FORTY HOUSES OF GIVING:
MUSLIM CHARITABLE PRACTICES IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Katherine Rose Merriman: Forty Houses of Giving:
Muslim Charitable Practices in the United States
(Under the direction of Juliane Hammer)

This dissertation charts the growing field of Muslim charitable organizations in the United States. It argues that over the last three decades, the 501(c)(3) faith-based relief and development organization became a dominant form of collective charity among American Muslims. As a new religious institution, charities hold significant regulatory power over the moral obligations, rituals, and technical requirements of Islamic charity. Authority emerges not through the publication of traditional religious tracts but constant multimedia publications, creating new ritual practices, and embodied engagement with Muslims communities at voluntary service events.

Using historical archives, community publications, and popular newspapers, I demonstrate that collective Muslim charitable practice in the United States were historically created by various ethnic and religious communities throughout the 20th century relative to the dominant socio-political logic of racial capitalism. By the 1990s, humanitarian logic and neoliberal development practices became central to the conceptualization of –and debates over – Islamic charity in the United States. Theological shifts ensued, where donors were told to take responsibility for the effective use of their donation, as a form of empowerment or development, instead of only its arrival at the proper recipient.

The contemporary dynamics of American Muslim charities are investigated through ethnography and critical textual analysis of four large US-based international charities as well as several local, grassroots organizations in three metropolitan areas. Charities mobilize Muslims to enact their religious ethics through devotional giving and service and subtly encourage the creation of religious community using tactics of informality, fun, and self-fulfillment. Through collective charity, Muslims contribute to the eradication of structural inequality in the United States as well as suffering abroad due to global warfare. In the face of continued Islamophobic suspicion and criminalization, they also challenge the dominant global regime of the human by insisting on the sacred value of all human life, especially those most often rendered disposable by the War on Terror.

To my parents, William and Christine:
You are my inspiration and example of the power of love in this world.
Go mbeannaí Dia daoibh.

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Kambiz GhaneaBassiri inspired the focus of my doctoral studies when I read his account of American Muslim history that centered the community and institution building of everyday people. His questions about dominant American social structures in the early stages of this project strengthened my research and later analysis. Fadi Bardawil provided expert advice for structuring my field work. He also challenged me to nuance my treatment of economic theory, which was the catalyst to my arrival at understanding racial capitalism as the undergirding social reality within which American Muslim charity emerged and changed over time.

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Introduction

Somehow, I got stuck with the middle school boys on balloon animal duty. I had ridden one of those city rental bikes to the *Eid* toy giveaway and did not realize that urban segregation meant there were not any ports to return the bike in this mixed Latinx, Black, and South Asian neighborhood. Worried about being charged for a lost bike, I rode it a half a mile back to the last port I saw and then ran back to the event to find that they only had volunteer shirts twice my size to wear and all the roles had been assigned – except, it seemed, for balloon animal duty.

A local chapter of a national American Muslim charity had organized this toy giveaway for the upcoming *Eid al-Fitr* holiday. It was held in what was probably a two bedroom apartment in a previous life, but now was the unused upper floor for a tiny storefront mosque, which had loaned the space to the charity for the day. In addition to the toys that had been collected by donation, mini bags of toiletries were prepared to distribute to the families. Pizza, cake, soda, and balloons were brought in to give the event a festive feel.

The event was festive like a five year old's birthday party– no center of action, children running or crying, or both, and abandoned half pizza slices everywhere. Family members came up the back staircase that bypassed the mosque to form a line for the toys. This ran smoothly, smiles galore, until the toys ran out halfway through the event. The chapter's director had anticipated this shortage – over the past few months, large numbers of Syrian refugees had been resettled in the area and the charity was trying to scale up their services to help more people with no increase in budget. So, toys were just replaced with shampoo. We did not have puzzles or art

sets left to give, but now each family was given double or triple the toiletries and the festivities carried on.

I share this snippet from my dissertation fieldwork to convey the messiness and dedication of running a charitable service program in 21st century America, a place defined by vast systemic inequality, for a Muslim organization serving the most marginalized. Dedication, because what cannot be seen in this surface-level vignette is the thick social network of staff, volunteers, and community members who put in the hours to plan, advertise, and run an event that served hundreds of people in the neighborhood on a miniscule budget. Many who served that day were regular recipients, who pulled friends aside to chat after they picked up toys. Amira, the chapter director, had access to no less than twelve WhatsApp groups of people on standby to volunteer their time for this beloved local Muslim organization.

My interest in American Muslim charitable organizations began in the summer of 2011 when I conducted a research project on local New York City Muslim responses to the Park 51 "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy of 2010. I was frustrated to see that apart from the mosque founders, no media outlet thought to ask local Muslims how they were being affected by the constant anti-Muslim protests or their thoughts on Islam as an integral part of the city's religious landscape. Over about two months, I spoke with Muslims across the five boroughs about their fears and anger over the hate they experienced in their hometown. But they also shared the ways they laid claim to New York City on their own terms, as social workers, artists, teachers, engineers, and bus drivers. It was not a performance of productivity, earning their right to belong, but a point of pride in how they made their city great. Nearly everyone was also engaged in charity whether in the form of service, such as working as a nurse at a free medical clinic every Saturday, or monetary donation, keeping a local Arab American nonprofit afloat or paying

rent for a fellow mosque attendee who had just arrived undocumented from Senegal. I remember one doctor telling me humbly that it was God who provides; he was just lucky to be able to give.

These conversations highlighted the quiet ways that American Muslims were actively making their own versions of an America where they wanted to live. Only months after I finished these interviews, the Occupy Wall Street movement emerged, pushing national dialogue about the incredible social inequality and wealth disparity we experience as a society, let alone the global crisis where a few billionaires own more than two thirds of the world population.[1] Social theorists like David Harvey were sought out by supporters of the movement, seeking to show that our problem of distributive justice was not "individual selfishness, but one of the modes of production, that is, capitalism."[2]

Placing these two lines of thought together, it made me curious about the way Muslim ethics on charity are a form of what Danielle Widmann Abraham calls a "practical theodicy" to "[remove] and [rupture] behavioral despair."[3] Because the required Islamic charity of *zakat* "occasions reflexivity and responsiveness," she posits, "it becomes a vehicle for shaping practical efforts to limit precarity and to reject human disposability."[4] Following Abraham's interpretation of *zakat*, which she applied to the Indian context, this dissertation investigates

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[1] Oxfam, "World's Billionaires Have More Wealth than 4.6 Billion People," January 20, 2020, https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-billionaires-have-more-wealth-46-billion-people. This is of course a statistic from nine years later. While the numbers have changed, the wealth gap has not.

[2] Sabithulla Khan, "Faith-Based Charitable Giving and Its Impact on Notions of 'Community:' The Case of American Muslim NGOs," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 11, No. 4 (2015), 159.

[3] Danielle Widmann Abraham, "Zakat as Practical Theodicy: Precarity and the Critique of Gender in Muslim India," *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society*, 2, No. 1 (2018), 38.

[4] Abraham, "Zakat as Practical Theodicy," 22-23.

American Muslims' drawing on their religious tradition to collectively respond to human suffering and inequalities created by the economic system and social hierarchies of our time.

The Divine Dictate to Charity

Marshall Hodgson describes the *zakat*, or required ritual charity, as "the original vehicle for financing Islam as a society."[5] In the English language, charity is associated closely with the term philanthropy, which is based in Christian concept of *caritas,* a love for fellow humans as a reflection of God's love for all humanity. Looking to the Islamic tradition, charity is introduced in the Qur'an as a ritual act of worship, to give of one's wealth for the sake of God's pleasure first, with a second purpose in establishing worldly justice. In Islamic law, Wael Hallaq writes that *zakat* is unique in that it has a "dualistic character" as both a devotional duty and an ethical social standard.[6]

In the Qur'an, charity is often mentioned in tandem with ritual prayer, conferring on it a level of regularity and importance for a committed Muslim.[7] Moreover, paying zakat is one of three acts, along with the *shahada* and prayer, that confer status as a member of the *ummah*.[8] The two words used for charity in the Qur'an are *zakat* and *sadaqah*, which begin as interchangeable but over time evolve to have different meanings: *zakat* is an annual required tax on wealth whereas *sadaqah* is anything material or immaterial given for the sake of others – a well-known

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[5] Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Period*, Volume 2 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009), 124.

[6] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 231. These two elements in Islamic law are referred to as *'ibadat* and *mu'amalat*.

[7] For some examples see Quran 24:55 and Qur'an 8:3.

[8] Qur'an 9:5. *Ummah* in contemporary use among Muslims today refers to the concept of the global Muslim community, as an imagined collective united by belief in Islam and without any temporal distinction, whether it be race, class, nationality, etc.

Prophetic tradition notes that even a smile is charity.[9] At the same time, because a believer should desire to give *zakat*, it is paradoxically, what Christopher Taylor calls, "obligated volunteerism."[10]

The notion of "forty houses" in the dissertation title is taken from a *hadith* where the Prophet Muhammad explains who can be considered one's neighbor in the context of determining social duties of care. He answers, "The term 'neighbor' includes the forty houses in front of a person, the forty houses behind him, the forty houses on his right and the forty houses on his left."[11] Forty here is most likely symbolic of infinity, in which case "the Prophet was employing hyperbole to imply that no absolute limitation should ever be placed on who can possibly qualify as one's neighbor," and by extension, one's sacred duty of benevolence towards them.[12]

Muslims can only distribute their required *zakat* to eight categories of recipients (Qur'an 9:60), which include the poor, needy, *zakat* administrators, those whose hearts can be brought to Islam, those in bondage, those in debt, travelers, and for "the cause of God." Charity in the Islamic tradition is then more than or not primarily focused on the elimination of poverty but is

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[9] In one telling from Abu Dharr there are several small acts mentioned as charity: "Your smiling in the face of your brother is charity, commanding good and forbidding evil is charity, your giving directions to a man lost in the land is charity for you. Your seeing for a man with bad sight is a charity for you, your removal of a rock, a thorn or a bone from the road is charity for you. Your pouring what remains from your bucket into the bucket of your brother is charity for you." Hadith 62, Book 27: Chapters on Righteousness and Maintaining Good Relations with Relatives, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1956.

[10] Christopher Taylor, "Islamic Charity in India: Ethical Entrepreneurialism & The Ritual, Revival, and Reform of Zakat Among a Muslim Minority" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2015), 104.

[11] Muhammad al-Bukhari, Hadith 109, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, *Sunnah.com*, https://sunnah.com/adab/6.

[12] Fatih Harpci, "Who is My Neighbor? Contemporary Muslim Philanthropic Norms in Light of the Prophetic Model," *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society* 4, No. 2 (2020), 10, 12.

more broadly, to go back to Hodgson, meant to fund a just society in line with God's vision as given through revelation. In this system, social stratification is accepted as part of human diversity, but suffering without resources to live a healthy life is not.

Apart from *zakat*, Islamic teachings on economics, ethics, and worship also call Muslims to be charitable in a wider sense by serving others; contributing to public welfare; and keeping fair in business.[13] Michael Bonner argues that the Qur'anic injunctions to purify wealth through charity is primarily a collective and not individual affair. In other words, wealth is purified by ensuring it is in "good circulation" to the benefit of the social whole, instead of "bad circulation" or lack thereof where wealth is hoarded to unjustly retain social or political control.[14] Wealth belongs to God, as a part of creation, and therefore it is God's will that determines its purpose.

The Qur'an and *hadith* are shared texts used by Muslims to know the purpose of charity, but we find divergent interpretations and practices across the history of Muslim societies.[15] Studying these varying interpretations can reveal the social norms and power dynamics specific to each historical cultural context. In the early modern period, the charitable endowment or *waqf*, superseded *zakat* collection and distribution by empires as the main form used by Muslim societies to use charity for the public good.[16] Medieval aid practices mostly looked like elites and

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[13] Taylor, "Islamic Charity in India," 107.

[14] Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Charity in the Rise of Islam," in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael Bonner et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 14.

[15] Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17.

[16] Said Amir Arjomand "Philanthropy, the Law, and Public Policy in the Islamic World Before the Modern Era," in *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions*, eds. Warren Ilchman, et al. (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 111. W*aqf* is a charitable endowment established by an Islamic legal contract, where a donor contributes an asset, such as property, that is meant to benefit a set population. The asset can produce profit that goes towards helping beneficiaries, such as a building whose rental income is sent to pay the rent for an orphanage. The asset can also provide a direct benefit, such as a fountain that serves as the drinking water for the public. *Waqf* developed in the first centuries of Islam, and over time became a significant mechanism to fund public-facing institutions such as hospitals, bath

the state funding large institutions like religious schools, mosques, and shrines and giving to the needy not as a form of social welfare but to give generously to a Qur'anically dictated demographic and reap the rewards for divine favor and one's social reputation.

In the modern period, private *waqf* administration was dismantled to incorporate their institutions and services into the biopolitical regime of the new nation state model. European epistemological hegemony contributed to the development of a paradigm in which Islam was understood as a "system" with functionalist parts to ensure perfect human existence. *Zakat* and *sadaqah* were subsumed under larger apparatuses developed by modernist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb to present "Islamic economics" as an ideal for human thriving in opposition to the exploitative capitalism and communism of colonial European regimes.[17]

The state was an entity imagined by Muslim modernists to enact social justice through the distributive justice of *zakat,* but later Islamist thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries moved towards the market as the central agent for "the formation and transformation of the moral community."[18] This did not mean that the market overtook the state in power, but that the idea and paradigm of the market and bottom-up social change did, emphasizing efficiency, transactions, incentives, and individual choice.[19] In this same period, Islamic finance burgeoned

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houses, mosques, soup kitchens, pilgrimage hostels, and programs to feed the poor. See Pascale Ghazaleh, ed., *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011).

[17] Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2000). A central text in this genre is Baqir al-Sadr's *Islam and Schools of Economics* (New York: Islamic Seminary Publications, 1982). Abul A'la Maududi wrote a similar text three years earlier, *The Economic Problem of Man and Its Islamic Solution Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1978).*

[18] Holger Weiss, *Social Welfare in Muslim Societies in Africa* (Stockholm, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002), 15; Humeira Iqtidar, "Secularism Beyond the State: the 'State' and the 'Market' in Islamist Imagination," *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, No. 3 (2011), 536.

[19] Iqtidar, "Secularism Beyond," 559.

for Muslims to conduct *fiqh*-compliant business and it encourages elite Muslims to rationalize wealth generation through capitalist business practices as a means to support the "public good."[20]

In the contemporary period, *zakat* and religious charity in general is institutionalized through private entities, such as social movements, Sufi communities, and charitable foundations for the establishment of a just society as defined by God –what Holger Weiss calls an "Islamic order."[21] How Muslim communities interpret that order is highly dependent on their material conditions, political context, and a shared discourse on the relationship between economics, welfare, and justice.[22] For Muslims living as minorities in Europe and European settler-colonial nations such as Canada there is a strong influence of the philanthropic field that is decidedly rational, professional, and secular.[23] The dominant political orientation of liberalism also inculcates the values of civic responsibility and service.[24] In the United States specifically, Muslims do not have a centralized system nor many centuries old practices, so they have had the opportunity as a highly diverse community to imagine what the divine injunction to charity may look like for making an "Islamic order" in the United States.

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[20] Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Muslim Entrepreneurs in Public Life between India and the Gulf: Making Good and Doing Good," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009), S203.

[21] Abraham, "Zakat as Practical Theodicy," 25. See Weiss, *Social Welfare*, 36. In a few rare instances, nation states like Pakistan have attempted to reinstitute a practice in which zakat is collected from Muslim citizens as a tax. However, Jonathan Benthall argues that none of these modern states fulfill the role correctly according to *fiqh* as "a system of automatic redistribution." See Jonathan Benthall, "Financial Worship: The Qur'anic Injunction to Almsgiving," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, No. 1 (March 1999), 36.

[22] Lara Deeb, "Piety Politics and the Role of a Transnational Feminist Analysis," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009), S123.

[23] Singer, *Charity*, 5.

[24] Rosemary Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the 'Ground Zero Mosque' Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

An American Islamic Order

Muslims in what is now the United States have engaged in explicitly religious giving for over four centuries, from enslaved West African women offering *saraka* rice cakes on Georgia Sea Islands to a turn-of-the-century Bosnian benevolent society in Chicago.[25] Surveys of 21st century American Muslims show that the overwhelming majority of American Muslims believed giving charity was important; were active in service work; and ranked the poor, sick, elderly, and homeless as their top philanthropic priority.[26]

In the last three decades, the 501(c)(3), faith-based nonprofit relief and development organization has become a dominant form of collective charity among American Muslims to fulfill their pious duty to God and ethical commitment to socio-economic stewardship, or *amanah*. Despite the collective blame and criminalization of Muslim charities after the September 11, 2001, attacks, Muslim expressed fear yet increased their giving to Muslim charities – perhaps for the traceable donation receipt or as an affective insistence on freely practicing their religion or bettering the world in the face of injustice. The charity nonprofit may not be proclaimed as such, but, as I argue in this dissertation, serves as a new religious institution for Islam in the United States.

Currently there are about a dozen national-level charities that self-identity as "Muslim" or "Islamic" and dedicate the majority of their work to human relief and development. The seven dominant organizations by 2019 gross receipts of donations (in millions) are Islamic Relief USA

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[25] In this dissertation, I use America and the United States as interchangeable designations for the same socio-political entity. Unless speaking about particular individuals or groups, using the adjectival "American" refers to the United States.

[26] Shariq Siddiqui, "Myth vs. Reality: Muslim American Philanthropy Since 9/11," in *Religion in Philanthropic Organizations: Family, Friend, Foe*?, ed. Thomas Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 208.

($91); Helping Hands for Relief and Development ($63); Mercy USA ($30); ICNA Relief ($27); Life for Relief and Development ($20); United Muslim Relief ($17); and the Zakat Foundation of America ($13.5).[27] While they do not identify theologically, they have a dominant Sunni orientation.[28] Chapter offices can be found across the country, in addition to the hundreds of smaller local Muslim service-based charity organizations, and their booths are present at national conferences, such as the Islamic Society of North America's annual meeting.

In this contemporary field of Muslim charity nonprofits in the United States, the normative discursive model for American Muslims to construct and enact charitable activity incorporates ethical framework of Euro-American humanitarianism. Muslims are simultaneously directed to purify their wealth and assist the needy for the sake of God while also being called to protect the human rights of beneficiaries, maintain political neutrality, and fund neoliberal development projects tied to individual "empowerment" and economic growth.[29] The commitment to humanitarianism is bolstered by mainstream American beliefs in self-reliance and capitalist free enterprise, where the structural nature of indigence is acknowledged but second to individual-based ideas of assistance and success. This intermingling of logics has produced new interpretations of Islamic values, mainly *sadaqah* (voluntary giving), *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (mercy), and *amanah* (stewardship).

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[27] Tax information on 2019 gross receipts taken from GuideStar, https://www.guidestar.org. The site provides the EIN for direct look up with the Internal Revenue Service.

[28] The Aga Khan Foundation USA, of the Nizari Ismai'li community has over triple the annual donation amount ($296 million) and over six times the amount of assets ($494 million) than the largest Sunni-centric American Muslim charity, Islamic Relief USA, but it does not actively participate in the same spaces and shared conversations as this grouping.

[29] Amira Mittermaier "Beyond Compassion: Islamic Voluntarism in Egypt," *American Ethnologist* 4, No. 3 (2014).

Muslim American charity organizations express interpretive control and regulate apt performance of Islamic mandated charity but do so not undisturbed by competing religious reasoning and action. Under the surface, despite incredible similarities in official publications and programming, staff and volunteers across organizations engage in a far wider debate regarding the deserving and undeserving; obligations of the privileged; responsibilities of the structurally marginalized; and necessity or danger of political mobilization. The history of African American Muslim entrepreneurial, community-uplift organizations and theologies of collective liberation are one notable - but not unique - tradition that challenges these norms and inspires multiracial forms of Muslim resistance to humanitarianism and neoliberal development.

Leaving Out Charity

Charity has only recently been tracked and analyzed as a religious practice in the history of American Muslims, coming into focus after post-9/11 government targeting of Muslim-run charity organizations for alleged terrorist funding.[30] Three major charities were shut down over

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[30] Khan, "Faith-Based Charitable Giving," 139. To explain by way of example, the 2008 *Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States* only includes charity in reference to charity organizations being targeted by the War on Terror. See Laila Al-Marayati, "American Muslims Charities: Easy Targets in the War on Terror," in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States,* ed. Edward Curtis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 275-287.

Over the last decade there have been six articles on the subject from academia: Shariq Siddiqui, "Giving in the Way of God: Muslim Philanthropy in the United States," in *Religious Giving: For Love of God*, ed. David Smith (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Siddiqui, "Myth vs. Reality;" Sabith Khan, "New Styles of Community Building and Philanthropy by Arab-American Muslims," *International Society for Third-Sector Research* 27 (February 2015); Sabithulla Khan, "Faith-Based Charitable Giving and Its Impact on Notions of 'Community:' The Case of American Muslim NGOs," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 11, No. 4 (2015); Danielle Widmann Abraham, "You Can't Be Human Alone: Philanthropy and Social Giving in Muslim Communities," in *The Practice of Islam in America: An Introduction*, ed. Edward Curtis (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, "U.S. Muslim Philanthropy After 9/11," *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* 1, No. 1 (2017), 20-21. The Muslim Philanthropy Initiative at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University is actively working to increase scholarship on Muslim philanthropy in general, including American

charges of material support to terrorism, while others that survived had to contend with continued religio-racial profiling, pathologizing language, and convoluted new anti-terrorism laws that regulated overseas charitable activity.[31] Over a decade later, John Mueller and Mark Stewart noted that the "terrorism/counterterrorism saga persists determinedly, doggedly, and anticlimactically," because we have internalized the logic of the War on Terror, where Muslim actions must be read in reference to questions of security instead of sincere religious acts.[32]

In scholarly research of the last thirty years on Islam in the United States, "charity" is mentioned most frequently when listing the "five pillars" of Muslim religious commitments even as charitable practices and conversations about the proper use of wealth abound in the same literature. This disconnect occurs because the import and categorical meaning of these acts and discussions are subsumed under the subjects of community identity, mosque growth, national organizations, or political activity. As a result, "charity" is topically limited to what are minimally described as private acts of *sadaqah* and *zakat*, given for unknown ends to an unmentioned collector. However collective charity, especially in the form of charity organizations, is nearly absent when discussing religious institutions. In 2021, these charities are

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Muslims. See "Muslim Philanthropy Initiative," Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University, https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/institutes/lake-institute/muslim-initiative/index.html.

Analysis of American Muslim charity is more actively pursued by policy-oriented research centers as well as the legal field, because of post-9/11 targeting of charities. A great example of the former is the work done by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), which is a research-based nonprofit focused on American Muslims. See Faiqa Mahmood, "American Muslim Philanthropy: A Data-Driven Comparative Profile," *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*, July 17, 2019, https://www.ispu.org/american-muslim-philanthropy-a-data-driven-comparative-profile/.

[31] Kathryn Ruff, "Scared to Donate: An Examination of the Effects of Designating Muslim Charities as Terrorist Organizations on the First Amendment Rights of Muslim Donors," *NYU Journal of Legislation and Public Policy* 9 (2005-2006), 447-502; GhaneaBassiri, "U.S. Muslim," 20-21.

[32] John Mueller and Mark Stewart, "The Terrorism Delusion: America's Overwrought Response to September 11," *International Security* 37, No. 1 (2012), 82.

ubiquitous sites in the American Muslim religious landscape and have authoritative impact in the formation of religious norms and community and cannot be ignored.

This bifurcation is fairly idiosyncratic to studies of North American Muslims and contrasts sharply with scholarship on Muslim majority regions, where organized charity is a recognized category of historical and contemporary religious life as well as a contributing force in state-based policy, private sector organizations, religious complexes, or social networks.[33] Although there is a longer history in these areas of large, institutional forms of charity, most notably the *waqf* (religious endowment), American Muslims have participated in religious charity since their arrival on occupied indigenous lands in North America four centuries ago, and with equal complexity. Moreover, transnational connections are an ever-present part of the narrative because of United States geopolitics and American Muslim genealogies, movements, and debates that reach across oceans.[34]

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[33] Major examples from the field focused on Islamic Charity in Muslim Majority Spaces and available in English: Janine Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Egbert Harmsen, *Islam, Civil Society and Social Work: Muslim Voluntary Welfare Associations in Jordan between Patronage and Empowerment* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); Jane Harrigan and Hamed El-Said, *Economic Liberalization, Social Capital, and Islamic Welfare Provision* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Hilman Latief, "Islamic Charities and Social Activism: Welfare, Dakwah, and Politics in Indonesia," (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2012); Dietrich Jung, et al., *Politics of Modern Muslim Subjectivities: Islam Youth, and Social Activism in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014); Robert Lacey and Jonathan Benthall, eds., *Gulf Charities and Islamic Philanthropy in the "Age of Terror" and Beyond* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014); Marie Juul Petersen, *For Humanity or for the Umma? Aid and Islam in Transnational Muslim NGOs* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); Matthew Clarke and David Tittensor, *Islam and Development: Exploring the Invisible Aid Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Amira Mittermaier, *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Holger Weiss, ed., *Muslim Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Nada Moumtaz, *God's Property: Islam, Charity, and the Modern State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021).

[34] See Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

Adaptive Theology, Institutionalization, and Communal Discourse

Humanitarianism, born in the 19th century from European philosophy and Christian ethos, took earlier forms of communal care and transformed them into organized non-partial service to human need on a global scale.[35] These organizations were nonetheless grounded in Eurocentric conceptions of social order and morality, including a racialized ontology of the human that set whiteness as the benchmark.[36] Over time, they became increasingly entwined with Euro-American states, international organizations, and corporations and their respective drives for security, development, and profit at the expense of the Global South as well as marginalized populations within their borders.

Given this genealogy of humanitarianism, where Muslim populations have historically been raced as less human and then subjected to domination and violence by Euro-Americans, the first objective of my dissertation is to examine why these discourses and practices have been adopted into American Muslims' religious charitable activity in the final decade of the 20th century and remain the norm today. To answer this question, my method is mostly historical, using communal archival material, writing and speeches of key leadership figures, and secondary historical literature.

I initially point to the environment of suspicion around American Muslim financial and political activity, which began long before the "War on Terror" or even the Iranian Revolution with covert government efforts to dismantle the Nation of Islam in the 1960s. Islamophobia was and continued to be an external force that makes the outwardly neutral moral language of

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[35] Michel Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[36] Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

humanitarianism attractive, as a means to express a sincere belief in a universal aim towards the elimination of human suffering. The humanitarian nonprofit was therefore the most acceptable way to collect and distribute charitable funds, in-kind donations, and services.

Like marginalized religious groups in the United States before or alongside them, Muslims' use of seemingly secular humanitarian language and the concomitant formation of service organizations was a means to enjoy conditional acceptance and express their faith in acts within the confines of cultural alienation and political suppression.[37] Mary Louise Pratt describes these forms of communication as "autoethnographic" as "those written by people who undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" by constantly negating stereotypes of Muslims as insular or misogynistic by emphasizing their embrace of all people and women's empowerment in their literature.[38] Juliane Hammer writes about this as the "Muslim American public square" where "Muslim debate, analysis, and affect…is defined by intense outside public scrutiny of and hostility towards Muslims and Islam, which Muslim participants in such debates are acutely aware of."[39]

Adaptation of these discourses is not capitulation and charities took humanitarian thought into directions not anticipated by the dominant Euro-American field. Organizations serving Muslims abroad subversively insist on the value of Muslim life in a global order where they are not grievable – existing only as "potential combatants" or collateral damage—and also proclaim

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[37] Bruce Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Rosemary Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[38] Khan, "Faith-Based Charitable Giving, 148. He is referencing Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" *Profession* 91 (1991): 34-40.

[39] Juliane Hammer, "Queer Love, Abrahamic Morality, and (the Limits of) American Muslim Marriage," *Theology & Sexuality* 27, No. 1 (October 2021), 21.

Muslim values as worthy and admirable in the service of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or creed.[40] In the United States, Muslim charity brings attention to poverty within Muslim communities, including the greater burden they bear of surveillance and criminalization as "potential extremists" and also proclaims a belief in the right to healthcare, food, and shelter under a government that does not guarantee services beyond bare subsistence.[41] The ritualized collection and distribution of charity helps to create moral dispositions towards justice and care, which animate Muslim's proactive involvement in representational politics, civil rights activism, and confronting the War on Terror.

Turning to internal community discourses, I show that Muslim communities in the late 20th century who enjoyed middle or upper middle class positions used their collective wealth to construct their mosques, continued to build wealth, and were looking to formalize religious charity beyond remittances abroad. They found the legal category of the 501(c)(3) expedient to their goals and adopted this format. At that time, neoliberal programs of privatized development in place of state welfare were on the rise, and American Muslims followed other faith-based charities in adopting these economic values and practices when creating new nonprofits.[42] The Clinton and Bush presidencies further encouraged the bureaucratization of religious service through the "Charitable Choice" and later the "Faith-Based and Community Initiatives" program

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[40] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso Books, 2016).

[41] Khaled Beydoun, "Between Indigence, Islamophobia, and Erasure: Poor and Muslim in 'War on Terror' America," *California Law Review* 104, No. 6 (December 2016): 1463-1502.

[42] Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 29-54.

to allow faith-based organizations to receive federal funding when providing Americans welfare-based services.[43]

By the early 21st century, the incorporation of collective acts of charity into Muslim nonprofits became so widespread and commonplace that large-scale charities began to be seen as a discrete institution to define and regulate proper Islamic giving and service. Using charity publications and speeches at official events, I capture the dominant themes and language used in the 2010s to encourage and guide American Muslims to give.

My second main objective is to show that American Muslim charities emerged first as a religious third space, between interpersonal relationships and the mosque, and then became a new institution. Here, I enter discussions within Islamic Studies about Muslim religious institutions and their role in facilitating ritual norms, values, and social cohesion. In the study of Islam in America, mosques and educational centers – whether primary education or seminaries - are the overwhelming sites of study, but I argue that charities are as widespread and powerful. Without a central regulatory force, charities have institutionalized from the ground-up, creating their own mechanisms of professionalization while seeking recognition by way of their charismatic presence and conformity to what American Muslims think a charity "looks" like.[44]

While they make no definitive claim to be sources of religious knowledge, I demonstrate that these American Muslim nonprofits are nonetheless sites where authoritative religious discourses, affective orientation, and ritualized practices are produced regarding charity and the

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[43] Mark Chaves, "Debunking Charitable Choice," Stanford Innovation Review (Summer 2003), https://ssir.org/articles/entry/debunking_charitable_choice.

[44] Nancy Khalil, "He's not an Imam, LOL He's a Postal Worker: Locating the Imam in the USA," *Project on Middle East Political Science Studies, No. 32: The Politics of Islam in Europe and North America*, December 2018, https://pomeps.org/hes-not-an-imam-lol-hes-a-postal-worker-locating-the-imam-in-the-usa.

establishment of justice in human society.[45] Overwhelmingly, they downplay their active authority, presenting as merely a "bridge" or facilitator of a commonly understood religious act, which reduces scrutiny of their particular interpretations and creates an air of informality to increase participation from those weary of being judged for outward signs of piety.

By reading and interacting with online and print media; sending donations; attending fundraising events; and participating in direct service work as staff or volunteers, American Muslims' moral subjectivities are shaped by their relationship to Muslim nonprofit charities. Participation in Ramadan charity fundraisers is a particularly potent example of an expected, ubiquitous, and highly structured ritual activity that is run by charities yet central to communal religious life. Religious values are not inculcated here by mere cerebral activity but exist in an epistemology of embodiment that demands presence and participation.[46]

After laying out the historical circumstances that gave rise to the American Muslim humanitarian nonprofit charity, and its establishment as a new normative religious institution with neoliberal practices, my third objective is to map out the discursive Muslim theological landscape regarding Islamic charity – on social media and through my interviews - that affirms or challenges the rights-based and development orientation of dominant organizations.

I argue that the speaker's greater proximity to power in American society, relative to intersectional positions of race, class, gender, and citizenship status, boosts the circulation of an interpretation as properly "Islamic" in national Muslim conversations. Those, due to race, class, or gender privilege, who can remain "politically neutral" or do not make demands on the

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[45] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[46] Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

circumstances that create suffering attract the greatest support fiscally from Muslim donors and a larger American audience. It is no coincidence that the most famous male scholars, colloquially referred to as "celebrity imams" are those most often invited to make an appearance at fundraising events or offer endorsements to charitable causes.

American Muslim perspectives on religious charity, however, do not fall precisely along demographic lines of race and class, which is partially due to matters of faith. Participants offer diverse explanations for their charitable work that often complicate and sometimes exceed the moral horizon of liberal humanism. For example, some volunteers portray charitable work as an act to ensure their spiritual wellbeing exclusive to the transformation of society. In other instances, I show that participants do not measure their work according to development metrics but insist on an "ethics of immediacy" where the present moment of human connection through service is the focus of charitable action.[47] Nonetheless, the authoritative theological power of charitable organizations dictates the public and dominant explanation for Muslim charity for now.

Mixed Methods Approach and Sources

This study is focused on four large US-based international charities with budgets in the hundreds of millions as well as several local, grassroots organizations in three major US cities spread across the East Coast and Midwest. The sites, organizations, and individuals have been anonymized per the requirements of this research project's IRB exemption but more importantly, to protect privacy and safety.[48] Quotes are attributed to specific, anonymized individuals and

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[47] Mittermaier "Beyond Compassion," 523.

[48] This research project is registered with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Office of Human Research Ethics for the IRB as Study # 16-1551.

event details are often combined to hide specificity. These charities still endure acts of racial and religious profiling from the state, banks, and the public, including surveillance, excessive auditing, and bank freezes. Individuals have been subject to Islamophobic harassment and assault and also share concerns about critiquing the US government and being ostracized or criminalized as an "extremist."

The national organizations were selected using a theoretical sampling methodology, by choosing sample charities to "develop the properties of [my] categories until no new properties emerge."[49] These categories include high visibility, respected status, and an active volunteer base. They demonstrate the existence of an ecosystem of large and small-scale Muslim charities linked together by social or professional networks and shared projects. Together they constitute the multi-scalar field of Muslim charitable activity in cities and towns across the country. Interviewees almost always had experience with multiple organizations and in several roles such as donor, client, staff, or volunteer. Moreover, organizations themselves often collaborated and regularly welcomed other charities to the table at their events.

Several complementary research components are used in Part II (Chapters 4-6): qualitative interviews with staff and volunteers; participant observation at fundraisers, panels, and direct service events; and analysis of print and digital media created by or about the selected charities. First, I conducted fifty semi-structured long form (1-3 hour) interviews with staff and volunteers about the purpose and activities of their organization, their experience working for a self-designated Muslim charity, and their personal perspectives on Islam, charity, and inequality in the world today. Most interviews were one-on-one, but several interviews were done in a

[49] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 193.

group setting, so that I have a total of 78 interviewees. A majority of staff interviews were with people in leadership positions. Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr argue that while highly involved leaders might not be representative of the group, they have knowledge and experience of certain topics that others would not including social context, institutional memory, relationships with other organizations, and funding streams.[50]

The aim is twofold: to capture the norms and tensions in language and practices of Muslim charity in these organizations and to understand the means by which Muslims' religious subjectivity is affected by and develops through participation in Muslim charitable organizations. In addition, at large service events, I spoke informally to donors and conducted short (5-10 minute) structured interviews with five to ten volunteers per event, to get a sense of how people heard about and decided to attend; their perception of the organization; and their conception of Muslim obligations to charity and service. To share one data point, the mobile communication application WhatsApp was not mentioned in any official publications but was the go to means to send information and stay connected to clients, staff, and volunteers.

Second, I used participant observation at over fifty charity fundraisers, direct service events, and social gatherings to see how collective religious charitable practices were facilitated by charities and supported through the participation of local Muslims. I recorded speeches and media used at the event to explain and frame the charitable practice; networked with staff, volunteers, and donors; and saw firsthand the material and social elements of charities that are then processed and re-presented on organizational websites. It was in these moments that I also gained access to unofficial and often uncensored reflections on normative charitable activity –

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[50] Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans Respond* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 28.

learning about informal care among one charity's caseworkers who are all refugees themselves; fake donors planted in a fundraiser audience to encourage participation; or frustrations with older male leadership who will not hand over the reins to younger and women members.

My analysis of the qualitative interviews and ethnographic participant observation is based in constructivist Grounded Theory, which recognizes the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. I began with the transcribed interviews, and then coded for seven initial themes: humanitarianism versus Islamic thought; fundraising; donors' expectations and volunteer involvement; consumerist strategies; communication mediums; the War on Terror; and the personal biography of the interviewee. Building from these initial themes that helped organize the data from my interviews and observations, I then moved to intermediate coding, reading the themes for more conceptual meanings. I used this more abstract analysis to build towards the central theories proposed in the ethnographic section of the dissertation including Ramadan fundraisers as a new ritual; charity publications as a genre of constructive theology; and volunteering opportunities as a spatial practice of religious community.[51]

Third, I tracked the charities' digital and print media and secondary literature from news and social media. On site visits or at events, I collected print publications provided by staff and photographed – with permission - banners, signs, and uniforms. I subscribed to the email lists of these organizations, followed them on Facebook, and archived relevant material. In reading this literature, I focused on its explanations of the purpose and the intent of the charity's programming – looking to see how organizations express themselves between or while synthesizing together dominant humanitarian discourse and Muslim theological conceptions of

[51] Ylona Chun Tie, Melanie Birks, and Karen Francis, "Grounded Theory Research: A Design Framework For Novice Researchers," *SAGE Open Med* 7 (published online January 2, 2019), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6318722/.

charity. My overarching method with texts is critical discourse analysis, to understand them first as texts or linguistic objects; how they exist as part of discursive practices in their production, distribution, and consumption; and their role in social practices, affirming or challenging dominant social relations and their ideologies.[52]

I include imagery in my analysis of charity publications, using Wendy Hesford's "spectacular rhetorics" – a rhetorical analysis of imagery's contribution to humanitarian arguments for who is deserving of care from an intended Western, affluent, and politically dominant audience.[53] It takes the politics of recognition beyond state-based policy, to show how optics of recognition can be the primary driver in who is seen as the worthy "victim." In other words, who is included in charity publications and how they are depicted reflects the organization's intent to educate Muslim publics on who deserves care or sympathy and how they should be assisted – through services but also abstract "recognition."

As a foundation for my contemporary ethnographic section, Part I (Chapters 1-3) charts the historical development of Muslim charitable practices in the 20th century and the rise of the 501(c)(3) organization as a normative religious institution. There is only a scattered historical record of American Muslim charities in secondary literature on American Islam. Because of this gap in the literature, I bring in archival research conducted in museums, mosques, and university archives, including sites such as the American Islamic Heritage Museum in Washington, DC; the Islamic Cultural Center of Greater Chicago's Bosnian American Museum; and the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan: Ann Arbor. My history chapters provide a clear

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[52] Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. James Gee and Michael Handford (New York: Routledge Press, 2013).

[53] Wendy Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

chronology of the growth and diversity of Muslim charitable work and organization.

Central Arguments and Chapter Outline

The dissertation is split into two sections that represent complimentary elements of the central argument. In Part I, I chart historical efforts to institutionalize collective obligations of care among US-based Muslim communities across the 20th century. Then in Part II, I take as an ethnographic focus the last three decades of Muslim giving and service, in a milieu of formal American charity work dominated by humanitarian rights-based logic and neoliberal development practices, and analyze organizations through their production of religious texts, creation of new rituals, and facilitation of communal Muslim space.

Part I

In response to the lacuna of a thorough developmental history of American Muslim charitable practices in the United States, Part I of the dissertation serves as an introduction to the types of religious charity performed and promoted by Muslims in the United States from the turn of the 20th century to the 1990s. Historical data before the advent of social media is scant on small-scale, interpersonal charitable giving – acts that scholars argue constitute a significant amount of Muslim charitable activity across history.[54] The focus instead is on collective charitable acts by American Muslims, accomplished through fixed term collections for a natural disaster or mosque construction as well as systematized, ongoing programs, provided informally or under community-generated organizations. In tracking these varied practices of wealth

[54] Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250-1517* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 174; Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, *American Muslim Philanthropy: A Data-Driven Comparative Profile*, July 2019, https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019_Philanthropy-Report_WEB.pdf?x39162.

(re)distribution, this study reveals the "complicated webs of intention and activity" that arise from differing interpretations of the public good and deserving need.[55] These trajectories show the multiple conjunctural developments and shifting conditions that made possible the rise of faith-based humanitarian organizations as the dominant institution for religious charity among American Muslims by the end of the century.[56]

Through this historical account, the diverse and changing uses and meanings of religious charity among Muslims in America are explained in relationship to their embeddedness in the social and political conditions of the United States.[57] Relevant national and transnational discourses and events are included as much as they clarify the multi-scalar character of charitable activity – including foreign government and organizations competing for influence through financial contributions to American Muslim life. Following the work of Lara Deeb, religious thought and action are contextualized without resorting to instrumentalist readings of piety as a tool for political ends and religion is not reduced to a "singular aspect of life unto itself."[58]

To situate Muslims' charitable action and discourses, I argue that racial capitalism, a material and ideological system of social relations, is the central reality of lives lived in the settler-colonial nation-state of the United States. Taking racial capitalist social relations as a starting point avoids pinning charitable thought and practice to inaccurate analyses of Muslim life in the United States that chart a progression of assimilation into a shared, equally-accessible

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[55] Gregory Kozlowski, "Religious Authority, Reform, and Philanthropy in the Contemporary Muslim World," in *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions*, eds. Warren Ilchman, et al. (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 282.

[56] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127, No. 3 (Summer 1998), 99.

[57] Arjomand "Philanthropy," 110.

[58] Deeb, "Piety Politics," S113.

socio-political culture or a push-and-pull between an idealized binary of Muslim versus American values.[59] I instead attend to the location and regulation of people according to "hierarchical schemes of racial and cultural difference," as well as gender and religious identity, in contradiction to the mythic promise of universal equality within American liberal democracy.[60]

From different social positions, American Muslims of the 20th century expressed agency through their intellectual production on the ethics of charity and through charitable acts that by intent or consequence were complicit in or resisted this dominant order.[61] Their divergent readings of racial capitalism involved moral responses that equated it to a godless, destructive and unethical form of social relations while others may have expressed the need to merely guide capitalism by Islamic principles to ensure shared prosperity. For most, juggling the challenges of everyday life, there was a far greater moral ambiguity beyond revolt or capitulation.

These debates fit Charles Tripp's argument that Muslim discourse and political life in the 20th century was dominated by "the challenge of capitalism," as a hegemonic imaginative, productive and institutional colonizing force that disembedded moral and social practices and recombined them for the sake of exclusionary profit.[62] However, following Cedric Robinson's

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[59] Examples that employ the binary are Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam* (Brookings Institution Press, 2010); Mucahit Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[60] Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37, No. 5 (December 1996), 737.

[61] Sylvia Chan-Malik, "'Common Cause': On the Black-Immigrant Debate and Constructing the Muslim American," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 2, No. 8 (May 2011), 31.

[62] Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3, 4.

foundational work on racial capitalism, I argue that racialization is not only a developmental element of capitalist order as it appears in Tripp but an inseparable part of it, continuously creating intense inequality by way of "unequal differentiation of human value" for the sake of accumulation.[63] Therefore the non-explicit but ever-present racializing elements of capitalism must be accounted for and analyzed especially as they are less explicit (but no less violent) in later stages of liberal and neoliberal capitalism of the 20th century.

The variety of American Muslim responses to their socio-political contexts show that there is no agreement among them (or Muslims globally) about what constitutes an "Islamic" response to capitalism. Moreover, actions in response to a capitalist order can be about working against undesirable socio-political conditions but can also, and sometimes simultaneously, operate to "mark the limits of community, strengthen identity and loyalty, and promote ideologies."[64] Across this variety of perspectives and priorities, I measure Muslim choices in giving relative to their experienced privileges or marginalization by race, class, and gender within American cultural and political citizenship. In other words, in what ways do their choices reaffirm or resist the socio-economic conditions of this country and the conditions of suffering populations abroad in relationship to the America's reigning order of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and patriarchy?

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[63] Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 77. Cedric Robison's *Black Marxism* built off of the development of the concept of racial capitalism within the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. See Cedric Robison, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000 (1983)).

[64] Singer, *Charity*, 153.

The history section, Part I, starts from the turn of the 20th century when Muslim communities started to visibly organize collective religious life.[65] It moves through four major changes in dominant American socio-political order – white supremacy, racial liberalism, multiculturalism, and neoliberalism - up to the 1990s when self-designated "Islamic" humanitarian charities emerged as a new category of religious organization among Muslims. At each stage, I identify the major practices of religious charity – as both philanthropic giving and communal redistribution of resources, and how they should be understood relative to the religious, social, and political status of its participants. The diversity of Muslim responses to living within a racial capitalist order reflects different "communal concerns, norms and cultural practices."[66] But collectively, these varying groups came to these conclusions from a shared experience in a white settler colonial nation. They were mostly Black and Brown people in a marginalized, minority religion, used as expendable and excluded labor populations to support the growth of capitalist value.

Moving through these four periods of history, the final, overarching goal of this section is to demonstrate which elements of charitable practices, religious discourses, and larger social conditions contributed to the emergence of the Muslim humanitarian charity organization in the 1990s. Unlike the drama of a soap opera, this new type of religious organization for charitable activity was not foreshadowed as an inevitability in earlier historical episodes. Instead, it is the

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[65] Muslim charitable practices began in North American settler-colonial societies with kidnapped and enslaved African Muslims. However, due to the effects of ethnocide, only echoes remained of these practices in the lives of their descendants even as their legacy serves as inspiration for African American Muslim movements in the early 20th century.

[66] Singer, *Charity,* 172.

product of the changing American ideas of capitalism and social responsibility; the relationship between structural racism and community-based care; and continued devotion through giving.

In **Chapter 1** I argue that Muslim charitable activity first developed in the 20th century primarily to serve the survival of working-class Muslim populations, who were denied access to basic government services in a white nationalist society. By the mid-20th century, growing populations in urban centers and communal wealth allowed for charity to fund institutional religious services, in the form of mosque rental/building and Islamic education. Pan-Islamic sentiments and shared struggles encouraged multiracial community in national organizations and aspirations to provide "benevolent" aid to the imagined global community of religious brethren in Islam. By the 1960s, some Muslims had embraced the racial liberalism of post-WWII America to imagine Islam as a new addition to the Judeo-Christian conception of American religious life whereas others embraced the revolutionary possibilities of ethnic power movements to imagine a world liberated, by the hands of the marginalized, from racial hierarchy and capitalist exploitation.

I then argue in **Chapter 2** that in the 1970s and 1980s, two dominant models of charitable ethics emerged. The first model was African American Muslim communal wealth generation and (re)distribution against racial capitalism, which was strongest in the Nation of Islam but also present in Sunni organizations. The second model was Islamic revival-inspired charity in service of civil society at home and as aid to Muslim majority regions and political causes abroad, best represented by the burgeoning Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). For nearly two decades, both models received significant funding from Muslim led-states and organizations and would overlap in critiques of domestic inequality and American imperialism.

Successful wealth generation and class mobility among mostly Arab and South Asian Muslims, with increased access to privileges related to legal and cultural citizenship allowed the later model to grow, while African American communalist charitable practices were significantly weakened by financial insolvency in the face of increasing legal, social, and political anti-Blackness in American society. Although both models made radical critiques of American and larger global practices and structures of racial capitalism, Black communalist praxis was seen as a greater threat to its logos and structural order. This resulted in continuous surveillance and sometimes covert government efforts to eliminate the activity entirely.

At the same time, the open contempt for capitalist and imperial exploitation that gave spirit to the Islamic-revivalist-inspired charity model diminished significantly in the late 1980s, dampened by Islamophobic fearmongering against "political Islam" as well as some Muslim leaders' growing interest in participation and influence in domestic formal politics. Accommodation to significant scrutiny on the one hand, coupled with desires for socio-political inclusion, led Muslim leaders across the racial and class spectrum to renew investment in civil and community service in the 1990s.

In the final decade of the 20th century, I conclude the historical investigation of Part I with **Chapter 3** that shows the factors that led to the nonprofit humanitarian charity to become a dominant form of collective Muslim giving in the 1990s. The majority of wealth controlled by American Muslims was held by majority non-Black leaders and communities interested in adopting dominant humanitarian, development, and philanthropic language for religious charity. As part of the boom of American Muslim institutional building in this decade beyond the mosque/community center and school, humanitarian nonprofits were created among new civil rights and professional organizations. These charities elevated a specific interpretation of Islamic

charitable giving: a personal act of philanthropy to provide relief and development, prioritized to Muslim majority regions abroad. It would not be until the mid-2000's that domestic giving, championed by Black Muslim theology, would rise in importance again. The chapter ends with a short study of the development of proto-War on Terror legislation that focused on Muslim charities as the funders for "terrorist" networks of non-state actors threatening the unipolar control the US enjoyed after the Cold War.

Part II

The second half of the dissertation argues that the Muslim humanitarian non-profit initiated a new kind of religious institution in American Islam of the Muslim "charity" organization, which provides relief, social services, and development here or abroad (or both). I use Joseph Lowry's definition of institution: the "processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior" tied to, "the assertion and maintenance of religious power."[67] Building on the argument of Part I, historical circumstances of racial capitalism led to this institutional form, versus other popular types globally such as a *waqf* or a national *zakat* board, to become the dominant type for collective Muslim charitable practice in the United States. This form centers the Qur'anic category of the *'amaleen* or *zakat* officials, who abstractly are represented by the charity organization itself in its various capacities of connecting with donors and recipients; collecting; holding, distributing, and keeping records of all religious charity.[68]

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[67] Joseph E. Lowry, "Institution," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford, UK: One World, 2010), 200.

[68] Farishta de Zayas, *The Law and Philosophy of Zakat* (Damascus, Syria: Al-Jadidah Printing Press, 1960), 288-289.

The brick and mortar Muslim humanitarian non-profits are the religious bodies that claim and maintain authoritative force in this new institution, to produce discourse and facilitate correct practice of charity, as both religious devotion and ethical care.[69] These charities make use of pre-existing relationships and links into larger network of American Muslim institutions and concomitant discourses and practices to buttress their authority, including mosques, schools, theologians, and Muslim Students Associations. As a result, these organizations strengthen American Muslims community life because they are an additional site of belonging and action.

Across the field of American Muslim charities, the authoritative theological position on correct Islamic charitable practice is what I term American Muslim Humanitarianism. This position is composed of three elements: pious action, humanitarian intervention, and neoliberal logic. Religious redistribution and cleansing of wealth is tied to a commitment to help all people, regardless of race, nationality, or creed as well as the aims of neoliberal development projects to empower recipients to increase their productive capacity and avoid dependency. Upon taking this position, Muslim charities gain greater entry and recognition in mainstream fields of humanitarian and faith-based organizations, which can help but not entirely eliminate continued government surveillance and religio-racial profiling of their work as potentially criminal.

I break down institutionalized religious charity in the United States through Muslim humanitarian non-profits into three core areas, which are each allotted a separate chapter: ritual, religious texts, and communal space. Across the three, media, signage, and commodities were produced and disseminated to give the charity credibility and to shape understanding of the ethical norms of *zakat* and *sadaqah* according to the charity's interpretation. Equally important

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[69] Devin DeWeese, "Authority," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: One World, 2010), 33.

are the "non-verbal venues" in which religious authority was exercised and communities were formed in charity offices and volunteering events.[70] Through texts, images, and spaces, charities overwhelmingly maintained an informal religious atmosphere, in which Muslim participants were made to feel as welcomed collaborators in effecting social change through shared religious charitable action. Charities remained nonetheless necessary in this logic because they provided the opportunity to donate or volunteer for causes that are assumedly *zakat* compliant.

Across the section, I mark the tensions that put strain on the current norms in this new institution. Leadership is still dominated by a male, older leadership, with limited numbers of women and Black men in top positions. Calls have been made for more representative leadership and for bolder solutions than what is often seen as a slow, gradualist approach in programming. Second, despite programmatic literature celebrating recipients, younger staff and volunteers find there to be a paternalistic divide that keeps Muslims donors separate from people who receive aid in their local community, revealing a continuous paradox between charities' focus on Muslims as united by their charitable acts versus their promotion of charity as a mean to develop community between donors *and* recipients. In response to these two tensions, many organizations in the last five years have turned to inspiration from the historical precedence of Black Muslim traditions of redistributive justice and collective business and resource sharing. Multiracial Muslim charity organizations have altered American Muslim Humanitarianism through their use of the Black Muslim liberatory tradition, so that recent charitable activity has generally been more explicit in its aim for radical change of systems of oppression, led by the most marginalized but for collective justice and wellbeing.

[70] DeWeese, "Authority," 33.

Chapter 4 looks to annual Ramadan fundraisers for charities as an expected, predictable, and shared religious activity for American Muslim communities. I argue that these fundraisers are a new ritual that allow charities to engage with their religious public and spread their theological message. The chapter gives historical antecedents in Islam of dinners and feasts used for religious celebration and charitable distribution. Then I narrate a typological fundraising dinner, a composite story built from *iftar* fundraisers attended during fieldwork, to explain the ritual's setting, stages, roles, and set actions. From the speeches and PowerPoints, attendees learn that their *ajr* (spiritual recompense) does not arrive once they have ensured that their charity reaches the Qur'anically prescribed categories of recipients but takes a future orientation towards making measurable change in the lives of the deserving poor. The chapter ends with an explanation of how the ritual achieves religious authority, which is built from the charity's self-authorizing rhetoric and bureaucratic charisma of form as well as the limited moral obligation demanded of Muslim ritual participants.

Chapter 5 analyzes the communication registers used by American Muslim charities in their media and merchandise to spread its theological interpretation of correct understanding and practice of religious charity in the context of the 21st century United States. I name this new genre of theological writing "formal messaging" and currently the dominant position promoted across organizations is American Muslim Humanitarianism. A case study of one organization is used to discuss the constituent parts of formal messaging as well as its major assumptions, the strongest being a Sunni orientation, and limits, due to the constricting surveillance of the War on Terror. The final section of the chapter uses ethnographic vignettes from local charity sites where formal messaging is in competition with embodied ethics of interpersonal relationships between charity workers and recipients in their community. Instead of neoliberal efficiency and

development metrics, we see an ethics of immediacy that centers building interpersonal relationships and takes into account the full person receiving care.

The spatial dimension of charity is at the center of **Chapter 6**. I argue that charities create spaces to participate in charitable activity, where staff and volunteers experience a shared religious community of service provided by the charity as the organizing institution. Established relationships are reinforced and new connections are forged. Muslims who feel marginalized by other institutional spaces that have more overt demands on dress or behavior are made to feel welcome by the intentionally fun and informal atmosphere.

The chapter uses Henri LeFebvre's spatial triad as a framework to explain how these spaces are conceived, built, and experienced, with attention to historical context, social relations, and competing power dynamics over authority. The chapter concludes with volunteers' reflections on their experience, revealing a wide variety of motivations for attending, the most common being a sense of religious duty and personal satisfaction. Fulfilling charity through volunteering in a group setting is especially beneficial because participants are motivated *more* to fulfill this religious duty; benefit from growing together with others who share moral commitments; and become closer to God.

The **Conclusion** closes the dissertation with reflections on the future of American Muslim collective charity. I think through technological developments, especially changes in social media as well as online crowdfunding and new philanthropic endowments that allow elite Muslims to participate more directly in wealth distribution. The chapter closes with anecdotal evidence of charitable thought and activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. I ask whether this moment of crisis opens up new possibilities of charity inspired by the mutual aid and direct

action taken by some Muslims to not just alleviate suffering in unprecedented times but reimagine American society and the world from a non-racial capitalist perspective.

Part I:
The Development of American Muslim Charity Under Racial Capitalism: 1901-2001

Chapter 1
Muslim Charitable Formations under Racial Capitalism: From Immigrant Collectives to Black Power 1900-1969

By the turn of the 20th century the United States had expanded its settler colonial reach across North America and had naturalized African Americans as citizens *jus soli* who nonetheless were violently regulated into Jim Crow segregation.[1] It developed an industrialized economy toping European powers and enacted the first immigration restriction laws against non-Western European populations, especially in response to Asia immigrants on the West Coast.

It is in this context of a white supremacist capitalist nation-state in the first decades of the 20th century that we see the beginnings of sustained Muslim communities in the United States, the majority of whom were African American, Middle Eastern, and South Asian.[2] Visiting transnational Muslim political activists, intellectuals, and theologians were present, too, and more often caught the attention of press than these small communities. African Americans had

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[1] The United States was also engaged in a larger empire of imperial holdings across the Pacific and Caribbean. See Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Picador, 2019).

[2] I use the word "sustained" to differentiate from the experience of African diaspora Muslims who arrived in the United States through slavery and were mostly, save small pockets, disconnected from Islamic practice or thought. Enslaved African Muslims in the Americas performed several forms of documented charity. In the United States, for example, we have evidence of the distribution of small cakes among enslaved Muslims on southeastern barrier island. See Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

I am using these assigned ethnic and racial terms of African American, Middle Eastern, and South Asian across several time periods to be able to make general points and not to oversimplify the changing nature of such categories. Eastern European, Southeast Asian, and African Muslims are small minorities from this time period, and the first group quickly gained access to whiteness within American society, falling outside of the experience of Muslims as racialized "alien" explored in this chapter.

come to Islam mostly among working class, "unchurched" Great Migration migrants in northern industrial cities through three avenues: Pan-African movements and Masonic societies, missionaries, and African American Muslim prophetic movements.[3]

Arabs and South Asians immigrated at the turn of the century in the tens of thousands, among much larger immigrations of Europeans and East Asians. They came as refugees; labor migrants seeking to repatriate after adequate wealth accumulation; and immigrants looking for better social and material conditions. Christians made up the majority of Arab immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century, although exact percentages are unreliable because many Muslims hid their religious identity due to anti-Turk sentiment against anyone perceived as Muslim and Middle Eastern.[4] South Asian migrant religious identity was highly variable dependent on the region of emigration but was largely non-Muslim.[5]

In this chapter, I chart the beginnings of sustained Muslim practices of collective religious giving in the United States from roughly the turn of the 20th century to the start of the 1970s. My aim is to first illuminate the socio-political status of Muslims within the racial capitalism of a post-slavery US that included Asian and Middle Eastern immigrant populations. From this historical understanding of the reigning social logics and structures of the United States, we can then explain and analyze Muslims' diverse responses to economic and political conditions in America and crises abroad through the specific lens of religious charitable activity.

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[3] Richard Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Indianapolis, IL: Indiana University Press, 2003), 153.

[4] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

[5] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 148.

To understand Muslim religious giving, I argue that one has to look beyond narrow definitions of Islamic charity and explore more broadly the concept as Muslim thought and practice regarding the distribution and circulation of wealth for the sake of God and ethical human community. Money and material goods are evaluated by these communities for what good they should do to ensure human flourishing. Oftentimes it is the community itself that needs the resources first, especially in this context for those who suffer from poverty and marginalization as a result of American racial capitalism as people of color, immigrants, and the undocumented.

A pattern emerges in these early decades: those Muslim communities who have obtained greater access to social privileges due to proximity to whiteness show less interest in interrupting the socio-economic order of wealth in the United States with their religious giving. In contrast, African American leaders and communities develop the most robust challenges to racial capitalism through their theology and practice of joint spiritual and material salvation.

The chapter covers three main periods in American social history, with corresponding developments in religious practice of charity: white nationalism of the early 20th century, racial liberalism of the post-World War II decades, and revolutionary change of the 1960s.

American Racial Logics of the Alien

If America is a settler colonial society, by the turn of the 20th century are free African Americans and Arab and Asian immigrants settlers? Where do they fit into this social, political, and economic project at this point of industrial capitalism? Iyko Day provides a useful paradigm of racialization in 19th century and early 20th centuries North American settler colonial societies with three symbolic positions: the Native, the settler, and the alien. She argues that this triangulation of heterogeneous racial formations emerges from "a settler colonial mode of

production driven by the proprietorial logic of whiteness" whereby white settlers dispossess native peoples of land through a logic of elimination and make use of a "surplus alien work force." This objectified "force" of people is kept exploitable and expendable through a logic of exclusion in order to fuel capitalist accumulation.[6]

African Americans were the original alien population in the American context of settler colonialism, used as a commodified labor force and confined by the logic of exclusion to outside the white settler colonial state, manifest through violent containment and the inheritable condition of slave status. After the abolition of slavery and the granting of citizenship, African Americans became an "*undisposable* alien population." While they were legally incorporated as citizens they were now excluded by the newly formed pseudo-biological conceptions of natural racial divisions, whereby blackness was inimical to whiteness and "whiteness became the basis of racialized privilege."[7]

Asian immigrants began to migrate in large numbers in the second half of the 19th century to a newly industrialized United States. They entered a market that demanded expendable, flexible labor. Within the racial logics of this period that "solidified biological notions of race," Day explains, "Asianness as a racial signifier of indelible, exclusively transferable attributes" was used to "[ascribe] alien-ness and spatial vulnerability" to Asian bodies. This form of alienation resulted in a more legally volatile status of exclusion than for African Americans.[8]

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[6] Ikyo Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 24.

[7] Day, *Alien Capital*, 29.

[8] To be clear, Day's argument about volatility is not equivalent to a scale of violence. It points to the unpredictable status of inclusion for Asians that introduces a different form of precarity than the historical structures and practices experienced by African Americans.

In addition to being barred from naturalization, Asian immigrants (as well as others considered non-white) saw increasingly restrictive immigration, land, and other laws in the early 20th century. This includes the Immigration Act of 1917 blocking immigration from an "Asiatic Barred Zone"; the 1921 Emergency Quota Act to severely limit non-Western European immigration; and the 1923 Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh* that excluded South Asians from naturalization alongside other "non-white Asians." Through the mechanisms of immigration restrictions, Asians were not only controlled through borders but could be legally restricted from "naturalizing, voting, owning and transferring property, and working."[9]

In summary, for both African American and Asian populations, life in the turn-of-the-century industrialized United States was defined by a logic of exclusion to the white nationalist, settler colonial state, produced through heterogenous racialization processes of segregation, exploitation, and disposability as alien labor populations.[10] The logic of exclusion does not mean separation from everyday life, but instead describes racial capitalism as a "technology of antirelationality," a separating out of collective life that is then reconnected "in terms that feed capital."[11] Moreover, this disjoining of social relations creates a vulnerability where the Native and alien are "blamed for their own past expropriability and present precarity."[12]

While Day does not specifically discuss Arab, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern populations from this time period, they teeter between the position of settler and alien dependent on their ability to be perceived, treated, and act as white. This relates to the unacknowledged

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[9] Day, *Alien Capital*, 32-33.

[10] Day, *Alien Capital*, 34.

[11] Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2015): 78.

[12] Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 81.

category of religion as a factor in this racialization process, whereby proximity to Protestant Christianity is a further instrument of division between the "natural" American and foreignness. For example, the comprehensive Immigration Act of 1891 included moral evaluations of fitness for migration that condemned polygamy. This law was inspired by Mormonism but applied to some male South Asian immigrants who were or were assumed to be Muslims.[13]

Several early 20th century court cases regarding Arab naturalization showed a continued debate over the racial definition of whiteness – as phenotype, culture, or civilization. In the 1917 Supreme Court Case *Dow v. United States* a Christian Syrian immigrant, George Dow, was deemed sufficiently white partially on the basis of Christianity's link to the Semitic people of Western Asia. Even so, after *Dow*, a 1942 case involving a Yemeni immigrant first denied him naturalization because he was "indisputably dark brown in color" *and* Muslim.[14] Therefore Islam or what is socially read as "Muslimness" continued to indicate foreign status and incompatibility with the project of American white nationalism in the early 20th century for Arabs and all other Muslims populations, relegating them to continued status as an alien population.[15]

Muslim Economic Activity Under White Nationalism: 1900-1940

For the first four decades of the 20th century, the United States government maintained a white nationalist agenda through Jim Crow legal segregation and extralegal violence against non-whites assigned second class status. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs (1933-1936) reinforced these divisions by systematically excluding people of color from

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[13] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 65.

[14] Howell, *Old Islam,* 70.

[15] This also affected other non-Christian Arab immigrant populations, such as the Druze.

housing, employment, and other government subsidies or financial programs.[16] These legal powers worked in concert with dominant cultural and social norms that promoted the intertwined components of patriarchal whiteness, Eurocentric history, and Protestant Christianity as the defining center of American liberal democracy and capitalist progress.

Within this system, legally and socially non-white African American, Arab, and South Asian Muslim were given "alien" status, as defined by Day. The majority of Muslims at the turn of the century were working class, with small gains into the middle class. Muslim thought on and practices of economic redistribution and poverty alleviation focused on collective survival before institution building. Crises in homelands and calls to support Pan-Islamism abroad also elicited monetary support. Some practiced what Kambiz GhaneaBassiri calls "de-Islamicization" to find greater mobility and acceptance within the status quo while others resisted white nationalism in strengthening their commitments to Islam, Muslim community, and African and Asian heritage.[17]

Mutual Aid Practices

Muslims made alternative support systems in the stratified society of the United States, most frequently in the form of informal and formal mutual aid collectives. African Americans formed the earliest mutual aid collectives in the late 18th century, but the numbers took off in the 1800s when two other major African American social institutions – fraternal lodges and churches— adopted mutual aid practices into their organizations.[18] They were created to build

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[16] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

[17] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 141.

[18] Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 42.

"in-group solidarity and cohesion" necessary for survival and greater well-being, with the goal of "economic stability…human and social capital and economic independence."[19]

Mutual aid society members would pay dues to an unincorporated pool or a formalized organization, from which they could request assistance for illness, unemployment, family tragedy, and funeral services. These societies provided proto-insurance program, necessary when African American could not access *de facto* white-only corporate insurance, banks, and government welfare programs. Mutual aid societies became vital for African Americans and other people of color to build capital and obtain social welfare.[20]

African American fraternal lodges became increasingly important in the 1920s for "unchurched" working class African Americans who came through the Great Migration to Northern cities and felt unwelcome and insufficiently middle class for established Black churches. The ritual and symbolic elements of dress, movement, and roles in African American lodges also provided an alternative modality of identity, using red fezzes, crescents, and other regalia associated with Black Atlantic seafarers and African royalty that linked them to secret knowledge from "the East."[21] These elements would be adopted by Pan-Africanists, most notably Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey internationalized collective economic practices to create alternative wealth and industry for the African diaspora. Later, early African American Muslim movements connected Islam with African Americans' original identity and used mutual aid practices towards liberation.

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[19] Nembhard, *Collective Courage*, 24.

[20] Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good? American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14.

[21] Kaufman, *For the Common Good?*, 24.

Mutual aid was equally important to early South Asian, Arab, and Turkish Muslim immigrants (as well as Muslims from Eastern Europe) who arrived in notable numbers roughly from the 1880s to the 1910s and spread across the nation through peddler trade routes and social networks. They were mostly single men who entered working class jobs in agriculture, shipping, and factory line work with limited investment in building social institutions in the United States. Muslim women from these same communities more often remained in home countries because of gender dynamics of reproductive, industrial, and colonial labor.

Collective mutual aid within particular immigrant ethnic or national groups was informally organized to support basic needs, including room and board, funerals, and burial plots, in part because these single, working class men were living away from the financial safety net of their extended families. The Bosnian Benevolent Society (Džemijetul Hajrije) founded in 1906 provided all these services in Chicago and additionally worked to "organize celebration of Muslim religious holidays and to help them preserve their religious and national customs and traditions." Coffee houses and heritage language newspapers served as social commons, with the former often providing the only space for shared religious practice outside of private homes. In the Chicago Bosnian community, Mustafa Sarich ran a coffee shop starting in the 1920s that helped not only Bosnians but "other Muslims such as Albanians, Turks, and many others" with food, shelter, and credit while searching for work."[22] With the intent to repatriate, workers supported each other's spartan lifestyles and sent remaining funds home as remittance. In the first decades of the 20th century, ethnic clubs were created to formalize mutual aid; provide

[22] Becir Tanovic, "A Brief History of the Islamic Cultural Center," *The Islamic Cultural Center: The Center, The People, and The Mission*, October 15, 1988, The Islamic Cultural Center of Greater Chicago Museum, 2-3. In the 1910s, the Benevolent Society opened chapters in Illinois (1913), Pennsylvania (1915), and Montana (1916).

networks for employment; engage in domestic electoral politics; and fundraise for nationalist, regional, or Pan-Islamic campaigns.

In rare instances, Muslim missionaries came to the United States at the start of the century to assist building a social welfare network. For example, Sudanese missionary Satti Majid arrived in New York City sometime in the first decade of the 20th century to perform *da'wah*. He began his time writing the British consulate on behalf of Sudanese, South Asian, and Yemeni sailors who suffered from unemployment or other social ills. He argued that, as subjects of the empire, they deserved social welfare assistance when working far from home.

Majid had larger ambitions to start "a nation-wide association for [Muslim] political, industrial and social betterment."[23] While keeping an office in lower Manhattan, he made several trips to Detroit and established the "Moslem Welfare Society" to provide political support and humanitarian relief to Muslim "under the yoke" the "imperialists of Europe."[24] Majid would find longer lasting success in founding a Moslem Welfare Society in Buffalo, New York, during his stay from 1924-1927. A local newspaper reported that seven hundred men had signed onto the organization, which provided assistance with anything from unemployment to court translation services.[25] Before leaving the United States permanently in 1929, Majid founded at least one other Moslem Welfare Society in Pittsburgh and attempted but failed to create a national organization, the United Moslem Society. Nonetheless, his success in creating several

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[23] Patrick Bowen, "Satti Majid: A Sudanese Founder of American Islam," *Journal of Africana Religions*, 1, No. 2 (2013), 196.

[24] Bowen, "Satti Majid," 197.

[25] Bowen, "Satti Majid," 98.

organizations reflected the sentiments of his multiracial Muslim supporters who wanted to both assert their religious identity and join hands in service for each other and the larger *ummah*.

