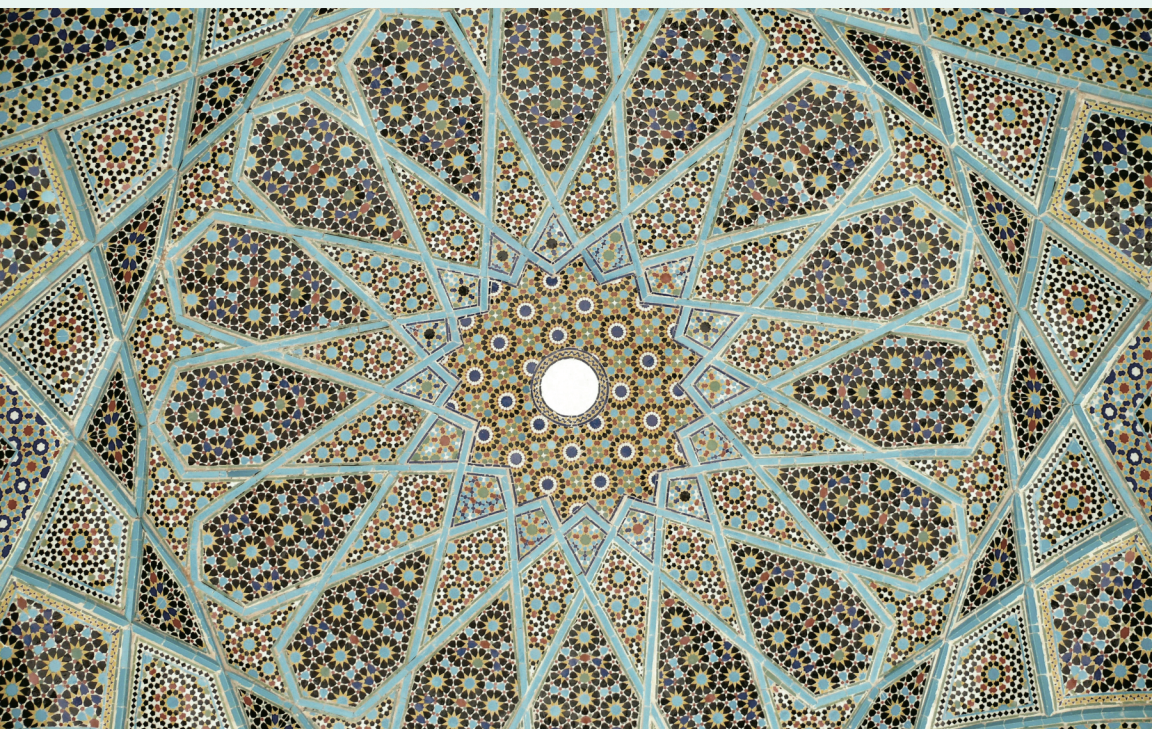




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THE POLITICS OF GIVING: CHARITY, STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

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Charitable giving has always been centrally important for both the political ambitions of the state and its governing structures, and the Muslim feelings of public belonging and commitment to religious duty. In Turkey, associations and vakıfs provide the technical assemblages to devise projects that go beyond the dichotomies of secular/religious, of charity/philanthropy and develop communities that transcend national boundaries. This paper highlights charitable associations and vakıfs as not only places where formal and informal mechanisms of social protection manifest themselves, but also as places where new understandings of the role of the state are fashioned. Visibility of the poor, tinged with nostalgia, becomes a way to remember the “just” and “fatherly” Ottoman Empire and an Islamic charitable heritage based on transnational religious feeling of brotherhood/sisterhood. Consequentially, charitable communities inadvertently aid and abet the neoliberal agenda of the government.

Keywords: charity, Middle East, Turkey, neoliberalism

Introduction

Research continues to affirm the increasing role played by NGOs in shaping national and international policy as well as advocacy on the local

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level. NGOs are increasingly reframing the nation-state, both from below and from above, through their efforts to fulfill social functions that the state previously performed and through their ability to mobilize financial and political pressure on national politics and agendas (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Bratton, 1989; Hyuk-Rae & McNeal, 2007; Pierre, 2000). They aim to represent those people and interests they see as ill served by the structure of the neoliberal nation-state (Eldridge, 2005). The rising presence of civil society organizations such as NGOs, transnational corporations, and supra-national bodies are also seen as indicators of a declining or dying nation-state with the onset of globalization and the emergence of a “post-national order.”

Several authors frame the rising influence of civil society organizations in terms of an inherent dialectical tension between local institutions and practices, on the one hand, and globalization, on the other. Two of the most well-known articulations of this tension are that of “fundamentalism versus cosmopolitan tolerance” (Giddens, 2000) and “Jihad versus McWorld” (Barber, 1995). Within this formulation, the nation-state becomes a minor player caught between the antagonisms of the local and the global. Yet these categorizations remain crudely dualistic and thus unable to account for many important contextual factors in the dynamics of the relationship between civil society and the nation-state. In particular, such categorizations often ignore the voices and praxes of those who work at various local nexuses of civil society organizations and the state.

This paper is a study of the privatization of charitable giving in contemporary Turkey and its effects on conceptualizations of the state’s role in Turkish society. In my analysis, I specifically focus on associations and faith-based foundations or *vakıfs* engaged in projects aimed at alleviating poverty, investing in development, and providing relief to victims of natural disasters and other humanitarian crises. The paper highlights charitable associations and *vakıfs* as not only places where formal and informal mechanisms of social protection manifest themselves, but also as places where new understandings of the role of the state are fashioned. For example, many of the *vakıfs* dedicated to alleviating poverty call attention to the poor in a way that generates and leverages a certain historical nostalgia for the “just” and “fatherly” Ottoman Empire and its storied Islamic charitable heritage. This nostalgia, in turn, enhances the efficacy of different versions of the popular “neo-Ottoman” narratives designed to lend historical, moral, and ethno-national legitimacy to certain political parties, platforms, and candidates. This underscores the importance of studying the role charitable giving plays in the broader politics of memory and influence

in the contemporary Turkish context. Accordingly, this article focuses on both the politics and varied meanings of praxes of giving in today's Turkey.

The article will first discuss the politics of civil society organizations and the concept/practice of *vakıf* in Turkey. In doing so, I rely on Max Weber's definition of politics: "‘politics’...means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state" (cited in Singer, 2018, p. 2). I offer three interrelated arguments and a concluding argument. The three arguments are:

- 1) *Charitable organizations provide robust, contradictory, yet important venues for various philanthropic agents (e.g., donors, volunteers, employers of charitable organizations, aid-recipients, etc.) as they reframe the contours of the responsibilities of both the state and the citizenry.*
- 2) *The individual subjectivities of these philanthropic agents are fashioned within this reframing process. It is through the act of volunteering time and money that individuals reimagine, reconstitute, and reaffirm their ties to their local communities, to the Turkish state, and to the Ottoman past.*
- 3) *Consequently, many charitable institutions lend themselves to cooptation by the current Turkish government and its neoliberal agenda.*

My concluding argument is that charitable associations in contemporary Turkey occupy complex and multifaceted sociopolitical spaces. People have strong and at times contradictory reasons for why they participate in and how they perceive these spaces. In turn, charitable associations are continuously negotiating their roles within the context of local and national politics and policies. They play an under-researched and yet extremely important role as both the products and shapers of the contemporary Turkish nexus of the "local versus global" dialectic referenced above.

Methodology

This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Istanbul and Izmir (Turkey) between 2007 and 2013. During this time, I conducted several site visits to two civil society organizations: the Deniz Feneri Aid and Solidarity Association (DFASA) and the Foundation for

Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH). DFASA does not openly support any political party, but it is closely aligned with the current conservative AKP government, while the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), created as a *vakıf*, situates itself as a transnationally active human rights organization with the goal of helping Islamic groups and nations.¹

Despite the diversity of alignments, each relies heavily on charitable donations predominantly collected during Ramadan and other religious occasions such as *Eid al-Fitr*. Each advertise themselves as legitimate bodies where believers can donate their *zakat* and *sadaqa* with the guarantee that the donated money will be spent in religiously appropriate ways and for the betterment of larger society in general and the Islamic community (*umma*) in particular.² These associations and *vakıfs* use charitable donations to fund specific projects such as return-to-village projects, educational support for orphans, building of schools and homes, distributing aid in natural disasters, aid to Gaza, and the distribution of aid-in-kind and monetary aid to needy families both within Turkey and abroad.

During the fieldwork, I visited these organizations, spending time with both employers and volunteers at their sites. I also visited the homes of aid recipients. At DFASA, I participated in aid packaging and distribution as well as working at their locations where they distribute clothing to the needy. I read and catalogued the letters of the needy that were sent to DFASA and entered data into their computerized system of aid categorization and delivery. This allowed me to see the entire process of aid application and delivery firsthand. It also gave me an opportunity

¹ Although DFASA does not openly declare loyalty to any political government party and does not define itself as an Islamic organization, it had received the blessing of the AKP government and informal interviews with volunteers and employees of the organization conducted by the author suggests empathy and alliance with the AKP government. Several issues of a magazine published by the association showcase either the then prime minister and now president Recep Tayip Erdoğan, or other party officials, as supportive of DFASA and present in various organizational activities. In one such story, Erdoğan himself calls the association, noting how he was moved by the television program of DFASA (Başbakan..., 2006, p. 31). In other issues Erdoğan's wife, Emine, and various government officials were seen participating in activities sponsored by the association. Regardless, DFASA does not get any funding from the government and largely sees itself as a charitable association free of politics.

² The obligatory *zakat* is technically a subspecies of *sadaqa* (i.e., "righteous action" or "charitable giving"), which is a broader term in Islamic teaching often used to describe all obligatory and non-obligatory forms of giving. Despite this distinction, in practice many donors may not differentiate between the two, seeing all forms of charitable giving as "obligatory" for Muslims.

to meet aid recipients on site and do follow-up research and interviews later.

I chose these charitable associations due to their continual work on aid delivery in times of disasters and in times of need. Additionally, when I started my research in 2007, DSFA was one of the most well-known and respected associations with extensive intranational and international connections. Since then, it has been embroiled in a corruption scandal and lost some of its luster. However, it still works extensively in aid delivery. Another reason I chose these specific organizations was mere serendipity: they were the organizations that opened their doors to me after my initial inquiry. I would like to note that my visits to IHH were limited since then, due to time limitations and the need to do deep ethnographic work, I decided to work more with DFASA. I have also visited several smaller, municipal associations engaged in the distribution of charitable aid. These visits emerged, in part, due to the fact that some volunteers I encountered at the two primary organizations were also involved in various other charitable associations.

The Meanings and Politics of Charitable Giving

Both theoretical and practical concerns over the varied meanings and functions of “civil society” have a long tradition in Western social thought. Unsurprisingly, from the era of classical social theorists (such as Locke, de Tocqueville, Marx, Hegel) to that of contemporary scholars (Cohen & Arato, 1992; J. Alexander, 1998), social thought has conceived of the concept of “civil society” in nearly exclusively Western terms as a largely Western phenomenon. Despite problems of definition, these thinkers took for granted that individualism, political rights, property rights, and democratic institutions were among the essential ingredients for “civil society” and thus could hardly conceive of “civil society” as anything but in the context of a modern Western society comprised of freely associating, atomized individuals bound by contracts and competing in a free market economy (J. Alexander, 1998; Kamali, 1998; Seligman, 1992; Shils, 1991). Additionally, framed as bulwarks of democratization, civil society institutions were and are often hailed as counter-hegemonic, autonomous, and apolitical spheres disconnected from and resistant to state power (Kadioğlu, 2005; Ehrenberg, 1999; Dower, 1998).

In light of this distinctively Western theoretical bias, the existence of “Muslim civil society” was generally assumed to be a *de facto* impossibility. This is why evidence of a vibrant civil society in a Muslim-majority nation-state such as Turkey was looked on as an

anomaly (Gellner, 1994; Gellner, 1997). Yet research focusing on the Middle East has shown that groups and organizations with an Islam-oriented agenda have been avid participants in the democratic sphere and have developed projects and received support from national governments (Norton, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Kazemi, 1996; Lesch, 1996, Toprak, 1996; Anjum, 2012; and others). Additionally, the individualized, “rights”-oriented approach to civil society based on freely associating citizens was noted to have little relevance or resonance in cultures where kinship and neighborhood ties play an enormous role in encouraging and supporting civic participation and are central to the individual’s sense of belonging (White, 1996; Waylen, 1994; Göle, 1994; Kamali, 2006; Birtek, 1994).

Such research has conclusively demonstrated that “civil society” and its institutions can and do exist and play an important part in community formation within a number of different sociopolitical contexts. In such situations they can both rely on and challenge existing communal and relational ties, have undemocratic agendas, and embrace larger societal missions (Keyman & İçgüdü, 2003; Keyman, 2000), whatever their sociopolitical orientation. More importantly, they can help legitimize and solidify the neoliberal state in whatever form it may take. As Foucault points out, every society exists within the framework of a state’s legal regulations, yet at the same time remains “inaccessible to centralized political power. [Civil society is] the correlate of a political technology of government. It is a ‘transactional reality,’ existing at the mutable interface of political power and everything which permanently outstrips its reach. Its contours are thus inherently variable and open to constant modification” (cited in Burchell 1991, pp. 140–141). Following Foucault, it is more productive to conceptualize civil society organizations not so much as apolitical or independent entities pursuing their own distinct agendas, but rather as actual means and technologies of governance that may help or hinder a state’s regulatory power over society. In other words, they are “mutable interfaces” that help construct and give meaning to the varied ideas and representations of the state and its citizenry.

Social scientists working on state-society relations in Turkey have positioned the development of “civil society” (primarily in the 1980s and 90s) as emblematic of democratization, demilitarization and decentralization (Heper & Evin, 1994; Kadioğlu, 2005; Göle, 1994). Pivotal to this analysis has been the interpretation of the public resurgence of Islam in Turkey as crucial to the blossoming of civil society against the state after more than 70 years of state repression against religious orders and public expressions of religion (Heper, 1991;

Göle, 1996; Özdalga, 1997; Mardin, 1969; Pusch, 2000). These scholars were highly influential in pointing out the importance of Islam in the public sphere, in historicizing Turkish civil society by pointing out its rootedness within the Ottoman Empire, and in correcting the Eurocentrism of secular humanists, such as Habermas (1991), who would not have recognized the causal connections between the public resurgence of religious expression with the burgeoning of a vibrant democratic public sphere.

However, the conceptualization of a civil society as one that is formed as an alternative or in opposition to the state runs the risk of constructing an artificial dualism of “state-versus-society,” or “Islam-versus-state,” which falls short of understanding key sociopolitical realities, and Turkey is a prime case-in-point. Far from largely being agents of alternative or counter-hegemonic social agendas, many Turkish Civil society organizations can and should be more accurately conceptualized as necessary partners of states. Seen in this way, civil society organizations allow the researcher to empirically analyze a new form of state governmentality that invests in an idea of civic partnership as a form of state legitimacy and accountability. This, in turn, invites us to question not only the structuring of such partnerships, but also the ways in which they become important in solidifying certain understandings and practices of the state and the citizen with both a representational and a material reality (Mitchell, 2000). As Mitchell (1991) points out, instead of trying to locate a definition that fixes the boundary between state and society, we need to examine how this distinction is produced. I would argue civil society organizations are crucial actors in producing the distinctiveness of the state and the society through embracing civic governance as the model for the modern state, which in turn maintains social and political order. Yet, they also provide a new venue where new communities are formed and citizenship is defined.

The contours of such a representational and material reality can be seen in several of the interviews I conducted. As one donor, Sedat, noted³:

³ Names and other information about the individuals have been changed, and some interviews and information have been aggregated, to ensure anonymity. This was necessary because some of the volunteers and employers I talked to were very active and well-known in the organizations. I met most of my interviewees with the help of the organizations mentioned in the article; once I had initial contact, I was able to meet other donors and volunteers with the help of those I interviewed. Some of the interviews, data, and other related materials used in this article have also been referred to in other earlier publications by the author

The state cannot be everywhere, but I think the state needs to step in and become an organizer of all these charitable institutions. That should be the state's role. Do the monitoring and do the organization and check these places. That should be state's role. Create a space where all these organizations and vakıfs can work together instead of defending their own turf sometimes. State needs help because it is so bureaucratized. I am not saying state is not relevant, but it does not function well. It is a bureaucracy. We are to blame, too. You know the Ottoman did it the right way. We lost so much of our own history. Charity was important to the Ottoman Empire and charity is important to our religion. You know the story about zimem defteri (debt ledger) or sadaka taşları (charity/sadaka stones), right? Back then there were stones and people had trust. Now we have computers, but we don't trust each other. (Interview with DF Volunteer, Istanbul, 29 July 2008)

When explaining the role civil society organizations play in contemporary Turkey, Sedat's narrative embraces practices and institutions (i.e., *zimem defteri*, charity stones, and/or the *vakıf* institution) that have their origins in the Ottoman Empire. Although hard to trace historically due to its variety, voluntary charity has played a significant role in Muslim societies (Singer, 2008, 2002; Ergin, Neumann, & Singer 2007).⁴ Sedat's narrative mentions three unique forms that other volunteers also noted. *Zimem defteri* was a form of "debt ledger" that listed the names and the amounts owed by a person to a specific merchant. During Ramadan, those who were rich would change their attire to remain incognito and visit grocery shops in unfamiliar neighborhoods and ask the merchant if he had a debt ledger and told him to count a certain number of pages from the ledger and calculate the amount owed listed in those pages. The rich visitor would pay that amount then and thereby obtain the grace of Allah and leave without asking the identity of the people he or she saved from debt. This enabled the poor and the rich to remain anonymous, as prescribed by the jurisprudence on the giving of zakat. Charity stones had a similar stress on the importance of anonymity. Charity stones were pillars with small niches at the top that one would find in neighborhoods and even in front of the Topkapı Palace where the Ottoman Sultan resided. Those who

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The hardship of tracing voluntary charity historically is indeed due to its variety and its anonymous nature. Charity could consist of a coin given to a beggar or a kind act or word with good intent. For various forms of charity in Muslim communities and their significance see Singer (2008, p. 316).

wanted to make donations could visit these stones whenever they wanted and leave a certain amount. Any needy person could then reach up and take the amount required to meet his or her needs, leaving the rest behind for other needy people. This preserved the anonymity of the poor and saved them from shame and, in turn, enabled the rich to gain the grace of Allah.

Aside from these types of charity, which are difficult to quantify and document historically, Sedat's narrative refers to the more regulated and visible institution of the *vakıf*. *Vakıfs* were pious endowments or foundations constituted for a particular specified sacred and charitable purpose, thus rendering the endowments permanent and no longer subject to the laws of inheritance. *Vakıfs* had a registered deed and were irrevocable and unalterable once constituted. These endowments could be constituted for various charitable reasons, ranging from building a new mosque, to preserving an old mosque, to providing for the poor in a specific neighborhood. Unlike the more anecdotal forms of charity, deeds of *vakıfs* were well documented in the Ottoman period. They are still vibrant institutions within the Turkish Republic and work alongside other civil society organizations, such as associations (*dernekler*), that are formed by a group of individuals who get together to work on a specific cause.

Although one difference between *vakıfs* and *derneks*, aside from the way they are founded, might seem to be the religious significance of *vakıfs* as places that allowed the donor to get the approval of Allah (*Allah rızası*) and attain a place in paradise, Sedat's narrative is a good testament to the fact that associations may also retain a religious significance for the volunteer and the donor. In turn, research on *vakıfs* reveals that they served more complex social and economic purposes than attaining the approval of Allah, such as protection of property, tax reduction, gaining and/or maintaining the support of various constituents, and promoting a specific worldview (Singer, 2008). Sedat's discussion on all these various forms of charitable giving point to their political nature and their interconnectedness to the state as an institution that provides for and protects its citizenry. In turn, this citizenry is fashioned into pious individuals and communities through their participation in these diverse civil society organizations and various processes of giving.

Fashioning Pious Citizenry as Political and Social Actors

Whether organized as *vakıfs* or associations, many civil society organizations rely on the charitable donations of the public for their

survival and for the successful distribution of aid for the proposed mission of curbing poverty in Turkey and abroad. Yet it is also a fact that this mission remains limited in scope due to several factors. Buğra (2008) points out that despite the fact the current government sees civil society organizations as a way to curb government spending and delegate its welfare responsibilities, civil society organizations suffer institutional problems and the state is still perceived as the primary agent responsible for alleviating poverty. In her analysis, she relies on a survey study conducted on charity and volunteerism that demonstrates how many civil society organizations face institutional problems by being so dependent on charitable donations and how 38% of the survey respondents still see the state as responsible for alleviating poverty (Tüsev, 2006). Yet, these findings do not shed light on the vibrancy of civil society organizations despite such challenges and, through overemphasizing donations, do not take into consideration the intimate politics of how or why people still invest in these organizations. The same study notes that 80% of the public engages in some form of individual giving and donations made to civil society organizations tend to be bigger in number and constitute 37% compared to 31% of direct giving (Tüsev, 2006, p. 15).

