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Public and private spaces in Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century

In the first half of the twentieth century, the most important market road in Jeddah, known today as Sūq al-ʿAlawi, led pilgrims from the harbour in the west to the Mecca Gate in the east. The regular stream of pilgrims made this street the most lucrative location for shop owners, especially where it intersected the city’s north–south axis, Sūq al-Nadā (Krause 1991). Historical photographs of the market area in Jeddah show shopkeepers sitting or standing next to the entrance of their shops, displaying some of their stock on the street in front of them, and ambulant merchants selling their goods on wagons, trays or mats on the ground. One can see a steady stream of people passing by the shops in the early twentieth century: customers looking at goods on display and negotiating prices with salesmen, porters carrying large baskets or sacks on their heads, donkey drivers, camel riders and heavily loaded water sellers, as well as residents and workers trying to find their way through the crowd (Figure 2.1). Women, however, are almost completely absent in photographs of the streets and markets in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jeddah.

In the past, observations such as these led Western scholars of the Middle East to the conclusion that cities in Muslim contexts were characterised by a clear physical separation of the private domestic sphere from the public realm, and that women in these cities were excluded from the public sphere (recently, e.g. Ammann 2004; Wirth 2000). This argument has been challenged by a generation of feminist scholars since the 1980s, yet the impression that women in gender-segregated Muslim contexts do not participate in public life and are confined, more or less, to the private, domestic realm lingers in public discourse. It is based upon two Eurocentric assumptions: first, that publics convene only in public spaces, while residential buildings are essentially private; and second,
that gender segregation restricts the movements and freedoms only of women. This chapter looks into the relationship between public and private spaces in the city of Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that the architecture in Jeddah did not provide fixed boundaries between public outdoor and private interior spaces, but helped in the constitution of gendered publics both inside and outside the home. The division between the public and private realms was immensely important, demanding that men and women alike strictly observed gender-specific rules of conduct.

The chapter begins with a stroll through the city, moving eastward from the harbour to the bazaar area, the mosques and the open spaces in the city centre. The fictional walk through the old city then continues inside the typical tower houses, starting on the ground floor and moving up the stairs all the way to the roof terraces. Looking deeper into questions of gender, such as the one touched upon above concerning the visibility or invisibility of women in certain places, this survey of the city is divided into four sections. Investigating public and private spaces in a particular city, especially a city in the Middle East, requires a critical reflection on the concepts of public and private, which is provided
in the next two sections: the first deals with the problem of translating the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ into Arabic, and the second discusses the meaning of these concepts in the local context under scrutiny. Applying the analytical categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ to the observations from the survey of the city, the last two sections in this chapter offer a synthesis of the preceding parts, with the first being dedicated to private spaces and the second to different forms of public space in Jeddah in the past.

From the harbour to the bazaar: Topography of a trading town

Until the middle of the twentieth century, most merchants, pilgrims and other travellers arrived in Jeddah by boat (Sanger 1954: 11). Their first view of the city was a cluster of white houses of different sizes, enclosed by a wall. On land, travellers first had to pass through the customs house and a health check in the maritime health office (Figure 2.2). These facilities were situated on the shore among a row of other official buildings: the quarantine station, the post office and, further north in a building known as Bait al-Baghdadi, the Foreign Office (al-Ḥārithī 2003/4: 233–5; Manāʿ 2011: 30, 97; Ṭarābulst 2008: 159–60). Behind these buildings was an open space where petty traders and Bedouin sold their goods (Figure 2.3). Traversing the square along a dirt road, travellers came to the western city gate, known as Bāb al-Bahhr (Gate of the Sea) or Bāb al-Bunt (Harbour Gate). The gate opened onto Qābil Street, the widest street in town and, since its modernisation in the Hashemite era (1916–25), one of the city’s major market streets (Figure 2.4; Ṭarābulst 2008: 235). Qābil Street was bordered by a large mosque, named Masjīd al-ʿUkash, in the north. South of Qābil Street was a lively bazaar area known as al-Sūq al-Kabīr, the ‘Large Market’ (Manāʿ 2011: 211–50; Ṭarābulst 2008: 236–7). At its eastern end, Qābil Street was intersected by Sūq al-Nadā, the city’s main north–south axis.

Instead of diving into the bustle of the bazaar, most visitors would first look for a place to stay in a quieter area. Having crossed Sūq al-Nadā, they would continue eastward along the extension of Qābil Street, called Sūq al-ʿAlawī, and probably ask for lodging in a caravanserai. Offering ample space for commodities, caravanserais were used particularly by merchants. They were often strategically located close to city gates or along the main street of Jeddah (Burckhardt 1829: 44; Ṭarābulst 2008: 241–4). An increasing number of modern hotels have replaced them since the 1940s.
constructed beginning in 1950, pilgrims and other travellers often found lodging in private homes. The city’s economy depended heavily on the pilgrimage, and the accommodation of pilgrims was one way for the inhabitants of Jeddah to profit from the annual flow of people through the city. Pilgrimage guides (mutawwifān, sing. muṭawwif, also referred to as wukalā, sing. wakīl = agent) rented additional rooms, sometimes entire buildings, if their own houses did not offer enough space to accommodate customers (Ma‘ānī 2008: 72–6; Ṭarābulṣī 2008: 173, 620). Some

Figure 2.2  The customs house, photographed from an arriving boat, 1926. Photo: van Voorthuysen. © Leiden University Libraries, C.S. Hurgronje collection (Or. 12.288 B: 10).
Figure 2.3  View of the town and an open space behind the customs house, around 1900. Unknown photographer. © Leiden University Libraries, C.S. Hurgronje collection (Or. 26.365: 12).

Figure 2.4  Al-Qābil Street, with al-ʿUkāsh Mosque to the left and al-Miʿmār Mosque in the background (centre). View from the terrace of the post office, 1918. Photo: Charles Winckelsen. © bpk / Ministère de la Culture – Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais.
pilgrims, Africans for the most part, slept on the streets (Manāʾ 2008: 75; Sanger 1954: 11).

Sūq al-ʿAlawī was the east–west artery of Jeddah (Manāʾ 2011: 143). Sloping uphill towards the east, it led pilgrims and travellers through the city to Bāb Makka, the Mecca Gate. The street divided Jeddah into two northern and two southern quarters. The former were Ḥārat al-Shām in the northwest and Ḥārat al-Mażlūm in the northeast, the latter Ḥārat al-Baḥr facing the sea and Ḥārat al-Yaman to the southeast. Rathjens and von Wissmann (1947: 77) indicate Sūq al-ʿAlawī and some adjacent streets as the city’s main market area.

**Places of encounter: mosques, open spaces and coffeehouses**

In the first half of the twentieth century, seven major mosques and an undefined number of small prayer houses existed in Jeddah. All available sources indicate that Masjid al-Shāfiʿī in al-Mażlūm quarter is the oldest of the existing mosques. Built around the middle of the thirteenth century, Masjid al-Shāfiʿī seems to have ceased to be the city’s only central Friday mosque in the course of the centuries, as foreign and domestic merchants as well as different Ottoman governors often funded the construction or extension of other mosques (Krause 1991: 52–3; cf. Pesce 1976: 120; Sijeeni 1995: 74–5; Țarabulsī 2008: 287–97). In principle, a mosque is open to every Muslim, and believers often simply choose the nearest mosque to pray in. Before the Saudi–Wahhabi conquest, however, adherents of the various Muslim schools and sects used different mosques and spaces to conduct their respective rituals. Maurice Tamisier (1840: 78–9), for example, reports that Sufi dervishes used to gather and sing for three to four hours in the Sulṭān Ḥasan Mosque (also known as Masjid al-Bāsha, or Pasha Mosque) during pilgrimage season. Charles Didier (1857: 136) mentions Sufi gatherings with music and singing in the house next to the one in which he resided in al-Shām quarter. It may have been one of the many Sufi zaqwīyas, places where Sufis conducted their collective rituals (Țarabulsī 2008: 298–9), or a gathering of Sufis at home. Sufism was – and still is – a widespread phenomenon in the Ḥijāz, and many ‘ulama’ (Muslim scholars) and other notables adhered to a Sufi convent (ṭarīqa). Under the rule of King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (1926–53), many zaqwīyas were destroyed and numerous Sufi shaykhs left the Kingdom or moved to areas where Wahhabi influence was weaker. Others,
however, stayed in the Hijāz, adopting less visible ways to perform their rituals (Sedgwick 1997: 360–1).

Apart from serving religious purposes – daily prayer, Friday sermons, Sufi rituals, etc. – mosques were also important places of sociability. For many residents of Jeddah, the neighbourhood mosque was the primary place to meet friends and acquaintances (Sijeeni 1995: 152–61; Ṭarābulstä 2008: 304). In the evening after prayer, men would sit together chatting and exchanging news in front of the mosque or in other open spaces in the streets. Some of these spaces, called barḥa (pl. barḥat), were just a widening of the street, large enough to set up a mirkāz, a group of benches for the men to sit on (Figure 2.5). The larger ones, like Barḥat al-ʿAidarūs in al-Yaman quarter, extended over the facades of several houses. Children used to play on a barḥa close to their home while their fathers, grandfathers or uncles sitting in front of the house could keep an eye on them. On special occasions, such as weddings or the Eid festivals, music was played and a dance called mizmār was performed on the squares (Figure 2.6). The mizmār, danced by men with wooden sticks, was seen as a competitive display of manhood, usually carried

Figure 2.5  Open space with a sitting area next to al-Bāšā Mosque in Ḥārat al-Shām, 1918. Photo: Charles Winckelsen. © bpk / Ministère de la Culture – Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais.
out in a playful way but sometimes causing violent clashes between rival groups (Freitag 2016a). During the two main festivities in the Muslim calendar, the Eid al-Adha towards the end of the hajj and the Eid al-Fitr at the end of the fast of Ramadan, wings for children were set up in some of the larger squares.

In every city quarter, several cafes (maqāḥti, sing. maqḥā) offering coffee, tea and water pipes provided shaded areas for sitting down,
meeting friends and socialising (Figure 2.7). The cafes were furnished with high wooden seats and benches made of local materials such as dūm-tree, palm leaves and rope. Customers were for the most part regulars who all knew each other. They were often of the same profession and used these informal meetings at the end of their workday to discuss news and make collective decisions pertaining to their business (Manāʿ 2008: 45–50; Ṭarābulūsī 2008: 196–202). Another large portion of a cafe’s customers were residents of the neighbourhood. In his autobiography, ‘Abdullāh Manāʿ, a physician and journalist from Jeddah, states that he and his shilla (clique, or group of young men) visited Qahwat al-Yamānī in al-Baḥr quarter so frequently that for them it became ‘a centre of our everyday life’ (2008: 45). Women and children avoided the cafes. Like the daily gatherings in open squares, cafes were exclusively adult male spaces.

