Ideals and Practices of Giving in Islam

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For Barbara Roggema

A partir du film Le Graine et le mulet, dans une famille de Tunisie, il est question dans la pratique du don islamique, inhérent à la foi du Coran (i.e. les offrandes à Dieu sont destinées aux pauvres). Tout d'abord, l'auteure évoque sadakah, le don spontané qui date des temps pré-Islamiques, comment il a été influencé plus tard par l'emphase sur la discrétion du Coran, comment il a trouvé son expression dans les fêtes religieuses et comment il a été englobé dans les aumônes et dans les prêts. Ensuite l'auteure aborde le mot zakat , l'obligation de faire un don perçu comme une taxe religieuse. Enfin l'auteure parle de la recherche actuelle sur le sujet de zakat, surtout depuis qu'il est sorti de la sphère publique vers la sphère privée, sa mobilisation vers des projets politiques et son interaction entre l'engagement humanitaire et les « objectifs subversifs politiques » et elle termine avec l'espoir que les chercheurs conduiront des études équilibrées libres de condamnation ou de glorification.

The Secret of the Grain, directed by Tunisian Abdellatif Kechiche and released in 2007, is a film that can disappoint those looking for an ethnic film, yet surprise those who let themselves be carried away with captivating dialogue full of passion, contradictions, and the will of redemption. The film tells the story of a Tunisian family who, for two generations, has been living in Sète, near Marseille, in a tangle of destinies flagged with migratory experiences: parental separation, inter-racial marriages of the children…. The film tells an extraordinary story of cultures colliding. It all begins when after so many years of work at the city shipyard, Slimane is laid off. He is sixty years old, an unforgiving age in an economic downturn. Faced with the possibility of poverty in the near future, the family decides to open an ethnic restaurant on an old abandoned boat. To secure the permits and licenses, the family decides to organize a big couscous dinner for the local authorities. A turn of events occurs the day of the big dinner though; in fact, nothing is going necessarily well.

The essential is that the couscous is ready, and it's here where an act of giving, shortened to a sequence of a few images, is introduced. We do not believe that it is a coincidence that the Tunisian director provides such a subtle cinematic representation. It is the fundamental rule this type of giving would require: discretion. Souad, a motherly-type, puts aside a portion of the food before bringing it to the floating restaurant. She does this with naturalness and without worrying about the importance of the guests at the restaurant. Souad does not even join the rest of the family, but rather goes looking for a poor person in the neighbourhood to whom she offers her couscous. This gift, which seems so natural, has a long history, as we shall see: that of Islam.

Through anthropology, we know of remote societies in which giving is a fundamental experience that, according to studies by Marcel Mauss, is the creation of social relationships. In *The Gift*, Mauss devotes a specific note to charity, a difficult subject to confront, yet at the same time impossible to avoid. Conscientious of the difficulty in researching the origins of charity, he situates the origins in the Semitic history of the moral idea (12). The French anthropologist believes that alms made their

appearance in an evolving society, in which "…the old gift morality [is] raised to the position of a principle of justice" (12). According to Mauss, this phase would have been characterized by sometimes extreme ways of circulating goods where lavishness was pushed right to destruction, such as in the case of *potlatch.* If this system of exchange functioned before all else to consolidate/transform the social hierarchies of Indigenous people from the Northwestern coast of America, he accepted, from its vertical extension, its function as a sacrifice to "the Gods and spirits" (*ibid*). In his note, Mauss refers directly to these destructive practices to which "legal and religious evolution" no longer require sacrifice to the spirits and Gods, but to transform the sacrifice paying particular attention to "children and poor people" (11). "Generosity," writes Mauss, is the theory of alms (12). "A moral idea about gifts and wealth" (12*),* where the elements of the donor transaction (giving, receiving, returning) must be subjected to the requirements of justice.

Sadaqah: Open Your Hand and Give; Do Not Be There Only to Take Account

In the film *The Secret of the Grain*, Slimane's job loss is a tough blow, and for a family of labourers, opening a restaurant is a hardship to endure. Preparing a big couscous dinner and giving a portion of it to the poor are the means that Souad offers. It is never articulated out loud what pushes Souad to such an act of generosity, a gesture that we understand to be customary for this family. With the collaborative project in the revival of the reproductive economy, Souad feels the need to accomplish a gesture that surpasses the exchange logic, of the win-win, an act that lets the meaning of the contents appear from where it stems. Everything that has been placed in the restaurant, both material and immaterial goods, does not belong to entirely to us. Souad feels that she is a part of a cause bigger than herself. Her affectionate act can be understood in a spiritual sense, born from the Koranic revelation, in the dynamic of expectations where this union springs forward, a universe in which, by virtue of her style, this gift seems to express an old tradition which, in the period of Mohammad preaching in Mecca, was called *sadaqah*.

