

EXCERPTED FROM

Changing Saudi Arabia:
Art, Culture, and Society
in the Kingdom

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1

Creating Change in Saudi Arabia

“Suspended Together” is a powerful installation that gives the impression of movement and freedom. However, a closer look at the 200 doves allows the viewer to realize that the doves are actually frozen and suspended with no hope of flight. If you examine it even more minutely, it shows that each dove carries on its body a permission document that allows a Saudi woman to travel. Notwithstanding their circumstances, all Saudi women are required to have this document, issued by their appointed male guardian.

—Manal al-Dowayan

The power of the arts to anticipate future social and technological developments, by a generation and more, has long been recognized. In this century, Ezra Pound called artists “the antennae of the race.” Art as radar acts as “an early alarm system,” as it were, enabling us to discover social and psychic targets in lots of time to prepare to cope with them. This concept of the arts as prophetic contrasts with the popular idea of them as mere self-expression.

—Marshall McLuhan

In late September 2017, the colors green and white dominated everyday life in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. Although it was only a week after the Eid holiday, this profusion of color had little to do with religion. It was because of National Day, which is celebrated on September 23 to commemorate the day in 1932 when King Abdulaziz ibn Saud issued the proclamation announcing the unification of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.¹

While the days leading up to the holiday were tense, dominated by a diplomatic dispute with Qatar,² the holiday featured large government-sponsored events throughout the country, with men and women intermingling freely, a rare sight in this conservative society. Equally remarkable was the central place of the arts and a new class of male and female Saudi

artists in the celebrations throughout a country where, in the words of the Saudi sociologist Abdulsalam al-Wayel, the “contempt for the arts lies at the heart of its values.”³

In Riyadh, Saudi men and women, including some women who were unveiled, sat together to see an operetta about Saudi history at King Fahd Stadium, the large football (soccer) stadium that usually only allows men into its stands.⁴ Eighteen miles (30 kilometers) away from the stadium, thousands of young men and women were dancing to a music-and-light show with a live DJ on Tahliya Street—a central shopping district, which is loosely modeled on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.⁵

Throughout the festive evening, large color images of female Olympians, members of the royal family, and other prominent Saudis appeared on the side of the Kingdom Tower, the ninety-nine-story skyscraper in central Riyadh, not far from Tahliya Street.⁶ Further adding to the festive atmosphere in the country surrounding the national celebration, King Salman issued a royal decree on September 26, 2017, directing the country’s legislature to develop regulations to issue driver’s licenses to both men and women.⁷

On Saudi National Day and the day of the announcement about women driving, Saudis turned to social media to express their opinions and to post memes, photos, and videos. Among the most popular items posted on Saudi National Day was a music video produced by Majed Alesa, one of the country’s emerging artists. Sponsored by the MiSK Foundation, a nonprofit organization closely linked to Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman,⁸ the video is a collage of oppositional images—Western and Saudi, old and new—in a black-and-white landscape periodically accentuated by brightly colored objects.⁹

Set to stirring patriotic Saudi music, the video opens with an image of a young Saudi man wearing a tuxedo as he plays the piano. It then cuts to a Western orchestra, a stallion, an old warrior in traditional clothing with a sword, a falcon, Bedouin warriors riding camels, and men dancing traditional sword dances. The video concludes with a black curtain covering the screen that is adorned with the images of three generations of Saudi leaders: King Abdulaziz ibn Saud; his son, King Salman; and Salman’s son, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. In sum, although Alesa’s video is clearly Saudi, referencing the country’s culture and history, it nonetheless has the feel of the American popular music videos that are watched by young people around the globe.¹⁰

The online discussions about Saudi National Day, the king’s decision to allow women to drive, and Alesa’s National Day video accounted for thousands of posts on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and other social media platforms. Collectively, those posts resemble the discussions that Saudis conduct in a *majlis*, a forum for debates and problem solving that exists throughout the kingdom. Virtually every Saudi home and public insti-

tution, including the offices of senior government officials, has a large space set aside for a majlis. Some of these spaces are segregated by gender; others are open to both men and women. Notably, one sees similar segregation online. Although many discussions on Twitter are open to anyone, the same is not true for Instagram and other social media platforms that allow users to limit who can see feeds or even specific posts. Indeed, it is common for Saudi women, including public figures with large followings online, to limit who has access to their social media sites.

Surprisingly absent from these online discussions about Saudi National Day were the Western experts on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, many of whom are active on Twitter, frequently commenting on the country's affairs. Even during the days following the announcement on women's driving, many of these scholars focused on state/elite concerns or the reactions of both women's rights and conservative activists—often overlooking the rest of Saudi society.¹¹

The absence of these scholars from these discussions reflects their general focus on Saudi economic and political issues rather than online or cultural/social issues, many of which are seen as less important or as ancillary to the country's "real" politics in the royal family and among the religious and commercial elites. As Kristin Diwan lamented in a tweet on August 22, 2017, Gulf politics "is a very immature field of study. Most Gulf scholars . . . have a shallow understanding of Gulf cultural history."¹²

There are sound reasons that many Western scholars of Saudi politics focus on the kingdom's elites—what Steffen Hertog identified as the princes, bureaucrats, and others who have shaped the country's economy and politics.¹³ For decades, these elites have constructed a centralized bureaucratic and hierarchical governing system—or regime—in which the monarchy, individual royal family members, and those with close links to them retain vast wealth and wield power through both unofficial and official channels. As we will see, unofficial elite power takes a variety of forms, from funding new private cultural institutions to securing allies' preferred access to the media or to the state's bureaucracy. Nonetheless, the royal family retains enormous power, which can be used to deliver massive social change. It was King Salman who issued the royal decree permitting women to drive, and his son, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, appeared on state television shortly afterward to explain how the new regulations would be implemented.¹⁴

As Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori have stated, the monarchy has used decrees like Salman's to circumvent the authority of the ulama, the kingdom's clerical class, when making major "administrative, economic, and social changes."¹⁵ Saudi jurists believe that they serve as "social leaders who strive to preserve the Islamic image of the Saudi nation"—one consistent with the ideals of Hanbali Sunni scholar Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792),¹⁶ which have defined the Saudi nation since its inception.

