

Islamic Charity and Royal NGOs in Jordan: The Role of Monarchial Institutions in its Balancing Act

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on royal NGOs for Islamic charity in Jordan, portraying them as NGOs with two wings, or two fundamental components, namely, Islam and welfare. Jordan is a country which has been hosting large numbers of refugees, from Palestine in earlier decades, from Iraq after the Iraqi War, and from Syria in recent years. The charitable bodies in Jordan giving them a helping hand have been formed both from the bottom by civilians and from above by the initiatives of royal family members. In modern times, providing welfare is one of the important functions of a nation-state to protect the social well-being of its citizens. The implementation of social welfare is a fundamental component of Islamic teachings and is still practiced by the people in its modern form, namely NGOs. The NGOs in existing literatures are by definition non-governmental, and largely secular, and, therefore, the category of “royal NGOs” in Jordan presents a new type of faith-based NGOs. As a monarchial state, there are both royal and civil initiatives for providing charity in Jordan. The role of royal institutions in Jordanian society is not only an important source of welfare but also a clear representation of the benevolence that Islam teaches to Muslims. Under popular demands for better living conditions in Jordan in recent decades, royal NGOs have been trying to improve the welfare of its citizens, while they also seek to coordinate with local collective civil organizations. In the realm of Islam and welfare, both civil and royal charity associations underpin Jordan’s host community.

Keywords: *Islam, Islamic Charity, Civil Society, royal NGO, Jordan, refugees*

1. Introduction

One of the defining characteristics of Jordan is the large proportion of refugees and citizens of refugee-origin among its population. It is estimated that sixty to seventy percent of its population is of Palestinian ancestry. Moreover, it has accommodated a substantial number of refugees from Iraq in the years after 2003 Iraq War, and continues to host a large number of Syrian refugees due to the crisis in that country over a protracted period of more than 7 years.

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According to the 2018 UNHCR report, Jordan is the second largest refugee-hosting country after Lebanon compared to its population, with 89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants¹. Due to this situation refugee relief aid has been flowing into Jordan from all over the world. There has always been a group of people in need, in other words, there have always been grounds for charitable work in Jordan.

Another characteristic of Jordan is its political status. Jordan is a hereditary monarchy and the ruling Hashemite family are the direct descendants of Prophet Mohammad. One of the principal characteristics of monarchies in the Arab world is the weakness of their established political parties. Therefore, opposition to the regime in Jordan has only appeared through a number of civil organizations. Jordanians have been living under martial law since 1967, so the formation of its civil society has been limited for a long time, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood. This condition was eased after the social unrest and public protests against government corruption in 1989. As a result, Jordan started to initiate programs of political and economic liberalization, and new non-governmental organizations (NGO) were founded. Their numbers continued to increase, although these formations remain depoliticized and circumscribed by the realities of continued state power and control (Wiktorowicz 2002; 77).

Again in 2011, when the Arab Spring swept through the region, there were several massive street protests against the government and the monarchy itself, though none of them escalated to aim at overturning the regime. This makes Jordan an interesting example as a country where the traditional monarchy has survived the Arab Uprisings, and still remains in control in spite of continuous popular demands. The demand for political reforms in 2011 occurred under the pressure of an influx of Syrian refugees, which is still continuing to this day. The increasing refugee population puts a lot of strain on the host community both economically and socially, and triggers more demands for political reform. However, Jordan as a monarchy still continues to bear all these difficulties.

While investigating refugee relief organizations in Jordan, the author noticed that a number of royal NGOs have been functioning satisfactorily. However, most of the previous researches on NGOs tend to view NGOs as formal grassroots associations, and as mechanisms for collective empowerment, as well as a factor and an agent to drive democratization (Wiktorowicz 2002; 77). Thus, the most popular approach for analyzing NGOs is to examine their socioeconomic impact or to consider them as a leading body for the democratization process. Moreover, NGO studies in Jordan often focus on Islamic characteristics and tend to concentrate on the Muslim Brotherhood organizations (Clarke 2004; Harmsen 2008; Wiktorowicz 2001). Other studies focus on the Islamic values among them and describe how the workers are motivated by their faith in Islam (Harmsen 2008; Petersen and Jung 2014). In those works, so-called "Islamic charity" was picked up as a phenomenon in Jordanian society after economic and political liberalization, which is seen mostly at the grassroots level and also at a transnational level (Petersen 2016; Benthall 2016).

