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Faith-Based Charitable Giving and Its Impact on Notions of “Community”: The Case of American Muslim NGOs

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Abstract With the current economic downturn, increased levels of unemployment, and poverty, the role of non-profits has come into spotlight. Considering that there are over 1.5 million NGOs in the U.S.A., and a proliferation of faith-based organizations (FBOs), their role in social capital, civic engagement cannot be discounted (Salamon, Sokolowski, and Anheier 2000). The role of FBOs has also been recognized as being important, and this became a part of mainstream discourse with the Charitable Choice provisions introduced by President Bill Clinton and consolidated under George W. Bush. While there is a lot of literature on Christian FBOs, there is very little written matter on American Muslim NGOs, or comparative research. American Muslim FBOs have emerged in the last 20 years, as important players in both domestic and international humanitarian aid movement. I will examine the case of Muslim faith-based giving to organizations to analyze how charitable giving towards them is influencing discourse about the American Muslim “community,” and how it is best to understand their work “relationally” rather than in opposition to other faith traditions (GhaneaBassiri 2010). While the narrative of giving among American Muslims seems simple and there is also very little literature on this issue, my preliminary research points towards a complicated landscape of giving, which combines both local giving at the mosque level and giving at the international level to the *Ummah* (community) or brotherhood, through transnational humanitarian aid agencies such as Islamic Relief. I argue that giving practices are creating new forms of “relational communities” in America. This notion of “relationality” can be applied in philanthropy, and is evident in the global humanitarian aid movement, as I demonstrate. I ask whether this is forming a new “moral geography” that is more pluralistic and broader than the one that we are familiar, especially in the American context. A closer examination of this phenomenon offers us insights into how a community is imagined and created. This paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on FBOs, and also that on American philanthropy.

Keywords Community; Faith-Based Giving; American Muslims; Philanthropy; NGOs

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Historically, scholarship on philanthropy points to its significance as a site for forming “relational communities” (GhaneaBassiri 2010). Contemporary debates in American philanthropy are no different and point to the potential of philanthropy in not only community development but also several other facets of institutional development and organizing, both across secular and FBOs (Frumkin 2006). While many aspects of FBOs, such as fundraising, the dynamics, and norms of giving, have been studied closely for Jewish and Christian congregations, such studies do not exist for American Muslim FBOs or congregations. Also, as several scholars have argued, the narrative of Muslim philanthropy is extremely narrow and usually focuses on national security perspectives, and is mostly grounded in policy literature (Singer 2008; Howell and Jamal 2009). Though there is a vast body of literature on *zakat* (a form of obligatory alms in Islam) and *sadaqa* (a form of voluntary alms in Islam) from a theological and historical perspective, it is not very helpful in painting an accurate picture of how philanthropy is evolving in Western societies (Singer 2008).

There are no large-scale sociological or anthropological studies that seek to explain the norms of giving among American Muslims and how the individual donors and organizations that receive these funds are utilizing them towards community development or related activities (Alterman and Von Hippel 2007; Singer 2008). What is known, however, is that there has been a steady increase in the number of mosques across the county (Bagby 2012). This study by Ihsan Bagby is among the only known surveys about social capital formation

and related issues at the local community level. Given that measures of social capital and philanthropy are positively correlated, one can assert that philanthropy is also growing in the American Muslim community. But, the landscape of giving is not clear, both in terms of how and why giving occurs and the motivations of the donors—whether they are purely religious, secular (despite giving to religious organizations), or both. The cultural dynamics of giving and the meaning-making process have also not been thoroughly examined.

The narrative of American Muslim philanthropy is thus very ill-informed and also based on recent developments, many of which have not been studied in a scholarly manner. As several scholars have argued, the “terrorism delusion” has overshadowed any other discourse of philanthropy towards Islamic philanthropic entities (Mueller and Stewart 2012). They argue that “the terrorism/counterterrorism saga persists determinedly, doggedly, and anticlimactically onward, and the initial alarmed perspective has been internalized” (Mueller and Stewart 2012:82). The narrative of terrorism and the resulting discourses of securitization have had an enormous impact on how Islamic charities are perceived and treated in courts of public opinion, as well as in legal cases (Crimm 2011). The resulting picture of Islamic philanthropy that exists is one-dimensional and does not capture the complexity of the role philanthropy is playing in the American Muslim community. In this paper, I address this gap in understanding and offer an alternative discourse—through an examination of how American Muslim philanthropy, to the “humanitarian aid” sector specifically, is creating “relational

communities" (GhaneaBassiri 2010) and also enhancing the understanding of what constitutes a "community" for American Muslims.

I begin with a brief overview of the philanthropic landscape of the U.S.A., and look at the various paradoxes that it contains, both in the "religious" giving space, as well as in the "secular" domain. While the U.S.A. is one of the most generous nations in the world, it is also one of the most individualistic ones. Then, I offer various perspectives of how a "community" has been defined and the ongoing contestations of this concept, given immigration, shifting demographics, et cetera. The fact that people are able to hold such deeply held notions of "common good" along with a great concern for their own well-being is part of the "enlightened self-interest" that Alexis de Tocqueville noticed when he wrote *Democracy in America* (2006 [1787]). Next, I draw on the findings of Jonathan Benthall (2008) and Amy Singer (2008), and analyze the humanitarian aid movement in the U.S.A., specifically among American Muslims, as a lens to look at the changing dynamics of how philanthropy is being conceptualized to create new boundaries of a "community." This new notion of community, I argue, is both cosmopolitan, in that it draws on trans-geographic ideas of welfare, charity, and universal brotherhood, and also draws on religious notions of belonging to the same *Ummah* (community), or spiritual brotherhood through Islam, as reflected in their mission statements and projects. Finally, I draw this connection to how this "relational understanding" of philanthropy is being operationalized through partnerships and projects in the humanitarian aid movement. Following

GhaneaBassiri (2010), who has investigated some historical aspects of American Muslim giving, I argue that philanthropy among American Muslims should be seen as a medium that defines new "moral geographies" by redrawing boundaries of a community, and is thus a very powerful tool that can have a lasting impact on how the community develops and forms its own identity in the American context. This framing will also help us move beyond the dichotomous Islam versus West framing that is not conducive to a clear understanding of the issues under examination (GhaneaBassiri 2010).

