the group's uniqueness by its members is what makes a group an ethnic group. i.e. all nations are built on ethnic groups, but not all ethnic groups are nations (Conversi, 2003). Connor's ethnically based concept of the nation confirmed a connection between 'national identity to an incipient belief in ethnic commonalities' (Dahbour, 2002, p.20). Here, what is significant for ethnicity is what self-definition entails, such as, 'the perception of ancestral or felt kinship ties, while objective features of national identity (such as language or custom) is important only to the degree to which they contribute to this nation or sense of the groups’ self-identify and uniqueness'. (Dahbour, 2002, p.21). Ethnonationalism builds from a commitment to shared ethnicity and produces and reproduces a particular national identity by people in particular
social contexts and living in particular historical periods - this may then include and exclude certain people.

Applying these concepts to the Gulf Countries, Dresch and Piscatori (2005) explored how the citizens define themselves in the Gulf ethnonationalisms, where there are 'extreme examples of the nexus of identities' although there are small populations (p. 1). The complexity of ethnic identity in the Gulf is not only the result of polities, wealth flow, and workforces, but also an accumulated result of histories of cultural mixing and longstanding trade exchanges between the Gulf and various other parts of Asia; also significant here is the role of Islam and the challenge it is held as posing to the nation; and also the very modern nature of the nation in the region, after the tribes were consolidated into distinct nations (Dresch and Piscatorri, 2005). Although there are certainly ethnic commonalities among citizens in the Gulf, whereby they share certain aspects of language, culture and genealogy, for example, and while the citizens themselves hold beliefs about their uniqueness and separateness, it is important to note and acknowledge that this sense of national identity and belonging excludes certain people who have lived in the region for a very long time, creating degrees of citizenship and belonging (Akinci, 2020).

Similarly to Kuwait, ‘Kuwaitiness’ is defined here as the Kuwaiti national identity, which is culturally and socially produced and reproduced through the citizen-community’s experiences of living and thinking and expressing a sense and belief of belonging to a group or nation, while noting that Islam is embedded as part of that identity, as inhabitants of a Muslim nation (Buscemi, 2020; Buscemi, 2017; Wheeler, 2000). Wheeler (2000, p.444) describes national identity in the context of Kuwait as influenced by ‘major life-changing events, the discovery of oil, the Iraqi Occupation, being Muslim, being born Kuwaiti’.

Due to the political and social circumstances that passed through the region, this notion of Kuwaitiness has emerged especially strongly since the Iraqi invasion. These challenges and especially the fears of losing the homeland lead Kuwaitis to create and sustain their ethno-nationalism. This reactive fear has led Kuwaiti citizens towards protecting Kuwait through doing charitable work and representing their national distinctiveness toward themselves and to the world. In the face of matters that are not in the hands of the citizens - such as the gaps in the role of the state in some sectors - Kuwaitis found that charitable practices provided a means to express their Kuwaitiness via the giving spirit and also raise future generations in which engaging in charity and helping others is a core part of what constitutes the sense of
being a good citizen. Charity then becomes central to this post-liberation project of nation building. In this research, I argue that charity is one of the practices that Kuwaitis use to create and sustain their ethno-national distinctiveness. Although there are sectarian differences - as discussed below - in Kuwait which may impact upon degrees of national belonging, at the level of charitable engagement, which becomes an expression of Kuwaitiness, all Kuwaiti citizens are able and active participants.

However, it must be noted that this sense of Kuwaitiness includes all Kuwaitis citizens while carefully excluding long term migrant residents and their descendants. These communities exist often as an object of charity - as recipients. The exclusions arise in the context of the very narrow forms of national identity in operation, based upon a putatively shared ethnic identity. Although migrants make up 90% of some GCC countries' population (Ahmad, 2012) and have a presence for decades, which leads to existence of second and third generations, Gulf countries do not accept those who are not included in the foundational ethnic groups as being able to call the Gulf their official home (Gardner, 2011). They have been denied citizenship. In this way, they are formally excluded from the sense of Kuwaitiness. With reference to charity, although these migrant and diasporic communities are very active in charitable activities (both within the Gulf, and also within their own countries), most often, they are represented as those who benefit from Kuwaiti charity. Their role as ‘givers’ is erased (or obscured). This all refers to the GCC’s strict migration regimes that prevent permanent settlement and naturalisation and to national founding criteria which were stringently and very narrowly tribal. There is a relative absence of discussion of the situation of middle-class migrants (entrepreneurs, professionals) and their descendants in the contemporary literature of migration and citizenship, ‘because they are considered neither diasporic nor transnational due to legal and social policies that position these migrants as temporary and economic’ (Akinci, 2020, p. 2309). While there has been some work done to redress this representation, (See, e.g., Vora, 2013; 2020; Osella and Osella, 2009; Kamrava et al., 2011; Akinci, 2020), still the burden of public representation in academia and media alike portrays migrants as ‘temporary’ and takes a focus on unskilled labourers.

With the erasure of migrant and diasporic populations, charity in Kuwait becomes a means by which to constitute a sense of national belonging and to show affiliation to a particular ethno-nationalist project of nation building. By doing charity, Kuwaitis participate in and also constitute this sense of what it is to be a ‘proper’ Kuwaiti citizen. The good citizen here is
defined in this context as the citizen who, in their sense of belonging, accepts commitments and responsibilities toward themselves, nation, and homeland (Pykett et al., 2010); a good Kuwaiti citizen is someone who engages in Islamic charitable activities and doing charity becomes an intrinsic part of Kuwaiti self-identity and projections of Kuwaitiness to the outside world.

Kuwaitis commonly believe that they are unique in their charitable activities and commitments, and they share these sentiments with other participants in charitable activities. When Kuwaitis use charitable practices as a means to express their Kuwaitiness and stress distinctiveness, through their diverse ways of doing charity, they take it as a part of being a good citizen in Kuwait and to the world, where it then takes on a political dimension.

The ethnography in this research show that expressing national belonging through charitable practices is taking different forms. Firstly, ‘self-cultivation’, where engaging in charity by different people from different sectors of society is understood as the outcome of careful processes of self-cultivation. Self-cultivation, as defined by Mahmood (2001), refers to ways in which people recreate an inner state of piety continually and actively via their outer behaviour. While charity is an expression of Kuwaitiness and as I shall show - training children to be good Kuwaitis by being charitable - and while piety is important, self-cultivation in the wider sense is also at stake here. Through giving charity, Kuwaitis understand themselves as expressing other dimensions of everyday life as a human-being and as a specifically Muslim human being. These include giving expression to the sense of being a good parent, of engaged sociability and connectedness, by being with friends and taking part in social activities. It is clear from the ways that people use giving as a part of projects of self-cultivation that the persons for whom these charity acts are significant have a variety of objectives, motives, and commitments (Mahmood, 2001).

In addition, doing charity is used in another dimension, in that it is intended to address the inadequacies of state provisioning - especially with regard to migrant / diasporic populations and the disenfranchised Bidun. Charity here is not replacing the state, but is trying to participate in building society by providing the services that are not available to access for those non-citizens who are living and working in Kuwait. This leads to consideration of another aspect of giving. Here, larger-scale questions of the nation become important. Charity and Kuwaitis’ desire to be a ‘charitable nation’ connects into the importance of portraying
Kuwait's international standing and even on towards more political dimensions such as are associated with informal diplomacy and soft power (Marsden et al. 2016).

The expression of Kuwaiti national identity through charity has two facets, internal and external. I seek to show in this thesis the ways in which Kuwaitis who are active in the field of charity express through charity their understandings of what it means to be a good Kuwaiti citizen as well as the way in which they wish Kuwait to be regarded globally. I argue that the Iraqi invasion and the events following the attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 played a critical role in the processes through which charity has become central to Kuwaiti identity. In the context of these critical events, Kuwaiti charity brings together dimensions of giving which scholars have seen as different: the individual ‘giving to God’ (Mittermaier, 2019), and giving as a means of socio-economic-moral development (Atia, 2013).

The State of Kuwait is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of personal GDP. Huge amounts are spent yearly on charitable donations in Kuwait, especially during Ramadan. Statistics from 29 non-governmental charitable organisations in Kuwait showed that Kuwaitis donate more than GBP 750,000 daily during Ramadan (Alkhaleej-online, 2019). The government sector in just one institution, Zakat House, recorded GBP 56 million in donations for the whole of 2020 (Zakat House, 2017). Kuwaiti charitable contributions worldwide resulted in Kuwait being recognized as a humanitarian centre in 2014 by the United Nations:

Kuwait’s exemplary humanitarian leadership has saved thousands of lives: Kuwait has shown exemplary humanitarian leadership in supporting these operations under the compassionate and passionate leadership of His Highness, the Amir. Kuwait may be a small country in size but she has a big and broad and compassionate heart. (United Nations Secretary-General, 2014)

Kuwait’s role in charitable giving and provision is also increasingly being recognised globally. The previous Amir of Kuwait, Sabah Aljaber Alsabah, was named the United Nation a humanitarian leader in recognition of the massive contribution by Kuwait in relief and assistance to countries in need, and of the humanitarian role of Kuwaiti associations and charities (KUNA, 2014).

The Kuwaiti philanthropic sector has sought to intervene internationally in the provision of charity, especially with regard to Muslim populations. Philanthropic activities in Kuwait have
recently grown in significance and hold much potential for social development (Alshatee, 2001). Charity in Kuwait involves different innovative and sustainable projects both local and international. In recent years, Kuwaiti society has become very notable for its charitable activity.

Kuwait has taken a position of global significance in charitable provision, yet it nevertheless faces considerable forms of social and economic inequality itself, notably those arising from stateless people (*Bidun*) staying in the country and the low income levels of migrant workers (Beaugrand, 2018; Alshamari et al., 2014, Ghabra 1997). These have affected charity in Kuwait in different ways, such as shaping the needy segment in Kuwait, the directions of charitable giving, and the motives that Kuwaitis have for engaging in charity; Kuwaitis are trying to cover the shortages that these needy people inside Kuwait are experiencing as well as helping others abroad. This has enhanced the desire of Kuwaitis to be seen as a charitable nation, both within the country and globally.

Although Islamic charities around the Islamic world have made massive contributions in a range of social and economic ways, including in shaping the nature of debates about ‘humanitarianism’ (Osella and Osella, 2009; Benthall and Lacey, 2014; Benthall, 2018), the existing literature does not fully capture the shift in the nature of the activities that contemporary Islamic charities are currently undergoing (Azmi et al., 2018). In the Muslim world, there has been a transformation of the old methods of charity (Cheema et al., 2010). In Kuwait, charity is undergoing significant transformation, although there is still adherence to the traditional methods of charity among some Kuwaitis.

1.1 Rationale for the study

This thesis explores how Kuwaitis express their ‘Kuwaitiness’ (their Kuwaiti national identity) through the contemporary practices prevalent in charitable activities in Kuwait, in the context of Kuwaiti society’s transformation into a renowned centre for charitable works. It focuses on a range of individuals and organisations active in Kuwait’s charitable domain. The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with people from a range of backgrounds in Kuwait.
This thesis explores how charitable participants in Kuwait – young people, individuals, collective groups, and organisations – express their national identity through charity in diverse ways. Kuwaitis see themselves as living in a ‘giving’ society, and acts of everyday and informal diplomacy are one of the ways through which they seek to portray that image to the world (Marsden et al. 2016). Informal diplomacy here means the reaching out to officials and the broader public, including opinion-shapers, through charity channels in the national context.

This national image/identity has shifted since the Gulf War in 1990 (Crystal, 2016). Within the wide-ranging diversity of charitable practices in Kuwait, people share ways of being distinctively Kuwaiti and recognized as Kuwaiti citizens. The desire to be seen as a Kuwaiti citizen emerged particularly strongly after the Iraqi invasion. The conflict with Iraq changed the way in which Kuwaitis thought about their country, with a new emphasis on being Kuwaitis (Alnaser, 2018; Al-Nakib, 2016; Alrashidi, 1996). As Crystal (2016, p.5) remarks in her book on Kuwait:

The invasion had a thoroughgoing and devastating effect on all aspects of Kuwaiti life. The destruction of so many of Kuwait’s oil-producing facilities had long-term economic and environmental consequences. Financing reconstruction cut deeply into Kuwait’s foreign reserves. The social impact of the invasion was more subtle but perhaps as far-reaching. The occupation deepened one rift – that between Kuwaitis and expatriates, especially those who had supported Iraq – and created a new rift between those Kuwaitis who fled the country and those who stayed behind and endured the occupation.

During the Iraqi invasion, the Palestine authority’s president, Yasser Arafat, supported Iraq against Kuwait, and this attitude had many consequences in Kuwait in both government and society (Lesch, 1991; Katzman, 2005). ‘As a result of Arafat’s alignment with Saddam [president of Iraq 1979–2003], a reported 450,000 Palestinian workers were expelled or pressured to leave Kuwait after the 1991 war’ (Katzman, 2005, p.5). The Kuwaiti government, after liberation from Iraq in February 1991, banned five nationalities from entering Kuwait for their support for Iraq: Palestinian, Jordanians, Sudanese, Yemenis, and Iraqis. This has affected charity both locally and overseas in relation to these nationalities (Alshatti, 2001). A minority of Kuwaitis continue to resent the Palestinian authorities for their political choices in 1990 and this minority continues to refrain from helping the needy in
Palestine; this can be seen in comments on social media on charity appeals for Palestine (Lesch, 1991; Katzman, 2005). It has taken time for Kuwaitis to move beyond the rift left by the Iraqi invasion.

The claim that lay behind the invasion was that Kuwait belongs to Iraq, that it is an Iraqi governate (Shehabi, 2015). The invasion caused fear among Kuwaitis and destabilized their safety. Much research has explored the legacy of the invasion and its continuing impact on Kuwaitis (Crystal, 2016; Alrashidi, 1996; Aleissa, 1995); where children were the most widely affected (Abdullatif, 1995). Every Kuwaiti family was affected in some way, either by the death of a family member, damage to property, psychological issues, or respiratory issues caused by air pollution from the burning of wells. Fear brought Kuwaitis together in the face of these difficult times. They tend to deal with this fear, both at the time and afterwards, by a sense of closeness to God through doing good deeds, including charity and charitable work, as well as thanking God for bringing Kuwait back and keeping it safe. There was a strong belief that charitable giving would bestow blessings and protection (Alshatti, 2014). This belief is not unique to Kuwait, but can also be seen in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries (Yaqoub, 2008).

Kuwaiti national identity has evolved since the Gulf War. Alrashidi (1996, p.13) states that the Iraqi aggression towards Kuwait in 1990 was ‘a total community disaster’ that required from Kuwaiti citizens social and psychological integration to cope with it and face the threats. Alrashidi confirmed that there was a concept of psychological and social integration that existed among Kuwaitis as a result of the Iraqi aggression. This integration was represented in expressions of belonging, and was obvious in their involvement in group work that had the aim of ‘pulling together and helping each other in facing life’s difficulties’ (Alrashidi, 1996, p.19). Alrashidi explained that the characteristics of this ‘patriotic integration of the Kuwaiti citizens during the Iraqi aggression’ include ‘mutual feelings of empathy, trust and attachments, common interest and group thinking’, with the interconnections deeply rooted among Kuwaitis during the invasion. The integration was like ‘a front against the external change and threats represented [by] the aggression and its forces’. The integration was interpreted according to a pride in national identity, as well as a feeling of danger, which inspired people to unite against it (Alrashidi, 1996, p.20).

The social adaptation seen in Kuwaiti society – during the Iraqi invasion and after it – is reflected in engagement with charity. Kuwaitis developed different ways to form and portray
their national identity through their engagement in charity, and the various facets of their expression of Kuwaitiness – through charity – originated in the same dominating facets that took root during and after the invasion. For instance, collective charitable engagement that maintains trust and attachments, feelings of empathy, common interests and group thinking in regard to charitable causes, all help express their Kuwaitiness both within the nation and to the world.

Kuwaitis collectively sought to move beyond the Iraqi conflict to create a national identity independent of neighbouring Iraq, and the role they have played in global charitable activities has strengthened this emerging identity. In helping recognise the strengths and weaknesses in Kuwait society, such as poverty and marginalization, charitable acts have been a way to redress some of these domestic inequalities – one of the key ethical goals of Islamic charity.

This study seeks to explore and understand the evolving image that Kuwaitis as a nation seek to display to the world through charity. The focus of anthropology on ordinary people means that the discipline is especially well positioned to analyse the intersections between contemporary charitable giving and national identity in Kuwait. The thesis elaborates on the dominant aspects of the expression of Kuwaitiness through charity, via a consideration of key social groups involved in charity in Kuwait today.

The main contribution of this thesis is to show the ways in which charity in Kuwait, in its diverse modalities, has become a means of expressing a sense of belonging in Kuwait, and to participate in a nationalist projection of Kuwaitiness both within Kuwait and in relation to the Gulf at large.

1.2 The State of Kuwait

1.2.1 Kuwaiti society

Kuwait is a Muslim country with a population of 4.3 million people (World Population Review, 2020). Kuwait is unusual among its neighbours in that it has a well-established national identity and a long history as a nation, dating back to the eighteenth century. Yet it shares with neighbouring societies the feeling that they have a distinct identity based on similar aspects (Crystal, 2016): being Muslim, living in an Arab Gulf state, and being Kuwaiti. The result of this is a strong national identity with workable national institutions,
but an identity that has involved a constant process of maintenance and reconstruction, especially after the Gulf war in 1990 (Crystal, 2016).

There are more non-nationals than natives in Kuwait. Kuwaitis make up 30% of the population, while the remaining 70% is comprised of expatriates (World Population Review, 2020). Kuwaitis thus form a minority in their own country, similar to Qatar and the UAE, where the number of non-nationals has been higher than the number of nationals for several decades (Gardner, 2011; Shah, 2007). The main reason for migration to Kuwait is employment. Because of this imbalance, the Kuwaiti government has focused on protecting and preserving Kuwait’s national identity through a variety of initiatives, such as developing and amending laws that relate to nationality and Kuwaiti rights (Alshammari, 2021).

Expatriates in Kuwait come from a range of different nationalities (Gardner, 2011). At the beginning, in Kuwait’s early years, many Indians and Europeans travelled to Kuwait to work in the oil industries and infrastructure, while many Palestinians were engaged in the education and health sectors. Nowadays, data shows that more than half of the non-nationals in Kuwait are from Asian countries, while the others are Arabs: Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians, and others. Expatriates in Kuwait work in different sectors, such as construction, food industries, domestic roles, and professional occupations such as education, health, and law (Al-Nakib, 2016).

Prior to the discovery of oil in the country, the pearl industry dominated trade in Kuwait. Kuwait relied financially on merchants, before the state began to provide public services. Merchants played a vital role in offering these services via individual charity and Islamic endowments (waqf). ‘Rich merchants often endowed their properties or shop revenues to less affluent families. For example, in 1923 Abdullah al-Sayer, along with two other men, turned eight shops in the water market into Awqaf for the maintenance of the Al Sayer mosque in Sharq’ (Al-Nakib, 2016, p.31). In 1946, however, Kuwait witnessed substantial change after the discovery of oil. The state then began to fund welfare for ‘education, healthcare, housing, and employment’ (Al-Nakib, 2016, p.9).

Soon oil came to be the heart of Kuwait’s economy. With the decline of the pearl industry because of the development of cultured pearls in Japan, and the beginning of global oil exports, Kuwait became a leader in the oil industry. Kuwait invested in oil exploration both locally and abroad, and also invested in refining and retailing petroleum. Alongside the oil industry, there were attempts to diversify investment in different directions, such as local
industry and banking services, and to invest oil revenue in foreign properties and industries. By the 1980s these foreign investments exceeded oil sales and covered the fluctuation in oil prices (Crystal, 2016).

The discovery of oil had an impact on various levels, including on national identity. Identities in Gulf countries are treated as the product of the intersections of oil, wealth, and political regimes, which has resulted in ‘extreme examples of the nexus of identities’ (Dresch and Piscatori, 2005, p.1). This has prompted researchers to investigate how citizens define themselves in a broader context, not only because these polities are so reliant on international economic flow, but because migrant labour frequently outnumbers home citizen workers (Dresch and Piscatori, 2005).

Although there was a restructuring in Kuwait after the discovery of oil, this did not weaken the Kuwaiti identity. As Crystal (2016) states, Kuwaitis have had a distinct feeling of themselves as Kuwaitis since the mid-eighteenth century, and they have always had a stronger political identity as belonging to the Gulf, as Arabs, as Muslims, and within the international community; national identity in the Gulf is not an entirely modern or an invented phenomenon (Crystal, 2016).

Kuwait, as an oil-rich country, has a reputation as one of the wealthiest Gulf states, and was identified as fifth amongst the 25 richest countries in the world (Suneson, 2019), according to a data review of 200 nations conducted by the World Bank (2019). Kuwait is ranked third in the Arab world in terms of annual per capita GDP after Qatar and the UAE, according to an International Monetary Fund report in 2019. The average Kuwaiti per capita income amounts to approximately GBP 21,700.

Kuwaitis are divided into two demographic groups, hadhar and badu; hadhar refers to the civilized and badu to the tribal (Longva, 2019; Al-Nakib, 2014). Since the state, not the tribe, now provides material well-being, welfare commodities, and services, there has been a shift in loyalty from tribe to state. Kuwaiti citizenship may not provide many political rights, but it does include a wide range of social privileges. Some Kuwaitis worry about the large presence of migrant workers, but little attempt is made to get them to leave. Yet Kuwaitis’ concern for the social privileges of migrant workers is unjustified, because the latter do not have access to social services, as the natives have (Longva, 2019).
Among migrant workers, domestic workers ‘constitute 16% of Kuwait’s total population, and are employed in over 90% of Kuwaiti households’ (Ahmad, 2009, p.15). Domestic labourers have become essential to the daily life of Kuwaitis and also well-to-do foreign residents (Ahmad, 2009). Some Kuwaitis have empathy with the migrant labourers’ way of living in Kuwait, as the state does not provide expatriates with free services such as education, and because of their low income and the cost of living in Kuwait. For this reason, they have become a target for local charitable activities. Some participants in charity in Kuwait, as explored in this research, help cover for the shortages in state services, expressing their Kuwaitiness through charity. The thesis did not focus on the charitable initiatives by non-citizens residents of Kuwait (e.g. expatriates and migrant workers) because the scope of this thesis is specifically to explore Kuwaiti nationals’ charitable practices. It must be acknowledged, though, that many migrant and diasporic residents are very active in different charitable sites, since charity is not limited to being a citizen in the country you live.

1.2.1.1 The sects of Kuwaiti society

There are two doctrines of Islam in Kuwait, Sunni and Shia; the majority of Kuwaitis, including the ruling family, are Sunni. Despite the lack of official census figures, it is estimated that 65% of Kuwaitis are Sunni while 35% are Shia. The State of Kuwait in its main courts follows the Sunni sect. However, there are courts that specialise in Shia. The Shia sect have their own places of worship, and their own charitable organisations, including the Jaafari endowment, which is designed around Shia principles, by the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation, the governmental institution of endowments. In this thesis, the focus is on Kuwaiti charitable initiatives at different levels of society: youth, individuals, NGOs, or Governmental bodies. Regarding the levels concerning individual charitable practices, whether individual or via NGO volunteer work or those working in state charitable bodies, I interacted across the board, without always being aware of a person’s doctrinal or sect status. I was unable to ask the question - highly impolite in Kuwait society - of doctrinal status. I can confidently state that volunteers who are doing charity in Kuwait are drawn from both sects and that members of different sectors do work alongside each other in many organisations.

At the level of charitable giving, although people might decide - as givers - to give according to sectarian differences, more often they do not. The sense of Kuwaitiness that I am exploring
in relation to engagement in charitable activities cuts across Kuwaitis from both sects. I found that people’s criteria for giving rests strongly on the basis of the effectiveness and the reputation of NGOs. The activities of NGOs are also not driven by sectarian differences.

The specific NGOs that are explored in depth for this thesis may have a Sunni orientation, but this in no way means that they either give to - or receive from - Sunnis. For instance, Suhailah, from the Direct Aid organisation, stated that although Direct Aid is a Sunni organisation, its donors are drawn from all sects, both Sunni and Shia. Suhailah said that they received a contribution from a lady who wanted to request a charitable project for the sake of her father, who passed away, and she wanted to name it after him. This lady was a daughter of a famous actor in Kuwait; it is clear from his name that he is from the Shia community. As Suhailah explained it to me, the reason this lady chose Direct Aid is for the organisation's good reputation. Direct Aid agreed to do the project - but on the condition that the name be changed. This is because the donor's father's name is Abdul-Husain (literally meaning the slave of Al-Husain, the grandson of the prophet (peace be upon him)). This is not acceptable in the Sunni sect and thus was not acceptable in the Direct Aid organisation. Since the donor trusted the charitable work of this NGO, she did not mind that God's reward would reach her father with the intention of her donations, rather than in the name of the charitable project. I later saw this same lady in Media, in another Sunni NGO, engaging in a charitable trip and marketing for it. For some people, then, the sectarian affiliations of charities does not appear as critical. It is acknowledged that there is a degree of exclusion on the basis of belief. Shia may give to a large Sunni charity, yet this research did not explore whether this is a one-way relation or whether Sunni also gives to Shia charity.

Although some Shia people can be recognised from some popular names, there are many names that could be found in Sunni and Shia families and a person’s affiliation is not always obvious. Shia in Kuwait also have a somewhat better economic and political position in comparison to the Shia in the area. There is coexistence between Shia and Sunni on the social level, unlike Saudi Arabia for instance, where we see a large gap between sects, even in the residential neighbourhood areas (Fibiger, 2022). In Kuwait, there is coexistence in terms of living together, in schools, in different workplaces, living areas, and generally in the style of dressing, except for the highly pious people’s styles of dress.

The respondents I interviewed themselves also did not express concern, and even in the media, there is no sectarian distinction made in reporting of ‘charity appeals’ nor in the
‘charitable team joining’. It was generally names simply as a ‘Charitable Work’, and it is universally acknowledged that charity is an act which is not limited to a doctrine or another.

Selecting two NGOs from the Sunni doctrine in this thesis is not an active exclusion, it is a choice made on the basis of methodological and ethical issues. Given the limited time for fieldwork, it would be too complex to include discussions of both charitable Shia and Sunni organisations’ practices in the same thesis. It would require separate discussion of the significant theological differences, besides the complexity that already exists in charitable practices themselves, among the participants’ levels explored, and each sect separately. I acknowledge that this focus on Sunni giving might re-enforce a particular ethno-nationalist discourse which represents Kuwait as predominantly Sunni and this is not my intention. Just as many insider anthropologists often work within their own group, to facilitate access and interpretation, I am working with people and groups who offered good contacts, access and with whom I could build strong relationships. Insider ethnography underpins my research strategy in this complex society. In addition, writing about and sensitively analysing the charity practices of Shia would require for me significant training if I were to present the faithful in an accurate way; this is therefore an ethical issue. I feel more confident to be able to represent Sunni practices than I do Shia ones. This is a question of representation and accuracy. I want to make sure that my analysis was accurate in relation to the material, and because of the risk for misunderstanding even elementary factors within Shia practices, the ethical decision was taken to limit research to a field that I understand well.

1.2.1.2 The stateless segment in Kuwait (Bidun)

*Bidun* literally means ‘without’, and refers to a person without a nationality. This was one of the human rights issues raised in Kuwait’s record internationally – it is considered a major problem in Kuwait, and arose after the Iraqi invasion in 1990. Since *Bidun* do not hold any nationality, they have no legal right to stay in any country, and therefore they cannot access social rights such as education, health services, accommodation, work permits, or even a passport to travel out of the country.

The majority of the *Bidun* are from North Kuwait, namely the Jahra Governorate, and it is said that many of them are probably migrants from the northern Arabian Peninsula.
(Beaugrand, 2018; Alshamari et al., 2014; Ibrahim, 2016). Many of them were in the Kuwaiti army before 1990. The number of Bidun was roughly between 220 and 350 thousand in 1990 but the number dropped to 95 to 110 thousand by 2010 because of the policy of pressure and displacement that they were subjected to by the government (Ibrahim, 2016).

The majority of Bidun insist on claiming Kuwaiti nationality, since they do not know any homeland other than Kuwait. They were born here, as were their parents, and they do not want to repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, who came from the desert and who did not claim citizenship, rejecting the census in 1965 when many Kuwaitis acquired nationality. The Bidun demand that Kuwait complies with the UN Convention on the Rights of Stateless Persons of 1954, which provides for the granting of all human rights to Bidun (Beaugrand, 2018).

Some Bidun took part in demonstrations to demand their rights, in Jahra Governorate in 2011, resulting in clashes with Kuwaiti police (Beaugrand, 2020). After the Kuwaiti National Assembly refused to reconsider the Bidun rights report, they founded the Free Bidun Youth Group. The reactions of MPs in the National Assembly tends towards solving the problem of the Bidun in order to save the reputation of Kuwait internationally, although the decision to naturalise 2,000 people a year will not solve the issues of 50 years ago. Kuwait has been criticised by international human rights organisations and is an embarrassment in international forums, which call for Kuwait to quickly resolve this thorny issue by granting Bidun Kuwaiti nationality and recognising their civil and legal rights (Alshamari et al., 2014; Ibrahim, 2016). This issue, unfortunately, is an ongoing debate in the Kuwaiti parliament. For the current research, this segment of society is important because it is the target of several charitable projects in Kuwait.

By looking at the fact that Bidun very often tend to be the object of charitable activities (alongside migrants workers and in certain circumstances, the poor and needy in other parts of the world), we can highlight some of the concerns that have been brought up with reference to the relationship between humanitarianism and the reproduction of hierarchies and inequalities. For instance, Fassin (2012) argues that charity in contemporary social worlds is producing hierarchy and potential inequalities in addition to helping the poor. According to Fassin (2012), the focus on suffering in Western aid organizations elicits empathy and supports fundraising. Although the spread of suffering provokes a broad sense of solidarity, where a sense of a common humanity tends to the recognition of social equality,
this, at the same time, implies that inequities and hierarchies are hidden. In other words, rather than focusing on the vertical relationships of class and highlighting the problem of injustice, charities, NGOs and aid policymakers evoke a depoliticised sense of ‘suffering’. Fassin explores this aspect, focusing on the horizontal relationships of inclusion and exclusion and highlighting the problem of depoliticized, decontextualized suffering. When the theme of suffering is used, the focus turns towards individuals rather than community issues (Fassin, 2012). When the focus on (suffering) is used in humanitarianism, the focus will be on individualised or decontextualized suffering, as in the case of the Bidun, rather than the roots of the communal problems.

1.2.2 Historical overview

The Gulf region’s recent political history has helped shape engagement with charities. I previously elaborated on the effect of the Iraqi invasion and how public discourse was insistent on confirming the idea of Kuwait as a sovereign nation. Kuwaitis were trying to prove their national loyalties and attachments by demonstrating that Kuwaitis do things in a particular way. This encouraged people to do more good deeds, such as setting up charities, seeking Allah’s protection for the country, and reminding themselves of their ancestors’ way of giving. Charities started to emphasise Kuwaitiness and the idea that this was strongly linked to Islamic forms of piety. For example, one of the discourses used in the media was that the secret of why the country was being protected was due to the good deeds of its people. This appeared in an advertisement produced by an Islamic bank in Kuwait, published for the national and liberation day holidays on 25 and 26 February 2017. The advertisement focused on neighbours helping each other in hanging a large Kuwaiti flag on a house to celebrate the occasion. The text of the advertisement said: ‘This is the secret of this country, the habits of the Kuwaiti people who are accustomed to supporting each other’ (Kuwait Finance House Ads, 2017).

Another incident that affected charitable work both in Kuwait (Kuwait Philanthropy Law, 2017) and in the world as a whole (Benthall, 2016) was 11 September 2001. After 9/11, there was a shift in society, as people became afraid of associating with Islamic groups, in addition to international pressure, given the strong US presence in Kuwait since the Iraq war. This had an effect on charity engagement in Kuwait. It led some Islamist organisations to change their approach and start to engage with charities, especially among young people. From their
public discourse, it is evident that Islamist groups consider charities a way of attracting young people or turning them to Islamic activities. For example, a young man in an NGO associated with an Islamist organisation told me:

"Young people like to engage… in [charity] trips more than other individuals in society. So, our role is to increase and facilitate their engagement since it will benefit the organisation by showing them transparency and let them trust us more, and also benefit the young people themselves.

This comment links a new generation to piety and learning how to care about others. At the same time, the non-pious find that charities are a model of humanitarian considerations and ethics that they feel their children should be raised in relation to. All agree that charities help young people to become considerate towards the value of life. Engaging in charity has become something that all Kuwaiti society is united around, but from different perspectives.

After the Arab Spring (2010), Kuwait had its own local version, from 2011 to 2013. Tens of thousands of people, many of them women and young people, protested against corruption and demanded changes, sparked by the mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt (Buscemi, 2020). Many Kuwaitis despaired about the prospect of political reform and joined the opposition in pushing for change. Kuwait’s Arab Spring youth activists, who opposed corruption and demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister, were targeted by the government. This led them to break into the Parliament Council building in November 2011, along with some opposition parliamentarians, as a reaction to being prevented from expressing their opinions in licensed marches. This resulted in further demonstrations in the streets and the imprisonment of a large number of government opponents, including some members of parliament for the first time in Kuwait’s history. This was coupled with several political actions, such as the decision to amend the constituencies for membership of the Parliament Council, which resulted in the emergence of an election boycott, thereby creating dissatisfaction and division among Kuwaitis. Some of those who were engaged in these reforming initiatives, especially young people, decided to redirect their political energies into charitable activities. As Buscemi (2017) argues, such youth initiatives contributed to the process of reform by creating new forms of sociability, and by shifting political engagement to informal venues, as well as enhancing engagement with charities. This was followed by the government establishing the Ministry of Youth Affairs in 2013, in order to promote national youth values and creativity, and to be a partner in sustainable development (Ministry
of Youth Affairs in Kuwait, 2020). It could be argued that this was simply a way to preoccupy young people with matters other than politics, however.

These events were followed by the Gulf crisis of 2018, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt imposed an air, sea, and land blockade on Qatar (Kabalan, 2018). Kuwait refused to apply these measures and played a mediating role between the two sides (Alajmi, 2018). At this moment, Kuwaitis believed that they demonstrated leadership in the Gulf in solving the crisis, especially when the Amir was recognised as a humanitarian leader by the United Nations in 2014. The role of the state, the Amir, and society in charitable organisations is, in fact, more developed in Kuwait than in other Gulf states. Many countries in the Gulf have changed their policies and tightened conditions for international charity work. For example, when I was a volunteer on the site of a charity campaign in Kuwait during Ramadan, I encountered Saudi people who travelled to Kuwait to deliver their donations, since international online transfers to any non-Saudi charity organisations had been banned in their country. As a consequence of such events, many Kuwaitis feel that they have a duty to help solve the region’s problems, and that they have a wise government as well as freedom in politics and charities. In addition to participation in charity funding, charity teams and trips have established Kuwaiti charities’ reputation in Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries for doing good deeds and pushing others to make a difference.

During my fieldwork, I talked to the official spokesperson of a Kuwait charity engaged in educational efforts directed towards Syrian children in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. She was a Bahraini in her twenties, accompanied by two Saudi girls volunteering online to develop the social media presence, and the charity for which she worked is based in Kuwait and managed by local young girls. In other words, Kuwait is a regional hub for charity.

1.3 Contemporary Islamic charity

Benthall (2018) gives two reasons for the importance of studying of Islamic charity practices: the first reason is that you can find Muslims as givers and recipients (or both) in almost every country, which illustrates a wider range of religious behaviours than is present within any other religion, and this has immediate implications for aid and development charity programmes. The second reason is ‘more intellectual’ (Benthall, 2018, p.7), where the
charitable and humanitarian traditions were mostly ignored and put the European claims to secular universalism into doubt.

Since the late 1990s, it has become fashionable in the Western humanitarian aid community to promote rights, and to dismiss charity as paternalistic and demeaning. Non-Western actors, particularly Islamic actors, put the issues of charity and of voluntary action squarely back in the centre of humanitarian action, at least in terms of intentions. (Maxwell & Majid 2016, cited in Benthall, 2018, p.8)

Muslim piety extends beyond the individual, as seen by how the moral responsibility to meet the needs of others is distributed socially (Schaeublin, 2019).

There is a long-term trend in the literature on charity that treats it as a religious modality of giving directed towards the ‘poor’ and also to the definition of the ‘deserving poor’ (Kahf, 2002; Ahmed, 2004). Subsequent scholarship has explored the transformation from traditional charity to philanthropy, which focuses on the quality of life (Benthall, 2018). Most recently, scholars have explored charity as a tool for ‘development’, which is concerned with the welfare of the recipient (Atia, 2013; Tobin, 2016).

Islam has had an impact on charitable giving, yet in Kuwait the forms of charity that are important cannot be understood solely through the lens of Islam (Alshatti, 2017). As I argue in the thesis, charity has also become central to Kuwaiti identity, and in this respect it combines the religious and the development aspects, and this is visible in a diversity of contemporary charitable practices. Nevertheless, Kuwait as a state still officially does not impose the Islamic obligation of zakat for companies (as in Saudi Arabia), though not for individuals. Performing zakat, in Kuwait, is considered as an obligatory act between a person and their God. Yet, simultaneously, in Kuwait diverse charitable modalities have developed through the complex contemporary initiatives of different participants.

There is a rich body of literature in the social sciences and humanities that takes as its concern the nature of Islamic charity in the modern world. Starting with obligatory charity, zakat, Singer (2008) undertook a comparative and historical study of charity in the Islamic context. She follows a topical approach in her book, asking in different chapters, ‘Who gave? Who received? Who were the deserving and undeserving poor?’ (p.14). Singer points out that Islamic charity has not been addressed in depth in Western scholarship. She suggests this is due to the complexity of charity structures in Islam. Singer (2008) states that zakat is
considered an instrument of social justice by many modern Islamist thinkers, and they are trying to activate its role in the Islamic financial system. She lists all the types of charity that may be encountered in any Muslim country historically, by month, in what she names the ‘Islamic Charity Calendar’. The details that she mentions bring attention to the fact that some forms of Islamic charity do not in fact aim at sustainable charity or the creation of self-sufficiency, or at changing people’s lives.

Also focusing on zakat, Fauzia (2013) conducted a pioneering historical study of charity in Islam in Indonesia, considering the role of the state alongside individuals and NGOs. However, her study did not look for the motivations of donors or those who engaged in charity. Fauzia states that after independence, many decisions related to charity underwent a change in Indonesia. Firstly, the state’s decision in 1954 to collect and distribute zakat put the state in competition with NGOs. Secondly, in 2008, the decision to take the payment of zakat by force was followed by a ‘war-like situation’ due to the response from Indonesians, as she describes it (Fauzia, 2013, p.248). In contrast, in Kuwait, although there is a government body that focuses on collecting and distributing zakat, Zakat House, zakat is not implemented by force, neither for companies nor people. In this regard, this research investigated the elements of zakat law in Kuwait and analyses the ideal definition of zakat and its elements from the contemporary Islamic literature, in order to understand the contemporary implementation of zakat.

By expanding the literature from zakat to the whole of Islamic charity, including sadaqa, the optional alms, Atia (2013), in the context of Egypt, raises new and different aspects of zakat: if we look at the categories of zakat, i.e. who to give to, there are new categories emerging, thus there needs to be a ‘reconceptualization’ of what constitutes the ‘deserving poor’ (p.90). However, observers of Islamic sharia law understand that Islamic charity regulations, such as the categories of zakat, are valid in every place and time (Altuwier, 2017). This issue will be discussed in the context of this research in regard to the categories of zakat and how these categories fit with contemporary recipients of zakat.

Although charity has been diversifying for a long time in order to increase fundraising revenue, the existing literature has not given sufficient attention to how and why charitable practices have diversified (Saunders, 2013). Singer (2005) conducted an insightful analysis into an Ottoman public kitchen, established in the fourteenth century. This kitchen provided soup to the public as a form of charity. She states that before the Ottoman era there are no
indications of food distribution in any Islamic society. The Ottoman kitchen investigation revealed a merging of the concepts of ‘patronage, charity, and hospitality’ (Singer, 2005, p.481). These types of charity may not address poverty; they simply give a person a meal. Singer affirms that donors derive their modes of charity from their understanding of the needs of their own society. She states that this type of charity illustrates how such food distribution was considered a means of charitable aid, and how it shaped such social demands. This is relevant to what is happening in Kuwait: on the one hand, it is similar to the distribution of iftar meals during Ramadan in some aspects; on the other hand, it is similar to more collective and social engagements with charitable giving. In Kuwait, the distribution of meals was traditionally a government activity, but individuals have developed this into iftar preparation workshops that involve engaging personally in preparation and distribution of food. Children are also often included in these workshops. Yet all of those involved in charity, whether institutions or individuals, do not differentiate between recipients on the grounds of whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, or fasting or not fasting.

It is important to understand how Kuwaitis conceive of giving, and how they differ in understanding and practicing charity. For instance, some are satisfied when giving a small amount directly to the poor, while others are keen to put their small amount into a sustainable charity project. How do people in Kuwait nowadays derive their understanding of charity? This research attempts to understand how people are engaged in charity and how they translate their drives into diverse charity practices. In other words, what does it mean to be charitable in Kuwait?

In order to address these issues, I also consider earlier debates in the literature about Islamic charity, particularly concerning the motives for acts of giving, be these religious, economic, or related to questions of development. There is an expanding body of anthropological research into charitable giving in Muslim-majority Arab settings, and this work has brought attention to diverse modes and motives for the practice of charity in such contexts (Mostowlansky, 2020; Benthall, 2018; Osella, 2017). There is a particular emphasis on the role played by piety in contemporary forms of Muslim giving in the Arab-speaking Middle East. In an examination of everyday practices of Islamic charity in post-revolutionary Egypt, for instance, Mittermaier (2019) argues that Egyptians are ‘giving to God’ by giving to the poor, and that it is this religious impulse rather than caring for the poor that motivates them. Mittermaier analyses how this ‘giving to God’ shapes the ways in which people fit in the
world. Giving to God offers a deeper purpose than ‘humanitarian reason, neoliberal models of development perspectives [or] the revolutionary desire to overthrow the socioeconomic order’ (Mittermaier, 2019, p.7). Giving is ‘not organized around the poor’s suffering, the donor’s compassion, or the hope for a better tomorrow’ (Mittermaier, 2019, p.7).

However, giving charity for the sake of piety is quite different in Kuwait. Piety is the foundation underlying all engagement in charity. Exhibiting piety is embedded in all charity engagements; it is unstated, in the current research, but understood. There are two reasons for this: firstly, there is a commonality in that the research participants know piety exists, and I as a researcher know it exists, so there is no need to talk about it, as it is taken for granted. Secondly, there are aspects that participants did not like to shine the light on, that they are preferred to keep secret. The piety in their charitable engagements is for God and God knows about it. So there is not much acknowledgement that piety is a kind of foundation of all engagement in charity, though it is always there. Participants were keen to show the new expressions that they use charity for, while referring only briefly to certain aspects of piety, such as seeking for rewards and feeling blessed.

Other research indicates different aspects of charitable practices in Muslim societies. For example, Atia (2013) and Tobin (2016) emphasise that charities are no longer a means simply to fulfil an Islamic obligation, but have transformed social and civil life in the Middle East. Atia (2013) investigated a series of case studies in Egypt on the way in which charity has been deployed for the development of the Muslim world. Atia suggests that Islamic charity is an activity devoted towards changing or improving the lives of recipients. Tobin (2016) argues that everyday Islamic piety in Jordanian society is performed in a social and sustainable way that combines economic and Islamic aspects. While revealing diversity in Islamic practices of giving in Arab societies today, the existing literature either emphasises charity’s relationship to personal piety (Mittermaier, 2019) or charity’s marriage with neoliberalism as a means of socio-economic development (Atia, 2013; Tobin, 2016). On the other hand, from the humanity and sympathy perspectives, charity can be performed as a response to ethics and sentiments (Osella & Widger, 2018). In Kuwait, there is a wide range of influences on how people give to charity and for whom they give that go beyond piety. These influences range from traditions and politics to pious and neoliberal concerns, to ethics and sentiments. I argue that practicing charity in Kuwait – as an expression of Kuwaiti
identity – brings together a diversity of forms of charity, and that piety underlies all charity engagements.

Most research in Islamic charity has explored what charity does for development and the economy; a novel aspect of this research is to investigate what charity does for organisers and donors. According to Retsikas (2014), there was a definite reconceptualisation of charity in Indonesia during the 1970s and 1980s, where charity transformed from a simple ritual of worship to a fundamental tool for achieving socio-economic justice. Retsikas (2014) explains this change in terms of the spread of modernist discourse and the ‘de-politization’ of Islam (p.4). In contrast, the informal diplomacy that Kuwait charity has used, such as pursuing social justice (locally and globally) and changing people’s lives via charity, has turned the classic notion of charity toward a new local focus, which involves charitable participants using charity to express their national identity.

This thesis contributes to the conceptual intervention that charitable practice in Kuwait merges both 'Giving to God' (Mittermaier) and the imbrication of both neoliberalism and religious piety (Atia), given the potential conceptual contradictions in the Kuwaiti charitable arena. Doing charity for the sake of piety is something that, officially, cannot be acknowledged by charitable participants in Kuwait in order to keep it secret and avoid showing off. Yet, the thesis material unfolds some sentiments of doing charity that indicate a clear sense of piety. There are clear pieces of evidence of piety-related motivations in people’s charitable aims and motives, although it is barely acknowledged, in terms such as ‘keeping it a secret for God’s sake’, the feeling of blessing by doing charity, or of ‘pursuing God's rewards’.

Ethnography shows that charitable practices in Kuwait within different participating levels (individuals, NGOs, government) are multidimensional and diversify to meet both piety and development aims. There are particular forms of classical charitable practices that still exist, in Kuwait, that place emphasis on religious piety, just as Mittermaier (2019) argues, such as iftar distribution and financial aid - which will not solve poverty. Yet, the ethnography suggests that charitable giving’s motives are not organized only around piety or 'giving to God', but also involve an empathic sense of the poor's suffering and compassion for the feelings of others. These feelings provoke charitable participation, as in, for instance, the iftar preparation workshops that include children discussed in Chapter 3. Here, a major - or main -
motive of this practice is to invoke in children the love of giving, from an appreciation of the feelings of others. Compassion and empathy are clear forces at work here.

On the other hand, the ethnography also demonstrates the transformation of Islamic charity into a means to socio-economic development. Several charitable projects in this research mark the ongoing confluence of political, economic and religious processes as Atia (2013) argues, in which they combine these sentiments of piety with a feeling of better tomorrow and seeking sustainable change that empowers the poor and gives them a way of living in the most charitable projects. The degree of development and sustainability is varying by the size of the charitable project and the capability of the charitable participant who performs this project. For instance, you can find an individual initiative that results in changing a life for just one needy person, while some projects offer enduring benefits for a whole village of needy people. In Kuwait, giving to God, giving for individual piety concerns, giving from compassion and empathy, and giving as a means of socio-economic development are all existing together, often at the same time and in one person’s motivations.

