The Role of Philanthropy in Islamic Education

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The purpose of this study is to explore the scholarly literature on how philanthropy intersects Islamic education. Specifically, we uncover motivations for supporting voluntary Islamic education. We also find wide gaps in the current amalgamation of disjointed literature.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is highly valued in Islamic scripture and traditions. A journey into Islamic history will prove a fruitful endeavor for those seeking to understand its revered status. In fact, education has helped tell a social history about Muslim people. Islamic centers have waxed and waned, often demonstrative of flourishing and marginalized Muslim presence. Islamic education today is sometimes received with outward hesitation or conjures images of terrorist-like madrassas. For many Muslims, however, voluntary associations for Islamic education continue to be welcomed. This appears especially true as a response to social and political influences.

We readily acknowledge that a broader debate exists about the meanings and applications of the terms "philanthropy" and "public good." Muslim philanthropy has unique qualities, many of which resemble best practices in today's funder discussions—hyper-local, trust-based, and systems-based thinking. For our purposes, we set aside the bigger debate and

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operate under two basic premises. Firstly, we build upon the Payton and Moody definition of philanthropy as "voluntary action for the public good" (Payton & Moody, 2008). In doing so, we will evaluate the individual actions and voluntary associations established for the purposes of furthering Islamic education. This type of philanthropy can include treasure, time, talent, ties, and trust. We also accept education as a public good rather than a private right.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Current scholarship about Islamic education in the United States is emerging. Studies span Islamic history, school curriculum, and Muslim demographics but offer room for further development. Other spheres remain largely uncharted. Muslims are consistently accounted for among the enslaved on the trans-Atlantic trade (Curtis, 2009). They were often literate in Arabic but "with the brutal dislocation of families at the owners' discretion, and with the gradual disappearance of African-born people who could provide guidance and reference, their knowledge ran the risk of being very approximate and incomplete" (Diouf, 1999, p. 29). Under these social confines, Islamic education happened informally. Some Muslims continued Islamic obligations with sunrise and sunset prayers. West African women observed charitable giving as they had in their homelands by blessing children with saraka cakes, sweetened rice balls given for the purpose of pleasing God (Diouf, 1999). The frequency of this giving, however, decreased from weekly to monthly or yearly, given the harsh living conditions. The religion as a whole, however, was not passed down to future generations. Formal Islamic centers came much later (Curtis, 2009).

The Moorish Science Temple was founded in 1913, and the Nation of Islam (NOI) surfaced around 1930 (Berg, 2005). The NOI established a network of the University of Islam schools, later renamed the Clara Muhammad Schools. These schools were molded, in part, by the outward systematic, social-political suppression of Black Americans (Ross, 2003). They also offered a means to develop a collective racial, moral, and religious identity, similar to other empowerment movements that rose from the failures of the Reconstruction period (Soskis, 2020).

After the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, the population dynamics of Muslim Americans changed. Today, Muslim Americans are more racially and ethnically diverse than the rest of the U.S population. Full time Islamic schools grew nearly 370% between 1989 and 2011 (Keyworth, 2011). In

2018, an estimated 270 Islamic schools were registered. Our emerging understanding already reflects a pluralistic field. Through instruction and socialization, students learn about the Quran and Islamic values (Sirin & Fine, 2007). The study of educational institutions in a post-9/11 era appears especially relevant to understanding the tension of a dualistic identity: Muslim and American.

LEADERSHIP, CURRICULUM, AND ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The current literature speaks to curriculum, leadership, and Islamization of knowledge. The study of Islamic influence upon leaders and organizational culture provides us with some indication about what aspects of Islamic tenants are most important to preserve (Aabed, 2006; Alsaeedi & Male, 2013).

Some curriculums seem to adapt alongside shifting social-political norms and should be further evaluated for such trends. For example, Islamization has notably influenced curriculum. Islamization is a worldwide trend, where one understands and acts upon knowledge from the lens of Islam (Ahmad & Fontaine, 2011). Most Muslims view religion as congruent with all forms of knowledge, including secular subjects like science (Aabed 2006, p. 31). The compatibility between Islamic and western methodology is seen to enhance educational institutions (Aabed, 2006) and serves in contrast to Timani's concerns about social isolation. This way of thinking became incorporated into curriculum in the Clara Muhammad Schools during the years 1975–1980 (Abd-Allah, 1998) and proves to be a widespread practice.