Philanthropy in America: An Overview of Individual Giving in 2012

Individual giving in the United States of America is estimated to be about \$316.23 billion in 2012, according to a recent report by the Giving USA Foundation (2013a). The annual report that is brought out by the Giving USA Foundation and Lilly School of Philanthropy documents giving by various sources, including publicly declared sources, as well as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) data. Of this estimated \$316.23 billion, about one-third or \$100 billion were directed towards religious institutions. This is a very large number, but, as a percentage, it has shrunk since the 1950s, when it was roughly half of the total giving.

Religious giving has undergone a shift since the recession of 2008, too. Other factors, including demographic changes, shifting denominations, and other sociological factors, have all taken a toll on this sector. As the Giving USA Foundation report

(2013a) pointed out, giving to religion was virtually flat (a -0.02% decline) with contributions estimated to be \$101.54 billion. Giving to religious organizations (mostly local houses of worship) represents the largest share of U.S.A. charitable giving at 32% in 2012. This is a reflection of both the historical role that churches have played in the country and the renewed salience that has come about for the FBOs sector. All of this is not to suggest that philanthropy is becoming redundant or that religious giving will decline, eventually. Quite the contrary.

Philanthropy is as American as apple pie, and its manifestations are visible across all segments of society. Those who can, write million dollar checks, while those who cannot, volunteer their time in the local church or to the fire brigade. As Robert Bellah has argued in his book, *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Americans are deeply individualistic, as well as idealistic about their communities. This book is a study of how Americans, who are among the most individualistic people in the world, often balance self-interest with an enlightened understanding of what is good for the others—through volunteering and acts of generosity. This fact of forming "civic associations" for the general good of society, of being civic minded, and politically active are features that have been admired by the American public. Philanthropy has been conceptualized in many forms, and various synonyms have been used for it: civic engagement, volunteering, charity, et cetera. All these words have been used to capture the same essential spirit—that of being of service to others and going beyond the call of duty to help others. As Bellah (1985:22) asks in his book, "How are we, Americans, to think about the

nature of success, the meaning of freedom, and the requirements of justice in the modern world?" these questions are being rephrased and re-examined in light of new challenges. In the year 2013, growing income inequality, religious fundamentalism, intolerance, decreasing civic engagement are all converging into a deadly mix of factors that threaten to overwhelm us, if not for the palliative effects of some of our "higher" values that bind us together. While these anxieties tug at our hearts and we seek solutions for them, hoping that the old structures and logics will offer us some hope, we may have to re-imagine some of the old institutions, and, in some cases, find new ones. One of them is that of philanthropy.

My working hypothesis in this paper is as follows: Philanthropy is not only an act of faith—indeed, it is one of the "five pillars" of Islam that binds Muslims, but also one that is being used to re-imagine new boundaries of "community" and create a new "moral geography" of many dimensions. The sub-thesis is that the notion of "community" among American Muslims is being defined in relation to other communities, and is not as rigid or fixed as is assumed. American Muslims are finding common ground and "contact zones" with others to practice their philanthropy, thereby extending the notion of "community." NGOs and campaigns that these organizations are creating are acting as these "contact zones" for various ideas to meet and converge. Further, the re-imagining is occurring through using tools such as an intertextual interpretation and reading of the Koranic injunctions of philanthropy and practices that are re-imagining what philanthropy is and its role in Muslim society.

Faith-Based Humanitarian Aid for International Affairs: The American Landscape

One of the “growth areas” in philanthropy is that of international humanitarian relief. As the Giving USA Foundation report (2013a) shows, this sector is robust and growing, despite the recession. While the history of the humanitarian aid movement, by which I mean “emergency relief,” is rich, there are new emerging configurations that need a closer examination.

While the international humanitarian movement’s work has been studied quite extensively, with rich

documentation of the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Oxfam, Save the Children, a similar study of the Muslim organizations is missing. It is only recently that with the work of scholars such as Jonathan Benthall, Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, Jon Alterman, Karin Von Hippel, to name a few, and a group of upcoming scholars, this field is beginning to grow. In this curious mix of actors, there are both “secular” and “faith-based” actors, and I confine my discussion to largely FBOs.

As the chart below shows, there has been an overall growth in this sector in the last three decades.

Figure 1. Giving to International Affairs vs. Combined Giving to All Other Charities.



Source: Giving USA Foundation (2013b:2).

Further, these FBOs within Christianity are what Robert Wuthnow (2006) has called “special purpose groups,” and span the spectrum of both New Age, as well as purely fundamentalist ones. Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan (2003) call for an analytic separation of “confessional” NGOs—those that are formally aligned with a particular religious group—from those that are “faith-inspired”—those that depend on a looser affiliation and commitment to Christian ethics and values. My focus in this paper is on the latter group.

In her paper titled “Religion and Giving for International Aid,” Allison Schnable (2013) argues that: 1) higher service attendance, placing importance on spiritual growth, and exposure to international needs through one’s congregation all are associated with giving to international causes; 2) individuals with more frequent attendance, those who place importance on spiritual growth, and evangelicals are significantly more likely to prefer church over government aid; and 3) aid organizations affiliated with a religious tradition enjoy an “in-group” advantage in support. This occurs, she states, because religions teach people values about the causes and effects of poverty, and thus encourage people to support particular causes. Also, religious congregations are sites for enforcing social norms, where one is “pressured to give” (Schnable 2013:89). Schnable’s argument is predicated on the understanding that it is hard to predict how exactly someone is motivated to give to a particular cause and why. Even with large studies, it is hard to say what caused a behavioral change.

Schnable further argues that religion is an important determinant when it comes to encouraging Americans to support international causes and also

to determine which organizations to support. There is reason to believe that religious approaches to relief and development enjoy continued legitimacy among Americans. World War I and II era religious aid groups like Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Relief, and the American Friends Service Committee remain important and financially robust providers of aid. As the evangelical movement blossomed in the latter part of the 20th century, so, too, did a crop of evangelical aid organizations: World Vision (1950), Samaritan’s Purse (1970), and Rick Warren’s P.E.A.C.E. Plan (2004). Religious groups across the theological spectrum advocated jointly for debt relief for poor countries in the late 1990s (Kurtz and Fulton 2002). Concomitant to these (largely) Christian and Jewish organizations are a new crop of American Muslim NGOs that have emerged—the most prominent of them being Islamic Relief—that are working alongside these NGOs and government agencies in emergency relief.