1.3.1 New forms of charitable engagement in Kuwait

There is an emerging literature on international development, designing development, and everyday humanitarianism (Chambers, 2006; Schwittay, 2014a, 2014b, 2019; Fassin, 2012; Fechter and Schwittay, 2019). This literature intersects with contemporary Islamic charity practices taking place in Kuwait, but the literature has not always considered Islamic charity in much detail, especially with regard to the ways giving is practised as a religious charity with the aim of development. This thesis therefore contributes to moves made towards filling a knowledge gap in this field (Osella et al., 2015).

1.3.1.1 Technology and Charity

The ethnography in this research shows a strong engagement and interaction of technology in charitable practices in Kuwait among all levels of participants, including the general public. Schwittay (2014b, 2019) confirms how the new media technologies are playing an effective role in international development practices. Schwittay (2014b) argues that the new media in international development has an affective dimension in the capability of narrative and visual representations and in establishing personal connections to link people in the global North.
with people in the global South. She named these everyday citizens that support poverty alleviation as 'everyday humanitarians' (Schwittay, 2014b, p.3). She defined the 'Everyday Humanitarians' as the 'Northern publics [who] come to learn and care about geographically, culturally and materially distant others and how they share some of their money and time to improve far-away lives.' (Schwittay, 2014b, p.3). She urged that these 'everyday humanitarians' practices and interventions need attention in research as important as other subjects in development studies, such as aid beneficiaries and development decision-makers (Schwittay, 2014b, 2019). Similarly, in Kuwait, contemporary charitable work, with its tools that include technology and new media, has contributed to expanding the base of those involved in charity, whereas engagement was previously more limited to religious people or workers in charitable organizations. The general public engage in charity through social media more than at any time before. This research reveals how different people in different ways are practising charity and care for other Muslims in different places in the world.

Engaging social media in charitable activities in Kuwait participates in evoking the sentiments that 'direct attention to the suffering of others and make us want to remedy them' (Smith, 1759 cited in Schwittay, 2019, p. 1923), thus changing the social relations with recipients and resulting in creating a connection between givers and recipients. This virtual connection relationship also increases charitable engagement and donations. The use of emotional engagement generated by media, when used in giving charity, can generate financial and also social commitments to others (Schwittay, 2019; Fassin, 2012). At the same time, there is the risk of making the poor a spectacle or of demanding evidence from them of their neediness.

Photographs are used to embody a sense of the realism and urgency of the scene of need. The use of photography in charity has had a significant impact on charitable practices. One aspect here is photography’s ability to link the donor to the recipients and to witness what is going on in the charitable site, especially if it is far away from Kuwait. It is often assumed that photographers are always objective and portray the truth without any bias; however, photography is subjected to a set of cultural frames that are usually affected by 'stereotypes' of the places and people. (Schwittay, 2014b , p. 82). In addition, photography has the limitation of not revealing the whole context of the reality, i.e. the meaning of the photos is affected by many issues, such as the reputation of photographers, the platform and channels of representations, and the context that this photos is used for (Schwittay, 2014b).
Although there could be a positive use of visually portraying the needy in evoking others to help, yet from a wider humanity perspective, there is a problem with the negative side of this. This includes utilising the situation of the poor to represent them helpless and passive, rather than as equal humans; it also tends to isolate the poor as 'needy victims', rather than acknowledging their political and economic exclusion or the causes of poverty. There is also a debate about how these negative images are used for aid purposes. We note how images derived from 'neo-colonial stereotypes' emphasise the passivity and dependency of the poor in developing countries, while disregarding how people in the developed countries are 'complicit, through consumption and political choices' (Schwittay, 2014b, p. 86). In the same way, within Kuwait, the use of images and social media, and the choice of words used to talk about the poor, can work to hide or ignore the causes for poverty and suffering – economic marginalisation, political exclusion, ethnic divisions.

Though there is a common use of photographs in charitable practices around the world (Schwittay, 2014b), there are signs of the emergence of an awareness of the politics of representation that has also begun to spread in Kuwait contemporary charity. For instance, it has now become common to ask permission before taking pictures or to commit to not showing the face of the needy, with the understanding that the poor person is in a sensitive situation - forced to reluctantly agree to media and charity publicity because they need this help. There are attempts, especially in youth charitable engagement, towards using photography in different ways, as for example the example of the portrayal of Rohingya refugees as the heroes of the story instead of as the helpless (See chapter 4).

1.3.1.2 Do it Yourself (DIY) Charity

Recently there are some new types of charity and development that become evident, not managed by development agencies or aid organisations, yet by ordinary citizens (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019). Although these practices are expanding, they remain dispersed among fields (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019). There are attempts to explore this field empirically and theoretically under the name 'citizen aid' (Fechter and Schwittay, 2019, p.1769 ). The ethnography in this thesis builds this field with new knowledge about how charitable initiatives in Kuwait by individuals are practised and via discussion about how people derived their understanding of charity and translate it into charitable and development projects.
Schwittay (2014a) has investigated ‘humanitarian design’, in which some development organizations fund development specialists and experts to find innovative solutions for challenges by depending on 'eliciting the poor’s needs' rather than using assumptions taken by most development interventions for granted. Thereby, this process designs new mechanisms that offer potential solutions, and has resulted in new forms of giving that merged business and entrepreneurial objectives with larger moral concerns.

Many charitable initiatives in Kuwait have adopted such innovative forms of charity as an attempt to solve their problems from the initiator's views. Do-it-yourself (DIY) Charity is a way to design and begin charitable projects in Kuwait, whereby the initiator is designing the charitable project according to specific bottom-up criteria and ideas. These new charitable ideas are derived from the specified needs of the poor and the charitable participant's conviction that the poor deserve a better life. They generally aim at increasing the potential that can be offered to the poor and empowering them to gain better lives, rather than, as often assumed by charitable organizations, as a means to fill the necessary need only, as in the aim of compulsory charity (zakat). A new set of creative modalities are emerging, explored in the ethnographies in this thesis, that consists of mixed forms of different elements such as entrepreneurial and humanitarian. Some of these applications are supported by charitable organisations and others appear are as individual initiatives, however, in both cases, this work is designed by the participants' own ways of doing things and their understandings of how charity should be enacted. Although this type of charitable work opens up new innovative modes and standards, it may also be subject to randomness in targeting poverty, which may lead to dispersal of efforts and lack of focus.

1.3.1.3 Charitable Tourism Trips

One of the contemporary means that have become a common trend in Kuwait charity recently is organising and engaging in charitable tourism trips. In the past, such trips used to be limited to the workers in the charitable bodies, but now it includes the general public from volunteers, social influencers, and photographers. It has been widely used among all levels of charitable participants, by youth, individuals, NGOs, and governmental bodies, including the workers in these bodies from other departments not related to organising charity. Charitable tourism trips are a means of realistic learning in situ - in the environment of those who are to be recipients. These trips are aiming to offer a better understanding of the needs of people in
poverty, by careful listening to them, and by living alongside them for a few days. Charitable Tourism Trips have mutual benefits, for beneficiaries to express their needs and for decision-makers in development charity to grow better understandings of lived contexts.

However, these ‘poverty tourism’ events, undertaken in the aim of development, may have some bias and problems that may be generated unintentionally and need attention (Chambers, 2006) and could play a part in re/producing inequalities (Fassin, 2012). Chambers (1979) coined the concept of Rural Development Tourism and how it interacts with perceptions of poverty; he illuminates some of the problems of bias that contribute to challenges in growing realistic understanding of the challenges of people living in poverty (Chambers, 1979; 2006).

Chambers (1979) discusses several problems of bias and suggests some tactics (1979, p.11) that help development actors, including aid agencies to pioneer a ‘responsible pro-poor professionalism’ (Chambers, 2006, p.3). For instance, the bias within sources of information and communication is one challenge. Here, certain influential and powerful people in a community of beneficiaries have the priority to talk and express the needs of the poor to the development actors, and this communication will reflect a certain set of priorities and perspectives. ‘It is rare to find a body or institution that adequately represents the poor in a certain community or area’ (Devitt, 1977, p.23 cited in Chambers, 1979, p. 7). Chambers (1979) suggests addressing such ‘biases of personal contact by deliberately seeking out the poorer people, by making a point of meeting women, by taking time to seek out those who are sick at home and not at the clinic or in the fields, by asking about those who have left or who have died’ (p. 12).

My ethnography of charitable trips in Kuwait shows that it benefits the participants themselves, in appreciating their own life when they see at close quarters the worse living conditions of others; it also gives a sense of transparency and credibility to charitable bodies and is thus a tool for the maintenance of trust and loyalty by the process of observers who witness the scenes and temporarily share the experience and context. These trips differ from projects that simply deliver aid to execute the development projects. Some become whole family tourism trips, in the form of family holidays that also have a charitable aspect, where all family members are engaged in visiting needy families and supporting them socially and financially. While there are challenges, it has been obvious from my ethnography that engaging the general public, beyond professional workers, in charities, and the engagement via trips of influencers, youth, and individuals (from both genders and all age groups) in such
trips has given another dimension. By the trip’s ability to offer a direct focus on the poor, with some exposure to the context of their lives and their needs by direct contact, by listening to them and being among them, these small and self-organised tours in villages and other spaces of need offer very different understandings than the regular trips that aid organisations are used to do previously.

This research contributes to scholarship on charity within and beyond the Muslim world by demonstrating how local practices and the religious understanding of the contemporary role of Islamic charity within the State of Kuwait, with its many modalities, has become a means to express national identity – *Kuwaitiness* – within Kuwait and in connection to the Gulf and the world.

The following section elaborates on how the data for this research was gathered, the methods used, how participants were selected for the ethnographies, and the other elements that were necessary for scholarship on Islamic charity in the State of Kuwait.

### 1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Overview

The ethnographic work was conducted in Kuwait between March 2018 and February 2019. Data was collected via a combination of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with participants involved in charity in Kuwait. This section outlines the details of the methodology used in conducting this research, that is, participant selection and fieldwork timing, along with data analysis techniques and researcher positionality.

1.4.2 Methods

The primary data for this research was collected in two phases: (1) anthropological participant observation in local charity activities and campaigns conducted during Ramadan (May 2018); (2) semi-structured interviews with Kuwaitis involved in charity from different levels of charitable involvement in Kuwait. This combined method in the fieldwork reveals details/elements of how charity is understood and practised in Kuwait by different participants (individuals, NGOs, government bodies). I conducted multiple interviews with
the same organisations in order to gain more depth and different dimensions on the practices they tend to engage in.

1.4.2.1 On-site observations

The reasons for selecting participant observation in this research was to enable me to access to a wider range of data than could be accessed through interviews alone. Participant observation is an integral method for interviews in anthropology studies; it reveals the relationship between what people say and what they are actually doing, thus allowing an understanding of how things work and are practised. Being involved in the context as a researcher allows for an intimate knowledge of the subject, which helps in the development of interview questions and in understanding how to interpret the qualitative data (Bernard, 2005; Guest et al., 2012). To answer research questions via participant observation is like seeing what you are interested in as it happens; ‘seeing is believing, and seeing is often data collection’ (Guest et al., 2012, p.81). My positionality as a Kuwaiti Muslim woman allowed me to use this data collection tool, and since I participate in the field of charity this is not only my area of research but also my current work and my mission in life. As a volunteer and charitable person, I was in a more informed position to undertake this aspect of data collection in the field, thereby allowing me the opportunity to monitor all aspects through being an insider in the world of charitable work.

Conducting the participant observation in this research required preparation. I conducted interviews with organisations as the first step, after which it became clear which departments/sites I needed to focus on. Secondly, I obtained permission to enter the relevant departments and campsites, along with choosing the time required for participating. Time is crucial for these organisations, because their work peaks at certain times, such as during Ramadan. I chose to start the interviews before Ramadan, and conduct the participant observation during Ramadan, which proved highly beneficial in respect of the richness of the data I was able to collect while witnessing the charitable work at its peak time. The places that I visited, observed, and sometimes engaged with and volunteered in were as follows: the site of the 1,000 Wells campaign; two different iftar workshops managed by individuals, which included engaging with my children in preparation and distribution in one of them; iftar sites set up by the government; and a visit to a needy area (Aljeleeb) to visit some needy
families. I also arranged to visit a few departments at Zakat House involved in collecting and distributing zakat in Kuwait.

1.4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Given that my research questions revolve around examining the dimensions of charitable transformation in Kuwait and how charity is practiced there among different charitable participants, most of the semi-structured interviews were designed to seek more depth in details rather than broad responses. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, specifically the Kuwaiti colloquial language, with numerous charitable participants in Kuwait: individual youths; individual adults; different levels of employees at NGOs; and different levels of employees working in charitable government bodies.

During the fieldwork, 45 interviews were conducted. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed into Arabic; anonymised copies were then saved on multiple digital devices. I translated selectively as needed from the transcribed Arabic data in order to include raw data in this thesis. Transcription was done personally without a mediator, since the Kuwaiti colloquial language would be challenging for a translator who was not Kuwaiti. In addition, while transcribing the interviews, I tended to write comments and headings that helped me during the coding and analysis.

1.4.2.3 Ethical Clearance

All participants were given the freedom to decide whether to participate in this research or not. The participants who decided to participate in this research acquired a 'Consent Form' that stated their rights; prior to conducting the interview, this was to be signed by the participants. This form stated that they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the project, and that all information that they provided in the interview will be anonymised, with care taken to prevent their identity from being made public (See appendix 1). For certain selected participants, I acquired their prior permission and full consent to disclose their identity in the research for specific reasons - such as Sharia Scholars, the social media influencer. This has all been stated in the 'Note' Column in the interviews list (see Appendix 2). Participants agreed to record the interviews with ensuring protective confidentiality and anonymity to ease the research process. This consent form was supplemented by an information sheet that
presented additional details for participants about research and the University approval. It 
stated that this research has been approved by the University of Sussex Research Ethics 
Committee to ensure the highest ethical standards and protection of data, and provided the 
contact details to the supervisors and the University of Sussex in case respondents had any 
other concerns.

1.4.2.4 Techniques

In order to overcome the ethical dilemma in gathering the data from participants about their 
charity without them feeling the culturally and religiously inappropriate feeling that they 
were bragging, I used my own cultural competence to take steps in an appropriate manner. 
Some of my informants needed to be given permission to speak, or reassured, at the 
beginning of the interview; it was my role to explain to them that participating in the 
interview with good intentions could be purely for God, and not for bragging; I explained that 
every single detail of their charitable engagement matters and could be considered as sadaqa, 
a long lasting sadaqa, if these words are written and disseminated and other Muslims can 
imitate them. It was also important to confirm to them that the research would be anonymous 
and for academic purposes only. Such details particularly matter for research in Islamic 
charity scholarship; in order to give participants the confidence to speak comfortably about 
engaging in charity, it is vital to exclude feelings of hypocrisy that they may feel. This is 
what actually happened in this research, therefore, continuous close observation (in addition 
to the interviews) was necessary in order to find out what was not declared, through the work 
itself; sometimes also people tended to say things at the time of engaging in charity, rather 
than at the time of the interview, as they attempted to stay modest and sincere. However, I 
recognise that participant observation also has its own limitations and potential drawbacks, as 
discussed in the conclusion (see Chapter 8). This technique did, however, overall benefited 
this research greatly. I found some of the participants kept talking in detail about their 
charitable work, and reminding themselves of what we had discussed such as, ‘as we agreed 
at the beginning, this is not for showing off, but for an academic purpose, and I hope God 
will reward us for that’.

1.4.3 Participants
The selection of participants was based on tracking Kuwaiti charity work on social media and in the Kuwaiti charity arena from April 2017 to March 2018, and through personal connections. This helped me identify charitable projects that were planned and implemented by different participants. I was keen to have a wide selection of sources for my data, so participants come from a range of Kuwaiti charitable organisations, both with national and international charitable interests, displaying a variety of purposes such as education, helping refugees, and poverty relief. It was a challenge to encourage participants to talk about charity without bragging, and to get them engaged. This was an obvious challenge with individuals engaged in charity more so than with people who work as employees for charities, as discussed below.

In order to form a complete image of charity in Kuwait, participants were divided into different groups, in a multi-dimensional investigation. Groups were based on information related to Islamic sharia law, Kuwaiti regulations, and charitable practices. Participants were placed in five groups according to the consideration of participants, the sort of information needed, and the methodology required for each category. These are listed below.

1.4.3.1 Islamic scholars

This group work as independent Islamic scholars and members of fatwa boards in different Islamic institutions, and as heads of department in the sharia offices of some charitable bodies. This group’s interviews focused mostly on Islamic opinions (fatwa) on charitable practices and the newest practices in Kuwait and how compatible they are with Islamic law. Most of these Islamic scholars were hard to reach due to their busy meeting schedules. However, the positionality of my current career as a researcher in the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic affairs in Kuwait facilitated the setting up and conducting of these interviews. The scholars made themselves available for this specific piece of research, since there are previous networks that exist to involve them in such endeavours. Islamic terms used by these interviewees are often described as difficult to understand for someone not working in this field. My native Arabic language and Islamic background and knowledge of Islamic law counted as distinct advantages.

1.4.3.2 Senior management
This group comprised the heads of administrations and departments in Zakat House and some NGOs. This group involved those from the top and middle levels of management. Interviewing these participants helped in answering how these levels of management interconnect with other departments. With this group, an interviewer might face the challenge of convincing them of the importance of the research study and gaining their trust. Some managers consider surveys and interviews as a hidden means for quality testing, i.e. the work of a mystery customer or 'spy'. To cope with that, as Kvale (2006) suggests, building relationships of trust, charm, and kindness with the interviewee has an impact on the amount of information gained from each interview. It is essential to demonstrate the purpose of the research from the outset and to clarify for the interviewees the ethical issues and their rights both during and after the interview (McDowell, 1998, p.213). Designing the interview questions from one department to another depended on the tasks they perform. McDowell (1998) asserts that it is important that the interviewer has a flexible enough agenda to manipulate the questions as needed. On the other hand, the interviewer is advised to present different positionalities to invoke the required type of response. This group required a connection to be utilised – a prior recommendation of a friend who knew these managers helped ease the process of getting an appointment for the interviews, as per Kuwaiti culture’s emphasis on personal relationships.

1.4.3.3 Middle management

These are employees who connect directly with clients (contributors). Interviewing this group was for the purpose of exploring the process of collecting donations, and to recognize the strengths and weaknesses in the collection of donations, and therefore to reflect on the whole process from different angles. Determining the objectives of this research and clarifying the rights with interviewees helped to maximize the openness of interviewees’ responses, in respect of clients and policies covering work privacy. These interviews collected data which helped to draw a complete picture of charitable work from different perspectives.

1.4.3.4 NGO representatives
Some NGOs are institutionally-oriented while others follow a voluntary-based system. The institutionally-oriented NGOs had a clear hierarchy and it was easy to access their top management, whereas the voluntary NGOs had teams which changed regularly. I selected these NGOs according to their distinguished reputations and involvement in charitable campaigns and the variation in their political affiliations. The main questions for this group were how they work and how they build trust amongst Kuwait society, whether they depend on donor loyalty and networks or on marketing campaigns, and what the challenges in charity work in Kuwait are. This helped to address how different NGOs function as charities in Kuwait.

1.4.3.5 Individuals in Kuwaiti society

Initially I intended to interview individuals who were leading charitable teams only, but these interviews led me to more individuals who were volunteering in teams of youths and who had different perspectives on practicing charity. This in turn led to additional participant observations of those who volunteered in charity sites such as iftar workshops being included.

To select individuals, I used my networks to reach the most effective charitable individuals in Kuwait, having already met some of them previously. I tried to engage with different charitable causes and initiatives to gain access to individuals engaged in various areas of charity. Most interviews with individuals were conducted in cosy places such as cafes. I noticed that most individual interviews lasted longer than interviews conducted in offices with previous groups.

Although the preparation for and conducting of these interviews was vital, interpreting and presenting the information was even more important. Some interview agendas do not go as planned, since interviewees have the right to not respond to any of the questions, or some may not give real answers. The interviews had to be culturally acceptable and beneficial in achieving the desired objectives, and it was essential during the conversations with my respondents from this group to always remind them that their charity story and details matter, and the more details they gave, the more they would help enrich the research. They liked the idea that their responses could bring them more rewards from God too, for example if people were to imitate their charitable actions. This made the interviews less stressful and more positive, resulting in richer data. I knew that it was hard for them to talk about their good
deeds, preferring to be pure for God by doing them secretly. Sometimes people talked about their good deeds as if to deliver a good example or experience to others so they can perhaps learn and do the same, and there is no harm in that in Islam. Yet, at the same time, they also thought that doing so might entice them into feeling proud of themselves and of what they did, and then it follows that they feel afraid of being hypocritical and losing the rewards from Allah. I tried to convince them to avoid the feeling of hypocrisy and showing off in their intention while talking, as all interviews were anonymous, so no one would know who they were.

1.4.4 Position and role of the researcher

I am a Kuwaiti woman from a traditional Islamic background who was raised in a conservative family. I am from the 1970s generation who received an education in government schools and at the state university. Studying Islamic sharia law for a bachelor’s degree gave me knowledge of the Islamic religion. I have been involved with a number of charities since high school, with teenage groups in civil and Islamic organisations, and I was active in university student unions. I have also worked in the Awqaf and Islamic Ministry of Kuwait, and have good connections with other departments that work directly with charities. I have close relationships with charity founders and groups, and I volunteer with many of them. My positionality permits me to write as a witness to the generational change in charitable activities in Kuwait. However, in the beginning, I had expectations and previous judgments in charity work from my practices and experience in Kuwait, which I am happy to say were refined and polished after delving into the research literature and collecting data in this research journey.

1.4.5 Data analysis

I employed inductive analysis for coding the interview transcripts (Thomas, 2006). I wrote the descriptive ethnography as a first stage, then followed this by the manual coding and extracting themes, and then undertook the analysis. The coding process provided a coherent basis for analysis of the interviews; I then wrote up the findings and connected them with the themes extracted from the data. This thesis is a novel contribution to the literature, therefore it does not adapt a specific theoretical framework. The inductive analysis helped to create a new framework that suits the data collected. The analysis uses the relevant existing literature
related to the themes; previous literature is discussed in three areas: (1) in the introduction generally to justify and state the overall argument of the thesis, then (2) the specific discussion of existing literature in each chapter, where new themes emerge around a specific charitable participant’s activities, and finally (3) in the conclusion, where findings of the thesis are linked to the related literature discussed in this research.

1.5 Organisation of the study

In order to support my argument that charity is an expression of ‘Kuwaitiness’, Kuwaiti national identity, this thesis opens in the second chapter with the context of Islamic charity in general and reflections on what is currently happening in the Kuwait charity sector, and how charity regulations are shaping and affecting the direction of charity in Kuwait.

The third chapter explores the charity scene at a particular time of the year, Ramadan month, the key month of charitable giving, in which charity is very much on everyone’s mind. This chapter focuses on the two primary aspects of Ramadan in Kuwait in regard to charity: the role of social media in leading and directing people to charity, and the engagement in iftar distribution among different charitable participants. This chapter discusses the charitable engagement of all of the participants, from individuals to NGOs and government bodies, exploring their different charitable practices in Kuwait as an expression of Kuwaitiness. The first part of this chapter elaborates on how social media is taking the lead in charity during Ramadan in Kuwait, and to what extent trust plays a role in virtual engagement in charity, and how this is reflected in live engagement and socialising. The second part explores how the simplistic charity of distributing iftar meals – which has existed for decades – is taking place in Kuwait among different participants and how this idea has developed to cope with the transformation of contemporary Kuwaiti charity.

From there I move on to discuss the different participants in charity and what they are expressing through their charity work. The subsequent chapters focus on a variety of types of individual, social group, and institution. Starting with a specific demographic group of charitable participants, I explore in the fourth chapter the charitable engagements of young people in Kuwait. This chapter focuses on the diversity of charitable modes and engagement among Kuwaiti youths. It addresses the origins of Kuwaiti young people’s understanding of
charity and how they are expressing their national identity through their diverse charity practices.

From young people to a wider range of Kuwaiti individuals, in the fifth chapter I examine individuals’ expressions of Kuwaitiness through engagement in charity by exploring diversity in the practices of, motives for, and autonomy in designing their charity, and how they socialise and maintain trust when undertaking teamwork. This chapter elaborates on the motivation behind individuals’ charitable efforts and how they cope with charity regulations in Kuwait.

The sixth chapter elaborates on the transformation that has been taking place in the ways in which NGOs practise charity in Kuwait by comparing two different NGOs with different histories and affiliations. This chapter outlines the diversification in NGOs’ engagement in charity and how they refine their trust and public image within society through connections on social media and charitable trips. This chapter shows how NGOs are enhancing the Kuwaiti national identity through their charitable practices both locally and internationally, and what the political and social challenges and implications are of their charitable work.

The final empirical chapter focuses on government charitable engagement. The seventh chapter explores the role of the government body that deals with zakat and sadaqa in Kuwait, Zakat House, and explores the challenges that they face in the competitive charitable environment alongside NGOs and other charitable participants, and how they cope with these. This chapter elaborates on how the government regulates charitable activities in Kuwait, including implementing zakat to help establish Kuwaitiness through charity.

Finally, the eighth chapter concludes the thesis by discussing the key themes that have been explored. This chapter discusses the primary elements that are apparent in the diversity of expression through charity in Kuwait and to what extent these matter to different charitable participants in Kuwait.
Chapter 2: Research Context

This chapter explores the context of this research, with a specific focus on Islamic charity regulation and its implementation in Kuwait. It elaborates on the context needed to understand the charitable engagements made by different participants in the subsequent chapters. The chapter opens with charity in Islam in general in section 1, then focuses on contemporary Islamic charity in Kuwait specifically in section 2. The chapter will aid in understanding the regulations in Islamic charity, types of charity, and what is required for charity to be implemented as it is regulated in Islam. It also discusses criteria that Muslims involved in charitable work take into consideration, such as reward calculation and giving to charity secretly.

2.1 Islamic charity

Charitable giving in Islam is related to monetary giving and other tangible forms of giving such as dedicating time to help, or simply even a smile on your face to make others happy, which is also considered charity (Benthall, 2018). This section begins with the idea of Islamic charity, the financial system in Islam with its definitions and conditions, and the various types of charity and how these should be implemented. First, it is important to understand the financial system in Islam in order to understand the types of Islamic charity. The philosophy of money in Islam involves understanding the ownership of sources of money and how it should be spent. This philosophy includes the legal ways of gaining money, the regulations regarding spending, and the role of the Muslim within their family, their community, the Muslim world, and the world as a whole.

2.1.1 Money ownership

The Quran states that money belongs to God and we are its inheritors: ‘Believe in Allah and His Messenger and spend out of that in which He has made you successors. For those who have believed among you and spent, there will be a great reward’ (Holy Quran 57:7). God, Allah Almighty, is the creator of the entire universe, so all treasures in the globe belong to him, the one and only possessor of the kingdom. In the Noble Quran Allah says: ‘To Him
belongs what is in the heavens and what is on the earth, and what is between them and what is under the soil’ (Holy Quran: Taha, 20:6). Allah refers to the money owned by people as his own wealth: ‘Give them from the wealth of Allah which He has given you’ (Holy Quran 24:33). Although money is assigned as the wealth of Allah in the Quran, it is also described in some verses as the money of the people. Quran interpreters explain that this indicates the usufruct of the money which people gain in their life (Ibn Kathir, 2010).

2.1.2 Spending money

Spending money is a significant issue in Islam. Many verses in the Quran and in the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings (PBUH) indicate the rules of how Allah wants us to use money in a proper way. All rules urge using money with manners, and avoiding harm to any human beings by monopolization, exploitation, or squandering. Moreover, it is forbidden to seize the money of orphans, weak people, or workers. The Prophet (PBUH) said that among three things Allah hates, one is ‘wasting wealth’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 30, No. 12). Islam’s third pillar is called Zakat; this literally means purifying and is related to the purification of money. It is a form of almsgiving, treated in Islam as a religious obligation. It is Allah’s right to Muslims’ money. There are other types of charity that are also recommended in Islam as optional alms, such as ordinary sadaqa, which is the charity given at any time to anyone, just with the intention of helping them. Muslims are imposed upon by Islamic principles to help and care about others. Allah promises donors many rewards both in life and after death to motivate them to spend on charity.

2.1.3 History of the public treasury in the early Islamic state

Islamic scholars have paid close attention to the procedures for distributing zakat, which may ‘historically as having set out the principles of a proto-state treasury’(Benthalh, 2018, p.8). To understand the sources of income in the early Islamic state, we must go back to the beginnings of Islam. During the era of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) there was no need for a public treasury. Money gained from wars and almsgiving was distributed immediately (Fauzia, 2013). After the Prophet’s death (PBUH), at the time of Abu Baker the first caliph, there was also no need for a treasury. It was always locked up and unused because it was empty, and after Abu Baker’s death there was only one dirham in the treasury. After expanding the borders of the Islamic state in the late seventh century, at the beginning of the
caliphate of Umer bin Alkhattab, a public treasury began to play a role in managing the huge amounts of money gained from Islamic conquests. This public treasury was called ‘Beit el mal’, literally ‘house of money’. It was always near the Prophet’s mosque so that it could be monitored at all times (Alshatti, 2014; Alyafee, 2013).

The public treasury’s income at that time was sourced from both Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims provided alms via zakat and sadaqa. Zakat has certain conditions and calculations, such as the amount of money needed to reach a certain amount and that it must be held for a full year without being used, in order to be eligible for zakat payment. Other sources of income were the spoils gained from the Islamic conquests by peace or by war, and taxes on individuals and lands (Fauzia, 2013). The public treasury’s expenditure paid salaries for Islamic state workers (judges, guardians, soldiers, etc.), prepared the Islamic army, covered state expenses, and supported the poor or needy (Alshatti, 2014; Alyafee, 2013).

2.1.4 Zakat in Islamic law

Abduallah Bin Umar reports that the Prophet (PBUH) said: ‘The superstructure of Islam is raised on five pillars: Allah alone should be worshipped and Mohammad is his bondsman and messenger, establishment of prayer, the payment of zakat, the fast of Ramadan, and the Pilgrimage to the House (Mecca)’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, No. 3). Zakat is mentioned 30 times in the Holy Quran (Ahmed, 2004). It derives its importance from being one of the five pillars of Islam, as mentioned in the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet). In addition, in Islamic ruling, any Muslim who intentionally refuses to pay zakat is prosecuted by the Islamic State (Ahmed, 2004).

2.1.4.1 Defining zakat

The word zakat in Arabic is derived from the root of the verb zaka, which means to increase or to purify. Zakat holds several meanings, involving growth, blessing, cleanliness, and purification. Ibn Taymiyyah states that the soul of the donor is purified when donating, and that their money is purified and increased by blessing (Ahmed, 2004, Alyafee, 2013). Scholars have varied in defining zakat according to Islamic law; some consider zakat tangible and define it as the money itself (the contribution paid), others define it as the act of paying this contribution, and some scholars prefer to merge the tangible and the act, as in Yusuf
Alqardawi’s definition. Alqardawai, a contemporary scholar, defines *zakat* as ‘The determined share of wealth imposed by God for the deserving’ (cited in Alyafee, 2013, p.15). Alyafee (2013) notes, after combining scholars’ definitions of *zakat*, that most definitions are not comprehensive enough to show how *zakat* should be collected; none of them mention the guardian (*Sultan*) of Muslims, who is supposed to collect it and distribute it. He states that the definition of *zakat* within Islamic law has to be comprehensive and practical, to make each administrator clear in their responsibilities in implementing *zakat* in all its aspects. Alyafee points out that earlier scholars are excused in not including these details, because they did not imagine that any future Muslim leaders would not perform *zakat* correctly.

It is worthwhile shedding light on Alyafee’s (2013) attempt to redefine *zakat*, after gathering the previous visions of scholars and observing the reality of Muslim countries and societies, where *zakat* has suffered from disruption or poor performance. Alyafee explains that in order to reform *zakat* and make it as it should be, its elements first have to be analysed from the text of sharia, especially during the eras of the Prophet (PBUH) and the caliphate. One needs to understand sharia with regard to the jurisprudence of *zakat* according to contemporary sharia jurists, taking into consideration their debates around best practice of *zakat* with respect to its aims, role, and effect on Islamic societies (Schaeublin, 2019).

2.1.4.2 Elements of *zakat*

Alyafee (2013) defines *zakat* as including all the elements of *zakat* that lead to a clear understanding and performance of *zakat* as it should be in Islamic law. He builds a definition from the terms existing in previous Islamic scholars’ definitions. Terms in previous definitions included *share, money, deserving, time, obligation, give, and take*. Alyafee’s (2013, p.19) new definition is ‘an estimated financial obligation, taken by the *Sultan* [the Guardian] in its time, to return it to its deservers’. Each term in this definition indicates a basic condition or provision of *zakat* in Islamic law.

*zakat* is not mercy nor pity, but it is a right of the poor to the wealth of the rich, and an obligation of the rich to establish a relationship between them and avoid circulating money among the rich, by sharing it with the poor (Boisard, 1980, cited in Suhaili et al., 2013, p. 2) therefore achieving balance in society. In addition to the aim of spiritual purification via *zakat*, it has ‘an obvious mission in society as a social security mechanism to develop
balanced economic growth via the redistribution of wealth in society and also development’ (Suhaili et al., 2013, p.3).

In conducting research for this thesis, I held discussions with Islamic scholars in Kuwait concerning the contemporary role of zakat in the absence of the power of prior forms of the Islamic state. They believe that since Islam is a source of legislation that is valid for all times and places, any Islamic state which regulates its laws on that basis will be able to implement zakat as it should be, from the old Islamic state to contemporary Islamic countries. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, zakat is forced on companies, but not forced on individuals, since individuals have the choice to not declare their own money. In Kuwait neither companies nor individuals are forced to pay zakat.

Hallaq (2014) argues that it is impossible for the Islamic state to fit with the modern state because that paradigm of Islamic governance – developed through centuries of Islamic rule – is incompatible with or might contradict with the modern state of the West. The situation in Muslim countries nowadays is different; there are no unified Islamic states like the old Islamic state, in which the same implementation of Islamic governance is applied everywhere. Within the same religion, Islam, there are different opinions (fatwas), and this diversity has made different interpretations of the law valid for each nation and time. The Muslim world is divided into countries with separate state powers and varying implementations of Islamic regulations. It is thus important to understand the role of zakat nowadays in comparison to its role in the early Islamic state, and how it is implemented in the contemporary era within different Muslim states that have different rules.

Islamic scholars have the ability to issue fatwas and they can push Muslims towards ‘public benefit’ (Almaslaha Al Amma). In Kuwait, zakat is not compulsory as yet, however sharia scholars are using their knowledge to direct Kuwaitis and charitable organisations by issuing fatwas that offer the best suggestions for implementing charity in ways that will increase Muslims’ public benefit. They do not have the power to force implementation of these regulations, however.

All previous explanations of zakat are about zakat of what one owns, called zakat el mal (‘mal’ literally means money). There is another type of zakat, zakat al-fitr, which is the focus of the next subsection.
2.1.4.3 Zakat al-fitr

Al-fitr comes literally from the word *iftar*, which means breaking a fast. It called it *zakat al-fitr* because it has to be paid before *Eid al fitr*, the Muslim celebration day that follows Ramadan. Some Muslim societies call this celebration *fitra*, but not in Kuwait. It is also known as *zakat el abdan* (*abdan* literally means bodies), because it is determined by how many Muslim persons you have in your home, and usually the head of the family pays it on their behalf. *Zakat al-fitr* is obligatory alms to be paid once a year at the end of Ramadan. All Muslims must pay it regardless of their age or financial status, while the ordinary *zakat* on money is only for adults who meet *zakat* payer conditions. The rate of *zakat al-fitr*, according to the Permanent Committee for Issuing Fatwas in Saudi Arabia, is equal to approximately three kilograms of rice or similar staple food, or its equivalent in money. It is recommended that it be given in the same country unless there is a crucial need abroad. Contemporary *sharia* opinions vary in regarding the permissibility of giving the monetary value of food instead of giving the food itself, depending on the public interest of the poor (Nadzri et al., 2012). The amount of *zakat al-fitr* is very small (approx. two Kuwaiti Dinar or GBP 5) compared to financial *zakat*, which is a 2.5% of one’s net savings if these reach a certain amount, *nisab*, and it is a condition that this *nisab* stays constant for a year.

The purpose of *zakat al-fitr* is to purify the fasting person from defects in their fasting, and to feed the poor. Fasting during Ramadan is an act of worship that involves the hardship of self-control for most people due to the long time it takes; it is difficult for the fasting person to avoid some of defects, as a result of which they might miss the full reward for this act of worship, so this *zakat* is made as financial penance to compensate for deficiency in fasting (Agha et al., 2020).

Most charitable organisations in Kuwait accept all kinds of *zakat*. A recent mode of charity in Kuwait is videos spread on social media by ordinary people encouraging them to involve their children in this form of *zakat*. The father, for example, brings a bag of rice and collects from his family members, including children, letting each child weigh the amount of rice that they need to pay for *zakat al-fitr*. This is one of the contemporary forms of charitable acts that can be found in Kuwait: bringing up young children as charitable givers by engaging them in understanding why and how to give charity. The guardian of the family is responsible for paying for all Muslim family members in the house, including any domestic labour.
2.1.5 Sadaqa in Islamic law

Islam urges individuals to collaborate within society (Atia, 2011). In addition to the imposition of zakat, Islam encourages optional charity (sadaqa). There are many rewards that Allah promises to Muslims who donate. The concept of sadaqa is not limited to monetary or even tangible things. For instance, the smile on someone’s face is considered sadaqa, because it spreads happiness. A good word is considered sadaqa, because it affects the rest of your day. From the perspective of Islamic law, Muslims’ duties are linked to each other, since Allah Almighty created mankind for two reasons: to worship, and to work for the construction of the Universe. In order to perform this mission in the best way possible, while facing life’s difficulties, Islam requires people to live harmoniously, full of peace and happiness, and to care for each other. This is the responsibility of each Muslim to their family, friends, and neighbourhood, and especially to those who are in need of help, materially or morally. The poor or needy should not have to beg to live. The Prophet (PBUH) was keen to pay attention to the conditions of Muslims around the world, and he described those who did not care about Muslims as not being of them (i.e. not Muslim) (Alshatti, 2014).

In Islam, the virtues relating to charity include: giving from the best things you have – the best reward for Muslims comes from giving from what you love and from the best of what you own; charity can be considered anything, not simply money; and charity is not limited to food and shelter, it can include education and empowering a person to be able to live in the future and support their dependents (Ahmed, 2004).

Charity is conceived of as a personal achievement that brings pleasure to the donor as well as the receiver. Muslims who perform charitable acts have different aims. Foremost among these aims is seeking satisfaction from Allah and His rewards. Then there is doing good in order to provide others with a decent life and spread the values of solidarity, tolerance, and cooperation. People can also participate in societal development to support the creation of an independent life for people who need help starting their lives correctly, with the minimum of needs. In addition, there is the belief in equality and the compensation principle, i.e. that what you give today you will gain tomorrow, in your life or after death. Giving sadaqa has many benefits for donors in Islam – in addition to rewards – as stated in the Quran and the
Prophet’s saying (PBUH) in different hadiths. These benefits may include, for instance, protection and prevention of affliction, forgiveness of sins and softening of God’s anger, an increase in livelihood, and the curing of disease. The purpose of charity towards non-Muslims has an additional benefit of spreading the Islamic attitude, thus inspiring goodwill towards Islam and curiosity about it as a religion (Alshatti, 2014).

Charity in Islam derives its importance from pure faith in the act of giving. Since people generally need money and have to pursue it to gain it, donating this money is a strong sign of a clean intention and a sound belief. Sadaqa is also described by the Prophet (PBUH) as proof of faith; he said (PBUH) ‘…and Charity is a proof’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, No. 25). Muslims are free to give sadaqa to anyone they think needs it. There are many verses in the Quran encouraging Muslims to be charitable, promising donors big rewards, and emphasising the benefits for donors in gaining happiness in their souls and increasing their money by what is called baraka, the blessing. The Prophet (PBUH) said: ‘Allah The Almighty Says, “O son of Adam, spend and I will spend on you”’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, No. 548).

2.1.5.1 Types of sadaqa

Sadaqa can be divided into two types depending on the duration of benefit: the ordinary sadaqa, which is finished with the giving itself; and sadaqa jareya (the perpetual), or waqf (Islamic endowments), the benefits of which last longer (or even forever). Waqf is a term that means perpetual charity (Fauzia, 2013; Shaqra, 2006; Ahmed, 2004). It can be explained as strategic charity aimed at implementing sustainable development within a society, where the benefits extend for generations. The Prophet (PBUH) said: ‘When a son of Adam (i.e. any human being) dies his deeds are discontinued, with three exceptions: Sadaqah, whose benefit is continuous; or knowledge from which benefit continues to be reaped, or a righteous child who supplicates for him’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 7, No. 178). This saying was repeated generation after generation, and, since the era of the Prophet (PBUH), many Muslims have set aside money and wealth for Allah Almighty as a continuous form of charity. This is known in Islam as waqf (Kahf, 2002; Ahmed, 2004).

Waqf literally means ‘hold’. The word waqf is used in Islam to mean ‘holding certain property and preserving it for the specific benefit of certain philanthropic activities and prohibiting any use or disposition of it outside of that specific objective. Waqf (plural: Awqaf)
is called *Habs* (plural: *Ahbas*) in North and West Africa’ (Kahf, 2002, p.2). Ahmed (2004, p.28) defines *waqf* as ‘a voluntary act of charity that comes under the general terms of *sadaqa*, “stand still, hold still, not to let go”. *Waqf* implies restraining from consumption and sale and not to let go.’

*Waqf* simply means that instead of giving monetary contributions directly to the needy, money is invested in projects so that the usufruct can be permanently available for different types of good deed (Fauzia et al., 2018). Atia (2013, p.105) terms such philanthropic projects ‘business with *Allah*’. The idea of *waqf* is to eliminate dependency on the never-ending charity cycle (Abdul-Karim, 2010; Alam, 2010). Islamic endowments nowadays have their own frameworks and institutions in most countries that deal with *waqf* management and investment, asset preservation, and profit distribution (Abdul-Karim, 2010).

The distinction of *waqf* from ordinary *sadaqa* is that it is a system with a sustainable profit stream. Ernst and Young’s ‘Islamic Funds and Investment Report’ (2010) indicated that the market value of *waqf* assets was then around USD 105 billion, with the largest segment located in the Gulf countries (cited in Alkharafi et al., 2015). *Waqf* draws its force by merging the power of economics and social development. Singer (2008) writes that the donor’s aims in making *waqf* fall under two principles: personal reward from God in the afterlife and benefit to the community. The usufruct of *waqf* is perpetual; it contributes to the state economy by creating new job opportunities for the management of *waqf* (Singer, 2008). Thus, *waqf* has the dual benefits of job creation internally for the *waqf* institution itself, and externally for the charitable distribution of profit.

2.1.6 Some essential criteria in Islamic charity

As stated earlier, the differences between the types of Islamic charity is that there is obligatory, optional, and sustainable charity. The question here is what makes people choose a certain type of charity. What factors affect their choices of what to give and whom to give it to? Certain criteria play a major role in choosing a type of charity, according to what I found among my informants in this research. The diversification of charity types in Islamic regulations means there are many options for Muslims to choose from and for the needy to benefit from. The following subsections discuss two main criteria that were found in the contemporary Kuwaiti charity sector while conducting this research.

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2.1.6.1 Reward calculation in Islam

One of the most important issues in choosing a charity practice is the reward to be gained from the charity. Zakat is compulsory, if one meets the conditions, but sadaqa varies depending on several aspects. Rewards can be duplicated where Islam provides evidence for this, in the Quran or Sunnah. Charity rewards are affected by (1) the advantage of place: where you do the charity, (2) the advantage of time: when you do the charity, and (3) the extended benefit: how long this charity will benefit the receivers (Alnaeem, 2001).

These three factors are supported by a variety of evidence in Islam. Firstly, the advantage of the place: there is a double reward if you perform any worship in Mecca, such as praying or giving charity or performing any other good deeds (Alnaeem, 2001). Some Kuwaitis tend to spend some of their charity in Mecca in order to have this advantage.

Secondly, the advantage of the time, such as Ramadan in general, and Lailat Alqadr (the destiny night) in particular, which refers to the last days of Ramadan; these times have double rewards too (Schielke, 2009). The last ten days in Ramadan in Kuwait witness the most active practices because of Lailat Alqadr. This is the night when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), and it is one of the last ten days of Ramadan, where the mercy and blessings are numerous. On this night, Allah forgives sins and accepts prayers and worshippers are rewarded double for good deeds, which is equivalent to of the same for 1,000 months, as mentioned in the Quran: ‘The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months’ (Holy Quran 97:3). Muslims are keen to work hard on these days, seeking forgiveness and engaging in various acts of worship. The exact date of the night is unknown; the Prophet (PBUH) was trying to tell his friends exactly which night it is, but they disagreed amongst themselves and he did not tell them. But there are some signs, such as, it is on an odd rather than an even night of Ramadan. So Muslims try to do their best for all the last ten nights, spending all night in prayer.

Thirdly, there is the extended benefit, which is the sustainable charity, waqf. This benefit will last for a long time, and the rewards will be in counting until the benefit ends, though this may even not be until judgment day.

Some of the participants I interviewed liked to diversify their charity choices to obtain these three advantages, and some of them would merge two or more together, such as donating for
waqf in Mecca during Ramadan. Many Kuwaitis – as stated by my informants – are aware of sustainable charities and nowadays tend to prefer these to other charitable projects. Yet ordinary charity – giving small amounts to the needy anytime – still exists (Alnaeem, 2001).

2.1.6.2 Charity between secrecy and recognition

Secrecy is one of the key characteristics of *sadaqa*. Islam encourages Muslims to donate in secret. Giving in secret, for the donor, is done to preserve self-purification, i.e. it keeps the ‘giving’ pure and sincerely for God without any intention of showing off, obtaining praise, or being famous. Secrecy also protects the dignity and feelings of those who receive the donation (Bensaid & Grine, 2013).