(These ideals are widely known outside of the Kingdom as “Wahhabism.”) For decades, the Saudi state’s commitment to upholding that vision, including restrictions on women, have been, in Bernard Haykel’s words, “intimately entwined with its own legitimacy.”¹⁷ For many in the kingdom, 1979 was a watershed moment in that relationship: Following the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca that year by a group of religious extremists seeking to overthrow the monarchy, the Saudi government reaffirmed its commitment to those conservative values by strongly supporting forces tied to a movement widely known among Saudis as the “*Ṣaḥwa*.”¹⁸ Although Riyadh has significantly scaled back that commitment in recent years,¹⁹ some ulama still have a public voice and, as we will see, have played a role in determining what type of cultural production is acceptable in public settings.²⁰

However, focusing on the governing or the religious elites, no matter how important they are or have been, can overlook a critical element in Saudi politics, especially in the age of social media—namely, the intense debate about women’s driving and other issues among the country’s masses online. This is the type of debate that Deborah Wheeler recently identified as occurring “beneath the surfaces of power” in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.²¹ Indeed, since the start of the twenty-first century, both male and female artists have played a key but overlooked role in the debate online over women driving and other controversial issues. Through art that is either abstract or a collage of oppositional elements, including Saudi and Western ones, as in Alesa’s video, artists in the kingdom have expressed both the views and the experiences of their fellow Saudis. We can see this clearly with the issue of women driving. For example, many Saudi artists, including Arwa al-Neami and Manal al-Dowayan, have explored the issue of women driving in their art.²²

Saudi artists also play a large role in debates online, where they are leading personalities, with millions of followers on social media.²³ Many Saudi artists maintain close ties to members of the royal family,²⁴ including Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman. Not only have some artists met with the crown prince,²⁵ but Ahmed Mater, a leading visual artist, also serves as the CEO of MiSK’s Art Institute.²⁶ At the same time, Saudi artists have ties to female activists who lobbied online and elsewhere to allow women to drive. For example, Saudi stand-up comedian Fahad Albutairi has stated on his Twitter account that he is the “proud husband” of Loujain al-Hathloul,²⁷ the female and driving rights activist with a global following.²⁸ She has been imprisoned multiple times by Saudi authorities, and has seen her cases referred to a special terrorism court.²⁹ In fact, she was most recently arrested just before the driving ban was lifted in 2018.³⁰ Moreover, Manal al-Sharif, a leading Saudi driving activist, talks at length about the role of drawing during her coming of age in her memoir, *Daring to Drive: A Saudi Woman’s Awakening*.³¹

Thus, it should come as no surprise that two works of art, which combined Western and Saudi cultural norms and were released online, played an important role in the debate on women driving in Saudi Arabia. The first was “No Woman, No Drive,” a satirical music video from 2013 that starred Albutairi, Hisham Fageeh, and other men at Riyadh’s Telfaz11 studios.³² The second was “Hawājis” (“Concerns”), a satirical music video starring a group of Saudi women, which was produced in 2016 by Majed Alesa’s 8IES Studios.³³ The two satirical music videos, which have been viewed on YouTube around the world over 38 million times, received extensive coverage outside the kingdom.³⁴ Together, the two videos reveal both the global appeal of Saudi Arabia’s art and, more important, its role as a barometer of the prevailing cultural and political winds in the country.

Remarkably, 8IES released “Hawājis” on YouTube on December 23, 2016—almost nine months to the day before King Salman announced that he was lifting the restriction on women driving in Saudi Arabia.³⁵ Although one would not suggest that “Hawājis” prompted the king to lift the ban, the proximity of its release to the announcement points to how Saudi works of art can be prophetic and reveal key social debates that are not visible using other forms of political or social analysis.

* * *

In this book, I investigate the rise of the modern Saudi arts movement in order to shed light on what Diwan has correctly identified as an understudied but important aspect of Gulf politics—namely, how the region’s culture and society shape and reflect its contemporary politics. Building on the work of Mark LeVine and others on the importance of art and popular culture in Middle East politics,³⁶ I argue that artists play a role in Saudi society akin to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals: Saudi artists are not part of the society’s traditional intellectual elite, but through the language of their culture, they articulate feelings and experiences that the masses cannot easily express.³⁷ To paraphrase Ezra Pound, Saudi artists are the “antennae” of the kingdom’s society,³⁸ whose work is not “mere self-expression” but, in the words of Marshall McLuhan, the “distant early warning system that can always be relied upon to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it.”³⁹

Although Saudi artists are deeply tied to their society, and most of them live there, they also travel abroad, read foreign books and journals, and are closely linked to foreign artistic and cultural networks. Some have also studied abroad and lent their voices to political movements in the West, such as the Standing Rock protests in North Dakota.⁴⁰ Collectively, they resemble the stratum of young globally minded activists whom Sidney Tarrow has called the “rooted cosmopolitans.”⁴¹ These activists, Tarrow has argued, are distinguished by their linkage of the “global with the local” and

the use of “domestic and international resources and opportunities” to realize significant change at home.⁴²

These activists are also fluent in modern ideas and communication technologies—viewing the latter as tools of “collective action” that permit them to employ “their skills and artistic talents” to further their goals.⁴³ Despite their association with foreign ideas, however, these rooted cosmopolitans define themselves in clearly nationalistic terms, advancing a political vision that is analogous to what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls “rooted cosmopolitanism” or “cosmopolitan patriotism.”⁴⁴ As we saw with Alesa’s video, it is possible to create art that is recognizably Saudi while still adhering to global norms.⁴⁵

The success of these rooted cosmopolitans in winning a permanent place for their work in the kingdom suggests that although oil revenues and the ruling bargain between the state and society may shape the nation’s politics at a structural level, Saudi society retains a significant amount of political agency. Saudi art and society beyond the traditional political structures are characterized by the many opposing social norms, systems of belief, and social spheres that exist alongside each other in the nation. As the late Saddeka Arebi, a sociologist who studied the Middle East, once observed about Saudi Arabia: “These contradictory elements have had deep and lasting effects on society, if only because they have led to a type of ‘collage culture’ that manifested itself in both the material as well as the symbolic. The collage can be observed in all aspects of life—in architecture, in marriage and weddings, in leisure, and even in the media’s coverage of international sports events.”⁴⁶

Thanks to these oppositional forces, there are cultural and social issues for which there is no common ground among the people living in the kingdom’s fragmented society. Rather than selecting a single answer that might threaten social stability, Saudis and their leaders have instead sought frameworks to achieve harmony among divergent social groups and to permit the nation to be both for and against the same issues.