Two important questions arise: 'What are royal NGOs in Jordan?' and: 'What are their roles in the Jordanian society?' To answer these two questions, this paper looks at royal organizations with charity as a key issue and examines the interactions between government institutions and collective civil organizations in distributing social benefits, by analyzing various social structures from mosques to charitable organizations that seek to support the host community in Jordan.

In order to deal with the two questions posed above, this paper will look into the condition of NGO's in Jordan in general, and then locate the royal NGOs among them. This investigation is divided into the following three sections. Section 2 explains the theoretical background for dealing with Islamic charity and royal organizations in Jordan. In Section 3, Islamic charity is analyzed from both the contexts of traditional backgrounds and social-political formations of modern times. In the Section 4, royal NGOs are analyzed by examining their roles in Jordanian society. Then finally, in the conclusion, we will attempt to answer the above questions.

¹ Jordan Times, *Jordan second largest refugee host worldwide- UNHCR*.

2. Condition of NGOs in Jordan

(1) Theoretical Background

Civil society is an inclusive norm consisting of citizens' formal and informal associations, including NGOs. NGOs, which are collectively defined as a form of "non-profit sector", tend to be considered as some of the organizations "engaged in the promotion of economic and social development, typically at the grass-roots level" (Salamon and Anheier 1992; 125). In Jordan, there is a parliamentary system under the political system in which the king is the permanent head of the state, but as yet political parties' formation has been substantially limited. In this situation, the formation of NGOs and their activities are a key factor in determining whether Jordan's civil society is functioning or not. On the other hand, many royal NGOs which are sponsored by royal family members have been created.

Since 2011, several protests have been seen, following in the wind of the so called "Arab Uprising" blowing from Tunisia. More recently, in June 2018, there were also large protests against a new tax law. On several occasions, people in Jordan went out into the streets and raised their voices against the government's policy. It is said that the protests in 2018 were composed of youth groups, as well as thirty-three of Jordan's professional associations and civil society groups nationwide². It is clear that civil society organizations, rather than political parties, are the major source of protest against the government.

The literature on NGOs is often mentioned in discourses regarding Islamic movements, mostly those that closely examine the Muslim Brotherhood. The main argument stands on how a monarchical system strengthens its power by tightening its grip on civilians' activities by enacting restrictive laws and regulations, preventing them from engaging in political activities (Wiktorowicz 2000; 2001). Another way to examine the civil society is to depict it as an actor reinforcing democratization according to western countries' expectations (Ibrahim 1995; Yom 2005). Both approaches show only a one-sided image of the civil society's situation in Jordan, namely how it is regulated by the regime or how it plays a role in the democratization process.

As this paper focuses on charitable bodies, research on charitable NGOs in Jordan in which their Islamic character is featured has been increasing recently (Hasselbarth 2014; Petersen 2016). Their favoritism in choosing recipients, unfairness, and lack of transparency of money flow are often pointed out. Furthermore, especially after the 9/11 terror attack in the United States, those Islamic charitable organizations started to be seen as terrorists' groups or funding bodies to armed groups (Petersen 2012; 2016). By the globally shared norm of humanitarianism, charitable NGOs ought to be fair and transparent. However, Islamic NGOs are often criticized for not fully meeting internationally accepted standards.

