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- Islamic charities, the “religious field” and the international aid system
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Summary

• Islamic charities
  – The Islamic tradition of humanitarianism
  – The rise of Islamic charities since 1970s
  – “Families” of Islamic charities
  – The crisis since 9/11
• Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and the “religious field”
• Connections to the international aid system
The Islamic tradition of humanitarianism

- *zakat* – 8 categories of beneficiary – and *sadaqa*
- *waqf* or *hubs*
- the religious calendar and life-cycle
- references to Quran and the *hadiths*
- special concern for:
  - orphans
  - refugees and the displaced
  - medicine and health
  - schools and bursaries
- visual motifs (crescent, minaret, grain of corn, Dome of the Rock etc.)
The rise of Islamic charities since the 1970s

- Confluence of two historical tendencies:
  - The rise of NGOs
    - rapid growth in conjunction with the international aid system
  - The Islamic resurgence
    - successor to revolutionary socialism and pan-Arabism post-1967
- Islamic charities as sub-set of Faith Based Organizations
  - but till recently excluded from analyses of international aid flows
“Families” of Islamic charities

- Excluding the “one-offs”, usually with charismatic founders:
  - Aga Khan Foundation
  - Edhi Foundation, Pakistan

- and the Red Crescent National Societies
  - red crescent used by 32 countries
  - officially non-confessional
  - in practice often take on an Islamic colouring

- Iranian *bonyads*

- Other, non-Arab countries e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan

- Turkey
  - e.g. IHH (Insani Yardim Vakfi) – formally secular but with strong Islamic overtones
“Families…”

1. Petrodollar based

- Kuwait, Qatar, Dubai…
- But especially Saudi-Arabia
  - International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)
    - Was specially active in ex-Communist states in the early 1990s.
  - World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)
  - Unfulfilled pledge by Saudi govt. to set up committee to coordinate all its overseas aid charities
    - These charities now much reduced owing to the Saudi regime’s desire not to offend the USA
- Some mixture of aims especially during 1980s in Afghanistan, with support of US government
  - USAID supported *mujahideen* by means of the USA charity system
  - Later in Bosnia
“Families…” 2. links with Middle East opposition movements?

- **Muslim Brothers of Egypt (founded 1928)**
  - Combined political, religious and welfarist goals
  - Algeria
  - Palestinian Territories
    - Zakat committees thought by Israeli and US governments to be merely fronts for Hamas – research suggests the contrary

- **Are charitable activities a mere front for politics?**
  - Evidence suggests great popular trust and support, and religious as well as political motivation

- **But in the case of Hizbullah (Lebanon)…**
  - Clear integration between welfare programmes and political organization
“Families…”

3. UK based

- Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid and others strongly influenced by British charity environment
  - Precedent of Christian Aid and CAFOD
    - divorcing aid from proselytism
    - accepting principle of non-discrimination
  - Transparency, accountability, professionalization, partnerships
  - Based on Islamic values
    - ‘humanitarian reading’ of jihad
  - Using Islamic tradition for effective fund-raising
  - Islamic Relief Worldwide now largest Islamic charity
- The movement as an example of practical (rather than merely rhetorical) “integration”
Islamic Relief’s work in Aceh, Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami

• Includes
  – Orphan programmes
  – Rebuilding schools and clinics
  – Housing
  – Rebuilding markets

Insiden Brutal di Juli

Lima Korban Masih Dirawat
The crisis since 9/11

- Extensive black-listing - an over-reaction?
- Need to distinguish?
- between
  - International terrorism of the Al-Qaida type
  - Nationalist movements
- Muslim civil society as a potential protection against terrorism...
- …rather than always a fomenter of terrorism?
The crisis since 9/11

- Distinguish between
  - intelligence- and police-based building up of associative networks (emails, wiretaps etc.), use of press reports, US and Israeli intelligence websites etc. - necessary for the suppression of terrorism
  - but dangers of ‘guilt by association’ and injustice
  - and
  - Serious social research studying charities and charity actors in widest possible context