As indicated in the Qur'an, God created the world and gave it to man (Pizzi 203). At the end of the fourteenth century, it is in these words that that Ibn Khaldun combines the meaning of the ancient tale with the one that established Islam. It is extrapolated from *Livre des exemples,* a piece of work that does not limit itself to North African Arabs, but offers an extraordinary saga of many other Islamic societies from the East to the West with several forays beyond Dar al-Islam, towards Christian Europe.

We are moved by Khaldun's words, in which the earth and everything in it, including man's existence, are the words of God.[1] This masterpiece is entrusted to man. Driven by the spirit of gratitude (and/or fear), man is called to fulfil the debts he owes to God through prayer in the vertical extension, and by taking care of the poor who need it in the horizontal extension. Man must accomplish what is just and give back what he has received. God receives what he is owed through the poor, achieving divine justice and righteousness at the same time. Giving God what He is owed means synchronously recognizing Him as the source of all goods, and confirming his sovereignty. The principle of justice finds its fulfilment when *existing for God* becomes *existing for others*.

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In this regard, the story of the gardeners and the gift of fruit becomes significant. God tests a group of people, owners of a plot of fruit trees. They agree to harvest the fruit the next day, but forget to submit their plan to the will of God. During the night, God triggers a storm that destroys the entire crop. Early in the morning, unsuspectingly, the gardeners go to their property to collect the fruit for themselves and not for the poor. They only realize what has happened, and only understand that they had done wrong, once on-site. The more sensible one among them says, "Did I not tell you to give glory to God?" (Qur'an LXVII: 28). Making mutual recriminations, they recognize having been righteous too late.

The metaphor of the fruit[2] speaks of an order broken by the bad gardeners and restored by God. The gardeners had forgotten that everything be-

longs to God, a membership that man receives by offering a piece of everything he owns. This offering is received through the poor. By offering a piece of what one owns—the fruit—man metaphorically offers his entire harvest and glorifies God by giving him what is in fact His. Ignoring this spiritual order causes the fruit to be destroyed, what is in this case, retribution inflicted on the gardeners and the recovery of the goods deducted from his true sovereignty. Unlike the gardeners, Souad does not forget to offer a portion of the food to the poor before taking it to the restaurant.

The oblate actions leading to this type of gift, and more generally, the entire universe of giving in Islam, is created on the basis of service that the Koranic faith supports and transforms based on the requirements of its spiritual nature. The study of linguistic codes belonging to this type of experiment already gives us sufficient guidance regarding their similarities with Judaism and Christianity. However, an exploration of the origins of these practices—beyond the goals of this article—would take us a long way into the study of the contributions of the Greeks, Romans, Sassanids, Byzantines, and the pre-Islam Arabic traditions.

It is safe to assume that the history of *sadaqah* is pre-Islamic (Weir 729). Pre-Hegiran Arabic writings show the importance of practices, such as generosity and hospitality that followed this tradition (Rosenthal "Hiba" 343). The tradition was shown in the excessive demonstrations where, for example, camels were slaughtered in greater numbers than necessary. We wonder if this type of practice is, among others, also a rank indicator, like that of the *potlatch* (Bonner 16-20).[3] From the beneficiaries' perspective, the transformation occurs mostly downward in Islam: the poor and needy become first on the list. But there is another side to this. In the histrionic ostentation of natural giving, the Koranic faith prefers the discretion rule, an expression of a new spiritual order in which, in view of ordinary giving, *sadaqah* is qualified through a particularly religious intention (Weir 732).

This rule, as in the case of almsgiving, is motivated by the will to preserve the dignity of the poor. In a context as rich in significance as the one alluded to, giving to the poor, in a face-to-face relationship, remains a difficult gesture. It is a problem that extends to the interpreter who rarely listens to the recipient's point of view. In these asymmetric relationships, the sources more often provide the information related to the donor while the situation of the poor and needy remains in the dark. For this reason, the voices in favour of the discretion to be practiced never waver. Al-Ghazali in particular has highlighted the importance of helping in secret (220).