There are also several researches which provide details on how the royal family is involved in civilian society in Jordan. First of all, this article defines "royal NGOs" as organizations which are initiated by royal family members. Brand calls them RONGOs as they are almost governmental organizations with royal patronage (Brand 1998: 171). In other literature, Petersen and Jung states that "(I)n general, royal NGOs are highly professional organizations, chaired by members of the royal family and typically engaged in mainstream developmental activities of various kinds, including community development, women's empowerment, children's rights, and microfinance programs (Jung and Petersen 2014: 292-293)". Their existence in Jordanian society is prominent in the field they work in, so that it is necessary to deal with them separately from regular NGOs in Jordan. They are also unique in terms of registration as they are free to cooperate and receive funds from international donors as private societies with state-relationship (Jung and Petersen 2014: 293). In regard to these features of royal NGOs, many tried to highlight their royal features by emphasizing how they regulate civil society

² "Jordan protests: what you should know", *Al-Jazeera*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/jordan-protests-180604052840527.html>, accessed on October 18, 2018.

from above. In the process, Wiktorowicz calls this feature “civil society infiltration”, in which both royal and governmental NGOs are tools for the regime to control the civil society (Wiktorowicz 2002: 78). They are portrayed with regard to the regime's strategy of maintaining its stability as an “authoritarian monarchy”. Most of these organizations were founded during the 1970s to 1980s when Jordan was under martial law. These royal NGOs seem to have been expanding even after political and economic liberalization in 1989, which will be mentioned later in Section 4.

These analyses of civil society in Jordan are one way to deal with NGOs, either as a potential body to accelerate the democratization process or as a target for the regime to control the nation. Another way is to focus on their Islamic features. Royal NGOs are separately discussed as a means for the state to control the society and to preserve the stability of the state itself. These views, however, ignore the fact that these NGOs are established for charity's sake. Before asking if they serve the monarchy's political goals, we should examine the actual activities of these NGOs and determine if they conform to their officially stated goals. In other words, we will examine how they try to combine both aspects of Islamic charitable and royal organizations as a pair of wings composed of two elements; Islamic charity and welfare. Both sides have Islamic features providing for Muslims' Islamic obligations, which are also organized as a state authorized social welfare system.

(2) Formation of Civil Society in Jordan

Jordan embarked on an ambitious process of political and economic liberalization in 1989. The first election after the liberalization process was held in 1989 after more than fifty years³, and also the civil society has flourished since then. When the first election revealed that the party formed by the Muslim Brotherhood made an impressive showing at the polls, this influence spread to the civil society level. The representatives of certain professional associations were elected from members of the Muslim Brotherhood and a student association of the Muslim Brotherhood was established. Another feature in 1989 was the increasing formation of family associations (*Jam 'iyāt 'alīyāt*) (Baylouny 2010: 93). These associations were started by mainly Jordanians with Palestine origin in order to rebuild their lives after their refugee experiences. Moreover, at this time societies of a new type began to flourish, such as those targeted to work for environmental issues, human rights and so on.

The main type of civil organizations in Jordan consists of those engaging in charitable work. In Jordan, all voluntary organizations are required to register with the government. The Law 33 passed in 1966 defines voluntary societies and organizations as being comprised of at least seven individuals who have come together “to provide social services without any intention of financial gain or any other personal gain, including political gain” (Wiktorowicz 2002: 116). The recent data from ICNL (The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law⁴) shows that there were 5,108 civil society organizations registered at the Ministry of Social Development in 2016⁵.

The formation of civil society organizations boomed after 1989 under the political liberalization even though it was limited and still is (Wiktorowicz 2000: 86; Baylouny 2010: 100). Moreover, NGOs addressing Islamic values in various ways have been formed in the process of the winning of the Muslim Brotherhood party in the newly operated election (Sparre and Petersen 2007: 21; Wiktorowicz 2002; 85)⁶. It is difficult to distinguish or define NGOs' characters as secular or Islamic, though in the fieldwork conducted through 2011 to 2018 by the author, it seems that there are many NGOs that have Islamic values in their core aims, principals and motivations, both related and unrelated to the Muslim

³ During the time of British control and after its independence, Jordan operated formal electoral politics, until when King Hussein suspended full elections and announced that political parties would be banned in 1957. It is described that the period from 1951 to 1958 was marked by significant liberalization when opposition parties won 65% of the seats (Schwedler 2006: 39-40).

