

# Transnational Islamic charity as everyday rituals

MARTA BIVAND ERDAL\* AND KAJA BORCHGREVINK†

*\*(corresponding author) Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO),  
Hausmanns gate 3, 0186 Oslo, Norway  
marta@prio.org*

*†Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and Norwegian University of Life  
Sciences (NMBU), Universitetstunet 3, 1430 Ås, Norway  
kaja@prio.org*

**Abstract** *In this article, through a case study of transnational Islamic charity, we explore the intersection between migrant development engagements and religious practices. While migrant engagement in development is well known, the intersections of these with everyday religious practices are less so. We use the prism of ‘everyday rituals’, understood as human actions that connect ideals with practices. Everyday rituals not only express but also reinforce ideals, in this case those of Islamic charity in a context of sustained migrant transnationalism. The article draws on 35 interviews about Islamic charity, transnationalism and development with practising Muslims of Pakistani origin in Oslo, Norway. We argue that everyday rituals are a useful tool for exploring the role of religion in motivating migrant development engagements. This is because they include transcendental perspectives, bridge ideals and practices that connect the contemporary to the hereafter, encompass transnational perspectives, and are attentive to the ‘here’ and ‘there’ spatially in migrants’ lives.*

**Keywords** DEVELOPMENT, ISLAMIC, RELIGION, RITUALS, TRANSNATIONAL

---

On a shelf in Aisha’s<sup>1</sup> living room, there is a small, discreet collection box. If she happens to have spare change when she is passing the box, Aisha will drop a few coins into it. She does not keep track of how often or how much. It is something she just does in passing, usually on a daily basis – sometimes when reminded of all she has to be grateful for, at other times when she learns of the pain and suffering of those less fortunate than herself. The latter are often people in the village where her mother still lives and about whom she gets updates whenever she and her mother speak on the phone. She always uses the money in the box to help other people. Sometimes she donates it to a development organization or initiative collecting money at the mosque, at others she sends it to Pakistan for her mother to pass on to those in need of assistance, or to victims of natural disasters or conflicts.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

*Global Networks* 17, 1 (2017) 130–146. ISSN 1470–2266. © 2016 The Author(s)  
130 *Global Networks* published by Global Networks Partnership and John Wiley & Sons Ltd

For Aisha, passing the box and dropping coins into it is a natural part of everyday life. This vignette reveals how migrants incorporate their religious practices into their contributions to development in their daily lives, thus highlighting the relationship in Islamic charity between ‘ideals’ and ‘practice’. The fact that migrants such as Aisha contribute to what one may conceive of as ‘development’ in their country of origin is well known. What is less well known is how ideals and practices of Islamic charity intersect with and motivate these engagements on an everyday basis. Our inductive analysis starts from an observation that these migrants intertwine ideals and practices in their Islamic charity and development engagements. The aim of this article is to explore how Islamic charity intersects with and motivates migrant development engagements. Rather than exploring this from the perspective of a particular definition of what constitutes ‘development’, we do so through an inductive analysis of what practising Muslims in Oslo – Pakistani migrants and their descendants – conceptualize as ‘Islamic charity’. We explore the intersections of migrant development engagements with religious practices through the prism of ‘everyday rituals’, understood as human actions that express, but may also reinforce, ideals. Through this we seek to contribute to the scholarship that explores relationships between religion, development and migrant transnationalism (Garbin 2014; Gardner and Grillo 2002; Levitt 2007; Singh 2013; Vásquez and DeWind 2014; Wong and Levitt 2014).

‘Islamic charity’ refers to both a set of ideals, rooted in Islamic theologies, and to practices, some of which are obligatory and others voluntary (Benthall 1999). The best-known Islamic charitable practice is *zakat*, the obligatory ‘tax’ of 2.5 per cent on annual surplus, one of the five pillars of Islam. It is an equal obligation for men and women – and Islamic scripture details who must offer these alms, who must not, and who are the rightful beneficiaries. There are also other charitable practices such as *qurbani*, the distribution of meat to the poor after the Eid ul-Adha;<sup>2</sup> *zakat-ul-fitr*, the offering of money to the poor so that they can also celebrate the end of the holy month of Ramadan; and *sadqa*,<sup>3</sup> the more general principle of performing good deeds, in particular helping the poor. Here, we are not primarily concerned with the theologies and the Islamic teaching underlying each of these ideals and associated practices, but rather with the ways in which the people we interviewed perform, articulate and reinforce Islamic charity through everyday rituals.

