

MORALLY REIMAGINING THE WAQF: USING A CLASSICAL ISLAMIC INSTITUTION TO DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

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This paper builds on the insights found in Abdur-Rashid (2021) and reimagines how the Islamic civilizational heritage of awqāf (charitable endowments) might look today. Throughout Islamic history, waqf institution changed in form as the community's material and historical circumstances changed but retained the substance of its spiritual imperative. What are some of the root causes of poverty in today's world, and how might the waqf be resuscitated to acknowledge and remedy those causes?

Keywords: charitable endowments, waqf, racial wealth divide, agribusiness, permaculture

Introduction

This paper builds on the insights found in the preceding article in this issue, Khalil Abdur-Rashid's historical review of the history of the Islamic institution of the charitable endowment known as the "waqf."¹ Taking as its starting point where Abdur-Rashid left off, it asks how the Islamic civilizational heritage of *awqāf* (Ar. pl. for *waqf*) might be

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¹ "Financing Kindness as a Society: The Rise and Fall of the *Waqf*."

revitalized after a long period of what Abdur-Rashid refers to as “deterioration” and “decline.” As Abdur-Rashid notes, like most classical Muslim institutions, the waqf has its origins in the Sunna (i.e., normative living example) of the Prophet Muhammad, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him, and is rooted in Quranic teaching that material support for the economically deprived and, by extension, charitable giving in general falls on a spectrum ranging from absolutely obligatory to strongly encouraged. Parting with a certain percentage of one’s accumulated wealth does not only fulfill the religious obligation of zakat, but also resounds at the deeper level of the soul and ultimate reward in the afterlife by enabling the purification of the heart and the beautification of one’s character. Kind words, helping another across the road, removing litter from the street, showing affection toward one’s spouse, feeding the poor, and even remembering God are among the numerous actions that are considered charitable in Islam.

According to God’s promise, the interchange of material blessings increases the flow of spiritual blessings. The companions of the Prophet, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him, took this very seriously. After consultation and guidance from the Prophet, they established practices that later scholars would identify as the charitable endowment or “waqf,” one of the earliest examples being Abu Talha and his wife’s perpetual donation of the usufruct of their 600-palm date grove to the support of Medina’s poor. The spiritual worldview at the heart of charitable endowments in Islam, and thus their ontological ground, centers around cultivating a person’s desire to seek God’s pleasure through service to His creatures and to purify one’s inner self from greed and other moral and spiritual vices.

While *awqāf* have historically served the nutritional, educational, health, and other immediate needs of individuals who lack the financial means to meet these needs for themselves, this paper focuses specifically on the potential for reenvisioning the waqf for the purposes of remedying the structural causes of poverty and other forms of marginalization and oppression such as climate change and systemic racism. The two examples I will offer in this regard are (a) the plight of global farmworkers in light of the global agricultural production line and (b) the racialized wealth gap in the United States in its social and historical dimensions.

I propose that certain institutional solutions to the poverty caused by these problems can be financed through a creative moral reimagination of the waqf for the early 21st/late 15th century. In this way, Muslims can revive the institution of the waqf as an effective means of addressing the specific needs of today. Even where structural causes of

poverty are caused by complex networks of global capital, local foundations can have transformative effects with far-reaching impacts.

Historical Background

Abdur-Rashid argues convincingly that the history of the waqf can be understood in terms of five basic evolutionary stages. These are what he refers to as the “formative,” the “post-formative,” the “maturation,” the “transformative,” and finally the “deterioration” periods. His genealogy reveals the ontological ground of charitable endowments in Islam, how central the waqf institution became to Islamic civilization, how vastly diversified the services offered were, and how the colonization of Muslim lands along with postcolonial nationalization projects came to decimate, if not obliterate, the institution.