Similarly, Jonathan Benthall (2008) has argued that humanitarian relief until recently was a largely Western enterprise, and Western scholars largely underestimated the non-Western traditions of humanitarianism. To elaborate on this point, he states that, “The *Waqf* [inalienable religious endowment], for instance, dates back to the founding of Islam and is a very important institution in the Muslim world” (Benthall 2008:89). Similar to this are traditions in Confucianism, where paternalism sustained the Manchu dynasty for centuries in China (Benthall 2008). The Muslim humanitarian aid movement globally has grown in salience over the last two-three decades, as the leaders have embraced principles of transparency, accountability, and also have

become more active in the international realm, Benthall argues. Their growth has also resulted because of their "entry" into the international aid domain, by embracing international principles of non-discrimination (Benthall 2008:93).

While there has been a growth of non-denominational and "secular" organizations that offer relief without any proselytizing agenda, there are several others that have both a visible or subtle faith-based messaging in their program. At the other spectrum are several Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim organizations that have come out to operate as non-denominational, non-proselytizing, and "cultural pluralists," embracing all those who need and working from a purely humanitarian ethic of "caring for the stranger" (Appiah 2007). I will explore this dimension in the examining of the changing "moral geography" of American Muslim philanthropy.

Literature Review

This section provides a brief overview of faith-based giving in the U.S.A., and how it relates to the notion of "community." While FBOs have been positioned as one of the crucial levers to fight poverty and social depravity in the U.S.A., since the passage of the Charitable Choice provisions, the vast array of legislations made it easier for religious institutions to receive federal funding. The mechanism for funding them, the purposes of funding have all come under severe attack (Wuthnow 2006; Wineburg 2007). The salient arguments against funding FBOs by the federal government have involved First Amendment provisions of separating the State from religion by keeping the State funding out of religious institu-

tions. Secondly, scholars such as Wineburg (2007) have argued that funding FBOs is inherently "inefficient," given the bureaucracies that go with implementing this model of working.

The literature review is divided into four sections, each exploring an aspect of the issue at hand.

FBOs and Civil Society

With the salience of religion in the public realm, since the 1980s, there has been much research on the sociological and policy implications of religiously inspired organizations in the public sphere (Wuthnow 2006). In attempting to answer the question of *Why faith-based, why now?*, Wuthnow argues that FBOs are not well understood by those in the policy circles and there are many misconceptions about them. He states,

[f]or instance, I show that congregations, despite being more numerous, are less important than more specialized faith-based service organizations as service providers. I show that the most extensive ways in which congregations provide services do not occur through the formal programs on which most discussion has focused, but through the informal activities—fellowship circles, Bible studies, classes and worship services—that constitute what congregations themselves would refer to as the "caring community." (Wuthnow 2006:xvi)

His key argument in *Saving America* (Wuthnow 2006) is that

faith-based social services are a complex array of activities that sometimes work quite well, that often

differ little from the activities of nonsectarian organizations, that on the whole contribute positively to the functioning of civil society, and yet that also play a relatively small role in relation to government and other service providers. Faith-based agencies must therefore be understood in terms of their linkages with larger civil society networks of which civil society is composed. (p. 7)

This means that FBOs can, and perhaps should, be examined for the factors that shape other non-religious organizations, such as social capital, linkages to political structures, their needs for creating their own identity, et cetera. The results in *Saving America* (Wuthnow 2006) are based on three national surveys, comprising both qualitative and quantitative data. The data dig deep into questions such as how these congregations provide services to the needy, how faith is expressed in these organizations, and the kinds of clients who seek help, among other factors. As a contrarian book, *Saving America* points to data that many of the assumptions about congregations and FBOs are wrong. For one, congregations do not provide as many services as do specialized FBOs. Also, the reasons why some FBOs are effective are the very ones that would disqualify them from receiving federal government support. Finally, Wuthnow argues that faith-based services contribute positively to the cultural norms in civil society by promoting trust. He argues for continuing federal support to the FBOs by saying, "Yet there is considerable evidence to suggest that specialized faith-based agencies function just as well as non-sectarian agencies, and for this reason, should not be discriminated against in receiving government support" (Wuthnow 2006:xvii). This is by no means

an uncontroversial view as many scholars and practitioners are vehemently opposed to support of FBOs through the State apparatus, as it compromises many of the First Amendment provisions and is seen as undermining American democracy.

Wuthnow's argument is relevant to the one I am making here, that faith-based giving to FBOs can strengthen civil society and also form new "relational spaces" for American Muslims. Wuthnow makes a strong case for considering the value that FBOs bring in increasing social capital, other "loose networks" that can have a positive impact on society.

The value of renewed interest over the past decade in civil society is that it reorients thinking away from the modernization story and criticisms of that story. Where modernization pointed to institutional differentiation, civil society emphasizes the interaction among institutions. Voluntary associations draw people from their families and workplaces into organizations that may look very similar to businesses even though they are not oriented towards profit, and their activities may link local concerns with national interests and generate a political response even though they are not part of the government. (Wuthnow 2006:16)

The debate about religion, policy, and involvement of the federal government is a complex one and is on-going, with no final agreement thereon. While the debate rages on, there is growing recognition that as complicated as the discourse about FBOs is, one cannot ignore them.

In case of American Muslim NGOs, Nina Crimm (2011) has argued that these NGOs provide much

needed assistance in times of crisis and humanitarian disasters in the developing world, and this is a matter of human dignity. She states that ensuring that those impacted by disasters get support to restore their political, social, economic, and other vulnerabilities is a task these organizations provide, and that these goals might serve to keep the terrorist groups at bay. Approaching American Muslim NGOs as agents who can further the cause of human dignity around the world is crucial, she says, as many of them have been providing much needed humanitarian services for decades now, and have an element of trust that many government agencies do not.

The Changing Notions of “Community”

While scholars and thinkers have argued that America is essentially an individualist society, with the primacy of “individualism” as the nation’s creed (Bellah 1959; Wuthnow 1991), there have been calls for reviving the “communitarian” ethic in American society, one that Alexis de Tocqueville so praised in the 18th century (Etzioni 1994; Delanty 2003). As the U.S.A. recovers from the great recession, questions pertaining to the role of individual, communities, and institutions in dealing with the economic recovery are being asked. While the fiscally conservatives offer “enterprise” and free market solutions to all these problems, those on the left call for greater communitarianism and collaborative governance at the local level.