We use the term ‘transnational Islamic charity’ to depict the transnational social field that creates a universe of meaning for many of our research participants. Islamic charity refers both to a set of ideals, drawn from religious texts or teachings, and to the practices that correspond to such ideals in the lives of practising Muslims. The interactions between ideals and practices, however, make a binary distinction that is of little value here. Rather, drawing on emergent work on ‘lived religion’, focusing on material cultures and spiritual practices, at the opposite end of the spectrum from studies of ‘descriptive religion’, conventionally focusing on belief and membership (Ammerman 2014), we approach this inductively, from a perspectives drawn analytically from our research participants. Therefore, we approach religion in people’s lives not as a dichotomy between ideals and practice, but as encompassing the ways in which they make sense of their everyday lived experiences. Seeing transnational Islamic charity in

terms of everyday rituals therefore encompasses the religious ideals as well as the everyday practices.

We understand Islamic charity as both inspired by and as an articulation of religious consciousness. Since human motives are rarely clear-cut, with regard to our decision to categorize everyday rituals as ‘Islamic charity’, one could argue that for secularized Muslims such motivations are as much socio-cultural as religious. We thus understand Islamic charity among our research participants as everyday rituals in which the religious, social and cultural are strongly interrelated and reflective of a holistic approach to life worlds. Nabeel, for example, told us that ‘Islam is a way of living ... this affects all aspects of your life and it isn’t only linked to prayer ... it is how you behave as well ... how you treat other people.’ This statement echoes debates on the methodological challenges of studying ‘the religious’, as if a category isolated from social, cultural, political and economic dimensions (Berghammer and Fliegenschnee 2014; Bolognani and Mellor 2012).

By understanding Islamic charity as everyday rituals, we build on previous research on migrants’ religious and non-religious ceremonies, with reference to life-cycle rites such as funerals and weddings (Gardner and Grillo 2002), and studies of lived religion (Amermann 2006, 2014; McGuire 2008). We argue for increased attention to migrants’ mundane everyday religious practices, practices that are not only associated with life-cycle events, or public festivals in temples, mosques or shrines, but that happen in the home, with friends, privately. Adopting a transnational optic, we investigate migrants’ everyday religious practices with openness to the transnational social field (Levitt 2003).

We explore how migrants’ everyday rituals associated with Islamic charity intersect with their motivations and efforts to help people in Pakistan and beyond. Through an ethnographically based analysis, we tease out the ways in which the everyday rituals of transnational Islamic charity intersect with development and humanitarian ideals. We thus seek to contribute to discussions on religion in the migration–development nexus.

In the section below, we outline the conceptual framework that sets out how we use the concept of *everyday rituals* to connect the levels of ideals with those of practices. We follow this with a presentation of our methods and data, before proceeding in the main part of the article to analyse how everyday rituals of Islamic charity and migrants’ motivations and development engagements intersect. In the conclusion, we consider the usefulness of the concept of everyday rituals for studies of social practices within transnational social fields, drawing on our analysis of these in the contexts of Islamic charity and migrant development engagements.

### **Conceptualizing transnational Islamic charity as everyday rituals**

Aisha’s religious practice described at the beginning of this article – in which she puts a little money in her collection box as she passes it – may be conceptualized as an *everyday ritual* (Al-Ali 2002: 256; Gardner and Grillo 2002: 185). We understand rituals to be human actions that are both expressions and reinforcements of particular ideals, in this case Islamic charity. Rituals connect ideals to practices; they are bearers

of meaning, at once translating ideals into practices and reinforcing said ideals through their continued enactment over time and across geographic space. The reinforcement of ideals, however, does not entail their conservation, for reinforcement can involve change. This is the result of rituals being ‘everyday routinized activities and practices’, where meaning and activity, intention and outcome, are intertwined (Gardner and Grillo 2002: 183; Salih 2002). Given that transnational Islamic charity intersects with migrants sending remittances and engaging in development, questions arise about what kinds of motivations trigger what kinds of actions. On the collective level, we can see Islamic charity as motivating migrants to engage in development through structuring and organizing the charitable efforts that are set out in the Islamic calendar (Erdal and Borchgrevink 2015). On an individual level, routinized everyday rituals of transnational Islamic charity can help to structure and motivate migrant’s development engagement.

The study of rituals has roots in both sociology and anthropology, with Durkheim’s (1915) work focusing on rituals as significant for the renewal of bonds of solidarity as the starting point of a literature that has since developed in different directions. We may understand rituals as ‘conventionalized, stylized, communicative and meaningful human actions’ (Smith 2007: 506). For the purposes of this article, however, we see them as those human actions that, in different ways and more or less actively, connect the everyday with the hereafter (*akhira*)<sup>4</sup> and thus provide an eternal perspective. This transcendental dimension is a defining feature of the everyday rituals of Islamic charity. At an individual level, they relate strongly to the notion of duty – where the fulfilment of obligations at one level serves the function of helping other human beings, but at another level serves to invest in the eternal. Significantly, there is an inherent inter-connection between the eternal perspective and the here and now. In other words, the migrants conventionalize, stylize, and communicate the everyday rituals of Islamic charity in a shared universe of meaning to bridge everyday life – and the life hereafter.