At its height, the waqf presented a “credible commitment device to give property owners economic security in return for social services” (Kuran, 2001, p. 841) and was thus an integral tool for providing public goods through local trusts. A waqf is a charitable endowment that must fulfill the following requirements: 1) that the person endowing it, or the subsequent maintainer, sequester the principal and devote the proceeds to charity; 2) that the endowment be specifically and legally removed from commodification (i.e., is no longer “on the market”); and 3) that its sole purpose be charitable, with the beneficiary group explicitly named. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him, the first waqf consisted of a grove of 600 date palms, the proceeds of which fed Medina’s poor. During the Crusades, awqāf dealt with the ravages of war, such as feeding, housing, and nursing the poor, injured, and displaced (Abdur-Rashid, 2021). In 16th-century Jerusalem, the Haseki Sultan charitable complex founded by the wife of Suleyman the Magnificent serviced 26 villages and included shops, a covered bazaar, two soap plants, 11 flour mills, and two bathhouses (in Palestine and Lebanon). For hundreds of years, income generated in these provided for the maintenance of a mosque, a sizable soup kitchen, and two traveler and pilgrim inns (Kuran, 2011). In Aleppo during the 18th century, a waqf established by Hajj Musa Amiri included 10 houses, 67 shops, four traveler inns, two storerooms, several dyeing plants and baths, three bakeries, eight orchards, three gardens, and agricultural land (Kuran, 2001).

However, from the paragon of a morally accountable social ethos, in which property- and asset-owners felt spiritually and financially invested in uplifting the less fortunate, the waqf took a dismal turn during what Abdur-Rashid (2021) terms the institution’s *deterioration period*

(from the middle of the 19th century until World War I) notably immediately following the normalization of interest-based lending. Indeed, this deterioration was due to the direct involvement of colonial powers. European colonizer states generally failed to comprehend the waqf system and through economic restructuring disrupted the practice of the endowments beyond recognition. For example, in Zanzibar, awqāf traditionally helped to foster bonds of interdependence between wealthy patron families and their less well-to-do clientele. The local elite families were the ones who endowed the public trusts, maintained mosques (and were socially esteemed for doing so), and provided for clients and enslaved persons who had no means of their own. By contrast, British economic norms pertaining to social welfare and order meant different patterns of rights, responsibilities, and the distribution of political power and economic resources. The British colonial administration insisted that wealth instead function as a private business resource (as opposed to a publicly endowed charitable fund), while mosque upkeep was to become governmentalized. The former waqf clientele became a “working class entirely dependent on wage labor” (Oberauer, 2008, p. 315).

In their mission to codify and fix interpretations, colonial administrators often undermined traditional female trusteeship in favor of exclusively male trusteeship of the waqf. Although colonial outposts farther removed from the metropolises, such as Tanganyika (later Tanzania), saw relative longevity for awqāf and female trusteeship, centers of colonial rule experienced an interrupted and uprooted history of the traditional institution (Kelly, 2014).

The other cause of deterioration was the waqf’s becoming nationalized and, over time, bankrupted by being stripped of their operational funding sources. Postcolonial Muslim governments were unable to meet social service needs at levels previously handled by the awqāf, leading to increasing impoverishment and general neglect. For example, at the end of the 18th century, the estimated “combined income of the roughly 20,000 Ottoman waqfs [sic] in operation equaled one-third of the Ottoman state’s total revenue, including the yield from tax farms in the Balkans, Turkey, and the Arab world” (Kuran, 2001, p. 849). Both in geographic terms, when accounting for the Ottoman territory, and fiscally in terms of the total percentage of revenue, such income represents a gargantuan quantity. When we look at the figures in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Algeria, Tunisia, and Greece, we see that *significant percentages* of all arable land, cultivated soil, and total land area were awqāf (see Table 1).

Table 1

Waqf-Controlled Land in the Twentieth Century (Kuran, 2001)

Country	Year	%Waqf
Turkey	1923	75% all arable land
Egypt	1920s	12.5% all cultivated soil
Iran	1920s	14.29% all cultivated soil
Algeria	1850s	50% agricultural land
Tunisia	1883	335 agricultural land
Greece	1829 ^a	30% total land area ^b

^a After breaking from Ottoman Empire.^b Confiscated by new government.

Muslim Charitable Giving Today

In the 21st/late 15th century, we find that globally, there is no single paradigm of *Islamic economics* that Muslim-majority states employ. Islamic principles pertaining to wealth, property, labor, etc., are contextualized and appropriated in a variety of ways given the specific material conditions and cultural histories of the various locales (Wilson, 2015). Political scrutiny, institutional frameworks, and policy choices all shape Islamic financial legal application today without necessarily upsetting the sacred textual decrees. As such, the channeling and administration of the Muslim requirement of charity, zakat, is administered in numerous different ways. Based on the major factors of resource endowments, demography, economic history, and politics, Muslim-majority countries developed a unique national infrastructure for distribution of the wealth tax. As for philanthropic giving in Muslim communities, the magnitude is unclear, but a 2004 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates it to fall between \$250 billion and \$1 trillion annually (Alterman & Hunter, 2004).