It is true that charity, charitable donations, and volunteering as a form of charitable donation are closely associated with the Islamic virtue of generosity and the duties of Muslims to offer obligatory alms once a year as zakat and to engage in other forms of charitable giving, such as regular donations to the poor (i.e., *sadaqa*). In fact, another survey on philanthropic giving suggests that individuals are motivated mainly by religious obligations (32%) and traditions and customs (26%) and less so from a sense of obligation to serve society (12%) (Çarkoğlu, 2006). Yet, these obligatory or volunteered donations of time, money, or aid-in-kind are wedded to a distinctive sense of patronage, biopolitics, and possible rehabilitation of itinerant street beggars and future criminals. This could be glimpsed by several responses coming from volunteers of different ages and backgrounds in the various interviews quoted below. All of these volunteers visited DFASA and donated both their time and money there and also at other charitable associations:

According to Semiha:

Ben kendimi vakfettim burda [I donated myself here]. I donate my time and, when I have some extra, my money, for Allah rızası [God's grace] first and foremost. Both zakat and sadaqa for me are ways of being closer to God. I give to my neighbors when I can, too, but this is better because I know it goes to those who are really in need and I do not need to feel bad about

humiliating people who are worse off than I. (Interview with DF Volunteer, Istanbul, 10 June 2009)

As İbrahim noted:

Being generous is one of the names of God. We are generous as believers and as a nation. I think it is the obligation we have. I feel my donation of my time and sometimes money here creates a bond between me and the recipient. I may not know the recipient yet I know that she or he is in need for real and that this will be a way to protect that person from bad things like begging in the streets or stealing things. What they do here is more than just distributing food. It is like they integrate people into the nation and save families. (İnsanları milletimize kazandırıyorlar ve aileleri kurtarıyorlar). (Interview with DF Volunteer, Istanbul, 10 June 2009)

Semra pointed out:

I feel like this place gives me an ability to develop my skills and be more disciplined. Coming here I learned how to work in a setting like this, which is invaluable. Also, this place does things like educate people in various skills. I went to their computer classes. So, you become a more productive person and I am proud of that. (Interview with DF Volunteer, Istanbul, 22 July 2008)

Civil society associations provide their volunteers the opportunity to gain valuable skills to become better workers in the capitalist marketplace, better believers through “vakfetmek” (volunteering) themselves, which were both intertwined with and depended on proper identification, reeducation, and “rehabilitation” of the “real” needy, whose needs were always evaluated in light of their immediate family situations. This search of the needy, I would argue, complemented an increasingly changing understanding of the state not as top-down protectionist modernizer, but as sympathetic partner of civil society organizations in a globalized economy. Through participating in the ritual of giving, the volunteers, donors, and employers of charitable organizations gained the grace of God as well as becoming productive members of their societies.

Communal Selves, Service, and Nostalgia for Ottoman Beneficence: Survival in the Neoliberal State

It is outside the purview of this paper to discuss the historical contours of neoliberalization and the growth of the market economy in Turkey. There are already several detailed analyses of these developments within the context of the several coups that marked the history of the Republic (Aytar, 2006; Ünlü, 2006; Keyman, 2000; Buğra & Keyder, 2005; Atasoy, 2004; Göle, 1996; and others). Suffice it to say here that the opening of the Turkish economy to the global market and the continued embrace of neoliberalism and the free market as benchmarks of Turkey's economic and cultural future continue to have deep effects on Turkish society.

In fact, three significant processes have marked the rise of Islamic and conservative civil society organizations as important actors in the political and social scene of Turkey since the 1990s and also aided in the representational and material legitimacy of the neoliberal state as inefficient but benign partners of civil society organizations. First, increasing critical analyses of the state-centered, top-down processes of modernization in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras allowed for the imagination of alternative processes of state formation and modernity that could embrace both the Ottoman past and Islam within the public space (Navaro-Yashin, 2002; White, 2002; Silverstein, 2008). Second, gradual and steady incorporation of the Turkish economy into the global market since the 1950s was marked by increasing rural-urban migration, rising disparities between the rich and the poor, and the dissolution of the protectionist welfare state that favored state-centered development for a neoliberal state that favored the small-medium-sized enterprises and the rising Islamist bourgeoisie (Yavuz, 2006; Atasoy, 2008; Turam, 2007). This rising Islamist bourgeoisie increasingly founded and supported civil society organizations to promote their visions of a just society. Last but not least, all these changes were marked by a legitimacy crisis of the strong-state tradition as a result of continuing charges of corruption within ruling governments, the uncovering of a "deep state," and the complete failure of state organizations to mobilize their resources during the 1999 earthquake (Aytar, 2006; Howe, 2000). These processes should be considered when analyzing the relevance and role of charitable civil society organizations as legitimate partners of the state.

All of the civil society organizations I visited were formed as associations and/or *vakıfs* during the 1990s when neoliberalism and globalization were embraced openly by the state and the government.⁵

⁵ DFASA was officially founded in 1998; IHH in 1995. In fact, the other associations the author visited were also founded within the same time frame: IBS in 1994 and MAZLUMDER in 1991.

Yet, these two decades of intensive neoliberalization and globalization did not eliminate clientelist ties that were deeply rooted in the bureaucratic structure of the state and were highly charged by possibilities of corruption and inefficiency. Kadioğlu (2005) notes how civil society organizations blossomed alongside the “inefficiency associated with political society as well as its corruption.” In the 1990s in Turkey, political corruption brought several leading politicians under the spotlight for years. The public encountered shocking corruption cases where the military, the politicians in power, and the mafia were interlinked.⁶ Additionally, the current ruling party (AKP) perceived corruption largely as a problem of the state resulting in the erosion of public trust in state institutions and governance.⁷ Civil society developed in the 1990s was seen as unmarred by such concerns over corruption and it was perceived to be a means to the increasing democratization of politics.

Hence, the increase in the number of Islamic and conservative civil society organizations, and the current AKP government’s stress on collaborating with civil society, happened within the context of neoliberalization, rising poverty, and rising distrust of state and state institutions due to corruption charges and clientelism. Buğra and Keyder

⁶ Known as the Susurluk incident, a car crash near Susurluk, Balıkesir on November 3, 1996 resulted in the unraveling of social networks that connected the mafia, the police, and the state, which the media and the public dubbed the “deep state.” Riding in the same car were police chief Hüseyin Kocadağ; Abdullah Çatlı, who was a convicted criminal on the run; Çatlı’s girlfriend; and Sedat Bucak, who was the then ruling coalition partner, True Path Party’s deputy. This was the first widely reported incident that highlighted the presence of a deep state that was involved in assassinations and other informal operations against various constituents in Turkey like the Kurds and the Armenians. The public uproar over the incident was coupled with a severe loss of credibility of the state. When it comes to corruption charges, implication of state officials is also not a new phenomenon. For example, former prime ministers Mesut Yılmaz and Tansu Çiller; former economics minister Recep Önal; and former deputy prime minister Hüsameddin Özkan, to name a few, all faced corruption allegations and court cases.

⁷ The current AKP government has made corruption central to its program, as it is a key concern for European Union accession negotiations. In its program that received a vote of confidence on September 5, 2007, corruption was defined as “a fundamental problem that damages the trust relationship between state and its citizens” (Sarlak & Bali, 2008, p. 2). The report released by the Istanbul Chamber of Independent Accountants and Certified Public Accountants noted the negative effect of rapid urbanization, which destroyed social networks, and created social uncertainties that have accelerated the level of corruption in the country (Sarlak & Bali, 2008, p. 4). Only 25% of the public trusted the Parliament and the central government. The public ranked corruption as the third most important problem in Turkey, following inflation and unemployment (Göksel, 2001).

(2005) discuss how civil society organizations that specifically focus on alleviating poverty in Turkey increasingly compartmentalized the poor while shouldering the burdens of globalization that the neoliberalized state was refusing and unable to tackle. If the state is taken to be a discursive, diffuse, and representational construct, then the delegation of poor relief to civil society organizations increasingly support and enable both the representational and real existence of the neoliberal state.

Recent changes in the Turkish political scene have definitely affected charitable associations. For example, the gradual falling out with the Gulen movement dissolved its charitable association (called *Kimse Yok mu*), which, as this article argues, is a testament to the fragile politics of state and civil society in the Turkish context. Although the author did not focus on *Kimse Yok mu* during her research, this organization was far-reaching and extremely popular in Turkish civil society. In fact, I interviewed and spent time with several volunteers of DFASA who also participated in *Kimse Yok Mu* activities and gatherings. However, the rift between Erdogan and Gulen meant the total dissolution of *Kimse Yok Mu*, as their movement was continuously penalized and their adherents were jailed or fled Turkey. The corruption accusations against Burak Erdogan and Reza Zarrab resurfaced many of the doubts about charitable associations, such as DFASA, with close connections to AKP. One of the volunteers of DFASA who was no longer active in the organization voiced concern to me during an informal chat that she was afraid how the unproven corruption charges against the organization would rematerialize and affect aid collection. Additionally, the more recent changes after the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, which resulted in continual top-down suppression of any type of dissent to AKP and the surprise defeat of the AKP in the municipal elections of Istanbul and Ankara in 2019, will undoubtedly further affect the image of charitable associations as well as potentially limit their access to governmental support and resources.

It remains to be seen how these recent developments will affect the sociopolitical dynamics and interplay between state and civil society. In fact, the next step for this researcher is to return and re-interview former volunteers and employers of charitable associations to document the shifts and changes these new times will bring. It will be interesting to further study the responses of volunteers and employers of charitable associations to these recent changes and challenges; however, short communications and social media postings suggest that they are still active and provide an important place of gathering and support for their volunteers and aid recipients. This has always been the case, and my

research shows how volunteers cherish the time spent in these organizations.

Although civil society might not necessarily entail increasing democratization but contain possibilities of essentialist identity claims and anti-democratic ideals (Keyman & İçgüdü, 2003), and although AKP's goal of including civil society organizations in the democratic political process as a means to a more participatory democracy were at times deemed unsuccessful (Tepe, 2005), for all volunteers who were interviewed, their presence in a civil society organization was made meaningful through relational ties that were not deemed as corrupt and ineffective as the relational ties created within state institutions.

Sevim, a vivacious nineteen-year-old, was one of the several young participants in a bazaar sale that DFASA organized to fund its project of housing families who had to come to Istanbul to reside due to a family member needing treatment in a city hospital. The bazaar took place at the guesthouse adjacent to the Cerrahpaşa Mosque close to one of the busiest hospitals in Istanbul called Cerrahpaşa. What started out as a bazaar that would last for a couple of days ended up lasting for more than 40 and was a huge success. The donations of clothing and other materials sold at the bazaar came from donors and employees affiliated with the association. Sevim was also part of a group of students from various universities that congregated to form a youth group at the municipal level to organize volunteering projects at various charitable associations. When I asked her why she participated in volunteering activities, she stated the *huzur* (peace) she felt as a result of such participation, but also noted how, as a young veiled woman, her participation enabled her to be part of a larger community: "I love doing this because I meet people like you. I am a very social person. I am very active and have many friends. I meet people who care and want to do good things here. A lot of people I met here became my closest friends. I have a trust that comes from sharing this place and this experience. That is very important to me" (Interview with DF Volunteer, Istanbul, 20 July 2009).

Valuing a communal self over an individualistic one is not unique to these volunteers. Research conducted in the Middle East and the Mediterranean continuously noted the importance of a communal sense of self as a unique way of realizing selfhood and agency that could not be understood through a Westernized lens that valued individuality and separation from family and community as a way of finding one's self (Marcus, 1992; White, 2004; Delaney, 1999; Dubetsky, 1976). This communal or relational understanding of self is also implicated in ties of reciprocity and dependency that can be conceptualized as clientelist ties

within governments, states, neighborhoods, and families (Öniş, 2003; C. Alexander, 2002; Gellner, 1977). In fact, the importance of families and a familial and communal sense of self are emphasized in the mission statement of AKP, which is also reiterated by the focus of DFASA on helping families and not individuals.⁸ Despite the fact that historically Turkish families have mostly been nuclear, extended networks of kin have been important sources of support in tough times (Dubetsky, 1976). Unfortunately, these ties for new migrants to urban spaces and within neighborhoods are being continuously eroded due to increasing poverty (Buğra & Keyder, 2005). Charitable associations such as DFASA step in to curtail the effects.

Civil society organization volunteers saw themselves as being part of a community that was rooted in the Islamic and Ottoman emphasis on charitable donations without dishonoring and dishonoring the poor. Singer (2008) has provided an excellent historical study on the importance of charitable *vakıfs* and donations in the larger Islamic world and within the Ottoman Empire. As she pointed out, charitable donations and *vakıfs* greatly aided in the political legitimization of the empire and its broad reach. Charitable donations were also integrated into biographical sketches as part of the portraits of the ideal lives for both rulers and ruled, and they might entail not only aid to the needy, but were also a way to gain personal status, political power, and legitimacy (p. 114, 9).

Yet, for the volunteers I talked to, charity was perceived as largely apolitical; it was not the politics that mattered, but the fact that volunteerism provided them the opportunity to form a community of like-minded individuals. The Ottoman past became a touchstone for how this community saw itself foregrounding justice when it comes to aid relief through a genuine respect for the needs of the poor. The loss of confidence in the state's ability to take care of its population was replaced by the imagined reality of an idealized Ottoman past and the increasing responsibility of civil society organizations toward curbing poverty.

Singer (2008) calls these groupings "welfare societies" instead of "welfare states," pointing to the fact that aid relief and charity were central to the formation of communities (p. 183). My research shows the increasing importance of such communities as places of belonging and

⁸ AKP's mission statement and information on the party can be found at <http://www.akparti.org.tr/>. In her work critically analyzing human rights practices and the discourses of political parties, Arat (2017) discusses how AKP's central concern for families instead of individuals when it comes to human rights tends to be problematic, as women's rights remain overshadowed by the concern for families.

trust. It also underlines the importance of these associations to the civilianization and privatization of poor relief. Yet this reading is a partial one. The Ottoman *vakıf* was not open to everyone and civil society organizations in Turkey are not devoid of political agendas and viewpoints. Despite the fact that these spaces provide a sense of community to their volunteers and employees, their effectiveness in curbing poverty and their accessibility to all who are in need remain questionable.

Conclusions: Charitable Communities

For their volunteers and employees, charitable civil society organizations are contradictory places. On one level, they represent new types of communities that bond due to the failure of others, such as neighborhoods and relatives, within the context of neoliberalization. They are contextualized as places where like-minded individuals can meet and possibly change the fate of the poor one family at a time. These communities rely on familiarity and close bonds that are deemed to be more trustworthy than the bureaucratized state institutions reminiscent of an imagined Ottoman past where the Sultan and the empire cared for and felt a religious and moral responsibility for the needy. In this sense, civil society organizations, through their efficiency and honesty, are seen as places of belonging for the citizen who is suspicious and critical of the state.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the presence of the state is any less relevant or that civil society organizations are not subject to challenges to their legitimacy. As discussions with volunteers quoted above show, people tend to contradict their own statements. Sedat, for example, is a proponent of charitable associations, yet, he still feels the state needs to step in and regulate these associations. However, these, at times, contradictory stances did not curtail the value of these charitable communities in creating social capital in terms of trust, social networks, and morality that the state and markets were unable to produce. Charitable civil society organizations acted like glue, creating vertical and horizontal ties between people and institutions both in Ottoman times and within the Turkish Republic while defining the contours of state-citizen relations.

As the responses of the volunteers show, civil society organizations were crucial in the successful governance of the state and society and created citizens' participation in how complex social problems such as poverty were defined and identified. Hence, the emergence of a partnership between civil society organizations and the

state points to a negotiated rather than state-centric governance. The Turkish case is a good example of the complex nature of charitable associations that remain under-studied in civil society literature. It also points to the different ways charitable associations can be viewed and studied in diverse national societies:

- 1) *Charitable civil society organizations necessarily engage in partnership relations with nation-states and it is more effective to view these as continuously negotiated rather than state-centric.*
- 2) *The state uses these relations in the local and global context of political, economic, and social strategies as it seeks to adjust to the changing realities of neoliberal globalization.*
- 3) *In turn, charitable civil society organizations assume the role of the welfare state as they deliver aid and support to those in need while remedying the negative effects of neoliberal globalization.*
- 4) *For individual volunteers and workers, charitable associations and their social projects provide a way to form moral communities, become engaged citizens, and good Muslims.*

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CHARITY AS POLITICS “WRIT SMALL” IN GULF PETRO-MONARCHIES

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This paper offers an overview and comparative analysis of charitable giving in four Gulf monarchies—Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. It focuses on both domestic and international giving as well as on giving by different donor types. It explores several questions: who gives, how do they give, to whom do they give, and why do they give as they do? The data were collected in the course of four research trips to the region, including site visits, extensive interviewing, and the review of documents provided by the various organizations. On the basis of my findings—some of which confirm those of other scholars working on the region or in other contexts—the paper elucidates various ways in which charitable giving, while intrinsic to the practice of Islam, is often instrumentalized by donors to advance political and/or social interests. Among such interests are extension of influence, gathering information, asserting relationships of power and authority, shoring up allegiances, and consolidating communal boundaries. The paper argues that charity—in discourse and practice—is a tool for social management and social control. Thus, the study of charitable giving in Gulf monarchies offers a window on the practice of politics and state-society relations.

Keywords: aid, appeasement, autocracy, charity, 'dawa, exclusion, governance, Islam, oil, philanthropy, political interests, relief, ruling families, zakat

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Introduction¹

Charitable giving in the petro-monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula provides a rich field for the study of politics and state-society relations in the contemporary period. This is so for several reasons: First, as these are Muslim societies, people are expected to give to charity (*zakat* and *sadaqa*) regularly, to show their devotion to God by attending to the community's welfare and assisting those in need. Indeed, giving is said to be substantial in these states, although reliable data are lacking.² Second, as ruling elites assert, to varying degrees, their adherence to Islamic norms in governance, charitable giving is not only prominent, but it is encouraged by regimes, extended in a variety of ways, and engages ruling families, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and private citizens. Active donors in the international sphere, these regimes encourage charitable giving among their subjects; they tend to employ a two-pronged rhetoric that identifies it, first, with Islamic doctrine and, second, with nation-building through social solidarity (*tadamun ijtima'i*) (LeRenard, 2008, p. 148). Some go further by showcasing their own—that is, the royal family's—benevolence.³ Third, given that wealth is abundant, the possibilities for broad redistribution and the enhancement of social welfare, through charitable

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² It is noted repeatedly in the literature that governments do not publish all that they give bilaterally and until recently, published figures on the size and sources of revenue, the extent of giving and the size (and destination) of donations by numerous charitable organizations were said to be incomplete, imprecise and/or unreliable. Insofar as individual giving is concerned, the challenges of conducting surveys effectively result in the absence of hard data. However, see Tok et al. (2014) who write the following: “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been among the most active donors in the world, with official development assistance (ODA) averaging 1.5 percent of their combined gross national income (GNI) during the period 1973–2008, more than twice the United Nations target of 0.7 percent and five times the average of the OECD-DAC” (p. 591).

³ For example, in 2013, the Emir of Kuwait made a very public personal contribution of \$300 million to Syrian refugees (Stafford, 2017, p. 15).

giving and otherwise, are vast. However, that poverty persists, to varying degrees, in these countries suggests that, for whatever reason, charitable giving as a poverty alleviation strategy is insufficiently effective and that its principal purposes may lie elsewhere. How, then, is charity practiced in Gulf states today, for what purposes, and to what effect?

In this article, I offer an overview and comparative analysis of charitable giving in four Gulf monarchies: Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.⁴ I consider giving both at home and abroad and by different donor types: private individuals and public figures, multinational agencies, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, those that are explicitly charities and those that have a charity wing, those that are “identity-based” in that they are religiously and/or ideologically motivated, and those that have no obvious agenda apart from philanthropy. I explore the following questions: what kinds of entities extend charity, how do they give, to whom do they give—or, not give, and why do they give as they do? In conducting this research, I made four trips, ranging from three weeks to five months in duration, to the four countries over the course of four years. These trips included multiple site visits (to the organizations mentioned herein) and extensive interviews with members of government and of royal families, religious scholars, representatives of charitable organizations and of business groups, and private citizens.⁵ The research also involved close study of documentation provided by the organizations and of the secondary literature on charity in the Gulf monarchies and the broader Middle East.