Within this process of presenting conflicting groups and views, Saudi artists regularly offer fresh awareness-raising questions while simultaneously bringing forth a reevaluation of the assumptions and terms that Saudis use to discuss critical issues. For example, Manal al-Dowayan’s *Suspended Together* can take on diametrically opposed meanings depending on how a viewer looks at it. It can portray either freedom of movement and travel, or figures frozen in place without any hope of escape.⁴⁷

As Rajaa al-Sanea, a Saudi novelist, observed, artists not only alter *what* is discussed in public in Saudi Arabia, but also *how* issues are discussed in the kingdom.⁴⁸ We can see this process unfold in the public’s reaction to works on subjects as different as the absence of public space open to men and women, US president Donald Trump’s rhetoric, and women’s right to drive—prompting Ahmed Mater, a leading artist, to declare in *Al-Ḥayāt* that the Saudi artist “is now a political and social activist.”⁴⁹

These examples demonstrate how Saudi artistic and cultural figures can, in certain contexts, shape how the kingdom looks at seminal political issues. This leads us to three key insights.

The first insight, to quote LeVine, is that to understand the people and politics of the Muslim world, we need to follow the artists and “the musicians, and their fans, as much as the mullahs and their followers.”⁵⁰

The second insight is that the mainstream West’s view of popular culture in the Middle East rests on a series of basic errors and “orientalist” stereotypes—primarily the notion that popular culture in the Middle East is both “secular” *and* “Western.” Westerners largely assume that popular culture in the Middle East is an oppositional force within authoritarian societies that are steeped in Islam and are hostile to the contemporary world.⁵¹ That viewpoint reflects a long-standing principle of Western analysis—the “secular-religious analytical binary”—which, as John Voll has noted, can lead to misleading conclusions about the politics of a region in which secular and religious forces have become increasingly intertwined since 2011.⁵² Indeed, in the Middle East, it is just as likely for Saudis and others who are outwardly conservative in both dress and demeanor to be liberal and open to the West as it is for outwardly secular peoples to advocate illiberal positions hostile to the West. As we will learn, Saudi artists help us see that pious men and women can be advocates for cultural and social change that is consistent with global norms in the twenty-first century.

The third insight is that popular culture, including art and cultural production, can, in the words of Karin Van Nieuwkerk, Mark LeVine, and Martin Stokes, “no longer simply be viewed—and dismissed—merely as a decoration of, or distraction from, ‘real politics’ in the Muslim World.”⁵³ Thomas Hegghammer has made a very similar argument about the politics of militant Islamists, noting that they “have a rich aesthetic culture that is essential to understanding their mindset and worldview.”⁵⁴

My text aims to build on these insights, showing that an alternative vision is possible for art and popular culture in Saudi Arabia. I will argue that the kingdom’s artists make the surprising intellectual leap of linking conservative Islam with comedy and modern art, genres of culture that are often associated by Westerners with cosmopolitanism and secularism, not to say subversion. As Nasser al-Qasabi, a leading Saudi actor and comedian, stated on television in 2015, “The artist’s essential role is to reveal society’s challenges. . . . Warning the people about ISIS [the Islamic State] is the true jihad, because we’re fighting them with art, not war.”⁵⁵

But I am not contending that Saudi artists are attempting to imitate that very Western figure: the solitary individual who speaks to the world through comedy, film, music, painting, photography, poetry and other writing, or sculpture. Saudi artists reject the central tenet of Western modernity that there is a natural and inevitable progression of humanity to abandon

tribalism in favor of individualism. They are artists, but they are not individuals in the Western sense. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that they are *not* attempting to be individuals—that is, unified entities—that allows them to remain open to disparate, even contradictory, forces.

My argument builds on my extensive experience with and scholarship about Saudi Arabia and the Muslim world—in particular, the time I lived in the kingdom from March 2013 to January 2014. From my base in Riyadh, I traveled throughout the kingdom, visiting regions that few other Western scholars ever get to see, including Asir, the southern province situated along the Yemen border and the birthplace of the Modern Saudi Visual Arts Movement. Throughout my time in the kingdom, I met not only many of the Saudis whom Western experts usually interview, but also organic intellectuals and other cultural and social actors who are *not* part of the traditional ruling elite or the opposition.

At the same time, my approach recognizes that conducting in-country research is not enough by itself for a scholar to understand Saudi society and its art—a view made clear by Mater in 2003. After he read an article about Saudi Arabia that had been published in *National Geographic* by an American who visited the kingdom, the Saudi artist lamented to British artist Stephen Stapleton, “It is always the same perspective. . . . [Westerners] come here, spend one week in our country, and go away with a distorted reality.”⁵⁶ To transcend the “perspective” that Mater commented on, I have supplemented my in-country research with extensive work in two sources that provide invaluable insights into social change and mass opinion in that country.

The first source, *fatāwā*, or the responses of the ulama to the questions posed by citizens, illustrates the views of the clerical elite and of ordinary people—especially because many of the questions begin with a request to reaffirm an individual’s beliefs. Although scholars have often used this type of documents to understand Saudi clerical opinions,⁵⁷ the present author is one of the first to stress the limitations of the power of *fatāwā*—that is, the possibility that Saudis can ignore the edicts of clerical elites.

For instance, although Saudi clerics classify any art that features animals or humans as *ḥarām* (forbidden),⁵⁸ Saudi artists have produced cartoons for the kingdom’s media and state-funded art shows that utilize both humans and animals as tools of cultural and social critique. Among the gifts that the Saudi government presented Donald Trump during his trip to Riyadh in May 2017 was a “large canvas depicting a Saudi woman” and an artwork by a Saudi artist “featuring a picture of President Trump.”⁵⁹

The second unconventional source for my research is the body of work of the contemporary Saudi arts movement, and their posts and professionally made videos on Saudi social media, two cultural spheres that are now merging into a single world. Over the past several years, I have conducted in-depth interviews with many of the top Saudi cultural and social fig-

ures—including visual artists, stand-up comedians, actors, actresses, and male and female film directors.