In the North American context, this charitable giving mostly takes the form of relief efforts and remittances sent “back home.” After September 11th, 2001, American Muslim giving has seen a shift to domestic causes, guided by the scrutinizing of our assets during the so-called War on Terror (Baron, 2005). This period has also witnessed the opening of new nonprofit spaces such as the Pillars Fund and the American Muslim Fund. The 2019 report jointly issued by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding and the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving titled “American Muslim Philanthropy: A Data-Driven

Comparative Profile” sheds light on the specific trends in our charitable giving today (Mahmood, 2019). Nearly 89% of respondents reported that they contributed to their house of worship. Another important cause was overseas relief (54%). One issue that Muslims invested in more than our counterparts of other faiths is civil rights protection for community members (48%). Additionally, “for Muslims, among the issues facing those outside their faith community, domestic poverty is the most important charitable cause (81%), followed by overseas relief (58%) and educational causes (54%)” (Mahmood, 2019, p. 8).

What have not yet emerged are efforts to centralize the giving at a national level along the lines of the United Way, the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, or the Jewish Federation, for example. Arguably our classically trained scholars of Islamic sciences, in collaboration with our political economists, sociologists, and historians of the American context, ought to determine if such centralization is a desirable goal and, if so, how and why.

We know that Muslim history provides innumerable examples of a robust charitable endowment institution in the waqf. We also know that in the 19th and 20th centuries CE, colonial and postcolonial national forces motivated by political and economic interests systematically and structurally dismantled the waqf to the point that it is no longer part of the living history of Muslim civilization, but is a deracination. Looking ahead to a possible future I ask: how can the waqf be revitalized today in a way that is relevant to our society’s structural poverty and authentic to the ethical impetus of Islamic giving? I provide two concrete examples of pressing need and propose these as sites for establishing modern-day awqāf.

The Waqf as a Means of Dismantling Structural Injustice: Two Examples

It is imperative to understand poverty in relational terms, or multidimensionally as a set of experiences (Spicker, 2020). Poverty is best understood through the patterns of human relationships that undergird it and the social institutions that organize these (Piven, 2018). This is where the waqf institution can be instrumental insofar as it defines a specific socially organized set of relations. Globally, at the beginning of the 21st century, half of the human population (3 billion people) live in poverty, on less than \$2 USD/day. Two billion around the world suffer a mineral deficiency, 1 billion have no access to potable water, and 840 million are undernourished and hungry. Poverty and food insecurity seasonally lead to incidents like drought, war, inclement weather, and

famine. Ironically enough, *three-fourths* of the world's undernourished people live in rural areas and are the producers and sellers of the food we all eat (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006).

In our own nation, poverty refracts along racial lines. White households' average wealth is in the amount of \$656,000, Latino households average \$98,000, and Black households average just \$85,000. Average Black and Latino households don't even *combine* to equal *half* of average White wealth. Compounding this stark reality, it would "take the average black family 228 years to accrue the same amount of wealth that white families have today" (Asante-Muhammad & Collins, 2016). Median wealth provides a more representational picture of typical households than average wealth, since it prevents the highest incomes at the top (small in number that they are) from skewing the midpoint. But whether you look at median or mean wealth, White households are significantly wealthier than Black and Latino households. *Average* White wealth is three to four times greater than Black, Latino, and other minority wealth, while *median* White wealth is five to seven times greater than median minority wealth (O'Flaherty, 2015).

But what are the root causes of poverty today, as in the two examples provided? This question can be approached in at least three ways: 1) spiritual impoverishment, 2) structural exploitation, and 3) cultural norms (e.g., consumerism or wastefulness). Focusing on the relation between spiritual impoverishment and structural exploitation, I propose two pathways by which Muslims can revitalize the waqf and address the structural causes of poverty identified above.