In historical photographs, men usually wear some sort of robe, or jacket and trousers. Most men, rich and poor alike, cover their head with a turban or cap. The only bare chest visible in any of the historical

Figure 2.7 Coffee house next to the Dutch consulate. Photo: van Voorthuysen 1926. © Leiden University Libraries, C.S. Hurgronje collection (Or. 12.288 B: 26).
photographs available to me belongs to an inmate of the local prison (Figure 2.8). The picture was taken on 9 May 1917 by Raphaël Savignac, a Dominican brother who travelled with the French military expedition to Saudi Arabia during the First World War. It shows a prison guard and two convicts who sit on the floor in an excruciating position, their arms and legs bound by strong iron bars. In pictures of slaves from the collection of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, one can see knees exposed. All other men, from the esteemed pilgrimage guides to shippers, donkey drivers, and water sellers, do not reveal naked parts of their body apart from the lower legs and feet, hands and head.

Visible, but unseen: Women and public space

My description of public spaces in Jeddah has thus far left out women. As mentioned above, they are almost completely absent from historical photographs of the city’s streets and markets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. There are only a few exceptions: Raphaël Savignac, the Dominican brother, took a snapshot of two fully veiled women in the street as they passed by (Figure 2.9). The shaky image stands in sharp
contrast to Savignac’s other photographs, suggesting that the picture was taken hastily, without a tripod. His travel journal reveals that he was aware of the fact that taking pictures of women was socially unacceptable. A few similarly discreet point-and-shoot images of women were taken by Charles Winckelsen, also a Frenchman, who visited Jeddah in 1918, and some more can be found in the collection of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, which spans the period from the mid-1880s to the 1930s (Freitag 2016b). The only women who look into the camera without hesitation or distress are black Africans from clearly poor social backgrounds. In one picture by Winckelsen, a young, barefoot woman dressed in rags, carrying a baby and a basket, can be seen; in another, a young woman with a baby on her back sits next to some fishing boats at the port, her dress revealing her shoulders, arms and the upper part of her back (Figure 2.10). A third picture, also by Winckelsen, shows a barefoot black woman with a baby leaning to a wall, her breast exposed. Some pictures of crowds taken from a distance are also available, with the photographers being able to operate unnoticed. With the exception of a few vendors of water, agricultural produce or homemade food, women do not feature (Figures 2.3, 2.4). The almost complete absence of women

![Figure 2.9](image)  Women in the street, 1917. Photo: Raphaël Savignac. © École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem.
in the latter pictures in particular indicates that women not only avoided to be photographed, but also to be seen in public.

A Ḥijāzī saying confirms this impression, stating that, ‘A woman leaves her house twice: she leaves her father’s house when she is married, and [she] leaves her husband’s house when she is buried.’ The author who cites this saying, Hisham Jomah, limits its scope, adding: ‘Women went out to visit relatives and parents but not for any sort of participation in public functions or entertainment’ (Jomah 1992: 231). Ideally speaking, in early twentieth-century Jeddah a woman’s place was inside the house, not outside (Altorki 1986: 55). The street was a place occupied by men, to be avoided by women of any but the lowest social strata.

Women from well-to-do families would not go to the market because shopkeepers or men sitting in the streets could have recognised them (Sijeeni 1995: 149). If their families could afford a servant or a slave, women would have him buy what they needed. Shopkeepers would also come to affluent households upon request, to allow women to choose from a selection of goods (Alireza 2002: 66–7). However, as mentioned by Hisham Jomah, women often left their homes in order to

Figure 2.10  Poor woman of African origin with a baby in the harbour, 1918. Photo: Charles Winckelsen. © bpk / Ministère de la Culture – Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais.
visit neighbours, friends and relatives, attend weddings and other festivities, or to go to the cemetery to pay their respects to the deceased (Didier 1857: 133; al-Shahrani 1992: 55). But whereas men spent much of their time lingering in the streets, women were only supposed to traverse public spaces, not to participate in the activities occurring there.

A distinction drawn by the ethnographer Michael Gilsenan (2008: chapter 8), between being seen and being visible, helps to explain women’s limited presence in, but not complete absence from, the public realm. Gilsenan (2008: 171–2) observes that women walking down one of the narrow paths in the Lebanese village where he conducted his fieldwork in the 1970s are ‘in the literal sense of the word visible. But they are not “seen”. … Men walk down the middle, women cling to the sides and walk fast. Neither gives any sign of seeing the other at all. The women are socially and for all practical purposes invisible’ (Gilsenan 2008: 172).

A very similar practice was common in Jeddah, as reported by Hisham Jomah (1992: 198), Mohammad al-Shahrani (1992: 55) and ʿAbbas al-Faḍlī (2010: 13). Adhering to this rule was not so much a matter of religiousness, as of social standing (cf. al-Rasheed 2013: 53–4). The two poor women with their children photographed by Winckelsen do not cover their faces, and one of them even has a naked shoulder. Their visibility indicated the low status of these women. Women at the other end of the social scale, such as the veiled ladies in Savignac’s snapshot, avoided being seen. Being photographed, even fully veiled, represented being seen, and this was intolerable to them.

Hisham Jomah describes the close link between women and home in the Ḥijāz in somewhat idealising terms. Most of a woman’s time, he writes, ‘was devoted to the family, and in what remained she was allowed no scope for any other vocation (even if maids or servants were employed). Her sphere was wholly in the home. It was her workshop, her vehicle of expression, but was never thought of as a confinement’ (Jomah 1992: 230–1). He does not mention that a considerable number of families were not able to conform to this ideal but depended on a woman’s income to make ends meet. ‘Abdullah Manā’s mother, for example, began working as a seamstress after her husband’s death. Even his grandmother had to earn some money to support the widow with her two sons. In one of the rooms of the family home she established a school for young girls whom she taught reading, writing and the Quran (Manā 2008: 21–23, 33). Women working in orphanages, doing laundry for other families or vending food in order to augment a scarce family income were quite common (Tarabulsī 2008: 308; al-Faḍlī 2010: 54).
If a woman was compelled to earn money, work inside the house was of higher esteem than any business in the street. Manāʿ (2008: 23) reports that, in times of severe financial straits, his grandmother sent him to a benevolent supporter of the family, who gave the child some money in return for a handful of empty bottles. As Manāʿ remembers it, this was an embarrassing experience, in spite of his young age. But it helped the family survive without making it necessary for the women to leave the house in order to earn money. A generation earlier, Manāʿ’s family had been better off: his grandfather, captain on a sanbāk in the harbour of Jeddah, owned two houses in Ḥārat al-Baḥr, several boats and a few slaves (Manāʿ 2008: 21–2). By avoiding any occupation that involved exposure to the public, Manāʿ’s mother and grandmother maintained the social distinction of the family in spite of their poverty. Rather than leaving the house and having to interact with men outside the family, they would rely on male relatives if necessary. If an adult male was not available, a child could serve as a messenger. In his memoirs, Manāʿ (2011: 37–40) recounts the story of a man refusing to pay his dues to the author’s mother. The widow sends her juvenile son to a man of some rank named Sulaymān Abū Dawūd, a friend of her deceased husband’s, in order to ask for help. Sulaymān promises to settle the problem and tells the boy to visit the cheater the following Friday. Manāʿ does what he is told, collects the money and brings it home. As a widow, Manāʿ’s mother was obviously able to fight for her rights and manage her economic affairs, which normally fell within the remit of a husband’s duties. Yet she did so by communicating through a chain of male agents, thus avoiding direct contact with a man to whom she was unrelated.

The social practice of women avoiding being seen also required men to actively avoid seeing women. In his memoirs from al-Nuzla al-Yamāniyya, a former village to the southeast of Jeddah, al-Faḏlī (2010: 13) recounts how men in al-Nuzla, as well as in Jeddah, looked in another direction when a woman passed by, so as not to disturb her. It was a matter of good conduct to feign not seeing a passing woman. Al-Shahrani relates this practice to a religious demand articulated in ‘Sūrat al-Nūr’ in the Quran:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except
what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers …

(Quran 24:30–1, quoted in al-Shahrani 1992: 55).  

An annual women’s carnival constitutes an exception from the general picture sketched out here, in which women were a rare sight in the streets of Jeddah. During the hajj season, when the streets of Jeddah were empty of men because they either temporarily worked in Mecca or performed the pilgrimage themselves, women dressed as men paraded through the city, playing drums and performing dances. For the four nights of the al-Qays carnival, those men remaining in the city risked becoming subject to mock songs or even a beating when they got in the parading women’s way (Freitag 2014). The al-Qays festival indicates that the concept of gender segregation did not generate a stable topography of permanently male or female places. Rather, it demanded that both men and women be constantly attentive to the rule that contact between unrelated men and women should be avoided, in the streets and, as we will see in the next section, inside homes.

**Residential architecture: One building, multiple functions**

While the streets and the market were, with the exception of the al-Qays festival, places occupied by men and avoided by women of a certain social standing, the houses, especially the upper floors, were associated with women and families. As I will show in the following pages, this did not entail a fixed spatial division between a male public sphere and a female private domain. Whereas women were excluded from male spaces of encounter outdoors, they convened inside the home and not outside to exchange news, discuss important affairs collectively, argue about right or wrong and celebrate. The home was hence not a strictly private space, nor was it reserved for women and family alone. As the centre of male social and commercial activity, the ground floors of houses in Jeddah were in fact designed to allow for the presence of unrelated men and strangers, unlike houses found in Syria, for example. How, then, was gender segregation achieved inside the house? Is it appropriate, after all, to speak of a division between the public and the private in Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century? And if so, what role did architecture play in maintaining the border between these spheres?
Most of the day, the front door of a residential building served as a symbolic threshold rather than as a physical barrier (Jomah 1992: 179–81, 229). The front door was often left open but few people who were not invited would attempt to enter the house. Marking the transition from the street to the interior of the house, the entrance was often emphasised with green colour applied to some of its features – the door, lintel or arch. Visitors would utter religious formulas of blessing upon crossing the threshold, such as ‘ma sha’ Allah (God’s will be done)’ (Jomah 1992: 179–81).

Many houses, especially the larger ones, had two entrances, one for men and their male guests and one for women (Jomah 1992: 61, 194; al-Shahrani 1992: 53). Entering a house via the main entrance, visitors found themselves in a reception hall, the dihlīz, with wooden benches attached to the walls. Next to the entrance hall was the maqʿad, that is the office and reception area of the head of the family (Figure 2.11). From his maqʿad the patriarch could watch over the entry and the way to the staircase. On the ground floor of larger houses there were other rooms beside the maqʿad which could be used to receive guests, or as storerooms, or as servants’ sleeping quarters (Pesce 1976: 118; Bokhari 1978: 183–4).

