

Report

Symposium on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society at Indiana University

The Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy recently organized a symposium titled, “Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society.” This event, which was held on Oct. 2-3, 2018, in Indianapolis, was convened in partnership with the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), and the Center on Muslim Philanthropy.

During the symposium’s dedicated education track, a number of scholars from the United States and other countries presented their research. Ilham Nasser (IIIT) and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (American University) shared IIIT’s Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative and its first wave of “Mapping the Terrain,” which surveys socio-emotional constructs in Muslim-majority societies. They explained that AEMS is an empirical study that continues IIIT’s larger mission and vision of education reform, which had previously focused more on higher education and publication of textbooks.

Mapping the Terrain investigates values such as empathy, forgiveness, community mindedness, and moral reasoning, as well as sense of belonging among youth (15-17 years old), teachers, parents, administrators, and university students (first and second year). Its theoretical framework is grounded in the Head-Heart-Hands (“3Hs”) model and the human development approach, which emphasizes the whole person and education as a transformative experience rather than just a utilitarian one.

Sara Konrath (Indiana University), Shariq Siddiqui (Indiana University), and Saulat Pervez (IIIT) argued that approaching education reform in Muslim societies through an empathic lens and rooting it in traditional ideas of Muslim philanthropy will make it indigenous, as opposed to foreign, and thus may yield better outcomes. Konrath spoke in detail about empathy and its importance in education as it relates to both students and teachers. Siddiqui focused on the intentionality aspect of philanthropy in Islam, which includes the pre-cognitive/ cognitive stage of decision-making. Pervez gave an overview of the intersectionality of Islamic education and Muslim philanthropy from historic to current times.

Arshad Ali (George Washington University) presented his ethnographic study, “Examining the Purposes and Premises of American Higher Education for Muslim Undergraduate Students.” He stated that his goal was to understand how students conceptualize the purposes and functions of their education. To this end, he interviewed 24 students over a nine-month period in higher education institutions in Southern California. In speaking with first- and second-generation

American Muslim students, Ali focused on how they are challenging and reshaping dominant notions of education to highlight their small acts of defiance and rupture; this aligns with James C. Scott's "infrapolitics of everyday life," Ali stated.

Nuraan Davids (Stellenbosch University, South Africa) described the rise of faith-based education among Muslims in democratic South Africa (see her full article in this issue). Even as desegregated schools were becoming the norm, the number of independent schools continued to increase. Davids traces the trajectory of Islamic education in the country in an attempt to understand both the motivation behind these schools' proliferation and how the prevalence of such schools promoting faith-based identities enhances the South African democratic project.

Khadija Abdul-Samad (University of Ghana) assessed the use of digital technology for fundraising among non-profit Muslim educational organizations in an increasingly competitive context of the developing world. She utilized a mixed-methods approach that involved in-depth interviews with members of three educational Muslim non-profit organizations in the capital city of Accra while conducting an online survey of Ghanaians. Her findings suggest that these organizations' leaders are not reaching tech-savvy donors due to their own lack of proficiency in digital technology. She recommended online fundraising as a way to overcome donor fatigue and stated that it has the potential to sustain many projects.

Rasheed Adeleke (Adeyemi College of Education) examined the impact of several welfare organizations' support of Muslim education in Nigeria in a class-based context. In the process, he strove to show another perspective of the widely held notion that the majority of Muslim Nigerians opt for Western education, which he considers an incomplete picture.

Jeffrey Guhin (UCLA) shared findings from the ethnographic research he conducted in two Sunni Muslim high schools in the New York City area. After explaining the distinctions between *salah* as formalized prayer and *du'ā'* (supplication) as something mutable, he related that his study had revealed the influences of a more individualistic and a less formalistic spirituality, also a feature of the larger American religious landscape, on young Muslims. He posited that this may be one reason why they are eschewing the practice of their elders, who see *du'ā'* as more scripted in terms of set Arabic sentences or phrases. The student interviewees preferred to supplicate in English about their needs, fears, and wants. His full article appears in this issue.

Supriya Bailly (George Mason University) shifted the lens of global education from students to teachers in her "Teachers Building 'Planetary Villages': Considering the Possibilities in Majority-Muslim Countries." During her investigation of how Muslim educators help their students navigate a globalized world, she drew from interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys conducted with teachers from 15 Muslim-majority countries who participated in a global teacher exchange program. Among her findings was their commitment to both a national and an

international understanding of culture, an underscoring of hegemony in what is sometimes considered “global,” and of fostering common ground with their students. Her full article will appear in the next issue of *JEMS*.

Ilham Nasser (IIIT) gave a second presentation in the education track’s final panel. Focusing on forgiveness in the Arab world, she explored teachers’ reasoning for this construct by surveying the forgiveness attitudes of 590 teachers in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan, along with conducting 89 interviews on pedagogy and methods to teach forgiveness in K-12 classrooms. She found that the interviewees’ willingness to forgive depended on such things as the intentionality or unintentionality of the act, religious beliefs, and the extent of the harm done. Teachers emphasized historical religious figures—such as prophets and the Prophet Muhammad’s Companions—as well as social and family figures like community elders, parents, friends, and siblings, as models of forgiveness.

All in all, this diverse symposium presented an opportunity for conversations beyond philanthropy by highlighting the importance and multifaceted nature of education as we strive for a more altruistic world.

Saulat Pervez
Associate Researcher, IIIT
Herndon, VA

doi: 10.2979/jems.1.1.09