Ameliorating the Plight of Migrant Farmworkers and Global Climate Change

Permaculture design can provide a way to address the global plight of farmworkers. Permaculture design, theorized by Bill Mollison (1988), is the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems that have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems. It involves the harmonious integration of the landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way. There are several successful ecosystem restoration camps worldwide where permaculture design principles have been instituted to produce improved agricultural and biodiversity outcomes. For example, Camp Contour Lines in the Tatin Village of the Guatemalan rainforest has pushed back against the ravages of slash-and-burn deforestation and corn monoculture to produce diverse, locally owned agroforestry. Similarly, Camp Via Organica in

San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, is leading the regional effort to educate and form interventionist and regenerative ways of producing food to challenge the desertification Mexico is experiencing. Camp Paradise in Butte County, California, was set up as a direct result of the 2018 wildfires that destroyed over 110,000 acres of forest. It is successfully mobilizing local community residents and schools to join the restoration project. Camp Uthai in Thailand, Camp Habiba in Sinai, Egypt and Camp Virsoleil in Ajat, France, are other successful examples of the implementation of permaculture design principles into restorative projects that are good for the Earth and good for local economic sustainability.²

One of the assumptions behind permaculture design is that local ecosystems are capable of providing for the needs of the living things comprising them and relying on them. But that is far from how the current global agricultural system operates. The process that brings food from farm to table proceeds as follows: wilderness is biologically cleansed; most arable land is converted to subsistence agriculture farms that specialize in only specific species of a small number of crops or animals; these species are selected based on their resistance to diseases and toxic pesticides; and postcolonial states in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa were assigned their crops based on the Europeans' vision of a single global supply chain (what are called *cash crop economies*, or the various *banana republics* in Latin America). Countries that survive through cash crop economies are extremely vulnerable to devastation and even starvation, as they are susceptible to fluctuations in global supply and demand as well as bad harvest seasons. The species that are exclusively selected—i.e., of preferred or favored varieties of livestock—become extremely immune-deficient over time, as there is no more of the crossbreeding found in nature to keep genetic pools robust. They are also vulnerable to plague, which would wipe out the supply of millions, and for this reason, farmers over-medicate their domesticated animals—all of which enters our own bodies and even those of our babies through breastmilk.

In addition to the physiological and ecological costs, the global food production system carries subsistence and livelihood costs. Internationally, farmworkers get paid pennies per hour of labor producing the world's food supply. For example, certain groups of Mexican farmers, while earning two or three times more than the minimum wage, make \$9/day (Escobar Latapí et al., 2019). American farms don't fare significantly better than their international counterparts and are disappearing at an ever-increasing rate. The current global

² See <https://ecosystemrestorationcamps.org/>.

agribusiness arrangement is *directly* forcing vast majorities of the world's agricultural population into extreme poverty and hunger, often to the brink of death (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the suicide rate is higher among farmers as a group than any other occupation (Smith, 2018).

In addition to rising suicide rates among American dairy farmers, farmer suicides have significantly increased across the globe. Research findings released by France's public health institute in 2016 indicate that "985 farmers killed themselves from 2007 to 2011—a suicide rate 22 percent higher than that of the general population" (Rougerie, 2017). In India, where 49% of the population works in agricultural food production, over 290,000 farmers have committed suicide between 1995 and 2014 (Barry, 2014). Even the globalization model case and international breadbasket Australia suffers this phenomenon. Studies find that, in Queensland, "farmers are more than twice as likely as the general population to take their own lives. In remote parts of the state, the suicide rate for farmers was up to five times that of nonfarmers" (Williams, 2018). The racist politics of agribusiness also lead to food deserts in urban centers, in which fresh healthy produce becomes utterly unavailable to working-class city-dwellers (Pevec, 2016; Whelan et al., 2002).

This dismal trajectory follows the broader logic of capitalist accumulation and monopolization that governs international trade. Transportation costs are lowered (thanks to war against oil-rich countries followed by what David Harvey [2004] calls *accumulation by dispossession*) and agricultural trade is *liberalized*, meaning forcibly opened up into more global "free markets." In reality, supposedly "free trade" involves one set of exchangers enjoying full protection by the State's military power and market regulatory mechanisms and the other set of exchangers having no security or say in the terms of trade whatsoever. For example, upon dissolution of the political colonial administrations, colonized countries were lent money (with conditions) by the same powers who had been colonizing them. Referring to the fiscal revenue enjoyed by colonial powers in their *honorable exit* toward *welfare colonialism*, Crawford Young (1994, p. 217) states: "The essence of terminal colonial politics was the implanting of fragile graftings of a constitutional polity onto the robust trunk of colonial autocracy." This is why much literature on colonialism prefers the term *neocolonialism* over *postcolonialism*, the former implying a mere change in form of exploitation and plunder while the latter implies its end. Much like the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) required by International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, loans from former colonial

powers create situations of unpayable debt: punitive and vindictive financial situations that some call *revenge capitalism* (Haiven, 2020). The “free market” does not involve contracts among equals but, in essence, slave contracts (Black, 2001; Ross, 1998).