Figure 2.11  Ground floor office in the Dutch consulate in a typical old building, around 1900. Unknown photographer. © Leiden University Libraries, C.S. Hurgronje collection (Or. 26.365: 6).
Ground floors in the bazaar area accommodated retail shops. Unlike the *maqʿad* in a house in a residential quarter, a shop in a multi-storey building in the *sāq* was normally disconnected from the upper floors (Krause 1991: 53–6). During *hajj* season, rooms on the lower levels of residential buildings were rented to pilgrims (Anṣārī 1972: 183; Burckhardt 1829: 11; Rathjens and Wissmann 1947: 80–1). Some families temporarily gave up entire buildings or apartments on the lower floors of multi-storey houses to take in pilgrims. This practice was facilitated by the absence of many men during the *hajj*. For the duration of the *hajj*, the women, children and elderly people remaining in Jeddah withdrew to the upper floors of their houses or moved to the homes of relatives (Fadan 1983: 152–3; Manaʿ 2008: 19–20).

During evening hours, control of the entrance was transferred from the *maqʿad* inside to the *mirkāz* (gathering place) in front of the house (Figure 2.12. See al-Shahrani 1992: 55–6). The *mirkāz* consisted of sets of benches, most of which were made out of wood, while others

**Figure 2.12** A *mirkāz* next to an entrance and another one in an open space in front of a row of houses, around 1900. Unknown photographer. © Leiden University Libraries, C.S. Hurgronje collection (Or. 12.288 J: 28).
were part of the masonry of the building (Bokhari 1978: 175; Krause 1991: 50; Ṭabbulī 2008: 202). Sometimes referred to as an extension of the living room (majlis) in the street (Bokhari 1978: 175), these benches helped to maintain gender segregation: while male family members and their friends met in front of the house, women were able to socialise in the upstairs majlis (Jomah 1992: 61, 67, 193; al-Shahrani 1992: 55–6, 63–4). At a certain age, young men began to spend the evening hours sitting at their father’s side in his mirkaz, thus integrating into his network of friends. The mirkaz was seemingly open to everyone, but it was normally occupied by a group of regular visitors. For outsiders it would have felt inappropriate to take a seat among them. Although situated in the street, the mirkaz legally belonged to the owner of the house, because in Islamic law the immediate surroundings of the house, called al-fināʾ, count as the homeowner’s private property (Bokhari 1978: 175; al-Hathloul 1996: 94–102; Krause 1991: 50; Mortada 2003: 115).

Wealthy homeowners used their maqʿad or downstairs dīwān/majlis to receive guests on a regular basis, in some cases daily, thus providing another kind of platform of exchange for men. Particular salons (nādī ijtimaʿī, pl. nawādī ijtimaʿīyya), for example the ones of Sulaymān Qābil and ‘Abdullāh Ǧaghīr, were known to be regularly attended by eminent people – rich merchants and local notables. Others were dedicated to young men, who came there to chat and play dominoes. In every salon, guests were offered coffee, tea and water pipes, and in some even dinner, all at the host’s expense (Manāʾ 2011: 84, 107–8, 142; Ṭabbulī 2008: 265). Even prior to the establishment of the first electricity company in Jeddah in 1950/1 (Anṣārī 1982: 35), radios were set up and films were screened in the majlis of houses with individual power plants, for example in the Surratī house in al-Shām quarter (Manāʾ 2008: 41–2; 2011: 106–7). According to ‘Abdullāh Manāʾ’s memories of the 1950s, the maqʿid of houses such as the Surratī house, the Nāzīr house, the Bā Ṿājī house, the Lārī house, the Tūnisī house and the Shams house provided a forum for ‘a complete social network of men and male youths of a quarter to meet and gossip, explore the news of the day, and play games’ (2011: 107–8). The neighbourhood representative, known as shaykh al-hāra or ʿumda, occupied a special position within this network. The ʿumda was responsible for security in his quarter and mediated between families or individuals in cases of dispute. Therefore, his office was open to everyone who needed help or advice. Important neighbourhood affairs were discussed in his maqʿad by elders of the quarter or people concerned (Freitag 2016a; Manāʾ 2011: 184; Ṭabbulī 2008: 180–1). In sum, the
Ground floors of houses in Jeddah were open to guests and visitors who did not belong to the families residing in the buildings.

Whereas the entrance door constituted a symbolic threshold between the street and the house, an effective physical division between the reception hall and office on the ground floor and the residential space on the upper floor was achieved by a stairwell. Usually situated at the rear of the house, the stairwell led all the way up to the roof. Doors separating the stairs from each upstairs apartment regulated physical and visual access to the living rooms (Jomah 1992: 85, 89; King 1998: 50). While climbing up or down stairs, a man had to make himself conspicuous in order to avoid contact with female residents or visitors who were not mahram, i.e. close relatives. He would say ‘ṭarīq, tarīq [make way]!’ or ‘yalla, ṭarīq [hurry up, make way]!’ (personal communication with a former resident of an old building in Jeddah; see also Alireza 2002: 63; Jomah 1992: 199; al-Faḍlī 2010: 13–14).

Every upper floor contained one or more separate apartments, each of which was inhabited by a segment of the extended family. The residence pattern was patrilocal; that is, a married couple usually lived together with the husband’s family. In the patrilocal home in Jeddah, every married son shared an apartment with his wife and children (Altorki 1986: 30–2; Bokhari 1978: 184; Jomah 1992: 66). When a family grew and the building could no longer accommodate its members, it was often enlarged by constructing another apartment on top of the house, which was cheaper than acquiring another plot of land or a new building (Jomah 1992: 156–8). Sometimes neighbours negotiated an agreement which allowed an expanding family to build on top of a smaller building next door, resulting in horizontal extensions of an upper floor. Wealthy families bought larger homes or constructed ground-floor annexes and separate buildings to accommodate growing numbers of households within an extended family.

Each apartment in a typical residential building in Jeddah contained at least one large, prestigious reception room, the majlis. It was normally situated on the cooler side of the house and was airier than the other rooms due to large latticed bay windows, called rashān (pl. rawāshīn). The majlis was therefore a preferred living room and sleeping place. In addition, the apartments contained one or more smaller family rooms, called suffa and mu’akhkhir, a kitchen and a toilet (Bokhari 1978: 184; Jomah 1992: 66; Tarābulṣī 2008: 110). The rooms were not strictly limited to specific functions, but could serve various purposes at different times and occasions, such as eating, sleeping, household chores and receiving guests. Heavy, immobile furniture was rare in the first decades
of the twentieth century. People sat on cushions on the floor or in the alcove of a rashan and they slept on mattresses that were spread out in the evening and rolled up again and put aside in the morning (Fadan 1983: 148–51; Jomah 1992: 88; al-Mutawea 1987: 71–2).

Although the upper floors were normally the place where a family resided, the majlis was also used to receive visitors. During informal calls on neighbours, relatives and friends, or on the occasion of formal visits known as wuʿud, the family’s living quarters were regularly used to host female guests. For women, who were not supposed to meet and gather outside, access to the upper floors of other people’s houses was less restricted than for men (Jomah 1992: 193). Compared to women, men used an upstairs majlis to entertain guests relatively seldom because the presence of male visitors limited the freedom of movement of female family members. The rules of gender segregation required that family members of the opposite sex withdrew to different sections of the house when visitors were present (Jomah 1992: 199). Although men had other places to socialise, either downstairs or outside the home, trusted male guests were occasionally invited into the family domain as an indication of their closeness to the family. After having come to an agreement over a marriage, for example, a man was often allowed entry to the upper floors of his future wife’s family home (Jomah 1992: 175). In addition, particularly honourable guests were entertained upstairs.

ʿAbdullāh Manāʿ, again, provides us with an example of this practice. He remembers a dinner party that took place in the house where he lived with his mother and members of the extended family. As secretary of a local football team, his uncle, who lived on the third floor, had invited team members for dinner (Manāʿ 2008: 61). Due to the presence of the guests, the third floor became a space temporarily limited to men. As a child of 12 or 13 years, ʿAbdullāh Manāʿ was still associated more closely with the female sphere than with the social world of men (Manāʿ 2008: 19, 31). The poor boy was considered too young to join the dinner party and was not allowed to walk up to, nor greet or even look at the admired football stars.

The rooftops were used as terraces (khārijat, sing. khārija or khārja). They offered space to do household work, such as laundry and cooking, to gather and sleep during the hot summer months (Manāʿ 2008: 19–20), and for children to play. Protected from view with the help of perforated exterior walls or wooden fences, the terraces allowed residents, especially women, to be outside but within the domestic sphere (Eyuce n.d.: 27–9; Jomah 1992: 71–2).
In a comparative study of historical and contemporary houses in the Hijaz conducted in the early 1980s, a team of building researchers of King Abdulaziz University (KAU) Jeddah measured the proportion of openings in the facades of, among others, 14 old houses in the city. They found out that, on average, only one third (34 per cent) of the front of old buildings was constructed of solid stone (Eyuce n.d.: Appendices III–IV). Two thirds of a facade remained virtually open, covered only by splendidly ornate wooden lattices that were air-, light-, and sound-permeable and offered views (Figures 1.3, 1.5, 2.12). The wooden constructions of bay windows, referred to as ṭūshān, protruded about 60 cm into the street. Adding 60–80 cm for the thickness of the wall, the alcoves were approximately 1.20–1.40 m deep and over 2 m wide (Eyuce n.d.: 111–14; Greenlaw 1995: 21; Jomah 1992: 64). Before technological innovations rendered the ṭūshān useless, it fulfilled a variety of functions. It illuminated the interior without letting direct sunlight heat up the rooms, as screens and lattices shielded the large opening in the facade. Wind could enter the house through the unglazed opening and ascend the staircases to escape, allowing for a pleasant draft. Covered with carpets and cushions, a ṭūshān was a comfortable place to sit in or to sleep in at night. Furthermore, the lattices made it possible to look out of the house and even talk to people in the street or in the ṭūshān next door without being seen, which was particularly important for women (Bokhari 1978: 176, 180–1, 187–8; Eyuce n.d.: 34–9, 75–80; Fadan 1983: 56, 59; Jomah 1992: 54–5, 91–2). Hidden like this, mothers could supervise their children in the street without leaving the house themselves (al-Shahrani 1992: 52). ‘Abdullāh Manāʾ (2011: 153–4) recounts an anecdote which demonstrates the sound-permeability of the ṭūshān. In Manāʾ’s childhood, his neighbour, together with his son, would entertain children of the quarter with a puppet theatre in the open square in front of the house. At night, sitting in his own ṭūshān, Manāʾ could hear the father teaching his son puppet plays in the ṭūshān next door.

Together with the staircases at the rear of the house and, if available, the separate entrances, the latticed openings in a wall provided the local answer to the religious demand that women and unrelated (non-mahram) men should avoid visual contact. At the same time, they allowed the house’s inhabitants to communicate with the outside world. A person standing or sitting in the alcove of a ṭūshān had one foot inside the house and one in the street. The ṭūshān allowed a woman to stay dressed according to the rules of the house – i.e. she did not have to wear a veil – while she observed the activities outside and supervised her children in the street. To some extent, the ṭūshān can be regarded as
an extension of the living room into the street, just like the benches of a mirkaz in front of the house. And as much as the streets were primarily occupied by men, so that women avoided being seen outside, the upper floors of houses were the places where women socialised, which required that male visitors and family members alike were particularly attentive and did not disturb them there.