Secret charity is better, for God Almighty says in the Holy Quran, ‘If you disclose your charitable expenditures, they are good; but if you conceal them and give them to the poor, it is better for you, and He will remove from you some of your misdeeds’ (Holy Quran 2:271). In addition, the Prophet (PBUH) in his hadith ‘Seven whom Allah will shade on the Day of Judgement’ mentioned ‘A man who gives in charity and hides it, such that his left-hand does not know what his right hand gives in charity’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 4, No. 652). This an exaggeration in order to urge individuals to use their best in secrecy while performing a good act. However, it does not mean that a person cannot do charity in public. Giving to charity can be done publicly or secretly; the latter is more rewarding, yet in some cases giving to charity publicly is favoured if it inspires others to do the same.

In Kuwait as in other countries, there are many different ways to give charity secretly but nevertheless fulfil the purpose of inspiring others to do the same (Alshatti, 2014). For instance, many NGOs now accept donations online, while posting on social media about donating encourages others to do the same, while it does not mean that the person has already donated or declare how much that person has given. However, this is only applicable to charitable projects that accept donations online. On the other hand, engaging in charity does not only include making donations; it can involve working and volunteering too. So there are still chances for some people who like to engage in charity yet are not happy to do so in public to do so with secrecy.

In Kuwait, this issue is varied among people and individuals. Some of my informants didn’t mind engaging publicly but were keen not to show how much money they donate. Others,
liked their donations to be reported publicly. Those who have seen how they can affect others by posting about their charitable engagement on social media know that this is better for the public interest than to do it secretly. These issues affect people’s choices in charity. In this research this was obvious mostly among individuals. Yet many of those who do charity publicly still participate secretly as well, as my informants told me.

2.2 Charity in Kuwait

The Kuwaiti government has three institution dealings with different types of charity: (1) Zakat House, which deals with zakat and sadaqa, (2) the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF), which only deals with waqf, the perpetual sadaqa, and (3) the Public Authority for Minors Affairs, which plays the role of guardianship of Kuwaiti minors who do not have a guardian and supervises the guardians who hold the money of these minors. These three government bodies are regulated together by a separate board under the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Awqaf. In this research the focus will be on Zakat House. The regulation of charities among government bodies and NGOs in Kuwait is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL). Further detail on charity by NGOs and Zakat House is given in Chapters 7 and 8.

2.2.1 Kuwait Foundation History

The history of Kuwait goes back more than 400 years. Kuwait was founded in the seventeenth century (1601 - 1700), and the city flourished after it was settled by the Alsabah family with the Alutub tribe after it was under the rule of Bani Khalid. The residents of Kuwait agreed at the time for Sabah bin Jaber (Known as Sabah Al-Awal: literally Sabah the first) to take over the presidency and the affairs of government as their ruler, then he was granted the title of the district governor (In Turkish: Kaymakam) in 1718 AD by the Ottoman governor of Baghdad. Most of Kuwait's inhabitants, since its foundation, were engaged in pearl diving and maritime trade between India and the Arabian Peninsula. This all helped turn Kuwait into a commercial centre in the northern Arabian Gulf and a major port for the Arabian Peninsula. Although Kuwait was ruled by 15 sheikhs since the year 1716, Sheikh Mubarak Alsabah (1896-1915) is generally considered the real and actual founder of the
state, and the Kuwaiti constitution stipulates in its fourth article that all the rulers of Kuwait after him are his offspring with his sons and his sons' sons. (Alrasheed, 1978; Alghunaim, 2001)

In 1899, the political conflict with the Ottomans prompted the Kuwait's ruling dynasty, the Alsabah family, to conclude a protectorate agreement that assigned responsibility for Kuwait's foreign affairs to the United Kingdom, so that Kuwait became a British protectorate under Ottoman rule. After the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Kuwait became an independent emirate under British protection. This situation continued until June 19, 1961, when the protection agreement was rescinded so that Kuwait would gain its full independence. Since the day of Kuwait independence, Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Karim Qassem started raising the historical demands for the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq, claiming that Kuwait is an Iraqi territory and was separated by British colonialism from Iraq (Alghunaim, 2001).

2.2.2 History of charitable practices in Kuwait

Charitable activities are documented in Kuwait dating back to the 19th century, and continue to nowadays. There are several records of the existence of concepts and practices around social solidarity and mutual aid. The old history of charitable work in the State of Kuwait shows several instances of charitable aid donated by the people of Kuwait, by citizens and rulers, by merchants and low-income people to neighbouring tribes. Despite the limited of ability in the past, the charitable aid provided by the people of Kuwait to tribespeople gives witness to a longstanding tradition of giving among the people of Kuwait. For instance, records note, (1) the contribution of Kuwait during the crisis that occurred to the residents of Persia, the Alhailak crisis in 1868 (Abdulmughni, 1977; p. 132); (2) The Ottoman Empire’s distress in the Istanbul fire in 1910 and Kuwait’s donation to it, and the subsequent Ottoman Empire’s Medal granted in 1912 to Sheikh Mubarak Alsabah (the ruler of Kuwait at the time); and (3) Multiple donations offered by Kuwait in 1934 to help Palestine (Abdulmughni, 1977).

1 Alhailak is diminutive of the Arabic word Alahalk, which literally means perdition. Alhailak crisis (1868 to 1871) is a big famine in Persia and the Arabian Peninsula, where famine continued in the region for three years with the interruption of the rain. Many of the people in Persia emigrated to Kuwait because of this famine, some of them settled in Kuwait as another homeland. Still, there are Kuwaitis with roots back in Persia from that migration (Abdulmughni, 1977).
1977; Alshatti, 2001). There are, it is understood, massively political angles to charity (Lowi, 2019) from this old Kuwait history. The history of charity in Kuwait was a way to project positive identities, whether by sheikhs and traders (old time) or by the modern nation (contemporary Kuwait). There is also a tradition in the region of rulers using charity to help bind their subjects to them, and to project positive images both internally and externally; and also among old Kuwaitis - traders and residents- the use of charity to bind the Kuwaitis as a nation. This tradition has been built on and expanded by the modern nation and everyday citizens have also taken it up.

Alshatti (2001) documented that the charitable work history of the State of Kuwait has passed through three stages: First, the individual initiatives. Due to the smallness of society and the simplicity of its composition, there were no governmental or private institutions at that time to dedicate for charitable or voluntary work. Everyone in society, from both genders, contributed with individual efforts, each according to their capacity and capabilities. So the rulers had a role in managing the affairs of the country, scholars had a role in education, and the merchants had a role in helping the weak and the needy. Charity work took different types, such as direct monetary donations, building mosques, charitable endowments (waqf) whose proceeds were spent on community needs, opening private schools and supporting them financially. The role of charity at that time was to assist the ruler in managing the affairs of the country by providing the people of Kuwait with necessary services. "Despite the development of society and the establishment of governmental and non-governmental charitable institutions, individual charitable work in Kuwait still constitutes an important factor of charitable work in building the modern state" (See Chapter 5) (Alshatti, 2001, p. 146).

Second, the group work. "The collective charitable work took the form of spontaneity, simplicity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation of the people of the community" (Alshatti, 2001, p.147). The institutional aspect of charity is not taken into consideration because of the society’s small size and lack of potential. Records suggest that there was sponsorship by merchants of aid to ships in distress around the port city, and it is stated that the merchants did not hold the main concern of protecting their wealth on the ships, rather they were concerned about other Kuwaiti sailors, who should not be at risk because of their work (Abdulmughni, 1977). The most common group charity work, in the past, was known as *faza’a* volunteering. *faza’a* is literally means ‘hurry to help’. This is where the people in the
community hurry to help by collecting donations collectively for any harm that befalls the people of Kuwait, to meet the needs and to solve any problem they face. For Instance, the "faza'a of saving ships" (Abdulmughni, 1977, p. 132). Ships were the source of livelihood for many Kuwaitis during this period, used in trading; this maritime trade work is fraught with risks. Ships's faza'a is a campaign to rescue the ships that facing troubles in the sea, the Arabian Gulf. The campaigns were undertaken voluntarily and quickly, where one or more of the wealthier traders are taking charge to pay the expenses of the rescue campaign as donations. They used to raise the Kuwaiti flag on the campaign ship, marking the start of the process of the rescue campaign, while the rescue ships were reaching around 100 volunteers (Abdulmughni, 1977; Mutwali, 2015).

The third stage of charitable work in the history of Kuwait is institutional charity work. The emergence of collective voluntary and charity institutions during the 20th century had several reasons, despite the simplicity of society, its limited capabilities and the population at that time. The mutual relations based on cooperation and respect between the rulers and the ruled, the possibilities for initiatives, and the tradition by then among the Kuwaiti people to do charity work led the rulers to allow the establishment of various civil and charitable institutions. The first charitable project in Kuwait, serving education, is the Mubarakiya School, which allowed people to collectively contribute to the school’s establishment in 1911 (Alnori, 1988).

In addition, Kuwait’s strategic location overlooking the Gulf played its part. This region is considered a corridor linking countries and as such it saw the passage of many merchants, scholars, writers and thinkers entering to and passing through the State of Kuwait. Such contact with Kuwaitis had a clear impact to establish educational, cultural and charitable institutions. For example, the establishment of the Arab Charitable Association in 1913 (Alshatti, 2001, p.150) contributed to the restoration and repair of old mosques, while also helping poor families and equipping a charitable clinic for the sick.

Kuwait's rulers engaged in charity as well as encouraging individual and collective charitable work roles, long before the establishment of official charitable institutions. Sheikh Jaber (The First) - the son of Abdullah Alsabah - was named in 1813 Jaber Al-aish (literally the rice) because of his generosity in distributing rice. He used to cook rice for the poor. His grandson, Sheikh Abdullah (The Second), who ruled between 1865-1881, opened his house to the Kuwaitis and other delegations who sought refuge in Kuwait during the year of the famine.
Sheikh Salem Al-Mubarak, the fifth ruler of Kuwait, who ruled from 1917 to 1921, was known for his love of charity and his assistance to the needy. Jaber Al-Khair was named Charitable Person of the Year in 1995. And the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad received the title of Prince of Humanity in 2014 (Alshatti, 2001, p.272).

Although charitable giving is fundamental to Islam, it may also be used by social actors for political ends, including establishing hierarchical power structures (Lowi, 2019). Al-Nakib (2016) suggests a deliberate political strategy of doing charity from leaders early on, to 'whitewash' as we might say, their actions, and draw people close to them. The engagement of rulers in charity is obvious in Kuwait's history, mostly for Kuwaiti society internally. However, the rulers' role took a more global direction in contemporary charity in Kuwait, for instance, with Kuwait's position toward the world as a giver and humanitarian state and with the titles obtained by Kuwaiti rulers and the state. Lowi (2019) suggests that charity in Gulf provides a window into the conduct of politics and the relationships between the state and society.

2.2.3 Charity Legislation of laws in relation to the Kuwaiti state, national and international politics

Systems of regulation of charitable work passed through different stages. In the beginning, the establishment of the Affairs Department was on December 14, 1954. Its mission was to supervise social affairs activities, at that time there were nearly 20 public benefit institutions were established including charitable institutions. Later on, after Kuwait's independence in 1961, voluntary social work was codified in (texts) to the community to adhere to the values they had of solidarity and compassion from the heritage of parents and grandparents (MoSAL, 1997). Law No. 24 was issued in 1962, which in its first article allows the conduct of a social, cultural, religious or sports activity that is not aimed at profit. It was common in Kuwait to call these institutional non-profit organisations charitable associations or public benefits associations. After that, the number of registered non-profit associations rose to 36 in the 1970s, and their number reached 55 in 1995, organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MoSAL).

The State of Kuwait legislated laws to regulate the institutional establishment of the public benefits associations and charitable associations. The state has also established governmental institutions to aid Islamic countries and peoples, including the Zakat House, Kuwait Awqaf.
Public Foundation, various state government funds to provide aid to Arab and Islamic countries, and the state’s contributions to support international institutions and funds such as the Islamic Development Bank, Arab funds, and international and regional non-governmental organizations. The state provides some facilities through its institutions, such as the free transportation service on its planes and ships, and the aid is transported on government and military planes and ships. In addition to honouring and encouraging philanthropists, she also honoured the late Dr Abdulrahman Alsumait and Lulwa Al-Qatami (Alshatti, 2002, Alrashidi, 1995)

The organizational forms for Non-profit Organizations by the Law No. 24 of 1962 expanded from Public Benefit Associations to have Public Charities Associations and Non-profit Companies.

Organizations designated as public charities are governed by an additional set of regulations that are not applicable to other public benefits associations, primarily the Ministerial Decision No. 48\A of 2015 on Public Charities Executive Regulations. Public charities can receive authorization to engage in public fundraising and campaigns, and thus organizations that wish to raise funds from the public generally choose to register in this form. Public charities require specific approval from the ministry to engage in public fundraising. (Kuwait Philanthropy Law, 2017, p.7)

During the Iraqi invasion the charitable financial flows was affected, even though there was some indirect and secret charitable initiatives in Kuwait with the limited capabilities that time, such as helping the foreigners who lived in Kuwait and are not able to get the access to daily needs.

When I was twelve years old, in the early months of the Iraqi invasion, I vividly remember my father taking me and my younger siblings to a house in the neighbourhood near a school that Iraqi soldiers had used as a military base. A man came out of this house to open the door, wearing a Kuwaiti thobe (dishdasha) with a ghutra (traditional men’s head covering), but he spoke English and had blonde hair! I learnt that he was a British man who was stuck in this house with his wife, while a circular had been distributed by the Iraqis to kill anyone who hides, covers up, or helps any foreigner! My father used to take him food that had been prepared with the residents of the neighbourhood because he was unable to go to the supermarket while the Iraqi soldiers were everywhere. My father had told me later on, that they allow him to visit the supermarket, to choose his own needs,
wearing black Abaya and covering his face with black cover to not be noticed by Iraqi soldiers.

The charitable regulation system was subjected to change that affected the flexibility of fundraising regulation that Kuwait Charities were enjoyed it prior to the incident of 11 September 2001. The Kuwait's aid policy has been influenced by international counter-terrorism efforts (Alshaheen, 2018), which led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to engage with MoSAL in regulating charitable organisations. In addition to the international pressure, given the strong US presence in Kuwait since the Iraq war. Alshaheen (2015) argues that MoFA has taken a 'conciliatory approach' that is notable in their aid and development policy to the contrast approaches taken by other Muslim states in the aid policies (Alshaheen, 2015, p. 34). The MoFA intervened in the financial responsibility in the financial transfers of charity operations, which formerly supervision belongs to the MoSAL only.

Prior to September 11th, Alshaheen (2015) stated that there was no 'solid system' for charity and everything was handled by tolerance. In order to establish a legal framework to legalise and monitor the charitable activities the MoSAL established a new department specialised for charity organisations, and issued some regulation list such as prohibiting cash donations and money transfers overseas, while allow it only through the MoFA (See chapter 5).

Dr Alsabeeh, the Minister of MoSAL at that time, justified the changes in the new measures by MoSAL and MoFA was to "oblige charities to issue a transparency document identifying the source and final destination of the funds they have raised and to obtain officially stamped receipts from the ministry, otherwise the collection of donations would be considered illegal" (cited in Alshaheen, 2015, p. 35). The new charity law regulations in monitoring moneteral donation is subjected to the Law NO. 85 OF 2013 on approving the accession of the state of Kuwait to the international convention of the suppression of the financing of terrorism. Law No. 106 of 2013 on anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (Kuwait Philanthropy Law, 2017, pp.6–7).
2.2.4 Charity Governmental Bodies

2.2.4.1 Zakat House

The establishment of Zakat House was a response to the proposal of some deputies in the Kuwaiti parliament that they should collect and distribute zakat funds. Zakat House was established in 1982 as a public body with an independent budget. It is a legal entity and is subject to the supervision of the Kuwaiti government, specifically the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Zakat House’s role is not limited to collecting and distributing zakat funds, but also involves collecting general donations – sadaqa, or as they name it, khairat, for such causes as poverty relief, orphans, and various charitable projects. Zakat House is entitled to spend zakat funds and donations internally within Kuwait and externally in the wider world using high quality systems and administrative, financial, and information technologies. In addition, it can invest donated funds to create a continuous income for its charitable work.

Zakat House’s budget relies on four sources, whether for zakat or khairat. The first is the Kuwaiti government; the Kuwait Financial Ministry is allocated a specific budget for Zakat House yearly, since it is a government body. This budget is used to pay employees’ salaries and to conduct certain programmes. This is called the General Budget (or Public Treasury), Mezania Amma. The second source is the state’s contribution of around 1.5 million Kuwaiti Dinar a year (GBP 3 million). Since Zakat House’s monthly expenses exceed two million Kuwaiti Dinar, the state’s contribution accounts for less than one month’s budget. The third source originates from zakat law which is imposed in Kuwait on Kuwaiti companies, which are required to pay 1% of their profits to Zakat House or any government body that they choose to contribute to. This is called literally ‘zakat law’, but it is not compatible with the legitimacy of zakat in Islam, as discussed below. The fourth source is donations collected from people, whether zakat or sadaqa, online or via Zakat House’s branches (source: interview with Financial Department, Zakat House).

2.2.4.2 The Sharia Office in Zakat House

The core of Zakat House is the Sharia Office, which specialises in all Islamic affairs in Zakat House; it is under the direct supervision of the general manager. It has two main departments, the Awareness and Sharia Supervision Department, and the Research and Legal Studies Department. There is a higher authority than the Sharia Office at Zakat House, which is the
Sharia Board, which is under the direct supervision of the board of directors. Its main purpose is to put Zakat House’s policies in place and direct the work to make sure it is in conformity with Islamic law. The members of the Sharia Board are chosen by the board of directors, and they are all Islamic scholars who are qualified to issue advisory opinions (fatwas). The Sharia Office is the link between the Sharia Board and Zakat House.

Each new project in Zakat House is referred by the general manager to the board of directors – which consists of sharia scholars from Kuwait who are set by the Board of Directors – and is subject to the Sharia Board’s approval. If there are any issues, the Sharia Board will state their fatwa. In turn, the Sharia Office circulates every fatwa to the departments of Zakat House, depending on the specialism of each department; for example, they provide the financial department with fatwas about deposing money in commercial banks or non-Islamic banks.

The Awareness and Sharia Supervision Department conducts awareness seminars and lectures about zakat, responds to inquiries and fatwas from departments inside Zakat House and from the public in Kuwait, issues flyers about zakat, and makes awareness and monitoring visits to all departments. Recently this department provided an electronic service for fatwas, called ‘Ask the Mufti’; Mufti literally means the Islamic scholar who issues the fatwa. They also displayed all the previous fatwas on their website, with a search feature.

The Research and Legal Studies Department audits all publications, providing departments with any topic related to zakat, such as orphans or zakat categories. The most important role for this department is conducting an annual Seminar of Contemporary Zakat Issues (see below). In addition, this department supervises the Zakat House Library, which is open to the public, who can borrow specialised books on sharia. The department also helps to educate employees via a weekly electronic bulletin, in which the department chooses a book and provides a summary of it to all employees in Zakat House.

2.2.4.3 The Seminar of Contemporary Zakat Issues

There is a standing committee dedicated to preparing for and conducting this annual event, a committee called the ‘General Secretariat of the Seminars of Contemporary Zakat Issues’. Its function is to determine the topics of each seminar, organise the panels, register the visitors and participants, reserve a location for the seminar, and deal with any other administration
issues. So far, they have conducted twenty-five seminars. After each seminar, a book is published with all the papers presented, discussions, and the final statement, around 400 pages. These annual books are audited and prepared for publication by the Research and Legal Studies Department.

I met Dr Jassim, the director of the Sharia Office and the Sharia Board rapporteur at Zakat House. He said that this annual seminar is considered an important event in the Islamic world in the field of zakat: ‘You cannot find any research on zakat which doesn’t refer to the Contemporary Zakat Issues Seminars organised by Zakat House’. The seminars derive their strength from the fact that most of the participants are pioneering sharia scholars, and specialists in Islamic accounting and relevant legal issues from all over the Islamic world. Zakat House are keen to host the seminar in a different country every year. Ibrahim explained that this is a big chance for more participants to be involved, since not all people are able to travel to Kuwait every year, which reflects Kuwait’s increasingly international approach to charity. This decision was made to achieve benefits in many ways, for example in order to spread awareness of the zakat obligation abroad and to enrich the subject with expertise by reaching out to Muslim scholars and involving them in the discussion of contemporary zakat issues. In addition, it aims to provide scholars with the voice of Zakat House and its role, and disseminate the recent fatwas issued by Zakat House.

They have conducted seminars in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Sudan, and many other countries. I asked about how they reconcile the diversity of opinions and the differences of jurists in the fatwas issued in these seminars. Ibrahim stated that each topic has to be presented by three scholars, with three papers on the same issue for twenty minutes each, then the discussion starts. All opinions are recorded; sometimes there are differences and sometimes there is consensus. In each panel, there is a drafting committee composed of a group of scholars and researchers who gather all opinions and formulate them as a fatwa or a recommendation, which is discussed in the final statement. Ibrahim confirmed that since these seminars specialise in sharia, it is necessary to record all opinions (whether agreement or disagreement) in order to be a valid reference for researchers.

It has to be mentioned that there have been no female scholars or attendees in these twenty-five seminars. Ibrahim commented on my question about women participating in these discussions; he said that seminar topics are complicated, and the timing is extended to a long time, often until midnight, which may not suit Muslim women’s style of life, in addition to
the fact that some scholars are concerned about the presence of women with them at these events, which may be a reason to prevent scholars from attending. Some sharia scholars hold the opinion that mixing women with men is prohibited in Islam.

I think that unfortunately some Muslim men have the view that women are not qualified to discuss complicated sharia issues. This does not originate in Islamic regulations, since most of the Prophet’s sayings, the hadith, were narrated by the prophet’s wife Aisha, and the Prophet’s friends asked her about many issues after the Prophet’s death. It could be that cultural and accumulated ideas have led them to prohibit women from participation. This is unfortunately widespread among some Muslim scholars, though not in Zakat House, as I saw many women involved in positions in different departments, other than the Sharia Board. Yet there are very few women who are qualified to issue fatwas or who are even trying to be in this position.

One of the achievements that Zakat House is most proud of, as Ibrahim mentioned, is that they dedicated three seminars to establishing a model of zakat law, with an explanatory memorandum and explanatory notes. This zakat law elaborates the contemporary procedures that the state can follow to apply zakat as it is regulated in Islam. For instance, how to determine the properties among companies and individuals and how to check the status of zakat recipients. It is printed in a book and has been drafted in legal form, ready for implementation in any Islamic country, and available to all. Sharia and legal experts were involved in the preparation of this, such as the Sufi Abu Taleb, an Egyptian legal expert, a senior advisor in the Arab world, who passed away in 2008. In addition to issuing the model of zakat law, there is another publication, Zakat Computation Guidelines, which has been issued to companies, defined in both accounting and legal aspects. Some seminars are available online and some are under construction; the aim is to make them available to everyone as soon as possible.

2.2.4.4 Implementing zakat and Kuwait’s zakat law

In 2006 Kuwait enacted Law No. 46 ‘Regarding Zakat and the Contribution of Public and Closed Shareholding Companies to the State’s Budget’. This states that 1% of companies’ net profits shall be collected annually. Companies now have to calculate the zakat amount from their annual report. They have the right to allocate their zakat or part of it to a particular
public service. Article 1 of this law states that if any entity provides incorrect statements or abstains from submitting their statements, with the intention of evading the payment, they will be subject to imprisonment for a period of not more than three years and/or a fine of not more than KD 5,000, along with paying the due amount. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for collecting zakat from companies for the public treasury and is in charge of determining the procedure of collection and payments, including the distribution of zakat after getting approval from the Fatwa Authority at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (Ministry of Finance Law 46/2006 publication).

In an interview at the Ministry of Finance in the taxation department about Kuwaiti zakat law, Hind, the taxation head division, stated that ‘it is called zakat law, but it is not identical to the permanent provision of zakat’. If we analyse it in comparison with zakat in Islam as discussed above, firstly, the Kuwaiti zakat law percentage is 1%, while in Islam more broadly the zakat percentage is 2.5%. Secondly, the percentage should be taken from a business’s capital according to Islam (on applicable assets), while in the law it is taken from net profit. Thirdly, distribution has to be to one of the eight zakat categories mentioned in Islam, while in the law the company has the right to allocate its zakat or part of it to public services, which sounds more like a corporate social responsibility contribution than zakat. If a company does not allocate it, the amount will be sent to the state treasury and then transferred to Zakat House. To compare zakat in theology and zakat in practice here, three conditions are not met, the percentage, zakat threshold (nisab), and the beneficiaries. So it is far from what zakat means in Islam.

Regarding the sharia perspective on the Kuwaiti zakat law, I asked the Sharia Office at Zakat House about this law, and whether it is compatible with sharia or not. Ibrahim, Sharia Office manager, said: ‘This law is not valid in sharia for companies as it is incomplete’. He explained that it was unfortunately from a political era when politicians wanted to impose a tax on companies in the name of sharia. Zakat House had issued a fatwa on this, among the fatwas published from the Contemporary Zakat Issues Seminars. I asked if Zakat House asked the Ministry of Finance to change the name of the zakat law so as not to conflict with the real zakat in Islam. Ibrahim stated that Zakat House, as the government body in charge of zakat in Kuwait, provided an explanatory memorandum to explain the nature of the law in terms of Islamic legitimacy. However, there has been no action regarding it so far; the response was that the law is called a law regarding zakat, not a full zakat law.
Since *zakat* is a personal obligation in Islam, company management, in the name of all staff members, should be keen to fulfil this obligation, as requested by Allah. The procedures require all companies who are subjected to the state law to pay 1% of their net profits, or it shall be calculated as the 2.5% of the capital that is fixed for a year (the period of one year is called *hawl* in Islam). Then the amount paid to the state shall be deducted and the rest of the amount paid to any *zakat* body, or alternatively the company can distribute it in their own way according to *zakat* categories.

In the case of Kuwait, we can say that the state uses companies’ annual reports as visible money, and that the Kuwait government has the right to oblige them to pay *zakat*. However, *zakat* law in Kuwait is not formulated in accordance with Islamic law. The Financial Department at Zakat House confirmed that they are not aware in advance whether companies are going to pay *zakat* to the state according to the *zakat* law (1% of net profit) rather than to Zakat House. Zakat House does not know the annual income of Kuwaiti companies (and thus the level of their *zakat* payment) in advance and therefore does not rely on it in their yearly budget. Some companies do not comply with what they are legally required to provide to Zakat House within their budget. Some companies are not forced to pay their *zakat* to the state. In Saudi Arabia, by way of comparison, *zakat* is mandatory for all companies, at a rate of 2.5% of capital, paid to the state. ‘This guarantees a permanent income to the Saudi Zakat Foundation’, Basma said, a senior in the financial management of the Zakat House. Zakat House in Kuwait remains preoccupied with obtaining an income via charity projects for families who are waiting for the annual *zakat*. In Saudi Arabia, *zakat* is applied to all companies so the income is very clear for the *zakat* authority and they have no difficulties collecting the funds, unlike what happens in Kuwait.

### 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated on the essential elements of Islamic charity and its implementation in the State of Kuwait. Charity in Islam has two types, obligatory (*zakat*), and optional (*sadaqa*). *Zakat* is categorized into two types, *zakat* for money and *zakat* on bodies, which is called *zakat al fitr*. Each type has its conditions and amount. *Sadaqa* have two kinds, the normal *sadaqa* that you pay anytime for anyone, and the perpetual *sadaqa*, the benefits of which last for a long time, and which is called *waqf*. 
Zakat is important because it is one of the five pillars of Islam. Most definitions of zakat by Islamic scholars do not show how zakat should be collected in the Islamic state. Alyafee (2013) developed a contemporary definition that includes this missing part. In the early Islamic state, the public treasury, ‘Beit el mal’, was used to collect and distribute zakat. Nowadays, most Muslim countries have dedicated an institution that specialises in this mission of collecting and distributing zakat, yet zakat is not compulsory in Kuwait as in many countries. In Kuwait, zakat and sadaqa are accepted by government bodies and NGOs as formal charity channels. The advantages of the diversification in charity types in Islamic regulations is that there are many options for Muslims to choose from and for the needy to benefit from. There are several criteria that were obvious in contemporary Kuwaiti charity and that affect people’s choices of what to give, how to give it, and to whom to give it: Firstly, Reward calculation in Islam. Secondly, giving charity secretly. Islamic scholars in Muslim countries could activate their roles towards Muslim public benefit (Almaslaha Al Amma) by issuing fatwas, directing people in the best implementation of Islamic charity, and remodelling the charity regulations.
Chapter 3: Ramadan: The Exceptional Month

3.1 Introduction

Ramadan in Kuwait is a mixture of universal forms of Islamic piety, that many Muslims strive to have, with distinctive traditions that remain from generation to generation. Previous ethnographies have discussed Ramadan as an exceptional month in relation to personal piety in Muslim countries (Atia, 2013; Schielke, 2009). The focus of this chapter is on the particular significance of the month of Ramadan as a time for ‘charitable activities’ in the State of Kuwait as well as the diversification in the ways in which people relate to charity during this time.

Although some of my respondents argued that every day should be a day of piety and Muslims should make the same efforts all year around, for many Muslims Ramadan is the exceptional month for the doing of good deeds. The importance of making concerted efforts towards achieving piety in this month in Muslims’ lives is drawn from the virtues of Ramadan, as mentioned in the Quran and in the sayings (hadith) of the Prophet (PBUH). Rewards during Ramadan come from multiple sides: rewards for fasting, rewards for feeding fasting people, and the doubling of rewards for worship in this month (see Chapter 2). The reward is increased in parallel to the hardship in worship, God’s daily forgiveness in this month at the time of iftar, and the importance of charitable giving to God. Moreover, Ramadan contains a once-a-year chance, the night of destiny (Lailat Alqadr), the night when the Holy Quran was revealed; charitable deeds in this night are doubled to an equivalent of around eighty-three years of good deeds, as already discussed (Ata, 1990). As observed by Schielke (2009, p.27), in the context of Ramadan in Egypt, there is a temporally exceptional ‘focus on reward and piety’.

Many people in Kuwait choose charitable activities as their exceptional activity during Ramadan, as in other countries. Ramadan is the most prominent season for almsgiving in the Islamic calendar. Most Muslims pay their annual zakat at Ramadan; however, this chapter will focus on sadaqa, the optional alms; zakat will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter. For some, charity is not only a religious obligation, it is optional piety that aims to bring the believer closer to God during Ramadan by increasing good deeds as much as is possible, seeking for the rewards that are characteristic of this holy month.
Ramadan has the feature of blessing, that lets people dedicate their piety carefully toward the most rewarded act. An example of this includes donating to a charity which has long-lasting benefit, such as sustainable sadqa, thereby resulting in continuous rewards from God. During Ramadan there is a diversification in Kuwait of charitable practices performed from different perspectives, and people differ in their choices and beliefs. Mittermaier (2019) argues that giving to God is the main aim of Islamic charity in the context of Egypt, thus the focus is on the giver’s relation with God. Atia (2013) suggests – also in the context of Egypt – that Islamic charity is an activity devoted towards changing and improving the lives of the recipients. However, in Kuwait, there is a wide range of influences on how people give and engage in charity. Some people give secretly and anonymously, while others are personally involved in charity in public. Some people prefer to socialise in collective activities while engaging in charity. In this chapter, I explore the sentiments that Kuwaitis use to express their engagement in charity in Ramadan - involving preparing and distributing iftar meals and especially targeting migrants living in Kuwait - and discuss how this is modelling charity to their children. Children and teens are brought into the iftar activities as a part of raising them to be good citizens. This is done collectively through charity teams, aligned with aspirations of crafting and expressing a ‘charitable subjectivity’, and linking this work to various dimensions of everyday life. I argue that Kuwaitis, through charity activities during Ramadan, are expressing their Kuwaitiness in social and collective charitable activities; these charitable activities bring together dimensions of giving which scholars have seen as different, giving to God (Mittermaier, 2019) and giving as a means for socio-economic and moral development (Atia, 2013).

Charity is undergoing a significant transformation in Kuwait. Traditional charity practices in Kuwait in the past were performed mostly within families and local neighbourhoods. There was a strong connection between givers and recipients. Donors used to give to people they knew locally, meaning they could see the impact and the transformation that their giving created (Alshatti, 2014). After charitable giving began to be taken over by NGOs and government bodies it became more anonymous and more global, with less connection between giver and receiver. Giving anonymously through a mediator led to the loss of that personal connection. The only connection created is through the news and reports of charity projects which are given by NGOs to the donors. I argue that using social media in charity has the potential to recreate that personal connection. Social media recreates the opportunity for the giver to see the impact that their charity has had. People can track the results of their
donations through social media and witness the transformation in which their donations result. Saunders (2013) states that although charities are diversifying in order to increase fundraising revenue, the existing literature has not paid attention to how and why charitable practices have diversified.

This chapter demonstrates the ways in which Kuwaitis express their national identity (their Kuwaitiness) through the diversification of charity practices during Ramadan. It documents the ways in which people relate to charitable giving, and the different collective work that people are using charity for during Ramadan, alongside those relating to their personal and spiritual motives. Specifically, this chapter explores, through ethnography, two main aspects of charitable giving in Kuwait during Ramadan. One ethnographic theme concerns the ways in which social media is taking the lead in Ramadan charity in Kuwait by controlling and directing people through charity campaigns. A second ethnographic theme revolves around the ways in which Kuwaitis as individuals and government bodies are practising and engaging in iftar distribution in different ways, from traditional forms to those that are more contemporary and innovative.

3.2 Engaging social media in charity

3.2.1 The man of a million campaigns

One example of the diversification of the ways in which people relate to charity in Kuwaiti society involves social media. The most popular influencer on social media charity campaigns in Kuwait is currently Alhusainan. He was born in 1987, and is now married and the father of five children. He lives in Jahra Governorate. This governorate is located in northern Kuwait; people who live there are members of known Kuwaiti tribes who are very attached to their customs and closely adhere to the teachings of religion and conservative Arab customs (Al-Nakib, 2014). People from this background are easily recognisable to others in different cities in Kuwait by their accent. Alhusainan in fact the first Kuwaiti influencer famous for his influence in charitable campaigns on social media. He is a volunteer, so he does not get paid, and does not work for a charity nor does he have a charitable foundation. He is known in Kuwait as ‘the man of a million campaigns’ because his campaigns have at times raised millions in Kuwaiti Dinars in one day.
Based on the reports of my participants, some charity organisations ask social media celebrities to announce charitable campaigns, and some of these influencers ask for a fee, so they consider the charity advertisement in the same way as the commercial ads that they usually do, although sometimes some may post it free of charge, if they care about doing good deeds. Alhusainan has a different story; he did not plan to work for charity. He is neither a religious person nor has he worked for charity before, but he explored the influencing power that he has among his followers through a charity post that he wrote on his blog. He enjoyed the effect he had among people in Kuwait, that he could move people towards a charity goal. He thus started his charity journey through social media and influenced many people by himself in the beginning, without requesting help from any charitable body, and increased his popularity among the influencers in Kuwait. He has had success in each charity campaign that he has been engaged with. His effect on Kuwaitis in regard to charity has been very obvious. He does not stop at announcing a charity campaign, but actively engages in following up on the implementation of the charitable project. He has recorded huge leaps in charity fundraising in Kuwait and the Gulf through social media.

Alhusainan works in accounting in a government institution, the Ministry of Commerce. His background is neither related to social media, Islamic charity, nor the humanitarian field. He has been an active participant in Arab online forums since 2005. Such forums at that time were the first platform where people in the Arabian Gulf could meet together and discuss certain topics, before any of the recent social media platform had appeared (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat). At that time people on the internet tended to use nicknames rather than their real names; his nickname was q8ping (q8 is an abbreviation for Kuwait and ping is sort of beep sound in the technology world). I assume that including the name of his country in his nickname was an indicator to show his sense of belonging and his patriotism – as confirmed later in his story by how he expresses his Kuwaitiness through his charity work.

Alhusainan started a personal blog in 2008, titled with the same nickname that he had used in the forums, q8ping. He was writing daily on his blog on different subjects, but mainly about technology. His blog posts at that time were unique because of two things: they were leading the news – every post was about something people had not heard about before – and there was continuity of posting. He was a source for many people on the latest news in technology, and he then expanded to include any interesting news locally and internationally; in addition,
he was interested in photography. Alhusainan stated that one of the elements that gave his blog fame more quickly than others and attracted more viewers was that in 2010 a portable internet router was released, which provided him the fastest internet service and allowed him to post videos from YouTube on the blog, and it had a head start on other blogs because he was posting interesting and attractive material. He told me that the ranking of his blog in Kuwait at that time, based on Alexa rankings (a global ranking system), was between 13 and 19, among all websites globally, including Google and Facebook. He was the second among Kuwaiti websites; the first was a Kuwaiti women’s forum that began before his blog.

Until this point, all Alhusainan’s followers knew about his identity was that he was a Kuwaiti man; they had a general idea of the orientation of his thoughts and interests from the general nature of his blog. His blog was dominated by Alhusainan’s conservative and moral style that apparently came from his tribal background. As he described himself, ‘I am simply a Kuwaiti Muslim, who is far away from politics, controversy, and partiality issues’. In Kuwaiti society there are certain signs that indicate that a person is religiously committed, such as that he follows the Sunnah, the Prophet’s (PBUH) sayings and actions, by letting his beard grow and shortening his thoub (dishdasha), has religious words and sayings obvious in his speech, rather than the ordinary, simple Kuwaiti speech, and also maybe engaging in Islamist activities in society. None of this applied to Alhusainan. He gradually became a trusted source of news for many Kuwaitis, who trusted him without really knowing much about him personally, and this was how the readership of his blog increased. Later on, some commercial companies noticed that he was trusted in society, and asked him to try their products and talk about them or post ads for them on his blog.

3.2.2 First charity appeal through social media: Famine in Somalia

Alhusainan’s involvement with charity started after he tried to donate online, for the first time, to a charitable organisation, and found the process easy; he posted this experience on his blog:

In 2011, there was a famine in Somalia. The representative of the United Nations stated in a video posted in a tweet published by a news channel that ‘The United Nations officially classifies what is happening in Somalia as famine’. A founder of a charitable organisation in Kuwait called Direct Aid, which specialized in aid and development projects in Africa, and had invited people to donate to this famine. This founder, Dr
Abdulrahman Alsumait, has a good reputation among Kuwaitis and had a terminal disease. Since my blog that time was seeing views up to a million, I wanted to write about this famine to let my blog’s visitors know what was happening!

At the same time, Direct Aid broadcast the news that they were accepting online donations to their Somalia appeal. Alhusainan told me that online donations were largely unknown at that time. Most people were still afraid of shopping online or using their personal bank details with any website, ‘even me, although I was used to online shopping’, as he said. Alhusainan called the number on Direct Aid’s website and asked them ‘if I donate online now, will my donation be delivered to Somalia?’. Direct Aid’s call centre employee answered him: ‘Yes, from the donations we are receiving we buy food supplies and deliver them to Somalia every day’. After that, he wrote a blog post; he put the video clip of the United Nations that he found on Twitter, news of the Somalia famine, and his experience of donating online with Direct Aid. The post was titled ‘O people of Kuwait, Somalia is hungry… is there any relief?’ (In Arabic: Ya Ahl al Kuwait, al Somal jay’eaa … hal men mugheeth?)

He mentioned in the post that he had called the Direct Aid hotline in person, and confirmed his experience with the online donation process. Alhusainan showed via photos how to donate online via the Direct Aid website. He justified why he chose Direct Aid as an NGO to donate for Somalia, which was for two reasons: the first was because ‘the founder is Dr Abdulrahman Alsumait’, who was very popular in Kuwait in the charity sector and trusted by Kuwaitis, and had been honoured by the government and many authorities. Dr Alsumait was well-known and admired – in Africa, his home Kuwait, and in the Gulf – as a result of his humanitarian initiatives and the big efforts he made in changing people’s lives (Ahmed, 2009). The second reason was because Direct Aid was focusing intensely on the famine in
Somalia. Alhusainan said that he wanted to make it easy for people by noting in his post that a donation could start from KD 1 (approx. GBP 2), lest people think that a donation should be a large amount.

His wording caught my attention; simplifying the donation process for his blog visitors was a personal initiative to encourage them to participate and to introduce them to how to do that, just like he used to introduce them to new technologies – this time technology was connected to charity. In the context of new media in the Muslim world, Eickelman and Anderson (2003, p.1), suggest that new media creates ‘a new sense of public’. They suggest that having access to new media technologies ‘has multiplied the channels through which ideas and information can be circulated and has enlarged the scope of what can be said and to whom’ (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003, p. 29). At this point, the whole matter had been a personal effort by Alhusainan without any cooperation or request from the organisation. It was not enough for Alhusainan to post on his blog, which recorded a million views, he also encouraged his readers to spread the post. He wrote at the end of the post as follows:

If you have a blog, website, or you can send email, or a message via WhatsApp application; I wish you to spread this online donation experience with photos, no matter if you don’t mention the source [i.e. his blog] in order to help all people to donate and to help solve this crisis in Somalia.

He mentions that he doesn’t care about the copyright of his post (‘no matter if you don’t mention the source’); he was not seeking popularity. For him, it was a call for Kuwaiti people, not for his blog readers. He was encouraging his readers to spread the charity appeal, thereby hoping people would participate in helping Somalia through their own channels. He said that he wants everyone to have a reason to solve this crisis in Somalia, including himself. Although he does not consider himself religious and preferred to be categorised as a conservative Kuwaiti, yet his Islamic spirit and manners in his personality and the conservative style of his blog led him to not post anything contrary to Islamic protocol in topics, photos, or videos. Alhusainan told me: ‘I told myself, why not try? If they are listening to me I will get rewards from God, if not, I will not lose anything.’
A photo posted on Alhusainan’s blog (posted on 21/07/2011)

Photo shows the steps you need to do to donate online to Somalia via Direct Aid website;
Alhusainan designed it with arrows to make it easier for his readers.

3.2.3 The charity-starting spark

One trial of donation online was the first step for Alhusainan to engage simply with charity through his blog and encourage his followers to do the same. This section will show how he explored how he could have an effect on his social media followers, which led him to gradually engage more in charity. After a couple of days, Alhusainan got a message via his blog from the director of public relations at Direct Aid; it said: ‘I am your brother Ahmad Sami, director of the Direct Aid website. I would like to thank you. We have received many donations recently, and when we searched for the source, we discovered that it was because of a post on your blog. Thank you.’ Alhusainan said that Sami included his contact number and asked him to get in touch. The words ‘thank you’ completely changed the concept for Alhusainan, as he told me; he started to analyse what this meant to him:

Imagine if Sami had not noticed that there had been an increase in donations via Direct Aid’s website, or he had not tried to figure out the source of that increase. Also, he was keen to contact the source to say ‘thanks, what you wrote on your blog has increased our donations’. If all that had not happened, I would not have noticed that posting about a charity appeal is really important! I was posting 10 to 15 time a day on the blog; if I had not got the thanks message from Sami, I would not have noticed how much it mattered!
Alhusainan said that what happened after this situation is what gradually led him into charity work. He never thought that his communications could influence his followers to listen to him directly and do what he said, especially in something that he hoped to get rewards from God from. As Alhusainan describes it, ‘the moment that Sami contacted me was the discovery moment of my own oil well, a communication revolution’. Alhusainan cared about the relationship between him and his followers. He posted the message that he got from Sami on the blog to pass on the thanks to them too. He titled the post ‘Direct Aid: Thanks to the blog’s followers’. Then he thanked the followers on his own behalf too; he said: ‘I am so proud of your actions’. And he posted the donation link again, in case anyone had missed it. Alhusainan has showed his appreciation for his followers in sharing with them the thank you message, which had a magic effect in creating trust and loyalty and strengthening his connection with his followers.

After this, he continued getting in touch with Sami; they found a common interest in that Sami is a professional photographer and Alhusainan has the same interest, and had just started practising photography. They talked about charity very little, mostly about photography. Alhusainan enrolled in a photography workshop presented by Sami, and they became friends. After more than a year, Alhusainan said:

Sami and I were out together in a restaurant. He suggested we create a charity campaign together. He suggested we make a customised fundraising link – you may find it popular nowadays, but at that time it was kind of unique – to a certain project and let people donate online. Sami suggested putting a donation counter and a target for this campaign to encourage people to reach the target. Each one of us was giving opinions and ideas together, like brainstorming, until we agreed on the campaign details.

They agreed to make a charity appeal for the building of a well, with a target of KD 1100, via a direct donation link just for this well. Sami prepared the link and sent it to Alhusainan, but Alhusainan did not post it directly; he wanted to introduce a preface to the topic first. He posted on Instagram, which was the most popular social media app at that time, a picture with one Kuwaiti slang word as an open question, *Shraykoom?*, which literally means ‘what do you think?’. Under this photo, Alhusainan wrote for his followers: ‘What would you think if we did something together?’. After this sentence he wrote praise to Allah for the mutual friendliness and kindness between him and his followers on the blog and then Twitter and
now Instagram, which was shown from the positive response to the post. Alhusainan wrote also in this post how he was careful that his social media accounts avoided insulting people and provoking controversy because he sought to keep this good relationship with his followers. And he noted to them how he was always keen to share his personal experiences with his followers, and that he would continue doing that. Then he went to the crux of the topic; Alhusainan told me that he wrote ‘Since we are gathered in the virtual world, social media, how about we do a charitable project together so that we all gain a reward from it, and may Allah accept it. The donation from us will be very simple because together we are a big number. The project costs KD 1100, everyone can participate with any amount.’

The use of colloquial Arabic, specifically the Kuwaiti dialect, may have eased the discourse and helped bring Alhusainan closer to his followers. Such colloquial discourse, especially in Islamic texts, is more fluid in terms of acceptance, understanding, and the feeling that the writer of the message is close. Most charity discourse in Kuwait in the past had used formal Arabic language, which gives a feeling of complexity and anxiety in its similarity to the language of some Islamist groups, who use pious commands in formal Arabic, which may repel people. Suleiman (2014) states that ‘language anxiety’ is a universal phenomenon. It may be worth analysing language anxiety in the Arabic language, particularly in modern discourse within the charity domain, and what is more effective in regard to charitable practices. The diversification of charity presentation and the change from more text-centred forms of formal Islamic charity have played a key role in attracting people recently in Kuwait. I found that the more creative discourse is, the more it draws attention and people start to talk about it in the community. Simplification and condensation of key religious principles are important, as explored by Eickelman and Anderson (2003), who discuss the potential of Muslim media discourse in shaping social practices in tangible and novel ways.

Alhusainan wanted to gauge his followers’ opinions before he began this campaign with them; the preface aimed to outline what he was feeling toward them and the relationship that they have, and that he was keen for it to continue. He had already decided all the details with Sami, but this step was intended to provide his followers with a feeling of affiliation. I assume that this is not easy for any popular influencer, unless he is humble and can get this across to people, with a sense of teamwork. This is similar to the notion of closeness deployed in Arab society by Eickelman (1977, p.11): “Closeness” is a form of relationship which is said to exist between persons bound together by multiple personal obligations and
common interests and who regularly can be expected to act on each other’s behalf”. The critical notion of ‘closeness’ in Arab society is constructed on the internet, in Alhusainan’s case, with his followers. There is a relationship between them and commitments from one to another; this close relationship was fashioned virtually on social media.