The role of religious motivation in migrant development engagements – such as those connected with Islamic charity – is relatively under-researched, as opposed to the more established fields of study on religion and migration (Levitt 2003, 2007), or religion and integration (Foner and Alba 2008; Kivisto 2014). Studies on migrant development engagements often focus on *where* and *how*, including organizational dimensions, and on *why* migrants choose to engage (Brinkerhoff 2012; Mercer et al. 2009). Questions about *motivations* are central in the remittances literature, where identifying the degree to which altruism or self-interest is a driving force has been an important quest (Lucas and Stark 1985). Yet, although with some exceptions (such as Bashir 2014; Erdal 2012; Kelly and Solomon 2011; Pollard et al. 2015), studies on remittances rarely explicitly mention religion. Often there is an implicit assumption about ‘ethnic’ motivations to help ‘one’s own’ (Sinatti and Horst 2015) in studies on migrant development engagements. We argue that adopting a lens that puts the religious sphere at the foreground provides a complementary perspective on migrant motivations to engage in development.

Transnational Islamic charity has been studied in the context of development, mainly as part of emergent work on the connections between religion and development (De Cordier 2009; Deneulin and Rakodi 2011; Orji 2011), including studies of

transnational Muslim NGOs (Ozkan 2012; Petersen 2012a, 2012b; Rosenow-Williams and Sezgin 2014). Some authors have explicitly connected it with humanitarian engagement in times of crisis (Benthall 2008; De Cordier 2009). We engage with this literature, and seek to expand existing work by adopting a perspective on ‘lived religion’ and ‘everyday practices’. However, we also acknowledge the potential relevance of transnational social fields.

A study by Page and Mercer (2012) is one of the few explicitly to question the ways in which both academic literature and development policy often base motivations for diaspora development engagement ‘on ideas from economics’ (Page and Mercer 2012: 3). They argue that a focus on what people do – on social practices – and how these become relationally embedded in familial, local and transnational communities would provide a better understanding of migrant development engagements, thus placing the role of ‘the everyday’ in social life at the foreground. They advocate this approach as an alternative to economic theory, which tends either to overlook or to simplify communal and relational dimensions, even when individuals are seen as part of households (Erdal 2012). Our study of Islamic charity as everyday rituals shares this perspective on the importance of everyday social practices as embedded in local as well as transnational communities.

We subscribe to a critical approach to the concept of ‘development’, including the need for attention to ‘whose’ development and on what premises (Raghuram 2009). When we use ‘development’ here, it is as a shorthand for the various attempts to help, improve and assist in which migrants are involved in their countries of origin. The overlap between what in some contexts is labelled ‘Islamic charity’ and in others ‘development’ reveals the need for an inclusive approach to diasporic efforts to help people in need, ‘to pay more attention to everyday life in the diaspora and less to those activities that are labelled as development’ (Page and Mercer 2012: 13). Rather than taking development projects as a starting point, we turn to the broad array of everyday rituals encompassed under the umbrella ‘transnational Islamic charity’.

The study of ‘everyday’ and ‘lived’ religion is gaining prominence, as the everyday religious practices of individuals receive more attention from sociologists of religion (Ammerman 2014; Dessing et al. 2016; McGuire 2008). The religiosity of migrants – perhaps particularly Muslims – has received increasing attention in Europe recently. An emerging body of work discusses ‘Muslim religiosity’, drawing on the notion of everyday lived religion (Berghammer and Fliegenschnee 2014; Dessing et al. 2016). Lived religion includes the ‘material, embodied aspects of religion that occur in everyday life ... [as well as] how people explain themselves. It includes the experiences of the body and the mind’ (Ammerman 2014: 190). A focus on lived religion ‘includes activities that might not immediately be seen as spiritual or religious by outsiders, but are treated as such by the people engaged in them’ (Ammerman 2014: 191). It is important for our analysis of the ways in which people practise Islamic charity as everyday rituals locally and transnationally that the individuals involved in these social practices ascribe religious significance to them.

Everyday rituals in the transnational social field refer ‘not only to more easily identifiable religious rituals, but also to the everyday routinized activities and practices’

(Al-Ali 2002: 250; see also Gardner and Grillo 2002). As Ali-Ali's (2002) analysis of gender relations, transnational ties and rituals among Bosnian refugees indicates, rituals may be religious – or seem to be – but they always intersect with culture and with ongoing negotiations of identity at an individual and collective level. Routinized transnational practices take on ritual meaning, as noted in other studies on migrant transnationalism, with reference to the weekly phone call, the shared celebration of holidays across transnational space, and the return visit itself (Mason 2004; Sagmo 2014). In our study, we acknowledge the significance of the transnational social field as a site for the performance of everyday rituals. We also acknowledge how rituals not only connect the here and now with the hereafter but also create connections across geographic space. The everyday rituals of Islamic charity are located within the transnational life worlds of our research participants, where they take on meaning transnationally, motivating and intersecting with migrant development engagements.