I highlight several key findings, some of which confirm what is considered to be universal in the world of charity and philanthropy or have been identified elsewhere in the Middle East or by other Gulf scholars.⁶ First, benevolence may be motivated not only by charitable feelings or commitment to the faith, but also by political ambitions. For most donor types, providing charity at home or abroad is an important source of political capital: a means to extend influence, establish networks, gain recognition, and secure allegiance, et cetera. Furthermore, in three of the four countries, among the most prominent charitable foundations are ones created by members of the ruling family or by major political associations or interest groups.⁷ Both

⁴ This study builds on and extends a preliminary treatment of the topic in Lowi (2017).

⁵ All those interviewed for this study remain anonymous.

⁶ See for example, Atia (2013), Cammett (2014), Isik (2014), Jung et al. (2014), as well as Benthall (1999, 2003, 2018), Derbal (2011, 2014), Le Renard (2008), and Petersen (2014).

⁷ Given issues of transparency noted above (note 2), it is difficult to know which

instrumentalize charity and social welfare for political ends: to enhance legitimacy, deepen their penetration of society, shore up political power, gain adherents, and/or advance a particular ideology. Second, when the state intervenes in the domain of charity by, for example, declaring how and/or to whom entities may or may not give, even at times by revising religious edict, it is transforming charitable giving into a tool for social management and social control. It may aim thereby to appease a particular social category or demarcate the boundaries of community. Third, not unlike international giving that has prioritized Arab and Muslim countries and communities, private giving at home appears to favor—although we cannot know for sure given the paucity of hard data—one’s family, tribe, ethnic, and confessional community.⁸ With few exceptions, migrant laborers, for example, are excluded from access to charity. Hence, as can be found elsewhere, an “ethics of care” does not extend seamlessly to those who are perceived as distant—socially or otherwise.⁹

The article is structured as follows: it begins with an examination of international giving—its purposes, methods, and sites (target communities)—distinguishing among multinational, governmental and “semi”- or nongovernmental organizations as donors. For each I note connections among extending aid and promoting interests. It then proceeds to address the matter of access to charity and offers an explanation for the exclusion of certain social categories. Next, it turns to private citizens and their giving—its purposes, methods, and sites—and then moving on to outline their views on how and why Gulf nationals, on the one hand, and Gulf institutions, on the other, extend charity as they do. Finally, the article offers conclusions about what we learn through the lens of philanthropy about the dynamics of politics and piety in Gulf monarchies today.

International Giving: Multinational and Governmental Organizations

of the foundations are the best endowed financially and the most active in charitable initiatives.

⁸ This finding is largely impressionistic, based exclusively on interviews with private citizens and specifically, on what they shared regarding their own habits and what they surmised about others.

⁹ See, in this regard, Sethi (2017). Closer to home, consider the treatment of asylum seekers at the US southern border and the enforced separation of families: see, for example, Hackman (2019).

From the outset, international giving by Gulf monarchies has been a vehicle for advancing political interests. Beginning in the early 1960s, several multilateral (aid) agencies were created, with the Saudi monarchy as their driving force. Each had a distinctly political agenda: to combat the rising tide of secularism, leftism, and republicanism in the Arab world—a phenomenon perceived as deeply threatening to the political authority of conservative royal families in the Gulf.¹⁰ The basic strategy of these organizations was to promote Islamic identity—rather, a particular vision of Islam—by extending aid and assistance, in various forms, alongside religious instruction to Muslim populations where they lived. With the Crown Prince and then King Feisal of Saudi Arabia at the helm as prime mover and the Kingdom as chief financier, organizations such as the Muslim World League (MWL, 1962), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC, 1969), and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY, 1972) contributed vastly to the spread of religious conservatism, in general, and Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine, in particular, and to bankrolling Saudi influence across the Muslim world.¹¹ During the “oil bonanza” decade (1974–1984), these politico-missionary—what could be called *daʿwa*—organizations were joined by other religiously tinged entities created with a focus on charity, humanitarian aid, or development assistance.

Daʿwa or “Missionary” Work

The first organization to combine material assistance with indoctrination and political mobilization is the Muslim World League, with roughly 90% of its funding from the Saudi government (Interview with secretary-general of MWL, Jeddah, April 17, 2012). Since its inception, MWL has been funding schools and Islamic cultural centers, building mosques and clinics, distributing religious literature, training imams, and offering scholarships to study at Saudi religious universities. It has also sent missionaries to Africa and elsewhere to spread Wahhabi doctrine, as well as supported *salafi* groups in South Asia and beyond (Commings, 2009, pp. 152–153, 174–175). Similar in its mission to the MWL, WAMY was also created to combat various forms of secularism and promote Islamic identity, and to do so by propagating Wahhabi views, but with a focus

¹⁰ For thoughtful treatments of the regional context within which (politico-) missionary entities were created, see Chalcraft (2016, pp. 312–392) and Farquhar (2017, pp. 67–85). On Saudi Arabia as “counter-revolutionary state,” see Bsheer (2017).

¹¹ In 2011, the OIC changed its name to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. For a useful discussion on Saudi Arabia’s “export” of Wahhabism through different entities, see, among others, Mandaville and Hamid (2018, pp. 9–12).

on youth and, according to its Secretary General, through “development activities in the fields of education and institution-building.” It builds schools, offers scholarships and training courses, and organizes summer camps (Interview, Riyadh, April 4, 2012). Since 1988, it has also provided charity in the form of, for example, support for orphans (Bellion-Jourdan, 2001, p. 177; Lacey, 2014, p. 49).

The first of the international Muslim charities, the International Islamic Relief Organization, Saudi Arabia (IIRO or IIROSA), was founded with royal approval in 1978 as the humanitarian arm of the MWL, thereby explicitly integrating political interests, pursued via *da'wa*, with the Qur'anic injunction to be generous and compassionate by providing relief from hardship. It was through IIROSA, in fact, that the MWL became especially active in the 1980s and 90s, first in Afghanistan, supporting mujahidin materially in their struggle against the Soviet-backed government and Soviet forces, while “spreading their messages in refugee camps,” and then in post-Soviet Chechnya and Bosnia, combining material aid with “spiritual renewal” for the purpose of “re-Islamizing” society (Petersen, 2012, p. 774; Bellion-Jourdan, 2001). Then in 1984, the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) was created in Kuwait at the recommendation of Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi—former member and spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood—who advocated the need to offset the impact on Muslim communities of Christian and secular NGOs in their use of aid and welfare. The IICO's expressed purpose was similar to that of Christian missionary-aid societies: to combine the provision of charity, relief, and development assistance with the promotion of religious identity and practice (Petersen, 2015, pp. 65–69; International Islamic Charitable Organization, n.d.). Eventually, IIROSA and the IICO, along with the MWL and WAMY, were brought under the umbrella of the International Islamic Council for Da'wa and Relief (IICDR), created at the behest of Saudi Arabia in 1988—during the height of the war in Afghanistan—to coordinate the activities, including charitable efforts, of the organizations and their member states and, although not stated, promote a single vision of Islam (Benthall, 2003, p. 75; Bellion-Jourdan, 2001, pp. 176–177).

Indeed, from the inception of these related organizations until the early 2000s, and with burgeoning oil revenues after 1973 especially, relief in the form of material support for Muslim communities and *da'wa* went hand-in-hand. Political goals—to consolidate monarchical conservatism and absolutism, while extending Saudi power and influence—couched in language about strengthening the *umma* in the

face of external challenges, were at the forefront of their activities (Petersen, 2015, p. 86).¹²

Since the early 2000s, numerous Gulf-based entities that had been providing material assistance abroad have claimed to have modified their activities significantly in keeping with new governmental regulations imposed in response to suspicions of Western powers since 9-11 regarding the sources of salafi-jihadi financing.¹³ In an interview with this author in 2012, the MWL's leadership stated that the organization had cut by half its support for projects connected to religious instruction and practice; instead, it focuses mostly on hosting conferences and promoting inter-faith and intercultural dialogue (Interview, Jeddah, April 17, 2012). Nonetheless, according to Benthall (2018), the MWL today remains "a vehicle for Saudi influence" (p. 9); in the religious field, it continues to promote a particular vision of Sunni Islam in an effort to confront both the rise of Shi'a Iran and the attraction of "jihadi ideology." The Secretary-General of WAMY, at our meeting at its headquarters in Riyadh, insisted, unprovoked, that WAMY neither proselytizes nor engages with other (i.e., non-Wahhabi) *madhāhib* (Interview, April 4, 2012).¹⁴ However, other sources maintain that the organization remained explicitly engaged in *da'wa* by publishing and distributing religious literature, offering classes in shari'a, training young men to become Imams and then paying their salaries at mosques throughout the world (Commins, 2009, pp. 192–193).

As for IIROSA, considered, until 2015 and the creation of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KS Relief), to have been the most prominent charity in Saudi Arabia that worked both inside and outside the kingdom, and said to have been the world's largest, or second largest, Islamic charity in the mid-1990s (Benthall, 2018, p. 2), its efforts, according to its spokespeople, are no longer centered exclusively on Muslim communities and "faith-based causes" (Al-Yahya, 2014, p. 189). Nonetheless, a perusal of its annual report for 2011/2012 suggests that the initial focus persisted: training in Islam

¹² No doubt, Christian missionary work has also been associated with humanitarian assistance/relief. See, for example, Rohde (2005). More often than not, it aims to convert non-Christian populations, while Muslim charities working in foreign lands are mainly focused on "re-Islamizing" Muslim communities. In both cases, though, a principal goal is to strengthen the ranks of the "believers."

¹³ For legislation in Saudi Arabia regarding philanthropic activity since 2001, see ICNL (2017, pp. 8–12).

¹⁴ In the Sunni jurisprudential tradition, there are four dominant schools of thought (*madhhab* / *pl. madhāhib*): Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanafi, and Hanbali.

continued and the universalization of aid pertained solely to emergency humanitarian relief. In fact, at least four of the seven programs described in that report were geared partially, if not exclusively, to Muslims and included religious content (International Islamic Relief Organization, 2012).¹⁵ Be that as it may, KS Relief is said to now enjoy a monopoly over almost all Saudi foreign humanitarian aid; what's more, explicit religious content is absent from its programs and documentation (King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, n.d.; Benthall, 2018, pp. 1–2).

Despite recent modifications in their operations, the five *politico-da'wist* agencies discussed above have remained closely interconnected. As evidence, the same individuals appear in the leadership structures of each. For example, the Secretary-General of WAMY, (Saudi national) Saleh Al-Wohaibi (2002–), is on the Board of Directors of the IICO, and a former Secretary-General of the MWL (1983–1994), (Saudi national) Abdullah Naseef, held the position of Secretary-General of the IICDR some years later. Indeed, Saudi-dominated transnational collaboration and efforts at forging ideological unity in the provision of “material and spiritual sustenance” were fostered decades ago; they have persisted, at least in part, as means to achieve political ends: the consolidation of monarchical autocracy/absolutism in the Gulf region, the strengthening of the position—both political and symbolic—of the Saudi state vis-à-vis other states in the Gulf and the broader Arab region, and the related diffusion of a conservative Sunni Islam with a Hanbali orientation.

Development Assistance

As with charitable giving, Gulf-based development assistance through institutional channels took off in earnest after the 1973/1974 oil “shock” and was brought under an umbrella organization: in this case, the Coordination Group of Arab National and Regional Development Institutions (CG-ANRDI, 1975) (Momani, 2012, p. 616). Of the five multilateral aid agencies created by the Gulf monarchies (in which they have a heavy presence), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) is the only one with an explicit religious orientation.¹⁶ It was created as a

¹⁵ According to Benthall (2018, 16), 2011 was the first time that IIROSA appointed external auditors.

¹⁶ The other four are OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), and Gulf Arab Program for UN Development Organizations (AgFund). Three national aid organizations—

“specialized institution” of the OIC to promote Islamic solidarity by addressing the “economic development and social progress” of its member states and assisting “Muslim communities within nonmember states” by financing approved projects in accordance with principles of the shari’a (Shushan, 2011, p. 1970; Interview with employee of the IDB, Jeddah, April 18, 2012).¹⁷ While its membership, composed in 2019 of 57 countries with large Muslim populations, provides the bank’s capital through their contributions, Saudi Arabia, which houses the institution and has occupied the position of president since inception, is the largest shareholder by far at 23.5–26.5% (depending on the source); the remaining five states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had been contributing roughly 40% of the bank’s capital, according to one source (Lacey, 2014, p. 23), although this proportion seems to have decreased considerably in recent years.¹⁸ Despite the apparent dominant position of Saudi Arabia, a senior researcher at the bank said the following: “the IDB is independent of the Government of Saudi Arabia just as the World Bank is independent of the Government of the United States” (Jeddah, April 18, 2012). What he failed to add, however, is that, as in the case of the World Bank, the political-ideological positions and policies of the IDB reflect those of its principal financiers.

Especially active in the domain of development assistance, and part of the CG-ANRDI, bilateral organizations in several GCC states channel much of their governments’ foreign aid disbursements. The largest donors, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED, 1961) and the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD, 1975), are closely connected to, if not supervised by, their Ministry of Foreign Affairs or of Finance. As such, it is neither surprising nor exceptional that their aid is politicized, in one form or another (Momani, 2012, pp. 617–618).¹⁹ (To be sure, it is banal to point out that the donations of

Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), the Saudi Fund, and the Abu Dhabi Development Fund—figure under the umbrella group as well (Barakat, 2010, pp. 11–12; Momani, 2012, pp. 616–617).

¹⁷ Additionally, according to a senior researcher at the Bank (Jeddah, April 16, 2012), a percentage of its net income is earmarked for charitable activities such as the provision of scholarships and other forms of support to educational institutions.

¹⁸ The IDB website (www.isdb.org) suggests that today (2019), the five other Gulf monarchies combined contribute about 22%.

¹⁹ Without providing details, Momani and Ennis (2012) report that the SFD extends two types of foreign aid: “one that is politically motivated and another that is oriented towards economic development.” The first, according to them, is the larger of the two, and administered by the Minister of Finance, “by whom an unknown amount of aid is predominantly funneled to Arab countries largely based on political motivations” (p. 619).

DAC member states of the OECD reflect those governments' political and ideological interests and concerns.) Take Kuwait, for example: because of its perceived geopolitical vulnerability—given its small size, peculiar demographic features and governance structure, and the capriciousness of regional relations—regime security, hence domestic political stability, has been at the forefront of the Al-Sabah monarchy's (existential) preoccupations since independence. From the outset, therefore, oil revenues have been instrumentalized in its foreign relations for political capital: referred to by Abdulreda Assiri as “dinar diplomacy,” Kuwait's foreign assistance activities have been “...inextricably tied to its efforts to gain political support” (Leichtman, 2017, p. 5).

Founded just six months after the country's independence, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) was the very first national aid agency established in a developing country and for more than forty years (1961–2006) it was the largest and most active Arab bilateral donor agency (Leichtman, 2017, p. 6). Like other Gulf aid agencies, it has prioritized Arab countries in extending development assistance.²⁰ While it denies a religious bias and avoids the kind of explicit conditionality and tying of aid practiced by the World Bank, on the one hand, and DAC donors, on the other (Leichtman, 2017, p. 8), its giving is strategically motivated: to gain friends.

Gulf aid has been most prominent in the Middle East and North Africa, although a growing proportion has gone since the 1990s to sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and even Latin America. The preference remains, nonetheless, for Arab and Muslim-majority countries, followed by Muslim communities in non-Muslim-majority countries (Momani, 2012, pp. 613–614).²¹ Nonetheless, to whom and how development assistance, as with charity, is extended is determined in response to changes in political circumstances and interests, as Cammett (2014) demonstrates with regard to welfare provisions in the Lebanese context (pp. 140–160). Thus, post-9/11 suspicions and local concerns regarding “negative publicity” have caused numerous Gulf aid agencies to redirect their attentions somewhat. As a former Secretary-General of the MWL stated: “We need to show the world that we care about humanity, no matter who they are” (Interview, Jeddah, April 21, 2012).

²⁰ According to KFAED figures cited in Leichtman (2017) for the period from Jan 1962 to March 2017, of the \$5.86 bill. of loans extended, almost three-fifths went to Arab countries, and of the \$233 mill. in grants and technical assistance, more than four-fifths went to Arab countries (p. 9).

²¹ For a discussion of the main features of Arab development aid and a comparison with that of DAC member states, see Tok et al. (2014).

International Giving as Politics

Far more illuminating than the favoring of ethnic and religious ties when extending generosity is the instrumentalization of giving for political purposes: in the case of the Gulf monarchies, for example, as a form of “soft power” projection on behalf of the donor country; to promote a particular *madhhab* or religious ideology; to encourage and build support for a particular regional power, such as Saudi Arabia, and counter the spread of influence of another power, such as Iran; to reward a government for voting similarly to the donor country in a multilateral body; and to weigh in on the side of one party to a conflict (Barakat, 2010, pp. 13–28). Of course, the instrumentalization of international giving for political purposes is hardly unique to Gulf monarchies; most major donors, and particularly the United States government, the European Union, and Russia (as well as the former Soviet Union), have (had) powerful political agendas attached to their foreign assistance.²² Nonetheless, it is the nature, manner, and assumed goal(s) of the politicized giving by the particular donor country that may be instructive with regard to their interests and concerns. Recall, for example, that Saudi Arabia (along with the UAE) reduced its financial support to Egypt from January 2014, eventually suspending part of its aid and energy grants through March 2017. While the purpose, it seems, was mostly to punish the Egyptian leadership for what was viewed as ungrateful behavior vis-à-vis its benefactors—it had been reluctant to send troops to Yemen and had voted in favor of a Russia-drafted UN Security Council Resolution on Syria—Saudi Arabia has since resumed its former level of support. It is inclined to bankroll the Sisi government, which it views as a bulwark against both the empowerment of the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran’s further penetration of the region—which currently represent the regime’s foremost geopolitical concerns (see Saleh, 2016; Saleh & Kerr, 2017).

Organizational Giving at Home and Abroad: Governmental, Semi-governmental or Nongovernmental

Across the GCC states, charitable foundations of various types abound. Often referred to as semi- or nongovernmental, many of them are, in fact, closely connected to, if not created by, (members of) the local ruling family or government, and many receive some portion of their funding

²² For a searing critique of the “development” paradigm and its political ideology and motivations, see Escobar (1995).

and operating costs from the government. Hence, the appropriateness of terminological designations ought to elicit closer examination.

While some charitable foundations specialize in a specific region and/or activity – as with the Kuwaiti NGO, ‘Awn Mubāshir (Direct Aid), that works in Africa among Muslim communities, Qatar’s Reach Out to Asia (R.O.T.A.), that supports education initiatives there, or the privately funded Qatif Charitable Society that provides services mainly to Shi’a in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province (Montagu, 2010, p. 82)—most of the larger foundations conduct similar activities, with considerable overlap and negligible collaboration among them: supporting the socially disadvantaged groups recognized in Islam (orphans, widows, and the sick and disabled), as well as digging wells, funding educational endeavors, and health services. Many include an explicitly religious component, as in providing Islamic education and building mosques, preparing *‘ifār* tables during Ramadan, or distributing sacrificial meat at *‘Eid al-Adha* (the Feast of Sacrifice). Alongside their routine activities, some foundations respond to emergencies around the globe, while an increasing number, having adopted the language of “empowerment”—at times linking it discursively to the Islamic tradition—offer skill-building and job-training programs of various sorts.

In Saudi Arabia, but especially in Riyadh, among the largest and most visible foundations are those associated with members of the Al Saud family or their closest associates (Le Renard, 2008, pp. 144–145), while in Kuwait, they tend to be affiliated with religio-political organizations. Although variants of both features are found in Qatar, neither accurately characterizes the philanthropic landscape in Oman. There, the largest and best endowed charity is the Oman Charitable Organization (OCO), a public entity founded in 1996 by royal decree. Its board of directors is composed of several members of government—including, today, one Bu Sa’idi—and prominent members of society. A spokesperson for the organization told me in 2013 that it receives about half its funding from the government and roughly 10% from private donations; the remainder comes from returns on its investments (Interview, Muscat, October 30, 2013).²³ The OCO’s activities comprise mostly relief work outside the country in coordination with international organizations, local officials, or other GCC states and several social programs at home (Interview with representative, Muscat, October 30, 2013).

²³

Much of the private donations come from Omani companies, which are expected to contribute 5% of their net income to social works.