Nationalist Movements and Pan-Islamic Charity

Even as Muslims in this period used mutual aid to ensure collective survival and community solidarity in the United States, they continued to demonstrate an interest in sending charitable support abroad to Muslims in need beyond immediate family. Mutual aid and sending funds abroad were linked as a form of resistance to a world of racial capitalism, whether it was the white nationalism of the United States or European colonialism in Muslim majority nations. This was not simply reactive, but an investment in "an alternative identity and consciousness and thus an alternative route to economic and social mobility," rooted in several overlapping ideological movements, most importantly Pan-Islamism and anti-colonialism.[26]

For some, this religious and ideological solidarity translated into monetary donations to political campaigns and relief abroad, whether in a familial homeland or in support of what was imaged as the *ummah*, or global religious community in Muslim majority spaces in Africa and Asia. One particularly active community in the early 20th century were Turkish Muslim immigrants concentrated on the eastern seaboard. They engaged in mutual aid and maintained connections to the Ottoman empire, which was shifting from a multiethnic and religious empire to a nation-state model organized around ethnic Turkish Muslims as the essential citizen.

Collective giving in support of the Ottoman state and to relieve fellow Muslims began in response to the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and was formalized at the start of World War I when

[26] Howell, *Old Islam*, 64.

a group of Turkish businessmen established the *Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Islamiye*, the Islamic Benevolent Society, in Peabody, Massachusetts. It held weekly meetings to report on "conditions in the homeland" and enforce a sense of "duty for the welfare of their own country." Sums of six to seven thousand dollars were sent to Turkey in 1919 to assist with post-WWI recovery.[27]

During the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), the American diaspora was moved by both a nationalist and religious sentiment to relieve the large-scale suffering and destruction that befell the new republic. The Turkish government worked with the newly created International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 1919 to send representatives of private charities on fundraising tours to the United States. Dr. Mehmed Fuad, founder of the Society for the Protection of Orphans, in Turkey, came on a multi-year fundraising tour and raised over $400,000 for relief.[28] Men would often pray together when together at fundraisers, reinforcing the connection to faith through giving.

Financing A Welcoming Home: Early Mosques

In the 1920s and into the 1930s, Muslim mutual aid organizations and collective resources for survival start to be used to solidify permanent religious community in the form of a mosque. While fraternal organizations or ethnic clubs had originally provided the grounds for these shared commitments among men, mosques expanded collective institutional religious life for women and children who earlier practiced in private homes.

Funding mosques in the early 20th century was done collectively among mostly working-class people or small business owners without singular patrons to sponsor real estate and

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[27] Isil Acehan, "Ottoman Immigrants and the Formation of Turkish Red Crescent Societies in the United States," *Perceptions* 20, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 66.

[28] Acehan, "Ottoman Immigrants," 70.

building projects. International funding was also not an option, with Muslim majority states in the throes of crisis, colonialism, or building new nations. Collective funding took various forms: membership dues, sales of shares in the property, local fundraisers, regional or national fundraising tours, and appeals in ethnic newspapers. For the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park in Detroit, Michigan, Imam Mohammad Karoub included "subscriptions" for maintaining the space."[29] Women were managers and executers of fundraising, organizing lunches, parties, and food sales through social networks of both Muslims and non-Muslims. They enjoyed visibility through American cultural "notions of volunteerism, the public role of women, and civic life in general," but were not give public, decision making power.[30]

While many mosques began among a closely-knit community that shared ethnicity and a shared geographical homeland, the small populations in this period of Muslims within an unwelcoming white supremacist society encouraged cross-racial religious solidarity. For example, the Universal Islamic Society was incorporated in 1925 in a multiracial neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan as a site for religious practice and "benevolent services," by a board consisting of African, Arab, Turkish, and Indian members. The mosque brought together men with a common sense of religious identity and political consciousness of Pan-Islamism. They hosted Duse Muhammad Ali, a Sudanese-Egyptian intellectual and anti-colonial activist who preached that all "oppressed peoples should organize their own trading and other economic relations independently of the white ruling nations…[to gain] freedom."[31]

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[29] Howell, *Old Islam*, 45.

[30] Howell, *Old Islam*, 125.

[31] Howell, *Old Islam*, 78. Ali briefly operated his own trade goods business to which he offered congregants shares.

In the local setting of Detroit, Muslims lived out the Pan-Islamic and anti-colonial message of Ali building families, social services, businesses, and other shared resources together. Azira Maeh, the daughter of a Bengali father and African American mother, recalls that in this time, "No Muslim was different then…You didn't even know the difference."[32] As the decades passed, different access to rights, social privileges, and wealth especially by race would separate out the various Muslims who prayed together at UIS. The mosque itself dissolved in 1929 as a finance consequence of the national Great Depression.

Over the course of the 1930s, some Arab Muslims and other Muslims socially coded as white had greater success gaining access to benefits of white settler society than their African American and South Asian counterparts, because they could more often -but in no way completely- avert legal and social barriers such as immigration bans, residential segregation, and routine denial of employment or financial services.[33] For example, despite the incredible racial and class diversity of Muslims in pre-WWII New York City, the first corporate body to successfully purchase a building for Islamic practice was the American Mohammedan Society, established in 1907 by Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian immigrants.[34]

African American Prosperity and Collective Entrepreneurialism

African American Muslim majority communities grew and spread in the 1920s and through the 1930s mainly through the Moorish Science Temple; the Ahmadiyya missionary

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[32] Howell, *Old Islam*, 93.

[33] Howell, *Old Islam*, 104-105.

[34] Marc Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims in New York City," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 211-212.

movement and its breakaway Sunni offshoots; and the early Nation of Islam. What differentiates mosque growth among majority African American movements from Arab American led communities is the explicit investment in cooperative corporations and communal land acquisitions as a route to religious salvation. The accumulation of wealth and property collectively in the name of Islamic principles was a reaction to white settler colonialism and an active step to obtain resources to build community based on their own values as African Americans and Muslims.

Jamaican Marcus Garvey inspired the African diaspora in the United States with Pan-Africanist calls for repatriation to Africa and the need to build black capital through business enterprises. In 1919 Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association opened the Black Star Line shipping company and the Negro Factories Corporation, which led to a diverse array of commodity and service shops. Although the businesses folded with Garvey's politically-motivated conviction for mail fraud in 1923, his model had an enormous impact on African American-led Muslim movements. As demonstrated in the examples below, they absorbed his critique of socio-economic injustice, models for building collective economies, and reclamation of racial pride and spiritual heritage and then read them through an Islamic lens.

The Moorish Science Temple (MST) claimed citizenship rights fully outside of the white supremacist nation state, issuing national identity cards linked to their true "Asiatic" heritage in Morocco and Egypt and in rejection of the "Negro" identifier. Founder Noble Drew Ali wrote in their central text, *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America*, "we are returning the Church and Christianity back to the European Nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation. While we, the Moorish Americans are returning to Islam, which was

founded by our forefathers for our earthly and divine salvation."[35] Here, the prophetic message states that Islam promises not just salvation in the hereafter but here, in the material world.

Although the nationalist ideology provided an exit from white supremacist America when the Temple was founded in 1917, Noble Drew Ali was careful to register the Moorish Science Temple of America in 1928 as a religious corporation under Illinois law. Ali could protect his group from taxation, including the dues he collected from members. Outside of the registered religious organization, the group ran the Moorish Manufacturing Corporation, which produced and distributed medical and hygiene products linked to African American herbalism, religious charms, and literature, amassing nearly $40,000 by the late 1920s.[36]

From its beginnings in early 1930s Detroit, the Nation of Islam also framed Islam as the original religion of African American people. Its leader, Elijah Muhammad, trained by mysterious founder M. Fard Muhammad, promised liberation from the oppressive living conditions of Jim Crow America through moral reform and collective businesses and social services. Numbers before World War II were small, with members paying dues and renting out spaces for temples in Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee, but as the group's consolidated wealth increased after the war, the Nation was able to slowly initiate businesses to serve black communities in mostly urban centers, which will be detailed in the following historical section.

The South Asian Ahmadi missionary Mufti Muhammad Sadiq came to America in 1920 and brought the promise of racial equality, and joint spiritual-material uplift through interracial

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[35] Noble Prophet Drew Ali, "Chapter XLVIII," in *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America,* https://hermetic.com/moorish/7koran.

[36] Turner, *Islam*, 100.

solidarity among colonized people of the world, including internally colonized Americans.[37] African Americans converted in several East Coast and midwestern cities, but complaints quickly arose that dues and funds raised to support *da'wah* were pocketed by Indian missionaries and headquarters in India. In 1923 the newly appointed lead missionary for the United States, Sufi Bengalee, announced that *zakat* could be distributed "among the poor Moslems of your local community" or sent to India to be divided for distribution. African American leaders promptly insisted money would stay in their local community.[38]

Over the next decade, several African Americans left the Ahmadi community to start on their own Muslim communities. For example, Wali Akram founded the First Cleveland Mosque in 1937 and believed the Qur'an and the Prophet's community provided the ideal blueprints for African Americans to rise from mental and economic slavery. Even before the mosque, he was inspired in a dream to create the "Muslim Ten Year Plan," a "social contract to break the bonds of economic dependency."[39] The first draft declared, "Our plan is to present the true doctrine of Islam to our fellow man and secure for its members the sole necessities of life here as well as in the Hereafter." It included educational programs, burial expenses, and a fund for the sick and infirm. Members paid monthly dues of fifty cents to a dollar for programs, an emergency fund, and a wholesale buying programs, where they would buy in bulk and sell amongst themselves to "realize the profits in the community."[40] Members recall being inspired to seek education,

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[37] Admittedly, Sadiq began his time in the United States focusing his *da'wah* work on affluent white New Yorkers and their social networks. After achieving very limited results, he shifted his strategy to work among working class African Americans.

[38] Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100.

[39] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 108.

[40] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 47, 109, 111.

develop financial literacy, secure employment, and achieve a quality standard of life for themselves, their family, and the larger community of African Americans in Jim Crow Ohio.

Caribbean immigrants Daoud Ahmed Faisal and Khadijah Faisal were also led by this theological vision that linked material and spiritual uplift for racially oppressed Muslims. The couple converted to Islam under the tutelage of Sudanese missionary Satti Majid and in 1928 founded the Islamic Mission of America for the Propagation of Islam in Brooklyn, New York. The stated mission was "the worship of Allah" and "the enlightenment and liberation for the African and Asiatic people residing and born in the United States and in the Americas… who have been denied the human rights and privileges [their oppressors] enjoy."[41]

Like Wali Akram, they saw Islam as an ethical and spiritual program from God that could provide economic security, social liberation and spiritual salvation for African Americans and other oppressed peoples. Khadijah and Feisal formed a multiracial and cross-class community at the State Street mosque working towards these values. In the mosque mission statement, Faisal enumerates several proposed services including prayer space, Arabic and Islamic Studies, "hospitals, sanatoriums, clinics, nurseries for the children, homes for the old and aged, for the orphans, and the unfortunate" Muslim and non-Muslim children. It also includes funds to assist displaced persons; Muslim mutual and benefit societies; and Muslim cemeteries.[42] From these lofty goals, we have evidence that mosque held extensive religious programs, housed "indigent Muslims," and secured insurance and burial plots for isolated Muslim migrant port workers. Imam Faisal also went to the United Nations headquarters in Manhattan in 1949 and 1963 to call

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[41] Daoud Ahmed Faisal, *Islam: The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity* (Chicago: Magribine Press, 2011), 183.

[42] Faisal, *Islam*, 185-186.

for the restoration of human rights for African Americans.[43] The State Street mosque was a critique of the absence of rights and services as a direct result of contemporary racial hierarchies and provided a solution through just economic practices its leadership found in Islam.

An African American Hijra to Rural Settlements

In addition to economic plans to uplift Great Migration migrants within the setting of northern industrial cities, several African American Muslim leaders in this period also proposed separatist rural settlement programs. These proposals followed a longer history, beginning with enslaved African maroon communities in the Americas. More contemporarily, it was a part of African Americans "returning to the land" as a form of reparations and regeneration after the failure of Reconstruction and the promise of prosperity in industrialized northern cities. Land ownership was the solution to escape bare sustenance wages within white-owned capitalist industries.

Imam Wali Akram, alongside several affiliate Midwestern Muslim communities, wrote to the land-grant bureau at the US Department of the Interior in the late 1930s to "begin a rural agricultural venture to sustain the urban communities with its profits and farm produce."[44] This project was a part of his Cleveland community's Ten Year Plan program as an investment in a sustainable business, not necessarily a new settlement, and ultimately went unfulfilled.

Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal successfully started a rural community in 1938 called Medinah Salaam in East Fishkill, New York.[45] It was intended as a permanent residence for

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[43] Patrick Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2: The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975* (Boston, MA: Leiden, 2017), 458-459.

[44] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 47.

[45] Medinah Salaam translates from Arabic to "Peace City."

Muslims, "in full accordance with the laws, the principles, the culture, the ethics and the philosophy of 'Islam,'" with "facilities for spiritual, educational, social and moral upliftment, and with economic security and stability." Property was purchased in 1955 for $100,000 with help from the Saudi Arabian government, facilitated by Abdul Basit Naeem, a Pakistani American publisher of *The Moslem World and the U.S.A.*[46] Shaykh Faisal describes the property as a "cooperative compound" purchased by the Islamic Mission of America, Inc. open for co-ownership by Muslims through an initial investment of $1,000. Residents would then be subject to a community maintenance tax and *zakat* tax.

Through membership fees, taxes, and donations, the community was meant to support all members as needed, including the sick, elderly, orphans, refugees, and displaced persons. It was a holistic vision of communal residential, commercial buildings, and a "social aid system."[47] Medinah Salaam existed for roughly eight years but was unattractive to most urban mosque members who lack agricultural experience, and ultimately was financially unsustainable.

Simultaneous to Medinah Salaam, the most sustained settlement was started outside Buffalo, NY by Mohammed Ezaldeen, the leader of the Addeynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association (AAUAA). Ezaldeen began his journey as a Muslim in the Detroit Moorish Science Temple but left due to theological differences in 1929. Shortly thereafter he traveled to Turkey, hoping to establish an African American community there, free from the racial oppression of the United States, making a direct appeal to President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk for land to "enjoy

[46] Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims," 216, 228 fn. 23.

[47] Faisal, *Islam*, 190-191.

Turkey's traditional impartiality to Negroes."[48] His appeal unmet, he studied in Egypt for several years and returned to the United States teaching Arabic and Islamic Studies to awaken African Americans to their true "Hametic" Afro-Arab heritage. In 1938 he formed the AAUAA, which successfully spread through chapter opening in the Midwest and East Coast. That same year he moved to Buffalo, New York on an invitation from local Muslims to teach Arabic.

At this time, he began to promote *hijra*, or migration, of African Americans to live together as a self-governing commune, inspired by the Prophetic model of seeking better living conditions for the early Muslim community.[49] Several men and women agreed to pool money to buy land and build a settlement community outside of West Valley, New York called Jabul Arabiyya.[50] Upon purchasing the land, Ezaldeen told the original members, "This is your country. Nobody rules this but you," and advised them to first build houses, then a mosque, store, and jail.[51] The handful of families that settled Jabul Arabiyya built houses and a mosque, which sustained itself through a handful of families and individuals into the 21st century.[52]

Small rural African American separatist communities as well as agricultural development programs would continue throughout the twentieth century, inspired by new iterations of African

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[48] Howell, *Old Islam*, 84. AP, "U.S. Negro Moslems Hunt Jobs in Turkey," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (July 13, 1930), 1.

[49] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 34.

[50] This Arabic name translates to "Arab Mountain." I did not find information explaining the choice of the name.

[51] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 127.

[52] Independent scholar Akil Fahd mentions a second settlement named Ezzeldeen Village founded by Ezaldeen in New Jersey. No additional research at this time was available to confirm this second settlement. See Akil Fahd, "Professor Muhammad Ezzeldeen and the Routes of Black Sunnism in the U.S.," *Sapelo Square*, November 8, 2017, https://sapelosquare.com/2017/11/08/professor-ezzeldeen-and-the-aauaa/.

American Muslim theology in the face of continued systemic discrimination. One example that is slightly later than analyzed here, from the World War II period is from the Moorish Science Temple, which purchased a fifty-acre farm in Prince George County, Virginia in 1942 through fifty "well endowed" members who lived there as a commune. Later they purchased additional rural property in Massachusetts and Connecticut and in 1943 ran a "Food for Freedom Program" for the poor.[53]

Muslim Economic Activity Under Racial Liberalism: 1941-1965

World War II and its aftereffects changed the dynamics of racial capitalism in the United States, leading to new actors and economic practices of religious giving among American Muslims. After its defeat of Japan using two nuclear bombs, American ascended on the world stage as a global power and positioned itself in opposition to the also powerful Soviet Union, beginning a policy of countering communist expansion, termed "containment," in what would become the Cold War. In the war's last months, President Harry Truman defined the United States by its "creed of liberty" and the God-given guidance it enjoys "in serving His will as a leader of freedom for the world."[54]

The United States' claimed position as a defender of freedom and equality appeared contradictory at best when considering its racial apartheid society, let alone the violent imperialism it carried out abroad. In response, Jodi Melamed argues that the United States made a break from the white nationalist paradigm of its founding through the early 20th century and

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[53] Turner, *Islam*, 105-106. Some contemporary examples of continued communities include Islamberg, NY, Dar al-Islam, NM, and New Africa farms within the W.D. Mohammed community.

[54] Harry S. Truman, *Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 157-58.

entered into a new era of antiracist policy. This new order, which she terms "racial liberalism," would maintain racial capitalism by explaining away social and structural inequalities as glitches to the telos of American progress.[55]

This ideology frames racism as an anomaly to American values of "abstract equality, individual rights, and market liberties" that are the universally available to and cherished by the American people.[56] Religion was an addition element that reinforced the new state credo of diversity in unity. President Dwight Eisenhower pinpointed American religiosity, in the recognized range of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew, as America's strength in contrast to Soviet state atheism. In a 1954 radio address, he explained, "Whatever our individual church, whatever our personal creed, our common faith in God is a common bond among us. In our fundamental faith, we are all one."[57]

Through a claim of shared values, all Americans are then held responsible to uphold this natural covenant that bonds them together as a nation, masking the very real differences and inequalities that were fundamental to American society. African Americans and other marginalized populations by race and other markers of social difference must accept "normative models of personhood…in exchange for incorporation into U.S. political modernity," including participation in the very market and culture built on their second-class status.[58] Participating in racial capitalism was preliminary to social existence, so that the only option was to demanding

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[55] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*: *Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 13.

[56] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 20.

[57] Gastón Espinosa, *Religion and the American Presidency: George Washington to George W. Bush with Commentary and Primary Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 279.

[58] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 25.

rights within its limits. To resist or outright reject the universal American project was evidence of a pathology that merited punishment or outright violence.

American Muslims would have to navigate this new racial order and its manifestations in capitalism, which continued to center Christianity and retain structural hierarchies on the basis of race and immigration status. In addition to these domestic dynamics, a new international element emerged where foreign Muslim majority states and organizations began to financially support American Muslim community institutions to promote their political and religious vision. Foreign funders took special interest in African American Muslim communities who they read as more "open to ideological and spiritual influence" and successful in *da'wah* than non-black Muslims.[59]

Both Egypt and Saudi Arabia had open diplomatic relationships with the United States, but the Saudi government curried more favor because of its friendly relations with American oil companies and utility as a counterweight to secular nationalism and communism in the Middle East and Iran.[60] In 1962, KSA led the creation of a new pan-Islamic organization called the Muslim World League (MWL) which became the most influential and ubiquitous foreign funder of American Muslim religious life for the next three decades.[61] By the mid-1970s, it bankrolled summer camps, imam training, religious literature, speakers bureau, cash grants, and building funds.[62] American Muslims were not passive and made their own decisions for how to maintain relationships with foreign funders and states.

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[59] Howell, *Old Islam*, 205.

[60] Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2012), 66.

[61] In Arabic the Muslim World League is *Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami*.

[62] The organization is often referred to simply as Rabitat in much English language literature on its activities. Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 73-74.

The remaining sections explore broad trends in Muslim collective economic practices, including charity, in the period of racial liberalism, roughly from the end of the war to the start of the 1970s. Two archetypical responses emerged, partially dependent on Muslims differing socio-economic status: embracing post-war America as a place of economic opportunity and religious inclusion or building alternatives to racial capitalism for material and spiritual liberation.

Embracing the American Creed: The Right to a Place of Worship

Many Muslims in the United States saw their well-being and future through accommodation, if not assimilation to mid-century racial liberalism, civil religion, and the superiority of American democratic model. A representative example was second generation and newly arrived Arab American Muslims in the Detroit metropolitan area, especially those who lived in the middle-class Arab enclave of Dearborn. The privileges of being socially white, or in proximity to it, afforded access to this community in the form of housing, employment, and business unavailable to Black and South Asian Muslims – a pattern replicated in cities across the nation.

Sally Howell describes this group of Arab American Muslims in Detroit as "educated to expect social, economic, and political advancement and to assert their rights as citizens," including freedom of worship.[63] Many men of this generation had served in the military in World War II and believed their patriotism proved their dedication to the United States, keying into the new social conception of America as a diverse melting pot united by its religious values, service,

[63] Howell, *Old Islam*, 141.

and opposition to communism.[64] They also performed normative masculinity through their military service, capitalist entrepreneurship, and ability to support a nuclear family.[65]

These Detroit men embraced the promise of the American Creed in the 1950s and directed their charitable activity to become patrons of their local mosque. Earlier social halls and spaces of worships were rebuked as not religious enough – Muslims, they argued, like their Christian neighbors, needed a sanctified site for proper religious education and practice. They followed a Protestant Christian church model: a salaried male religious leader, education classes for adults and children, and the space of worship at the center.[66] Supplementary activities that encouraged participation in mainstream American life were encouraged, such as volunteering. For example, Muslim-focused Boy Scouts of American troops were started in the early 1960s.[67]

To lead these reformed spaces, this generation sought to replace earlier, self-taught leaders with trained scholars. The Lebanese Shi'a community recruited Mohammad Jawad Chirri, a young Lebanese cleric from Lebanon to bring the community back into *dar al-Islam*, centering modern elite textualist interpretations of the Islamic tradition over communal heritage religious traditions.[68] In the far smaller Albanian community, their Imam Vehbi Ismail wrote about the "rational, enlightened, and universal" quality of Islam for the modern period.[69] He saw

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[64] Rosemary R. Corbett, "For God and Country: Religious Minorities Striving for National Belonging through Community Service," *Religion and American Culture* 26, No. 2 (2016), 236.

[65] Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 85-89.

[66] Howell, *Old Islam*, 149.

[67] Boy Scouts of America, "Scouting in the Islamic Community," https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/02-928.pdf.

[68] Howell, *Old Islam*, 137, 167.

[69] Howell, *Old Islam*, 169.

Islam and Muslim identity as a positive contribution to the United States and a rightful participant in the American project of democracy and piety in contrast to the projected image of godless Soviet societies.

This reformist shift extended across the country, led by reformist minded immigrants and second-generation Muslims savvy in normative American society. For example, the majority Lebanese Arab American Banner Society in Quincy, Massachusetts retired its ethnic club model to rebuild as a mosque, renaming the organization in 1962 to the Islamic Center of New England.[70] Even with these changes, all three mosques made use of earlier social networks and technologies for their fundraising – the ethnic newspaper, ethnic clubs, and non-religious social activities such as picnics, dances, and dinners. They shared a belief in building private wealth and success, especially as entrepreneurs, who could sponsor their houses of worship and contribute to their larger society through private entrepreneurship and volunteerism.

Women's Work

In all three examples, from Detroit and New England, the unsung but crucial demographic responsible for programming and soliciting charity from their local Muslim and non-Muslim community members were women. Left off of boards, restricted from serving as religious leaders, and curtailed from freely moving through the heavily patriarchal spaces of business and politics, women maintained commitments to their mosques and Muslim community through their own auxiliary societies. While they were given traditional women's tasks, for example children's activity or food preparation, they often obtained -privately- held decision-

[70] Mary Lahaj, "The Islamic Center of New England," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 300.

making power because they not only gave in-kind labor to the upkeep of the mosque but were consistent in bring regular, needed donations to their community. For example, in Detroit the American Moslem Women's Society was formed in 1947 to serve the majority Lebanese American Moslem Society. In the 1970s when new immigrant men disagreed with women in decision making roles, the AMWS used their saved funds to start a new mosque in 1982 according to their idea of a welcoming, women-friendly religious space.[71]

South Asian Liminality

Still unable to acquire citizenship, and related rights to land and legal employment, the smaller numbers of South Asian Muslims in the United States at the end of World War II had greater structural barriers in place to acquire the communal wealth necessary for mosque building projects. Usually, male elders served religious needs among fellow South Asian Muslim immigrants privately, but many joined Arab or African American led mosques.[72]

The most organized community of South Asian Muslims in the mid-century originated from Bengal men working on British ships who abandoned their posts in American ports, most notably in New York City, Newark, and New Orleans. They married women of color, often African American and Puerto Ricans, and built wealth through restaurants and other small businesses. By 1947, the New York community founded the Pakistan League, coordinating political activity, religious, and social events, bringing out hundreds of people.

In an effort to have a permanent shared mosque, then Pakistani League president Ibrahim Choudry did extensive fundraising outreach to Muslims of diverse religious, socio-economic,

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[71] Howell, *Old Islam*, 185.

[72] Howell, *Old Islam*, 70-71.

racial, and ethnic backgrounds. The New York Mosque Foundation was formed in 1952 and in 1957 it purchased a building at 1 Riverside Drive.[73] Mosque leadership in the 1950s and 1960s involved themselves in civil rights letter writing campaigns and interfaith philanthropic mission trips to Palestine/Israel. Through "concentric circles of identification and association", this diverse South Asian-centered Muslim community sought stability and strength through donations to communal recreation, socializing, and a shared place of worship.[74]

National Organizations, International Funding Ambitions

Expanding from local mosque construction, American Muslims who embraced the logic of racial liberalism extended their efforts further to form regional and national Muslim umbrella organizations.[75] Like white Christians and Jews, they saw it as their right to enjoy religious freedom and receive social recognition as full Americans for their contributions to society.

The leading example from the post-war period is the Federation of Islamic Associations (FIA), formerly incorporated in 1954 by a group of young, business-oriented Arab American men in Detroit, Michigan.[76] Founders used their private funds to set up the organization to "contribute to the modern renaissance of Islam" by connecting Muslims across the US and

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[73] Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims," 215. This mosque would be the predecessor to the internationally funded 96th street mosque.

[74] Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 188.

[75] It should be noted that Muhammad Ezaldeen and Wali Akram created the first successful national Muslim organization; however, it was resistant to racial liberalism. The Uniting Islamic Society of America (UISA) was formed at a 1943 conference in Philadelphia but was short lived and dissolved in 1946.

[76] The organization had its origins in the earlier International Muslim Society, founded in 1952.

internationally to serve communal needs.[77] Membership was limited to formal groups, who were expected to fundraise to finance these collective programs of aid and Islamic practice. The FIA quickly attracted a racially diverse roster from the East Coast and Midwest.[78] Annual conventions brought members together to fundraise for FIA and support the local businesses of the hosting Muslim community, which was commended publicly by local government officials.

Leadership of the FIA had a global vision of Muslim solidarity in which powerful Muslim majority states would financially support the building of Islam for a minority community in the United States. In return, American Muslims would use their political clout to support Muslim causes abroad, which, for the Arab American leaders, was mixed in with Arab solidarity politics. The FIA set up tours and speaking engagements for Arab dignitaries and in turn sought and found patronage from President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt.[79] From a 1959 trip to Cairo, FIA leaders secured scholarships for al-Azhar University and gained four al-Azhar-trained imams to serve in the US. On a separate FIA-sponsored trip from 1961, Nasser gave a Detroit-based Shi'a Imam $44,000 for a new mosque.[80] In his telegram sending the funds, Nasser subsumes religion within his Arab nationalist sentiments, writing, "May God keep and preserve Arabism and defeat its enemies…who can never attain their personal end thanks to the bonds of

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[77] Howell, *Old Islam*, 152-153.

[78] New York City leaders were inspired by this coalition building to create a local Muslim Council for *da'wah*, social work, and mosque construction. See Bowen, *A History*, 457-458.

[79] Nasser was briefly the head of state for the short-lived United Arab Republic state, which united Egyptian and Syrian territories from 1958 to 1961. Egypt retained the UAR name until 1971.

[80] Howell, *Old Islam*, 158-59.

solidarity and fraternity between the sons of Arabism for preserving their nationalism and grandeur."[81]

The American government took interest in FIA activities abroad because of its concern about the spread of communism in the Middle East. President Eisenhower's strategy was to use "foreign intelligence and intervention, as well as domestic surveillance and promotion" to build Muslim allies.[82] American Universities were funded for Arab Studies programs and scholarships were created to build intelligence and allies in the region.

A project that served the international goals of Muslim activists like the FIA leadership as well as the Cold War diplomacy of the United States government was the creation of the Islamic Center of Washington, DC. Founded by three Arab American men in 1945, the 1.4 million mosque project was mostly funded by Muslim foreign diplomatic community and elites as well as Muslim majority nations.[83] The project represented an investment in Cold War era ideas of cross-national Abrahamic friendship between the United States and the "Muslim world" while simultaneously reinforcing Pan-Arabism by way of supporting the minority Muslim community in the US.

In March 1945, the founding group put out two appeals in Arab newspapers, encouraging readers to give a tax-exempt donation to this project to provide a "supportive pillar of faith" to

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[81] "October 30, 1961, Telegram," Chuck Alwan Papers (Box 1), Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[82] Rosemary Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the 'Ground Zero Mosque' Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 44. Operations Coordinating Board (1953-1961) was the organization that prepared the report, titled "Inventory of U.S. Government and Private Organization Activity Regarding Islamic Organizations as an Aspect of Overseas Operations."

[83] The founders were A. Joseph Howar, Ameen David, and Abraham Caspor, with Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian heritage, respectively. Muhammad Abdul-Rauf Sr., *History of the Islamic Center: From Dream to Reality* (Washington, DC: The Islamic Center, 1978), 13.

Muslims in the US and a "symbol of solidarity and true brotherhood" for "all people of the [East]," closing with the *sura* "God does not burden any soul with more than it can bear" (2:286). By the year's end, the organization received nearly $48,000 in early funding from Christians, Druze, and Muslims in the Arab American community; Afghanis in the United States; and a handful of private Egyptian citizens as well as $4,025 from the late Saudi Arabian King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud.[84] Later funds arrived from major global Muslim leaders including the Nizari Ismaili Aga Khan III and the Nizam of Hyderabad Asaf Jah VII, who contributed $34,681.

Cumulatively, Egypt ($331,806 plus directors' salaries), Pakistan ($321,610), Saudi Arabia ($258,297), and Iraq ($104,186.19) gave the largest donations to the building and budget. Several nations gave in-kind gifts of décor, Qur'ans and religious literature, and labor. In addition to these main sources, U.S. companies such as the General Motors branch in Jedda gave in the tens of thousands, reinforcing economic and political interests that went beyond the lofty goals of peace and brotherhood.[85]

After its completion in 1957 and opening at which President Eisenhower spoke, the DC Mosque continued to be a symbolic site of pride for American Muslims. It demonstrated that the majority Muslim world was willing to donate significant sums to ensure religious life would flourish for the minority Muslim community in North America. It also reflected the promise of a multiethnic collective identity and vision of the immediate post-WWII period in America.

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[84] Abdul-Rauf Sr., *History of the Islamic Center*, 14.

[85] Abdul-Rauf Sr., *History of the Islamic Center*, 50, 64.

Resisting the American Creed: Building a Nation, Spurring Revolutionary Change

A contrasting response to post-WWII racial liberalism is best represented by the Nation of Islam. Unlike efforts to achieve social recognition and rights through institution building that fit within assimilation to white Christian normativity, funded by private donations or foreign states, African Americans in the Nation of Islam worked towards an exodus from white controlled society and racial capitalism to create a new nation and institutions "in the wilderness of North America." In the earlier examples, Muslim individuals embraced the opportunity they saw in American capitalism to pursue their own wealth, which could then be given to a common cause.

Warith Deen Mohammed, son of and successor to leader Elijah Muhammad, describes the early Nation of Islam orientation as a "socialism ideology" in its design to fight social and economic problems in poor black communities.[86] Original members were Great Migration migrants who were shut out of safe housing, healthcare, and wealth creation and found a welcoming message from founder Fard Muhammad and then Prophet Elijah Muhammad often not afforded to them in higher class Black churches. The Prophet taught that the psychological damage and material conditions of oppression forced upon Black people could be overcome through spiritual resurrection and material prosperity through Islam. While Muhammad preached about the benefits of black capitalist mindset, where individual entrepreneurial success would bring wealth into the black community as a whole, the overall ethics and practices of the Nation

[86] Clifton Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 157.

were decidedly collectivist. The group tithed to support Elijah Muhammad and his family and to create black spaces with a system of education, moral discipline, and a service economy.[87]

A wrench was thrown in the gears of the new organization in 1942 when the Chicago temple was raided by the FBI for un-American sermons that praised the Japanese and critiqued the President for "[pretending] he is your friend and helping you, but he doesn't do anything about mobbing or burning you."[88] The next year Elijah Muhammad and four others were jailed for refusing military service. Unlike the Arab men in Detroit who saw themselves as role models for their time served during World War II, Muhammad and his co-religionists were morally against killing for a nation that brutally subjugated black people and all people of color globally.

After the war ended and Muhammad was released in 1946, the Nation saw small but steady growth in the early 1950s, attracting African Americans who continued to suffer under racial apartheid from a government that claimed to be the leader of the free world. New followers "felt that first class citizenship in the developing Nation was far better than second class citizenship in America."[89] Membership promised a sense of not only individual betterment but also collective spiritual and socio-economic uplift. Member Nathaniel Karim in Baltimore, Maryland and wrote on his initial experience joining the Nation in 1953 that, "There was no little you and big I's. If I had a bowl of soup and you didn't you got half."[90]

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[87] Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 2.

[88] Taylor, *The Promise*, 61-62.

[89] Hajjis Imam Wali and Rashidah Uqdah, *A History and Narrative of Muslim Americans in Baltimore, Maryland* (Self-published, 2003), 25.

[90] Uqdah, *Baltimore*, 29. This could be a reference to a very similar statement by Elijah Muhammad in *Message to the Black Man* (Phoeniz, AZ: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1973), 175.

The economic program of the Nation of Islam was central to its religious message. In this theology African Americans are likened to "a wondering beggar" that "cannot escape the slums" without the key: Islam.[91] Nation teachings demonstrate the link between Islam, Black salvation, and Allah: "Islam is a religion backed by the Power of Allah (God) to free you from the hands of your merciless enemies (the slave masters) once and forever."[92] In another passage, Elijah Muhammad wrote that God desires African Americans to be free and prosperous, " if they would only unite and acquire wealth as the masters and the other independent nations have."[93]

This habituation towards self-improvement was translated into the slogan and concept of "do for self." Self-improvement and communal renewal were the first step in a larger progression. In early theology, Elijah Muhammad was preparing African Americans for the Armageddon that would consume the wicked United States, but by the 1950s could be staved off if African Americans were given an independent territory as reparations. Land was necessary for freedom – a *hijra* at a national scale and inclusive of all "Original" people.

The most complete picture of Elijah Muhammad economic plan was developed in 1965 as part of his magnum opus, *Message to the Black Man in America*. Within *Message* was "An Economic Blueprint," which provided detailed instructions to Muslims in the fight against poverty and want to achieve self-sufficiency:

1. Recognize the necessity for unity and group operations (activities)
2. Pool your resources, physically as well as financially.
3. Stop wonton criticism of everything that is black owned and black-operated.
4. Keep in mind-jealousy destroys from within.

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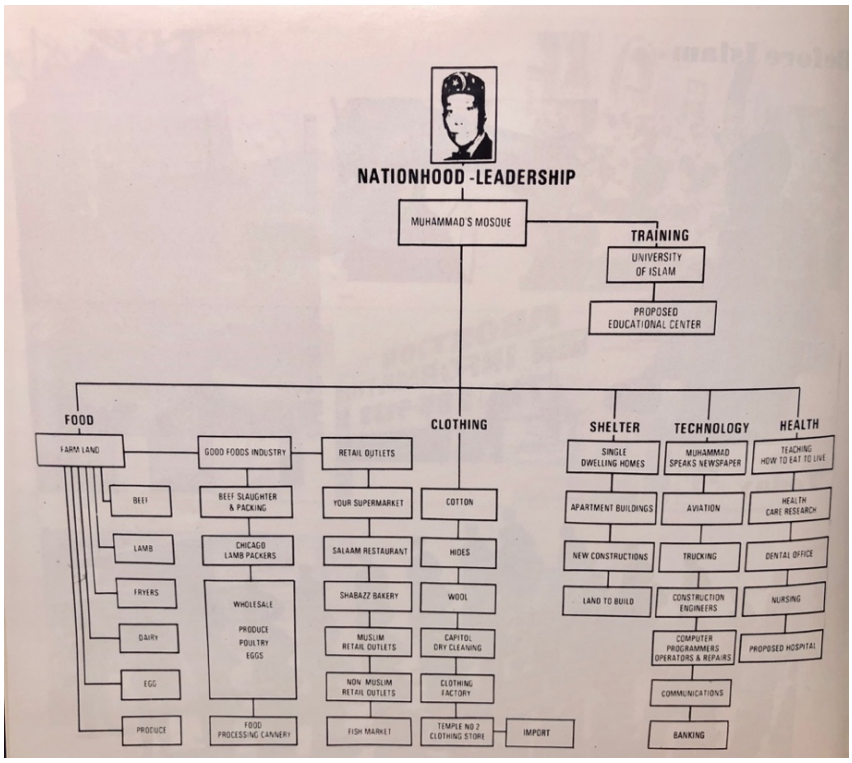
[91] The Nation of Islam, "Accomplishments of the Muslims," Nation of Islam Publication (undated, early 1970s), 4.

[92] Muhammad, *Message,* 22.

[93] Muhammad, *Message*, 170.

5. Observe the operations of the white man. He is successful. He makes no excuses for his failures. He works hard in a collective matter. You do the same.[94]

The "do for self" of the Nation of Islam took two forms in relationship to economic activity: monetary support to uphold the centralized institution of Nation leadership and entrepreneurial ventures across several industries. Seen in the 1970s diagram below, the four areas of focus, food, clothing, shelter, technology, and health, all stemmed from the religious leadership and training within the centralized, hierarchical mosque structure.



Source: *Accomplishments of The Muslims*. Nation of Islam (undated pamphlet, 1970s)

The project is described as "the only Divine Program in which all Black people can concretely benefit. Each of these blocks represents a phase of building a nation…One enterprise compliments the other in such a unique masterful way until we can see only success."[95]

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[94] Muhammad, *Message*, 174.

[95] The Nation of Islam, "Accomplishments," 5.

The main funding for the Nation came from regular weekly or monthly religious tithing to their temple, which would be split between local needs of the mosque and central leadership in Chicago. Tithing rates varied depending on the mosque, from $1 to as high as $13.50 per week in the late 1950s.[96] An additional large donation of between $100-$150 per person or a lump sum from each temple was expected annually on Saviour's Day, a February commemoration of W. Fard Muhammad's birthdate, and at other points of the year members might be called to contribute to a particular fundraising campaign for major projects such as the multi-million dollar expansion of Temple #2 in Chicago.

The Nation maintained high expectations for each Muslim to give religious charity, even as the organization, through the late 1960s, was composed mostly of working-class people.[97] Absolute trust in Elijah Muhammad and Chicago's financial decision was expected and members were encouraged to live simply and give any excess wealth to the Nation. National Secretary John Ali made clear in his writing that (assumed male) members, "should forget their rent, bills, wives and children, as when the Nation needs money you must give."[98]

One letter, obtained by the FBI, written by a Minister to his congregation, describes the intense message of thrift, even asceticism, and the positive benefits of religious giving: "Work cheerfully, have no fear, and do not be afraid to sacrifice. It takes finance to advance; in other

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[96] US Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Nation of Islam Part 3 of 3", *FBI Vault*, 44, https://vault.fbi.gov/Nation%20of%20Islam/Nation%20of%20Islam%20Part%203%20of%203. Of course, these FBI records are not entirely reliable sources of information on the group but represent agents collecting data through informants, phone tapping, and literature acquisition.

[97] See Lawrence Mamiya, "From Black Muslim to Bilalian: The Evolution of a Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, No. 2 (June 1982): 138-152.

[98] US Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Nation of Islam Part 3 of 3", *FBI Vault*, 42, https://vault.fbi.gov/Nation%20of%20Islam/Nation%20of%20Islam%20Part%203%20of%203.

words, it takes bread to get ahead, and if you want to go (make progress), you got to have dough. Don't be afraid to give; Allah is ever away of those who spend in the cause of truth. Give, Give, Give until it hurts." While giving might "hurt" individually, by redistributing it back into the community, the anticipated goal was to create higher standards of living, thereby ameliorating the suffering or "hurt" of poverty altogether.[99]

Charity sent to the Headquarters was allocated to five main funds, in addition to the Saviour's Day annual pool: Poor Treasury, to help the destitute, those in temporary need, and for direct services to members; Travel Fund for Nation administrators; Public Relations Fund for media; the Mosque Fund/Land Fund for new real estate acquisitions and businesses; and finally the Central Point Fund.[100] This last fund was at the discretion of Elijah Muhammad and was used to support him and his family; supplement temple rent and minister salaries not covered by local tithing; and helped fund the Sister Clara Muhammad schools; health clinics; and other projects.

In addition to tithing, Nation-owned and independent retail businesses that served neighborhood needs also brought in profits that were sent to Chicago headquarters and also reinvested in the local mosque community.[101] For example, Temple #6 in Baltimore, Maryland was established in the early 1950s and over the next two decades opened a restaurant, bakery, bookstore, sewing shop, and a fish processing plant as well as pro-bono health services. In the

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[99] US Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Nation of Islam Part 2 of 3", *FBI Vault*, 24, https://vault.fbi.gov/Nation%20of%20Islam/Nation%20of%20Islam%20Part%202%20of%203.

[100] US Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Nation of Islam Part 2 of 3", *FBI Vault*, 25-26, https://vault.fbi.gov/Nation%20of%20Islam/Nation%20of%20Islam%20Part%202%20of%203.

[101] The Nation of Islam, "Accomplishments," 2.

words of Baltimore leaders Imam Wali Muhammad Uqdah and Rashidah R. Uqdah, "Once a Muslim completes a project, everyone has a share in the glory."[102]

Elijah Muhammad was lauded in organizational literature for bringing his religious message of black uplift to life: "His words are in the stone and brick as he builds housing for the people. His words are in land as he acquires something we can call our own."[103] These businesses were part of a larger goal: an integrated environment, designed according to Islamic values, which ensured employment, healthy food, and circular wealth creation in black communities.

Building up from community-based shops, over the 1950s and 1960s the Nation acquired land and several buildings to run large-scale businesses and a central bank.[104] Agricultural land was purchased in Michigan and then Georgia for the growing and packaging of vegetables and grain as well as animal husbandry. The Nation was best known for two other industries: its seafood import business and the press that produced *Muhammad Speaks*, which began in 1962, went weekly in 1963, and hit its height in distribution around that time at around 70,000 copies a week.[105] By the early 1960s, Muhammad held half a million dollars in Chicago real estate alone and by the early 1970s all of the Nation's holdings were valued at $85 million.[106]

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[102] Uqdah, *Baltimore*, 53.

[103] The Nation of Islam, "Accomplishments," 3.

[104] Proposals were also made to obtain land for planned neighborhoods of affordable housing, but I did not find records of any completed projects. From oral testimony in Boston and New York, Nation of Islam temples, later mosques, bought property surrounding the mosque to support local businesses and services, such as health clinics, run by or for the mosque community.

[105] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 95. The paper ran bi-weekly until 1963, when it went weekly. The 70,000 copy per week estimate for the early 1960s is taken from Bowen, *Renaissance,* 497.

[106] Manning Marable quoted in Turner, *Islam*, 206. Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 68.

To achieve its goals of black flourishing, the Nation categorically reject political alliances or financial support from white lead organizations, politicians, or wealthy individuals in contrast to the FIA who worked collaboratively with city governments and in interfaith groups. Through *Muhammad Speaks* and the catalog of Nation owned bookstores, members and supporters were exposed to liberation movements and struggles, and alternative models for diplomacy, economy, and culture outside of the Eurocentric norms available in the US. Elijah Muhammad would also slowly build connections with international Muslim leaders.

This oppositional stance would gain the Nation nearly ten thousand active members, fifty thousand additional registered members, and twenty-five thousand unregistered participants by 1960, with tens of thousands more outside supporters.[107] With their bursting popularity, over the next five years the Nation turned towards greater political participation because of both its positive presence in black communities and in its power to shape national conversations in black and mainstream American press, radio, and politics.

While the Nation adamantly critiqued racial capitalism, its transforming message was carried further by the work of Elijah Muhammad's strongest representative and then ousted pariah, Malcolm X. Malik El-Shabazz, his preferred name in the last stage of his life, preached the program of the Nation of Islam as a Minister from 1953-1964, but shifted late in his years of ministry towards a belief in multi-scalar cooperative, direct political action against capitalism, in line with the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's critique of capitalism, militarism, and empire. El-Shabazz developed these ideas from his training and intellectual development within the Nation; vociferous and broad studies of history, politics, and religion; as well as his relationships and

[107] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 490.

collaborations with various anti-capitalist activists in New York City and Third World leaders. One can hear a break with the apolitical orthodoxy of the Nation in a May 24, 1962 speech when he states: "black people all over the world are uniting. Socialists, communists and liberalists all are coming together to get rid of the common enemy with white skin."[108]

Once fully separated from the Nation in 1964 and impacted by his multiple trips to several African and Middle Eastern nations, El-Shabazz still insisted on racial solidarity but rejected the Nation's emphasis on black capitalist entrepreneurship as an effective solution for politically and economically disenfranchised black communities. African Americans, as an internal colonized people, can work in solidarity with all people globally against what he saw were the two greatest weapons of white supremacy: capitalism and imperialism, or "dollarism."

In a December 20, 1964, speech at the Audubon ballroom in northern Manhattan, El-Shabazz lays out the danger of capitalism and the promise of socialism:

> Before you start trying to be incorporated, or integrated, or disintegrated, into this capitalist system, [you] should look [to newly independent nations] and find out what are the people who have gotten their freedom adopting to provide themselves with better housing and better education and better food and better clothing. None of them are adopting the capitalist system because they realize they can't. You can't operate a capitalistic system unless you are vulturistic; you have to have someone else's blood to suck to be a capitalist. You show me a capitalist, I'll show you a bloodsucker...we find that the nations in Africa are developing socialistic system to solve their problems.[109]

In the same speech, El-Shabazz insists on the inclusion of religion as part of transformation away from exploitation, using the example of the Egyptian revolutionary government under Nasser.

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[108] Turner, *Islam*, 205. He did not clarify specifically, but El-Shabazz and other Nation of Islam preachers usually used "black" in a global context in reference to all people of color and not only African and African diaspora populations.

[109] Malcolm X., "At the Audubon: Speech given December 20, 1964," *Teaching American History*, teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/at-the-audubon/. Here El-Shabazz is referencing Marx's famous lines in *Capital* about vampire-like capitalists sucking the life from laborers. See Karl Marx, "The Working Day," in *Capital Volume One*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm.

Revolution, "loses something" when it sidelines religion, but Egypt had been successful because it served the needs of the people and kept people "spiritually and morally balanced."[110]

El-Shabazz brought together these complimentary elements in the formation of a religious and a political organization, Muslim Mosque Inc. and Organization for African American Unity, respectively. For the former, the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Egypt and the Saudi Muslim World League offered him scholarships and partnerships during his travels abroad.[111] The revolutionary path of Malik El-Shabazz was cut short by his assassination two months later in February 1965. Nonetheless, his indictment of capitalism and imperialism as the core causes and threats to black welfare; his insistence on defending human rights; and the call for revolutionary change to achieve freedom and self-sufficient power would continue to inspire generations of resistance by diverse groups in the United States and abroad, including Muslims.[112]

Revolutionary Possibility in Transitional Times: 1965-1973

Several historical threads came together in the early 1960s that inspired new economic thought and charitable activity among American Muslims. Internationally, decolonial struggles and wins across Asia and Africa had grown significantly since the Bandung Conference of 1955. After independence, most post-colonial governments created state-controlled economies and welfare systems. In addition to obtaining control over resources and territory, newly independent

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[110] Malcolm X., "At the Audubon."

[111] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 541-542.

[112] To understand the varied interpretations of El-Shabazz's legacy, see Maryam Kashani, "The Audience is Still Present: Invocations of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz by Muslims in the United States," in *With Stones in our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire*, eds. Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 336.

states created various projects of cultural decolonization and reconnection with indigenous languages, art, and religion, decentering Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies. Relevant regional movements arose such as Third World non-alignment, Pan-Arabism, and Pan-Africanism.

Among Muslim majority spaces, the 1960s saw new developments in global Pan-Islamic discourse and solidarity politics. Extending a genealogy from Islamic modernism, Salafism, and the Caliphate movement, a movement of Islamic revival emerged in the 1960s that differed significantly from the modernist Islamic programs of Nasser or Muhammad Ali Jinnah in South Asia.[113] Roughly termed Islamism, this new current was most widely popularized by Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and Abul A'la Maududi in Pakistan.

The two theologians, among a larger cadre of thinkers, preached for revival of what they claimed to be the true message of the Qur'an and Sunnah, which had been muddled by theological lapse and submission to materialism and amorality through European colonialism. This revival demanded a "direct, unmediated encounter with the Qur'an" to allow belief free from modern "un-Islamic" influence.[114] Islam was described as a "social system," a novel, structuralist take on Islamic ethics and political theory, that organized all spheres of life. A genre of literature emerged called "Islamic economics," contrasting this religiously prescribed "system" to the materialism of capitalist, communist, and socialist economic philosophies.[115]

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[113] Charles Tripp calls Nasser's particular program Islamic Socialism. See Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77.

[114] Tripp, *Moral Economy*, 154.

[115] On the genre of Islamic economics, see Tripp, *Moral Economy,* 103-112.

Differing opinions arose regarding method: create grassroots change to an "Islamic state" through mass spiritual transformation or impose a top-down government system defined by Islamic law. Thinkers like Qutb and Iranian Ali Shariati imagined a revolutionary vanguard who would guide the masses away from ignorance and moral corruption towards God's dictates. Included in these Islamist reformations was Islamic charity as a form of "social justice" that upholds the rights of the poor and prevents the unjust exploitation and accumulation of wealth in capitalism.[116] *Zakat* was interpreted later by some states as a national tax on Muslims.

On the domestic front, the United States was facing a decolonial reckoning of its own. The civil rights movement had brought meaningful legal change in the political and social life of people of color, enshrined in the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts of 1965. But the fundamental economic and social hierarchies of the United States had not shifted. White flight to the new space of the suburbs and devaluation of black life in cities exploded into urban uprisings most concentrated in 1967. An independent commission produced the Kerner Report to explain the cause of uprisings and forcefully concluded: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal."[117] The language of imperial occupation felt apt for Americans of color, spurring self-theorizations as the internally colonized peoples of empire.[118]

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[116] Sayyid Qutb, "Economic Theory in Islam," in *Social Justice in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2000), 127-169.

[117] Hass Institute, "1968 Kerner Report, Executive Summary," https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/1968-kerner-report. The report was produced by an independent national commission for the US government to determine the cause of widespread uprisings. For white control of wealth in both white suburban spaces and majority people of color urban spaces see David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* (September/October 2008), https://newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city.

[118] This is not to ignore Native Americans, but to focus on Ikyo Day's conceptualization of "alien" populations as the central racial category affecting Muslim populations.

Although the Kerner Report used black/white language, the United States had a far more complex racial composition. This diversity would grow significantly, especially for Latinxs and Asians, after the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act's elimination of restrictive laws on non-European immigration. At the same time, the invasion of Vietnam chipped away at popular trust in the US's commitment to sovereignty and freedom for post-colonial nations. Instead, it appeared to be bald Cold War competition with the Soviets for regions of neo-imperial control.

Altogether, the social power of post-war racial liberalism was severely weakened. The universal promise of American civic belonging could not hide the violent contradiction of deep social hierarchies, especially for marginalized Americans who lived the empty promises of racial reconciliation. Various movements emerged with radical critiques of the coercive hegemonies of race, gender, sexuality, and Eurocentrism. Their projects overlapped on several key aims: "psychic decolonization, nonexploitative ethico-economic orders, an internationalism aligned with the third world, and new… collectivities."[119] These interconnected shifts in the late 1960s and early 1970s contributed to changes and new forms of collective charitable activity among Muslims in the United States. Overall, Muslims in the United States used Islam revival thought to imagine a social order beyond American racial liberalism, whether it was a more internationalist model produced by professional class immigration-origin Muslims or radically anti-capitalist collectives among African American Muslims.

Muslim Movements to Community Uplift and Black Power

As demonstrated in earlier section, African American Muslims have a long tradition of radical critique of white supremacy and black-centric solutions to the structural and cultural

[119] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 26.

dimensions of racial inequality. Their organizations, especially the Nation of Islam, served as predecessor to the Black Power movements of the late 1960s, which then inspired new Muslim organizations informed by Black Power ideas of liberation from the violent contradictions of racial liberalism.

In a 1962 *New Yorker* essay, James Baldwin captured positive feeling stirred by the Nation of Islam, as a "divine corroboration of [the Black] experience" of white supremacy.[120] In his social assessment "God (the white God)" had failed the oppressed. Baldwin declared, "God is black. All black men belong to Islam; they have been chosen And Islam shall rule the world."[121] The Black Panther Party (BPP), arguably the vanguard of Black Power, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California took inspiration from the Nation as seen in the similarities between "What the Muslims Want" from the Nation and their manifesto, the "10-Point Program." The BPP made overlapping demands of reparations, military exemption, education, housing, judicial justice, freedom from mass incarceration, and separation from the exploitation of white controlled society to achieve, "Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice And Peace."[122]

Several Muslims from the Nation were part of the BPP, with the strongest concentration in the New York City chapter. In 1974 Osman Sharrieff, a Sunni Muslim, brief Nation member, and then chairman of the Lost-Found Moslem Movement in the United States of North America,

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[120] James Baldwin, "Letter from a Region in My Mind," *The New Yorker*, November 11, 1962, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind. Baldwin would later publish this essay as part of his 1963 novel *The Fire Next Time*.

[121] Baldwin, "Letter."

[122] The Black Panther Party, "The Ten-Point Program," https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/workers/black-panthers/1966/10/15.htm.

filed a (unsuccessful) lawsuit against the United States government demanding two hundred fifty thousand dollars for each member as reparations for the effects of racial capitalism.[123]

By the height of Black Panther expansion, *Muhammad Speaks* ran articles in support of student activists and Black power thinkers such as Stokely Carmichael, Maulana (Ron) Karenga, and Robert F. Williams.[124] One illuminating source from this time period is the May 1970 catalog for Books and Things, a store in the Muhammad's Mosque #7 complex in Harlem, New York. The thirty-three-page catalog focuses mainly on the subjects of Islam and African American history and thought, overwhelmingly featuring male authors. On both topics, there is a clear interest in providing literature on contemporary affairs, in Muslim majority regions, postcolonial Africa, and for African American in the United States.

As a whole, it creates a bibliographic argument about connected struggles and concerns between Indian anti-colonial theologian Maulana Mohamed Ali; Ghanaian Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah; Caribbean, Algeria-based anti-colonial writer Franz Fanon; and black intellectuals James Baldwin and Richard Wright. Notably the catalog gives an entire section to "Marxist literature," listing several books by Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong, and two books by the New York Jewish scholar and political activist Bertram D. Wolfe (d. 1977).[125] Taken together with several books offering analysis of poverty, urban uprisings, and black disempowerment, the catalog reflects discourses relevant to the Muslim and larger New York City African American population. It conveys sympathy if not outright support for the critique of capitalism and

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[123] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 584.

[124] Bowen, *Renaissance*, 585.

[125] Wolfe's views significantly shifted over his lifetime, from a founding member of the Communist Party of America in 1919 to becoming avowedly anti-Communist by the 1950s.

alternative economic and political programs from Islamist, Pan-African, anti-colonial, and Marxist streams of thought.

Outside of the Nation, African American Muslims were also organizing Black Power informed communities that eschewed strong entrepreneurialism for the more socialist community programming of the BPP. A representative example could be found in Harlem, New York City, where followers of the late Malik El-Shabazz opened the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB) in 1970 under the leadership of K. Ahmed Tawfiq. A native son to Harlem, Tawfiq was a member of OAAU and Muslim Mosque Inc and was sent to study at al-Azhar University in 1964 on scholarships given to El-Shabazz by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs.

From a blighted street in south Harlem, he aimed to create an "African American Sunni intelligentsia" with rigorous theological education and devotional activities; a university lecture series; a monthly newspaper *The Western Sunrise* (1971-1981); and public outreach events.[126] In his writings for the newspaper, Tawfiq offered analysis and prescriptions for improving black life in America using Qur'an and *hadith* and gave a translation each issue of a section from Muslim Brotherhood founder Hasan Al Banna's *The Message for Education and Guidance*. By the early 1970s, MIB had between 200-300 regular members.[127]

The mosque's reach expanded into the neighborhood through local businesses and activities meant to improve collective welfare. In the 1960 and 1970s the mosque opened a tea room, restaurant, and health food store.[128] MIB also started a housing development called

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[126] Amir Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience: The Dialectic and Dialogic of Race, Ethnicity, and Islamicity: Mapping and Decoding the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, 1964-2001" (PhD diss., New York University, 2010), 287.

[127] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 602.

[128] Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam," 295.

"Living Islamic Community" and a public health project to reduce drug use and trafficking.[129] In the early 1970s, the mosque supported Boy Scout Troop #357 and held "jazz concerts, street fairs, martial arts demonstrations, cook outs, and public educational programs."[130] The MIB worked in local hospitals as well, such as Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. There they connected with the Young Lords, a Latinx Power organization deeply committed to community-based social welfare and activism against racial capitalism.[131] After COINTELPRO broke apart the Lords in the late 1960s, roughly ten former members would convert and join MIB and later start their own mosque in Harlem called Allianza Islamica with a strong focus on public health.

New Immigrants and the Muslim Students Association

The current of the Islamic Revival did not only spark intellectual developments and new charitable practices in African American-centered Muslim communities. It also animated the visions of a small but vocal minority among the large numbers of Muslim immigrants who were able to come to the United States after the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. On average, these Muslims immigrants were wealthier, held professional education, and could more easily bring family members. Even as working class and undocumented Muslims continued to arrive as well, these more economically privileged Muslims enjoyed greater visibility and wealth that could be directed towards religious activity.

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[129] I cannot find any primary sources from the community that detail any residential developments, save the mosque itself, which was bought for a very low price in return for fixing it up and shaping the street life of the neighborhood. The housing project was approved through the city's "sweat equity program for restoring blighted residential housing." Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage*, 69.

[130] Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam," 295.

[131] Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam," 284.

Before this policy change, there was a small growths of foreign Muslim students in American universities. Since WWII, these students brought with them experiences of colonial resistance and by the 1960s had been exposed to, if not involved, in Islamic revivalist social or political programs that promised Islam as a "system" superior to the Western model and a corrective to the failure of nationalist socialist regimes.[132] Those motivated by these new ideas saw the United States as a blank template to create a Muslim community guided by an Islamic ethos unbounded by culture, ethnicity, or any worldly marker of identity.[133]

In 1963, four foreign male students, who were Arab, Iranian, and African and inspired by Islamic revivalism, founded the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign.[134] Other Muslim students and their families started affiliate chapters, so that by 1968 there were 105 local associations across North America. In its first years, the MSA received funds from Kuwait and Pakistan and connected with the Muslim World League, which would be a major funder for institutional growth over the next two decades.[135]

National level MSA leaders took on a missionary zeal, to bring about a utopian Islam, informed by an ideological understanding of Islam as a "way of life." In the March 1968 issue of the MSA publication *al-Ittihad* (Unity), one writer made a promise to "[sacrifice] our money and wealth, our efforts and knowledge, and our time and lives so as we can see our history being

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[132] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 98, 101.

[133] This "blank template" mindset reflected a disconnect with the long-term presence of African American Muslim communities.

[134] The Iranian student was Shi'a, making the group not only multiethnic and multiracial, but open to differences in major theological traditions.

[135] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 265.

written in the best way we love to see."[136] They positioned the MSA as more religiously rigorous than longer established national organizations like the FIA or mosques lead by classically trained scholars because of their direct, textualist understanding of the Qur'an. The perspectives of the loosely affiliated chapters admittedly included a far wider range of religious opinions.

In its first years, the MSA incorporated ideals of service and charity as a central component of their mission and success as a Muslim organization. As expressed in the *Ittihad* quote above, the values of sacrifice and dedication defined the voluntary labor necessary to run a national organization. Though service was upheld as a shared value, it was enacted through patriarchal ideas of work and visibility. Left out of the central decision-making positions, women started an MSA "Women's Committee" in 1966 that contributed administration, services, and fundraising but was still regarded as a secondary component in the group structure.[137]

Unlike African American Islamic revivalist organizations that used ideas of an Islamic-based society to create material resource-sharing, direct community services, and businesses, the mostly non-black organization focused individually donated material resources and labor on shared religious life. They distributed religious literature, convened group meetings, offered public lectures and prison outreach, and supported children's religious education.[138] Wealth redistribute was restricted to a national *zakat* fund for *zakat*-eligible people in need and specific funds were also created to provide relief abroad to Muslim majority regions suffering from natural or human made disaster. While African American centered organizations focused on the violent realities of social and political inequity in the United States, the MSA framed its

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[136] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 268.

[137] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 265.

[138] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 265.

commitment to Muslims in relation to heritage or religious identification with the "Muslim world," a new iteration of Pan-Islamic solidarity.[139]

African American Communalism Turns to Islamic Revival

Some African American Muslim groups of the time period took a more separatist approach to Islamic revival, while maintaining the value of African American community self-development. An example of this type is the Dar ul-Islam, which was started in 1962 by a small group of African American men who studied under Pakistani Tablighi Jama'at missionary Hafis Mahbub at the Islamic Mission of American in Brooklyn, New York. He explained Islam as a "complete way of life" that begins with personal transformation and progresses to complete social reform.[140]

Three years later the study group founded "Yasin Mosque" in Brownsville, Brooklyn as a form of *hijra* to a new beginning, to "formulate and implement a wholly Islamic environment."[141] In 1965 the group acquired a new mosque space where they also had a dormitory for single men in need of housing.[142] The Dar took a stance that the liberation so often spoken of by civil rights activists, black power revolutionaries, and contemporary anti-colonial thinkers could be achieved

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[139] On the creation and use of the concept of the Muslim or Islamic World in the 20th century see Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[140] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 66.

[141] Kamal Hassan Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam: Principle, Praxis, Movement* (The *Dar-Ul-Islam* History Project, 2009), 3.

[142] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 67. This service is mimicking a practice that had been taken up by several American Muslim communities in California, Michigan, and elsewhere who had encountered the peripatetic Tablighi Jama'at missionaries. It does not necessarily indicate that they were meant for itinerant missionaries. Some new converts chose or were forced to leave their family homes, while other members experienced housing insecurity due to financial instability or poverty.

"via strict adherence to Islamic orthodoxy."[143] To achieve this purity of vision, the group became self-contained, structed by the guidance of a leading imam and the all-male Council of Amirs.

By 1969, the group worked to branch out and recruit other African American Sunni mosques into the movement, with successful links in cities across the East Coast, Midwest, and Los Angeles, California. The Dar also established ties with the Saudi royal family and the Muslim World League, who paid for *hajj* trips and scholarships for study at the Islamic University in Medina.[144]

Founding member Kamal Hassan Ali described all activities during its core years of existence (1962-1983) in his 2003 book according to the five pillars of Islam.[145] In his words, *zakat* is the "collection and distribution of surplus wealth to the poor, the needy, the wayfarer."[146] This is significant, because organizations before this time period of Islamic revival were not regularly using the language of *zakat* or *sadaqah* to describe charitable giving, usually opting to use conventional American English expressions for fundraising, volunteering, and philanthropy.

Starting the section with two Qur'anic verses (2:110, 9:60) and a prophetic tradition on charity, Ali explains that the Dar was created in the context of Brooklyn neighborhoods "defined, in the main, by poverty" and in response "leadership encouraged economic inventiveness" in the form of self-supportive economic practices and community businesses.[147] Dar chapters generated

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[143] Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam,* 4.

[144] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 609. Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam,* 55.

[145] This heuristic mimicked the use of the pillars as a framing device in Dar *da'wah* pamphlets.

[146] Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam,* 30.

[147] Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam,* 31. Page 41 provides an image of the pamphlet with the explanation of the five pillars of Islam.

profits through a magazine, *Al-Jihadul Akbar*; *Dar-ul-Miska* incense brand; street bazaars; and other small businesses. Women were responsible for the Islamic bazaars and fundraisers.

In addition to providing needed employment, some of the profits were used to fund the *bayt al-mal*, or the community's 'house of wealth,' that distributed funds to the needy and funded social services and religious programming.[148] For example, Masjid Mu'minin, a Dar affiliate mosque in Cleveland, Ohio used its *bayt al-mal* for religious instruction, first aid training, a halfway house, community garden, food donation project, and local drug patrols.[149] Even with the set intention for collective wealth for communal living, Robert Dannin argues that the group, in fact, mainly relied on "[employment] wages and welfare subsidies" for funding.[150] After leadership and budget issues, the original movement weakened in the late 1970s but members spread out to led mosques in Cleveland, New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.

Outside of the Dar, the Islamic Party of North America (IPNA) also represented another black-centered Islamic revivalist organization, started in 1971 by Caribbean immigrant Yusuf Muzzafuaruddin Hamid. Like the 19th century Islamic modernist Jamal ad-Din Afghani, Hamid traveled in the 1960s to connect with major Islamist activity of his time in Turkey, Palestine, and Pakistan, including an audience with Abul A'la Maududi. In 1971 he settled in Washington, D.C. and recruited African American university students and others from the black middle class to Masjid al-Umma, his vision of a *hijra* from mainstream society to a society organized by Islam.

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[148] Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam,* 33.

[149] Bowen, *Renaissance,* 607. This mosque was also known as the Islamic Revivalist Movement.

[150] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage,* 67.

Members participated in collective living and wealth, and some maintained a taxi service to generate revenue.[151] IPNA represented a strongly internationalist Black-informed Islam.

Conclusion

Muslim charitable activity over the course of the century grew significantly in reach from internally focused mutual aid practices to religious giving aimed at impacting the domestic and international socio-economic order. At the start of the century, Muslim communities shared the greatest proximity because of similar demographic experiences of being working class people of color in a white nationalist society. Moving into the post-World War II period, we see greater socio-economic diversity demographically among Muslims and diverging responses to the economic order of racial capitalism domestically and internationally in Muslim majority spaces. In addition, we see the beginnings of powerful post-colonial Muslim majority states sending money to support and influence Muslim life here.

At the end of the 1960s, two dominant perspectives emerged on collective religious giving that correlated with but was not caused by differences in class and racialization. From one perspective, American racial capitalism was not directly critiqued, and Islamic charity was understood as individuals giving from their personal wealth to ensure religious life flourished here in the United States, which expanded nationally through the work of the nascent Muslim Students Association (MSA). Caring for the needy was an obligation incumbent on individuals and could be organized through groups like the MSA for *zakat* collection and distribution.

The second dominant conception of religious giving led by African Americans made a strong critique of racial capitalism and centered the poor and marginalized as central actors who

[151] Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage*, 69-70.

could change these unjust socio-economic conditions through their practices of religious giving. This framework encouraged collectivist wealth practices, building local businesses, social services, and community wellness programs to ensure spiritual and material uplift for both Muslims and their surrounding community members. In the next chapter, I explore these two American Muslim interpretations of Islamic charity and their praxis as they develop further and respond to the conditions of the 1970s and 1980s.

Chapter 2
Building Prototypes for Organizing American Muslim Charity: 1970s and 1980s

In the summer 1986, a woman in Indiana was "made a celebrity" for donating her earrings to the cause of Islam.[1] Among roughly 4,000 Muslims in attendance at the annual conference of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) in Indianapolis, Indiana she had distinguished herself during the crowded closing fundraising appeal by giving not just a check or cash, as others had lined up to do, but objects valuable to her. We know of her stirring act beyond the brief fame among attendees because it was included in a conference report titled, "the Onus is on You!" in the October 1986 edition of *Islamic Horizons*, the central publication of ISNA.[2]

This celebratory event in the mid-1980s demonstrates significant developments in American Muslim charity over the 1970s and 1980s which will be explored and explained in this chapter. Most notably, the conditions of racial capitalism shifted to a new orienting logic of multiculturalism and neoliberal policy. The momentum for radical change found in the late 1960s Ethnic Power organizations was blunted and people of color were encouraged to focus on cultural and religious organization building evacuated of political critique of structural inequality. At the same time, the striking down of racial quotas for immigration in 1965 created

[1] Zulf M. Khalfan, "The Onus is on You!," *Islamic Horizons* (October 1986), 9.

[2] Khalfan, "The Onus."

new possibilities with hundreds of thousands of people from Asia and Africa bringing new ideas, experiences, and needs to America.

Following the larger argument from chapter one, I argue that the change in racial capitalism and the altered demographics from new immigration in the 1970s produced new forms of Muslim charitable practices. In that decade, the two most prominent changes involved the boom of mosque building and the transition of the Nation of Islam into the American Muslim Mission under Warith Deen Mohammed. What is shared in this decade is an investment in middle class values of personal wealth building to provide benefit to Muslim communities.

The chapter then turns to the major socio-political events of the 1980s relevant to Muslim life in the United States. This includes American government policy on the domestic front including dismantling of the welfare state and abandonment of urban people of color. Internationally it involved US engagement in self-interested global affairs to boost its political and economic dominance, often at the expense of Muslim majority populations – most notably in the Afghan-Soviet War. American Muslim responses to these new conditions of racial capitalism were diverse. In all cases, religious charity was interpreted as a tool of resistance to the suffering and exploitation of Muslims, and often more broadly of people of color.

The final section explores the three most influential Muslim organizations' religious responses to racial capitalism through charity in the 1980s: the Islamic Society of North America, the American Muslim Mission (AMM); and the revived Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan. I argue that the AMM and the NOI pragmatically used capitalist practices of Black business to create community wealth for the ultimate purpose of building a liberated, Islamically-guided collectivist community. In contrast, ISNA slowly created a bureaucratic, humanitarian organization that sought to alleviate Muslim suffering abroad and build institutions for religious

life in the US. This model would ultimately inform the creation of American Muslim humanitarian charities in the 1990s.