### **Practising Muslims in the Oslo area**

We draw on ethnographic data from the larger Oslo area in Norway, including 35 semi-structured interviews with practising Muslims of Pakistani origin conducted in the period 2012–2014. The data came from a research project on Private Islamic Charity and Approaches to Poverty Reduction, with a main emphasis on Pakistan, including the Pakistani diaspora in Norway. The research participants included individuals who defined themselves as practising Muslims, whom we recruited either on an individual basis, as part of two particular mosque environments (the Minhaj ul Quran and the Islamic Cultural Centre), as part of the Pakistan Development Network, or as part of the multi-ethnic NGO, Rahma Islamic Relief.

The interviewees were of Pakistani origin, both migrants and their descendants born in Norway. The population of people of Pakistani origin in Norway is approximately 38,000 and it is one of the largest non-European ethnic communities in the country. More significantly, it is the largest long-standing community of Muslims. The Pakistani community provided the first purpose-built mosques in Norway and in Oslo. The long-standing diaspora not only sustains transnational ties with Pakistan involving marriages, return visits, house ownership, investments and remittances, but, as in the UK and Denmark (Bolognani 2014; Rytter 2014), it also engages in development within and beyond the family and kinship group. With the maturing of this diaspora population over time, transnational religious practices are undergoing change in post-migration generations (see Aarset 2015 on Quran courses via Skype).

By interviewing people who defined themselves as 'practising Muslims', we were able to gain insight into the roles that Islamic charity can play in motivating development engagements, which in different ways and to different degrees are themselves framed as 'Islamic charity'. We recruited our research participants with a specific view to gathering a varied perspective on the interconnections between transnational Islamic charity and development engagements. For this reason, our findings are likely to be more revealing of the individuals actively engaged with one or both practices, than representative of the broader Pakistani diaspora communities in the Oslo area. We used

our data to analyse what people told us about their motives and practices, bearing in mind that individuals have compound motivations and that the data primarily measure the ways people represent what they do, which is clearly not random.

In our interviews, we combined questions about everyday religious practice and underlying ideals with those on transnational ties and practices, and on engaging in local and transnational humanitarian and development projects. In this article, we focus on how Islamic charity as everyday rituals intersects with and motivates the development engagements of migrants. Other aspects, including the organization of transnational Islamic charity, gendered perspectives, the confluence of remittances and transnational Islamic charity, and the circulation of social remittances are addressed elsewhere (Borchgrevink and Erdal 2015; Borchgrevink and Erdal forthcoming; Erdal and Borchgrevink 2015).

### **Everyday rituals of transnational Islamic charity**

Islamic charity, as everyday rituals, motivates and intersects with diasporic development engagements. We discuss how routinized activities that transcend the divide between mundane everyday life and the afterlife can throw light on transnational Islamic charity. First, we discuss how many Muslims regard their knowledge of Islamic charity principles as an integral part of their universe of meaning. They are well informed about what duties they need to fulfil, and how and on what basis to carry them out. Second, we analyse rituals as connections between the everyday and the eternal. Here, we focus on how one ritual – *qurbani* (ritual slaughter) – provides a meaningful connection between the everyday here and now and the hereafter. Because *qurbani* involves actors in different sites across the transnational social field, it necessarily takes on a particular performativity. Third, we look at the intersections between Islamic charity and development activities. This involves probing the meanings of human actions, and tying ideas about longer term development for social change to principles of Islamic charity. Fourth, we discuss how, by adding a divine actor, Islamic charity connects the everyday with the eternal, thus introducing a new dimension to the usual discussions of diasporic development engagements. The fifth and last dimension pertains to Islamic charity and transnational ties beyond the migrant generation. That transnational ties will weaken over time is a common assumption in relation to post-migration generations. We argue that adding Islamic charity to this discussion brings a new and important perspective to our understanding of how the post-migration generation views diasporic development engagements.

#### *For people and for God: Islamic charity as social and religious obligation*

Islamic teaching gives concrete directions on the giving of charity. Charity, which is both voluntary (such as *sadqa*) and obligatory (such as *zakat*), includes ideals about helping people in need and a perspective on the hereafter. Although all our research participants were practising Muslims, their degree of self-reported religiosity varied. However, there was no doubt that they knew their *zakat* rules, as Nabeel demonstrated:

In the Koran ... you are told how much you should give and who you should give to. ... I don't really remember the order, but I think your relatives come first, then the ones without a father – this can be a family who doesn't have a father and therefore aren't able to sustain themselves – or that they are orphans ... eh ... poor ... people on the road.

