

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Muslim Philanthropy in Canada

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Muslim Philanthropy in Canada is a special issue of the *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society (JMPCS)* based on papers given at a symposium hosted in March 2021 (virtual due to the COVID lockdown) by the Centre for Religion and Its Contexts at Emmanuel College, of Victoria University in the University of Toronto. The symposium was jointly funded by *JMPCS* and Emmanuel College. A special issue and a symposium dedicated to the topic of Muslim philanthropy in Canada is pioneering in two ways. First, Canadian academia has not focused enough on charitable giving, despite it being a significant part of the Islamic tradition. Oral history testifies to its presence and importance in Canadian Muslim communities since the earliest Muslim settlements (Bullock, 2004, 2017; Hogben, 2021). Yet its academic study is negligible. Participants at a 2017 workshop in Ottawa studied a comprehensive bibliography about scholarly work on Muslims in Canada and identified that academia has focused on issues related to identity, integration, law, media, radicalization, and securitization (MUN). Arts, charitable work, business practices, economics, ethics, history, organizational behavior, and leadership are all important features of Muslim life in Canada that are barely studied. We hope the symposium and this special issue lay foundations for a new scholarly field that studies Muslim charitable life in Canada.

Second, both the symposium and this issue bring together scholars and practitioners to illuminate the topic of Muslim philanthropy in Canada. Philanthropy is above all a field of action, so including practitioners' voices is a crucial part of this pioneering issue on Muslim philanthropy in Canada. Mosque sermons remind congregations regularly that charity is part of faith, of the obligation of annual zakat, of the importance of serving the community and trying to alleviate poverty and suffering. Hundreds of Muslims in Canada heed this call and dedicate countless volunteer hours to charitable work, be it through formal associations or informal networks. It is only fitting that their voices be part of the symposium and this special issue. Pioneers have to tell foundational stories, so narrating the story of how we arrived at this special issue is an important part of understanding the topic itself.

The account begins in 2017, when I volunteered with a multi-faith group to host a conference on faith and basic income at the University of St Michael's College, Toronto. Although I had a cursory understanding of basic income, I knew how similar some of its concepts were to the Islamic institution of zakat and practices of the early Caliphs in distributing money from the public treasury to support the poor (Bullock & Daimee, 2021a). And yet, there were less than a

handful of Muslims participating in basic income advocacy, and even fewer able to present Islamic perspectives on basic income at that conference. Moreover, as a comment by one of the (non-Muslim) participants demonstrated, there was very little understanding by attendees of the differences between Islamic concepts of charity and justice and that of secularists or other faith groups: she suggested that basic income was about justice, that is addressing the political and economic structures that lead to and support poverty, whereas religious groups tended to focus on charity, which is more about “mercy”—helping the poor—than justice. Even with my then perfunctory knowledge of a few scattered relevant Qur’anic verses and ahadith, I knew this did not describe the Islamic philanthropic tradition. There was the Qur’anic verse describing zakat as a “right” of the poor (70:24–25), and a hadith about the relationship between charity and justice that went like this: “Every joint of a person must perform a charity each day that the sun rises: to judge justly between two people is a charity. To help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it, is a charity. And the good word is a charity. And every step that you take towards prayer is a charity and removing a harmful object from the road is a charity” (Bahi, 2002, p. 128). In addition to showing that “charity” in Islam goes beyond a standard Western definition of “voluntary donations of money or goods” (Kymlicka, 2001, pp. 87–88; also Goodin, 2017), this hadith relates charity to justice. Indeed, it makes justice a subset of charity.

Clearly scholars need to pursue these topics more. With the aid of a volunteer research assistant, whose thorough scan of the literature about charity and justice from the Muslim point of view, or the study of Muslim charity in Canada, revealed next to nothing, we learned that much contemporary Muslim scholarship on zakat is mostly theoretical—how zakat could or should work as a normative tool for distributive justice (Ahmad & Hassan, 2000; Ahmad et al., 2006; Ahmad, 1991; Allheedan, 2016; Baidhaw, 2012; Siddiqui, 1988). Some work from the point of view of jurisprudence, covering the theoretical basics of what is zakat, how it should be calculated, who should pay it, and who should receive it (Dhar, 2013; Al-Qardawi, 1999). Others investigate its application in contemporary Muslim-majority societies (Davis & Robinson, 2006; Retsikas, 2014; Powell, 2009). Retsikas (2014) found that for Indonesia, zakat studies have been undertaken mostly by historians, geographers, and anthropologists (the latter focused mainly on the politics of international Islamic aid organizations) with “very little sustained attention” (p. 341) by ethnographers. Many scholars lament that zakat is currently overlooked as a potential tool for poverty alleviation, so their scholarship also advocates for zakat as a new (revived) policy instrument (Ahmad & Hassan, 2000, p. 169; Ahmad et al., 2006, p. 15; Al-Qardawi, 1999, p. 709; Chapra, 1992, p. 270). A few scholars conclude that where the state does administer zakat it is often marred by mismanagement, corruption, and dissension (Malik, 2016, p. 73; Powell, 2009, pp. 73–79).