1970s: Multiculturalism and American Empire

In the 1970s, shifts in the relationship between race, economics, and culture created a new context from which Muslims in the United States lived and thought about Islam and charity. Black power and other ethnic power movements of the late 1960s were mostly dismantled or significantly weakened by the covert and illegal FBI Counter Intelligence Program (1956 to 1977).[3] Nonetheless, these movements' critiques as well as uprisings by majority people of color in urban centers, met with violent government suppression, conveyed the incapacity of civil rights legislation to create the universal equality promised by post-WWII racial liberalism.

This is not to say that new equal opportunity protections and affirmative action did not introduce resources for women and people of color to obtain gains in personal rights and institutional access. However, these new rules could not force changes in entrenched attitudes and systematic practices to maintain the status quo. These laws also arrived in a period of economic change that reduced social welfare and increased financial volatility after over two decades of postwar national economic growth.

Several factors contributed to this new economic reality. Generally, the United States saw continued deindustrialization and white flight (and their collective wealth) to the suburbs, putting a strain on city budgets that provided substantive services. At the time, government policy was guided by a Keynesian economic philosophy to provide protections for basic social welfare, employment for all citizens, and financial regulation. Budget strains in the early 1970s, coupled

[3] The COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) within the FBI worked to discredit and violently oppress leftist organizations critical of violent American imperialism and domestic inequalities.

with growing distrust of government spending due to the Vietnam War, gave credence to Milton Friedman and other critics of Keynesian economics that influenced President Richard Nixon to abandon the Brenton-Woods economic system in 1971.

However, the full blow to the welfare-based system came with the economic crisis in 1974, set off by the oil embargo of October 1973 to March 1974, a punishment from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) for any nation that supported Israel in the Arab-Israeli War (1973). The embargo caused a global stock market crash and the United States saw a "stagflation" of rising inflation and unemployment into the end of the decade. Federal, state, and city governments moved towards reductions in economic protections and social welfare in favor of a free market approach that could theoretically "stimulate capital growth."[4] Instead, the wealth gap widened and capitalist accumulation continued to work through racial hierarchies of value, resulting in re-segregation and "the accelerated control of the economic prerogatives of private capital over Black and Brown lives."[5]

Culturally, the failure of racial liberalism led to the demand for an orienting logic to defend this new form of racial capitalism and also accommodate the significant increase in racial and ethnic diversity after the 1965 Harts-Cellar Act. Following the work of Lyndon B. Johnson in the second half of the 1960s, President Richard Nixon continued policies to ensure desegregation, promote racial equality by law, and supported the Equal Rights Amendment of 1972. American inclusion and unity through shared values and assimilation, centered on Christian and Jewish white immigrants, was now replaced by the logic of multiculturalism.

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[4] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 27.

[5] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy,* 31.

Adapting to a new era, multiculturalism as a logic of racial capitalism took the language of radical Black and ethnic power movements and separated it from its materialist critiques of inequality. Racial justice thus became a matter of recognition. Americans were encouraged to be tolerant and celebrate their country as an "internalized model of global diversity," whitewashed of the history of radical critique and direct action to abolish racial hierarchies.[6]

The only channel given to people of color within multiculturalism was appeals to "representation" as valuable parts of the status quo. Meanwhile white people and other privileged groups who accepted cultural diversity were deemed morally good without confronting unearned material and social benefits.[7] Any structural analyses of race were met with scorn, paradoxically leaving space for explicitly racist arguments against multiculturalism in defense of meritocracy and in opposition to the "unfair advantage" given to people of color through affirmative action.

Within multiculturalism, people of color were celebrated in as much as they were seen as capable and willing to participate in a society that was still discriminatory and structurally unequal. Indigence or a lack of political power among marginalized groups was a mark of incapacity, most glaringly represented in the manufactured image of Black "welfare queens" who were trapped by their own culture of poverty.[8] In 1971, President Nixon declared the "War on Drugs," ostensibly to curb the illegal drug trade but the program was used to criminalize poor Black and Latinx people, paving the way for mass incarceration.

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[6] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy,* 32, 35.

[7] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy,* 37.

[8] Martin Gilens, "How the Poor Became Black: The Racialization of American Poverty in the Mass Media," in *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform*, eds. Sanford F. Schram, et al. (University of Michigan Press, 2003), 101-130.

Arabs in the United States, and those perceived to be Arab, were treated as incapable of membership within multiculturalism because of popular interpretations of the Middle East. Although the United States government and natural resource companies had close relationships with several Middle Eastern governments, popular media upheld images and narratives of a senseless and violent Arab world, in opposition to the US and Europe. To be Arab, was to be anti-American by default, thereby encouraging discriminatory treatment and suspicion. In response to discrimination within multiculturalism, several Arab American associations were founded: The Association of Arab-American University Graduates (1967); National Association of Arab Americans (1972); and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (1980).[9]

In this decade, there are two major developments within Muslim communities I explore in the following two sections: the changing logic of the Nation of Islam and the significant growth in mosques and schools across the country.

Transitions in the Nation of Islam: Moving Away from Strict Collectivism

The Nation of Islam in the beginning of the 1970s projected strength and sustainable growth of their business and development projects through their newspapers and official reports. Controlling over $80 million dollars in assets, the Nation was the "richest black organization in American history."[10] Elijah Muhammad continued to promote Black-centric freedom and power outside of white power structures. Personal responsibility, education, employment and a "ascetic

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[9] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 303, 306.

[10] Richard Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Indianapolis, IL: Indiana University Press, 2003), 224; Patrick D. Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2: The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975 (New York: Brill, 2017), 636.

life of thrift and savings," was expected in addition to supporting Black businesses and contributing labor and money to Nation programs for religious and social needs.[11]

In a 1970s pamphlet titled *Accomplishments of The Muslims*, the Nation of Islam displayed a variety of industrial and service-based business that promised a level of prosperity denied to most African Americans. Under an image for a development in Phoenix, Arizona, it explained, "Messenger Muhammad desires to tear down the slums and build us new Homes, Schools, Temples, Shopping Centers and safe communities for our children to grow in the way of the peaceful and righteous."[12] Echoing *Message to the Black Man* (1965), these developments centered on land, property ownership, and social services, like education and healthcare, as the keys to the salvation from the exploitative and evil American empire.[13] Land made it possible to be "producers and not remain consumers or employees."[14]

With Black power movements mostly dismantled in the early 1970s, the Nation's focus on business creation and community uplift was reinterpreted by mainstream white politicians and media as a convenient model to promote for African Americans – centering a "bootstraps" mentality evacuated of structural racism. Although Elijah Muhammad continued to speak against the white establishment, some of his public speeches could be interpreted to align with critics of

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[11] Lawrence Mamiya, "From Black Muslim to Bilalian: The Evolution of a Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, No. 2 (June 1982), 147.

[12] The Nation of Islam, "Accomplishments of the Muslims," *Nation of Islam Publication* (undated, early 1970s).

[13] *The Fall of America* became the title of Elijah Muhammad's 1973 book, detailing the signs of the end of days and the salvation guaranteed to all righteous original people. See Bowen, *A History of Conversion*, 636. High schools in the Sister Clara system were referred to as Universities of Islam. In 1970 there is evidence of a Nation run adoption agency in Chicago.

[14] Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man* (Phoenix, AZ: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 1973), *56*.

multiculturalism from neoconservative fronts. For example, in one 1974 speech he stated, "[the] slave master is no longer hindering us, we're hindering ourselves. The slave master has given you all he could give you. He gave you freedom. Now get something for yourself."[15] Again, this same argument could be found in *Message to the Blackman*, his manifesto from 1965, but it now resonated differently with white civic leaders who offered public praise for the Nation's work.

Covert efforts to dismantle the Nation of Islam, however, continued into the 1970s. A 1969 COINTELPRO document describes the NOI as non-violent but still a "real racial threat" and the "personal fiefdom" of Elijah Muhammad who was enriching himself through the misuse of member donations and labor.[16] The FBI strategy was to wait until his death when they could prop up a successor who would "change the philosophy of the NOI to one of strictly religious and self-improvement orientation, deleting the race hatred and separate nationhood aspects." Alternative approaches included "generating factionalism" and "legal action" to tie up and possibly seize Nation assets, a popular FBI strategy against "un-American" organizations.[17]

Before Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, available evidence does not provide a clear picture of the socio-economic condition of the Nation's members and whether its disciplined lifestyle had succeeded in economically uplifting members.[18] Evelyn Akbar, the head secretary

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[15] Rosemary Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the 'Ground Zero Mosque' Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 50.

[16] "COINTELPRO Black Extremist Part 09 of 23: Counterintelligence Program / Black Nationalist – Hate Groups / Racial Intelligence / (Nation of Islam) January 6, 1969," *FBI Records: The Vault*, 141, https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists/cointelpro-black-extremists-part-08-of/view.

[17] "COINTELPRO Black Extremist," 145.

[18] Looking at social science data from this time period, there was a general movement of some African Americans into the middle class in the 1960s and early 1970s, benefiting from general economic prosperity, civil rights legislation, as well as specifically African American efforts to increase higher education and obtain secure employment and strong benefits in the public sector. Nonetheless, African Americans still held significantly less wealth and lower average incomes than white citizens, suffered significantly higher percentages of unemployment and poverty, and endured continued segregation and

of the Oakland, California mosque reported, "Everybody who has been in the movement for 10 years or more has moved upward. You can't help it because the Hon. Elijah Muhammad's message was strongly economic… uplifting people's education and economics."[19] In the late 1960s, Muhammad had also begun to recruit from among middle-class and college educated African Americans to bring expertise to Nation programs, shifting away from exclusive "fishing" (proselytizing) among the Black lower-class.

While many members could have fought their way into the middle class using Nation advice, there is also evidence that many rank and file members remained poor. The Nation standard of a patriarchal household - a working father, domestic mother, and no birth control- was "rarely financially achievable for Black families."[20] The reality was that married women worked and were irreplaceable labor for Nation businesses, sewing uniforms, teaching in schools, and staffing bakeries. Because women's salaries were only regarded as *supplements* to their husband's income, it was common practice to pay them less than minimum wage and only for alternative weeks of work in Nation businesses.[21] Due to financial strains, women reported a common practice of not legally registering their marriage in order to obtain welfare benefits for single parents from the "Mother nation," i.e., the federal government.[22]

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discriminatory exclusion from jobs, housing, and government services. See "Black Americans, 1963–1973," *CQ Researcher*, No. 2 (August 15, 1973), http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1973081500.

[19] Mamiya, "From Black Muslim to Bilalian," 147.

[20] Ula Yvette Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 107.

[21] Taylor, *The Promise,* 113.

[22] Taylor, *The Promise,* 120.

Qualitative interviews also confirm financial fatigue among Muslim men. By the late 1960s, each Muslim man had to purchase and sell a weekly quota of *Muhammad Speaks* newspapers. The amounts increased over time and most suffered a financial loss, stacking up old, unsold papers in a closet or garage. Even as the father/breadwinner model was extolled, ministers summoned Muslim men for service to the centralized Nation both in low wage and voluntary work. In one dramatic story from 1974, men at Mosque No. 26 in San Francisco were told that Elijah Muhammad "needs you to push his program. He wants you to give up the white man's jobs."[23] Several men that day accepted the call and left their positions but suffered financially.

When Elijah Muhammad passed away on February 25, 1975, he left behind a Muslim community that had a strong sense of community, support mechanism for sharing resources, and mixed socio-economic status. Although not all members had moved into the middle class, the religious values as espoused and practiced by members were aspirational towards it. What still separated members from the white majority relationship to normative "middle class values" was the commitment to communal uplift and Black-owned business from the position of escaping the continued effects of structural racism.[24]

The future direction of the Nation was decided by Elijah Muhammad in the surprising choice of his son Warith Deen Mohammed as successor.[25] Warith Deen had frequently bucked the Nation's basic theological tenants and was close to Malcolm X. However, he explained that his father succeeded in resurrecting African Americans from the blindness of the Jim Crow era

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[23] Taylor, *The Promise,* 118.

[24] Edward Curtis, "Islamizing the Black Body: Ritual and Power in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam," *Religion and American Culture* 12, No. 2 (Summer 2002): 167-196.

[25] He was born Wallace Fard Muhammad but changed his name in 1980 to Warith Deen Mohammed.

and he was chosen to enact a "Second Resurrection" towards the message of the Qur'an. In an article from his first months in leadership, he drew a parallel between the Prophet Muhammad enlightened by the Qur'an and "Black people" favored "with the bright light of Truth from Almighty God to lift the darkness of ignorance and to light the whole world of man."[26] This enlightenment is possible through Islam, the Qur'an, and the five pillars of Islam.

In the same article, Mohammed describes *zakat* as an act of giving from your money, mind, and heart to "those who need," and an "institution which strives to attain equality in the distribution of wealth with which Allah has blessed his creatures." Upon taking leadership, Mohammed re-oriented the Nation's economic strategy alongside spiritual and organizational transformations to create "equality in the distribution of wealth" among African Americans.[27]

Mohammed's economic plan in his first years of leadership was a strong departure from his father's Nation because it began a slow process of democratization and decentralization of leadership and wealth. First, the communal call for separate land was abandoned and Muslims were encouraged to embrace their American citizenship to reap the full benefits of political and social membership. In a 1977 speech he also endorsed military service because "as citizens of the United States of America we are obliged to defend the USA."[28] In 1978, the renamed World

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[26] W.D. Muhammad, "The Night of Power," *Muhammad Speaks*, September 26, 1975, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/9-26-75.html. Here Mohammed has not changed his name nor the name of the Nation's newspaper, which would go through several iterations over the following decade. New Africa Radio is a website run by Leslie Taha and Choling Taha as a repository for the W.D. Mohammed community, with lectures and articles from 1975-2008. For all sources from their site, I follow their spelling of Mohammed's name.

[27] Muhammad, "The Night of Power."

[28] Clifton Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 71.

Community of Islam in the West (WCIW) won a $22 million contract from the Department of Commerce to produce prepackaged meals for the United States military.

This valuable contract represented Mohammed's re-structuring of the organization to better assist his members economically. Behind its powerful façade, when Mohammed took over the national office was "operating at a loss" despite several million dollars in loans from the Middle East and North Africa. Except for the fish operating business, where the Nation was a major importer for mostly white fish from South America, most other large holdings were not significant profit generators.[29] Elijah Muhammad and the national office had made large, expensive purchases such as a jet and houses that could not be paid off. Therefore, Warith Deen Mohammed immediately "liquidated more than $6 million in long-term debts and tax obligations and…sold less profitable enterprises" but retained some to lease to Muslim and non-Muslim partners who would share their profits.[30] As a leader he wanted to both resolve the Nation's financial strains and provide jobs because, in his words, "profit and money in the bank mean nothing unless it is wisely invested to create more opportunities for people."[31]

Unlike Elijah Muhammad's nationalist message of an independent Nation of "Original People," Mohammed saw his role as a moral leader, to prevent individuals from falling to "crime, welfare, or just idleness" and enjoy "the opportunity to earn a living with [their] own

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[29] For the impact of the Nation's fish business on Nation of Islam members and Black communities, see Theresa Coty O'Neil, "Religion and Fish Come Together in Legacy of Lil Fish Dock, an Eastside Staple," *Second Wave*, February 28, 2019, https://www.secondwavemedia.com/southwest-michigan/features/Religion-and-fish-come-togethe-in-legacy-of-Lil-Fish-Dock-an-Eastside-staple-0228.aspx.

[30] Bowen, *A History of Conversion*, 642; Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 73.

[31] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 169.

individual resources."[32] This quote shows a shift from Black nationalism and a centralized economy towards a greater free market philosophy in the late 1970s, centering private business growth and individual agency as the key to ensure well-being. Several WCIW members gained ownership of former Nation businesses and later mosques, resulting in more localized wealth. In all, Mohammed separated out a centrally controlled practice of economic redistribution and put greater focus on devotional practice as the mark of his reformed Muslim community.

Although the bulk of members followed him into this new stage of development, many community members lamented the loss of the Nation's economic empire. Even if members heard of financial mismanagement or were still poor, it was a minor detail compared to what former Nation member Benjamin Hogue called "a beautiful business model… [with] a good solid economic opportunity that I feel is missing in the so-called orthodoxy community."[33] On the flip side, former Nation members like Hajj Hogue, felt decisions from Chicago "were not in the best interest of the community. They were in the best interest of maintaining their power structure."[34] To change this dynamic, in addition to the financial changes, Mohammed resigned as spiritual leader, became an "ambassador-at-large," and expanded power-sharing to a six-member imam council for the 138 domestic and international mosques.[35]

Nonetheless, Mohammed still commanded a leadership role without officially serving as the head of the organization. This role helped significantly in obtaining financial support from

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[32] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 170-171. Original People referred to African Americans with space for other people of color. This language arose from the creation stories told by Elijah Muhammad, in which humans were originally Black but an evil eugenicist had used Original People to create white people.

[33] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 233.

[34] Howell, *Old Islam,* 226.

[35] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 74.

Muslims abroad who were interested in supporting the largest African American Muslim organization in the United States.[36] In 1975, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat awarded the WCIW twelve university scholarships and in 1979 Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing nations in the Middle East appointed him the "sole consultant and trustee" for the "monies of all Islamic organizations involved in missionary activities in America."[37]

The practice of Black business ownership and community resource sharing continued in WCIW communities but was more vulnerable to the whims of particular personalities and relationships specific to each mosque. Members were encouraged to live piously and create a morally upstanding life through employment and financial independence, including women. A competing perspective would emerge in 1978, when former Nation minister Louis Farrakhan reestablished the Nation of Islam according to the earlier theology of Elijah Muhammad. In the 1980s, Farrakhan would become a foil to Mohammed, focused on the need for more radical socio-economic change among the Black underclass of urban America.

Growth of Local Investment in Mosques and Schools

The number of mosques across the country increased significantly in the 1970s and, with it, obligations to donate for their construction and longevity as religious institutions. This rise was not solely correlated to an increase in population numbers but more generally reflected multiracial communities' capacities and desire to fund a long term, collective place of worship for religious practice, education and community. This growth can be attributed to several factors.

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[36] Many foreign funders were also interested in Mohammed's community because they identified the group as theologically similar to themselves, as fellow Sunnis. Mohammed's community did not fit squarely or used the Sunni label, but Mohammed was trained in Middle Eastern Sunni theological institutions.

[37] Turner, *Islam*, 226.

Regarding the Warith Deen Mohammed community, former Nation mosques obtained independent status and, with that, responsibility to fund themselves and any ancillary programs, such as Sister Clara Muhammad schools. The mixed class membership of members, with arguably more in the middle class, were able to support over 75 main mosques listed in 1975.[38] There was also growth in other African American Sunni mosques, including those affiliated with theological movements like the Dar ul-Islam. However, because of the economic downturn of the 1970s, some independent African American led mosques encountered financial difficulties.

The influx of foreign-born Muslims as students, immigrants, and refugees after the immigration policy change in 1965 affected mosque growth, too. By one estimate, over one hundred mosques and religious organizations were founded by immigrant Muslims in this decade across the country.[39] Some joined and expanded existing majority immigrant-origin mosques, while others founded their own or joined earlier communities to build, buy, or rent new spaces. Shi'a refugees and immigrants bolstered the still small number of Shi'a mosques, bringing with them particular Shi'a charitable donation practices such as *khums*, which were sent to scholars abroad or leaders such as the Aga Khan within the Nizari Ismaili community.[40]

In addition to mosques, Muslims continued to pursue the creation of national organizations, such as the aforementioned Muslim Students Association and the South Asian

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[38] Mamiya, "From Black Muslim to Bilalian," 147. "Temple Listings as of 1975," *Nation of Islam*, posted to *Issuu* by Abdul Khaliq Muhammad on August 6, 2012, https://issuu.com/khaliq91169/docs/muhammad_s_temples_of_islam__1975_. There were also very likely smaller mosques that did not have a designation listed here.

[39] Bowen, *A History of Conversion*, 596; Marc Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims in New York City," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 216-217.

[40] See Liyakat Takim, *Shi'ism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

formed Islamic Circle of North America (1971). Ethnic and ethnicity-specific professional organizations were created to build solidarity, including the National Arab American Medical Association (1975) and the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (1977). Within the multiculturalism order, ethnic organizations were welcome replacements to ethnic power activism because bureaucratic institutions were beholden to the state for legal status and funding opportunities.[41]

As they had in the mid-century, mosques were the site for multiple levels of religious charity from those who used the space. Donations to mosques included combinations of several wealthy patrons, membership dues, annual tithes, fundraisers, and in-kind donations of material and labor. Mosques created before the 1960s by majority immigrants frequently were born from or used a fraternal society model, with members paying annual dues. In the 1970s, immigrant Muslim men who identified with Islamic revival theology critiqued the dues model from several angles. It was deemed too secular or a mimicry of dominant Christian practices, including activities like casino gambling fundraisers that were additionally problematic because they were read as legally forbidden, or *haram*. Critics also argued that dues were religiously unsound because they forced voluntary charity (*sadaqah)*.[42] These concerns won the day at several mosques which began to use an annual budget that was funded only through voluntary donations and revenue from attached schools.

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[41] Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 148-170. Ramamurthy describes the parallel process of bureaucratization that occurred to radical Black (in this context, African, Caribbean, and South Asian British people) organizing in England.

[42] Mary Lahaj, "The Islamic Center of New England," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 304.

By the 1970s, mosques could also regularly turn to international donors, especially Gulf nations and the Muslim World League (MWL). In 1976, the MWL opened their New York City office and Council of Masajid which made "financial and other support available to eligible mosques."[43] For the Islamic Center of New England in Quincy, Massachusetts, a chance encounter with King Saud of Saudi Arabia at a Boston city government event resulted in five thousand dollars for their mosque building efforts.[44] Money was given seemingly without ties, but there are records of American based communities crossing invisible lines and losing support. For example, the Kuwait government gave mosque funding to support nearly a thousand Saudi and Kuwaiti students in southern California but pulled it when they found students to be "too politicized."[45]

Local mosque growth also received a boost in 1973 from the Muslim Students Association when they created the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT). This venture grew from MSA leadership goals to professionalize services; centralize funds to sustain the "Islamic work in North America;" and provide an "interest-free institution" for savings and investments.[46] NAIT began as a mixed enterprise, running a printing press and managing an investment portfolio, but also expanded to hold titles as trustees for Muslim community real estate,

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[43] Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims," 223. *Masajid* is the plural for *masjid* or mosque in Arabic.

[44] Lahaj, "The Islamic Center," 299.

[45] Marcia Hermansen, "The Muslims of San Diego," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 173. These students were mostly studying at the United States International School.

[46] Interview with Br. Jamal al-Barzinji, "N.A.I.T. is a Milestone in Our Endeavors Toward Generating Funds: Certain Quarters Dislike MSA's Growth," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan 1978), 5.

especially for mosques. By February 1978 NAIT held fifteen titles in the United States and Canada.[47]

The final element to the large mosque growth in this decade was the suburban mosque. The American suburb saw its largest growth since World War II, with the highest number of residential constructions on record from 1971 to 1973. By the early 1970s, the number of suburban jobs outnumbered city employment.[48] Causes included a shift towards financial deregulation and major capital investments in real estate coupled with the deindustrialization of urban centers. Some Muslims in the United States moved with this trend and built mosques in the suburbs. They included older communities who had outgrown urban mosques and had the wealth to move to single family homes and fund a new mosque build. In addition, many - but not all - Muslim immigrants who benefited from the 1965 Harts-Cellar Act, came with or earned graduate degrees, entered white collar jobs and could afford to live in the suburbs.

Taking the Detroit area as an example, former South Asian graduate students, now "doctors, lawyers, engineers, and pharmacists," opened the Muslim Center of the Western Suburbs (1977) and the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit (1978). Meanwhile, inner city growth of mosques continued with lower class or mixed-class Muslim communities: Yemenis founded the Islamic Mosque of Yemen of Detroit (1976) and African Americans established

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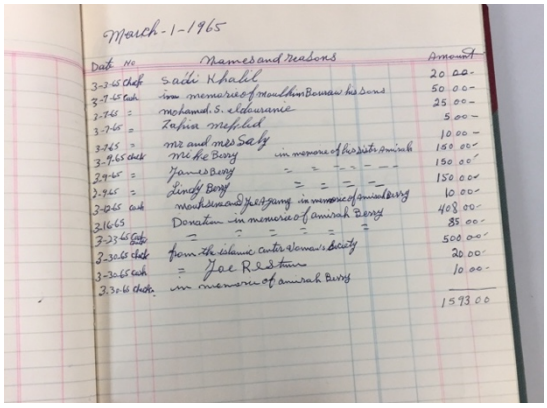
[47] Interview with Br. Jamal al-Barzinji, "NAIT's Investments are Financially Sound: Financial Independence Doesn't Exclude Seeking Donations," *Islamic Horizons* (February 1978), 6.

[48] Becky Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese, "Suburbanization in the United States After 1945," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (2017), oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-64.

Masjid al-Asr (1978), Masjid al-Nur (1981), and Masjid al-Haqq (1981).[49] Similar patterns emerged in large metropolitan areas like New York and Chicago, in addition to communities sprouting up in majority suburban areas of cities like Dallas, Texas or Arlington, Virginia.

Regardless of the type of mosque, the central facilitators of charitable donations were lay leaders, continuing patterns from earlier decades of local mosque creation in the 1940-1960s. This includes board members and community leaders, as well as mosque women's organizations. While lay leaders brought in the largest numbers, Imams are most often on record bringing in large donations from fundraising trips, both domestic and international. Donation records exist from some mosques who kept ledgers as part of their financial records. For example, for the March 1, 1965 record page for the Islamic Mosque of America in Detroit, Michigan, seven donors gave in the name of a deceased member, Amirah Berry.[50] Even though large donations from abroad would garner attention, it was smaller, ongoing, individual, family, and local business donations that built and maintained mosques. What was new to this era was the growing class divisions with the suburbanization of Muslim centers through middle and upper-class


March-1-1965

Date	No.	Names and Reasons	Amount
3-2-65	check	Saïd Khalil	20.00
3-7-65	cash	in memories of moulthin Bouzar his sons	50.00
2-7-65	=	mohamed S. elaouane	25.00
3-7-65	=	Zahra mefield	5.00
3-7-65	=	mr and mrs Saly	10.00
3-9-65	check	mr Ke Berry in memore of the sister Amirah	150.00
2-9-65	=	James Berry = = = = =	150.00
2-9-65	=	Lindy Berry = = = =	150.00
3-10-65	cash	moulthin and his family in memore of amirah Berry	10.00
3-16-65		Donation in memore of amirah Berry	408.00
3-23-65	Cash	= = = = = =	85.00
3-30-65	check	from the islamic center Women's Society	500.00
3-30-65	cash	= Joe Rabstein	20.00
3-30-65	check	in memore of amirah Berry	10.00
			1593.00

Donation ledger from the Islamic Mosque of America in Detroit, March 1965

[49] Howell, *Old Islam,* 255; Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, *Unity Banquet Packet* (2007), 14.

[50] Donation ledger from the Islamic Mosque of America in Detroit, March 1965, Hussein Makled papers, 1956-1999, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan Ann Arbor. The Berry extended family are a prominent part of the Shi'a community in the Greater Detroit area.

wealth. Physical segregation did not prohibit cross-mosque cooperative work, but diminished intimacy between communities.

Changes in the 1980s: Revolution, Invasion, and Reaganomics

Three events shaped the beginnings of the 1980s for Muslims in the United States, which in turn affected their charitable activity. In 1979, the autocratic government of Iran, led by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was overturned by a popular revolution. Through a general referendum, Iran became a theocratic republic organized on the principles of a newly developed Shi'a political concept of *velayat-e faqih*. The revolution's success inspired contrasting responses.

Voices from Muslim majority spaces and other post-colonial nations celebrated the revolution as a victory over oppression under the Shah and his complicity with European and American imperial violence. European and American political theorists were stunned by the central role of religion in the revolution, but its complexities were quickly sidelined to center fifty-two Americans taken hostage in the US embassy in Tehran. The hostage crisis, lasting 444 days into January 1981, became symbolic in the United States as a standoff between a free and diplomatic "West" and a fanatical and draconic "Islamic" and "non-Western" nation.

The second major event was the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, ostensibly to ameliorate political instability by staging a coup and installing a Kremlin friendly leader, Babrak Karmal. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the invasion and the Islamic Conference also called for the "immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Soviet troops."[51] The fragmentary opposition groups in Afghanistan, broadly

[51] Associated Press, "Moslems Condemn Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan 29, 1980, 2,

referred to as the *mujahideen*, were supported morally and financially by two camps: Muslims invested religiously in defending Muslims against atheist occupiers and the US government and allies who sought to stem the Soviet expansion from Central Asia.

The final relevant historical event was the 1980 election of Republican Ronald Reagan to the presidency of the United States. Reagan took an aggressive stance in America's Cold War fight against communism, funding and arming military coups to overthrow popularly elected communist and socialist governments in Latin America and secretly providing ongoing support in Afghanistan to the *mujahideen* guerillas. Reagan also moved forward with drastic economic changes that had begun in the 1970s. His government abandoned finance regulations and welfare protections to create free market opportunities for private business in the United States. Abroad he pursued neo-imperial development through the expansion of Structural Adjustment Programs funded by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Contradictions of Islamophobia and US Foreign Policy

The Iranian Revolution and its triumphalist rejection of American hegemony interrupted the major dynamics of the Cold War. The goal of the US government was the prevention of Soviet control globally, which included intervening in the affairs of non-US aligned nations, sometimes orchestrating wars or coups to install dictators friendly to their interests. Iran was a new kind of player because it was a religious, and specifically Islamic, government, that loudly denounced American imperialism.

Both the US government and mainstream American discourse shifted to vilify Islam and Muslims as the major anathema to democracy and freedom. Words like "terrorist," "fanatic," and

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https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=0esNAAAAIBAJ&sjid=rG0DAAAAIBAJ&pg=6692,3799612&dq=soviet+invasion+of+afghanistan&hl=en.

"extremism" were to become synonymous with political Islamism.[52] Scholars coined a new sociological term, "fundamentalism" to describe modern religious groups who looked to the past "for models of truth and value and reject what they perceive as forms of secularism" but mostly pinned Muslims as singularly allergic to modernity and prone to violent resistance.[53] At the same time, the United States government's choices in economic relationships and influence were not consistent with an anti-Muslim stance. Their actions continued to follow the objective to defend and extend American power globally, including close relationship with Muslim majority states, even those with a stated religious government, like Saudi Arabia. These efforts in the 1980s would become the "template for the War on Terror," to "demonize those resisting US hegemony" with racist and Islamophobic policy.[54]

For example, the US maintained strong connections with Saudi Arabia (KSA). In addition to the World Muslim League and Organization of the Islamic Conference, KSA created an "Islamic financial system": a network of banks, fed by oil-rich countries, that used this wealth to fund the growth of Islamist movements such as "Muslim Brotherhood operations in Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, Turkey and Jordan." Major American banks, with the support of the US government, provided expertise and invested in this new financial market for the free flow of capital, including Goldman Sachs, Citibank, Chase Manhattan, and Price Waterhouse.[55]

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[52] Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2012), 71.

[53] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 307.

[54] Sunaina Marr Maira, *The 9/11 Generation Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 5.

[55] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 69.

More than participation in the petrodollar market, the United States was directly involved in funding major political change towards the Islamism it claimed to oppose. Decades before in Iran, the CIA had provided funds and support for Khomeini's mentor, Ayatollah Abolgassem Kashani, during the 1953 coup d'état to depose democratically elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq and reinstall the Shah. Dubbed "Operation Ajax," these funds and strategic training helped Kashani to "position" Khomeini and the theological class to consolidate power post-revolution, which was not an issue for the US until they lost access to Iran's oil reserves.[56]

The US also worked closely with Afghan fighters during the Soviet invasion who they would later call dangerous "fundamentalists" and deny having ties to. In July 1979, before the Soviet invasion, the CIA, with full approval of President Jimmy Carter, secretly provided aid for various *mujahideen* groups in order to give "the USSR its Vietnam War." Under President Reagan, the US fought a proxy war against the Soviet Union and directed there three billion dollars' worth of aid between itself and its allies, including weapons, training, and reconnaissance to *mujahideen*. They also gave access to conduct fundraising and recruitment in the United States to several paramilitary and religious leaders, including Sheik Azzam, a religious leader to the *mujahideen* who worked closely with the young Saudi-Yemeni ideologue Osama bin Laden.[57]

Azzam traveled across the United States, collecting donations from mosques and events organized by political or religious groups in support of the campaign in Afghanistan. The CIA also encouraged Azzam's network to set up a US branch of their *Maktab al-Khadamat* or Service

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[56] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 70.

[57] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 72.

Bureau, headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan, within the al-Faruq Mosque in Brooklyn, New York. Named Al-Khifa Refugee Center, with satellite offices in New Jersey and Arizona, it channeled funds to the *mujahideen* campaign and Afghan civil relief.[58] In addition to funds, Muslim men from across the globe answered the call to fight in Afghanistan, motivated by Pan-Islamic unity. Some would continue in Kashmir, Bosnia, and Chechnya, supported by global fundraising networks that had initially supported the Afghan cause. Others formed non-state militant groups, the most famous being al-Qaeda, whose co-founder Osama bin Laden had worked closely with the CIA during the Afghan war. Azzam's Service Bureau in Brooklyn transitioned to global efforts to use political pressure and violence for the cause of "global jihad."[59]

These relationships with various Muslim actors ran counter to the official American narrative in the 1980s that divided the world into the free, modern "West" and the despotic and violent "Islamic world." It is not a question of uncovering America's involvement with terrorism – Muslim actors varied widely, and generalization reinforces stereotypes of Islam as inherently political and violent. What is meaningful is that the United States contributed to political turmoil and in some instances instigated violent conflicts in Muslim majority spaces, only to later claim no role in regional instability that allowed the rise of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the early 1990s or despotism in the Middle East. At home, this historical amnesia fed the narrative that no loyal American had political and financial relationships with Muslim majority spaces at war or embroiled in conflict. Conspiracy theories of anti-Western extremism among US Muslims rose

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[58] Elizabeth Grifk, "Muslims in Manhattan: Those Who Built It Up and Those Who Brought It Down" (MA Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2010), 88-89.

[59] Darryl Li, *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

in the 1990s and would have devastating effects on charities after the 2001 terrorist attacks. Tragically, the impetus for these charities was suffering in these same regions devastated by American military interventions, arms sales, and resource extraction.

Muslim Charitable Activity of the 1980s

American Muslims in the 1980s were active in sending significant funds and in-kind donations to Muslim majority regions affected by political conflict, war, and natural disaster. A major motivation for donations was a global surge of religious revival at the start of the decade, expressed in a "self-aware, expressly politized, and *fiqh*-based" understanding of Islam.[60]

The source of this revival is complex. On one level it was born from the failures of secular nationalism in postcolonial states – in part due to continued Euro-American neocolonial exploitation and oppression— and the response from varied intellectual, religious, and political voices that called for "Islamic" solutions to social ills. The Iranian revolution was an incredible endorsement of this prescription. The *mujahideen* fighters in Afghanistan also bolstered feelings of global Islamic unity and added legitimacy to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, as well as other groups that were being suppressed by secularist, Soviet friendly regimes.

Religious revival, however, cannot account for all charitable monies sent abroad. American Muslims with direct links abroad, through immigration or heritage, were aware of and had personal connections to events that affected Muslims in foreign countries. In the institutionalization of community through religious and ethnic organizations of the 1950-1970s, charitable funds were collected and sent to assist with immediate crises or to build schools and mosques abroad. For example, Palestinians organized charity for their homeland through

[60] Howell, *Old Islam,* 276.

community organizations such as the United Holy Land Fund (1968), United Palestine Appeal (1978), and The Jerusalem Fund (1978).[61] New immigrant communities, such as West Africans, arriving in an era of cheaper travel and greater technological connections, could remain close to homelands and kept transnational identities "across a series of imagined localities in which a globalized Islam has become a dominant… discourse."[62] Many belonged to Sufi networks that channeled funds to religious leaders and communities in West Africa.

Imaginative reflection on community was not limited to new diasporic groups. While several older forms of national organization had dissolved for various reasons, whether it was the Federation of Islamic Associations or the Uniting Islamic Society of America, the 1980s saw the solidifying of both old and new national organizations. These groups would provide large-scale religious connection and spur the development of religious thought and activity through the 21st century, including charity. For the next sections, I look at three of the most influential national organizations: the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the American Muslim Mission under Warith Deen Mohammed and the revived Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan. Analyzing their perspectives on charity and economic justice through their organizations' publications, I demonstrate how they created the dominant, competing positions among American Muslims that shaped the emergence of large scale humanitarian charities in the 1990s.

Islamic Horizons: MSA/ISNA Organize and Lead Organized Charity Here and Abroad

Founded in 1983 as an umbrella organization for Muslim religious, professional, and service groups, the Islamic Society of North America was the creation of several earlier student

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[61] The Jerusalem Fund was originally called the American Palestine Educational Foundation.

[62] JoAnn D'Alisera, *An Imagined Geography: Sierra Leonean Muslims in America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Pres, 2004), 7, 11.

and professional organizations working alongside 38 Muslim communities across the United States and Canada, who all saw a need for a centralized Islamic organization to unite the diverse Muslims of North America.[63] Once incorporated, ISNA inherited the main publication of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) called *Islamic Horizons*.[64]

At the time of the mid-1980s article about donated earrings referenced at the start of the chapter, *Islamic Horizons* had a wide distribution in North America and letters continuously poured in globally, including those from prominent Islamist theologians and politicians. In the mid-1980s subscriptions can be estimated to have been in the high thousands to possibly the low tens of thousands from members, incarcerated individuals, mosques, universities, and professional organizations.[65] Among several regular topics, charitable giving was a central concern and action item in *Islamic Horizons* (IH), explained and encouraged through appeals, advertisements, and articles like the article at the start of the section.

Most immediately, ISNA needed charitable support to fund its work and created processes and structures to obtain it. But as a larger moral goal, ISNA worked to promote the

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[63] The main organizations that created ISNA were the Muslim Students Association, the Islamic Medical Association (now IMANA), the Association of Muslim Scientists & Engineers, and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists.

[64] ISNA also ran two other publications in its early history: *Al-Ittihad* and the *American Journal of Islamic Studies*.

[65] It most likely did not surpass the distribution levels of World Muslim News, the new iteration of former Nation of Islam publication *Muhammad Speaks*, that had circulation rates of well over fifty thousand copies across the United States. *Muhammad Speaks* peaked at roughly 70,000 in the late 1960s; see: Bowen, *A History of Conversion*, 497. The publication of Warith Deen Muhammad's community peaked in the late 1970s at 98,450 and the last available data from 1981 placed it at 80,000; see: Malachi Crawford, "Bilalian News and the World Community of Al-Islam in the West" (MA Thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2003), 42. *Islamic Horizons* was running near 60,000 copies in the early 2000s, but subscriptions dipped to 9,000 in the early 2010s due to "financial constraints"; see Nadia Malinovich, "The Americanization of Islam in the Contemporary United States," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* (September 2006), 100, 109 and Saif Shahin, "Unveiling the American-Muslim Press: News Agendas, Frames, and Functions," *Journalism* 16:7 (2015), 884–903: 887.

regular practice of religious charity as part of its quest to create a strong, shared Muslim culture in North America. The majority of formally organized charitable campaigns by North American Muslims in the 1980s for what were deemed Islamic causes were either done in conjunction with international political and missionary (*da'wa*) activity or as a method of collective communal resource consolidation and distribution among domestic Muslim communities. Over this same period, ISNA created structures and standards to support Islamic charity according to a new model based on the Euro-American field of humanitarianism. And true to its call, in its first decade ISNA successfully created and facilitated comprehensive charitable structures based on this model. It used the platform of *Islamic Horizons* in this process to present itself as *the* representative organization for Muslims' communal charitable practice even as it published debates and critiques of its own methods.

In its opening decade, ISNA transformed *Islamic Horizons* from the fraternal newsletter of the late 1970s MSA into a formal magazine that promoted a particular picture of what American charity was and should be from the perspective of organizational leadership.[66] The magazine was kept as a selective archive, its function to support ISNA's religious vision and organization-building. In other words, in their attempt to be *the* premier Muslim organization in North America, ISNA invested in the construction of an archival catalog *qua* bimonthly magazine to serve as a universal representation of American Muslim religious perspectives and

[66] Currently, there are only two direct studies of *Islamic Horizons*. Malinovich, "The Americanization of Islam" and two overlapping works by Saif Shahin: "Unveiling the American-Muslim Press" and "News Framing as Identity Performance." Malinovich looks at Islamic education to understand how ISNA presents its vision for American Muslim life whereas Shahin is interested in the way organizational identity, especially its racial components, plays into how news events are presented to a larger Muslim public.

performance – despite the particular ideological and demographic identity of its leadership and their editorial choices about what did and did not appear in its pages.[67]

By calling *Islamic Horizons* an "archive" of ISNA, I am following Michel Foucault's definition, where the archive is more than the "mass of texts" specific to a discipline. It operates as a "law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" by framing truth – or in this case correct religion- as only possible within its discursive apparatus.[68] Regarding charity, ISNA encouraged certain forms of charity over others in their choices of what to feature in the magazine, centering international humanitarian campaigns for Muslims populations abroad and funding domestic mosques, schools, and their own institutionalization as a benefit to all American Muslims.

This interpretation of Islamic charity did not form immediately. In its first decade as an ISNA publication, *Islamic Horizons* moved from a more overtly political, Pan-Islamic call to charitable giving to a Euro-American humanitarian paradigm of universal compassion and neoliberal development funded by American Muslim citizens. Campaigns led by individual members became projects, bureaucratically managed by the organization. What was consistent across the shift was ISNA's use of *Islamic Horizons* to claim they provided both a representative picture of North American Muslim charity while idealizing their own model of practice.

Less explicitly, the majority male, professional, and mostly South Asian (with some Arab) Sunni leadership of ISNA centered themselves as the default Muslim donor participant in this model. Going back to the conference report featured at the start of the chapter, while the

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[67] Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Libraries and the Academy* 4, No. 1 (2004), 15.

[68] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 129.

anonymous woman with earrings provided a heartwarming anecdote in one sentence, the main focus on fundraising in the piece was on a group of men - several named - organizing a donor-member program to ensure the financial solvency and independence of ISNA.[69] Even though a diversity of Muslims participated in ISNA and *Islamic Horizons* itself as writers, editors, and subscribers, the dominant identity of the organizational leadership provided the framing for its content.[70]

Large scale Canadian and American Islamic relief and development charities began to emerge in the 1990s as a sphere of North American Muslim organizational life and they adopted this new model of practicing and defining Islamic charity. While I do not claim a direct outgrowth from ISNA's institutionalization of charitable activity to early organizations like Human Relief International, Islamic Relief-USA, and Life for Relief and Development, it laid theological and organizational groundwork for the emergence of these large scale North American Muslim relief and development charities at the turn of the 21st century.

This section on ISNA will move through three periods of the archival process within *Islamic Horizons* from the founding of ISNA in 1983 to the turn of the 1990s. First, I will show how ISNA followed the MSA's goal for creating a shared Muslim culture and rapidly created a three-part apparatus to organize American and Canadian Muslims' charitable giving on domestic and international fronts. Second, I will show that in this early period the archive of *Islamic Horizons* was more informal and participatory, which allowed for instances of direct critique by everyday Muslims. The final section will show the closing of the archive to the larger Muslim

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[69] Khalfan, "The Onus," 9.

[70] Saif Shahin, "News Framing as Identity Performance: Religion Versus Race in the American-Muslim Press," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39/4 (2015), 339.

public's immediate participation, to ensure epistemological and historical consistency for ISNA as it because a professional, self-sufficient non-profit organization.

At the end of the 1980s, *Islamic Horizons* operated as a professionally managed archive that promoted bureaucratically organized humanitarian practice of Islamic charity. It prioritized relief abroad to Muslim majority regions and religious institution building at home and worked to be a unifying space for all North American Muslims even as it inadvertently reinforced gender and ethnic centering of Arab and South Asian Sunni men in ISNA leadership.[71] To call the archive formally managed or closed is not to imply a limit or curb, but to signal the effectiveness of how ISNA professionalized its magazine and solidified its religious vision for North American Muslim religious life. ISNA's success set an example for the newly emerging field of large-scale Islamic charities in North America that would become a mainstay of North American Muslim organizational life by the 2000s.

Stage One: The Establishment of the Islamic Society of North America

While the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and later the Islamic Society of North America were inspired by foreign Islamist movements, especially Jama'at-e Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood, they did not see their organization as an Islamic movement in the same way because they operated outside of what they saw as the "Muslim world."

Instead of forming political parties or directly shaping the state apparatus, in a 1978 *Islamic Horizons* article ISNA leader M. Tariq Quraishi is quoted proposing that MSA should "utilize the available resources of the Muslim World to build Islamic institutions" here because

[71] On the prominence of South Asian Muslim leaders in national American Muslim organizations in the 1970-1980s, see Karen Leonard, "South Asian Leadership of American Muslims," in *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens,* ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 233-249.

the North American community can help "leverage for the best interests of the Muslim ummah."[72] The first ad for a separate Muslim charity organization did not appear until 1987 for the Canadian organization Human Concern International (HCI) and remained the only Muslim charity to do so that decade. Therefore, charitable activity described and fostered by *Islamic Horizons* for their two aims of domestic "Muslim community development" and international "Muslim relief effort[s]" was nearly exclusive to ISNA during this formative period.[73]

Concerns about injustice against and the suffering of Muslims abroad received the largest amount of attention for charitable fundraising in the magazine of the 1980s. Each issue had reports and analysis of political struggles in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe as well as natural catastrophes, which were identified as the "problem" and "duty" of all Muslims to ameliorate if not solve.[74] In a 1981 article, MSA President Sayyid M. Sayeed described the Muslim world as plagued with "decadence, division, confusion, instability" and an "inferiority complex" caused by two systems of exploitation that divide humans by either individualism (capitalism-liberalism) or class (socialism-communism).[75]

To address these crises of the Muslim world, *Islamic Horizons* informed readers about these events, published letters from individuals or organizations in the field, and then created specific funds to provide monetary support for the cause. While some funds were short lived, such as the 1976 Turkey earthquake fund, most stayed open to provide continued aid and later

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[72] N. Rasheed, "Why Immigrants?," *Islamic Horizons* (May 1978), 2.

[73] "Islamic Horizons Readership Survey," *Islamic Horizons* (March 1987), 33.

[74] Ayyub Thakkur, "Kashmir: Paradise Lost," *Islamic Horizons* (Nov/Dec 1989), 44.

[75] "MSA Third Summer Conference: Islamic Change is Moral and Spiritual," *Islamic Horizons* (July 1981), 7.

for long term education and development projects.[76] *IH* often published accounts of staff or volunteers who journeyed to service sites to connect readers emotionally to the service work.[77] Readers were encouraged to pledge to each fund, preferably with ongoing donations and were also urged to "take the initiative and organize your community to become systematically involved in…efforts" to support these "Muslim causes" abroad.[78] By the late 1980s, ISNA was receiving around $1 million for their international relief funds.[79]

The most active fund in terms of advertisements and appeals in the 1980s, far outpacing others, was the Somali Relief Fund that supported mostly refugees displaced by local conflict. Beyond basic needs, fund organizers were especially concerned about "Christian missionaries and relief organizations, in addition to the secular ones, [having] unlimited access to the Muslim refugees, 90 percent of whom were Muslim women and children without husbands or other male relatives to take care of them."[80] ISNA worked for their projects to have legitimacy in the Euro-American humanitarian field, which demanded impartiality and independence, but used *Islamic Horizons* to continuously expressed suspicion of Christian organizations who used neo-colonial access to vulnerable Muslim populations in need to engage in proselytization.[81]

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[76] "An Investment in People: Indian Muslim Relief Committee of the Islamic Society of North America," *Islamic Horizons* (July 1987), 16.

[77] Nadifa Abdi, "The Long Way Home," *Islamic Horizons* (Jul/Aug 1989), 44-48.

[78] Nasim Sarvaiya, "Helping the Cause," *Islamic Horizons* (December 1988), 5.

[79] Amer Haleem, "Editor Response: Where is Everybody?," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988), 5.

[80] "Dawood: A Man Who Brings Feeling to His Work," *Islamic Horizons* (January 1983), 11.

[81] This concern continued throughout the decade. See Ali Mukhtar Mahmoud, "Refugees in Somalia" *Islamic Horizons* (March 1986), 12.

The Afghan Relief Fund, offering both direct support to *mujahideen* and later general humanitarian aid, was the fund that received the most attention in the 1980s by way of the extensive articles and condemnation of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (and to a lesser extent Pakistani obsequiousness to it) in the 1980s. In a 1983 advertisement, Afghan Relief Committee Chairman Muhammad Afzal urges readers to "come forward and help your fighting brothers in Afghanistan" with "donations, zakah, sadaqat and other contributions," ending with Qur'an 9:44-45 regarding believers who "[fight] with their goods and persons."[82]Afghanistan was held up as a universal, "pure" cause for Muslims, and echoing the United States official stance, the *mujahideen* and their leaders were heralded as selfless fighters for the cause of God.[83]

In general, MSA/ISNA raised funds for causes that elicited Muslim sympathy that *also* were in need of support. For this reason, although ISNA had both the Occupied Land Relief Fund (for Palestine) and the Relief Fund for Palestine, they only displayed one ad for them between 1976-1989 and did not mention their programs in the frequent articles and reports on Israel/Palestine. When one college student wrote a letter to the editor to ask, how he could "personally help the cause of Palestinians," the editors encouraged him to write to the media and government officials, organize locally, and donate to ISNA's Palestine funds but pivoted at the end, saying, "There are many Muslim causes that also need to be remembered: That of Kashmiris, Indian Muslims, Afghanis, and Muslims here in North America. The challenge is really one: Establish Islam and the dignity of a believing life on earth."[84] While ISNA supported

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[82] "MSA Afghan Relief Fund Committee," *Islamic Horizons* (February 1983), 16.

[83] "Hikmat Yar Visits ISNA Headquarters: Struggle for Islamic State in Afghanistan Continues," *Islamic Horizons* (Nov/Dec 1985), 10.

[84] Nasim Sarvaiya, "Helping the Cause," *Islamic Horizons* (December 1988), 5.

Palestine as a Muslim cause, it did not commit significant energy to fundraising possibly because of the already strong organizing and charity by Palestinian and Arab Americans.[85]

Unlike the well-established cause of Palestine, ISNA worked hard to bring visibility to the plight of Cham people, a majority Muslim southeast Asian ethnic community, displaced by the Vietnam war from Vietnam and Cambodia. Started in 1980 as the Cham Muslim Relief Project, it became the Indo-Chinese Muslim project to help refugees abroad and later supported resettlement sponsorships to southern California.[86]

A secondary motivation for fundraising campaigns abroad was the destructive power of imperialism from Europe and the United States in the form of debt and development-based dependency. In a late 1983 article, Muhammad Tahir reports back from a meeting of 7,000 in Washington, DC for the IMF and World Bank, organized to "protect their own financial security," and fleece their pocket with interest money, instead of their ostensible promise to provide solutions to the problem of debt in post-colonial Third World nations. Later in 1986, *IH* continued their critique of capitalist intensive development policy that left most people behind, arguing that the priority should be the fulfillment of basic needs and building social services.[87] The United States as a superpower, which promoted capitalism and exploitative interests, nonetheless received minimal direct criticism from *Islamic Horizons*, perhaps indicative of

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[85] Pamela E Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[86] "Relief Work: Cambodian Muslims Resettled in California: Pioneering Project by ICMRP," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1986), 11. Upon arrival, Cham refugees would receive cash grants, orientation and language courses, religious studies support, free youth camps. Funding was also raised for two mosques that were completed in Fullerton and Santa Ana, California.

[87] Salahu-Din Ali, "On Development of Muslim Countries," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1986), 21.

prominent leaders and writers relatively positive perception of the United States during the Cold War.[88]

In all these reports on global affairs and fund collections in *Islamic Horizons*, ISNA continuously argued it had no interest in creating an independent relief organization, yet de facto developments reveal a deep investment in creating sustaining structures for funds and direct relief programs at several international sites. From a 1988 Somali Relief Fund ad, readers are reminded that ISNA "is not looking for miracle cures but trying to work for short and long term goals. Goals that will benefit generations of Somali's," featuring pictures of their disabled children project, children's village, and poultry project.[89]

Continued fund reports and advertisements established the ethical norm that religious charity was due to fellow Muslims in the greatest need abroad, not necessarily here. Moreover, contributing abroad was framed as a particular American obligation. *IH* featured a speech from Imam Warith Deen Mohammed that linked patriotism to standing up for justice in international affairs; real leaders, "to speak out as an Imam and make contributions on behalf of the community, with their approval, to the suffering people of Africa."[90] It is possible that ISNA saw their work as analogous to Mohammed, less as a freestanding Muslim relief and development organization and more like modern day *zakat* collectors - the Qur'anic category of *'amaleen* -

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[88] The only exception perhaps is on the issue of Israel and Palestine, although it could be argued that here too, the focus was overwhelmingly on Israeli government action and not American support.

[89] "Somali Relief Fund," *Islamic Horizons* (March/April 1988), 45.

[90] Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, "On South African and Palestinian Struggles" *Islamic Horizons* (July 1985), 6.

who facilitate humanitarian aid with funding from religious charity but are not conventional aid workers in the larger field.[91]

If ISNA did not claim international charitable action as a part of their institution building, they did claim to be building domestic programming and infrastructure, while maintaining the MSA's earlier commitment to help North American Muslims in need on a case-by-case basis. *Islamic Horizons* had extensive appeals for domestic charitable activity in three areas: *zakat*, finance, and community programs. For *zakat*, *Islamic Horizons* regularly ran primers to explain its uses, as well as *sadaqah*, and how it was different from government taxes.[92] Articles described *zakat* as the glue to hold the community together. If *zakat* was the glue, ISNA was the structuring beams that made "establishing the cause of Allah" or an "Islamic way of life" possible in North America because it could collect and distribute charity in the absence of an Islamic State.[93]

Instead of focusing on *zakat*, ISNA presented a comprehensive set of programs and subsidiary organizations to create a religiously sound and financially successful North American Muslim community. A month after ISNA formally launched, they listed eighteen projects that

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[91] Qur'an 9:60. The word *'amal* in Arabic has a basic meaning of worker. Specific to Islamic charity, this term refers to a category of people mentioned in Qur'an 9:60, the *'amaleen* (plural of *'amal*), one of the eight groups of people in the verse who are eligible to receive *zakat*. The tafsir is universal in understanding *'amaleen* as a designation for workers who collect and manage *zakat*. Among American Muslim charities, this term has been used loosely for staff who work at these organizations, even if an individual's job is not specific to handling *zakat* funds specifically, such as a graphic designer, implying that they all share the collective work of the organization responsible for *zakat* funds.

[92] "Zakah: Questions and Answers," *Islamic Horizons* (May/Jun 1987), 15.

[93] "Zakah: The Why, What, When, and How Much of It," *Islamic Horizons* (May 1984), 12. This is a reprint from the June 1983 *Islamic Horizons*. ISNA inherited a *zakat* fund from the MSA for direct distribution to Qur'anically eligible individuals, which received at most 40 to 50 thousand dollars annually, but it never grew and was very much secondary to the economic and community-based fundraising work.

are worth mentioning in full: Islamic Center of North America, Islamic Schools in Chicago and Toronto, Muslim Cooperative Project, Zakat Fund, Prison Program, Islamic Correspondence Course, Arabic Correspondence Course, Central Research Library, Central Muslim Cemetery, Masajid Fund, Foundation for Islamic Education, Muslim Credit Union, Publications and Periodicals, Relief Funds, Film Loan Program, Library Assistance Program, *Da'wa* Programs for Muslim adults, youth, and non-Muslim, and Convention Brotherhood Fund. The number of programs is dizzying and reflects the ambition to be the centralized agency for funding Islamic life in North America.[94]

Later ISNA President Ahmad Zaki Hammad explains that giving *zakat* to ISNA fulfills a divine commandment and provides "an opportunity to excel by giving sadaqa and volunteering" and "holds out as well the possibility for a meaningful national Muslim presence."[95] In other words, Hammad extends the meaning of Islamic charity beyond the idea of a set individual requirement *qua* donation to a larger, collective ethical project of building religious community. How is this accomplished?

First, ISNA used *Islamic Horizons* to educate readers about *zakat*, *sadaqah*, Islamic finance and general *fiqh* on economics.[96] Then, they presented themselves as the natural facilitator of ethical and sustainable economic life through two main avenues. The North American Islamic Trust (NAIT) held properties and funds in trust, especially mosques, and

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[94] "What Should You Support? Eighteen Projects for Muslims in North America" *Islamic Horizons* (June 1983), 15.

[95] Ahmad Zaki Hammad, "Giving and Receiving," *Islamic Horizons* (Mar/Apr 1988), 8-9.

[96] "Zakah: Questions and Answers with Usuf [Yusuf] al-Qaradawi" *Islamic Horizons* (May 1985), 8. Steven Abdul Kader, "In search of financial identity: Financing our Future," *Islamic Horizons* (Mar/Apr 1988), 27-30.

facilitated a communal pool of funding through its subsidiary Islamic Centers Cooperative Fund for different Muslim communities to assist in mosque building. Second, ISNA created AMANA, a *fiqh*-compliant mutual fund, approved by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in 1986.[97] Finally, ISNA solicited the funds for the building and sustaining of religious life in North America through educational programming and mosque building. The aforementioned NAIT was the main source for mosque building, but ISNA also used *Islamic Horizons* in a section called "Community Profile" to highlight exemplary centers worthy of financial support as they were built or in need of expansion. Features such as the 1991 profile on the Muslim Community Center in Silver Spring, Maryland would tell heartwarming stories of mosque leaders and members, after an *IH* staff member made a visit, before outlining community activities and the need for expanded space or programming (indirectly encouraging readers to send a check).[98]

For education, ISNA dedicated several departments to create *dawah*, pedagogical, and education material for adults and children in print and video; offer panels and events through its speakers bureau and the annual ISNA convention; and made two attempts in Chicago and Toronto to co-purchase buildings with local Muslim communities to start Islamic schools. Incarcerated individuals were especially active in requesting these materials, and after receiving three thousand letters from prisons in 1986, ISNA started the Prison Fund to supply books, pamphlets and more.[99] A 1989 ad for the Fund quoted one man transformed by the program who

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[97] "AMANA Mutual Fund," *Islamic Horizons* (August 1987), 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19.

[98] "Community Profile: The Muslim Community Center in Silver Spring, Maryland," *Islamic Horizons* (Winter 1991), 49-53. For another example, see "Islamic Society of Milwaukee," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988), 41-43.

[99] "ISNA Bulletin," *Islamic Horizons* (November 1986), 4; "Donate to the ITC Prison Fund," *Islamic Horizons* (November 1986), 26.

wrote, "Great is Allah, who can raise a broken man in prison to a *mu'min* [believer], who can say when asked who he is, 'I am a Muslim who Rejoices in Islam."[100]

Stage Two: Regulating the Archive of Charitable Action

As demonstrated in the first section, ISNA utilized *Islamic Horizons* to create both a narrative of the history and status of North American Muslim communities as well as a report of the work they did to create structure and programs to fund a thriving Muslim community here and restore the wellbeing and independence of Muslim majority societies and minority groups abroad. They encouraged Islamic charity as a form of collective humanitarian relief and development, a duty owed to fellow Muslims due to the *rizq* of being an American or Canadian with wealth to share, as well as a collective ritual act that could fund religious institution building at home for the greater good of the community, and ultimately, the greater American and Canadian society.

As it built up these formal appeals for international humanitarian aid and building domestic religious structures, *Islamic Horizons* in the early to mid-1980s retained personal appeals that fell outside this purview as a holdover from its earlier, more fraternal and informal iteration under the Muslim Students Association.[101] During this time, the magazine featured a community news section and accepted fundraising appeals for local community needs or even individual financial crises.

For example, in a July 1986 appeal, readers are encouraged to assist 31 year-old student Naseer Farooqi who needed heart surgery to fix a pulmonary hypertension that could prove

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[100] "I.T.C. Inmate Services Fund," *Islamic Horizons* (Jul/Aug 1989), 16.

[101] Manoff, "Theories of the Archive," 9.

fatal.[102] Mosques and schools also regularly paid for advertisements for their fundraising campaigns, some for several years such as the Wayne State University Muslim community in Detroit, Michigan. These advertisements for local initiatives used Qur'anic and *hadith* quotes to solicit money, such as the oft quoted *hadith* used by a 1983 San Francisco community ad: "For anyone who builds a mosque, Allah will build a house for him in paradise."[103] Two key areas of work that were frequent in community news reports but absent in ISNA's work included medical care and food insecurity. For example, in 1984 we learn of the work of the Los Angeles, California Medical Clinic, which provided free or minimum fee medical care and several reports appeared on food distribution programs in Michigan, New Jersey, and Maryland.[104]

The gap between ISNA's vision and programming and these local programs demonstrate that ISNA was not engaging in issues of structural inequality and suffering on the domestic front, even as it was offering systematic critiques of the conditions of Muslims abroad in contexts of war, dictatorships, and neocolonial exploitation. Instead, *IH* focused on the spiritual wellbeing of domestic Muslims, especially regarding religious education and moral community. For example, *IH* featured an interview with a New York Imam, Al-Amin Abdul Latif, that argued Muslims needed to live together not for economic survival but because "Non-Muslim society's way of life poses a threat because it practically drags Muslims away from Islam."[105] He argued they could

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[102] "A Matter of Life or Death: Brother Needs Operation," *Islamic Horizons* (July 1986), 18.

[103] "The Muslim Community Association of San Francisco Bay Area," *Islamic Horizons* (Mar/Apr 1983), 5. Their English translation of the *hadith*.

[104] "Los Angeles, California Medical Clinic," *Islamic Horizons* (November 1984), 13.

[105] "To Survive Muslims Must Live Together," *Islamic Horizons* (Winter 1991), 20.

"support each other mentally, psychologically and spiritually" and avoid "shameful" behavior such as drinking, drugs, and adultery.[106]

This difference between the broad charitable activity of diverse Muslim communities engaging with the magazine and the charitable programming promoted and institutionalized by ISNA points to the relationship between organizational identity and what Saif Shahin calls "news framing." Shahin argues that media are sites where multiple identities compete for salience in a community's collective identity. Organizations like ISNA that run magazines have their own identity which is determined by "members' shared beliefs about its central, distinctive, and enduring features."[107] The organizational identity of ISNA was conceived as an all embracing community of North American Muslims committed to an Islamic lifestyle in the West. At the same time, the organizational identity was overdetermined by the positionality of ISNA's leadership.[108] This created tensions between the broader identities and ideologies presented in the magazine by readers, advertisers, and contributors that did not align or directly contested the framing of *IH* editors and ultimately ISNA leadership. Overtime in the first decade of publication, the organizational identity and framing was professionalized but it also shifted to become more inclusive and reflective of the Muslim communities it represented. Going back to the question of domestic inequalities and Muslim responses through religious charity, I show in

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[106] "To Survive Muslims Must Live Together."

[107] Shahin, "News Framing," 341.

[108] This article does not delve into sectarian differences, but it is important to note that *Islamic Horizons* centered Sunni theologians when answering questions on *fiqh*; did not feature articles on Shi'a celebrations; and on the topic of Islamic charity, does not bring up *khums* in this first decade of publication when educating readers or discussing communal action. ISNA reflected a larger pattern in the United States that persists today, in which a Sunni religious orientation is taken as the default for Muslim thought and practice. See Hoda Katebi, "Acknowledging Structural Anti-Shi'ism in Sunnī Dominant Spaces," *Amaliah*, May 18, 2020, https://www.amaliah.com/post/57582/hoda-katebi-on-sunni-privilege-anti-shia-prejudice-structures-academia.

the examples below *Islamic Horizons* wrestling with the formalizing of its organizational identity and issues of gender and race relative to religious charitable giving at home in North America.

In the Jan/Feb 1988 letters section, Margaret Stokely wrote in about the absence of support for indigent North American Muslim women according to their Islamic rights of protection and communal support as women. She points out a form of neglect by ISNA: "Where are my brothers?" she writes. "So far all I see them doing is building more and more organizations, asking for more money for more buildings. For what? So that the least of us are neglected?"[109] Stokely's letter pointed out a regular frame in the magazine: foreign women, especially widowed mothers, were highlighted as a needy and deserving recipient of Islamic aid in places like Afghanistan, whereas women here were mostly discussed in the context of responsibilities towards children's education and family life. A year earlier five women who had a long tenure at ICNA shared their frustrations of being sidelined and structurally locked out of leadership positions.[110] They lamented that every day North American women were told to be "living examples" of Islam without "[looking] at the realities that [they] are facing in society."[111]

The letter from Stokely spoke so powerfully to *Islamic Horizons* editor Amer Haleem that he published a response commending her for bringing up this issue and opening the larger question of whether the significant amount of international relief funds should be sent abroad if there are Muslims in need here?[112] Interestingly, after Stokely's letter, a report of the ISNA Majlis Al-Shura's bi-national annual plan included the regular priorities of schools, *da'wa*,

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[109] Margaret Stokely, "Where is Everybody?" *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988), 5.

[110] Ameena Siddiqui, et al., "Forum: Women in Community," *Islamic Horizons* (August 1987), 33-39.

[111] Siddiqui, et al., "Forum," 35.

[112] Ameer Haleem, "Editorial Response: 'Where is Everybody?'" *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988), 5.

youth, camps, women's affairs, but adds "a house to house homeless women."[113] Whether the highest council of ISNA was influenced by Stokely's letter to include this shelter is unknown, but the fact that the shelter was proposed in 1988 shows a greater recognition of gender inequities in North America as well as American and Canadian Muslims' obligation to intervene and support these women.

The second challenge for *Islamic Horizons* in its quest to be representational for all Muslims in the United States was its frequent framing of American life according to an organizational identity oriented around immigrant Muslims of Arab and South Asian descent. Right before the MSA formed ISNA with its collaborators, it sent out a survey about how to better incorporate African Americans, showing self-awareness of the unequal participation of racial groups in their idealist Islamic community.[114] Africans and African Americans were a minority but active members of the organization and magazine from the start, but their identity and history as North American Muslims was in tension with organizational identity and they were often left out of the news framing of the magazine altogether.

To take one early example, the dominant news framing of need in *Islamic Horizons* articles positioned foreign Muslims as poor and in need of charity for material support and domestic Muslims as financially stable but in need of supplementary brotherly charity to boost fundraising for institutions like mosques and Islamic schools. Framing North America as a place of opportunity, not poverty, reflected the majority experience of ISNA leadership as white collar professionals, an assumption taken by a 1983 letter to the editor complaining about American

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[113] "ISNA Majlis Meets," *Islamic Horizons* (Mar/Apr 1988), 12.

[114] Omar Etman, "For Black Muslim Students, a Two-Pronged Fight for Solidarity," *PBS*, August 13, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/black-muslim-college-students-issue-call-allies.

Muslims "begging" for money to build their mosque.[115] "Any Muslim community that cannot look after its own needs does not deserve to have a mosque," the anonymous writer insists, "even in large centers where there are fairly successful Muslim doctors, and other Muslim professionals and businessmen, the urge to look for easy money" or "handouts" is a "harmful trend."[116]

The following month, Khalil M. Tariq-Amir, an African American Imam from Peekskill, New York, wrote a firm rebuttal. He states the clear religious merit of donating to mosques and the "dignity in which Allah has safeguarded those who are compelled to ask" for charity. Tariq-Amir then notes the racial dynamic of these socio-economic issues that seems to be invisible to the offending letter writer: "All over America, there are brothers in indigenous communities who have to pray in churches and social halls because Muslims have forgotten the rewards of charity."[117] Following the letter, the editors added a brief note of support for Tariq-Amir.

Tariq-Amir's 1983 letter brings to light the absence of regular conversations about socio-economic inequities affecting Muslims domestically, especially its racial dimensions, in earlier years of *IH*. Without including these socio-domestic structural issues in their evaluation and solutions for North American Muslim life, no programs were developed for these needs in the early 1980s save *zakat* funds distributed on an individual basis.

The second effect of the racial character of *Islamic Horizon's* community identity and news framing was that it created a historical picture where religious community charity and

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[115] "Money and What to Do with It?" *Islamic Horizons* (July 1985), 15. Articles about managing socio-economic status were more often than not aimed at individuals with some wealth, giving advice about ethical entrepreneurship, investments, and writing a will.

[116] Anonymous, "Build Mosque If You Can Pay for It," *Islamic Horizons* (Sept/Oct 1983), 3.

[117] Khalil M. Tariq-Amir, "Asking Donations for Mosque, Not Begging," *Islamic Horizons* (Nov/Dec 1983), 5. Tariq-Amir uses "indigenous" here to mean African American.

institution building only started through the leadership and efforts of immigrant Muslims. A report on the 1984 ISNA convention details the speech of Pakistani Professor Munawar Iqbal, who was invited to reflect on the topic of "Economic Problems of Muslims in Non-Muslim Societies." In his talk, Iqbal suggested that North American Muslims should focus on institution building as a measure of building strength and fighting discrimination, through "cooperative housing, investment cooperatives and consumer societies" – all efforts that ISNA took up but that were already developed theologically and in practice extensively by African American Muslim communities, and some earlier non-black and racially mixed groups before the 1980s, most successfully financially by the Nation of Islam.[118] One reader named Devin Uqdah points to this erasure in a 1983 letter, noting an oversight in an *Islamic Horizons* survey of North American Muslim schools that ignored the American Muslim Mission's Sister Clara Muhammad Schools, which outpaced all others in terms of size and longevity.[119]

One reason for this omission is the belief, held by many foundational leaders in ISNA, that the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad was an illegitimate expression of Islam and therefore their example irrelevant. Talat Sultan, part of this pioneer generation in the MSA, felt there were no properly Islamic organizations at a national level in the early 1960s when he arrived, including the Nation of Islam which was "not an authentic Islamic organization." He went on to describe "one of the most important challenges" for the MSA was "to bring the so-called Nation of Islam within the purview of authentic, mainstream Islam" including working

[118] "Economic Problems of Muslim in Non-Muslim Societies," *Islamic Horizons* (September 1984), 4.