In a country that lacks a free press or national participatory politics, the work of artists provides us with a fresh view of the way many Saudis discuss the key issues impacting their lives. As Abdalnasser Gharem, a leading Saudi visual artist, has observed, “The media cannot talk about these issues, but art has a language that needs no translator.”⁶⁰ My approach to these types of sources seeks to complement the growing literature on public opinion in the Gulf monarchies⁶¹ and Mohamed Zayani’s *Networked Publics and Digital Contention*. I especially build on Zayani’s insights on the importance of online media and other “less formal spaces” of everyday social engagement, and on the different forms that online activism takes throughout the Arab world.⁶²

Whereas intense online engagement in Tunisia, the subject of Zayani’s study, helped to produce a political movement that toppled the regime in 2011,⁶³ online engagement in Saudi Arabia has produced quite a different political result. There, sensitive issues are discussed online but in a way that has privileged rather than undermined existing structures of power in the kingdom.⁶⁴ This dynamic echoes Sean Yom’s recent insight about the benefits of broad coalitions in Middle East politics, where “critics tend to complain not *if* but *how* regimes should reign.”⁶⁵ Indeed, to paraphrase Yom, the Saudi state uses online media to communicate *with* rather than *through* Saudi society, including the kingdom’s artists.⁶⁶

Ultimately, I aim to introduce readers to Saudi art along with the social context out of which both works of art and artists emerge. By doing so, I build on the work of Nada Shabout, who has called on scholars to research the artistic movements of specific Arab states, linking the visual arts to film and to other artistic genres.⁶⁷ In particular, I explore a paradox that lies at the heart of Saudi art and the kingdom’s society as a whole in the twenty-first century—namely, how a socially conservative nation can simultaneously be the home of one of the most vibrant artistic movements in the Middle East today. My approach questions a widely held view that Saudi culture and society are inherently hostile to art and modernity⁶⁸—a perspective that is reinforced in the West by media coverage of public beheadings, radicalized young men bent on terror, and an absolute monarchy that rejects democratic institutions. In short, I am challenging both the preeminence and the single-mindedness of these views.

* * *

To understand the existing literature on Saudi Arabia and where this book fits into the discourse, it will be helpful to start with Ahmed Mater’s explanation of how art has emerged in Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹ Mater draws parallels between his work as an artist and as a physician, arguing that both of these activities call

upon him to diagnose and solve complicated problems. A key part of addressing those problems, he says, is to understand Saudi Arabia's unique social landscape, which has little in common with America's. Whereas individual choice and liberty are sacrosanct in the United States, religious and other traditional norms take precedence over everything else in Saudi Arabia.⁷⁰

It is ironic that for Mater, the conservative environment, which many Western artists would regard as a threat to creative freedom, is a source of artistic inspiration. Some of Mater's most provocative photographs of Mecca were taken as he flew on a Saudi military helicopter above the city—an experience that would not have been possible had he not secured government permits to film the holy city, the Kaaba, and other religious sites. Winning those approvals was, of course, one of the many impediments he had to overcome to conduct his work in the nation. As he notes, "It is more interesting to be an artist surrounded by challenges like ours than to be an artist surrounded by too much choice and unrestricted opportunity."⁷¹

Understanding the meaning of this seemingly paradoxical statement and the position of Mater and others like him in Saudi society requires us to transcend the usual binary divisions that many journalists and popular scholars employ to understand Saudi Arabia, such as conservative versus liberal or state versus civil society.⁷² As Stéphane Lacroix correctly observes, these types of divisions "are of little relevance" to Saudi Arabia,⁷³ a country that Madawi al-Rasheed, a leading scholar of Saudi Arabia, has labeled a "postmodern pastiche."⁷⁴ In this pastiche, there is an absolute monarchy that upholds Arab, Islamic, and tribal values in public, but, in Greg Gause's words, is really "little different from other authoritarian regimes" elsewhere in the world.⁷⁵ Thanks to the earnings generated by the kingdom's oil, the Saudi royal family and its allies dominate a conservative society in which Islam is omnipresent but exists alongside a veritable cornucopia of groups, some of which are modern and others of which, like the ulama, blend modern and pre-modern elements.⁷⁶

For decades, scholars have understood this political dynamic through the lens of rentier theory. According to that theory, since the rise of the Saudi oil economy, the state has dominated the kingdom's politics, thanks to its wealth, which has allowed it to co-opt society, control the media, build an impressive security infrastructure, and capture the symbolic power of Islam and national myths.⁷⁷ Rentier scholars have focused on the views of the following categories of groups in Saudi society: the clerics and governing elites,⁷⁸ women,⁷⁹ and groups seeking systemic change.⁸⁰ Two areas of inquiry are central to many of these studies: first, whether the state and the monarchy can maintain their legitimacy and the "ruling bargain" during periods of low oil prices and regional turmoil; and second, whether the state can resolve the tension between modernity and Islam in the country.⁸¹ Indeed, in 2012, the Arab Spring prompted one

scholar to predict that the tensions between modernity and Islam and the revolts in neighboring Arab states would inspire Saudis to overthrow the monarchy by 2015.⁸²

Over the last several years, however, several scholars have sought to broaden rentier analysis to include the views of groups that have been overlooked in previous studies of Saudi politics, while integrating the insights provided by in-country field research. Four scholars are important to this study.

The first scholar, American anthropologist Loring M. Danforth, gives his readers the results of interviews he conducted in English during a brief visit to the kingdom in 2012. Although Danforth's work is more of a travel log than a formal academic study, some of the people he interviewed during his trip to the kingdom were conceptual artists who are important to my study, such as Ahmed Mater and Abdunasser Gharem.⁸³

The second scholar, Robert Kluijver, briefly covers a few of the Saudi artists discussed in Danforth's book along with artists in other Gulf states in a self-published text. Although the text provides some useful historical background, its analysis of the contemporary Saudi art scene dates from 2012 and is now largely out of date.⁸⁴

The third scholar, Namie Tsujigami, has used intense in-country field research along with postmodernist theory to demonstrate a critical factor of Saudi life that has been overlooked in other studies: namely, how Saudi women retain significant agency and ability to negotiate boundaries while still facing systemic inequality.⁸⁵

The fourth scholar is the French sociologist Pascal Ménoret. Two of his works in particular are important to my study. In the first, "Saudi TV's Dangerous Hit," Ménoret explores what *Ṭāš mā Ṭāš* (*No Big Deal*), a popular Saudi TV show, reveals about the country's politics. Using a combination of interviews and analysis of specific episodes, Ménoret clearly demonstrates that Saudi Arabia, "a country long believed to be monolithic and mute,"⁸⁶ can have energetic public debates through both art and comedy.