Royal Connections

Many of the nominally “nongovernmental” foundations in Saudi Arabia that operate internationally were established by royal decree for a member of the royal family, yet they are considered to be private; among them are the Sultan bin Abdelaziz Foundation (1995), Alwaleed bin Talal Foundation/Alwaleed Philanthropies (2003/2015), and King Abdallah International Foundation for Charity and Humanitarian Deeds (2010) (Al-Yahya, 2014, p. 180). One of the most visible of this type of philanthropic organization is the King Feisal Foundation (1976), established as waqf at the late king’s death by his children. While historically it built schools, libraries, hospitals, and mosques, today it focuses primarily on supporting education, providing scholarships, and funding research inside the country. Although created from the estate of a public figure—indeed, a former ruler—whose wealth derived, in large measure, from the oil-infused public purse, the foundation claims, remarkably, to be fully private: it was created by “private” citizens, receives no funding from the government, and cannot request donations from the public, although anyone can make a donation privately (Interview with a former employee of the KFF, Riyadh, March 26, 2012).²⁴

In her studies of different forms of institutionalized charity in Saudi Arabia, Nora Derbal (2011, 2014) explains that while all not-for-profit philanthropic institutions (*mu’assasat khairiyya* and *jama’iyyat khairiyya*) must be registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), organizations established by royal decree and financed from the assets of the founder, like the King Feisal Foundation, enjoy somewhat greater autonomy than the far more numerous associations that do receive government funding but must follow MoSA’s rules and regulations and submit all programs and procedures for its approval.²⁵ Maintaining responsibility for the supervision and evaluation of these welfare associations, MoSA enjoys considerable powers: to veto programs, refuse particular board members, and define eligible recipients of services, et cetera (Derbal, 2011, pp. 48–50).²⁶

²⁴ In fact, I was told that “the Foundation has no relationship to the government,” despite that prominent members of the ruling family both founded it and hold key positions in it.

²⁵ In 2016, MoSA and the Ministry of Labor merged into the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MoLSD).

²⁶ This information evokes Pollard’s (2014) study of the charity field in Egypt pre-1945. The Egyptian state recognized the potential influence of welfare provision and so, through the creation of the MoSA in 1939, it assumed control

Saudi royals are prominent in several of what are sometimes designated “nongovernmental” charitable associations, if not as founding members or patrons then as members of the board. As LeRenard (2008) notes, involvement in the charity sector is one of the principle roles of Saudi princesses today (pp. 150–152). Besides, their engagement is thought to be mutually beneficial: on the one hand, it practically guarantees the association’s approval by the MoSA and may even lessen the ministry’s oversight somewhat; it attracts important donations from private individuals, banks, and companies; and it improves networking possibilities and, therefore, access to resources.²⁷ On the other hand, the participation of royals enhances the family’s visibility and legitimacy: royals appear intimately connected to civil society and responsive to its various needs; thus, they are associated with compassion and care. In these ways, they gain allegiance from the population while bolstering discreetly their monitoring of society.

The Al-Wafa’ and the Al-Nahda Philanthropic Societies, which focus exclusively on poor women, were created in the 1960s; they are headed by princesses Latifa and Sara, respectively, both daughters of the late King Faisal, but from different mothers. They receive funding from the government annually and donations from private enterprises, prominent individuals, and other private citizens. The two foundations cooperate with each other insofar as they divide the poor neighborhoods of Riyadh between them; in their designated areas, they provide a variety of similar services to women and their children (LeRenard, 2008, pp. 146–147).²⁸ Beyond that, Al-Wafa’, for example, takes charge of individuals referred by the public hospital who travel to Riyadh for hospitalization and require lodging prior to and following their medical procedures. According to my interlocutors, the building in which these individuals are housed in Riyadh was provided gratis to the organization

over welfare associations for its own political ends (p. 249). In so doing, it enhanced its ability to engage in surveillance, among other things. Caroline Montagu, in her 2010 study of the voluntary sector in Saudi Arabia, notes that the royal family’s efforts at oversight and regulation “reflect its concerns to control what could be a parallel power structure and threat” (p. 77).

²⁷ In April 2012, this author attended a fundraiser in Jeddah for a charity that focused on the handicapped and was closely associated with Princess Adilah, a daughter of the late King Abdallah. Individual donations were as high as \$45,000; the names of the donors were announced with great fanfare, while attendees rubbed shoulders with the princess.

²⁸ According to a representative at Al-Wafa’ (Riyadh, April 10, 2012), the organization, in 2012, was taking care of about 1,800 families, each with an average of seven members, in various ways, including providing job training, helping them acquire official papers and pay monthly rent and food bills, et cetera.

by a prominent donor—whose identity they would not share—who, at the end of each year, reimburses al-Wafa’ for all that it had spent on this particular service (Interview, Al-Wafa’, Riyadh, April 10, 2012). Coincidentally, it was announced in April 2013 that the Alwaleed bin Talal Foundation had made an important donation in kind to Al-Wafa’s patient lodging units in Riyadh (Alwaleed, 2013). To be sure, the family connection makes a big difference: royals support royals, especially when there is no competition between them.

Among its activities, al-Wafa’ runs a center for abused women and girls. However, it takes in only those who have been referred by the Ministry of Interior; it will not provide sanctuary or assistance to an abused person from outside an official channel. Thus, its attachment to, endorsement of, and collaboration with the Saudi government, as well as with other royals, is indisputable. In practice, therefore, Al-Wafa’ is neither truly private nor independent.²⁹ Emblematic of what Derbal (2014) refers to as the “intense entanglement not only of individual members of the royal family, but also that of the Saudi state with private charities,” “loyalist” charities such as al-Wafa’ actively uphold the national project of the state while providing another avenue for its infiltration of society (p. 163).

In Qatar, most of the prominent foundations were established as *awqāf* from the fortunes and in the names of members of the ruling al-Thani family—Sheikhs ‘Eid bin Mohamed, Jassim bin Jabor, Thani bin Abdallah, and Faisal bin Jassem—by their heirs. Some of these, like the *salafi*-leaning Eid bin Mohamed al-Thani Foundation, follow a particular religious orientation (Interview with representative from ‘Eid Foundation, Doha, November 11, 2013; interview with a consultant to charities, Doha, November 12, 2013). While these foundations are financially dependent on their endowments, all but one rely increasingly on private donations; at times, they solicit contributions through fundraising efforts for humanitarian crises.³⁰ Although their activities focus on both assisting local needy families and funding projects abroad,

²⁹ It is important to note that Al-Wafa’ is not necessarily representative of women’s organizations in Saudi Arabia, many of which would find ways to circumvent certain state impositions (such as, for example, the requirement that a woman produces consent from a *mahram*). I am grateful to Nora Derbal for sharing this insight and information.

³⁰ While the Jassim and Hamad bin Jassim Charitable Foundation does not collect donations, the Sheikh ‘Eid bin Mohammad Al Thani Charitable Foundation has changed its status to a charity; as such, it receives an annual financial contribution from the government. Interviews with consultant to charities, Doha, February 29, 2012 and November 12, 2013.

it is said that more than 75% of Qatari charity goes outside the country since, in the words of one citizen, “there are not many things to do here” (Interview with consultant to charities, Doha, February 22, 2012). Despite their royal pedigree and branding, these establishments are considered to be private. Needless to say, they enjoy excellent relations with the Qatari government (Mohamed, 2014, p. 263).

In contrast, Qatar Charity, one of the largest and oldest charities in the country, was not created by royals. With an elected board and hired general manager, it is regarded as independent even though its chairman since 2002 has been an al-Thani.³¹ While financially dependent on donations, it, like all registered charities, as distinct from *‘awqaf*, receives an annual sum from the government. Moreover, it absorbs some al-Thani initiatives: when the royal family wants to contribute to an effort abroad, it may choose to do so through Qatar Charity (Interview with Qatar Charity representative, Doha, November 13, 2013).

Unique at home, Qatar Foundation comprises numerous sub-organizations, including charitable initiatives. Registered as a nongovernmental organization, it was created as waqf in 1995 by the then-ruling emir, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, with the addition of public funds and land granted by the government (Interview with Qatari scholar and activist, Doha, Nov. 10, 2013). His wife, Sheikha Moza, chairs the foundation; in addition to herself, three of their children are on the Board of Trustees and one on the Board of Directors). Reach Out to Asia, a sub-organization and charitable initiative of the foundation, is chaired by their daughter, Sheikha Myassa (Qatar Foundation, n.d.). Remarkably, Qatar Foundation is touted as “a private foundation for public purposes” even though it has been financed, both directly and indirectly, by the public purse. With its public-private, “loyalist” nature, Qatar Foundation is somewhat similar to the Syrian Trust for Development, an entity comprised of several government-created, but supposedly nongovernmental, organizations, a number of which were initiated by Asma’ al-Assad, the wife of President Bashar al-Assad (Ruiz de Alvira, 2014, pp. 334–340). With the resources to monopolize activities in the educational, cultural, and philanthropic spheres, Qatar Foundation, like “The Trust” is geared, in large measure, toward “reproducing patterns of authoritarian rule,” while enhancing the public image of regime figures (Ruiz de Alvira, 2014, p. 335). To be

³¹ Founded in 1992, it emerged from the “Qatar Committee for Orphans of Afghanistan” created in the 1980s. Referred to today as a “faith-driven organization,” it is considered to “lean toward the Muslim Brotherhood” (Interviews with consultant to charities, Doha, November 12, 2013; representative from Qatar Charity, Doha, November 13, 2013).

sure, it is the darling of the most powerful branch of the ruling family, providing it with tremendous visibility and a tentacular presence.

The involvement of royals, whether directly or indirectly, combined with the branding of foundations with their name, is noteworthy for the ubiquity and authority it signals, despite their being advertised as private or even semi-private establishments. In the case of Qatar, consider that until recently, more than 75% of government revenues were derived from oil and gas—common property resources to be overseen by the leadership for the benefit of the community.³² In other words, the former emir established the Qatar Foundation from his “private” wealth, accrued in large measure from hydrocarbons (and related investments) and supplemented from the budget of the government he controlled at that time as monarch and head of state. What ensues, as Le Renard (2008) identified in Saudi Arabia, is a pernicious mixing of and calculated confusion between public and private: royals take from what belongs to the people and invest those resources in the creation of entities that they oversee and that carry their name. By colonizing the charity field in this manner, they shore up a fabricated image of themselves as magnanimous benefactors and benevolent devotees of the faith, thereby bolstering their legitimation—both political and religious—and commanding allegiance. In fact, they have simply transformed public resources into private, or rather, royal resources and exploited them in ways that deepen their penetration of society, hence their power and control.

Doctrinal Connections

Unlike in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, charities in Kuwait are not connected to the ruling family. Rather, the most prominent—excluding the Red Crescent Society—adhere to one or another religious tendency, which may or may not be affiliated with a political movement.³³ As such, they are equivalent to the “identity-based charities”—associations that prioritize welfare and charitable activities as goals and are linked to a particular (ethnic or) religious group—discussed by Cammett (2014).

‘Awn Mubāshir (Direct Aid) was created some thirty years ago by Abdelrahman al-Sumeit, a Kuwaiti physician and *‘ālim* with a *salafi* orientation. Formerly called Africa Muslims Committee and reliant on

³² From 2006 to 2011, 50–65% came from hydrocarbon exports and 25–30% from investments made possible by resource rents (Ibrahim, 2012).

³³ Recall that political parties are banned in the four countries. In Kuwait, however, several political movements are tolerated and remain active in politics.

private donations and regular contributions from the government, the organization digs wells and builds schools, clinics, and training centers in Africa. It also builds mosques, teaches Arabic and Islam, and helps African Muslims make the pilgrimage. According to one of its representatives, “where there are Muslims, we work.” Furthermore, “we are involved in helping Muslims be better Muslims,” and so “*da’wa* is part of our work” (Interview, Kuwait, May 13, 2012).³⁴

Jama’iyyat al-Islah and Jama’iyyat al-Turath belong to Kuwait’s Muslim Brotherhood (*al-haraka al-dusturiyya al-islamiyya*, Islamic Constitutional Movement, or HADAS) and Salafi movement (*Tajama’a al-Islamiyya al-Salafi*), respectively, both of which are active in Kuwaiti politics and, typically, hold seats in Parliament. Both are engaged in vast philanthropic activities at home but especially abroad in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and in countries in crisis (e.g., Afghanistan, Bosnia in the 1990s, and Syria since 2012). According to their representatives, their work is funded principally by donations from Kuwaiti nationals and residents. Both are explicit that an important goal is to “preserve Islamic culture” wherever there is a Muslim community (Interviews with representative of al-Turath, Kuwait, May 13, 2012; representative of al-Islah, Kuwait, 14 May 2012).

While Jama’iyyat al-Islah insists that recipients of their aid do not have to be Muslims, *da’wa* is, nonetheless, central to the mission of both associations. According to a member of HADAS, “(M)ost charities in Kuwait have a *da’wa* component because in Islam you need to both encourage *da’wa* and help people live the best way as Muslims.... Much of the charity we give is about supporting Muslims in their way of life...” (Interview, Kuwait, May 7, 2012).³⁵ In short, these three organizations combine the provision of assistance with efforts to strengthen the ranks of the Muslim community and their particular orientation within Islam.

To be sure, the *da’wa* of the Muslim Brotherhood is distinct from that of the Salafi and certainly of the Shi’a. In this regard, it is noteworthy that during my meeting at Jama’iyyat al-Islah, the representative mentioned Iran’s charitable work, referring to the Islamic Republic as “a major competitor in Africa.” He expressed concern about how Kuwaiti Shi’a, who constitute about 35% of the population, extend

³⁴ See, www.directaid.org. For “Islamic charity” elsewhere in the MENA, see, for example, Atia (2013), Jung (2014), and Isik (2014).

³⁵ More specifically, “...of course *da’wa* is very important: we can’t just let anyone do the work of teaching Islam.... In Indonesia, for example, we have an Islamic training school where we train Imams and then send them elsewhere in Indonesia to work in a mosque we’ve built. We also write the Islamic curriculum for the schools we build” (Interview with representative from Mujama’ Sanabeel al-Khiir, Jama’iyyat al-Islah, Kuwait, May 14, 2012).

charity: “I’m convinced their money goes to initiatives supported by Iran and to strengthening Shi’a networks (in West Africa)” (Interview with representative from Mujama’ Sanabeel al-Khiir, Jama’iyat al-Islah, Kuwait, May 14, 2012). In short, charitable giving, as described above, is intimately connected to politics and competition to gain adherents.

“Unaffiliated” Charity

Across the region, there are numerous charitable organizations that are linked neither to royal families nor to religious tendencies or religious-political movements. To take but one example, in Oman, Dar al-I’tā’ is an important local charity. It was created in 2002 by a group of women married to Omani businessmen and became an official organization in 2006. A distinctly private initiative, its revenues come exclusively from private sources, via a host of donation strategies and fundraising events, as well as from companies. Its ambitions and capabilities are relatively modest, and its activities are confined to Muscat (Interview with a founder, Muscat, October 29, 2013).

Distinct from the above in their status as “unaffiliated,” several prominent business families, like Al-Rajhi and Olayan in Saudi Arabia and Bahwan in Oman, who enjoy clientelistic relations with the regime are engaged in broad-based philanthropic activities, while others, like the Sultan family in Kuwait, have created issue-specific entities (see, Sultan Education Fund).³⁶

Who’s in, Who’s out? The Politics of Exclusion

In the four countries, many charities extend assistance to long-term residents who do not hold local citizenship.³⁷ However, except for very few cases, charities tend not to help poor migrants apart from offering *ifṭār* during Ramadan and Friday meals at some mosques. Recall the words of a Qatari national: most charitable giving by Qataris is sent abroad because “there are not many things to do here” (Interviews with consultant to charities, Doha, February 29, 2012 and November 12, 2013)—despite the vast numbers of indigent foreign laborers often living in conditions of precarity.

One charity in Qatar and one in Oman told me that, in fact, they do give to laborers, but not systematically and certainly without

³⁶ Space restrictions prevent me from including a deeper discussion of these types of charities.

³⁷ Indeed, a representative of Al-Wafa’ claimed that 20–25% of those who request help from them are non-Saudis. (Interview, Riyadh, April 10, 2012).

publicizing it. The representative of the Omani charity elaborated thus: “Once you open that door, it will never close” (Interview Muscat, October 29, 2013; Interview Doha, November 13, 2013). This rationalization—that obliquely acknowledges the dire circumstances—was echoed almost verbatim by a representative of al-Islah (Kuwait): “If we open the door to helping the more than 1 million foreign laborers, our work would be insurmountable” (Interview, Kuwait, May 14, 2012). In contrast, “loyalist” (or rather, explicitly royalist) Saudi charities, when asked about the exclusion, inclined toward a legalistic explanation: according to Ministry of Labor stipulations, the *kafeel* (sponsor) is supposed to take care of his workers and abide by the conditions he agreed to in exchange for receiving visas. Apart from the *kafeel*, the worker’s embassy is responsible for him/her (Interviews with representatives of King Abdallah Foundation for Developmental Housing, Riyadh, March 28, 2012; Al-Wafa’ ..., Riyadh, April 10, 2012). To be sure, the response of an *‘ālim* with the Omani Ministry of *Awqāf* and Islamic Affairs was remarkable: “We already do a lot for them: we allow them to come here and work” (Muscat, May 31, 2013).

A more compelling explanation, I suggest, relates to the prevailing sense of community. In this regard, an Omani interlocutor noted that migrants’ exclusion is “merely a matter of priorities”: that “charity begins at home” (Interview with former minister, Muscat, October 30, 2013). He failed to add that for many, home is also where charity ends. As philanthropic organizations in these Gulf states routinely extend material support to causes and crises beyond their borders—for example, to Palestinian programs for decades, Syrians since 2012, victims of the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, and of other natural disasters since then—ignoring needy foreigners in their midst, rendering them virtually invisible, suggests that *takāful* (social solidarity) at home is a circumscribed notion that applies chiefly to the community that matters and compassion is not extended to those at home for whom one feels no obligation precisely because they are not part of that privileged group.³⁸ No doubt, the tendency to prioritize one’s own is universal, and the disadvantaged are more-or-less invisible everywhere. Nonetheless, the “invisibility” of the disadvantaged in Gulf monarchies is especially striking given the vast unearned wealth there from which they are excluded.³⁹

³⁸ See note 8. For a discussion of the relationship between the Gulf citizen and imported labor that develops this argument (and others), see Lowi (2018).

³⁹ In this regard, it is worth reflecting on the fact that in spring 2015—my last

While exceptions do exist, they are few. In the four countries I encountered only three charitable initiatives created by nationals for the foreign community specifically.⁴⁰ Two of them, Lajnat al-Ta'arīf b'il-Islam (Islam Presentation Society) in Kuwait City and ḍyūf Qatar (Qatar's Guests) in Doha, target non-Muslims, offering Arabic language instruction, Islamic education, and conversion. While they couch their activities in philanthropic sentiments, *da'wa* for the purpose of expanding the Muslim community is what motivates them.⁴¹ The only program that—at least until summer 2015—explicitly addresses the material conditions of migrants is, like ḍyūf Qatar, part of the *salafī*-directed Eid bin Mohammed al-Thani Charity Foundation. Referred to as ḥafīz 'ala na'ima (Preserving Grace), its volunteers collect leftover food from hotels and private dinners in Doha and distribute it in industrial zones where the poorest workers live.⁴² They also distribute used clothing at construction sites and buy and distribute phone cards “so that laborers can remain in touch with their families back home.” Alas, a program officer mentioned to me, parenthetically, that preachers from Ḍyūf Qatar go to industrial zones following distributions to encourage conversion (Interview, Doha, November 11, 2013). Alas, there is “no free lunch”; charity and proselytism often go hand-in-hand.⁴³

Individual Giving

Recall that there are two types of individual giving in Islam: obligatory *zakaṭ*—a tax equivalent to 2.5%, levied on “capital gains” in one’s

⁴⁰ research trip in the Gulf—per capita income in Qatar was the highest in the world (\$130,000); at that time, the lowest paid migrant workers there (those in the construction industry) were earning roughly \$160 monthly (or \$2,000/year). There are, however, expatriate-founded initiatives that assist migrants. In Oman, for example, the Charitable Wing of the Indian Social Club gives to needy Indians, and the Ecumenical Council for Charity, connected to the Reformed Church in America, does not discriminate among those in need. Another project—recently discontinued—that addressed migrants, albeit on a tiny scale, was “I Care.” The inspiration of a young resident of Palestinian descent, it was active from May 2011 until 2017 and brought together volunteers to distribute bottled water at construction sites in Muscat and thank laborers for their work (Interview, Muscat, October 29, 2013).

⁴¹ Such programs exist in Oman and Saudi Arabia as well through the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

⁴² Al-Wafa' in Saudi Arabia also collects and distributes leftover food, but for poor Saudis (Interview, Riyadh, April 10, 2012).