Alhusainan said that this post received enthusiasm from his followers in the comments. On the second day, he published the donation link on all his communication networks: the blog, Twitter, and Instagram. He saw striking interaction with the donation link and the campaign reached its target. Alhusainan stated that 110 people participated, donating an average of KD 10 to 11 per person. He promised his followers that they were going to see, God willing, the fruit of their contributions. Alhusainan asked Sami for the report about and photos of the implementation of the well in Africa, in order to publish them for his followers.

After this, Alhusainan forgot about what they did. Five or six months later, Sami called Alhusainan and said that the photos were ready. ‘Honestly, the photos were very humble, a pit and a meeting of people around the well, but for me it was a very big thing’, Alhusainan said. Then he stopped talking in the interview for a while, as he wanted to remind me: ‘As we said at the beginning of our conversation, we were avoiding hypocrisy and showing off [in Arabic, nefaq and reya’a] in our work’.

During the conversations with my respondents, I always needed to remind them that their charity story mattered, and that it could bring them more rewards from God too, if people imitated their charitable works, so they could talk in comfort. I knew it was hard for them to talk about their good deeds, as many like to be pure for God by doing them secretly, free from hypocrisy. Alhusainan reminded me that his intention in these charitable works was done purely for God, to silence any sense of personal admiration.

Sami asked Alhusainan if he could name the well with the latter’s nickname (q8ping’s well), but he refused. He asked him to name it the Kuwait people’s well. Usually, in Kuwait, charitable projects do not give special names. Sometimes charitable campaigns are given a general name, but after the internet became part of charitable, people began to assign special names to charitable projects, which motivates people to donate to them, such as the name of a group or a certain deceased person, so the rewards of this project belong to them.

Alhusainan explained that his view was that the well did not belong just to him, and did not need to be linked to somebody’s name. At that time, most of his followers were from Kuwait,
so he said naming the well the Kuwait people’s well expanded the contribution circle to include all Kuwaitis and those who live in Kuwait. Alhusainan commented on this: ‘I always say, for those who want to market a charity project, after my experiences in campaigns, do not attribute it to a specific person or even a specific country, so everyone is welcome to participate. As long as you want to do it for God, do not forget the essence of the matter is for God.’ Refusing to link the name of the well to his nickname and rather linking it to Kuwait, might indicate two aspects: first, the humility and teamwork manners that he wanted the project to represent, and second, it shows how he expresses Kuwaitiness, and a sense of national belonging.

In this story, the role of NGO in following up – such as monitoring the increases and drops in donations, communicating with charity influencers, improving the means that they use to attract participants, and sending reports to donors – is part of the success of charitable projects. During my research, I noticed that these details were mentioned to me by the charitable organisations that have an institutional system with full-time employees, rather than a volunteering system. The institutional system provides stability, so such charities can easily track all the relevant details. Direct Aid paid full attention to what was going on, before, during, and after their charitable campaign, which in Alhusainan’s case was what really helped to improve their work. Sami is a full-time employee at Direct Aid; he recognised the power of influence that Alhusainan had on social media, especially when used for charity. Alhusainan forgot about the well, until Sami got back to him with the photos and the report he requested.

3.2.4 Charitable work march

After Alhusainan recognised to what extent his social media encouraged others in charitable work, Alhusainan started a continuous march of charitable work that became his focus in life. After publishing the report and the photos of the well, the first charity campaign that Alhusainan had done on social media, people who had not participated started to ask questions and show an interest. Alhusainan published a poll asking his followers ‘who wants to repeat it?’ ‘Everyone wanted the charity campaign back’, he said.

Alhusainan and Sami decided to make a second donation link, but with a slightly higher amount than the first one. Charitable campaigns continued in collaboration with Direct Aid, and each time the project increased in size and amount. Alhusainan was keen every time not
to engage with any further charity project until he had got the report from the previous one and published it to his followers. He said that every charitable report encourages him to start another charitable project. Sometimes reports take several months to be ready. One of these reports was a video report; he said it was very moving and influential on him. The effect of happiness was clear to me through his voice when he said: ‘I honestly do not have the money to build a mosque or dig a well, but I am one of the reasons for this to happen! And I am the one who initiates this. Although the well was named for the Kuwaiti people, I felt that it was really mine, and it was sort of a dream for me to do charity like that.’ He explained to me how the rewards of giving water mentioned by the Prophet (PBUH) – that for every drop of water you donate you are going to be rewarded for it, and those who build a mosque are rewarded with a house in heaven – all these merits encouraged him to dream of building a well or a mosque. He discovered that it is possible to create huge change thanks to the communication revolution; he said: ‘You can change the destiny of a family or an entire village through just a tweet or a post!’

Charity has achieved for Alhusainan things that he had not anticipated. He assumed that such big charity projects were impossible to reach by his own donations, but he achieved some charitable projects, for example building a mosque, by engaging his followers. Alhusainan did not know that he had this influencing power in the world of charity through social media. His post about charity let him discover his capability and popularity, by encouraging people to donate. Being a reason that this charity project was accomplished gave Alhusainan a sense that this was his own charity project. I assume that this feeling was also shared by the other participants – Alhusainan’s followers – as he kept telling them that they are one team and that they played a part in this charity achievement. The emotional satisfaction of this type of work, in charity, is not just calculation and instrumental, it is a feeling. This keeps Alhusainan and other participants motivated to do more and spread charity appeals to others. Getting involved with fundraising appeals allows people to do more than the monetary limit of their donations, and they will be rewarded by Allah because they become a reason for a project to happen.

Social media has opened up channels for charities to witness the result of their donations. Posting photos and videos of charity projects via social media has a motivational impact. Witnessing the results of a donation not only increases trust in the NGO, it also encourages contributors to do more. Social media allows for virtual socialising and collaboration in
online activity, allowing people to do charity together. Alhusainan fostered the relationship between himself and his followers. The importance of loyalty, support, and the social aspects are made clear by this case. These were strengthened by clarity and credibility, and by giving his followers a sense of their own importance and asking them for their opinions. This made his followers feel that he was appreciating them following his account, and their responses and involvement in the campaign. This is not necessarily about the performance of piety but more complex calibrations of self-presentation that avoid ostentation about piety.

3.3 Iftar meal practices

From engaging social media in fundraising for a charity campaign, I now turn to an innovative charity practice that also used social media, in encouraging others to help with iftar meal distribution in Kuwait. Iftar meal distribution during Ramadan is one of the most common charity practices, and another example of the diversification in the ways in which people relate to charity in Kuwait.

This section builds upon anthropological literature based on Muslim societies that has brought to attention the forms of work and energy that are invested in social events and gatherings revolving around the distribution of food (Meneley, 2016; Marsden, 2005). Feeding people is mixture of generosity, tradition, and pious virtue, as ‘Arabs and Muslims are conspicuously proud, [and so] karam [literally generosity] has become a prominent feature of national identity and cultural policy throughout the Middle East’ (Shyrock, 2004, p.38). What is interesting is how in modern Kuwaiti society people are reinventing such practices and using Ramadan as an opportunity to teach younger generations the values of expanding social energy in this manner. In addition, being engaged in such activities is also widely held to have important implications for people’s social and mental well-being, as well as their position and status in society more generally.

The ‘giving table’ is a charity practice that encourages people or companies to engage in charity iftar meal distribution in modern way. During Ramadan, on social media, I noticed many photos of a long table on the roof of a building with attractive lighting and table settings, with many workers there at sunset – a lovely picture of an iftar gathering under the sky. I tried to find out who was behind this table and this iftar idea, which looks like a special occasion or a wedding. The giving table is an initiative that Nagwa – a sweets and
confectionary company – adopted in Kuwait in collaboration with their marketing consultant, under the name ‘One Table’. I contacted a woman from the company who is in charge of this project to find out more about what they aim to deliver.

She explained that the idea is to make iftar setting equipment ready for any person or company, who can then just hire it from Nagwa, and Nagwa on their behalf will deliver the table wherever they like and decorate it for them. The client chooses whether they want it to be public, for anyone, or private, for example for their employees. The client needs to provide the food and the location, while the setting is designed and prepared by Nagwa. The setting consists of a table with enough chairs for 40 to 60 people, with decorations and lighting. Some of these companies find it remarkable that Nagwa provides such settings, meaning they do not have to think of a creative way to present a special iftar banquet on their own. This shows how the nature of Ramadan has changed in Kuwait; there are attempts to be creative and distinct in the charitable initiative of the traditional distribution of iftar, to fit in with the commercialisation across the wide range of similar charitable activities in the region.

One of the interesting ideas used by some companies is to cook for the workers at the iftar table, rather than ordering the food. Companies vary in their purpose in hiring a setting from Nagwa; some do so as a corporate social responsibility project conducted by their company for the public, and they take photos and publish it. Others see it as a social relations activity for their workers, allowing them to interact and to do something good together during Ramadan. The cost of hiring a table is around KD 500, approximately GBP 1,000 (this does not include food or a venue). This is expensive for an individual for only iftar decorations and a setting, yet it may be sensible for companies to record it as Ramadan achievement on their social media. The average cost of an iftar meal in Kuwait offered by middle-class restaurants is around KD 1 to 2 (approx. GBP 2 to 4).
The traditional practice of iftar meal distribution still exists: people make monetary contributions to a charity organisation, without a direct connection between donors and beneficiaries. However, diversification in iftar meal distribution has occurred in a number of ways. There are initiatives in which people do it by themselves with minimum cost. There are innovative practices of iftar distribution that are more inclusive, such as modelling charitable practices for children and including them in this charity practice. For instance, children might help in preparing the meals from items they have bought, and then counting the bags and distributing them to workers. Such charity practices have a high level of personal engagement, in which people enjoy preparing the meals themselves instead of buying ready-made food or simply donating money.

In this section, analysis of iftar distribution ethnographies highlights the diversification of this practice in a number of ways. There is diversification in practice: both traditional and innovative practices are all visible. There is diversification of distribution scope: from the local to neighbourhood to nationwide, including recipients who are Muslims and non-
Muslims. There are different types of personal engagement: there are those who are deeply engaged in cooking and preparing the food and distributing it to recipients, and there are those who are less engaged. There is a connection between giver and receiver among some of the participants who engaged in distribution. I argue that Kuwaitis – through their engagement in *iftar* preparation and distribution – are expressing their national identity and modelling this charitable giving as an Islamic practice and tradition to their children, by emphasising that generosity is a central element in their identity. Engaging in *iftar* distribution is how Kuwaitis like to portray themselves to their children, to expats, to their communities, and to the world.

For Kuwaitis, Ramadan is a month for gathering with family, as in many other Muslim countries. Some of the details of Kuwaiti rituals during Ramadan have been kept the same from the past. These rituals include gathering the whole family together to break their fast (*iftar*) and to exchange dishes with neighbours and families, for which they cook traditional foods eaten only during Ramadan. In the past, similar to many Muslim countries nowadays, Kuwaitis would make a big banquet of *iftar* in the neighbourhood and invite people to it (Alshatti, 2014). With expansion in urbanisation, *iftar* distribution in Kuwait nowadays involves delivering a dish or more to someone’s house before *iftar*. This distribution is usually for family who do not live at the same house, and for friends, relatives, and neighbours. This expanding of the scope of distribution allows people to carry on their traditions when their relatives or neighbours are not living around them. This type of giving is not for those who are actually in need; it is about different drives that arise from a mixture of motivations in Kuwaitis. As Muslims, Kuwaitis seek reward for feeding fasting people, and are raised on hospitality as a tradition. This practice is also a means to getting in touch with relatives and friends during Ramadan. It is a manner of letting them participate in the *iftar* gathering when they are far from us. Shyrock (2004, p. 38), in the context of Jordan, suggests that generosity ‘brings into sharp relief what hospitality means in domestic spaces, what it meant in the past, and what it should mean in everyday life’.

Kuwaitis are keen to feed people during the month of Ramadan. This may come from the tradition of exchanging dishes within the neighbourhood and among families for *iftar*. Kuwaitis do this during Ramadan because they believe it is rewarded, in that when feeding fasting people you will be rewarded from God the same as if you were fasting (Alshatti, 2014). I have observed this ritual since childhood, when we used to do it with our friends too.
Many Kuwaitis give dishes of traditional porridge called harees, made from wheat grains with meat, and jereesh, made from crushed wheat and meat or chicken. They do this on Monday or Thursday, because of the saying of the Prophet (PBUH) that deeds are presented to God on these two days, as stated in the saying ‘Deeds are presented (to Allah) on Monday and Thursday’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 17, No. 83). They call this type of giving food on these two days nafilah. Nafilah is a wider name that means extra good deeds, good deeds that go beyond what is obligated in Islam, such as voluntary prayers or sadaqa. Kuwaitis usually cook a big amount of this porridge, to have enough to send to ten people from among their relatives, friends, and neighbours. If the houses are close to them, they usually send the housemaid to deliver the dish, and if they live far away from the recipient, they send it by their driver. Many send the food using their own plates, though recently some are buying plates just for Ramadan giving; they label these with a sticker saying ‘Bon Appetit’ in Arabic (bel’afya) and their name, to be returned easily, and in some way also as fashionable packaging of their gifts, representing their prestigious style. Usually, it becomes a ‘food exchange’, and usually the recipient will return the dishes filled with food. This is not like the traditional practice in Kuwait, where giving was to houses around the neighbourhood, and was done by members of families, when there were no features of modern life like maids and drivers.

3.3.1 Iftar workshop at a restaurant

This iftar preparation workshop conducted at a restaurant is the initiative of a Kuwaiti woman, Bedoor. She is a teacher at a government school, is divorced, and has two young adult boys who live with her. She started a charity team called ‘Draw the Smile’. As can be seen from the name of the team, her aim is to create happiness from her charity work. She does a number of different charity projects, which I will discuss in other chapters where relevant. One of her projects is a workshop at a restaurant to prepare iftar meals on a daily basis during Ramadan, which are then distributed among immigrant workers, mainly domestic workers from other countries. I arranged a visit to this workshop while I was in Kuwait during Ramadan for my fieldwork; she was happy for me to get involved in this workshop and to give me the chance to see how they do things.

I arrived at the restaurant, and saw a sign saying ‘Restaurant will open at 5 pm during Ramadan’; I could see the team working inside. I called out to ask if I could enter the
restaurant. ‘From the back kitchen door’, Bedoor said. I entered from the kitchen to the main restaurant hall. I asked her ‘Why did you choose this restaurant? Do they give you special offers?’. She said that over the years they had tried many restaurants and different kinds of meals, and that the workers liked the meals here, such as chicken with rice cooked with tomato sauce and spices (kabsa). Portions are big and the food is delicious, matching different nationalities’ tastes. It is also affordable, meaning that they can make their target number of meals, compared to other restaurants.

The youngest volunteer is an 11-year-old boy; Bedoor introduced me to him and told me that he is keen to come even though he is fasting. I told him ‘Aziz, don’t you feel tired doing this preparation while you are fasting?’ He said ‘Not at all, I am happy to do it’. ‘Who are you here with, Aziz?’, I asked. He replied, ‘No one, my mom brings me here every day, beginning several years ago; sometimes she stays with me to volunteer too’. That day, I chose to volunteer to help with the meal preparation, and he was faster than me in packaging.

It is often thought in Kuwait that those involved in charity work are religious people. However, I found that most female volunteers in the workshop did not cover their head (did not wear the hijab), an aspect of Muslim bodily comportment that is often regarded as being compulsory according to Islamic principles. Wearing a hijab in Kuwait is a sign of commitment to Islamic commands and is a minimum requirement for being religious. This indicates that there are reasons other than solely religious reasons behind each person’s decision to volunteer for the charity. It could be that practicing charity is a different way of expressing religiosity and closeness to God for these girls.

While working together in the workshop and chatting with a few of the volunteers, both men and women, I found a group of three sisters, Rayan, Layan, and Farah. They told me that they have been working with Bedoor every Ramadan for seven years. This woman had clearly built loyalty within her teams, with both old and new volunteers. Some volunteers have had a high level of engagement for an extended period of time. Rayan said that they were just preparing with her until 5 pm, then they would go back home. Layan explained that their parents did not allow them to go with her for distribution because the area contains mainly foreign single men. This is a cultural issue in Kuwait, as these areas are not good for girls to visit or even to pass through. But they publish photos and videos on social media to show the volunteers and the donors and others doing the distribution every day.
One interesting thing in this workshop is that it is not about buying ready meals from restaurants and packaging them as individual meals: it is about the work involved in making the meals themselves. I told Bedoor that it would be faster if she asked the restaurant to prepare the meals in advance. She said:

Yes of course we could, but we do this for a purpose. Firstly, I want each volunteer to be involved in preparing a meal by hand. Secondly, Kuwaiti young people rarely cook a full meal in their homes even for themselves, and this is a chance for them to feel proud to do something by themselves for others. Thirdly, we get a special price if we cook the meals, so we can make more meals within our budget.

They needed to make 670 meals on that day, to be made between 1 pm and 5 pm. The team is divided into groups, and each group has a sequence of tasks. The early stages are to shred the carrots and to cook them with rice, put salad dressing in the empty boxes, cut up the salads, and put them in containers. They put a cup of uncooked rice in a foil tray with a small amount of shredded carrots. After that they put in three pieces of cooked chicken. The hardest part is to pour a cup of hot chicken broth on the rice, since it is hot and may spill everywhere; then they put on the foil lid, and put it in the oven for one hour. After that, individual meal bags are prepared, which consist of water, Laban (a yogurt drink), a small box of dates, a small box of salad, a small box of salad dressing, a big foil tray of rice and chicken, a piece of fruit, and yogurt.

All volunteers have to pay KD 5 (approx. GBP 10) to attend the workshop; this is explained to them beforehand and used for administration fees. They use these fees to hire people for meal distribution – since many of volunteers cannot wait until iftar distribution time – and they bought a transfer car from this income too, and other expenses they need to cover. The cost of iftar meals is collected from different donors personally; volunteers can also donate. The financial contribution – administration fees – is a part of their commitment here. I chatted with Omar, a 16-year-old boy, who was volunteering; he was very polite and quiet, and I did not see him chatting with the team. We talked about his motivation to volunteer in this workshop, especially in a school holiday, as many of his peers may choose to sleep at this time. Omar said:

These are the happiest days of my life; I just started this Ramadan to volunteer, with encouragement from my mum, and I was really upset when I couldn’t attend one day.
for family reasons. I found here respect between people. They treat me differently. Did you see the people during Ramadan out in the street? They fight in their cars in the road! Just because they are fasting and tired and don’t have the patience to wait, here in the team they are different.

The reason he attends the activities is because he is treated well by the team. This boy finds something he needs there that he is unable to find in other activities and contexts. He could have been suffering from bullying in different places he has been to – Bedoor hinted that some people call him ‘the fat boy’. He has found in this charity engagement a social environment of cooperation, and a space that is free of ostentation.

Bu Ali, A fifty-year-old man with white hair and glasses wearing a work uniform was also helping in the workshop. He was the oldest volunteer that day; Bedoor was joking with Bu Ali about his age when she introduced me to him. I asked how long he had been doing charity work, and why. He said:

It is a family initiative, it started when I had a zakat that I paid always to NGOs or Zakat House. A few years ago, my wife and I decided to distribute it by ourselves. We found a team who directed us to needy families in Kuwait and we examined their needs. Some we paid in cash and for others we ordered what they needed from appliance shops; I went by myself to an electronic shop and bought [the required item] and followed it until it was delivered to them. We found it more interesting when we spend it in this way; even my boys are with us, they have been raised this way. We want to be involved in paying our zakat or sadaqa. And this is why I volunteer with the Draw the Smile team, because it is something I do by myself.

The diversification in the case of this charity workshop is that the practices are expanded, inclusive, and involve a high level of personal engagement. The practices are expanded to distribute the meals around different areas and are not limited to one neighbourhood, as in traditional iftar distribution. They are inclusive in that they include different people, and anyone can join; you may meet different people within the group, from different backgrounds, of all ages and both genders. There are different levels of personal engagement, such as paying the admin fees as and donating their working hours. Volunteers are not necessarily donating for iftar, but they are doing charity by participating in making the meals, which reflects a long period of commitment and personal engagement and an enjoyable practice in doing charity by themselves. The term ‘from donating to charity to
doing charity’, here in the iftar preparation workshop, sums up many elements beyond monetary donation, such as participation, work, satisfaction, social relationships, and giving of time and energy. Engaging in charity in this way is a more grounded way of giving.

3.3.2 Engaging children in an iftar workshop

The Dania Charity Team’s workshop is quite different from the previous one in a number of respects. They are similar in the type of practice, in that it is an iftar workshop and volunteers prepare meals by themselves then distribute them for migrant workers in Kuwait. They differ in the level of engagement, the manner of meal preparation, in the manner of distribution, and in the connection between givers and receivers.

The diversification in this charity practice can be found in the level of engagement, and that the team is female-led and inclusive of children, in order to model the charitable work to their children. It is not inclusive: volunteers are limited to friends, friends of friends, and relatives. The way they prepare is different; they do not cook anything but build meals together in individual meal bags, to make it easier for children to do it by themselves (the children involved are aged four and up). Distribution is not limited to domestic workers, but includes workers in supermarkets, gas stations, and hospitals. In addition, there is flexibility in distribution. The volunteers are recommended to distribute with their children a certain number of meals that they choose, but they can also choose where they want to distribute the iftar meals. So, the scope of distribution here is wider than the previous example, which is limited to two locations near the mosque where workers live, and lacks a real sense of connection between giver and receiver, because not all volunteers are able to engage in distribution.

The Dania Charity Team, a team made up of Kuwaiti women, was established by a religious woman working in the government finance sector. This team carries out charity work all year round. They provide weekly iftar preparation workshops and distribution in different cities in Kuwait. These workshops are aimed at helping children get involved in preparation and distribution. They have been doing this for several years.

The team leader, Dania, opens her family home, and in the big reception hall they arrange tables with different sections (dates, water, yogurt drink, two types of wrapped sandwiches ordered from a restaurant, pieces of apple, slices of covered cake). I had the chance to
volunteer for one day with my seven-year-old son and my four-year-old daughter. First, we had to write on a poster how many meals we intended to prepare and the city where we would like to go for distribution. I wrote that I would prepare 50 meals, and I chose two cities near my house, so it would be easy for me to distribute the meals quickly before sunset. Next, all families – mothers, children, and some nannies – stand in a queue to take a nylon bag, and fill the bag from all sections, tie the bag, and put it on the carpet. There are volunteers grouping 50 bags together, so they can easily be transferred to volunteers’ cars for distribution. Not all volunteers are involved in buying the contents of the meals. The team leader goes to a wholesale shop to buy the food at reasonable prices, and orders the sandwiches from a restaurant the day before. It is possible to donate cash towards meal costs, but it is optional. Usually they distribute 750 meals in one day. My children noticed the cakes and wanted some while we were packaging the meals; the team leader said ‘each one can take one cake, go ahead’. I asked if she was sure, as the donations are for the needy. She said ‘I always keep in mind that some children may want to eat while they are working, so I pay some of it from my own money, and absolutely I agree that they can take one item of their choice’.

We finished our 50 bags and took them to our car, and went to the distribution areas we mentioned on the poster. I talked to my children about giving and how they would make these people happy now, and how they may get a reward directly from Allah and be happy. This dialogue was inspired and encouraged by the team, who suggest that mothers use it with their children while distributing the meals. Modelling charitable work for children creates generations who care about charitable giving and helping others. The team personally engages volunteers in the preparation of the meals rather than buying ready meals in order to let them live the experience, and engages children in distribution so they can see the results of their giving and the reaction of the workers.

The beneficiaries are mostly workers of different nationalities who work at fuel stations and cooperative supermarkets. Most are Egyptian, Bengali, Sri Lankan, or Indian. My son started to distribute meals, and he was smiling and surprised that they were happy and laughing when they received the meals. They told their friends, and came running to our car so as not to miss the free meal. The meals ran out very quickly, and my son asked me to take more next time. He felt sad that there were many who wanted meals but couldn’t get one.
These impressions will be in the children’s memories for a long time: doing something with their mum, preparing meals with other children, and getting a cake as a treat. They saw needy people running to get a meal which they had prepared for them, and they saw how this made them happy. This means that one is raising a child who enjoys working for charity. It would have been easier if we simply paid for the meal without having to go out in hot weather with children in different moods to distribute them, yet involving them in the work was worth all the effort.

This team are not keen to take photos or have social media coverage of their work. This means that not many people are aware of them, but they believe they are doing something big for Allah and purely for him. It could also be that by not publishing on social media they are trying to prevent more requests for participation in the team, since it is a team that is limited to close friends and relatives, and it is held in the team’s founder’s house. The Dania team tell friends, and word can spread. Some of these friends are from university; having been a volunteer in the student union, they grow up loving volunteering and bring their children with them now. They are not an official team and are not registered with any NGOs.

3.3.3 Government iftar distribution by Zakat House

Zakat House, as a government body, has a number of different philanthropic roles, not only in relation to zakat, as the title implies. One of their specialities is providing iftar banquets in different mosques in Kuwait. Zakat House iftar distribution is another type of diversification in the charity sector in Kuwait. It is highly regulated and has a much broader scope in terms of distribution. Yet there is a lack of any personal engagement with preparation of meals and distribution, and also a lack of any connection between giver and receiver, even on social media. I met Almosa, projects manager at Zakat House, who is responsible in managing these iftar banquets. He said that the uniqueness of this charity practice is that they are following quality standards and daily evaluation, as it comes from an authority which has stability in regard to its employees and a quality department who are capable of performing regular evaluations. Individual charity teams tend to lack stability, as volunteers are not usually permanent.

Donors make monetary donations to Zakat House, whether online or in person, and Zakat House does the whole job of iftar preparation and distribution, to mosques around Kuwait.
Some of these mosques were built as a family donation and named with their family name, for example ‘Alothman Mosque’. Some of these families have requested that they will donate for *iftar* in their mosque, as they feel it is their duty for hospitality in this month, so they want to pay all expenses. Their role does not end with paying the costs of *iftar*, as some of them send someone to inspect the food and give notes to Zakat House. One Zakat House employee told me that one family concluded that on the day they served seafood there was a lot of leftover food. They then asked for seafood not be served. They didn’t want their donation to be wasted and to be less acceptable than other kinds of food. Zakat House attempts to balance the locations, depending on the turnout of beneficiaries. They announce with a big banner with their name and logo that there is *iftar* daily in this mosque. Before Ramadan, they put out official bids for restaurants who want to be providers of *iftar* during Ramadan. They have some conditions, such as that the restaurant must have been awarded an ISO certificate regarding quality and food safety, they have to make a menu with a variety of food every day with different kinds of food (meat, chicken, seafood), they have to provide containers to keep the food warm until it is time for eating, and they are responsible for providing scales to weigh the meal along with the location supervisor to match their standards, and they must clean the place after them.

I had the chance to visit two *iftar* setups in two different locations during Ramadan. Khaitan, a busy and crowded city, is full of resident workers of different nationalities, mostly Egyptian. The mosque that I visited provides more than 400 meals per day. I met the location supervisor from Zakat House, one hour before sunset; everything was set up and people were sitting outdoors in the shaded yard, waiting for *iftar* time. Workers arrive early to reserve a place; they sit on the ground, on the edges of a long nylon roll where the food is. I found the banner outside the mosque with the Zakat House logo, and the restaurant delivery truck. It was embarrassing for me to be the only woman in that location; many people were staring with wondering faces, asking ‘Why she is here?’ It is a cultural issue that women are always protected by a man and should not be in workers’ areas alone. I took my young adult nephew with me so that I would feel more comfortable and safer.

The food containers are too big for four people. I asked the location supervisor how they weigh them. He replied, ‘I weighed all the food in the container and divided it by four to be sure it meets the standard we asked for in the contract with the restaurant. I also checked the food’s temperature’. They weigh the food daily and check it all, and give an online report to
Zakat House, with comments. If a restaurant does not meet their conditions, they will not get the payment.

The other location is in a modern city, Rawdha. The residents of this city are mostly Kuwaitis. The iftar is for the workers in Kuwaitis’ houses or in the shops and services available in the city. The cooperative supermarket of the city donated an air-conditioned tent for iftar, because the yard was not shaded and the weather was really hot. The mosque I visited here has a smaller number of beneficiaries, around 100 people. This may be explained by the fact that most Kuwaiti families provide their workers with accommodation and food as part of their jobs, not only during Ramadan, but all year round. The location supervisor showed me how the online report is done; for example, he mentioned in his report that the bananas provided for iftar today are green, not yet ripe! They needed them to be good for eating that night.

This iftar distribution by the government is more distant and less emotionally pregnant than other iftar distribution initiatives explored in this chapter. It is more like a sequence of jobs that need to be carried out and evaluated. The giver is not connected to the receiver and does not enjoy the feeling of giving that exists in the others examples, such as in preparing the meals and seeing the smile on the worker’s face when he collects the meal, and maybe their gratitude too, and also the connection between the teamwork and the feeling of achievement at the end of the day. Yet both are doing the same job and distributing iftar; it is only that the method is different and not lively enough for some donors, who prefer to engage more than just donating.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Islamic charity in Kuwait is used as a means of socialising and as a collective activity during the month of Ramadan, in a number of diverse ways. Firstly, using social media in charity and socialising virtually online by engaging in collective charitable activities. The story of the ‘man of a million campaigns’ demonstrates how social media can be engaged in charity. This influencer has built a relationship with his followers, and they trust him, which has had the effect of increasing the amount of donations he can encourage people to give; beyond that they also engage in online charity fundraising
among their peers. They are using charity to socialise, through comments in different apps and forums, and demonstrating their feelings at the result of their donations, changing people’s lives online and witnessing the change that their donations result in.

Secondly, highlighting the types of work and energy involved in social activities and gatherings centred on food distribution, in which Ramadan is utilized to teach younger generations about the need for extending social energy in this way. It is commonly believed that participating in such activities has significant ramifications for people’s well-being, as well as their overall position and prestige in society. *Iftar* meal distribution in Kuwait has two facets: the traditional charity practice, that still exists thanks to the government charity body, and the newer version of *iftar* distribution, developed by individual charity teams to deliver the same meals but with a high level of engagement in person. This involves working within a team as a charity collective, socialising with other participants, connecting donors to receivers, and preparing meals by hand. Some practices are so inclusive that they include different genders and ages, and have volunteers that have never met each other before, while others are designed for friends and family circles and certain genders, and aim to model charity practices to children. Expressing Kuwaitiness through charity during Ramadan is about a triple expression: firstly, that of national belonging, by taking part in the wider national project of giving; secondly, expressing other sides of personal identity, such as a person’s commitment to social connectedness and giving charity; thirdly, through cultivating a person’s own subjectivity and also crafting the subjectivity of young people, by modelling charity to their children.

In the following chapters, the focus will be on the key players that can be found in the Kuwaiti charitable arena. Different groups are practicing charity under different umbrellas and for different purposes. Each of the subsequent chapters focuses on one group, starting with charity engagement by Kuwaiti young people, then moving on to individuals and the legal umbrella – charitable teams – that some practice charity through, then to wider campaigns executed by NGOs, and finally charity by the government. These distinctions provide different angles for analysis of how charity is practiced in Kuwait. How is each group different from each other? How can we distinguish their practices and motives and their uses of charity, and what does charity do for each of them?
Chapter 4: Engaging Kuwaiti Young People in Charity

4.1 Introduction

This chapter turns its attention away from Ramadan to a specific demographic group, Kuwaiti young people, and explores the ways in which they engage in charity. It focuses on their modes of being charitable and brings attention to the diversity of charitable practices important to Kuwaiti young people today. I argue that this diversity in charitable engagements shapes and reflects their sense of belonging, their reliance on religious beliefs and traditions, and the range of social concerns they address in their daily lives. What does charitable giving mean for young people and what motivates them to give? A central contention of this chapter is that whilst Islamic doctrine and practice are critical motivations for charitable giving amongst Kuwaiti young people, religion is not the only source of motivation.

Youth in this chapter is defined as being between the ages of 18 and 34, following the definition of the Ministry of Youth Affairs in Kuwait (Ministry of Youth Affairs in Kuwait, 2020). The primary data for this chapter is drawn from semi-structured interviews with eight Kuwaiti young people involved in charity in Kuwait, alongside participant observation in local charity activities and campaigns conducted in Kuwait. The selection of participants was based on tracking Kuwait charity works on social media and in the Kuwaiti charity arena and through personal connections (see methodology section, Chapter 1). I attempted in my selection of participants to present a range of charitable engagement by Kuwaiti young people, conducted both locally within Kuwait and internationally, and to include a variety of motives and charity purposes, in order to build a comprehensive image of charity by young people in Kuwait.

This chapter demonstrates how young people’s engagement in charity is diverse and complicated. The specific focus is on how young people in Kuwait are practicing charity as an expression of national identity, Kuwaitiness. For the youth, participating in charitable activities in their own self-directed ways offers a youthful perspective on the question of how to live as a contemporary Kuwaiti. Young people do this by expressing the sense of global belonging and participating in global youth cultures by doing charity together, socialising, travelling to deliver aid and support, and at the same time, building social connections and
having fun. Ethnographic material presented in this chapter explores how young people do so to express their Kuwaitiness in different facets: as a sense of belonging to Kuwaiti tradition, to show their Islamic spirit (closeness to God), and to socialise and promote well-being, as well as doing so as an expression of a self-image as contemporary youths. The analysis shows how this diversification of youth expressions through charity affects and shapes their charitable practices, determines their motivations and modes of charity, and is reflected in their lives. It also shows how public charity discourse encourages youth engagement and directs young people to participate in charity.

A central concept in the literature regarding Muslim youth is fun, though this is subject to some debate in the Islamic context. Fun is considered outside of the activities of Islamists; for example, Bayat (2007, p.433) argues that ‘Islamists are… distinctly apprehensive of the expression of “fun” – a preoccupation most people in the world seem to take for granted’. Fun, for Bayat, is ‘a metaphor for the expression of individuality, spontaneity, and lightness, in which joy is the central element’ (p.434), and something that Muslim states governed by sharia law are inherently hostile towards, most notably in the case of post-revolutionary Iran. In contrast, Deeb and Harb (2013), in a study of Shia youths in South Beirut about choosing both faith and fun, state that the pious parents were concerned about their children’s piety. The concern arose from the fact that young people had ‘begun to question moral boundaries related to leisure’ (p.7). Deeb and Harb emphasise that young people are able to adapt their demands for ‘individual choice’ according to the teachings of their religion. Flexibility in choosing from diverse perspectives and multiple interpretations within one faith allows young people to ‘reflect their own desires and ideas’ (Deeb and Harb, 2013, p.17).

From this research’s ethnographies we can see that charity for Kuwaiti young people has become a means to express different perspectives, such as political engagement and youthfulness, as well as piety, and to socialise and have fun. In order to make sense of this diversity, this chapter builds upon two bodies of literature about the contemporary Muslim world. Many scholars have written about Islamic charity in general (Atia, 2013; Mittermaier, 2019) and its role in shaping debates about humanitarianism (Osella, 2017; Benthall, 2018). There is also an expanding body of literature on young people and in particular how Middle Eastern young people create spaces of independence, autonomy, pleasure, and fun. Despite the scarcity of research combining youth studies and Islamic studies, a small number of studies have greatly enriched this field (Masquelier and Soares, 2016). Bayat and Herrera
(2010, p.5) state that ‘There is more to the lives of Muslim young people… than mere religiosity, conservative cultural politics, and extremism’. This chapter is novel in bringing these two approaches together to explore the active participation of Kuwaiti young people in charitable giving.

I build on this excellent body of work in this chapter in recognising the significance of Islam in underpinning charitable giving amongst Kuwaiti young people. I depart from it, however, in that I argue that charitable giving in Kuwait needs to be understood in a more layered and multi-dimensional manner. Charitable giving as practised by young people in Kuwait, I suggest, is a complex and multidimensional set of practices which takes place across different levels, including those of individuals’ initiatives and of the activities of charitable bodies in society. I also seek to bring attention to the agency of Kuwaiti youths themselves in the charitable field, as they imprint charities with their ideas and interests, and in doing so establish for themselves a space for diverse expressions. There is a need to understand young people’s charity practices through the lens of young people expressing their national identity.

4.2 Young people in Kuwait

Kuwaiti society is described as having a ‘youth bulge’ (Lakshminarayanan, 2020). Statistics from the Public Authority of Civil Information (2018) recorded that 70% of Kuwait’s population is under the age of 34. According to recent statistics in the World Factbook (2020), the median age in Kuwait is 29.7 years. What distinguishes young people from other age stages is that it is the age of self-affirmation, representing independence from family and transformation to adulthood, full of activity, emotion, love experience, impulsiveness, and unlimited energy, that if used positively will benefit both young people and society. If we want to define Kuwaiti youth, there is no formal legislation that determines a specific age in Kuwait. The Council of Youth and Sports Ministers in the GCC determined the age of young people to be 15 to 24 years (Alnaser, 2018) This research uses the age period defined by the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs in Kuwait, as mentioned earlier.

Some research in Kuwaiti youth studies has demonstrated that studying young people in a country as complex as Kuwait requires deep understanding of cultural and sociological changes, and must take into account surrounding events, such as the Iraqi invasion of 1990 (Lakshminarayanan, 2020; Alnaser, 2018; Ghabra, 1997; Al-Naqeeb, 1991). Alnaser (2018,
states that ‘young Kuwaitis live under conflicting conditions’. She refers to the characteristics of traditional society that still exist, such as traditional norms, family restrictions, gender roles, and religion. Alnaser argues that the Kuwaiti context might seem confusing, since it is located in the global south and shares the surrounding cultures, while at the same time it maintains its own identity and distinguishes itself from other nations in the region. Economically Kuwait is more like developed nations in the global north, while culturally it is more like developing nations in the global south. Alnaser found Kuwait to be in ‘an interesting and challenging period at which to examine youth experiences’ (p.5).

Kuwait is a rich country and has a welfare system that provides for Kuwaitis from cradle to grave. Increasing usage of the internet and social media has resulted in an increase in demands for greater freedom and socioeconomic reform (Lakshminarayanan, 2020). Ghabra (1997) demonstrated that there has been a change in Kuwaiti society that increased social mobility and led to emerging social strata with new demands and aspirations. He explained that this was the result of the rapid economic development of the preceding four decades.

Al-Wagayan (2016) states that there are various challenges facing Kuwaiti young people in regard to engaging in volunteering, such as family restrictions or linking participation opportunities with large donations instead of effective engagements. Lakshminarayanan (2020) confirms that there is a need to enhance youth participation. These challenges can be barriers.

This research explores how Kuwaiti young people seize opportunities and create roles for their engagement in charity. Kuwaiti young people are often chided by their elders for growing up in the comforts of an oil-rich economy, unaware of the efforts and difficulties their ancestors had to endure for generations in order to make a living. However, contrary to expectations, such an apparently ‘spoilt generation’ is increasingly being drawn to charitable activities (Alshatti, 2017). Although their involvement as donors might be constrained by limited access to individual resources, Kuwaiti young people have been increasingly involved in charity campaigns over and above giving monetary donations. This phenomenon reflects a shift toward charity targeting young people in Kuwait that is a result of different influences: the government, NGOs, Islamist groups, family and individuals, and young people themselves. Traditionally, charities in Kuwait were largely related to Islamic conceptions of piety and depended on personal interactions between the members of a community, although
this began to change with the discovery of oil and the social and cultural implications this had for everyday life in Kuwait.

4.3 Young people’s engagement in charity in Kuwait

In the sections that follow I focus on how young Kuwaitis engage in charitable giving in a number of ways: 1) as an expression of Kuwaiti traditions, 2) as an expression of Islamic spirit, 3) for socialising and well-being, and 4) as an expression of a self-image of contemporary youth. These diverse expressions and modalities in practicing charity stem from different motives that drive young people to shape their charity involvement according to their thoughts, needs, and beliefs, and to use it for different purposes. The environment in which they live also has a role in their directions and selections, which are occasionally encouraged by public discourse. These motivations and efforts are described and analysed in the next sections, to contribute to an exploration of the full complexity of youth charity engagement in Kuwait.

4.3.1 Charity as an expression of Kuwaiti traditions

One of the dimensions of youth charity engagement is the practice of charity for the sake of nationalism and to mirror past local Islamic traditions. As one of my research participants commented: ‘This is what we are raised on and these are our Kuwaiti traditions from a long time ago.’ I found that a wide range of people engage in charity, from children to elderly people, men and women, although women appear to be more involved in different kinds of projects, not only by participating but also in convincing family and friends to join charitable organisations.

In a study of gender differences in relation to volunteering and charitable giving, Einolf (2011) states that women are more likely to give to family and friends and have broader social networks, and to be more enthusiastic in helping others. Much research has been conducted on charitable giving in general, however very little focuses on how and why charity participation varies by gender (Einolf, 2011). The characteristics and roles of men and women have been differentiated in all societies, although anthropologists believes that these roles cannot be universal since gender is subject to cultural construction (Brunel, 2000). Brunel suggests that future (cross-cultural) work should consider the different extents to
which collectivist vs individualist cultures react to charity appeals. Brunel’s (2000, p.25) findings show that ‘Individualist cultures are more “masculine” (i.e., more competitive) and the collectivist cultures more “feminine” (i.e., more caring) in their charity ad-responses’. Kuwaiti society is considered to be a collectivist society, where relationships are particularly valuable (Aladwani, 2013). This could be a reason why we find more Kuwaiti women involved in charity, and Kuwaiti women responding more to charitable appeals. More reasons for this are explored in Chapter 5.

The people in the segment of Kuwaiti society that my research focused on would argue that the circumstances experienced during the Iraqi invasion (see Chapter 2) brought them closer to Allah. They believe that Allah saved their country because of the good deeds that Kuwaitis used to do. Therefore, they consider it essential for Kuwaiti parents to raise their children within these traditions. For example, when I was volunteering to collect donations for an NGO during Ramadan, I met a mother whose son had brought his savings box to donate; she was encouraging him and asked me to put his name on the receipt of his donation. He was smiling and seemed very proud when he offered me the money like the other adults were doing, although there were many other children and young people at the campaign site. Charity campaigns now target donors of all ages, which is also indicated by the ways in which the aims of a project tend to be presented in a simple way that can be understood by different ages, and how Kuwaitiness and belonging are emphasised in campaign ads. I remember one of the ads by Zakat House, for a government-affiliated charity engaged in poverty relief, which used an old Kuwaiti proverb, dehenna fe makabbatna, meaning that the people from our nation are the closest to us and should have priority in charity.

In the past, charity practices in Kuwait were mostly limited to families and neighbourhoods. One of my fieldwork informants, Dr Khalid, worked in Zakat House for decades, and after his retirement, he became interested in archiving Kuwaiti charity work. He told me that in the past, zakat distribution in Kuwait occurred in the front yard of people’s houses, and all family members would witness it; they were raised on this Islamic-inspired habit. There was a connection between givers and recipients: donors used to give to people they knew locally, meaning they could see the impact and the transformation that their giving created. After charitable giving began to be taken over by NGOs and government bodies, it became more anonymous and global, with less connection between giver and receiver.
Recently some NGOs have tried to recover the personal connection between giver and recipient. An especially interesting example of this trend is the Sirdab al Faiha project. *Sirdab* literally means ‘basement’ and *Faiha* is the name of an area in Kuwait. Its founder, Alsalem, is a young middle-class girl who also volunteers in another local charity called *Tarahum*, which is registered under the semi-governmental umbrella organisation the International Islamic Charity Organisation (IICO). The IICO seems to be a popular statutory preference among many youth charities, when I asked Sara why *Tarahum* chose the IICO, she replied: ‘Because it is clearly not connected to any political Islamist trend’. The *Tarahum* charitable team is run by young men and women engaged locally and internationally. *Sirdab Al Faiha* is a local project which was established during Ramadan 2018 by a number of young girls who are also members of *Tarahum*, and who wished to expand and also include non-Kuwaiti members.

The project targets needy families inside Kuwait, mostly stateless people, or *Bidun* (see Chapter 1). Sara told me that the charity group was inspired by her childhood:

> The idea of this project was inspired to me from my childhood, where I started learning about giving, accompanying my grandmother during Ramadan. We would finish prayers in the mosque and then my grandma would take me to visit some houses in the neighbourhood. … At that time, I thought they were my grandma’s friends! They used to spend some time in talking as friends. I never thought that these visits were to deliver them donations until I realised much later on.

From this, she was inspired by the idea and motivated to start her charity project, *Sirdab al Faiha*. Basements in Kuwaiti houses used to be large and suitable for family gatherings and occasions. The *Faiha* area, and the basement of one of the team members’ houses, where the project volunteers would meet, came to identify the project name. Alsalem said that nowadays you rarely find needy families in a neighbourhood of Kuwaiti houses. In the past, many low-income workers’ families used to rent rooms in Kuwaiti houses, so you could find different nationalities from different financial levels living in the same area with connections to each other, whereas nowadays, with modern houses and buildings, these same rooms are dedicated to domestic workers such as drivers or home chefs. And if they want to offer part of their houses for rent, they make flats on higher floors with a high rent, which is not affordable for those on low incomes anymore, and is, instead, intended mostly for newly married couples who do not have a place to live in their family house. This is why Alsalem
wanted to apply her grandmother’s concept to connect Kuwaiti volunteers with other needy families, wherever they live.

*Sirdab al Faiha*’s twenty female volunteers, as observed during Ramadan 2018, are each responsible for one needy family on an everyday basis, and are meant to connect with them for a year as if it were their real family, such as visiting them, calling them regularly, providing them with food, clothes, or used furniture, or surprising kids with toys or taking them out to the cinema or to play. Volunteers fund all of these activities through donations from the people around them. Although their team conducts some charitable campaigns internationally on a regular basis during the year, they like to do charity locally during Ramadan. Alsalem told me that they were aiming to enhance the spirit of ‘giving with connection’ within the community. Alongside the congestion of charity appeals for donations on social media during Ramadan, the charity arena in Kuwait cannot afford many campaigns at the same time. That is why Alsalem said, ‘We wanted to find creative ways to [do] something together differently, not just to [give money], to attract attention to our charity project within this media hype in Ramadan’. I realised that she finds it very difficult to allocate space for their charitable project, in competition with big campaigns such as those of Alhusainan the influencer (see Chapter 3).