[119] Devin Uqdah, "Sr. Clara School Has More Than 150 Students," *Islamic Horizons* (February 1983), 2.

directly with W.D. Mohammed after he came to power and re-oriented his community in 1975.[120] Mohammed eventually accepted an invitation to sit on the Majlis Al-shura, the "highest policy-making body" of ISNA.[121]

ISNA actively worked to shift its organizational identity by the mid-1980s to be one more reflective of African Americans and began to build in their input into vision and programs. In early 1986, *IH* expanded its editorial board and committed to inviting a wider variety of contributing writers. Two people who came on board as assistant editor and editor respectively were a member of the American Muslim Mission (Warith Deen Mohammed's community) and professor Sr. Salwa Abdullah.[122] In addition, Wali Akbar Mohamad, former editor of *American Muslim Mission Journal* joined the *IH* Editorial Board and was set to contribute to reporting on community affairs, an impressive expert to have join. These changes demonstrate an active effort on the sitting Editorial Board to open up news framing decisions to African Americans as part of the religious vision of a united North American Muslim community.

Eventually, in 1989, there was a panel interview of four Black male leaders in *IH* that address racialized structural inequality in the United States. They discuss poverty, homelessness, lack of medical care, and reintegration for the formerly incarcerated as necessary issues to address in the "movement" for Islamic community in the United States. However, one article, amid hundreds focused abroad on political and humanitarian causes in East Africa, Palestine, and Afghanistan, did not change the organizational identity, and its prescriptive idea of Islamic

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[120] Talat Sultan, "Interview: From MSA to ICNA and ISNA," *The Message International*, February 16, 2016, https://messageinternational.org/community/from-msa-to-icna-and-isna/.

[121] Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 58.

[122] "New Faces...New Horizons," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1986), 3.

charity, overnight.[123] Scholarship from the late 1990s and early 2000s records the continued ambivalence of African Americans to join an immigrant-origin dominant organization, some even feeling "unwelcome and unappreciated" when ISNA was still perceived as "devoted primarily to the needs of members of the immigrant community."[124]

Phase Three: Formalizing the Archive

In its first few years of existence since its founding in 1983, ISNA ran on a deficit and quickly saw its foreign funding drop from roughly $850,000 in 1984 to $344,000 in 1985. This funding shift reflected larger trends of decreased funding sent to American Muslim organizations by foreign governments or international Muslim organizations but also ties in with the change from the Muslim Students Association's beginnings as a fraternal support organization for foreign Muslims studying in America to a decidedly North American religious organization, ISNA.

To create a sustainable and independent organization, ISNA's governing board created a multipronged approach. It included personal fundraising goals of $21,000 by each board member; an appeal at the annual convention (where our celebrity woman gave her earrings); and a robust advertising campaign from November 1986 to March 1987 in *Islamic Horizons* to encourage donations to the ISNA fund, the general pot for all ISNA programs and administration. Letters and articles were also written encouraging Muslims to not only give abroad to places like Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, and India, but, they emphasized, to give here

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[123] Ihsan Bagby, et al., "Forum: Muslim Americans," *Islamic Horizons* (July/Aug 1989), 25. Participants included Al-Amin Abdul Latif, Ishaq Abdul-Hafiz, Jamil Abdullah al-Amin (formerly H. Rap Brown), and moderator Ihsan Bagby. Interestingly, Siraj Wahhaj was not present, but was indirectly included through a text box selection of a speech he gave at a 1989 ISNA conference on politics.

[124] Smith, *Islam in America*, 171.

too![125] By 1988, it appears, the organization had finally made its way to financial stability and independence from major international funding. A February 1988 report declared ISNA was receiving no budgetary foreign funding and saw $192,000 raised at the 25th annual convention that fall.[126]

By successfully transitioning from a smaller membership-based organization to a financially solvent faith based non-profit organization, ISNA reaffirmed its belief in and commitment to its vision for North American Muslims and, arguably, the global *ummah*. This moment of formalization was reflected in *Islamic Horizons* itself with the removal of the community news section and the decision to phase out community and individual fundraising ads or appeals in the early 1990s. The advantage of a growing readership also simultaneously meant more interest from commercial businesses in advertising space, which translated into revenue.

The year 1988 marked the "closure" of *Islamic Horizons* as an informal community newsletter space. At the end of the decade, editors limited writing to staff and invited authors, except matrimonial advertisements and the short letters to the editor section at the start of each issue. This select set of writers in this more professional space took on ISNA's organizational identity and followed its framing methods. They determined what information was included about Muslim life between the covers of each issue, which then shaped the goals of future of the North American Muslim communities in the future. Instead of a more improvisational, diverse array of perspectives and projects, the early 1990s see a structured, section-by-section picture of the religious positions and socio-political conditions of American and Canadian Muslims and,

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[125] See "Letters," *Islamic Horizons* (April 1986) and "Letters," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988).

[126] Ahmad Zaki Hammad, "Dawns: Turning the Corner," *Islamic Horizons* (Jan/Feb 1988). This source reports ISNA receiving zero foreign funds by 1988. For the $192,000 raised at the ISNA 25th annual convention in 1988, see "The Real Pledge," *Islamic Horizons* (December 1988), 7.

specific to charitable giving, the possibilities for what constitutes proper religious charitable action to ensure a healthy and just world.

Looking towards this new future in 1988, ISNA President Ahmad Zaki Hammad penned an article titled "Giving and Receiving" for the March/April issue titled "Financing our Future." Hammad offers demographics about American Muslims as an educated, affluent community living in a time of opportunity and great possibility for success, but woefully behind other religious communities in the US in their philanthropic giving of money and volunteer hours. He offers a litany of Qur'anic and Prophetic quotes about the ethical good done by charity, its ability to purify wealth, and its potential to help American and Canadians impact the larger society and political life. ISNA is presented by Hammad as the right Muslim guide for increasing charitable activity and serving God, ending with a provocative question: "Before you is a vision of Islam enlivened by a compassionate and bold Muslim Community. But will we continue to hold the dream hostage to our personal desires, or will we ransom our future?"[127]

By the end of the 1980s, ISNA had created a solid infrastructure of central leadership and administration in Indiana as well as eighteen administrative regions to support sixty programs in the United States and Canada, all financed without the need for foreign funding. *Islamic Horizons* grew with the organization so that by the late 1990s special editions of the magazine were published in the 50,000 copy range for a majority white collar professional subscribership.[128] While ISNA would solidify into a stalwart organization for North American Muslims in the 1990s, it would be national Muslim charity non-profits that would take the reign

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[127] Hammad, "Giving and Receiving."

[128] "Note to Advertisers," *Islamic Horizons* (Mar/Apr 1998), 8. In 1991 it is reported that there are 6,500 members who all receive the magazine: "What You Had to Say About ISNA" *Islamic Horizons* (Winter 1991), 37.

in the same decade to represent specifically humanitarian aid and domestic service work funded by Islamic charity in North America. This transferring of the torch fits with larger trends in the decade, which is discussed in the following chapter.[129]

The American Muslim Mission and the Rebirth of Farrakhan's Nation of Islam

Reading through *Islamic Horizons* from the 1980s, one gets a clear sense of the Islamophobic effect of international affairs on Muslims in the United States. Most prominent are Muslims concerns for family abroad or more abstractly Muslims globally caught in the snare of Cold War battles or exploitative development policy. In the US, these international affairs contributed to the political racialization of "Muslim" as foreign, threatening, and fanatical. What is mostly absent from *Islamic Horizons* is a sense of the economic upheavals of the 1980s, later referred to more broadly as "Reaganomics," which most heavily affected African American Muslims.

In *Islamic Horizons,* American society of the 1980s is mostly presented as a time of opportunity and possibility for American Muslims to use their financial strength and build the institutions and communities they desire. This fed into the multiculturalism logic of this period and the budding neoliberal logic of individual responsibility, deregulation, and financialization of all social spheres. In *Islamic Horizons*, any mention of domestic issues like homelessness or incarceration is met with charitable programs and not interest in policy or advocacy work, versus the intensive political work related to Palestine, Afghanistan, East Africa, or India.

In contrast, the national groups directly born from Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam took an intense interest in the shifting dynamics of economic life in America, especially as they

[129] Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 77.

affected African Americans, the overwhelming majority of their membership. This included the American Muslim Mission (AMM), led by Imam Warith Deen Mohammed, and the Nation of Islam (NOI), resurrected in 1978 by Louis Farrakhan. Mohammed's AMM did have significant participation in ISNA and national affairs outside of its community whereas the NOI had some local relationships but generally operated independently of other Muslim organizations at the national level. The two organizations used different strategies for the same goal: to use collective efforts to resurrect spiritual consciousness of African Americans and build Black economic stability and power.

The differing economic strategies of each organization belie similarities in demographics that usually are minimized to exaggerate the differences between the two leaders. According to survey data, Farrakhan's NOI was younger, attracted more men and people who prioritized racial and socio-economic issues, whereas new AMM members prioritized religion and socio-economic issues and enjoyed greater class mobility.[130] However, both had meaningful class diversity and a strong base in the lower-middle class – showing an economic shift from the core constituency of the lower Black working class of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam.[131]

Despite Farrakhan's more public disavowal of the United States government and society for the poor socio-economic status of African Americans, both he and Mohammed preached for economic self-reliance, a "bootstraps" mentality. In an early 1986 article, Mohammed imitates

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[130] Nuri Tinaz, "Conversion of African Americans to Islam: A Sociological Analysis of the Nation of Islam and Associated Groups" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2001), 279, 277-278.

[131] Tinaz, "Conversion of African Americans," 275. Both groups had much higher rates of education than Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, in part due to an emphasis on education and because of proselytizing programs on college campuses. By the end of the 20th century, the majority of members in each group had at least some college education versus Elijah's era when only 47% had achieved a high school degree and 16% had only elementary education. See Tinaz, "Conversion of African Americans," 272.

an imaged critic who says, "Hey, he sounds like a Republican. He sounds like Reagan," to which he retorts, "Well, you should sound like somebody."[132] Both leaders embraced the direction of government economic policy - reducing government financial oversight, embracing free market capitalism, and striking welfare programs - even while simultaneously critiquing the anti-Black tropes and abuse suffered by African American communities because of it.

Their solutions were both spiritual and practical, the AMM offering decentralized, locally centered programs whereas Farrakhan resurrected the Nation's centralized economic strategies to uplift Black communities. Charitable giving, not just business investments, was a cornerstone of both communities' work. The following sections explain the religious positions and practices of the AMM and NOI in the 1980s on economic justice and charity. Although outwardly Mohammed and Farrakhan discussed racial capitalism differently, I show that both developed collective buying programs to bring wealth, power, and ultimately wellbeing into Black communities.

W.D. Mohammed on Business and Charity

As mentioned earlier, when Warith Deen Mohammed was given the mantle of leadership for the Nation of Islam, he transformed the community religiously through what he called the "second resurrection." Part of this process were the more mundane matters of sifting through significant debt, including millions in loans and several million dollars of back taxes, Social Security payments, and unpaid wages and workers compensation.[133] In a 1986 lecture, Mohammed identified mismanagement as the cause but more deeply a consequence of

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[132] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Controlling Our Resources: Part 3," *Muslim Journal*, January 10, 1986, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/1-10-86.html.

[133] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 106-107.

organizing the community around nationalism, which he called an "evil" in human history and a "bad development" for his people, citing an example of the mostly poor and working class members being forced to meet a "quota of donations."[134] Plainly stated, "We are not to work to build a nation, we are to work to build Islamic life."[135]

W.D. Mohammed took action to reorient his community towards the Qur'an and *sunnah* by decentralizing control. He transferred ownership of property to local Muslims and stepped down as an official leader even while continuing to advise on projects such as the Sister Clara Muhammad schools and businesses and to speak at major conferences.[136] Donations nonetheless continued to flow into the Imam's ministry, called the Muslim American Community Assistance Fund (MACA). In a 1985 speech, he describes this process dramatically as "[removing] the structures of slavery," where, "every Imam has dignity, every congregation has dignity, all on an equal footing. Free, as they should be."[137] In this new arrangement, business and charity could be

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[134] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Muhammad Speaks," *Muslim Journal,* May 10, 1985, http://newafricaradio.com/articles/5-10-85.html. It is of note that Mohammed said imams had a "monopoly of power" when it came to business practices but never went through the accusatory lists that scholars and other NOI members have done.

[135] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "National Concern and The Success Of The Individual," *Muslim Journal,* December 26, 1986, http://newafricaradio.com/articles/12-26-86.html.

[136] The former Nation fish import/export businesses, now privately owned, were successful in the early 1980s and operating in Atlanta, Washington, DC, and Philadelphia. See Curtis G. Bunn, "Prayers and Profits," *Black Enterprise*, December 1983, 28. In January 1980 Baltimore members of the American Muslim Mission hosted a leadership forum titled "Politics-Education-Economics," for which W.D. Mohammed was the keynote speaker: See Hajjis Imam Wali and Rashidah Uqdah, *A History and Narrative of Muslim Americans in Baltimore, Maryland* (Self-published, 2003), 106.

[137] Muhammad, "Muhammad Speaks."

implemented properly, in service to the "universal scheme" of Islam, the guide to fulfill humanity's duty to create a good society.[138]

Business success served the larger religious goal of a better existence in Islam. In multiple articles and speeches throughout the 1980s, Mohammed chastises African Americans for spending frivolously, lack business sense, and being a "deficient and extremely dependent people," unlike other racial and religious minority groups: "The fact that we don't have established wealth and power in this country is no reason for us not to aspire for great roles and great responsibility as citizens here."[139] In a 1985 article he commends Chinese American Buddhists and American Jews for being diligent, banding together, and working hard for their respectable place in America. And in a later piece he attributes business success to hard work, sacrifice and strategy, without acknowledging structural inequalities.[140]

Mohammed seems to echo contemporary American arguments about the "culture of poverty" in which African Americans are regarded as trapped by their own incapacity and sloth, symbolized by the "welfare queen," contrasted with the "bootstraps" success narrative told about "white ethnics," Jews, and Asian "model minorities."[141] His politically conservative idea of American belonging, earned through self-dependence and hard work, differed from the mainstream in one crucial way: he did not frame African Americans as worthless or without agency to change their condition. Pushing back against anti-Black political rhetoric of his time,

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[138] Muhammad, "National Concern;" Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Message of Economic Concern," *Bilalian News*, May 25, 1979, http://newafricaradio.com/articles/5-25-79.html.

[139] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Freedom in America," *Progressions* Magazine, October 1985, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/october-85-2.html.

[140] Muhammad, "Controlling Our Resources."

[141] Muhammad, "Controlling Our Resources."

Mohammed urged his followers and all African Americans to be courageous and proud of their heritage as Africans and as Muslims. Even as followers were told to be patriotic and strive for full social and political inclusion as citizens, it was to be done on their own terms. He showed a firm belief that African American life based in Islam is the path to respect, establishment, and worth. Freedom, as white Americans have defined it is the "opportunity to gain more and more independence" and Mohammed wanted that same freedom for all African Americans.[142]

Charity within W.D. Mohammed's theology followed a similar framework. Those who are recipients are urged to not be on the receiving end for "too long" because God elevated personal responsibility as a duty: "You are obligated by your own self."[143] Although *zakat* is a right of the poor, Mohammed argued it will not be given to those without dignity, using the example of a highly inebriated man on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. This legal position flatly challenges mainstream Sunni legal opinions that alcohol use does not disqualify the poor from their *zakat*.[144] His position is development oriented as well; charity provides survival aid and relief but is ultimately meant to assist the poor in achieving independence, which is novel relative to Sunni positions that focus more on delivering charity properly than its consequence.[145]

Giving charity in Islam is "a means for improving society" that "keep us in touch with the best of our natures" by fulfilling the duty to give of one's wealth for the collective good.[146]

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[142] Muhammad, "Controlling Our Resources."

[143] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Excerpts from Imam Muhammad's N.Y. Address: Part 2," *Muslim Journal*, May 9, 1986, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/5-9-86.html.

[144] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "The Role of the Masjid," *Muslim Journal*, August 5, 1988, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/8-5-88.html.

[145] Muhammad, "Excerpts."

[146] Muhammad, "Excerpts."

Charity situates Muslims ethically in multiple social relations: it is a way to uplift the African American community; it helps Muslims across the globe; and is a tool for the "universal struggle" of helping to save humanity.[147] Mohammed's core focus is the well-being Black people, but he was never disconnected from global concerns, discussing suffering in Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and other sites in the 1980s. Collaborative efforts were encouraged across religion and with secular humanitarians, so long as they served the collective good.

A positive consequence of giving, apart from caring and loving one's brother and neighbor is a growth in power. Mohammed explained that the more responsibility the individual or the community takes on, the greater the power God bestows upon them: "If you want to be bigger and more able to manage things and to manage affairs and responsibilities, then accept fully the responsibility of a Muslim man and woman and accept fully that responsibility of a Muslim community. Work hard, and Allah will bless us and we will become a great people, insha-Allah."[148] Donations that helped build up Black business were power building, for the sake of God and God's desire for society organized according to an innate human nature.

Applied Economic Ethics and AMMCOP

W.D. Mohammed and his community's central economic project in the 1980s, to enact this entrepreneurial solution for Black liberation, was the American Muslim Mission Committee

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[147] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Imam Muhammad's Jumah Khutbah at the Washington Monument: Part 2," *American Muslim Journal*, September 28, 1984, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/9-28-84b.html.

[148] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Human Rights in Al-Islam: Lecture by Imam W. Deen Muhammad at 4th Annual Seerah Conference in New York: Part 2," *Muslim Journal*, February 12, 1988, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/2-12-88.html.

to Purchase or AMMCOP.[149] The project was started in 1981, following Elijah Muhammad's precedent to call Black people together and "pool resources" to achieve economic independence.[150] In a 1983 interview, Zaki Zakat Abdullah, the chairman for the Indianapolis AMMCOP defined it as

> an economic strategy designed to organize the collective buying potential of the American poor into annual big buys of 10,000 commodities plus directly from the manufacturer. This will drastically cut the cost of items purchased and leave some money for future investment. AMMCOP is a non-profit entity operated by Muslims and based on Muslim principles and beliefs which dictate that we must take care of the community's underprivileged.[151]

AMMCOP started small as a "weekly buy" at the mosque of basic food and paper products that, bought in bulk, could save the community money. A for- profit element involved unemployed community members buying items in bulk to sell and support themselves and their families. The weekly buy was to be scaled up to the Annual Buy for larger consumer goods, such as refrigerators or stoves, among the estimated 300,000 Muslims who identified themselves as followers of W.D. Mohammed's leadership.[152]

Enthusiasm was strong in the first years. Samiyya Saafin, wife of Quadir Saafin, AMMCOP assistant national chairman, remarked: "Put your money with Imam Mohammed; he knows what to do with it…Allah wants [the children] to grow up and get their share; with

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[149] The name was changed later to the American Muslim Committee to Purchase One Hundred Thousand Commodities Plus.

[150] Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Imam Muhammad in Wash., D.C.: Part 3," *American Muslim* Journal, January 27, 1984, http://www.newafricaradio.com/articles/1-27-84.html.

[151] "Warith Deen Muhammad to lecture Saturday," *Indianapolis Recorder*, September 22, 1984, https://newspapers.library.in.gov/cgi-bin/indiana?a=d&d=INR19840922-01.1.1.

[152] Wali and Uqdah, *A History and Narrative,* 130. Another article put the number at 2 million, see Bunn, "Prayers and Profits," 28.

AMMCOP we will open the doors of these closed plants and put them back to work."[153] Even with strong vocal support, the program did not grow into an annual, large scale buy program, although it saw moderate, continued success as part of the business ethos of W.D. Mohammed communities.[154] However, funding and supporting local Muslim-owned businesses continued. Therefore, the goal was still fulfilled to not just change the economic status of Muslim and African American communities, but the psychological and spiritual as well. In the words of Imam Rasool Bashir, who started an AMMCOP chapter and built a mosque complex of businesses in St. Petersburg, Florida, "We're establishing motivation throughout the nation...Afro-Americans are learning that with sound business principles you can be your own boss."[155]

Farrakhan on Business and Charity

Louis Farrakhan was equally invested in Black economic uplift but saw himself as operating closer to the theological ideas and implementation of Elijah Muhammad. Even though a Black middle class had emerged in the 1970s, and multiculturalism had supposedly made space for Black culture and contributions, structural racism continued to block African Americans from access to economic and political power.

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[153] Wali and Uqdah, *A History and Narrative,* 130.

[154] Interestingly, W.D. Mohammed attributed the lack of success to imams disinterested in business ventures and community members low level of interest in entrepreneurial ventures because of religious and community building activities. Even though Mohammed was working to turn his community towards being Qur'an centric and not nationalistic, it seems there was some gap in understanding the continued role of entrepreneurialism. See Imam W. Deen Mohammed, "Muhammad Speaks," *American Muslim Journal,* March 8, 1985, http://newafricaradio.com/articles/3-8-85.html.

[155] Bunn, "Prayers and Profits," 28.

The 1980 Federal Census reported African Americans at over three times (32.5%) the rate of whites (10.2%) living under the poverty line.[156] Moreover, President Ronald Reagan abandoned urban renewal funding and city centers were starved of tax support, making room for large increases (and incentives) for private capital to expand without accountability to the populations around them. These economic shifts contributed to the "ghettoization" of city-dwelling African Americans in the 1980s. By 1990 one out of five African Americans lived in an urban area of high poverty, isolated from the Black middle class.[157] Popular media regularly created stereotypes of "cultures of poverty" among African Americans while creating sympathetic pictures of poor white Americans caught by circumstance, obscuring discussions of structural inequity.[158]

In this context, Farrakhan believed that serving God necessitated continued strong focus on the well-being of African Americans, which was being lost in the broader Islamic message introduced by Warith Deen Mohammed. In a 1980 speech in Harlem, New York, he exclaimed,

> I am here as a servant of Allah [not Mecca]. I see Muslims taking advantage of Blacks in Arabic and Africa. I will not jump over one Black Christian to find brotherhood with a Muslim…If you [non-Black] Muslims are so interested in the Black man in America, why don't you clean up the ghettos in Mecca…I see racism in the Muslim world, clean it up![159]

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[156] Associated Press, "Census Bureau Reports 1980 Poverty Statistics," *New York Times*, August 22, 1982, https://www.nytimes.com/1982/08/22/us/census-bureau-reports-1980-poverty-statistics.html.

[157] Paul A. Jargowsky, "Ghetto Poverty Among Blacks in the 1980s," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 13, No. 2 (1994), 289. See also Loïc Wacquant, *Prisons of Poverty* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[158] Premilla Nadasen, "From Widow to 'Welfare Queen': Welfare and the Politics of Race," *Black Women, Gender + Families* 1, No. 2 (Fall 2007): 52-77.

[159] Turner, *Islam*, 228.

Contrary to majority non-Black led American Muslim organizations in the 1980s, Farrakhan did not frame the US with "optimism" as a country with a fundamentally fair government and site of economic bounty that should be shared to assist Muslims abroad.[160] Economic redistribution started and ended here; international affairs for Farrakhan would remain squarely in the realm of political and Muslim solidarity, especially in the Middle East and Africa.

This critique was not unique to Farrakhan but common among African American Muslim leadership in the late 20th century. At the 1974 meeting of the Muslim Students Association in Toledo, Ohio, African American walked out protesting the "naive attitude of [MSA] administrators… [and] 'foreign' Muslims [who] were accepting the racist conditions imposed upon them by non-Muslim Americans and Canadians." They moved outside and the group of forty men decided to create a "caucus" to address the needs and create decision-making power for African American Muslims.[161]

In Indianapolis of the 1980s-1990s, multiple African American Muslim groups, including the W.D. Mohammed community and the NOI, complained about their treatment by ISNA and non-Black Muslims. Muhammad Saddiq, the leader of the W.D.M. community said ISNA had a "dominate them or ignore them" attitude, taking credit for the work of African American Muslims and then refusing to put funding towards Black issues in the city.[162] There was also

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[160] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 314.

[161] Akil Fahd. "RARE Photo of Historic Event aimed at forging national unity amongst African-American Muslims...," Public Facebook Post (with image), December 6, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155932285617290&set=t.1307534&type=3&theater. Fahd is a recognized African American Muslim leader from Detroit, Michigan and currently based in Atlanta, Georgia.

[162] Steve Johnson, "The Muslims of Indianapolis," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 262-265.

general frustration that ISNA frequently invited Black Muslims on fundraising missions to the Gulf, where Arab Muslims were delighted to hear about their conversion, but then were summarily ignored and were denied funding upon return home.[163]

Farrakhan stood out from the larger critiques among African American leaders because of his access to a national platform to talk about structural racism within Muslim communities and in American society. Also, he avoided the use of donations from non-Black organizations and government grants, remaining fiercely independent.[164] Shortly after Farrakhan resurrected the Nation of Islam in 1978, W.D. Mohammed challenged him to a competition to "produce more business with his philosophy than I produce with Al-Islam, with the Holy Qur'an."[165] Mohammed believed Black nationalism in the NOI would stand in the way of members' access to opportunities because they would be labelled as anti-American. It is not clear whose members were more successful at the start of the 1980s. What is true is that while most NOI members transitioned to Mohammed's new organization, Farrakhan was successful in rebuilding membership and non-Muslim supporters in the 1980s.

POWER Program

The revived Nation of Islam's central economic program was founded in 1981 and called People Organized and Working for Economic Rebirth, Inc. (POWER). Like AMMCOP, POWER was meant to keep money within Black communities through for-profit business. A trial program was started in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where African Americans were asked to "use

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[163] Johnson, "The Muslims of Indianapolis," 262-266.

[164] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 82.

[165] Marsh, *The Lost-Found Nation,* 110. Quoted from Imam W. Deen Muhammad, "Imam Warith D. Muhammad's Appeal to Minister Farrakhan" *Bilalian News,* April 28, 1978.

at least 10 percent of their income or $10 a week (whichever is greater) to buy goods and services from participating POWER merchants and manufacturers."[166] African American consumers spent $204 billion in 1984, and POWER appeared as an exciting venture because, in the minds of NOI members concerned with "vice" as a cause of suffering in the Black community, it could redirect spending from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and poor foods to Black companies that could "help develop their communities." In addition, the NOI promised to employ Black youth, unemployed men, and college-educated professionals.[167]

Farrakhan saw this as the first step towards the Islamic good society promised to the Original People: "We must use the instruments of capitalism because that's what we have available to us…but as we study the scripture of the Bible and Koran we believe in a state where the benefits are shared by the masses of the people,"[168] In this statement, the Nation's capitalist enterprise is a pragmatic means to build wealth in order to then create a Black socialist system.

POWER became more than a vision or small scale project in 1984 when the NOI was approached by Al Wellington, a prominent Black businessman, to expand into manufacturing, sales, and delivery of Black owned products within Black communities.[169] That fall POWER was established as a corporation and signed on several manufacturers of personal care products as

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[166] "P-O-W-E-R," *Black Enterprise,* September 1981, 18.

[167] Rogers Worthington, "Farrakhan Stand Bad for Business" *Chicago Tribute*, October 28, 1985, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-10-28-8503130815-story.html.

[168] Edwin Black, "Would You Buy Toothpaste From This Man?," *Chicago Reader*, April 15, 1986, https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/would-you-buy-a-toothpaste-from-this-man/Content?oid=3636375.

[169] Wellington is the founder of the Wellington Group, a famous Black owned marketing-researching firm. He initially approached the Urban League and Jesse Jackson. When both refused, he turned to Farrakhan because of his popularity and despite his anti-Semitic and anti-American public remarks.

collaborators, with the eventual goal for the NOI to take over all stages of the business while retaining a cooperative with buy-ins from members.[170]

Seed funding arrived in a circuitous way: In early 1985 Libyan Head of State Muammar Gaddafi offered a five million dollar loan to Farrakhan as the unofficial representative of "disenchanted" Black people to fund an armed insurrection against the US government.[171] Farrakhan publicly declined but renegotiated for the money to go to POWER.[172] In public talks, Farrakhan both boasted about the loan and defended himself from critiques: "I am not a terrorist. Don't say I've taken his money to make bombs. I'm not a prostitute...It is a loan to be repaid."[173] From initial projections, POWER was estimated to make $150 million in five years and the NOI claimed there were already forty thousand members in the cooperative making it possible to pay the loan back in as short a time as eighteen months.[174]

The momentum that POWER was building came to a halt in September 1985 when *Crain's Chicago Business* newspaper published an exposé of businesses who had met with POWER representatives over the previous few months. Business owners were called to task for working with Farrakhan who at rallies openly used crude anti-Semitic stereotypes, disparaged Christianity, and appeared unpatriotic and possibly seditious for his relationship with Gaddafi. Disavowals were swift: nearly all business pulled out within a month and other Muslim leaders

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[170] Worthington, "Farrakhan Stand."

[171] Edward D. Sargent, "$5 Million Qaddafi Loan to Go to Toiletry Firm," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1985, A9.

[172] Sargent, "$5 Million Qaddafi Loan." The interest free, unsecured loan was technically given by the Islamic Call Society, an organization founded by the Libyan government for *da'wah* purposes and soft power politics.

[173] Sargent, "$5 Million Qaddafi Loan."

[174] Black, "Would You Buy."

spoke out against him.[175] Without large scale manufacturing support, Wellington and Farrakhan could only start a small trial program in Philadelphia to be scaled up later.

Even with continued negative coverage in the white, mainstream press, at least some in the African American communities continued to see Farrakhan as one of the few voices truly committed to Black uplift in America. While partnering businesses were pulling out of their agreements that fall, Farrakhan shared this message: "All we have to do is marshal our purchasing power, redirect it back into our own communities. We can build institutions; we can buy farms to feed ourselves; we can do anything that it takes to make ourselves economically independent."[176] Wellington estimated that Farrakhan's speaking tours had made at least one in five African American aware of POWER – even if the venture failed, the message had spread.[177]

The Promise of Charisma

The Nation of Islam did not employ financial transparency with members, so members and other Black supporters had to trust in the message when the press revealed financial troubles in the organization. Right after the Gaddafi loan was acquired 1985, the NOI bought a three story property in Southside Chicago and a mansion in Phoenix, Arizona for Farrakhan's personal use and as the address for several nonprofit funds.[178] Yet only two

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[175] Black, "Would You Buy." Fazlur Rahman was quoted: "Farrakhan is an extremist. When he uses the language of the Koran to condemn the Jews, he is misrepresenting the Koran." See Worthington, "Farrakhan Stand."

[176] Lorraine Adams, "Mission Mires In 10-Year Heap of Unpaid Bills: Troubles Shadow Farrakhan's Economic Empowerment Goal," *Washington Post*, Sep 1, 1996.

[177] Adams, "Mission Mires." From the article, Wellington on POWER: "Once the POWER program is seen in its true light and we replace the negative financial pressure with positive financial pressure, he'll be there…If you focus on what POWER is all about, on what it is intended to do, you can't be against that or you would be seen to be an enemy of Black people."

[178] Adams, "Mission Mires."

years later, all revenue generated from sales of books, the *Final Call*, and other products in 1987 barely covered NOI salary, travel, and entertainment expenses. It was only through $273,000 dollars of donations that the organization was "able to break even."[179]

In that same year, Farrakhan revived the Three Year Economic Plan, a broader vision from POWER to support Black owned and NOI owned businesses, and the Number Two Poor Treasury, advertised in the *Final Call* to "continue the work of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in resurrecting the Black Man and Woman in America." Treasury ads included giveaways of photographs or t-shirts with Farrakhan's bold statements like "Your day of running Black people is over!" and "I, Louis Farrakhan, will never bow down."[180]

While the NOI expanded, most notably buying back the Chicago headquarters from Warith Deen Mohammed in 1988, its financial troubles continued. From 1989 to 1990 seven companies filed claims against the NOI for non-payment. Because it was listed as a religious organization, government financial regulators took a "hands off" approach unless there was suspicion of criminal activity like fraud.

Despite the lawsuits and unpaid taxes, and bad press, support for Farrakhan in the NOI did not waiver. Local Nation of Islam mosques built businesses, mosques, and community programs to grow wealth and well-being in African American communities. Healthy restaurants, drug recovery programs, young men programs, prison support – all these and more were being made available as services for the betterment of the neighborhood, not as development charity but as investment and distribution of funds within the Black community.

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[179] Adams, "Mission Mires."

[180] Adams, "Mission Mires."

Conclusion

The several organizations profiled here approached the idea of Islamic charity differently in the 1980s depending on socio-economic context, religious interpretations, and political standpoint. The MSA and ISNA had clear, comprehensive programs for zakat, humanitarian relief, and funding for mosques and other religious institutions. At the same time, W.D. Mohammed encouraged his community to meet their duty to give generously but was strongly focused on building business and wealth for African Americans, echoed in the more centralized economic messages of Minister Louis Farrakhan in the NOI. Even though Mohammed and Farrakhan did not frequently talk of charity, they both expected and encouraged donations to projects guided by their Islamic ethics to undo structural racism and redistribute wealth back into African American communities denied their share.

What these organizations share and reveal about this decade is the strengthening of national organizations and the movement towards professionalization. Before then, the strongest investment in professional services was in the recruitment and retention of imams; any other responsibilities were taken on by enthusiastic novices or given to a member with a professional background to do voluntarily. By the end of the 1980s, American Muslims not only created large scale organizations for educational and devotional life, but were formalizing concomitant interests in political organizing, economic ventures, and charitable relief and development. Each group faced different challenges to raise funds and use them in relation to their socio-economic position and in the face of harassment due to racism and Islamophobia. Whereas organizations like ISNA and the American Muslim Mission saw themselves as part of liberal multiculturalism within the American nation, Farrakhan's

Nation of Islam formulated the most direct critique of this order and the resulting socio-economic injustices in the United States.

This initial professionalization period serves as the groundwork for the emergence of the first large scale American Muslim charities in the 1990s. ISNA would be the clearest genealogical link, in part because of its strong capacity to fundraise for humanitarian causes and interest in both relief and development as the rallying causes for Islamic charity as Muslim duty. In addition, its idea of a professional, centralized organization that fit dominant humanitarian and non-profit sector norms, met with funding from white collar members, allowed it to enjoy a visibility and legitimacy not afforded to Black-led organizations.

Chapter 3
Organizing Charity into Bureaucratic Form: Post-Cold War Humanitarianism and the Dawn of the War on Terror

National level Muslim charities came to the fore as a new religious organization in the 1990s in a period of intense growth and further professionalization among American Muslims. Their appearance also coincides with the larger socio-political development of what Inderpal Grewal calls "imperial humanitarianism," which framed American charities as uniquely capable to save the distant, different others of the Global South (summarily disregarding domestic suffering).[1] This decade was formative to the structure, values, and activity of major American Muslim charities, including learning how to navigate an environment of intense Islamophobia and criminalization.

The chapter begins by explaining "neoliberal sovereignty," the newest logic of American racial capitalism in the late 1980s and 1990s, which shaped Muslim life according to its structural hierarchies. I then argue for and outline three key factors for the emergence of US Muslim charity organizations in the 1990s. Globally, Muslim relief work was separated out from political, missionary, and military activity and was organized into professional nonprofits to become part of the larger humanitarian field. Specific to the United States, American Muslims bureaucratized their shared activities as a religious community into specialized organizations, including charitable relief and development non-profits, spurring a period of incredible

[1] Inderpal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 64.

organizational growth. Third, service became an important tool for social inclusion during the Clinton Administration when privatization of social services put the onus on individuals and marginalized ethnic or religious communities to prove their capacity and commitment to a productive and "free" America. In the final section, using legal developments and media reports, I argue that 1990s created the structures and ideology of the War on Terror, despite it being formally declared after the September 11, 2001, attacks. Muslim charities were a central target for the newly forming counterterrorism apparatus and put significant limits on the free exercise of religion for American Muslims to practice collective charity.

Neoliberal Sovereignty and its Humanitarian Citizen

The 1990s strengthened socio-political developments from the last decade including the breakdown of U.S. state welfare and turn to privatization and austerity; increase deregulation for corporations and the unrestricted movement of global capital; and the imposition of structural adjustment programs onto Global South nations by financial and regulatory organizations run by the Global North.[2] These social, political, and economic changes are generally referred to as Neoliberalism. Its genetic material traces back to European imperialism/settler-colonialism and industrialized capitalism but has its origins in the late 1970s, embodied for many in the policies of U.S. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). After the end of the Cold War in 1991, the unipolar power of the US, with support of its allies, allowed it to impose neoliberal capitalism as the dominant global order.

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[2] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 39. These decisions were guided by the economic recommendations of the Washington Consensus, a policy program set by the United States, Word Bank, and the International Monetary Fund for reforming vulnerable post-colonial nations according to their neo-imperial standards of development.

Moving away from the liberal multiculturalism of the post-World War II democratic state, the United States in late 1980s and early 1990s created new social relations according to what Jodi Melamed calls "neoliberal sovereignty," whereby the global market replaces the state as the organizing power for human life.[3] In place of a central government and guaranteed universal public goods, neoliberal sovereignty promotes an efficient and productive market, coupled with strong private property rights and free trade, ostensibly to solve societal problems and provide necessary services.[4] Unbridled capitalist growth *was* "political and social freedom."[5]

Like earlier social orders, neoliberal sovereignty's appeal to universal freedom invisibilized the injustices inherent to its logic, introducing a new form of systemic racism to justify violent extraction and exploitation for the sake of white populations.[6] Unlike liberal multiculturalism, neoliberal sovereignty has a highly abstract racial logic in that the market itself is enshrined as antiracist because it is open, free, and multicultural.[7] Therefore a society is markedly free of racism when everyone can participate in an open marketized existence.

In addition to macro-level policy, neoliberalism altered individual subjectivities in the United States from the liberal citizen, entitled to universal democratic rights to "differentiated

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[3] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 39.

[4] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 2, 3. This builds on David Harvey's definition of Neoliberalism: "Neoliberalism is "the acceptance of the idea that 'human wellbeing can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade." From Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 3.

[5] Grace Hong, "Neoliberalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 59.

[6] Joe R. Feagin, "Towards an Integrated Theory of Systemic Racism," in *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Maria Krysan and Amanda Lewis (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 205.

[7] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 42.

citizenship" depending on one's value in the nation state and global economy.[8] Both individuals and social groups are assessed on economic and cultural grounds for their potential as good citizens of the United States and the international order.[9] The ideal subject is the "entrepreneurial self" who is self-making, self-marketing, and self-improving while those unfit for citizenship are a burden or threat.[10]

While it promotes itself as a post-racial meritocracy, built on initiative and fair competition, American neoliberal subjectivity reinforces existing hierarchies across race, gender, and North/South boundaries. Neoliberal sovereignty is given a moral authority by "ascribing racialized privilege to neoliberalism's beneficiaries and racialized stigma to its dispossessed. In particular, it has valued its beneficiaries as multicultural, reasonable, law abiding, and good global citizens and devalued the dispossessed as monocultural, backward, weak, and irrational."[11] The process to become the "ideal" neoliberal subject, "becomes inseparable from the process of whitening" and depends as much on the "Blackening" of those deemed "less desirable" and at fault for their precarity.[12] Domestically this gave life to anti-Black policy including the "War on Drugs," "War on Crime," and the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act.

These legislative acts were reinforced by racially coded and gendered culture talk of "welfare queens" and "thugs" to ascribe pathological failure of the Black community and

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[8] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 39.

[9] Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 37, No. 5 (December 1996), 742.

[10] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 3.

[11] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 44.

[12] Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 739; Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, No. 1 (Spring 2015), 81.

conversely to idealize the moral, disciplined, and meritorious white heteronormative nuclear family. Non-Black people of color are slotted within this white-Black spectrum where intertwined aspirational whiteness and entrepreneurial selfhood are rewarded but any perceived economic failure or disruptive cultural perversion takes away access to rights and freedoms within American society, putting oneself or one's racialized community in proximity to Blackness.[13]

Humanitarianism in the Neoliberal Order

Humanitarianism gains a more comprehensive role in the neoliberalism socio-political system emerging in the 1990s. Grace Hong explains that neocolonial action abroad through debt, forced austerity, and militarism were "increasingly narrated as a form of humanitarianism" to assist states deemed incapable of their own security, management, and "development."[14] This included the Euro-American humanitarian NGOs in post-colonial states who claim formal neutrality yet worked alongside Western militaries and private corporations. In the domestic realm, through mass privatization, American nonprofits "[took] over the welfare functions of the state."[15] Welfare is no longer treated as universal benefits of US citizens because they are now expected to be entrepreneurial and self-improving. Instead, it functions as programs of "care, regulation, and punishment" for dispossessed populations –stigmatized for the very care they are offered.[16]

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[13] Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 749.

[14] Hong, "Neoliberalism," 59.

[15] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 5.

[16] Hong, "Neoliberalism," 60.

In response to the fading prominence of the state as the central manager of governmentality, the ideal, multicultural neoliberal subject steps forward to serve as a humanitarian to meet the need for a sovereign actor to assess, manage, and care for local and global populations in a neoliberal capitalist order. He is trained by elite education, class socialization, and professional organizations to understand and employ "racializing codes for vulnerable or exploited groups through so-called leadership training and discourses of service, mission, benevolence and reform," in order to capably employ the "civilizing/disqualifying regimes that target populations disconnected from circuits of neoliberal wealth and value."[17] The racializing codes locate sovereign power in whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity. Marginalized populations only enjoy alienated relations with elites as sources of value production. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes this as "the state sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" for the sake of profit.[18]

Although the US serves as an "imperial security state" at the end of the 20th century, it still maintains the myth of American exceptionalism to justify the status quo of a violently unequal world.[19] In this mythology, the US is "model of a liberal, capitalist democracy" born from anti-colonial struggle, which gives it the "sovereign right to kill and the right to rescue" as a moral leader to the world.[20] In conjunction, the "exceptional citizen" is equally afforded the right to adjudicate human value to the point of life or death for internal populations and those it

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[17] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 45.

[18] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

[19] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 5.

[20] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 8.

manages through military, diplomatic, and humanitarian methods. The US and the exceptional citizen are therefore posited as both morally obliged to save and care for the world as exemplars of freedom, liberty, and the common good, placing them above international law.

Islam, Muslims, and the New International Order

These ideological and structural shifts in the geopolitics of the late 1980s and early 1990s used racialized ideas about Islam and Muslims to justify ongoing hierarchies of life, which impacted Muslim living in regions of American "interest" as well as local populations within the US metropole. The Cold War came to its political end in 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The United States and its allies interpreted this moment as the defeat of communism and a confirmation of the superiority of democratic capitalism and the "free world," reinforcing American exceptionalism and its global leadership. Even when lauding the benefits of global connections and freedoms, American commentators expressed triumphalism and nationalist pride reminiscent of modern European imperialism. Conservative commentators Charles Krauthammer called it "The Unipolar Moment" with one unrivaled superpower standing: The United States.[21]

Even with incredible hegemonic power, United States' imperial position required an oppositional force to justify dominance. In other words, if the US no longer needed to "save" the world from communism, what would define and legitimize to US global hegemony? At this time, the United States, its allies, and the UN, framed "insecurity" as the main threat to a free and democratic world. Absent the Cold War proxy wars or disputes between sovereign nations, insecurity was caused by domestic conflicts, "weak" or collapsed states, and non-state actors,

[21] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, No. 1 (1990). https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1990-01-01/unipolar-moment.

which consequentially affected the security and human rights of civilians.[22] In the new "free" world all people deserved democracy, human rights, rule of law, and access to freedom. The "CNN effect" of a 24-hour news cycle and live-satellite coverage created popular investment in intervention among First World viewers to prevent violence and protected the "insecure."

The effect of this new security regime was to return, albeit with new language, to a colonial language of paternalism by European and American powers. Third World nation-state sovereignty "was not a right but a privilege that depended on how it treated its citizens."[23] The United States was the self-appointed judge of stability, freedom, and respect for human rights, a role it exercised through "peacebuilding," i.e. military-humanitarian hybrid interventions buttressed by soft power, "not based [outwardly] on coercion but rather on the attractiveness of American values, commodities and popular culture."[24]

In practice, the United States measured "stability" relative to states and non-state actors' willingness to appease American interests. Those who capitulated to America's neoliberal sovereignty were considered stable members of the global community and those who resisted were labeled "rogue" states or illegitimate actors. This position extended across political lines in the American government, divided only by two main positions on global enforcement. Confrontationalists saw global power as a zero-sum game where the United States must act independently and unapologetically to maintain its hegemony and protect its interests abroad

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[22] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 162.

[23] Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 166.

[24] Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2012), 128.

whereas Accommodationalists were invested in soft power and used multilateralism, coalition-building, and diplomacy to achieve the *Pax Americana* necessary for maintaining their empire.[25]

During the George Bush Senior and William "Bill" Clinton presidential administrations Accommodationalist policy dominated. President Clinton's national security advisor, Anthony Lake, explained this position: "The fault line runs not between civilizations or religions; no, it runs instead between oppressive and responsive government, between isolation and openness, and between moderation and extremism."[26] In reality, treatment was contingent on whether a particular government cooperated with American interests. For example, while Saudi Arabia was an autocracy with significant human rights violations, the US considered them a strong and stable ally because it welcomed American private oil business and US military bases.

Although the Bush and Clinton administrations worked to "win over" Muslim majority countries by encouraging and rewarding "moderate" Islam, their pathologizing of Muslims as prone to violence and less capable of self-governance reveals that only a superficial veil separated them from the Confrontationalists who painted Muslims as the "biggest threat to global security," which necessitated American leadership and international military control as a "bulwark against 'Islamic terrorism.'"[27] While they were not the most powerful actors in policy during these two administrations, Sohail Daulatzai argues that they consistently produced influential theory and impact on American policy that became the blueprint for the War on

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[25] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 78.

[26] Kumar, *Islamophobia*, 79.

[27] Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 150.

Terror response to the September 11, 2001 attacks. Mainstream American media and politicians in the 1980s were already using pathologizing language about Arabs and later Muslims.

In the 1990s, American political scientists developed blanket theories of the "Green Menace" in reference to Islam that evoked crude Orientalist tropes to justify American dominance. The manifesto for this position was provided by Bernard Lewis in "The Roots of Muslim Rage," written in 1990 to support the American military invasion into Iraq during the First Gulf War. He called the moment, "no less than a clash of civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historical reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both."[28]

Several other conservative commentators used dehumanizing language against Muslims, warning of a "global intifada" and a "specter haunting America." But it was Samuel Huntington who developed a fully-fledged ideological position on international relations.[29] In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (1996) Huntington argues that post Cold War conflict will be based on cultural difference defined by major civilizational zones across the globe and rejects the Accommodationalist position that other cultures can be coaxed into American values of democracy, human rights, and free markets. "Western Civilization," code for the United States, is the cultural superior to other civilizations because it is the origin point and manifestation of these values. "Islamic civilization" is fundamentally opposed because of spite and a perverse inferiority complex; notably, he does not call out "bad" Muslims *qua* the archetype of the terrorist or the extremist – it is Islam itself that is the problem. Huntington offers

[28] Daulatzai, *Black Star,* 155.

[29] Daulatzai, *Black Star,* 154.

a grave warning that Muslims are "unrelenting enemies who will try to destroy us unless we destroy them first."[30]

Even if neoconservatives were not at the helm in 1990s America, the "clash of civilizations" theory became credible in policy circles and was reinforced through popular culture. Films like *Not Without My Daughter* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992) perpetuated the idea of dangerous and backward Islamic countries and Spike Lee struggled to find funding for his film *Malcolm X* because the Muslim leader was framed as an anti-American figure who hated white people.[31] Both government and popular Islamophobia came to a head in the response to the Oklahoma City bombing of April 1995 when dominant media was quick to blame foreign non-white Muslim "terrorists" for the attack when in fact it was done by two white men. Arabs, Muslims, and those caught in the dragnet of "looking" Muslim were harassed in the confusion.

It is easy to point to the fearmongering and racist language of neoconservative and Confrontationalist political thinkers and actors, but they were one side of the same coin as the liberal administration that promoted freedom, democracy, and neoliberal sovereignty. Liberal Accomodationalists shared both the belief and structural investment in global racial orders to maintain American hegemony and white supremacy for the purpose of protecting their own power, stability, and wealth.

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[30] Huntington quoted in Daulatzai, *Black Star,* 156.

[31] Megan Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020); Maytha Alhassen, "Haqq & Hollywood: Illuminating 100 years of Muslim Tropes and How to Transform Them," *Pop Culture Collaborative*, 2018, https://popcollab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HaqqAndHollywood_Report.pdf; Lena Williams, "Spike Lee Says Money From Blacks Saved 'X'," The New York Times, May 20, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/20/movies/spike-lee-says-money-from-blacks-saved-x.html?searchResultPosition=41.

American Interventions in Muslim Majority Regions

The US intervened in several humanitarian disasters and regional conflicts in Muslim majority spaces through a new strategy to use the military to deliver aid. It retained biopolitical decision making power, alongside international organizations and Euro-American humanitarian nonprofits, above national governments. For example, after Bangladesh was ravaged by a massive cyclone in late April of 1991, the US sent a group of 8,000 military personnel to deliver humanitarian assistance, citing their logistical and transport capacities as a far superior form of assistance than funding.[32] During the civil war in Somalia (1991-), President George H. W. Bush authorized troops to stop looting and attacks and provide avenues for the safe delivery of food and aid to civilians; he explained, "Our mission is humanitarian… [but commanders will] take whatever military action is necessary to safeguard the lives of our troops and the lives of Somalia's people."[33] Critics were concerned that Bush was leading 28,000 troops into a conflict zone with no end date, limit, or set rules governing American authority, creating a Vietnam situation of occupation and protracted involvement.[34]

This concern became manifest in the 1990s when America attempted this military-humanitarian intervention in Sudan and Bosnia. In both instances, internal warring parties used food and other humanitarian aid to benefit their own cause, whether it was feeding their own troops in Sudan or Serbian forces encouraging Bosnian Muslims to flee to humanitarian safe

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[32] David Binder, "First U.S. Troops Arrive in Bangladesh to Begin Large-Scale Relief Effort," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/13/world/first-us-troops-arrive-in-bangladesh-to-begin-large-scale-relief-effort.html.

[33] Michael Wines, "Mission to Somalia; Bush Declares Goal in Somalia to 'Save Thousands,'" *The New York Times*, December 5, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/05/world/mission-to-somalia-bush-declares-goal-in-somalia-to-save-thousands.html.

[34] Wines, "Mission to Somalia."

zones as a means to expedite their expulsion.[35] In 1998 Julia Taft, the Assistant Secretary of State for Refugees and Humanitarian Assistance decried the US government's military delivery of aid to one faction in Sudan as a "departure from the way we should be using food aid" because it violated humanitarian neutrality and weaponized food as a tool of war.[36] Nonetheless, American intervention was framed as a matter of paternalistic biopolitics, ensuring the lives of dependent populations were protected to participate in the free world – albeit under American hegemony.

Civilian populations that did not have ongoing strategic or extractive value post-conflicts could easily lose aid. A flagrant example was the abandonment of aid to post-war Afghanistan in early 1995. At the time, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, Kabul Director had choice words for the Americans for not "cleaning up" the mess they created in Afghanistan: "When you go to somebody's house and burn a hole in the carpet, you should either repair it, or buy a new carpet."[37] Civilians could also be treated as collateral damage in instances of America enforcing its geopolitical order, as was the case with sanctions against Iraq in 1991 to inhibit Saddam Hussein's regime from buying war-grade weapons.[38] When applied the sanctions caused widespread suffering, such as severe child malnutrition and medical supply shortages. The global community saw it as a retaliatory act that *caused* a humanitarian crisis.

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[35] Barbara Crossette, "Famine Peril Returns to Sudan as Aid Is Blocked," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/12/world/famine-peril-returns-to-sudan-as-aid-is-blocked.html.

[36] Jane Perlez, "U.S. Weighs Using Food as Support for Sudan Rebels," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/11/29/world/us-weighs-using-food-as-support-for-sudan-rebels.html.

[37] John F. Burns, "As U.S. Aid Ends, Need of Afghan War Victims Persists," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/22/world/as-us-aid-ends-need-of-afghan-war-victims-persists.html.

[38] United States Department of the Treasury, "Iraq-Related Sanctions," accessed July 22, 2020, https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/iraq-related-sanctions.

In the 1990s geopolitical order, the complimentary side to America's humanitarian intervention was the effort to stop "terrorism" to protect global stability and its own interests. Terrorism was a label applied to non-state actors whose actions disrupted international security, separated out from other non-state actors who the US deemed justified in fighting against tyrannical governments. For example, in Latin America the US backed several militant groups that performed bloody coups in the 1980s and 1990s against communist governments during the Cold War. Organizations with ideologies tied to Islam were of special interest to policymakers because of a belief that they were particularly motivated by anti-American sentiment mixed with fanatical piety, especially a new conception of *jihad* from the Afghan War, described in US media as "a borderless religious war against infidels."[39] These groups' critique of unipolar American hegemony, such as American military bases in Muslim majority countries, was irrelevant. The US mainly targeted two categories they labeled as Islamic terrorists: Islamist groups labeled a threat to Israel and al-Qaeda and its affiliates.

Over the 1990s, the US tried to shut down several Islamist socio-political movements in the Levant region such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad because Israel was a close ally, symbolically anchoring Western democracy, stability, and control in the region.[40] The US label al-Qaeda a belligerent terrorist organization hellbent on taking down the United States and "the West," which was affirmed by 1993 World Trade Center bombing. The 1998 American embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania linked to al-Qaeda confirmed that this powerful organization

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[39] Jeff Gerth and Judith Miller, "Funds for Terrorists Traced to Persian Gulf Businessmen," *The New York Times*, August 14, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/14/world/funds-for-terrorists-traced-to-persian-gulf-businessmen.html.

[40] The US also pursued non-religious groups as well, such as the Marxist the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

was the greatest threat of future terrorism into the new millennium. Whether providing aid for Muslim civilians in regional conflicts or fighting Islamist political organizations, the United States consistently affirmed its moral and social superiority as the humanitarian and security force across the globe. This paternalistic position towards Muslim populations abroad and foreign states would have a mirror effect on Muslim populations in the United States trying to engage in their own humanitarian work.

The Rise of the Humanitarian Non-Profit in Muslim Charity

In this post-Cold War era, Muslim charity in the US was impacted by and responding to the emergent milieu of neoliberal sovereignty and the new geopolitical dynamics of what I call the early War on Terror period. The origin of this phrase is typically linked to the early speeches given by President George W. Bush after the 2001 attacks, evoking a wartime bravado to give meaning and shape to the United States' forming response, its centerpiece the swiftly passed PATRIOT ACT (October 26, 2001). However, I argue that the War on Terror legislative, judiciary, intelligence, and military apparatus was laid in the 1990s. Its blanket surveillance and criminalization of Muslim political speech and monetary activity as "terrorism" had a direct and detrimental impact on the nascent field of American Muslim humanitarian charity organizations.

The following sections will demonstrate how humanitarian non-profits began as a new religious institution in the United States among American Muslims in the 1990s. The first factor was that, over the course of the 1990s, Muslim charitable activity globally shifted from more hybrid Islamist political movements to organize overseas aid to adopting a professionalized standard of the humanitarian non-profit charity, formally separate from political organizations. Second, American Muslims created an organizational boom to professionalize shared activities in civic and religious life. Earlier informal charitable aid work was professionalized too into

relief and development organizations, both for international aid and local service. Differences among these new organizations are visible relative to their racial dynamics and interpretation of systemic inequality. Nationalistic service was an especially prominent strategy from W.D. Muhammad and his community to support the Black community and promote themselves as ideal neoliberal citizens and humanitarians of the security state while subversively working towards economic justice in an anti-Black society.

Professionalization did not spare these organizations from increasing surveillance and blanket criminalization for relief abroad by the United States government's quickly escalating campaign against "terrorism," near exclusively focused on Muslims, which will be the focus of the final section. In opposition to this order, there is significant evidence of Muslims asserting their rights and obligations to charity for the sake of devotion and justice.

From (Pan)Islam/ism to Humanitarianism

The Afghan-Soviet war of the 1980s inspired a strong Pan-Islamist sentiment that resulted in significant support *fi sabil Allah* (for the cause of God) from Muslims internationally. The influential Egyptian Sunni scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi interpreted the war as a *jihad* and gave the legal opinion that participation was a *fard 'ein* (individual obligation), with each giving "material and intellectual help" as they are able.[41] This coming together of post-colonial Islamism and Pan-Islamic unity were a powerful mix that brought to Afghanistan millions in aid; missionaries; medics and aid workers; and thousands of Muslim fighters.[42]

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[41] Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 71. This categorization means that each person individually is responsible to help versus a communal obligation in which the need must be met but can be fulfilled by a combination of people within the community.

[42] Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 74.

American Muslims were no exception. They sent money to ease suffering, gave to missionary activity, and also welcomed fundraisers for the *mujahideen* (championed by the United States government and mainstream American culture as "freedom fighters") in their mosques.[43] As we saw in the *Islamic Horizons* publications from the 1980s, the effort to support the Afghan war as a "Muslim cause" or "Muslim duty" fit a larger trend of American Muslims' belief that they had a religious duty to provide charitable support to Muslims globally. Some saw it as a Pan-Islamic duty to care for the *ummah* in all circumstances while others took an Islamist perspective to be in solidarity with Muslims fighting for their survival and freedom under conditions of neo-colonialism and imperialism from non-Muslim powers. Famine in East Africa and apartheid in Palestine were also two issues that attracted significant attention in the 1980s.

For all these causes, Muslim fundraising and media campaigns treated political movements, military action, *da'wa*, and relief as intertwined affairs. This was because "'Islamic relief' was not merely an act of relief for victims, but part of a total commitment to the support of a political cause with a strong religious component."[44] Relief was a form of justice, not benevolent care. On the ground in Afghanistan these activities did not have hard and fast boundaries either. Humanitarian organizations founded to support the Afghan cause by Muslim minority communities in Europe and North America such as Muslim Aid (UK), Human Concern International (Canada), and Benevolence International Foundation (USA) were deeply committed to keeping their activity "Islamic" and differentiated from non-Islamic organizations who they be rejected because they were secular, "western," or Christian. American Muslims

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[43] According to available records, there was not a notable number of American Muslims who left the United States to join the military ranks in Afghanistan.

[44] Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 74.

founded relief organizations for East Africa and Palestine on the same model, such as the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development and the Islamic African Relief Agency.

Three factors had a significant role in the collective shift towards a more distinct humanitarian field for American Muslim international relief organizations in the start of the 1990s, following global trends. First, during the Afghan war, Muslim relief organizations saw that they lacked the same level of professionalism as mainstream European and American relief organizations like Catholic Relief Services. At the time, they recruited based on religious zeal instead of credentials, which lowered their capacity, coordination, and effectiveness. Second, after the war ended, Muslim majority states once eager to support the *jihad* turned cold, abandoning these organizations and in some instances treating their relief efforts as a cover for criminal activity or a base for revolutionary political activity.[45] For example, in 1992 British Muslim Aid was kicked out of Pakistan on these grounds. The United States and its allies in the post-Cold War order viewed most Muslim non-state political actors as forces of global instability, creating further barriers for relief organizations to do their work while affiliated with Islamist political parties or movements.[46] Third, after Saudi Arabia supported American military intervention in the First Gulf War, "American Muslim organizations came to view petrodollars as a toxic asset," ending the pressure to parrot the Kingdom's political and religious positions. [47]

In response to these realizations and changing conditions, dominant American Muslim international relief charities shifted away from a close affiliation with Muslim socio-political

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[45] Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 77.

[46] Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 75.

[47] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 334.

movements. They "adopted the standard discourse of international humanitarian action, which mentions only relief and development…distinct from the political and the military."[48] Nonetheless they read humanitarian values through their own religious traditions of charity and made exceptions to neutrality to ensure Muslims in need were cared for globally.[49]

Becoming a humanitarian organization allowed American Muslim charities (and others globally) to become normalized under the new order of neoliberal sovereignty – regardless of whether they completely accepted its logic. Framing the suffering of Muslim populations abroad as a matter of relief and development, and avoiding political speech to critique the racist and Islamophobic imperial violence of post-Cold War *Pax Americana*, conferred legitimacy and value to these organizations as forces of security and stability. Working in Muslim majority regions in situations of war would not be an act of sedition but a form of humanitarian care for populations coded by the US government as less civilized and in need of benevolent guidance.[50]

A useful case study of this transformation is the Detroit-based Mercy International-USA. The charitable organization was Founded in Denver, Colorado in 1986 as Human Concern International (HCI) to "assist refugees arriving in Pakistan to escape the war in Afghanistan" and was embedded in the matrix of Muslim aid, *da'wah*, and military organization and activity on the ground.[51] In 1988 it incorporated in the Greater Detroit area and officially changed its name to

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[48] Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 77.

[49] The global standard for humanitarian values is generally recognized from the United Nations. See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles*, June 2012: https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf;
Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 82.

[50] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 45.

[51] Dan Shine, "Garden City Agency Offers Help to World," *Detroit Free Press*, January 19, 1996, ProQuest.

Mercy International in 1989.[52] Ten years later the organization had a two million dollar budget, mostly from "small private donations," and expanded its operations to Somalia, Albania, and Bangladesh, and Bosnia.[53] Not to be seen as an organization oriented exclusively abroad, Mercy repeatedly helped with disasters in the United States, including the 1993 Iowa floods, 1994 Los Angeles earthquake, and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

From a January 1996 interview, the Executive Director Umar al-Qadi and other staff are careful to frame all of their activity according to humanitarian values first: Mercy staff "keep their religious beliefs out of their work." Staff member Mohamed Ahmed, 40, admits he is personally inspired to serve because of his religion "to help the people whether they are yellow, black, red, Muslim, non-Muslim, Christian, Jew…if people need help, I help." Mercy also works in line with neoliberal sovereignty – their focus with charity recipients in developing nations is building self-sufficiency. Muslim staff offered no political analysis about conflicts where they served, like the Bosnia War, protecting their public image of neutrality. This strategy was rewarded by the Clinton White House, when four staff were invited to an interfaith meeting with Catholic Relief Services and International Orthodox Christian Charities to assist with reconciliation and rebuilding efforts in Bosnia. Muslim organizations were typically roundly ignored or seen as completely separate to the international humanitarian field and staff felt this was a breakthrough moment. In August of 1995, Mercy was also granted consultantship status with the UN Economic and Social Council, further cementing their place at the table.[54]

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[52] Steven Emerson, *Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the US* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), 312. I do not endorse the Islamophobic message of this text, but it was the only source that contained the date for the name change and registration of this charity.

[53] Shine, "Garden City Agency."

[54] Shine, "Garden City Agency."

Several other American Muslim charities followed suit to transition from their politically and religiously explicit form into a humanitarian non-profit organization in stated values and practice. They professionalized staff and programs according to humanitarian principles and non-profit standards in expertise, delivery, and assessment metrics. By 1996, seven of the largest American Muslim humanitarian charities, including Mercy International-USA, met to facilitate greater cooperation in their relief efforts. Less than a year later they founded the Council of American Muslim Charities, with four more organizations, consolidating power and representation in the larger field dominated by historically white Christian and secular organizations.[55] Together they demonstrate the new standard for organized Islamic charitable work: a registered 501(c)3 humanitarian relief and development organization.

The Organizational Boom

The movement of collective Muslim charitable activity away from relief organizations intertwined with explicit Islamist political work and towards humanitarian non-profits took place within a larger movement among American Muslims towards forming differentiated, formalized organizations. Three key factors contributed to a swell of formal organization building in the 1990s. First is demographics: census data shows there was a near 200% increase in "foreign-born individuals from Muslim-majority countries" from 871,582 to 1,717,132 in the 1990s.[56] While

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[55] "Historical Meeting of Leading Muslim Charity Organizations Paves the Way for More Cooperation," *Global News* 4, No. 1 (Winter 1997). The founding organizations were the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, the Global Relief Foundation, the Benevolence International Foundation, Islamic African Relief Agency, the International Relief Association, Mercy International, and the International Relief Organization. Additional participants were Care International, Gulf Medical Relief Fund, Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) Relief, and Indian Relief. Information on participants is from Emerson, *Jihad Incorporated*, 360.

[56] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam, 294*. Large increases in Muslim immigration also came from previously restricted countries with Muslim minorities, like India.

there is not parallel data for native born Muslim population, it is notable that 60% of the 1,600 mosques built in the 20th century (about 960) were built in the 1980s and 1990s.[57] The rise in population coupled with a continued interest in collective religious life would support a rise in the number of organizations in the 1990s.

Per the second factor, Iqbal J. Unus argues that Muslim organizations at the end of the 20th century became more formalized in general, which led to increases in visible numbers of organizations as government-registered entities. Unus coins the term Muslim Community Organizations (MCO) to describe these independent Muslim voluntary sector or civil society organizations.[58] He identifies four main types of MCOs: worship and religious education; welfare and relief; research and professions; and advocacy and issue-oriented. Among all four, Unus argues there had been a growth in sophistication at the end of the 20th century in organizational structure and drive from "individual initiative, charismatic leadership, or even adventurism…[to becoming] more structured, membership driven, and service oriented."[59]

By the closing of the millennium, he makes the crucial point that nonprofit law "[demanded] greater transparency in making decisions, increased accountability in managing funds, and an enhanced focus on the declared mission of the organization."[60] Work that in the past would be done informally, was now formally incorporated, which would lead to greater numbers of organizations. For example, an advertisement for Relief International in a 1995

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[57] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam, 346*.

[58] Iqbal J. Unus, "Governance in Muslim Community Organizations," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari, et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), 350.

[59] Unus, "Governance," 360.

[60] Unus, "Governance," 361.

Islamic Horizons assures the potential donor: "Upon Your Request We Will Provide you our complete financial records for the last 3 years (1992-1995)."[61] This transparency could also be related to fears of donating after the United States government started to accuse international American Muslim charities of sponsoring terrorism, discussed in the chapter's final section.

Considering charities as part of the growth of MCOs, in this decade we have evidence that charity organizations become a more regular conduit through which religious charity was funneled to provide aid abroad, in addition to distribution done through family networks or foreign charities abroad. For example, after a devastating earthquake in Afghanistan in February 1998, mosques in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles held fundraisers for the victims during Friday prayers coordinated by the charity Islamic Relief-USA (IR-USA), which started in 1984 in the UK but opened its first US office in 1994.[62] A year later, IR-USA held a fundraiser for refugees of the Bosnian War for "Southern California Muslim groups [that] hope to raise $300,000."[63] It would not be the imam, mosque board, or a prominent community member alone to find the right place for donation now that Islamic Relief-USA was present as a new specialized organization for this activity.

The final set of factors to explain the large growth of MCOs, including Muslim nonprofit relief and development organizations, relates to domestic and international politics of the 1990s. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri argues that post-Cold War civilizational talk that targeted Muslims as a

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[61] Relief International Advertisement, *Islamic Horizons,* September/October 1995.

[62] John Dart, "Mosques Collect Relief Donations for Afghanistan Quake Victims," *Los Angeles Times* February 14, 1998, ProQuest.

[63] Jeffrey Gettleman, "Burbank-Based Group Shifts Its Focus to Refugee Camps; Balkans," *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1999, ProQuest. From the article, "Now that the conflict has sent 230,000 streaming across borders, Islamic Relief is moving from development projects to emergency help."

threat propelled Muslim leadership to avoid financial sponsorship from abroad, especially from Gulf states, and "organize and actively participate in American society."[64] Leaders transformed themselves from "Islamic activists in America to being American Muslim activists" and worked to create a variety of organizations in this new direction.[65] They invested more in defending and protecting their identity publicly as Muslims, in ways we saw earlier with ethnicity for Arab or Iranian identity.[66] A flurry of organizations sprouted to protect and celebrate Muslim presence.

Civil rights organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (est. 1994) were formed to protect Muslims from hate crimes and discriminatory treatment. Political organizations like the American Muslim Alliance (est.1994) took shape to form voting blocs and advocate for issues that mattered to Muslims. And more grassroots initiatives were created, like the Muslim American Society (est. 1992) or the Islamic Circle of North America's domestic relief organization ICNA-Relief (est. 1994) to build community connections, offer Islamic solutions to domestic ills, and counter Islamophobic stereotypes.[67] Large scale humanitarian relief and development organizations like the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development or Mercy International were part of this period of organizational growth and specialization.

Leadership in this camp was majority Arab and South Asian, male, and white collar or business-owners, who were sympathetic to or (former) members of Islamist political organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Jama'at-e-Islami. Women played a role to

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[64] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 341.

[65] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 350.

[66] Nadine Naber, "Muslim First, Arab Second: A Strategic Politics of Race and Gender," *The Muslim World* 95, No. 4 (October 2005): 479-495.

[67] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 344-354.

create these organizations, despite seeing little visibility, but on the national stage were most prominent in the women-centered organizations they created, including the Muslim Women's League (est. 1992) and KARAMAH (est. 1994), a legal aid organization for Muslim women's rights.[68] These leaders responsible for the most visible growth in national organizations did not coordinate closely with the two largest African American national organizations, the Warith Deen Mohammed community and the revived Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan, the later often routinely dismissed as un-Islamic.

Organizational Growth for Domestic-Focused Local Charities

Local, Muslim grassroots organizational growth in this period also rose across all four types of MCOs -including relief and service charities- as a result of population growth; bureaucratic formalization; and as a response to the socio-political conditions of local Muslims. It also was spurred in part by the drying up of funding from the Gulf region. For example, in San Diego, California a promising social organization called Al-Ribat al-Islami formed in 1985 to collect money and clothing for locals in need and disaster zones abroad but went into decline by 1992 because "interest abroad in supporting this type of project [was] waning."[69] Below I offer examples of local service organizations incorporated at the end of the 1980s through the 1990s.

Several Muslim women-centered organizations came onto the map focused on local needs. In 1989, an affluent mostly-Punjabi Indian diaspora women's group in Chicagoland incorporated their previously informal service work into Apna Ghar (Our House), the first shelter

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[68] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 345.

[69] M.K. Hermansen, "The Muslims of San Diego," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 183. (perhaps inspired by but not a local branch of the Gulf organization) Ribat al-Islami.

for Asian women in the United States, with a specific focus on Pakistani and Muslim women.[70] In Detroit, Michigan the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) and the United Muslim Women Association of the Islamic Institute of Detroit applied and were granted thirty thousand dollars in 1998 from Michigan's Women Foundation to start what they called The Arab Female Domestic Violence Advocacy Project.[71]

More general medical services were also a popular form of local Muslim nonprofit relief and service organizations. One well-known example is the UMMA Community Clinic in Los Angeles, California, formed by Muslim medical and graduate students, with university and local government support, "to provide healthcare, often at no cost, to underserved populations of Los Angeles."[72] Other local organizations aimed broader, trying to attend to comprehensive needs in communities with significant structural inequalities and social breakdown. A representative organization of this hybrid type, beyond a humanitarian idea of service or relief, is the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) founded in Chicago, Illinois in 1995 as a "a community organization that fosters health, wellness and healing in the inner-city by organizing for social change, cultivating the arts, and operating a holistic health center" on Chicago's South Side.[73]

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[70] Padma Rangaswamy, *Namasté America: Indian Immigrants in an American Metropolis* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000), 311-313.