Amidst these debates and discussions, the notion of a global cosmopolitan identity is also being debated. While much of philanthropy in the U.S.A. occurs locally, there is a growing size of international giving,

as the data from the Giving USA Foundation report (2013a) indicate. The communitarian credo, according to Amitai Etzioni (1994), one of the most famous and articulate proponents of this philosophy, reads:

Americans—who have long been concerned with the deterioration of private and public morality, decline of the family, high crime rates, and the swelling of corruption in government—can act without fear. We can act without fear that attempts to shore up our values, responsibilities, institutions, and communities will cause us to charge into the dark tunnel of authoritarianism and moralism that leads to a church-dominated state or a right-wing world. (p. 2)

These fears articulate the liberal tradition that most Americans claim to uphold and celebrate, in their fiery individualism. The conversation about “values” and “traditions” is being revived by the insecurities, vulnerabilities of the day-to-day existence. Speaking of America’s youth, Etzioni (1994) states:

[y]oung people have learned only half of America’s story. Consistent with the priority they place on personal happiness, young people reveal notions of America’s unique character that emphasize freedom and license almost to the complete exclusion of service or participation. Although they clearly appreciate the democratic freedoms that, in their view, make theirs the “best country in the world to live in,” they fail to perceive a need to reciprocate by exercising the duties and responsibilities of good citizenship. (p. 3)

This captures the tension between rights and duties, Etzioni says, pointing to the gradual shift in rhetoric from President John F. Kennedy onwards to George

W. Bush. While Kennedy called on the moral and civic duties of every American, George Bush and Clinton’s administration pushed the agenda of government paying for many of the services and the market taking care of other social obligations. Etzioni and others of his persuasion have shown that “rights talk” without the corresponding focus on obligations/duties is both unethical and illogical.

Relationality and “Contact Zones”

In his book, *A History of Islam in America* (2010), GhaneaBassiri argues that the charitable practice of giving—*saraka* or *sadaqa* (a form of voluntary alms in Islam)—in Antebellum America brought Muslims and non-Muslims together, into communal relations. He states,

[e]nslaved African Muslims in America may have given *sadaqa* with any or all of the personal reasons, that is, to attain divine favor in the here and now, the expiration of sins, and assurance of general well-being for one’s self, family, or community against calamity or evil. (GhaneaBassiri 2010:71)

He adds that what is notable about all of these is the communal dimension of *saraka*. In the case of one of the participants in the Georgia writer’s project, Katie Brown, *saraka* marked an annual day of giving, especially of rice cakes.

The giving of rice cakes between grandparents and grandkids showed the transfer of this understanding across generations; additionally, this practice also occurred between generations of unrelated people, showing that this clearly went outside any kin

relationships. These practices were part of everyday life among the African American slaves. Magical practices also brought Muslims and non-Muslims into communal relations in West Africa, according to GhaneaBassiri (2010). This is echoed by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2007) who talks about the Muslim healers who cured sick people and catered to the needs of all in the community, irrespective of religious affiliation. In his book, *Cosmopolitanism* (2007), Appiah, a Princeton University professor, talks about the healing practices in Ghana, his native country, and the communal aspect of how magic and spirituality played a role of bringing communities together. Speaking of his own family’s experience in witchcraft, he talks about his father’s death and how some of his relatives suspected that there was some foul play involved.

Since my aunt was supposed to be a powerful witch, this wasn’t the only danger we faced. So it was fortunate that there are also practitioners of good witchcraft—many of them Muslim *malaams* [clerics], actually—who could counteract bad witchcraft. My sister made sure we brought a white ram to be sacrificed to protect us. (Appiah 2007:35)

Such religious practices are part of the common practices of asking the spirit world for intervention, which is common in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. There is an overlap of traditions and understandings of “this world” and the “other world” or that of spirits.

GhaneaBassiri (2010) also points to the use of amulets among African Muslims in colonial and Antebellum America:

[e]ighteenth- and nineteenth-century West African Muslim societies were semi-literate societies in which writing had great religio-magical significance. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Arabic-Islamic writing was used in amulets and talismans that provided protection from calamities or adverse spirits and individuals. Marabouts regularly produced and sold amulets with Arabic inscriptions to both a Muslim and non-Muslim clientele. (p. 75)

The practices and beliefs of the Africans and African Muslim slaves and those they encountered seem to have been shaped by a "relational" understanding of the world, the role of religion and religious practices, as not exclusive, but one that was shared by those not belonging to the same faith traditions. This "syncretic" and "relational" understanding of practices is key to the understanding of how *zakat* and *sadaqa*, the two philanthropic practices that are under discussion here, have evolved, and continue to grow in the U.S.A.

Appiah (2007:38) reasons about this relational understanding of religious and faith practices by arguing that "in belief, as in everything else, each of us must start from where we are." This means acknowledging the beliefs, worldviews, and understandings that each group of people bring to the table, and working from that as the starting point. What both Appiah and GhaneaBassiri seem to be pointing to is the need to look for the commonalities that exist between the various diverging traditions, and how they have managed to reach a "syncretic" understanding of each other, through creating shared boundaries and "mental models" or "paradigms."

Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) notion of "contact zones" is also useful to my discussion of the evolution of American Muslim charitable giving. She uses the term to refer to "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt 1991:34). She uses the term to reconsider the models of community that are used in pedagogy and practice. Her notion of "autoethnographic texts" (Pratt 1991) as those written by people who undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them is also of particular use to my discussion of American Muslim charity, as much of the representations of *zakat* and *sadaqa* are made use of in a language and manner that are compatible with the humanitarian aid narrative, even though the religious notions of giving that this institution is fused has a slightly different intent and purpose. Pratt (1991) argues that these autoethnographic texts are addressed to both a metropolitan audience and the speaker's own community, and can often be seen as a marginalized group's entry into the mainstream. In these terms, the entire discourse of giving that American Muslim NGOs are creating can be seen as an effort at producing autoethnographic texts that use elements of intertextuality to get the message across. A related notion of "transculturation" describes the "processes whereby members of subordinated groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 1991:36). Pratt states that this allows the subordinate group to incorporate those parts of the dominant culture that are important for them, while ignoring others that are not

so key. I will examine this in later sections as I deal with the messaging campaign of American Muslim NGOs and how they are using these elements in communicating with an audience that is aware of both the mainstream American notions, as well as deeply held religious norms among Muslims.

Arab American and American Muslim Giving

Giving by American Muslims largely occurs through individuals giving to other individuals. This is in contrast to the "mainstream" notion of giving, where more than 80% of donors are individuals, where virtually all legally registered tax-exempt recipients of these contributions are organizations (Ostrander and Schervish 1990:69). But, among American Muslims and Arab Americans there is a gradual recognition of the need to build institutions. As Adil Najam (2006:20) has pointed out, there is also a growing realization, over the past few decades, about the importance of building institutions such as mosques, Islamic schools, et cetera, and hence this has resulted in increased philanthropic activity towards these institutions, as well. Therefore, a close study of religious giving by American Muslims is important. Giving to religious institutions has been historically high (e.g., see: Giving USA Foundation 2013a). Increased focus on FBOs as providers of social services has been in place since the Charitable Choice provision and the subsequent push by George W. Bush's administration in establishing the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in the White House.