While some think of new and improved technology and the globalization of the world as necessarily good things, on the ground these devices benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor. Motorization and mechanization of farm equipment are too costly and can never be universally accomplished; they also produce widespread unemployment, destroying people’s ability to sustain themselves and their families, communities, and nations (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006). The underequipped peasantry has to “compete” with overseas commodities—like bananas, lettuce, carrots, meat, or milk—that come from those 10% of fully mechanized, successful factory farms that can afford to offer their produce at very low prices. The farmworkers fall, one by one.

Recall that during the maturation period of the waqf in Islamic history, as the community’s needs changed so did the services offered by the awqāf. Today our needs are deeply entangled in the global economic system. This capitalist system is a life-sucking force for global farmworkers in a manner akin to what Thom Hartmann (2004) calls *cannibalism* (from the Algonquian *wetiko*, meaning a sickness of complete lack of concern for others). Hartmann uses this term to describe our modern warmongering and consumerist way of life. Given this reality, the question becomes: How can Islam inspire Muslims to challenge and block the ravages of global capitalism? Specifically, how can we revive awqāf to redress the deadly ravages inflicted on global farmworkers?

Investing in permaculture design would produce several concrete solutions to the crisis of global agriculture. The permaculture *statement of ethics* includes the following provisions:

- *No further disturbance of natural forests*
- *Vigorous rehabilitation of wasted systems*
- *Minimal land use for cultivation of plant systems*
- *Creation of refuge sanctuaries for endangered species of plants and animals*
- *Creation of our own noninvasive systems based on these ethical principles.*

Designing local agricultural systems based on these principles would localize food production and farm labor; wrestle control over the food

supply away from big business and invest communities with greater accountability for how we live and what we eat; rewild tracts of agricultural land (meaning the return of land back to the wilderness) to increase biodiversity, healthy ecosystem function, and soil resilience; and interrupt the global supply chain that thrives on the pauperization of most of the world's farmworkers. The success of ecosystem restoration camps (mentioned above) and smaller-scale community garden and local food co-op projects provide evidence as well as hope for thinking outside the global supply chain box. They also provide concrete sites for tethering local waqf infrastructure that spiritually washes our wealth while addressing a real historical problem. As Mollison (1988) and others acknowledge, it is not the lack of creative alternatives to the current agricultural production system that is the problem: it is the lack of political goodwill to put those alternatives into action.

The Waqf as a Means of Transforming the Wealth Chasm and Systemic Racism

The other example of structural poverty in our world, which I propose can be a space for revitalizing awqāf today, is the racial wealth divide in the United States. Over the past three decades, racial wealth discrepancies have only grown. After adjusting for inflation, we find that between 1983 and 2016, the median wealth of White families increased from \$110,000 to \$147,000, the median wealth of Black families has decreased by half from \$7,000 to \$3,500, and the median wealth of Latino families has increased slightly from \$4,000 to \$6,500 (Collins et al., 2019). The wealth gap also creates and exacerbates other gaps: the achievement gap—the difference between the educational attainment levels of two groups, including standardized test performance across the groups—the gap in economic mobility, standard of living gap, and racial health disparities.

The Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC) is a beautiful example of Muslims working in research, curriculum, and community partnerships to combat institutionalized racism. Islah LA is another organization working to provide quality social services that restore and renew faith, education, unity, family, civic engagement, and economic empowerment in Southern Los Angeles, California. The vehicle of the waqf can specifically target the racial wealth gap by financing community centers, artist collectives, think tanks, media outlets, and advocacy institutions that work specifically toward bridging the racial wealth gap. In addition, Muslims can find concrete recommendations for creating target-specific waqf endowments in the

National Community Reinvestment Coalition, The Ohio State University, Institute for Policy Studies and Inequality.org, who in 2019 issued a joint report titled “Ten Solutions to Bridge the Racial Wealth Divide” (Collins et al., 2019). The report makes policy recommendations at the federal level, but several of these can be blueprints for private waqf programs. For example, we can create baby bonds, which are managed accounts set up at birth for children endowed at a level based on the financial position of that child’s family. Each year thereafter, money is added to the account, again, inversely proportional to the child’s poverty level. When the child reaches adulthood, the bond can be used toward education, purchasing a home, or opening up a business. The hope is to begin to redress the ravages of unfair race-based inherited advantage that systematically limits opportunities for the majority of Black and Latino families. Recent research at Columbia University’s Center on Poverty and Social Policy has shown that, properly instated, baby bonds could reduce the racial wealth divide by more than tenfold.