**Theoretical reflections (1): The problem of translation**

The rūshān, the mirkaz and the roof terrace enabled the inhabitants of a house to use the surfaces of the walls as floors, thus dissolving the phenomenological border between inside and outside. In addition, people associated with the outside world were allowed to enter the dihlīz and the maqʿad on the ground floor. Neighbours, customers, traders and pilgrims lodging downstairs transformed the ground floor into an almost public space. The reception of guests in the upstairs majlis further connected domestic space with the external world. Obviously, the residential house in Jeddah was not conceived as a strictly private space.

Does this mean that using the terms ‘privacy’ and ‘private/public space’ in a study of social life in Jeddah would be inappropriate? Trying to prevent a reading of my material that hinges on Western notions of publicness and privacy, I have so far largely avoided these terms in my description of Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century. In favour of an account that is closer to the way the city’s inhabitants spoke about their own built environment, I have turned to local terminology instead. Anthropologists and historians of the Middle East familiar with the political theory of the concepts of public and private sometimes find it difficult to apply these categories to societies where, at first glance, they do not seem to apply. Moreover, they feel uncomfortable with the apparently Eurocentric idea of transferring concepts deeply rooted in Western political thought to Middle Eastern societies – an act which risks failing to acknowledge the particularity of these societies.

There has not always been such reluctance to transfer these terms to a non-European context. Until recently, geographers and historians dedicated to the task of identifying structural similarities between cities in the Islamic world claimed that a clear separation of the private domestic sphere from the public realm was a key characteristic of the ‘Islamic City’ (see most recently Ammann 2004; Wirth 2000). A critical discussion of the Islamic City paradigm is provided in chapter 4. Suffice it to say here that such an unambiguous distinction cannot be maintained for...
Jeddah, and since the 1980s it has repeatedly been challenged for other cities as well.\textsuperscript{15}

Responding to a tendency in anthropology to apply Pierre Bourdieu’s (1979) model of the Algerian Kabyle house,\textsuperscript{16} which also involves a gendered private/public divide, to other contexts across the Middle East, Gabriele vom Bruck published an article entitled ‘A House Turned Inside Out: Inhabiting Space in a Yemeni City’ (1997). Based on her own fieldwork in Northern Yemen, mostly in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, vom Bruck casts doubt on the general validity of Bourdieu’s dichotomous model. In Northern Yemeni tower houses she discovered principles of spatial arrangement of social life which contradicted Bourdieu’s findings. As vom Bruck maintains, ‘rather than being rigidly compartmentalized, the meanings attached to the spatial domains of the house shift in accordance with the categories of people who occupy them’ (1997: 166). In other words, rules of behaviour depend less on whether people meet inside or outside the house, or in a specific part of the house, than on the social categories they belong to, such as male, female, mahram, non-mahram, trusted friend, stranger, old or young, high or low social status. In this respect, her interpretation seems to apply to early twentieth-century Jeddah as well.

Her observations lead vom Bruck to the conclusion that boundaries between the public and the private spheres in Northern Yemen ‘are inherently unstable, and they shift both inside and outside the house in accordance with the categories of people moving in space’ (vom Bruck 1997: 144). On that account, she not only calls the applicability of Bourdieu’s model outside Algeria into question (vom Bruck 1997: 152, 166) but also rejects the use of the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ in a cultural context such as the one she studies:\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{quote}
In the case I examine certain behavioural codes operate in all spatial domains – ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ – and they are always contextual. Whether they are observed or not depends on factors such as the categories of people who act within them and the moral evaluation of specific types of practice. Therefore, the ‘public’/‘private’ terminology carries little analytical weight.
\end{quote}

(vom Bruck 1997: 143)

Similarly, Suad Joseph argues that ‘[t]he public/private is an imagined divide which enables critical moves in law and social arrangements impacting citizenship, but does not correspond neatly with the lived experience of daily life in any state, Western or Southern’ (1997: 76).\textsuperscript{18}
However, the problem that lies at the core of these scholars’ reservations about these categories disappears if we do not equate public and private space with inside and outside or with physically defined localities, such as the house, street or marketplace. I want to suggest instead that we conceive of these spaces as variable products of social practice involving both people and artefacts. According to Martina Löw (2001: 153–7) and Doreen Massey (2005: 9–12, 119, 131–2), people do not move in space, as vom Bruck puts it, but rather belong to the elements that constitute space. This means, for example, that walls, doors, curtains etc. are not enough to turn a building into a private space. It could just as well be used as an office or for the assembly of a political party. In order for it to become a private space, whether continuously or temporarily, people have to use it as such, that is, keep other people out to remain undisturbed, screen certain bodily appearances and activities from view, do what they only want to do alone or with a limited number of persons with whom they share an intimate bond. On the other hand, a public does not necessarily assemble ‘in public’. The political circles of bourgeois men, literary salons and charity organisations of women prominent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe convened in the reception rooms of private homes. In spite of their location, these gatherings are often regarded as archetypes of a public sphere (cf. Habermas 1989; Ryan 1992; Fraser 1992: 113–18).

In physical terms, the boundaries of private space in early to mid-twentieth-century Jeddah, just as in Sanaa in the 1990s, were not fixed and cannot be localised easily because of the relatively high openness of buildings to strangers and the varying functions of rooms. With regard to the social dimension of space, however, the boundaries between public and private were well defined and, as far as the sources suggest, strictly respected. As we have seen, precise rules of who was allowed access to places and people at specific times of the day existed, and visual, verbal and physical contact was highly regulated according to these rules with the aid of architectural elements, clothes and social practice. The boundaries were drawn first and foremost in relation to the human body and depended on social status as well as on gender. By saying this, I do not mean to associate men with the public and women with the private sphere. Rather, my objective is to explore mutually exclusive gendered publics as well as conceptions of privacy that varied between men and women of different social strata.

Another reason for vom Bruck’s rejection of the categories ‘public’ and ‘private’ is that there are no Arabic terms corresponding directly to them (vom Bruck 1997: 143–4). Yet architects, urban planners and
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building archaeologists from Saudi Arabia as well as several of my non-specialist interlocutors are surprisingly at ease with these concepts. Either using the English term ‘privacy’ or the Arabic translation of it, *khuṣṣūṣiya* – a neologism based on the adjective *khaṣṣ* (in private property; particular) – they frequently describe privacy protection as a key principle in building design, urban layout and rules of behaviour in Jeddah and other Saudi cities (most recently: Gazzaz and Gazzaz 2019). They devote journal articles and theses to the question of how the relationship between public and private space has changed in their city or in Saudi Arabia in general over the course of the twentieth century. Most of these texts, some of them published, others unpublished, date to the 1980s and 1990s, a few of them to the 2000s.19 Prior to the 1980s, and hence also in the period discussed in this chapter, the concepts of public and private space have to be considered as largely unknown in Jeddah.

It is interesting to note that Saudi urbanists nevertheless consider privacy to be a genuinely Islamic concept. Moreover, they regard the urban structure and architecture in the old town of Jeddah – that is, in early twentieth-century Jeddah – as ideal in terms of Muslim conceptions of privacy and public space. In his doctoral thesis Fahad Mohammed al-Mutawea, for example, dedicates 14 pages to the subject of privacy in Islam (1987: 55–69). He claims that ‘Islam … has given much attention to the privacy of the family and the house, and the inside of the house is regarded as a sacred place which can be entered only by permission’ (al-Mutawea 1987: 56). Mohammed Eben Saleh speaks of a ‘religious and cultural imperative of privacy’ (2002: 516). He declares that ‘violating this privacy can be considered a crime in the Islamic sense’ (Eben Saleh 2002: 516). To give another example, Tawfiq Abu-Gazzeh published an article on the topic of ‘Privacy as the Basis of Architectural Planning in the Islamic Culture of Saudi Arabia’ (1996). In another article the same author asserts that, ‘[a]ccording to Islamic teachings, human behavior should be committed to respecting privacy’ (Abu-Gazzeh 1994: 56).

Abu-Gazzeh (1994) and other Saudi architects and urban planners maintain that private, semi-public and public spaces in the historical city of Jeddah were arranged according to Islamic principles. In their writings, they explore the ‘Impact of Islam on the built environment’ (al-Mutawea 1987: chapter 2.2) or ‘The Formation of the Muslim Urban Community and the Traditional Muslim City’ (Sijeeni 1995: chapter 2). The teachings of Islam, they argue, led to the emergence of a gradual transition from the private realm over various forms of semi-private or semi-public spaces to the more or less anonymous, public arena of the bazaar and the mosque.20
In order to substantiate the claim that the idea of privacy is deeply rooted in Islam, these authors quote from, or make reference to, the Quran and Hadith (the collection of sayings of the prophet Muhammad). They often refer to verses in ‘Sūrat al-Nūr’ 24:30–1, which I have already cited above (with reference to al-Shahrani 1992: 55), as well as another verse from the same sura (24:27): ‘O ye who believe enter no house other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them’ (e.g. Abu-Gazzeh 1996: 96; Jomah 1992: 197; Mortada 2003: 78–9; al-Mutawea 1987: 56; al-Nafea’ 2005: 48, 52). Quotations from the Hadith suggest that the prophet disapproved of anyone ‘who looks into a house without the occupants’ permission’, justifying even severe physical punishment of ‘intruders’ (al-Mutawea 1987: 56; al-Nafea’ 2005: 48, 56–7). The ‘hierarchy of open spaces’ – a phrase often used to label the varying degrees of accessibility of spaces in the city – is explained with sayings of the Prophet such as: ‘Avoid sitting in thoroughfares … but if you insist then you should respect the rights of thoroughfares … Avoid staring, do not create harm. Salute back to those who salute you, bid to honour and forbid dishonour’ (Abu-Gazzeh 1994: 56; Mortada 2003: 83; al-Shahrani 1992: 55). Such rules of behaviour in public, the architects and urban planners argue, shaped the appearance and the location of dihlīz, maqʿad and mirkāz.

In sum, for all these authors, the terminology of ‘public’ and ‘private’ does carry analytical weight, in contrast to vom Bruck’s conclusion quoted above. Although the terms are not used in the sense of a binary division between a public and a private domain, the concepts are useful for them to articulate the changes they observed in the environment of their hometown or country of origin. Taking these voices seriously – that is, listening to the residents’ own stories of cultural change in their hometown and not dismissing their use of the categories ‘public’ and ‘private’ as false adaptations – offers the opportunity to compare basic principles of social coexistence in Jeddah and other places, or in Jeddah in different periods. Moreover, relating the description of various places and institutions in Jeddah to the abstract and more general categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ allows one to study the local particularities of spatial organisation and to contextualise them within a wider frame of reference.