Putting aside the question of the origins, which on the other hand can be fully documented, is the varied reality of a practice translated, reinvented and passed on from Islam. It is a practice rooted in the main sources of this religion: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. There are many oblate actions linked to *sadaqah* and they vary throughout time, location, and category of persons. The strength of gift exchanges is shown right from the origins of Islam and accompanies the life of Islamic societies through the centuries. These origins and developments are virtually ignored by the western world. Furthermore, *sadaqah* is strongly encouraged in Islamic sources. Many travel reviews bear witness to the spontaneity of giving and of the capacity of taking care of travellers and strangers, a practice which surprised traveller Guillaume Patel in his experiences in Turkey and its surrounding areas:

> When you will give *tzadaqa*, almsgiving, give the best that you have and the most precious because one piece of the best is more pleasant to God, than one hundred ill-gotten crowns after your death: and one date given thoughtfully during your life, is better than a thousand after your death. This implies that when they [those who practice *sadaqah*] welcome someone into their home, they treat them [the guest] as they themselves would like to be treated: something I had not thought true at first, until Seraphin de Gozza Raguzois, who had tried it around Serbia and Bosnia enough time, told me.… He sees a house by itself, pretty for such a country, there where there was a man sitting by the door, he gets up, and comes to welcome them, saying *sapha gheldinis*, You are very welcome.… Then says to them … God loves you, come into my home, I will give you God's blessing: that is to say, goods that God gave me. He is incontinently late: there are no other homes here and along your way there are no other homes. Here we have good fire, and good chickens, come in the name of God.… And they were made to sleep on Turkish-style mat, each by oneself. The next day, they wanted to pay in the morning, they were told: … Live for my soul, God gives it to you, or loves you: from here be treated well they were told, a big thank you. (Postel 160-162)

Already in the sixteenth century, it was unusual for a European traveller to experience such unconditional hospitality,[4] in which, not surprisingly, it is he who welcomes and who thanks. Here, as Jean Starobinski reminds us, the horizontal gift of

hospitality crosses paths with, and becomes subordinate to the vertical gift addressed to God:

> Almsgiving is a gift of compassion (*éléèmosynè*) where the poor are granted a particularly important role. Salvation, having already been announced to the compassionate, must be passed through the object of compassion: the humble, the sick, the poor in whom God is present. The gift that heaven will reward a hundredfold is through them. (Similar precepts echoing the same statements from the Hebrew Bible can be found in Islam). (94)

Structured works of welcome just as much as acts of hospitality have unconditional gifts[5] to known and unknown persons, to Muslims and non-Muslims, as the common denominator, leading to several types of *sadaqah*. Unlike *zakat*, voluntary almsgiving is intended for everyone, without conditions. This openness has tensions and differences that could already be raised in early Islam (Weir 734). Whether a passage from the Qur'an (Qur'an II: 272) or more explicitly a *Hadith*, the importance of this extension above the borders of the community of believers is remembered: "A man asks the Messenger of God … which was the best Islam. He says, "You provide food and you greet those you know and those you do not know." [6]

Sadaqah has often been focused on religious festivities. The first, on the weekly basis, is that of Fridays. On the day of common prayer, the entry to the mosque was filled with the poor who hoped for a prayer capable of turning into charity.

Aside from the weekly day of celebration, the Muslim calendar includes months of remembrance. Ramadan and that of Dhu 'l-hijja both offer opportunities to multiply *sadaqah* gestures.[7] As the Postel tale suggests, besides those who can give only a date palm, there are those who, rich or ruling, will rally to give more. During the month of Dhu 'l-hijja, the celebration of sacrifice is always an occasion for acts of generosity from those well-off and the rulers. These groups voluntarily get together to publicly demonstrate their generosity and to consolidate their patronage affiliations (Singer 82). In this intricate flow of goods, there also exists a hierarchical form of giving for which giving unsparingly seems to be the basis. However, it is a topic not broached in this paper.

Giving to the Poor: From Charity to the Loan

This consists primarily of spontaneous acts like Souad's that show affection for and attention towards the poor and needy. Those supported today, may tomorrow become a stakeholder in mutual aid actions. "The part given to others allowed him re-enrichment so that he was then able to re-impoverish himself in a continuous cycle of charity" (Décobert 241). Experiences of giving passing through to the principle of justice have had important historic developments well above the "the history of Semitic moral ideas" (Mauss 12). Here we synthesize Mauss's theory that has already been discussed.[8] The theory is a new way of giving that includes a cultural transformation, a new interpretation of poverty (Starobinski 95).

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It remains to be asked if this "entry" of the poor in history, is not accompanied by a new peril. By accepting the poor in their conditions of poverty, is there not a risk of keeping them in their status? By rescuing the poor as needy, it is not imprisoning them in one category? These questions ponder the rationale of the kind of solidarity reserved for the poor in light of the modern principle that is identified by trusting the primary assistance offered to those who are in need. Without claiming to tackle the question in all its complexity, we will limit ourselves to the most relevant information from a philosopher like Moses Maimonides, who from the twelfth century, had already pinned down the problem and had researched the answer in the Jewish tradition. The philosopher's remarks, highlighted in Judaism and referring to the importance of granting loans to the poor, are surprisingly relevant:

> *The 197th Commandment: Lend to the poor.* By this injunction we are commanded to lend [money] to a poor man so as to help him and ease his position. This is a greater and weightier obligation

> than charity; for the poor beggar, whose need compels him to ask openly alms, does not suffer such acute distress in doing so as one who has never yet had to do it, and whose need is for help which will save disclosing his poverty. (Maimonides 175)

Responding to a poor person's needs with a loan "is more important and more precious" than giving them alms (this is our interpretation) because, in the former case, there is a trust *relationship* that can be absent in charity. In the latter, if there is a change to consider the recipient as the subject (passive) belonging to the poor category, granting him a loan signifies asking him to rise by counting on his capacity (active) for resilience. For Maimonides already, the best solidarity does not consist in making an offering, but in helping the poor to rise on their own, by helping them to increase their self-confidence. If charity is an activity by which we can maintain distances, the loan is able to decrease the distances as is shown in the existing experiences of large scale micro-loans, and in which Jewish philosopher's precept transforms into credit unions promoted from below. It is a process that shows the social dimension of trust that is the foundation of these projects, but that, at the same time, is fuelled by the forming of the social capital that may then be reinvested. As we know, the fiduciary relationship is a characteristic of giving.

This social dimension of a giving, which goes above the *I-Thou* relationship to invest in the *Us*, is no stranger to the spirit of *sadaqah*. Postel's account showed the importance of giving and of hospitality, but giving freely extends to common goods such as mosques, schools, and hospitals in a dynamic progressive expansion of recipients as is seen in the gift of the Tariq legacy. In 2005, during his first year of studies at a university in Pennsylvania, Tariq Fischer, an American with a Pakistani mother, was the victim of a car accident. After his death, his parents decided to preserve Tariq's legacy at the institution he attended. In the letter accompanying the gift, the Fischer family asked that the legacy go towards supporting Islamic studies at the university, with the hopes of contributing to greater knowledge and friendship among the students. It is added, with an important specification for our topic—that in Islam there is a tradition of support for studies that foresees projects that continue to operate even after the death of the donor. It's a matter of *al-sadaqah al-jariya*.[9] We know, thanks to Tariq's story that, besides the forms of *sadaqah* meant to welcome, for others who focus on Muslim celebrations, there are gifts intended to create and support the common good.

Each guarantees the return of generosity with a degree of regularity that is entrusted to the individual's initiative, exposed to idiosyncrasies, and marked by boundaries. The awareness that the ethics of care, owed to the world of *sadaqah*, must be reinforced, continues from the outset of Islam, which feels the need to assure solidarity by making it compulsory. *Zakat* serves this purpose.

Zakat: Fighting Greed, Encouraging Social Justice

With *sadaqah,* a network of relationships oriented towards the support and protection of those who are near and far, friends and strangers, is encountered. This universe, due to its importance, is seen from the perspective of protecting and giving reassurance, and seems to have produced an institutionalized process of voluntary giving to the religious instructions with which, Islam establishes the obligation of the distribution of the wealth[10] from the beginning. Even in historical events (Bamyeh 244), the introduction of mandatory almsgiving (*zakat)* thereby strengthens this network of individual initiatives for which is discussed in the preceding paragraph. In a crescendo of various interventions which have, over the centuries, given life to the Islamic framework, *sadaqah* becomes the regulating model for *zakat.*[11]

The meaning of Zakat

"Perform the prayer, and give alms. Whatever good you forward for yourselves, you will find it with God. God is Seeing of everything you do (Qur'an II: 110). The dual meaning of *zakat*, among others, is revealed to us in this passage from the Qur'an. It is an action that often goes hand in hand with prayer as if it were another way of praying; it is not one person's altruistic impulse towards someone in need that is expressed, but rather an act of faith and obedience towards God. During his journey through Turkey in eighteenth century, Carlo Mantegazza understood that in the Qur'an, almsgiving was not just a commitment, but an obligation: "Almsgiving is not exhorted, but ordered" (Mantegazza 37). Mantegazza said this in regards to the guidelines in the Holy Book of Islam. The intent to fulfil the will of God is the sole motivation capable of achieving this gift in the meaning of *zakat.* Focused on the relationship between God and the believer, the religious meaning emerges as a priority in the main Islamic sources. However, unlike prayer, an obligation such as this one can only be achieved through interaction with others, through assuming responsibility in relation to the community of believers, and asking for support from those more well-off. There are important variations seen in this precept, this second meaning of *zakat.*