⁴ ICNL: <http://www.icnl.org>, accessed November 19, 2018.

⁵ Civil Freedom Monitor: Jordan by ICNL <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/jordan.html>, accessed October 18, 2018.

⁶ Wiktorowicz states that Islamic NGOs numbered 49 in 1995, which is just 6% of overall numbers, however, he doesn't define what is Islamic (Wiktorowicz 2002; 85).

Brotherhood. Though, it is difficult to clearly distinguish them as secular or Islamic, we should consider the composition of the population in Jordan, of which more than 90% are Sunni Muslims, and therefore, culturally Islamic in one way or another. In other words, NGOs are composed of Muslims and support the Muslim community by forming NGOs.

Even after the Arab Spring when we saw thousands of demonstrations and many constitutional amendments, Jordan's political scene looks much like it did before the Arab Spring (Yom 2017: 127). Yom continues that “the kingship and its government still dictate all major policy stances, and the security apparatus continues to loom over civic life with overarching authority” (Yom 2017: 127-128). In the protest of 2011, many Jordanians, regardless of their religious affiliation, gathered on the streets to express their hostility towards the monarchy and demanded changes. In the process, political opposition has grown larger and more coordinated to call on the regime for greater democracy (Ryan 2011: 368). This democratization process is still on its journey and the goal is unknown; that is to continue as a “hybrid regime”⁷ or change to a constitutional monarchy.

Whatever option the regime takes, the greater number of charitable societies won't play any important role in the process, as these are essentially depoliticized and under governmental control. Jordan's numerous social charitable societies are firmly positioned as alms providers to the needy.

3. Charity as Having Two Wings, Islam and Welfare

(1) Traditional Context: Charity as an obligation in Islam

Charity as an action by individuals or groups has historically been a part of all religious traditions, and still is. The current contemporary aid organizations in many parts of the world are founded with religious origins (Bornstein and Redfield 2011). In the Muslim societies, there has historically been a wide variety of charitable work, either as customary or obligatory acts for Muslims. Charity itself is understood as a right, privilege, grant or gift, as intended by the Arabic term '*sadaqa*'. Singer states that “both the moral and religious explanations of charity and the philological discussion consider charity from two perspectives, that of the donor and that of the recipient” (Singer 2008: 4). He continues that “on the one hand, charity is a gift or grant required by law; on the other hand, charity represents a right of the poor or a just claim on the community” (Singer 2008: 4)⁸. In Islam, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth provide a common core of textual references for all Muslims, lead by Islamic Sharī'ia law; fiqh. So charity in Islam is considered by the donor and recipient linkage, prescribed by the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, and ruled by fiqh.

Charity in Islam has several types. Zakāt for example is one of the five pillars of Islam, entailing the giving of a percentage of an individual's wealth to the poor. Zakāt derives from the verb *zakka* which means to purify; usually the traditional proportion required is one-fortieth of one's assets per year (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 9). There is also an annual requirement on everyone to pay a small zakāt al-fitr to the needy at the end of Ramadān (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 9). Another type is called sadaqa. This is a personal form of charity or voluntary beneficent giving. Another aspect is Waqf, which is a form of endowment. Islamic buildings such as mosques, madrasas (schools), and tombs were constructed and supported by waqf, as the large foundations. It is said that waqf took a central role in Islamic societies, seen in their influence on wide sectors such as religious practice, social interaction, cultural transmission, aesthetic production, political legitimation, economic organization, and the physical structure of towns and villages (Singer 2008: 91). Waqf institutions are the most visible evidence of charity in its public form in Islamic societies.

⁷ In the analysis of the 2003 election in Jordan, “Hybrid Regime” is mentioned (Ryan and Schwedler 2004).

⁸ Singer uses the Arabic words zakāt and sadaqa in his book by translating the first as “obligatory alms” and the second as either “charity”, “philanthropy”, or “beneficence” (Singer 2008: 20).