⁴³ Again, this is not uncommon (see note 13). Atia (2013) notes that in Egypt, *zakaṭ* committees at mosques make assistance conditional on submission to religious instruction (pp. 55–76).

possession for at least one year—and elective *ṣadaqa*.⁴⁴ Typically, zakat contributions are transferred to the Public Treasury (*beyt al-māl*) or its equivalent, then distributed among the poor, needy, and other Qur'anically defined appropriate recipients, while *ṣadaqa* is given to whomever, however, and in whatever amounts the donor chooses. Among Muslim countries today, there is little uniformity in the role the state plays as collector and distributor of zakat. Furthermore, there is no consensus about whether zakat payments should be voluntary or imposed, or even the forms of wealth that are “zakatable” (Kahf, 1989; Kuran, 2003, pp. 277–283; May 2013).

In Qatar and Oman today, there is no formal, government-enforced collection of zakat; giving, in whatever form, is left to the individual. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, in contrast, governments impose and collect zakat, but only from companies. In the former, Saudi- and GCC-owned companies, including banks, pay zakat. Funds are collected by the Ministry of Finance and transferred, in full or in part, to the MoSA/MoLSD for distribution for the purpose of poverty alleviation: in the form of, for example, social security payments to those considered to be the poorest Saudi nationals, allocations to unemployment programs and to charitable foundations (LeRenard, 2008, pp. 142–143, 146).⁴⁵

In Kuwait, it was only in 2006 that formal collection of zakat was imposed on companies. Interestingly, the mandatory 2.5% was reduced to 1%: many had complained that the former was too onerous, while others suggested that since the country had a Shi'a population who were required to pay *khums* to their religious leaders, it was preferable to reduce the obligatory contribution to the state and trust that each company would, independently, pay the remainder to an entity or initiative of its choosing (Interviews with M.P. for HADAS, Kuwait, May 7, 2012; former M.P. for *tajama'a al-islamī al-salafī*, Kuwait, May 8, 2012).⁴⁶ Furthermore, until 2015, the controversial “white lands” in Saudi Arabia—extensive, undeveloped properties owned privately by wealthy Saudis (and blamed, in some circles, for exacerbating the housing crisis in the kingdom)—were not subject to zakat. The regime

⁴⁴ Muslims whose assets fall below *niṣāb*—a minimum, predetermined value necessary for subsistence—are exempt from having to pay *zakat*.

⁴⁵ For a rich discussion of the history of state-imposed *zakat* in Saudi Arabia, see Derbal (n.d.). She notes, among other things, that the collection of *zakat* holds both symbolic and political value for the Al Sa'ud in that it underscores “the Islamic character of the nation” and the legitimacy of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance at its core.”

⁴⁶ *Khums* refers to a 20% tax on annual profits, half of which is meant for *marāji'* (the highest, Shi'a clerical authorities) and half for orphans, the poor and needy.

'*ulama*' maintained, remarkably, that they constituted "hidden wealth" that, according to several schools of Islamic jurisprudence, is not subject to zakat (Interview with Saudi Shari'a scholar and specialist in Islamic finance, Riyadh, April 25, 2012).⁴⁷ That the Kuwaiti and Saudi governments endorsed such claims and, in doing so, essentially revised a religious edict or judgement intimates that they aimed thereby to appease a particular social category.

Alongside innovative forms of "zakat evasion," Kuwaiti companies, like their Saudi counterparts, may take advantage of the weak regulatory environment by failing to divulge their true net worth so as to contribute less than they would have otherwise (Interview with former M.P. for HADAS, Kuwait, May 11, 2012; Interview with member of Supreme Economic Council, Riyadh, April 2, 2012).⁴⁸ In the words of a Saudi economist who sits on the shari'a boards of several Islamic banks, "there is a lot of deception and trickery in the payment of zakat by the very rich: many are not prepared to pay 2.5%, especially since 2.5% of a few billion [Saudi riyals] is a lot of money" (Riyadh, April 5, 2012). Thus, while zakat was meant to counter hoarding, reduce inequality, and combat material hardship, it, like taxation systems in Europe and North America, is manipulated by some to facilitate private accumulation.

Although private giving is said to be substantial in Gulf monarchies, statistics are lacking (Hartnell 2018, pp. 42–43).⁴⁹ Moreover, many who are employed in the philanthropic sector voice skepticism about the true extent of generosity. According to a representative of Oman Charity, "What is said and what is true are not always the same; there is a lot of exaggeration about the generosity of Gulf nationals" (Muscat, October 30, 2013). A prominent Kuwaiti philanthropist went further: "We are still a tribal society, and being tribal means that in order to give, we need to first find out who is involved, who will get the credit, et cetera. We are not yet ready to give magnanimously" (Kuwait City, May 15, 2012).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See al-Jassem (2013). This changed, however, with the gradual imposition of the "White Land Tax Regulation, 2015," issued pursuant to Royal Decree no. (M/4), dated 12.2.1437H, equivalent to November 24, 2015.

⁴⁸ Kuran (2003) reminds us that opposition to and evasion of *zakat* payments were not uncommon even in early Islamic history (pp. 278–282).

⁴⁹ Coutts's (2015) *Million-Dollar Donors Report* relates that 34 donations worth at least \$1m each and totaling \$894m were made by GCC nationals in 2014; these figures do not include unannounced donations.

⁵⁰ On characteristics of individual giving in the Gulf, see Hartnell (2018, pp. 30–35).

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, giving is greatest during the holy month of Ramadan and through mosques, especially following Friday prayers. People donate to different sorts of entities: individuals in need, government offices, charitable organizations, and campaigns focused on particular causes or crises at home or abroad. There are thousands of private charitable initiatives, as well as highly publicized, government-sponsored campaigns that, until recently, solicited contributions via telethons or television, or collection boxes in malls.⁵¹ No doubt, some private giving circumvents organizations, foundations, and government agencies. Several interlocutors explained that it is characteristic for individuals with means to help a select group of people recurrently. In Qatar, for example, they may have a roster, constituted over time, of needy individuals or families, inside and sometimes outside the country, as well, to whom they give on a regular basis; and this roster, revised over time, may be handed down from one member to another within a family (Interview with lawyer and former minister, Doha, February 21, 2012). In Kuwait and Oman, where an underdeveloped culture of giving outside the family was noted repeatedly by my interlocutors, the focus remains on one's tribe, ethnic or confessional community (Interview with member of prominent Omani business family, Muscat, January 31, 2012; Interview with former minister, Muscat, October 30, 2013; Interview with former member of majlis al-dowlā, Muscat, November 5, 2013; Interview with leading philanthropist and businessman, Kuwait City, May 15, 2012). Across the region, building a mosque is another popular form of giving, as is establishing a *waqf* to address a particular concern.

What do Citizens Say about Charitable Giving Today?

Many of my interlocutors pointed out that although giving is said to be extensive, poverty still exists in GCC states—certainly in Bahrain, Oman, and, most notably, in Saudi Arabia. They insisted that if zakat were paid and distributed appropriately, poverty would have been eliminated (Interview with religious activist, Riyadh, April 2, 2012; Interview with economist with the Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah, April 16, 2012).⁵² Some went further, suggesting that persistent poverty in these petro-monarchies is the result of greed—among Gulf elites especially (Interview with prominent economist and former member of

⁵¹ Due to transparency-related concerns, these collection methods are less common today.

⁵² Atia (2013, pp. 111, 132) reports of similar comments by Egyptians, and Jung (2014, pp. 294–295) does likewise by Jordanians.

majlis al-shūrā, Riyadh, April 1, 2012; Interview with economist with the Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah, April 16, 2012). Others suggested that in the current environment, characterized by abundance, rampant consumption, and waste, commitment to social welfare and recognition of the social value of money are wanting, while “piety, to the extent it does exist, is de-linked from social responsibility” (Interview with prominent philanthropist, Kuwait, May 15, 2012).

When asked about prevailing concerns for *maṣlaḥa ‘amma* (the common good), several interlocutors responded, tongue-in-cheek, that *maṣlaḥa khaṣṣa* (private interest) was far more prevalent (Interview with member of *majlis al-dawlā*, Muscat, February 5, 2012; Interview with renowned *‘ālim*, Muscat, February 13, 2012; Interview with philanthropist, Kuwait, May 15, 2012). An oft-cited example was the penchant to construct a mosque and attach one’s name to it. As a successful Omani businessman remarked: “mosque building is not about Islam; it’s about status and posterity” (Muscat, January 31, 2012).⁵³ Indeed, the predilection for public posturing and ostentation, for cozying up to the powerful, was underscored repeatedly: “The preference is for big, well-advertised projects—promoted by the Emir, perhaps—that glorify the selves.... Some want to show off that they’re giving. Look at charitable societies, like....money goes to the media first, to make a big splash about them, and the founder uses the foundation to enrich his other projects. He makes sure the Emir knows about his charitable acts and so, gives him more business” (Interview with professor, Shari’a College, Qatar University, Doha, February 27, 2012; see also LeRenard (2008, p. 151) and Derbal (2014, pp. 153–154). Of course, this is not unique to Gulf states; similar behavior has been identified in Syria among government-sponsored NGOs and “loyal philanthropists” (Ruiz de Elvira, 2014, pp. 337–340), as well as in Egypt (Atia, 2013, p. 121), among others. According to some, “Islam is a big business...; it’s an instrument for making more money and increasing popularity...” (Interview with member of al-Thani family, Doha, February 20, 2012).

There are, for sure, exceptions to these patterns, but they exist because “the philanthropist is exceptional” (Interview with Lebanese scholar of religion, Muscat, February 10, 2012; Interview with Saudi former deputy minister, Riyadh, May 1, 2012). Bab Rizq (Door to Livelihood) is a community service program within the Saudi business organization Abdellatif Jamil Group (AJG) that is named for its

⁵³ Petersen (2015) quotes a manager at IIROSA who says that donors “...want to see buildings.... They want somewhere they can place a sign” (p. 93).

founder.⁵⁴ It was established in 2004 as a microfinance initiative modeled on the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh to assist poor Saudis through their self-designed income-generating projects. Like Grameen, it lends to women who have formed a group of five borrowers, each of whom has a plan for a small business and only one of whom may be a non-Saudi resident (Interview with CEO of AJG, Jeddah, April 17, 2012; Interview with representative at Bab Rizq, Jeddah, April 21, 2012). As in the Grameen Bank model, lending to the group is meant to encourage solidarity and shared responsibility. Bab Rizq also runs free job-training courses for poor, unemployed men and women and assists successful graduates in finding employment. This multifaceted CSR operation, financed almost entirely from the family's fortune, is focused on helping the poor get themselves out of poverty.

Conclusion: Charity as Metaphor for Politics

What can be deduced about such practices of giving and their implications for politics? First, a universal phenomenon, benevolence may be motivated by political ambitions in addition to charitable feelings. Giving at home and providing assistance abroad can be sources of political capital: means to extend influence, establish networks, gain recognition, and secure allegiance, et cetera. This is true for governing authorities and multilateral entities, as well as for clientelist business groups, and "loyalist" and "identity-based" organizations. As we have seen with ideology-driven entities, for example, their generosity is tied to adherence to their *da'wa*. Thus, conformism and obedience are enforced, the ranks of the believers grow, and the particular ideology gains influence.

Charitable giving may be a (more-or-less) deliberate conservatizing force: rather than promote real socioeconomic change, it is, as Derbal (2011) observes, a means to reinforce difference and consolidate the hierarchy in place (pp. 63–64). It is not a strategy to address poverty at its source or effectively mitigate inequality (Cammatt, 2014, pp. 218–227; Isik, 2014, p. 322). Furthermore, while "named" giving—in contrast to the Qur'anic preference for anonymity—may indeed provide a positive example for others to follow, it is, as well, an

⁵⁴ Abdellatif Jamil began his career subcontracting with ARAMCO and running gas stations, later becoming the sole distributor of Toyota vehicles in Saudi Arabia. Today, AJG is the largest private independent distributor of Toyotas in the world, with operations in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia; it is involved in real estate and financial services, as well. In 2005, it endowed the Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

unequivocal expression of relative status and, hence, a solicitation of recognition. To be sure, “named” giving may offer the benefactor an array of public relations benefits related to his/her stature and ambitions—of a social, political, or economic nature (Cammatt, 2014, p. 203). Added to that, when not extended anonymously and/or when conjoined with ideology, benevolence presupposes indebtedness; and what more effective a way to repay a debt than through submission—to the benefactor’s authority and/or beliefs?

Second, when the ruler or members of the ruling family extend charity and/or are active in charitable associations, there is a blurring of the distinction between public and private, with important effects (LeRenard, 2008, p. 145). The “royal”—in the guise of an exclusively private citizen—is able to intervene more deeply in society; in so doing, s/he gains not only recognition, but also information that may be useful in the ruler’s public function, perhaps enhancing his domination of society. Furthermore, when the state gets involved in the domain of charity and philanthropy by encouraging citizens to give, decreasing requisite (zakat) contributions from some social categories, or withholding access (to charity) from other social categories, it is using charitable giving as a tool for social management and control. By appealing some and marginalizing others, it consolidates the contours of the community via hierarchy and exclusions.

Third, while international giving has prioritized Arab and Muslim countries and communities, giving at home tends to concentrate on one’s family, tribe, ethnic, and confessional community. Those at home who are disadvantaged, but not considered part of the community to which the Gulf state and citizen feel an obligation, are not merely distanced, but are denied assistance. To be sure, the allegiance of migrant laborers is unnecessary and their submission expected.

In conclusion, highlighting exclusions and other features of charitable giving in Gulf monarchies demonstrates that in these states, as in other environments, the normative inferences, supposedly at the source of charitable giving, are not always obvious or primary. Beyond that, the study of charity in Gulf monarchies offers a window on the practice of politics and state-society relations.

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ZAKAT AND THE *UMMA* IMAGINARY OF THE 1970s MUSLIM STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

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This paper charts the linked religious, political, and economic visions undergirding Muslim Students Association (MSA) publications on zakat during the early 1970s. These publications demonstrate how the MSA saw zakat as a key practice in building a unified Muslim identity across multiple communities: local communities centered around university campuses, an American Muslim community (the boundaries of which were highly contested), and, finally, as part of a global Muslim community, or umma, in which Muslim students increasingly saw themselves as an exceptional group. These writings on zakat demonstrate the many concerns that Muslim students brought to bear on this foundational Muslim practice. This article argues that the university setting facilitated these multivalent debates on religious giving and contributed to students' aspirations for the umma as a whole.

Keywords: zakat, umma, Muslim Students Association, Islamic economics

From its inception as a national organization in 1963, the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada (MSA) focused on

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fostering a variety of religious practices among American Muslims.¹ As a foundational practice of Muslim piety, zakat (obligatory almsgiving) was taken up by MSA writers in the organization's early years in order to articulate, and in some cases expand, its meaning for contemporary Muslims. These MSA writings reveal linked religious, political, and economic visions that undergirded conceptualizations of zakat during the early 1970s. These publications demonstrate how MSA members saw zakat as a key practice in building Muslim identity in the many communities of which they were a part: local communities centered around university campuses, an American Muslim community (the boundaries of which were highly contested), and, finally, as part of a global Muslim community, or *umma*, in which Muslim students increasingly perceived themselves to be an exceptional group.

This paper focuses on the ways that the MSA envisioned zakat as fulfilling a variety of goals, and alleviating specific challenges, for each of these communities. Above all, MSA leaders of the 1970s feared the decline of religious identity and associated social disintegration among American Muslims as well as in the *umma* as a whole. The astonishing diversity that its members confronted in the United States presented both an opportunity and a challenge to this goal of producing a unified Muslim identity. In their local communities, MSA authors saw the potential for using zakat to foster individual piety. For American Muslims, the MSA as an organization envisioned zakat as enabling them to remain a distinctive yet vibrant community with a network of supporting institutions. And on a global scale, these authors put forward proposals for zakat to help to alleviate poverty and eliminate social injustices for Muslims around the world.

From the organization's inception, MSA leaders recognized that the professional status and financial position of Muslim students conferred on them the exceptional potential to shape the direction of the American Muslim community and possibly the *umma* as a whole. MSA writings on zakat suggest an intellectually vibrant space through which authors and members debated proposals for implementing Islamic principles on a broad scale. They brought multiple academic fields to bear on these debates, including sociology but especially economics. MSA authors of the early 1970s devoted considerable space in the MSA's quarterly magazine, *al-Ittihad [Unity]*, to the practice of zakat,

¹ Although historians typically designate 1963 as the founding of the MSA at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, individual Muslim student groups and associations were created in the 1940s and 1950s, including at UIUC and Columbia University, among others. The 1963 MSA of the United States and Canada was the first to attempt to coordinate activities among chapters across North America.

investing it with immense social importance to their specific position as American Muslims. They also hosted conferences and published conferences proceedings dedicated to the project of Islamic economics, of which they saw zakat as an integral part (13th Annual Conference 1973).

The limited scholarship on the MSA and its role in shaping exceptionalist visions of the American *umma* have tended to focus on the contributions of established Muslim scholars, such as Ismail al-Faruqi (Grewal, 2014). However, students were also already marshaling diverse intellectual resources to the project of zakat and its role in shaping broader economic futures of modern Muslim communities and societies. All of these sources are aspirational in nature; they reveal much more about the vision that MSA leaders and writers had for the practice of zakat than they do about actual giving practices among Muslim students. Nevertheless, these writings demonstrate the expansive importance that these student leaders invested in the practice. The United States, though a society suffering from a variety of ills, was a place in which visions of a more just economic framework could be put into practice in order to produce a more pious and materially secure Muslim community. And it was upwardly mobile, male students at American universities, destined for professional careers, who considered themselves poised to lead such an effort.

A Brief History of the MSA, 1963-1978

The presence of Muslim students on American university campuses resulted from wider changes to higher education in the post-war and the Cold War periods, during which American higher education expanded considerably (Biondi, 2012; Dorn, 2017; Marsden, 1994; Mahoney & Schmalzbauer, 2018; Yancy, 2010). Thousands of military veterans entered college under the G.I. Bill, many universities became coed and others admitted women in unprecedented numbers, and new institutions focused on technical and vocational training were created to train students in manufacturing, agricultural, and new technological fields. As a result of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, which eliminated immigration quotas from Asian countries, American universities also became much more religiously diverse (Mahoney & Schmalzbauer, 2018). These students had a variety of religious identities, including Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims.

These changes to immigration policies allowed for thousands of immigrants from Muslim-majority nations to come to America beginning in the 1960s. Many of them were professionals recruited to

take white-collar jobs and to meet the burgeoning demand for scientific and technical training in their countries of origin and in the United States (Kurien, 2007; GhaneaBassiri, 2010, p. 264; Warner & Wittner, 1998; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). Universities created the opportunity for foreign students to pursue their education in the United States, who had fewer options as European universities sought to rebuild themselves in the post-war era (GhaneaBassiri, 2010, p. 264). Most of the first MSA members were male graduate students pursuing additional training in the fields of engineering and medicine. Many of them were already married, engaged, or looking for a spouse. Their families often joined them in the years following their arrival or were formed during their courses of study. Muslim students were cosmopolitan and mobile, seeking opportunities for economic and professional advancement, often with the expectation that they would return to their countries of origin. Of course, many (though certainly not all) chose to stay and build a permanent life in America.

The first MSA chapter was started at the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign in 1963, and branches were quickly established at other institutions in Midwest, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeastern states. Within five years, MSA chapters formed in several Midwestern public universities. The MSA of the 1960s and 1970s was a loosely organized network of local chapters based in individual university campuses. An elected board of national representatives coordinated activities across the chapters, especially conferences and publishing. In addition to local and national programming of regional conferences, events such as holiday gatherings proved to be enormously popular in the first decades of the MSA. These events drew not just student attendees and their families, but also immigrants from local Muslim communities across the Midwest. By the late 1960s, MSA board members realized that many of their regional conferences and activities attracted more attendees from outside the university (I. Yunus, personal communication, April 2, 2019). The organization formally established a national headquarters in 1974, when it built a facility in Plainfield, Indiana, that would in 1981 become the site for the Islamic Society of North America.

Unlike other campus groups to which Muslims belonged, which cultivated a wide range of national, ethnic, or cultural identities, the MSA was, from the beginning, largely focused on cultivating religious identity and practice (I. Yunus, personal communication, April 2, 2019). In the absence of established Muslim institutions in many parts of the United States, MSA members had to figure out ways to fulfill their religious obligations. For many of the Muslim students who arrived at

American universities in the 1960s and 1970s, the MSA served as their primary religious community.