Since the authors quoted here already belong to a generation later than the one they write about, we are faced with a discourse that claims to reconstruct social practices and collective enunciations of the past. My attempt to analyse the conception of public and private space in Jeddah in the early twentieth century necessarily relies on these discursive
reconstructions. That being said, my own reconstruction of the past through non-contemporary sources need not be entirely disconnected from what residents of Jeddah experienced as their own reality. It is only important to note at this point that a substantial part of the information on which I base my account has been filtered by a layer of discourse with a marked tendency to idealise the past. A detailed discussion of the project behind this idealising discourse can be found in chapter 4, and its repercussions for the architecture of public and private spaces in Jeddah are dealt with in chapters 5 and 6.

One question raised by vom Bruck, among other researchers, remains to be answered: Are there any Arabic concepts corresponding to the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’? In order to situate the material from Jeddah presented here in the broader cultural and linguistic horizon, I will discuss this question in the next section.

Theoretical reflections (2): Approaches to public and private space in Arab-Muslim societies

A linguistic approach to notions of public and private space in Arabic has been presented by Ludwig Ammann (2004) in an article ambitiously titled ‘Privatsphäre und Öffentlichkeit in der muslimischen Zivilisation’ (‘Privacy and the Public Sphere in Muslim Civilization’). Ammann shows that Arabic expressions based on the roots ‘-m-m, ‘-m-m, j-m-‘ and j-m-h-r are close to Western concepts of the public sphere, which he defines as an ‘autonomous, open sphere of debate about the common good, situated between the official sphere of the state and the private realm’ (Ammann 2004: 75). Among the derivatives of these roots are terms and concepts like umma (community, nation), ‘āmm (common, general; accessible to all), jama‘a (community, congregation), ijma‘ al-umma (the consensus of the Muslim community) and jumhūriyya (republic, audience) (Ammann 2004: 80–3). Ammann (2004: 84–91) compares the meaning of ‘privacy’ to expressions derived from the Arabic roots kh-ṣ-ṣ, h-r-m, h-j-b and s-t-r. Derivatives of kh-ṣ-ṣ centre around individuality and private property, for example khāṣṣ = 1. special, particular, 2. in private property. Words derived from h-r-m are related to the vulnerability of bodies and places, for example haram = sacred space; ḥarām = forbidden, religious taboo; ĥurma = 1. integrity of the human body, 2. woman; ĥarām = 1. the interior of a building, 2. the sphere of women. The protection, covering and veiling of what is denoted by these terms is referred to by ḥajaba or satara, for example, derivatives of h-j-b and s-t-r which translate as covering,
screening, veiling or blocking. Ammann emphasises the religious dimension of the Arabic–Islamic concept of privacy, because the *shariʿa*, which Muslims regard as sacred law since it is based on the rulings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, protects the integrity of the human body (*hurma*) and the interior of the house (*ḥaram*) as well as the space of the women (*ḥarīm*) (Ammann 2004: 84–91, referring to Krawietz 1991: 278–80). If we define private space as a sphere to which outsiders have only limited access, a space that is withdrawn from the public and of no concern to a wider group of people, a space that is regarded as vulnerable and in need of protection by means of social norms, codified rules of behaviour and physical boundaries, we find all these aspects embraced by the Arabic semantic fields suggested by Ammann.21

Michael Cook (2000) was, to my knowledge, the first scholar to have produced a brief English account of notions of privacy in the Quran and Hadith. In a short passage in his long book on *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cook (2000: 80–2) mentions three different but complementary principles which jointly correspond to Western concepts of privacy. One centres around the prohibition of spying (*tajassus*), the second restricts actions that would dishonour a Muslim and the third secures the integrity of the home and protects it from intrusion. Owing to the overall subject of his study, Cook is primarily interested in respect for privacy as a principle that places a limit on the exhortation to believers to forbid wrong (*al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*). A similar, yet more comprehensive study of legal sources related to Muslim conceptions of privacy has been presented by Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2008: chapter 3) in a book entitled *The Right to Life, Security, Privacy and Ownership in Islam*. Apart from the themes addressed by Cook, Kamali deals with legal protection of private correspondence and confidential conversation as well as instructions in the Quran and the Sunna not to conceal other people’s nakedness, weaknesses and failings. Both Cook and Kamali provide an overview of the legal foundations on which Muslim conceptions of privacy are built, thus corroborating the claim made by Saudi architects that values corresponding to Western notions of privacy are embedded in an Islamic tradition. The question that remains, however, is how these values, rules and regulations are dealt with in a particular historical context.

This question has been addressed in an article by Eli Alshech (2004). Defining privacy briefly as the recognition and safeguarding of ‘a person’s need for a sphere immune from intrusion’ (2004: 293), Alshech
examines how Sunni scholars in the classical period of Islam interpreted the Quranic verses:

Oh you who believe! Do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission (tastaʾnisū) and greeted (tusallīmū) those in them: that is best for you, in order that you may remember. If you find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you, if you are asked to go back, go back, that makes for greater purity for yourselves (azkālakum), and God knows well all that you do. It is no fault on your part to enter buildings not used for living (ghayr maskūn), which serve some (other) use for you, and God has knowledge of what you reveal and what you conceal.

(Quran 24: 27–9, quoted in Alshech 2004: 294)

He discusses how authoritative scholars from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries (CE, i.e. first to seventh centuries AH) addressed the question of what exactly is to be protected from intrusion – houses occupied by people, specific groups of people themselves or people’s personal affairs, including their bodies, letters and conduct, be they inside a house or elsewhere. He shows that in the first two centuries of Islam, exegetes tended to defend a private sphere defined in terms of property rights and occupancy of buildings, whereas legal scholars from the third/ninth century on offered protection of private affairs independent of places, buildings and property rights. In contrast to their early classical antecedents, these scholars did not conceive of the house as such as an inviolable zone. It was rather people’s private affairs inside the domestic sphere which mattered. Alshech’s approach, which puts an emphasis on exegetical texts and legal rulings, does not reveal much about the changing modes of producing and protecting private space by means of physical boundaries and rules of behaviour. Nevertheless, his analysis clearly demonstrates that the verses in the Quran cited as fundamental to the establishment of an Islamic legal category of privacy have been interpreted in different ways at different times and that the conception of private space is subject to negotiation and change.

One of the rare case studies dedicated to the topic of privacy in an Islamic urban context has been conducted by Abraham Marcus (1986). In his inspiring article, he examines attitudes, norms and legal rulings related to ‘modesty, sexual morality, civility, respect, honor, and other prized values’ granting people a personal sphere of limited access for outsiders (Marcus 1986: 167). Marcus’s study is based on rich archival
sources produced by Aleppo’s Islamic law (ṣaḥīʿa) court in the mid-eighteenth century. A comparable corpus of material was not available to me. Still, Marcus’s approach provides useful analytical tools for my own work on Jeddah. Firstly, Marcus differentiates between the ideals of privacy which prevailed in Aleppo and the varying degrees to which townspeople of different financial and social backgrounds were able to meet them or to prioritise other values and social obligations (1986: 170–4). Secondly, he distinguishes between physical privacy and the privacy of information. He notes that the latter enjoyed far less legal protection and was only seen as an issue when knowledge of personal affairs threatened to cause severe damage to a family’s reputation (1986: 167, 174–8). By contrast, much attention in terms of legal and physical protection was given to bodily and domestic privacy (1986: 167–74), an observation that seems to hold true for early twentieth-century Jeddah as well. Marcus shows surprisingly little consideration for gender differences. In dealing with a society that creates sharp distinctions between the sexes, the question of how different notions of privacy applied to men and women certainly deserves more examination.

With regard to the public sphere, Armando Salvatore (2007) has explored institutions analogous to modern notions of publicness in different pre-modern societies, among them the early Islamic community. His aim is to develop a transcultural concept of the public sphere based on Habermas’s theory of communicative action. With the exception of jumhūriyya, Salvatore (2007: 140–1, 155–65) elaborates on the same concepts as Ammann, namely maslahā `āmma (common good/public weal), and ijma` al-umma (the consensus of the community of believers). He does not fail to note that, in practice, the idea of a unified will of the Muslim community remained an unachievable ideal (2007: 141). This observation leads him to analyse institutions dedicated to practical reasoning about maslahā `āmma, including the four Sunni legal schools (madhhīb, sing. madhhab), Sufi brotherhoods (ṭuruq, sing. ṭariqa), guilds, and pious endowments (awqāf, sing. waqf) in different stages of the early Islamic period (2007: 150–5). Salvatore convincingly extends Habermas’s model of the public sphere to an Islamic context, challenging the liberal-secular assumption that religion can and should be separated from the public sphere. The idea that religious beliefs, Islamic, Catholic or other, cannot be confined to the private realm and do not contradict the notion of a public sphere is intrinsic to his approach. Yet, like Habermas, he neither pays attention to any forms of exclusion from the institutions of the public sphere under scrutiny, nor does he take the role of women into account (for such criticism of Habermas, see e.g. Benhabib 1992a;
Fraser 1992; Ryan 1992). His argument implicitly supports the impression that any sort of public in Muslim societies was restricted to men. The same can be said about other publications with a similar objective, for example the volume edited by Hoexter, Eisenstadt and Levtzion (2002), which I do not summarise here for the sake of brevity.

The inherent gender blindness of these accounts is surprising in so far as feminist scholars of the Middle East since the 1980s have shown that women in various Muslim contexts were organised in formal and informal networks, had a rich public life and were not powerless at all (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1986, 1990; Chatty and Rabo 1997; Hale 1986; Hegland 1986; Joseph 1983; Peteet 1986). For twentieth-century Jeddah, for example, Altorki (1986) has shown that, although women were not organised in guilds or convents and did not occupy powerful offices such as that of a judge, they did have networks and regular gatherings quite similar to those of men. It would be a severe mistake to believe that the rules of social coexistence were not reproduced and renegotiated within women’s networks, discussions and decisions as well.

Women, however, are not the only category of people who do not feature in many analyses of Muslim publics. Critical studies in masculinity (e.g. Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb 2000) have drawn attention to the fact that not all men have the same access to power. Even in a patriarchal society there are some types of women who are more powerful than certain categories of men. Research following this line of thought is often informed by the concept of hegemonic masculinity developed by Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee (1985; see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; for a critique, see Demetriou 2001; Amar 2011). It is not my intention here to define what kind of men embodied hegemonic masculinity in Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century, but rather to ask who precisely had and who did not have access to various publics in Jeddah. A second question I want to raise is whether subjects excluded from those publics had the opportunity to constitute their own subaltern publics.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mapped the architectural framework of sociability in early twentieth-century Jeddah. I have subsequently argued that the categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are fruitful concepts for an analysis of the spatial arrangement of social life in a place like Jeddah, and I have elaborated on the premises upon which the use of these terms should build. In the remainder of this chapter I will connect the historiographic material to the theoretical discussion provided thereafter. The aim is to inquire into the local conception of public and private space in Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on the
material manifestations of and social practices related to these concepts. The analysis of private and public spaces will serve as a starting point for the trajectories I explore in the following chapters.