We also found that zakat in Western countries is understudied, locating only two papers on the topic (May, 2019; Ndiaye, 2007). In 2019 the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, based in the USA, released a pioneering comparative study of Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and non-affiliated

Americans' giving, measured in dollar amounts, investigating why they donate, and who they donate to, with an age, gender, and race breakdown. But they did not break the dollar amounts down into zakat money versus other monies (Mahmood, 2019). Studies of Muslim communities do highlight social service practices, such as soup kitchens or food banks; such analyses mention zakat in passing in a routine way as an aspect of Muslim charity (Azmi, 1997; Bolognani & Statham, 2013; Bramadat & Seljak, 2009; Fridolfsson & Elander, 2012; GhaneaBassiri, 2017; Nadir, 2013; Peucker, 2020; Peucker & Kayikci, 2020; Qasqas & Chowdhury, 2017). These kinds of community-based studies are empirically focused and are mostly descriptive. They might use substitute concepts such as social work, social services, or volunteerism for zakat (Borell & Gerdner, 2011).

So we decided to begin this pioneering research ourselves by doing a qualitative study of Muslim charities in Canada. In the absence of secondary literature, we needed to start at the source and ask the people doing zakat work what that means in a Canadian context. This resulted in two papers published by the Yaqeen Institute (Bullock & Daimee, 2021a, 2021b). The *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* grant opportunity arose during this time. Knowing from our literature review that there was little scholarship on this topic in Canada, I thought a symposium might be able to draw out hitherto unknown scholars working on the topic. An event would also serve as a networking and gathering moment for a fledgling field. Fortunately, Emmanuel College and JMPCS agreed.

Yet the symposium itself revealed the innovative nature of studying Muslim charity in Canada: the first call for papers focused solely on zakat in Canada. Even though we knew that there were no scholars who had published on zakat in Canada, we hoped that scholars working in cognate areas might take up the topic, or that we would discover PhD students working on these topics. Titled "Muslim Charity in a Canadian Context," we invited papers to consider the following questions:

- Why do Muslims give in the Canadian context? What causes do they give to?
- What kind of adaptations are necessary or observed in the fiqh of zakat in Canada? The definition of someone who is zakat-eligible? The calculations of zakat-able goods and assets? The distribution, i.e., cash vs goods? Are there distinctions made between Muslims and non-Muslims for zakat distribution?
- What role does the regulatory environment of Canadian charity law play in zakat giving? In the foundation and development of zakat-focused organizations, especially post-9/11?
- What is the relationship between zakat and distributive justice in Canada?
- What role does zakat play in alleviating poverty?
- Do Muslims in Canada make a distinction between charity and justice?

- What relationships do zakat-focused organizations have with wider social justice and anti-poverty movements?
- The history and evolution of zakat-focused organizations in Canada
- The establishment of waqf institutions in Canada?

Resounding silence led us to widen the scope of the symposium. *JMPCS* works from the expanded Islamic understanding of what counts as charity based on hadith, such as the one cited above. A revamped call for papers for the renamed “Muslim Philanthropy in a Canadian Context” invited submissions on the following topics:

- The history and evolution of charitable organizations in Canada
- Muslim involvement in refugee resettlement in Canada
- Muslim volunteerism and civic engagement in Canada
- Muslim participation in wider anti-poverty and social justice movements
- Muslim social work and social services in Canada
- Muslim charitable giving in the Canadian context
- The establishment of waqf institutions in Canada
- The impact of the regulatory environment of Canadian charity law on Muslim charities in Canada, especially post-9/11
- The adaptations in the fiqh of zakat in Canada

We accepted papers from a mix of junior and senior scholars, and, recognizing the pioneering nature of the event, included practitioners, based on the understanding, as mentioned, that with regard to charitable work, knowledge is contained and conveyed by people in the field. Senior scholars moderated the sessions.