In his second work, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, Ménoret investigates the young men who rebel against the existing Saudi order by "drifting"—that is, by driving cars through the streets at high speed.⁸⁷ According to Ménoret, joyriding is a "thriving subculture" and a serious political movement that offers "a way of confronting the state in its most basic operations: managing public spaces, protecting private property, and enforcing the law."⁸⁸ In Ménoret's eyes, joyriders operate in a space in the kingdom's society analogous to what Jürgen Habermas has labeled the "plebeian public space"—that is, the political and social space in eighteenth-century France in which ordinary people voiced their political opinions and made demands of their government.⁸⁹ The opinions expressed in this space, Ménoret continues, "burrowed through" absolutism and the legitimacy of the French monarchy, preparing the way for the French Revolution.⁹⁰

For the young men who operate in Saudi Arabia's plebeian public space, Ménoret argues, the central issue is not the absolutism of the king, but the interlocking system of repression that the state uses to control young men and the country's sprawling cities. That system, Ménoret reveals, emerged out of a partnership between the Saudi state and modernizing European urban planners, whose ideas for cities were applied throughout the kingdom. To support his argument, Ménoret draws on the records of the Western planners who designed Riyadh and other modern Saudi cities, along with conducting extensive field research, largely in Riyadh, over a period of several years in the early 2000s.⁹¹

I seek to dramatically expand on the limited interviews conducted by Danforth and build on Ménoret's and Tsujigami's approaches through an argument that combines four components:

The first component is intensive field research that focuses on artists—a critical social group that is not part of the ruling elite or the political opposition.

The second component is the work of LeVine, Ménoret, Van Nieuwkerk, and others on the definition and importance of popular culture in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia in particular.⁹²

The third component includes the ideas of Gramsci, McLuhan, and Tarrow on the place of artists and of globally connected but still nationally oriented intellectuals and social movements.

The fourth component is a rigorous analysis of Saudi art and online media sources. Visual art plays an expressive function in virtually all societies, but the creative works studied in this book serve two additional social roles in Saudi Arabia, where there is an absence of a free press and mass politics: they are a barometer of public opinion, and a tool for discussing issues as sensitive as the environment, gender, poverty, and religious extremism. Again, as LeVine and his colleagues have correctly noted, art and cultural production are integral to the "real politics" in the Middle East.⁹³

I should emphasize, however, that the artists whom I describe in this book do not see their role as one of instigating direct political change, or even marked social transformation that might have political implications. Rather, they nearly always position their expression in spaces consistent with the cultural and religious values of society, and as part of a qualified discourse with the state and society—not in opposition to either. They neither inhabit a "plebeian public space," as joyriders do, nor are they rebels or revolutionaries: they do not seek to challenge or to overthrow the governing system or the ruling hierarchies. In fact, artists have openly allied with the ruling elites and have integrated into their work the language and themes that reflect their country's values. These choices of course reflect the artists' aim to channel the views of their society organically and have shaped how they present their work publicly. Indeed, some have tied art to terms like jihad, and others have utilized concepts with deep historical significance for

their country—such as the principle that Muslims should periodically revive (*tajdīd*) and reform (*iṣlāḥ*) their societies to conform to the behavior and the ideals of the Prophet’s society in seventh-century Medina.⁹⁴

The presence of these groups in the kingdom points to a larger set of questions. Why do they remain in the kingdom rather than moving to countries that more rigorously protect individual rights? Many of these Saudi men and women are highly educated, speak English, frequently spend time abroad, and have access to financial resources. How, then, do we explain their willingness to interact with a society that is often suspicious of anything that strays from religious and tribal norms? What gives them the confidence to challenge those norms, expecting cultural and social transformation in a kingdom that strongly resists such change?

The answer to these questions, I contend, is that while the country is governed by a strong centralized monarchy, the society is far more flexible, allowing for the coexistence—however tenuous—of a powerful clerical elite and a number of informal spaces and channels for group action. These spaces and channels, in which the state can intervene, reflect an understudied but critical aspect of daily life in the kingdom.

Here, too, my analysis builds on the work of Zayani’s *Networked Publics and Digital Contention* by stressing the politics of everyday life instead of formal institutions and structures. Among the hundreds of tribes and other groups that live in the vast kingdom, there are many views, some of which may appear contradictory, on cultural and social issues, which are played out daily in a variety of contexts. In the Saudi model, society is the site of a network of disparate and constantly changing elements that resemble Michel Foucault’s definition of absolute chaos: “the disorder in which a large number of possible orders glitter separately.”⁹⁵

Saudis have made their seemingly paradoxical social system function by seeking harmony over uniformity and multiplicity over dualism. Their approach, which exists in many aspects of this “collage-like culture,” recognizes that there are cultural and social issues for which there is no common ground among the peoples who live in the kingdom, including the religious elites. Rather than selecting a single answer that would threaten social stability, Saudis and their leaders choose frameworks that link everyone in society together, permitting their country to be both *for* and *against* the same issues.

This approach rejects the chief argument of Islamist activists and the secular argument of the activists who led the Arab Spring in Tahrir Square—namely, that the only way to reform any Arab nation is by overthrowing its systems of power from the top. This Saudi view is based on a very different understanding of power, reflecting a desire to avoid the instability and mass violence that has plagued the Arab world for the last thirty years, when governing systems collapsed and institutions vanished.

Rather than overthrowing the systems of power in a revolution that takes place only once, with uncertain outcomes, Saudi artists have aimed to continue to operate under evolving cultural and social norms that they help to shape. The tactical choice not to challenge the system has given Saudi artists the social space to explore controversial topics while appearing to be apolitical. At the same time, this approach has compelled them to address the views of all of society, not just the members of the royal family and that portion of the public that happens to share their outlook. Saudi artists cannot cherry-pick views on social media that support their position and assume that they are in the right. Their vision can only work if everyone is included and invested in it, a process that is facilitated by a conception of art and culture that is the product of a group rather than a single person. Indeed, the approach of Saudi artists implicitly rejects a central tenet of Western history and modernity—that is, the abandonment of tribalism in favor of individualism.

This is a critical choice, for tribalism and religion are viewed with deep suspicion among many in the West. Yet individualism has its weaknesses, just as tribalism and religion have their strengths. In fact, tribalism and religion even address some of the problems inherent in individualism—as in “the lonely crowd.” The people I discuss in this book wish to maintain elements of tribalism, while functioning in the contemporary secular world. In both their art and social media, Saudi artists have created a vision that contains political elements but which can nevertheless be presented as “apolitical.” Their art is clear, sophisticated, and sometimes critical, but it is never confrontational toward the state or the political system. It is a dance of intellect and feeling that rouses its audience, including the rulers of Saudi Arabia, to thought. Such artists perhaps aspire to be in some sense—to use the British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley’s famous phrase—“the unacknowledged legislators” of their country. In their work, complex issues are brought into the strong light of art and laughter.