Influenced by ideologies associated with the global Islamic revival of that period, the MSA emphasized individual piety as the foundation of social and political transformation (Schumann, 2007; Howe, 2019). There were multiple sources for revivalism in the MSA, with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-e-Islami being the two most important among many diverse religious and political influences (Grewal, 2014, pp. 136–139). As we will see below, proposals concerning zakat reflect multiple intellectual and religious strands that cannot be traced to a single organizational source. Moreover, the MSA soon positioned and framed its revivalist goals in relation to their observations concerning the possibilities and limitations of their American context (GhaneaBassiri, 2010, pp. 263–270).

This revivalist mission also spurred the MSA to do outreach in local communities. MSA frequently members sought out existing mosques near their college campuses (I. Yunus, personal correspondence, April 2, 2019). Where such institutions did not exist, Muslim students often started their own. By the 1970s, MSA members had founded mosques, started financial trusts, created educational programs for both adults and children, and created lecture series. All of these programs reflected the MSA mission of the period: to build and reinvigorate Muslim piety among students and to prepare them to become religious exemplars while in America, and if and when they returned to their countries of origin. MSA writings on zakat reflect its leadership's recognition of the potential for the organization to reach growing numbers of Muslims across the United States through the mission of *da'wa*, or calling others to a more faithful Muslim practice (Mahmood, 2004; Grewal, 2014, pp. 48–49; Howe, 2019).

Print media was one of the primary modes through which the MSA sought to reach a diffuse, growing American Muslim immigrant community. In the 1970s, the MSA was especially focused on publishing and distributing devotional and educational material to meet the demand of newly arrived Muslim students and their families. For example, the MSA Women's Committee put out the *Parents' Manual: A Guide For Muslim Parents Living in North America* (1972) and the *Muslim World Cook Book* (1973), two publications aimed at helping Muslim families to navigate the challenges and opportunities of Cold War America (Howe, 2019). Through the 1970s, the MSA published *al-Ittihad* [Unity] on a quarterly basis, distributed to chapter members around the country. The magazine featured editorials, letters to the editor, feature articles by MSA members, reprints of pieces from prominent global Muslim

intellectuals, such as the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb, and advertisements for Muslim programs, events, and literature. *Al-Ittihad* also published lectures and talks delivered at MSA annual conferences.

This zakat literature was thus part of a broader attempt through print media to connect MSA members to a global project of reform and renewal. It was also one of the primary vehicles through which the national MSA organization sought to build community among American Muslims. Given the constraints of time and resources, it was not possible for MSA activists and leaders across the US to meet regularly. Moreover, MSA leaders also recognized, early on, that the experiences of living as American Muslims varied widely depending on geographic location. There were much stronger regional ties among MSA chapters than national ones (I. Yunus, personal correspondence, April 2, 2019). Print media became a cultural space through which the MSA attempted to form community among its aspiring middle-class, educated public. Through this media, activists and leaders attempted to forge religious authority and to experiment with a wide range of political, economic, and religious proposals that they sought to apply across many social contexts.

By the 1970s, the MSA publications noted the political benefits of living in the United States, namely the relative ease through which they could create nonprofit organizations for religious purposes. Concurrently, MSA rhetoric shifted from exploring American Muslims' disadvantages as a religious minority to articulating the benefits that establishing permanent institutions in the United States could afford them and future generations of American Muslims. These advantages included the possibility of marshaling American Muslims' wealth toward pious ends, the effects of which MSA members hoped would have a global reach. These students' aspirations for serving as an exemplary model for less economically secure Muslims around the world reflects the ways in which MSA members saw themselves working to bettering the transnational Muslim community while envisioning themselves as occupying an exceptional place within the *umma*.

Local Zakat Practices

Alongside securing prayer space and planning social gatherings for Muslim families, MSA chapters also worked to ensure that their members met the requirement of zakat. They did so even though many students may have been considered exempt from zakat collection. Often the campuses that recruited the most numbers of Muslim students were

the most isolated from institutional centers of American Muslim life, such as the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign and other land-grant institutions in the Midwest, with some notable exceptions, like the University of Michigan campuses, with their proximity to the robust Muslim communities in Dearborn and Detroit. At UIUC, located in southern Illinois, where there were fewer local Muslim communities, the MSA set about enabling its students to fulfill their basic obligations to God and to the Muslim *umma*. And zakat was one such obligation. As a result, the UIUC chapter began to collect and administer zakat for its students. The chapter's 1964–1965 report on activities, coordinated by founding MSA member Ahmad Sakr, describes how alongside coordinating Friday prayers and organizing various lectures on topics related to Islam, the chapter also distributed MSA members' zakat contributions (Muslim Students Association of University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign Report on Activities, 1964–1965). This report does not stipulate the recipients of zakat, only indicating that the MSA distributed its members' offerings.

These early MSA zakat coordination efforts demonstrate how American Muslim giving during this period was (and to a large extent remains) highly localized. Zakat, which is a form of giving that is intended to purify one's wealth, is considered a universal obligation for Muslims, usually given as a percentage of one's income (around 2.5%). The Qur'an specifies certain groups to be recipients of zakat, such as widows and orphans, but the mechanics of zakat are often negotiated among local communities and adjudicated differently in particular times and places. As Danielle Widmann Abraham (2017) has argued, zakat in the US spans a variety of charitable and giving practices that are often enmeshed in everyday life, as Muslims fulfill their obligations depending on perceived needs in their various communities. The particular way in which that requirement is met therefore takes many forms (Widmann Abraham, 2017). The options for giving are thus contingent on local context and shaped by the particular communities in which giving takes place. For MSA members, these localities included not just their American and regional Midwest contexts, but also their particular universities, towns, and neighborhoods. Generally speaking, there is a paucity of research on zakat practices in America, a difficulty that is compounded by the dearth of studies on American Muslim giving more broadly. Kambiz GhaneeBassiri (2017) has shown why Muslim giving remains "invisible" in the current scholarship, due to ongoing Protestant and/or secular assumptions about what constitutes a religious act worthy of academic attention (pp. 5–11). Moreover, the vast majority of recent studies on Muslim giving have been focused on purported ties between

Muslim philanthropy and terrorism. Systematic studies in Muslim-majority contexts are rare as well, though there are more examples of ethnographic work of lived philanthropic practice (Mittermeier, 2019) as well as recent studies of the politics of giving in the context of state-society relations (Brooke, 2019).

As a result of the current state of the academic literature, it is not surprising that we know even less about student giving practices. Scholars have explored the MSA's early attempts to ensure that its members engaged in *salat*, either by providing their members with prayer spaces on campus or by establishing and supporting mosques close to campuses. Muslim student writings on zakat in the 1970s show that these student leaders had a rather capacious understanding of the practice as they analyzed it in relation to local, national, and transnational contexts. As this article explores below, its members saw few social or political impediments to leveraging their present and future financial resources toward fulfilling ambitious religious aims.

Zakat in an Islamic Economic System

Multiple MSA articles from this period situate zakat in a holistic Islamic economic system. Such writings reveal a constellation of intellectual and political developments that came to bear on MSA members' conceptions of finance, money, and materialism. One important current was the global Muslim revival, the multifaceted and complex movement of a diverse set of actors seeking to elevate Muslim piety and practice through a variety of social and political activities. Second, these writings on zakat in the context of Islamic economics were part of transnational debates concerning the status of Islam in relation to the predominant opposing political and economic paradigms of the Cold War, namely democratic capitalism and Soviet-style communism. And third, Saudi Arabia during this period began promoting the field of Islamic economics as an academic field and a political practice, by establishing positions at universities, sponsoring conferences, and establishing an Islamic bank (Philipp, 1990, pp. 117–119). Taken together, these writings reveal the global outlook of the MSA and how the organization's members saw themselves as part of broader intellectual and activist projects of revival in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially as articulated by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, as well as the Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan.

For example, these MSA engagements with zakat coincided with the expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt within the social service sector. The Nasser government expanded a wide array of state

welfare programs. These programs became increasingly difficult to fund, and beginning in 1970, the Sadat regime encouraged the growth of non-state social service programs to fill in the sizeable gaps in services that the state was unable to fulfill. As Steven Brooke (2019) demonstrates, in the 1970s the brotherhood began to “rebrand” itself by creating a range of medical and other nonprofit organizations that operated within state legal structures (and not outside of them as is commonly assumed). These efforts facilitated the reentry of the Muslim Brotherhood into various social sectors. Significant for our purposes were arguments made by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated scholars, namely Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who advocated for a wide array of organizations as legitimate recipients for zakat. These organizations, such as hospitals, had a general public benefit not just for the poor, but also for Muslims across various sectors of Egyptian society (Brooke 2019). *Zakat* became a way to supplement state social services and a fundraising mechanism for a wide array of causes (Benthall, 2014, p. 145).

This interest in the broad social potential of zakat is evident in MSA activities and publications on Islamic economics from the late 1960s and into the 1970s. In 1970, the MSA published *Contemporary Aspects of Economic Thinking in Islam*, a document that resulted from the “Proceedings of the Third East Coast Regional Conference of the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada,” which was held in April 1968. The foreword was written by Ismail al-Faruqi (d. 1986), the renowned Palestinian-American thinker, who was then a professor of Islamic studies at Temple University. Al-Faruqi’s project of the Islamization of knowledge had a profound influence on the MSA.² During this period, al-Faruqi advocated for the primacy of Muslim identity over other forms, including ethnicity and nation (Grewal, 2013, pp. 139–144). Al-Faruqi saw MSA chapters, with their diverse memberships, as essential spaces for the realization of Muslim unity and as sites for putting Islamic ideals into practice.

In the foreword, he detailed what he believed made Islamic economic concepts (and their corresponding practices) unique (al-Faruqi, 1968, p. xi). Al-Faruqi (1968) argued that Islam stood out from other faiths because it affirmed the material world as “the only theatre where the absolute may and will be realized” (p. xiii). As a result, “Islam teaches the greatest possible individualism when it declares that “to every man belongs what he had earned [Qur’an 53:39]” so long as that enjoyment of wealth does not conflict with moral law (al-Faruqi, 1968,

² The influence of Muslim students, especially the diversity of Muslim perspectives they represented, on al-Faruqi is an important area of inquiry, but is outside the scope of this essay.

p. xiii). In this way, the moral law set limits on hoarding wealth and in the process encouraged capital to circulate.

For al-Faruqi, zakat thus promoted justice by preventing the accumulation of excessive wealth. The practice of zakat rested on the assessment that poverty was not an individual moral failing, but rather “the result of unforeseen circumstances, of innocent miscalculations” (al-Faruqi, 1968, p. xiii). Muslims recognized the dignity and “right” of the poor by imposing charity universally such that “no man in the commonwealth of Islam was to be deprived as long as any other has more than he needs” (al-Faruqi, 1968, p. xiii). Alongside its economic benefit, al-Faruqi emphasized the “sweetening” effects of zakat as it conferred both material and spiritual benefits on both the giver and the recipient (Benthall, 2014).

Zakat satisfied multiple moral imperatives within this emergent Islamic economics of the 1970s. Portrayed as its own system, Islamic economics was distinctive and superior to other social forms, namely democratic capitalism because, in theory, it facilitated the redistribution of wealth. Yet it was also compatible with, as well as could flourish within, democratic capitalism. Islamic economics provided a moderating influence of capitalism’s excesses, affording vulnerable people protection from poverty and preventing greed and waste. In “The Role of Az Zakat (An Institutionalized Charity) in the Islamic System of Economics, in *Curing the Poverty Dilemma*,” Ali M. Izadi (1975) built on al-Faruqi’s piece to advance the idea that zakat was in fact the cornerstone of “both the Islamic economic system and the Islamic social justice scheme” (pp. 2–3). Despite discussing Islam as a singular system, Izadi argued that zakat functioned differently in the varying societies in which Muslims lived, such that determining who was required to pay zakat depended on specific living standards and expectations. Ideally, a system of Islamic economics would provide for the basic necessities for all members of the society, treating everyone as part of a “big family” (Izadi, 1975, p. 2).

Although all members would be provided for on some level, according to Izadi (1975), zakat was not intended to eliminate socioeconomic stratification among Muslims. For example, “many commodities such as refrigerators, cars, and electricity, for example, which are considered luxuries elsewhere are counted as necessities in the USA” (Izadi, 1975, p. 3). As a result, the threshold for a minimum income was higher in certain societies and lower in others. Izadi imagined Islamic economics as organized around a core set of principles that were flexible enough to be implemented in any national setting, such that even in the absence of government, social harmony would be

retained through the practice of zakat (Izadi, 1975, p. 4). Islamic economics could function within a variety of political and economic configurations, including, possibly, a non-Islamic state.

It is worth pausing on the elements that Izadi took for granted in this article, which suggest the underlying tension in these zakat proposals between the goal of Islamic unity and specific, national interests. Zareena Grewal (2014) has argued that the *umma* ideal largely superseded the diasporic attachments that many MSA members had during this period. This transnational vision developed what she calls a “Muslim American counterpublic” (p. 139), which she views as potentially disruptive to the claims and political imperatives of the nation-state. In Izadi’s piece, the relationship between Islam and the modern nation-state is a source of ambivalence. Islamic economic principles (as he understood them) could be, and possibly needed to be, fulfilled *through* different national governments. But he also wanted to allow for the possibility that his economic framework could be applied in “any kind of society” (p. 4). The state seemed to be essential for preserving social order in the case of an emergency or catastrophe such as war or a natural disaster, in which case zakat could be marshaled to address a crisis or other “social purposes ordained by God” (Izadi, 1975, p. 3). Presumably, his proposals hinged on the existence of an overarching governmental structure that supported Muslim ethical and social frameworks. Significantly, he left open the question of what kind of state through which Islamic principles might be pursued and how the Islamic principles that he articulated as universal related to the moral claims of various nation-states. In either case, the nation-state played an essential role in this top-down proposal. Many Muslim students aspired to take up government posts in their countries of origin after acquiring the requisite training and credentialing. Thus, while the nation-state was problematic, it was also a potential site through which MSA members imagined implementing such proposals.

In part, this ambivalence resulted from the multiple threads of influence and authority on which these proposals rested, which cannot be wholly explained by the MSA’s revivalist orientation. The MSA zakat literature also placed significant weight on technical and scientific knowledge to produce not just economic gains, but also to achieve religious aims. The conviction in modern, scientific knowledge to produce broader religious goods was a persistent thread throughout these proposals. For example, in addition to his list of Islamic economic principles and his ensuing explanations of their meanings, Izadi presented a graph demonstrating how minimum income related to government expenses and zakat contributions. He then provided

calculations for the amount of state subsidies per person to account for education and other services. Zakat was, in effect, the tax that people with incomes above minimum income threshold would pay, which Izadi calculated at roughly 40% of the population. The feasibility or accuracy of these calculations are not what concerns us here. In fact, the entire exercise was hypothetical and imaginative. Rather, it is significant that Izadi imbued this project of Islamic economics in technocratic methods and language that were themselves infused with their own kind of religious conviction. This assumption suggests that Izadi (1975) anticipated that his audience—other male students from engineering, science, and medical fields—would also be persuaded by his technocratic conceptualization of zakat. Such an approach also meant that those with professional training, and not necessarily those possessing formal religious credentialing, were ideally suited to lead the *umma* toward social and religious progress.

Zakat was also a particularly important practice within these ruminations on Islamic economics because it was represented as a religious and economic activity that Muslims could actively undertake to bring about Muslim conceptions of justice outside of a Muslim-majority context and in the absence of an (imagined) Muslim political system (Izadi, 1975). It was something modern Muslims living in the West could do, as opposed to a range of capitalist practices that were seen as largely off-limits, such as charging interest, collecting certain kinds of land rent, including sharecropping, and exploitation of natural resources (AbuSulayman, 1974, pp. 16–25). By contrast, zakat offered the potential to implement Islamic economics across social locations, from the individual to civil society and religious institutions to the state. In “Theory of the Economics of Islam: The Economics of Tawhid and Brotherhood,” a talk delivered at the Third East Coast Regional conference of the MSA in 1973, Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman laid out three foundations of Islamic economics: *tawhīd*, brotherhood, and private property. AbuSulayman was a political scientist and al-Faruqi’s collaborator on the Islamization of Knowledge project (Grewal, 2013, p. 143). For him, *tawhīd* encompassed the other two categories, as the principle that expressed the idea of God’s absolute oneness and control over all human domains.

AbuSulayman framed zakat through principles that he considered to be original and foundational to Islam from the time of the Prophet Muhammad. For Abu-Sulayman *tawhīd* undergirded the ideal of brotherhood and the institution of private property, governing how humans should relate to one another justly and fairly:

The tawhīd philosophy should have its reflections in the social, political, and economic relationships of the Muslim society, so as to unify the mosque and factory under the same concept...in economics we can call it the economics of tawhīd and we may call it for convenience the economics of brotherhood to emphasize its cooperative human character. (AbuSulayman, 1974, p. 20)

For AbuSulayman (1974), the “mosque and the factory” was an example of how religious and economic unity, expressed through an ethos centered on the *umma*, mirrors that of divinity unity. These theological underpinnings were crucial for realizing the possibilities for economic and social progress that could only be achieved through an Islamic framework. These publications show the expansive imagination of MSA members, who viewed zakat as linked to global projects of reviving Islam and unifying Muslims, in the United States and around the world. This activist framework envisioned Muslim American students spreading their reinvigorated Islamic message, as it was articulated through “principles” that they imagined as having universal appeal in multiple cultural contexts.

Crucially, all of the MSA authors saw zakat as mitigating the excesses of the capitalist system, but not necessarily undermining capitalism’s structures in the way that they saw Islam as clearly standing in opposition to communism. Their emphasis on principles added to the impression of the malleability and adaptability of Islamic economics to capitalism. MSA authors found communism much more problematic from the standpoint of their religious convictions. The atheistic ideology of the USSR was of course a key reason for this critique. But the other was MSA authors’ belief in Islam’s ability to promote individualistic growth, both in spiritual and economic terms. For these authors (many of them socioeconomically secure and well educated), economic disparity and differentiation was taken for granted. Instead, the principles of *tawhīd* and brotherhood preserved hierarchical relationships among social classes assumed to be inevitable, but did so in such a way that promoted justice and human flourishing.

The Islamization of economics was thus an intellectual project and a fulfillment of what these authors saw as core religious and philosophical values that were not being implemented under modern political structures. This notion of Islam as being inherently cooperative underscored the idea of Islam as a “third way” between communism and capitalism. As we will see below, MSA authors identified the United States as a kind of “social laboratory” for putting these principles into

action. Though many Muslim students ended up staying in America, during this period many of them, spurred by the vision of al-Faruqi and AbuSulayman, held out hope of transporting these realized principles and proposals back to Muslim-majority contexts and to the *umma* as a whole (Grewal, 2014, pp. 143–144).

Zakat was therefore implicated in complicated webs of transnational intellectual and religious activist exchange. Multiple lines of influence are evident in these writings on zakat, making it difficult to point to a singular vision for a modern Islamic economic system. What these arguments suggest are the broad moral authority that MSA writers sought to establish for themselves through these engagements with zakat and other forms of Muslim practice. This authority rested on both these writers claimed religious expertise in Islamic ethics and history, as well as their academic, especially scientific, knowledge and skills that many of them had cultivated across multiple continents. This combination of revivalist critique and technocratic optimism created a rather expansive, yet not necessarily coherent or realistic, vision for the future of zakat in late twentieth-century global capitalism.

Zakat and Building an American Muslim *Umma*

Beyond this global frame, MSA writers also considered zakat within their particular circumstances as American Muslims. MSA publications of the 1970s took up the topic of zakat in a number of articles and reprints of conference lectures. *Al-Ittihad* dedicated an issue to Islamic economics in summer 1974. In these articles, writers articulated different purposes for the practice, both historically and in its contemporary instantiations. All of these MSA authors stressed zakat as a universal obligation for Muslims, but that this obligation represented something distinct in the American context.³

Additionally, these authors saw zakat as an essential practice for the creation of a robust American Muslim community on college campuses and in neighborhoods across the US. Rather than an act of individual charity, as Ilyas Ba-Yunus (d. 2007) put it in the summer 1974 issue of *al-Ittihad*, zakat is an “act of collective responsibility and duty” (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 2). Ba-Yunus was a founding member and past president of the MSA. By 1974, he had taken up an academic post as a sociologist at Courtland College. In this capacity, he addressed the importance of zakat within the broader frame of his article, entitled “Muslims in North America, Problems and Prospects,” which focused

³ For example, Ilyas Ba-Yunus (1974), “Muslims in North America: Problems and Prospects.” *al-Ittihad*.

on the “pragmatic” and “ideological” challenges facing American Muslims in the late twentieth century (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 2).