All the above three forms of charity work are for the needy, the poor, and for the Muslim society in general. In addition to these three forms, there are several terms which are linked to other concepts. One found in pre-Islamic Arabic writings is *karam*, which means generosity, and another is *diyāfa* which means hospitality. Both were important and valued characteristics in the Arab world before Islam spread in the region. It is said that “generosity and hospitality were deep rooted in the habits and customs of the inhabitants of the desert and they are still regarded as dominant and absolute values among the Arabs” (Arnaout 1987: 13). In the region where Islam was born, the climate is arid and hot with a severe scarcity of water resources. In these arid conditions, oasis cities played an important role for human life especially by providing traders, travelers and pilgrims with a place to gather, rest, and restock provisions. The city was the center of all types of commodities in the arid zone.

Due to the arid climate and ecological features where Islam was born, Islamic ethics are much reflected in the obligatory allocation of zakāt for travelers, public protection of caravanserais, and so on. Even today in the twenty-first century, these ecological features in the arid zone have not dramatically changed from the ancient times, even the infrastructures and technology that were developed which made it easier for people to move around. Those ethics and Islamic values in charity are inherited by Arabs even when their surrounding environment changes.

(2) Modern context: Welfare system within Government

Providing welfare, which protects the social well-being of the citizens, is one of the most important functions of a nation-state in modern times. The welfare function may differ in each country, offering health care, free education, public assistance programs, and so on, but it is common sense that the state has an obligation to provide its citizens with physical and economic security.

In the contemporary Muslim world, the major charitable system of zakāt has become a state-welfare system under governmental control. In Jordan the Zakāt Fund, which manages zakāt distribution, was established in 1978. The Zakāt Fund possesses around 170 zakāt committees (Lajna Zakāt) mostly attached to mosques (Sparre and Petersen 2007: 29). In addition, there are many governmental organizations engaged in charitable work. Since Jordan has been under martial law for a long period, civil society organizations which engage in social welfare are limited, however there are many royal institutions that were created to support society by engaging in various social services.

After the 1980s, Jordan's economy boomed due to remittances from the Palestinian diaspora mainly from Gulf countries, and investment by Lebanese whom moved from Lebanon due to the Lebanese civil war. The Jordanian government itself started to proceed with development plans to fight poverty issues. One of the projects was the rehabilitation of illegal settlements. This project is related to Jordan's rapid urbanization due to an influx of refugees in 1967 from West Bank caused by the third Middle Eastern War. Many of the Palestinian refugees reside in cities such as the capital, Amman, or the northern city of Irbid. To ease the situation, Jordan started to establish its own funds for receiving foreign aid, which can now be seen as a variety of royal NGOs. These were dominant in society at that time in Jordan, and quickly became the major source for social service institutions. It is important to note here that these royal NGOs are set up by the initiative of royal family members. Under martial law, the organic formation of civil organizations from the society itself was impossible. These royal NGOs also became the main gate for foreign aid to enter the country, which lead to Jordan's development.

The major royal NGOs set up from the 1970s until today include funds and foundations as the Table 1 shows.

Table. 1 Major Royal NGOs in the charitable field in Jordan

Name	Year	Activity	Centers
Young Muslim Women's Association	1972	Education	1 Center for Special Education and 1 College
Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD)	1977	Community Development, Education, Empowering Local Governance	51 Community Development Centers in 12 Governorates
Noor Al-Hussein Foundation	1985	Community Development, Health Care, Micro Credit Company (Tamweelcom)	1 Jordan Micro Credit Company, 1 Institute for Family Health, 1 Community Center (in Aqaba)
The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO)	1990	Education, Community Development, Empowering Local Governance, Women's / Youth Empowerment	1 Head Office, 2 Charity Clothing Banks, 2 Warehouses
Jordan River Foundation	1995	Community Empowerment, Child Safety	1 Head Office, 1 Showroom, 1 Family and Child Center, 1 Community Empowerment Center
King Hussein Foundation	1999	Education, Cultural Development, Micro Credit Company (Ethmar for Islamic Finance)	International Headquarter (in New York, USA), 4 Institutes and Centers (including 1 School), 1 Jordan Micro Credit Company
King Hussein Cancer Foundation	2001	Health Care (Cancer patients)	International Headquarter (in DC, USA), 1 Cancer Center, 1 Head Office
Tkiyet Um Ali	2003	Hunger eradication	1 Head Office
Queen Rania Foundation	2013	Education	3 Foundation (including Jordan River Foundation), 1 Teaching Academy, 1 Museum, 2 Initiatives