The role of zakat

In this regard, we can also understand the role of *zakat*. A derivative of the verb *zaka*, *zakat* means purification and growth. If the path to purification lasts one's whole life, the practice of *zakat* is of particular importance to the believer, for giving a portion of one's income to the needy signifies (1) purifying the rest, but also purifying one's self in the battle against greed and ignorance. "Fighting against one's own greed"[12] also signifies (2) growth in generosity and reinvesting in different types of solidarity. The many Koranic references to a purification that will be rewarded (Qur'an xxx: 39)[13] as earthly prosperity promises, must not be understood in the Calvinistic sense; the reward, which is heaven, will be granted only on Judgement Day. Al-Ghazali, in the treaty devoted to *zakat*, extensively discusses the provisions to be followed in order to achieve this duty, the first being that of having pure intentions in the manner which has been previously mentioned. Emphasis on the Man-God relationship is also highlighted in reference to the the beneficiary's gratitude: "He who expresses his gratitude towards others and not towards God ignores his benefactor: everyone is powerless without His help." [14]

The disapproval of greed in the Qur'an is a permanent feature in the Islamic culture that has often struck the greedy, all the while revealing concerns, and the irony that is their fear of being robbed and deceived. In fact, their concern manifests a unique fear: the loss of their wealth, and with it, their own life. In *Avarice and the Avaricious,* Arabic writer Al-Jâhiz expresses himself with relation to this persecuted minority. Here, greed and generosity intersect in one of the most contradictory dialectics in Arabic literature (Al-Jâhiz; Benabdelali 188).

Returning to *zakat* doctrine, the requirement of giving a portion of one's assets only applies to revenue exceeding a certain level. With regard to the amount of tax, legal professionals have applied different methods of calculating and updating its value. At the moment it is 2.5 percent on an annual basis.

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Zakat recipients

Another important chapter includes *zakat* recipients. In this case as well, the Qur'an goes into detail and gives eight categories of persons identified as recipients of the religious tax.

> Almsgiving *(sadaqah)* expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect and for bringing hearts together and for freeing captives and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the traveller. (Qur'an ix: 60)

We understand that it is a passage that has been studied extensively, and with problems that begin with the first word "almsgiving." Where one would expect to find the Arabic word *zakat*, *sadaqah* is found instead. It is not the only time where the sacred text of Islam shows some variation with regard to the term "almsgiving." The most endorsed interpretation though suggests that *zakat* payment (Qur'an ix: 103)[15] must be understood. In Islam, even more than in Pre-Islamic and Classic traditions, a special place is given to the poor, who then become first on the list (Rosenthal *Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 143). The distinction between the poor (category i) and destitute (category ii) is not accidental and has been the subject of great debate, for which we only consider the last chapter to be fascinating. If the vast majority of interpreters (those interpreting) maintained that the poor as well as the poorest (destitute) be included as Muslims, an exclusivity that must be extended to the other recipients mentioned in the Qur'an's passage, some more liberal contemporary experts maintain that with the "destitute" we must include "all the poor," even non-Muslims (Al-Khayyat, cited *in* Benthall "Financial Worship" 31). *Zakat* doctrine experts are not the only ones split on this topic; social agencies are split as well. Of the two largest Muslim humanitarian organizations operating in England, *Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW)* finances operations in Africa for non-Muslims, whereas *Muslim Aid*, apart from a few small projects, supports only Muslims (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 10).[16]

As for the third category of recipients, "those who collect," it is important that they are included in the Qur'an's list. From the beginning of Islam, there has been an office responsible for collection

and also maybe the redistribution of *zakat* funds. Together with other kinds of social contributions, *zakat* has always been a qualified resource of taxation practices anticipated by Islam's canonical texts. If there had been legal experts to interpret and draw up the guidelines for this system while taking the needs of the Muslim community into consideration, the social contributions and redistribution would be returned to the rulers though dedicated offices. Those who worked in this type of revenue agency collecting *zakat,* at the same time, made up the third category of recipients of this tax. This task, which put the workers in direct contact with the contributions paid, heightened the risk of corruption.[17] Already recognizable in the progressive composition of the Qur'an, the wealthiest Muslims' oppositions to this tax was not diminished (Bamyeh 244). Today, observing this obligation is more and more left to each person's voluntary initiative, according to the direction that brings them closest to *sadaqah.* This historic process, which we will return to in the conclusion of this paper, allows the phenomenon of *zakat* to be considered in research devoted to giving. These oppositions have often prompted disputes and conflicts requiring interpreter intervention. In general, it must be recognized that theological and legal work have always been active because Islam does not have a recognized supreme authority to decide terms of faith and guiding rules for individual and collective existence.

The fourth category consists of "those for whom their hearts have embraced faith." From the beginning, the Muslim community looked to support those who had converted or were thinking of converting, conscious that it was hard to cut ties with blood relationships who were the only source of protection in pre-Islamic societies. With Islam's rapid expansion in the second half of the seventh century, this requirement began resize. There are currently a diverse range of interpretations: some argue that support for missionary training is found in this category, but also the fight against Zionism, Christian missions and Western ideologies. Others suggest that this category includes all those who sympathize with Islam *(Benthall "Financial Worship" 31); and others support, with *zakat* funds, Muslim minorities in non-Muslim states, or yet, in conflict zones such as Iraq or some African states (Singer 51).