In Ba-Yunus’s assessment, American Muslims lacked a coherent community. This lack of cohesion was of urgent concern. In fact, Ba-Yunus (1974) argued that “...the Islamic community does not exist today, and this has reduced Islam to a hypothesis which non-Muslims may disdain and many a Muslim may entertain serious reservations about” (p. 2). Going further, he argued that American Muslim “communities” were not communities at all because they “are only groups of concerned Muslim individuals who gather together only once or twice a week in the centers that are difficult to maintain” (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 2). According to Ba-Yunus, in the absence of substantive, enduring social bonds a variety of ills had resulted, including crime, lack of education, and sexual promiscuity. The more established and formal the organization, he reasoned, the more potential it had to maintain the Muslim faith in the next generation and to ensure that the American Muslim community did not get lost in the “melting pot” of 1970s America (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 5).

In order to rectify these ideological and pragmatic challenges, Ba-Yunus maintained that Muslims must return to the core principles of control and resource, or *shūrā* and zakat, respectively. Together, these two principles ought to form the basis of Muslims’ communal obligations to one another, as well as to God. Ba-Yunus (1974) defined *shūrā* as the Islamic principle of control, as the authority that Muslims invest in a person (*amir*) or shared governing body. In his telling, Muslims were the strongest during the “golden age” of Islamic history, that is, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and in the period immediately following. This strength came from their ability to put the principle of *shūrā* into practice through organized government under the caliphate.

Shūrā was required for fulfilling the obligation of zakat as God intended. Ba-Yunus contended that zakat must “...be established by and is the responsibility of the *Shūrā*.” For Ba-Yunus, zakat was a “collective responsibility” not an “act of individual charity” (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 5). Here, he differentiated zakat from Protestant Christian notions of philanthropy, which are predicated on individual voluntarism and service (Benthall, 2014). The ability of Muslims to organize ensured that zakat could be collected and distributed to needy members of society.

Zakat was the other essential ingredient for a resilient American Muslim community because it laid the foundation for financial stability and growth. In this framing, Muslim prosperity depended on successful collection of zakat, which was itself contingent on Muslims’ ability to

organize themselves. American Muslims ought to be able to pay 2.5% of their income as zakat, provide for the basic material needs of all Muslims “in their community,” and *still* have money left over. While the article is scarce on specifics, Ba-Yunus’s (1974) calculations imply that zakat would only be given to Muslims in the United States. It is difficult to imagine that he was proposing that American Muslims possessed the financial resources to provide for either the entire Muslim *umma* or to support all needy Americans.

As a result, Ba-Yunus (1974) argued that zakat funds could and should be used for a variety of purposes to serve the particular the needs of immigrant American Muslims. For example, he proposed that zakat be used for funding mosques and community centers, contributing to various *da‘wa* initiatives and to create programs for the “total involvement of children as well as adults to practice and live Islam when they come back from their day’s work” (Ba-Yunus, 1974, p. 5). This meant that zakat givers could donate to a wide spectrum of social and religious institutions. Ba-Yunus imagined zakat being marshaled toward a wide variety of social causes, from education to jihad, with the end point being the preservation of Islamic identity for generations to come. These goals, however, depended on an overarching organization to lead American Muslims. Other MSA leaders of the 1970s pushed for the creation of an umbrella organization that could, in theory if not in practice, represent all American Muslims. This would eventually become the Islamic Society of North America.

Other articles put forward different organizational possibilities to facilitate zakat distribution and in doing so to bring about unity across diverse Muslim American communities. In winter 1974, *al-Ittihad* reprinted a sermon delivered by Sulayman S. Mufassir at the Islamic Society of Baltimore in November 1973. In it, Mufassir (1974) argued, “American Muslims, in particular, are fortunate in living in a society where minorities do have some protections.” Given the advantages that such protections afforded, Mufassir asked:

Where are our business establishments, our Muslim banks, our news media, our commercial enterprises, our service industries? It is time for us to come together... The principle of zakat can work only on a highly organized basis. The Islamic principles of self-help and circulation of capital can work best only on an organized scale. We must progress to the point where our being Muslim is our most important consideration, and the brotherhood of Islam becomes a practical reality in our

day to day lives, nor merely a beautiful mental concept which is for academic appreciation. (p. 9)

This sentiment of unrealized economic and political potential of American Muslims was echoed in multiple *al-Ittihad* and *MSA News* articles in the 1970s. What American Muslims needed was a more coordinated and systematic effort to pool their resources to actually make the *umma* or the “brotherhood” ideal a “practical,” living reality. For Mufassir, this meant that American Muslims must develop their distinctive institutions that operated within existing economic mechanisms of late capitalism, which would ultimately serve their religious priorities.

Like Ba-Yunus, Mufassir (1974) saw the main challenge facing American Muslims to be one of organizational capacity. In order to accomplish this, Mufassir and other MSA authors called for an institutionalization process for Muslim giving that would complement organizational efforts he imagined taking place in other economic and social domains. And through these institutions, foundational Islamic principles could be put into practice and in a sense be fully realized as a “practical reality,” not just as a set of ideals. In this framework, zakat was more than a religious obligation. It represented the potential of American Muslims to organize themselves effectively toward activist ends. Zakat was one important piece of this puzzle, as a practice that could reinvigorate individuals’ and families’ observance, build communal connections across local communities, and showcase American Muslims’ attempts to alleviate pressing social problems.

The Contested Boundaries of the American Muslim *Umma*

These discussions of zakat further illuminate how MSA members navigated the complicated religious and racial hierarchies of the mid–late-twentieth century US. Ba-Yunus (1974) exhorted his readers to take inspiration from other American religious and ethnic minorities who modeled organizational prowess in effectively distributing their financial resources:

Chinese, Jewish, and the so-called Black Muslim communities are free of any locale and the generational shifts and mobility. Nor are they concentrated at any one place only. They operate on the basis of a central authority and a centralized fund. Those who belong to these communities are happier, healthier, and

more prosperous than the ones who got lost in this “melting pot.” We do not hear of sick, poor, or a criminal from among these communities. Their daughters have the assurance of getting married with their own kinsmen. Their elderly do not end up in old people’s homes. Their children do not become juvenile delinquents and they are some of the best educated people in this society. (p. 5)

This passage is noteworthy in several respects. First, it reiterated Ba-Yunus’s conception of zakat as a financial and community resource that could be put to work for broad social ends. His ruminations on zakat exemplified the multiple motivations and goals that have characterized the practice since its inception (Salim, 2008, pp. 115–117). Reflecting his sociological agenda, Ba-Yunus described zakat’s value as resting in its potential to address social inequalities, such as poverty, neglect of the elderly, and educational deficiencies.

Second, it demonstrates how Black Muslim communities occupied an ambivalent position in MSA constructions of the *umma* during the 1960s and 1970s. (Curtis, 2007; GhaneaBassiri, 2010; Grewal, 2014; Howe, 2019; Mir, 2014). The term “so-called” exemplifies this ambivalence as MSA members did not necessarily see Black Muslims as part of the Muslim American community or the global *umma*. Thus Ba-Yunus (1974) placed Black Muslim communities in the same category as “other” religious and racial minorities that he saw as distinct from the more recent Muslim immigrant communities with whom he identified and whom he aligned with the authentic practice of Islam.

And yet Black Muslims (along with Chinese immigrants and Jews) were also models that could be observed, analyzed, and possibly emulated. For Ba-Yunus (1974) they all achieved the institutional and financial mechanisms to develop recognizable identities in an emergent multicultural landscape that posed both challenges and opportunities for religious and racial minorities seeking recognition and resources. Ba-Yunus highlighted the ways that these communities built organizational structures to ensure “happy and healthy communities.” Crucially, Ba-Yunus failed to recognize, especially in the case of the NOI, that these communal efforts were also intended to challenge structural racism, surveillance, and discrimination (Curtis, 2006; Grewal, 2013; Taylor, 2017). Such organizational prowess often made these communities subject to governmental surveillance and violence. His account implied that these communities had the same set of options available to them and

were free of constraints as they built alternatives to institutions designed to undermine White supremacy.

Most importantly, according to Ba-Yunus (1974), these communities achieved their distinctiveness in a hegemonic society threatening to subsume them into the “melting pot” of 1970s America. By serving as the financial foundation for Muslims across America (however this community was defined), Ba-Yunus argued that zakat could help to guard against social and economic pressures to assimilate and conform to the secular dictates of American society.

An Exceptional Community?

MSA writings on zakat demonstrate the growing conviction among the organization’s members during this period that the American Muslim community not only occupied a privileged financial and political position that was advantageous to their local religious communities, but that it was also an exceptional community posed to do great things for the Muslim *umma* writ large. By the early 1970s, MSA writings reflected a growing recognition that despite the many challenges facing them as American Muslims (geographic dispersion, lack of Muslim educational institutions, moral corruption of American society generally, and the threat of assimilation), Muslims in the United States also enjoyed several advantages. The first was their professional prospects and wealth relative to other immigrant communities and racial and ethnic minorities in America. As MSA members graduated with degrees in engineering and medicine, they moved into middle-class and upper middle-class neighborhoods. Publications from the 1970s demonstrate how MSA national sought to marshal its membership’s anticipated financial resources. MSA student leaders of the 1970s saw the prospects for social mobility and economic security among MSA alumni. American Muslims, as “more prosperous than a very large number of people in this society,” were not just privileged among Muslims, but in fact enjoyed elevated socioeconomic status among Americans writ large. To return to the idea of zakat as a resource, the 1970s saw the awareness on the part of MSA members that their resource pool was potentially very large indeed.

The second advantage was the level of wealth and education among Muslim students relative to their student counterparts in many Muslim-majority societies. MSA writers thus saw American Muslims as capable of realizing the social transformative effect of zakat in ways that communities in other, often Muslim-majority, contexts could not. They frequently compared the position of American Muslims, a small, yet

privileged religious minority, to the position of pious Muslims in Muslim-majority societies, which they critiqued on political, economic, and religious terms. For example, MSA authors noted how secular authoritarian regimes worked to quash the Islamization efforts of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and regulated Muslim practice in various ways through the state apparatus. By contrast, by the early 1970s, MSA leaders saw fewer institutional and political barriers to creating religious institutions, such as mosques and schools, as well as to organize zakat giving on a broader scale in the United States.

This is why MSA authors writing in *al-Ittihad* saw in American society, and on college campuses in particular, the potential for putting Islamic principles into practice. The 1975 MSA National Convention was devoted to the theme “Islamization: Its Challenges and Promises” (Thirteenth Annual Convention Program, 1975). Held in Toledo, Ohio, the conference focused on two overarching aims: first, to “design a step-by-step plan to take Muslims from what they are now to what they aspire to be” and, two that “many Muslims believe that if only there were one country in the world that practices Islam in its totality, ... thus providing a living model of an Islamic society, that [it] would multiply fast in other parts of the Muslim world. How would you go about formulating a viable Islamization process to establish such an Islamic society?” (Thirteenth Annual Convention Program, 1975). Although the US was not the only possible country in which such an Islamization process could be achieved, the MSA clearly saw it as a potential launching pad for such aspirations.

Several articles during the 1970s echoed this sentiment that American Muslims had the potential to implement models for alleviating poverty on a global scale through zakat. The spring 1975 issue reprinted the speech given by Suhail M. Banister at the 12th annual MSA convention in 1974 entitled “The New City of the Prophet.” The essay encapsulates the broad aspirations of the MSA national organization of the 1970s, extolling the many benefits that American Muslims enjoyed:

I don't think it is too far-fetched right now to say that we in North America could well represent the best hope—if not the last hope—of world Islam. We are a small, scattered community, but we enjoy important advantages not found elsewhere in the Islamic world. For one thing, we have an atmosphere of religious and political freedom...we have an abundance of the type of brains necessary...when Muslims create an apparatus to feed the poor of North America, that apparatus can be used to feed people in North Africa! And when

Muslims discover ways to cure junkies in New York City, those ways can be tried out in Afghanistan! (Bannister, 1975, p. 13)

Banister went on to cite discussions and practices surrounding zakat as his primary examples for how American Muslims had made concrete steps toward alleviating structural poverty and its related social problems. Whether such aspirations could ever be fulfilled was less important than this aspirational vision Bannister articulated, in which American Muslims would create and implement models of economic and religious progress that could be exported around the world.

To be sure, Banister's (1975) ideas were met with skepticism by other MSA members. *Al-Ittihad* printed the comments and responses to his talk from the convention. Several conference attendees found his ideas implausible, especially talk of unifying Muslims around any concrete, political project. One questioner argued that pursuing such a project would jeopardize the political and religious rights that American Muslims currently enjoyed. Whatever concerns about the practicality of Banister's schemes the responses raised, they did not question the basic premise that indeed, the American Muslim community enjoyed tremendous economic and political advantages that could and should be leveraged for the benefit of Muslims around the world.

These zakat proposals encapsulate a key tension among immigrant revivalists of this period. On the one hand, they articulated a staunch anti-Western critique, predicated on their observations of the multiple moral failings of American democratic capitalism. These writings noted rampant materialism, vast income inequality, social disintegration, and the lack of economic and educational opportunities. On the other, these writers saw enormous potential in what Grewal (2014) calls the "American Medina," in which educated immigrants could succeed professionally beyond what they could accomplish in their diasporic homelands (p. 139). This was not the abandonment of the global *umma* but rather the prospect for Muslim unity to be realized through the intellectual and religious labor of American Muslim students.

Conclusion

These articles and conference programs from the mid-1970s represented the peak of MSA discussions about zakat as part of an economic alternative to capitalism or communism. As the 1970s progressed, this kind of inquiry faded as American Muslims became less troubled by the benefits that capitalism conferred on them and their families. The idea of

zakat as an economic resource that could be distributed through top-down political structures in order to address broad social problems such as poverty similarly diminished. Instead, the emphasis shifted toward building American Muslim institutions through philanthropic means and distributing zakat toward social service organizations and religious communities. One such instrument was the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT), founded by Muslim students in 1973. NAIT is a foundation that manages the financial investments of American Muslims in schools, mosques, and other religious institutions, as well as to provide wealth management tools, such as shari'a-compliant investment products. The options through which American Muslims could fulfill their zakat obligations proliferated on the local level as Muslim students founded mosques, social service agencies focused on particular causes, and other smaller communities through which they could meet their zakat obligations.

Yet, the aspirational imagination that these authors brought to the practice of zakat remains important for two main reasons. The first is that these writings on zakat underscore the premium that MSA writers placed on the ideal of Muslim unity. Muslim students found themselves in dispersed, often isolated religious communities. This social condition prompted them to reimagine what foundational Muslim practice could look like during a particularly urgent moment of transnational revivalist debates surrounding the *umma* ideal. The many meanings that MSA writers ascribed to zakat show that they envisioned the practice of zakat as fulfilling multiple social purposes. Yet, the contested boundaries of the *umma*, namely along racial and class lines, meant that certain American Muslims, namely poorer immigrants, were conceived of as benefitting from zakat, while others, such as Black Muslims, potentially were perceived as neither recipients nor beneficiaries.

Second, these MSA writings on zakat demonstrate the role of the university, a global site for the circulation of knowledge, in shaping Muslim students' conceptions of Muslim community, piety, and religious authority. In these writings, we see the braiding of intellectual, religious, cultural, and class positions among MSA male members. While MSA leaders of this period tend to recall this period as one focused almost exclusively on religious practice and identity, these writings show how zakat became enmeshed in a wider set of academic and policy debates, giving rise to new meanings and potentials for zakat as a social practice. Muslim students became conversant in multiple domains of knowledge in the secular academy and as they did so, they made the case that this kind of expertise conferred authority on them in their religious communities, both locally and beyond. The university thus

served to enhance Muslim students' aspirations for the *umma*, and their place within it, in the late twentieth century.

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BOOK REVIEW

TOWARD THE REFORM OF PRIVATE WAQFS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ISLAMIC WAQFS AND ENGLISH TRUSTS

Harasani, H. (2015). *Toward the Reform of Private Waqfs: A Comparative Study of Islamic Waqfs and English Trusts*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill - Nijhoff.

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In *Toward the Reform of Private Waqfs: A Comparative Study of Islamic Waqfs and English Trusts*, Hamid Harasani bridges what may seem like two discordant systems of theory (and ultimately practice). He masterfully explains how a study of Islamic *awqāf* and English trusts lays the groundwork for reform in these areas to allow Muslims to practice wealth-management that complies both with their religious decrees and with English common law. By detailing the two largest impediments – the issues of the use/refusal of perpetuity requirements and definitions of ownership – Harasani argues that it may be possible for Muslim adherents living under English common law to have access to a pathway that allows them to “utilize property in a way that transcends personal benefit and benefits the community” (p. 168).

As a doctoral thesis, Harasani methodically lays out his work, beginning with the research problem, its aims, and the context within which they lie. The reader is provided with an understanding of how the topics of Islamic *awqāf* and Muslims’ desires to create them are of importance. A waqf, as later defined in Chapter 2, is a wealth planning tool and a “mechanism whereby a Muslim, even after his death, can get as much reward as possible in the afterlife” (p. 94). Harasani helps the reader to understand that for a Muslim, “...law is all encompassing;

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touching all areas of life” (p. 16). This can be a challenge when Islamic law (non-state law) is in contradiction to English common law (state law); the non-state law is permissible and rewarded by God, but the state law forbids (at least in part) elements of the practice. Harasani argues that by understanding each legal system’s history, interpretations, and flexibility, there may be a way to reconcile the current points of friction between Islamic waqf law and English trusts law.

Chapter 2 delves into the details of the waqf system as it stands today (or at least in 2014). Harasani provides an overview of the waqf system’s definitions, foundations, and central principles. The author expands upon his earlier discussion of *ijtihād* (a jurist’s independent reasoning) for interpreting and understanding where the practice and goals of creating *awqāf* originated. There is a hierarchy of authority or determining authenticity when it comes to interpreting God’s law. At the top of this hierarchy is the *Qur’an*, the direct word of God, and is followed by the *Sunnah* (prophetic sayings), *Ijmā* (consensus of scholars), and finally *Ijtihād*. Harasani notes that each of the four schools of law have similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses, when it comes to understanding the creation and implementation of *awqāf*. The author argues for the use of the *Hanbalī* School of thought due to its strong reliance on hadith and having the “most systematic and logically expounded” discussion of waqf practices of the four schools (p. 56). Harasani goes on to outline five conditions that the *Hanbalī* School necessitates for waqf creation - the condition most salient to the primary point of discussion for the remainder of the book being that a waqf is “unconditional, perpetual, inalienable, and irrevocable” (p. 65). Subsequently, after outlining the five main criticisms most often waged against Islamic waqf law, Harasani spends considerable time detailing two primary critiques – perpetuity and inalienability/ownership – in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

According to Harasani, three of the four schools of law cite perpetuity as a condition for valid waqf creation. Harasani provides the reader with a sense that the four schools are a sort of continuum, with *Hanafī* thought being most stringent (and most cited), *Mālikī* thought providing the greatest flexibility in applying perpetuity or not, and the *Shāfi’ī* and *Hanbalī* schools forming a middle ground. However, why is the issue of perpetuity important and how does it conflict with English common law? Part of Harasani’s argument is in the definition of waqf - a literal translation of one hadith as “imprison the capital and liquidate the fruit.” Understanding the purpose of a *Waqf* is to set aside property for a charitable or pious function (p. 47). The reader is led to understand that the creation of a waqf is the transfer of property to God for use for

the greater community, which takes the rights of the property out of the hands of God's followers and creates its perpetual nature. Because the hadith does not specify the length of imprisonment, the four schools of law have interpreted the perpetual nature in different ways. Perpetuity is one of the primary points of contention between Islamic waqf law and English trusts law. English trusts law appears to prohibit perpetuity, but the reasons for doing so vary according to Harasani's research. Harasani explores various case law to demonstrate multiple rationales for the rule against perpetuities – from concerns to protect free markets and democracy from the removal or concentration of assets in the hands of the few to the sheer feasibility of managing a trust or waqf that spans generations indefinitely.

In Chapter 4, Harasani turns his focus to the second point of conflict between the two systems and discusses how each defines and understands the topic of ownership. Starting with what he terms theological considerations, Harasani reiterates that the creation of a waqf puts God in the role of owner of the property, leaving the named individual(s) to serve in the capacity of a "trustee" (p. 153). Harasani's discussion includes detailed outlines of types, objects, and modes of acquisition of not only property, but also property rights. He also reviews theories put forward by different Islamic jurists and British colonial stances throughout history. In his comparative methodological approach, Harasani turns the reader's attention then to the definition and practices of ownership as supported by English common law, particularly regarding trusts. Ownership in this realm is just as subjective as it is in Islamic law. According to Harasani, trust ownership is more about establishing possession than it is about determining actual ownership because, as Harasani quotes Honoré, "to own is transitive" (p. 177). Because "trusts' general purpose is managing property in a way that limits the control to the hands of a single or multiple persons or entity," it can be argued that a trustee is not an owner, but essentially an elected individual to serve on behalf of the property's benefit (p. 189). Harasani also spends time detailing how the idea of a split ownership structure that separates legal and beneficial ownership can create grounds for further conversation between these two legal systems. These points help to demonstrate that the gap between Islamic waqf law and English trusts law may not be so wide in regards to ideas on ownership.