[71] Tracy Van Moorlehem, "Domestic Abuse Grant Aids Arabs," *Detroit Free Press*, November 11, 1998, ProQuest. In New York City, Puerto Rican convert Khadijah Abdelmoty founded PIEDAD, Propagacion Islamica para la educacion y devocion de Ala'el Divino, as a *da'wah* and women's support group for Latina women who are Muslims themselves or married to Muslim men. While not a direct service organization it is notable that she was helping to facilitate group conversation and support for such issues as "employment outside the home, day care, child rearing, and marriage disputes." See Marc Ferris, "Immigrant Muslims in New York City," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 224.

[72] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam,* 354.

[73] "About," *Inner City Muslim Action Network*, Accessed July 3, 2020, https://www.imancentral.org/about/.

Finally, national Muslim humanitarian nonprofits began to create domestic arms of their work, taking it beyond piecemeal donations and support in response to natural disasters in the United States. For example, in 1999 the New Jersey office manager for the Holy Land Foundation (HLF), Abdulrahman Odeh, 40, founded a halal food pantry for local Muslims and all food insecure people in Passaic County. The Holy Land Foundation almost exclusively focused on Palestine and causes abroad, save disasters. Odeh came to the idea of a food pantry after seeing a bumper sticker "Feed the Hungry" and realizing there must be food distribution programs in the US too, so he got in contact with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey."[74] Unlike the deeply embedded politics that informed Holy Land's work in Palestine, these humanitarian organizations led by older, professional immigrants, were often newly involved in the politics and needs of their American communities.

The growing recognition by this group of older activists to address social problems in the United States, along with the growing visibility of locally based service organizations, helped to bring about a conference May 25-27, 1996 titled "Islamic Social Services" hosted by the Islamic Society of North America's Women's Committee and the ISNA Development Foundation in Chicago, Illinois. The conference centered experts in social welfare; they invited "licensed social workers, physicians, psychiatrists, family law specialists, psychologists… and community activists." The 75 attendees had three goals to "identify and bring together Muslim professionals and community workers to build a network"; "create a forum for dialogue between two important resources: community imams and mental health professionals"; and "[build] an Islamic framework for counseling and social services." To achieve those goals, the group

[74] Angela Starita, "On the Map: Following Muslim Charity and Dietary Laws, Food for the Needy," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1999, https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/21/nyregion/on-the-map-following-muslim-charity-and-dietary-laws-food-for-the-needy.html.

established committees on research and development, resource development, training, and publicity and planning. The lynchpin was ISNA, which would use their website and annual conference to help disseminate developments in social services from the network.[75]

Overall, the growth and formalizations of national and local American Muslim organizations created a landscape of differentiated services and activity that worked interdependently to enhance communal well-being and protect civil rights. Muslim charity organizations in the 1990s worked to establish themselves as the organic choice for American Muslims' religious charity, with a focus on human need and care.

American Muslim Society: Service as an Alternative to Humanitarianism

The movement towards humanitarian nonprofit organizations was a major innovation in collective Muslim charity in the 1990s dominated by non-African American Muslim male leaders heavily invested in charitable relief and development abroad. Domestic relief and welfare programs were a secondary and slower development for these new organizations that continued to orient their relief and care outside the United States.

The largest African American Muslim organization in the 1990s, the American Muslim Society (AMS) under Warith Deen Mohammed, did not pivot towards creating their own global humanitarian nonprofit for two main reasons. One, AMS was already well integrated into the bureaucratic structures of domestic religious organizations and non-profits in the United States

[75] "Conference Report: Muslim Social Services Take a Step Forward: ISNA Social Services Conference Brings Activists Together," *Islamic Horizons,* July/August 1996, 24. The organizations who attended and were listed include Hamdard Center (Chicago), Inter Muslim Action Network (Chicago), Islamic Relief (Los Angeles), Islamic Health and Social Services (Detroit), Mercy International (Detroit), MAYA Women's Committee (Detroit), ICNA Relief (New York), and Muslim InterCommunity Network (Washington DC). The article adds, "numerous other institutions and organizations also participated from many states."

and did not need the same legitimation. Local governments lauded their work for 'filling the gap' left by austerity cuts to social services with culturally competent programs for Black populations. Second, the focus of the AMS was on community-based uplift and development in this harsh context of austerity and criminalization. Far from humanitarian neutrality, AMS was decidedly committed to the vitality of the Black community, as a matter of self-love and justice. Going back to the late Elijah Muhammad, the Saviour's fund was dedicated not to universal *caritas* but for his own "use" to see that "the poor and the needy of *our* Nation are looked after."[76]

A representative AMS community in the 1990s is Masjid ul-Mutkabir in Poughkeepsie, NY. They avoided language of charity in favor of "social and economic development" towards self-sufficiency.[77] The community would evaluate, determine, and carry out the work to improve social conditions in place of inviting outside professional aid workers.[78] The mosque encouraged members to patronize Muslim-owned businesses and compiled the *Muslim Green Pages*, a national white page for Muslim businesses to build Black financial independence.[79] It also ran Baitul Nasr, a social service organization that began in the nearby men's Greenhaven prison and expanded out to the mosque to offer support for drug rehabilitation, job skills training, and

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[76] Charles Mount, "Bank Action on Moslem Funds Upheld," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 1, 1988, ProQuest. Emphasis added. This quote in the article is taken from a NOI brochure referenced as evidence in court of the official practices in the organization.

[77] Christine Kolars, "Masjid ul-Mutkabir: The Portrait of an African American Orthodox Muslim Community," in *Muslim Communities in North America,* eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 493.

[78] Barnett, *Empire of Humanity,* 218-219.

[79] Kolars, "Masjid ul-Mutkabir," 494. It is possible that this title is a reference to Victor Hugo Green's *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, that was a travel guide published from 1936-1966 to help Black travelers find safe hotels, restaurants, etc. in Jim Crow America. There could be a double meaning as well, because the color green is also associated with the Prophet Muhammad and Islam.

integrated therapy as well as a shelter for women and children in need.[80] Altogether, these programs reflect a shared effort to create a healthy, divinely guided Black Muslim community.

Similar examples can be found in other AMS centers across the country in the 1990s. The Muslim Center of Detroit in Michigan ran an "Outreach Ministry" that included a weekly soup kitchen, anti-drug program called "Enhance your Humanity," and a Muslim Big Brothers program where community members teach boys about their social responsibilities and lead them in community service.[81] Several AMS communities embarked on "New Africa" projects to create a fully self-sufficient rural community or city neighborhood, similar to the ambitions of the Nation of Islam's programming in the 1960s and 1970s and earlier Black Muslim *hijras*.[82]

While the everyday work of American Muslim Society communities was focused on Black uplift, and their neighbors in need, Warith Deen Mohammed also encouraged his followers to show their service to country.[83] In the 1990s Mohammed believed African American Muslims could contribute with their sincere faith and actions "not only to America but to the international community of Muslims."[84] Here Mohammed promoted the neoliberal ideal of the exceptional citizen, who is self-empowered and assists the US to ensure global security and

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[80] Kolars, "Masjid ul-Mutkabir," 494-495.

[81] Mary Lendzion, "Muslim Center Responds to Detroit's Needs," *Detroit Free Press*, Nov 5, 1997, ProQuest.

[82] Hajjis Imam Wali and Rashidah Uqdah, *A History and Narrative of Muslim Americans in Baltimore, Maryland* (Self-published, 2003), 169.

[83] Only three years after taking the mantel from his father in 1975, W.D. Mohammed declared July 4th "New World Patriotism Day" and eventually added the American flag to the organization's emblem.

[84] Imam W. Deen Mohammed, "How Your Religion Views Extremism: The Lesson for Daily Life: Part 1," *Muslim Journal,* August 11, 1989, www.newafricaradio.com/articles/8-11-89.html.

stability and reassert its legitimacy as a "model of a liberal, capitalist democracy."[85] Unlike the majority of national Muslim leadership, Mohammed supported the United States invasion of Iraq in 1991 and continued to welcome financial support from Saudi Arabia. He took diplomatic trips to the Gulf as a religious leader; secured a multi-million dollar contract with the US military to make premade ratios for troops; and placed the first Muslim chaplain in the army. Mohammed's acts of service and patriotism fit the US government's concept of a "good" or "moderate" Muslim, capable of helping humanity and not hurting it through terrorism. Commitment to service and the American neoliberal order would nonetheless be a short-lived avenue for Muslims to prove their value once the War on Terror went into full force after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Rosemary Corbett argues that Sufism became the new indicator of "moderation" in place of anti-socialism and patriotic civic service. The US government's idea of Sufism was a Protestant centric idea of an internal, private, and apolitical faith focused on "spiritual and personal development."[86]

The Racial Dynamics of the Emerging Muslim Humanitarian Field

The central position of Arab and South Asian men to the emergence of national humanitarian nonprofit charities as a dominant and visible form of collective Muslim charity at the end of the 20th century, while African American leadership continued in a different direction, is not a coincidence. At the same time, the founder of these charities by Arab and South Asian Muslim men are not homogenous and held various motivations for founding relief and

[85] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 5.

[86] Corbett, *Making Moderate Islam*, 65-70.

development organizations: Pan-Islam love of *ummah*, Islamism, anti-imperialism, or a more decontextualized religious commitment to serve fellow Muslims in the greatest need abroad.

I argue this choice to found charities is in part a result of their race, gender, and class position in American society and how they chose to respond.[87] Black Muslim leadership, also concentrated in the hands of men, had to contend with a different racial and class reality which played a part in their alternative choice to continue with Islamic charity *qua* do-for-self community uplift programs. I analyze these race, class, and gender dynamics -in addition to religious identity- at this foundational moment because they are otherwise invisibilized by the neutral coded language of humanitarian ethics in these new charitable religious institutions.

Racial Positioning and Respective Charitable Forms: Asian Muslims

Under the conditions of neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1990s, Muslims in the United States were racialized and experienced differentiated citizenship on a white supremacist and anti-Black continuum. Despite the United States having de jure "universalistic criteria of democratic citizenship," Arab and South Asian American Muslims – who together I refer to here as Asian Muslims- were offered conditional access to a valued social position as "model minorities" in as much as they submitted to cultural and economic power relations in the US.[88] This includes accepting responsibility to become a "self-improving" subject while also aspiring to "whiteness as the symbol of ideal legal and moral citizenship," tied to other dominant norms of cis-

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[87] I am careful to use African American here because I am focusing on a contrast between African Americans and non-African American Muslims in the United States. Recent African immigrant Muslims and their children, who came in large numbers in the 1980s and 1990s, are subjected to the social norms and structures of anti-Blackness in America and participate in internal dynamics of what it means to be Black in America, including the rejection of the identity altogether. For these debates, see Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[88] Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 737. Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 39.

heteropatriarchy.[89] Religious commitment to Islam or ethno-nationalist causes were indications of an incapacity to be multicultural global citizens, trapped by a monocultural outlook.[90]

Those who would become the founders and leader of the burgeoning American Muslim humanitarian nonprofit field were majority Asian men of at least middle class status. Humanitarianism was a field that aligned with American interests and allowed them to help fellow Muslims abroad without appearing resistant to American imperial power. And their class position, as professionals and entrepreneurs, meant they had sufficient wealth to create and sustain charities at their founding. While these race and class positions were forms of power that helped to create these humanitarian charities, Asian Muslims were still subject to marginalization because of their racial and religious status in a white and Christian supremacist society. From the start, these charities were treated as morally suspect by the US government, which constantly threatened its vitality as a form of collective Muslim charity.

Of course, not all Asian Muslims in the United States had access to wealth in the form of white collar salaries or family monies – poor and undocumented Asian Muslims are still routinely ignored or intentionally invisibilized to maintain the model minority myth of upward mobility.[91] For an example from this decade, a 1991 article from *The New York Times* recounts fundraising by Bengali immigrant mosque for cyclone relief victims in Bangladesh, where many congregants were people in "low-paying jobs [with] little money to spare." They were only able

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[89] Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 742. Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 3.

[90] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 44.

[91] On the issue of invisiblizing poor Muslims in conversations about Muslims in the United States, see Khaled Baydoun, "Between Indigence, Islamophobia, and Erasure: Poor and Muslim in 'War on Terror' America," *California Law Review* 104, No. 6 (December 2016): 1463-1502.

to raise $146 out of 300 people present for *juma'a*, the assumption being that they would have liked to give more.[92]

Unlike their poorer counterparts, major charity organization founders mostly constituted the post-1965 bloc of Asian immigrants who came to the United States as graduate students or skilled professionals and were welcome to America precisely because they were educated and considered valuable to the American economy. Although they had deep political investments in the affairs of Muslim majority spaces abroad, often opposed to American policy on Palestine or Kashmir, they were often publicly less critical of the inequalities and oppression they found in the US, which was then reflected in their charity organizations' absent or piecemeal response.

The impetus to help those closest to home in Islamic charity was often interpreted by Asian Muslims to mean proximity by ethnicity or a transnational connection to a homeland, and sometimes could reflect a paternalism towards African Americans and others positioned lower on the racial hierarchy. For example, in 1998 the Council of Islamic Organizations for the Chicagoland area organized a Ramadan food distribution in the Black neighborhood of Cabrini-Green as a form of religious charity. The Muslim volunteers were not from the inner-city and "[tried] to put [themselves] in the situation of people who are more needy."[93]

Alternative Charitable Focus: African American Muslims

African American Muslims were valuable to neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1990s through their own dispossession, as a disempowered labor underclass or bodies to feed mass

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[92] "New York Bangladeshi Cry for a Battered Land," *The New York Times,* May 7, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/05/07/world/new-york-bangladeshis-cry-for-a-battered-land.html.

[93] Tara Gruzen, "Muslims Reach Out to the Needy: Ramadan Food Donations Fight Hunger in Cabrini," *Chicago Tribune,* February 19, 1996, ProQuest.

incarceration.[94] The cruel logic of this racial hierarchy blamed African Americans for their own precarity, and identity with Islam could prove further cultural deviation. Unlike the communal conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, where mixed class urban Black neighborhoods pooled resources towards collective care and political action, Loïc Wacquant argues urban Black communities became a "hyperghetto" on a carceral continuum, subjected to intense securitization and undemocratic management practices parallel to American "intervention" in foreign "unstable" nations.[95] Middle and upper class African Americans were given conditional acceptance because they took on neoliberal subjectivity, publicly presenting as productive and self-sufficient members of society and "proof" of the meritocracy of American democratic life.

African American Muslims overwhelmingly focused their charitable activity towards economic justice in the United States and for their own community. They also did not share the same level of collective wealth that Asian Muslim professional class commanded and had stronger financial barriers in place to start nonprofit organizations. The American Muslim Society and the new Nation of Islam under Louis Farrakhan commanded significant resources as religious nonprofits because of the *massive* collective fundraising and resource sharing of the original Nation of Islam in earlier decades that could then be sustained. So even if African American leaders made use of the same humanitarian language and mechanisms to help their community in the 1990s, they did not have the same resources to do so as Asian Muslims.

For example, African American Muslim Deputy Mayor Adam Shakoor spoke in a 1991 article about the growing activism among Black Muslims in Detroit to form charitable groups

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[94] See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

[95] Loïc Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," *Punishment and Society* 3, No. 1 (January 2001): 95–134.

and join churches in community service. He believed that Islam could solve social problems in Detroit, in line with American principles, and his wife, Nikki, added that native-born African Americans were "more conscience of social problems than other Muslims." Shakoor left his job as a district judge to create policy and programs to support Black youth who "[did not] have the opportunities of my generation." One project, a book camp for young nonviolent felons, was stalled by funding issues, evidence that even when playing by the rules of American meritocracy, Shakoor's work was not a top priority to Detroiter politicians.[96] In the same way, despite Warith Deen Mohammed's continuous show of service and loyalty to the United States in the 1990s, African American Muslims were still subjected to systemic structural and ideological racism.

Despite the incredible barriers to collective charity as community uplift, African American Muslims were generally more active than Asian Muslims in service activities. From a 1999 study of American mosques Ihsan Bagby discovered that size, income and paid staff at mosques or Muslim community centers corelate with higher levels of community service – but only if you discount African Americans. Regardless of class, African Americans were shown to have the highest level of service to their local community and at higher rates – what Bagby describes as an "extraordinary commitment to pursuing social justice and serving needs of disadvantaged."[97] Activities mentioned include education, prison programs, anti-drug or crime programs, counseling, food distribution, and cash assistance.

As Muslim humanitarian nonprofits climbed in visibility as representative of "Muslim charity" it is important to remember that African American Muslims were engaging in a form of

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[96] Tarek Hamada, "Islamic Values Guide Shakoor," *Detroit Free Press*, July 21, 1991, ProQuest.

[97] Ihsan Bagby, "The Mosque and the American Public Square," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari, et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), 337-338.

Islamic charity of community socio-economic justice work to counter the exploitative conditions of anti-Blackness and American neoliberalism. In the words of Nikki Shakour, a Detroit Black Muslim leader, "you have to want for your brother what you want for yourself."[98] This type of charitable work did not receive as much visibility in the US because it did not reflect the neoliberal norms of the time, when charity was defined as a type of "calculative practice" of benevolence and control. In contrast, it was not politically neutral, and it openly challenged the belief in the American dream.

Coming Together

Even though there were racial tensions and different understandings and experiences of racialization in the United States between Asian and African American Muslims, there were numerous instances in which they came together to use charitable practice to address inequality in the United States. In 2000 the University Muslim Medical Association (UMMA) clinic was running into the red and a fundraiser was held in Los Angeles, California where over 1,000 people came out to raise $284,000. A journalist framed it as a moment to gauge "whether Muslims would extend their charity beyond causes overseas to the needy at home." Islamic Relief-USA, one of the sponsors of the event and a charity focused nearly exclusively on the needs of Muslims overseas "vowed to begin broadening its focus from Muslims abroad to support more charitable projects here." Everyday Muslims in the area with money to give also showed overwhelming investment in this type of work – the event ran over capacity by 300 people and dozens of pizzas were orders to make sure they were all fed.

[98] Hamada, "Islamic Values."

Prominent African American Muslim leaders were surprised by the incredible display of charity from immigrant Muslims. Najee Ali, a well know public figure and leader of a local nonprofit Islamic HOPE, shared, "No longer can any African American Muslim leader say that immigrants don't care about the part of the city we live in." Asian Muslims were using the resources and privileges they held as medical professionals to fight the situation of unequal or a complete absence of medical care to inner-city Angelinos. Unlike a sporadic food distribution for Ramadan, programs like UMMA were taking a page from African American Muslim charity, from people like Najee Ali, and building an alternative to humanitarianism even as they became the face of the newly emerging field of American Muslim humanitarian nonprofits.[99]

The Thwarting of American Muslim Humanitarianism in the Early War on Terror

Even in this moment of emergence and growth, American Muslim humanitarian charities could not escape the anti-Muslim power dynamics of the post-Cold War American unipolar order. Individuals and entire Muslim charity organizations in the 1990s were subject to racial and religious profiling, surveillance, investigation, and criminal prosecution in the name of fighting "terrorism" against the US and its allies. Time and again, Muslim charities and communities had to defend their religious charitable activity while counterterrorism became a central apparatus for the maintenance of the United States global power. The 1990s were then the effective start of the War on Terror era, making the 9/11 attacks an *accelerant* and not the start of oppressive tactics and laws against American Muslim charitable activity and organizations.[100] Moreover, these oppressive conditions shaped these organizations structure and activity in their formative period.

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[99] Teresa Watanabe, "Muslims Raise $284,000 to Halt Closure of Free Clinic," *Los Angeles* Times, November 20, 2000, ProQuest.

[100] The literature about the United States government acting unjust towards American Muslim charity is overwhelmingly focused only on the post 9/11 period. See "U.S. Muslim Charities and the War on Terror:

As stated in an earlier section, one major appeal of formalizing collective charity into humanitarian nonprofits was the legitimacy it conferred. The field of humanitarianism was a part of the dominant power structures in the US and international institutions reflecting the logic of both modernizing development and neoliberal privatization. Muslims theoretically could join this work because normative humanitarian standards make no demands of race or religion. But historically, humanitarianism is tied to European colonialism and a heroic white, secular actor. As a result, Inderpal Grewal argues, the "racialized histories of colonialism produced the American belief that only certain groups of people (particularly, white, American, Christians) could [be humanitarians]. In this framework, others cannot… because their goals are seen as nefarious."[101] Muslims were reminded time and again that they were humanitarianism's *homo sacer*.[102] In the following sections, I detail the growing security apparatus of the United States, including laws that expanded surveillance and secret evidence, that would be used criminalize American Muslim charity in the same decade it grew into a professionalized field.

The 1992 Anti-Terrorism Law and American Collaboration with Islamists

The activities of early American Muslim humanitarian nonprofit charities of the mid-1980s through the 1990s were legally protected by the constitutional freedoms of religion and association. However, the federal government still retained the power to suspend these activities in emergency circumstances or in the case of a crime. Per the latter, the US government had a

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A Decade in Review," *Charity & Security Network*, December 2011, https://www.charityandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/USMuslimCharitiesAndTheWarOnTerror.pdf.

[101] Grewal, *Saving the Security State*, 91.

[102] See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

long history of spying and disrupting activity interpreted as un-American and under suspicion for illegal activity, most recently the COINTELPRO program and FBI CISPES investigation, both of which the intelligence community had concluded were excessive, unnecessary, and illegal.[103]

At the start of the 1990s, the only major law for exceptional suspensions of such constitutional rights was the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), which authorizes the President to "impose economic sanctions during wartime or times of national crisis," where there is a threat to "national security, foreign policy, or the U.S. economy existing wholly or substantially outside the United States."[104] It is notable that the threat is not simply about security but global political and economic interests. IEEPA was generally used to sanction nation-states. In the early 1990s, IEEPA focused on Iran and Libya as state sponsors of terrorism as well as Iraq during the First Gulf War.[105]

The US government had a reinvigorated interest in terrorism financing laws at the close of the Cold War when they claimed there was an unchecked growth of non-state actors engaging in terrorism. The Antiterrorism Act of 1992 was passed to confront the threat of terrorism and

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[103] The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) was a nonprofit with chapters across the US in the 1980s in support of self-determination of the Salvadoran people against an autocratic regime. The FBI alleged that CISPES was a front for Salvadoran rebels to conduct "terrorist" activity and conducted an invasive investigation of chapters and collaborators but later admitted it was unjustified.

[104] American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), *Blocking Faith, Freezing Charity: Chilling Muslim Charitable Giving in the "War on Terrorism Financing,"* June 2009, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/humanrights/blockingfaith.pdf; 95th United States Congress (1977-1978), "H.R.7738- International Emergency Economic Powers Act," https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/house-bill/7738. The 1977 Act was an Amendment to the Trading With the Enemy Act (1917).

[105] "FBI Officials Expect Vigilance to Continue," *Detroit Free Press*, Feb 1, 1991, ProQuest. For example, in 1991, around 200 "prominent" Arabs in the United States were interviewed about the war.

secure the right of the government to keep secret evidence for the sake of national security.[106] American officials asserted that "terrorists who attack American, Israelis and others sympathetic to the West" had "sophisticated, privately financed networks" that posed new legal and diplomatic challenges.[107] Religion was identified as the dominant motivator for terrorist activity and Muslims were the primary culprits.[108] Laws to create states of exception limited in the past for waring states expanded to groups and individuals allegedly affiliated with terrorism, which left Muslim charities as vulnerable targets. Political commentators fanned the flames with "Clash of Civilization" rhetoric. Samuel Huntington wrote that Muslims were obsessed with their inferior geopolitical power, convinced of their cultural superiority, and were nothing less than "unrelenting enemies who will try to destroy us unless we destroy them first."[109]

The United States as the enforcer of international security took a pre-emptive and proactive stance to destroy these networks, with a focus on two aforementioned groups: Islamic movements and political parties in the Levant in open opposition to Israel and international jihadist groups, especially al-Qaeda. Ironically, Israel and the United States had a direct hand in bolstering the power and reach of both groups. To fracture Palestinian political unity in the 1970s through the First Intifada (1987-1993) the Israeli government made a "conscious decision to

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[106] 102nd United States Congress (1991-1992), "H.R.2222 - Antiterrorism Act of 1992," https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/2222.

[107] Gerth and Miller, "Funds for Terrorists."

[108] Laurie Goodstein, "Arab, Muslim Groups Oppose Counter-Terrorism Bill," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1995, ProQuest.

[109] Daulatzai, *Black Star,* 156.

build up the Islamic groups as a counterweight to the [Palestinian Liberation Organization]," and allowed them to "flourish and function" until they had their own paramilitary power.[110]

Regarding the anti-American jihadi networks, Mahmood Mamdani argues that they were a direct creation of the US government in its mission to eviscerate the Soviet Union in the Afghan War. Through its partnership with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), President Ronald Reagan and the CIA rejected working with mainstream Islamist nationalists and propped up a "highly ideological" Islamist fringe who read the Afghan struggle as the start of an international jihad against anyone -Muslim or non-Muslim- who did not support their vision of a holy world order.[111] The CIA had even allowed al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam free reign to distribute magazines, take fundraising and speaking tours, and set up a recruitment and fundraising station in 1987 in Brooklyn, New York.[112]

In summary, Hamas, and other Islamist Palestinian organizations, and early al-Qaeda were treated as an asset to both the US and Israel, including their use of violent terrorist tactics, until they acted beyond the control and interests of both countries' particular campaigns – whether it was Israel apartheid or American global hegemony.

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[110] John Kifner, "Roots of Terror: A Special Report. Alms and Arms: Tactics in a Holy War," *The New York Times*, March 15, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/15/world/roots-of-terror-a-special-report-alms-and-arms-tactics-in-a-holy-war.html.

[111] Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 154, 163.

[112] Thomas Hegghammer, "Why Jihadists Loved America in the 1980s," *The Atlantic,* March 6, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/03/jihad-abdallah-azzam-america-osama-bin-laden/607498/.

The First Strike: Palestinian Americans and Hamas

The first high profile case in the 1990s targeting American Muslim charitable activity as a front for Islamist groups-deemed-terrorist organizations was in early 1993. Two Palestinian American men from the Chicago area, Mohammad Jarad and Mohammad Salah, were picked up separately by Israel police during trips to Palestine. Israel claimed Salah was a "world commander" of Hamas's military arm with significant funds and a "terror cell" in the US and Jarad a money launderer for the Hamas's military activity.[113]

From the American side, news reports championed the men's innocence and made their arrest out to be a "publicity campaign" by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to produce the "terrorists" they alleged were ready to strike Israel.[114] Americans had a constitutionally protected right to donate to Hamas as a political party and the men received many voices of support: scholar Rashid Khalidi defended the large amount of remittances sent home by Palestinian American; Illinois Senator Paul Simon wrote the Israeli Prime Minister on their behalf; and the Chicago Tribune published an editorial calling for Salah and Jarad's release.[115]

By June, Israel backed away from their initial claims about the elaborate American Hamas wing but continued keep both men in detention. One military source explained, "It's not easy for us to distinguish those who are not involved in violent activity from those who are. A large part of the structure [of Hamas] is charitable, religious and benign."[116] Both were tortured

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[113] Tom Hundley, "Chicagoan is Charged by Israel with Heading Hamas Militants," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 23, 1993, ProQuest.

[114] Tom Hundley, "Chicagoan Denies Israeli Charges," *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1993, ProQuest.

[115] "Charge or Free Hamas Suspects," *Chicago Tribune*, March 9, 1993, ProQuest.

[116] Hundley, "Chicagoan Denies."

and signed statements of guilt under duress to obtain their freedom. When Jarad arrived home in July 1993, he defended his people: "All Palestinian people are not criminals. They are not terrorists. They are struggling for their own human rights. The only thing they're asking for is human rights."[117] In his testament, Salah named two American Muslim nonprofits as covers for Hamas funding: The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development in Texas and the United Association for Studies and Research in Virginia. By this time in early 1995, the US was already surveilling domestic Hamas activity for about a year and had it designated a terrorist organization; a few years later they would pursue Salah themselves.

The US government's work to thwart the post-Afghan War network of internationalist *jihadis* became more urgent for the general public after the February 23, 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. The attack was linked to a group of men allegedly affiliated with international *jihadi* groups. As part of the investigation, the FBI infiltrated another group of men in New York organized around exiled Egyptian "Blind" Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, an anti-Western ideologue for Egyptian Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya who took haven in the United States, thanks to covert help from the CIA. A paid informant recorded Abdel Rahman discussing a multiple-bombing attack in New York and later took a video of his followers mixing bomb-making ingredients, which was sufficient evidence to arrest Abdel Rahman and nine followers on June 23, 1993 for terrorism against the United States – although they would eventually be charted in 1995 for "seditious conspiracy." *Islamic Horizons* published an article "WTC Case: Justice or Entrapment?" concerned that Abel Rahman was arrested for his political stance against Egypt and America and was framed for a fabricated terrorist plot.[118]

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[117] Sherman Stein, "Grocer Tied to Terrorists Comes Home," *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1993, ProQuest.

[118] "WTC Case: Justice or Entrapment," *Islamic Horizons*, December 1993, 30.

Drawing Conclusions: Muslims, the New Threat to America

National media began to publish long investigative reports about these reported terrorist networks, providing maps that labeled different countries as "bases" or "centers" for money or fighters in Islamist movements.[119] These articles and television reports also fed the idea that America was a "hot spot" for terrorist networks, secretly fundraising, training, and growing their numbers here. A November 1994 article in the Chicago Tribune drew links between foreign networks of terrorists, but critiqued Israel and the State Department's scant evidence for a Hamas cell in Chicago. Yet the journalist chose to end the article discussing the strong growth in fundraising for five of the largest "Muslim-oriented" charities in the United States, forcing the reader to make a mental connection between charities and the alleged terrorist networks in the US.[120] A day later PBS broadcasted a documentary titled *Terrorists Among Us: Jihad in America* by journalist Steve Emerson, narrated at a fever pitch to convince Americans that terrorists had already "infected" mosques, Arab, and Muslim organizations with their ideology. Millions of American Muslims were stunned to see this jarring villainization in mainstream media.

Arab and Muslim groups, as well as general civil rights groups, immediate called the film incendiary and dangerous to American Muslims and Arab Americans and questioned Emerson's journalistic ethics. Everyday Muslims in America were seriously concerned that any one of them would be subjected to a witch hunt for sending charitable monies overseas. They feared that they

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[119] Image referenced from Steve Coll and Steve Le Vine, "Global Network Provides Money, Haven," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 1993, ProQuest.

[120] Stephen Franklin, "U.S. Probing Chicago Connection to Hamas: Israel and the State," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 16, 1994, ProQuest. The article mentions five but only lists three "Muslim-oriented" charities: Mercy International, United Holy Land Fund, and the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development. It also mentioned the Bridgeview Mosque in the Chicago suburbs as a major fundraising site.

would be silenced from speaking out about political conflicts in Muslim majority regions or discriminated against because of the stereotype that all Muslims were terrorists. Salam Marayati, from the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, suggested that perhaps the only solution was to pivot their charity to solely US causes: "More Muslims realize that although our hearts are for those overseas, we must help ourselves in America."[121] Though offered with good intentions, Marayati seemed to suggest Muslims had no choice but to abandon their extensive charitable works across the globe.

Six of the major Muslim organizations in the United States decided to come together and work proactively on a join strategy at a January 21, 1995 conference, "Civil Rights Crisis: The Campaign against Islam." Some groups present included the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the American Muslim Council, the North American Association of Muslim Professionals and Scholars, the Islamic Society of North America, and the Islamic Center of Southern California/*Minaret* magazine. Leadership felt the administration was "disingenuous to state that the campaign of vilification is directed towards a small percentage of Muslims who allegedly commit acts of terrorism because 'the consequences of this campaign will stigmatize Muslims at large.'" They were particularly concerned that acts of violence were given a religious label because it was done by Muslims. The current atmosphere was nothing short of a "neo-McCarthyism" against Muslims subjected to "spying, illegal arrests, [and] political trials."

The concluding resolution focused on securing new legislation from Congress for "ensuring civil liberties of all Americans in restoring justice in the criminal justice system" and improving media representation. These steps belie a belief that some good could come with

[121] Franklin, "U.S. Probing Chicago."

direct engagement with the government, as when they invited an FBI special agent to give a presentation on "federal anti-terrorism laws and how the public could help."[122] Overall, the conference held in tension a defiant tone of resistance to religious discrimination and a belief that better self-representation and cooperation with the state would result in stronger protections for their constitutional rights.

Executive Order 12947: The Counterterrorism Regime Announced

American Muslims' fears of a "neo-McCarthyism" were confirmed merely *two days* after the "Civil Rights Crisis" conference when President Bill Clinton announced a sweeping Executive Order intended to starve terrorist groups of any funding or material support from the United States. Executive Order 12947, "Prohibiting Transactions With Terrorists Who Threaten to Disrupt the Middle East Peace Process," issued January 23, 1995, extended the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to individuals and organizations by creating a new category of "specially designated terrorists" (SDTs). Clinton declared 12 organizations and 18 individuals SDTs and ordered American financial institutions to freeze any accounts or assets held by them in the United States. The order also "prohibited all transactions and dealings with designated organizations, including making and receiving contributions of funds, goods, and services."[123]

Early reports on EO 12947 noted the overwhelming number of organizations listed who were Arab and Muslim, save two militant Jewish organizations outlawed by Israel in 1994. Moreover, the EO focused on "preserving gains in the Middle East against those who would

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[122] Mohammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi, "McCarthyism Revisited: The Campaign Against Islam," *Islamic Horizons*, March/April 1995, 18.

[123] ACLU, *Blocking Faith*, 34.

scuttle peace efforts."[124] To ensure money did not go into the hands of "terrorists" in the region, the EO would investigate charitable funds by "Muslim and Islamic groups" for possible misuse. Critiques of the EO came in swiftly from the press and Arab and Muslim organizations. Some claimed Clinton had included the EO to bolster his reputation and to appease Israel.[125] Islamic Jihad and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, two groups on the SDT list, denounced the act as political posturing, denied holding assets in the US, and expressed concern that American Muslim charities would be criminalized.[126] Within the US, major Muslim organizations warned that the EO would "have a negative impact on legitimate political expression by American Muslims and others."[127] Outside mainstream media, Muslim publications ran sharper critiques; Human Rights legal expert Robert Crane in the January/February 1991 *Islamic Horizons* blithely observes that nothing has changed except the "imposition of a new global imperialism to square all efforts at introducing justice and peace in the world…[with] a new cold war against a new enemy, Islam."[128]

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[124] Douglas Jehl, "Clinton Orders Assets of Suspected Terrorist Groups Frozen," *The New York Times,* January 25, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/25/world/clinton-orders-assets-of-suspected-terrorist-groups-frozen.html.

[125] During his Presidential campaign, Clinton was repeatedly critiqued for being a draft dodger to the Vietnam War. See Jehl, "Clinton Orders Assets."

[126] Nora Boustany, "Palestinians Denounce Freezing of Assets," *The Washington Post*, January 26, 1995, ProQuest.

[127] Jehl, "Clinton Orders Assets."

[128] Robert D. Crane, "Chechnya: Victim of a New US-Russian World Order," *Islamic Horizons*, January/February 1995, 13.

The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996

Before significant mobilization could be organized to challenge the EO, President Clinton encouraged Congress to formulate a counterterrorism bill that would go further, specifically for wiretapping and deportation. On February 10, 1995 Senator Joseph R. Biden (D-DE) introduced the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995 to speed deportations of non-citizens who were suspected terrorists; allow for secret evidence in terrorism cases to protect national security; grant faster approval processes for FBI wiretapping; and expand government powers to investigate and block fundraising for terrorist organizations in the US.[129] After some debate within Congress, a new bill was introduced by Robert J. Dole (R-KS) titled the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act on April 27, 1995.[130]

What was particularly novel in this bill was the powers given to the Secretary of State to designate foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs). The criteria for an FTO was any organization that is foreign, engages or intends to engage in terrorist activities, and whose "activities threatened the national defense, foreign relations or economic interest of the US." The bill made it a federal crime to "knowingly provide material support or resources [to an FTO] in preparation for or in carrying out specific crimes of terrorism."

Like the Executive Order that spurred their creation, the two bills received immediate condemnation from civil liberties, Arab, and Muslim groups. The President of the Arab American Institute, James J. Zogby, wrote a scathing article in *The Washington Post* tearing apart each piece of the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act as a resurfacing of "the worst abuses of

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[129] 104th United States Congress (1995-1996), "Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995," https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/390.

[130] 104th United States Congress (1995-1996), "S.735 - Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996," https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/735/text/.enr.

the McCarthy era." The order looked reasonable, he allowed, because its basic aim was to impede terrorism, but the substance of the bill would "introduce draconian measure that would seriously erode civil and political rights guaranteed to US citizens and noncitizens alike under the Constitution and international law."[131]

Most chillingly for American donors, "U.S. citizens [could] be criminally prosecuted for giving to an FTO *without any intent* to further the illegal aims of the FTO" and would be prohibited from challenging the blacklisting of the organization as erroneous or politically motivated.[132] Moreover, no Arab or Muslim groups investigated in the past had been found providing direct support for "terrorist" activity; instead they were all exercising constitutionally protected rights. Ultimately, the bill would both stifle Arab and Muslim political speech and erode robust channels of humanitarian assistance through charities that were sending nearly twenty million dollars annually to regions in need.[133]

Because of these bills, American Muslim donations slowed. They reported fears of criminalization for donating to Muslim humanitarian causes abroad and lamented the real suffering of recipients who would go without aid. Moreover, Najat Arafat Khelil, acting president of the Palestinian American Congress explained, "The actual terrorist organizations are not going to be hurt...They always find ways to transfer whatever funds they need without being

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[131] Zogby details the types of violations built into the bill: "It removes the presumption of innocence for those under investigation, makes it easier for the government to conduct surveillance against persons suspected of violating conspiracy laws, allows for a prohibition on fund-raising by 'any person or organization' on the basis of a non-appealable declaration by the president that they are engaged in 'terrorist activities,' establishes a secret court that can deport persons convicted of no crimes, and allows law enforcement agencies to conduct surveillance on individuals and groups purely on the basis of their beliefs and associations."

[132] My emphasis. ACLU, *Blocking Faith*, 28.

[133] James J. Zogby, "Fighting Terrorism with Repression," *The Washington Post,* Mary 27, 1995, ProQuest.

detected."[134] Instead, there was concern that even writing or peaceful rallies in support of political views could be subject to criminalization because of the loose requirements for evidence.

The government response was a complete denial of discriminatory treatment. The FBI claimed they "do not by any means identify or single out" ethnic or religious groups despite all but two in the EO being Arab and Muslim and, in an attempt to be complementary, added that "thousands of decent Arab-Americans" live here and obey the law. In Congress, the bill's supporters made the arguments that it struck a balance between rights and security, albeit sacrificing the rights of some. Congressmen Bill McCollum (R-FL) and Gary Ackerman (D-NY) distributed a fearmongering film *Jihad in America* to every fellow Congressional representative to encourage their support.[135] The bill was passed on April 24, 1996.

Counterrorism Becomes a New State Apparatus and Locks in on Islam

After the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act came into effect in 1996, government intelligence and law enforcement agencies went into high gear to pursue cases against Muslims they alleged were working with FTOs. As part of these operations, they began covert, long term surveillance of several Muslim charities it suspected of illegal activity, including the largest American Muslim charity, the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development.[136] Popular media continued to run articles reinforcing the accusation that Hamas,

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[134] Umberine Abdullah, "Beyond McCarthyism," *Islamic Horizons*, May/June 1995, 32.

[135] "American Politicians Target Arabs and Muslims," *Islamic Horizons,* July/August 1995, 10.

[136] Judith Miller, "U.S. Contends Muslim Charity is Tied to Hamas," *The New York Times*, Aug 25, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/25/us/us-contends-muslim-charity-is-tied-to-hamas.html.

al-Qaeda, and other militant Islamic movements obtained funds by ways of re-routed humanitarian aid from the US or American shell companies.

To pursue this extensive caseload, the government significantly expanded the FBI and made counterterrorism a central priority. Between 1995 and 1998, the FBI budget more than doubled, from $118 to $286 million and "anti-terrorism staff" grew from slightly more than one thousand to 2,650. In the past a counterterrorism assignment was considered a "career dead end" but now had become a "marquee assignment" in the Bureau. The FBI continued to deflect criticism for its near singular focus on Muslims, to say nothing of staff racism, Islamophobia, and sheer ignorance about the populations they were hired to investigate.[137] A senior justice official remarked: "We have a problem with Islamic terrorism…If we had a problem with Latvian terrorism, we'd would focus on Latvians."[138]

American Muslims continued to publish articles in community publications wondering out loud about the United States' real motivations in pursuing terrorism, citing at times its investment in capitalism over democracy; its double standards on violence; and its imperialism.[139] By 1998 it looked as if the FBI was pursed cases in every corner of their communities without direct evidence and seemingly opened cases simply if a man was Arab or Muslim and held beliefs outside of line with official American foreign policy.[140]

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[137] John Mintz and Michael Grunwald, "FBI Terror Probes Focus on U.S. Muslims; Expanded Investigations, New Tactics Stir Allegations of Persecution," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1998, ProQuest.

[138] Mintz and Grunwald, "FBI Terror Probes."

[139] For examples, see Mu'min Iktisad, "Tooling Change in Central Asia," *Islamic Horizons,* November/December 1995, 39; Bruce Fien, "Double Standards that Fuel Terror," *Islamic Horizons,* July/August 1996, 48-49; Ilyas Bayunus, "Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and Muslims in North America," *Islamic* Horizons, September/October 1996, 20-22.

[140] I use "man" because all individual cases by the United States against Muslims and Arabs committing "terrorism" were made against men before 9/11. The gender dynamics of US State conceptions of terror

Mohammad Salah, who had already served time in Israel under shaky accusations of material support to Hamas, was arrested in 1998 under similar accusations, now with allegations that he received money from a high-ranking Hamas leader, Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook. He was the first individual to have his assets seized through the 1996 Act, including his bank account and even his family home, leaving him and his family to rely on others for maintenance, and all without a criminal trial. Salah's lawyer called the situation "undemocratic and bizarre," asking if they actually had evidence against his client. The investigation also shut down the local Quranic Literature Institute, calling it a front for Hamas. Unbeknownst to his community, the FBI was twelve years into an investigation titled "Operation Vulgar Betrayal" to blanket surveil Chicago Muslims, their homes, mosques, schools, and businesses for "terrorist" activity.[141]

Several other men were arrested and held without charges for material support to Hamas and others were held for years without respect for their habeas corpus rights, which was legal in the name of "national security." Abdelhaleem Ashwar from Fairfax County, Virginia, went on hunger strike for being held without charges for fundraising for Palestine. A letter writing campaign led by a local Muslim organization helped secure his release. Two men, Mazen al-Najjar and Sami al-Arian were held on secret evidence for working at a Muslim think tank that once employed two Islamic Jihad members. In all these cases, the accused were engaged in constitutionally protected activities of religious and political speech or association, providing humanitarian aid, or working at a nonprofit. Without access to the evidence against them they

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would shift later to include women. See Juliane Hammer, "Center Stage: Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women," in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. Carl Ernst (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 107-144.

[141] Tanvi Mirsra, "When Your Block Is Being Watched," *Bloomberg News: CityLab*, Oct 18, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-18/why-did-the-fbi-watch-this-chicago-suburb.

had no ability to build their defense.[142] After years of attacks through this law, Muslim and Arab Americans made secret evidence a key issue for who they would support in the 2000 elections.[143]

By 2000, the FBI moved from more isolated investigations to pursue more extensive campaigns. There was no major opposition from the general public, which indicated most Americans were comfortable with denying rights for some for their own security, especially after the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by al-Qaeda. In February 2000, government officials announced that after a decade of investigations into terrorist attacks they had found a common thread: Islamic charities and relief organizations "that they suspect are being used to move men, money and weapons across borders."[144] In a "major expansion" of counterterrorism policy, the government would investigate Muslim charities as a "bloc…to determine whether they are being used, wittingly or not, by Islamist terrorist networks." The US had a list of 30 organizations of significant interest out of 6,000 Islamic humanitarian service and relief groups globally, with three based in North America: Human Concern International, Global Relief Foundation, and the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development.[145]

What is significant here is two-fold. By this point in time there were three grand juries in Illinois, Texas, and New York in cases involving the 1996 law and no prosecutions – only two indictments for refusal to testify. In other words, the government had failed to produce a single conviction regarding material support for terrorism by an American individual, save the World

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[142] Mintz and Grunwald, "FBI Terror Probes."

[143] Niraj Warikoo, "Arabs are Forming Political Strategy, Secret Evidence is Among the Top Issues," *Detroit Free Press,* June 16, 1999, ProQuest.

[144] Judith Miller, "Some Charities Suspected of Terrorist Role," *The New York Times*, Feb 19, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/19/world/some-charities-suspected-of-terrorist-role.html.

[145] Miller, "Some Charities Suspected."

Trade Center group who was actually charged on an unusual Civil War era seditious conspiracy charge.[146] Second, while the FBI had initially argued that its Counterterrorism wing was not specifically targeting Muslims, this new bloc investigation unequivocally focuses on Muslim organizations as a "crucial part of terrorist infrastructure."[147]

Through this bloc investigation, the government could move swiftly against organizations that went against its national interests across the globe. In August 2000, the State Department asked the Agency for International Development (AID) to remove the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) from its roster of registered charities because it was accused of providing material support to the designed terrorist military wing of Hamas. HLF, as it had done in the past decade, denied the accusations and accused the US of supporting an "Israeli vendetta to deny charity to poor and needy Palestinians." The US did not have sufficient evidence to charge the group, and *still* asked for HLF to be stripped of its AID status because the group's work was allegedly "inimical to the American-led peace process in the Middle East" and therefore "contrary to national defense and foreign policy interests."[148]

In other words, the new normal by 2000 was that in one fell swoop the United States government could bypass freedom of religion and association rights of American Muslim charities, as well as their due process rights, for the sake of government interests and security. American Muslims were being told that they could continue to operate charities at the risk of

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[146] Joseph P. Fried, "The Terror Conspiracy: The Overview – Sheikh and 9 Followers Guilty of a Conspiracy of Terrorism," *The New York Times,* Oct 2, 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/02/nyregion/terror-conspiracy-overview-sheik-9-followers-guilty-conspiracy-terrorism.html.

[147] Miller, "Some Charities Suspected."

[148] Miller, "U.S. Contends."

criminalization, dissolution, and possible imprisonment without necessarily access to a free trial, all before the maelstrom of post-9/11 counterterrorism legislation that would bring titan-like strength against Muslim charities as the backdoor collaborators to the attacks.

Conclusion

American Muslim humanitarian nonprofits slowly emerged and grew over the 1990s to be recognized by Muslim communities as a specific type of organization dedicated to charitable works in the rapidly expanded and differentiated set of Muslim organizations in the United States. These charities helped American Muslim donors use their *zakat* or *sadaqah* to reach vulnerable populations hit by catastrophe or those without resources for *Eid al-Adha*. Their work in not just relief but development also allowed Muslims to donate to the fight against the injustices of preventable suffering that were born from civil conflicts and war as well as global inequities fundamental to the American neoliberal world order. Now members of the larger humanitarian community, charities were bound by its professional standards and gained the protection and respect of their field with a significant caveat.

In a post-Cold War world, the United States focused on Muslims as the existential foil to their imperial world order. Terrorism, specifically Islamic terrorism, was the greatest threat to *Pax Americana* and the US argued that it retained its lifeblood through Muslim charities that used the cover of humanitarian aid and relief to shuttle exorbitant amounts of money and supplies across the globe. The US would build the early War on Terror counterterrorism apparatus in pursuit of these "hidden" networks of terror, which included surveilling and criminalizing American Muslim individuals and groups, which produced suspicion and led to ostracization from the larger American public who accepted their guilt without legal convictions.

American Muslim charities worked incredibly hard to serve Muslims in the United States and abroad who suffered injustice because of the very conditions of structural inequality and oppression the American government and its allies had helped to create for the sake of neoliberal sovereignty. They fought the growth of the counterterrorism carte blanche given to intelligence and law enforcement and continued their service work despite the risks. The scope and severity of persecution American Muslim charities would face immediately after 9/11 was shocking, but not new. Those organizations who survived the seizures, investigations, and criminal prosecutions would push forward and grow Muslim charity in the United States in donations, reach, and into a new religious institution all its own in the American Muslim community in the 2000s and 2010s. Part II of the dissertation will explain this contemporary period and the making of a new institution through three elements: ritual, text, and space.

Part II:
American Muslim Charities as a New Religious Institution:
Ritual, Text, and Space

Chapter 4
"The Fundraiser's Not Religious, It Helps Everyone!"
The Annual Ramadan Fundraiser as a New Islamic Ritual Event of Giving

In her study of an Egyptian Muslim women's piety movement at the turn of the 21st century, Saba Mahmood details the technique of induced weeping during prayer in order to cultivate a desired moral subjectivity towards pious action. The emotion, in this case fear of God, is habituated towards prayer until it is "natural" to the believer, serving as the motivation for and perfection of the act.[1] In contrast to these weeping exercises towards virtue, when asked about attending Ramadan fundraiser dinners for Islamic charities, American Muslims I interviewed make an audible groan. Oftentimes the groans were ironic, other times not, or replaced by a long sigh or a tragic laugh. Regardless of the vocalization, the behavior communicated a displeasure at the obligation to organize or attend annual religious charity *iftars* for humanitarian causes.[2]

A stranger to American Muslim communities who attends such a dinner would be forgiven for their confusion at such emotional fatigue. National Muslim charities' Ramadan fundraisers, the largest event of the year, are set in hotel ballrooms decorated and catered like a lavish wedding. Friends and family members congregate in dress as fresh as *Eid al-Fitr*, famous speakers are flown in, and there are often gifts laid out with the table settings. But the groans are

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[1] Saba Mahmood, "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4: 843.

[2] *Iftar* is the meal following the breaking of the fast after sundown each evening during the lunar Islamic month of Ramadan.

directed not at the festive atmosphere. Instead, it is a vocalized foot dragging at the social and religious duty to attend and give generously only by sitting through a long program, its climax the strong push for donations to total tens and even hundreds of thousands of dollars.

My interest here lies less in a dissection of displeasure and more in what else is implicit to the groan: these interviewees treat Ramadan fundraiser dinners for Islamic charities as expected, predictable, and shared religious activities for themselves and who they see as their Muslim community. This understanding arose because, over the past three decades, dominant American Muslim charities have effectively created a new annual ritual event of giving. Every year, several Ramadan dinners are held by these organizations across the country, with tickets regularly selling out in regions with large Muslim populations. Donors, their friends, and family experience a ritualized space, with a set of performative roles, actions, language, and behavior, while still enjoying the socializing and fanfare. With the establishment of the charity event as an annual, routinized religious practice, American Muslims internalize the expectation of attendance in order to model and perform meritorious behavior - with the bonus of a three course meal.

Through the example of the Ramadan fundraiser, I argue that American Muslim charities hold significant regulatory power over legal norms regarding charitable giving despite their implicit claim to not have the interest or religious authority to do so. This ambiguity of recognizable authority arises from the presence of Muslim charities as a "third space" in the United States, between mosques and the home, providing "new forms of belonging and community" outside of "extant authority structures."[3] However, in the absence of a state body as

[3] Justine Howe, *Suburban Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 218. For the concept of "third spaces" see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge Press, 2004).

the principal agent, they are most often read as inhabiting a hermeneutically passive role as collection and distribution institutions for *zakat* and *sadaqah*.

My research challenges this reading to show how charities actively shape norms on the moral obligation and technical requirements of religious charity – not through the publication of *fiqh* tracts but in their constant multimedia and live engagement with the American Muslim public. They operate through what Bill Maurer calls a "charisma of form," taking advantage of an American investment in bureaucratic rationality and formalism before citation of the established institution of legal scholars.[4] The Ramadan fundraiser is one potent example, where charities create multisensory experiences for Muslim donors to elicit affective dispositions and enact ritual practices according to a particular organization's interpretations of Islamic obligations of giving and care.

In the early 21st century, the dominant legal interpretation promoted by national American Muslim charities explains the sharing and cleansing of wealth through humanitarian standards tied to neoliberal "empowerment" of recipients and development projects. This line of thought is not formalized like the "Islamic Economics" genre of literature that set an Islamic system of economics against capitalist and communist economies of the mid-20th century, but is an assemblage of pious action, humanitarian interventions, and neoliberal logic which I call American Muslim Humanitarianism. In this discourse, Islam is more than an empty signifier to be used for the sake of capitalist forms of intervention and care, but a "combination of different

[4] Bill Maurer, "Faith in the Form: Islamic Home Financing and 'American' Islamic Law" in *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States since 9/11,* ed. Katherine Pratt Ewing (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 196.

cultural forms."[5] These charities are invested in creating a new institution in the American Muslim communities, whose structures and behavior assert and maintain religious authority over the ethics of Islamic charity, shaping Muslims subjectivities as donors and volunteers.[6] Charities provide literature, opportunities and space for service or giving, and leadership on policy or social issues, all through the prism of "American Muslim humanitarianism" with the goal that Muslims will rely on them in order to correctly fulfill their obligations to God and stewardship for humanity.

While current academic literature shares my interest in researching the creation of moral subjectivities by and in contemporary Muslim charitable organizations globally, fundraising dinners are not covered as a site of production in countries for which they are ubiquitous, such as the United States or the United Kingdom. The most typical sites covered include publications and policy work; the internal dynamics of the organizational staff and volunteers; or direct service activities between organization members and recipients - including Ramadan food distributions to the public or food insecure.[7] My secondary aim here is then to show the power of fundraising events as a key site in the American Muslim context for shaping moral subjectivities, communal identity, and religious authority, let alone the incredible importance of these large scale donation events for the financial health of the charity organization.[8]

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[5] Daromir Rudnyckyj, "Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (February 2009): 107.

[6] Joseph E. Lowry, "Institution," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias, (Oxford, UK: One World, 2010), 201.

[7] See the description of Ramadan food distributions in Lebanon in Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 165-203.

[8] For all national charities, their Ramadan fundraisers contribute at least one fifth of their annual budget.

The chapter will proceed in four parts. First, I provide a historical background for the development of national Muslim charity organizations' Ramadan fundraiser dinners in American Muslim communities. Second, I give a typological description of this ritualized dinner from a composite picture of dinners attended during ethnographic research in 2016 and 2017. The third section demonstrates how the dinner promotes a religious ethic of "American Muslim humanitarianism." I end with explanations of the various ways charities establish their religious authority to dictate ethical norms through the ritual event of a Ramadan fundraiser.

Historical Antecedents

Feasts and elaborate dinners during religious celebrations have a long history in Muslim ruled societies, as some have argued as new iterations of pre-Islamic tribal, cultural, or religious customs.[9] Since the 8th century, Muslim rulers provided food for "privileged groups" during Islamic celebrations while the general population was often a secondary or unincorporated demographic.[10] For example, the 12th century Fatimid Empire, based in modern-day Cairo, Egypt, gave food to soldiers, state officials, and courtiers outside the eastern palace of al-Qahira during religious festivals, and more exclusive dinners were held during Ramadan inside the palace where guests were served according to rank.[11] These distributions helped to increase the

[9] Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Charity in the Rise of Islam," in *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, ed. Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 13-30.

[10] Yaakov Lev, *Charity, Endowments, and Charitable Institutions in Medieval Islam* (Gainesville, FL: The University of Florida Press, 2005), 133, 42.

[11] Lev, *Charity,* 131; Nasser Rabbat, "Al-Azhar Mosque: An Architectural Chronicle of Cairo's History," *Murqarnas* 13 (1996): 54.

rulers' popularity and legitimate their claim to leadership, linking them to institutional powers of the military, religious scholars, or Sufi orders.[12]

For the non-elites in pre-modern Muslim cities, collective feasts for religious holidays in open neighborhood tents or in large family gatherings constituted pious action because they brought people together as a religious community. Roy Mottahedeh argues that ritual celebrations like Ramadan or *mawlids* can include devotional prayer as well as shopping and entertainment because of their multivalent character.[13] These collective experiences of religious life through feast and celebration continue into the modern period. For example, during *Mawlid an-Nabi,* the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, Marion Katz explains that participants enter into "a network of relationships in which blessings, food, and shared emotions of love and joy tied individuals to one another, to the deceased, and to the Prophet himself."[14] The Prophet Muhammad is depicted across canonical *hadiths* as someone who enjoyed festival celebration, recognizing the "need for joy and for festivals inspiring joy."[15] By analogy, Ramadan dinners and celebratory activities are also part of the sacred, devotional time of a religious holiday, set

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[12] N.J.G., Kaptein, "Mawlid," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Peri Bearman, et al, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1430.

[13] Roy Mottahedeh, "Faith and Practice: Muslims in Historic Cairo," in *Living in Historic Cairo: Past and Present in an Islamic* City, ed. Farhad Daftary, Elizabeth Fernea, and Azim Nanji (London: Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2010), 113.

[14] A *mawlid* is a celebration of the birthday of a holy figure, such as Sufi *awliya* (saints) or the Prophet Muhammad. Marion Holmes Katz, "The Prophet Muhammad in Ritual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, ed. Jonathan E. Brockopp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 146.

[15] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Muslim Festivals," in *The Development of Islamic Ritual,* ed. Gerald Hawting (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 321.

apart from everyday life as a period to increase one's proximity to God and collective strength as a Muslim community.[16]

Across race and class, American Muslim communities in the 20th century also engaged in practices of communal feasts to celebrate the major *Eids* of Ramadan and Hajj as well as other holidays recognized in their own religious tradition or cultural community, such as *Eid al-Ghadir* for Shi'a Muslims or saint festivals among Sufi devotees. Food practices vary widely, with anything from African American soul food to South Asian curries as the centerpiece of their feasts, chosen because it is traditional cuisine for the community or simply a delicious halal option.[17] For example, in a 1989 article about *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations in New York City, a woman from Brooklyn is quoted explaining this culinary diversity: "While Muslims who are from the Middle East eat baba gannouj - mashed eggplant in sesame butter - and falafel, we'll have fried chicken and potato salad."[18]

In addition, while the Ahmadiyya Movement and the Nation of Islam kept centralized leadership and finances, the majority of more local Muslim communities held holiday celebrations with meals but also arranged shared dinners outside of holidays as an important mechanism for fundraising, to establish mosques and religious schools or to provide emergency funding to religious and political causes abroad. Because the date set for such dinners was not necessarily coordinated to coincide with religious holidays, these shared feasts were treated as

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[16] Samuli Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians," in *The Anthropology of Islam* Reader, ed. Jens Kreinath (New York: Routledge Press, 2012), 175.

[17] Carolyn Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (Los Angeles: University of California press, 2004), 105-126.

[18] "Fast of Ramadan Ends with Feasts," *The New York Times*, May 3, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/03/garden/fast-of-ramadan-ends-with-feasts.html.

social spaces to gather as Muslims and not necessarily a devotional activity, save possible time set aside for daily obligatory prayers.

Muslims in the early to mid-20th century often modeled their fundraising events on normative white Christian church gatherings. In the late 1960s, there was a growing circulation of new ideas from the growth of Islamist political thought and post-colonial discourse globally, which intersected in their call to throw off the yoke of Eurocentrism for indigenous epistemologies and practice. Some Muslims in US, mostly younger, sought to create activities for Muslim communities that embodied a new conception of sound religious behavior, cleansed, they argued, of Euro-American Christian norms or cultural accretions.

One illuminating example of these historical changes can be seen in the Islamic Center of New England in Quincy, Massachusetts. Revived in the 1950s from its early 20th century form as a Lebanese Muslim social club, its new, American-born leadership started rigorous efforts to recreate a close-knit community and fund construction of a mosque. After the building was complete in the early nineteen sixties, it hosted sock-hops, Halloween parties, and May baskets distributions - a former customary American gift in celebration of spring - for children on the Islamic New Year.[19] Its largest event was the annual *mahrajan* (Arabic for "festival") which served as a community day for Muslims in the larger region and a fundraiser, using raffles, card games, and auctions.[20]

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[19] Mary Lahaj, "The Islamic Center of New England," in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 298.

[20] Lahaj, "The Islamic Center," 299, 301. The chapter uses the spelling "maharrajan." It is unclear if this is a transliteration choice of the author or if the Islamic Center used this particular spelling of the Arabic term for their festivals.

In the late 1960s, mostly male international students became a larger percentage of the mosque membership, their presence a result of the new, less Eurocentric federal immigration laws. They brought with them ideas of a Muslim community free of "un-Islamic" cultural pollution, styled on the thought of Islamists thinkers like Abul A'la Maududi who wrote of a pious vanguard who would transform ethical norms for the masses. In a matter of years, alcohol was stripped from the Islamic Center's *mahrajan* and a communal vote was held to determine which activities were "Islamically improper" and should be barred.[21] This new demographic introduced debate into a community that otherwise felt comfortably Muslim, creating tensions and concerns over the possibility of shared social events, especially for fundraising. According to Islamic Center member Mary Lahaj, whose grandparents were founding members, it was only through the creative efforts of women in the mosque that a solution was found. She writes that the "American born generation reorganized the Ladies' Auxiliary and established new fund-raising activities that were Islamically appropriate, such as luncheons, dinner parties, banquets, bake sales, and an international food fair and bazaar."[22]

Similar shifts happened across American Muslim communities, changing the language, materiality, and activities of communal celebrations. In the late 1960s the overt use of recognizable religious language or symbols became more visible on invitations for communal fundraisers, including dinners. Through technological developments with computers in the 1980s, hand drawn maps to a community picnic that mimicked directions to a relative's house transformed into wedding-invitation quality invitations with elaborate Arabic script and invocations of religious heritage through geometric form. In addition to holidays and cross-

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[21] Lahaj, "The Islamic Center," 301.

[22] Lahaj, "The Islamic Center," 302.

regional Muslim gatherings, celebratory events were held for fundraisers. After mosques were built, fundraisers were used for religious schools, facilities maintenance, and causes important to the community, such as the popular call for relief for civilian Afghanis during the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989).

As these changes transformed many communities in the last decades of the 20th century, national Muslim charities started to emerge in the 1990s for the purpose of humanitarian aid and development abroad (with domestic work a later step), with explicit reference and identification with Islam. Born from dual cultures of what Marie Juul Petersen calls "development aid" and "Islamic aid," each Islamic charity organized itself through different choices about the primacy of either genealogy, falling between two broad archetypes of a "sacralised aid ideology" that derives its authority from what is read as a "traditional" religious orientation and a "secularised aid ideology," which she describes as a "professional organizational authority and resonating with principles of mainstream development aid," which will be discussed further in the next chapter.[23]

Generally, these Islamic charities aimed to establish themselves as recognizable and trustworthy facilitators of aid and joined an already populated calendar of fundraisers within Muslim communities, especially Ramadan, when religious giving is considered especially meritorious. Islamic charities' distinguished characteristic was that while fundraisers at other institutions were held for the purpose of a need, like the mosque electricity bill or the Islamic school's new industrial dishwasher, fundraisers for the Islamic charity were held for the purpose

[23] Marie Juul Petersen, *For Humanity or for the Umma? Aid and Islam in Transnational Muslim NGOs* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 15.

of charity itself. In other words, charities claimed a distinct part of the Ramadan fundraising marathon as the main event for practicing charity as a religious ritual.

Interviews with Muslims from my field sites in cities of the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest in 2016-2018 confirmed the timeline for the establishment period of this field and its public events. Those interviewed in their late 20s and early 30s who worked at charities or were attendees at events remember attending fundraiser dinners for different national Muslim charity organization in their childhoods of the 1990s to early 2000s. Interviewees over 40 years of age from areas with large Muslim populations also held a consensus that regular, annual fundraising dinners for American Muslim charities were not typical until the late 1990s and early 2000s. By the early 2010s, after years of budgetary growth as well as increased name recognition and popularity, national charities began to hold regular, multi-city iftars during Ramadan as the main fundraising events of the year. National charities that incorporated later in the 2010s immediately took up the Ramadan fundraiser dinner as a necessary and expected part of their engagement with the Muslim community.[24]

The Ritual Event: Staging, Stages, and Roles

The constitutive parts of Muslim charity Ramadan dinners are not completely unique - they build and overlap with elements from American humanitarian non-profits; fundraising at mosques or Muslim community centers; and formal dinners protocol for professional organizations.[25] In addition, American Muslim charity organizations use several different

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[24] A secondary benefit is interfaith and civic community building. Local leaders from government, religious groups, relevant nonprofits, and social organizers are usually invited to attend.

[25] There are extensive practical guides for American non-profit event planning. See: Alan Wendroff, *Special Events: Proven Strategies for Nonprofit Fundraising, Second Edition* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004).

strategies to fundraise throughout the year, including online portals; project-based online fundraising drives; emergency appeals; in-kind collections of items for the needy; and recruitment of large donors through personal or professional networks.

What is distinctive about the Ramadan fundraiser dinner is the particular arrangement of roles, actions, symbols, and objects to facilitate a unique ritual event, which communicates meaning and motivates behavior. It also has its own "formulaic spatiality" of movement, orientation, and body language organized to fulfill the religious obligation to give charitably for the sake of God.[26] For the routinized ritual event to be effective it uses these "explicit actions and interactions" but needs what anthropologist Yazid Ben Hounet describes as a "minimal shared understanding" that comes from culture and communal norms, symbols, language, and behavior recognizable to participants.[27]

Before analyzing the meaning and religious authority of the ritual event as a whole, I will provide an ethnographic description from a composite of several Ramadan fundraiser dinners I attended from 2016-2017 that were hosted by national American Muslim charities. At the time of writing, there are no scholarly descriptions of American Muslim charity organization fundraiser dinners, so this base composite account therefore serves as a typological description.

Preparation

Staff book a venue in a ballroom or other special event space depending on the capacity they expect in that city - here it will be 500 but the range is one hundred to nearly two thousand

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[26] David Perkins as quoted in Yazid Ben Hounet, "The Ma'ruf: An Ethnography of Ritual (South Algeria)," in *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*, ed. Baudouin Dupret et al. (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 53.

[27] Hounet, "The Ma'ruf," 58, 51.

attendees. At least two months before the event, announcements for the Ramadan fundraiser are posted officially on the organizational website and social media, then shared further by staff and supporters: fifty dollars for individuals and $450 for a table of ten. Typically headline speakers and Qur'an reciters have already been recruited and are listed on the advertisements. Politicians, non-Muslim religious leaders, and other local persons of influence are invited to attend as a form of diplomacy and fellowship. Local volunteers are recruited and attend a training session or are sent detailed instructions of their roles. In the week leading up, it sells out and urgent messages on WhatsApp or the Facebook event page are posted to buy last-minute tickets.

Arrival

Walking in from the parking lot, guests follow posted signs that direct them to the correct ballroom in the large hotel. Guests arrive outfitted in culturally diverse formalwear and are greeted by staff and volunteers dressed in coordinated colors. In the entryway area there is a twenty by fifteen foot printed screen covered in the name and logo of the organization, similar to film festival red carpet backdrops, and guests take "selfies" or group photographs. A "Prayer Room" sign is taped on the wall with an arrow pointing to a smaller room with rows of prayer rugs. Foam pads have been placed in the adjacent restrooms for safe sink *wudu* on marble floors.

Guests register at long tables in the hall with volunteers trying to quickly look up names on laptop screens and provide a table assignment. Individuals registered without a group are assigned a seat at single-sex tables for men or women. Most people come with friends or family, with an even distribution across age for adults and gender; it is overwhelmingly people of color and mostly South Asian, Arab, and African American. Registration is often interrupted by friends or family members finding each other and embracing or shaking hands. More subtle looks scan the room or settle on eye-catching outfits.

Before making their way to their seats, guests can visit the information table, where the most recent pamphlets, finance reports, and programmatic annual booklets are available from the charity. A staff member stands by, postured to answer questions. Pens and stress balls with the charity logo sit in containers and a child occasionally slinks up to take a treasured prize.

Inside the hall, there is a central stage with theatrical lighting and against the walls on all sides rest tall colorful banners with images of aid recipients, each detailing a different program: orphans, women's job training, micro-loans, the Syrian refugee crisis, and clean water. The dozens of round tables set for ten are decorated with a heavy cotton cover, center piece, and keychains engraved with the charity logo, tucked inside delicate mesh gift bags. There is also a donation envelope laid beside the appetizer plate. It has an image of a smiling child on the front and a miniature form on the back to complete a full transaction for the giving of *zakat* or general *sadaqah,* with the option to give to a particular program or the general fund. No schedule for the evening is provided – you are in it for the night.

At the time to begin the program, most guests are at their table, but many are still busy in the front hall or meandering between tables. Gaggles of teenagers chat and share phone screens before they are stuck with their family for the night. Muslims and non-Muslims sitting in reserved seats of honor are receiving visits while a volunteer is checking the stage microphones. Ten minutes after the posted start time, a staff member announces that the program will begin shortly; guests find their seats and volunteers move to their assigned spots. At tables that seat more than one party, guests introduce themselves to each other, sometimes tracing possible connections. The program begins as intended - twenty minutes after the advertised time.

Program Part One: Charity and Guest Speaker

The program opens with a Qur'an recitation by a college-aged man on stage, sung into the small podium microphone, which immediately extinguishes any lingering chatter from the audience. He then reads the English translation from a digital tablet. Another man comes onto the stage with a hand microphone and welcomes everyone to the fundraiser, comments on the blessings of Ramadan, and praises the hosting charity. He will be the emcee for the evening. After thanking everyone for attending, he introduces a senior level staff member from the organization.

A man older than the emcee comes onstage and thanks everyone again for their attendance and also gives thanks for the season of Ramadan. He singles out some important guests in the audience and thanks them individually for their support. The senior staff member gives a general overview of the charity: its mission statement, particular contributions to the field of Muslim charities and humanitarianism in general. To celebrate the blessings of the organization's work, a volunteer leadership award is announced and swiftly bestowed on a middle-aged woman who has given ten years of service. She comes to the stage, receives a small plaque, a photographer miraculously appears to capture a shot, and she walks back to her seat to polite applause.