Source: Author

For example, the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), the oldest and largest non-profit royal NGO, was established in 1977. It has fifty-one community development centers throughout Jordan, working to promote rights-based, sustainable human development in Jordan⁹. Another is the Noor Al-Hussein Foundation (NHF) established in 1985 by the initiative of Queen Noor. It operates in various fields for sustainable development in the country and the region. The most well-known charitable body is the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) established in 1990, which is now the main body in Jordan working for humanitarian issues. It aims to provide Arab and Islamic relief, not only in Jordan but all over the world. The Jordan River Foundation (JRF) established in 1995 by the initiative of Queen Rania is also a big royal NGO which focuses on child safety and community empowerment. These royal NGOs continue to operate in the major civil society till today. Through these royal NGOs, the government has proceeded with national development projects by obtaining foreign investment.

The regime has kept the civil organizations in Jordan depoliticized, while they themselves have created royal NGOs as mentioned above. Royal NGOs are headed by members of the Hashemite royal family. The regime's strategy of civil society control includes its tight administrative oversight and regulation designed to maintain a depoliticized civic community; the state infiltrates civil society

⁹ Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development <http://www.johud.org.jo/WhoWeAre>, accessed on November 20, 2018.

through regime sponsored organizations Royal NGOs and zakāt committees, the administration of mosques, and centralization through the General Union of Voluntary Societies which coordinates all civic activities in the Kingdom. It is a means of providing welfare in a unique way. This form of social welfare system through royal sponsored NGOs and other royal / regime led institutions supports Jordanian society both from above and below.

4. Two-Sided Institutions in Charitable Work

(1) Islamic Charity as the Social Welfare Network

In Islam, to give a helping hand to the needy is obligatory and highly recommended, as represented by zakāt and sadaqa. There are three types of charitable body in Jordan; one is the Zakāt Fund which was mentioned in Section 3 under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, another is civil societies that mainly collect zakāt and sadaqa to distribute to the people in need, and the third is royal NGOs which are a part of civil society, although their size in terms of budget and resources is huge compared to the grassroots ones. In this section, the function of the second and third types is analyzed as Islamic charity.

There are countless charitable civil society organizations in Jordan. The most well-known one is Jam‘īyā Markaz al-Islāmīya al-Khayrīya (Islamic Charity Center Society, ICCS) established in 1963 by the Muslim Brotherhood “which has a long history of cordial interactions with the royal family” (Wiktorowicz 2002: 85). It is one of the exceptions established under the time of martial law, enabling it to play an active role in the society. It owns community centers in all the governorates of Jordan, working in various fields from cash and goods distribution to managing hospitals and universities. Its values and ideology are undoubtedly Islamic (Hammad 1997: 191), providing orphan care, iftār meals to the community during Ramadān, and managing Qur’ān schools.

Other Islamic charities which have been mentioned in previous research are for example, al-Afaf Charitable Society, al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah, Takāful and many more (Wiktorowicz and Farouki 2000; UNHCR 2014). The important point to note here is that the definition of what is “Islamic” is vague and difficult to clarify. For example, Wiktorowicz and Farouki point out that an Islamic NGO is a ubiquitous institution which is a non-profit, grassroots, voluntary society that provides basic goods and services to the community “in a manner Islamists deem consistent with Islamic values and practices” (Wiktorowicz and Farouki 2000; 686). The report of UNHCR, which analyses Gulf donors’ impact on Syrian refugee assistance, also categorizes all the above-mentioned local NGOs as “Islamic charities” without a clear definition.