The interpretations even differ in the case of the fifth category. Referring to the past—centuries where slavery as was widely practiced in Muslim societies as in others—the inclusion of emancipation through religious requirements predicted in Islam consisted not only of encouragement, but especially practical support offered to proprietors to achieve a humanitarian act. Given that the gift of a slave's freedom signified a decrease in funding for the proprietor, this gesture must be properly assessed by the person and must not be in conflict with the owner's obligation to support his own family. In the Holy Books of Islam, the invitation to discernment is also recursive in reference to *sadaqah*. We wonder if this indicates that the individual giving in Islam is not only unconditional but rather, from the beginning, oriented towards ethical standards. According to some political interpretations, in contemporary history, old types of slavery had been replaced by new types such as colonization and new colonialism, types which also expect a work of liberation, and that with which we can anticipate strength and struggle *(jihad)* "in the Way of the Lord," to therefore foster God's cause (category 7).

With the eighth category, we are introduced to the last group of *zakat* recipients: travellers, rich or poor, who, for the mere fact that they are far from home, could use help—more so in the past than now. Merchants, immigrants, pilgrims, Sufis could all be found in this category. Today, others add new subgroups, such as refugees, to this category. With this last category, we have the complete spectrum of religious requirements for which believers are called to with the Qur'an. Establishing these eight requirements means allowing similar groups of recipients the right to be helped by those who have more than necessary. We can see here what we can be called the social function of *zakat*: the redistribution of wealth inside the community. Different than the other types of solidarity, there are eight collective requirements, types well-defined from the responsibilities towards the community of believers. In this concept of management by virtue of the community—a concept close to Judaism[18]—the inclusion of travellers can be interpreted as a need to grow the spectrum of recipients. Islam has constructed a unique way of structuring solidarity by obliging those who have more than is necessary.[19] It all appears to be a concept that aims to support those who are the closest. The travellers' category seems to introduce dystonia. In this respect, it is important to remember that Islam was born from the experience of being foreign; it was incorporated and spread by the first generations of Muslims. To follow the only God, Mohammed and his companions not only left their belongings, but they were pressured to cut ties with their families in order to new alliances. Born from migration, from the beginning, Islam has seemed capable—in the ideal plan—of reducing the distance to the unknowns and the foreigners.

With the evolving experience of Hegira[20] in this new paradigm, he

who comes from afar is recognized as the next to receive, not only under the spontaneous form of *sadaqah*, but also in those organized by *zakat*. Exposed to the widest range of dangers, the traveller is in need of protection. It's here that the eighth Koranic statute could be reformulated: with the requirement of hospitality, Islam listens to, welcomes and answers this need. Over the centuries, this reception has also extended to non-Muslim travellers. These exchanges occurring between Christians and Muslims are documented in historical research (Singer 57). Some contemporary Muslim organizations already mentioned[21] seem to be moving in this direction as well.

With the passion that seems to originate from experience, Seyyed Hossein Nasr summarizes in a few words what we have sought to construct:

> Finally, the gift of *zakat*, or religious tax, is once again a form of *jihad,* not only because in separating oneself from his proper riches, man must fight against his carnal soul's desire and greed, but also because in paying *zakat* in its many forms, man is contributing to the establishment of economic justice in a humane society. (31)

Furthermore, the importance given to *zakat* becomes even clearer when reflecting on the rank it is given in the cultural practices of Sunnite origins: anyone who wants to live their faith and obedience has obligations to God, which are the five pillars of Islam. The first pillar is the profession of faith. The second, the ceremonial prayer, obliges the believer, both individually and collectively. Required alms or *zakat* constitutes the third pillar of Islam and represents the unique obligation to God that engages the believer with the community. The requirement of fasting, which concerns the time during Ramadan, is the fourth pillar. Finally, the pilgrimage to the Islamic holy sites of Mecca and Medina is the fifth pillar. *Zakat* constitutes one of the fundamental paths in the life of a Muslim. The religious significance of this obligation also comes from the inspection of its transgression. Neither canonical texts, nor the majority of legal experts had foreseen the imposition of penalties because he who does not pay *zakat* should expect a punishment on Judgement Day, an aspect that must not be forgotten. Mandatory almsgiving is an act of faith, but it does not take away from the fact that it is also insurance for the afterlife.