Nonetheless, recent events in Saudi Arabia and the serious questions raised about the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 have adversely affected many people’s perspectives of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and the artistic movement that his government has championed. Not only have Western cultural institutions reevaluated their cooperation with Saudi artists and artistic organizations, but some analysts have dismissed the kingdom’s recent artistic and cultural initiatives as mere “window dressing” for an authoritarian regime.⁹⁶

But the issues raised in this book point in a different direction. They do not reflect the machinations of kings and princes but are concerned with the productions of an extraordinary group of artists whose work gives rise to an image of what might be called the deep consciousness of Saudi Arabia—something quite different from any of the political activities that dominate headlines around the world. Remarkably, it was Khashoggi, recognizing art’s

ability to express a multiplicity of viewpoints, who first brought together four of the pioneering individuals whose work and ideas give rise to this text.

* * *

I have divided this book into five chapters:

In Chapter 1, I chart the factors in Saudi society that explain the rise of a vibrant artistic movement in a country that is said to despise art and artists.

In Chapter 2, by contrast, I present a study of the Modern Saudi Visual Arts Movement, which emerged around the year 2000 among a group of professionals in Asir.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the second generation of contemporary Saudi artists, many of whom explore the same questions that the Modern Saudi Visual Arts Movement has, but do so in new artistic genres, especially stand-up comedy.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the third generation of Saudi artists, who have adopted the descriptor “creatives” and have moved comedy and other forms of art from the gallery and the stage to the screen and YouTube.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman has sought to utilize the kingdom’s artists and their movement to promote his political goals and to start a national dialogue about socioeconomic reform.

Discourse among different groups is central to the worldview of Saudi artists and reflects the centrality of collective discussion and action in the kingdom. Indeed, as Saudi comedian and actor Hisham Fageeh is fond of saying, “Our work is an invitation to start a conversation.”⁹⁷

Notes

1. Hassan Cheruppa, “A Day of National Pride and Patriotism,” *Saudi Gazette*, September 23, 2017.

2. “Qatar, Neighbors Trade Barbs at Arab League over Boycott,” *Reuters*, September 12, 2017, <https://reuters.com>.

3. Abdulsalam al-Wayel, “‘An iḥtiqārna al-Fann . . . fauz Muhammad ‘Asāf baina al-Ḥaḍīf wa al-Ġabaran,” *As-Šarq*, June 29, 2013, www.alsharq.net.

4. “Sa‘ūdīyīāt yahḍurna ‘urūḍan fannīa fī mal‘ab Riyāḍī lilmarra al-Ūlā bi-Munāsibad al-‘Īd al-Waṭanī,” *France24*, September 24, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2y2vGgy>.

5. For video of the event, see Ahmed! (@Ahmadooovich), “Iḥtifālāt Mūsīqīa šārī‘ Attahliya bial-Yaum al-Waṭanī.. ‘aṣr jadīd tāmān fī as-Sa‘ūdīya,” Twitter, September 23, 2017, <https://twitter.com/Ahmadooovich/status/911646243314683904>.

6. Al Jazeera, “Iḥtifālāt al-Yaum al-Waṭanī lil-Sa‘ūdīya binakha jadīda,” Al Jazeera, September 25, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2y1Gknx>. For pictures of Saudi women on Kingdom Tower, see Israa Garatli (@DameIsraa), “Ba‘da murūr ‘uqūd ṭamsa fīh wajh al-mar‘a, al-Ān yahtafile biḥā li‘anahā faḵr,” Twitter, September 26, 2017, <https://twitter.com/DameIsraa/status/912729089370415104>.

7. Ben Hubbard, “Saudi Arabia Agrees to Let Women Drive,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2017, <https://mobile.nytimes.com>.

8. MiSK is the Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Philanthropic Foundation for the Encouragement of Creativity (MiSK, Mu'assasa Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz "Misk" Ḳarīya . . . At-Taṣjī 'alā Al-Ibdā').

9. MiskKSA (@MiskKSA), "Kull 'ām wa waṭannā wa arḍnā biḳayyiran wa šumūḳ; #87_āmā_min_al-Majd," Twitter, September 23, 2017, <https://twitter.com/MiskKSA/status/911641102066823168>.

10. MiskKSA, "Kull 'ām wa waṭannā wa arḍnā biḳayyiran wa šumūḳ."

11. For example, see: Peter Bergen, "Bergen: Saudi Women Driving a Sign Bigger Change Is Coming," *CNN*, September 27, 2017, www.cnn.com; *Malaysian Reserve*, "Saudi Arabia Lifts Ban on Women Driving, Ending Isolation," *Malaysian Reserve*, September 27, 2017, <https://themalaysianreserve.com>; and Jane Kinninmont, "Scrapping the Ban on Women Driving Shows Mohammed bin Salman Is Something New," *Prospect Magazine*, September 27, 2017, www.prospectmagazine.co.uk.

12. Kristin Diwan (@kdiwaniya), "It is true. It is a very immature field of study," Twitter, August 22, 2017, <https://twitter.com/kdiwaniya/status/900052071742885888>.

13. Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 3.

14. Arwa al-Neami, "Women Are Allowed to Drive Cars in Saudi Now," Facebook, September 26, 2017, www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1607327719287973&set=a.101608766526550.3569.100000322800023&type=3&theater.

15. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, "Sacred Authority in Contemporary Muslim Societies," in *Muslim Politics*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 60.

16. Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25; Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, trans. Ethan S. Rundell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 14.

17. Bernard Haykel, "Afterword," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic, and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stéphane Lacroix (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 334.

18. Although this definition of *Ṣaḥwa* is less precise than the one employed by many Western scholars, it was frequently used by Saudis during my time researching in the Kingdom in 2013 and 2014. Today, one frequently sees *Ṣaḥwa* used this way in Arabic and Saudi media. Saudi officials, including Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, have also used *Ṣaḥwa* in this way in public statements. For more on this topic, see Mūnālīza Frīḥa, "As-sa'ūdīya qablu as-Ṣaḥwa," *An-Nahār*, December 30, 2017, www.annahar.com, and Fāya' āl Muṣīra 'Asīrī, "Al-'Āṣūf . . . Ḥarāk Ṭaqāfī!" *al-Makka*, April 27, 2018, <http://makkahnewspaper.com>.

19. For more on this issue and the scholarly arguments linked to it, see Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*, 15; "A Year After Curbing Its Power, the Saudi Religious Police Is Deemed Redundant by Many," *Arab News*, April 1, 2017, and Kareem Fahim, "Saudi Arabia's Once Powerful Conservatives Silenced by Reforms and Repression," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2018.