Privacy in an open house

Particularly illuminating with regard to the question of how privacy was previously constructed in Jeddah in terms of architecture and social practice is the Ph.D. thesis of Hisham Jomah (1992). It is based primarily on oral history, and therefore actually says more about the early twentieth than the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and is hence illuminating for the period investigated in this chapter. A sub-chapter is dedicated to the topic of ‘Privacy in the traditional Ḥedjāzī house’. Of particular importance in his analysis is the concept of haram. The upper floors of a building in Jeddah were referred to using this term, which Jomah in this context translates as ‘the most private quarters’ of a house. The haram was, as Jomah explains, ‘restricted to the men of the house and to the female members of the family. It was considered critically improper for other men to enter these areas’ (1992: 175). Jomah draws attention to the connection between the word haram and the holy city of Mecca, thus alluding to the religious connotations of this term: ‘the haram or inviolable zone which was first known in prehistoric Arabia to distinguish Makkah from other places became the term used to distinguish the most private quarters of the family in the Ḥedjāzī house’ (1992: 179). At a later point, he asserts that ‘[t]he sacredness of the Arab/Muslim house or haram (inviolable-zone) derives from the presence of women (harīm) within its walls’ (1992: 234).

As Eli Alshech (2004) convincingly argues, this generalising statement is hardly true for all periods and places in the Arab-Muslim world. In view of Jomah’s sources, which consist mainly of qualitative interviews with some of the last master builders in the old city of Jeddah alive at his time of writing, we can assume that his remarks are part of the discourse of around 1990 which linked local architecture and social practice of the early twentieth century to a specific interpretation of religious doctrine and moral standards. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 504), Jomah’s explanation reflects on the connection between a particular ‘machinic assemblage’ – the Hijāzī house – and ‘collective enunciations’ (i.e. religious concepts etc.) that are subject to change. The concept of privacy played an important role in Saudi architectural discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, as I will show in more detail.
in chapter 4. There I will also discuss the societal and political context of the discourse itself. What is of interest at this point is that Saudi architects and urban planners more or less univocally suggest that shielding household members, particularly females, from the view of outsiders was integral to the idea of privacy in Jeddah and other cities in the Ḥijāz (Abu-Gazzeh 1994: 56; Jomah 1992: 189, 195–6; Mortada 1992: 226–45; al-Mutawea 1987: 56).

In view of the relatively high openness of the buildings to strangers, a combination of architectural structures and social practice kept the movement of visitors from interfering with the family space (ḥaram) and unrelated men from disturbing the privacy of women (ḥarm; cf. Jomah 1992: 300). This interplay between artefacts and everyday practice constitutes what can be called the Ḥijāzi assemblage of privacy. Architectural elements included separate entrances, ground floors above street level, the design of the stairwell and screened and latticed windows. Furthermore, roof terraces and windows were positioned in such a way that residents were neither able to look into their neighbours’ houses nor be seen by their neighbours (Abu-Gazzeh 1994: 55–6; Jomah 1992: 134–5, 195–6; al-Mutawea 1987: 62). According to al-Mutawea (1987: 57–8) the house was separated into two spheres: rooms where male guests who were considered to be non-maḥram and in principle entitled to marry female members of the family were received; and areas reserved for family, especially women and their guests, as well as male relatives considered to be maḥram, that is not entitled to marry a female family member. Jomah notes several exceptions to this gender division within the house. Men were often allowed entrance to the more private upper parts of their future father-in-law’s house. In addition, the upstairs majlis could, as mentioned above, temporarily be turned into a space of exclusively male visitors (Jomah 1992: 193, 199). The division of the upper floors into separate sections with multi-functional living rooms enabled the reception of guests, who brought the social conditions of public space into the home, while privacy was maintained in other parts of the house.

Everyday practices protecting private space included social control, such as control of the house entrance and passage to the stairs by the head of the family from his maq’ad (office) or from the mirkaz. As we have seen, private space was neither congruent with the boundaries of the house nor fixed to a space within the house. Yet numerous rules of behaviour determined who had access to places and specific categories of people at particular times of the day. Rules which ensured that the private sphere was not violated included that women avoided being seen in public, that visitors knocked on the door before entering a house and men
made themselves heard while climbing the stairs. Jomah describes how the relationship between family and guest determined where the guest was received: ‘the closer one was to the family occupying the house, the deeper and the higher one was allowed inside it’ (1992: 175). Following this rule, the host signalled whether or not a threshold was allowed to be crossed and where the guest should settle. Coughing or making similar sounds at the doorstep, for example, alerted female household members of the need to evacuate the majlis and indicated to the visitor that he was to be admitted into the respective room as soon as it was vacant (Jomah 1992: 192). Children and family members falling into the category of maḥram often communicated between male visitors and female household members. Even within the extended family, different rules of interaction applied depending on the respective kinship relationship between a male and a female family member. In the presence of her grandfathers, her father, her brothers, her sons, her grandsons and her own husband, a woman did not wear the veil, but she was usually veiled before grown-up male in-laws (Altorki 1986: 36).

Within the home, privacy could have variable meanings. For Marianne Alireza, an American woman married to a Saudi, who spent the years between 1945 and 1957 in Jeddah, this was quite unusual. In her memoirs she writes:

If we had privacy it was a changing state with different definitions at different times – qualified as single or conjugal privacy, a privacy among various combinations of souls inhabiting the house; or it could be called privacy when we all came at one time in a gathering of all men, women, children within the compound, sitting together, eating together, talking together, playing together. Sometimes, of course, we seemed at such times more like a club that meets once a month with nothing better to do than read the minutes of the last meeting, but that was no doubt because of the way we rotated in different circles most of the day and only came together to share the oneness of family when other activities let us.

(Alireza 2002: 151–2)

Alireza lived together with her husband’s extended family in a newly built home of the early 1940s. Although the building was constructed out of new materials – concrete and glass – the social custom she describes in this passage seems to be the same as the one practised in the old town. A conjugal couple in an old building used to have some privacy because of architecturally separated residential units on each floor, but limits
to a couple’s and, even more so, to an individual’s privacy were set by shared entrances, a shared stairwell and shared roof terraces. In addition, collective activities of either men or women of different generations and sometimes, as mentioned by Alireza, of the entire household took precedence over individual or conjugal seclusion. Hardly any household member enjoyed unrestricted freedom of movement. Women, and to a lesser extent men of the younger generation, were not allowed to leave the house without permission. A married woman had to ask her husband or her mother-in-law for permission if she wanted to go out to make visits or attend celebrations at a friend’s home. For young men, rules were less strict, but they were expected to be at home at certain times of the day (Altorki 1986: 33–4, 55). Women were sometimes able to circumvent the obligation to seek permission and went out without their husband’s knowledge. A husband’s authority was thus never total (Altorki 1986: 55–6, 61). Nevertheless, the overall impression prevails that individual autonomy, especially of women, was fairly restricted.

The walls and gratings of the residential building in Jeddah and the social practice connected to it protected first and foremost the privacy of the extended family as a whole. Privacy was not defined as the autonomous sphere of an individual, but rather as a collective space sheltering members of a household from visual and physical contact with strangers. The categories of people present in a setting, not the architecture itself, determined whether a space was considered to be private or public. A combination of architectural elements and social practice helped secure the boundaries between public and private spaces, which were set differently at different times. Always dependent on the relationship between people present in a place, the limits of private space were maintained both inside and outside the house. While much emphasis was placed on shielding bodies from view and on the regulation of physical access to people, the permeability of walls to sound did not seem to pose a problem. The close proximity of neighbouring houses and the large latticed openings in the facades hardly prevented the spread of sounds between buildings or from a building to the street.

All the authors dealing with the topic of privacy in the Ḥijāz tend to ignore the fact that a significant number of men and women were excluded from the rules and norms described thus far, either because they could not afford a lifestyle that conformed to the ideals of privacy or because they were denied the right to maintain a personal private space. According to the travel report by Heinrich von Maltzan, travellers seeking ‘inexpensive lodgings and lewd temptations’ had to go to the settlements of huts outside the city gates, where prostitution was ‘exceedingly well...
represented’ (von Maltzan 1873: 47). Prostitutes apparently received customers in their own dwellings (see also Burckhardt 1829: 9). Not only were these women visible in public to a greater degree than women of higher social standing, but their homes were also not conceived as shelters protecting inhabitants from the view of outsiders. Furthermore, prostitutes were not able to follow the rules of the integrity of the body (al-hurma) as defined by Islamic law (Krawietz 1991).

A second group of people for whom the general rules of privacy did not apply were slaves. Enslaved men and women usually lived in the houses of their owners, but their sleeping quarters, purportedly on the ground floors (Bokhari 1978: 183–4; Pesce 1976: 118), are not marked in any of the ground plans of old houses produced by architects and building archaeologists since the 1980s. Rooms on the ground floor are labelled diwān/majlis/maqʿ ad, dihlīz or entrance hall, and khazzāna or storage, for example. This is not just because the existence of slaves was omitted by these authors. Slaves simply did not have a space of their own. Although none of the rooms – except for the maqʿ ad of the household’s patriarch – were reserved for any single family member, slaves must have been intruded upon very regularly, because their lodgings were not protected by the rules of behaviour that regulated access to free men and women.

The rules of gender segregation demanded that slaves recruited to help with household chores in order to reduce the workload of free women had to be female (Altorki 1986: 31). Whereas male servants were not supposed to see their mistresses, female slaves were not hidden from their masters’ sight. Considering slaves as property, the law allowed slaveholders to have sex with them, even without their consent (Toledano 1998: 72–3; Toledano 2007: 83–7, 101). Writing about slavery in the Ottoman Middle East, Ehud Toledano reminds us of the fact that the legal conditions for married women were not very different – neither in the Ottoman Empire nor in other pre-modern societies, where arranged marriage was common and conjugal rape not prohibited (2007: 83–4, 167). In contrast to married women who were subject to sexual abuse and ill-treatment, however, slaves, who were deported from their place of origin, could not take refuge with their own family. Measured against the values and norms discussed above, the privacy of prostitutes and slaves in Jeddah was severely curtailed or even completely lacking. The scarcity of information about both groups does not allow me to evaluate if they nevertheless had their own notions and niches of privacy.

The ability to define a personal private sphere and protect it from visual and physical intrusion certainly depended on social status and
wealth. Households ranking between the poles of severely disadvantaged people, such as slaves, prostitutes and beggars, on the one hand, and owners of large mansions containing separate apartments for several segments of an extended family on the other, compromised, or upheld, ideals of privacy to varying degrees. The fact that it was socially acceptable for women of poor families to sell food at the local market, for example, indicates that family wellbeing was given priority over the local ideal of personal privacy.

Exposure of female family members was avoided as far as a household could afford it. The veiling of body, hair and face generally allowed women to move from one place to another, but they ideally did not engage with and become part of the public realm by having physical or visual contact with men in the street. Such contact posed a threat to a woman’s privacy and, since men were considered guardians of their wives and unmarried daughters, to her entire family’s reputation (Altorki 1986: 67; al-Shahrani 1992: 55, 58). A woman of any but the lowest social class therefore limited her own physical presence in public as much as possible. In the case of ‘Abdullah Manā’s family, asking for and receiving financial support from benevolent sponsors was considered less shameful than any activity contributing to the family income which would have involved a female family member being visible in public and having contact with non-mahrām men. The maintenance and protection of a private sphere can thus be regarded as having defined a person’s, especially a woman’s, social distinction (Bourdieu 1984).