The senior staff member then introduces a five-minute video that connects audience members to scenes of service by the charity. The lights are dimmed and, between Qur'an verses and statistics about the organization, images and short videos vignettes play: Staff distributing rice bags from a truck to families in Eritrea; an Indian women embroiders a wool poncho in a subsidized women's work space; a famous American imam wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the charity's logo is handing out water in Detroit, Michigan; a Syrian child in the Jordanian

Zaatari Syrian refugee camp climbs a dirt hill and turns back to the viewer to smile. When the lights are raised again, the senior staff member reiterates the main points of their mission, adding additional statistics, and reveals what the charity gives that the audience does not often see: overtime work, going beyond budgets to serve new emergencies, and even risking lives - noting the recent loss of one staff member in Afghanistan. He then goes deeper into one current area of focus, the Rohingya crisis in South/Southeast Asia, and calls another staff member to the stage.

A younger man comes to the podium, shakes hands with the senior staffer who then exits left. He introduces himself and explains how he first got involved with the charity. A picture appears on the large screen behind the stage of himself in Bangladesh, wearing a purple vest with the charity name. He transitions to a first-hand account of the intense scenes of mass exile and threadbare existence for Rohingya refugees in overrun Bangladeshi camps from his four months coordinating food delivery for the charity. His story emphasizes the extreme nature of suffering, including overflowing latrines and refugees' severe PTSD after witnessing their town being torched and their family members murdered. As he speaks, hotel catering staff in white and black suit uniforms are silently placing a plate of dates on each table and a pitcher of water. Shifting back to the space of the ballroom, the field staff member reminds guests of their obligations as Muslims to help their fellow Muslims in need by boosting the charity's impact with their charitable support.

The emcee glides back onstage and thanks the staff member for his account. Not missing a beat, he then announces sunset for the breaking of the fast, according to whichever Sunni jurisprudence is being used by the organizers.[28] Audience members reach out to eat dates and

[28] There is no announcement at Ramadan fundraisers of what *madhhab* or other specific jurisprudential guidance is being followed by the charity when organizing ritual activity at the event. Guest speakers, for example, can lead at prayer breaks, bringing in diversity of *madhhab* beyond the staff. What is consistent is Sunni normativity – while there might be diversity in Sunni *madhhab* that guides these decisions, there

drink water as a collective breaking of the Ramadan fast. Some audience members can be seen muttering a short *du'a* under their breath before biting into their date. Meanwhile, the Qur'an reciter has returned to the stage and does the *adhan* or call to prayer. Once complete, the emcee gives directions to the prayer room for *Maghrib* prayer. About eighty percent of the room leaves. Many caregivers with children suddenly become visible, balancing babies or asking a child to not throw their charity stress ball at the ballroom chandeliers. The catering staff return and place salads at each seat.

About fifteen minutes later, the room has filled again and everyone is busy with salads or moving onto the next course being handed out as needed by the catering staff. The emcee steps back onto the stage and introduces the guest speaker for the evening, a well-known Muslim researcher and frequent guest on national media. As guests enjoy their main course of halal roasted chicken and vegetables, she speaks for ten minutes about the importance of responsibility among Muslims like this wonderful crowd today and our ability to affect global change. While acknowledging the fear of asserting oneself in an Islamophobic climate, she uses Muhammad Ali as a role model for serving God despite the naysayers - a model from our times, she adds, who followed the ultimate example of the Prophet Muhammad, *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam*.[29]

The researcher points to the battles that Muslims face making a difference in the lives of children in Yemen but also confronting food scarcity and homelessness in this very city. In the face of these impediments to justice we are not helpless, she asserts, but have resources in Islam and our privileged position in America to help. We also have our partners in civic and interfaith

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was no instance in which a major charity used Shi'a jurisprudential norms regarding, for example, announcing the breaking of the fast or organizing prayer.

[29] This Arabic phrase is invoked by Muslims to call blessings on the Prophet Muhammad after speaking his name.

work, including some allies sitting in the room tonight. And more than that, we have an excellent organization like this charity to help facilitate, transparently and ethically, these helping acts.

Program Part Two: The Fundraiser

The emcee returns and comments on the rousing words and energy the guest speaker has brought to the room. He asks the audience for applause and they comply. In the background catering staff are switching out finished dinner plates for small flourless chocolate cake slices and coffee. Next to the stage, the emcee continues, we are honored to have a storied scholar and holder of several religious degrees for our fundraiser. An older man signaling religious authority in a *thobe* ascends up to the stage and humbly thanks the emcee for listing his accolades.[30]

The scholar says a short introductory prayer and goes on to give homiletic reflections on the importance of Ramadan and its connection to charity, frequently tying in Qur'an and *sunnah*. He then praises the work of the charity organization and its ability to stretch their budget to do so much good in the world. To continue this service to humanity, he explains, we need to ensure its future by giving generously tonight. Unlike other events guests have attended, he assures the audience he would not badger nor prolong the fundraiser any longer than needed. Not like that mean uncle that locks everyone in! (Pause for laughs). His job, he reports, is to get us out as quickly as possible. In the background, while the audience is focused on the scholar, volunteers have placed themselves in a grid among the ballroom's dozens of tables.

The scholar then begins the fundraiser. We start at $25,000, he announces, and asks that three Muslims come forward at this amount. He explains the good the money can do and the

[30] A *thobe* is a long tunic worn in the Middle East, North Africa, and West Africa in various styles. *Thobes* associated with an "Arab" style convey religious authority in the United States by evoking the aesthetics of scholarly figures and their institutions from these regions.

importance of Muslims being ethical leaders in the United States and the world. Acknowledging the size of the donation, he asserts that there are certainly some individuals here who can give this much. One hand goes up, and the scholar beams, shouting *alhamdulillah* and wishing blessings on the donor, his family, and his future. He calls on the audience to say "a*lhamdulillah*" and they immediately comply. Another hand goes up on the other side of the room and is met with similar praise, prayers, and excitement by the scholar. A minute passes, which the scholar fills with a prophetic story. He calls out for $25,000 again, but no replies. A short Qur'anic verse on orphans. Nothing.

No matter! The scholar moves to $10,000 and repeats the process, calling on more people to donate for each step he moves down the monetary scale, now $5,000, then $2,500, $1,000, $500, $250, and finally $100. At each level, he repeats the process: summoning guests to donate; explaining the benefits of this money to recipients of a particular program; filling dead time with Qur'anic verses, a prophetic story, or anecdotes of the transformative power of *sadaqah;* and exaltations and short *du'as* for the sake of each donor who raises their hand. People who donate that appear young are met with additional praise for their efforts; children who raise their hands on the instruction of older family are met with cooing adulation. In all the fundraiser maintains a cheery tone and quick pace.

Each person who identifies themselves as a donor is quickly met by a volunteer or staff member ready to collect their check, cash, or IOU written down on the provided donation envelopes at the table. Some charity workers have digital tablets with a card swipe attachment and discreetly conduct the donation transaction. Envelopes are run by volunteers over to a collection table and added to a running tally immediately.

At the start of the fundraising process, audience members scan the room for raised hands, looking around with enthusiasm and joining the religious scholar in *du'as* for the donor. As it continues, there is still excitement to see where a hand would emerge next, but it is more difficult to maintain the energy. Quiet chatter, and awkward stares increase, down into a lap or off in the distance, to mitigate embarrassment or avoid the social pressure and felt responsibility to donate.

By the time the scholar has reached the $100 category of donation, the demand is high - he asks for 25 donors- and much of the room that came to donate has already given. He announces a surprise boost: an anonymous donor has agreed to match all $100 donations! Hands begin and then continue to rise. A table of college aged men smile as one, two, four put hands up to give. The scholar shouts out the count with fervor, his eye crisscrossing the room for more participation, and 36 people commit. The scholar thanks the audience for their immense generosity and commends them for what their donations will do in the hands of a great Muslim charity organization.

Walking on from stage left, the emcee returns and thanks the scholar for his assistance and brevity: indeed, it was only twenty minutes for the fundraising time. The emcee then announces with an impassioned tone that the donations were tallied up and $185,000 was raised! The crowd erupts in applause. Calls for *takbir* ring out, and the audience sings out together *Allah-hu-Akbar! Allah-hu-Akbar!* There are smiles all around - for the satisfaction of accomplishment. Or relief. The senior staff member from earlier joins the scholar and emcee on the stage. He thanks the audience for their donations, reminds them of the important work their donations will do, and thanks God for the opportunity to come together as a Muslim community during the month of Ramadan. The scholar closes with a short prayer for the welfare of each guest and the larger "family" of the charity.

Departure

The program has ended three hours later. Families and friends leaving separately say goodbye and new acquaintances who shared a table exchange parting pleasantries; some even exchange contact information. A small portion of the guests head to *tarawih* offered in the temporary *musalla* but most guests head out for the night, caught in the traffic of hundreds of people trying to leave a parking garage at the same time. Left behind are the hotel staff, cleaning the remaining dinnerware and stripping the table covers before the late-night cleaning crew arrives for vacuuming. Some volunteers remain with staff members who are breaking down and packing away organizational paraphernalia and re-counting the donations. It appears that three envelopes were empty. A seasoned staff member explains that sometimes participants use fake offers as performance to encourage others to donate. "Whatever works," she quips.

Dinner Manners: The Ethics of American Muslim Philanthropic Action

National American Muslim charities promote American Muslim Humanitarianism: an assemblage of Islamic ethical norms, humanitarianism, and neoliberalism throughout the evening of the Ramadan fundraiser dinner. Using the composite thick description above as a starting point for analysis, I move through three key elements of the event to demonstrate how this particular ethical configuration is promoted for the practice of *zakat* and *sadaqah*. While charities present themselves as generically "American Muslim," it should be noted that their interpretations begin with an assumed basis in established textual Sunni thought.

Visualizing American Muslim Humanitarianism

Visuals promote an interpretation of worthy recipients of Islamic charity. This includes imagery from the organizational material available in the welcoming area, banquet hall banners,

donation envelopes, and the videos played during the program. In emergency appeals, immediate suffering and pain is the dominant photographic theme, depicting lives disrupted. Regular programs operated by the charity are dominated by two characteristics: smiling and activity. Pictures show children engaged in play; a disabled man walking on a new prosthetic limb; a villager pumping water; or a woman sewing in a cooperative factory. Imagery is then framed with quotes from the Qur'an and hadith; pithy text boxes on the necessity of protecting human rights and empowering individuals in ways that respect their dignity; and statistics about the successful reach and future projections of the programs to sustainably transform lives and local economies.

Through the choice of imagery and framing texts, attendees are asked to measure not simply whether the featured individuals fit the eight prescribed categories of *zakat* in Qur'an 9:60 but whether they *appear* deserving according to humanitarian values and the "normative reason" of neoliberalism that economizes all sphere of human life towards maximizing current and future value.[31] At one 2016 dinner, a staff member explained that "we need to hear [recipients] stories, not just the numbers for foreign policy implication…We need to be engaged and actively thinking about people, as people, to help them."

In creating these categories in need of care - the orphan, the Palestinian, the economically dependent woman- charities tap into what Wendy Hesford calls "spectacles" in Western human rights discourse. Visually, dinner attendees are not asked to read human rights in relationship to a

[31] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015), 30, 22. Qur'an 9:60: "Alms-tax is only for the poor and the needy, for those employed to administer it, for those whose hearts are attracted [to the faith], for [freeing] slaves, for those in debt, for Allah's cause, and for [needy] travelers. [This is] an obligation from Allah. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise." These eight categories are universally agreed upon by Muslim legal scholars as proper recipients of *zakat*.

suffering body, but are given particular "spectacles" that visualize that phenomenon as a human rights issue.[32] So, for example, while orphans are visualized as people in need of a human rights intervention, therefore made into the human rights spectacle of "the orphan," people targeted by homophobia are not featured in the program as a particular body in need of intervention, putting them outside of the "spectacular rhetoric" of mainstream American Muslim Humanitarianism.

Attendees are also shown these images to feel hopeful and encouraged that their donations to a non-profit will create the conditions for recipients to obtain dignity and human rights, after which they can become accountable, responsible individuals who choose to change their lives for the better.[33] Far from cynical, the goal of individual freedom and capacity is framed as a desirable end, a blessing contrasted with the burden of structural oppression. Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnyckyj call this affect-based strategy the "economies of affect," a "zone in which affect serves as a means of conducting conduct" that make possible the behaviors and practices of social relations within neoliberalism.[34] In my qualitative interviews, charity staff of multiple national charities explained that they try to stay away from "depressing" imagery in favor of images that will inspire donors to feel "hopeful" about transforming the lives of recipients through the charity organization's programs. Staff craft images to affect "hope" in order to create donor subjects who will support neoliberal humanitarian interventions, which do not promote resource redistribution but fulfill basic human needs at the initial level of

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[32] Wendy S. Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Violations, Recognitions, Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 189.

[33] Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnychyj, "Economies of Affect," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 15, no. 1 (March 2009): 60.

[34] Richard and Rudnychyj, "Economies," 57.

intervention followed by programs of equal opportunity -in education and employment- to lead productive lives.[35]

Calculating Care

Across the presentations and speeches of the evening, guests are guided by oral and printed signposts of monetary amounts relative to the calculated impact of programmatic care: "Just one dollar a day can support an orphan in Pakistan!" "One hundred dollars means five beds in our rural health clinic in Mexico!" "With a thousand dollars, we can send a full shipping container to Turkey!" In other moments, speakers mention the obligation to pay *zakat al-mal* and *zakat al-fitr*, and the blessings of giving *sadaqah*. Yet unlike the constant expounding on budgetary needs by multiple speakers, no one goes into detail on the Islamic legal requirements of wealth distribution. One speaker quipped, "I'm not here to give a speech about proper *sadaqah* - if you need it, go ask an *'alim*!"[36]

The extensive mathematics of *nisab* (wealth calculation to determine charitable obligations) or complex financing of a *sadaqah jariyya* (ongoing charity) project are still relevant here: donors are held accountable to God and guests are reassured that these programs are *zakat* eligible. But valuations of Islamic charity in this setting are instead expressed relative to humanitarian impact within a neoliberal economization of care. In the examples above, speakers do not focus on the current wealth of donors and the proper amount for distribution through Islamic charity and instead encourage donations relative to future-oriented, tangible contributions to programs in the form of vaccines, rice bags, or school uniforms. This markedly

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[35] Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 9.

[36] An *'alim* is a religious scholar. The plural is *'ulema*.

shifts theological emphasis from the normative Sunni written legal canon's focus on the moment of giving as the central moment of responsibility incumbent on the donor, perfected in religious merit by proper research into the recipient's status and the giver's sincere intent, to the *consequences* of the charity to the recipient.[37]

Speakers at the Ramadan dinner also dedicate time to sharing figures that demonstrate the health and growth of the organization: increases in budget and countries reached; rankings on Charity Navigator, the gold standard for charity ratings in the United States; and the amount of aid distributed or individuals served by various programs.[38] For example, one speaker boasted that the organization was able to give sixteen thousand people food packages for *Eid al-Adha* last year, five thousand more than the year before, and hoped to increase the amount to twenty thousand in the coming year. These numbers give credibility to the work of the charity and serve as a selling point for Muslim attendees to give their religious charity through this organization. It also reflects the dominant language of growth, competition, and enhancement central to the ideology of neoliberalism, as defined by Wendy Brown. Charities insist that their work is valuable not just in the humanitarian moment of service but also in the charity's capacity to grow, stay competitive, and increase the impact of Muslim supporters' donations.[39]

Becoming Barakah Pioneers: A Call to Action

The final major element of the evening for the promotion of American Muslim Humanitarianism ethics is the homiletic speeches of invited guests that impart what is presented

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[37] Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 64.

[38] "Overview," *Charity Navigator*, https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=628.

[39] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 26.

as the proper intention and attitude in giving religious charity. To begin, the presentations by staff about the organization do not change the core religious requirement of right intention: to give for the sake of God, solely to receive *thawab* or *ajr (*spiritual benefit or recompense for pious deeds). Yet these speeches add an additional layer for consideration, as mentioned in the previous section, by directing donors to give to specific programs that effectively contribute to human development.[40] This shifts the temporality of obtaining *ajr* from ensuring at the moment of giving that the transaction goes to the correct party to a future oriented commitment to bring measurable change in the lives of the deserving poor. The intention to give correctly thus extends to the consequences of one's charity.

After establishing the right intention for giving, guest speakers and the fundraiser followed what I describe as a "call to action." Across the Ramadan dinners I attended in 2016 and 2017, guest speakers and fundraisers supplied similar prescriptive instructions for religious giving in the American context. In observing these different events, I recognized a shared homiletic script and method to motivate charitable action and impart a particular theological interpretation of charity catered to US Muslim communities. There was not a consistent order, but all speakers covered these six points, so I quote from different fundraiser guest speakers as different voices in a shared script:

1. Speakers acknowledged a reticence to donate within Muslim communities in the United States due to fear or feelings of inadequacy. The identified sources of these feelings were multiple: fear of an Islamophobic society that surveils them; fear that giving will render one

[40] Atia, *Building a House in Heaven*, 70.

vulnerable to poverty; self- doubt that one donation matters; and feeling overwhelmed when called to help those in need, let alone the structural conditions that create suffering today.

2. In response to "fearful" feelings they implied were impeding donations, the speakers had the audience take stock of their socio-economic position. The speakers labeled listeners "privileged" because they lived in the United States and were able to attend a fundraiser dinner with their disposable income (even though most charities will offer sliding-scale tickets to Muslim community members who cannot afford the full price). "You're in a good country," one speaker remarked. "We are all here because of a potential to change people's lives," stated another. At one fundraiser, a religious scholar called this a situation of *tawfiq*, where God has given the believer the ability and opportunity to do good.

3. Because God has provided the opportunity to do good in such a prosperous and stable nation as America, speakers make it clear that the only limitation to giving is lack of faith, as a weakness of *iman,* belief*, or taqwa,* God consciousness. Wealth is read as a blessing and not critiqued. In the context of charity, it is also a test from God of "your privilege and power…God is giving you the chance to give, so don't be tired or afraid." In the end, it was God who created that wealth and made you able to achieve it, and "wants to see what you'll do with the money to bring about *shifa'* (healing) and *hassanat* (good deeds)." Multiple speakers at different events also referenced the Qur'anic Sura Al-Ma'un (Chapter 107), which speaks of those who pray but deny the orphan assistance and the poor food. One speaker shared, "We don't have a right in our luxury to be tired."

4. While donors' socio-economic status was equated with the wealth of the United States, the speakers paradoxically were sure to note that charity was meant primarily for those for whom

giving was a challenge. One fundraiser pointed to the extensive discussion of giving in the Qur'an - "If giving was only for the rich, why would God spend so much time talking about it?" Donors were told they are meant to push themselves, to "*feel it*" viscerally when they give. While stories were told of poor people at past fundraisers who gave their last dollar to help the cause, the archetypal "poor" donor discussed was the college student - a figure in American culture who is not disparaged or pitied for their lack of money but just someone temporarily without wealth. A speaker reminded young people of their power and potential despite their economic status. They should therefore be willing to give in times of "ease and hardship," quoting from Qur'an 3:133-134.

Even with the challenge built into the act of Islamic giving, speakers always reminded participants of the positive benefit God intended in creating this duty. The consequence of giving is never a sacrifice without reward, demonstrated by the continuous use of the prophetic saying, "charity does not decrease wealth." Instead, giving will bring blessings into one's life and is "how you get into heaven." Additionally, charity during Ramadan, gives "ten times the reward," which one speaker said was akin to a Super Mario Brothers "coin bonus level" of *ajr*.

5. It is the mark of a Muslim, therefore, to act when there is need. Action, more than particular affect or emotion, was the most emphatic call from speakers, a command packed with an immediacy that could be conveniently fulfilled in the fundraising period of the evening. Wherever taking action was the topic at hand, speakers took on a strong, encouraging tone akin to a sports coach. During the fundraising period, this insistence on action was reflected in the calls for donations but also in the continuous physical collection

of donations that were then run to a central table for tallying. The envelopes created a physical buildup of acts.

Speakers urged their audience to use achievement, influence, and power to bring change for the good, to act following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's family and the *Sahaba*, the last of whom one fundraiser called "Baraka warriors." Another speaker remarked, "Being Muslim does not make you better than others. The moments when you act are when you are full and whole Muslims." The practice of giving help to the poor, the orphan, the needy is the mark that a Muslim desires God over this world. Speakers constantly invoked a thought process of a person hearing stories of suffering or seeing acts of human violence or natural disasters, and the proper response is to ask, "What can we do?" And then, "What more can we do?" Muslims have "a responsibility to intervene." They distinguish themselves by "enjoining what is good" and understand that "God won't stop this suffering until we start trying to end it," making an indirect reference to Qur'an 13:11.

6. This call as Muslims to practice action in response to suffering leads to the final point that the featured charity organization is the necessary platform for the Muslim community to make significant change with their religious charity. The rhetoric blurs the charity organization together with the *ummah*, because it is both an independent non-profit and the mechanism by which Muslims work collectively towards positive change. Speakers referred to Muslim charity organizations as a "platform," "venue," "extension of you," and even an "intercession" for Muslims living in America to help in conflicts abroad or poorer spaces of American life. The organization is plugged as the necessary force to move Muslims "from talk to making influence and change."

Guest speakers and fundraisers' homiletic speeches instruct the audience to first hold the intention to change lives and then act on that commitment. In the ethics of American Muslim Humanitarianism expounded here, there is no talk of a comprehensive moral transformation but constant trials of spiritual effort. While formal Muslim theology maintains a consensus that no one can see into a person's heart, the fundraiser event speeches make it clear that caring for humanity is only meaningful as an active practice.

Charities spent little time speaking about the causes of inequality in favor of an individual-based responsibility to act again suffering and inequality, regardless of how tiny the effect. It is left to the charitable organization to be the maker of sustainable, large-scale change through humanitarian interventions of relief and development, grounded as a Muslim organization in the conviction that ultimately it is God who intervenes to feed the hungry and care for the orphan.

The Religious Ritual Authority of the Ramadan Fundraiser Dinner

Although I describe the Ramadan fundraiser dinner for American Muslim charities as a routinized religious ritual, effecting ethical norms of American Muslim Humanitarianism, the majority of staff interviewed across four national Muslim charities and several regional charities responded in the negative when asked if it was "religious" event. For most, "religious" in this context meant "only for Muslims," and staff went to great lengths to assure me that their charity is inspired by Islam but serves people regardless of race or religion. One staff member went so far as to say, "the fundraiser's not religious, it helps everyone!"

It is hard to reconcile these explanations with the experience of an event inundated with devotional activity recognizable to the majority of American Muslims such as Qur'anic recitation, communal prayer, and a Ramadan *iftar*. While non-Muslim guests are welcome and

present, the assumed participants and audience are Muslims. Shared devotional resources are repeatedly used throughout the night in presentations and media in a religious register of speech: Qur'an; *sunnah* of the Prophet, his followers, and family; *du'as* and religious phrases such as *inshallah* and contemporary Muslim historical figures like Muhammad Ali. The event is advertised at mosques, Islamic schools, and is shared in Muslim social networks, in person and on social media platforms. And an implied shared knowledge of religious language and practices is also at work: for example, Arabic theological terms are left untranslated; no instruction is given for a plate of dates left on the table; and binary gender segregation is sometimes used for seating or self-serve food buffets.[41]

The discrepancy between my interview responses and the religious activity of the Ramadan fundraiser dinner is possible because of the methods American Muslim charities use to establish and maintain their religious authority, including the construction of the Ramadan fundraiser itself as an annual ritualized activity. I argue that the Ramadan fundraiser dinner effects religious authority as a ritualized event through three routes explored below: it self-authorizes using the Islamic discursive tradition; it builds trust through "a charisma of form"; and it establishes a sense of religious unity by focusing on a narrow act of donation instead of comprehensive, embodied performances of piety.

Self-Authorizing Rhetoric

At a primary level, the extensive use of recognizable religious textual sources and practices, as interpreted in contemporary American Muslim Sunni discourse, connects the event to a mainstream American dialectic of Islamic discursive tradition and collective conceptions of

[41] Hounet, "The Ma'ruf," 59.

apt performance.[42] But how is it possible for a Ramadan fundraiser dinner to be authorized by a global, centuries-long discursive practice that does not mention or give instructions to hold one? Anthropologist Steve Caton offers an explanation via analogy through the linguistic concept of metapragmatics, the "awareness of a speaker of the pragmatic functions of a speech act" that allows one to explain the meaning of everyday (pragmatic) speech.[43]

While Islamic authorizing discourses are understood as metapragmatic in their explicit claim to dictate "orthodox" ideas and action, Caton argues that everyday, pragmatic Muslim dialogue and social interactions are the means by which the authorizing discourse is given power, putting the two in a dialectic.[44] He goes one step further to say that everyday dialogue and practice has its own metapragmatics, in the way people rely and comment on it, so that both the recognized Islamic discursive tradition and the everyday Muslim pragmatics are two forms of authorizing discourses that contribute to "power as a discursive practice."[45]

Therefore, the Ramadan fundraiser dinner as a communal Muslim ritual practice is categorically everyday activity but "can constitute itself metapragmatically" by framing the ritual event as always already an Islamic ritual event. Participants further authorize its language and performances as "Islamic" through the citation of the canonical discursive tradition and use of already established practices of fasting, prayer, and donation as they are shared among dominant

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[42] Steven C. Caton, "What is an 'Authorizing Discourse'?" in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Tala Asad and His Interlocutors*, ed. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2006), 43.

[43] "Metapragmatics," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed September 9, 2018, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/metapragmatics.

[44] Caton, "Authorizing Discourse," 45.

[45] Caton, "Authorizing Discourse," 52.

American Sunni Muslim communities.[46] The repeated use of a set of particular Qur'anic or Prophetic quotations during these events creates an association between canon and a new practice, obscuring the novelty of this ritual.

Importantly, by choosing to hold the events during the holy month of Ramadan, charity organizations take advantage of a "time of exceptional morality" where Muslims who participate feel a sense of "increased social, moral, and pious commitment" for the aim of accruing spiritual rewards.[47] Ramadan then does the heavy lifting as it is a time period where the complex and competing ethical demands of Muslims are "temporarily subordinated to superior normativity of religion." In time, the fundraiser began to be experienced as the "correct" and most effective way to obtain the reward of giving in the holy month.[48]

Over the last twenty years, as the ritual of the Ramadan charity fundraiser has become more routinized in American Muslim communities, participants engage in metapragmatic language about how the event *should* proceed. This is most visible in younger participants, who take these annual events for granted because they have attended them since childhood – there was no experience of religious community before the existence of the charity fundraiser. Also, the routinely invoked straw man of the "mean immigrant uncle" who locks people in the room until they donate to his liking, is a useful foil for the charities to establish the apt performance of a fundraiser who - while usually still an older man and a religious scholar - invites and encourages participation with a smile.

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[46] Caton, "Authorizing Discourse," 56, 55.

[47] Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan," 175,176.

[48] Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan," 181.

A Bureaucratic Charisma of Form

The second method of authorization for this annual ritual event is what Bill Maurer terms a "charisma of form." He writes, "Muslim Americans' understandings of Islamic jurisprudence owes much to their understanding of law generally, and a specifically American legal consciousness that assumes that the law consists of forms and procedures which one may not understand but the very formality of which indexes its legitimacy."[49] In his study of American Muslims deciding between Islamic mortgage companies, Maurer found that many clients who were invested in sharia-compliance for their home financing preferred companies that did not look too "traditional." In place of religious authority coming from a "literalist interpretation of religious texts," what was labeled a "non-traditional" mortgage company by clients authorized itself through "professionalism" and "bureaucratic rationality" of standard American business practices.[50] This bureaucratic method of service is then endorsed by recognized religious scholars, who avoid theological analysis of its business practices. This "charisma of form" communicates a uniform and universal standard of practice and principles, which clients believe mirrors the legally consistent and universal character of Islam.

Applied to the Ramadan fundraiser dinner, national Muslim charity organizations "routinize people's pre-existing understandings" of what a reputable charity should look and act like, using the standard language of American faith-based humanitarian non-profits and fulfilling neoliberal expectations of charities capacities to maintain growth, competitive edge, and increase

[49] Maurer, "Faith in the Form," 179.

[50] Maurer, "Faith in the Form," 195, 193.

impact.[51] The organization is then further legitimized by famous religious leaders or scholars who endorse the organization in speeches or in various organizational media.

Through several layers of this "charisma of form," specific to the American cultural context of bureaucracy and the field of humanitarian non-profits, participants are lead to read the Ramadan fundraiser dinner as religiously sound. This creates the paradoxical statement that the charity is religiously upstanding but its practices, like the dinner, are "not religious." Although they mobilize a "charisma of form," charities are deeply invested in propagating a specific moral discourse and complimentary ethical practices of American Muslim Humanitarianism. In private interviews, high level staff of national charity organizations openly shared that Ramadan dinners are opportunities to shape the moral subjectivities of their supporters through ritual giving.

Limited Moral Obligation

The final way that the charity authorizes the Ramadan fundraiser dinner as a religious, ritual space is its narrow focus on motivating Muslim attendees to make a religious donation. In opposition to the environment of the piety movement studied by Saba Mahmood, which disciplines Muslim women towards comprehensive moral transformation and perfection, charities created the Ramadan fundraiser as a celebratory space: participants enjoy good food, socialize with family and friendships, show off social status with clothes or a new marriage, while also satisfying their religious duty to give charity. This celebratory atmosphere accommodates what Samuli Schielke calls the "incoherent and unsystematic conglomerate of

[51] Maurer, "Faith in the Form," 196.

different moral registers" of everyday people - mimicking the "multivalent" character of ritual street celebrations of religious holidays like *Mawlid an-Nabi*.[52]

In this morally diffuse festive environment, charities use the shared Islamic duty to give to create a *limited* sense of religious unity through its practice. "Ramadan Muslims" and extremely devout people alike, without distinction, can equally acknowledge, take responsibility, and accomplish the ritual act of giving for the sake of God.[53] In the "ritual sphere" of the fundraising period, Muslims are encouraged by speakers to take on a shared identification with Islam and responsibility to God through the charity organization *qua* facilitating presence and physical space.[54]

The ritual act follows Victor Turner's schema for ritual action, bringing participants from everyday order into a state of *communitas* as American Muslims, all facing the responsibility to act in the fact of an unjust and unequal world.[55] In the period of the fundraiser, participants are guided by the speakers to feel "a common history and cosmology and… fate shared by a universal Muslim community" even as they will scatter to different socio-economic, political, and religious groups after the last envelope is counted.[56] Despite the nebulous nature of

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[52] Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan," 179; Mottahedeh, "Faith and practice," 113.

[53] Heiko Henkel, "'Between Belief and Unbelief Lies the Performance of Salat': Meaning and Efficacy of a Muslim Ritual," in *The Anthropology of Islam* Reader, ed. Jens Kreinath (New York: Routledge Press, 2012), 145. In popular American Muslim parlance, I have heard "Eid Muslim" to refer to someone who only shows up for major Islamic holidays but otherwise is not active in their religious practice or community. This might have been coined as a parallel to the "Easter and Christmas Christian" in American Christian communities. Because these individuals are participating in these Ramadan activities, it seems an extension of this period of participation and are labeled "Ramadan Muslims."

[54] Henkel, "'Between Belief and Unbelief," 145.

[55] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Press, 1966), 94-204.

[56] Henkel, "Between Belief and Unbelief," 143.

"community" among Muslim attendees, the charity works to direct the *communitas* of the ritual giving towards its own authority in the everyday structures of American Muslim religious life. Through the experience of coming together to give donations through a charity's fundraiser event, the organization establishes itself as the institution that makes religious giving possible in the imagined community of American Muslims. And for that evening, it creates a community of believers who share in the practice of ritual.

Conclusion

American Muslim charity organizations are a guiding force in the interpretation of Islamic legal norms regarding religious giving but also serve as a physical and social space for Muslims to explore and make decisions regarding Islamic law in the United States. Religious values are not inculcated at charity fundraisers by mere cerebral activity but exist in an epistemology of embodiment that demands presence and participation.

This chapter argues that American Muslim charities have established themselves as a religious institution in American Muslim communities through the development of authorizing texts, practices, and roles in the sphere of Islamic charity. It took the Ramadan fundraiser as an illuminating case study for its central argument. After giving a composite thick description, it explains both how dominant national charities impart their moral norm of American Muslim Humanitarianism and establish the fundraiser dinner as a religious ritual event. The following chapter will extend this exploration of charities as a religious institution through their advertising and media presence, which I refer to as formal messaging. While Ramadan fundraisers are once

a year, formal messaging is produced and disseminated continuously to shape American Muslim understanding and practice of charity and simultaneously to reinforce the power of charities as an authoritative source of religious knowledge.

Chapter 5
"Empowering Lives Through Zakat": The Creation and Use of Formal Messaging

American Muslim charities spend a notable amount of their budget on advertising to gain support for extensive programming. Glossy annual summaries, pamphlets and donation envelopes are mailed cross-continental and passed out at annual conferences or events while websites are constantly updated with new videos that also pop up as advertisements on Facebook newsfeeds. The market for American Muslims' donations for religious causes is competitive, from Islamic schools needing to repave parking lots to mosque expansions and Islamic charities delivering emergency aid abroad, so standing out matters. In this environment, charities give close attention to digital and print design and copy to look professional and recognizable as legitimate non-profit organizations as much as they strive to convince Muslims of the Islamic imperative to support their aid and development work.

It is with this standard in mind that I was surprised by a flier I picked up from the Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD) booth at the 2018 Islamic Circle of North America conference.[1] The flier was titled "Shelter for Syrian Refugees" soliciting donations for "caravan homes" at $5,000 a unit to provide shelter and "bring dignity & joy" to Syrian lives.[2]

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[1] "About Us," Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD), archived site from March 16, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20180316152413/http://hhrd.org/aboutus. This date is shortly after the ICNA annual conference, so it reflects the organization when it published this flier.

[2] Helping Hands for Relief and Development, *Shelter for Syrian Refugees Flyer,* no date – in circulation 2018.

The designer used a common flier format for a fundraiser: a descriptive image and text on top, showing a caravan home delivery to refugees, with a detachable donation form on the bottom. It also included all the typical secondary elements of charity marketing material: the organizational logo, website, and contact information; tax exempt ID and accreditation agency ratings; and social media icons to follow their work. The flier, in summary, was right on the mark.

And yet, something seemed off about its center image, which I could not initially place. In a scene of arid red desert earth under a yellow sky, and a refugee camp far in the background, we see a crowd of about 25 adults standing around the back of a semi-truck flatbed holding the "caravan home" for a Syrian refugee family. It is a shipping container-sized structure punctured with windows and the Helping Hands logo emblazoned on the side. Roughly two thirds of the crowd are wearing green HHRD "Youth for Jordan" shirts – a "youth empowerment" service program for American 18-25 year olds - while the others wear khaki HHRD field operation vests or everyday clothes of shirts and pants.[3] And in the foreground, separate from the crowd, is renowned American Muslim scholar Omar Suleiman. In the HHRD green shirt and vest, he kneels with four young children, assumedly Syrian refugees, posing together with broad smiles.

Looking closer I realized what was askew: Suleiman and the children were photoshopped into the image. Quickly the visual disconnect became obvious, glaring even: the sunlight hit at a different angle; their bodies' edges ever-so-slightly pixelated; and parts of the grey ground beneath them left uncut, despite its marked difference from the red earth of the larger scene. HHRD had spent over half a million dollars on advertising and marketing that year and probably

[3] HHRD, "Youth Empowerment Program: Our Future Begins Today," Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD), archived site from December 3, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20181203023854/https://hhrd.org/youth.

held hundreds of digital images from this trip alone.[4] Why piece together an image, risk appearing unprofessional, and, as a result, lose donors?

After perusing hundreds of advertising and promotional materials from organizations across the American Muslim charity field, and without direct correspondence with the flier maker in question, I offer a conjecture and a larger argument. The imperfect photoshop was likely justified to create an image with the maximum ethical impact in the linguistic and visual register, developed over time by Islamic charities, to shape and encourage donations by American Muslims to their causes as a religious good. Religious legitimacy for American Muslim charities is not just achieved in the professional design standards of mainstream humanitarianism but in their capacity to convince their Muslim readers and viewers that their organizations, Muslim humanitarian relief and development charities, are the premier field to enact the moral economy of *sadaqah* and *zakat*.

This chapter is an analysis of the communication registers used by American Muslim charities in their online and print media as well as their merchandise. It is based on analysis of hundreds of pieces collected online and in person during fieldwork from 2016-2018. The creation of a media infrastructure of promotional texts, visuals, and objects used to spread a charity's particular theological interpretation of how to give and distribute Islamic charity constitute what I call the "formal messaging" register. These organizations are part of two larger and overlapping fields of humanitarianism and faith-based organizations (FBOs), but my analysis will be focused to intra-Muslim dynamics. The chapter explores how American Muslim charities use formal messaging to both project a constructive theology of charity and ensure it is

[4] "Consolidated Financial Statements December 31, 2018," Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD) and prepared by Alan C. Young & Associates, P.C., 7. Website accessed August 20, 2020, https://hhrd.org/auditReport/AuditReport2018-Consolidated.pdf.

received as an authoritative religious source for American Muslims in their conceptualization and practice of this religious act.

I borrow the concept of constructive theology from Christianity Studies to describe the way in which this genre of religious writing is presenting ideas about correct Islamic practice without an explicit claim to authority. Jason A. Wyman provides a clear definition:

> [A] method of doing Christian theology that takes seriously theological and church traditions as well as modern critiques of that tradition being something universal, eternal, or essential; it employs traditional themes and loci of theology in order to formulate useful, inclusive, fallible guidance for living as Christians in the contemporary world, against descriptions of a systematic theological system that pretend to unveil any true essence of essential reality of Christianity; and takes as its mode a good-faith engagement with parallel academic disciplines, often religious studies; an activist/crisis confrontation; or, ideally, both.[5]

Applied to this context, American Muslim charities are creating religious texts that are not making claims on Islamic charity in all spaces and contexts but providing guidance for how to best practice charity within the 21st century context of being Muslim in the United States.

The objective of formal messaging is threefold. At the level of religious authority, it creates a reflexive relationship whereby discussions of what Islamic charity "looks like" in major American Muslim publications and across social media take for granted the frameworks established by charities' formal messaging. This is achieved by referencing already established forms of authority from prominent Islamic scholars and religious texts, avoiding any direct participation in theological discourse, while more explicitly promoting a particular organization and form of the religious act. Materially, well designed and distributed messaging is also crucial to attract immediate and sustained funding, employees, and volunteer labor for dozens of projects and emergency interventions across the globe. And finally, it is also a means to counter

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[5] Jason A. Wyman Jr., *Constructing Constructive Theology; An Introductory* Sketch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), xxx.

suspicion and legal investigation in an environment where Muslim charity is treated as a potential criminal act, an adversary to humanitarianism itself.

The dominant theological position running through formal messaging in the interconnected network of national Muslim charities is American Muslim Humanitarianism. As described in the previous chapter, this religious ethic consists of three elements: Pious obligation to charity, humanitarian intervention, and neoliberal logic. It adapts Euro-American humanitarian rights-based logic and neoliberal development practices into dominant American Sunni religious ethics. Muslims are directed to purify their wealth and assist the needy for the sake of God while also being called to protect the human rights of beneficiaries, maintain political neutrality, and fund neoliberal development projects tied to individual "empowerment" and economic growth. Importantly, this particular ethical framework "[does] not contest established Islamic religious law…on zakat," but instead justifies "new organizational forms of *zakat*-giving-and-taking" to bring to life the ethic of American Muslim Humanitarianism.[6]

By the late 2010s, formal messaging had proved effective: familiarity and support for American Muslim charities brought in roughly a quarter billion dollars each year and hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours across the field.[7] In the areas where they invest resources with staffing, events, and advertising, national American Muslim charities are championed -or at the very least identified- by local Muslims as the standard bearers for apt performance of charity.[8] Even though giving rates are higher to support mosques and schools among American Muslims,

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[6] Christopher B. Taylor, "Islamic Charity in India: Ethical Entrepreneurism & The Ritual, Revival, and Reform of Zakat Among a Muslim Minority," (PhD diss., Boston University, 2005), 20.

[7] This estimate was made by combining the donation amounts for all the largest American Muslim charities in the field from 2018.

[8] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 20.

charities – while operating specific direct services – work to center themselves as the premier sites to gain understanding of and participate in charity as a religious ethic and duty to God.[9]

The chapter will proceed in two sections. In the first section, I fit formal messaging into a larger history of religious manuals and guides. Then I present a case study of one organization's formal messaging as an archetype, describing its constitutive parts, media infrastructure, and its employment of the three elements of American Muslim Humanitarianism. Following the case study, I show a pattern of shared theological claims in formal messaging among major American Muslim charities, as well as the major assumptions built into these shared, normative claims, the most prominent being a Sunni orientation. Finally, I discuss the limits of current formal messaging among these major charities because of the pressures and penalties imposed on them by the War on Terror. As Su'ad Abdul Khabeer writes about contemporary Muslim cultural and community organizations, the work is not to declare them "complicit with the state," because they are "in a tactical relationship with power." The work is to "[chart] the context that engenders the limits" of Muslim counter-hegemonic action's alterity.[10]

The second section complicates formal messaging. I use two ethnographic vignettes from charities' local service centers where the authority of formal messaging is weak and care workers' own religious interpretations of charity come to the fore. I show that not only media and objects but social texts written by interpersonal relationships and bodies make up the active theologies employed by each charity.

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[9] See Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, *American Muslim Philanthropy: A Data-Driven Comparative Profile*, July 2019, https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019_Philanthropy-Report_WEB.pdf?x39162.

[10] Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 180.

Islamic Instructional Documents

Formal messaging media falls into a larger Sunni Islamic tradition of religious manuals or guides. These are instructional documents but also function in a secondary manner to reinforce the author's interpretation of what constitutes correct religious thought and action.[11] Until the early modern period, madrasa-trained scholars ('ulema) -nearly exclusively male- were the central figures to produce authoritative religious texts. 'Ulema created these texts to be read first by fellow 'ulema and, second, cultural and political elites, to preserve and promote God's divine will for humanity.

Beginning in the 18th century, significant intellectual and material changes in Muslim majority spaces spurred critical reevaluation of the maintenance and production of religion knowledge. Before the advent of European global colonial hegemony, internal debates emerged where some 'ulema argued that Muslims were living in a way discordant with God's will, caused by scholarly authorities' failure to reign in (or their contribution to) the growth of un-Islamic beliefs and practices. Without outright challenging the epistemological institution of the 'ulema, these scholars began movements labeled "revivalism" to "replace the customary tradition with… the authority of the original sources of Islam, as interpreted by the revivalists."[12]

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[11] This is a broad category, for which guides exist regarding law, Sufism, ritual, etc. For some historical examples, see Hedaya Hartford and Ashraf Muneeb, *Birgivi's Manual Interpreted: Complete Fiqh of Menstruation & Related Issues* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2006); Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, *A Sufi Rule for Novices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Hasan Ayyoub, *Fiqh of the Muslim Family: A Manual Book in Islamic Jurisprudence*, trans. Al-Falah Staff Members (Cairo, Egypt: Islamic Inc., 2008); Ibn Ata Allah Al-Iskandari, *The Key to Salvation: A Sufi Manual of Invocation* (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1996).

[12] Charles Kurzman, "Liberal Islam and Its Islamic Context," in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

The external pressures of growing European material and ideological hegemony over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the declining power of major Muslim empires, inspired reevaluation of the state of Muslim societies by political leaders and scholars alike. Some buckled down and insisted on revivalism as the solution, maintaining a "purity" from any innovations from non-Islamic European sources. Others saw a promise of improvement for Muslim majority societies in embracing European technologies and openness to the benefits of their new forms of knowledge and political organization. A movement now labelled "Islamic modernism" emerged among some madrasa trained scholars to make use of Western disciplines and languages to better develop Islamic knowledge for the new age.

Technological change in the form of print culture and Muslim rulers' new interest in popular education, created new technologies and publics to consume this knowledge. Modernist Muslim thinkers made use of the newspaper and magazine to share and spread their ideas, most famously *al-Manar* produced by Egyptian Muhammad Abduh. Nonetheless these mediums were often seen as elitist and demanded knowledge of particular debates crisscrossing the *ummah*. It took the Muslim Brotherhood, the grassroots Islamic socio-political movement to "[pioneer] the use of mass media as instruments of Islamic activism and reformism. Books, short tracts, pamphlets and fliers by reformist writers as well as magazines covering national and international events considered relevant to Muslims were widely circulated."[13]

Mass media continue to be a useful format for Muslim social movements, missionaries, and political organizations to spread their ideas – most famously in the form of cassette tapes for Imam Khomeini to offer sermons to his supporters while in exile during the Iranian revolution of

[13] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 114.

the late 1970s.[14] Mass media is the central format for Islamic charities to spread their formal messaging, supporting a new form of transnational Muslim work not focused on formal politics or personal piety, but "engaging in social activism such as the profession of aid, based on Islamic values and ethos."[15] The advent of the internet, specifically organizational websites, and social media has provided further tools to disseminate information and attract new members.[16]

Building Blocks of Formal Messaging

To illustrate the basic building blocks of formal messaging and how American Muslim Humanitarianism appears within, I offer a case study from a representative organization to demonstrate how these constitutive elements are at play in a limited setting. I look at the formal messaging and media infrastructure of ICNA Relief from 2015-2018. ICNA Relief is a faith-based domestic nonprofit charity that formed in 2001 but grew out of the more informal service work done by the Islamic Circle of North America, a social and religious organization founded roughly 40 years ago predominantly by South Asian American Muslims.[17] By 2017, the charity had permanent offices in 38 states and 2 US territories and served over 300K people annually through several core programs: family services, free health clinics, hunger prevention, refugee services, disaster relief, domestic violence shelters, and school supply drives.[18]

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[14] Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1994).

[15] Marie Juul Petersen, *For Humanity or for the Ummah? Aid and Islam in Transnational Muslim NGOs* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2015), 14.

[16] Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

[17] The Islamic Circle of North American (ICNA) organizes their international charitable work through ICNA Relief's sister organization, Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD).

[18] ICNA Relief, "Building Bridges" and "Our Programs," *ICNA Relief Overview 2017*, 3-4.

Media Infrastructure

ICNA Relief uses a wide variety of formal messaging material to promote and educate their public, creating for itself a "media infrastructure." Their media infrastructure of a website, social media, and printed material is standard for the formal messaging of national organizations in the field and often copied in a more limited manner by smaller scale local Muslim charities. In the digital realm, the ICNA Relief website contains the vision and mission; a list of key staff; descriptions of programs and geographic reach; media; financial and performance records; basic information on the concept of *zakat*; and ways to get involved.[19] ICNA also maintains social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in order to promote programs and events; interact with partner organizations; post video and images of staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries; and share Islamic holiday greetings.

Even in a media landscape that is heavily digital, ICNA Relief and other American Muslim charities' printed material still retains an important, impactful position in the effort to inform and connect with potential and recurring donors and volunteers. These items are mailed out, placed in mosques and other Muslim community centers, and distributed at events and larger conferences. While the majority of ICNA relief videos on social media were viewed less than one hundred times, each piece of nationally distributed printed material easily reaches thousands across the country by mail. Recipients are past donors or signed up at an event or through a website for more information. Promotional merchandise, like t-shirts, is a supplement to printed formal messaging, and will be discussed in a later section because it takes a secondary, supportive role in promoting the charity's message.

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[19] "Home Page," ICNA Relief, Accessed August 10, 2020, https://icnarelief.org/.

The prime printed piece used for formal messaging is the pamphlet. Every national-level Muslim charity organization like ICNA Relief produces an introductory pamphlet to their organization; separate pamphlets for each program they run; and ones for emergency appeals in situations of crisis, war, or natural catastrophe. At the center of most pamphlets is a donation form and attached envelope for easy submission by mail. These are the most ubiquitous types of printed material found at events and in Muslim centers, mosques and otherwise. Flyers and postcards for events or fundraisers are less frequently used, with flyers more often being produced for emergency appeals. Finally, freestanding donation envelopes with appeals on the front are printed but are most often distributed in addition to other material at fundraising events.

The second most ubiquitous type of printed material for formal messaging is the annual report or magazine. ICNA Relief is part of ICNA, which has its own magazine called *The Message*, but the national office and its large chapters produce their own annual reports. This type of document includes a letter from the charity's leader(s); summaries of accomplishments in services created and delivered; new partnerships; recognition by media, government, or the humanitarian field; photographic and written reports from the field; and more open-ended articles or accounts from staff and volunteers about particular programs. At the end, there is a separate section for the annual financial report, fronted by a letter from the accounting firm hired to do the financial review.

ICNA Relief also produces impact reports for particular programs or regions where they work. These read like white papers, aimed at those familiar with the language and procedures of humanitarian work. They outline the goals, implementation, and either success or future plans of the highlighted project and are far plainer and shorter than annual reports or magazines and lack otherwise frequent references to an "Islam idiom," explained below. Because these are more

technical documents, they are less frequently distributed at public events. Finally, charities will sometimes produce mini booklets on particular programs, appeals, or topics, such as an informational guide on *zakat* or an explanation of the humanitarian situation in Syria and surrounding nations due to the war.

American Muslim Humanitarianism

ICNA Relief's formal messaging is imbued with the theology of American Muslim Humanitarianism, an intertwined triad of Islamic values, humanitarian ethics, and neoliberal development. First, they use what Charles Tripp calls a "self-consciously Islamic idiom" whose value and meaning are taken for granted as legitimately "Islamic."[20] In annual reports and pamphlets alike, ICNA uses phrases like "praise be to God," "inshallah" and "thanks to Allah SWT" freely.[21] Floating references are made to the Qur'an and hadith without direct engagement save directives to "follow the sunnah" or "revive the legacy of the Ansar."[22] Qur'anic verses and hadith selections are overwhelmingly selections that explicitly reference *zakat* or *sadaqah* or a particularly recognized charitable action, such as care for the poor or orphans, and lack accompanying traditional tafsir or breakdowns of their legal application in sharia. Finally, the major Islamic celebrations and rituals of Ramadan, *Eid al-Fitr*, *hajj*, and *Eid al-Adha* are celebrated across their media infrastructure, with encouragement to donate to food and gift distributions for both *Eids*.

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[20] Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 194.

[21] SWT stands for *Subhanahu wa ta'ala*, translated as "Glory to Him, the Most High."

[22] ICNA Relief (@icnareliefusa), "Reviving the Legacy of the Ansar," Instagram Post, May 28, 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BUqL8-qDsnn/.

For validation as a properly "religious" organization, ICNA Relief also solicits endorsements from Islamic scholars who have already recognized religious credentials as "Sheikh/a" or "Imam." Their stamp of approval on projects creates an association between the assumed rooted Islamic knowledge of scholars and charitable work – assumed because scholars are not asked to submit writing using their scholarly training to analyze or justify the charity's work in relationship to theology or law. For example, a 2016 post on the ICNA Relief Facebook page features a nondescript photograph of theologian Omar Suleiman and an ICNA Relief staff member wearing "ICNA Relief USA" baseball caps in a parking lot with the caption, "Did you know Sh. Omar Suleiman is an ICNA Relief volunteer? He believes, just as ICNA Relief does, in the importance of working in the US as a Muslim organization."[23] Although Suleiman is a trained theologian, who published videos and writing regularly about a variety of religious themes including charity, he is incorporated into formal messaging as a symbol.

For another example, in their 2017 Annual Report, ICNA Relief peppers in pithy endorsements of one to two sentences from whom they call "renowned scholars" Imam Yaser Birjas, Sheikh Yasir Qadhi, and Omar Suleiman.[24] Infrequently, one to two minute videos from scholars have been posted on the religious value and meaning of charity, and very rarely a substantive lecture is posted, such as Board Member Imam Rafiq Mahdi offering a Facebook live "Fiqh of Giving" in May 2018.[25] Nonetheless, these videos typically have very low views (100 or

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[23] ICNA Relief, "Did you know Sh. Omar Suleiman is an ICNA Relief volunteer?" Facebook Image, June 20, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/ICNARelief/photos/10154219868637770/.

[24] ICNA Relief, Endorsements, *ICNA Relief Overview 2017*, 8, 10, 16.

[25] ICNA Relief, "Fiqh of Zakat with Imam Rafiq Mahdi," Facebook Video, May 24, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/ICNARelief/videos/10156342991077770/. Perhaps because of the increase internet speed for streaming, in the last year (2020) ICNA Relief has invested far more into long (more

less) in comparison to the circulation in the hundreds of thousands of their images and short endorsements in print and social media posts.

Moving to the second element of this dominant religious position found in formal messaging, ICNA Relief's publications use multiple avenues to tout its congruence with the normative values and standards of the larger white and Christian-centric humanitarian non-profit world. ICNA Relief's slogan "charity begins at home" and the slogan of its sister program HHRD, "strengthening the bond of humanity," can easily be read through dominant philanthropic and humanist values without reference to Islam. In their 2016 impact report, the Chair of the Board, Rashid Siddiqi, touts the success of ICNA Relief because they are "ethical," "professional," and "transparent."[26] One will be wont to find an ICNA Relief publication that lacks listing of the charity's rating by the gold standards of Charity Navigator and GuideStar and annual reports always highlight connections to more widely known secular humanitarian and Christian charities or working groups like InterAction USA or the Salvation Army.

While the Prophet Abraham or the Companion Abu Bakr are used as internal examples of Muslim commitment to good works through charity, ICNA uses quotes from Desmond Tutu or Martin Luther King Jr. as a code-switch into normative secular American conversations about the ethics of service or charity that are deeply rooted in Christianity.[27] For example, in an August

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than 1-3 minutes) scholarly videos on charity and other aspects of Islamic law and ethics for their YouTube/social media.

[26] ICNA Relief, "Letter from Chairman of the Board," *2016 Impact Report,* 3.

[27] ICNA Relief, "Today August 19th is World Humanitarian Day," Facebook Image, Aug 17, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/ICNARelief/posts/10155586445772770. The image was a background of a world map in blue oceans and grey land. In the foreground are white abstract stick figures holding hands in a semi-circle while standing on a curved white ground. Below them is the ICNA Relief logo. Floating about the stick figures in front of the world map is the text: World Humanitarian Day / August 19th / "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." / Desmond Tutu.

17, 2019 Facebook post for World Humanitarian Day, the official ICNA Relief page posted an image of abstracted human figures holding hands across the globe with a quote from Christian peace activist Desmond Tutu: "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."[28] Matched with this fluency in normative humanitarian language is ICNA's use of photography. Save the overwhelmingly Brown staff, photographed images used showing ICNA's service-in-action is interchangeable with dominant charities like United Way or Catholic Relief Services: Smiling faces accept large rice bags stamped with the charity seal; children play in refugee camps; volunteers stand behind plastic tables at a health fair; and women work on organization-provided sewing machines.[29]

In addition to the connections to broad humanitarian values as expressed in language and image, formal messaging celebrates and serves as proof of record for ICNA's worth and effectiveness according to neoliberal logics. ICNA is presented as an efficient and effective channel for social change as development, through charity. It will often use infographics to show that it maximizes the impact of its work for every dollar donated. In an October 19, 2017 Facebook post about donations to Hurricane Maria victims in Puerto Rico, ICNA reports, in bold yellow writing with emoji-like symbols of each item, that it was able to ship 11 pallets of infant baby formula, 5 pallets of t-shirts, 2 pallets of generators, and 6 pallets of non-perishable food items, comforters, and pillows – with the added flourish that it totaled "26K pounds."[30] This constant evidence of "using every donation to maximum effect" not only allays concerns of

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[28] ICNA Relief, "Today August 19th is World Humanitarian Day."

[29] See: Wendy Hesford, "Introduction," in *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1-27.

[30] ICNA Relief, "Your Maria Relief Donations at Work," Facebook Image, Oct 19, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/ICNARelief/posts/10155754912267770.

donors about the effect of their donation but proves that ICNA Relief is always growing in programming, geographic reach, and individuals served.[31]

Neoliberal logics also dictate the goals of ICNA Relief's programming. Relief is provided in emergency situations of dire need, but the greater goal is individual and family empowerment and community development. They create what Mona Atia calls "pious neoliberal subjecthood" defined by a rhetoric of "individual responsibility, proactiveness, self-help, choice, and accountability."[32] For one donation campaign sponsoring primary and secondary "schools of excellence" in Pakistan, Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD) staff and volunteers "pray" that doctors and engineers will emerge from the school.[33] In sponsorship programs, whether to support women learning a new craft or orphans, donors are assured their donations will result in self-improvement; sponsors in the HHRD children with disability program were even offered "full medical and progress reports" to monitor their matched child.[34]

Market-based solutions are also a neoliberal form of help promoted in charity literature, bringing in "self-help and management science rhetoric with religion."[35] One example that emerged in the mid-2010s called "Esaar" was a microloan program with interest free financing, which was advertised as a way to "recycle" your charity." When the donor gives, he helps a "needy" person become self-sufficient and once the recipient pays back the loan, the charitable

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[31] ICNA Relief, "Message from Chairman & CEO," *Annual Report 2017*, 1.

[32] Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven*: *Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013), 154.

[33] Helping Hands for Relief and Development, "Education Support Program," *HHRD News: Newsletter 2017*, 3.

[34] Helping Hands for Relief and Development, *Children with Disabilities Program Pamphlet*, no date- in circulation 2018.

[35] Atia, *Building a House*, 136.

donation can figuratively be "recycled" again to help more "needy" people gain self-sufficiency.[36] At a secondary level, these assurances of cost-effective, successful programming are a means to counter suspicion in an Islamophobic environment that questions the legality or even morality of their work, to which I will return below.

Commodities

The final element of ICNA's formal messaging is the branding itself through the production of commodities – such as t-shirts, pens, or stress balls. The brand is not simply a conduit to communicate ideas but is another medium to express the value of American Muslim Humanitarianism. These commodities are cheap and would not be considered sacred objects – avoiding any sacrilege by using Qur'anic passages or images of holy figures or sites. Instead, the brand merchandise serve as signifiers of American Muslim charities like ICNA Relief to signify legitimate sources of religious practice and community. In other words, charities create and circulate these goods to produce the idea of the ubiquity, power, and authority of their organizations as *the* site of Islamic charitable activity. Over time, these goods are presented as worthy of being pursued and produce what Gregory Starrett explains as, "the need for themselves by the mere fact of imposing their consumption."[37]

To put it clearly, dominant national charities' strong investment in branding and large scale production of relevant merchandise – used at service sites and distributed at conventions or public events – has effectively cornered the market for brand recognition and trust. Although

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[36] Helping Hands for Relief and Development, *Recycle Your Charity: ESAAR* Microfinancing Flyer, no date- in circulation 2017.

[37] Gregory Starrett, "The Political Economy of Religious Commodities in Cairo," *American Anthropologist* 91, No. 1 (October 2009): 53.

these objects are not sacred amulets or contain divine text, they do have spiritual power because they help Muslims "remember God and think of God" and can therefore encourage or even trigger devotional acts. They do not directly cause action but commodities contain "social potential" that can be activated with use.[38] If you keep your ICNA Relief lip balm in your car, perhaps you will grab it a few days before an ICNA food drive and decide to go. Or, maybe you acquired an ICNA t-shirt from a flood relief project in Texas and when you wear it when spending time with a Muslim friend, you encourage her to do charitable deeds. Indeed, at mosque and MSA events across my field sites, there would more often than not be at least a few young people wearing Islamic charity shirts informally. These commodities become religious signifiers without having to explicitly claim religious authority by traditional roles.

In summary, formal messaging effectively establishes the authority of dominant national charities through the use of Islamic symbols and references; humanitarian values and development metrics; and the dissemination of branded merchandise. Over time, these three elements have been refined so that discussions of what Islamic charity "looks like" in major American Muslim publications and across social media take for granted the frameworks established by these publications and media components. It is this "taken-for-granted-ness" that demonstrates the projected establishment and authority of Muslim humanitarian nonprofit charities as a religious institution in the United States.

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[38] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural* Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

Muslim Humanitarianism or Humanitarian Islam?

The ideology of American Muslim Humanitarianism centered in formal messaging can appear as if it is focused on mainstream humanitarian developmental ethics with only an Islamic veneer.[39] This kind of critique is often leveled at Islamic financial instruments that reconfigure monetary transactions to technically avoid *riba* (interest) but ultimately leave in place the preexistent exploitative and hierarchical economic relations of the larger capitalist marketplace.[40] I argue that American Muslim charities' ideologies as presented in their formal messaging are not Islamic in name only, but use particular ideological positions and strategies that allow them to speak within their particular cultural context and target audiences. It is also a kind of reinterpretation of Islamic ethics from earlier forms of *zakat* economies that focused on private, unregulated, donor driven giving to a highly centralized and regulated bureaucratic form.[41]

Formal messaging is produced within the context of a post-9/11 world, where just to exist Muslim charities must continuously run the gauntlet of Islamophobic surveillance and accusations of illegal, violent activity. Muslim charities must outwardly, including in their publications, show they are consistent with mainstream charity norms. In addition, Muslims are a small religious minority in the United States, the majority of whom are Black and people of

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[39] Scholarship on the relationship between Muslim charitable activity and the extent to which they are informed by the logics of humanitarian compassion or neoliberal development include Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven*: *Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013); Marie Juul Petersen, *For Humanity or for the Umma? Aid and Islam in Transnational Muslim NGOs* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015); Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York: New York University, 2016), 178-218; Amira Mittermaier, *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

[40] For critiques of the religious inconsistencies in Islamic financial instruments see Timur Kuran, *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[41] Taylor, "Islamic Charity in India," 303.

color, in a larger society that is dominated by whiteness and Christianity. Finally, the mainstream aid networks in the United States are majority non-Muslim. In this context, with its various demands, Muslim charities are challenged to make their formal messaging legible and appeasing to readers who are unfamiliar or, worse, hostile to Muslim forms of charity and must "agree to operate within the framework of secularization" that nonetheless favors Christian norms of charity.[42] An overlapping consideration is audience. Formal messaging is primarily aimed at a donor base that is majority Muslim, but it is also written with several other constituencies in mind: private grant-giving bodies and foundations; the mainstream aid and development world, including the UN and international organizations; and the American government. These other constituencies have less investment in internal religious discussions of *zakat* and voluntary charity and instead look to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Muslim charity, which means formal messaging must respond to these key readers and viewers interests as well.

Marie Juul Petersen provides a useful set of classifications to understand the ideological standpoint of European and North American transnational Muslim charity organizations, pushing aside doubts of superficiality about the Islamic character of these groups' ideals. She argues that contemporary transnational Muslim charities work at the intersection between two cultures of aid, operating as "sites for the intricate interplay and joint appropriation of different bodies of knowledge": Development Aid, centered in Europe and the United States and Islamic Aid, centered in the Middle East.[43] Development aid is historically born from power and hegemony of colonialism, motivated by guilt and the desire to save the foreign 'other', and centers values of universalism, neutrality, professionalism, secularism, and objectivity. In contrast the culture of

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[42] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 56.

[43] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 37.

Islamic Aid emerges from the context of marginalization, colonized existence; the suffering poor being one's neighbor or countryman; and the championing of solidarity, brotherhood, justice, personal connection, and normative religious values.[44]

From these two cultures emerged two paradigmatic ideologies of transnational Muslim charity. The first is a sacralized form of aid, motivated by a "very visible, all-encompassing organizing religiosity…centering on notions of Islamic solidarity in the ummah and echoing core elements in the Islamic aid culture."[45] In the sacralized aid ideology, organizational authority is religious; aid has an inherently sacred nature and requires authorization from formal religious leadership and organizations.[46] The issue they aim to solve is poverty and suffering, which they see as both a material and spiritual problem: providing Qur'anic schooling is as important a program as food security. Aid is focused on Muslim populations, because the duty to charity goes beyond individual Muslims to "[strengthening] the *ummah*" by keeping the "distinctively Islamic character of society."[47] Aid provision is an act of solidarity with Muslim siblings, creating a personal and emotive relationship between the donor to those she is helping: "personal care and compassion are more important qualities than efficiency and professionalism."[48]

The Islamic rights of the poor are an additional rationale for aid but are not equated to the values of universal human rights. For example, it is by coincidence and not intent that goals like eliminating hunger, ensuring education, protecting health overlap with mainstream United

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[44] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 32-35.

[45] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 12-13.

[46] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 69-71.

[47] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 85.

[48] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 95.

Nations Development Programme goals.[49] The main strategies to implement this ideology include immediate relief, *da'wah* based aid such as mosque building, education, and empowerment programs. Those organizations who adhere to sacralized aid recognize the need to be taken seriously in mainstream humanitarian aid discourse and praxis, especially after 9/11, and work hard to exude a professionalism through their "financial 'transparency' and 'accountability;'" English-language resources; and relationship building with the UN, international organizations, and Western governments, banks, and companies.[50]

The contrasting ideology is secularized aid, which derives its authority from its "clinical humanitarianism" centered on relief and development according to mainstream development agencies. This ideology seeks to gain authority in the larger "global humanitarian community," among OxFam or World Aid, and rejects deep association with formal Islamic organizations lest it make them seem unprofessional or, worse, criminally suspect.[51] This ideology still incorporates religion through religious language and symbols; Islamic activities like Ramadan and *Qurbani* food distributions and orphan sponsorships; and instruction on correct *zakat* giving. However, it contains a different notion of religion than the sacralized form of aid: "religion is confined to specific and well-defined functions and spaces, acceptable primarily in the form of underlying

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[49] "Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations Development Programme, accessed July 20, 2020, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html. THE UNDP has seventeen interconnected goals and are referred to as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted in 2015 as a "universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity."

[50] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 74-77.

[51] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 127.

values and 'ethical references,' inspiring and motivating people rather than shaping organizational activities and structures in concrete and visible ways."[52]

The secularized aid ideology sets its purpose to serve individuals vulnerable to poverty and suffering because of a lack of resources and capabilities. This follows a "mainstream development approach" focused on the material and not the spiritual needs of beneficiaries. Aid is given not to strengthen the ummah or in solidarity with Muslim brothers and sisters but to global humanity, in line with mainstream universalism. There is still work in Muslim majority regions, under the strategy of "religious proximity" – the value-add of the aid organization sharing a common religious culture to ease access and provide culturally relevant services.[53] The rationale for providing universal aid is about creating "sustainable livelihoods" and upholding the "rights of the poor."[54] Charities who subscribe to this ideology mention that these goals are both Islamic and in line with mainstream development, the overlap being that the two are presented as common value systems.

Unlike in sacralized aid ideologies, recipients are represented as "proactive agents rather than grateful beneficiaries" who are capable of changing their lives while still "[having] to be assisted by the NGOs, facilitating that change."[55] The beneficiary, and not the donor, is the center of this ideological paradigm, making donors only supporters of the actual purveyor of aid: their charity organization. The emotive, personal relationships of sacralized aid are inappropriate;

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[52] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 131, 163

[53] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 140-145.

[54] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 145-147.

[55] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 147-148.

instead, there is a relationship of accountability from charity organization to beneficiaries.[56] The principal strategy to implement this ideology is long term development in the form of mainstream sustainable development programs that are planned, managed, and administered by trained professionals. Even emergency relief is framed according to development, assisting people to become "self-reliant and productive, active agents of their own development."[57]

Secondary programs include Islamic traditions of charity and Islamic development. Traditions such as qurbani, Ramadan meals, and orphan sponsorship are maintained to appease Muslim donors interested in "core" religious charity and to support transnational connections. To stay in line with the ideology the programs are compartmentalized, keeping them as separate "seasonal" programs or also making sure they provide to non-Muslims as well.[58] Islamic development programs use religion in an instrumentalist fashion, in the manner of translating developmentalist ideas into more accessible language to local Muslim populations or to encourage Muslim leadership to support aid projects.[59]

When applying Petersen's theory to the formal messaging produced by dominant American Muslim charities, they generally conform to the secularized aid ideology. Putting the six most prominent charities on a spectrum, United Muslim Relief (UMR) and Penny Appeal USA have the most secularized ideologies and the Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) and ICNA Relief/Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD) have some leanings towards sacralized ideology, with Islamic Relief USA (IR-USA) and Life for Relief and Development

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[56] Petersen *For Humanity,* 148-150.

[57] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 153

[58] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 155-158.

[59] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 159-162.

falling somewhere in the middle. In this section, I will show the ways in which these organizations' representation through formal messaging fit the ideological archetype of secularized aid, and the instances in which they displayed characteristics of a sacralized ideology of aid.

All agencies use language that separates out religion in the "form of underlying values and ethical references inspiring and motivating people" from its structure and core practices.[60] UMR makes clear their ethical inspiration from values and principles of Islam and the life of the Prophet Muhammad even in the short space of their one page pamphlets; ICNA self-designates as an "Islamic-faith based agency;" and IR-USA describes itself as "inspired by the Islamic faith and guided by our values" from the Qur'an and *sunnah*.[61] Even though magazines and pamphlets are filled with Qur'anic and Prophetic quotations, articles are included on proper *zakat* or histories of righteous Muslims enacting charity, and religious language of blessings and divine praise is peppered throughout, religion is kept isolated from the central mission of the organization for relief and development.

These organizations tend to show their secularized ideology, specifically its secular view of religion in aid work, by writing the vision statement inspired by Islamic values or references and the mission as purely secular development rhetoric. For example, in its 2017 Ramadan magazine, the Zakat Foundation of America states its vision: "ZF believes that those whom God has granted wealth must cleanse that wealth through charity, and those whom God has tried with

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[60] Petersen, *For Humanity,* 163.