20. For an excellent discussion of Saudi religious scholars and their "savvy use" of technology and the media to broaden their influence in twenty-first-century Saudi Arabia, see Ismail's *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*, especially chap. 1, 25–26.

21. Deborah Wheeler, *Digital Resistance in the Middle East: New Media Activism in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2.

22. Two examples are Arwa al-Neami's *Never, Never Land* and Manal al-Dowayan's *The Choice*. Another Saudi artist who has explored these themes is Sarah Abu Abdallah.

23. Fahad Albutairi, for instance, had over 3 million followers on Twitter, and Malek Nejer has nearly 1.3 million followers on Twitter. Fahad Albutairi (@Fahad), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Fahad> and Malek Nejer (@nejer), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/nejer?lang=en>.

24. Manal al-Dowayan, Abdunasser Gharem, and Ahmed Mater have stated that they have “strong backing from members of the Saudi ruling family.” Aya Batrawy, “Saudi Artists Cautiously Push Against Red Lines,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 4, 2014.

25. Malek Nejer tweeted on September 26, 2017, that he had personally met with the prince ten months earlier and discussed a variety of reforms. Malek Nejer (@nejer), “Qābaltu Walīy al-‘Ahd qablu 10 ašhur wa aḡabarnā biašyā’ kaḡīra, waq-tahā ḡarajtu ‘alā Twitter wa katabtu ‘anā mutafā’ il bi al-Mustaḡbal, fat’araḡat lihu-jūm salbī wa qāšī jiddan min al-Muḡaḡibīn,” Twitter, September 26, 2017, <https://twitter.com/Nejer/status/912762909855485954>.

26. Ahmed Mater, “CEO MiSK Art Institute,” LinkedIn, June 2018, www.linkedin.com/in/dr-ahmed-mater-ab594193/.

27. Fahad Albutairi (@Fahad), “Fahad Albutairi,” Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Fahad>.

28. In October 2018, Manal al-Sharif claimed that Albutairi had been expelled from Jordan and faced considerable pressure because of his marriage to Al-Hathloul. Manal al-Sharif, “Jamal Kashoggi’s Disappearance Spreads Fear Worldwide, but We Won’t Be Silenced,” *Washington Post*, October 8, 2018.

29. Heather Saul, “Saudi Women Jailed for Driving ‘Released from Prison’ After Two Months,” *Independent*, February 13, 2015, www.independent.co.uk; “Loujain al-Hathloul: Saudi Women’s Driving Activist Arrested,” *BBC News*, June 6, 2017, www.bbc.com.

30. Vaishnavi Vaidyanathan, “Women’s Rights Activists Arrested in Saudi Ahead of Lifting of Driving Ban,” *International Business Times*, May 19, 2018.

31. Manal al-Sharif, *Daring to Drive: A Saudi Woman’s Awakening* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 68–70, 107–108.

32. Alaa Wardi (@Alaa Wardi), “No Woman, No Drive,” YouTube, October 26, 2013, www.youtube.com.

33. Majed Alesa (@Majedalesa), “Hawājis,” YouTube, December 23, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rUn2j1hLOo.

34. For example, see “Trending: The Story Behind No Woman, No Drive,” *BBC Trending*, October 28, 2013, www.bbc.com, and Adam Taylor, “A Music Video Featuring Skateboarding Women Has Saudi Arabia Entranced,” *Washington Post*, January 3, 2017.

35. Majed Alesa, *Hawājis*.

36. See Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008); Karin Van Nieuwkerk, ed., *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); and Karin Van Nieuwkerk, Mark LeVine, and Martin Stokes, *Islam and Popular Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

37. Harold Entwistle, *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 72.

38. Christine Froula, “Ezra Pound and the Contemporary Literature of the Present, or Triptych Rome/London/Pisa,” in *Ezra Pound in the Present: Essays on Pound’s Contemporaneity*, ed. Paul Stasi, Josephine Park (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 151.

39. Douglas Coupland, *Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!* (New York: Atlas, 2010), 168.

40. Hrag Vartanian, "A Saudi Artist Hoists Flags at Standing Rock to Bring Attention to the Environmental Crisis," *Hyperallergic*, December 1, 2016, <https://hyperallergic.com>.

41. Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiii.

42. *Ibid.*, 34.

43. *Ibid.*, 137.

44. *Ibid.*, 42.

45. In her 2017 master's thesis, Brenda Campbell describes Ahmed Mater in terms that are similar to but different in one critical way from how I define Saudi rooted cosmopolitans. Although I agree with her that Mater draws on local and global forces in his work, I see no evidence—as she asserts—that he also employs individualism in his art. Brenda Campbell, "Contemporary Art of the Arabian Peninsula in a Globalized Art World" (master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2017), 58.

46. Saddeka Arebi, *Women and Writing in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16.

47. "Art Reviews: A Great Saudi Art Instillation, Suspended Together," *Mutant Space*, February 9, 2012.

48. Author in discussion with Rajaa al-Sanea, December 2013.

49. Ahmed Mater, "Ahmed Mātar: Al-Fann tajāwaz 'al-Kāma' . . . Al-Fannān al-al-Ān nāšit̄ siyāsī wa ijtimā' ī," interview with Turki al-Jundabi, *Al-Ḥayāt*, December 23, 2013, <https://bit.ly/2NDRMLT>.

50. LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*, 3.

51. Karin Van Nieuwkerk, Mark LeVine, and Martin Stokes, "Introduction," in *Islam and Popular Culture*, ed. Karin Van Nieuwkerk, Mark LeVine, and Martin Stokes (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016), 7.

52. Abdullah al-Arian, "Roundtable on Political Islam After the Uprisings," *Maydan: Politics and Society*, May 2, 2018, www.themaydan.com.

53. Van Nieuwkerk, LeVine, and Stokes, "Introduction," 14.

54. Thomas Hegghammer, "Introduction: What Is Jihad Culture and Why Should We Study It?" in *Jihadi Culture: The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*, ed. Thomas Hegghammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1.

55. Taghreed Almadani, "Death Threats for Saudi Satire Star Who Fights Islamic State with Laughs," *Reuters*, June 22, 2015, <http://reuters.com>.

56. Stephen Stapleton, "Border Crossing," in *Edge of Arabia*, ed. Stephen Stapleton and Edward Booth-Clibborn (London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2012), 23.

