Report

The 2019 Symposium on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society

Scholars from around the world met at the Symposium on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society on Nov. 4, 2019, to discuss research on approaches to education in Muslim communities. The symposium was hosted in Indianapolis, Indiana, by the IUPUI Lilly School of Philanthropy and sponsored by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving.

In his welcoming remarks, Shariq Siddiqui, director of Lilly's Muslim Philanthropy Initiative and JEMS co-editor, observed that both learning and philanthropy have expansive definitions in Islam. Historically, formal education originated in the form of charitably-funded institutions, but the process of gaining knowledge and wisdom happens throughout life, while charity encompasses any good action, from giving a smile to refraining from unkind speech. As such, the research presented in this conference engaged with not only a wide range of educational programs, but also the intention and purpose behind Islamic education.

The symposium began with a presentation by Dr. Ilham Nasser, director of the IIIT Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative. Dr. Nasser outlined the findings of the AEMS Mapping the Terrain Wave One project, a quantitative study of attitudes and beliefs in Muslim societies. This survey was conducted in multiple languages across 14 countries with the help of local researchers. Researchers examined the prevalence of values and skills such as empathy, religiosity, moral reasoning, and belonging, which they found to have a positive relationship to the outcomes of community-mindedness and forgiveness, among the surveyed Muslims.

The first session centered on research about the interaction between education, government institutions, and politics. Manjuma Akhtar Mousumi of Bangladesh's BRAC University presented her research on why Muslim parents send their children to private schools in low-income sectors of Delhi, India. Sarfaraz Niyozov of the University of Toronto examined approaches to research on education in post-colonial and post-Soviet Muslim societies. This led to discussion among the attendees about the

dangers of over-relying on either Western or traditional frameworks, and the importance of continuing to develop new approaches to knowledge production. Sandy Zook presented data from the University of Colorado-Denver, in partnership with a Ghanaian university, on the background and activities of Muslim education NGOs in Ghana, which are largely run by Ghanaians and often provide complementary services and resources to government education. Finally, Rafeel Wasif of the University of Washington presented his research on the tensions in reforming *madrasas* in Pakistan, which are the main providers of free primary education and tend to resist offers of government funding due to distrust of the state and fear of losing local support.

In the second session, the presenters examined how students' Muslim identity intersects with national identity, particularly for marginalized Muslims. Patricia Kubow of Indiana University spoke about how Jordanian students and Syrian refugee students in Amman understand citizenship and intra-Muslim unity in an environment where refugees face alienation and unequal access to resources. Timothy Reagan of the University of Maine discussed growing Islamophobia in American public schools and its effect on Muslim students' self-perception. He also posed interventions that address character education and ignorance about the historical and modern Muslim world. Lastly, Dilmurat Mahmut of McGill University presented on China's "re-education camps," placing them in the context of China's shifting relationship with organized religion. He also analyzed the limited documentation of the camps and the policies surrounding them, revealing a depiction of Islam as a foreign, imposed religion, in opposition to Chinese political identity.

In the third session, Elisheva Leah Cohen of Indiana University drew from ethnographic research on non-formal education programs in Jordan to illuminate how the experiences of Syrian refugees are included in the national curriculum. Next, Natasha Mansur of Columbia University presented on notions of belonging among Rohingya refugee boys who are excluded from formal schooling in Bangladesh, and instead are integrated into Bangladeshi society through their work as child laborers. Her research shows the effect of the decades-long crisis, resulting in generations of children who are not only stateless but also feel exclusion within the Rohingya community because they were born in Bangladesh. In discussion, the attendees raised the question of whether inclusivity is a relevant

benchmark for societies and public schools that host refugees, in contexts where the state is unlikely to ever give refugee students a path to actually joining the nation through citizenship. Cohen pointed to the ways teachers and programs can work within the existing system to help refugee students develop a sense of belonging. Last, Zulkipli Lessy of the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta presented on the practices of community charities in Indonesia, which utilize funds to promote educational programs, as well as other areas of social welfare, rather than direct charitable giving.

In the final session, presenters focused in on the goals of Islam-oriented education in its various forms. Sher Afgan Tareen of Florida State University gave a case study of Muslim American educators at a private school who center play and compassion over traditional academic concepts to encourage students and their parents to build stronger relationships. Tavis Jules of Loyola University Chicago presented on the use of "state philanthropy" in education, a form of soft diplomacy where one nation gives funding to another nation to develop educational programs. Their goals range from promoting democracy or Arab unity, to preventing extremism, to reducing the influence of a rival state. Finally, Derya Dogan of Indiana University presented research on Islamic schools in Chicagoland and how they present their goals and values to the outside world. Schools mirror parents' desire for their children to have a quality academic experience and an Islamic framework, as well as a sense of safety and a strong Muslim-American identity.

Through the research presented and the discussions that followed, the attendees of the symposium engaged with important questions facing students, families, educators, and governments in Muslim societies. These papers demonstrate that in various countries and contexts, educational programs offer more than just academic learning; they also mediate values and social identity. This journal aims to further the understanding of how these dynamics play out in classrooms across the Muslim world.

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