Given the salience of the non-profit sector and preponderance of faith-based institutions, this sub-sec-

tor is set to grow. With an increased focus on the non-profit organizations in general and FBOs in particular, there has also been an increased interest and research in this field. Given the salience of issues related to Islam and Muslim societies, scholarly and media interest has increased in this sector.

Similarly, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim and Asma Mohamed Abdel Halim (2006) have proposed a "human rights-based framework" for Islamic charity. They offer a compelling case for building a vision for philanthropy that addresses the societal needs of everyone in a society, using the framework of human rights. As they use the example of Egypt to point out, there are issues such as poverty, public health concerns, and environmental degradation that can only be addressed by mobilizing the human and material resources of all communities involved—Muslim, Christian, and others. They also suggest that there needs to be a synergy between the secular forms of organization and the religious incentive to give to those organizations to prevent any misunderstandings.

While there are pragmatists and cultural pluralists among American Muslims, who see the need for adopting new norms, practices, and methodologies of practicing philanthropy, there are also traditionalists, for instance, Salafists who are literalists. They often tend towards a fundamentalist reading of texts and interpretation of Koran, and hence can be considered rigid and inflexible. And in this worldview, any innovation in religious matters (or *bid'ah*) is forbidden (or *haram*). This is a line of reasoning that presents a challenge to the institutionalization and regulation of charity, as it can be considered an

"innovation" (*bid'ah*). These are some of the key outlines as it pertains to innovation in American Muslim philanthropy.

Ethnic, diaspora giving is a growing body of literature that investigates ethnic groups engaging in philanthropy in the U.S.A. Arab Americans, Asians, Pakistanis, Indians, Bosnians, Turks, and others, all have their own organizations catering to education, health, cultural issues, and a vast range of activities that are part of the ethnic mobilization efforts. On November 15, 2011, the Chronicle of Philanthropy hosted a discussion on Arab American philanthropy and targeting Arab Americans for fundraising. Jeanette Mansour, a prominent Arab American practitioner who participated in a discussion, stated that Arab Americans are interested in education, community, family, youth programs, and mainstream organizations, and further added that through philanthropy, Arab Americans break down stereotyping about the community.¹

In their book, *From Charity to Social Change* (2008), Ibrahim and Sherif discuss the ways in which Arab diaspora giving is evolving, albeit slowly. Speaking of the change from a religious norms to more institutionalized ways of giving (giving to foundations, more organized community foundations, or "secular charities" that do development work), they point out:

There are important social traditions of giving ...
What is new is the reconfiguration of the old forms

(*Waqf* [inalienable religious endowment] into social investing, corporate philanthropy, and establishment of grant-making foundations). Another trend is regional funding institutions, based in one country but governed by a pan-Arab board of directors. (Ibrahim and Sherif 2008:5)

This is an indicator of the trends towards institutionalizing and building of organizations that has gone on for many decades now, but is catching up as a trend. While there has always been a strong element of institution building among the African American communities in the U.S.A., including Ahmadiyya, Nation of Islam (before and after Elijah Muhammad), the trend towards giving to institutions can be considered somewhat new. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the culture of giving to individuals has been the predominant mode. Added to this is the assumption that many Muslims hold they would rather know the beneficiaries of their charity than give to an anonymous person or cause, over which they have very little control.

The Center's for Global Prosperity (2012) *Index of Global Philanthropy and Remittances* highlights the growing phenomenon of global philanthropy and its significance in America. The report points out that the total "American private flows to the developing world increased to \$39 billion in philanthropy, \$95.8 billion in remittances, and \$161 billion in private investment capital" (Adelman 2012:3). According to Carol Adelman (2012:3), the changes taking place in this sphere are due to a combination of "[s]ophisticated technology, new financing mechanisms, and a generation of hands-on problem solvers ... blurring the lines among philanthropy,

remittances, investment, and profit/not-for-profit socially aware organizations." The new philosophy of capital flow is to encourage capital flows into the developing world through any and all means possible—through philanthropy, private capital flows, investments, foundation grants, et cetera—with an access to defeat poverty and help people have access to resources to meet the challenges before them.

In the U.S.A., ethnic mobilization in philanthropy is particularly strong given that about 2/3 of American Muslims are of immigrant origin. While the giving patterns of diaspora have not been studied closely, one can reasonably estimate that much of the philanthropy among this segment occurs to the countries of their origin (i.e., through remittances or even helping in development or other needs). This may perhaps be changing, as the demands of institution building and growing of American Muslim presence in the public sphere.

In an insightful book on the giving practices of the Pakistani American community, Adil Najam (2006:106), a professor at Boston College, discusses how and why the community gives money and support. He points out that the Pakistani American community gives about 3.5% of their household income to charity, while the average giving in the U.S.A. (national sample) is about 3.1% of household income. While pointing out the uniqueness of the community's giving behavior, he highlights seven lessons learned during the research (that consisted of 54 focus groups and 461 completed surveys). He summarizes the lessons as following: 1) Pakistani Americans are a generous, giving, and active community; 2) There is a strong preference for giving

directly to individuals in need; 3) People are motivated by faith, but mostly give to social issues; 4) The philanthropy of Pakistani Americans is not limited to Pakistan; 5) 9/11 made the Pakistani diaspora more vigilant, but not less giving; 6) There is a significant potential for more giving by Pakistanis in America, including more giving to Pakistan; 7) There are serious hurdles that make it difficult to give more to Pakistan, including a lack of trust in the public sector in Pakistan, practical difficulties in giving to Pakistan, and a lack of credible information about philanthropic organizations in Pakistan (see: Najam 2006).

While all of the above show the behavior of just 15% of the American Muslim population (Najam 2006:4), this is based on empirical evidence and a thorough investigation into the community's behavior, and one can say that this provides us a glimpse of what is going on.

As briefly discussed in this section, ethnic and community based philanthropy is a growth sector. In addition, the fact that religious and faith-based giving is linked to the broader economy means that we can expect this sector to rise, as the economy picks up, slowly. Also, as mentioned in this section, the changing sociological dimensions in American society do pose serious challenges to the sector. While the "melting pot" hypothesis in the U.S.A. has not worked exactly as some scholars and thinkers point, there seems to be great mobilization in terms of ethnicity, and this is proving to be a safety net for many communities. In their book, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Glazer and Moynihan (1963:17) have argued that "[e]thnic groups in New

¹ See: <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Introducing--CAAPturing-Philanthropy---Making-strides-in-Arab-American-giving.html?soid=1102478471742&aid=v0FYwpVVVYU>. Retrieved December 10, 2012.