Considering that the Jordanian society mainly consists of Muslims, it means that while most of the NGOs in Jordan are formed by Muslims in Jordanian society, those NGOs cannot be completely distinguished as secular or Islamic. There must be a gray zone, and their level of religiosity must differ from one to another, so that it is unwise to determine them as Islamic without resolving the components they claim. The common features of Islamic charitable NGOs, however, are that they mostly care about orphans and run Qur’ān schools. These Islamic NGOs are grassroots organizations working closely with the local community, sharing the Islamic values which both the NGO workers and the local people possess.

In the case of East Amman for example, in the district of Ḥayy Nazzāl, several local NGOs are operating. These are charitable organizations that manage zakāt and sadaqa, giving assistance to those in need. In addition, the zakāt committee works with local volunteers to help the vulnerable in the community. Their office is located beside the main local mosque, and operates two health clinics and a hospital. The zakāt committee is one of the biggest in Jordan, in terms of budget size. The oldest social charitable body in Jordanian civil society, ICCS run by the Muslim Brotherhood, also operates in Ḥayy Nazzāl. Its center is called Markaz Abī Hurayra li-ri‘āya al-iytām (Abū Hurayra Center for Orphan

Care) and it is well known in the community as it has been operating since 1987. Its main work is caring for orphans and supporting the vulnerable by providing them with cash and basic necessities.

Another example is Jam‘īya al-Moḥsinīn al-Khayrīya (Moḥsinīn Charity Center) which was established in 2009. Since it started to operate a Qur’ān school for Syrian orphans in 2016, its activities have been developing each year. There are countless charitable civil societies in the region, helping people in need including Jordanians and Syrians, and the significance of their Islamic values varies from one to another. At the grassroots level, these local charitable bodies provide social welfare to both Jordanians and refugees, functioning as social welfare network.

(2) Royal Charity with Two Sides

Another type of charitable body in Jordan is royal NGOs. The above mentioned JOHUD is working in the humanitarian sector closely coordinating with the United Nations in the case of Syrian refugees. The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization for Relief and Development (JHCO) established in 1990 is another, one of the largest royal charitable bodies in Jordan which provides humanitarian assistance not only in Jordan but all over the world. In its vision, it clearly states that the JHCO is for “Arab and Islamic Relief”. It also does charitable work for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As descendants of Prophet Muhammad, and as the guardians of Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the JHCO stands with Palestinians¹⁰.

In the 2000s, some new royal NGOs were set up in Jordan. One of the major examples is the King Hussein Cancer Foundation established in 2001, which operates a medical center to combat cancer and raise awareness on early detection and prevention. Its advisements for fundraising to save cancer patients are seen all over Jordan and it offers advanced treatments for sufferers. It is also one of the institutions appealing for medical tourism¹¹, receiving patients from neighboring countries. Another example is Tkiyet Um Ali (TUA, Takīya Umm ‘Alī) established in 2003, which provides hot meals for the poor. It states that “TUA is inspired by the Islamic concept of providing food for the underprivileged and assuming social responsibility for all those who are less fortunate”¹². Its donation boxes are located in various places all over Jordan. There is also The Hashemite Fund for Development of Jordan Badia which was established in 2003 by the initiative of King Abdullah II. It targets the southern part of Jordan where mostly trans-Jordanians live and aims to improve their socio-economic conditions. As such it is more of a development fund.

While the demand for democratization was not seen in the streets till 2011, the economic situation in Jordan had been severely depressed for a long period as the unemployment rate had risen to about 14%, and many young people had difficulty finding jobs. This situation worsened after 2007 when the big wave of the world economic crisis reached Jordan. The Iraqi war started in 2003 and the influx of Iraqis of relatively middle-class status also impacted both the Jordanian economy and its society. The Jordanian government's solution was to privatize state companies, which had a somewhat positive impact with boosted performance and the creation of jobs for Jordanians¹³. The setting up of royal NGOs’ was another attempt by the government to tackle social reform. These provided a wide range of social welfare from medical care and food distribution to human resources development.