As he states throughout the book, Harasani believes that reform is possible and Islamic waqf law and English trusts law can be reconciled if both sides were to agree to reconsider the matters of perpetuity and inalienability/ownership. In regards to the issue of perpetuity, Harasani suggests that if either side were willing to rethink the interpretation of

each's perpetuity requirements or if English trusts law were willing to make an exception for *awqāf* specifically, then one interpretive hurdle would be cleared. A similar argument is made for reconciling the matter of ownership; if conversation can be had as to which approach is best represented by the matter at hand, then "in theory, there is room for congruence, but it remains to be seen whether this congruence will ever be realized in practice" (p. 222).

Despite the potential to limit his audience due to his work's legal perspective and language, Harasani makes his writing easily understood by non-legal scholars without oversimplifying the subject matter. Harasani is thorough and thoughtful in his consideration of how to proactively explore how two seemingly disparate fields of law may actually be closer than originally thought to "achieve workability" if they acknowledge each system's strengths and are open to exploring reinterpretations of established law. As I lack sufficient knowledge of these two legal systems and of the political context within which this conversation would occur, I would suggest that these topics be considered as part of the viability of Harasani's proposal. If concern must be found in Harasani's writing, it would be in the disconnect between his focus on the *Hanbalī* School's perspective on the Islamic understanding of *awqāf* and his suggestion that reconciliation may look to the *Mālikī* School to address the issue of perpetuity. I assume this disconnect is because of the authority and authenticity attributed to the *Hanbalī* School's Arabic writings as opposed to other schools' increased distance and subsequent decreased authority having not been written in the language of God. However, this is only my assumption and does not detract from the strength of the overall argument and purpose of the book. Harasani's work is commendable and provides scholars and practitioners a foundation to continue a theoretical discussion that could have immeasurable benefits for Muslims living in non-Muslim majority nations, especially concerning Islamic wealth planning and management.

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BOOK REVIEW

HUMAN SECURITY AND PHILANTHROPY: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES AND MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRY PRACTICES

Hasan, S. (2015). *Human Security and Philanthropy: Islamic Perspectives and Muslim Majority Country Practices*. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag New York.

Review by Zeeshan Noor
The University of Texas at Dallas

Philanthropy and the obligation to help those less fortunate are central tenets in Islam. It is one of the Five Pillars and as such is an integral part of a Muslim's ethical outlook. *Human Security and Philanthropy: Islamic Perspectives and Muslim Majority Country Practices* by Samiul Hasan is a helpful addition to addressing the philanthropic structure and practices in different Muslim countries. It is among the very few scholarly works that highlights the little-known concept of third sector organizations (TSOs) in relation to human security in Muslim majority countries (MMCs). In this case, public goods, service delivery groups, and organizations not a part of the market (the first sector) or the government (the second sector) are identified as the third sector.

The book is divided into 5 main sections and 12 chapters. Each section consists of one to four chapters focusing on a particular topic or concept. The first part provides some statistics about the 47 MMCs, followed by an explanation of the concepts and practices of Islamic philanthropy. The second part discusses the rise of TSOs. The third part discusses obligatory and non-obligatory charitable giving, while the fourth part discusses the nature of civil society in Islam. The final section discusses the role of TSOs in Islamic society and their potential.

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The first part (chapters 1-3) provides an overview of philanthropy and a discussion of third-sector organizations in 47 MMCs in Africa and Asia. Backed by several references, Hasan exhaustively addresses major issues and aspects of human security in Islam. The author also offers a holistic paradigm of human security, hinging on “freedom from want” and highlights major aspects of human security related to food security, shelter, health, education and work. He then elaborates on the key components, historical evolution, and conceptual formation of all these needs and analyzes the dimensions from an Islamic perspective in order to discuss relevant issues. He concludes the chapter arguing that there is no conflict between Islam and the concept of human security.

The second part (chapter 4) discusses the history and development of TSOs, philanthropy, and the structure of nonprofit organizations in MMCs. Hasan analyzes the legal environment, characteristics, extent, and functioning of all varieties of the third sector found in MMCs and their impact and effectiveness in addressing human security. He also discusses the varied policy frameworks in those countries. He touches on how governance and the political climate affects individual TSOs.

The third part (chapter 5) goes into further detail, transitioning from the previous section. Here the author explains the concept and process of the different type of obligatory (zakat) and non-obligatory (e.g., *Sadaqa* and *Khairaat*) charitable giving performed by Muslims. He compares different countries in his sample for a better grasp of the concepts and processes of zakat. He also discusses individual preferences and concerns in paying for zakat, especially in MMCs where payment is obligated by law (e.g., Libya).

The fourth part (chapters 6-8) presents an overview of the concept of civil society in Islam and relevant literature. Hasan delves deeply into the extent, scope, and structure of TSOs in the 47 MMCs. Again, he makes clear and illuminating comparisons between the countries and compares formal and informal TSOs. He discusses and contrasts their performance in the context of the different structures found in the 47 MMCs. This part helps the reader understand how these organizational structures can differ based on the culture and mode of governance, even in the context of the same religion. He devotes chapter 7 to the concept of waqf (plural *awqāf*), which in simple terms is a charitable endowment typically involving the donation of a building, piece of land or other in-kind asset for the Muslim good without the intention of the donor to reclaim the asset. He discusses the legal

mechanism of *awqāf* and how its evolution is helping Muslims in different parts of the world.

In the fifth and final part (chapters 9-12), Hasan discusses the role of TSOs in the Muslim world and their potential. He pinpoints some key practices and innovations that these organizations can adopt to expand their scope and streamline their operation. He also discusses how they can learn from one another and assist each other throughout the world.

Each section is well crafted and keeps the reader engaged with a combination of narrative, references, statistical information, and concluding arguments. Each section and concept flows smoothly and naturally into the next. His inclusion of a summary at the end of each section provides a useful and valuable summary of the ground it covers. This study is comprehensive in treating the subject matter from the analysis of the legal environment to characteristics of individual TSOs, the scope and functioning of different TSO forms found in different societies, and their individual effectiveness in addressing human security issues. On top of that, it offers a comprehensive geographic coverage of all 47 MMCs in Asia and Africa.

At times, the narrative may be too technical for a reader unfamiliar with the field. Overall, Hasan's work is a good study and worth the extra effort, even for the novice. I highly recommend this book to scholars and students (primarily graduate students), researchers, security experts, and anyone with an interest in philanthropy in an Islamic context. This book is equally beneficial for the practitioner involved in nonprofits, particularly those involved in nonprofit finances.

Zeeshan Noor is a Ph.D. student in the Public Affairs program at the University of Texas at Dallas. Mr. Noor's research interest lies in the use of digital and social media in the nonprofit sector. His other topics of interest include fundraising, human resource and diversity management. Mr. Noor is also a Research Assistant in his Ph.D. program and serves as an Editorial Assistant for Public Administration Review (PAR). In addition, he is an Editor for the ASPA Section for Women in Public Administration (SWPA) newsletter. Zeeshan Noor has an MPA degree from UTRGV and an MA degree in Mass Communication from his home country, Pakistan.

BOOK REVIEW

FORGING THE IDEAL EDUCATED GIRL: THE PRODUCTION OF DESIRABLE SUBJECTS IN MUSLIM SOUTH ASIA

Khoja-Moolji, S. (2018). *Forging the ideal educated girl: the production of desirable subjects in Muslim South Asia*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Review by Aabiya Noman Baqai
University of Texas at Austin

The current mainstream rhetoric by Global North medias and NGOs uses the ‘educated girl’ of the Global South as an indestructible force that will somehow address all familial, local, national, and global issues at once, such as dismantling the patriarchy, forging economic development, and negating global terrorism. The Muslim girl nuance adds another layer of ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’ that education apparently provides, saving the girl from fundamentalist, backward Islamic traditions that have restricted her potential for too long.

This rhetoric serves as the rationale behind the writing of *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia* by Shenila Khoja-Moolji. The author makes it clear that this global rhetoric is limited and limiting. Khoja-Moolji points out that such simple generalizations of Muslim girls, their contexts, and their education’s ability to overcome all global barriers to success within the confinements of commodified gains misses the mark entirely. Efforts need to be made that go beyond the ‘saving of Muslim girls’ from their religious and patriarchal societies.

To contribute to such efforts, Khoja-Moolji conducts an in-depth qualitative study of historical and contemporary discourses,

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particularly in journals, texts, stories, and visual advertisements in Pakistan about girls' and women's education through three key time periods. Through these texts and discussions, Khoja-Moolji is able to identify multiple tiers of nuance in issues pertaining to access to education, class differences, and imposing perceptions by Western ideologies. The use of the Muslim 'girl' and Muslim 'woman' is also a subject of contention in Khoja-Moolji's book.

Starting with the turn of the 20th century, Khoja-Moolji engages readers in several essays and stories published in journals, periodicals, and books during this time, such as *Mirat-ul-Uroos* (The Bride's Mirror), *Tehzib-e-Niswan* (Women's Cultural Upbringing), and *Akhbar-un-Nisa* (Women's News) that have both male and female readership. With the rise of British colonial rule, Muslim communities were forced to reckon with a changing political, social, and economic landscape, no longer enjoying the privilege that was once accessible to them in the Mughal era. Khoja-Moolji highlights the desire of Muslim communities to earn back that respectability, specifically for *ashraf* (honorable) families who once held high administrative positions. The discussions of education in these texts are centered on building back that *sharafat* (respect) under the realm of Islam. Women of *ashraf* families become a target audience of these publications. The texts highlight the need for girls and women to be educated in household management to become ideal daughters, wives, and mothers in order to garner that respectability. Both women and men are shown to engage in this discourse, oftentimes providing specific guidelines and examples as to how a *sharif* (respectable) girl/woman should behave. Gaining an education to acquire wage work that would foster individuality and autonomy was rarely supported. Both female and male authors deem wage work only a necessity in difficult times. In addition, western education in missionary schools was seen in a negative light for women from *ashraf* families. As claimed in the written discourses during this time, the influence of such liberal, Christian-oriented thinking was perceived as a derogatory form of education.

Khoja-Moolji then takes us to the post-Independence era exclusively in Pakistan, where new nationalistic sentiments and citizenship become essential factors in determining the course of education for women. Women are now seen as important national agents, who have to be educated with the right balance of religion and modernity to produce Pakistan's future generation. It is hoped that this generation, with the influence of their educated mothers, would then go on to cultivate the socioeconomic development of Pakistan. During this era, efforts are taken to let go of the colonial past and educational forms, as

well as dismiss traditional religious sentiments. Emphasis is placed on Islamic teachings that encourage social justice and the formation of a national community.

Lastly, Khoja-Moolji highlights contemporary discussions of girls' education by analyzing a lower middle class minority community's take on the issue. Girls, teachers, and parents from a city in southern Pakistan are interviewed in focus groups to understand the dynamics of contemporary education. Middle-class aspirations of wage work and marriageability are considered to be the main driving point. Working in an office is seen as social strata that will help support their families in the long run, and a means to avoid labor work that is not as respectable. Education is seen as a need, rather than a desire. Upper-middle-class girls are perceived to have the luxury of not having to work after gaining an education, while increasing their marriage prospects. The conversation on religious and mainstream education also comes up where students are still trying to find a balance between the two, not fully able to comprehend which one is more important.

The three eras show some commonalities in the kinds of conversations that have occurred around women's education. Respectability, social class, and religious vs. modern are themes discussed throughout. Though not explicitly stated or addressed by the author, the genealogical approach in writing this book seems to set a tone of incrementalism. The chronological order of eras studied, the gradual shift in rhetoric of discussion around girls' and women's education in Pakistan, and the ongoing conversation about achieving sustainable growth in the Global South, all support the influences of an incremental change in thinking and doing. As a student of planning theory and history, I consider incrementalism a natural approach to change in thinking and policy. Radical changes receive radical resistance, and so Khoja-Moolji's undertone, perhaps unintentional, can be a lesson for people in the field of policy and development. Perhaps global organizations and institutions need to adopt such thinking to allow for growth that is more organic and sustainable rather than enforcing ideals that might never resonate with the community they are trying to 'help'.

Another major commonality is that the driving force of education in each era fosters some sort of socio-economic gain for the larger community, usually imposed by people in some sort of power - a discourse we are still seeing in contemporary educational pursuits. It is incorrect to assume that discussions on who should be educated in what capacity for what benefit by which entity have not been considered before. Such conversations have been going on for centuries, where the educator, the educated, the location, and the beneficial outcome

continuously shift, but the rationale does not. This book, therefore, provides multiple tiers of issues around the discourse of girls' education: The generalization of the Muslim girl vs. the contextual realities of the Muslim girl; the generalization of pedagogical methods vs. the contextual reasoning of pedagogical methods; the generalization of the Muslim girl/woman vs. the difference between the Muslim girl/woman. This discourse resonates with those who have been labeled a woman or girl in need of saving, and is insightful to those who liken themselves as saviors of that girl or woman.

On multiple occasions, Khoja-Moolji refers to Malala Yousafzai's journey as an advocate for girls' education to highlight the kind of representative sought by the Global North. By combining these examples with the specific discourses and contexts in Pakistan mentioned above, Khoja-Moolji challenges the generalized narrative that girls and women are reduced to by such entities. The author emphasizes the need for more authentic representation and narrative building, where a girl or woman is able to overcome her personal challenges on her own, without the need for 'enlightenment' or education from Western organizations. She does not need to be a tool that fights all national threats. She already has local knowledge, achievements, and experiences that make her valuable to society, which Khoja-Moolji notes throughout the book.

The author's reference to South Asia in the book's title can be paradoxical based on what the author is trying to achieve. Accounts of countries like India and Bangladesh have not been analyzed, particularly in the post-Independence era. This can be misleading, as Pakistan's cultural context is quite different to experiences and discourses in other South Asian countries. However, Khoja-Moolji's evaluation of one case study in one country, with only three time periods, focusing mostly on one social class is overwhelming enough in its complexity. Imagine the complexity of all the nations of the Global South that have been reduced to one case study needing saving. Surely, this book can be used as a clue into what institutions should consider before imposing ironically patriarchal ideals. Therefore, I would recommend this book to leaders and organizers in the nonprofit and philanthropy sector, particularly those who have been tasked with running similar campaigns on 'educated girls' in the Global South.

Aabiya Noman Baqai is a first-year doctoral student in Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas at Austin. Aabiya's research interests include understanding gentrification and displacement issues in urban contexts, specifically national capitals, through the lens of local indigenous knowledge. She received her Master's degree in Public Policy from the University of Texas at Arlington during which she worked at a University Transportation Center conducting research in transportation equity and accessibility. Aabiya has previously worked with grassroots organizations in Washington D.C. fighting displacement of working-class, minority communities, and hopes to continue working with similar advocacy groups globally to help inform planning and policy decision-making.

BOOK REVIEW

FEMALE ISLAMIC EDUCATION MOVEMENTS: THE RE- DEMOCRATISATION OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

Bano, M. (2017). *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Review by Derya Doğan
Indiana University

In *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*, Masooda Bano conducts a rich analysis of female agency in Islamic education, within the context of the four Sunni *madhāhib* in three understudied contexts—Pakistan, Syria, and northern Nigeria. Although her analysis largely centers on high-quality ethnographic data, she also embeds her discussion within country-specific historical contexts, as well as that of Western feminism, to discuss attempts of female education and their effective outcomes, underpinning these outcomes in each national context as well as their implications for the wider Islamic world. She emphasizes the importance of feminism within national Islamic contexts, as opposed to its “standards set by Western liberal feminism” (p. 18), while also highlighting the persistent under-recognition of female education movements in scholarly research.

Evolving independently since the 1970s, as noted by Bano, the role of women in education has been critical in both initiation and implementation of these movements. Throughout her book, organized in three parts and seven chapters, the author weaves themes of female

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agency, gender roles, and Western feminism standards, within the contexts of conventional Islamic education and its implications for modernity. Given the distinct socio-historical variations of Islam in each of the nation's developments under the influence of both modernization and globalization (e.g., linguistic, post-colonial socio-economic and -political structures), Bano's synthesis of these themes makes her comparative analysis all the more compelling.

In the first chapter, Bano starts with a brief background of female education in the three countries of focus. The author embeds this introductory narrative within cultural contexts of growing religiosity in the studied countries. Bano continues by exploring the motivations behind these female education movements across the world that are independent of each other. She asks the overarching and critical questions of her research: "What then explains the demand for these apparently orthodox contemporary female Islamic education movements? And how are the readings of Islam that they promote shaping the socio-economic and political institutions within their host societies?" (p. 7). To answer these questions, she discusses the importance of the active role of Western and/or modern educated Muslim women in these movements whose translation of Islamic ethical studies (especially on gender roles) neither seek to fit in the ultra-traditional Islamic nor Western interpretations of women's position in society. Chapters 2 and 3 address why a "historically situated analysis" (p. 54) is needed to understand Islam's spread into the three regions at different periods. For a thorough examination of women's engagement with Islamic texts, the diversity of learning styles experienced by women either out of habit or through intellectual reasoning, and how they may relate their newly obtained Islamic knowledge to their modern lives as a result, must be taken into consideration.

Next, in the section called *Incentivizing the mixing of knowledge*, the author outlines the historical context of Islam especially in the production and transmission of knowledge, state-society relations, and the importance of "socio-economic, educational, and (most critically) cultural backgrounds of women" (p. 85) as significant influences on women's interpretations of the text. Chapters 4 through 6 bring together each state's response to modernization, and the role of the 'ulama' in defining the need for female education and educators. Within this context, the ultimate goal is not to constrain women within a fixed traditional position in society, but to reinforce their spiritual and intellectual development for their contribution to society. In the last section, the author highlights that the women at the educational institutions "respond to the teachings" differently due to the "realities of

their own lives” (p. 217). However, Islam’s “core principles” (p. 220) are preserved, which has only led to a diversity of understandings and practices.

Central to Bano’s analysis is the importance of a “historically situated analysis” (p. 54) to explore the long-term impact of educational institutions in their local context. While the specific time that gave birth to their emergence is important, the focus is not on investigating what led to them but how they remain running. Therefore, Bano discusses the changes in both the socio-economic and socio-political structures of Muslim societies’ critical forces that challenged conventional Islamic beliefs and practices, which have had a role in the evolution of these educational institutions. She guides the reader to abstain from seeing these institutions as separate from an “institutional framework of Islam” (p. 32) but to examine them through an evaluation of Islam and its interpretations that were shaped within a given context. In this regard, the individual goals of the educational organizations that are the focus of her study could be better explored. The author adds that textual interpretations should be included in such an analysis for a critical socio-cultural investigation of Islamic influences. Bano also draws attention to the lack of interest in successful outcomes of female education movements in scholarly research. This under-recognition and the issues with interpreting feminism through standards set from modern Western viewpoints not only leaves out the power and the role of female agency in social developments but also standardizes the norms and conditions of women’s empowerment from a single cultural (namely Western) lens.

Despite strong emphasis on understanding Islamic feminist initiatives from both Islamic and local contextual perspectives, Bano does not provide the reader with a wider and clearer definition of Islamic feminism. Whether it is the goal of the author to provide the reader with such a definition is not clear either. Instead, she presents its features in each given context and argues that it is the choice of women involved in these movements, especially in the perpetuation of their institutions, which make it feminist. In spite of its strong emphasis on the importance of historical, socio-economic, socio-political, and cultural structures in its relation to Islamic education movements in each country’s context, the book is limited in presenting detailed information on each of these aforementioned structures for all three nations of its focus. Rather, it serves as a guidance on conducting research in similar topics in a local context, especially from a comparative point of view. Its denseness in language might also be inaccessible to some readers.

Unique in its kind, this work can be a fundamental source in understanding female agency in the initiation and implementation of

education movements. Marrying the ongoing influences of traditional Islamic beliefs and practices with female agency requires a historical analysis of the Islamic faith, while being attentive to important regional and cultural variations, and that is clearly emphasized by Masooda Bano in this book. It is a critical addition especially in the fields of education, religion, and cultural anthropology for scholars, researchers, and students.

Derya Doğan is a double major PhD student in Education Policy Studies and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures with a concentration in International and Comparative Education at Indiana University-Bloomington. She started her career by teaching languages (German, Turkish, and English) respectively in Denmark, USA, and Turkey where she also led the European Study Abroad Program “ERASMUS” at a private university. Her current work in multicultural teacher training and previous experience in refugee education together sparked her dissertation research in understanding the multicultural response to education among marginalized populations in the U.S.

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