York are also special interest groups”—an insight that has validity in the context of my discussion in this paper. This seems particularly relevant in the case of philanthropy, as well, as we will see in the following sections.

Sampling, Data Collection Strategy, and Analysis

I chose two of the largest Muslim Humanitarian Relief NGOs in the U.S.A., that is, Helping Hands for Relief and Development (HHRD) and Islamic Relief USA (IR USA). I have chosen these as purposive samples as they represent the largest NGOs of their kind in the U.S.A. in terms of revenues. Qualitative samples tend to be purposive rather than random. As Miles and Huberman (1994:27) state, “[t]hat tendency is because the initial definition of the universe is more limited ... and partly because social processes have a logic and coherence that random sampling can reduce to uninterpretable sawdust.” As they further argue, sampling in qualitative studies needs to create boundaries, as well as a frame to help one uncover the phenomena and constructs that undergird the study (Miles and Huberman 1994). As Mautner (2008:49) advises, “[b]efore embarking on a project, it pays to delve into a small data sample, collecting initial observations, formulating general hypothesis, identifying promising lines of inquiry, testing your methodological toolkit, and honing your analytical skills.” I have done precisely this, focusing on a small body of marketing material and other resources to analyze the messaging, as well as test my hypothesis so they can be refined in the larger study I hope to undertake.

While Islamic Relief is headquartered in the U.K., the offices in the U.S.A. function independently. Similarly, HHRD is part of the Gulen Movement, inspired by Fethullah Gulen (Turkish spiritual leader).

To get maximum variation in data collected, I gathered the following items from the websites of both organizations: five most recent newsletters² and marketing material regarding their fundraising campaigns (posters and e-mail alerts).

I followed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the various texts. This method is suitable as it seeks to look for the connection of the text with larger themes and structures in society. As Mills (1997) argues, this method is appropriate for socio-psychological analysis and conversation analysis. Utterances in this instance cannot be taken as standalone, but are in essence ambivalent and interpreted by participants according to hypothesis and working models that they develop in the course of a conversation (Mills 1997:126). As Mills (1997) argues, CDA has forced analysts to shift their attention from words in isolation to words within context.

Analysis and Discussion

What follows is a brief analysis of the various discursive strategies adopted by HHRD and IR USA. I carried out the analysis looking for the research question in mind: How are these organizations incorporating “Islamic” messaging in an American

² HHRD newsletters and videos are accessible at: http://www.hhrd.org/hhrd_AllNewsletters.aspx. Retrieved January 12, 2013.

context? Further, how is this relational understanding of giving impacting notions of “community?”

I will examine the texts for these main elements that can give us insights about the changing norms or “relational understanding” of Muslim charity. While these concepts are intimately interconnected, they do represent different facets of the issue/phenomenon under investigation.

Helping Hands for Relief and Development

One can analyze the text/other material for various elements. One of the key elements I will focus on is intertextuality. As Wodak (2004) defines it:

Intertextuality refers to the fact that all texts are linked to other texts, both in the past and in the present. Such links can be established in different ways: through continued reference to a topic or main actors; through reference to the same events; or by the transfer of main arguments from one text into the next. The latter process is also labeled *recontextualization*. By taking an argument and restating it in a new context, we first observe the process of decontextualization, and then, when the respective element is implemented in a new context, of recontextualization. The element then acquires a new meaning because meanings are formed in use. (p. 3)

One of the fundraising campaigns involves a comedy show, *Comedy for a Worthwhile Cause*, with the title “Empowering the Women of the Ummah.”³ The visual and textual elements of this power (and

³ See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/649019615151169/permalink/666417806744683/>. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

the accompanying text) are quite intriguing to notice. While the campaign itself is styled as a regular fundraiser that any “secular” non-profit would carry out, the motive is clearly more than mere “entertainment.” The fundraiser is clearly for helping the “women of *our* Ummah,” referring to the women of the Muslim *Ummah*, where *Ummah* is the Arabic word for community. It is a polysemic word and has been used in various ways, but the most commonly used meaning refers to the global Muslim community (Petersen 2011). The images that go together show (visibly) poor and disadvantaged women and children who are working. The combination of images and text invites the reader (or potential donor) to enter this space and participate, by making sense of and connecting with the various motifs offered—Islamic, developmental, and “social justice” oriented.

Secondly, there is clearly an appropriation of fundraising techniques borrowed from mainstream NGOs that have followed the turn towards a neoliberal framework and started to use aggressive fundraisers, appeal for funds, and celebrity endorsements. The use of comedians such as Azhar Usman and Mohammed Ammer as their signature “brand ambassadors” is also quite an interesting discursive strategy.

Further, the newsletters begin with verses from the Koran, such as, “The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, ‘Allah will not be merciful to those who are not merciful to the people.’”⁴ While the stated mission of the organization is: “HHRD is committed to serve humanity by

⁴ E.g., see: http://hhrd.org/hhrd_enewsletter?title=Jan212014NL. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

integrating resources for people in need. We strive to provide immediate response in disasters, and effective Programs in places of suffering, for the pleasure of Allah,⁵ the organization is trying to position itself as both a “religious entity”—through its messaging infused with religious language—while at the same time utilizing capitalist means of raising money.⁶ As Charles Tripp (2006) has argued in his book, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, while some Muslim scholars have chosen the path of confrontation with capitalism, most have chosen the path of compromise. The work is framed around the development of Islamic socialism, Islamic economics, and the rationale for Islamic banking.

Humanitarian development aid provision for HHRD seems to be one of the key ways that Muslims can participate in the global economy while staying true to their faith. The intended audience for their messaging seem to be—quite obviously—practicing Muslims, given the consistent use of Koranic messaging, as well as visuals that communicate observant, pious Muslims. The attraction for participating in their form of development would be to be part of a movement that works to help others, through the message of Islam. It is interesting to also see that while the language is infused with Islamic messaging, at the same time, it is also inclusive. For instance, the organization is sensitive to women’s issues, as well as other non-Muslims.

⁵ See: <http://www.hhrd.org/about-us-profile>. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

⁶ This is one of the major criticisms of existing models of philanthropy, where large sums of money go towards “raising” funds through events or other activities that cost millions of dollars. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see: <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/kbfiles/551/Fundraising%20Costs%20excerpt.pdf>. Retrieved January 15, 2013.