As symposium participant Shaykh Rizvi, current Imam of the Jaffari Community Centre in Thornhill, Ontario, points out in his article, the Qur’an teaches us that “[they] will not attain righteousness till [they] spend in charity of the things [they] love” (3:82). Not only is charity more than justice, not only is it more than donating money or goods, but charity is also an act of worship for Muslims. Zakat is a spiritual practice with a secular element. That is why al-Qardawi (1999) called it a “tax-worship or a worship-tax” (p. 502). Our Yaqeen papers show that for those who work at or volunteer at Muslim charitable organizations, those who donate to them, and those who are clients, charity is a central element of being Muslim in Canada. Zakat, sadaqa, and waqf are all essential characteristics of Muslim communities in Canada. We must draw attention to them. Our Yaqeen studies, the symposium presentations, and this special issue show how traditional Muslim institutions adapt on migration to

minority status in Western countries. They draw attention to Muslim civic engagement and integration into the fabric of Western societies. They serve as meeting points for interfaith dialogue on service to the poor and secular commitments to social justice. They take us beyond identity politics and security and radicalization studies. They are a corrective to stereotypes of Muslims as haters of Western society, self-imposed ghettoization, people who take but do not contribute, or Muslim women as oppressed and men as terrorists. They draw attention to the material struggles facing Muslims in these societies. They are an insight into ethical life for Muslims in Canada. Fortunately, the *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* takes a leadership role by highlighting Muslim philanthropy in its publications.

The issue opens with Sanaa Ali-Muhammad and Ruby Latif's paper that examines where Canadian Muslim's philanthropic dollars are spent—at least those that are captured through a data analysis of the top 50 Muslim charities. It is the perfect piece to inaugurate this special issue, as it provides an overview of the landscape of Muslim charities in Canada. The paper begins with a demographic profile of Muslim communities in Canada. The authors use Nimer's (2014) eight-part typology of Muslim communities in North America to search publicly available data on the 50 largest Muslim-serving, Muslim-led, and Muslim-focused charities. They build on Qasqas and Chowdhury's (2017) analysis of Islamic religious groups in Canada to ask the questions, how much money is being raised, and where is it being spent? They want to do this to assess the efficacy of Canadian Muslims' charitable dollars. They make recommendations about this in their concluding section.

Echoing Ali-Muhammad's and Latif's literature review that it is "challenging" to locate scholarly work on Canadian Muslim charities, the next paper by Memona Hossain contributes a pioneering study of the environmental behaviors of Muslims in Canada. She found no work on this topic. Her paper is part of her larger study of environmental activism focused on over 60 Muslim women globally. She used semi-structured interviews to talk to 10 Canadian Muslims, men and women, exploring their environmental activism. Her paper begins with a brief discussion of the meaning of environmental philanthropy and then introduces Islamic perspectives on four key concepts related to environmental philanthropy. A series of recommendations follow her data results. Hossain makes a perceptive insight that Muslim integration and identity is related to their involvement in environmental activism, which is a movement not always inclusive of marginalized communities.

Next comes the three practitioner's reports, which together capture a diverse snapshot of on the ground activism in different Muslim communities. Nuzhat Jafri charts the story of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW). It was founded in 1982 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Jafri recounts the struggles of managing a volunteer-run organization. She discusses their fundraising techniques and strategies. The Canadian Revenue Agency restricts an organization's activities in order to be eligible for charitable status (which allows the organization to give tax-receipts). Jafri's discussion of the internal debate

among CCMW members as to whether or not go that route is germane to all Muslim nonprofit organizations in Canada.

Sheikh Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi's paper looks at Muslim charitable giving from the perspective of the Shi'a Ithnā-'Ashari Muslims in Canada. He outlines the theory of zakāt before turning to case studies of his organization, the Islamic Shi'a Ithnā-'Ashari Jamaat of Toronto (ISIJ). Noting Shi'ī jurisprudential rules of zakāt do not include banknotes, he concludes that the "the scope of zakāt, especially for Shi'as in the West, is limited." Rizvi details how the obligation of *khums* (one-fifth or 20% of the annual profit or savings of a person) is important both to poverty alleviation and to the financial upkeep of their religious institutions, along with other kinds of donations and fundraising. He argues for the importance of charity toward non-Muslims. He discusses various fundraising models, including income generating activities. He details the pioneering social services of the Islamic Shi'a Ithnā-'Ashari Jamaat of Toronto. He finishes with a brief survey of notable donations and charitable services by local Shi'a community members.

The final practitioner report widens the lens to an international level. Mohammed Abu Asaker's paper looks at the founding and development of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees Zakat Fund. Asaker discusses the rationale behind founding the dedicated fund, their activities, and disbursements. He highlights the fatawa received from scholars around the world supporting the fund as zakat eligible. He details the fund's transparency and governance policies—a crucial aspect of due diligence for those entrusted with zakat distribution. He finishes with a look at Canadian Muslim contributions to the fund, noting that Canada is the ninth largest donor. Abu Asaker's presentation in March 2021 was before the Ukraine crisis changed the face of worldwide refugees, but Muslims are, unfortunately, still among the top refugee producing countries (UNHCR).

We hope readers are inspired to begin their own studies of Muslim philanthropy in Canada.

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