What remains less explored is the scale of unique experiences such as art and comparative religion. In a qualitative study of the American Muslim Academy in California, Brooks highlights the student field trips to the Holocaust Museum and interfaith discussions. These curriculum additions—beyond basic secular subjects or Quranic studies—serve to build conversations externally and build confidence internally (Brooks, 2018). This thoughtful approach also finds relevance with translating non-profit mission into action.

PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS AND SCHOOL CHOICE

In secular countries where church and state operate independently, religious institutions are rich sources of information about how communities voluntarily engage with spiritual studies. Family, involuntary

associations, and registered nonprofit organizations all intersect Islamic education. The home is the center of charity for many Muslims (Siddiqui, 2010) and remains an excellent site for further understanding. Nonprofit data is currently more available (Siddiqui, 2014), but even this collection of information poses practical challenges (Keyworth, 2011).

Nonprofit organizations, such as mosques, Sunday schools and full-time schools, are important spaces for Islamic education. A few institutional examples include the ISNA Education Forum, Muslim student associations in high schools and colleges, the Al-Ilm School Weekend School in Indianapolis, and the Darul Arqam Academy network of full-time Islamic schools in Houston. These nonprofit institutions are autonomous and function within the broad expanse of charitable laws (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). Some schools are affiliated with the masjid, which may play a role in the funding and culture of the school. Others operate independently. In both cases, formation, governance, curriculum, and culture remain individualized.

Still, a few common reasons to choose an Islamic education emerge: morals, values, religious education, and religious identity (Clauss, Ahmed, & Salvaterra, 2013, p. 3). Islamophobia, social isolation, and heightened scrutiny feed the desire for Muslims to feel confident in their religious identity (Cristillo, 2009). Islamic schools offer a supportive network within which Muslims feel secure to develop this identity (Badawi, 2005; Brooks, 2018). Opponents of Islamic schools are skeptical about links to terrorism, but studies seem to indicate the opposite. Lessons from the Quran and Islamic history are taught to students to demonstrate how Muslims are expected to uphold exemplary moral behavior (Elannani, 2013). In certain circumstances, curriculums go a step further to incorporate examples about how Islam does not condone terrorism (Elannani, 2013).

A debate also exists over whether self-segregation into Islamic schools further alienates Muslim Americans from mainstream society. While Timani expresses this concern (Timani, 2006), others push back against this narrative with objective evidence. One study measures curriculum, finding that more than 85% of instruction is secular, inclusive of textbooks and standardized tests. (Cristillo, 2009, p. 68). Others point to the compatibility of Islamic school practices with democratic values. (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Brooks 2018). What appears fairly congruent across studies is that school choice offers a means to preserve Islamic identity.

PHILANTHROPIC TREASURE

Tracking monetary support for Islamic education reveals varied practices of charity in Islam. While we have a better understanding of charitable tools like the waqf, we are unable to make broad findings about nonprofit funding in the United States. This information remains siloed with individual institutions. The current insights are nonetheless helpful in guiding areas for future research.

Under the Ottoman empire, waqf support was considered *sadaqa*—voluntary charitable giving. Waqfs are perpetual trusts that operate as independent financial vehicles. They provide benefit to the community and ongoing blessings to the donor—*sadaqa jariya*. Waqf support was instrumental in building and operating education centers during Ottoman rule (Singer, 2018).

In more recent years, Gulf-based waqf support has carried on this tradition by supporting madrassas and other projects, some of which come under Western scrutiny. Madrassa schools offer basic education and are unequipped to foster much beyond but publically are scrutinized for potential links to terrorism. Is waqf support categorized as a charitable or politically motivated act? Could it be both? The lines appear blurred and skewed by subjective interpretation. This also raises the desire to better understand the extent of Gulf-based charitable influence on education: how many total dollars have been charitably invested in education? Do existing charitable or zakat laws make these actions more desirable? And how does Gulf-based charity compare against that of other regions in the world?