In the case of *Sirdab al Faiha*, its founder considers that the purpose of giving money to a charity is that the giver feels they are helping the most significant needs of the poor. For Alsalem and her team, witnessing the impact of charitable giving is essential for the giver; even if they give anonymously, it is related to a personal desire to feel the achievement of changing people’s lives. They showed me in their conversations how they really care for others in this project; caring of other Muslims is an important aspect of being Muslim. It might be that these feelings of being a good Muslim are taken for granted in their talk, since everyone from participants to beneficiaries is Muslims, so Alsalem was focused on the aspect they feel more strongly, changing people lives. What makes this charity practice different is that it is derived from old Kuwaiti charitable traditions of being directly connected with the needy in one’s neighbourhood. They use elements that indicate Kuwaiti traditions, such as the *abaya*, alongside modern elements such as using social media in project marketing and communication with donors.

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2 The *abaya* is a full-length outer garment worn by some Muslim women. Traditionally, in Kuwait and Gulf countries, an *abaya* is usually black in colour and is often worn over clothing.
The *Sirdab al Faiha* project involves a high level of commitment and responsibility toward needy families. Young people in this case are practicing charity in a different way, though one that they consciously conceive of as being derived from old habits and adapted to the contemporary situation, using tools within the Kuwaiti community in combination with innovative, youth-focused ideas.

4.3.2 Charity as an expression of Islamic spirit

Another dimension of charity engagements by young people is that they practice charity to express their Kuwaitiness and to show their Islamic spirit, which means practicing charity to feel a sense of closeness to God and of being a good Muslim. Many of my older informants stated that the openness and globalisation that young people in Kuwait and all over the world have witnessed concerns them, especially regarding how the new generations’ identity will be affected – both the Islamic identity in general and the Kuwaiti identity in particular. For instance, Bedoor, a divorced Kuwaiti woman who works as a teacher, has created a charitable team to engage meaningfully with Kuwaiti youths and keep them busy with charitable activities. She told me, ‘I have two teenage boys and… I worry [about] their life and for those youths in Kuwait and how the new generations will live with much spare time, leisure life, and openness on social media’.

The rapid global openness that Kuwait has witnessed has changed the country economically and democratically, and affected society too. Alnaser (2018, p.63) explored how these rapid changes – with the revolution in information access and the emerging welfare state – have created more opportunities for Kuwaiti young people than in previous generations, in providing them ‘with greater choices and freedom’. However, contemporary Kuwaiti society still clings to its traditions, and it is predicted by Alnaser that these traditions will continue and will influence the choices of young people. These traditions are likely to be shaped by ‘external constraints… such as gender, religion, strong social and family ties, religion and social division’ (Alnaser, 2018, p.63). The case is similar in Saudi Arabia, where globalization is not always interpreted as positive; it depends on how its impact is managed, but it is understood as negative if its impact touches on national or Islamic identities (Thompson, 2019).

After the claims surrounding Islamic activities after 9/11, Muslims realised that emphasising ‘humanity’ rather than religious speech in charity appeals is more acceptable to the public.
Benthall (2018) has discussed the links between humanitarianism and religion; humanitarianism as an ideology tries to alleviate suffering, and encompasses all forms of charity and altruistic deeds. Yet he preferred to avoid the stance of religion and traditions when talking about the ideal charity. The case is similar for young people in Islamic groups: to avoid any suspicion from those who are apprehensive about Islamic activities after 9/11, they found a better way to attract their peers. Kuwaiti young people in Islamic groups feel that if a charity appeal is framed as a ‘humanity discourse’ it will attract more supporters, especially among their peers. As explained by a young Islamist leader, Alkhalid, Some Kuwaiti young people are practicing charity in order to be modern young Muslims, who care about world development and changing others’ lives from a humanitarian perspective. In other words, they are practicing charity to be closer to God, but in public they are focusing on the humanity aspect more than the Islamic discourse. They use the term ‘humanity’ to stress their commitment to everyone having the right to a better life, thus being a good Muslim by taking care of other Muslims. Older people in the field – in Islamic groups – emphasise in their appeals that they are doing charity to seek Allah’s rewards (Ajr); they don’t have a problem with frankness in public discourse.

Alkhalid state that it is no longer easy for Kuwaiti Islamic groups, such as the Society for Social Reform (the Muslim Brotherhood) and the Society for the Revival of Heritage (the Salafist Movement), to bring young people together as they have in the past, under organised and ongoing activities. They are continuing, but the turnouts are lower. Attracting young people was previously done through fun, playing and travelling together under an Islamic moral environment that parents generally trust. But it was hard for parents to create this environment in compliance with Islam. For instance, when I was in high school, some Islamist summer camps for girls used to book an indoor swimming pool on a regular basis, so they could take off their hijab and swim in a closed place. Nowadays, in Kuwait, these pools are available in many female gyms. However, fun is subject to some debate in the Islamic context, as it is considered outside of the activities of Islamists, as already discussed. I argue that fun can exist in many Islamist activities when an Islam-compliant environment is created.

There are several reasons why activities organised by Islamists with the participation of young people in mind are not as significant today as they were in the past. First, unlike before, Islamist groups are not the only ones offering these types of activities. There are
many groups and youth communities in Kuwait now – as standalone groups not affiliated with any parties or currents – offering activities in different interests: travel, sport, paint, reading, photography, etc. Second, there are the challenges of the media and online virtual communities, which are more fun for some than groups of friends and other activities. The young person can be in their home in front of a screen having a lot of fun; as some studies show, the internet is increasingly fulfilling young people’s personal and social needs (Ayyad, 2011). Third, there could also be a rejection of involvement with groups based on political Islam, or fear from the linking of Islamic groups to terrorism in the media. For instance, Alkhalid stated that in Islamic groups, it is mostly the parents who are pushing their children to join the activities, to be with good friends and learn morals, but when it comes to political issues, they want them to stop:

I remember one student in the university voted in the student union without her dad knowing. The girl said that her dad agreed for her to join any activities with the Islamist group, but without voting or any political practice.

On the other hand, Alkhalid commented that nowadays some young people with a pious upbringing and religious family background are refusing to engage in religious groups when it is the parents’ desire that the children be like them. Alkhalid pointed out that some parents referred to their children’s refusal to join Islamist activities as just a personal preference to not engage and socialise, while sometimes it is a matter of the children not liking to be with an Islamist group and be labelled as religious. These divergences and generational transformations are obvious in the context of Turkey too; White (2014) states that with globalisation, the subjective freedom of choices has increased for individuals there. Muslim networks in Turkey benefit from searching for alternative collectives, especially the Islam-rooted justice and development party (AKP, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) which has been in power since 2002. White suggests that religious and national identities for many have become forms of personal expression after what Islam was turned into in the post-coup urban and globalised environment in Turkey. The AKP claims that they are ‘a conservative party’ rather than Islamic. However, it is led by openly pious Muslim politicians. This has a similarity to many Islamic movements in Kuwait, which claim the same, that they serve a broader segment of society. There are many Kuwaiti young people, raised with parents belonging to Islamists groups, who don’t like blindly following their parents; they are practicing Islam and charity in their own way with different authorisations, or individually,
without belonging to any particular Islamist trend. Charity has multiple aspect for young people. It is considered from the perspectives of religion, development, politics, authenticity, socialising, and having fun. All of these elements have pushed this research to explore how people differ in their understanding and practicing of charity (White, 2014).

Alkhalid said, ‘Some young people are coming to us thanks to encouragement from their peers’, unrelated to the parents’ thoughts or guidance. Alkhalid considers peer influence as having the strongest effect in attracting young people. Some young people have found charitable activities to be an outlet from their family constraints and it is accepted practice by their parents, especially those who have tough constraints in their home. Alsalem stated that she finds practising charity a part of having fun in life. She expressed that when young Kuwaitis started charity trips and she saw them online, ‘They excited me’, and this was the first motive behind her engagement in charity, after her friends’ encouragement. In other words, those who refuse to join an Islamist group for the general activities are happy to sign up only for their charitable activities. For example, many families would generally not allow girls to travel alone with a group, or to be in contact with boys, while in a charity project it is acceptable, religiously and traditionally, to travel within a mixed-gender group. One could argue that charity work is reshaping the social relations and thinking of religious people in Kuwait. Some flexibility in Islamic opinion is emerging in some issues, such as women travelling alone for charity within a trusted group, which before would contradict with the impermissibility of a woman travelling alone, without a Mahram, regardless of the circumstances.

In the case of Bedoor (see Chapter 3: Iftar workshop at a restaurant), she started a charity with the aim of engaging Kuwaiti young people, particularly her sons. Her preoccupation was that many young people lack purpose in life and are only interested in leisure and pleasure, as she had gathered from her personal experience. According to Alkhalid, charity can direct young people towards a deeper purpose in life via creating responsibility and caring for others, as charity work is a humanitarian act based on consensus among people from different religions. Therefore, some young people choose to express their ‘Islamic spirit’ through charity within Islamist groups, yet not through all other activities.

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3 A woman’s mahram is a person whom she is never permitted to marry because of their close blood relationship (such as her father, grandfather, son, etc.), or because of breastfeeding together (Islamiqa.info).
Alomar, a young woman in her thirties who grew up in the Society for Social Reform, as did her father, started a charity project as an individual initiative, aiming to target young people and engage them in charitable work focusing on education for displaced Syrian children. Alomar told me that she could easily collect donations for her project from merchants and VIP donors through her family connections, but what she really wants is to engage more young people in this campaign: ‘I want to create generations in each house in Kuwait who carry the message.’ She was commenting on how consumption is increasing among young people without them realising how they have the ability to change others’ lives:

After we had started our first campaign for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, I went with three of my friends to a popular Japanese restaurant in Kuwait, where we used to gather on weekends. I noticed that our bill was around KD 60! With this amount you could educate a Syrian child for a year. If we saved one of these gatherings’ budgets, we could enrol one child every month for a year!

For Alomar, charity is a vehicle for engaging young people in moral reform. Young people’s charitable practices are a means to make a meaningful life by caring for others and doing good, to be closer to God. Through charity young people can spread how to be a good Muslim among other young people in Kuwait.

4.3.3 Charity as socialising and a source of well-being

Another dimension in young people’s charity is practising charity to socialise and promote well-being. We saw this aspect in the previous chapter’s discussion of the importance that parents saw being involved as having for their children’s well-being, and we now see it with regard to the thinking and identity of young Kuwaitis themselves. This is not confined to doing charitable practices for the sake of their religion, but rather they have added a new dimension that reflects on them while they are engaging in charity. This section elaborates on how meeting new people to socialise and pursue well-being could be a motive for charitable engagement among young people.

The Salwan team was established with the aim of entertaining Syrian children in refugee camps, and then expanded to provide charity tourism trips for families with their children, with different charity goals that suit all family members. This was a new concept, embedding charity within their personal life as a family activity. They are on holiday, having fun, and
-sharing this happiness with others by practicing charity. Salwan comes from the word *salwan*, which means the demise of sadness and worry, and all that entertains the soul. Salwan is a small family and friends-based team, consisting of three generations: a grandparent, their children, and their grandchildren. The youngest participant is four years old and the eldest is 60. I had the chance to meet two members of this team, Dr Reham, a doctor of psychology and a grandmother, and Aisha, the leader of the girls’ part in the Salwan team. Dr Reham explained how working with the Salwan team affected her children and grandchildren:

> When we are in the bus travelling from place to place on any trip, after each charity activity we talk in the bus together. We do not have to tell the children how they could learn from this activity in their life. The microphone is passed around in the bus and everyone says what they feel from what they did, and we are often surprised by the lessons and meaningful points that our kids learn and mention; it is as if our kids inherit the charitable goals by practice.

I asked Aisha how the idea of this team started. She told me that she was not the founder of this team. Dr Reham’s son, Yousef, was the founder. She explained that:

> The idea started during a conversation between my friend’s brother, Yousef, and his brother-in-law, Mohammad, my friend’s husband. They were volunteers in a trip with a charity team to Syrian refugee camps; they were so happy when they saw Syrian children in the refugee camps and they were disappointed that they did not bring anything special for them other than the charity packs (food and clothes) for each family. While they were happy to play with the children there and talk to them, Mohammad told Yousef ‘It would be great if we were able to bring our children with us to play with these kids and engage in this charity with us’. Yousef was excited by the idea and said that he would do it. When they came back to Kuwait, they talked to their family, their wives, kids, and Dr Reham, Yousef’s mother, and they were excited by the idea too. Then they started to carefully select some of their close friends and ask them to be members of the team with their children. They wanted members that they knew well and they felt comfortable travelling with.

Aisha told me that she got a call from Yousef to join the team. He did not let his sister call her in the beginning, because she was afraid that Aisha would reject this request because of her illness, as she had rejected many offers before. Aisha had been diagnosed with Multiple
Sclerosis (MS) around six years ago. Her health is quite unstable because of her disease. Sometimes she suddenly cannot walk because of numbness in her legs or dizziness, also she gets tired quickly if she concentrates for a long time on a task, and cannot cope with lights and noise. She took early retirement from her work as a student adviser in a student affairs office in a university. Aisha has also faced other troubles in her life. She became a mother age nineteen, meaning she had responsibilities at an early age. She is divorced and has three children, two of whom live with her, while the eldest lives with her ex-husband. However, she is very innovative, meaning many teams like to have her for her ideas and enthusiasm. Aisha is lively and independent, strong enough to live with her situation and to accept her disease. She doesn’t like pity from others, especially about her disease or because she is a single mother with responsibilities. She also does not like to be dependent on the people around her.

There are some teams who called me before and I refused because I need a wheelchair sometimes if I get tired. For Salwan, I told them I am get tired, I cannot! But they insisted, Yousef told me ‘We want you as you are!’ and my friend told me ‘We are ready to do for you what will make you feel comfortable’. In reality, I was feeling that I was in distress and my life was missing something, but I didn’t know what. After my illness, I avoided many opportunities, I only have my small business, the children club. When I found that Salwan were keen to take into account my illness and facilitate everything for me, I agreed. Imagine, if I got tired in a trip, they would easily cancel the programme that day because of me. The team are very close, so they are flexible to change the schedule as they want without any complaints from members. We always travel together by bus and they hire another private car following us with my wheelchair; in case I get tired, I can go back any time.

They travelled to Lebanon three times and to Sri Lanka once. In Lebanon, they had the chance to visit some camps that were really in need of help, both Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps. Aisha told me, ‘Most of the refugee camps we went to, they told us “You are the first charity team who has visited us”’. Aisha explained that because of the unstable circumstances in Lebanon, many charity teams avoid taking the risk of travelling there, and prefer to travel to Syrian camps in Jordan or Turkey instead.

The Salwan team is officially registered under the Islamic International Charity Organisation (IICO), a semi-governmental body. However, Aisha mentioned that sometimes they travel
with other charity agencies, such as the Global Mercy Association (GMA), a charity body belonging to Social Reform Association, because of their good connections. The Salwan team are flexible in allocating their small team to whoever has the most connections in Lebanon and who can provide them with better facilities in terms of travel and access. Although they are an officially registered team, they access countries as tourists, usually stating that they are families with children and planning to do tours around Lebanon (for instance), not just charity activities. Aisha said: ‘It is much easier for us to enter a country as tourists, especially for airport inspections; each family takes one or two boxes of charity things as their personal belongings’. It seems that they have become more experienced after trying several times, and are trying to do it better every time.

In some of their trips, members collected KD 35,000 (approx. GBP 75,000) and in other trips they barely reached KD 10,000 (approx. GBP 25,000). Their target is not collecting a big amount of money, however. ‘Salwan’s goal is to spread happiness’, as Aisha put it. She explained that what they collect is used to cover the costs of entertainment activities, while each member pays their own trip cost. If what they collect is more than the cost of entertainment activities, they use it to sponsor orphans, called in Islam kafalah. They attempt to empower these orphans by providing them with a chance at education, such as registering them in a school. The main idea that Salwan aims for is to make ‘carnivals of happiness’ inside the refugee camps or orphan centres, such as taking the children to play in amusement parks or bringing them toys and gifts. Aisha explained for me their experience at a refugee camp:

We tried to spend a night at the camp with our children. That camp was very far, next to the border. We made a BBQ together, we brought a big outdoor screen and projector with us and watched a movie, and we did not forget the popcorn. We just wanted to bring them the atmosphere that our kids have when we gather in Kuwait. At night, we were playing cards, singing and laughing. Our children in the Salwan team made puppet shows for the kids at the camp. It was a wonderful experience that our children and we enjoyed, and we enjoyed seeing the happiness on their faces.

The Salwan children were surprised by the reaction of the camp children, as Aisha told me. Some of them had never seen a trampoline in their life and didn’t know what they were supposed to do with it; one child stood on the trampoline and asked ‘sho a’me?’, which literally means ‘what do I do?’. The Salwan team asked some of the youth volunteers to buy
some multiplayer games in Kuwait to bring with them to play in the camps. Aisha said that they went to the most expensive toy shop in Kuwait, Fantasy World, and bought some of the latest games and brought them with them to the camps. Aisha said, ‘We realised that the very simple games were enjoyed more. Such as traditional group games like hide and seek’. One of the team members, Salah, a Kuwaiti university student, told me that ‘we brought things that are enjoyed by Kuwaiti kids, and found that their happiness was much simpler than what we thought’. The Salwan team’s children started to look differently at what they have and to appreciate it more, as Aisha expressed. Aisha said that the Salwan children have become addicted to these types of trip. When Aisha asked her daughter, Farah (11 years old), where she would like to travel that summer, Farah answered that the Salwan trip is enough for her. Aisha said that her one and only daughter among her boys is so spoiled, and really she has whatever she wishes. After they came back from the first trip with Salwan, her purchases were fewer! And she began to watch prices more before buying; she told her mother: ‘You know that with this amount a child can live for a month in the camp!’ Aisha said that this resulted from how many times she had repeated the same on social media ads for Salwan team; her daughter had listened and absorbed this.

Aisha enjoys planning the trips, preparing the charity gift packages, looking after the details with love, meeting with the team members, and leading the team. This charity work gave her an outlet for her fears and provided her with more confidence to do what she had been trying to avoid or what she thought was difficult with her illness. Trying to spread happiness, through her work with this team, is bringing her happiness back. Aisha works in both the team and in her clubs to spread the giving mindset among Kuwaiti children and prepare packages for Salwan trips. Aisha said that before this she sometimes felt distress and she was trying to do different things with her life to give her the feelings of pride, confidence, and self-satisfaction that everyone needs for well-being and balance, but she did not feel these as much as she did from the charity work. She said: ‘Giving is an interesting feeling, no one can feel it until they try it’.

Aisha told me how she wanted to dedicate her life to herself and her children; maybe after her disease and after the failure of her first marriage, she cared only about protecting her family. She told me that she refused to even think about another marriage, and she doesn’t like to talk in detail about her illness with other people. A while after this interview, I noticed that she became more open about her illness on her social media, talking about it for the public. Aisha
mentioned that she has started writing a book about adaptation and coexistence with MS, and she has published videos on Instagram on the same topic. Although she thought that her illness was a barrier, maybe her work in charity has enlightened her that she can break it.

In Aisha’s case, with her illness and divorce, she said that she likes to be independent in raising her children alone, managing her small business, and dealing with her disease. She stressed that she doesn't like pity from others, even from her family. Autonomy was obvious in her life (see Chapter 5: The notion of autonomy).

4.3.4 Charity as an expression of self-image in contemporary young people

Some young people are engaging in charity for the purpose of expressing their self-image as being young and modern. This is the last layer of multidimensional youth charity practices that this chapter explores. Alnaser (2018) demonstrates in her study of social change among Kuwaiti young people that they are facing a complex reality in which traditional norms and cultural restrictions have come into conflict with modernity, and the rapid changes it has brought to collective ways of life. Young people must negotiate these contradictions. Everyday charity practices among young people in Kuwait take different forms, and help express their conception of themselves as contemporary young people. Kuwaiti young people engage in charity in different ways that are compatible with contemporary views and how they desire to be identified. Engaging in charity in the contemporary world, along with the tools that religion and tradition used to provide, can be challenging. Kuwaiti young people are promoting different and innovative initiatives which could be vulnerable to criticism or may not be accepted by Kuwaiti society.

A charity project, the *Luju* book (literally, ‘asylum’ or seeking refuge), which emerged from a collaboration between two young men, was based on the founders’ decision to devote their hobbies and passion to expressing themselves and fulfilling their desires in the service of humanity. Their idea was adopted by the Global Mercy Association (GMA) in Kuwait. They produced a book, which was the first of its type in Kuwait to merge charity literature and photography as a piece of art and as a means to raise awareness and urge people to donate. It was not at all similar to delivering donations or the completion of usual charity projects. Alqattan, a young Kuwaiti man who became a professional photographer, is currently in his seventh job, in the media and marketing department in the GMA. He has been working as a
professional *Insany* (humanitarian) photographer since 2013, where he is photographing the cases that need humanitarian intervention in his charitable trips. He credits his stability in his current job to his boss, whose experience and capability he trusts and who facilitated this more creative job. I asked him why he chose the GMA, whether it was to follow in his father’s steps, as he also belonged to this Islamic group. He told me:

My dad has studied media and [is] also a photographer, most of my siblings also [work] in media; you can say I was raised on photography at home. My dad likes charity work and travels a lot for charity with the GMA to deliver donations to different locations. I had the chance to join him in one of these trips.

On that trip, he practised photography for the first time on humanitarian issues and received admiration from others for his photos. Alqattan enjoyed photographing the trip, and this turned into a passion for charity, and it became his profession and his hobby. He liked that in this profession that he has chosen he has a meaning in life; he chose to help others by delivering their stories to the world using his lens.

The other founder, Alotaibi, is a young Kuwaiti writer in the field of charity literature and the owner of a non-profit humanitarian media company called *Insan* (literally, ‘human’). His background is in law studies, however, not related to literature or humanitarian work at all. Alotaibi told me that he liked to help needy people to have a better life, and he used his media production line for that purpose. His aim was to combine ‘the magnificence of the story with the story’s impact in an attractive and sympathetic manner’.

These two young men, with their capabilities and creativity – Alqattan, who has humanitarian photography skills, and Alotaibi, who has storytelling skills – came up with the idea of the book. Alqattan explained that from the beginning of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, many Muslims had to leave the country for fear of being killed. Because sometimes aid trips are delayed through having to wait for the collection of the donations that they need to deliver, Alqattan said that the GMA decided to travel to a refugee camp in Bangladesh, even if they did not have enough donations, just to show Kuwaiti donors what is happening.

Alqattan travelled to the Rohingya camp in Bangladesh a week after it had been established. He mentioned that he had been once before to Myanmar at the beginning of the crisis, but with a European organisation, since all Muslim organisations were banned from entering the country. It seems that his everyday charitable activities are not limited to his job with the
GMA, but rather they involve participation with different charitable organisations globally, and even risky activities.

He was motivated by his first visit to the Rohingya population when he thought of starting a fundraising campaign in Kuwait using the photos that he had taken during the trip:

In this campaign, I used my photos from the refugee camp in Bangladesh. I asked the refugees to cover their eyes in the photo with their hands, to express the campaign title which was, ‘We don’t want to see more’ [photo cited in (Alqabas, 2017)]. This title could be understood in two ways, as coming the refugees from what they have suffered, and as coming from the donors, who don’t want to see more injustice and persecution.

This is how the work started on the first trip. After that, Alqattan and Alotaibi thought of the idea of the charity book as a project between them. Alqattan explained to me the idea of the book:

Our main goal is creating something different and unique as a charity. We want to raise the ceiling of the printed product for charities. In order not to see ‘the worker’ in charity as a ‘dervish’, or you might say low quality work, we want our book to be the model for other charities’ productions with its high production values.

In the book, they wanted to describe the problems faced by the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in the form of realistic characters, in a narrative style that would bring the situation closer to the reader. Alqattan said that society commonly links the idea of charity with donating, donating what people no longer need or what remains after their expenses. Any charity production, such as adverts or brochures, is thus automatically thought of as low quality, coming from donations. He said: ‘We wanted to change this idea, and we did, in this book.’ He was so excited when he was talking to me, and his facial expressions showed his satisfaction in producing this book, which for him is worth the hard work that they spent to do it, and will pay off in the long term. The work on this book took 14 months and three trips to Bangladesh. The book was printed in October 2018 with professional photos in a luxury format, similar to high-end commercial books. As the book was so professional, they decided

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4 A dervish in Turkish is a person who used to work in religious ceremonies and perform tasks such as dancing and whirling. The term is sometimes used in Kuwait to describe a person who does not have the power to take any decisions regarding their job, but just performs what they are asked to do.
that they needed an appropriate event to launch it, so they arranged for a photography exhibition as a book launch. I attended this exhibition while undertaking fieldwork in Kuwait.

They found a supportive charity organisation that agreed with their conditions and embraced their talent and ideas. Alqattan and Alotaibi requested from the GMA that they did not want to be portrayed as heroes or saviours, either the name of the charity organisation or their own names. They believe that the hero in this book is the refugee, and that they need support to live their heroic story. They made the needy into the heroes of the story, and their purpose is to help them end up with a prosperous life. They explained that they considered this as a charity, too, and they were not interested in having their names in the book since they would be rewarded by Allah. In the end, the publisher refused to print it without names, so they did appear.

This form of charity has multiple, combined goals. For the charity organisation, they were able to embrace youth creativity, working with young people and marketing their project, while at the same time the organisation relinquished its right to the obvious marketing in exchange for gaining new loyalty and support for new forms of achievement in charity practice. For the young people themselves, it is a different way of engaging in charitable work, that they found to be a way for them to express their personality, identity, hobbies, and voice in their own way. Alqattan and Alotaibi want to use charity as an expression of their self-image as contemporary young people, and want to change perceptions of those who work for charities. On the other hand, they are also trying to change the narrative of the needy, poor, or refugees, usually seen as ‘victims’ in Kuwaiti charity discourse (and in many other regions), repositioning them as the ‘heroes’ of the charity story. It a self-reflexive critique of the notion of charity and the ways in which it has been deployed in modern times, both generally and by the Kuwaiti state. By challenging notions of victims and heroes by deploying photography and new literary forms, these young people are engaged in a critique of conventional ways of doing charity.

4.4 Conclusion

Charity involvement in Kuwait has become a means of achieving multiple objectives, not limited to religious obligations. Charity work practised by young Kuwaiti people is complex and multidimensional. Incidents in the region, 9/11 and the Iraq invasion, were critical
moments in the development of young people’s consciousness and investment in charitable activities. Charity practices by Kuwaiti young people reveal the diversity of charitable practices and how young people use charity to express their sense of belonging to Kuwaiti traditions and their Islamic spirit, to socialise and achieve well-being, and to express their conceptions of themselves as contemporary young people. This diversification in youth charity engagement has brought innovation, vitality, and a sense of society’s responsibility to charitable work. The sense of Kuwaitiness as expressed by youth through charity is actually wider than just belonging to Kuwait and participating charity to constitute a ‘good’ Kuwaiti citizen. The standards of charitable work have changed to accommodate young people’s inclinations and preferences, and travelling to deliver donations and witnessing the change they bring about have become essential. Youth involvement in charities has reshaped the old charity standards, enhancing their compatibility with the contemporary world, while keeping the authenticity and inspiration from traditions.

This diversification in practices has allowed for new modes of charity promotion, and young people in Kuwait have attracted more attention to charity, encouraging their peers, and developing new forms of charitable engagement. Some young people are practising charity to express their Islamic spirit and their feelings towards other Muslims, designing charity projects to encourage their fellow young people to participate in humanitarian activities. Young people’s involvement in charity has also highlighted their drive and their attempts at self-representation, such as promoting charity work through a book by mixing their hobbies and abilities in writing, photography, and socialising with the community via a charity exhibition. The leadership of young people in charity has led to the engagement of more people, beyond simply setting a specific amount of money for fundraising.

Having explored Kuwaiti young people’s engagement in charity, the next chapter focuses on Kuwaiti individuals more generally engaging in charity and their ways of practicing charity.
Chapter 5: Charity Engagement by Individuals

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which select women in Kuwait are expressing their national identity through their engagement in charity. The individuals in this chapter are people who have created charitable initiatives by themselves; some of them work alone, while some have formed a team for the sake of implementing their charitable initiative. Some of these charitable teams are not officially registered, while others are registered officially under the umbrella of an NGO to get the benefits of registration, such as permission to collect donations online. Participants were selected to include different charity aims and different levels of engagement, from multipurpose charities with sustainable aims, to the aim of engaging givers to connect personally with receivers, to a more simple engagement of fundraising through connecting with relatives and friends.

In this chapter, I will discuss how individuals express their Kuwaitiness through engagement with charity, and with the explicit desire of addressing the inadequacies of state and NGOs towards the needy in Kuwait, especially migrants and Bidun. Yet, these activities also intersect and touch some facets of identity and subjectivity, such as the goal of maintaining autonomy and constructing a personal sphere of agency through practising charity: this is especially the case among females. This chapter argues that individuals’ expression of national identity through charitable work is dominated by exercising autonomy, meaning that they maintain flexibility in being able to adapt their charitable aims and demands and their charity engagement according to their personal situations and to what they consider the best approach.

5.1.1 The notion of autonomy

Autonomy is a social product, the outcome of many social practices that ‘encourage self-determination’ (Kupfer, 1987, p.83). That is, what it means to be autonomous is to act according to one’s own goals, reasoning, or ideals. Anthropologists have previously been less likely to interact with a culture’s ethical components because their aim is to focus on social
relations, whereas ethical conceptions work at the individual level, which was a concern of moral philosophers, who focus on behaviour at the individual level, such as people’s motives and judgements. Anthropology of ethics, or moral anthropology, emerged in an attempt to bring into focus and make empirically researchable facets of human behaviour that were previously mostly unseen (Kapferer and Gold, 2018). Laidlaw (2013) combined these two disciplines, moral philosophy and moral anthropology, in the context of the study of the anthropology of ethics and freedom. Laidlaw suggests that ethics be seen as a significant and irreducible component of human life. He explores how individuals attempt to act in accordance with what they consider to be right or good, or what they perceive to be ‘the human good’ (Laidlaw, 2013, p.2). In the context of the Middle East, Abu-Lughod (2008) suggests that the notion of autonomy is a vital component of women’s cultural identity. While conducting this research I found more women engaging in individual charitable initiatives and charitable teams, while men were more likely to work in NGOs.

Alsalem and Speece (2017, p.151) shed light on some prominent issues for Kuwaiti women, including that Kuwaiti women are ‘not given opportunities to prove themselves in work and the opportunity to stand out by taking responsibility is somewhat rare even for men’. Given that just a small percentage of women perceive significant gender disparity, this may reflect judgments of management style rather than sentiments of gender discrimination (Alsalem and Speece, 2017). This could be from the older generation’s mentality, as some surveys of Kuwaiti young people show that they believe that women can be leaders, even at the very top level (Alsalem and Speece, 2017). In charitable engagement, young people of both genders have the same opportunities (see Chapter 4), while among individuals the number of women exceeds the number of men. Yet both genders, according to the ethnographies conducted in this research, are seeking to maintain autonomy in their different practices.

Alsalem and Speece (2017) state that independence is the most common motive behind the work of Kuwaiti women, which is similar among women elsewhere in the Gulf. It could be assumed that women do not have enough chances to be independent in other places, such as at home or work, and find that charity is an outlet to exercise autonomy. They express their Kuwaitiness through charity by adopting independence in creating and practising a charitable initiative to engage with. This does not mean women do not like group work: socialising is an essential part of their charitable engagement, but under their own leadership and control. For instance, one of the participants in this chapter, Nasima, was involved in a charity committee,
but later started her own individual charity work in order to be able to design her charity as she wanted and to be the decision maker, yet she remained a member of that committee.

5.1.2 Charity teams

A Kuwait charity law (See Chapter 2) related to ‘online donations and other electronic forms of fundraising’ (Kuwait Philanthropy Law, 2017, p. 2) prevents individuals from collecting cash donations and replacing them with electronic ones, while online donation collection is limited to officially registered NGOs. As a consequence of this, the concept of charity teams emerged, in which individuals can work officially, since they are not allowed to accept cash or online donations unless they are officially registered. In order to register a charitable team, it needs to be located within the hierarchy of NGOs, and registered under the umbrella of an NGO and monitored by them.

Some teams have the flexibility to manage different charitable projects, i.e. the teams are originating their own projects and fundraising through their own initiative and their connections, and they can travel, if necessary, to supervise their international projects. NGOs intervene in teams’ work by approving charity projects, and they have the right to reject any of them for any reason, following Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) rules. In other words, these charity teams are considered as individual initiatives that practice charity under individual management, but they are registered within an NGO in order to be a legitimate charity practice within Kuwaiti law. So they easily receive and distribute donations, locally and internationally, using the NGO’s bank account. The NGOs share the decisions in the teams’ activities, while applying SAM rules.

NGOs benefit from these teams by expanding their charitable activities and by charging them for a percentage of the donations as administration fees. In reality, some NGOs are very flexible in letting the teams work independently, while others have certain constraints, as shown in the ethnographies below. Therefore, individuals carefully choose the NGO that they would like to register with depending on their priorities, which may include: the flexibility inside the NGO, the percentage of administration fees that the NGO deducts from any donations that the charitable team collects, the facilitating of registration procedures, or the NGO’s political affiliation.
Although Kuwait has restrictions on accepting donations through individual channels, people in Kuwait still collect donations from friends, families, and sometimes from unknown people. They try to do so within the law. For example, the financial limit for individuals to transfer online in one transaction, according to the regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait, is KD 3,000 (approx. GBP 6000), so individuals who accept charity through their personal accounts try to avoid exceeding this amount, and try to break it up into small transactions, or avoid it by taking cash. However, in reality it is illegal to receive charity donations individually, except within financial personal transaction limits. This is socially acceptable in Kuwait between friends and families, and generated by trust between people with strong social relations, and spread by private messages through WhatsApp, rather than in public. It is a kind of organised work that has a specialization in charity. For example, I know a Kuwaiti who has good connections in Yemen, and all her messages are calls for donations for Yemeni people, organised by seasons, such as donating winter clothes, supporting girls in their marriage needs, iftar meals during Ramadan, Eid clothes and gifts for children (Eideya), preparing Yemenis for performing hajj, etc. There are many other women that I know who send similar messages: one who specialises in delivering to Egypt, another who specialises in the needs of expats in Kuwait, and another who specialises in helping Kuwaiti Bidun. These charities all are performed individually, through personal relations and connections.

The following sections examine three different cases of individual engagement in charity in Kuwait. The ethnographic material presented in this chapter further elaborates the diversification in the expression of national identity through charitable practices in Kuwait, especially in relation to the personal motives for creating charity initiatives, the modes of choosing a purpose of charity fundraising and designing a charity project, the methods of attracting donors, the role of teamwork, and overall how every case is varied in their charitable practices and levels of engagement.

5.2 Sustainable charity through cooking courses: Zahar Academy

This section explores a charitable initiative by a retired woman, Nasima, who started her charitable project, Zahar Academy, with diverse goals beyond just giving charity. Nasima is a retired chemical engineer who was active in her job and in society. Her message in life is to empower needy families in Kuwait. She pursues this aim through her charitable project,
which she began after retirement, using her retirement money, attracting volunteers to create a team that helps her.

Nasima’s motivation for getting involved in charity was her mother. Her mother was modelling for her in giving and being engaged in charity; they had relatives in Saudi Arabia, and she used to see her parents’ hospitality. She described how their house’s doors were open for all; her family often hosted travellers from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait. She saw how her father helped many families he knew in Kuwait. When she started university, she imitated her father and used her monthly allowances – from her parents – to buy things to give to these families, as her dad used to do, but she was doing it secretly, without any one knowing. She told me:

I was very affected by the poor and the needy cases around; once I heard about anyone in need, quickly I was offering my help. I found my interest in that, I liked to have a role in society, to help change something. That not only applies to giving; even in school, if someone’s attitude was bad, for example, I always thought about why they might be acting like that, there must be a reason, what must their life look like?

When she received a salary in her first job, in Kuwaiti Mills, Nasima was always thinking that she took a salary in exchange for her work, but was concerned that God might not be satisfied with her work, if it had any deficiency. So she was keen to give from this salary to charity in order to redress any deficiency in her work, and to please God.

While talking to Nasima about her work, I was surprised that she interrupted me to say: ‘You need to know the two things I hate in my life: chemistry and cooking!’ I laughed and asked her ‘Why? These two things are exactly what you have done in your life and excelled at, you studied chemical engineering and you taught lots of people how to cook’. She explained that she liked architecture, but at that time this major was not available in Kuwait University. It was also her father’s desire that she be an architect, and she wanted to fulfil his wishes, so she chose a major close to it, which was civil engineering. During her time at university and thanks to her involvement in volunteer work with the student union, she became more committed to religion. She was in her third year when she decided that she did not want to continue in her field because it required her to be in locations outside the office, and required a lot of dealings with men, which she did not like. She transferred her major to chemical engineering, thinking that her work after graduation would be in the laboratory only, and that there would be no moving between job locations. She laughed and told me, ‘I was the only
woman in the laboratory team and all my colleagues were men, there was only one female manager, yet nothing prevented me from adhering to my religion’. She said:

from how bleak the place was, equipment, factories, and laboratories, I was thinking, how can I create something that can benefit this place? They have many products, but people only know two of them! These were one type of pasta and one type of biscuit; I suggested to them why do we not market these products by showing people what they can make from other products? Or by publishing recipes that require our products.

They liked her idea and asked her to implement it. But she didn’t know about cooking, nor did she even like it! Nasima said that she was raised in a culinary household; her mother cooked very delicious food. From that time on, she started producing cookbooks for the Mills’ products, and at the same time she began volunteering with a women’s charity association. Nasima said, ‘If you try volunteering, it becomes your way of life, you cannot sit idly by’. She was leading a committee cooking food and selling it, and use the income for charity. It was called lajnat tabaq el kheir, which means ‘the good dish committee’.

I was stopped by a sentence that gave me the impression that she is not very satisfied with her work for that committee; she told me: ‘If you are in a charity association, you cannot be the decision-maker’. This is another source of motivation for Nasima, maintaining autonomy. That has encouraged Nasima to be personally engaged in her own charity project. Nasima had lots of ideas that she wanted to implement but there were many constraints preventing her where the decision was not hers. This was the spark that launched her current charity project.

Maintaining and sustaining her individual autonomy is very important to Nasima. She wants to decide on the type of charity activities in which she will be involved, especially because it is her money; she wants to decide what is the best approach to take. Nasima found that having to make decisions with other board members within the association is not convenient. She is still working with that committee as group work within her capability, yet at the same time she has started her own charity. She said ‘This obsession started in my head that I would work for 20 years then retire; after that, I want to use my money in a sustainable charity, the rewards and benefits of which will last forever’. Nasima was planning her charity with consideration of the maximum reward calculation (see Chapter 2 on rewards). Nasima was seeking for sustainable charity; she wanted to invest in a type of charity that would benefit receivers for a long period, thereby her rewards from God would be continuous, such as
continuous *sadaqa* or *waqf*. Some individual charitable initiatives are launched in order to have autonomy and so that their founders may implement their ideas freely without limitations from other decision-makers.

Another source of motivation that encouraged Nasima to seek a deeper level of charitable engagement and commitment is a sense of blessing. Nasima felt *baraka* (blessing) in her life because of engaging in charity. She said that when she was working, she agreed with her husband to dedicate a quarter of their salaries to charitable projects, and she found this blessing in everything, even in building their house. Nasima strongly believed that blessing is achieved because of giving to charity, which was possible not only because of her financial situation but also because of her extending the productivity of her daytime – she was working and also volunteering after work, besides her other responsibilities as a mother. The main goal behind creating her own charitable project was that even if she donated from her own money, it was not enough for the needy. She was convinced of the necessity of having a profitable project as a resource that would constantly finance her so that she could help the needy. She worked for 30 years, and after the hardship of submitting four resignations, her employer finally agreed to her resignation.

I started Zahar Kitchen Academy, a multi-purpose project. By teaching people how to cook we are delivering knowledge and creating productive women who depend on themselves in their home and benefit their families, and also doing charity. All the income from these cooking training courses is spent on charitable purposes. So we run a business as a source to finance our charitable work. I built my team by first targeting retired women, who don’t have commitments after retirement and have nothing to do other than meeting their friends in cafes. Many women volunteer with us, and others are participating by enrolling in the course.

Nasima invested in herself by taking many courses in baking, food science, food safety, and food storage. She then used her knowledge in presenting her own training courses. Nasima had popularity because of the books she published with Kuwait Mills in Kuwait and in the Gulf; her name had been linked with cooking for several years. Recently, she joined social media to connect with her fans, and thanks to this her followers have increased. She uses these channels to publish information about her courses. She makes them more attractive with her Instagram posts about what participants will learn in each course.
Nasima attracted retired women to take her courses and then to join her team to teach the participants (who pay for the course). She convinced them in this way:

By volunteering with us you are going to learn something new, gain the self-sufficiency to cook for your family and friends, and at the same time you will fill your spare time by having fun and socialising, and also you going to be rewarded in this work by God, because the income from the fees goes to charity.

Nasima knew the situation of retired women, her peers, and allowed them to join her in her dream of starting a charity project after retirement. At the same time, she achieved her desire for autonomy, as she is the leader and she decides what to do. Zahar Kitchen Academy does not accept zakat or sadaqa or any type of monetary donations; she said: ‘I told them if you want to help, we need your time, enrol and participate with us’. This is a type of mutual benefit with a charitable purpose. The participant is enrolled and pays the course fees in exchange for acquiring knowledge and engaging in a cooking course, while Nasima is financing her charity, creating self-sufficiency for Kuwaiti women, and helping them utilise their spare time by engaging in useful work. All of them will be rewarded for their charitable purpose. Nasima told me that she refuses any housemaids who want to join her cooking courses; it is common in Kuwait for people to enrol their cooking staff/housemaids to learn new recipes and enhance the house menu. She said: ‘I want the Kuwaiti women to engage by themselves with these courses and be productive and do something for their families with their own hands’. Although the purpose of Nasima is that of levelling up of the Kuwaiti woman - by training her to be productive and benefit her family - while at the same time using the income from these training courses in charitable ways, to empower needy families, we can note that still there is an element of ethnic and citizens’ discrimination at work: by accepting only citizen applicants for the courses, they then contribute to the citizen: non-citizen division and to inequality, by accepting Kuwaitis and excluding others. This confirms Fassin's argument that some charity in the contemporary social world creates potential inequalities in addition to helping the poor (Fassin, 2012).

We spent lots of time talking about her passion for baking, and she mentioned that baking is more than just cooking for eating; she believes that the baking smell at home is a kind of therapy, and kneading with your hand is stress relief too. Nasima currently also volunteers with a school to teach primary children how to knead and bake in a life-skills course, helping them learn to depend on themselves and to exert energy.
In regard to the volunteers, in the beginning Nasima interviewed the applicants to her team and let them work with her for ten days as volunteers, and observed their commitment and attitude, and then she decided whether to allow them in her team. After she had built her team, she did not follow the same approach, instead she asks any woman with the desire to work with her in the team to enrol first in five cooking courses that she offers to the public, and pay the fees, so she can observe the applicant during the five courses and see if they are fit to join the team or not.

Regarding her choice of beneficiaries for her charitable income, she explained that she knew of some cases – from when she worked with the charity association – and she still had these contacts, and sometimes people give her new contacts. Nasima investigates their situation, calling and visiting the needy. Sometimes if they are said to be getting help from other resources, such as Zakat House, she will check with Zakat House whether they are really getting this help, and whether that help is enough for them. Nasima said:

I don’t usually offer monetary help; I offer the needy options to empower them to work, and I provide them with what they need and support them. I discuss with them their capabilities and I train them. Once I had to change the whole kitchen belonging to one woman from a needy family so that she would be able to cook from her kitchen with the safety requirements for selling food products. I did the marketing for her through Zahar Academy and provided her with all the packaging she needed, I paid for her equipment and needs but I didn’t give her cash – she got the cash from her work after selling it.

Nasima aims to change the lives of the needy by ‘empowering’ them and giving them a job that they can depend on, instead of temporary charity. Some needy families don’t have stable accommodation to work from; that is why Nasima built a centre with her retirement money, so people are able to come to work from her centre’s kitchen, and she provides them with transport. Her aim is to create many centres that are close to where needy people live, so they don’t have to travel a long way to work every day. Nasima still has not registered her team with any NGO; her aim in the future is to register her work as a formal waqf centre and seek expansion in the region.

On other occasions, she donates to projects implemented by other charitable organisations, and in these cases she attempts to show participants in her courses where the money goes. For
example, at the end of some courses she invites some of these organisations to explain the project that Zahar Academy has donated part of the course fees to.

In Nasima’s case, it is more than just charity. Firstly, there is the autonomy that she pursues via her charitable work, after she tried the charitable work with a charitable committee and did not feel satisfied. Secondly, there is the motive of empowering needy families by creating the opportunity for them to work. Thirdly, she targets retired women who volunteer in her team to engage in charity and to utilise their spare time in a good way, and in the same way targeting the women who enrol in her cooking courses to be professional in cooking and independent, and using their course fees in expanding the charitable process of the project. Nasima chose to mix these all together to shape her creative project, that aims for charity and many other motives. Nasima’s expression of Kuwaitiness is via this complex method of charity, in which she has merged the old charity with contemporary social entrepreneurship and problem-solving (Dee, 2012). She has merged charity which used just to be piety with responses to the needs of others, her experience and creativity, her thoughts of the future and of creating opportunities to solve the problem of poverty for needy families; all these are reinforced by her feeling of responsibility toward her society, and especially for her gender. Volunteering in different channels since university and after work helped build for Nasima a picture of how she could help her society and collaborate with others towards one aim. Nasima’s engagement in charity is a unique and diverse way to express her Kuwaitiness to others in society. She believes in the success of group work, however, since she did not leave the charity association after she started her own charity project. In addition, she is keen to build teamwork with her peers, retired women, who she thinks are the best key workers for this project.

5.3 Fundraising for different causes: The case of Noura’s WhatsApp list

Having explored through the case of Nasima the importance of concept of autonomy to the motivations of a woman active in the field of charity, I now explore another example of individual engagement in charity, online fundraising using a WhatsApp list, to demonstrate the importance of sentiment and an ethical attitude toward others. This initiative does not involve a charity team and it is distinct in that it involves requests for small amounts for
different causes. This initiative is led by Noura, and she benefits from her connections in charity to gather donations for needy cases and causes. The main motive that drives Noura to engage in this type of charity is to see happiness in others.

Noura is a woman in her early forties, who works as a statistical analyst in a government job. She was raised in a religious family, is married, and has no children. Noura told me that her engagement in charity started from being influenced by her job. Noura works in a female-led administration in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs. Noura told me that she is affected by the nature of her job, in which she accompanies Islamic women preachers in their work, travelling around schools and ministries in Kuwait to deliver Islamic educational and awareness lectures to girls and women of different ages. Her role is to evaluate the lecturers’ performance and measure their acceptance by the audience by applying questionnaires and then analysing the statistics in order to improve the work.

