

Charity in Saudi Arabia

In this innovative study of everyday charity practices in Jeddah, Nora Derbal employs a “bottom-up” approach to challenge dominant narratives about state–society relations in Saudi Arabia. Exploring charity organizations in Jeddah, this book both offers a rich ethnography of associational life and counters Riyadh-centric studies that focus on oil, the royal family, and the religious establishment. It closely follows those who work on the ground to provide charity to the local poor and needy, documenting their achievements, struggles, and daily negotiations. The lens of charity allows rare insights into the religiosity of ordinary Saudis, showing that Islam offers Saudi activists a language, a moral frame, and a worldly guide to confronting inequality. With a view to the many forms of local community activism in Saudi Arabia, this book examines perspectives that are too often ignored or neglected, opening new theoretical debates about civil society and civic activism in the Gulf.

Nora Derbal is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She holds a DPhil in Islamic Studies from Freie Universität Berlin and has studied Islamic Studies and Modern History in Oxford, Berlin, and Jeddah. This is her first book.

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Charity in Saudi Arabia

Civil Society under Authoritarianism

Nora Derbal

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



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To all social workers, philanthropists, volunteers,
and civil society activists,
in admiration.

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Like the wind, civil society may lack tangible form;
but when it blows, its effects may be readily observed.
Sheila Carapico, “Yemen between Civility and Civil War”

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-316-51347-7 — Charity in Saudi Arabia
Nora Derbal
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

| | |
|---|---------------|
| <i>List of Figures</i> | <i>page</i> x |
| <i>List of Tables</i> | xii |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xiii |
| <i>A Note on Conventions</i> | xvii |
| 1 Introduction: Civil Society Theory, Charity, and Inequality in Saudi Arabia | 1 |
| 2 Meanings of Welfare: The First Women’s Welfare Association in Jeddah | 39 |
| 3 Managing Poverty and National Development: The Society of Majid bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz for Development and Social Services | 121 |
| 4 Negotiating Citizenship and Belonging: The Young Initiative Group | 197 |
| 5 Fun, Freedom, and Personal Growth amid Rising Repression: The Hikers | 245 |
| 6 Conclusion: Civil Society Activism and Everyday Islam in Saudi Arabia | 295 |
| <i>Select Bibliography</i> | 307 |
| <i>Index</i> | 339 |

Figures

| | | |
|-----|--|---------|
| 2.1 | Mobile food bank of the charity organization Jam'iyat Hafẓ al-Ni'ma. | page 72 |
| 2.2 | Zakat voucher, SR 100 (EUR 27), for food products. | 87 |
| 2.3 | WhatsApp fatwa of Dr. 'Abdallah al-Mutlaq. | 91 |
| 2.4 | The modern <i>ribāṭ</i> 'Abd al-Latif Jamil, a large-scale housing project. | 103 |
| 2.5 | Waqf inscription: Ribāṭ Bā Dīb. | 105 |
| 2.6 | For sale: Ribāṭ Bā Dīb. An example of <i>istibdāl</i> . | 105 |
| 2.7 | Inside Ribāṭ Bā Dīb. A garbage dump. | 106 |
| 2.8 | Ribāṭ al-Maghrabī, building inscription: "The Maghrabī shelter was founded in 1882–3 and renovated 1990–1." | 111 |
| 2.9 | The renovated Ribāṭ al-Maghrabī. | 112 |
| 3.1 | The Majid Society's headquarters on Taḥliya Street. | 124 |
| 3.2 | Rawāj al-Ḥīraf Center for Training and Development. | 164 |
| 3.3 | The Majid Society's bus shuttle for trainees at Rawāj al-Ḥīraf Center. | 165 |
| 3.4 | Toiletry manufacture supported by the Majid Society's easy loan scheme. | 185 |
| 3.5 | Cupcake bakery supported by the Majid Society's easy loan scheme. | 186 |
| 3.6 | A middle-class residential building, home to the cupcake bakery. | 188 |
| 4.1 | Streets of al-Ruwais District. | 218 |
| 4.2 | A garbage collector – women searching the garbage for food and other products for recycling are a common sight in Ghulail. | 219 |
| 4.3 | A day's work – a full stroller with recycling products collected from the garbage of al-Ruwais. | 220 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| List of Figures | xi |
| 5.1 Hiking for charity. In the background, the cars of the group stand in the shape of a U, at the center of which a barbecue is being prepared while the others hike. | 246 |
| 5.2 The Hikers’ meeting at Aya Mall, Jeddah. | 247 |
| 5.3 The Hikers’ departure. | 247 |
| 5.4 Barbecue after a hike. | 248 |

Tables

| | |
|--|----------------|
| 1.1 Overview of the case studies. | <i>page 33</i> |
| 2.1 Social security beneficiaries in Saudi Arabia, registered in 2020, by region and gender. | 62 |
| 2.2 Donors to the First Women’s Welfare Association, 2009–10. | 76 |
| 2.3 Nationalities of the inhabitants of Jeddah’s shelters in 1993. | 116 |
| 3.1 Poverty line estimates for Saudi Arabia. | 156 |
| 3.2 Rising rates of social security (<i>al-ḍamān al-ijtimā’ī</i>), 1962–2018. | 192 |

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A Note on Conventions

The transliteration of Arabic follows that of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). Therefore, terms found in Merriam-Webster's are exempted from transliteration: *ṣadaqa* but *zakat*, *waqf* but *awqāf*, and *hadiths*. I use full diacritical marks in the notes and in the bibliography for the sake of accuracy. The transliteration of names poses a challenge. I have chosen to write Arabic names of individuals in the distinctive spelling that they use in English (such as on their business cards or online profiles). Common place names like Jeddah and Riyadh are not transliterated; lesser-known names like al-Nuzla al-Yamaniyya are transcribed according to IJMES guidelines. I refer to names of welfare associations according to their own representations, in the shortest form possible. For instance, I speak of the Albir Society (instead of al-Birr Welfare Association, Jam'iyyat al-Birr al-Khayriyya) and the Majid Society, which is the shortest form of "The Society [literally Welfare Association] of Majid bin 'Abd al-'Aziz for Development and Social Services" (Jam'iyyat Mājid bin 'Abd al-'Azīz li-l-Tanmiya wa-Khidamāt Ijtimā'iyya).

If not otherwise stated, citations from the Qur'an are taken from the translation by Tarif Khalidi (*The Qur'an* [Penguin Classics, 2009]). Because of the great variety of printed and electronic editions of *hadith* collections, I refer to *hadiths* by chapters (*bāb*) rather than page numbers. Canonical *hadith* collections are referenced by editor, short title, volume (*kitāb*), and chapter. I traced popular *hadiths* – those mentioned to me without explicit source reference or that were reproduced without reference in annual reports and other documentations of charity organizations – with the help of the online database <http://sunnah.com>.

Dates from the Islamic calendar, which is the official calendar in Saudi Arabia, have been converted to the Gregorian calendar using the webtool www.aoi.uzh.ch/de/islamwissenschaft/hilfsmittel/tools/kalenderumrechnung/hegira.html (last modified September 3, 2018), provided through the Asian and Oriental Institute of Zurich University. If the month and day of a date from the Islamic calendar were not known, it was not always possible to translate the date into the exact year of the Gregorian calendar. In such cases, I have indicated both possible years.

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