Additionally, JHCO and TUA both mentioned Islam in their core values. It may be to legitimize their existence, as well as the royal family itself, as both were initiated by royal family members who are directly descended from Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, whether proclaiming Islamic values or

¹⁰ In the realm of political policy, Jordan faces the reality of maintaining a good relationship with the United States as well as with Israel by upholding the Peace Treaty.

¹¹ The King Hussein Cancer Foundation recently has signed a memorandum of understanding with a company for medical tourism in Jordan, for further promotion of medical tourism to the Kingdom.
<http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/king-hussein-cancer-foundation-partners-medx-jordan>, accessed on December 18, 2018.

¹² Tkiyet Um Ali <https://www.tua.jo/concept-commencement1>, accessed on November 11, 2018.

¹³ “Evaluating the government’s privatization programme”,
Jordan/Economy <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/evaluating-government’s-privatisation-programme>, December 10, 2018.

not, royal NGOs have to be run according to Islamic principles, as they are sponsored by the prophet's descendants.

In March 2014, JHCO was confirmed by the Cabinet to coordinate with local charity organizations by issuing the statement that it was “the sole entity authorized to receiving and collect in kind aids coming from local charity organizations and international societies and organizations” (UNHCR 2014; 34). Its purpose is to supervise aid programs concerning Syrian refugees. Currently, JHCO coordinates with twenty-one organizations, including other royal NGOs, professional associations, and civil society organizations. The list of coordinated organizations includes Jam‘īya al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah which is mentioned as “a network affiliated with Salafists” (Hasselbarth 2014: 9). It seems that royal NGOs have tried more to connect with local communities by developing their network through charitable bodies. During the month of Ramadān, a large number of food packages made by TUA can be seen, distributed by local charitable bodies such as Jam‘īya al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah and Jam‘īya al-Moḥsinīn al-Khayrīya. Royal NGOs and local charitable bodies coordinate with each other in various ways on different levels. Moreover, as one of the governmental and Islamic institutions, the Zakāt committee is the major charitable body which mobilizes citizens as volunteers.

5. Conclusion

In Jordan, charity is led by both civil and royal initiated collective associations. It is important to note that both are positioned as non-governmental organizations, which enables royal NGOs to shape themselves independently, to be official-like partners with the international humanitarian community, and at the same time to answer demands of its citizens at the grassroots level. In reality, the fact that royal NGOs are set up on the initiative of royal family members largely reflects the governmental aim to either intervene or support Jordanian society from above. By examining its features, this paper has pointed out that the royal NGOs themselves sensitively attempt to show the royal regime's legitimacy through their two-sided work, charity and welfare, by expressing its Islamic value and coordinating their activities with local organizations. Their fields range widely from humanitarian relief, community empowerment, to cancer patients' care and many others. In addition, the Zakāt committee as a governmental charitable institution is the major source of providing social welfare to its citizens. These organizations are all situated in the realm of both Islam and welfare and reflect Islamic values whether they clearly state so or not, as they are run in the name of the prophet's descendants. Therefore we can state that their role in the Jordanian society is primarily to provide welfare, thus fulfilling the ruler's Shari'a obligation while legitimatizing the monarchy itself. At the same time, they regulate the civil society by coordinating and supervising civil organizations.

This paper reveals the unique environment of the Jordanian civil society. Moreover, as demonstrated in this paper, while local charitable NGOs are working widely at the grassroots level to provide assistance to both Jordanians and refugees, royal NGOs are mostly set up for charity and social welfare, where the conditions peculiar to a monarchial political system in general, and peculiar to Jordan's economic and social conditions in these decades in particular, have helped these NGOs to flourish alongside the ordinary NGOs commonly found in non-monarchial countries. With this qualification, this author proposes that “royal NGOs” should be considered as a unique type of non-governmental welfare organization. This author further suggests that as charity in Islam has a long history of being sustained by the people, rather than the government, the future trend of welfare in the Islamic world ought to be reconsidered as a new type of welfare state.

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