Every deed in life is measured by intention in Islam, so if it is done with sincerity and good intentions it will be rewarded by God, whether or not it is directly related to Islam. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said: ‘Actions are by intentions and every person shall have only that which he intended’ (Sahih Muslim, Book 33, No. 222). Noura told me that she feels that her work is rewarded by God because she is benefiting people through her job, which is connected directly to religious guidance, even if her job is only for evaluation; she feels that she shares the rewards with the preachers, and this encourages her. She said that her boss always reminds them that they are doing a great job in delivering religious awareness to people, and they will feel this by blessings in their work and personal life. Noura told me she felt this in her life:

As I told you that my work environment had a role in guiding me for goodness, donation, and alms. But there was an incident that turned charity into a focus in my life. When I performed the pilgrimage [hajj] in 2004. Usually, the hajj organiser puts you with people that you don’t know, if you don’t have someone accompanying you. One lady with me, I didn’t know her, she asked me: ‘What is your purpose in life?’ These words rang in my ears and made me think a lot. I answered her that I want the pleasure of God and my parents, and like to see the happiness of others. Then I realized that this is the thing that I really adore. This is what made me turn to charitable work and helping people. This is the highest motivation, to see others happy.
Noura mentioned that there are many people who helped her to engage in charity. For instance, one of her colleagues at work was encouraging them to collect donations every month from their salaries to give to the cleaning staff in the office, who are mostly from Bangladesh, expats with low salaries. Noura said that she got in the habit of doing this and took charge of collecting the monthly donations in her evaluation department. She explained the process to me: ‘We simply pass an envelope around the offices, and I write on it “Donation for the department’s cleaning labour” and everyone can put cash in it, so no one knows if you donate or not, nor the amount that you donate’. Then she collects the envelope and divides it among the workers.

Noura has been engaging in minor charitable fundraising for eight or nine years, usually raising around KD 200 to 600 (GBP 400 to 1200). She fundraises for different causes at work, at family gatherings, and between friends. She has made a WhatsApp broadcast list that contains around 170 people, whom she knows well, and sends them messages about needy cases. I am one of these people, receiving her messages regularly. She writes the messages very clearly, one case at a time, with details, and usually she doesn’t send more than a message per day. She always specifies the required amount, how much they have collected, and how much is left. The message footer always mentions that this case is from a trusted friend, and it is a private message to the recipient and please do not publish it, then her name. I was granted her permission in the interview to let me put a sample of her WhatsApp messages here in the thesis -with an anonymised name- to show how simple it is and how many details there are.
Sample of Noura’s messages (a screenshot from my WhatsApp signed with an anonymised name signed)

This is a translation of the sample (in the photo) of Noura’s messages on WhatsApp:

*As-Salamu Alikum wa Rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu,*

A two-year-old boy with a malignant lung tumour in the intensive care unit, an urgent operation needed. The cost of the operation is KD 460 [approx. GBP 100]. His condition is very difficult, his mother called me and was crying. *Jazak Allah khair* [may Allah reward you well], we need your help. We have collected some of the amount and the remaining amount needed is KD 120. This is a message from a trusted friend, whoever likes to contribute, you can give it to me and I will deliver it to her. This is a private message, please do not publish it, your sister Noura.

When we look at the style of the messages that she sends, they use simple but essential words in influencing the receivers, with the intention of leading them to interact with the case and donate. Each message is for a specific cause, which is often a humanitarian goal that people can sympathize with. There is clarity in stating the amount needed for each case, which is

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5 This is the full form of greeting in Islam; Muslims generally use the short greeting (*As-Salamu Alikum*) which literally means Peace be upon you, where Peace is one of the 99 names of God. The full greeting gives more rewards for those who say it than the short one.
usually an affordable amount which can give the receiver (the donor) hope that even a small donation will have an impact. In addition, determining how much they have collected so far and how much is remaining from the amount needed could give competitive feelings in doing good and encourage the donor to donate immediately. She is always keen to note in each message that the case has been checked by ‘a trusted friend’, without mentioning the name of the organisation or the name of the person; this gives the reader the understanding that if they trust her, they will trust who she trusts as well. Finally, she mentions that this is a private message and asks them not to publish it; this preserves her right to privacy in regard to her message and her number, and prevents the circle of communication from growing, which may lead to legal accountability or communication with people out of her list that she does not know. There are risks involved in such activities, legally and in terms of interpersonal trust, since banks check transfers for individuals. These are things that Noura does with every message, and she sends her list another message to inform them when the amount is obtained.

When we talked about the interaction of the list with these messages, and how they donated to her, Noura said:

I usually try to make it a little bit organised, one case at a time, so every case takes its time in interacting and fundraising. Thank God there are responses, some people call, others send a text, and there are certain people who are very fast to be the first to donate. I mostly get an online transfer to my personal bank account, while elderly people prefer to give me cash. And there are some who ask may I just donate with KD 5 [GBP 10] or KD 1 [GBP 2]; I always accept any amount, and never reject any amount whatever the amount, and I tell them the most important thing is to participate no matter how much, it won’t stop the ajr [rewards]. However, to be honest, there are some people on the list who asked me to remove them from the list; I completely respect their personal preference and I am sure they have other commitments in charity and want to focus on them.

Because Noura knows the people on her list very well and trusts them, they are open to telling her about their preferences, or about the little donations that they will make. Also, they trust her enough to transfer to her personal bank account, though she is not a formal charity body. Noura said, ‘you can’t imagine how much this trust means to me!’. On the other hand, these donations are lacking in anonymity; Noura will be familiar with the amount that each one has donated. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) advises giving charity anonymously so as
not to be tainted by any impurities of pride, hypocrisy, or ostentation (see Chapter 2 on secrecy).

So the trust that Noura is getting is on many levels: the trust in the case itself that it is really someone in need, the trust in her financially to transfer the donation to her personal bank account, and the trust in letting her know how much they are donating rather than keeping it secret by donating to any other online fundraising source. Noura’s list might have other channels to do their charity through, including in relation to Noura’s cases. Though mostly what Noura offers her list in exchange for these levels of trust is an approximately daily opportunity to give charity to cases that they may never have heard of.

Noura finds these needy cases from different sources. She said that she doesn’t personally visit needy families in Kuwait, but her friends do. She has different connections in a charity that contact her with cases. Noura also sometimes offers the list charity projects that she likes and that she has chosen from different NGOs, especially during Ramadan. For these projects managed by NGOs, sometimes she puts the payment link – if there is one available – while also offering them the same way of donating to her personal account, then she will deliver it on their behalf. By doing that, Noura shows that she wants to be a part of each charity process. Because all the amounts are small, she states that she does not face any troubles with the bank in monitoring her account or restricting it. However, she faced trouble in one case that involved international donation to an NGO in Saudi Arabia:

Once I transferred a large amount to an NGO in Saudi Arabia, as an international bank transfer via my personal account. After several months, perhaps when the bank was making an inventory, the entire amount had been returned to my account! Saudi Arabia refused the transfer and returned the whole amount. I was shocked and really annoyed, that the bank had waited so long and then returned the money – why was it not rejected immediately at the transfer time? I was imagining the great trust that these donors had in me, and I could not deliver their donations! God might reward them at time of donation for their intention, but I had to solve this. Alhamdulillah [praise be to God], the NGO was in Makkah, and immediately I arranged a quick trip to Mecca to make *Umrah*⁶ and to deliver these donations to the same charitable project. I also took precautions by dividing the amount into small amounts, because I was afraid that it

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⁶ *Umrah* is a year-round pilgrimage to Mecca that can be performed at any time; it is optional in Islam. It like a mini form of the annual hajj pilgrimage, which is an obligation once a life.
would also not be accepted as a large amount there in Makkah. I was not relieved until I paid it to the NGO, I did not forget that!

Some people prefer to take advantage of multiplying their rewards through place or time, as mentioned in the Prophet’s sayings (see Chapter 2 on rewards); to make a donation in Mecca will multiply one’s rewards, and if it is during Ramadan they will gain another multiplication. People calculate how they can donate smartly. Noura said that she tends to send her messages on Monday and Thursday, which are the days when deeds are raised to God (Sahih Muslim, Book 17, No. 83), and most Muslims like to fast on these days in months other than Ramadan, as nafil, i.e. an optional deed.

For Noura, there is a big difference between donating to such a campaign, that is managed by an NGO, and engaging with the needy cases that she tries to help personally. She said that donating to any cause is ended by your giving, yet the reason she fundraises ‘is having joy and happiness, more than you imagine’. Not all cases that Noura deals with involve just collecting donations, sometimes there is more engagement than that. She told me that there was one case in which a needy woman was about to give birth and had not prepared anything for her baby. Noura decided to prepare her baby’s list by herself; she said:

I asked about the baby’s gender from my friend who knows her, and it was a girl; I collected an amount and went by myself to buy all the stuff. One of my friends helped me with the list of essential things for the new born baby and guided me to where I can get them from. You cannot imagine how happy I was while I was preparing the stuff like a gift for her. I enjoy doing these things by myself.

Engaging in charity gives her a sense of happiness for herself, not just for others.

On some occasions she prepares gifts for needy children, such as distributing candies during Gergea’an in the middle of Ramadan and Eidya in Eid. She got some responses from needy families through her friends that they are so happy and praying for her every night; Noura said: ‘This joy I cannot find when I donate to an NGO’. The connection with the needy and hearing the reaction from the recipients is pleasing for her and encourages her to do more.

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7 Gergea’an is an old traditional celebration in Kuwait and some other Gulf countries for children in the middle of Ramadan, usually the 13th, 14th, and 15th, when the moon is full. They distribute candy to children for their fasting half of the month and encourage them to complete the fast. Children take bags and knock on their neighbours’ doors, and sing a traditional song, and then they put the candy in their bags. Nowadays, it is not related to fasting anymore, but it still a traditional celebration at the same time; recently it tends to be more fancy candy bags or boxes that are distributed at family gatherings or by delivering them.
However, even the needy cases that need only monetary donations, without any involvement in buying or preparing things, are not just charity for her. Each case touches her heart, as she explained. Knowing the details of the case and how she can help in alleviating their troubles is more than just fundraising and delivering donations. She said that it really hurts when she sees so many problems that only require a very little amount to make a difference, for example a needy family whose son will be imprisoned if they cannot raise just KD 200 (GBP 400), or medical problems that need a certain amount in order to be able to do the operation. Noura said that she really gets pleased when the donations reach the amount determined in each case. She feels that she has a role in relieving their anguish and making people happy. She said: ‘Sometimes I think if I have millions I will just sit and help to solve needy problems all my life’.

Noura’s engaging in charity has its impact on herself and her family too, and on her own subjectivity and well-being. This demonstrates the extent to which sentiments are important in charitable activities to her (the participant) as much as for others (beneficiaries). She said that her husband and her family are helpful and supportive with her and are also engaged in fundraising. She said, ‘You can’t imagine the satisfying feeling and blessing that come to me after these charitable works’; then she laughed and ‘Even my Duaa [praying to God] I feel is directly answered by God, my husband is sometimes surprised how everything I want is achieved!’ The feeling of a strong connection to God and how this relates to charity is what makes Noura cling more to what she is doing. She is happy with the way that she is doing her charity through the WhatsApp list. She said: ‘I like that it is a simple thing’. She is convinced by her simple engagement in charity and does not aspire to high amounts. She describes it as God’s gift to her that she has done this work for many years and gained people’s trust.

5.4 Engage the donors in charity: The case of Yemenik Ta’eenek

This case offers another example of individual engagement in charity that involves a direct connection to the needy. This initiative’s beneficiaries are mainly Bidun and other needy foreign nationals who live in Kuwait. Each individual has other motives for their engagement in charity along with their seeking for a reward from God; these details will be revealed in explaining how they are engaging in charity, as this ethnography will explore.
Mona is a married Kuwaiti woman with no children. She has a good position, leading the control and audit department in the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF). Although her work is in a governmental waqf body, it is not related to charitable projects directly; her job is administrative work, monitoring the work in KAPF within all departments. The whole story started when Mona wanted to donate and distribute her own money by herself seven years ago. She told me that there was a man called Jasim from the Bidun; his brother was very active in charitable practices, collecting and distributing donations for the sake of the needy in Kuwait and specially the Bidun. He was not well known until he passed away, and then all Kuwait was talking about him on social media for his good deeds. Mona heard about him and heard that his brother, Jasim, was continuing on his brother’s path and completing his charitable projects, helping Bidun and expat workers in Kuwait. Mona contacted Jasim and asked him if she could go with him to visit the needy families that he knows. She described to me her first visit to needy Bidun families:

It was my first time visiting the Al-Sulaibiya area in Kuwait for seven years. Around 90% of people from this area are Bidun. I went with Jasim, who is Bidun too and familiar with this area and the families who are living there. I was completely shocked! I never thought that this could exist in a country like Kuwait! I wondered if Kuwaitis know what is happening here? Where were the human rights organisations? I met some families, I sympathized with them a lot. I wanted to help! I started talking about what I saw to other people, until we formed a small team, me, my sister, and Jasim, and who was interested in the case. The team is not stable, some people did not continue according to their circumstances, people have joined and people have left, but I was resilient.

Mona was personally touched by what she saw in her visit. The suffering of Bidun’s living is what provoked their empathy to help them. What Mona witnessed motivated her to engage in charity to help these people, Bidun, who are treated inhumanely, as she explained. Yet, the focus on suffering has its impact in turning the attention from the structural and longstanding inequalities, from the wider injustice of life (See Chapter 1) for Bidun as a group, and turns to the focus on the individuals’ help (Fassin, 2012). This team was started by individual initiative and not formally registered with any NGOs; it is just a group that have the same concerns and wanted work together toward the same goal. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is more than one scenario and explanation for why these people have not yet acquired a
nationality. There are many Kuwaitis who believe that they deserve a nationality, while other Kuwaitis think they have acquired another nationality and are hiding it to benefit from being in Kuwait. Those Kuwaitis, holding this opinion, blame the Bidun for their poor livelihood, thinking that they have caused their problems for themselves. Mona said: ‘Whatever the explanation that people are convinced by, this issue is not subject to discussion for me, whoever opens his mouth and says something about them, I tell him stop, at the end these are human beings!’

I asked Mona about the reason behind the pioneering reputation for her Yemenik Ta’eenek team, in spite of the debatable situation of its beneficiaries. She said: ‘The reason for the reputation is that I do not accept money! She explained that she always lets people deliver cash with her. Her role is to connect donors with the needy. Mona acts as a bridge between donors and receivers. She told me a situation that had happened previously. A woman came with her and saw a needy family’s house which needed air-conditioning. She saw the situation and later gave Mona the money to provide them with an air-conditioning unit. Mona bought the unit, and took a picture to send to the donor. Later on, in a gathering, she heard this woman said ‘We donated a lot but also we don’t know where the money goes!’’. Mona said that she was upset by these words, but later on she realised that she may be rewarded more because she is subject to criticism.

As a manner of connecting the donors to the recipients, she arranges visits for the people who want to donate, letting them come with her to see how the families are living and what their needs are; then donors can provide the needy with what they need directly. Mona said ‘our work has ethics’, because she allows people to bring their children with them; she said, ‘I am trying to let them learn how to give and teach their children too’. Involving children in charity is very prominent in Kuwait. It enhances a sense of ‘giving’ for children and they grow up with this habit, when they are able to connect to the needy and witness the happiness of others. Mona said that donors are seeing how a whole needy family are living in one room. ‘I saw their reaction! this is the best lesson to appreciate their current lives’, she said.

Mona explained that in Kuwait you may see needy families living in certain areas with low rent, such as Alsulaibiya, Hawalli, and Aljeleeb. She chose Aljeleeb because no one likes to go there, neither women nor men. Mona invited me to go with her to Aljeleeb for a visit to some families, to see for myself what she means by people refusing to deliver donations to this area. I asked her if I could bring my teenage son; I wanted him to see a needy family, to
really see how they are living. I went with my son to the supermarket to buy some groceries to give to the families we were to visit with Mona. What I saw in Aljeleeb was another country.

We went there in Mona’s car. She was talking to my fifteen-year-old son as if he were a man! She asked him to carry the groceries from my car and put them in her car, then threw an envelope full of money in his lap while she driving and asked him to count it. She winked at me and whispered to me ‘I want him to feel as if he is engaging in this visit with us’. As soon as we entered the area, I was shocked by the scene. Narrow, unpaved streets with many potholes and overflowing sinks, and a stench like a sewer. Some of the local shops’ signs were written in multiple languages, I think Bangladeshi and Hindi, as if I was not in Kuwait. The buildings were old, and there were many people on the streets, such that the car could barely pass. It struck me that Mona knew many of them, and she was very confident in driving in these tight and unpaved streets; she greeted many people as she walked.

We got out of the car to visit the first family, a Syrian family, who had been in Kuwait for six years. When I got out of the car near their building, I covered my nose in order to breathe from the severity of the bad smell. The father makes a living by working in a minivan for moving goods. This family has seven children; I saw four of them while visiting, as the older children were not at home. They live in a two-bedroom apartment. This family was not registered on Mona’s list, so she took from them a copy of their IDs and talked to them about their needs. The mother said that she wants their children to join the school, refusing to let her older daughter –16 years old – to go back to school; the mother said: ‘She learnt how to write, it’s time for her siblings to! And I am getting old and I need her at home to help me.’ I looked at the girl, her name was Dalia; Mona asked her, would you like to complete your education Dalia? Her eyes were full of tears and she changed the subject, saying to us ‘Would you like some tea or coffee to drink?’ Mona asked the mother again: ‘Why won’t you let Dalia go to school as well as her siblings? I can find someone who is able to help them complete their education’; the mother answered that her father will not allow her to complete her education. I don’t know if they are from a tribal Syrian background that does not allow girls to go out of their houses when they get older, preferring to keep them at home to do housework and wait to get married. While the mother went to get some documents, Dalia was with us alone; Mona asked her: ‘Would you like to complete your education, Dalia? I can insist to your mom if you wish’. Dalia was crying and talking: ‘Yes I really want to; when I
was at school I always had good grades, and I heard about some scholarship, and they offer transport also, but my parents refused to let me enrol’.

I was looking at my son’s face while she spoke; he had been struggling to take education seriously, and was now seeing how Dalia was dying to be in school. Now I understood what Mona meant when she said her charitable engagements have ethics and teach young generations how to appreciate life; seeing such a situation like this is, in reality, affects people more than formal advice. Mona registered the family and insisted to the mother that she would refuse to help them unless they allowed Dalia to complete her education. The mother said that she needed to discuss it with her husband first. Mona perceives these people and the problems they have; she gets hurt and then passes on her feelings to others who can help. She is thinking about how she can make their lives better. The mother did not ask for help for Dalia to complete her education, but Mona saw that it is a right for Dalia and necessary for her future. We went out, and on the stairs, I saw their electricity cabinet had no door, and all the wires were out and some were not covered. In short, the place was not safe for a family with children. They welcomed us and the children were very happy with the simple sweets we brought them. For Mona, this is expressing her Kuwaitiness, since this family are suffering in a situation of war and the state cannot help everyone, so she feels it is a duty for her. By doing this Mona is trying to do – by herself – what other charity bodies in Kuwait have failed to do, as she explained.

I was shocked; I had heard a lot about needy Syrians in Kuwait, but had not fully comprehended the difficulties they faced in their daily lives. Mona told me that she refuses to help any people who have an embassy here in Kuwait, because they have a state that can deal with their problems. She tends to help Bidun primarily because of their statelessness, and she includes Syrians in this because there is a war ongoing in their country. Sometimes she helps other nationalities if an emergency situation arises and they need help to get back to their country. Mona told me bluntly that she did not want to help anyone living in Kuwait illegally.

She explained that she gathered all the families and put them in an organised list, around 1,000 families. Mona said that Zakat House are unable to cover all these families from zakat or donations; they could only give them a part of their needs. When any Kuwaitis contact Mona, she shows them the needs on this list, and the Kuwaitis choose who and how they want to help. During Ramadan she has a waiting list, with a visit to Aljeleeb everyday to a few families. Mostly Kuwaitis want to go with her during Ramadan. Mona said that all the
people here in Aljeleeb know her car; during all her visits in the last seven years no one had hurt her, which is why she feels safe and continues to go to this place.

I asked Mona to about her motivation; alongside her desire for rewards from God for her charitable work, what is it that has really kept her doing this charity work for seven years without even a formal umbrella to work from? I said to her, ‘I can imagine how your mobile is if you are contacted by several needy families every day!’ She said that she divided the families among the team members. On how she has kept doing this work for a long time, she said:

You can’t imagine how this tremendous amount of prayers I received on my phone from the morning, this blessing, this is what has made me go on, and I hope God will help me to continue. I consider this as a refinement of self-discipline [tahtheeb le annafis]. If I have a problem in my life, I will solve it here with these families! Once before I had such a big problem during Ramadan, I went to a needy family, I was the one who was crying that day! When you see a problem greater than yours, it will be easier for you to solve yours.

Mona’s motivation for engaging in charitable work is that it brings her meaning and pleasure in life, and it is an outlet from the pressures of life. The same is true for those who volunteer with her; I told Mona that I met one man during an iftar workshop (see Chapter 3); he told me he had been with her to Aljeleeb too. He said ‘I felt pleased when I bought some appliances by myself, and I checked by myself that they had reached the needy families’. She said this man went with her on Eid, he said I want to distribute Edieya, an amount of money as a gift, for children. She said we went to one street and he was surprised by 50 to 60 children waiting for them. ‘You cannot see how the kids were running to us, their eyes full of joy – I adore distributing gifts for kids’, Mona said. Mona is married but unfortunately she is sterile, she doesn’t have children. Maybe this explains why she is so attached to children.

Mona told me that she is also learning from these families how to be sabora, literally patient. Patience is a virtue that is not easy to control by everyone. Islam stresses the significance of being patient, and patience is seen as a religious virtue in times of difficulty (Ibañez Tirado, 2019). In the case of needy families here, affording life difficulties with a sense of patience and satisfaction leads to a happier sentiment. Once before, Mona visited a family who live in a basement. As Mona described it to me, it was a gloomy house with a rickety kitchen; she saw some crawling insects in there. Mona wanted to take the details of this family to put
them in her list; she asked the woman who lived there, ‘What do you need?’ The woman answered, ‘I am fine, there is nothing I need, I am in a good situation Alhamdulla [thank God]’. Mona said, ‘I was crying because of her answer, and I told her I want to learn patience from you! Then she hugged me, and sympathised with me’. Sometimes people, when they have everything they need and enjoy the luxury of living, do not appreciate the blessings and pay attention only to what they lack. Engaging in charity, for Mona, shows her how people appreciate the little blessings which are nothing compared to what Mona has in her life.

Mona said that they do some big programmes together for needy people when relevant, such as charitable exhibitions, or preparing needy girls for marriage. One of the volunteers in the team told Mona that she wants to please people, and wants to make a celebration on Kuwaiti national days. Kuwaitis usually have celebrations on 25 and 26 February. The first day marks independence from England, while the second marks liberation from the Iraqi invasion. Mona said: ‘We held a celebration in a big hall near to the Bidun living area. Everyone was wearing Kuwait flags, singing together about Kuwait, playing games, they really had fun, we got some comments from people such as “you did something the country did not offer”, which is the feeling of belonging and loyalty!’

Recently Yemenik Ta’eenek has registered with a new NGO called Balad elkhier (which literally means ‘country of good deeds’); this step was taken, as Mona explained to me, because she wants to collect larger donations for appliances for needy families, such as air-conditioning units, fridges, ovens. Mona said: ‘We can now arrange our plans in advance by seasons such as school fees, Ramadan, monthly helping, winter clothes, and so on’. She has preferred all this time to work as an independent team, but due to the tightening of procedures in Kuwait on fundraising and collecting money she has turned to work within the law. Mona said: ‘My brother helped found this NGO, and they asked me to join them, they were keen that my team name should be under them. The NGO agreed with me that they will not take any administration fees from us, it’s wasta!’

Wasta literally means ‘mediation’, and traditionally in Kuwait it means that you need someone you know in your workplace to ease you into working there. In this case, Mona’s brother knows this NGO, so he helped her to work with them without administration fees. Many individuals refuse to work with NGOs because of administration fees. I remembered Bedoor, the woman who runs the iftar workshop (see Chapter 3); one of her main reasons for not registering her team is the administration fees. She said, ‘When I donate KD 100 [GBP
200] to someone, I want it to be delivered as a complete KD 100, not KD 90 [GBP 180]!’
Yet it is legally permissible in sharia, Dr Essa Zaki, an Islamic scholar in Kuwait, told me,
that each charitable organisation can take a small percentage of donations for administration
fees, but they need to declare it to the donors. I have seen many of the payment receipts for
donations which give the exact percentage that they take, usually 10%.

The case of Mona has brought attention to a striking aspect of individuals’ motives for
engaging in charity: she is learning patience and a refinement of self-discipline by connecting
with the needy directly. The connection has a deep impact on the level of engagement, in
which participants learn what that they cannot see when they donate to any charitable body.
This encourages participants to continue with this way of giving, witnessing the change in
others’ lives and attempting to solve their problems. On the other side, Mona’s case shows a
segment that many other charitable individuals are avoiding for its difficulties, thus Mona
feels that she is filling a gap in Kuwaiti charity by engaging in charity in this way.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed charity engagement by individuals in Kuwait, presenting three
different examples that vary in their purposes, motives, and implementation. From multi-
purpose charities with sustainable aims in Zahar Academy, to a simpler engagement with
fundraising through connecting with relatives and friends via a WhatsApp list, to connecting
givers personally to receivers. As individuals, all three women exercise a great deal of
autonomy in their charitable practices. However, there is diversification in their practices
regarding their motives, their level of engagement, and the method of their charity
fundraising and the design of their charity projects.

In the first case, the charitable initiative by Nasima, Zahar Academy is well
organised and
has a variety of goals with sustainable dimensions. The spirit of autonomy in the whole
design of this charitable project is present from choosing the volunteers, the courses they
offer, and the needy families they like to help. There are three levels in which Zahar
Academy helps others benefit from their charity: (1) the retired women who volunteer in the
academy to be teachers, (2) the participants in the cooking courses who learn to cook for their
family, on one hand, and on the other hand, pay fees which help finance the charitable goals
of this academy, and (3) the needy families, whom Nasima aims to help to be productive and
self-sufficient. The donations here are equal among all participants and are explicit; they are in a form of fees for the cooking sessions and in a return for a service, i.e. each participant is paying fees in order to take a course and these fees are used for charitable purposes. This initiative aims to move the needy from relying on donations to being productive.

In the second case, Noura is engaging in charity like a mediator between the needy and her relatives and friends. She finds charitable cases from personal connections and invokes the sentiment and ethical attitude toward others in her words through a WhatsApp message to encourage them to donate. This initiative is very easy in implementing; it is all about texting a list with a needy cause, then receiving donations and delivering them to the needy. Yet the connection between Noura and the needy has a lot of feelings of happiness, where the reaction of these needy in their messages makes Noura more committed to the cause. There is no secrecy in the amounts that Noura receives; she knows how much every participant is donating, though the list do not know. Participants don’t find this embarrassing, since they continue to send their donations to Noura. Noura differentiates her work from the complexity of NGOs’ practice; she likes the simplicity in her leading this charitable work and feels happiness in herself by doing this, and feels the blessing of this work in her life and sees happiness in others.

The last case, the Yemenik Ta’eenek team, involves a direct connection with the needy, providing the needy with their needs and requirements. It involves autonomy in performing charity and learning patience, and appreciating blessings in life from the conditions of the families they visit. There is a kind of secrecy in the donations, in that the team do not know how much each participant will spend. There is a sense of responsibility from participants to these needy families, partly because they are Muslims and need help, and partly because they live in Kuwait, thus charitable participants feel they are in charge of providing them with a good life when other charitable institutions do not do so.

To conclude, there are some similarities in these individuals’ initiatives, such as the sentiments that have been shaping the way of practising charity among individuals and used to express their Kuwaitiness. In all of the cases, there is an attempt to maintain autonomy through their charitable practices, and all three women emphasised that they find happiness in their charity engagement, and in helping others to engage in charity. Each case illustrates that individuals are flexible, in that they are able to adapt their aims and demands, their charity motives, and their charity engagement according to their personal aims and desires, and in the
same way they are enjoying what they are doing and talking about it with passion. These women are all also actively cultivating a sense of a crafted moral self, in Mahmood's sense (Mahmood, 2001), and are using their work as a vehicle for personal change and refinement. They are refining the nafs (self) via exposure to those who are forced to develop sabr (patience) by virtue of challenging life circumstances. In the following chapter, I move on to discussing charitable engagement by NGOs in more detail.
Chapter 6: Charitable Engagement by NGOs

6.1 Introduction

After exploring individual charitable practices in the previous chapter, I now expand the lens of the thesis to explore organised charitable work by formal charitable bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in Kuwait. This chapter elaborates on the ways in which greater charitable engagement than individuals’ actions alone takes place in Kuwait thanks to NGOs. The NGOs explored and analysed in this chapter are defined as formal organisations that are registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) in Kuwait as charitable bodies, and thus have a license to receive and distribute donations locally and internationally, while also being subject to government monitoring.

This chapter presents an exploration of the charitable engagement of select NGOs in Kuwait. This is not a historical overview of all NGO activity in Kuwait. The choice of organisations was varied to include multiple affiliations and interests. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the data for this chapter. The interviews involved multiple workers and sometimes the founders of an organisation, in order to build a multidimensional understanding of each organisation’s work. Additional data collection was through participant observation during Ramadan and volunteering in the 1000 Wells campaign site in collecting donations from people. Ethnographies will show how the NGOs are offering their charity campaigns and maintaining their trust and public image in Kuwaiti society. The analysis of the chosen organisations elaborates on the ways that NGOs are adapted to design and manage their charitable activities in the complex and competitive charity arena in Kuwait.

The sentiments that NGOs used in their expressing Kuwaitiness through charity have come to put stress on wider political dimensions. Here, questions of Kuwait's international standing have become important. In the post 9/11 landscape, this goes along with an attenuating trend in the public expression of those NGOs that hold specifically Islamic political affiliations. This chapter argues that NGOs in Kuwait tend recently to engage volunteers and donors in their charity and to exhibit transparency in their charitable work, in order to maintain trust and enhance their public image, and that this has intensified after 9/11. In addition, this chapter argues that through the diversification in NGOs’ charitable engagement in Kuwait,
Charity has transformed from traditional religious charity to include a development role locally and internationally, and that this is a means to express Kuwaitiness on the international stage and portray Kuwait as a charitable nation to the world.

6.1.1 Diversity and competition in charity

Charitable work in Kuwait is considered a competitive environment, in that there are many individuals and collective initiatives; the arena is crowded with charitable work and full of people raised on giving. The NGOs are competing in offering a high level of charitable engagement in a society that has diverse charitable modalities. NGOs are focusing on playing an effective role in society. This role is not limited to affecting people enough to donate, but also involves attracting people to engage in fundraising for a cause. This involves connecting the giver to the receiver by using social media and showing the changes that charity can lead to. In addition, NGOs engage people in delivering help by traveling with them on charity trips, and with volunteer initiatives (see Chapter 4 on the Luju book).

Nile Green (2020), in his study of global Islam, developed a model for exploring how different Islamic organisations compete with one another for support and resources; he suggests that there are ways of understanding why some organisations are more effective than others. The contemporary transformation that takes place within the work of NGOs is strongly linked to religious globalisation (Green, 2020).

However, globalisation has not resulted in the formation of a ‘single, unified Islam’ (p.2). Rather, it has facilitated the formation and spread of different versions of Islam, both political and non-political; these versions mean one ‘cannot identify a “true” version of Islam and should not be viewed as promoting some versions of Islam as more “authentic” than others’ (p.2). While from a theological perspective, Islamic regulations encourage this pluralism and do not contradict with changing and inventing new things, since these are compatible with sharia. This confirms that Islam is valid for all times and places, in which the Islamic mechanism can keep transforming since Islam is a way of living and can be adapted to different changes in the world (Khafagy, 2020).

Benthall (2016) argues that Muslims are encouraged by Islamic regulations to be religiously dedicated to charitable giving and human and religious unity. In this sense, Muslims can choose diverse socially constructed implementations of their religious obligations because of
the flexibility of Islamic jurisprudence. In this way, humanitarian aid is not an exception, it reflects varied readings of scriptures and their application to understanding societal concerns.

In the Islamic model, religious jurisprudence allows a flexible understanding of the Holy Qur’an and the prophet’s sayings and deeds, as main sources of Islamic rules, to accommodate changeable realities. The Ultimate goals of the Islamic Sharia (rules) are to preserve the life, the wealth, the human reason, the human species, and the honor or dignity of all humanity… These goals set a comprehensive and universal humanitarian mission for Muslims. Only a few compulsory rules are mentioned in the Holy Qur’an. Otherwise, Islamic jurisprudence sets the concepts of maslaha (interest) and mafsadah (corruption) to evaluate each deed and flexibly balance its religious rewards or punishment considering contemporary contexts. (Khafagy, 2020, p.3)

The different versions of Islam that have resulted from globalisation – including political and non-political (Green, 2020) – are reflected in NGOs’ affiliations and thus in their charitable engagements. NGOs in Kuwait are independent organisations in regard to management when dealing with charity, yet their affiliation affects the direction of their work and shapes public perception of them both within society and internationally. When looking closely at charitable groups in Kuwait and their affiliations, you will find that religious groups are the most active in charity (Alshaheen, 2015). Most organisations and founders belong to two main political Islamic trends: the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) and the Good Ancestors (Salaf). These two groups are the founders of two organisations, the Social Reform Association and the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage, respectively. Yet many liberals are also involved in charity. Some people perform charity from a sense of humanity and mercy for the people in the world, not only religiously, to be close to God. This is mostly found in international organisations, most notably the Red Crescent organisation. However, there are some organisations that do not belong to any political trends; some of them date back to the late 1970s, like the Alnajat charitable organisation and Direct Aid; others are new organisations in which the founders split from an Islamic political trend and set up their own charitable organisation in order to be independent and without any political affiliation – an example being the Kuwait Humanitarian organisation.
6.1.2 NGOs and maintaining trust

Trust has been considered ‘a positive moral sentiment that is embedded in shared kinship, ethnicity or friendship, or in shared frameworks of morality’ (Marsden and Anderson, 2020, p.697). The charitable sector is a complex system that involves a diverse set of stakeholders and competing interests that must be addressed correctly by charity administration. Building trust among stakeholders is a long-term challenge that a charitable organisation has to constantly do what it can to maintain (Hamdan, 2021; Davis et al., 2020). The transformation in charity is not limited to the approaches they adopt nor the transformation toward an institutional work in organisation management. There are changes in policies that some organisations have adopted in order to ease their spread, maintain trust, and achieve social acceptance locally and in the world. Benthall & Lacey (2014) state, in the context of charity in the age of the war on terror, that Islamic charities became a source of concern in the world after 9/11. Some NGOs in Kuwait tried to avoid associating with Islam in their names, for instance changing the organisation name in order to hide their religious identity, or to avoid declaring their political affiliation, i.e. avoiding the words Islam/Islamic and replacing them with ‘humanity’ or ‘mercy’. For instance, the organisation Muslims in Africa changed their name to Direct Aid. The general manager of Direct Aid explained that this is because some African countries refuse any religious aid. Multiple charitable branches belonging to the Social Reform Association (SRA) unified under one independent charitable body with a new name, Global Mercy, avoiding being explicitly related to the SRA, which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter is tainted by doubts around whether it supports the jihadist movement of Hamas (Abu-Amr, 1993).

It has been difficult for Gulf and Arab organisations to refute this claim, because charity in Islam is constrained by the virtue of anonymity (see Chapter 2 on secrecy in charity). Gulf charities are considered ‘less transparent in their financial and business dealings than Western charities’ (Benthall & Lacey, 2014, p.2). However, this is not a concern in Kuwaiti charity, as in the Gulf and particularly Saudi Arabia, the general cultural trend is toward secrecy and discretion, and what appears ‘at times to be the deliberate cultivation of obscurity’ (p.2). In a recent study conducted by Forbes Middle East, among 2,050 registered charitable organisations, two prominent Kuwaiti NGOs were named the ‘most transparent charities in the MENA are’” (cited in Benthall & Lacey, 2014, p.2). These two charities are the two NGOs which this chapter explores.
NGOs in Kuwait are subject to strict financial controls and laws regarding their movements and activities, after some elements of the Kuwaiti charity law changed in 2006 (see Chapter 5). Each NGO has to be registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) in Kuwait. They must have an official bank account where all donations can be received. Cash donations are limited to certain locations agreed to in advance by the government with NGOs, with receipts, while other locations as well as many campaign sites provide cash deposit machines. The central bank in Kuwait also monitors personal bank accounts (see Chapter 5). After the suspension of the bank accounts of some individuals in the charity sector, who tried to collect charity via their personal bank accounts, many individuals realized that using an NGO to do their charity is essential and safer. They use NGO accounts to collect donations; however, others are still collecting through their personal accounts, cautiously, so as not to exceed the daily limit and subject to legal accountability, as shown in my discussion of charity engagements by individuals (see Chapter 5, the case of Noura’s WhatsApp list).

The government fully monitors NGOs’ accounts, how much they collect, and where it is spent. This benefits the NGOs, as they have electronic records for all financial transactions and can monitor donations. For donors, more financial monitoring provides more credibility, i.e. reassurance that their donation will arrive in the right place without any manipulation from NGOs. The biggest advantage for donors from using online donations is that it allows them to give to charity secretly, which is an essential issue in Islamic charity; donors believe it provides the donor with more sincerity in intention rather than being tainted with pride or hypocrisy (see Chapter 2). For donors who prefer not to declare their names, most NGO websites provide an option to remain anonymous while donating. Online donations are provided via NGO websites or via internet banking in most Kuwaiti banks. It is common nowadays in Kuwait that NGOs tend to provide a quick link to make donations online, with the ability to customize the donation for a certain project one wants to support.

Thus, monitoring and transparency are essential elements in maintaining trust. Hamdan (2021) outlines strategies that charitable organisations can adopt with their donors for building trust gradually and sustaining it for long periods. The first element is ‘information disclosure, to keep the stakeholders [donors or volunteers] well informed of the organization’s activities or projects’ (Hamdan, 2021, p.8). The ethnographies in this chapter show that the NGOs that are distinguished by their transparency have high levels of internal
auditing and external scrutiny, and disclose all donations received and spent in charities locally and internationally in public reports. They benefit from this in maintaining trust among their donors and in society. People on social media, for instance, are happy to publicise and defend them.

Another element that helps maintain trust is engaging donors in their activities, ‘in a manner where the stakeholders are considered as partners of the organization in each aspect of the decision’ (Hamdan, 2021, p.8). The intensity of engagement is increased as the degree of an organisation’s attention increases. This not only maintains trust, it creates loyalty and attracts more participants. For instance, the charitable trips that have become a trend recently in Kuwait have resulted in a sense of belonging to the relevant NGO, and help maintain trust and loyalty on the part of donors, after they witness the charitable work for themselves in all its stages.

The following sections explore in more detail the different charitable engagements of Kuwaiti charitable organisations. The ethnographies show how each organisation is engaged in charity through their different approaches and policies, with an overview of their inception and the transformation in their charitable activities. In addition, I explore their political affiliations, if applicable, and how these affect their charitable work.

6.2 Direct Aid: An NGO with a focus on Africa

This section discusses a non-political organisation, Direct Aid, an organisation that embedded a calling to Islam through charity and that is focused only on the African continent. This organisation is distinguished in that it has established a great deal of trust and acquired fans in Kuwait and the Gulf countries too. Direct Aid has recorded the highest amount collected publicly in a short period of time in Kuwait. It is an independent organisation that is not affiliated with any political trends, which allows it to be attractive to different segments of society. They use social media intensively, most notably recently in collaboration with a volunteer social media influencer (see Chapter 3: The man of a million campaigns). Most of their practices are considered sustainable charitable projects which change people’s lives: they focus on empowering Muslims in Africa, on education and health, and on helping people in creating self-funding that they can depend on for their living. They work in
coordination with African countries’ governments, signing agreements to make their work as an international charity organisation more easy.

The Direct Aid organisation, which was previously named Muslims in Africa, was founded by Dr Alsumait. The work in Direct Aid is similar to family-based charity work, in that only family members are involved in the work nowadays. The man who leads it is the son of the founder, who has accompanied his family on charity trips to Africa since he was 1.5 years old. I met the mother, two daughters, and the son, the general manager. The father, who founded the organisation, was a doctor; he passed away five years ago. This charity is focused only on Africa, and not, as is the case for many other Islamic charities, on all Muslim issues in the world. Suhaila, the daughter, told me that her father asked scholars for a fatwa as to whether it is allowable to just focus only on Africa and not help Muslims in other countries who are in need, in order to see big change in African countries, where people are very much in need and need a long-lasting plan. She said that the scholars found that since there are other NGOs in Kuwait that are helping other Muslims it was acceptable to focus solely on Africa. In Kuwait, each NGO has their own sharia committee, since they often seek for religious guidance on their activities. Direct Aid has a very large number of employees: around 8,000 workers in Kuwait and in their all branches around Africa.

6.2.1 Direct Aid starting up

Dr Alsumait’s daughter Fatima told me that her father was raised in a family that sanctified learning and liked charitable work that helped people in the neighbourhood. His first initiative of charitable work, as Fatima told me, was while he was in high school, in the early 1960s; he couldn’t help seeing workers waiting for a long time in the very hot sun, waiting for someone to give them a ride, so he suggested to his friends that they go together and buy a used car and drive it to transport the workers to their accommodation.

Dr Alsumait studied his Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery at the University of Baghdad. During his time studying abroad he would eat only one meal a day and preferred to sleep on the ground instead of buying a bed. Although the price of beds was very low at that time, he considered it a luxury that he did not need. Fatima said: ‘My dad joined the scouts at school for a long time until he became the head of the scouts; he learned how to live in very difficult circumstances’. He used to allocate the bulk of his expenses to buying Islamic booklets to
distribute to mosques; he was a good reader, and cared a lot about spreading Islamic teaching. His wife, Noha, told me that on the first day of their traditional marriage he told her ‘You are my second wife!’. She said, ‘I was surprised because my family had not mentioned to me that he has another wife’ – then he said, ‘My first wife is my calling to Islam’. Noha said, ‘If that is the first wife, that is fine’. This illustrates how strong was his commitment to spreading Islam.

Before he became one of the knights of charitable work in Kuwait, as the Kuwaiti media has named him (Alenzi, 2019), he was not an ordinary doctor, but an extraordinary doctor. After he finished his professional work, he would inspect the condition of patients in the wards of Al-Sabah Hospital (the most famous government hospital in Kuwait), and ask them about their condition and their family, their social and economic conditions. And he sought to fulfil their needs and reassure them of their health conditions.

One of the factors that helped this organisation get set up was that there are common goals in the family. What I noticed from all the family’s interviews is that they all have deeply held beliefs and convictions. I never realised all these years that behind Direct Aid was a wife who believes in spreading Islam, supporting her husband, and carrying on the family responsibilities in order to pave the way for him to start charitable work in Africa. After Dr Alsumait got married, he went together with his wife, Noha, to study abroad in the UK and Canada; they spent around seven years away from Kuwait. Noha told me:

My husband spent all his time between studying and Islamic advocacy work. He was depending on me in all our family needs and this improved my English; I am an accountant who graduated in Kuwait and I didn’t know English well. We took care of Muslim minorities and taught them the teachings of Islam. I was trying to translate for them everything I knew about Islam. Life was so simple, I was enjoying my day, they were my family. We visited Kuwait during these seven years only twice! Other Kuwaitis, our peers, visited Kuwait once every six months! While we were on the plane returning to Kuwait for good, I told him: after we have spent our time with these simple people, Muslims from East Asia and the new Muslims, I wish we could travel and settle in Malaysia or Indonesia for good, living for dawa [advocacy]. He was looking at me and wondering how I did not miss my family and how this was my wish!

She illustrated for me how life with her children was hard, with her husband travelling so often to Africa. However, she got used to it, because she knew the reward that would come
back to her and her family. However, some of her young children started denouncing their father and saying that they did not know him, because of his regular absence from home. Here Noha suggested to him that they needed to spend all vacations with him in Africa. This opportunity of living in Africa for couple of months a year, witnessing their father’s charitable work and spending time with African children, allowed their children to live the situation and be part of it, and as a result they are following their father’s charitable work nowadays with Direct Aid.

Ahmed (2009, p.3) categorised Direct Aid as an Islamic missionary NGO, suggesting that ‘In Alsumait home country [Kuwait], people still consider him if not a member of the Muslim Brothers at least to be part of the general Islamist current’. However, the founder, Abdulrahman Alsumait has spoken in an interview recorded at Labik Africa organisation (cited in Ahmed, 2009, p.3) about his cultural affiliations:

I have belonged to different Islamic groups: the Jama’at al-Tabligh, the Muslim brothers (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun), the Salafis and many others. I owe a lot to all of them. Each has had great influence on my way of thinking. After having experienced the pleasure of helping others, particularly the most marginalized societies of Africa who often cannot supply the most basic wants I decided to choose charity work.

I argue that each charitable organisation has an underlying purpose, alongside the central aim of a reward from Allah. It is difficult to interpret the unstated intentions behind any charitable work, because it is something between a person and his god. Direct Aid started with the purpose of empowering African Muslims by preaching them to practice Islam well, delivering aid to Muslims in Africa, educating them, and transforming them into productive people who can depend on themselves. The motive that Dr Alsumait started with in preaching Islam, as his wife told me, was that he was surprised when he visited Africa that Muslims in many African countries are Muslims in name only. They lacked many Islamic teachings and were merely aware of them. Dr Alsumait was always blaming himself and Muslims in the media, thinking that we are all accountable for not delivering Islam as it should be to these countries. There are some former Muslims who are currently without any religion or who have changed their religion due to being affected by the preaching they heard with other countries’ aid, and, because of the extreme poverty they are suffering, they are responding to those who help them. Suhaila mentioned that there are some organisations who offer a meal
for children who attend their religious school, and the children then grow up with the religion that they learn in these schools.

Although they are focusing on converting people to Islam with their charitable work, they do not differentiate in terms of aid and health between Muslims and non-Muslims. Only the *zakat* which has to be given to Muslims is delivered only to Muslims. However, there was a small transformation that they needed to make in order to ease their access to some African countries, whose governments refused any aid based around converting people to a religion, as mentioned above, so they changed the name of the organisation from the African Muslims Committee to Direct Aid in 1999. Direct Aid as a name is more inclusive.