[61] For an example from United Muslim Relief's pamphlets, see *Together For Health Pamphlet,* no date- in circulation 2016; ICNA Relief, *ICNA Relief USA: Disaster Response Services Pamphlet*, no date- in circulation 2016; Islamic Relief USA, "Our Values," *Seven Years of Crisis: Islamic Relief's Humanitarian Response in Syria*, 2017, 3.

loss must be provided a rightful share from the resources of the affluent." In contrast their mission reads: "Zakat Foundation of America (ZF) is an international charity organization that helps generous and caring people reach out to those in need. ZF transforms charitable giving into actions that alleviate the immediate suffering of poor communities and build long term development projects to foster individual and community growth worldwide."[62] If there is a mixing of the two, secular humanitarian and Islamic, they are shown in perfect congruence, as common values. BDesh, a smaller Islamic charity based out of Northern Virginia and focused on relief in Bangladesh, writes in its Children Welfare Program appeal that "life is a gift from almighty Allah (SWT) and every human being has the right to live a dignified and happy life."[63]

United Muslim Relief and Penny Appeal mostly avoid references to Islamic authority altogether, only using symbolic references and occasional Qur'an and *hadith* quotations. In UMR's 2015 annual report they ground their authority in professionalism to become a "stakeholder in influencing national and international policy," justifying all their programmatic choices with references to UN and Euro-American international organization sources.[64] By 2016, they report that their goal is to be a voice in "humanitarian international and domestic policy decisions" and list their current high level work with the United Nations, White House, and leading aid coalitions such as InterAction and Crisis Action. To visually show their proximity, UMR thought it appropriate to include an image of their CEO standing alone in front of an empty stage at a White House summit on global development.[65]

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[62] Zakat Foundation of America, "Mission," *Zakat News: Ramadan 2017,* 2.

[63] BDesh, *Children Welfare Program Postcard,* no date- in circulation 2018.

[64] United Muslim Relief, "Foreword From the CEO," *Annual Report 2015,* 3.

[65] United Muslim Relief, "Advocacy," *Annual Report 2016,* 18-19.

The second major indication of a secularized aid ideology in formal messaging is the commitment to a "mainstream development approach" in their efforts to improve the material conditions of their beneficiaries.[66] A clear illustration of this commitment is Islamic Relief's "strategic objective" stated in a 2017 booklet on their humanitarian response to the crisis of the Syria war. They write that their work first is "reducing the humanitarian impact of conflicts and natural disasters," followed by "empowering local communities to emerge from poverty and vulnerability" and build their own capacity to cope and create better livelihoods.[67] Relief is not enough; organizations want to "[sever] the roots of poverty" to "develop long term, sustainable solutions."[68] Sustainable development is the heart and center of charity programs, kept accountable and efficient by professional standards of research, transparency, engagement, and monitoring.[69] Organizations are not shy to draw links between development and Islamic tradition, but show them as sharing a common value: "Sustainable development is the essence of zakat in Islam because it affirms the essential right to a dignified life for all."[70]

Regarding beneficiaries, Islamic Relief and all major American Muslim charities insist that they serve all people, "regardless of gender, race, or religion," upholding the mainstream humanitarian ideal of universalism.[71] This extends to the efforts of transnational American

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[66] Peterson, *For Humanity,* 138.

[67] Islamic Relief USA, "Islamic Relief's Humanitarian Programs Inside Syria in 2017," *Seven Years of Crisis: Islamic Relief's Humanitarian Response in Syria*, 2017, 12.

[68] Zakat Foundation of America, *Zakat Foundation of American Booklet,* no date – in circulation 2018, 4.

[69] Penny Appeal USA, *Our Vision: Eradicating Intergenerational Poverty Booklet,* no date- in circulation 2017.

[70] Zakat Foundation of America, "Development/Sadaqa Jariyah," *Zakat Foundation of American Booklet,* no date – in circulation 2018, 20.

[71] Islamic Relief USA, "About Islamic Relief USA," *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 3.

Muslim charities to bring more attention to and build programming for the needy in the United States, following the lead of ICNA Relief and its slogan "charity begins at home." Beneficiaries are at the center of all formal messaging publications, their faces splashed across magazines and pamphlets, their stories reported or shared directly in profiles like ICNA's "profiles of courage" on refugees they serve in the Chicagoland area.[72] Following the secularized aid paradigm, charities like Penny Appeal make it clear that they are working with and not for the poor community, fixing the situation, in HHRD's words, of beneficiaries' lack of being "heard or involved in the decisions that directly affect them."[73] Beneficiaries are celebrated but according to this logic they nonetheless require intervention from the charity to "empower [them] to be constituents" in their own self-improvement and communal development.[74]

Finally, mainstream American Muslim charities use formal messaging to present their programming in a secularized way, placing mainstream sustainable development programs at the center. It is these programs that get the most text and visual space in annual reports, magazines, and introductory pamphlets or booklets as well as on digital platforms. Secondary programs on Islamic traditional charity, such as Ramadan distributions and *Qurbani* for *Eid al-Adha* are downplayed or at the very least separated out as "seasonal programming" even though they are given their own pamphlets and advertising space in Muslim run newspapers and magazines, like the *Muslim Link*.[75] Orphan sponsorship is given more visibility across different charities but is

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[72] ICNA Relief Chicago, "Profiles of Courage Refugee Stories" *ICNA Relief Chicago Overview 2016*, 30-31.

[73] Penny Appeal USA, *Our Vision*; Helping Hands for Relief and Development, *Sponsor an Orphan: Create a Future Pamphlet*, no date- in circulation 2017.

[74] United Muslim Relief, "Emergency Response," *Annual Report 2016,* 17.

[75] For example, see advertisements in *The Muslim Link,* July 28-August 24, 2017, 53 (Helping Hands for Relief and Development), 55 (Islamic Relief USA).

still separated out from the main relief and development program. Programs that are focused on Muslims are also sometimes justified according to the "value-add" logic of faith based organizations. For example, ICNA Relief's Muslim Family Services is advertised as effective because it provides services that are "culturally relevant to Muslims."[76]

Even as the formal messaging of mainstream American Muslim charities fits the architype of secularized aid ideology well, the typology is not absolute and characteristics of the sacralized ideology of aid are present too. Unlike Penny Appeal and United Muslim Relief which maintain a strict secular divide in religious and non-religious action, most other major organizations use more mixed language. For example, the Zakat Foundation of America emphasizes the spiritual *in addition to* the material relief provided by their work: "We distribute not just things but the love and mercy that are inherent to us all by our Creator. This my friend is the Islamic and American way."[77]

Laudatory language about donors is constant in formal messaging otherwise focused on the beneficiaries because the primary audience, which must be drawn in and maintained, is Muslim donors. Organizations use flattering language like "dear humanitarian" or "beloved donor," with Penny Appeal going so far as to call donors "family."[78] Moreover, charities regularly talk directly to donors with urgency to say that they, not the charity organization, are the change makers, with appeals like "be a hero," "show them you haven't forgotten," or "these

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[76] ICNA Relief Chicago, *Muslim Family Services Pamphlet,* no date-in circulation 2017.

[77] Zakat Foundation of America, "A Note of Gratitude from ZF's Leadership," *2016 Annual* Report, 4.

[78] Islamic Relief USA, "Letter from Anwar Ahmad Khan, Chief Executive Officer," *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 1; Zakat Foundation of America, "Letter from the Executive Director," *Zakat News: Ramadan 2017, 4*; Penny Appeal USA, *Our Vision*.

families wait for your support."[79] Beneficiaries in turn are constantly quoted as praying for their donors, completing the transaction of the poor's prayer to God in response to a donor fulfilling their duty to circulate God's wealth and fulfill the rights of the needy. A Syrian mother states, "May Allah bless and reward you for putting a smile on my children's faces," and Bengalis who received fresh water share that they "pray to God to give lifelong blessing to the donors who helped" them.[80]

In some instances, donor participation as Muslims, with staff being majority Muslim as well, creates a sense of religion as the inspiring "spirit" of the work and moves religion into the realm of *why* the charity is done and what it achieves. ICNA Relief's Chicago office Director Dr. Saima Azfar writes in the chapter's 2016 Yearly Overview that their goals, of delivering secular developmental aid,

> depend on Allah's blessings, your du'as, donations of time, and consistent financial support. Insha'Allah, with the right intention, and our commitment to living our faith in our deeds and choices, we will find Barakah (blessings) in all we do. Inshallah, with His blessings, we will deliver on the responsibilities we have to Him, and His creation. May He help us meet His expectations of us. Ameen.[81]

Dr. Azfar's language goes beyond a contained religious sentiment to framing the regulated secularist programming in terms of religious goals of blessings from God.

Finally, some charities were explicit in singling out Muslims as recipients, in ways that go beyond the "value-added" justification of using religion in humanitarian work within the

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[79] ICNA Relief, *Be A Hero Pamphlet,* no date- in circulation 2017; Islamic Relief USA, *Syria Emergency Flyer*; Amoud Foundation for Education and Development, "Qurbani," *Touching Lives Pamphlet,* no date – in circulation 2018.

[80] Islamic Relief USA, "An Eid Gift for Umm Mohammed," *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 31; Zakat Foundation of America, "Do the People of Bangladesh Have to Pay for the Global Warming Others Have Caused?" *Zakat News: Ramadan* 2017, 18.

[81] ICNA Relief Chicago, "Onward and Upward," *ICNA Relief Chicago Overview 2016*, 3.

secularized aid ideology. Several organizations were concerned with the welfare of Muslims in challenging socio-economic situations because of their material conditions but also because of the real possibility they saw of losing their faith by way of desperation or aggressive missionaries, in the case of Muslim refugees cared for by Christian-run charity organizations.[82] ICNA Relief explicitly identifies its obligation to advocate for the needs of Muslims and the vulnerable, providing Muslims a unique and special category of care.[83] Murat Kose, writing for the Zakat Foundation of America, paraphrases a prophetic *hadith* to explain that "our tradition teaches us that when one part of a community gets hurt, the other parts of the community should feel the pain."[84] Because of the circumstances of a post 9/11 world of the War on Terror, Muslims are a particularly vulnerable category of people and several charities show a religious concern for their brethren that goes against the value of impartiality.

Overall, Petersen's theory of competing ideologies of transnational Muslim aid help to further elucidate the dynamics of American Muslim Humanitarianism as represented in charity organizations' formal messaging. Using the case study of ICNA Relief's formal messaging, I showed the three elements of American Muslim Humanitarianism at work to produce a clear and cohesive theology of Muslim charity. Using Petersen, we see the tensions and range that exist within this theological position on Muslim ritual giving because these charities exist at the intersection of two cultures of aid, Islamic and developmental. Within a context unlike her

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[82] *The Message* Staff, "Interview with Imam Hassan Amin," *The Message International,* May/June 2017, 34-35.

[83] ICNA Relief Chicago, "Refugee Screening Process for Entry to the United States," *ICNA Relief Chicago Overview 2016*, 35.

[84] Zakat Foundation of America, "ZF's Emergency Response in the Southeastern U.S.," *2016 Annual* Report, 13.

archetypal forms, American Muslim charities emphasize both the donor and the beneficiary to encourage active donations and continued commitment to the charity as the broker of these relationships. In their print and online publications, charities can both fulfill the demands of professionalism and sustainable development demanded of them by the mainstream aid and development world while also framing all of their work, and sometimes justifying it, by the duty and blessings of their faith.

Violating Impartiality in a Time of Islamophobia

In the dialectic between Islamic notions of charity and mainstream humanitarian imperatives to use aid for sustainable development, formal messaging subtly encourages charitable work specifically for the sake of Muslim recipients. On the surface this violates the humanitarian value of impartiality, as mentioned above, but it could also be seen as a synthesis, meant to reestablish universal care for humanity in a context of anti-Muslim criminalization and violence.

In the era of the War on Terror, Junaid Rana writes that "the Muslim body as a racial object is excluded from the U.S. body politic," because it is "racialized and normalized as illegal and criminal."[85] To maintain sovereign power and life *qua* biopolitics, the state must eliminate any threats, dangers, and enemies. In the 21st century, the Muslim is a racialized body that is all these things and serves as the "site of state warfare" that must be fought to protect the United States from its criminal and violent potential.[86] The consequences of this position are evident

[85] Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 154, 155.

[86] Rana, *Terrifying Muslims*, 157-162.

over the past two decades of the War on Terror: mass warfare and drone bombings; surveillance and incarceration, discrimination, harassment, and lethal violence.

Muslim bodies, both internal to the US and abroad, are evicted from political community and into a state of exception, outside the bounds of law. Rights are suspended because the racialized threat of the Muslim – to safety, to health, to whiteness— necessitates a state of emergency in order to ultimately remove said threat. Sherene Razack calls this racial project the "eviction of Muslims from Western law and politics" and into legal and literal camps outside the realm of law. Because there is "no common bond of humanity" between those inside the camp and the citizens outside it, there is "no common law." Muslims become, to quote Hannah Arendt, "people without the right to have rights."[87]

In this legal and political situation, it is subversive for formal messaging to insist that the majority Muslim populations abroad where American Muslim charities operate are equally human to white Americans and due human rights according to international law and Islamic ethics. Calls to help and console victims of war in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, and other sites in the War on Terror reject the notion that Muslim deaths are just collateral damage or the death of a potential "enemy combatant."[88] Charity can be a mechanism to restore justice and fight dehumanization against one's own religious community, and most charities' formal messaging is produced to support Muslim majority populations, with some organizations explicitly call donors to use their charity specifically for the sake of fellow Muslims. In this context, the violation of

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[87] Sherene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 1-7.

[88] Milena Sterio, "The United States' Use of Drones in the War on Terror: The (Il)legality of Targeted Killings Under International Law," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 45 (2012):197-214.

the mainstream humanitarian value of impartiality cannot be seen as simply a pivot to an Islamic notion of solidarity, or Pan-Islamic *ummah*, but as a means to reject a hierarchical global racial order and restore full humanity -including the right to life and dignity- to Muslims.

Moral and Communal Limitations of Formal Messaging

Even with this subversive push to recognize the full humanity of struggling Muslim populations across the globe, American Muslim charity's formal messaging as a discursive field stays within the confines of the normative Euro-American humanitarian discourse espoused by faith-based organizations. Formal messaging does not call Muslim donors to use their charity to support political revolutions or massive social movements that subvert the exploitative and destructive global hegemonies of the American empire and neoliberal capitalism. Instead, charity is presented as a process of sustainable development inspired by Islamic values, restoring dignity and rights to fellow Americans and productive communities to recipients abroad.

The American Muslim Humanitarianism of formal messaging charges Muslims to become good humanitarians, uniquely qualified as rich Americans to assist and rescue the needy from their emergency or underdeveloped circumstances. The ideal Muslim donor here coincides with the "exceptional citizen" of advanced neoliberal conditions in the United States who is uniquely qualified to save others from states of inequality through humanitarianism.[89] Humanitarianism is a state project and a form of "soft power of US empire" through private institutions, government, and individuals to establish distance between those who give benevolently and those who receive, often in racializing terms where the normative humanitarian

[89] Inderpal Grewal, *Saving the Security State: Exceptional Citizens in Twenty-First-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 60.

subject is "middle class, Christian and Western."[90] American Humanitarianism, carried out by the donor, volunteer, or nonprofit entrepreneur "hides the violence generated by wars and colonialism, as well as the power that have expanded inequalities" today, justifying it with the logic that "private philanthropy is necessary and that the generosity of the wealthy can ameliorate the structural inequalities created by capitalism and empire."[91]

My intent is not to reveal American Muslim charities as complicit in empire, but, following the work of Su'ad Abdul Khabeer on Muslim non-profits, to delineate the factors that limit charity as a ritual act that brings justice through wealth redistribution.[92] The greatest constraint is operating under the aforementioned racial order of the war on terror, where "only a narrow political vision and very particular political options" are available without being subject to violence.[93] The narrow field available is that of the "moderate Muslim" who limits herself to expressing ideas and taking actions that do not threaten the moral superiority and political sovereignty of the American empire. Several pieces of formal messaging conveyed the urgency and possibly anxiety around providing a positive "face" of Muslim charity to the larger American public. During Hurricane Sandy in 2012, ICNA Relief coordinated relief efforts in New York City to help but also for "building understanding of what it means to be Muslim American," proving they were the "good people" who show themselves through "good work."[94]

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[90] Grewal, *Exceptional Citizens*, 60, 62-63.

[91] Grewal, *Exceptional Citizens*, 67.

[92] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 180.

[93] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 217.

[94] ICNA Relief, "NYers of the Week: Muslim-American Group Helps Sandy Victims, Spreads Understanding," *Once There Was a Home! Hurricane Sandy and ICNA Relief's Response Report*, no date - in circulation 2016, 10. Hurricane Sandy occurred from October 22 to November 2, 2012.

In their 2016 Annual Report, the Zakat Foundation of America also wrote that while people were trying to "unweave Muslims out of the fabric of the land of the free and the home of the brave, it is increasingly important that we exceed ourselves in living out the example set by Allah's Mercy, an extraordinary example of kindness and compassion."[95]

Being an exceptional citizen who practices philanthropy through sustainable development fits this narrow alley of political mobility. Structurally, Muslim charities fall into the historical process of the "domestication of racial politics in the United States" through the domestication of political resistance by racial and religious minority into nonprofit bureaucratic forms.[96] While these charities do engage in government advocacy work on Capitol Hill and in local government, the American Muslim Humanitarian espoused by formal messaging does not call Muslims to radically remake the world. What Muslim charities are able to do is challenge the racial order by which Muslims are only the victims or enemies in the global moral order – the 'good' Muslim or 'bad' Muslim respectively- and become actors in their own right to reduce harm and restore humanity to fellow Muslims and non-Muslims affected by the violence of the contemporary global order. And the continued emphasis on religious duty in formal messaging helps to refocus attention and energy to pleasing God over appeasing suspicious onlookers. ICNA Relief captures this re-orientation advice from Hip Hop artist Yasiin Bey at a September 2016 school supplies giveaway in New York and published it on their Instagram. Bey remarks on his feelings:

> …for me [hosting a school supply giveaway with a Muslim charity is] really not even about trying to prove to people that Muslims are decent or apologizing for being who we are. We have a covenant with Allah, to have a certain type of character and to have a certain type of personality, and to be as the imam said, to be a mercy to mankind, be a benefit to all people that we encounter whether they like us or understand us or not. So,

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[95] Zakat Foundation of America, "A Note."

[96] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 194-197.

> yeah, I think it's a very positive thing, to show ourselves, and Allah, that we're concerned about humanity.[97]

The final limits to the idealized theology of American Muslim Humanitarianism presented in formal messaging has to do with more internal dynamics of power and self-perception in charities that in many ways reflects similar dynamics across American Muslim communities. Formal messaging, in text and image, more often than not presents a normative donor who is upper middle class, Sunni, and Arab or South Asian. This might be in part due to the outside pressures of the War on Terror, to only show a "successful" citizen who is upwardly mobile and seems to endorse the narrative of American opportunity for all.[98] Formal messaging uses universalized language of "Muslim" values and sources of guidance for how to properly carry out ritual charity, but dominant charities routinely ignore Shi'a sources of inspiration and identification. These charities frequently report giving grants, creating partnerships amongst each other and for smaller, local Sunni Muslim charitable organizations, but no mention is made of large and successful Shi'a charities operating in North America like Who is Hussein? and the Agha Khan Development Network.[99] In addition, historical forms of charitable practice by African Americans are absent in formal messaging by dominant charities, even after most charities made the "domestic turn" in the mid-2010s to ensure they gave equally at home. The exception is the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Chicago and more recently

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[97] ICNA Relief (@icnareliefusa), "Mos Def, now known as @yasiin_beyy gives his reflections on ICNA Relief's #back2school Giveaway," Instagram Video, September 7, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/BKDpC7pgZZC/.

[98] Ahmed Afzal, *Lone Star Muslims: Transnational Lives and the South Asian Experience in Texas* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 120.

[99] See two examples of Shi'a Charitable Organizations active in the United States: Who is Hussein, https://whoishussain.org/ and the Aga Khan Development Network (US activities), https://www.akdn.org/where-we-work/north-america/united-states-america/aga-khan-foundation-usa.

Atlanta, which "privileges the U.S. Black American experience as a critical site of critique for U.S. Muslims."[100] Otherwise, Arab and South Asian Sunni Muslims are the centered representation of Muslim donors in formal messaging, even as Muslims with Black and Shi'a identities are on staff and volunteer.

Beyond Formal Messaging: Embodied Ethics

To review, charities create and use an array of media infrastructure to disseminate a consistent language and look: website, newsletters, social media, advertisements, videos, pamphlets, clothing, and novelty items. Speeches and presentations at fundraisers and service events offer complementary insights beyond published communications. Well distributed formal messaging is crucial to attracting immediate and sustained funding and volunteer labor for often dozens of projects, but it is also a means to counter suspicion and legal investigation in an environment where Muslim charity is treated as a potential criminal act. Furthermore, these visual and written texts express the religious ethics of each organization, projecting an interpretation of Islamic obligations to God and care for humanity. Central to contemporary scholarly debate on Muslim charitable activity globally -and applicable to the US context- is the extent to which logics of humanitarian compassion or neoliberal development inform these Islamic theological positions.

Taken together, the two elements of media infrastructure and formal messaging provide a clear picture of the constructive theology projected by each charity organization to define and shape American Muslims' conceptualization and practice of charity as a religious act – down to producing *zakat* 101 guides. The dominant theology is what I have termed American Muslim

[100] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 36.

Humanitarianism and falls mostly into a secularized ideology of aid. And the formal messaging is effective: in the areas where they invest resources with staffing, events, and advertising, major American Muslim charities are championed -or at the very least identified- by local Muslims as the standard bearers for apt performance of charity.[101]

And yet, a significant portion of service done in the name of dominant Muslim charities in the United States is carried out by partnering with local Muslim charitable organizations and by trusting the work to highly localized chapters that operate in ways similar to a franchise. In this relationship, national charities provide in-kind resources or streams of funding while the local organization must run the program or event with nominal acknowledgement of their sponsor. Save a brand sticker here or a freestanding banner there, perhaps some pamphlets tucked into a plastic display pocket on the wall or a one day annual joint event, the national charity often does not have a dominant, shaping presence in these spaces. The incredible work put into formal messaging is interrupted, a bright signal weakened by the static of insufficient funding, improvised solutions, and the blurring of lines between donor and recipient. In these cases, what message is being communicated about Islamic charity? Is the national charity's message centered, interrupted, or is there an altogether alternative messaging at work?

In this final section, I argue that analyses of the normative power of religious discourse by major Islamic charity organizations in the United States must go beyond formal messaging to include what I describe as "praxis-based theologies" of charity done by these local partners and figurative franchises. Formal messaging occurs through multimedia texts, press releases, and fundraising events, which are then reinforced by professional standards that regulate staff duties

[101] Asad, "Towards an Anthropology of Islam," 20.

and behavior, making them, collectively, modern day '*ameleen* (*zakat* collectors) who represent their non-profit, unlike their premodern brethren who worked for a Muslim ruled empire or state. Staff members at the national level or headquarters are not without volition or critical perspectives on their organization's work but they are included here in their roles as the formal content creators and engineers of these theologies and media infrastructures.

In contrast, at these localized sites, an understanding of Islamic charity emerges from what Sa'diyya Shaikh calls a "tafsir of praxis," where Qur'anic injunctions on charity as devotion and social ethic are approached from marginalized perspectives that defy common interpretations from textualist tradition.[102] Muslim staff, volunteers, and recipients at local sites engage together in interpreting their religion to produce ideas of Islamic charity born from shared experiences of systemic inequalities of contemporary American life. Oftentimes, staff at local centers have greater proximity to the socio-economic conditions of the populations they serve or are themselves current or former recipients of aid due to poverty, domestic abuse, former incarceration, or refugee status. As a result, different priorities and religious interpretations emerge that focus less on development metrics or liberal compassion and more on community health, building interpersonal relations, and for some the need to "uplift my people."[103]

To demonstrate these alternative processes, I will discuss two key case studies of local charity sites that carry out a food distribution program on behalf of national charities but engage in their own methods in interpreting and fulfilling the obligation of Islamic charity. I provide two individual-focused vignettes that are meant to invoke an image, feeling, and sense of ethical

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[102] Sa'diyyah Shaikh, "A Tafsir of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence, and Resistance in a South African Muslim Community," in *Violence against Women in Contemporary World Religions: Roots and Cures*, eds. Daniel C. Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 70.

[103] Charity Staff 50, in interview with author, September 26, 2017.

norms at each site. While it is important to follow and analyze formal messaging to understand which ideas of charity become authoritative in national Muslim discourse, the study of local sites of care reveal competing conceptions born from less powerful, and often marginalized actors in the American *ummah*.

Case One: Sisterly Care

I found myself at a small but densely packed local service center for a national American Muslim charity in a major midwestern city. Looking around, there was one small poster for the national charity and nothing else: no pamphlets, no banners, no annual reports or merchandise. There was not even one t-shirt in site. It was 9:30 am and over thirty people were crowded into a waiting area comfortable for ten and a line was queuing outside for the monthly food distribution. The first step in receiving one's allotment of rice, oil, potatoes, and other foodstuff was helping a staff or volunteer at the registration table find your name on a lengthy spreadsheet ordered by country. I sat at the table asking awkwardly, "Where are you from?" next to other staff and volunteers asking in multiple languages.

This sponsoring national charity promotes food security as a fundamental need for human development and stability as well as an indisputable form of charitable care in Islam as contained in the Qur'an, *sunnah* of the Prophet, and other pious historical figures' stories. To ensure the support is distributed to needy recipients, every potential client is required by the national charity to fill out paperwork to determine their eligibility by poverty level and relevant factors such as disability. Once a person or family is approved, they are issued a registration card that is then required to pick up food. Photographs of and data on food distribution are collected by staff which are then assessed by national headquarters for effective "success" and then used for formal messaging through infographics or advertisements of smiling recipients of charity.

One woman sat at the registration table with me asking in Arabic "*Min wayn*?" or "Where are you from?" over and over. Reham is a part-time staff member at the service center who also receives support from the charity because she is a Syrian refugee and is under the federal poverty line. She lives near the office with her two daughters and works most monthly food distributions. While there, as much as she is checking names off the list, Reham is greeting, exchanging kisses, and inquiring about family news with every Syrian and most other women who come in alone or with family. She started her service work independently organizing support and resources for the Syrian community displaced by war when there was nothing available in her neighborhood and now works at the charity as a community coordinator. She makes home visits, assessing needs and creating custom service plans, which all begin with building trust between those in need and her organization - what she calls the work to "open their heart" to the charity.

Reham identifies as Muslim and calls her work a form of "sadaqah" and "Gift from God" answering the call to be "gentle" and equitable to all of humanity. She works according to the "rules" of Qur'an and *sunnah* to ensure charity "arrives to the right person" and is constantly judging her work according to what she calls "God's standard." But as part of her job she is required to work within the charity's institutional standards, which she is not sure always coincide with Islamic ethics. For example, Reham says she is empathetic to the needs of all clients but is often forced to say "no" to services because of capacity or organizational rules: "I can't say no and unfortunately have to." However, she pauses in our interview to make a caveat: "Well, sometimes I put them on a special waitlist. I can't say no 100% of the time."

Indeed, when walking in on food distribution day, the formal mechanisms for evaluating eligibility and access to services, the gold standard touted on charity websites and in

advertisements, is but one part of more ambiguous ethical practices. Reham, and other refugees staffing the event, often work around missing registration cards for the people they know well in the neighborhood. Or, if a young man walks in claiming to collect for his registered mother, refugee charity workers will first interrogate his claim but on verification quickly console him and send him off not just with food but love to the absent mother. In other instances, extra food is added to bags when refugee staff know a father is there to pick up for his registered six person nuclear family but also feeds his elderly in-laws in an apartment nearby. Over the course of the event, the mood moves almost immediately from the procedural atmosphere of the DMV to a communal check in, where both staff and clients reaffirm their membership and responsibilities to these personal networks in the neighborhood.

Case Two: Brotherly Love

A small Muslim charity center and weekend Islamic school runs bimonthly food distributions funded through one of the largest American Muslim charities. Based in a poor, majority African American neighborhood in a large East Coast city, this local charity offers a fish fry, barbeque, and grocery handouts in a rotating public housing common space.

The national charity frames food distribution as a moral obligation and employs military metaphors of a "fight" or "battle" against hunger, mostly in foreign countries but also on the home front. They offer a multipronged approach by addressing food access, nutrition, agriculture, socio-economic development and political stability. Like the previous example, this national charity's formal messaging mixes visual and textual rhetoric of liberal compassion with development metrics and the creation of self-sufficient neoliberal individuals.

Imam Daoud, the founder and leader of this local Muslim "public charity" bases his service on the transformative lessons he learned in prison, where he was incarcerated for 28

years. When he first entered, Daoud "knew nothing" and was a "human *shaytan* – lost from the humanity of community, from the lost order of the highest degree." Conversion to Islam changed him, he recounts, providing identity and orientation. A new man, he helped to create an in-prison charitable fund, what he called a *Beit al-Mal*, to "look out for homies" who needed food, clothing, or financial assistance. Daoud invokes a pre-modern tradition of Muslim-led governments maintaining a public treasury and, among its varied uses, it held *zakat* funds that were collected and would be distributed by the state.

Once out of prison, Daoud set up this Muslim service organization that eventually found its home in a tiny one-story building. In our first meeting, he shared his vision for his charity work, centered on African American life: "[Our work is to] uplift our people spiritually, morally. Consciousness is the core conception. [We're] offering people a way out, through our own experiences of liberation through Islam. But we need to nourish the body before the soul. Oppression is the common enemy of humanity, and our people are not in the third world but in a third world reality."

Daoud's food distribution events are opportunities to, first and foremost, "nourish" his Black community physically and spiritually. In housing complexes with multiple layers of structural oppression and high rates of police and interpersonal violence, residents treat the charity events as a resource to stock empty pantries, seek out mentorship, or simply enjoy relaxing together in public commons. He and his team are "giving people Islam" to serve their human needs, especially to help young Black men avoid imprisonment. Through the conduit of food, from the barbeque or in grocery bags, Daoud says they are doing the work to show "it takes love to feed, love to serve those here affected by violence and loss," and provide a new way.

The inspiration for this work comes not from the theology of the national charity and its formal messaging but from major African American Muslim theologian Warith Deen Mohammed, who led a Black-centric Sunni Muslim community out of the Nation of Islam of his father. Muhammad was a prolific orator, and Daoud models his food work on the former leader's messaging: "W.D. Muhammad – spokesperson for human salvation – said serve the whole human. Feed the soul hungry for connection with creator and created. The medieval philosopher el-Ghazali says this hunger for God can be muted by the desires of the body, like sugar and salt, and US society conditions us for that – just look at our diabetes rates. We want to condition those we help to crave service, and one's own purification." Ultimately, Daoud's goal is to build skills, knowledge, and spiritual strength among local Black residents to create first the "conditions for peace" and then a "a society of paradise" on earth for his people. But you need to start somewhere, and for Daoud, that is hotdogs on the grill.

Conclusion

Listening to Reham and Daoud and observing their strategic ritual action of distributing food at local charity events, we encounter a religious ethics that is notably distinct from the dominant, normative language and procedures of their national-level sponsors.[104] My inquiry is not, however, an effort to recover less visible forms of thought and action for the sake of a dense catalog of Islamic perspectives on charity in the American context. Instead, these ethnographic encounters allow us to better understand the status of Muslim charitable infrastructures in the

[104] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 125.

United States, especially their formal messaging, and how they are being reworked at the local level.

Anthropologist Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as the "technical and cultural systems that create institutionalized structures whereby goods of all sorts circulate, connecting and binding people to collectivities."[105] The media technology of national charities as well as their procedural rules for facilitating charitable giving are meant to stabilize the logic of Islamic charity as pious, neoliberal humanitarianism, akin to the ethos described by Mona Atia in contemporary Egypt. According to this logic, charity workers are meant to have a specific type of relationship with recipients: religious love for humanity; compassion for suffering; and commitment to help others to become effective and efficient neoliberal subjects.[106] Through monetary or in kind giving, donors and volunteers can take on this pious subjecthood and normative theology and are regularly encouraged to do so by the dense proliferation of charity media and advertising online, through mailings, in mosques, and at fundraiser and service events.

However, these theological perspectives and practices cannot be permanently fixed and have the capacity to be taken into unexpected directions. In other words, the infrastructure of American Muslim charity, and the formal messaging it contains, can be destabilized and remade to support different kinds of moral life.[107] In these two examples, local charities have resisted the disciplinary power of sponsoring national organizations by facilitating charitable activity that remakes media infrastructure and arranges different social dispositions. First, consistent, branded

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[105] Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

[106] Atia, *Building a House*, xviii.

[107] Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 217, 219.

messaging is interrupted and destabilized by the strong investment in informal networks of communication, including word-of-mouth, chat groups like WhatsApp, paper fliers, and simply neglecting the use of banners, organizational t-shirts, or other paraphernalia.

Second, both food distribution events focused on communal care and resilience even if staff and volunteers followed basic procedures from sponsoring organizations (and legal requirements) by, for example, using client registration systems or filling out event assessment reports to demonstrate well-regulated and growth-oriented efforts. A different mode of togetherness, rest, and immediate needs filled Reham's service center and rode the aromas of Daoud's cook-out. Because the ultimate evaluation for their charitable acts is by God, these charity workers believe that their devotional work is accepted and valuable to God regardless of their conformity to national organizational standards. This alternative orientation fits Amira Mittermaier's definition of a nonhumanitarian "Islamic ethics of giving" that "[refuses] to locate justice in the future."[108] She writes that this ethics of giving is radical because it "foregrounds distribution, relationality, and interdependency rather than entrepreneurship and the individual's right to work and make a living. It is neither about economic growth nor about compassion toward, or the deservingness of, the poor. It is not even about human rights. It is to and from and because of God."[109]

The infrastructure of American Muslim charity includes both the pious neoliberalism of the national charities and the Islamic ethics of giving at local franchises or partners. If we give too much attention to the Facebook ads or the sheer ubiquity of national organizations' theological rhetoric and programming, we miss the unraveling and reworking done by the

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[108] Mittermaier, *Giving to God*, 5.

[109] Mittermaier, *Giving to God*, 16.

Muslim charity workers who know God would want them to put an extra sack of potatoes in a client's monthly distribution bag.

Chapter 6
"Service is Life and Service is Islam": The Spatial Dynamic of Charitable Work in Volunteering Events[1]

There is an uplifting Turkish parable about Islamic charity that centers on an exchange of bread which Khalil Demir, the founder and Executive Director of the Zakat Foundation of America, retells in the opening to his 2019 book *9 Myths About Muslim Charities*:

> A talented Istanbul baker sets out to make the perfect loaf of bread. When he succeeds, he decides it can only be given to the best of recipients: God. He carries the bread to the center-city Blue Mosque and, after placing the loaf on the pulpit, offers prayers of thanks for his talents and prosperity, with the hope that God will make the bread "a cause of blessing for me with You." As he walks out of the *musalla*, a stranger passes who has come to pray. In contrast to the baker's serenity, this man is overwhelmed with fear and desperation. He cannot find work, faces hunger and indignity, and in response has come to bend in supplication for God's help. Not long into his prayers, he notices a loaf of bread on the pulpit and is struck with joy: God is the greatest of givers! For this speedy answer, he vows to live in constant service to his Lord.[2] In the same moment that the penniless man leaves with his blessed loaf, the baker on his walk home becomes worried that his gift would not be accepted. He quickly returns to the mosque to find the bread already gone! In thanks, he offers his own vows to always bring God the best of his creations and leaves "renewed" in spirit.[3]

Demir regularly shares this parable because he believes his charity organization is the "prayer between the sincere giver, to whom God has granted resources, and the needful receiver, whom circumstances beyond the person have elevated to the central moral test of our time."[4] The

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[1] Charity Staff 32, in interview with author, September 5, 2017.

[2] Demir uses "Lord" to refer to God in the parable.

[3] Khalil I. Demir, *9 Myths About Muslim Charities: Stories from the Zakat Foundation of America* (Bridgeview, IL: Zakat Foundation of America, 2019), xii- xiv. This is my paraphrase of Demir's version.

[4] Demir, *9* Myths, xv.

embodiment of that prayer is service, he continues, visible in the work of Zakat Foundation's staff and volunteers. For him, this service is ultimately for the pleasure of God.

But crucially, at the end of his book, he reveals that there is a more profound element to the story necessary for the work to proceed: the mosque. The two men never meet, and it is the space of the mosque that welcomes their prayers and makes their exchange possible. The mosque, Demir explains, exemplifies "*the sacrosanct space of freedom that every society needs* to make possible the most elementally human of all transactions: charity."[5] Charity is human nature, he continues, because it is our most fundamental instinct given by God: to request and give mutual aid with no qualifications and for no benefit other than the intention captured in the Qur'anic expression, "*Seeking only the Face of God*."[6] In Demir's eyes, a good society is one that jealously guards these "charitable spaces" as the embodiment of an orienting ethic of communal care and comfort.

Demir's story of the loaf of bread is more than a metaphor – charitable activity is inherently spatial. It cannot be defined only by the realms of the historical or social.[7] This chapter argues that American Muslim charities create shared spaces of charitable activity, co-created and experienced by participants, that function as transient ethical communities of service. However, unlike the parable, this space is not centered at the mosque but is manifest in various physical sites where charities organize volunteering and service, the most important of which is the direct service event staffed by volunteers and employees. I argue that these spaces cultivate a

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[5] Demir, *9 Myths*, 160.

[6] Demir, *9* Myths, 160.

[7] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 2.

shared sense of religious community and practice, with the charity organization as the facilitating institutional force. While charities present themselves as mere service providers, through these spaces they are actively attempting to shape American Muslims' understanding of the meaning and application of Islamic charity through service. Nonetheless, volunteer participants collaborate in this moral formation dialogically by bringing their own expectations and deciding which ideas and ideals of the charity organization they will authorize and deploy.

When discussing their engagement in charitable service events, volunteers and staff most often used the word "community" unprompted to talk about both why they feel drawn to participate and who they are trying to serve. In this chapter, I make a secondary argument throughout that spaces created for charitable activity both reinforce already existing relationships among Muslims who share religious life – as kin, friends, or members of schools, mosques, or other Muslim community organizations— and also facilitate new connections. It creates a moral community not in the sense of set membership but as what Sabith Khan calls "communities of conscience," defined as "groups or networks of individuals who come together to solve problems, often through existing organizational structures."[8] It is a "community of meaning" that arises from individuals, networks, and groups choosing to come out to service events, which then perpetuates itself when participants retain a sense of imagined belonging.[9]

While many American mosques struggle to integrate and retain youth, women, and converts who are marginalized by their dominant authority structures, charity spaces for volunteers and staff retain an informal atmosphere – often incorporating leisure or play— that

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[8] Sabith Khan, "New Styles of Community Building and Philanthropy by Arab-American Muslims," *International Society for Third-Sector Research* 27 (February 2015), 948.

[9] Khan, "New Styles of Community," 945.

allows for moral cultivation in a way that is experienced as less regulated or judgmental.[10] Therefore, in addition to facilitating connections in general, charity spaces often are able to attract participants who otherwise do not feel included or comfortable in more well-established institutional Muslim spaces. What is less predictable is whether recipients are incorporated as members of this community-building space or remain outside beneficiaries of givers' compassion.

Given the larger context of Islamophobia, Muslim participants also see their public service to feed, clothe, and assist others as a means to prove their moral worth to the larger American public. Service events have become "part of a larger assemblage of public outreach activities" that Muslim communities are coordinating as interfaith opportunities and to show their investment and contribution as a "neighbor and real member of the community."[11] Altogether, in these charity spaces, most especially service events, I argue that Muslims are invited and express satisfaction in finding the opportunity to enact their religious duty - often described as a "human" duty - to charity while also finding and serving community.

This chapter explores the making and experience of charity spaces through a thematic analysis of participant observation and short interviews conducted at over two dozen American-Muslim-charity-organized service events on the East Coast and in the midwestern United States from 2016-2018. It focuses on volunteering and direct service events and explains how they are the central space for the cultivation of a community of conscience for practicing Islamic giving

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[10] See Ihsan Bagby, et al., "Reimagining Muslim Spaces: Creating a Welcoming, Inclusive, Dynamic Mosque," *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding* (2016), https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RMS-Community-Brief-02-2016.pdf?x12896.

[11] Irene Levy Yates, "How Muslims Help: An Ethnography of Muslim Voluntary Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Louisville, KY" (MA thesis, University of Louisville, 2017), 94, 91.

through service under a charity organization. It also brings in charity organization publications on volunteering and service events because of their important role in advertising their definition of Islamic service to Muslim supporters/potential volunteers, building off of the conclusions from the previous chapter.

The analysis of American Muslim charity service events is organized using Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad of representations of space, spatial practice, and spaces of representation. This geographical-philosophical framework explains how these spaces are conceived, built, and experienced as religious sites of communal practice, with attention to historical context, social relations among different actors, and competing power dynamics over authority. After explaining this space in its three main aspects, I conclude with an argument for why charity service events are a new type of religious space for American Muslims, one which has the possibility to be what Homi Bhabha calls a "Third Space" of resistance.

Spaces to Volunteer

Where can people volunteer at Muslim charity organizations? There are several places in which they are welcome to participate in carrying out the work, whether it is administrative or service related. Staff often consider themselves in part volunteers too, because of the amount of labor they contribute far beyond the time commitment dictated by their job requirements and salary. Altogether, there are seven types of activities in which American Muslim charity organizations involve volunteers:

1. Regular Distribution Services: These events can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly and are most often a pantry for food and basic household goods for the local community. Can be in a building, outside table, or walking out to meet people on the street.

2. Booth Work: A table for the organization is set up with informational packets, event fliers, and sign-up sheets for mailing lists. Sometimes paraphernalia like t-shirts are on

sale. Booths can be set up in a variety of mostly Muslim-centered settings, including but not limited to large Muslim conventions, conferences, Friday prayers, and special events.

3. Fundraiser: Volunteers help run fundraising dinners or other events, taking on various roles such as registration tables, donation collection, or ushering.

4. Annual Event: Some charities have regular annual events to celebrate their work. One national example is the Islamic Relief USA Day of Dignity, set up as an annual service day coordinated with organizations (Muslims and non-Muslim) local to the event.

5. Emergency Services: In response to natural or human-made disasters in the United States, volunteers assist with packing supplies without direct service and/or distribution at centralized sites. Volunteers are sometimes invited, and even trained, to help with recovery work such as light construction on damaged homes.

6. International Trips: Infrequently, volunteers are invited for short trips to assist with service at low-risk international site. Youth trips are organized as learning opportunities and persons with special expertise, such as medical or engineering, are welcome on a person-by-person basis.

7. Administrative: Clerical work in office spaces. Some volunteers take on regular full time responsibilities as a member of a local office while others come in as-needed for regular or one-time assistance.

Of all the listed types, most people will experience volunteering work in distribution-centered activities including the regular distribution services, annual events, and domestic emergency services. Therefore, the spatial characteristics of volunteering are most often initially defined by these types of events, which will be analyzed in the following sections. These initial volunteering opportunities nonetheless share family resemblances with the larger range of opportunities, spatially and otherwise, which gives continuity to the volunteering experience.

Spatiality in the Social Life of Religion: Perceived, Conceived, and Lived Space

Incorporating a discussion of spatiality expands discussions of meaning in volunteer service events beyond two dominant methods that study either material relations of charitable giving or religious and ideological reasons for such events. French theorist Henri LeFebvre wrote *The Production of Space* (1974) on *l'espace vécu*, or lived space, to challenge the determinism of

these two interpretive positions favored by social scientists: subjectivism-idealism and objectivism-materialism.[12] He writes:

> What exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships? Are they substantial? Natural? Or formally abstract? The study of space offers an answer according to which the social relations of production have a social existence *to the extent that they have a spatial existence*; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process produce the space itself. Failing this, these relations would remain in the realm of "pure" abstraction.[13]

LeFebvre looked to open up the dominant modes of the material and the imagined, often taken as a dialectic, by proposing a "trialectic" of the historical, social, and the spatial.[14] Analyses from historical or social angles before had overwhelmingly included spatiality "peripheralized into the background as reflection, container, stage, environment."[15]

Geographer Edward Soja argues that LeFebvre's introduction of the spatial is an intrusion, what he calls a "third-as-Other." The spatial is given a "temporary strategic privileging" to disrupt totalizing methods of thought and reveals analytical understanding as always already an "approximation" of life.[16] This corrects two biases in scholarship: first, the "illusion of transparency," where space appears "completely intelligible" and social spaces becomes only mental spaces, "[reducing] spatial knowledge to a discourse on discourse."[17] Second, it corrects "the realistic illusion," which "oversubstantiates the world in a naturalistic or

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[12] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 64.

[13] Emphasis added. Henri LeFebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 129.

[14] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 61, 65.

[15] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 71.

[16] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 61, 65.

[17] LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, 28.

mechanistic material or empiricism, in which objective 'things' have more reality than 'thoughts.'"[18]

Bringing on a new category of analysis demands a new method of investigation. In *The Production of Space*, LeFebvre describes social space as having three "moments," or qualities: *espace perçu* (perceived space), *espace conçu* (conceived space), and *espace vécu* (lived space).[19] Taken together, these three qualities encapsulate the full experience of lived space.

Perceived space "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation."[20] In other words, this is the "process of producing the material form of social spatiality…[it is] both medium and outcome."[21] As a medium, it is material space that can be measured and observed. *Conceived space* is the quality of space that is produced to impose order or design. Soja explains that "such order is constituted via control over knowledge, signs, and codes: over the means of deciphering spatial practice and hence over the production of spatial knowledge." LeFebvre argues "this is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)" because it aims to regulate, representing power, ideology, and control. It can also be a creative space, of "utopian thought and vision" because insurgent voices can offer a radical alternative to the status quo through a broad, new vision of space.

The final quality is *lived space*. It encompasses the two aforementioned spaces but is distinct from them in the way it is often the "underground side of social life" – not fully

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[18] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 64.

[19] Edward Soja translates these as Spatial Practice, Representations of Space, and Spaces of Representation.

[20] LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

[21] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 66.

knowable in the way perceived and conceived space are because it is "space as directly lived."[22] Lived space is space as it is made through the experience of "inhabitants" and "users" who engage and read material space with their own symbolic engagement. LeFebvre describes it as the "dominated" space "which the imagination (verbal but especially non-verbal) seeks to change and appropriate. It overlaps physical space, making symbolic use of its objects…[for] more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs."[23]

Analogous to the potentiality opened by space in the trialectic with history and the social, lived space brings together the real and imagined qualities of the first two characteristics of space, perceived and conceived. Soja calls lived space, "the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning."[24] At the same time, all three qualities are simultaneous to each other, reinforcing the larger ontological point of the interrelatedness of existence beyond idealist or materialist conceptions.

In the following sections, I use LeFebvre's three-part spatial analysis to understand direct service events organized by American Muslim charities, using ethnographic and media data. Like LeFebvre, my privileging of the spatial is to emphasize that organizations write and distribute religious interpretations of direct charitable service but the production of new understandings of charity by American Muslim communities influenced by such organizations is produced spatially through the creation, management, and experience of spaces.

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[22] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 67.

[23] LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

[24] Soja, *Thirdspace*, 68

Perceived Space of Volunteer Events

Volunteer events for American Muslim charities can be physically recognizable at a glance. Not because the spaces themselves are as consistent as a Turkish Sinan mosque or an American big-box chain, but because there are several regular characteristics of their physical design and organization. To illustrate I will share a representative example and then analyze its characteristics as a perceived space. Below is a description of a post-hurricane emergency supply distribution from 2018. It was run by a national charity organization in a tiny East Coast town.

Mid-morning, I pulled up to the distribution site: a large parking lot in front of a nondescript, long one-story brick building, save a small sign that identifies it as a mosque. In front of the façade's entrance ramp stood a small tent and banner with the charity logo. The area had the look of an old storage depot, which is possible as it was right beside a train line and a former transport river. The otherwise plain site was already buzzing with staff and volunteers – every adult I saw was either wearing a t-shirt or a vest from the charity. It looked to be about forty people of all ages; most women were in hijab and all were people of color.

I looked for Tameem, the twenty-something staff member who I was in contact with via the Facebook event page about attending as a volunteer and doctoral researcher. I found him working out of a large moving truck parked close to the distribution area filled with packages of water bottles. He gave me a warm welcome and handed me my uniform for the day, a type of utility vest with the charity logo often worn by humanitarian workers in the field. He then explained his role as the regional emergency response director and gave an overview of the day's operations.

Locals had come to the mosque over the past week to give clothes, non-perishable food, water, diapers, feminine products, basic household items, and toiletries. Supplemental to these

donations, the charity made bulk-purchases of water locally and shipped in additional items to make a few thousand hygiene kits. The majority of volunteers present were either members of local Muslim communities or a group of twenty emergency-trained travel volunteers who had come from across the country to help for a week with humanitarian assistance and rebuilding efforts. Tameem told me a graduate student like myself had posted about the event on Facebook and successfully brought together a small group to volunteer from his large university a few hours away. In fact, he let me know there were only five staff present, making them very much the minority in charity workers for the day.

At my arrival, volunteers were sorting donated clothes into piles by age, size, and gender; building hygiene kits; and stacking water before locals-in-need would start arriving in a few hours. I was instructed by Tameem to "find somewhere to jump in" in the three main areas set up from left to right in front of the building: clothes, hygiene kits, or water. I gravitated to the hygiene kit making group of a dozen, which was exclusively women, from from teen to middle-aged. The group had created a process to open the supply boxes, sort items, and fill zip lock bags to create individual emergency kits. Most people had found their own rhythm in preparing a kit but two women, who I learned were old friends, packed together. One twelve-year old girl stood slightly apart from the group and quietly packed with laser focus. I later met her dad, a local college chaplain, and he told me that in their regular volunteering she always took a serious tone.

As we worked, the group shared light conversation about family or travel interspersed by short problem-solving asides when, for example, zip lock bags had run out for the kits and we transitioned to plastic shopping bags. A soft conversational divide often fell between the women by age, myself joining the mostly college age women talking amongst themselves about school and worries about summer jobs. At one point, a young woman arrived late and ran up to hug a

girl next to me – they were cousins, and it turned out they were part of a group of eight women from one Lebanese extended family who had driven out from a larger city to volunteer together.

Around us, men were stacking water bottle packages to the right of the hygiene kit table and a group of older women were sorting clothes to the left. Children were haphazardly helping or running about. A man and woman, both in their twenties, came by and introduced themselves as the charity's social media team and asked us for verbal consent for any photos or videos they would be taking. Now and again, an older man would ask my group if we needed anything.

Around noon, the imam of the mosque announced that *dhuhr* prayer would be held in fifteen minutes. One of the middle-aged women in my work group asked me if I was thirsty and let me know there was water, juice, and snacks in the mosque foyer. It seemed like a good time for a break, and after walking inside I found a group of young boys sitting on the floor with juice boxes hanging by the straw from their mouths. I took an apple juice box myself and turned around to most of the volunteers coming through the door for prayer. I exited back to my kit making area and two women and I stood around talking during the work lull. Mariam was curious to understand my research and choice to attend given, in her estimation, that I was only non-Muslim volunteer there. Ansev, a travel volunteer, then told us a story about removing debris with the charity team yesterday in a house that had flood stains two feet up the walls.

Soon after prayer the event officially began and cars started to arrive with local residents looking for assistance. Some parked and walked over to look through clothes. Most cars lined up to create an improvised drive-through starting at the small tent on the far right end of the building. There, volunteers would put one to two water bottle packages in the car's trunk and provide hygiene kits the number of people per household. It was a smooth running operation, with lots of smiles and exchanges of greeting and gratitude before the cars pulled out to the left.

The new dynamic of the event opening meant that some volunteers took on service while many of us continued to make hygiene kits to ensure there would be enough for the entire distribution period. Some recipients came up to talk or express thanks and we exchanged pleasantries. The social media duo gracefully wove in between activity to capture candid moments and pull aside volunteers for mini interviews. Through it all, even as we all mostly still had time to chat with fellow volunteers, I noticed a strong shift in volunteers' demeanor towards a confident professionalism. Even though we had only created this distribution site hours before, volunteers took on the role of assured, veteran humanitarian service staff.

The constant arrival of new cars and hum of activity kept everyone busy, creating a flow of sorts. When one station could not keep up with demand, it was sensed and someone would leave their present duty to help. The water station would wax and wane from three to sometimes six people loading packages. The clothing station would slowly become more disorganized and a few volunteers would find their way over to straighten the clothes again in their appropriate open cardboard boxes. There was nonetheless still time to simply talk: while I helped tidy the men's coats section, a volunteer and a recipient talked nearby after finding their young children playing together on the mosque ramp.

Even with the demanding work of service, volunteers overwhelmingly showed excitement towards their work. Several people verbalized their gratitude for the privilege to serve, especially as locals who were spared the devastation that this region had seen. There was only one memorable moment of tension. A middle-aged man quietly complained to his mother when a large, sparkling luxury SUV pulled up in line: "What do they need this for?" implying they were abusing the charitable distribution. Without losing a beat the mother chastised him, "You don't know their circumstances. We have not seen their house. We don't know how many

mouths [the driver] has to feed or whether he lost his job." Her son became quiet and, in what seemed like an admission of error, put himself to work loading water.

When the last recipients pulled away around four o'clock, we started the cleanup. Tameem and other staff explained how unclaimed kits should be boxed up and volunteers from the mosque began bagging the clothes, which they would continue to distribute in the area that week through local shelter drop offs. During the explanation, one older woman was already picking up trash unprompted across the entire site. I realized I needed to leave early and asked the women I met for contact information for follow-up interviews. Many gave me hugs and wished me the best of luck. I walked over to Tameem to thank him for all his help and started off to my car before he yelled for my attention: "The vest!" I looked down sheepishly as he continued, "Sorry, we just need to reuse it." I walked back to hand it over and drove off. After arriving home a few hours later, I found six friend requests from fellow volunteers on Facebook who had all already linked up as friends.

Perceived Spatial Characteristics

Using this ethnographic narrative as a representative case study, several set material characteristics can be observed. For direct service events experienced by volunteers, there is no regular building or overall space – one could be in a large food pantry room at the charity's office; on a street corner; or a senior center recreation room. Instead, the first orienting physical element will be signage from the charity in the form of a standing banner, poster, or tent, and the staff and volunteer bodies themselves marked with organizational t-shirts, vests, or matching colors. The second physical characteristic will be areas designated for volunteers (and staff) separated from recipients. These areas include the storage and preparation space for the charitable material – in this case water and emergency kits- as well as the space from which to

distribute it. Often, as in the case study here, there is a physical barrier such as a table that divides the space between volunteer and recipient. Additionally, volunteers along with staff will also have spaces for their personal belongings and refreshments. From the case study, the mosque and its foyer stocked with water, juice, and cereal bars served that purpose.

In addition to these specific elements, a final general characteristic is that physical space is not set in a site that is regularly read as religious even though the shared activity of charity is explicitly religious. Overwhelmingly these volunteer events will not happen inside a mosque or Muslim "community center" – the central religious spaces in American Muslim communal life.[25] Nor are they regularly at Islamic schools, Sufi centers, or seminaries – even if communities connected to these institutions often come together for volunteer opportunities. While Islamic ritual and practice do not need "juridically claimed territory or formally consecrated or architecturally specific space" there are nonetheless shared ideas of what constitute spaces for Muslim communities in the United States that are religious or "Islamic," in the sense of oriented towards devotional life.[26] Besides the functional choice of service sites to reach recipients effectively, charities choose physical spaces that are associated with everyday life and not devotional practice.

By setting volunteer service events in everyday spaces, charities evade the physical expectations of the highly signified mosque that has also been a central site of debate over exclusion and belonging.[27] As will be discussed in a following section, the physical setting of

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[25] Barbara Metcalf, "Introduction," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Metcalf (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 1996), 13.

[26] Metcalf, "Introduction," 3.

[27] Justine Howe, *Suburban Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 76. On controversies regarding women's participation in mosque spaces see Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women,*

everyday spaces that are regularly read as non-religious - a parking lot, civic hall, or charity pantry space - have "generative power" to create new ideas and practices of religious meaning.[28] Therefore, tying back to LeFebvre, the material site creates a form of social spatiality for its Muslim volunteers. Volunteer service events create a communal Muslim space where everyone can belong as part of the collective effort of giving.

Conceived Space of Volunteer Events

The quality of conceived space at volunteer events is produced and regulated directly by charity organizations. This does not mean charities maintain complete control over how a volunteering event is understood or experienced by participants, but that the charity finances and has executive decision making power over its planning, design, and management for the purpose of shaping participants religious ideas and practice.

In this section, through an analysis of staff interviews and various charity-produced media, I demonstrate efforts to encourage Muslims in America to see volunteering as an important form of Islamic charity, a "next step" of involvement from monetary or in-kind giving. In addition, service event spaces are overwhelmingly represented in major charity organizations' media by statements from and photographs of volunteers, giving the appearance that volunteers create and are decision makers in carrying out religious charity in this form.

To encourage participation in volunteering events as a community space, charities emphasize the quality of "fun" in how events are described, designed, and run. There is a strong emphasis on the inclusion of youth, from school children to fresh college graduates, to show

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Religious Authority, and Activism: More Than a Prayer (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012). Also see the online project Side Entrance by Hind Makki, https://sideentrance.tumblr.com/.

[28] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 81.

them a place to belong and to ensure the future of the American Muslim communities. A fun and easy-going atmosphere not only attracts youth but by design aims to assuage feelings of exclusion some Muslims of all ages have felt in established religious spaces, especially around expectations of piety.[29]

I end the section discussing two main consequences of conceived space. First, the majority of charities create a communal space that is focused almost exclusively on the givers of charity and not the recipients, which reinforces paternalistic interpretations of Islamic charity and counters the organizations' own humanitarian and religious claims that charity is aimed at systemic change to societal inequities. At the same time, interest and investment in local service events shows a shift among older immigrant Muslims to give a greater priority to needs and issues in their local area, following the lead of youngest generations of college and school age Muslims who overwhelmingly feel a pull to serve their town or city. African American led spaces do not show the same pattern. Second, in its emphasis on a fun and easy-going atmosphere providing community service, there are appeals to Americanness and performing an upstanding character that can reinforce Islamophobic standards of loyalty placed on Muslims. Lower class Muslims who often are not able to dedicate time to service volunteering are doubly punished, by anti-Muslim hostility and poverty, because their absence from volunteering can be read as disinterest in the larger neighborhood or an inability to assimilate into American culture.

Volunteering is the Next Step of Charity

Formal messaging from national Muslim charities encourages readers/viewers to volunteer and presents it as the next step of involvement in charity beyond donations. Although

[29] See Bagby, et al., "Reimagining Muslim Spaces."

people of all religions are welcome to volunteer, across organizations the main audience is Muslims. Donors are of course celebrated for the impact of their *zakat* and *sadaqah* in funding programs and donations remain the clear center of messaging. However, publications and social media use action-based language to call Muslims to go further in their dedication to the causes addressed by the charity through direct involvement in voluntary service. One staff member explains that it is "easy to write a check" but it takes a greater effort to think what one could do to directly serve community needs with time and skills – what one charity calls giving your "human capital."[30] A staff member at a different organization explains, "If you just give money, you don't experience [the fulfillment of the charitable donations] yourself."[31] Physical presence is key.

What is volunteering meant to involve? All organizations provide examples in their formal messaging of how volunteers can support the charity. A Helping Hands for Relief and Development Pamphlet in circulation in 2017 is representative. It lists educating others and advertising for the charity; running fundraisers; organizing clothes/food/hygiene/school kit drives; encouraging their employers to match donations; and volunteering in service events individually or as part of group such as MSA, Girl Scouts, or with "your own group of family, friends, or colleagues."[32] Some organizations even have service events organized specifically for

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[30] Charity Staff 30, Fieldwork Event, June 14, 2017. ICNA Relief Chicago, "What Can You Do?," *ICNA Relief Chicago Year in Review 2015*, 23.

[31] Charity Staff 42A, in interview with author, September 18, 2017.

[32] Helping Hands for Relief and Development, *Helping Hands for Relief and Development Office and Warehouse: Mid-Atlantic Region Pamphlet*, no date - in circulation 2017.

volunteers, such as the Zakat Foundation of American's "Volunteer Days at HQ-ZFA" where supporters could come to package care kits to ship to domestic and international sites.[33]

Multiple organizations use the phrase "get involved" for volunteering and any informational forms, including donation envelopes, will ask if the recipient would be interested to volunteer. Once placed on their listserv, the recipient will receive emails about volunteering opportunities in their area. In 2016, Islamic Relief distributed an index-card sized card that read "Get Involved!" on one side with images of volunteers and staff at work in the field in IR-USA shirts and vests. On the back, "It's Your Time" was printed in large font across an image of a group of thirty people at a service event. Below were three boxes - Sign up at irusa.org/volunteer; Get Trained; and Start Making a Difference - a streamlined process to get a potential volunteer on the ground in service.[34] For another example, Muslim Family Services (MFS), run by ICNA Relief, had a pamphlet in circulation in late 2017 with a section titled "Get Involved" with an image of what appears to be a father and three young sons picking up trash together and a word map of service-based words, with "helping" and "volunteer" at the center. The main page text reads "MFS welcomes you to become a part of our team and participate in our programs. Give us a call today to contribute and help make our programs even better."[35]

Even though volunteering is considered an in-kind *sadaqah*, the use of "involvement" implies donations facilitate service but are not as direct an action as volunteering in delivering

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[33] Zakat Foundation of America, "Volunteer Days at ZF," *Zakat News*, Fall 2017, 30-31.

[34] Islamic Relief, *Get Involved Postcard*, no date - in circulation 2016.

[35] Muslim Family Service Detroit, *Muslim Family Services: A Division of ICNA Relief Pamphlet*, no date - in circulation 2017.

needed aid or development.[36] One could argue that the call to volunteering blurs the line between the donor and the *'amal*, the designated *zakat* collector, challenging Islamic legal definitions of charity versus facilitation and the respective religious merits.[37] Several staff members across different organizations described an intended progression of deeper involvement from donating, to one-off volunteering, organizing voluntary work, and finally socio-political advocacy for the issues addressed by the charity in order to move beyond what they described as a "savior" or "missionary" model of service.[38] This interpretation reflects a social justice model of Islamic charity, that giving is not only an obligation to God or even a right of the poor to receive but extends to changing the conditions of suffering caused by structural inequalities.[39] While this was the dominant understanding – that Muslims were keyed into a contemporary ethical impulse to address socio-political inequities - one staff member offered a different perspective, citing a poetic line, "For the Muslim nature of hearts is they love *sadaqah* and want to help."[40] Regardless of interpretation, what one charity leader calls "solidarity through service" demands physical presence and connection with those being served.[41]

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[36] Often donation-based actions are referred to with the language of "partnership," which frames the donor as a separate party to the service work. Notably, in the Egyptian context, Mona Atia, reports that volunteering has become "a dominant expression of sadaqah." See Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 141.

[37] The limitation to collection and not necessarily distribution has to do with historical precedent when *'amaleen* often worked for Muslim ruled empires or smaller territories and the state made decisions about the management and distribution of funds.

[38] Charity Staff 4, in interview with author, June 23, 2016; Charity Staff 69A, in interview with author, November 4, 2017.

[39] Charity Staff 44, in interview with author, September 21, 2017. In her words, "Our duty is also from Islamic values. It's our duty to help and give back."

[40] Charity Staff 76, in interview with author, November 11, 2017.

[41] Charity Staff 69A, in interview with author, November 4, 2017.

Institutional Provision of Opportunity

Charities as institutions provide the physical space and resources to fulfill their call to volunteer. The conceived character of charity-organized service sites is meant to present as the prerequisite to practicing *sadaqah*. Linked to their modern *'ameleen* role when it comes to collecting and distributing *zakat* and *sadaqah* funds, charities advertise themselves as a "connector" or "bridge" for Muslims to access the *sadaqah* of volunteering.[42] Staff describe American Muslim populations as eager to help, even "always looking to do volunteer work," for which the charities are "providing opportunities to provide service locally."[43] Simply put by one staff member, the charity is "helping others to help."[44]

This last statement infers the need for a facilitating charity organization in order to perform voluntary service as a Muslim, a phenomenon tied to the rise of institutionalized charities themselves as ubiquitous by the late 2000s/early 2010s in the United States. The expectation parallels the institutionalization of Muslim community service in several other neoliberal societies where the destruction of government welfare prompted the growth of charity service providers that, subsequently, bureaucratized previously informal charitable actions by Muslim individuals and networks.[45] Elisa Banfi argues that Western European Muslim provision of services on the basis of the common good (*maslaha*) "[challenges] the state-centric, vertically

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[42] Charity Staff 32, in interview with author, September 5, 2017.

[43] Charity Staff 62, in interview with author, October 25, 2017.

[44] Charity Staff 42B, in interview with author, September 18, 2017.

[45] A great comparison would be Shi'a Lebanese women in Beirut. Lara Deeb describes earlier generations of women working individually in community service as a religious practice of public piety. After the institutionalization of the Islamic movement, women overwhelmingly were volunteering through *jam'iyyas* instead. Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 170.

defined, disciplinary discourses of the social" on the basis of rights and obligations with its vision of collective uplift on the basis of shared humanity.[46]

At the same time, this model still exhibits a desire for humanitarian norms of efficient and effective charity built from business strategies versus what is labelled as earlier forms of "unorganized charity" or "'traditional' patterns of giving."[47] At a fundraiser event, an invited local Imam explained that "noble change" brought by *sadaqah jariyyah* requires dedicated institutions, because individuals, even imams, are unreliable in terms of dedicated time and resources.[48] Both UMR and IR-USA used language about togetherness to reinforce this outlook, employing slogans in the late 2010s of "Better Together" and "Working Together for a Better World" respectively. The "together" is not specifically modified but implies a relationship between an organization and Muslims supporters.

More than promoting their own organizations, charities reinforce the need for an institutional body in religious service work by directing supporters to their events. Charitable acts according to Islamic law and contemporary humanitarian ethics – feeding the poor; providing school supplies for children; or offering blood pressure checks in a mobile clinic – are presented as opportunities *provided by* the charity. Muslim self-motivation is directed less to self-organized charitable activity than to coming out to a prearranged event where the charity has decided the location, physical set up, and methods for service. The location is peppered with their signage – if the event is not simply located within the charity building itself. In addition,

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[46] Elisa Banfi, "Islamic Organizations in the West: New Welfare Actors in the New Welfare Systems in Europe," in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (New York: Routledge, 2015), 317.

[47] Atia, *Building a House*, 70.

[48] Charity Volunteer 58, Fundraiser Event, Nov 30, 2018.

returning to the case study above, charities usually ask all volunteers to wear clothing such as a shirt or vest that identifies them with the organization and will have media staff to take pictures of volunteers at work to claim their service as part of a shared, institutionalized act of charity.

Cementing Religious Authority for Service Events

Even as charities situate themselves as a necessary institution to carry out voluntary service, volunteers are described in formal messaging as essential resources to charities. Like donors, volunteers are showered with gratitude in these publications, oftentimes gracing covers, such as ICNA Relief's 2017 Annual Report featuring four young volunteers in yellow charity shirts preparing food supplies among others in a large tent.[49] Formal messaging is filled with standalone images of volunteers as well as "profile" sections where volunteers are celebrated for their efforts or share their reflections on the benefits of service.[50]

In the Summer 2017 *Partnership* report from Islamic Relief USA, the "Volunteers" section describes volunteers as the "foundation" for the charity. It continues,

> Without volunteers, many amazing projects and programs would not be possible. From responding to disasters to hosting toy drives, it's easy to see the enormous impact volunteers have on individuals in the community and around the world…Islamic Relief USA was founded by volunteers. Today, we couldn't do what we do without you.[51]

This language of gratitude is repeated at events. Charity t-shirts that are required for service double as "thank you" gifts to volunteers for their time and in addition to basic water

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[49] They appear to be preparing food because they are all wearing hairnets and are positioned in ways that look like a food packing event. The report provides no description of the photo. ICNA Relief, cover page, *Annual Report 2017*.

[50] For a great example of volunteer profiles, see United Muslim Relief, "Quotes from Chapter Members," *United Muslim Relief Annual Report 2016,* 28-29.

[51] Islamic Relief USA, "Volunteer With IRUSA," *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 45.

or snacks, events can include pizza or a table of sweets. Volunteers are treated not simply as laboring hands but active contributors to the success of events. When Muslims imagine service, they are meant to see themselves there – seeing a volunteer in a charity ad and mentally transposing their own on top. While institutionalization is a given, it appears the charity organization and volunteers are in a symbiotic relationship in the effort to serve.

Apart from the strategic laudatory content to attract and retain the necessary number of volunteers for large volumes of services, as well as presumably sincere gratitude, the pervasive presence of volunteer faces and voices in formal messaging also gives religious legitimacy to the events as forms of *sadaqah*. Charities in their formal messaging about volunteers at events, and in their treatment while there by staff, use what Kirsten Wesselhoeft calls "epideictic rhetoric" where the speaker is "explicit [in] positing of a community of adherence" and argues in a way to put forward something the person feels they already believe.[52]

By constantly featuring the voices and faces of Muslim volunteers in formal messaging, the charity implies that it and potential volunteers coinhabit this "community of adherence" which "shares …certain premises of moral discourse." National Muslim charities do not use an authoritative tone to define what counts as correct Islamic service, but instead use tactics within epideictic rhetoric like ethymemes, which are syllogisms with an absent premise that is assumed too obvious to mention. The absent premise defines a form of knowledge, including moral values, that is shared or taken for granted in a particular community.[53] Formal message employs a general ethymeme: If you are a Muslim who cares about enacting your religious values, then

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[52] Kirsten Wesselhoeft, "Making Muslim Minds: Question and Answer as a Genre of Moral Reasoning in an Urban French Mosque," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, No. 3 (September 2010), 800.

[53] Wesselhoeft, "Making Muslim Minds," 801.

you will be present at charity hosted volunteering events like these Muslims featured here. The assumed premise is that Muslims who are committed to their religion, especially charitable work, attend these types of events.

The *sadaqah* of volunteering is not defined or justified through traditional forms of a *fatwa* or legal text and is most often left to the words of volunteers themselves. For example, the 2016 annual report of United Muslim Relief includes a two page spread of quotes from volunteers, including one from Hilal from Twin Cities, Minnesota:

> Joining United Muslim Relief has inspired me to give back to my community both on a local, and global level. It has benefited me spiritually, in that we are helping those in need, and giving back as a form of sadaqa. I am blessed and grateful to be a part of an organization that strives to make a positive change in almost every area possible. May God perpetually bless this organization for all the good it has done.[54]

When Muslim leaders avoid prescriptive responses to community members' seeking guidance on living Islamically and instead use epideictic rhetorical strategies, Wesselhoeft argues that members feel they are allowed to be vulnerable and respected to make their own decisions. At events, this extends to welcoming all Muslims volunteers to participate in *sadaqah qua* service, trusting that they are capable of carrying out this duty without strict oversight from staff.[55]

And this is not an easily performed act – volunteers often have to make quick decisions about how to proceed when demand exceeds what resources are left at a distribution site or have difficult discussions with recipients about their refugee status, homelessness, or food insecurity while trying to secure them resources. To take a less demanding example, volunteers are often welcome to literally put their own words on the charitable work – offering messages of

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[54] United Muslim Relief, "Quotes from Chapter Members," 28.