57. While writing this book, I benefited from the insights of two leading scholars of Saudi *fatāwā* and the country's clerical elite—namely, Raihan Ismail and Muhammad al-Atawneh.

58. For instance, see Bakr Abu Zayd, Salih al-Fawzan, 'Abdul-'Aziz Al al-Shaykh, and 'Abdul-'Aziz ibn 'Abdullah ibn Baz, "Fatwa no. 19933" (part no. 1, page no. 323), *Fatwas of the Permanent Committee*, group 2, vol. 1: *'Aqidah, Taswir, Making and Buying Cartoons*, <http://bit.ly/2bUbWQ0>; and 'Abdullah ibn Qa'ud, 'Abdullah ibn Ghudayyan, 'Abdul-Razzaq 'Afify, and 'Abdul-'Aziz ibn 'Abdullah ibn Baz, "What Is the Islamic Position on Sculpture, Classical Paintings, and Abstract Art?" (part no. 1, page no. 696), *Fatwas of the Permanent Committee*, group 1, vol. 1: *'Aqidah (1), Creeds, Taswir, Sculpture, Classical Paintings, and Abstract Art*, <http://bit.ly/2c3uf8F>.

59. Ken Klippenstein, "The Insane Gifts Saudi Arabia Gave President Trump," *Daily Beast*, September 4, 2017, www.thedailybeast.com.

60. Batrawy, "Saudi Artists Cautiously Push Against Red Lines."

61. Recent examples of this literature include Justin Gengler, *Group Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf: Rethinking the Rentier State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Calvert Jones, *Bedouins into Bourgeois: Remaking Citizens for Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jocelyn Sage Mitchell and Justin Gengler, “A Hard Test of Individual Heterogeneity in Response Scale Usage: Evidence from Qatar,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, August 29, 2016; and Jocelyn Sage Mitchell and Justin Gengler, “What Money Can’t Buy: Wealth, Inequality, and Economic Satisfaction in the Rentier State,” *Political Research Quarterly*, May 30, 2018: 1–15.

62. Mohamed Zayani, *Networked Publics and Digital Contention: The Politics of Everyday Life in Tunisia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.

63. *Ibid.*

64. In understanding Saudi Arabia’s Twittersphere, I have benefited from conversations with Geoffrey Martin, a PhD student at the University of Toronto, whose ongoing field research in Kuwait has dealt with the influence of Twitter and other social media on social movements in the country and the Gulf. For a recent example of his work, see Geoffrey Martin, “Researching Twitter,” in *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Jannie A. Clark and Francesco Cavatorta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 218–232.

65. Sean Yom, *From Resilience to Revolution: How Foreign Interventions Destabilize the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 5.

66. Sylvia Westall and Angus McDowall, “Saudi Arabia’s Rulers Adapt Message for Social Media Age,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2016, <https://reuters.com>.

67. Nada M. Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 154.

68. For instance, Noah Feldman, in a 2012 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, noted that the United Arab Emirates is “next-door to Wahhabi, art-despising Saudi Arabia.” Noah Feldman, “Taking It to the Street,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2012.

69. Ahmed Mater, “Symbolic Cities,” lecture, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC, March 20, 2016.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, and Ahmed Mater, “A Conversation with Ahmed Mater, Co-Founder of Edge of Arabia,” interview by James Scarborough, *Huffpost*, July 21, 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com.

72. For examples of this type of literature, see Frank Viviano, “Kingdom on Edge,” *National Geographic*, October 2003, or Karen Elliott House, *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, Past, Religion, Fault Lines—and Future* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

73. Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, trans. George Holoch (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6.

74. Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59.

75. F. Gregory Gause, *Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring*, Brookings Doha Analysis Paper (Doha, Qatar: Brookings Doha Center, 2013), 1.

76. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 6.

77. Two texts that have recently made this argument are: Bernard Haykel, Stéphane Lacroix, and Thomas Hegghammer, “Introduction,” *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, ed. Haykel, Lacroix, and Hegghammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–6, and David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

78. Examples of this literature are: Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats*; Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi’a Islam*; and Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*.

79. An example is Madawi al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics, and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

80. Two recent examples of this literature are: Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

81. This issue is central to a number of texts, including Paul Aarts and Carolien Roelants, *Saudi Arabia: A Kingdom in Peril* (London: Hurst, 2014).

82. Christopher Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (London: Hurst, 2012).

83. Loring M. Danforth, *Crossing the Kingdom: Portraits of Saudi Arabia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 89–111.

84. Robert Kluijver, *Contemporary Art in the Gulf Context and Perspectives* (self-published, 2013), www.sciencespo.fr/psia/sites/sciencespo.fr/psia/files/Contemporary%20Art%20in%20the%20Gulf%20for%20print.pdf.

85. For an excellent recent example of her work, see Namie Tsujigami, “A ‘Gender Backlash’ in the Midst of Globalization: The Dynamic of the ‘anti-Cedawīyāt’ in Contemporary Saudi Arabia,” *Global Studies Journal* 2, no. 4 (2009): 17–29; Namie Tsujigami, “Higher Education and the Changing Aspirations of Women in Saudi Arabia,” in *Higher Education Investment in the Arab States of the Gulf: Strategies for Excellence and Diversity*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf (Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press, 2017), 42–54; and Namie Tsujigami, “Stealth Revolution: Saudi Women’s Ongoing Social Battles,” in *Arab Women’s Activism and Socio-Political Transformation: Unfinished Gendered Revolutions*, ed. Sahar Khamis and Amel Mili (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 149–166.

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88. *Ibid.*, 11.

89. *Ibid.*, 10.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Ibid.*

92. LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam*; Van Nieuwkerk, ed., *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater*; and Van Nieuwkerk, LeVine, and Stokes, *Islam and Popular Culture*.

93. Van Nieuwkerk, LeVine, and Stokes, “Introduction,” 14.

94. For more on *tajdīd*, *iṣlāḥ*, and their role in the Wahhabi tradition, see John Esposito and Natana DeLong-Bas, “Seven: Modern Islam,” in *God’s Rule: The Politics of World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 160–165; DeLong-Bas, “The Origins of Wahhabism” in *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Modern Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7–40; and Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

95. James Harkness, translator’s introduction to *This Is Not a Pipe with Illustrations and Letters by René Magritte*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 4.

96. Jasmine Weber, “Major Arts Institutions Navigate Ties to Saudi Arabia After Disappearance of Journalist.” *Hyperallergic*, October 17, 2018, www.hyperallergic.com.

97. Author in conversation with Hisham Fageeh, Ali Kalthami, et al., September 2013.