The architects and urban planners writing about the issue of privacy in Jeddah emphasise the protection of female private space with the help of architecture and social practice, but they say little about men. This corresponds to the overall pattern in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) which, as Birgit Krawietz (2016) observes, is much more attentive to the female than to the male body. With reference to the sociologist Michael Meuser (2005; Meuser and Lautmann 1997), Krawietz contends that, in Muslim and non-Muslim cultures, it is mainly the female who is perceived as a sexual body. Furthermore, women tend to be regarded as the particular which deserves more attention than the universal male. The silence of the urbanists with respect to male privacy makes it far more difficult to reconstruct the conception of male as opposed to female private space in Jeddah, but it does not mean that men did not enjoy the blessings of a sphere that was protected from intrusion either legally or by means of social conventions, nor were they exempt from social obligations to maintain their own or to respect other men’s and women’s privacy.
The principle that no one was allowed to enter a house without asking permission, together with the convention that a woman had to inform her husband or father about her comings and goings, as well as the position of mirkāz and maq ‘ad, ensured that chiefly male members of a household had control over who entered and left the home. At the same time, they were also expected to be in control, and were held responsible, if the privacy of female household members was intruded on or not safeguarded. Moreover, as highlighted above, men were required to respect women’s privacy by not looking at or talking to them in the streets, not meeting them outside the house and not entering rooms occupied by women, as well as alerting female household members while climbing the stairs. Stairwells, apartment doors and latticed windows sheltered men as much as women in the upstairs apartments from view and from the physical intrusion of outsiders. In fact, rules regarding the concealment of the body from view, based on a rather strict notion of shameful nudity (ʿawra), existed for men too (Lange 2012). The only naked parts of the male body that could regularly be seen in public were the hands, lower legs, the head and sometimes the arms. The special garment of pilgrims also occasionally revealed parts of a man’s upper torso. Unlike many other cities in the Middle East, public bath-houses did not exist in Jeddah. Even within families and same-sex groups, men in Jeddah probably covered the penis, testicles and rectum, as this is a widespread rule among Muslims (Krawietz 2016). For prisoners and, again, slaves, rules were different. Their clothes often revealed knees and chest – parts of the body that other men usually covered. As their dress had little to do with free choice, it seems appropriate to say that they were denied the right to comply with the general standards of nudity and thus, once more, deprived of the privilege of privacy.

**Strong publics, weak publics and public space**

Just as the rights and opportunities of slaves, prostitutes and the poor to define a personal space and protect it from intrusion were limited, so was their access to formalised publics. A slave or servant may have been present in the gathering of men in the mirkāz or of women in the majlis. However, with a few exceptions of slaves who made careers as assistants to rich merchants (Pétriat 2016: 169–75), or as favoured concubines who became accepted members of their masters’ family and subsequently of the community at large (Mana‘ 2008: 19–21), under-privileged subalterns were not supposed to participate in discussions taking place during
such meetings. They also did not have a voice in collective decision-making processes, such as the election of an ʿumda or the leader of a guild. Needless to say, slaves and prostitutes were not organised in guilds.\(^{23}\)

Subalterns were not the only group of people who were excluded from public spaces and institutions. Explicitly public places, such as a mirkāz, cafes, open squares during festivities and even market streets in Jeddah were not open to everyone in the same way. Women, as we have seen, were excluded from many places of encounter in public. Men, on the other hand, were not allowed to enter a room in which their mothers, sisters or wives met with relatives and friends. Precise ideas about who was allowed to enter, pass through or stay at a specific place and who was or was not supposed to be seen there determined the social composition of every space in the city.

This does not mean that genuinely public space did not exist in Jeddah in the early twentieth century, nor that women did not have any public life. Sociologists, anthropologists and geographers have shown that access to any kind of public is limited, never open to everyone (e.g. Benhabib 1992b: 75–9; Stolleis 2004: 167–8; Wilson 1992). They suggest that the public sphere, like any other space, is regulated by explicit and implicit rules. As an outcome of competitive processes and negotiation, these rules are determined by social differences (see e.g. Ardener 1993; Fraser 1992: 112–21). Therefore, according to Massey (2005: 152–3), for example, public space is always shaped by unequal power relations and exclusion. In Jeddah, the principle of gender segregation caused the emergence of mutually exclusive gendered public spaces. Having said that, I do not want to deny the patriarchal character of Ḥijāzī society.\(^{24}\)

In early twentieth-century Jeddah, it meant, among other things, that all public offices were occupied by men, who thus dominated important institutions and controlled decisions pertaining to the common weal (maṣlāha ʿamma). A woman had the right to see the ʿumda in his office, but she could not become an ʿumda herself. The governor of the city, the cleric, the judiciary, as well as the leaders of guilds, Sufi convents and pious endowments had to be men.

Women were in principle precluded from almost all decisions reaching beyond the domain of the family or the household. But the patriarchal society did not prevent them from forming their own publics, nor were those female publics powerless. Nancy Fraser (1992: 132–6) labels publics possessing the capacity of decision-making as ‘strong’ publics. ‘Weak’ publics, in contrast, are defined by her as circles of debate lacking such power. They can nevertheless be crucial in shaping people’s opinion, or influencing decisions relating to the common interest, and as such have
a political dimension. This idea was further elaborated on by Michael Warner (2002), who inquired into publics that exist, or come into being, through the circulation of texts, spoken or written, and images: theatre audiences, readers of books, articles or newspapers, crowds listening to speeches and sermons, viewers of TV shows. Charles Hirschkind’s (2006) study of what he labels Islamic counterpublics (a term borrowed from Fraser and Warner and adapted to an Islamic context) provides an illuminating example of how such publics can change the overall social landscape. Likewise, feminist scholars of the Middle East have argued that Muslim women in various historical contexts, while being excluded from so-called ‘strong’ publics, were and are organised in formal and informal networks. The alliances forged within these networks and the activities they engage in often have reverberations in the community at large (e.g. Chatty and Rabo 1997; Nelson 1974; Stolleis 2004).

Slaves were also not living in isolation from their social environment (Toledano 2007: 70). They had contact with other people, both enslaved and free, and in cases of severe maltreatment and abuse they were sometimes capable of organising resistance. Toledano (2007: 65–6) gives an account of an incident involving 17 slaves who sought refuge in a British ship lying at anchor in the harbour of Jeddah in March 1879. Although we do not have any traces of the precise circumstances under which these people were able to meet and plan their escape, the example shows that slaves were able to connect with each other, exchange news, discuss strategies to improve their working conditions or to abscond, and organise mutual support. British and, to a lesser extent, French consular reports repeatedly mention cases of slaves seeking refuge at the European consulates to escape their masters. These reports sometimes allude to a concerted strategy of the absconders, similar to that of the 17 slaves mentioned by Toledano. These cases indicate that subalterns were able to constitute their own publics.

The example also indicates that not every male public in Jeddah was a ‘strong’ public and that not every man was equally involved in public decisions concerning, for instance, the living and working conditions of slaves, let alone the existence of slavery in general. Social hierarchies in the Ḥijāz, which made a distinction between highly esteemed families (ʿawāʾil) and ordinary people, masters and slaves, rich and poor, old and young, as well as professions of high and low regard, determined a man’s influence and his likelihood of attaining powerful offices (cf. Manāʿ 2008: chapters 1, 2; Yamani 2004). Furthermore, the regular meetings of men in the mirkāz or the maqʿad fulfilled functions quite similar to the gatherings of women in the upstairs majlis: sociability, exchange of news,
opinion formation – and not necessarily decision-making. But all decisions pertaining to the common good were made by men or exclusively male publics (Altorki 1986: 23–5; for an example of such a male public, see Freitag 2015a). The distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ publics offers a way to address power asymmetry between men and women without reproducing the stereotype that associates men in Middle Eastern societies with the public sphere, on the one hand, and women with a domestic private sphere of no political importance.

The mutual dependence of husband and wife on information about the sphere of the opposite sex is, again, vividly depicted by Marianne Alireza:

We women depended on the men to keep us informed of all such little stories. I look back on how much a husband and wife (perhaps Ali and I more than other couples because we could have been more aware of the separation of the sexes) learned about events in the other’s circles. Ali told me things that happened in that part of his life where I had no entree, and I would tell him of events in mine and thus we shared what was not experienced together. … Besides the chit-chat concerning local happenings there was an enormous amount of information, anecdotes, and history that I gleaned about Ali’s own family to recount to him later. He hated to admit it, but he learned a lot from me that he had never known before.

(Alireza 2002: 155–6)

Particularly the institution of *wuʿād*, or formal social visits between women, can be considered a form of ‘weak’ female public in Jeddah. The guests to such a meeting were usually entertained in the *majlis* of the mother or of her new daughter-in-law. As a demonstration of unity and amity between members of the household, every woman in the family was expected to be present on the day of the *wuʿād*. Consequently, social networks were never limited to only one generation. As they grew up, members of the younger generation were automatically integrated. *Wuʿād* and other, less formal meetings of women inside the home were held to exchange news and to organise support for anyone who needed it. Social norms were reproduced and negotiated. Furthermore, female social networks in Jeddah played, and still play today, though to a lesser degree, an important role in finding suitable marriage partners for family members (Altorki 1986: 24–5, 32, chapter 5). It is a well-known fact that the question of who marries whom can have far-reaching economic and political consequences – in the tribal society of the Arabian Peninsula as much as
elsewhere. Women’s conversations may have differed from those of men, but their knowledge of family affairs, their social networks and their ability to arrange marriages were also politically relevant. While men sat in front of the house discussing local politics, economic and neighbourhood affairs, their mothers, wives and sisters in the upstairs majlis negotiated marriages and organised material and mental succour in times of hardship and distress. Like the men’s regular gatherings, the women’s get-togethers helped forge alliances which had an effect on the dynamics and the coherence of the entire community (cf. Nelson 1974).

Just like any other female space in Jeddah, women’s spaces of sociability had to be protected from the visual intrusion of non-maḥram men. Expressed in terms of publicness and privacy, this observation seems perhaps like a paradox: female publics were concealed behind the walls and screens of residential buildings to preserve the privacy of the women involved. Yet if we think about the clothes we wear when we leave our home, this phenomenon may appear familiar. Layers of cloth conceal our private parts when we enter the public realm. Maintaining our privacy with the aid of clothes is a precondition for our being public. In Jeddah, where women were not supposed to be seen by men outside the family, the architecture of the residential building which protected women’s privacy, allowed them to constitute publics. Since women’s privacy was at stake, non-maḥram men were forbidden from entering rooms in which they had settled to chat and exchange news.