Our research participants clearly articulated the Islamic principle of helping those closest to you first, not just through their knowledge of *zakat* rules, but also in the form of helping family and kin in Pakistan, clearly venturing into the territory of what one would usually discuss as remittances (Erdal 2012; Pollard et al. 2015). The everyday rituals of helping family in Pakistan were often simultaneously religious and family based – two dimensions that they saw as highly compatible with each other. However, at times family members in Pakistan would not know that they were in fact receiving *zakat*. Being a *zakat* recipient indicates a position of relative poverty, of being in need, which might be associated with shame (Erdal 2012). Some therefore might perceive the receipt of *zakat* as an insult and, as several of our research participants pointed out, upholding the dignity of the receiver is an obligation. Consequently, giving Islamic charity often requires discretion. It is a duty to give and a right to receive. While receiving remittances in general could be indicative of the same, the religious dimension attached to alms, such as expressions of love or fear of God, generosity or gratitude, or seeking protection in this life or the afterlife, provides another layer of meaning for the sender, as well as for the recipient. Hence, in some cases the migrant perspective was religious, whereas the family member in Pakistan regarded it solely as family-based assistance. Qamar explains that *zakat* is a responsibility for any Muslim, but also adds a diasporic perspective when he explains that 'in terms of the annual *zakat* we have to take that responsibility. Besides that, someone in need of something might call and if we have the money, we have to evaluate our own financial situation as well, but if we have the money we can contribute.'

Migrants and their descendants often get phone calls from family and kin in the country of origin, what Anna Lindley (2009) calls 'the early morning phone call', asking for assistance. Assisting them could be *zakat* or *sadqa*, or a familial obligation not necessarily expressed in religious terms. The literature on remittances notes the compound nature of transnational exchanges (Carling 2014), but in this case also underlines the superficial divide between 'the religious' and everything else in studies of everyday practices across transnational social fields.

For some migrants, regularly putting aside money for *sadqa* and *zakat* was an everyday ritual often responding to needs for assistance in the broader kinship group – paying for education for nephews or nieces, helping cousins establish businesses, or functioning as insurance mechanisms (Mazzucato 2009). As such, there is no need to link these transnational practices, which are common among migrants across the world, to either religious motivations or everyday rituals. However, in our analysis we find a significant overlap in terms of the religious significance ascribed to these practices, in terms of both motivation and the routinized social actions in which meaning and activity, intention and outcome become intertwined. For instance, Aisha's collection



box, which we referred to earlier, is one example of how one might conceptualize migrant transnational Islamic charity – for it often occurs spasmodically throughout the year – as everyday rituals that need not but may overlap diasporic development engagements and familial obligations.

*Qurbani: rituals as eternal and transnational connections*

Maryam describes how the annual sacrifice (*qurbani*), which in Pakistan is usually of a goat, is one occasion when, as a Muslim, you do not need to remember your duty:

Two weeks before *qurbani*, if you walk around Grønland,<sup>5</sup> and in the food stores, you can see advertisement everywhere. You can find a lot of advertisements in Norway, but if not, many give their support through international companies or organizations, like in England. ... What happens is that they have adverts like on TV but the adverts are from stores in England, organizations and everything ... and during Ramadan and the time before *qurbani*, they have a lot of things saying that you can give your *qurbani* here and here.

There are many ways in which *qurbani* can be performed, as the quote illustrates, usually involving either private transfers to family and kin, or transfers through international organizations offering Islamic charity services.

*Qurbani* is perhaps a more archetypal form of *ritual* than the other everyday ones we discuss, in the sense that it offers the explicitly religious and performative dimensions often expected of rituals. Indeed, it conforms to the idea of rituals that Gardner and Grillo (2002: 187) noted in the context of Moroccan migrants' ritual practices within transnational families as 'detachable bundles of practice ... performed partly in one country and partly in another'. Because it is not possible to perform *qurbani* in Norway, it has to be performed elsewhere, as Maryam explained. In addition, because the ritual is a bundle of practices, it requires the involvement of more actors and this strengthens the notion of rituals as communicative. Discussing *qurbani* among our research participants often brought energy to the conversation, for they saw it as something special that demanded extra effort, and there were clear expectations from family members located elsewhere in the transnational social field of conforming and actually performing the ritual.