There are campaigns that are run by the organization for women and Philippines⁷ (a Christian majority country). This should also be interesting from a discourse perspective, as some traditional Muslim scholars argue that *zakat* money should only go towards Muslims. This is a contested idea as most Muslim organizations in the West have adopted an ecumenical conception of where this money can be used. In fact, the Fiqh Council of North America (association of Muslims who interpret Islamic law) and other organizations have brought out *fatwa* (legal rulings) arguing for the use of *zakat* money for any humanitarian purpose.⁸ There seems to be an incorporation of some elements of the feminist discourse, too, with empowerment of women coming to the foreground. As Leila Ahmed (2012) has argued, the reformist discourse regarding women’s rights is emerging from the politically engaged Islamist women, that is, those who practice Islam and believe that it has an active role to play in the public sphere. This is another instance where traditional categorizations of “feminism,” “Islamism” do not hold, and such instances and examples complicate the narrative of Islam that we are used to.

While there certainly are elements of consumption philanthropy in the messaging of HHRD, one can argue that many of the campaigns are for “genuine needs” of victims who are struck by natural disasters or those stuck in hopeless situations—in Pakistan, Haiti, Philippines, et cetera. While there is a call for participating in entertaining events, which

⁷ E.g., see: http://hhrd.org/hhrd_newsletter?title=Jan142014NL. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

⁸ For an example of this debate, see: <http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?110530-Can-you-give-your-Zakat-to-a-non-Muslim>. Retrieved September 20, 2013.

carry the element of consumption philanthropy, the underlying message is definitely to do what is right, to “help the servants of Allah,” in other words, to fulfill one’s obligation as a pious Muslim. There is a healthy tension between aspects of consumption philanthropy and a needs-based model in the messaging of this organization.

Islamic Relief USA

Islamic Relief mission statement is:

Islamic Relief strives to alleviate suffering, hunger, illiteracy, and diseases worldwide regardless of color, race, religion, or creed, and to provide aid in a compassionate and dignified manner. Islamic Relief aims to provide rapid relief in the event of human and natural disasters and to establish sustainable local development projects allowing communities to better help themselves.⁹

As in the case of HHRD, one can see that their mission statement is ecumenical and broad-based, going beyond just the Muslim community. This is a discursive strategy that re-imagines the boundaries of who is eligible for *zakat*, as I have pointed out in the previous section. This is similar to the practices of African American Muslims who re-imagined community through their charitable practices (see: GhaneaBassiri 2010).

One of the most recent and successful campaigns that IR USA has run is the #WithSyria campaign (as part of the #WithSyria coalition) that garnered

⁹ For more, see: <http://www.interaction.org/member/islamic-relief-usa>. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

massive support on Twitter, reaching a quarter of a billion people in over 111 countries.¹⁰ As part of the marketing email that was sent out, the Public Affairs manager is quoted as saying:

Islamic Relief is providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance inside Syria, but this campaign reminds us that we can also be a voice for positive change. We aim to continue the momentum to demand humanitarian access into challenging areas and raise more dollars that will save and improve the lives that have been forever changed by war.¹¹

While this meets the criterion of fulfilling their mission statement, what is lacking, one could argue, is a lack of any long-term orientation towards addressing the conflict or an engagement to garner this massive support to press the American political establishment for any political action. As Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) argue, this discourse could be seen as mollifying the donors and luring them into thinking that their donations have made a difference, and they have done their bit. This could be seen as co-optation of philanthropy for a short-term gain (provision of aid), but not really addressing the root cause of the problem, that is, the continued violence and injustice in Syria.

Further, the promotional video of IR claims: “Because of you we are building roads, bridges, water systems, even homes. Together we are building entire villages.¹²” The discourse of “sustainability” is

¹⁰ See: <https://withsyria.com/>. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

¹¹ Source: email received by the author of this article.

¹² View the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wjy-bI6l0Fw>. Retrieved August 17, 2015.

also co-opted in their messaging as the voice-over says, "We call these intelligent solutions," referring to the sustainable practices of IR. There is a very strong emphasis on long-term solutions for the communities concerned. As Pratt (1991) has argued, this strategy could be seen as one of "transculturation," where American Muslim NGOs are adopting the language of mainstream philanthropy to further their own discourse. While this can be seen as a pragmatic move, it also can be interpreted as a move to expand the definition of both *zakat* and *sadaqa*, and taking them beyond the purely religious purposes that they are identified with.

Other campaigns that are ongoing, such as Skate for Syria,¹³ are in the realm of a consumption philanthropy model. This could be seen as belonging to a category of philanthropy through entertainment and consumption of services that IR USA creates.

Intertextuality

As Sturken and Cartwright (2009) argue,

[o]ne of the fundamental aspects of intertextuality is its presumption that the viewer knows the text that is being referenced. Intertextuality is not a new aspect of popular culture or specific to postmodernism. After all, the use of celebrities to sell products can be seen as an intertextual tactic—the stars bring to the ad the meaning of their fame and the roles they have played. However, contemporary intertextuality operates on a level that is much more ironic and complex. (p. 265)

While the advertisements used by both HHRD and IR do contain imagery and words that refer back to themes and ideas that are familiar to their audience (e.g., words such as *Ummah*, *zakat*, or *sadaqa* and certain verses from the Koran or Hadith), there is an appeal to either religious symbolism or that of "development." IR falls under the latter spectrum, while HHRD tends to use more of the religious discourse, to make their appeals more emotive. With IR USA, there is also a conscious effort on part of all the communication devices used to appropriate "sustainability," as a paradigm.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to problematize Islamic philanthropy and "community," and tried to show the discursive strategies of philanthropy that are impacting the latter. While there are scholars who have argued for the use of *zakat* and *sadaqa* money only towards Muslim causes, newer and more interpretive works by religious scholars in the West, as shown above, have challenged this, creating a new understanding of charity, and hence expanding the notion of "community."

As GhaneaBassiri (2012: 175) argues, the histories of Western Muslims have only recently been critically examined, but they offer us an opportunity to make "considerable theoretical and methodological contributions to our understanding of Islam and the modern world." He further adds:

While the diversity of the modern world has generally been examined through bifurcating categories that distinguish the self from the other, the histories

of Western Muslims, situated in between "Islam and the West" call for a rethinking of the modern world by viewing diversity—not as an intractable problem that needs to be explained or contained, but as the grounds on which modern experiences, identities, institutions, and concepts are formed. (GhaneaBassiri 2012:175)

Muslims in the West offer this opportunity of studying these polyvalences, and thus are not just products of history but themselves productive of history. This sentiment of GhaneaBassiri reflects what other scholars, such as Tariq Ramadan (2012) and others, have called for, that is, a recognition for the multiple identities of individuals and a more nuanced and complex understanding of how it can and does influence the way identities are formed and shaped.