Guaranteed employment is another potential waqf site. Research shows that simply increasing workforce participation is not sufficient to lift families out of poverty. Most working-class families—what the Bureau of Labor Statistics calls the “working poor”—work several jobs simultaneously all their lives and still pass zero wealth on to their children. More *good* jobs that pay *living* wages are needed for all those able to work. Guaranteed employment would take a certain form at the federal level but in the private sector at the waqf level, Muslims can create job banks in their locales—a register of necessary tasks—and employ low-income adult workers at minimum wage, which is an annual \$24,600 for full-time work and includes a standard benefits package. After adjusting for inflation, the minimum wage has not only failed to keep up, it has actually *gone down* since 1968 (Collins et al., 2019). It is impossible to survive on today’s minimum wage. Building toward guaranteed employment would begin to redress this.

Another potential waqf site involves investment in affordable housing. One can scarcely find locales in the United States today where a worker earning the federal minimum wage (\$7.25/hr) can afford to rent a two-bedroom apartment. For this reason, several states set minimum wage rates higher than the federal minimum, in order to better approximate living wage requirements. Muslims can endow trusts, like the Housing Trust Fund proposed by Senator Elizabeth Warren. The trust would provide homes for low-income families and down-payment assistance to first-time homebuyers. The trust can specifically assist families at risk of losing their homes due to gentrification. It would also

be a site to advocate for shifting the present tax incentives that privilege wealthy homeowners over renters and first-time buyers.

Another potential waqf site for redressing the racial wealth divide is free medical clinics, such as the University Muslim Medical Association Community Clinic in Los Angeles. The American Muslim community is blessed with an abundance of medical doctors. If wealth- and property-owning Muslims collectively endow the establishment and staffing of clinics in neighboring low-income areas, and if each Muslim doctor volunteers one day weekly or monthly to provide medical check-ups and treatment free of charge, it would immensely impact the overall health, well-being, and economic stability of Muslims and non-Muslims across low-income communities. Scores of Americans go into poverty each year due to medical bills; *awqāf* establishing free medical clinics could alleviate this phenomenon. Other potential and easy-to-implement *waqf* programs include interest-free lending and fee-less check cashing, both of which would help to rectify the unequal and unfair race-based distribution of inherited advantage in the United States.

Conclusion

The Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "The hand above is better than the hand below," meaning the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives. In elaborating on this *hadith*, Ubaydullah Evans (2019) suggests that African American Muslim communities and their allies ought to have collaborative sessions to map out mechanisms by which certain African American Muslim communities can become hands that give, thereby partaking in the blessing promised in the *hadith*. In addition to revitalizing the *waqf* as the central mechanism in Muslim society uniting the spiritual ground of giving with the concrete imperatives of social welfarism, such measures would also renew a lost *sunnah*. Economic partnerships across American Muslim communities through *waqf* funds could potentially resuscitate that beautiful and necessary "Helper-Migrant" (Ar., *ansār-muhājirūn*) kinship set up by the Prophet Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, when he saw his community in Medina divided in their stability and resource base. In our ethnically and racially diverse Muslim community here in the United States, we are notably missing these types of relationships. What would happen to the racial wealth divide in America if each migrant family was tied to an indigenous family among African American, Latino American, or Native American communities, with an added layer of mutual rights and concern? *Awqāf* are not limited to exclusively benefitting Muslims, so it stands to reason

that such potential waqf sites for redressing the racial wealth divide would help dignify and advance non-Muslim people of color in the United States as well.

There are countless points of intervention where Muslims can identify structural causes of poverty and develop waqf institutes to redress them. For example, animal sanctuaries have been secured through waqf endowments in Muslim history. How can awqāf be revitalized today to address the ecological devastation that includes depletion of freshwater sources and species extinction? The possibilities are endless if we employ what John Paul Lederach calls the *moral imagination*, “the one thing uniquely gifted to our species, but which we have only on rare occasions understood or mobilized” that alone can orient us toward a more human horizon “to constructively impact the fundamental well-being of the human community” (2005, p. 23).³ Despite the time that has passed since the deterioration of the waqf, erasing it from the living practice of Muslims, we can revitalize its use through our moral imagination for solving the specific structural causes of poverty in our world. That is, after all, the legacy of the Muslim waqf institution.

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