While happening only once a year, the Muslims we interviewed linked their reflections about *qurbani* to a broader notion of Islamic charity as something that ties together worldly and divine perspectives, not in opposition to one another, but from a complementary perspective. Arguably, in its practical performed nature, ritual animal slaughter is quite detached from the everyday lives of urban Muslims in Europe. However, the particularities and rules of its performance bring to the fore the ways in which, for them, there is a meaningful connection between carrying out this ritual, thus contributing to the fulfilment of their religious duties, and the implications of it, which result in feeding poor people in Pakistan who could otherwise not take part in the sacrificial meal. While one-off meals are clearly no solution to development challenges

in Pakistan, when we place them within our research participants' universe of meaning, we see that these practices extend beyond merely feeding people. Relating to the rituals as meaningful human actions, we argue that the inclusiveness of transcendental perspectives generates the meaning whereby it is significant to enable those excluded from completing the animal sacrifice to take part in the sacrificial meal, thus taking part in the same celebration, sharing the same food, as the rest of their community. As such, the ritualistic aspects of *qurbani*, as meaningful human actions, may be both stylized and conventionalized, and at the same time speak to principles of equality and community. It is worth noting that sales of animal hides for *qurbani*, donated to Islamic charity and development organizations operating in Pakistan, are an important source of funding for these organizations' relief and development activities.

#### *Islamic charity as a sustainable development engagement*

An instrumental reading of Islamic charity as almsgiving in a traditional sense has been criticized as an underlying conception of development for failing to contribute to social change in the sense of 'handing out fish' rather than 'teaching people to fish'. Our research participants' descriptions of the aims and contents of their practices of Islamic charity showed a consistent duality between short-term and long-term perspectives on assistance. They nearly always discussed emergency relief, and particularly the civil war in Syria, in relation to the ensuing refugee crises. However, they also often spoke of long-term development initiatives in terms of sustainability and helping people to help themselves. This suggests that a narrow understanding of Islamic charity as everyday rituals of almsgiving, without concern for longer-term social change, is incorrect. Rather, we observed a spectrum of different types of Islamic charity practices, which included:

- alms-giving (giving money to a beggar on the street);
- familial assistance (paying the hospital bill for a relative);
- emergency relief (sending money to an area struck by a crisis);
- long-term development engagements (such as investing in the education of a relative through a scholarship, or supporting community-based local development projects or a formal development NGO), and
- a one-off development contribution with longer-term benefits (such as building a well in a village).

Our data show a high degree of reflection among those deeply engaged in Islamic charity and who see Islamic charity as intersecting with broader development engagements; some are frustrated with the lack of commitment among others, where paying your *zakat* is simply a religious duty you execute and not much beyond that, with little reflection on long-term development effects. Our research participants were perhaps among those for whom both Islamic charity and diasporic development engagements matter more than average. It was significant to many of them that they were supporting education because 'education is a duty in Islam' and 'it is a duty to help others get education'. In other words, they see supporting education as a way of contributing to

change, both by enabling individual people to help themselves and by contributing to the development of Pakistan in general through a more educated population. Acknowledging the religious dimensions of these everyday rituals of helping is a potentially important avenue for exploring migrants' motivations for engaging in development.

Our research participants showed a substantial interest in education and building wells, namely long-term projects that support sustainability. Some gave their support collectively, through organizations, while others undertook individual ventures. With regard to education, research participants discussed a lot of family-level support, often for distant relatives, and for the children of the servants of relatives, as well as for former neighbours' children in the village. However, there was also significant support for established development organizations that focus on education and sustainable development. One Islamic charity practice that our research participants brought up in discussions on 'sustainability' is *sadqa-e-jariyah*, an institution that provides constant benefits to those in need, such as investments in education, or water provision. Just as *sadqa* gives religious rewards, *sadqa-e-jariya* bestows religious rewards on the giver, so long as the intended beneficiary reaps the benefit of the gift. One of our informants Nabeel describes how:

When I think about a well, that is something which is easy to build and it is something a lot of people can use. ... If someone thinks towards the award that person has contributed towards ... it is said [in Islamic teaching] that if you have helped install a well, and as long as that well is still standing, and as long people are using the well to fetch water, and they drink from that water, you will be rewarded (by God) every single time someone drinks from that water.

The ways in which everyday rituals associated with Islamic charity motivate and intersect with migrant development engagements are of course personal, and often context dependent: if your family and kin are needy, they will be your priority, if not, your priorities will be different. However, our data suggest a high degree of reflection about the nature of engagements. Our research participants evoked Islamic principles about charity, as well as their own perceptions about events in the contemporary world. They emphasized what they saw as a need to invest in long-term sustainable development, as in education, as both individual and organizational initiatives. They saw Islamic teaching as providing practical guidance on when or whom to help, but they adjusted and adapted it to the particular circumstances of the transnational social field. On the one hand, the everyday rituals of Islamic charity support continuity; they reinforce practices such as *zakat*, perhaps as a one-off annual offering or through the routinized practice of putting a little money into a collection box in the home each day. On the other hand, such everyday rituals, seen as communicative and meaningful actions between actors in a transnational social field, contribute towards affecting change. This reflects the function of rituals as essential for societal integration and development, which Durkheim identified in his early work. Here we are thinking for instance of the multiple engagements, in particular with education, including girls' schooling, in which our research participants were involved, and which were discussed in terms of both sustainability and contributing to real societal change (for a discussion on the renegotiation of rituals in migrant contexts, see also Al-Ali 2002).