[55] The exception is for volunteers who are placed into high-risk situations such as hurricane recovery and need (or are legally required) to have training.

encouragement on lunch bags distributed to the hungry in streets or on pieces of paper placed in packages sent to hurricane victims afar. When volunteers are part of the decision making process at the event itself, the responsibility shifts from leadership providing a right answer to "imparting to them certain Islamic priorities and an Islamic orientation to the world."[56] In the case of volunteering, that means guiding Muslims to volunteering opportunities that best serve immediate needs and long term development goals of an Islamic humanitarian organization and a Muslim national community invested in American Muslim Humanitarianism.

A Fun and Welcoming Atmosphere

The final conceived spatial characteristic of service events is the intentional design of a fun and comfortable atmosphere for all volunteers. Seen in the case study above, volunteering service events are not rigidly organized. Participants are assigned needed responsibilities but are otherwise not instructed on any expected behavior in how the task is performed, leaving space to socialize while preparing distribution supplies together or filling downtime. Volunteers come out with friends, family, clubs, or make new acquaintances working together and chatting. Children often find a corner to play and teenagers waver between helping and wandering off to watch TikTok videos – and at several events parents (most often mothers) brought infants who were passed around for care.

These scenes are visible in charity publications celebrating volunteers. In the Fall 2017 *Zakat News* newsletter of the Zakat Foundation of America is a two page spread titled "Volunteer Days at ZF." It features mostly large group scenes of volunteers working together at donation packing stations. In one image two small children are holding a white board with

[56] Wesselhoeft, "Making Muslim Minds," 801.

#ZFVolunteerDay at the bottom and one of the girl's words scribbled in pink above: "I am here to help you because I love you - Emily." ZFA explains that these new monthly "volunteer" days at their Chicagoland headquarters have become popular, "[drawing] throngs of youth, parents, and even grandparents to package all kinds of Care Kits for people in need."[57]

While staff retain their managerial role, they socialize freely with volunteers, and consistently maintain a friendly and often playful attitude. In fact, a typical behavior was to see a staff member go over to an area where volunteers were quiet or appeared serious in their work to break the intensity with a joke, kind words, or an invitation to take a snack break with the Dunkin Donuts they just picked up. Two leaders of a monthly meal preparation and distribution event I attended were constant in their playful jabs with volunteers. When their daughter, a regular volunteer, continued to pick up her phone to read Snapchat messages from friends, her mom teasingly remarked in front of other volunteers, "Ayesha, I can't push you into *jannah*, you got to do the work," implying she get back to helping with PB&J preparations. The couple explained afterwards that they were trying to "make [the pack] fun…a break from the grind."[58]

When people voluntarily offer their time and labor *pro bono* to carry out programming, it is in the interest of any non-profit to create a welcoming and comfortable environment. It keeps morale high and encourages people to return for later events or, one step further, become volunteer leaders or even staff. It is no exaggeration to say that no national American Muslim charity could carry out their current volume of domestic programming (including fundraising and service) without volunteers. One staff member even remarked, "volunteers run almost the entire

[57] Zakat Foundation of America, "Volunteer Days at ZF," 30-31.

[58] Charity Staff 69A and 69B, in interview with author, November 4, 2017.

organization."[59] However, this atmospheric choice by the charity also serves a religious purpose to shape the meaning and experience of the event for Muslim volunteers.

At a base level, the charity is extending the space in which Muslims can come together to practice their faith and maintain their connections as a religious community, especially in an anti-Muslim national environment.[60] Volunteer events are advertised as places where family members of all ages can attend. For example, the Zakat Foundation of America advertises preparing backpacks and school supplies for students in need internationally as a unique opportunity because "children and adults alike are encouraged to directly partake in a humanitarian effort," with information to "get your family involved."[61] Volunteering makes it possible for the entire family to participate together in a religious activity.

However, these events go one step further. Creating a fun, informal atmosphere at a volunteer service event aims to minimizes "insecurity or alienation" that attending American Muslims feel in American society but also from other dominant Muslim spaces.[62] Justine Howe argues that American Muslim organizations that incorporate leisure or service activities "exceed conventional boundaries of religion" in which "religion pervades social life, rather than being limited to the boundaries of the mosque."[63]

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[59] Charity Staff 20, in interview with author, February 9, 2017.

[60] For the use of anti-Muslim racism instead of Islamophobia, see Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, Arshad Ali, Evelyn Alsultany, Sohail Daulatzai, Lara Deeb, Carol Fadda, Zareena Grewal, Juliane Hammer, Nadine Naber, and Junaid Rana, "Islamophobia Is Racism Syllabus," https://islamophobiaisracism.wordpress.com/.

[61] Zakat Foundation of America, "Backpack Program," *Zakat Foundation of America Booklet*, no date - in circulation 2018, 23.

[62] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 42.

[63] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 82, 81.

In Howe's 2010-2014 case study of the Mohammed Webb Foundation, a midwestern middle to upper-middle class suburban Muslim community outside Chicago, leisure and service activities were used to create an inclusive "indigenous" American Islam, which they defined in opposition to mosques that by theology and ethnic particularism were read as "narrow, overly ritualistic, and exclusionary."[64] The community elevated relationships, rather than "formal doctrinal programs" to build their religious understanding and identity and they "embrace American culture as the fullest expression of their Muslim identity."[65] Members created pious selves through American consumer practices of leisure, such as football games. There members believed they could overcome racial difference and, in the words of one Webb member, "feel culturally at home….[and] develop an indigenous Muslim community and feel comfortable and be Muslim."[66] Community service work is a quintessentially American activity taken on by the community as well that is focused more on meeting needs than the fine details of *fiqh* requirements, such as ensuring all meat distributed is halal.[67] Quintessential American activities of leisure and community service are remade into "morally laden, politically efficacious rituals."[68]

Without the explicit critique of mosques and other established Muslim spaces such as Islamic schools or conventions, national American Muslim charities are also creating a new space for American Muslims to "come together" and feel comfortable as Muslims through

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[64] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 76.

[65] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 74, 69.

[66] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 77.

[67] See Rosemary R. Corbett, "For God and Country: Religious Minorities Striving for National Belonging through Community Service," *Religion and American Culture* 26, No, 2 (Summer 2016), 227-259.

[68] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 81.

voluntary service and linked leisure activities, with a strong emphasis on youth.[69] The religious import of charity as *sadaqah* emerges from collective action and the relationships built. Coming out is also a means for all Muslims to "feel culturally at home" when serving their larger local community. ICNA Relief orchestrated a large response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and while "Hurricane Sandy was a terrible misfortune for many," participating in the response efforts "created a strong sense of community and connection."[70] Muslims also are invited to come together as Americans by Islamic Relief USA through their annual nation-wide Martin Luther King Day service events.[71]

Penny Appeal USA is a national charity especially invested in leisure practices to bring together Muslim volunteers as a community. They invite Muslims to be part of the "family of volunteers," referred to in a shorthand sports analogy as "#teamOrangeUSA."[72] Volunteers, especially young adult faces, often in the charity's bright orange t-shirts, are regularly featured in formal messaging enjoying fun activities together for a worthy cause, which they call a "FUNdraiser." These gatherings have no direct service component- one postcard showed #teamOrange volunteers sky diving – but primarily serve to model religious community built around charity as a place that is fun and cool.[73] Moreover, the consumer model of religious

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[69] Charity Staff 61, in interview with author, October 24, 2017.

[70] ICNA Relief, *Once There Was a Home! Hurricane Sandy and ICNA Relief's Response Report*, no date - in circulation 2016. Hurricane Sandy occurred from October 22 to November 2, 2012.

[71] Islamic Relief USA, "Volunteers Make MLK Day 'A Day On,'" *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 11.

[72] Penny Appeal USA, *Our Vision Eradicating Intergenerational Poverty: Informational Pamphlet*, no date - in circulation 2017.

[73] Penny Appeal USA, *#TeamOrange Penny Appeal USA: Are You In? Pamphlet,* no date – in circulation 2017.

identity – to define one's religious identity by choosing commodities or experiences instead of by a set of values - infuses all these activities, even those that are direct service events.[74] Those who are most active "consumers" of Penny Appeal social life are even offered a "prize": #teamOrange members who successfully raise ten thousand dollars are invited on a free international trip to participate in a Penny Appeal international project.[75]

Encouraging volunteers to organize a fundraiser or service event around a fun leisure event– such as a basketball tournament, ice skating night, or a bake-off – is a widespread incentive tool used by charities for younger volunteers.[76] Charities are explicit in their commitment to youth volunteers, from elementary school age through post-college. Youth are provided opportunities, empowerment programs, and mentoring to get first-hand experience of charity work with the hope that they will grow into leaders in Islamic relief and development programs.[77] United Muslim Relief's annual report includes its philosophy about mentoring university students at a key age to cultivate a "life-long" bond to learn, grow, and develop a voice to change the world.[78]

While staff say that younger generations are more interested in "getting their hands dirty" with charity work than their parents or grandparents, for many reasons from a desire for building community solidarity or resume padding for college applications, they admit that fun is still a

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[74] Miriam Gazzah, "European Muslim Youth and Popular Culture: At the Crossroads of Fun and Faith," in *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (New York: Routledge, 2015), 336-337.

[75] Penny Appeal USA, *#TeamOrange Penny Appeal USA: Are You In? Pamphlet,* no date – in circulation 2017.

[76] Islamic Relief USA, *Skate for Syria Postcard,* no date - in circulation for event on April 7, 2018.

[77] For an example of the promotion of youth programs, see Helping Hands for Relief and Development, "Youth Empowerment Program," *HHRD News*, 2017, 4.

[78] United Muslim Relief, "University Chapters," *United Muslim Relief Annual Report 2016*, 20-21.

necessary element for retainment.[79] Youth can "get hooked" in with a "trade off" of volunteering to get access to fun activities, shared one regional staff leader. For example, one national charity will get young people to run their booths at the annual Six Flags Muslim Family Day by offering them free tickets to the amusement park.[80] The consumptive character of volunteering was extended further when charities started to offer youth international trips to the Middle East and Africa, where they can gain cultural cache among their peers when posting from Kenya or Jordan on Instagram.[81]

One staff member bluntly said that volunteering was initially seen as uncool by youth, so they added basketball and movie nights to meal packing events. After this change, participation grew and continued to expand because the volunteers' peers saw it was cool and fun to attend.[82] A different staff member shared that these activities are important because "part of the organization's purpose is to serve as a community space where young people who want to be involved in service can also experience being with the Muslim community…socially," demonstrating that "the mundane spaces of recreation, consumption, and labor become stages for spiritual self-transformation."[83] In other words, being in physical proximity with one's religious community, without engagement with explicitly religious ritual actions, can impact youth's (and

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[79] Charity Staff 42A, in interview with author, September 18, 2017.

[80] Charity Staff 42C, in interview with author, September 18, 2017.

[81] For an example of youth international trips, see United Muslim Relief, "Volunteer Deployment," *United Muslim Relief Annual Report 2014,* 14-15. For an example of advertising to make these international trips enticing to youth, see Helping Hands for Relief and Development*, Youth for Africa Postcard,* no date - advertisement for January 2018 trip.

[82] Charity Staff 44, in interview with author, September 21, 2017.

[83] Charity Staff 28, in interview with author, July 25, 2017. Justin Wilford, *Sacred Subdivisions: The Postsuburban Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 6.

others) religious beliefs and behavior. Moreover, the staff who are present earn trust as authority figures by using language and behavior that are "soft and compassionate" and matched with cultural competency in areas relevant to volunteers' everyday lives, like videogaming. By fronting their interpersonal skills over overt demonstrations of religious sciences as one would expect from an *'alim*, they follow the logic of popular preachers like Amir Khaled whose main concern is to "make young people love religion instead of fearing it."[84]

Beyond elementary and secondary school children, charities also provide this social space for recent college graduates in their twenties. Many participants in this demographic had a Muslim community in college through a friend group or the Muslim Student Association but now feel isolated and, staff report, are looking for the "safety net of a group" within an organization "guided by Islamic principles."[85] Amira Mittermaier writes about a similar phenomenon in Egypt; through friendship and shared experiences in service, over time repeat post-college volunteers can see charity service sites as a "space of collective self-cultivation and moral education."[86] For youth of all ages, many charities will regularly allow them to use some of their headquarter's space for just "hanging out," sometimes providing a television or other recreational devices, in order to increase their social bonds and grow together in Islam.

Ensuring spaces are defined by a feeling of informal socializing instead of doctrinal expectations around ritual practice can ensure that not just youth but all Muslims feel welcome

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[84] Dietrich Jung, et al, *Politics of Modern Muslim Subjectivities: Islam Youth, and Social Activism in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 120-121.

[85] See Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina press, 2014). Charity Staff 28, in interview with author, July 25, 2017.

[86] Amira Mittermaier, *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 80.

and excited to participate in volunteering. Several staff commented that because volunteering events do not exert the same religious pressure about piety that they find in dominant Muslim spaces like the mosque, MSA, or Islamic educational institutions, it makes it easier for Muslims who feel ostracized or anxious about expectations to attend. These feelings of disempowerment or exclusion are a regular issue especially in mosque communities for youth, women, and converts as documented by the 2016 project from the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, "Reimaging Muslim Spaces: Creating a Welcoming and Dynamic Mosque."[87]

At volunteering events, even though it is intended to serve religious ends for Muslims as a ritual activity, there are no expectations when entering the space about dress code, gendered use of space, or ritual action that would separate people on the basis of *fiqh*, Islamic branch, or level of religious knowledge. These divisions and tensions do not disappear, but the "mood" set by the charity in volunteer spaces is an expectation to be friendly and welcoming to everyone who is there to serve humanity, making it harder for normative religious expectations to be explicitly enforced.

One staff member stated, "I have met Muslims that don't normally come to the mosque, but they do want to do things as Muslims, and we serve as an entry point to those Muslims too. They don't have a mosque-centric life. Still, they have Muslim identity and want to build one."[88] Another staff pointed out that when he was in his college MSA, inviting classmates to MSA events would only attract people who were "more practicing," whereas invitations to charity events brought everyone out. He said that he would "see people who would ask to help [with charity events], that I would never see at the masjid. And then see them come back again [to

[87] Bagby, et al, "Reimagining Muslim Spaces."

[88] Charity Staff 28, in interview with author, July 25, 2017.

volunteer]. Through [volunteer] work people get a better understanding …to change [them]selves for the better."[89] Like the community studied by Howe, staff argue that "creating a comfortable space facilitates the development of spirituality" that is wider than even established Muslim spaces.[90]

Consequences of Conceived Space

Thus far, I have discussed charities setting up volunteer service opportunities as a space for Muslim community making and spiritual development through a shared ritual practice of *sadaqah*. Formal messaging, staff behavior, and the setup of the physical space are all presented as an attractive, religiously sound, and welcoming space for all Muslims to participate. This logic nonetheless creates limits by way of access, inclusion, and representation, which reinforces a particular interpretation of Islamic charity that eludes the all-embracing community messaging.

First, volunteer service sites are overwhelmingly designed as a social space for volunteers to experience a one-directional practice of charity despite the community-building language used in the stated goal of the program. Images of recipients at service distribution events are featured widely in formal messaging and recipients are given profile boxes detailing their struggles or are quoted giving thanks and praising the volunteers and organization. Current or former recipients of an organization's programs are acclaimed for volunteering themselves, with several instances of charities calling them the "best" volunteers or refugees turned volunteers who become the

[89] Charity Staff 42A, in interview with author, September 18, 2017.

[90] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 74.

"trunk of the tree" for their community.[91] Amid this praise is still language that draws a separating line between volunteers and , instead of a presentation of service in which all people present are recognized as community members aiming to cultivate healthy and just shared community. A 2017 report from Islamic Relief USA from their annual Thanksgiving turkey distribution in Washington, DC actually mentions a recipient literally crossing the line: "Resident Josephine came to get a turkey, but she saw the line and hopped across the line to help stuff bags for other residents."[92]

Man Jia Janet Xiao calls these two dialectical logics of non-profits "charity" and "demos" in which charity is a "framework in which "the poor" are acted upon" and *demos* "[constitutes] a community in which all are citizen-participants."[93] The conceived quality of volunteer events skews towards charity over demos. Websites, social media, and most print media advertising domestic service events are made to inform and excite volunteers (and donors); it is most often the case that information for recipients is not readily available on websites for things like how to register for a monthly food distribution card, sign up for sewing classes, or access the on staff case worker. Volunteering for packing care kits and direct service events is organized with an open door policy, but there are often enforced regulations for recipients' presence. And while volunteers are always encouraged to develop a lasting relationship with the charity organization

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[91] ICNA Relief Chicago, "Refugee Screening Process for Entry to the United States," *ICNA Relief Chicago Year in Review 2015*, 19; Zakat Foundation of America, "Zakat Foundation Helps Resettle Rohingya Refugees in Chicago," *Zakat News*, Fall 2017, 28.

[92] Islamic Relief USA, "Something to Be Thankful For," *Partnership Report*, Summer 2017, 10.

[93] Man Jia Janet Xiao, "Co-Forming a Hologram: The Community Empowerment Fund as Charity and Demos" (unpublished paper, Duke University, Spring 2014), 4.

there is not the same effort to ensure that volunteers are developing relationships of "reciprocal attachment" with recipients as fellow community members of a *demos*.[94]

Taken to its logical conclusion, volunteer events can make recipients play the role of the "extra" at the event for the sake of volunteers to both learn technologies of the self as charitable organizers and forward their personal spiritual development, especially for youth for whom volunteering is described with training language.[95] Without acknowledging the inequalities of power, events like these do maintain an "order of beneficence." Giving charity, "rather than being the sharing of what some received for the good of all, becomes instead the noble gesture of the privileged toward the poor."[96] This can reinforce paternalistic racial dynamics in American society, in some instances where mostly Asian and Arab Muslim volunteers are assisting Black communities. At the same time, volunteers' religious obligation to charity is ultimately to please God for their own salvation. While charities have public humanitarian commitments to social change, the religious obligation is to serve for the sake of God of which helping individuals is a secondary consequence.[97]

Because voluntary service events are run in an informal and fun way, it makes room for alternative relations there that are closer to a social order of *demos*. Most often, when former or current recipients are working as charity staff in their residential community, they set the tone as one of mutuality with recipients as demonstrated in the closing section of the previous chapter. The mental barrier falls of a line between staff/volunteers and recipients and instead the space

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[94] Xiao, "Co-Forming a Hologram," 17.

[95] Jung, et al, *Politics of Modern* Muslim, 152, 16.1

[96] Xiao, "Co-Forming a Hologram," 18.

[97] Mittermaier, *Giving to God,* 94-97.

feels like a communal gathering, where everyone benefits from mutual efforts to care for each other. Recognition of power differences does not disappear, but allows volunteers and recipients to, in Xiao words, "recognize that they share a common world while also allowing for them to inhabit different spaces—and therefore bear different responsibilities—as citizens within that world of meaning."[98] This is reinforced when recipients and volunteers work together outside of service events in advocacy work to change conditions in their area, modeled nationally in the work of the Chicago and Atlanta-based Inner-City Muslim Action Network.

Demos sites also emerge where charity leaders come from American marginalized communities targeted by service events. For example, African American leaders of a monthly meal distribution event in a predominantly African American area host a large contingent of Asian and Arab suburbanite volunteers. One leader described his work as creating "solidarity through service," where non-Black suburban volunteers confront their stereotypes and dismantle their "deficit model" of Black communities. Over time, he explains, volunteers can recognize the non-monetary benefits they receive from engagement with recipients.[99]

The second consequence of how volunteering events are conceived as spaces by charity organizations is linked to questions of power, relative to class, race, and citizenship status among volunteers. In an attempt to create a comfortable and welcoming space for volunteers, especially youth, mainstream American consumptive and leisure practices are used for events, from distributing organizational t-shirts to hosting video game nights. Moreover, volunteering for the

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[98] Xiao, "Co-Forming a Hologram," 12. One example of an attempt at demos-centered relationships is ICNA Relief's Client Mentor Program. See ICNA Relief Chicago, "Why Be a Mentor?," *ICNA Relief Overview 2016*, 42.

[99] Charity Staff 69A, in interview with author, November 4, 2017.

sake of *sadaqah* is regularly situated with the language of community service, which politicizes the ritual act into a larger civic tradition in American society.

These choices to use American culture as a positive organizing choice for volunteer events obscures the inherent racial and class inequities of American society, and, by extension, among volunteers.[100] As a result, Muslims invested in normative American culture are afforded greater comfort at service events as volunteers, inadvertently rewarding model minority identity practices. For example, several major charities welcome police officers to join as volunteers in service events like back-to-school backpack giveaways. Police are presented according to a normative American ideology as partners in creating a safe and healthy local community. Volunteers uncomfortable with police presence because of experiences of systemic police violence are left uncomfortable and possibly ostracized if they express opposition.[101] In addition, creating service events as a form of consumer practice can also obscure class access to volunteering when many Muslims cannot afford to give their time and labor to volunteering practices.[102] Without addressing the real differences in experience and access by race and class, volunteering spaces can become another site of racial segregation in American Muslim communities, in what Jamillah Karim calls "ethnic Muslim space."[103]

Collectively, the expectations of a "good volunteer" reinscribes American Muslims into a good/bad binary in which Muslims who reject the norms of volunteer events are rendered

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[100] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 70.

[101] ICNA Relief, "Back 2 School Giveaway," *Annual Report 2017*, 15-16.

[102] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 99.

[103] Jamillah Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender Within the Ummah* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 53-54.

suspect. Sunaina Marr Maira argues that the War on Terror surveillance state makes it difficult for Muslims, especially young people, to escape these notions of "'moderate' and 'extremist' Muslim American politics that regulate acceptable political subjecthood" to narrow projects of "liberal reform and national redemption."[104] The expectation of moderation also pushes Muslims to conform to model minority expectations, evidenced in the 2007 report put out by the Pew Research Center "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream" where Muslims happiness in the United States is tied to ideas of assimilation and moderation.[105]

This pressure is intimately part of the history of large scale American Muslim community service traditions. Two major organizations – Islamic Relief USA and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) started large scale community service events shortly after 9/11 – Humanitarian Day (2002) renamed the Day of Dignity and the "Muslims Care" program "encouraging volunteerism in Muslim communities," respectively.[106]

Serving in the United States instead of sending money abroad also "proves your loyalty" to the well-being of fellow citizens over those seen by the United States government as potential terrorists or assumed "enemy combatants" abroad in Pakistan or Syria.[107] "Good" volunteering events reflect neoliberal language and ideology in which service events help individuals in need

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[104] Sunaina Marr Maira, *The 9/11 Generation* (New York: New York University Press), 231.

[105] Tom Rosentiel, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," *Pew Research Center*, May 22, 2007, https://www.pewresearch.org/2007/05/22/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream/.

[106] Islamic Relief USA, *Partnership Report,* Summer 2013. At the base of each page IR USA printed a timeline of their achievements and growth. They share that 2002 was their first Humanitarian Day, which was renamed Day of Dignity in 2012. Council on American-Islamic Relations, "Challenging Common Misconceptions," *American Muslims – A Journalist's Guide to Understanding Islam and Muslims* (2015), 41. CAIR established the "Muslims Care" program in 2003 and encouraged volunteerism in Muslim communities.

[107] Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 97-98.

to take responsibility and develop their skills to become worthy members of society. In the same pamphlet that celebrated ICNA Relief creating community bonds between Muslims and their neighbors in the response to Hurricane Sandy in 2012, another section quotes a volunteer, "If we keep on working like this [providing relief], definitely, we can change everybody's mind…There are different kinds of people in every ethnic [sic] and religion. There are some good, there are some bad. And we are the good people."[108]

These oppressive conditions leave little room for charities to organize more radical action to fight inequity and injustices with volunteer events on a large, visible scale. Frustrations felt by organizational staff about this oppression, even at the highest level, is often left out of public view. For example, one charity leader privately expressed frustration that youth educational programs he set up in a Muslim majority country were constantly interrupted or rendered inoperable because of American drone bombing in the region.

Even with these challenging conditions, charities are trying to make a space for Muslims to come together that is welcoming, where Muslims can trust each other and build community around Islamic values that strengthens individual and group religious identity.

Lived Space of Volunteer Events

The final characteristic of service events, "lived space," is space as it is made by the Muslim volunteers' experience, who engage and read material space with their own symbolic engagement. Encountering the physical and social spaces prepared by charities for ritual practice, volunteers find meaning in their experience that fit and exceed the organizations' conceived

[108] ICNA Relief, "NYers of the Week: Muslim-American Group Helps Sandy Victims, Spreads Understanding," *Once There Was a Home! Hurricane Sandy and ICNA Relief's Response Report* no date - in circulation 2016.

purpose to concretize charities as a necessary religious institutional space to enact Islamic charity in the United States. This section explores lived space of Muslim volunteers working at service events sponsored or organized directly by American Muslim charities.[109]

Volunteers working at charity service events mostly fall within the age range of teenagers to working age adults, but there are regularly children and senior volunteers as well.[110] Youth usually only outnumbered other groups when volunteering as a group or for internships. Generational differences exist in service history, where older participants' volunteering experience predates national Muslim charities. Many of the later have dedicated time to building earlier institutions such as mosques, schools, and civil rights organizations in addition to meeting charitable obligations to socio-political "Islamic" causes here or abroad. In contrast, the younger generations of Muslim volunteers were socialized into their religious community through established mosques, Islamic schools, college MSAs and take for granted the existence of national Islamic charities.[111]

Across demographics, Muslim volunteers have mixed motivations for attending volunteering events that are shaped by "wider fluid geographies of cultural and historical forces."[112] Their "multiplicity of imbricated desires" does not fall neatly along the lines of

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[109] Muslims generally make up the majority of volunteers at these events, but non-Muslims are often present. Because I am analyzing the religious understanding and discussion of volunteering for Muslims, I will only focus on that population at these events.

[110] I did not interview minors (below the age of 18).

[111] This parallels the generational history divisions described by Lara Deeb among women volunteers at a Shi'a charity organization in Beirut, Lebanon. See Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 187.

[112] Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 31.

secular or religious because American Muslim volunteers do not live bifurcated social lives.[113] What is shared is the taken action to attend a social event defined as a service opportunity, provided by an Islamic organization to serve humanity for the sake of God. Therefore, even if everyone is propelled by a variety of motivations, they become part of what Sabith Khan calls communities of conscience, fluid and situational "groups or networks of individuals who come together to solve problems, often through existing organizational structures."[114]

After collecting and analyzing ethnographic observations and volunteer interviews at Muslim charity service events, certain trends did emerge in the reasons that Muslim volunteers gave for attending, resulting from both social forces and personal desires. Considered together, Muslim volunteers experience service sites in four main ways: as a space to feel good, to fulfill a moral duty, to achieve personal improvement or development, and to secure community. Most people framed these aspects religiously with reference to Islam. Interviewees displayed competing ideas of personal religious development, clustering around two main types of subjectivities. The first subjective position was the self-reliant, entrepreneurial individual who takes a consumption-oriented stance towards volunteering and the second was the peer-oriented volunteer who is interested in collectively binding practices to ground their piety.[115] Both ideal types seek out collective activities of service to achieve this moral development, where "personal piety [is] … brought into the public realm" in order to serve humanity for the sake of God.[116]

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[113] Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own*, 50.

[114] Khan, "New Styles of Community," 948.

[115] Jung, et al, *Politics of Modern* Muslim, 22, 86.

[116] Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 169.

For volunteer interviews at service events, I asked three questions: "What are you doing here? Why are you here? And why come out with this organization?" In response to these simple questions, volunteers would offer pithy replies or long anecdotes, speaking plainly or waxing philosophically. One 19 year-old woman, Zahraa, at a large emergency kit packing event at a charity headquarters gave a riveting answer that is worth quoting in full as an emblematic example. Her words capture all the main themes that emerged in volunteer reflections on their experience of participating in service events with Muslim charities:

> To be totally honest with you, I came here kicking and screaming because …I really didn't want to be here. I'm in college, and I have so much homework to do. My parents were like, you have to suck it up. They tricked me into coming, actually: we got in the car to do something else and they were like surprise, we're driving an hour to this event! And I was a total brat about it. But then I came here. And there's all these people that are coming together for one joint effort. You can feel love in the room and adrenaline in the room. I feel that type of energy is only powered and fueled by doing something with a purpose. So, I feel like my afternoon got a lot better spent than it would have just probably loitering around at home and not doing anything.
>
> It's an atmosphere of something where you're doing something productive. I feel that's really beneficial, not just to the people that you're helping out, but also to your own self, because I'm managing a table [for packing emergency kit boxes]. A lot of the people at my table are high school kids, and I heard a lot of them talking about the fact that they would normally be asleep right now. But they're doing something that's good and productive. And that's making them feel good. And not just packing stuff, but they're also being involved with the community. And I think that's something else that's really important because this is a Muslim organization. The political climate that we're in right now makes people often feel disenfranchised, not just from the country that they're from, which is America, but also the religious community that they belong to. There's a risk that's created, when young people want to disassociate themselves from where they come from, because they feel it doesn't belong to them, or because they feel like it's been so politicized that they just don't want to be attached to it anymore. So, they're doing something like this, that's not explicitly quote unquote Muslim. But is something that has tenants of belief in it because we're doing service. And that's an integral part of our faith that ties you to your community and that ties you to your faith. That is a personal experience, but also a larger experience of bonding with the people around you. For all those reasons, I'm here today, but mostly for my parents.
>
> This is an organization that's an hour and a half away from us, but I have a unique experience with it because I interned for them when I was 16. And then I also went to Jordan when I was 15 through the organization. And my mom's very close friend is the one that's running this event now, Aliyah. So, my mom was like, "Aliyah said that we're needed." What's special about this charity organization is Aliyah. She puts her heart and

> soul into everything that she does. I mean, she never gets enough recognition for it. But the fact that she just keeps doing it is a testament to her not doing it for other people, but for the fact that she actually believes in it and thinks she's doing it for a higher purpose. And she fulfills that by just seeing the turnout that comes to everything that she does. We have this word called *baraka*, the reward that's in it. There's a special type of reward that comes when you have people that have pure intentions and pure hearts. And when you see that drive, it ripples, and it creates that energy that I was talking about earlier. I genuinely believe that Aliyah is the starting point that makes the support for everybody else to be able to go off of, like—I went to Jordan with her. I've known her my whole life. And I can just say that she is a light that exudes to other people, whether or not they realize that they're taking from it and being lit up for that.[117]

Zahraa's reflection begins and ends with a focus on affect – the energy, love, being "lit up" and feeling good at the pack-a-thon. Volunteers overwhelmingly shared positive feelings about participating in service events, saying that they "like," "love," and "enjoy" doing the work, which produces a "good" or "warm" feeling. Other repeated feelings include satisfaction, excitement, and joy. One woman even reported that she had chronic headaches but whenever she was headed to the charity center, they disappeared![118] This affective effect is a motivator to come to service opportunities. Volunteers also use ocular language to explain that these attractive feelings arise from being physically present and "seeing" the impact of charity on the faces of recipients, as opposed to providing *zakat* and *sadaqah* through monetary donation alone.[119]

She goes on to say that this positive energy, a kind of collective effervescence, is produced because volunteers are doing something productive, which is of beneficial to others and themselves.[120] From another volunteer at the same event as Zahraa, "There's just love

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[117] Charity Volunteer 42, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[118] Charity Volunteer 20, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

[119] Charity Volunteer 37, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[120] For the concept of collective effervescence, see Émile Durkheim's classic *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

everywhere and everyone's trying their best to do what they can…It's not just the presence of people but that they are willing to help, you know?"[121]And while Zahraa does not see the act of emergency kit packing as an essentially religious activity, it is situationally a religious act because it fits the "tenant of belief" of service. Coming to charities' service events is then a religious duty to serve others that reflexively will benefit the volunteer.

When asked why they showed up to a volunteer event, volunteers overwhelmingly offered a religious explanation, sometimes buttressed with Qur'an or *sunnah*. Helping people in need, they shared, is a "part," "tenant," and "core principle" of Islam. Giving is not altruistic but a right of the poor over those with wealth, which is not theirs to magnanimously bestow but a loan from God. It is, in their words, a "duty" and "obligation" to God to help humanity, regardless of background, although some volunteers argued it is just "basic humanity" to help people.[122] Volunteer Batool vocalizes this perspective: "Charity, obviously, is a part of the religion. And so, I think it is a spiritual act. But I think an opportunity like this, I feel like I would also do just to help out. It's kind of two in one."[123] Others went further to clarify that even if their work is "Muslim based" their obligations are to assist their "own" neighbors and society, regardless of religion, which in some instances had a defensive inflection, in response to Islamophobic accusations that Muslims only help other Muslims and are disconnected from their local American community.[124]

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[121] Charity Volunteer 48, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[122] Charity Volunteer 51, in interview with author February 24, 2018.

[123] Charity Volunteer 33, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[124] Charity Staff 46, in interview with author, September 22, 2017.

In addition to bringing in a general humanism to their Islamic idea of duty, volunteers also brought in two different socio-economic justifications. For some, their obligation came from a place of financial privilege: "When we're more fortunate we have a duty. I want to thank God…I appreciate the fact that God gave me so much, [and] I want to give back to the community."[125] In contrast, others expressed a *demos* oriented sense of duty, that it was important to help because they too could be in a place of need in the future, whereas some combined the two perspectives: "As Muslims, we're supposed to help one another, because you never know when you need someone else's help. So, this is sort of paying it forward."[126] Altogether, volunteers communicated an understanding that fulfilling this duty demanded physical presence or participation in direct service work.

The benefit of attendance for the volunteer herself is threefold. First, by attending the event with other Muslims they become, in Zahraa's words, "fueled" or motivated to fulfill this religious duty. Volunteer Ayoob explains that when he attends an event, he can learn from others carrying out service, and in "physically helping, moving donations…a change manifests in you that, you know what, you *can* do this, you can help."[127] Volunteer events provide access to in-person communal ritual that enhances individuals' ability to practice their religion.

Second, continuous participation in service spurs moral development to grow in empathy for human suffering and in awareness of systemic socio-economic inequities.[128] On the other

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[125] Charity Volunteer 37, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[126] Charity Volunteer 44, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[127] Charity Volunteer 17, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

[128] Charity Volunteer 23, in interview with author, September 22, 2017.

hand, by modeling this form of *sadaqah*, volunteers encourage others to do good.[129] Not only are they fulfilling their duty but they benefit, like Aliyah in Zahraa's story, from others meeting their Islamic obligation because of them. Together, volunteer create a moral community through shared action. Noble Prince, a college aged volunteer, captures this when he shared his gratitude for being at a large community service day:

> I need intellectual people around me. I need kindhearted people around me. If you surround yourself with people like you, then you'll become a better person. If you surround yourself with people that have low vibrations, like low energy, then you start to pick up their habits…so I need these kinds of environments and these events.[130]

This leads to the third benefit volunteers see in coming to service events tied to religious duty. When Muslims volunteer at charity service events, it brings them closeness to God in this life and -*inshallah*- in the afterlife. Volunteer Shaadi believes that "by helping out…God's creation, we're also getting closeness to God and also kind of being an extension of the mercy that He's putting in creation."[131] Volunteers gained solace in the knowledge that with all the time put in helping those in need, they will be ready for the Day of Judgement when God will ask them what they did with the abilities and privileges afforded to them in this life.[132] Put plainly, serving people earns Muslims "points" to paradise, building their heavenly mansion brick-by-brick with each good deed.[133] However, volunteers did not use language to imply recipients were

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[129] Charity Volunteer 35, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[130] Charity Volunteer 28, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[131] Charity Volunteer 32, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[132] Charity Volunteer 16, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

[133] Mittermaier, *Giving to God*, 95. My reference here to a "house in heaven" is Qur'an 39:20: "But those mindful of their Lord will have elevated mansions, built one above the other, under which rivers flow. That is the promise of Allah. And Allah never fails in His promise." Translation: Mustafa Khattab, *the Clear Quran*, on Qur'an.com, https://quran.com/39/20.

merely a "medium" for an eschatological goal and instead focused on the humble fact that it was only by God's power that they were given these blessings.[134]

After affective pleasure, religious duty, and benefit, the final theme in Zahraa's interview is community. Her family and connection to Aliyah at the charity were the reason why she attended. Coming out for service is also a means for Muslims to bond while sharing in a religious experience, which "ties you to your community and that ties you to your faith." Zahraa believes that social "tying" is especially important in a hostile anti-Muslim environment where Muslims, especially youth, want to distance themselves from their religious identity. Altogether volunteer opportunities at charities strengthen preexisting relationships and build new ones among Muslims.

Most Muslims arrive at charity service opportunities due to preexisting bonds with their religious community and Muslim family members; it is not an exaggeration to say that volunteering is a social event. Almost every volunteer had a personal connection that encouraged them to attend, whether friend or family member. Many knew someone who worked at the charity who reached out in need of volunteers, and they came out of friendship and loyalty. Others saw the event brought up in a group chat or in a Facebook group or were encouraged to attend by their mosque, MSA, or Muslim girl or boy scout troupe. Volunteer Farzana described volunteering as "an extension of other community work I do in the Muslim community," in which she was a youth committee member for the Muslim American Society and also ran a women's weekly Qur'an study *halaqa*.[135] Charity volunteering is clearly integrated into Muslim volunteers' social world.

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[134] Mittermaier, *Giving to God*, 89.

[135] Charity Volunteer 13, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

Parents, like Zahraa's, are also keen to have their children attend volunteering events to instill the value of service and enjoy family bonding, both around religious identity. They want their children to be among a community of Muslims engaging in service as *sadaqah*. One mother said these events were the "best way to help teach my kids…to do whatever they can for anyone."[136] Even when parents took their kids to a variety of other community service events – interfaith, civic, environmental – they valued Muslim charities making clear the religious meaning of service. Many adults explained that they were present because of similar training from parents so that it became habitus, "it's just what you do."[137] There was a shared feeling at events that the Muslim community wanted young people to come out to "engage them spiritually and physically" and eventually become leaders to carry their community into the future.[138]

Some participants did not have a strong community and were able to find one through volunteer events at the charity. For example, I met Aysenur tabling at a national Muslim convention for an American national charity. A middle-aged woman with children, she had moved from Connecticut to New Jersey and had no religious community. She did not find a connection with a mosque but did when volunteering at a national Muslim charity: "It is a community where it isn't political, you can do good work. And that was what it's about. I'm so interested in doing good work, which [is] why I like it's not a judgmental group, you are wherever you are in your faith, it doesn't matter, you just work to help people."[139] She was there that day with another middle aged woman, Mimoza, who confirmed that she and Aysenur started

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[136] Charity Volunteer 46, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[137] Charity Volunteer 35, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[138] Charity Staff 46, in interview with author, September 22, 2017.

[139] Charity Volunteer 20, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

as strangers but are "now the closest friends."[140] At events, volunteers working together often became fast friends, and social media has helped people stay connected. Volunteering sites are understood as a social site for Muslim life.

Whether people came with social connections among Muslims or not, most were also looking to connect to the larger local community through their service. Beril, wanted to "be in touch with community" and "volunteering gets you to meet with the community where they want to be met, and then we develop trust."[141] Volunteers repeatedly said they wanted to "get involved with" as if they were standing outside their locale as an independent individual whereas others like Madina saw their service as one between "community members, neighbors, [and] friends."[142] These different perspectives often were impacted by the proximity of the volunteer's socio-economic status with recipient neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, many felt they had to prove their membership in their local neighborhood or as part of American society in general because of Islamophobia, in what Zahraa called the "politicization" of their religious identity. Volunteers exhibited significant concern about media representations of Islam and the pressure to disprove the stereotypes of the "terrorist" or the foreigner who is apathetic to the American town where they live. Correcting this mistake meant living Islam "in the truest sense of the word" and making sure that when they carried out service, others knew it was by Muslims.[143] Service work takes on a performance element, where

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[140] Charity Volunteer 19, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

[141] Charity Volunteer 24, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[142] Charity Volunteer 36, in interview with author, September 23, 2017.

[143] Charity Volunteer 19, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

onlookers are meant to see a "good" representation of Islam through Muslims helping their local community.

This defensive reflex was visible on a national scale when there was a surge in Muslim youth volunteering in 2015 after the anti-Muslim murder of three young people in Chapel Hill, NC – Razan Abu-Salha, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Deah Barakat— who were very active in domestic and international service work. United Muslim Relief, where the three volunteered and held leadership positions, went from a few college affiliates to blooming with college chapters across the country in the year after the tragedy.[144] This collective turn to shared service to honor their legacy transformed the forced marginality through Islamophobia into marginality understood, in bell hooks writing, "as a position and a place of resistance." Muslims refusing their dehumanization and murder by using a "counter-language" from the margins of Islamic ideas of the sacredness of human life honored and persevered through the *sadaqah* of service.[145]

In reviewing the many motivations and experiences of Muslims at charity service events as they arise from Zahraa's account, what is missing is mention of the charity organization itself. Does the charity as an institution inspire volunteers to come out? For Zahraa it was more about her familial relationship with senior staff member Aliyah. Among other volunteers, the responses were mixed. Many volunteers chose to come out to volunteer with a charity because it was a "good" organization, referring to the organizational values; its effective programming; and the

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[144] United Muslim Relief, "Our Three Winners Endowment," *United Muslim Relief Annual Report 2015*, 20. The Barakat and Abu Salha families initially met at a United Muslim Relief event. All three Winners were involved with UMR. Deah and Yusor started the Triangle Chapter of UMR and Razan became the Project Downtown (a food and supply distribution to the poor and unhoused) chair. For a timeline of the growth of UMR Chapters and the spike of growth in 2015 after the murder of Our Three Winners, see United Muslim Relief, "University Chapter Timeline," *United Muslim Relief Annual Report 2016,* 22-23.

[145] bell hooks, *Yearning*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 150.

good community it cultivates among volunteers and staff. Overall, volunteers were less interested in specific organizations than the institutional role of a Muslim charity to organize opportunities for Muslims to carry out their religious duty and "do something positive" together.[146] One volunteer, Ayoob, used a corporate metaphor to differentiate between charities – "it's not about one organization, it's like different cultures, Apple and Microsoft – engaged and friendly with each other."[147] Volunteer Selma spoke more plainly: "It's not about the organization. We'll support any [Muslim charity] organization that helps on a humanitarian level."[148]

Taken together, the themes of pleasure, duty, and community define Muslim volunteers' creation of lived space at volunteer events. Muslim who participated in charity volunteering events demonstrated a belief that their religious development as Muslims was strengthened through organized communal ritual practice of service work. Lara Deeb identifies this as the "primacy of the idea that a pious modern self is socially embedded and relational, where self-development is not a private act, but one where 'serving others' is its ultimate purpose."[149]

Conclusion

Henri LeFebvre asks in the *The Production of Space*, "what is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space to which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, whose code it embodies?"[150] In the case of American Muslim charities, the Islamic ritual act

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[146] Charity Volunteer 41, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[147] Charity Volunteer 17, in interview with author, September 16, 2017.

[148] Charity Volunteer 38, in interview with author, October 15, 2017.

[149] Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern,* 186.

[150] LeFebvre, *The Production of Space*, 44.

of *sadaqah* as conceived by charity organizations is spatialized into service sites, which are opened to everyday Muslim volunteers.

Using LeFebvre's spatial triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space, I have shown how charities have created material sites and spatial practices to shape and affect American Muslims' conceptions of Islamic charity and institutional belonging. Volunteering is introduced as an enhanced form of *sadaqah*, for which Islamic charities provide needed institutional management. Their authority rests on the use of epideictic rhetorical strategies to imply a shared moral community as well as the ability to make the site fun and inviting for all Muslims, thereby avoiding dominant debates about piety and comportment present in other major American Islamic institutions.

Muslim volunteers in turn take what has been provided by charities, both materially and ideologically, and accept the premise of volunteering as *sadaqah* through large scale participation. They find these sites attractive spaces of genuine enjoyment, moral cultivation, and religious community. Volunteers embrace the fun, "convivial" atmosphere that allows them to solidify and grow their religious networks of family, friends, and others who they grow to trust while serving together.[151] This strong social network, built from collective religious practice, not only works to manifest a community of conscience around American Muslim Humanitarianism but provides a third space for "political strategy of empowerment and articulation" against Islamophobic accusations that Muslims are inherently violent or uninvested in their local community.[152]

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[151] William Barylo, *Young Muslim Change-Makers: Grassroots Charities Rethinking Modern Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 72.

[152] Homi Bhabha cited in Soja, *Thirdspace*, 141.

By creating an inviting and purposeful space to practice Islamic charity, from which Muslims participants retain a sense of imagined belonging, American Muslim charity organizations have successfully introduced a new space within the larger matrix of American Muslim institutions. Their efforts to create a space to attract Muslims wherever they are in relationship to their faith and practice also sets a model for mosques and other religious sites searching for practices to become more "welcoming, inclusive, and dynamic." In this space, American Muslim Humanitarianism is enacted to serve those in need while shaping the religious sensibilities of Muslim participants as needed intervening forces for relief and development.

Conclusion

During Ramadan in 2020 a halal cart in the Little Pakistan neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York was distributing containers of meat over rice meals for free. A page plastered over the menu read: "No Iftaar Meals in Mosques Due to Covid-19. WE ARE HERE TO HELP! FREE MEALS FOR EVERYONE." The charitable act of providing food, especially to the poor, was dedicated on the front panel, "In loving memory of Mahmooda Shaheen and everyone who we lost to Covid-19." This cart was one of four across Brooklyn and Queens commissioned by the "Come Break Fast With Us" initiative, created by the Pakistani American Youth Society and sponsored by a local coalition of Muslim groups, restaurants, city government, and community organizations, to provide over 1,000 meals a day.[1] With mosques closed and food insecurity on the rise during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Muslim organizers found a creative way to maintain communal meals and meet the call to good deeds during the holy month.

This chapter offers concluding reflections on the future possibilities of charity among American Muslims and how they have been impacted by the pandemic. Because it is based on currently developing movements, discourses, and events, it is open ended and not theoretical. It looks at several trends present in the last five years across a spectrum where American Muslim Humanitarianism, for now, rests at the normative center for what constitutes theologically sound

[1] Zainab Iqbal, "Halal Food Carts Launched to Feed Over 1,000 People Every Day During Ramadan" *Bklyner*, April 30, 2020, https://bklyner.com/halal-food-cart-ramadan-meals/.

understanding and practice of Islamic charity. Following larger trends in American society, a notable divide exists among these theological perspectives between those which frame the incredible socio-economic inequities and violence in the United States as incidental to an otherwise fair order and others that mark these as systemic and structural. I end with the radical possibilities opened up by the pandemic, which push the moral center of American Muslim charity towards a more communalist theology in opposition to racial capitalism.

Technological Developments

Overall technological advancements at the end of the 2010s, and their impact on social behavior, have made it possible for American Muslim charitable action to become more participatory, decentralized, and entrepreneurial. Social media that was initially used as a one-directional announcement platform by charities has expanded to be a multi-directional space whereby supporters' re-posts and comments on an organization's posts, as well as their own posts using the charity's social media handle, are a crucial part of its visibility and messaging. The formal recognition given to social media pages and postings also allowed local initiatives to circulate far beyond their geographically-immediate networks of support.

Online crowdfunding platforms took off as a broad phenomenon at the turn of the 2010s, harnessing the reach of social media to raise funds by mostly small donations from a large number of people for a particular project. The American founders of LaunchGood created a niche site for Muslim-led crowdfunding for social good in 2013, but the idea was slow to catch on until a viral campaign in 2015 brought it greater attention in American Muslim communities.[2]

[2] Faatimah Knight, "Campaign: Rebuild with Love: Rebuild Black Churches & Support Victims of Arson across the South," *LaunchGood*, Summer 2015, https://www.launchgood.com/campaign/rebuild_with_love_rebuild_black_churches_support_victims_of_arson_across_the_south#!/.

Most national American Muslim charities over the last five years have secured a "Community Page" on the site to benefit from the popularity of this new form of fundraising. LaunchGood also encourages participation through religious promotions, such as the "Ramadan Challenge" that features a different campaign to support each day of the holy month. This and other challenges put on by the site are also a mechanism to increase traffic to campaigns anchored in less affluent communities to "equalize the playing field with crowdfunding."[3] By the end of the decade, their reach had grown exponentially, and in mid-2021 they have nearly 900,000 users who have raised nearly a quarter billion dollars total through the site.[4] It has created a unique role for itself in the Muslim charitable sector as a for-profit facilitator of charity without any direct participation in distribution.

Finally, applications (referred to as "apps") for financial activity, including donating funds, have become widespread in the United States but one specific to the Muslim community has not taken off.[5] Zakatify was an app of this kind started in 2018 to connect donors with *zakat*-eligible charities that they could add to a portfolio and donate to regularly through the app. It has only been downloaded roughly five thousand times and has less than fifty reviews.[6] While most reviews on major app distribution sites are positive, two reviews might point to its failure: the application charged a 5% service fee, which user H3Hatim equated to UberEats "[sweeping] into

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[3] Layla Abdullah-Poulos, "LaunchGood's Amany Killawi on Giving the Muslim Way," *Haute Hijab*, November 27, 2019, https://blog.hautehijab.com/post/interview-with-launchgoods-amany-killawi.

[4] "About Us," *LaunchGood,* Accessed April 28, 2021, https://www.launchgood.com/about-us.

[5] There are several *zakat* donation apps with greater traction for markets outside of the United States. *Zakat* calculation applications are more popular here in the United States, but they do not include options to donate directly from the app.

[6] Download number for the Zakatify app collected from the Google Play store on May 30, 2021. "Zakatify: Support, donate & give to charity," *Google Play*, https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.affinislabs.zakatify.app&hl=en_US&gl=US.

donations" and taking "profit that's being earned off the struggle of others."[7] User buffet bridge adds that "the organization that has direct connection to the needy is eligible to take part of your donations" not Zakatify, to which the developer responded that the *zakat* workers mentioned in Qur'an 9:60 include *zakat* collectors and does not necessitate that they also be the party to distribute the funds.[8] LaunchGood, in contrast, avoids these moral and Islamic legal questions by charging no platform fees, instead requesting "contributions" from donors for their operations.[9]

These technological developments have allowed everyone a greater reach for their fundraising and messaging regarding charitable action. While large charity organizations still command significant power and resources for communications and programming, social media and crowdfunding has made it possible for smaller organization or individuals to fundraise without the need for larger institutional support, especially for programming absent from national Muslim organizations, such as LGBTQ+ issues. Decentralized fundraising, and moving away from one organization's set of programs to campaign-specific drives, has led to a broader embrace of what it means to serve God and humanity through charitable giving than the dominant two categories of humanitarianism and devotional activity upheld by national Muslim humanitarian charities.

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[7] Apple App Store, Zakatify, Comment from H3Hatim from 2019 (no specific date given) "Poor Interface and Making Money of [sic] Other Peoples [sic] Struggles." The Apple App store is only accessible through its app and does not have a corresponding webpage.

[8] Apple App Store, Zakatify, Comment from buffet bridge from 2019 (no specific date given), "You don't belong in one of the 8 categories."

[9] "How Do I Cover LaunchGood Fees?," *LaunchGood Support*, June 12, 2021, https://support.launchgood.com/support/solutions/articles/35000016101-how-do-i-cover-launchgood-fees-.

Pursuing the Social Good: Philanthropy versus Community Care

Benefiting from these technological advances, philanthropic funds are emerging as a powerful form of collective charity among wealthy American Muslims. Instead of individuals giving independently to their charities of choice, philanthropic funds provide financial vehicles such as "donor-advised funds, giving circles and endowments" to guide their charity beyond what one philanthropic leader called Muslims' "traditional methods of giving."[10]

The most visible example is the Pillars Fund, started in 2010 by a small group of wealthy American Muslims who wanted move away from the intense focus of American Muslim charity on mosques and overseas aid. By 2017, Pillars had attracted two dozen donors, "mainly Muslims with South Asian and Arab roots who made their fortunes in the finance, tech, and medical fields," interested in giving large amounts towards the fund.[11] The Pillars collective fund is then distributed through competitive grants to organizations that provide social services but also others who for example create art, build research on systemic inequality, or produce other work that contributes to improving society.[12] The grantees constitute a combined portfolio, a "showcase of the most groundbreaking Muslim initiatives in the nation."[13]

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[10] Sarah Murray, "State Scrutiny Has Not Turned US Muslims Away From Giving," *Financial Times*, October 16, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/10d2c87e-d92a-11e9-9c26-419d783e10e8.

[11] Hannah Allam, "These Muslim Millionaires Want You to Think of Philanthropy When You Think of Islam," *Buzzfeed*, September 6, 2017, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/hannahallam/pillars-fund-secret-weapon-in-the-fight-against-islamophobia. The article did not mention the minimal amount given, or possibly required, to be part of the fund but implied that donations were at least close to $25,000. The Current Board of Trustees rules (2021) require a minimum $25,000 donation annually.

[12] "Our 2021 Organizational Partners," *Pillars Fund*, Accessed April 15, 2021, https://pillarsfund.org/grants/our-portfolio/. See the page for all grantees from 2015-2021.

[13] Allam, "These Muslim Millionaires."

Philanthropic funds like the Pillars Fund or American Muslim Community Foundation present a more fluid idea of what activities are worthy and necessary recipients of Muslim charity than dominant American Muslim humanitarian charities, including interfaith dialogue, civic engagement, and the arts.[14] In addition to taking a clear interest beyond the legal categories of recipients for *zakat*, Pillars' choices for grantees place a strong emphasis on the arts and public education about Muslims as a mechanism for cultural and social change. In one sense, these funds leave aid and relief to American Muslim humanitarian charities with significant budgets while they are focused on serving as a "venture capital incubator for social ideas."[15] However, they indirectly also offer a critique of humanitarian charities as part of a "traditional" and limited vision of what Muslim charity should accomplish.

A notable characteristic of these philanthropic funds that also differentiates them from humanitarian charities is the centering of donor priorities as opposed to language that centers religious obligations to particular populations or causes. Pillars' choice to use the term "philanthropy," a term from a European Christian context meaning "love of humanity," centers the affective position of the donor who cares to help his fellow human as opposed to *zakat*-centric language that places the foundational emphasis on an obligation to God.

Even as they are funding community-based work, Pillars' ultimate aim is to work alongside Ford Foundation and other major philanthropic players in the United States that

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[14] The American Muslim Community Foundation (AMCF) is a foundation that creates "Donor Advised Funds, Giving Circles, distributing grants, partnering on fiscal sponsorships, & building endowments for the American Muslim community. AMCF has committed to social basic needs, racial justice, and health equity initiatives by distributing more than $4,250,000 to over 300 nonprofits." See "About Us," American Muslim Community Foundation, Accessed June 11, 2021, https://amuslimcf.org/about-us/.

[15] Paul Sullivan, "A Fund to Support the Muslim American Community, Inside and Out," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/24/your-money/pillars-fund-muslim-americans-suppport.html.

maintain a mostly one-directional relationship of the ruling class retaining control over wealth and power by deciding who they fund in social movements. They are key players in the non-profit industrial complex, "a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements."[16]

This asymmetric control is in tension with Islamic concepts of recipients' "right" to charity as a redistribution of wealth and resources. It is equally present in humanitarian charities whose recipients are beholden to expectations of development or improvement. Philanthropic funds therefore face a similar struggle to that of American Muslim humanitarian charities in that even while they are fighting systemic inequities, especially ones of particular harm to Muslims such as racism, imperialism, and Islamophobia, their practice of charity through dominant industries of humanitarianism and philanthropy circumscribes their actions to within the status quo of the American racial capitalist order.

Muslim participants in these sets of practices should not be confused with the order itself, nor are they its intended beneficiaries in a continually white-centric structure. Their benevolent actions do make real changes in beneficiaries lives to fund an educational program or finance a voting access nonprofit. However, they nonetheless keep decision making power and control of resources within a limited circle of people that overrepresents individuals outside of the beneficiary community.

The longstanding, robust, and yet marginalized tradition of collectivist African American liberatory theology does challenge the status quo of racial capitalism. It expanded decision

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[16] Dylan Rodríguez, "The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,* ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 21.

making and resource control, and today has been preserved, adapted, and adopted by Muslims of all races. Black Muslim epistemologies and practices to resist racism and Arab and South Asian ethnoreligious normativity are propelled by a "loop" of building self-knowledge, developing ethics, and taking action in the service of social justice.[17] While African Americans are present across the larger US Muslim charity landscape, including decidedly pro-capitalist programs, it is this alternative tradition of care and justice that began in Black communities and now informs various Muslim collectives, which actively push against humanitarian and neoliberal objectives now centered in normative American Muslim charities. It is a transition from what Bogumila Hall identifies as a politics of recognition to a politics of refusal, "disengaging from state projects, disavowing cooperation and questioning the legitimacy of those with the power to recognize" and turning towards "communities' vernacular and embodied knowledges" to generate "new political spaces and …collectivities."[18]

One example that represents charity informed by a politics of refusal rooted in African American Muslim knowledge is the multiracial Chicago/Atlanta-based Inner City Muslim Action Network (IMAN). IMAN defines itself as a "community organization that fosters health, wellness, and healing in the inner-city by organizing for social change, cultivating the arts, and operating a holistic health center."[19] Charity is not a term used to describe the organization in its

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[17] Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 8.

[18] Bogumila Hall, "Art and Activism of the 'War on Terror' Generation: British Muslim Youth and the Politics of Refusal," *Project on Middle East Political Science Studies*, *No. 32: The Politics of Islam in Europe and North America* (December 2018), https://pomeps.org/art-and-activism-of-the-war-on-terror-generation-british-muslim-youth-and-the-politics-of-refusal, 85.

[19] Homepage, *Inner-City Muslim Action Network*, https://www.imancentral.org.

own literature, but IMAN organizes Muslim voluntary giving to rethink questions of equitable redistribution of wealth in a structurally racist and classist society.

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer explains that IMAN "privileges the U.S. Black American experience as a critical site of critique for U.S. Muslims" and treats the inner-city neighborhoods of Black and Latinx people as "culturally rich communities rather than as inner-city wastelands."[20] Community members who are direct recipients of IMAN's services sit in decision making positions of leadership, including the Board of Directors, and grassroots organizing and cultural production are at the center of programming. The line between donor and recipient blurs and a vision of collective transformation emerges. At the same time, IMAN faces a paradox that while it critiques the state and structural inequality it nonetheless fights for its constituents using the language of rights that "align with state objectives of subjectification."[21]

Another more recent example is the Believers Bail Out (BBO) initiative, which formed in 2018 to use *zakat* funds to bail out Muslims held in pretrial incarceration, including those held in immigration detention. The multiracial founders work to educate Muslims about the religious obligation to post bail for Muslims because they are held captive in bondage and incarcerated solely due to their state of poverty – two Qur'anic categories of *zakat* eligibility. Building on this new application of *zakat* donations in the American context, the all-volunteer team is trying to bring Muslim communities into "grassroots abolitionist advocacy" by understanding the larger structural elements of systemic violence that affect Muslim communities through mass

[20] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 37.

[21] Abdul Khabeer, *Muslim Cool*, 198.

incarceration, especially anti-Blackness and anti-Muslim racism.[22] BBO not only redirects *zakat* but reframes Islamic charity as more than relief: a mechanism to bring radical change to the social order – and has attracted wide attention, endorsements, and support within Muslim communities. While it is fiscally sponsored by a Chicago-based non-profit, its volunteer-only structure keeps their work running on a social movement model of collectivist decision making.

These two examples point to a possible future of American Muslim charitable work that thinks beyond American Muslim Humanitarianism and its focus on rights, relief, and nonprofit led service. It already informs more recent Muslim majority refugee communities organizing from positions of poverty and undocumented status as well as Muslim youth organizers who find rights-based language limiting in its critique of American imperialism and violence at home.[23]

Importantly, as shown in the example of BBO, multiracial Muslim communities at varying levels of the socio-economic ladder have grown disillusioned with the American promise of universal prosperity and respect under the law as economic inequality widens, social protests in summer 2020 reinvigorated the call for racial justice, and the War on Terror roars into the 2020s. Sijal Nasralla of the national Muslim activist organization MPower Change witnessed the spread of this radical remaking of charity in September 2020: "*zakat* is being framed within many U.S. mosques as a politicized charge to support those who are being targeted by state violence."[24] Breaking from the humanitarian value of political neutrality while serving those in

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[22] Mehreen Karim, "How Muslims Are Rethinking the Future of Ramadan," *Eater*, May 6, 2021, https://www.eater.com/22420889/the-future-of-ramadan-post-covid-19-pandemic-lessons.

[23] See Sunaina Marr Maira, *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

[24] Sanya Mansoor, "'At the Intersection of Two Criminalized Identities': Black and Non-Black Muslims Confront a Complicated Relationship with Policing and Anti-Blackness," *Time*, September 15, 2020.

need, American Muslims generally are showing more interest in taking a political stance against the status quo of American and global inequality rooted in racial capitalism and using collective wealth to bring about a more just society.

The Global Pandemic: Reimagining American Muslim Charity through Mutual Aid

The global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has already inflicted a massive toll on American society through suffering and disruption to everyday life. This challenging time has caused American Muslims to rethink and reimagine their charitable practices, which has the potential to set religious norms and practices in a new direction. Most immediately, Ramadan began roughly a month after the nation-wide shutdowns in March 2020 and Muslim communities had to get creative in order to distribute *iftar* meals and fulfil the call to service during the holy month. The "Come Break Fast With Us" initiative mentioned at the start of the chapter was one solution that brought together several sponsoring organizations and community businesses to serve their neighborhoods in New York City.

As the pandemic extended beyond a few weeks of lockdown to become a long-term crisis, Muslims alongside their non-Muslim community members saw the inadequacy and flaws of American political and social structures to provide for those in need in nearly every area of social service such as medical care, housing, food, and childcare. Some people were also systematically excluded because they were undocumented or unhoused. It also laid bare the priorities of our capitalist economic system where low wage workers were forced into hazardous work conditions for the sake of profit, with the burden overwhelmingly put on the shoulders of

women and people of color.[25] Some wealthier Muslims expressed shock when they learned about poverty among Muslims when, for example, local food banks made requests for halal meat.

In response to these structural failures, mutual aid practices cropped up across the nation. Communities pooled together skills and resources to meet the needs found amongst themselves, providing food, childcare, and gas money.[26] Muslim organizations or new Muslim collectives began to spring up as well to participate in mutual aid practices and some national Muslim humanitarian charities put significant funding towards these projects. Asad Dandia, co-founder of the volunteer group Muslims Giving Back explains his mutual aid work as a circular practice among those impacted by the pandemic: "We're not reaching out to the government, we're not reaching out to millionaires. This is a community coming together, with all of us pooling our resources to support one another."[27] Muslims in different contexts across the United States created these new initiatives, realizing the tenants of mutual aid– meeting needs, mobilizing people, and solving problems collectively – were compatible with Islamic ethics of collective welfare.[28]

For example, Minneapolis based activist Asma Nizami draws an analogy between her pandemic mutual aid work and a *hadith* on the interconnectedness of humanity and the value of

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[25] Lexi McMenamin, "What Is Mutual Aid, and How Can It Help with Coronavirus? Communities Across the Country are Organizing to Provide Relief Directly to People the Government Has Failed," *Vice,* March 20, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3mkjv/what-is-mutual-aid-and-how-can-it-help-with-coronavirus.

[26] Charlie Warzel, "Feeling Powerless about Coronavirus? Join a Mutual-Aid Network," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/opinion/coronavirus-aid-group.html.

[27] Aysha Khan, "New York City Muslims Work to Build Food Security During Ramadan," *Religion News Service*, April 28, 2020, https://religionnews.com/2020/04/28/new-york-city-muslims-work-to-build-food-security-during-ramadan/.

[28] These three key elements of mutual aid are taken from Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (New York: Verso, 2020).

compassion, which uses the metaphor of the human body: "When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever."[29] Ramadan, too, provides a model for mutual aid work for local New York City politician Zohran Mamdani, who shared, "Ramadan is fundamentally about solidarity - the belief that we must draw no distinction between a friend and a stranger, all deserve dignity."[30] *Zakat* was also frequently referenced as an Islamic mutual aid practice itself, "around redistribution of wealth."[31] Altogether American Muslims were finding inspiration from their faith tradition to respond through collectivist, anti-capitalist practices of mutual aid. Haddiyah Ali, co-founder of Abolition Ummah in Connecticut, wrote about her work with incarcerated people that "as Muslims, it is our responsibility to find ways to connect with people that the state is attempting to disappear…mutual aid is radical love in action."[32]

Muslims were finding mutual aid woven into their tradition through the pandemic and some like Ali developed a radical critique of the causes for suffering. The previously mentioned politician Mamdani shared that in participating in Muslim mutual aid work, "We've been able to reimagine, on a small scale, what a world would look like where we care and provide for each other…As we rebuild after the pandemic, we have the opportunity to learn lessons from this

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[29] Aysha Khan, "Solidarity, Not Charity: Why Mutual Aid Reemerged in the Pandemic, and Is Flourishing Amid Protests," *Religion News Service*, June 23, 2020, https://religionnews.com/2020/06/23/solidarity-not-charity-why-mutual-aid-reemerged-in-the-pandemic-and-is-flourishing-amid-protests/.

[30] Vanessa Taylor, "'Radical Love in Action': How Organizers Supported Vulnerable Muslim Communities during Ramadan," *Mic,* May 10, 2021, https://www.mic.com/p/radical-love-in-action-how-organizers-supported-vulnerable-muslim-communities-during-ramadan-76073842.

[31] "Radical Muslim Mutual Aid: COVID-19 Redistribution Fund," *Masjid Al Rabia*, https://masjidalrabia.org/mutualaid.

[32] Taylor, "Radical Love in Action."

solidarity and build a better world that strives beyond just 'normal.'" But what does that world look like and how does a perspective based in Islam inform that vision?

For one answer, I turn to a May 2021 podcast hosted by Darakshan Raja of Justice for Muslims Collective with Detroit organizer Hazel Gomez on the topic of mutual aid, *zakat,* and *sadaqah*. Gomez co-created Dream of Detroit, a community empowerment organization based on IMAN as a model, with a focus on housing and land development.[33] The episode organized their conversation in response to the isolation caused by the pandemic but also the deeper isolation revealed by the difficultly many populations faced in accessing basic needs, such as food or medicine. Midway through their conversation Raja asks, "How can *zakat*, *sadqah* and mutual aid be also interventions to really challenging capitalism and all this greed we have? Islam has a very clear ruling against abolishing debt and yet we are a society in debt, everybody's in debt."[34]

Gomez replied that *zakat* challenges the alienation caused by capitalism. In order to fulfill their obligations of care through *zakat* and more generally through religious ethics of care, Muslims must be in community to know who is struggling and in need of support. She notes the Arabic root of *sadaqah* is connected to the word for trust, and charitable action in Islam demands that you must develop trust and connections with your community members to correctly fulfill its purpose. This mutuality puts power back into the community instead of the typical leap to bring in nonprofits or other outside organizations to "save" them: it is relationships not money that make a thriving community. Gomez found these relationships crucial to shift her organizing

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[33] Homepage, *Dream of Detroit*, Accessed May 5, 2021, https://dreamofdetroit.org/.

[34] Justice for Muslims Collective, "Zakat, Sadaqah and Mutual Aid: Interview with Hazel Gomez," Facebook Live, May 4, 2021, https://m.facebook.com/justiceformuslimscollective/videos/5521779054530490/.

strategies in the pandemic to reach people through mutual aid, where community spaces were closed and charitable action was brought to the doorstep of people's homes.

Religion, in Gomez's assessment, is the "fuel" to mobilize people to perform Islamic charity as a form of mutual aid. She ties her argument about building and being in community to Qur'an 13:11: "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."[35] From her standpoint as a Muslim, nothing is possible without God, and God in this *ayah* requires that humans put in the work in order to receive divine favor. In this instance, American Muslims are then tasked with ending capitalist alienation by building mutually supportive community, using in part the divinely provided tools of charity.

Closing

The rupture of the global pandemic has had a profound effect on American Muslim charitable thought and practice. Before this crisis, the dominant theology of American Muslim Humanitarianism was already shifting to incorporate more systemic critique of racial capitalism and grassroots organizing methods as opposed to the nonprofit industrial complex, thereby changing the theology itself. These changes are evident in the programming and goals of American Muslim humanitarian charities, which continue to hold institutional authority over what constitutes correct charity. While philanthropic funds concentrate control in the hands of the upper classes, they too are using their grants to endorse the theological position of grassroots organizations that radically critique and seek to dismantle unjust socio-political structures.

The pandemic created greater vulnerability for all American Muslims and exposed those with socio-economic privilege to the incredible failure of the current social order to ensure the

[35] "Ar-Ra'd," Saheeh International Qur'an translation, *Qur'an.com*, https://quran.com/13.

wellbeing of humanity – a responsibility Muslims are beholden to as *khilafat Allah*.[36] Mutual aid work, a temporary measure where everyday people take responsibility for each other's survival and care, brought into view a more concrete possibility for a better world. For American Muslims it was also a demonstration of the purifying effect of charity on human life. Queen-Cheyenne Wade, a Muslim organizer of anti-racist mutual aid from Boston, shared, "Mutual aid can help us envision a world of unity, a world of equality, a world of balance. Class lines and racial barriers and all these constructs have no place in this divine unity that we're striving for."[37] For Wade and other American Muslims, charity is not simply a means to help or to show care, but to bring humans into consciousness of their shared humanity and ultimately the reality of all things emanating from a divine whole.[38]

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[36] A reference to Qur'an 2:30. *Khilafat Allah* is a concept of humanity as the deputy for God on earth or as the steward, again on God's behalf, for creation.

[37] Khan, "Solidarity, not Charity."

[38] This connects with American theologian amina wadud's concept of the tawhidic paradigm, developed in *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006). Michael Muhammad Knight provides a useful definition: "humans - as God's representatives on earth - are called to match God's absolute oneness in our treatment of each other as equal representatives of God without regard for race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, national origin, or any other imaginations of difference." Michael Muhammad Knight, "Building and Destroying," in *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Life of Amina Wadud,* ed. Kecia Ali, Juliane Hammer, and Laury Silvers (self-published, 2012), 33.

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