6.2.2 The 1,000 Wells campaign

The most noticeable transformations obvious in Direct Aid’s charitable work in Kuwait are the social engagement and the developmental charity track, which are the focus of this section. I witnessed one of Direct Aid’s big campaigns during Ramadan 2018, following their ads before and during Ramadan, and volunteered with them in the Kuwait team for fundraising at the campaign site. Prior to Ramadan, Alhusainan, the most popular influencer on social media charity campaigns (see Chapter 3), announced that he would travel to Africa with Direct Aid. This kind of charitable media trip helps to increase the trust of donors and allows them to see a live broadcast of previous activities and plans for the current year. The team consisted of some popular Kuwaiti photographers, NGO members, and Alhusainan. The whole trip was published in detail on the photographers’ social media accounts and on Alhusainan’s accounts. Everything was documented, including arrivals at airports and details about what they were aiming to do when arriving in each city and village. This trip was for marketing purposes for their big campaign that they intended to launch at the beginning of Ramadan. They filmed people in the villages in Niger who had benefited from last year’s well campaigns. They also took videos and photographs for other projects, the details of which they planned announce on the last days of Ramadan.

One of the most influential pieces was a short film of some children in Kuwait being asked ‘What is the colour of water?’ Most of them said ‘It is transparent, without colour’. However, when they asked African children the same question, they said ‘brown!’, as they had never seen water in another colour (Alhusainan, 2018a).
Alhusainan brought glasses with him to a well, about one hour’s walking distance from surrounding villages. The well is used by many families who travel there without transportation, often with children, carrying heavy water containers. In the video he is seen pouring water from their containers, showing it to people, and then pouring clear water from the team’s bottles to another glass. The water in one glass is brown, in the other it is transparent! Then he said ‘Did you see the water that we drink and the water that they drink?’ (Alhusainan, 2018b).

Alhusainan then gives information about the 1,000 Wells campaign, due to take place on the first Friday in Ramadan. This campaign aims to accept donations on one day only, and their target is around three million Kuwaiti Dinar. This would build one thousand wells in Africa in different locations. Wells vary in depth and cost; Artesian wells cost around thirty thousand KD, others are cheaper. This campaign did not accept cash, only electronic transfers to the bank account of Direct Aid, which is monitored by the government. This gives more credibility to financial transfers. For those who prefer to bring cash, there are machines for depositing money for this project, and receipts are given. Two days later, many people, including celebrities, had posted advertisements in support of the campaign. I received many messages in my message application (WhatsApp), some with links to photos and videos about Alhusainan’s Africa trip. One of the advantages for Alhusainan, as a person, is that he is not linked to a political party in Kuwait, the same as Direct Aid.

There were two weeks of good coverage of the Africa trip on social media, with live videos to show how people are suffering in getting water in different villages. It was announced that on the first Friday in Ramadan, the campaign would be launched in the 360 Mall (Alhusainan, 2018c). Campaigns often take place in malls, because they are air conditioned, with open halls, and shops, and they provide a big screen to show the extent of current donations. Alhusainan explained that these wells would be all around Africa in different locations, and with variations in price, depending on their type. The night before, people shared the videos on WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat to encourage people to participate in the campaign. In Islam, if you guide someone to good deeds, you will be rewarded by Allah, as if you did them yourself. For example, if you tell five people and they all donate, you will be rewarded five times in the same way by Allah (see Chapter 2). This is why people were keen to spread these messages.
On Friday 25 May, 2018, before midday, people were waiting for the donation link to be announced at 1 pm. One could donate online or by going to the 360 Mall. The campaign started, and after just a few minutes, the donation link had crashed, because of the high numbers using the link at the same time. I planned to attend the campaign location to see how things were going, and since the donation link was not working, some family and friends gave me their donations to donate on their behalf. I took the chance to play the role of donator.

I arrived at the mall, the screen was on and the amount reached around KD 600,000 in just three hours. There were around six tables of men processing donations, with short queues of donors. Each table had four men, with two men processing one donation – one takes the ATM card to charge it in the machine, while the other writes the receipt. I waited in the queue for a couple of minutes and it was my turn. He asked me ‘Would you prefer to write a name on the receipt or just make it anonymous?’ I said yes, I would like it to be anonymous, and can I have it divided in different payment processes? Because it was for my relatives and I would like to give each one proof of donation. He said that he could. The reason for asking this was because it is better if sadaqa is secret (see Chapter 2). Many people prefer it to be secret, to not be seen as ‘showing off’ in donating. If this happens and if that is your intention in sadaqa, the donation will lack sincerity and Allah will not reward you.

I made my donation and went around the tables to see the people who were coming. There were men, women, couples, and families with children. I saw a wooden booth with the name of Direct Aid and there were many women in black abaya (a full-length outer garment worn by some Muslim women) inside working. I came closer to learn what they were doing exactly, and to understand the difference between paying on this table and the men’s tables. I saw some women on the men’s tables also. First, I found a banner that said, ‘Have you built your well?’ Children were being provided with clay in order to build a well and take it home. A group of volunteer girls were working to help children put the clay in the mould, take it off, then hang a rope on it. Children were very happy to do something on their own. After a while, the queue of kids increased. I noticed an old friend from university, who was leading these volunteers. Suhaila is a daughter of the founder of Direct Aid, Dr Alsumait. I told her that I would be in that location until that evening and asked her if she needed help. She said ‘You can see that we are in a mess! Yes, if you please’. She explained the process; because of the problems
with the donation link, people were coming with cash to donate. And they were not allowed to take cash, but had a deposit machine, so they took cash and put it directly in the machine to make it easier for donors in this emergency situation. It was hoped that the link would be fixed soon. I told her I really like the art and craft activity of letting children build tiny wells, and I asked, ‘Why did you not advertise that?’ She said that they didn’t want many people coming just for that activity, and that there wasn’t enough capacity to accept more children. Staff were asked not to publish it on social media, and it was mainly done for children whose parents were donating, so they could take part and see how this donation would turn into a real well. I had the chance to sit at the table and face people (women only) to take their payment by cash or by card.

Separating women and men in donation queues is preferable in Kuwait, for cultural and religious reasons. It lets them feel comfortable and free to ask and interact with questions and answers.

Since I had the chance to work on social projects with the Kuwait National Students Union, I have experience of dealing with people in different public occasions. I welcomed people, and asked ‘How much do you want to donate? Would you like to pay with cash or a card? Do you want it all in one receipt or multiple?’ These are the questions we asked to process the donations. One woman asked ‘Do you accept zakat for this project?’ Since I had not seen anything related to zakat in the advertisements and videos published, I could not answer her question, and I told her ‘I will ask, just a moment please’. I asked the team leader, Suhaila; she said ‘Yes, because the wells benefit three categories of zakat, fuqara, masakeen, and ibn alsabeel’. I then wondered why they did not announce that they accepted zakat. I knew that building wells for the poor and providing water is not (explicitly) within the zakat categories (see Chapter 2), since zakat money has to be transferred to the beneficiaries as something they can own or as cash. Then Suhaila showed me that they have a new fatwa that shows the details of this: since water is essential for living it can be provided to them instead of zakat.

The purpose in not announcing this was to not in engage with differences of scholarly opinion in public; they could show the fatwa just to those who asked about paying their zakat to the campaign. There are still some scholars who believe that zakat is not appropriate for payment for building wells. Difference among scholars is seen by Muslims as a kind of a mercy, and fatwas can be changed for the sake of the public interest if they are not related to core beliefs or worship.
There was a deeper level of engagement and personal connection marked at the campaign site. Some parents brought their children to donate by themselves. One child brought his savings box with coins to donate, but unfortunately they were not allowed to take coins because of a decree by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL); the mother gave her son the same amount in notes to let him pay. One man brought four children, varying in ages, perhaps 7 to 16 years old, and gave each one a different amount and encouraged them to talk to me when donating; he said ‘I am Iraqi from Akrad [which literally means Kurdish], but this association is a different one for me, I have to participate in this’. I had not asked him where he was from, and there was no need to show ID; I got the feeling that he wanted to show me that there are ‘good Iraqis’, something that Kuwaitis may not think after the Iraqi invasion of 1990 (see Chapter 1). Involving children in these practices will stay with them for a long time. Some people brought money not only for this campaign but also for other projects by the organisation, such as paying iftar for the poor in Africa.

At midday, another NGO, the Alnajat charitable organisation, helped Direct Aid by letting them use their server to host the donation link. This showed the collaboration and trust among these two organisations in such situations. However, rumours quickly spread that the other link was not legitimate. It was thought that the other NGO had taken the name of a campaign that belonged to Direct Aid. Direct Aid clarified on their public social media accounts that Alnajat had let them use their IT server. Unfortunately, the campaign was supposed to last until 1 am (12 hours in total) but Direct Aid chose to suspend it and complete it on the Monday in a different location. Their aim was above 3 million KD. At that time, they had reached above 2 million. On Monday, the second day of this campaign, I went to the Direct Aid building in Hawalli city; it was much quieter than on the first day. There were fewer women than men. There were big screens here too to display the amount reached. This campaign closed earlier than expected, with 5 million Kuwaiti Dinar, which was above the target that they wanted.

Direct Aid are very clear in their strategic plan. The social media influencer, Alhusainan, tried to suggest some charitable ideas to implement with them, but they refused. Alsumait (the son) told me that they had shown Alhusainan their plans and told him that they were happy to collaborate with him, but within their plan and geographic target, Africa. Alhusainan told me that he tried some other charitable projects with other NGOs, then came back to Direct Aid. He said ‘I am convinced now with their entire work and their focus on
Africa, I witnessed it myself and will support all Direct Aid’s charitable projects’. Direct Aid as an organisation shared with Alhusainan their strategic plans and explained for him why they focus on Africa, and engaged him in their charitable trips. Therefore there was loyalty generated toward this organisation by Alhusainan, he was fully convinced to work with them, and engaged his followers in these campaigns. As a result of which, these donors got the same spirit of loyalty that Alhusainan delivered to them virtually through social media, then they started not only to donate to this organisation, but to help in fundraising too. Many people who are not volunteers with Direct Aid are re-posting and marketing Direct Aid campaigns.

6.3 The Global Mercy organisation

The previous organisation, Direct Aid, is a family-based charity organisation that focuses only on the African continent. Direct Aid gained their trust from their founder’s reputation and their independence from any political roots, in addition to the advantage of the deep social engagement that they acquired by collaboration with Alhusainan. In contrast, the case of the Global Mercy organisation is quite different. Global Mercy arose out of a political party and has its supporters and opponents. This section discusses how this organisation began, how they undertake their charitable projects, and how they have gained trust. Four head members of the main departments in Global Mercy, including the executive manager, were interviewed for this case, and I also used their published data and media reports.

Global Mercy is an NGO with a political affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood, a political Islamic movement. I discussed with Nabil, the Media Manager at Global Mercy, the effect of their affiliation on their work. Nabil stated that the affiliation made their organisation vulnerable to criticism in the media, which they are accustomed to, yet they were able to recover every time in the media. Global Mercy counters these criticisms by adopting transparency in their charitable performance. They are distinguished by the IT system they have for online donation and for their follow-up with donors, which parallels the personal account systems in commercial banks. They have been granted several prizes for the IT system that they use and their website, and have been granted quality control awards. In addition, they are distinguished by their heritage, as they started very early, before the charity rules were set up in Kuwait, which means that they established their charity branches as
international foreign offices in 22 countries. So they have strong connections with certain Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. They are also distinguished by their flexibility in embracing youth initiatives and their procedures for involving people in and participating in charitable trips, which has led to the expansion of their base in the youth community.

6.3.1 Historical overview

The idea of involving the Social Reform Association (SRA) in charity and relief in the Islamic world emerged around the beginning of the 1980s. The SRA is an Islamic body that works to achieve the common good that Islam has brought; it was founded in 1963. It is a public welfare association that serves many aspects of Kuwaiti society, involving social, cultural, and charitable aspects. It stems from the political roots of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan). It is represented in the political arena in Kuwait by the Islamic Constitutional Movement, Al haraka Al dustoriya Al Islamiya, known as Hadas. Hadas is a Kuwaiti political bloc founded in 1991 after the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion, to be the political front of the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait and to adopt the Islamic political line. It is a peaceful movement that does not adopt violence. The movement has members who represent it in the Kuwaiti National Assembly.

They started to explore the situation of Muslims in East Asia in 1982 by sending two members to travel there and determine their needs. After that visit, the first charitable committee was established by the SRA, called the Islamic World committee. From that moment, the charity started to reach out to all parts of the world. With every major event that happened to Muslims in the world, they dedicated a committee to follow it and take care of its details. For example, they formed a charitable committee for the relief of Muslims in Afghanistan, called ‘The Islamic Call’, in 1986. Thereafter the Lebanese problem broke out, and the situation got worse in Palestine too. A committee for helping the Levant area, Ash-sham (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan) has also been established. After the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi invasion in 1991, there was an outbreak of ethnic conflict led by the Serbs against Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Islamic World committee was then activated to send relief to them. Another charity committee specialising in aid to the African
continent was established in 1994, yet there was already charity in Somalia before the Iraqi invasion; this committee expanded to reach all African countries.

On account of the multiplicity of charity committees established to meet the calls for relief in the Muslim world, and in order to establish institutional and professional charity work, there was an urgent need for coordination between these committees to achieve optimal functioning and to ensure that the charitable work was structured according to different aspects such as financial, media, relief, educational, and logistical support through an integrated administrative system. In 1991, they established the General Secretariat of Charity Committees, Alamana alamma, with the aim of unifying the administrative and accounting systems, supervising the work of the charitable committees and coordinating them, and working to deliver donations to those who deserved them most. The four committees were organised under the umbrella of the General Secretariat of the Charity Committees at the SRA. All the committees were grouped under three core sectors: the Asia and Africa sector, the Arab-European sector, and the integrated sector.

The executive manager, Alqenai, said that the big transformation in charitable work in Kuwait started around 2010:

Before 2010, charitable work was not taking its right place. Some sharia scholars advised not recording charity practices because secrecy is part of piety. Even the culture of giving among donors before was different; after they donate they didn’t want any connection with the NGO, they preferred to not hear anything about their donation. Since then, awareness among people has increased and the donors know that they have a right to know where their money is going. It became essential to NGOs to change their charitable discourse and media presence according to these new requirements.

The diversification of charitable giving and competition amongst different organisations required further organisation (Green, 2020). New departments began to appear in charitable organisations, such as public relations department, the marketing department, and the editing department, which had not existed before. In 2011, a new direction of transformation was witnessed, with the expansion of new charity offices; the previous three core sectors were redistributed to four new sectors: Asia, Africa, the Arab sector, and Europe. On the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Alamana alamma in 2016, a new name was launched, Global Mercy, to express more clearly the carrying of that blessed mission, the message of mercy that applies not only to the body of the Muslim nation but to
humanity as a whole. Global Mercy became an independent non-profit organisation that focuses on charity everywhere, supervised by the SRA.

Global Mercy now has around 16 branches around Kuwait and 26 international offices around the world. Alqenai said: ‘One of the strongest elements of excellence in Global Mercy is the presence of external representatives for us, as we do not need to use a third party to implement our charitable projects internationally’. Global Mercy’s vision is to be the leading philanthropic organisation in the Arab world, in accordance with the best practices of quality and institutional performance, in the growth of financial and human resources, and the comprehensiveness of projects in quantity, quality, and spread. The Global Mercy association is keen to deliver its mission of improving the lives of peoples and minorities, via sustainable development, along with charitable and developmental activities, partnerships, and initiatives.

In order to maintain trust, charitable organisations that have political origins have a greater responsibility than any other independent organisation to clarify the transparency of their work to donors. Because they will be subject to many criticisms and rumours – by opponents to their political affiliations – the organisation’s image in society may fluctuate. Global Mercy was keen to work in a professional and transparent way in order to give it more strength. Alqenai said, ‘We have nothing to hide, we are keen to show all society our work’. In addition, Global Mercy was the first NGO in Kuwait to have quality certificates (ISO).

6.3.2 Maintaining trust and loyalty

The transformation in charity work within the Global Mercy organisation is obvious in different aspects. They are seeking to maintain trust in Kuwaiti society through the creative use of media, by documenting their charitable results and showing transparency. They are keen to enhance loyalty among employees and donors through diversification in charitable projects, and social engagement in their charitable campaigns and trips.

6.3.2.1 Maintaining trust through the media

Global Mercy’s campaigns are characterized by creative use of media, such as creating high-quality products in films, printing, and social media, with a touch of institutional spirit. For example, they don’t depend on live videos represented by an influencer on social media or an
employee. Their posts and adverts are consistently professional and compete in quality with those of private sector companies. As the media department mentioned to me, ‘What makes a difference in Global Mercy’s work is that we have a high standard for ourselves, as the private sector does, we don’t compare ourselves with existing charitable organisations’. Their charity discourse sometimes relies on a scientific basis, such as ‘We did a field survey of the need in this area…’. Rarely do you find in Kuwait the kind of speech that can give authenticity and a research basis for a charity project.

One of their distinguished media campaigns that documented their charitable results in a creative way was the Mercy movie (Al-Rahma movie). As a part of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of their charitable work, and to document the previous achievements of Global Mercy, they launched a big campaign to tell the Kuwaiti community ‘Who are we? What are we doing? And why are we doing this?’

This campaign was creative in filming, expression, and direction. They published some pre-ads (Khaironline, 2018b; Khaironline, 2018c) that brought attention and excitement to their big documentary movie. The pre-ads are short video clips with a truncated ending, to attract people to see the one-hour documentary movie (Khaironline, 2018a) that they posted on YouTube and presented at their anniversary festival.

The pre-ads were derived from real stories that they had encountered during charity trips around the world. Real people were interviewed in the movie. For example, there was ‘the secret of the abandoned house clip movie’, as they called it: while one of the organisation’s team was on a charity trip in Kyrgyzstan seven years ago, they found an abandoned house in a forest. They went into it, and found two little girls with a group of dogs around a bowl of food, alone without parent or carer. The little girls, Merjan and Ejan, were around seven or eight years old and were alone in an unpopulated area. The Global Mercy team adopted these two little girls under their orphan programme. They filmed these two girls in the orphanage telling their stories. ‘I’m Merjan, I’m in grade 11 now, I really don’t remember the details, we were young. I remember that we lived a tough life. They brought me and my sister Ejan to Al-Doha School. I thank Allah that we got everything that a child is hoping for from their family. Thanks to the Kuwaitis donors’, one of them said (Khaironline, 2018b).

Global Mercy used a one-minute video clip (Khaironline, 2018b; Khaironline 2018c) telling a real story that happened in Kyrgyzstan to produce a strong and effective ad for the orphanage school that they built. The humanitarian discourse and especially the stories told by the
orphans deliver a powerful message to donors. At the beginning of the clip, the narrator tells us ‘The Global Mercy organisation did not know that there is qualitative work waiting for them’. There is a scene of a dark place in a forest and a shadow of two children walking around, a small abandoned house between the trees, along with sound effects of human voices, like sighs, as background music, then a written question appears in Arabic: ‘Is there a human living in this place?’ The narrator continues, with a scene of a little girl with miserable expressions on her dirty face, but the care of Allah reveals his ability to bring the hand of mercy to save Ejan and Merjan from an unknown fate. These are realistic events from a real story, with a group of predatory and stray dogs gathering around a bowl of food. The scene shows the flank of a dog and the two little girls with their bowl of food, and background music of a poem with lyrics ‘(We are who our prophet came as “mercy” for the world’). And the movie ends. The story is completed in the documentary ‘Mercy Movie’. Every advertisement was planned to shed light on an issue that they aim to support via their charitable projects. Merjan and Ejan’s story was to shed light on the orphanages.

The second story, about Sola, is a real story from Sri Lanka focusing on supporting disabilities in poor families. A Muslim family migrated from northern Sri Lanka because of the wars of the past three decades. They got land to live on as a donation from a local charity, where they built their house from coconut tree fronds. In this family there are four girls, three of whom are disabled. The mother Sola said, ‘My husband works for a daily wage and we can only eat on the days he earns money while other days we cannot; I have suffered with my daughters a lot; in the rainy season, there is a deep leak filling the house with water’ (Khaironline, 2018c). Global Mercy constructed a new home for them with consideration to accessibility for the disabled girls. The able-bodied girl, Shafna, explained about their new home:

They built a house for us with all the required facilities, now our house has a water supply so we don’t need to bring water from outside, we have a bathroom and kitchen too. These metal handrails which have been installed inside the house help my sisters to move around and go on their own to the bathroom, and most importantly when it rains there is no leak (Khaironline, 2018c).

These stories had a strong impact in Kuwait. People like to see where their money goes, and not just by a written report with photos and accounts. The style that Global Mercy used was so special, showing the reality inside needy families’ homes in other countries. Choosing
certain charity issues to support in each advertisement with truncated stories enticed potential donors to find out about the story’s end, which could only be found by watching the documentary.

In addition, one of their projects is an adoption of a youth charitable project; they embraced the hobbies of a photographer and writer in producing the *Charitable Literature* photo book, along with a charitable exhibition, about the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Global Mercy use media to highlight their strengths, such as the IT system they use. Global Mercy has developed a unique line in their IT system and marketing. Their IT system not only accepts donations online but also, like internet banking, allows the donor to check all their previous donations and manage any further donations for different projects. The IT system has been awarded several prizes in the Arabic world. Nowadays they are keen to talk about these prizes and distinctions in public. Alqenai said that before when they were awarded any prize they would just keep it in a drawer! Now they are exaggerating in showing their awards in the media to let people know what is going on, and this helps them enhance their public image and maintain trust.

### 6.3.2.2 Enhancing loyalty (internally and externally)

When I visited the Global Mercy headquarters in Kuwait my eye was caught by a big wall built from bricks with names on, titled the Mercy Wall. I asked the public relations manager about this wall; Khalid said:

> When we launch a new charity project or campaign, the marketing starts from the inside. We need the internal environment to be prepared for the campaign, starting from the employees. Usually the Marketing and Public Relations department are aware of the campaign because of their role, but what about the rest of the employees in other departments? What is their role? We want them to be part of it!

The idea behind the Mercy Wall is that Global Mercy has just started a new charity campaign for orphans, and they determined the benefits that orphans that will get from this campaign. Then they asked their employees to participate with a brick (made of cork) with their name on, to build this wall in the headquarters; in return they did not want them to donate or do any
specific work. The whole idea is moral support, as Khalid explained, to give the employees a feeling that they all are in one boat. Khalid said: ‘After that, you find the employees automatically start tweeting, sending messages about the campaign, and marketing it, without being asked’. They are creating a team spirit for all employees, thus enhancing their loyalty toward the organisation, resulting in them acting by marketing it and spreading the word.

Alqenai, the executive manager, stated that one of the challenges that Global Mercy is trying to tackle is the lack of a human resources department in the organisation. He said HR is essential to enhancing the internal image of the organisation as a place of work, to motivating employees, and evaluating and developing them. So these ideas are gradually implemented to enhance the loyalty of the employees in each charity project executed by Global Mercy.

A key charitable act that Global Mercy is famous for with Kuwait is organising charitable trips. These trips involve travelling to deliver aid to certain places such as Syrian refugees camps. First, they established charity teams under the Global Mercy umbrella, and from these teams they arrange charitable trips for donors or volunteers. These trips have multiple purposes: 1) they are a marketing instrument, 2) they increase trust by increasing transparency around the distribution of donations internationally, and 3) they create loyalty among the volunteers on these trips by changing the donor into a fundraiser, i.e. the volunteers who travel with them and usually just donate to charitable projects, they come back to Kuwait and fundraise for this purpose because they have been affected by the reality they have seen. Khalid said that the charitable teams increased in number after the Syrian crisis; they reached 370 teams that each contained between four and thirty-five people. However, since the Syrian crisis has gone on for a long time, Khalid said, ‘we cannot always deliver aid; we turned to sustainable giving that lasts for a long time, for example instead of giving the refugee a tent that I need to change yearly, I build a room from fibre boards that can be moved anywhere and has a warranty for ten years’. The type of giving performed by Global Mercy depends on the needs in charitable causes.

Recently their charitable trips expanded to include volunteers from Gulf countries also under their supervision. The main idea of these charitable trips is that volunteers raise donations by themselves (from their friends, families, and neighbourhood) and travel with Global Mercy to distribute them among the needy in refugee camps. These charitable trips have helped expand the donor base of Global Mercy and enhanced loyalty to them in society. Most of the participants on these trips are young people who are travelling for the first time for charitable
causes, and who encourage their peers by publishing trip details on their personal social media accounts.

6.4 Conclusion

Kuwaiti NGOs’ charitable engagement has been transformed from traditional charities into international standard charities, working as modern institutional organisations and as sustainable charities. We can see a transformation in how ethnonationalist sentiments work here, in that these two NGOs are expressing their Kuwaitiness not only to internal audiences and beneficiaries, but with a conscious self-portrayal that impacts Kuwait's international standing. Modern times and the rise in awareness among donors have driven NGOs toward this transformation in their charitable practices. The two NGOs mentioned in this chapter vary in their affiliations, however they have similarities in their use of media, technology, and social engagement. Direct Aid have created a high level of virtual engagement online, while Global Mercy have created a high level of live engagement by arranging charitable trips. Direct Aid maintain trust thanks to the reputation of their founder and the social media coverage that they obtained from a trusted influencer, while in Global Mercy maintaining trust is done through creative use of media that sheds light on their strengths and the awards that they have acquired, in addition to changing donors into fundraisers. The competitive charity environment that exists in Kuwait is encouraging diversification in types of charity, which can then suit different donors.
Chapter 7: Charity by Government: Zakat House

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the engagement of Kuwait’s government in charity through the charitable activities conducted by Zakat House, in order to address how Zakat House express the Kuwaiti national identity through their charitable work, within Kuwait and to the world. In my discussion of research context (Chapter 2) I placed in context the government authorities in charge of charity in Kuwait, the establishment of Zakat House, the charity law in Kuwait, and the implementation of zakat in Kuwait. This chapter pays more detailed attention to the diverse charitable activities conducted by Zakat House in Kuwait and globally through the understanding of the role of some of the main administrations in Zakat House, discussing the obstacles and strengths in their charitable work in comparison to other charitable participants covered in the previous chapters. Zakat House is often referred to simply as the House or Albeit, a common term used between employees to refer to Zakat House. Zakat House collects zakat and sadaqa (or as Albeit name it, khairat) for such causes as poverty relief, orphans, and different charitable projects.

There are certain challenges that Zakat House faces and which have affected their charitable practices. Although there is a monitoring and controlling system that they are subject to in Zakat House, as an independent governmental financial body, yet they are vulnerable to criticism and rumours, and attention from others such as National Assembly members, for any mismanagement or corruption, more so than other charity institution. This what my informants in Zakat House described for me. The media department manager in Zakat House, Alwasmi, said: ‘People are not judging the efficiency of Zakat House’s work, rather they are judging who is leading Zakat House at this period’. This is the mentality in Kuwait in matters related to the government and politics, and especially in institutions that have financial goals. This does not come out of anywhere, there are some accumulations of incidents of corruption that Kuwait has witnessed in various government bodies (see Chapter 1 on the anti-corruption protests in the wake of the Arab Spring).

According to the Corruption Perception Index & Related Rules (Al Azemi et al., 2019) – from a study of the reality of financial corruption in Kuwait – Kuwait has a high financial
corruption indicator, which has been rising over the previous ten years. When citizens believe that there is corruption in government their trust decreases, and they are more likely to trust other organisations (Marinova, 2011). However, no single corruption case has been registered against Zakat House, which would in fact be almost impossible because of the multiple stages of internal and external audit and control that Zakat House is subject to, Alwasmi explained; but these are the consequences of being under the governmental umbrella.

There is a continuous debate in Kuwaiti society and in the media about the Al-Haraka Al-Islamia Al-Dustoreya – the Constitutional Movement Called HADAS, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood – and any positions they occupy in different governmental institutions, especially Islamic financial spaces such as Zakat House and the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation. Despite their supporters in parliamentary elections and their members in the Social Reform Association, many of their opponents – whether from other political parties or independents – believe that their appropriation of governmental Islamic financial institutions is disturbing (see Chapter 2). Regardless of whether this true or not, or where these debates come from, this affected the role of Zakat House in Kuwait during the time that the Islamic Brotherhood’s members were running Zakat House, as my informants explained. Similar to how this issue rose in regard to NGOs that have a political affiliation, it appears here in the case of a government body in regard to the affiliation of the management. Zakat House is exposed continuously to criticism depending on society’s judgment of who heads it.

Tonkiss and Passey (1999, p.257) determined essential keys that need to be in consideration when examining trust in the voluntary sector: ‘the general public; government and institutional funders; business; and users or beneficiaries’. In the case of Zakat House, there are several factors that have affected the image of Zakat House and trust in them in Kuwait society. First, there is the general public perception of belonging to the government and the affiliation of the management. The continuous changing administrations within Zakat House, the diversity of the personal political affiliations of individuals in the administration, and their acceptance in Kuwaiti society, all affect the public image of Zakat House. Kuwaiti society has become focused on individuals themselves, not on the performance of Zakat House in the period that these individuals manage it in. Second, Zakat House’s funding from the government is not enough, and the donations they receive are random because there is no clear income source for zakat from companies (see Chapter 2). Third, the opportunities available in each department inside Zakat House are unequal (e.g. the international aid
department is much better than other departments in many aspects). Fourth, there are the unsatisfied beneficiaries: the negativity on social media from Bidun, who are one of the beneficiaries of Zakat House, because of their dissatisfaction with the shortage of help that they gain from Zakat House.

This chapter argues although government policies on local charities at Zakat House lack opportunities for practising charity and media publicity in comparison to other charity participants in Kuwait, such as individuals and NGOs, Zakat House still stands out in some departments and maintains trust in its clients, albeit less so in comparison with NGOs and individuals. In addition, this chapter argues that the diversification of charitable practices at Zakat House – with its limited policies as a government body – has participated in the expansion of the expression of Kuwaitiness through charity both locally and internationally. The sentiments of Kuwaiti national identity, associated with ethnicity, are evident in Zakat House. Here, the governmental charitable body sincerely believes they are unique by doing their charity. Zakat House is involved in portraying Kuwait's local and International standing, by engaging more Kuwaitis in charity and by sharing these sentiments with other participants in charitable activities, all framed as being a part of being good Kuwaiti citizens. Yet these feelings are, however, subjected to constraints by the state in the form of the specific opportunities available for expressing Kuwaitiness through charity, quite different from the other charitable participants outlined in previous chapters.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section looks at the departments which deal with the collection and distribution of zakat. The discussion here is limited to collection from individuals, not companies; collection of zakat from companies is discussed in detail in the research context chapter (Chapter 2). This section elaborates on how zakat functions in Kuwait, addressing how Zakat House identifies those in need both inside and outside Kuwait. The second section is about the external activities department, who are like an independent department within Zakat House because of the independent line in the media that they have. This department recorded a notable success in their fundraising and charitable projects, based on a personal success of one active employee. The third section elaborates on how Zakat House represent themselves in the media, the tensions of being government body that is not particularly accessible in the media and that has many constraints, and how they are affected by the continuous changes in individuals and their political affiliation within the management.
The data in this chapter was collected from semi-structured interviews with employees of several departments in Zakat House headquarters, in addition to sharia scholars in the Awqaf Ministry and financial experts in the Financial Ministry, both involved in the work of Zakat House. To gain more effective data about how work is done in reality, I interviewed employees from different levels in Zakat House, then linked their work between departments, which means that sometimes one story has been heard from different perspectives. In addition, to understand a full picture of Zakat House’s job, participant observation in different locations was conducted during Ramadan: first, in the social services centre, where beneficiaries (needy women) can apply for zakat, renew their papers, or apply for a non-profit loan, and second, in the VIP department, where donors visit and calculate their zakat and pay it in the branch.

7.2 Departments for collection and distribution of zakat

7.2.1 Zakat House VIP branch

In Zakat House, there are many branches that calculate and collect zakat for people. Calculating zakat is also available online on the Zakat House website, yet most people come to the branch to weigh a piece of new gold jewellery then calculate the zakat for that amount of weight. These branches are found around all Kuwait’s cities. I planned to visit the most active branch of Zakat House and the one that recorded the highest zakat collection, which is the VIP branch in Abdulla-Alsalem city. This is usually the busiest branch during Ramadan. I had the chance to contact Alfalah, the head of the branch in the women’s department. I chose to visit during Ramadan to see how the work was going with donors.

I arrived around midday, which is supposed to be the start time in Ramadan for those who don’t like to wake up early while they are fasting. Some sleeping habits change during Ramadan, and people stay up until dawn to eat their last meal, suhuor, before they start fasting. The branch was quiet and very clean, with a nice fragrant smell. There is a reception desk in the middle, with offices around; all offices have big glass windows, so they can see anyone entering the branch. As soon as I asked at the reception desk for the woman I wanted to meet, she stood up from her office and waved her hand to welcome me to her office. She said that she knows her customers well, and when she saw me she knew that I was not one of them, and she thought this is the woman who talked to me and asked me for an interview.
I asked why it was so quiet as it is the busiest branch. She explained that the problem is that the branch closed for three months prior to Ramadan for construction work and opened again on the first day of Ramadan. Many people did not know they had reopened. She had been keen not to close the branch; she would have preferred the construction work to be done while keeping part of the branch open. However, management refused her idea since this would have cost them double and taken longer.

The reason why I chose this branch was because it is known for its strong relationships with clients, and its customers have loyalty to Zakat House because of personal relationships with this woman, Alfalah. This is what I heard from the employees of Zakat House in the main branch, and I was excited to see how they could reach this stage with their donors and maintain trust for so long.

While Alfalah was talking about the work, she said that they are really cared about *elaqat*, literally relationships or connections, and to maintain the customer’s trust, *theqa*, which led many clients to pay their *zakat* with them. ‘I have some customers who just pass by to drink a cup of coffee with me and go, not even for paying or asking about *zakat*. I have been here for long time and know them well and they know me’, she said. This area, Abdulla Alsalem, where this branch is located, is considered a high-class residence area. These people mostly have a large amount of jewellery and need to pay *zakat* annually. Most of them annually acquire new jewellery that needs to be weighed at the Zakat House branch to find the amount of their *zakat*. The head of the branch is a Kuwaiti woman from a well-known family close to this class, and this might have contributed a lot to the relationship with the customers; her belonging to this family helped her to build connections better than any other employee. I noticed that Alfalah was talking with love and passion for her job. She said ‘I like my work a lot and I don’t care about working time, I stay longer sometimes if I have a customer or work to do without taking extra payment. We are here keen to make charitable reports for customers who spent 20,000 KD and more on *zakat*, we ask them if they would like a visit with this report, or just the report delivery, or they may prefer to collect it from the branch’. ‘Yes, we want to consolidate the relationship but we respect their privacy, and many of them don’t like the home visit, except old women staying alone at home’, she clarified. While we were discussing different issues about *zakat* work, a woman visited her in the office. Alfalah stood up and went to the door with a warm welcome and greetings, and as we do in Kuwait for people whom we are close with, they shook hands and kissed each other on the cheek.
She introduced me to her, saying: ‘This is Soha, a PhD student in the UK doing her research about charity, do you mind if she stays with us or do you want a private meeting?’ The client replied, ‘Yes, for sure she can stay’.

I was following their conversation; they talked about the renovation of the branch and construction work, moving furniture, and life in general. I was waiting to hear ‘What can I help you with? Do you want to pay your zakat or calculate it?’, but neither of these were said, just general conversation between women. Then the customer asked about my studies and living away, and we moved on to discuss UK cities, the weather, and other issues. After maybe twenty to thirty minutes of talking, the customer handed the woman small cards, and told her ‘I need you to calculate these for me please’. These cards were to record the weight of her gold, and she wanted to calculate it at the day rate of gold. She did not pay her zakat and Alfalah did not ask her if she would like to pay. After the visit was finished, I expressed surprise about the conversation to Alfalah, because it was like talking with a friend, and she said that she never asks them about money or how much they want to pay this year. She said ‘In my experience, donors don’t like to feel that you want their money, so it is best not to talk about it too much, they are keener to give it to you when they want’. She said that they did not differentiate between the way they treat or welcome customers who pay and those who do not pay. She explained that the woman had calculated her zakat, but would not necessarily pay it; however, some loyalty towards Zakat House has been established, and she may come in the future for other reasons.

She talked about clients and their loyalty and trust. She told me that there was a strange situation that she faced with an 84-year-old woman. An old woman came to them and said ‘I don’t like Zakat House and I will never pay you from my own money, and I hate any religious organisations. But I have my sister’s money who did not pay zakat for six years, the amount is around six hundred thousand KD, and she has a mental disability and I am her guardian’. Alfalah said that she welcomed her and neither insisted on convincing her to pay to Zakat House, though it was a really big amount that cannot be missed, nor argued with her about what she said, and did not defend Zakat House. They talked together for one and a half hours without saying that she needed the sister’s zakat, and finally the woman agreed that she wanted to pay it to Zakat House, but not for any religious cause. She agreed that it could be used for education, for example. And she said ‘I want to choose where to spend the money’, then she said that she wanted it to be spent in Egypt. Because she came to them with a feeling
of hate for Zakat House, she didn’t finish the process that day and was hesitant. Alfalah said that the woman told her, ‘Take the cheque and I will come later to finish the paper and sign’; Alfalah told her, ‘We are not in rush, take your time and whenever you are ready come again, and you can keep the cheque with you’.

Alfalah’s case shows keenness on maintaining trust, and that attracting clients comes from good connections with clients, and communication skills that show to the client that they are welcome even if they do not intend to pay their zakat to Zakat House. Relationships built in this way turn into long-term loyalty.

7.2.2 The Social Services Department

From collecting zakat in the last section, in this section I explore the distribution of zakat. The Social Services Department is in charge of distributing zakat funds. In collaboration with the Financial Department, they distribute the donations, whether they are zakat or general charity (sadaqa), i.e. khairat. The board of directors stipulates certain conditions for receiving funds that are compatible with zakat categories under Islamic sharia law. Zakat House dictates some standards that should be met in regard to the fuqaraa (the poor) and masakeen (the needy) categories. Those requesting funds under these two categories are asked to provide evidence of their personal ID, salary, expenses, or bank statements, and this applies to both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. The category of fi sabil Allah (those fighting for a religious cause) is distributed by the External Activities Department through aid campaigns such as Muslim countries at war. The category of ibn al Sabil (wayfarers) covers, for example, those who have come to Kuwait as a visitor and been unable to find a job, and their legal permission to stay in the country has expired, or someone who was an employee in Kuwait and their employer went bankrupt or terminated their employment; in those cases Zakat House can help in buying a ticket back to their home country. However, it will not help with living costs, in order to not encourage them to stay illegally in Kuwait, in support of government immigration policies. For those who have security conditions, such as wars, in their native country and cannot return, Zakat House will give them the chance to renew their papers and permission to stay through their country’s embassy in Kuwait, in order to be able to help them legally. The category of algharmin means those in debt; people in debt are considered under this category only if they have been sentenced by a court. Someone who suffers many debts by their own misconduct (called by Zakat House ‘internal
circumstances’), and who may have a good salary but have saddled themselves with many financial obligations, can be helped by Zakat House without solving the person’s entire financial problems; in addition, they are advised and made aware by the Social Services Department that they are the cause of their own problems.

I met one of the branch managers of the Social Services Department in Zakat House, Amina, to discuss the procedures that they follow to distribute zakat funds at his branch. Amina said: ‘Our work is based firstly on trust; this person would not come to us and ask for help unless he is really in need. Since we are a government body we ask the applicant to provide some evidence from official authorities such as personal identification, marriage certificate, work certificate, or lease contract. We check the original copies and take a copy for his file too.’ The issue of trust is apparent in all charity players, individuals, NGOs, and government bodies. Amina explained that they have not faced any problems regarding evidence from Kuwaitis, but have faced some fraud issues with non-Kuwaitis who do not have any records from government authorities; for example, a person who worked illegally with no records, or who owned properties but had not registered them with their name, so in the financial record they are shown as poor. Zakat House can sometimes figure this out from a visit or from information that the relevant authorities provide; they do not go and investigate behind people’s backs. If they get information from authorities that a person has properties or other accounts, then they ask them to bring the financial statement document from the Kuwait Central Bank. Amina said: ‘It has happened before that we have found accounts for applicants who have sufficient money to live on in their bank account, while they provided us with another, different bank account statement. Some of these accounts have big savings that need to pay zakat, and are not eligible to receive it.’

If it happens that Zakat House has excess budget, they re-distribute it according to the priority of applicants’ situations. After the Arab Spring, a series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa that commenced in 2010, and some other incidents in the region, some visitors to Kuwait from different countries could not back to their homes, such as Syria. Therefore, the amount of zakat funds available became barely enough to fund the needy.

The procedure that this department follows in receiving applicants for zakat has developed very quickly. In the past, it was based on an interview – the applicant came and explained their situation or financial problem and the social researcher asked them to come back again
with the required documents, then they sent their file to the social search committee to make a decision as to whether the applicant deserves zakat or not, and if yes, how much, depending on their situation. After that the procedure was done by phone: anyone needing an appointment called a telephone number, in order to minimise the procedure time; they discuss the situation, then the applicant is asked to bring their documents to the branch, so they only come once to apply instead of twice. Later on, Zakat House introduced the envelope application process, which is a special envelope that mentions all the documents needed, and the applicant puts the documents inside and sends it to any of the branches. The social researcher texts the applicant to ask if they need further information or help with the final decision. Amina stated: ‘Nowadays the whole process is online; documents are uploaded to our system; we started with existing applicants not just new ones to avoid any fraud. And the applicant can track their request to see if it has been approved or whether further documents are needed’. I asked Amina how easy this process is for those who are not familiar with technology; she said: ‘We still have the old application process in the branches, and we started WhatsApp services in some branches, where they can simply photograph the document and send it to us and we upload it for them online’. Existing applicants need to renew their documents every couple of months.

Since the process has moved online, work has become faster and more intense. Amina explained that this is because people are embarrassed to attend personally, especially Kuwaitis, so applying online is easier. Usually the time from providing the documents to the committee’s decision is around a week if all documents are complete; if there are any missing documents it may take longer. After the committee’s decision is issued, the cheque is released in the name of the applicant directly for receipt from the branch, or directly to deposit in the applicant’s bank account. Amina noted that some of the non-Kuwaitis, or Bidun, do not have a bank account, so they request a cheque. The number of payments varies depending on the needs of applicants; some receive help every three, four, or six months, or perhaps once a year. Kuwaitis usually receive funds every four or six months because they have an income but it is not enough. Priority is always for the divorced, the widowed, the elderly, and orphans, whether they are Kuwaiti or non-Kuwaiti.

The Quality Department follows up all administration in Zakat House. Huda, Head of the Quality Department, said that the Social Services Department is committed to all procedures requested from the Quality Department and they got a note of thanks for the new service that
this department established recently, the open-door service. This service was suggested after a training programme for employees and managers in the Social Services Department. The service allows applicants to talk to any manager in the branches without prior appointment every Tuesday, then after that they expanded it to four days a week. I clarified from Amina about this service, asking ‘What exactly do the applicants want to talk about with managers and did this service cause any failures or create disruptions in their work?’ Amina explained:

Our department’s structure has expanded, so the managers have more time to handle this task. You can’t imagine how difficult this service is, as we get to hear their problems or complaints and sometimes absorb their anger and bear their crying, but it is really the greatest doorway to rewards from Allah. The person could go out from us and his problem has not been solved completely, but he was happy with a few good words from us or he was just pleased and comforted that someone heard his story.

She continued:

Our department is the only one in Zakat House that is interested in celebrating local events, such as Ramadan, *Gerjean* [traditional occasion in the middle of Ramadan to distribute candies to children as a reward for having completed fasting almost half of the month], the Kuwait National and Liberation Day. All these are by personal efforts and we are not asked for that as part of our job. The staff do not deal with that as an official function nor as a task assigned to them. We feel a blessing in our life, *baraka*, that’s why we are happy in helping people and pursuing our aim of pleasing them.

She smiled and took a deep breath, then said:

I’ll tell you something, this passion for work was not there at the beginning. Previously I had bad feelings after the Iraqi invasion against some of the nationalities that stood up against Kuwait, such as Iraqis and Palestinians. I am a human and it is normal that I had some bad feelings towards those who brought harm to me or my country. My managers and supervisors in work at that time always advised us that the past is over, and anyone in need, no matter where they are from, we have to help them. I was trying to forget but inside there was a feeling of hatred towards them. I remembered that once before I was on a visit to one of these nationalities that I hated, and I was thinking I may find a reason to reject his request for help. When I arrived at their house and found how poor they were, and I saw his family members, all those feelings were gone! Since that, I
took a decision that no matter where they came from, they are not guilty for the invasion at all.

After this she was keen to tell her children what she sees in these visits to needy families. She gained permission from her supervisors to take her children on one visit by themselves; she said: ‘My boys came back with broken hearts, they never imagined that there are people in this much need in Kuwait, and this visit helped them to feel the value of things in life’. So this job not only changed Amina, but the effect reached her family too.

7.3 The Administration of External Activity Department

Although Zakat House is a single charitable authority, some departments beat others in performance, depending on the facilities and policies given to employees to practice charity by the administration. Therefore, there is no equivalence in the performance of the various departments.

The Administration of External Activity Department is the only department involved in government charity projects internationally, and it is the governmental interface for Zakat House around the world. This administration started with the establishment of Zakat House in 1982. It focuses on humanitarian projects in general such as building schools, hospitals, health centres, wells, shelters and houses, and mosques, in addition to caring for orphans. Although the benefit of some of these projects are long-lasting, these are considered *hiba* (voluntary gifts) rather than *waqf*. For example, say that Zakat House is collecting money within Kuwait specifically for a charity project in another country (for example, Somalia). Zakat House collects the money and establishes the project in Somalia. Then they collaborate with one of the local organisations in Somalia to supervise this project and administer it, meaning that Zakat House’s role in the project is ended at this point. Currently Zakat House administers funding for 35,000 orphans in 26 countries; over 100,000 orphans have been helped since its foundation in 1982. The orphans are all children, i.e. under 18 years of age. If the child excels in his/her studies and wishes to progress to university, they are directed towards the student sponsorship programme *kafalat taleb elm*.

The orphans project *kafalat al yateem* is not just aimed at providing food and accommodation for the children, it also tries to create a productive person, an effective person in the
community, who is able to work and reach the highest positions to serve their country and to be active in the community. This is done without interfering in orphans’ majors and speciality, nor in the Islamic approach they follow. Interference from a religious perspective is a key issue, in that there are some organisations forcing children to follow their beliefs in order to receive care. It can be argued that this is against the freedom of the children and is exploitative.

I met the head of the orphan sponsor department in Zakat House, Hamed. He said, ‘A while ago, I met at a conference the Mufti [scholar] of Moscow, he was one of the orphans at Zakat House’. Hamed mentioned that they are proud that around 43 million Muslims in Russia are following this scholar, who is supported by Albeit. He said: ‘Many people may have held positions in their countries too but we do not follow our orphans after they grow up, unless they tell us’.