Zakat During the Month of Ramadan

On the closing day of Ramadan *('Id al-Fitr)*, there is another pittance to pay, this one also annually: *zakat al-Fitr*. Here is what Jonathan Benthall says:

> In 1996, while I was spending the month of Ramadan in Jordan, I discussed the question of *zakat* with a large number of Jordanians, from the warm Muslim to those who sincerely believe, from the rich to the poor. From these conversations we were able to determine how the word *zakat* was associated with *zakat al-Fitr*. This practice, highly observed by believers, constitutes a modest commitment for wealthy families, but becomes an onerous one for the poor with many children. Ignoring those in charge of collecting *zakat,* many people will give gifts to the poor in their neighbourhoods or in those circle of acquaintances. Others maintain that in a modern state like Jordan, with its tax levy system, *zakat* is an obsolete obligation. (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 14)

These anthropological observations find confirmation of the quantitative data developed by Abu Kuraysha's research conducted in Egypt's rural areas. Here, it was discovered that many farmers had knowingly neglected *zakat* payment (only 20 percent settled), while many amongst them (up to 76 percent) paid *zakat al-Fitr*, a less important requirement for Muslim law, but more common among believers for its relationship with the holy month of Ramadan (Zysow 456).

Concluding Remarks

The principle that no citizen should be forced to practice almsgiving, but that each has the *right* to public assistance still has a certain solidity in industrial and post-industrial societies despite current difficulties. It was a long and complex[22] story that led from the caring of the poor as a public virtue (Brown 1-16) to the creation of social foresight institutions. In Europe, under pressure from the socialist forces, Bismarck launched the first large scale social security programme (health and accident insurance, pensions, etc.) in the 1940s.

Basma Sharif, with her vast and highly-skilled experience in social engagement, cites the Qur'an which reminds us that in Islam, the poor have the right to social assistance (Benthall "Organized Charity" 159). Current research, which has begun to tackles these topics, seeks to understand in which way *zakat* has succeeded in influencing Muslim societies; it is a large investigation in which there is actually little evidence. So much in fact, that both historians and researchers in the social sciences agree that, over the centuries, *zakat* was not an effective assistance tool for the needy and the redistribution of wealth. Historic research has predominately shown the gap between the requirements of canonical texts

and Muslim practices over the centuries and concluded that personal or discrete payments of this tax must have always been the most widespread practice. Ami Singer, while reflecting on the fact that documentation on *zakat's* public action seems to be restructured in favour of private action, believes that the tax system could be considered as an institutionalization of *zakat.* She says this in referring to certain areas in the Muslim world. In this sense, there could be consequences for the creation of new taxes and a general increase of the tax ratio: abandonment of traditional systems for collecting *zakat*, or merging them with another name under a new tax system (Singer 64).

On the social sciences side, field studies yield important evidence. As has already been seen, farmers from rural zones in Egypt, while fully acknowledging zakat laws, choose for the most part to carry out oblation during the end of the month, heart-warming celebration of Ramadan. In addition, the stories that Jonathan Benthall heard in Jordan seem to confirm that *zakat* is perceived as an obsolete reality. More precisely, what is called into question is the fact that *zakat* is mandatory. Aside from some Muslim states that have, with limited success, attempted to revitalize the *zakat* by putting it into their legal system (Zysow 455-456), it is the voluntary or optional payment that seems to prevail today. Like Souad, people earmark their donations for the poor in their own neighbourhoods or the poor in the neighbourhoods of their friends and acquaintances (Benthall "Financial Worship" 33). The sense of responsibility and fear of divine punishment have become increasingly influential.

In the gradual decentralization of the *zakat* from state sphere to the private sphere, it must not be forgotten in as much as a religious obligation, "ritual almsgiving" remains a duty for all Muslims. In this tension, some groups and movements have taken advantage of the *zakat* to launch their own political and social projects. For example, *zakat* committee in Nablus, Palestine, built an effective clinic. Another Jordanian group is very active in *zakat* fundraising and works on behalf of Palestinians on the Gaza Strip. During Benthall's visit, this group did not hide its political support for the Palestine against Israel case, further reinforcing the opinions of some critics, not only Westerners, who, after September 11, 2001, highlighted the link between humanitarian commitment and extremist violence present in certain groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Those who recognize the importance of generosity and solidarity in contemporary, and also past, Muslim societies, will have a difficult time sharing the idea that the humanitarian operations of recent decades are nothing other than hedging activities to conceal subversive political objectives. However, another thing is to think that it is a work that has a political scope—no different than the work of Western organizations. Some researchers, by identifying new political actors, think that the intense activity of these mostly large groups also has a historical significance for contemporary Muslim societies. Their identity is not really established on the basis of land like the nationalist surges in the first decades of the twentieth century, or on the basis of socialist or Marxist ideologies, but rather pursuant to multiple affiliations that can be ethnic and/or religious (Elwert).

