

# SUMMARY OF 2016 SYMPOSIUM ON MUSLIM PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

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The Center on Muslim Philanthropy (CMP) hosted the first annual Symposium on Muslim Philanthropy on September 1-2, 2016. The symposium was held in Indianapolis, USA through a research grant from the Indiana University Office of Research in partnership with the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and Lake Institute on Faith & Giving. The Symposium hosted scholars from all over the world who presented their research on Muslim philanthropy and civil society. Papers presented at the Symposium are eligible to be published in the *Journal on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* after an additional blind review process. What follows below is a brief summary of the two-day event. You can find links to the videos on our website: <http://muslimphilanthropy.com/research/symposium-on-muslim-philanthropy/>

Dr. Amy Singer opened up the symposium with her paper, “The Politics of Benevolence.” Philanthropy, she argued, is not just reactive, but intertwined with politics and power. The public kitchen that was the focus of Singer’s study was located in Jerusalem. The location was very much intentional in an effort to make the city more *Ottoman*. In the same session, Dr. Sabith Khan’s paper argued for the opposite, saying that because Islamic philanthropy operates differently in different contexts, it ought to be depoliticized. His paper shows that Islamic philanthropy is a living tradition with multiple interpretations. While Meira Naggaz’s presentation was not a typical academic paper, the ISPU poll results she shared provided a helpful snapshot of the Muslim-American community and hints to giving potential and gaps. The biggest takeaway from her presentation was the finding that a stronger Muslim identity correlates with a stronger American identity. This suggests that Muslim American are strongly invested in community engagement.

During Session II, Rahma Ali provided possible solutions to what NGOs can do when they become embroiled in politics. Ali provided a case study of Resala, a student group at Cairo University, that saw a loss in support when the Egyptian media labeled them as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, and how Resala responded in light of these allegations. Dr. David Campbell’s presentation explored the determinants of giving in Turkey. What David and his co-authors found is that the formal and informal giving that we see in Turkey is not included in philanthropic studies done by Westerners. You can find this paper in its full in this issue. Amelia Fauzia noted that the growth of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia has encouraged a movement in the rest of Southeast Asia and beyond. She argued that Islamic Philanthropy networks have softened the traditional binary oppositions between state and civil society, Islamic and secularism, and Muslims and non-Muslims. Dr. Barbara Ibrahim concluded the session by stressing the

importance of networks. But she also shared her concerns about the challenges ahead. In her experience, building a network of scholars and practitioners involved in Islamic philanthropy proved difficult for several reasons: inadequate funding and a lack of infrastructure.

During session III, Dr. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri presented his paper on Muslim Philanthropy after 9/11. Islam has been pathologized especially after the terrorists attacks. Kambiz argued for depathologizing Islam to see what we can learn from Muslim giving. You can find his explorations of this question in this issue. Dr. Brad Fulton covered the topic of Muslim civic engagement through Faith-Based Community Organizing. There are social issues that do not affect just one community or faith tradition, poverty being one of them. The Inner-city Muslim Action Network (IMAN) is one such example of a coalition. You can find Fulton's paper also in this issue. Dr. Peter Weber came back to the issue of giving after 9/11. His paper, however, took a slightly different approach. Coming from a thoroughly Western perspective, Weber was surprised by the already existing literature (a theme that was brought up by several authors during the symposium) and what actually happened. What he found was that Muslim giving shifted from more international to local, was largely in-kind, and that Muslims were more engaged than ever before. During the last presentation in this session, Ihsan Bagby presented on the giving practice of U.S. mosques. Unlike churches, a high income and education is not correlated with higher levels of giving. There are several reasons why this is the case, some of which are theological and cultural, and they have important implication for the study of Muslim philanthropy. Dr. Bagby's paper also appears in this issue.

During the final session, Uzma Mirza discussed the "Sustainable Human." She argued that we need to change the way we view philanthropy and Muslim philanthropy in particular. For Muslim, the act of giving is not simply a voluntary act. Philanthropy is required. As she put it, once you are a conscious human being, you become a steward of the earth and all its living things. In his presentation, Tariq Cheema talked about the need to channel giving for humanitarian crises to eradicating the root causes of these crises. Currently, a large percentage of Muslim giving goes to emergency responses. Cheema is interested in further studies on how *zakat* can be used for humanitarian assistance that gets to the roots causes of poverty. Danielle Abraham's paper provides a case study of an NGO in Hyderabad, India attempting to do just that. After a decade of stop gap measures, the Hyderabad Zakat & Charitable Trust decided to change their focus by addressing the root cause of poverty amongst Indian Muslims: lack education. By linking *zakat* to gender (poverty, she argued, is a gendered phenomenon), the Trust provides an example of practical theodicy. According to Jasim Al-Najmawi, most of the literature on Muslim Philanthropy is based on the experience of the Christian West. These studies do not fully appreciate the theological influences on Islamic philanthropy. Al-Najmawi argued that there needs to be more use of original sources of Islamic jurisprudence, focus beyond *waqf*, and more empirical studies. In all four papers presented during the final session, we see there is a tension between the ideal and the norm. The challenge, according to discussant Cathie Carrigan, is how to overcome the superficiality of Western studies of Islamic philanthropy.

What we found in this two-day conference is that there are no easy answers to any of the questions that were posed. Islamic practice of philanthropy is evolving, according to discussant Dr. David King. It continues to be influenced by political power, theological (re)interpretation, and institutional discourses. It is our hope that the *Journal on Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* can provide the forum to allow for these voices to be heard.