- **Unintended consequence** – to drive money underground
  - As well as depriving beneficiaries of aid
  - And damaging the lives of trustees and charity staff
Dilemmas for humanitarian ethics

- Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan generally agreed to a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba, both designated as terrorist entities.
- However, Jamaat-ud-Dawa was the most effective charitable organization bringing relief after the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005.
- Many international organizations cooperated with it to gain access to and assist earthquake victims.
- Similar issues have arisen in Nigerian civil war, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Sudan, today in Sri Lanka…
Towards removing unjustified barriers for Islamic charities

• “Humanitarian Forum” launched by Islamic Relief

• “Montreux Initiative”
  – Swiss Government
  – Move towards self-assessment after prior stage of capacity building
    • Withdrawal of FCO ‘Engaging with the Islamic World’

• Charity and Security Network (USA)
Present situation

• Major UK Islamic aid agencies earn high reputation and government support
  – Interpal (UK Islamic charity for Palestinian aid) allowed to continue after three investigations by the Charity Commission

• Increasingly complex political situation involving many Islamic charities overseas
Islamic charities: the future

- Current concerns about terrorist finance likely to be temporary
- Growing acceptance probable of regulation and international charity standards
- European Islamic charities a powerful force for integration within Europe
- Eventual emergence of a few genuinely transnational Islamic NGOs probable
- And large private philanthropic foundations
- Continuing problems over such flashpoints as gender and (in some regions) religious freedom.
- Generational tensions among Muslims working two opposite ways: towards integration and towards radicalism
Solutions to current problems...

• Solutions likely to come from confidence-building among people of different views, on the common ground of humanitarian values...

• …not from organized dialogue among people who already agree with one another!
The ‘religious field’

- Towards clarity in thinking about religion
- Instead of thinking about religions as *blooms of believers*
- The ‘religious field’ interacts with other fields (politics, law, media etc. – also the humanitarian field)
- These fields are all essentially mobile and have *contested boundaries*
Strong and medium-strong religious fields

- **Strong religious field:**
  - FBOs, e.g. Christian Aid, Islamic Relief

- **Medium-strong religious field**
  - ‘faith-inspired NGOs’, e.g. Oxfam, Save the Children

- **Ostensibly wholly secular NGOs still occupying the medium-strong religious field since inspired by ‘religioid’ values**
  - E.g. ICRC, MSF, Amnesty International
FBOs and the international aid system: two alternative models

- 1. FBOs in *longue durée* (Terje Tvedt)
- 2. FBOs as manifestations of “individuo-globalism” (Raphaël Liogier)
1. FBOs in *longue durée*

- Modern aid system began in 1960s when OECD members began to fund NGOs
- Social integration through exchange of personnel between NGOs and public donor agencies
- World religions are much older and are using the aid system for their traditional purposes, i.e. proselytism and spreading influence
2. FBOs as manifestations of “individuo-globalism”

- FBOs as surface manifestations of a structure of convergence
- New Age cult of spirituality or ‘personal growth’ as **not in opposition** to a concern for Nature and the cosmos, but **the two as mutually reinforcing**
  - Correlation with Western affluence as opposed to ‘survival values’
2. FBOs as manifestations of “individuo-globalism”

- **Individuo-globalist sensibility as challenging**
  - I) established religious hierarchies
  - II) national boundaries

- **FBOs can bypass both the above**
  - Substituting new transnational bureaucracies

- **Examples: World Vision, Islamic Relief – but also Soka Gakkei, Baha’i and many others**
“Civil society”

- A contested term, much co-opted by governments
- Should be redefined as:
  - “a space for voluntary collective actions that can be a source of autonomy” (Benoît Challand)
  - “civil society as it is” as opposed to “window-dressing civil society based on abstract models of what it ought to be” (Olivier Roy)
- Recognition of this essential for effective humanitarian aid
The “religious field” and humanitarianism

• The religious field can provide a bridge between
  – Locally trusted networks

• And
  – Transnational non-profit organizations that can act as a counterbalance to governments and multinational corporations.