The policy of Zakat House is now to not open any international offices outside of Kuwait. In the past, they used to have offices in Senegal and Bahrain; now the only office that Zakat House has internationally is in Egypt. To implement their projects internationally, they are dependent on Kuwaiti offices being available in the countries in question, even if they are held by an NGO or the local official offices in the country itself. As with any charitable organisation, Zakat House has to follow certain conditions and obtain the External Ministry’s approval for any office that is dealt with internationally. The decision to establish a project is dependent on the need existing in a particular country, and the Ministry is informed about that from the offices they deal with. For example, in a case study of the need for a school, Hamed said: ‘If we receive a report of a case study of a need of some project we discuss it with our engineers, then we approve it by the board of directors, and start marketing it to our donors’. Quick relief has different procedures – they are informed about an issue from news around the world and from the offices they deal with in the countries via a quick contact, and informed that the issue needs the action of raising funds immediately. This department represents just 20% of zakat funds; mostly they rely on general charity (khairat) from people who state that they need their sadaqa to be international. Zakat House cannot spend any zakat internationally unless the donor explicitly states ‘I want it to be spent outside of Kuwait’.

Although Zakat House is a government body, Kuwaitis trust them to implement their charity projects, as Hamed explained: ‘It is a weird culture in Kuwait; a Kuwaiti comes to us to build for him a mosque, for example, and we are a government body, and at the same time he can
trust any NGO on his donations. This you will not find in other countries; governments who impose taxes and issue laws are not trusted on charity mostly.’ The State of Kuwait is not subjected to any taxes so far. Yet there are a number of rumours about Zakat House, for example that it is mostly for parliamentary and political gain. Regarding collaboration with other governmental charity bodies in Kuwait, Hamed said: ‘We have a collaboration with a Kuwaiti Awqaf public foundation that we implement and supervise any waqf project for them outside of the border of Kuwait, and this is done by a ministry decision’.

This department has strong media coverage and presence on social media, more than other department in Zakat House. This could be for many reasons, as understood from my discussion with Hamed: (1) the administration is independent in marketing and media reports, more so than local projects, so they have their own ideas and creative implementing; (2) the manager gives his employees space to suggest and implement plans and ideas in order to increase their spread and raise more funds, however he sometimes faces legal investigations from the board of directors regarding his bold decisions, which may conflict with Zakat House’s policies as a government body (these policies are discussed in more detail below); (3) a personal initiative from Hamed to post everything they are doing on social media from his personal account, which got a good reception and the number of followers since he began is increasing, which helps to spread the word more quickly, with encouragement from the manager because he sees returns from projects.

One of the good experiences they tried in this department was to give Zakat House employees the chance to participate in relief trips. They derived the idea of engaging more people in charitable trips from the NGO sector. These trips let staff know how the department works and help to increase their loyalty to Albeit, as well as showing appreciation for the great jobs that they are a part of. Hamed explained the first trip: ‘We chose employees who had spent twenty years at Zakat House, their ages were between 50 to 60 years old; the reactions were unexpected, most of them never been on a relief trip before. One of the reactions that we heard was: “I came back from this trip as another person completely, for the first time I know what we are doing in Albeit; this trip changed my life”’. Hamed further explained the impact of involving employees in these trips:

We found that strengthening the internal front is much better than strengthening the external front. In other words, when our employees are convinced of the work, they are going to market it and defend it within society, in addition to strengthening their
relationship to us and their passion for their work. After this experience, for each trip we chose some employees from each department to join us, and every one enjoyed the charity trips.

I asked about whether the government eased the procedures for relief trips for Zakat House since it is a government body. Hamed said: ‘Not at all; for example, we used to pay a higher price with taxes for flight tickets if they were booked with the governmental airline, Kuwait Airways’. That means that even though Zakat House is a government body it does not benefit from other resources owned by the state.

7.3.1 The factory of intelligent limbs for war children

One recent project, considered a distinguished achievement for Zakat House, is the factory of intelligent limbs for war children. Hamed said that they coordinated a trip last month with the participation of employees, and he presented a paper at a charity conference in Turkey about this project. The idea came after fieldwork research and followed the China cave idea, which involved taking people who were living in caves and accommodating them in houses. Hamed said: ‘We tried to find what more we could do for Syria, which had not been done before by any charitable organisation, or was difficult for NGOs to implement’. They came up with the idea of artificial limbs for children, because such limbs need to be changed every six months since the child is growing up and their bones are becoming larger. The limbs are expensive, around KD 1,000 per limb, and if not changed on time the muscle affected may atrophy and the bones may be injured. The campaign was called ‘Limbs for Kids’, in Arabic Atraf min Ajl Atfal. ‘We published a leaflet that can be read in eight minutes with real stories and real photos that we got when we undertook the fieldwork study’, Hamed said. The project was published on social media with a goal of raising just 50,000 KD for 30 children, with the slogan ‘You may be bored of your old shoes while there are those who hope to have feet’. The fundraising return was above expectations; from the first week they collected 550,000 KD, and that was last Ramadan. Hamed said that they thought that they could enlarge their goal of helping thirty children to making an artificial limb factory, and gradually the donations reached 850,000, then close to the target of two million, two hundred thousand KD. Some of the donations came from NGOs and the Awqaf foundation, with just a phone call from some managers who were really impressed and convinced by the idea.
Usually in war intelligent limbs, which a person can move and use like the real limb, are not provided; the injured have to depend on artificial limbs that are for cosmetic purposes only. Hamed said: ‘Since we got a really big amount, we came up with the idea to establish a factory that provides war-affected children with electric and mechanical limbs, which we called intelligent limbs’. Zakat House chose Turkey to be the place for this factory, because it has the longest border with Syria, around 940 km. The headquarters is in Istanbul, the Alfatih area, with a capacity of 1,000 persons. There are two other branches in Urfa and Reyhanli, with a capacity of 200 persons. The factory is managed and supervised by a Turkish company, Aid Institution, within a building that was bought by Zakat House. Hamed stated that the amount collected can run the factory for two years, including the salaries of doctors and staff who are trained in Germany by the company who manufactured the machines that they use in the centre. Hamed said: ‘We got requests from many people in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf asking to be treated there due to the high-quality machines and equipment that can usually only be found in Germany, but we are keen to make it special for Syrian children for the first two years’. It is worth noting that, from the Islamic sharia perspective, this kind of project is an acceptable use of zakat money, since the limbs become the property of the poor.

7.3.2. Zakat House Orphans Ceremony

There is a big event held annually in Zakat House, and they let many employees from all departments participate in organising and planning this event. It is called the Zakat House Orphans Ceremony; the idea is to bring a number of orphans from different countries to Kuwait. Hamed stated that they are keen to ensure that the presence of the orphans at this event is not to raise funds. Their attendance is not to say ‘who wants to sponsor this orphan?’, nor to ask for donations to get a better life for them, it is only to honour the orphans. Utilising their presence to collect donations is not acceptable, as they wish to preserve the orphans’ dignity and their human rights. The first ceremony had just eight orphans; this year 100 orphans will visit Kuwait, and this event’s expenses come from state funds rather than from donations. Each country’s children are asked to wear traditional clothes in the ceremony, and with each group there is a supervisor from their country to accompany them. Some of the sponsors can meet ‘their’ orphan.
The orphans’ stay in Kuwait includes a tourism tour and some activities to let them enjoy their trips.VIPs, official authorities, embassies, and charity bodies are invited to this event. The orphan sponsorship programme in Zakat House relies on *waqf* issued via the Administration of Resource Development. This *waqf* is in the form of investment portfolios and rented real estate. The orphans’ donors nowadays number 17,000 people, but it is hard to depend on donations only, so the *waqf* is to ensure that there is always liquidity in case any sponsor decides to stop donating for any reason. In addition, Zakat House itself has 1,000 orphans which are not registered to any sponsor, so there is availability for any donor wanting to sponsor an orphan at any time. The monthly sponsor expenses for an orphan are KD 10; this was recently raised to KD 15 for all charitable organisations in Kuwait. There is a department to follow up the orphans in their home countries and provide reports about them.

There is a palpable feeling of satisfaction and loyalty in this administration, more so than in any other department in Zakat House. I know that Hamed’s photography is popular and he sometimes presents workshops on how to photograph a relief trip. Many charity bodies in Kuwait ask him for photos to use for publicity. I attended an exhibition of his photos at an NGO event; he is very accomplished at delivering the feeling and suffering of needy people in a photo. I asked him what encouraged him to work in a government body with its regular routine, while he has the ability to get another job in any other place with more freedom of work. Hamed replied:

> I have been twenty-two years at Zakat House; my love of humanitarian work has grown with me in this institution; yes, I got many offers, and I participated sometimes in some charity projects outside of my work, but as a job my loyalty is to Zakat House. Our administration is not like any other governmental place, it encourages creativity and working without routine boundaries compared to other departments, and this makes me want to stay in my job.

### 7.4 The Media and Information Department

Zakat House cannot go with social media trends and do a live stream campaign as many NGOs do during Ramadan, due to many constraints! It happened that we started one
campaign called *Faza’a* [which literally means ‘hurry to help’], conducted in one of the shopping malls in Kuwait. This campaign aimed to bridge the budget deficit in financing needy families with food. The problem that Zakat House is facing is that 80% of our beneficiaries are from *Bidun*, the segment that already has a political issue around. As a government body, we cannot point out this major problem which has not yet been solved by other government agencies in Kuwait. (Alwasmi, Manager in the media department at Zakat House)

This is how we started the interview with the media department about the tensions around the limited media role at Zakat House. It is very obvious how the comparison is generated between the media role at Zakat House and other charity media at NGOs in the charity arena in Kuwait. Alwasmi explained that they wanted to do more media coverage to market their charitable work, and they tried to but they were unable to for many reasons. Being a government body practising charity means that there are many constraints in the media, unlike for other NGOs. This was the main tension that the department focused on while they explained the department’s role. It seems they tried their best but there are some limits that they cannot go beyond. Alwasmi told me that he barely convinced the administration that they need to photograph needy people’s homes to show the reality of their needs, publishing this on the campaign site for the public. ‘We are like someone walking in a minefield, we cannot publish problems that are caused by the failings of the government’, Alwasmi said. Zakat House is not the cause of the poverty of this segment of society, neither is it the reason this segment exists. He explained that it is not comparable to other local charity organisations, which have a greater margin of freedom than Zakat House; it difficult for a government body to put the blame on another government body, they all have to work together side by side in the same boat.

To take advantage of social media and publish everything online is complicated for Zakat House, there are many caveats. For an NGO, permission is obtained from the needy person and they film it easily without any accountability. For example, Zakat House had a charity project, a training programme to empower *Bidun* young people with qualifications to enter the labour market and be independent and get their own income and benefit their families. The media department suggested letting them be shown on public social media to show that they got help from Zakat House, to show this for donors and also to let other needy people be encouraged to do the same and join the qualification programme. Zakat House agreed to let
them be shown to thank Zakat House and share their experience. Alwasmi said: ‘We took their consent for that and we filmed it and showed it for the administration to approve it, they said it cannot be published unless you blur their faces! Complex things are binding them, they cannot do just whatever they like.’ He said that he went with a photographer from a media company that they contracted with, but they couldn’t find one family to agree to let them photograph their house. They told the families that they wanted to take photos without the family members, without showing the house number, and even if it is dirty we will not show that, even though it is normal to have some mess since they are needy and they don’t have a cleaner. Alwasmi said that there were some people who agreed, then later changed their minds. Alwasmi said:

Despite the crowded shopping mall that we were conduct the campaign in, and the famous radio show that we attended, the best speakers on TV, and one of social media influencer, and some popular singers too, all these efforts could not be as strong as we hoped! I know that one of the secrets to a successful campaign is to highlight the problem you are talking about first; if people do not feel the problem, how will they support it and donate?

Alwasmi confirmed that as when giver is more aware of a problem they are more likely to want to get involved and to donate. This is the power of social media nowadays, it can increase awareness by showing a need to the public, but it is still weak at Zakat House. They tried to benefit from working with one photographer who is an employee at Zakat House in another department. The photographer was really active on social media and they tried to get him to run the whole Zakat House Snapchat account. Alwasmi said: ‘To be honest, as we say in the traditional Kuwaiti saying, a man with two minds is a liar. He failed to focus on our account, he was already popular in his account and had his own posts that already benefit his department, only not the whole of Zakat House’. Now Zakat House have only Instagram and Twitter. Zakat House can reach influencers on social media, but their policies mean they cannot hire or deal with any of the influencers. Alwasmi said that the high administration may see some angles to this issue that he can’t see. The media department hopes to have the courage to do more things on social media; Alwasmi said that they need boldness in their charitable discourse. Alwasmi believes that successful campaigns in the Kuwaiti charity landscape are conducted when the campaign’s cause is very strong, and if it doesn’t have boldness people will not respond.
Alwasmi found that the culture of Kuwait society is to go with the latest trend, as the saying goes: ‘the first one that comes to you, you agree with him’. So he thinks that NGOs are winning the initiative. For instance, one NGO raised four million once a year and people waited for the results for a whole year, but they were happy even without the results, while Zakat House are paying two million monthly and talking in the media and publishing in local newspapers and TV channels, but people listen to what they want. He said, ‘Even if the government follows the same path as NGOs in using social media for charity, they are still looked at as the government’.

Zakat House is labelled by the community, in that it is responsible for solving the problems of the poor and is blamed for failing to solve them. Alwasmi said that many people think that Zakat House’s income is from the state only, and this is not true. He explained that Zakat House is an intermediary body established by the government, taking from donors to give to the needy. Zakat House is trying to solve poverty problems through partnership. The title of Zakat House’s last campaign was ‘With you, we draw their smile’: together we help the poor, with you, not on our own.

Alwasmi explained that although Zakat House has many competencies, society still looks at it as a government institution that lacks many things, i.e. they don’t see how people work at Zakat House and how their work is worthy of trust; many Kuwaitis judge the work poorly since it belongs to the government. Alwasmi stated that their problem is that culture affects Zakat House in creating a public image of any government body. In addition, people judge any institution by the people who preside over it. Alwasmi told me that Zakat House has gone through a period in which some members of the board of directors were from the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) and some were from its predecessor (Salaf). They received attacks in the media from those who were against their approaches, for political purposes. Rumours targeted their poor management rather than the persons themselves, and they meant to target the political current that they belong to. Fuller (2002) states that in the Muslim world, Islam and politics are inextricably linked, yet there are still people who do not accept political Islam.

However, in reality, even if they belong to any political trends, they cannot complete any of their aims in Zakat House, as Alwasmi described; they have several supervisory and monitoring levels that put all practices under control. Zakat House’s board of directors are currently stable and the members are not classified into any particular political streams.
Alwasmi said: ‘We are regaining our breath as an independent government body’. Some non-pious traders guarantee their safety in paying their zakat or donations to Zakat House because it is not following any political trend. It could be argued that affiliation to political trends – whether in regard to NGOs or charitable government bodies – causes confusion and is considered problematic, and this has a negative impact on Kuwaiti society.

The audience for Zakat House, as Alwasmi explained to me, could be classified into two types: (1) The beneficiaries: for example, they come to Zakat House with a need of KD 5,000 (approx. GBP 10,000) and they get only KD 750 (approx. GBP 1500), meaning they will not be satisfied; (2) The donors: they donate and get detailed reports, and they are fairly satisfied. The needy think that Zakat House, as a government authority, can solve all their problems, but that is impossible. Zakat House has a limited budget from the state, estimated to be around KD 1.5 million (approx. GBP three million) per year, while their expenses are two million per month, as noted above. For the remaining 11 months they are dependent on donations and zakat, which is optional in Kuwait. ‘It is hard to tell people to pay us. If you do not pay zakat you are going to hell!’, Alwasmi said. Zakat House cannot estimate how much they will have for the next period. As referred to in Chapter 2, the collection of zakat in Kuwait needs to be reconsidered and developed to solve Zakat House’s budget shortage.

7.4.1 Zakat House and KidZania

One of Zakat House’s previous media initiatives, the idea of working with the KidZania educational company, was launched as a unique initiative as part of raising the community’s awareness of Zakat House’s work. Zakat House submitted a proposal to KidZania to this effect.

KidZania is a unique educational and entertainment environment for children aged 4 to 16, giving them the chance of role-playing and mimicking activities done by adults in real life. It is an indoor city that is built like a miniature world, as in the real world, with paved streets, shops, banks, fire stations, groceries, mini vehicles, etc. It has a (simplified) functioning economy in the form of establishments sponsored and branded by local and leading multi-national brands. Each child gets around 50 Kidzo, the currency used in the game at KidZania, and they can spend it in different services or gain more by paid jobs. This money can be saved in a bank account in KidZania or cashed in to spend on other visits. The main company is Mexican, and it is a franchise project in Kuwait.
One of the principles and conditions at KidZania is that it must not involve anything religious, such as temples or Islamic iconography, etc. The marketing team at Zakat House has convinced them of the concept of giving, and how important it is to teach children the value of giving for humanitarian help. They explained to KidZania that they wanted children to have the chance to imagine and learn how Zakat House are communicating with the poor, and how to manage donations and aid projects. The marketing team outlined the work process in simple and interesting ways aimed at children, such as how a child can wear an aid vest and collect donations for a project. The team relied on convincing them by focusing on supporting development projects that change children’s lives. They did not include Islamic projects such as building a mosque in the agenda at KidZania in order to respect their policy in this respect. KidZania has a clothing shop, a bank, a bookstore, a supermarket, and a post office. So the child can play the role of a relief person and collect from these facilities to make a relief package. KidZania found the submission really interesting and the request has been approved.

The process starts when the child comes to the Zakat House section, where they show them all the charity projects that they have, and the child has to choose one. The child wears the vest of Zakat House and passes through the shops in KidZania to collect the aid. For example, there is a project involving preparing a child for the Eid celebration, preparing a school bag for a student, or building a school. The project manager at Zakat House in the Marketing Department, Wafa, said:

We were afraid that children wouldn’t like to build a school as a charity, since some of them in the Kuwaiti culture prefer holidays to schooldays. But we conducted a questionnaire for the children before we put the list of charities at KidZania, asking them ‘What is the thing that you want most to make for the poor kids of the world?’ and we were surprised that most children said that they wanted to make a school.

The children are responsible for delivering the things from shops and packaging them in the post office, after placing the Kuwait flag on the aid parcel, to be ready to send from Kuwait to the world.

On the other hand, Areej, an employee at media department in Zakat House, said: ‘The first statistic that KidZania provided to us shows that the highest number of visitors was to the Zakat House section, and the most income in KidZania money was also at our section’. The idea of the game at KidZania is to collect money by trying careers or spending money by
enjoying producing something. The administration at KidZania told Zakat House that children mostly like to try certain careers in order to gain money, like a paid job, and they are keen to collect more money. But they were surprised that the children are also happy and easily spending money at Zakat House, when it is for charity. It may be that the awareness of charity and helping Kuwaiti children is really high. KidZania allocates workers to all departments, and the workers at the Zakat House section have been trained by the marketing team; they learned how to tell children about charity projects and how to encourage them too. They are provided with enough information for each charity project.

7.5 Conclusion

From observing different departments in Zakat House in this chapter we can see that there are many strengths and weaknesses in the charitable practices performed by the government. Firstly, there is the trust issue; loyalty is apparent in many places, such as the VIP department and the social services for donors and recipients, as well as within the employees in external charitable activities.

It seems that presenting on social media varies among departments in Zakat House, as the media department discussion showed. However, there are some initiatives to maintain their image and to enhance it, starting with children. The media department’s role is limited and has boundaries because of government policies, while external charitable activities at Zakat House have full media policies. It could be argued that the lack of implementation of zakat policy – as it should be in Islam in Kuwait – has participated in reducing the help for cases of need in Kuwait, and a consequence is dissatisfaction on the part of zakat beneficiaries in Kuwait. Hence Zakat House has taken responsibility for expanding their role to invest and find resources, in addition to the donations and annual budget from the government. The political affiliation of management also affects the public image of Zakat House.

The way that ethnonationalist sentiments dominate the expression of Kuwaitiness through the charitable engagement within Zakat House clearly shows the political dimensions of giving at work. Here, Kuwait is at the forefront in both local and international standing, while there is work done towards engaging more Kuwaitis in charity explicitly as a part of being good Kuwaiti citizens. However, the existing constraints that Zakat House is facing, as a
governmental body, are limiting its opportunities for wider forms of charitable engagement in the wider arena.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research has examined the pathways that have led Kuwaitis to become collectively involved in charity and the ways in which they translate their motives and understanding of needs into a wide range of charitable activities. I have argued throughout this thesis that charitable giving intersects with national identity in Kuwait. I have done so by drawing attention to the various ways in which Kuwaitis exhibit their national identity, their ‘Kuwaitiness’, through charitable engagements, and by pointing towards the ways in which a wide range of charitable activities in Kuwait combine piety (individual and collective) with the goals of socio-economic development, and are an important aspect of the presentation of the country to the wider world. I have used the term of Kuwaitiness in this thesis to refer to a national identity that is culturally and socially produced through community experiences of living and thinking, through everyday life and social practices, as well being the expression of a group identity, noting that Islam is embedded in this national identity.

This thesis has sought to address my over-arching research question – what does it mean to be charitable in Kuwait – by analysing local charitable practices and the religious understanding of the contemporary role of Islamic charity in the context of Kuwaiti society among different levels of participant: young people, individual donors, NGOs, and the government. The contribution of this thesis is to show that charitable giving in Kuwait takes many forms and modalities, and thus cannot be reduced to one dimension alone, such as giving in the context of seeking to achieve piety (Mittermaier, 2019) or giving with the aim of fostering ‘development’ (Atia, 2013). In addition, this thesis contributes to the field in demonstrating how charity, in its diversity, has become a way of expressing a sense of belonging to Kuwait and participating in a nationalist projection of Kuwaitiness, both inside Kuwait and in respect to the Gulf and the world as a whole.

There are ethnic characteristics at work among Kuwaiti citizens, such as how they dress, eat, speak, trade, etc., that are all familiar from the literature on nationalism and ethnicity. However, what is significant is that, along with this, the thesis has demonstrated how these Kuwaiti citizens engaged in charity believe themselves to be unique or distinctive in the field and in the ways that they go about their charitable work. This charitable engagement, then, reflects and constructs national identity. However, the thesis has also shown how some residents of the same country were either included or excluded (Akinci, 2020). Moreover,
while within Kuwaiti charity, this notion of ethnonationalism includes both Sunni and Shia citizens of Kuwait, it excludes migrant residents, who are occasionally used as objects of charity, although they also often take part in charitable activities themselves. The ethnographies in this thesis revealed some of the ways that ethnonationalist sentiments that dominated Kuwait's national identity work. This thesis has also shown how there are connections between those expressions of Kuwaitiness through charitable activities and the processes of ‘self-cultivation’. The ways in which Kuwaitis are practising charity continually and actively – from childhood - acts to recreate the sense of being a good human - and a good citizen (Mahmood, 2001). Practices such as engaging children in charity and encouraging youth in practising charity have led to development of some projects that differ from Kuwaiti traditional charitable practices. Secondly, from this baseline goal of ‘being good citizens’, Kuwaitis are also trying to address the inadequacies of state provisioning, especially towards the migrants and Bidun. Thirdly, the more political dimensions of giving are associated with informal diplomacy and with Kuwait's international standing. Here, the thesis provided material on the role of Kuwaitis toward Syrian refugees and the adoption of the responsibility of educating refugee children. Fourthly, Kuwaitis were widely found in the research to be taking on as personal responsibility the idea that every needy person has the right to live a better life. Ethnography has shown that the charity found in Kuwaiti engagement here is not limited to delivering aid and to giving people the basic necessities of life, but is moving beyond that and on into concerns with social development - to provide recipients of charity with a better life and empower them in longer-term senses. The act of giving is a complex one and cannot be reduced to any single motive, such as piety, empathy, politics, self-development or duty. The thesis has shown that many factors are involved.

Given that the state of Kuwait is a Muslim nation, giving charity for the sake of piety is inevitably embedded in the people’s charitable practices. Piety as a motive for engaging in charity is fundamental to all the different charitable participants in Kuwait. Charity for the sake of piety is often unstated, yet understood by all – not to mention that for many Muslims piety should be expressed anonymously, since piety in charity is a matter related to the intention between the person and their God, and talking about this might lead to feelings of hypocrisy and showing off. Therefore, piety is included in all other motives and is an integral part of charitable giving in Kuwait that can be taken for granted. In short, I have argued that conceptions of piety are the basis of all charity projects in the country, regardless of the
modalities through which giving is expressed and mobilised. The analysis in this thesis has sought to investigate motivations for participation in charity beyond piety.

The expression of Kuwaitiness through charity has been illustrated in different ways in each chapter. In this conclusion, I contextualize a blend of shared characteristics that emerged in the charitable engagement taking place in Kuwait at the present time, that reflect diverse ways of expressing national identity. In the following section, I categorise my main findings into several major themes.

8.1 Research themes

This research concludes by exploring five themes that have been revealed by the ethnographies in the five empirical chapters (Chapters 3 to 7). Each theme is a different way of expressing, through charity, the participants’ Kuwaitiness. Several of these themes were exhibited alongside one another and overlapped in complex ways. This was evident through consideration of engagements by different charitable actors across the thesis’s chapters. It is important recognise multiple layers of charitable engagement and the interleaving of these with one another, because of the complexity of the diverse charitable engagements.

The first theme tackles the issue of trust and the vital role it plays in charity on the side of the fundraisers (be these individuals or charitable bodies). Exploring the diverse acts that proved important in different charitable engagements, I came to recognise the significance of trust and the ways in which it enabled the consolidation of relationships important within the charitable field, by understanding the concrete settings and practices in which trust is created (Marsden and Anderson, 2020). The issue of trust looms large in new modes in contemporary charity in Kuwait, especially virtual trust, which is required when people unknown to one another are connected in the field of social media.

This leads us to the second theme, which is the use of social media in contemporary charity. Social media is a prominent aspect of charity in contemporary Kuwait, and, I have argued, rather than having a simply innovative effect, it has also resulted in increased importance being given to the connection between giver and receiver that was also central to historic modes of charity in Kuwait.
The third theme concerns the engagement of children in charity. This theme refers to the ways in which charitable participants model charity in the upbringing of children, especially in terms of the importance of sharing love and affection. Young people feature prominently in work by individuals, teams, and charitable bodies, playing a role at different levels and in creative ways.

The final theme is the global orientation of Kuwaiti charity, evident in the way Kuwaitis express their Kuwaitiness through their engagement in charity. A common aim is to present themselves as a ‘charitable’ both internally in Kuwaiti society and among their peers, and externally as a nation to the globe.

The following sub-sections elaborate on each theme, reflecting on where these themes have been more obvious in charity practices and which types of participant they relate to.

8.1.1 Trust

Charitable work involves financial transactions and implementation efforts that require high levels of trust among donors, charitable participants, and institutions. Although there is some financial corruption in Kuwait (Buscemi, 2020; Al Azemi et al., 2019), which could affect trust in Kuwait among people and institutions, what Kuwaitis collectively went through together during the Iraqi invasion resulted in deeply rooted forms of social trust (Alrashidi, 1996). In this sense, shared feelings and mutual empathy that arose as a result of facing difficulties together also reflect pride in national identity and help build shared forms of trust (Alrashidi, 1996). This is evident in most charitable practices, especially among individuals. By contrast, trust in charitable institutions is affected by different factors.

The ethnographic material presented in the thesis has shown that trust in persons and institutions involved in charitable activities can be created and maintained via several overlapping factors. Firstly, social relationships play an important role in determining levels of trust; this was more obvious among young people and individuals than among charitable institutions. The previous theme related to how creating relationships on social media could result in virtual trust in a person (the influencer), thus leading to trust in the whole NGO. Here I discuss the trust among people initiated from direct circles of family relationships, that can also be expanded to a wider circle of friends of friends, and so on. For instance, in the case of Noura (Chapter 5), the relations that she has created in her work with relatives and
friends have resulted in a very strong sense of trust, and led to some donors preferring to make donations to her directly instead of giving to charitable teams or NGOs. While Noura’s charitable work is not officially registered in Kuwait, it is culturally accepted and recognised. Noura’s connections do not mind giving their donations directly: they know that this will not be a secret sadaqa, but they accept the situation nevertheless (see Chapter 2). In addition, levels of empathy in charitable appeals are connected to social relationships: i.e. providing more details about recipients that touch the donors and invoke their sympathy leads to more attachment in relationships and thus to increased levels of trust. Discourses that incite empathy lead to closeness, in a similar way to the way in which people who feel a sense of closeness to charitable participants also feel a sense belonging to them (Eickelman, 1977).

Secondly, ‘doing’ charity instead of just ‘giving’ is essential in creating and increasing trust. Getting involved in charitable work allows charitable participants to learn more details about the charity project, which helps to create trust. This involves multiple aspects other than monetary donations, including participation, work, satisfaction, and social connections, as well as the devotion of time and energy. This type of charitable engagement is more grounded and results in long-lasting trust (Hamdan, 2021; Davis et al., 2020). This was very popular among different levels of charitable participant in this research, among both individuals and institutions. Of course, the charitable engagement varies in regard to levels of engagement and time spent. It varies in rewards too – the more effort a person puts in, the more rewards they get from God. Volunteers today are able to choose an approach that suits them from a variety of charitable activities.

Thirdly, witnessing the effect of charity also increases credibility and trust. This was an important aspect of older forms of charity Kuwait and was usually achieved by giving directly to the needy in the neighbourhood (Alshatti, 2001). Accepting donations online has changed this situation, and it has been replaced by online reports that contain photos, both from institutions and some individuals, that are sent in personal messages. The diverse modalities explored in this research reveal multiple ideas of how charitable participants let donors witness the changes that their donations have led to, because they know the fruits of this in regard to increasing trust. In addition, letting donors see the reaction of recipients leads to more empathy and encourages them to engage more in charity. Witnessing the effect of charity can be done both online on social media and in person via charitable trips that are arranged by both individuals and NGOs. The government, in Zakat House, also uses this
approach (exhibiting change through charitable trips) to increase trust in this institution among their employees.

The final factor that increases trust is disclosure, or transparency. This factor is especially important to charitable institutions (NGOs and government) and less significant for young people, individuals, and charitable teams. Transparency takes different shapes among different institutions, but they all meet in the good use of the media to counter rumours and disclose their work. Some charitable institutions maintain trust via the reputations of some of their workers, which they have created by publishing their charitable work for a long time, and via the social media coverage that they obtain through collaboration with trusted influencers, as in the case of Direct Aid. Other institutions shed light on their strengths and the awards that they have acquired, as in the case of Global Mercy. Government institutions, such as Zakat House, tend to disclose their financial reports and charitable achievements to the public in order to maintain trust.

8.1.2 Social media

Social media is taking the lead in charitable engagement among all participants in Kuwait, especially during Ramadan, by directing people to and through charity campaigns. It provides a virtual connection between charitable organisers and participants, and between givers and recipients. Social media directs people in what to give and how to give. New social media channels have become essential to broadcasting charitable appeals and explaining their aims and expected benefits. In addition, social media has opened the door for new forms of competition between charitable participants; as a result, it also plays a role in what I have identified as the diversification of charitable practices in Kuwait. Nevertheless, social media has also been criticised as having important consequences regarding the accountability of charity, such as in regard to the Bidun and Zakat House (see Chapter 7).

Social media in Kuwait has created channels through which charitable engagement has been expanded. That is, the marketing of charitable campaigns is spread not only in Kuwait, but in the wider region too. As a result, the range of participants engaged in charity has been enlarged, and connections among participants have increased. Social media also enables the creation of trust and credibility (Marsden and Anderson, 2020; Anderson, 2003) by enabling
people to witness the ways in which donations reach recipients, through the use, for example, of photos, videos, and live broadcasts. Social media is a virtual community, and has, I suggested, played a role in creating ‘new sense of public’ (Eickelman, 2003, p.1), in which socialising is practised, charitable collective activities are created, and fundraising activities are circulated. This is reflected in real life in new connections and relationships (see Chapter 3).

In the ethnographies presented in the thesis, using social media for charitable purposes has demonstrated links to notions of trust that are important in Kuwait. I focus here on the forms of virtual trust that arise from online connections between people. In the story of the man of a million campaigns (Chapter 3), the influencer had built a relationship with his followers prior to the period during which he engaged with them in charitable activities. The trust in the relationship that he created with his followers intensified in the context of cumulative acts, including talking about his personal experience in charity and encouraging them to do the same, thereby demonstrating to his followers that he cares about their opinions. Inserting the factor of feelings in his posts by using colloquial language enabled the creation of ‘closeness’ online: this resulted in common personal obligations and interests that were expected to be mutual (Eickelman, 1977). Openness about his identity with his followers (instead of using an anonymous nickname) as soon as the charity projects started also intensified the levels of trust. And, most importantly, he demonstrated that he was not seeking for popularity from his charitable engagements, by naming the projects with a general name rather than his own. These accumulations of acts led to trust behind the screen, a virtual trust in an influencer, that he then utilized in his social media channels to further build relationships for participating in charitable activities.

High levels of engagement in charity on social media have led to a sense of competition among charitable participants, which in turn has led to more diversity and creativity. Some charitable participants find it difficult to make space for their charitable projects because of the congestion in appeals for donations on social media in Kuwait during Ramadan. This pushes them to think of new and creative approaches to charity in order to attract attention to their charity projects: some are putting themselves in competition with the big campaigns of leading social influencers, for example.
8.1.3 Modelling charity to children

A theme that has not been explicitly explored in the literature on Islamic charity nor in the literature on charity in Kuwait is the role of children and young people. Older forms of charity in Kuwait involved people distributing *zakat* in the front yards of their houses, where all family members would witness this, including children. Children were raised on the ‘giving’ habit, and witnessed the connection between givers and recipients in the neighbourhood. Since there is no giving among neighbourhoods in Kuwait nowadays, contemporary charity in Kuwait has involved children via new modalities and practices.

Some children refuse to engage in religious group activities for a number of reasons. Due to generational transformations (White, 2014), some children find the activities offered by religious groups to be boring: the media and online virtual communities, as well as other activities associated with cultural globalisation, have resulted in some children preferring not to be active within Islamic organisations and, indeed, seeking to actively avoid being labelled as religious. The forms of charitable engagement created with children in mind form an interesting new dimension in the broader field of charity. It is possible to shape desires and adapt them within the different modalities of Islamic practice (Deeb and Harb, 2013), which is in contrast to the statement that fun is considered outside of the activities of Islamists (Bayat, 2007).

Kuwaiti children are engaged in diverse modes of charity. The first mode is participating in charity tourism trips, which are aimed at families with their children for the sake of entertaining Syrian children in refugee camps. The fun part is that the children are with their family on a holiday, having fun and sharing this happiness with others by practising charity, as in the case of the Salwan charitable team, which consists of three generations: grandparents, their children, and their grandchildren, in which the youngest participant is four years old and the eldest is 60 years (see Chapter 4).

The second method of engaging children in charity is involving them in the preparation and distribution of *iftar* meals (see Chapter 3). Parents model charitable giving to their children and participate with them in preparing the meals and choosing a place to distribute them. The connection that children witness in the distribution of the meals has a big effect on them: it helps them think of others, when seeing how the recipients, the workers, express their
happiness and attitude in giving. The gratitude that they get from the workers and the praise they get from their parents enhances the interest in giving among children.

The third mode of engagement in charity among children is learning about giving through play. An example of this is how children can try role-playing and can mimic the role of a charitable relief person in a play centre called KidZania, where they can try different jobs done by adults in real life (see Chapter 7). This was an initiative by Zakat House in Kuwait to teach children the value of giving and humanitarian help. Children engage by imagining and learning how Zakat House is communicating with the poor, and how to manage donations and aid projects. At KidZania the child wears the vest of Zakat House and collects aid from the other facilities at KidZania, such as a clothing shop, a bookstore, a supermarket, to make a relief package and deliver it to the post office, where a Kuwaiti flag on the box shows that this aid is from Kuwait to the world.

8.1.4 Autonomy

This theme was very prominent among individuals and young people. My ethnographies (see Chapter 4) revealed that a common motivation for young people engaging in charity is a wish to exercise autonomy, meaning they have the capability and readiness to make independent decisions (Kupfer, 1987). They engage with and promote charitable causes through diverse expressions and modalities, such as combining their hobbies and abilities in writing and photography, as in the book about Rohingya refugees discussed in Chapter 4.

Ethnographic work with young people revealed that some young individuals choose to engage in charity in order to redirect their political energies into charitable activities, following dissatisfaction with political reform initiatives in Kuwait (Buscemi, 2017). They have created new forms of charitable engagement that have shifted political engagement to informal venues, allowing them to socialise and practise their leadership and independence, while also pushing for political reform (Buscemi, 2017).

The individuals I interacted with in this research have designed a variety of charitable initiatives that derive from their ideas and motives, and that sometimes have purposes beyond the charitable cause. For instance, Zahar Academy (see Chapter 5) has charitable aims and seeks to benefit society. Individuals act in line with what they believe is good, or what they
believe is ‘the human good’ (Laidlaw, 2013, p.2). In Zahar Academy, Nasima shows that the desire behind her initiative was to create her own charity team, after she tried to work with a charitable committee. Her aim was to create self-sufficiency for the women who learn cooking in Zahar Academy, and to empower needy families from the fees she gains from the cooking courses. These multidimensional aims from a single charitable project are customised according to Nasima’s own thinking and identity. The notion of autonomy is an essential element of women’s cultural identity (Abu-Lughod, 2008). The desire for autonomy was found among women more than men, which may be because Kuwaiti women to some extent lack opportunities to prove themselves in work (Alsalem and Speece, 2017). In this research, women were found to engage more in individual charitable initiatives – that provide them with autonomy in leading charitable work by themselves – while men were more likely to work with NGOs.

8.1.5 Kuwaitiness as global orientation

Of all the themes explored in this thesis, this theme was the most visible in the ethnographic material at various levels. This demonstrates the importance of charity in enabling the expression of Kuwaitiness as a global orientation. It was obvious from their charitable practices that Kuwaitis desire to see themselves as ‘charitable’, both internally in Kuwaiti society and among their peers, and externally as a Kuwaiti nation to the globe.

Inside Kuwait, participants express that Kuwaitis care about the people who are living in their country (see Chapters 4 and 5), such as the stateless (Bidun) and migrant workers (see Chapter 1), who cannot fulfil their own needs. Diverse modes of engaging in charitable activities demonstrate the importance to Kuwaitis of their concern about the lives of their fellow residents in Kuwait: these include showing commitment and responsibilities toward needy families (Sirdab al Faiha, Chapter 3), empowering families through teaching cooking classes (Zahar Academy, Chapter 5), and visiting needy families in their accommodation and giving them support directly (Yemenik Ta’eenek, Chapter 5). They do this from the perspective that we are charitable in Kuwait, and will do what charitable institutions are unable to do.
The charitable trips which Kuwaitis take show a global orientation of this aspect of Kuwaiti identity. This global orientation is demonstrated in the forms of gratitude directed toward Kuwait as a charitable country, and from the role of Kuwait as a national charitable centre in the wider world. There is significant pride in the country in connection with depictions of Kuwait as generous and of Kuwaitis as people who ‘like to help others’. There is an important official aspect of this aspect of charity’s role in Kuwaiti identity, and this is evident in the role of the government in charity, especially via Zakat House (see Chapter 7). By supporting development through charity (such as via the factory of intelligent limbs for war children, or funding around 100,000 orphans since its foundation in 1982 and educating them in twenty-six countries around the world), Zakat House plays a role in efforts to depict Kuwait in international contexts as a state committed to charity.

In this thesis, the relationship between charity and national identity (Kuwaitiness) contributes to previous research in multiple fields: the anthropology of Islam, social anthropology, anthropology of ethics, theology, sociology, and cultural and historical studies. The narration of intertwined ethnographies in charitable activities is beneficial in terms of methodological writing in anthropological research especially in the context of Muslim countries and the Gulf countries in showing different ways of describing the life experience of individuals.

The ethnographies in this research have brought to light some important issues that might have implications for charitable research and beyond, such as: engaging in charity might become a means to have fun, and to participate in global youth cultures; the ways social media can produce intense emotional responses, thus allowing for a higher degree of empathy and piety; and the notion of ‘virtual trust’, which allows us to understand the production and configuration of relations of trust beyond face-to-face relations, especially important in the post-Covid world.

8.2 Research limitations

The limitation of the thesis is that the findings do not show explicitly to what extent all citizens are involved in this charitable realm, such as migrants worker, Bidun, and also Shia NGOs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no declaration in the individual interviews by participants regarding their belonging to Sunni and Shia doctrine and it might be something
(ethically) not preferable to be asked individually since the aim of the research is to generally focus on all Kuwaitis charitable practices. However, the Shia NGOs are not included in this research because of methodological and ethical issues. Since these are living in Kuwait, they are a part of Kuwait's charitable realm. The limitation of the research's findings is that it cannot give a full sense of the extent to which Shia charitable organisations in Kuwait are transnational and relate to national identity in Kuwait in a similar or different way than the Sunni charitable organisations. In addition, it is not shown whether the long-term migrants (second and third generation) are engaged in charity as a way of pushing their own claims for belonging.

Although participant observation in this research brought to light more rich data, including elements that participants might not have wanted to declare in the interviews, it also has limitations and potential drawbacks as a method. For example, the researcher’s gender may affect observation (Kawulich, 2005), especially in a conservative environment like Kuwait (Longva, 2019). I am a female researcher dealing with a religious and conservative culture in Kuwait, and my research included me being with men in different charitable sites, such as iftar banquets in mosques. It was embarrassing for me to be the only woman present in certain places where men go to worship among a large number of people, where some of the iftar banquets were held.

In the field of Islamic charity there is the issue of the confidentiality of charitable work from the Islamic perspective, meaning that donors may prefer to keep their identities and the amount they donate private, as something between a person and their God. It is important to consider these issues. To eliminate such potentially problematic issues, this research had to establish clear research objectives for each organisation, as well as making participants’ rights clear, and using other techniques to maximise the trust of participants (see Chapter 1). Nevertheless I am sure that there is more about their charitable practices that they kept hidden, in order to keep the plurality of their deeds known only to God. It is possible that participants declared only what they felt would be necessary to benefit others, or that would fit the academic purposes I described to them.
8.3 Further research

Looking forward, further attempts to study engagement in charity in Gulf countries could prove beneficial to the literature. The Gulf as a whole is a similar environment to Kuwait in terms of economy and culture, but there are different political regulations in different countries, and the potential effects of these should be considered carefully. Further work is certainly required to disentangle these complexities in regard to the opportunities that are available and how different levels of participant are involved in charity from different perspectives.

This thesis hopefully provides a good starting point for discussion and further research, by adopting the ethnographic approach, to study the contemporary engagement of each group of participants discussed in this research and in addition the non-citizen residents’ engagement in charity – in Kuwait, in the Gulf, and in the wider Islamic world – and their diverse understandings and interpretations. More comparative studies that include all NGOs in Kuwait from different doctrines, Sunni and Shia would also be interesting future directions. Focusing on a particular gender and their engagement in charity could also be very useful. With all the massive contributions made by Islamic charity in Kuwait, a question has to be asked: why have all these engagements not eradicated poverty in Kuwait? Further work is certainly required to study developing the process of zakat collection and distribution in Kuwait.

Apart from looking at how and why people engage in charity, future research should look for intersections between diverse giving modalities and explore beyond ‘giving’, investigating areas such as the effect of giving on participants, or the relationship between giving and feelings. The feelings of joy found in Islamic giving could certainly be addressed in future anthropological studies.
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Appendix (1) : Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE:

Islamic Charity in the State of Kuwait: Between Regulation, Local Understanding, and Practice

Project Approval Reference: ____________________________

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:
- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Allow the interview to be audio taped
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that any information I provide will be anonymised prevent my identity from being made public.

| I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. |
| I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. |

Name: _____________________________________________
Signature: __________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________
Date: ______________________________________________

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## Appendix (2) : List of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Names¹</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Position &amp; Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>26/Oct/2018</td>
<td>Leader of the girls in Salwan team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Alfalah</td>
<td>27/May/2018</td>
<td>Head of the branch in the women’s department</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Alhusainan</td>
<td>2/Feb/2019</td>
<td>Social Media influencer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Alkhalid</td>
<td>20/Mar/2018</td>
<td>Young Islamist leader, the Society for Social Reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Almosa</td>
<td>21/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Projects Manager, Zakat House</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Alomar</td>
<td>4/Sep/2018</td>
<td>Charitable Team Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Alsalem</td>
<td>2/Nov/2018</td>
<td>Founder of <em>Sirdab al Faiha</em> project</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Alsumait the son</td>
<td>14/Jan/2019</td>
<td>Direct Aid Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Alwasmi</td>
<td>20/Mar/2018</td>
<td>The media department manager in Zakat House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Amina</td>
<td>24/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Branch Manager in the social department, Zakat House</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Areej</td>
<td>20/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Employee in Media department, Zakat House</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Aziz</td>
<td>24/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Volunteer in iftar workshop</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Basma</td>
<td>5/Sep/2018</td>
<td>Senior in the financial management of the Zakat House</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Bedoor</td>
<td>24/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Founder of Draw smile team and Iftar workshop in a restaurant</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Dania</td>
<td>21/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Dania Charity Team Leader</td>
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<td>Dr Alkurdi</td>
<td>24/ Dec/ 2018</td>
<td>Islamic scholar in Kuwait Awqaf Ministry [real name]</td>
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<td>Dr Essa Zaki</td>
<td>16/Apr/ 2018</td>
<td>Islamic scholar in Kuwait [real name]</td>
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<td>Dr Jassim</td>
<td>24/ Mar/2018</td>
<td>Director of the Sharia Office and the Sharia Board rapporteur</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Dr Khalid</td>
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<td>Head of Fanar centre for archiving Kuwaiti charity [real name]</td>
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<td>Dr Reham</td>
<td>15/Nov/2018</td>
<td>Salwan Team</td>
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<td>Hind</td>
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<td>Mohammad</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>31/Oct/2018</td>
<td>Head of Yemenik Ta’eenek</td>
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¹ Anonymous Names unless stated in the Notes Column (See Chapter 1: Ethical Clearance)
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<td>Project Manager, Alnajat Charitable organisation</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Nabil</td>
<td>24/ Dec/ 2018</td>
<td>Media Manager, Global Mercy</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Nasima</td>
<td>24/Mar/2018</td>
<td>Founder of Zahar Kitchen Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Noha</td>
<td>22/Oct/2018</td>
<td>Member of Direct Aid’s founder family</td>
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<td>39.</td>
<td>Noura</td>
<td>5/Sep/2018</td>
<td>Individual fundraising charity via Whatsapp list</td>
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<td>Omar</td>
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<td>Radhi</td>
<td>5/Sep/2018</td>
<td>Head of Centre of Charity Studies, International Islamic Charity Organization</td>
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<td>Rayan</td>
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<td>45.</td>
<td>Yousef</td>
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