We can also trace zakat contributions to Islamic schools. Zakat is a dual pillar in Islam: an outward manifestation of altruism to society and an individual duty to God to share one's wealth (unless exempt) for one of eight specific categories. Zakat has evolved in practice by jurisprudence, interpretation, and culture (Mattson, 2003). One effort to distribute zakat to the needy resulted in an Islamic school. A family discovered a community of refugees needing support beyond their initial resettlement. Through charity and a redistribution of resources, a weekend school was established, responsive to the community's needs (Sonday, Sonday, Sonday, & Sonday, 2005). Collecting additional such stories may be difficult but could prove important in understanding the relationship between zakat, *sadaqa,* and Islamic education.

In the United States, we are beginning to scratch the surface of quantitative data about mosques and Islamic education institutions. Some schools

are affiliated with the masjid, which may have an impact on its financial stability. The industry itself is not formalized under an umbrella institution, as say Catholic schools might be established under the Church. Thus, the methodology of uncovering data is resource-intensive and demands creativity. One study indicates that "faith-based philanthropy" is rooted in local giving to establish Islamic schools. (Cristillo, 2009 p. 73). Will additional research support this assumption? And who gives to support Islamic education—by gender, age, socioeconomic and cultural demographics? This data remains unknown on a large scale.

20th- AND 21st-CENTURY GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

Islamic education on a global stage is dominated by discussions about the Gülen Movement—a social movement intertwined with philanthropy and Islamic education (Barton, 2014; Ebaugh, 2009; El-Banna, 2014; Khan & Khan, 2018). Thematically, this movement was built in the shadow of Turkish politics and can be compared with a movement like NOI, a social movement responsive to the systemic oppression of Black Americans.

Other ways of examining Islamic education in the world can be spent following the Malaysian youth movement or Waqf support for Islamic education in Thailand or Nigeria (Adebayo, 2012, p. 97). The localized influences upon the development of Islamic education make broad conclusions difficult but interesting for comparative purposes.

Indonesia falls into a third category where Islamic education is state sponsored and therefore not entirely within the realm of philanthropy. The study then shifts to understanding civil society and the gaps it fills to provide education to children otherwise left behind. This proved especially true during the sudden shift from centralized to decentralized educational structure. In societies like Indonesia, supplemental education and family involvement are important arenas for understanding Islamic education. (Hasan, 2009; Barton, 2014).

DARK MATTER

Perhaps the least quantifiable aspects of Islamic education includes spontaneous and informal voluntary action, described by Smith as "dark matter" (1997). These actions could include (a) traditional volunteer hours that take place among parent-teacher associations, (b) voluntary Islamic education at home, and (c) metrics that assess the true market value of Islamic educators and business costs who often give discounts for the purposes of

sadaqa. No significant literature was found related to these contributions but might add much depth to the conversation, especially in a religion where charity is individually motivated and often begins in the home.

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Book Reviews

Education and Muslim Identity During a Time of Tension: Inside an American Islamic School

MELANIE C. BROOKS
Routledge, 2018, 182 pages.

In this book, Melanie Brooks argues that the widespread association between Muslim Americans and anti-Western ideology is fraught with misinformation and misunderstanding. Through a qualitative study of the Islamic Center of San Rico and the American Islamic Academy (AMA), she demystifies the Muslim American for readers. She deconstructs the outward tension between the terms "American" and "Muslim." She also uncovers subtle, internal differences through pluralistic voices within a singular Muslim American community. This unintimidating book invites readers to explore how Muslim Americans think, feel, and act—accounts that are often invisible to mainstream audiences in the United States. While the small sample size is self-admittedly too narrow to offer broad implications, the themes introduced remain important.

The author provides a warm space for the reader to connect with students, teachers, founders, and parents at the Islamic Center of Rico and the AMA. Muslim Americans are humanized through relatable descriptions of home and school life. For example, the author is a houseguest of a Muslim family during her research trips to California. Through the family's interactions with the author, the reader feels the family's hospitality and generosity. They feed their guest delicious meals and unload groceries from the store together. They also assist her with meeting coordination. Through a series of interviews, a collective consciousness can be seen with regard to best spiritual and integration practices of individuals and institutions.

The introduction provides a concise history lesson about the ebbs and flows of Islam in the United States, from the transatlantic slave trade to modern-day Islamophobia. Within this context, we learn about the development of 270 Islamic schools across the United States. The author zones in on the AMA, partly due to her friendship with a woman named Sara who is a former community member. In fact, this connection is key to gaining