

ABSTRACTS FOR WORKSHOP NO. 2:

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC CHARITABLE WORK

(in random order)

Women in Islamic Civil Society Organisations - the Palestinian Case

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On the occupied Palestinian West Bank decades of violent conflict, insecurity, de-development, and isolation have led to widespread poverty. As an occupying power, Israel has not fulfilled its responsibility of delivering adequate services to West Bank Palestinians. The proto-state of the Palestinian Authority has not had the capacity to provide for its “citizens”. In the absence of a welfare state, private social initiatives take over. In the largely Muslim Palestinian territories Islamic charities are an important provider of health, education, and social services. This is not new. The post-September 11th coupling of Islamic social welfare with violent political Islam drew international attention to Islamic charity. When Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, explanations pointed to the Islamic charities’ role in mobilising the grassroots. In particular with respect to women; women are thought to be the main receptors of assistance from Islamic charities and more than half of those who voted for Hamas in 2006 were supposedly women.

This paper focuses on Islamic charitable organisations run by women that deliver services mainly to women. What kind of work do the organisations engage in? Who are the activists, and who are the beneficiaries? Why and how they participate in the organisations’ activities? Is there any link between women’s Islamic charities and political movements like Hamas?

The politics and socio-economic functions of religious associations in Dakar

Elin Selboe

In a situation of economic and political crisis, the inhabitants of Dakar (Senegal) engage in a number of ways to find solutions to their problems. Collective mobilisation in community associations is a vital part of people's everyday lives, - including religious associations. Islam has a prominent place in Senegalese society. At the national level the *marabouts* (leaders) of Sufi orders have served as intermediaries in state-society relations, and Islam has also marked social organisation, economic networks and political arrangements in local communities.

Religion is an integral part of the lives of the Senegalese, as it penetrates society and informs attitudes and practices, and many are members of religious associations.

Local religious associations are prime arenas for religious worship, instruction and discussion. They unite religious followers and provide relations to the marabout in the case of *dahiras* and the organisational hierarchy for those engaged in the various religious movements.

However, religious community associations also hold vital socio-economic functions and have political implications. Religious imperatives and economic crisis encourage mutual help and solidarity among members. In difficult situations, associational membership provides a minimum of social security, as fellow members and institutional practices help those who need assistance with expenses related to illness, schooling of children, ceremonies or food, water and gas. Through relations to the *marabout* and his network of contacts, followers may get help to find a job, start a business or migrate. Economic functions are particularly evident in *Mouridism* (one of Senegal's main Sufi orders), where the religious, social and economic logics are closely connected. The religious movements have charity programs that provide socio-economic assistance also to non-members.

Thus, religious associations provide access to symbolic (religious) and material (economic) resources for members who thus access and nurture personal relations and social networks. However, they have more direct political implications too as they are important in the everyday lives of the Senegalese and thus are appealing to local and national politicians. They are potential means of political critique and mobilisation. At the community level, the associations, particularly *dahiras*, attract the attention of local politicians who try to build social relations and secure political support through these associations. They may serve as arenas for patron-client relations, as politicians provide economic support in exchange for this support and the potential votes of leaders and members. At a more aggregate level, religious collective organisation influence political relations at the national level and put a strain on delegitimized politicians and state leaders. The relations between marabouts and followers forms the basis of and influence the continuous (re)negotiation of the Senegalese post-colonial social contract and the increasing number for members in various religious movements are potential pressure groups in national elections and politics in general. The Senegalese population as religious followers and citizens engage in religious associations not only to practice and honour their religion, but also to promote their own interests and tackle the socio-economic and political crises that affect their lives.

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‘The Palestinian *zakat* committees, contested local welfare producers’

Lars Gunnar Lundblad

In Western scholarship, religion has widely been assumed to be a back-peddalling force in modernizing processes. This assumption conceives of there being a strong split between traditional and modern societies. Theories of evolutionary development have in recent years become more nuanced. This has opened up for more pragmatic assumptions that acknowledge a space for religion as an order-making factor in interaction with other societal forces. Within this frame of analysis, *zakat*, Islamic alms, becomes a religious principle with potentialities for developing socio-political structures. The Palestinian *zakat* committees are part and parcel of the Palestinian *sumud* (steadfastness), institutionally developed within a framework of Israeli occupation, Western cultural and economic intervention, and Islamic individual and collective resources. A very material and bodily aspect of the human condition is the state of ‘ontological insecurity’ (Turner and Rojek 2001:32) This state of human vulnerability, in mental, social and material senses (these vulnerabilities are both natural and manmade) seems to trigger cultural creative forces that strive to overcome the vulnerable condition. *Zakat* is one of several expressions of such cultural efforts. The balance of power is asymmetrical in Palestine, and the instability of political and military conditions is also clearly reflected in civil society. Until 2007 there were about 90 *zakat* committees in the West Bank offering welfare services locally. This year PA took a firm political control of the *zakat* sector. I asked one of my informants (he lives in the West Bank and is a previous member of a *zakat* committee board) about the recent development; was there any chance of return, i.e., that the *zakat* committees could regain their relative independence? He replied bluntly: ‘No, sorry, I don’t think so’. In light of the actual circumstances, this reaction is understandable. But looking at the issue in a more long-term perspective, I believe that one way or another, building welfare in Palestine will have to take into account cultural resources embedded in local welfare, especially those connected to the *zakat* principle and its appurtenant practices.

**The story of three brothers:
The Muslim brotherhood's humanitarianism in practice.**

Stig Jarle Hansen

The Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) is infamous; rumors, information and disinformation have been circulated by foes, friends and neutral parties since the movement started in 1928. Despite meeting resistance from both the Soviet block and later also the West, the ideas of the original Brotherhood have inspired a global movement with affiliated organisations in more than 80 countries. Brotherhood organisations are involved in humanitarian and development efforts, and might also be tempting partners for Western development and humanitarian efforts, they have proven that they are able to survive in harsh environments and they seem to offer potential gains to development projects. However, their ideology might influence their aid programs, and their modes of organization could be different than western organizations complicating cooperation. This article explores the impact of ikwhan ideology on the humanitarian efforts of three specific organizations that define themselves, and is defined by the international ikwhan shura council, as being ikwhan. This article studies and compares three ikwhan organizations active in societies with war and hunger, the ikwhan in Yemen, Sudan and Somalia, and their capacity for humanitarian action and implementer of wider development projects. It explores how their self-proclaimed belief in the wider ikwhan ideology influence their charitable work, how they organize their works, and if they share similarities in the way they organize their work and the way they relate to other brotherhood organizations, aiming to explore the challenges that potential partners could meet when cooperating with them.