Souad's simple act of affection and solidarity had led us into the rich universe of giving in Islam, with specific forms of self-giving. It is a question of ideals and practices that, in turn, open doors to the vibrant fabric of many contemporary Muslim societies at the heart of what Seyyed Hossein Nasr calls "traditional Islam." These societies, some more than others, are affected by deep divides that must drive researchers towards well-balanced studies, while avoiding the temptation to condemn or glorify.

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Endnotes

[1]With Jewish origins, this doctrine had also been inherited from Christianism. In the Books of Psalms, *cf.* the beginning of psalm XXIV.

[2]Even if the metaphor of signs is not explicitly referred to in the Koranic parable, we still don't think it's arbitrary for it to be interpreted as such. We will refer to the details in Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan (22)

[3]On the gift-justice link, or more generally, the transformation of giving in the moral sense in the Abrahamic faith, *cf.* Mauss (24). Also on the same

topic, see the beginning of this article.

[4]A few decades later, in noticing that paid hospitality existed only in Europe, Rousseau wrote: "I have remarked that hospitality is only fold in Europe: throughout Asia you are lodged gratis. I well know that it is not so abundantly furnished with conveniences; but it is nothing to be enabled to say, "I am a man, and as such, received by my fellow creatures: pure humanity affords me this shelter?" Small privations are easily endured when the mind is better treated than the body" (Rousseau 376).

[5]The following Hadith is brought by Al-Bhukari and Muslims: "Distribute and give—or, rather: transfer—and do not be there to take accounts only, or God will keep the accounts at your losses, and do not be tense, or God will be tense at your loss" (Al-Nawawi 566).

[6]A Hadith in which Al-Bukhari and Muslim collected works are compatible. In this regard, *cf.* Al-Nawawai (557).

[7]For a reconstruction of *sadaqah* gestures during the important times in the Muslim calendar, *cf.* Singer (72-81).

[8]See the beginning of this article.

[9]The discussion regarding this can be found in Singer (1-2). It is an enormous thread of solidarity that is reminiscent of western charitable works. Could this behaviour be considered a gift in the Mauss sense? An affirmative response can be found in Tonkin (171-183).

[10]See *infra* for the sociopolitical importance of the *zakat* doctrine, considered by some to be the first Social Security system.

[11]According to Islamic sources, *sadaqah* was already being practiced at Mecca and precedes *zakat* which was established in Medina, *cf.* (Weir 730). For historical context that leads to the introduction of "mandatory almsgiving," *cf.,* among others, Bamyeh (243-244).

[12]This expression from Seyyed Hossein Nasr will be cited in its entirety in the following pages.

[13]"And whatever you give for interest to increase within the wealth of people will not increase with Allah. But what you give in zakah, desiring the countenance of Allah - those are the multipliers."

[14]The small treatise given to the "Mysteries of *zakat*" is found inside Al-Ghazali's larger work (I: 212).

[15]Also in reference to this excerpt, the meaning of *zakat* prevails the direction that is attributed to the term used, *sadaqah*.

[16]The *International Islamic Relief Organization* financed operations in favour of Muslims in Rwanda, *cf.* Benthall ("Organized Charity" 160).

[17]The risk of public officers confusing the gifts with the bribes was present from the beginning of Islam: *cf.* Rosenthal ("Gifts and Bribes" 137).

[18]This concerns the obligation in Judaism of expressing solidarity towards members of the community, *cf.* Brown (17).

[19]Benthall argues that Islam was capable of devising a Social Security system before the European states. This topic will be revisited in the following pages.

[20]On the significance of the immigration of Mohammad and his disciples from Mecca to Medina, a paradigmatic event of "extraordinary wealth," *cf* Arkoun and Borrmans (76).

[22]*Cf. supra*: "The recipients of *zakat*."

[22]For a reconstruction of the history of Social Security in France, *cf.* Chanial (272-305).

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KATERINA FRETWELL

Celtic Knots Introduction (paternal side)

Vaughan Vychan Campbell – Welsh Irish Scots:
Celtic forbears and UK dissenters

no surprise they staged *risings* – a desire
for fair play stoked their flinty genes

  against mercury as medicine land
as foreign-owned borders as porous …

and my rants against aggression and inequality …
until I grew into a woodland-calm.

Now forested a widow I heed the creeds
of animals crossing my destination

  with intent. I'm content in my *détente*
from omnipresent screed and screen

My shadow-side welcomes palpable air
night-hued atoms and dappled darkness.

Katerina Vaughan Fretwell's ninth poetry book, which includes her art, We Are Malala, *was published by Inanna Publications in 2019. She lives in Seguin, Ontario.*