*Bringing a divine actor into motivations for development engagement*

Islamic charity as religious ideals may be a distinct motivating factor for engagements in emergencies, poverty reduction or development. More often, however, the purely religious motivations and those drawing on humanism overlap. As Safia explained, ‘well, looking at it from a human rights perspective, or from a human perspective, I feel it is a common understanding and that also with our belief as Muslims ... it’s an obligation to support your fellow humans, it’s a duty.’ Ateeq then went on to say how:

Islamic charity is not linked with only giving to Muslims. ... If you look around in the world, you find people from different religions and ethnicity having needs ... and to do things in the right way – I am conscious about giving a set amount to non-Muslims ... because at the end of the day, we are all children of Adam ... and that is what our religion tells us to do.

Religion and humanism combine to inspire the desire of these practising Muslims to help the poor, regardless of where or who they are. However, the presence also of a divine actor not only ensures a better future for the poor, but it also provides for eternity. Shakeel said:

You know, for me personally, as a Muslim, we believe in a life after we die – and you can ask why religion is [necessary]. ... It is here to make sure we do our best for humanity. OK, and God has given me a chance. I have a responsibility for everyone who is weak, in this case I give this and when I die I will be asked this question on judgement day, and then on that day I can say, with my head lifted, OK what I did was in my hands and I tried to do the best I could. This is what motivates me, what I am able to do for humanity, because we have to help when we are able to.

As Shakeel points out, the link with eternity has an obvious role in maintaining Muslims’ focus on the poor, and thus encouraging continued engagements. While a binary distinction between religious and humanistic motivations was not present in our data, we could identify a religious dimension to them, which suggests that looking only for ‘the religious’ is probably a recipe for missing out some of the picture. At the same time, one should of course avoid framing every action made by a believer as religious, for instance in the context of Islamic charity, by drawing in *sadqa* – understood as doing good deeds – as an ever-present injunction.

Our research participants referred to *sadqa* in particular contexts, but often in the sense of an overarching framework to help them remember the eternal perspective in their everyday lives. Migrants’ everyday rituals clearly bound these different dimensions of their universes of meaning together and, by routinizing mundane rituals such as Aisha’s collection box, sending *zakat* money to Pakistan, or performing the rich ritual of *qurbani*, brought the eternal into their everyday lives.

*Adding religion to perspectives on the post-migration generation's transnational ties*

Our data clearly indicate that migrants and their descendants believe that the transnational ties they have with people and places in which there is extreme poverty are a significant factor in their continued engagement with development. Members of the younger generation, in particular, reflecting back on their visits to Pakistan as children and youths, have vivid memories of their personal experience of poverty first hand and of their conversations with their parents about the evident inequality in Pakistani society. Migrants thus draw on both transnational connections and Islamic charity to drive their diasporic engagement with development.

The idea of engaging in development outside one's geographical diasporic homeland is perhaps particularly a 'second generation', or 'first generation Muslim European' (Andersson 2010), phenomenon. These young adults pointed out that, for their parents, there were personal obligations to individuals in the family in Pakistan, whereas this is less and less the case for the next generation. Nevertheless, based on our interactions with highly motivated, young, practising Muslims of Pakistani origin, we find that the difference between the migrant and post-migrant generation is more an openness among the post-migrant generation to contribute beyond Pakistan as well, as opposed to not engaging in Pakistan at all.

Many young Muslims of Pakistani origin are religiously aware and, although their obligational ties to family in Pakistan have weakened with the passage of time, Islamic charity remains a significant transnational practice. Perhaps because of their conscious attitudes, many of our research participants were receiving phone calls with requests for help from cousins in Pakistan, and many were assisting cousins, second cousins, and other kin, not in the same way as their parents, but more than what might have been expected based on purely familial obligations. Such everyday rituals for these young people were often routinized (taking place at specific events, or through regular saving in groups of friends), though not necessarily frequent.

These young people embed their everyday rituals relationally in communications across transnational social fields; the actions themselves communicate a relational as well as a religious meaning, often with direct references to a holistic perspective on living a Muslim life featuring Islamic charity as a key element. It seems then, that Islamic charity intersects with a diasporic sense of engagement, perhaps strengthened by the fact that principles of Islamic charity underline helping those closest to you first, which may suggest a different future for post-migration generations' transnational ties, when religious dimensions are included.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis highlights the ways in which a sense of duty to engage is present, a duty that underlines the interrelatedness of transnational and eternal connections. This was explicit in the case of *qurbani*, the ritual animal offering, which could only happen through diasporic connections with different geographical places, with a shared goal that entailed several elements, including helping the poor, confirming transnational ties,

and investing in eternal prospects. More implicitly, Islamic ideals and principles contribute towards motivating migrant development engagements not just in terms of duty, but also in relation to the kind of engagement – be it humanitarian relief, sustainable development, investing in educational projects, or building infrastructure. Islamic charity – as an ideal – motivates contributions to longer term sustainable development and has much in common with non-religious humanist ideas. However, there is a distinction, which our research participants brought out by emphasizing the salience over and above the givers and receivers of a third and divine actor. The faith in the existence of a divine actor is of course a prerequisite for the ways in which our research participants grounded their sense of duty towards humanity.