Men therefore often met outside the home. The location of male public gatherings was chosen according to the principle that women should be able to pass by undisturbed. A mirkāz was normally located in an open square or at a widening part of the street, not in a narrow thoroughfare. The fact that these spaces were within the visible range of outsiders rendered them taboo for women. In comparison to female spaces of sociability, access to male publics was regulated to a lesser extent with the help of architecture. Even entry to the dihlīz and the maqʿād inside the house was not obstructed by any effective physical barrier. The symbolic value of the threshold indicates that limits to male spaces of encounter were set rather by social conventions.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, rules of, and access to, both privacy and public spaces in Jeddah in the first half of the twentieth century depended on gender, class and other criteria defining a person’s social status. Privacy was not
understood as the autonomous space of an individual but as a vulnerable sphere with the human body at its core. Furthermore, privacy was thought of collectively, that is, as the protected sphere of an extended family. Inappropriate behaviour of an individual family member – such as public exposure of a woman – put the entire family’s reputation at risk. Gendered conceptions of nudity (ʿawra) determined the way men and women dressed and which parts of their bodies were to be concealed from whom. Publicly revealing one’s arms and upper torso, knees and, as far as women were concerned, the hair and face was a sign of low social distinction. Of particular concern was the visibility of women, but not every household could afford a lifestyle that complied with the ideals of female privacy. Depending on their family’s financial capacities and social distinction, women compromised these ideals to varying degrees. The extent to which a person’s body was publicly exposed thus marked his or her social position. Slaves, prostitutes and prisoners did not enjoy the privilege of personal privacy, at least not in terms of integrity of the body (ḥurma).

Because concealing the body from the sight of outsiders was intrinsic to the conception of privacy in Jeddah, the architecture was designed to provide visual protection. Physical access to the home was chiefly regulated by social control, which was enabled by locally specific architectural solutions. A combination of architectural elements and rules of behaviour in the house kept the circulation of men separate from the non-mahram women visiting or living in the same building. In spite of very strict rules of privacy protection that were derived from a specific interpretation of Islamic law, as various authors from Jeddah quoted here have argued, the home was not a private space per se. Most residential buildings did not only serve domestic functions, but were also used for commercial and representative purposes. Since gender segregation had to be maintained in almost every situation, mutually exclusive gendered public spaces existed. While specific aspects of male public life were regularly hosted on the ground floors and sometimes in the upstairs apartments, women normally constituted their own publics on the upper floors, protected from view by walls and lattices. Maintenance of their privacy with the aid of architecture and rules of gender segregation was a precondition for their public activities.

Men also met outside the home, in cafes, in open squares, in front of the mosque or by a house’s entrance. Women were ideally not to be visible in public, but they were able to move from one place to another. Separating male from female public activities and allowing women to traverse public space without being seen demanded of both women and
men a constant awareness of the categories of people present in a given place, inside the house and outside. Gender segregation thus did not only restrict the movements of women, but of men as well.

However, the point I wish to make is not that men and women were actually treated equally and had the same rights and opportunities. As I have shown, male and female publics were not only spatially divided, but they could also have different qualities, labelled here as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ publics. Representative offices and the power to make decisions pertaining to the common weal were limited to men – that is to say, to men of a certain social standing. The participation of women, men of low social status and even slaves in so-called ‘weak’ publics, however, could also have political and economic consequences for the community at large. The public spheres of men and women in Jeddah were thus mutually exclusive and, since the information circulated in these gendered publics was different but relevant to all, they were interdependent.

Notes

1. Because of the coral reef in the bay of Jeddah, larger ships could not enter the harbour. Until 1951, when the first pier extending into deeper waters was constructed, ships had to anchor at a distance of 2.5 to 4.5 km from the port. Passengers and goods were brought into the harbour by smaller vessels, locally referred to as sanbāk, šandal orランス (from the English ‘launch’). A large number of workers was involved in recording the imported goods on the merchant ships, transferring them to small boats, navigating cargo and passengers to the port and discharging the boats at the pier (Manaʿ 2011: 50–5, 140–1; Rathjens and von Wissmann 1947: 76; Ṭarābulṣī 2008: 152–9, 169). Ṭarābulṣī (2008: 153) estimates that 300 such boats were in use in the first half of the twentieth century.

2. According to Ṭarābulṣī (2008: 235), the street was named after Sulaiman Qābil, mayor (raʾis al-baladiyya) in the Hashemite era, who bought the street, electrified it and built offices on top of existing shops.


4. Examples of these buildings, known as wakala, khān or qaysariyya in Arabic, have been preserved in different parts of the old city. They are no longer in use today, but one can still recognise them by their typical structure. They consist of several separate rooms on one or two floors arranged around a common courtyard.

5. According to Ṭarābulṣī (2008: 251–4), the first hotels in the city – the Kandara Hotel, the Basāṭtīn or Garden Hotel and the Kandara Palace Hotel – were opened after the Saudi conquest, but probably not before the 1940s (cf. Sanger 1954: 4–6). The names of these hotels indicate that they were situated outside the city gates: al-Kandara is the district – at that time still a suburb – where the first airport was built in 1946 (Ṭarābulṣī 2008: 618). In the old town hotels were established in former residential houses or in new buildings from the 1950s onwards (Ṭarābulṣī 2008: 253; Manaʿ 2008: 47, 51; 2011: 96).

6. In a map by Carl Rathjens and Hermann von Wissmann (1947: 77), two German geographers who visited Jeddah in 1927, Saq al-ʿAlawī is clearly indicated as the city’s main market area and passage from the harbour to the Mecca Gate in the east.

7. Built under governor Bakr Pasha in 1724–5, the mosque was famous for its leaning minaret. The entire structure was torn down in 1978 (Ṭarābulṣī 2008: 205).

9. In his travel journal Savignac remarks that, at Eve’s Tomb outside the city walls, he saw two women who did not seem to bother about him taking their picture (Savignac 1917: 7 May; I thank Jean-Michel de Tarragon for sharing Savignac’s unpublished journal with me). His remark indicates that he was surprised that they did not evade his picture taking, which he saw as an exception proving the rule.


12. The family of shippers was struck first by misfortune because of the opening of the first harbour pier in 1950/1 which allowed direct unloading of vessels, leading to the unemployment of men like Mana’s father (Mana 2011: 50–7). Secondly, the death of the father shortly afterwards left the family without a male breadwinner.

13. The verse continues: ‘… their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments’. This part is not quoted by al-Shahrani.

14. According to Tarabulsī (2008: 235, 236), the houses of the Jukhdār and Qābīl families were the first houses to have electricity produced by private generators, probably in the 1920s. Already in the Hashemite era (1916–25), the entire Qābil street was electrified. In the 1940s, power plants of the Surratbour pier in 1950/1 which allowed direct unloading of vessels, leading to the unemployment of men like Mana’s father (Mana 2011: 50–7). Secondly, the death of the father shortly afterwards left the family without a male breadwinner.

15. A summary of the critical debate on the Islamic City paradigm with regard to its presuppositions about public and private space in relation to gender has been presented by Friederike Stolleis (2004: 13–19).

16. Bourdieu supports the assumption of a gendered private/public divide in his famous essay ‘The Kabyle House or the World Reversed’ (1979). Following a strictly structuralist approach, Bourdieu depicts the Kabyle house, and Kabyle society as a whole, as being organised in terms of dual oppositions. He associates the sphere of Kabyle women with the interior of the house and the private domain, which he contrasts with a male public sphere located outside the house.

17. Gabriele vom Bruck remarks that ‘Space comes into being through practice; cultural meanings thus invoked are principally unstable and contextual’ (vom Bruck 1997: 166). Nevertheless, she rejects the use of the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ space in the Yemeni context because there they do not correspond to outside and inside, market and home. This implies that a distinction between public and private can meaningfully be drawn. After all, vom Bruck does not refrain from frequently using this terminology herself.

18. Suad Joseph contends that the ‘public/private divide’ simplifies social activity in such a way that male domination is normalised, naturalised or glossed over, although she also recapitulates an earlier strand of feminist scholarship that employs the categories of public and private to criticise patriarchal structures (Joseph 1997: 74–6, 88).


20. Among the authors employing this concept in the context of cities in Saudi Arabia are Abu-Gazzeh (1994: 56), al-Mutawea (1987: 40–1), Eyuce n.d.: 56, Sijeeini (1995: 74, 140), al-Shahrani (1992: 47–8) and Mortada (2003: 83–5). Fahad al-Mutawea, for example, writes: ‘As domestic life calls for full privacy which requires maximum segregation from outside activities[,] at the same time, moslems … are encouraged and required to participate fully in public community life where there is lack of privacy. Such relations … resulted in compromise between the extreme privacy for the man of the family in the house, to the reverse in public life through the development of spatial organisation. The concept of sequences in spatial organi-
sation are quite clear on two scales; the domestic scale and the community scale’ (al-Mutawea 1987: 58).

21. Whereas Ammann provides a very useful linguistic analysis, his approach is problematic in that he claims to write about ‘Muslim Civilization’ as if he was dealing with a closed and static entity. His analysis deals with neither local differences nor changes in Muslim conceptions of privacy and the public sphere. Moreover, he does not even suggest that local and temporal varieties have ever existed. On the contrary, he combines Quranic exegesis with eclectic quotations of medieval authorities on Islamic jurisprudence, pre-Islamic Arabic etymology, and geographical knowledge produced in studies of contemporary cities in Morocco, Turkey, Iran and other countries. This leads to the impression that a universal Muslim culture in opposition to ‘the West’ produced uniform and stable definitions of privacy and the public sphere. However, Ammann’s article is meant to provide an overview, and it is indeed a useful starting point for investigations into specific local interpretations of the concepts he outlines.

22. Unlike other authors I refer to (with the exception of Ammann 2004), Jomah touches on the problem of translating the English term ‘privacy’ into Arabic. He points out that no single Arabic word is completely equivalent to the English term, but several local expressions reflecting aspects of it ‘were used in similar contexts’ (Jomah 1992: 190). He suggests comparing the concept of privacy to the Arabic concepts of ār (1. the part of a person’s body which is not supposed to be exposed to others; 2. shame), ārd (land, area, territory) and haram (1. sacred space, 2. a place in the house forbidden to outsiders). The phrase ihfaz ārak (literally translated, ‘keep your honour’) was, according to Jomah, used as an appeal ‘to defend or protect one’s private things or honour like the female of the house’, similar to the English expression ‘maintain your privacy’ (1992: 190).


24. On patriarchy in Middle Eastern societies in general, see e.g. Kandiyoti (1996) and Joseph (2000); for Saudi Arabia, see al-Rasheed (2013: chapter 1).

25. In opposition to the Egyptian state and hence without access to political decision-making, these Islamic counterpublics made extensive use of cassette-recorded sermons to share their thoughts and ideas about ethical self-improvement and pious living, thus influencing the political climate contributing to what is known as the Islamic Revival (Hirschkind 2006).

26. I owe this observation to Philippe Pétriat.

27. For similar institutions of formal social visits between women in Mocha, Yemen, see Um (2009: 143); for Damascus, see Stolleis (2004).