Creating a New "Moral Geography?"

American Muslim philanthropy lies at the intersection of religious, ethnic, and transnational boundaries. While it is certainly a "border-crossing" phenomenon, and one that has and continues to evolve in America, as GhaneaBassiri (2010) has demonstrated, the implications of this change are not clear. While discourses of identity and religion embrace polysemous meanings, the same flexibility has not been accorded to Islamic philanthropy in the U.S.A. While both the NGOs discussed above are using the discourse of social justice, sustainability, and religion in their messaging, the discourse of Islamic philanthropy has not received sufficient investigation, apart from certain narrow, policy analysis.

As Caroline Nagel (1999:134) argues, the discourse of multiculturalism could be problematic for the mi-

norities (she uses the example of Muslims in Britain), since it assumes unity and homogeneity that do not exist. As she further argues, this creates false categories and individual power brokers are often struggling to maintain monopoly over representing the "interests" of their groups. Both supporters and critics of multiculturalism are in a bind, given the complexity of the phenomenon, she argues. The growth of a "Muslim identity" has also created a sense of alienation among certain segments of society, and critics point that projects such as separate Islamic schools can create further divisiveness in society.

While philanthropy, in many cases, is tied to identity politics, and in the example of HHRF and IR USA, there is certainly an element of this, there is a greater emphasis on social justice issues. One can argue that both these organizations are addressing the central notions of social justice that Islamic philanthropy emphasizes in its intentionality. While the discourse of Islamic philanthropy has co-opted various discourses—development, sustainability, and environmentalism—to name a few, the central concern remains that of social justice. And this is one of the key reasons why several government agencies across the world have signed up to partner with various projects of both the NGOs. In fact, The United States Agency for International Development and the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives at the White House have very strong relationships with IR, on several initiatives.

As Nagel (1999) further states, there has been quite a lot of theoretical work in the area of social justice and distributive justice that can help us understand the dimensions related to trans-border issues. The

¹³ See: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10152125372380208.1073741904.6919565207&type=1>. Retrieved April 18, 2014.

work of David Harvey, in particular *Social Justice and the City* (1973), is useful in framing issues related to injustice and redistribution of wealth. Harvey (1973) argues that the problem facing distributive justice is not one of individual selfishness, but one of the modes of production, that is, capitalism. Nagel (1999:139) states: "While Harvey's work inspired countless geographers and brought Marxism into the mainstream of geographic thought, Marxist views on social justice have come under fire by feminists and others since the 1980s." While this is a structuralist perspective of looking at wealth redistribution, much of the rhetoric of both the NGOs does not go to this level of analysis, preferring to stay at the level of "doing what you can" to help the members of *Ummah* around the world. Both the NGOs examined, while certainly promoting activism, remain silent in their messaging about the need to question why things are the way they are. They are also silent about the political dimensions of the conflicts.

Similarly, in her book, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, Zareena Grewal (2013) argues that transnational communities produce ties that pull at the seams of national demands for complete and total submission of one's attachments. She uses the example of American Muslim student travelers, who traverse across the Middle East in search of knowledge, to illustrate how this shifting "moral geography" occurs and how it is best to understand it. She presents the example of Omar, a young American student inspired by Malcolm X, the charismatic Black leader who defined his identity in transnational terms—of being an African in America, until, perhaps, the end of his life. This "protest" mindset has been part of how American Muslims have, in the past, imagined

their identities, and this could, perhaps, explain some of the tensions in discourses pertaining to Islamic philanthropy. While there is a definite tendency among American Muslim NGOs to focus on "domestic" projects and build communities "here," there is also an overwhelming focus on Muslim communities and projects globally, alluding to the needs of the global *Ummah*. Grewal (2013:83) argues that the "Islamic East has become an archive for the transnational moral geography in the American mosques." This process, one can argue, continues in the form of discourses created by American Muslim NGOs, as we see in the examples in this paper.

Indeed, much of the backlash against Islamic charities that came about post 9/11 was largely due to the alleged connections of some of the NGOs with "terrorist networks," in the Middle East and Africa. While many of these allegations turned out to be false, there have been some convictions in these cases, with the American Civil Liberties Union and other civil liberty groups calling these judgments as politically motivated (see: American Civil Liberties Union 2009). This has been further corroborated by research from Benthall (2007), who wrote his famous article "The Overreaction Against Islamic Charities," arguing for looking at the positive role they can play and for not exaggerating the threat from a few organizations or individuals that had dubious links with terrorist networks.

As Grewal (2013) further argues,

Muslim Americans' transnational moral geographies challenge the primacy of national affiliation through devotional practices, calls for racial equality, and

global religious communion. As we see, the transnational moral geographies of the American Muslims are not only in competition with those of the nation, but also with one another. (p. 85)

While this seems to be true, what Grewal misses out on, or rather does not focus on, is the level of co-optation that is undergoing. The borrowing, lending, and merging of norms, discourses of giving between the various Islamic discourses of donating and those of the "mainstream" American ones, as we have seen, are too many to be ignored. To simply put, these in competition with one another would be simplifying the argument. Perhaps, GhaneaBassiri would agree with this perspective.

The level of merging of norms of consumer philanthropy, marketing principles, the use of "commonalities" between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism to call for serving "mankind," and the various "inter-faith" programs that seek to bridge barriers between "Abrahamic faiths" are all further examples of this shifting moral geography. This shift can be

seen as a reconfiguration of relations between how philanthropy, community boundaries are constantly being re-imagined in America.

Finally, the study of American Muslim philanthropy offers us the opportunity to also look at the plurality of how philanthropy is being imagined and recreated. The discourse starts with an assumption of diversity and further pushes us to be conscious of the need for this vocabulary of pluralism. There is no single modernity, as GhaneaBassiri (2010) has argued, but "multiple modernities," that are being negotiated. The notion of "contact zone" that Pratt (1991) has proposed also pushes the boundaries of imagining language as a "community" that is homogenous. This may well be the biggest contribution, both theoretically and conceptually, of studying American Muslim philanthropy. Apart from helping us redraw the boundaries, this effort can also help us become conscious of the barriers in our own language, conceptual frameworks that are stopping us from fully understanding the norms of giving in this frame.

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