By focusing on Islamic charity and unpacking universes of meaning with an approach that includes religion, we have de-centred family connections in our analysis of transnational ties. Among the young practising Muslims of the post-migration generation, religious duties, Islamic charity, and transnational ties intersected. Their religious obligations became relatively stronger compared with those of their parents, whereas their familial obligations became weaker.

Throughout this article, we have sought to demonstrate that *everyday rituals* can be a useful conceptual tool for grappling with social practices (Al-Ali 2002; Gardner and Grillo 2002). These may be explicitly religious – such as *zakat-ul-fitr* or *qurbani* – but may also be less clearly religious, such as the more mundane acts of giving to charity on a day-to-day basis, as in the case of Aisha's collection box. In studying Islamic charity through the paradigm of lived religion and everyday practices, we do not seek to essentialize 'the religious', yet our findings suggest that studying the ways in which everyday life is – and at once may not be – religious, has the potential of adding insights, also to the study of Muslim religiosity (Ammerman 2014). Hence, only asking about religious practices may in fact conceal some of the interrelatedness, even interchangeability, of different motivations and functions of particular human actions, which a more encompassing perspective allows.

The transnational social field per se does not have to be relevant to the lives and actions of migrants, whether religious or not. Yet, in our analysis of migrant Islamic charity as everyday rituals, we found the transnational context very relevant, with people and places across transnational social fields in Pakistan, the UK, the Gulf states, and other migrant destinations serving as key reference points. These reference points were salient not only in practical performances of everyday rituals, such as phone calls and physical meetings in Pakistan or elsewhere, but also through the shared universe of meaning that religion provides, connecting the everyday scattered across geographical space with an eternal perspective beyond. This deeper meaning of the everyday rituals of Islamic charity relates to what Peggy Levitt (2003: 872–3) describes as 'theologies of change about how to make the world a better place', which shape how people think, as well as how, where, when and for what purpose they choose to act. Thus, the mundane everyday rituals of Islamic charity performed by migrants and their descendants – and other actors across the transnational social field – may simultaneously be understood as desires to contribute to change, including contributing to development in Pakistan, and, through this, making investments with an eternal perspective in mind.

## Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Eid ul-Adha is an annual Islamic festival involving an animal sacrifice (*qurbani*) to commemorate the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to offer his son Ismail to God. It concludes the annual pilgrimage (hajj).
3. *Sadqa* is voluntary charity, in contrast to *zakat*, which is obligatory. Our informants often described *sadqa* as 'a good deed', it can be a smile, helping someone, volunteering or donating money.
4. The afterlife, *akhira* in Arabic, and the notion of eternity, or an everlasting world, is central in Islamic eschatology. Many of our informants' thoughts on what motivated their Islamic charity reflect the idea that when you die God will judge your good and bad deeds – thus emphasizing the intention behind your actions – and will decide whether you go to heaven or hell.
5. A multicultural neighbourhood in East-Central Oslo, where most purpose built mosques and many minority shops, including those selling halal food, are located.

## Acknowledgements

This article is based on research within the project 'Private Islamic charity and approaches to poverty reduction', funded by the Research Council of Norway (2011–2015). We are very grateful for the insightful and constructive comments on previous versions of this article provided by Kristian Berg Harpviken, Ingrid Nyborg, Lynn Nygaard, Cindy Horst, participants at the RGS-IBG 2014 session 'Religion in the migration–development nexus?', and the two anonymous reviewers.

## References

- Aarset, M. F. (2015) 'Transnational practices and local lives: Quran courses via Skype in Norwegian-Pakistani families', *Identities*, doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2015.1024122.
- Al-Ali, N. (2002) 'Gender relations, transnational ties and rituals among Bosnian refugees', *Global Networks*, 2 (3), 249–262, doi: 10.1111/1471-0374.00040.
- Ammerman, N. T. (ed.) (2006) *Everyday religion: observing modern religious lives*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ammerman, N. T. (2014) 'Finding religion in everyday life', *Sociology of Religion*, 75 (2), 189–207, doi: 10.1093/socrel/sru013.
- Andersson, M. (2010) 'The social imaginary of first generation Europeans', *Social Identities*, 16 (1), 3–21, doi: 10.1080/13504630903465845.
- Bashir, N. (2014) 'The drivers and impacts of family obligations and overseas remittances practices: a case study of Pakistani-origin individuals in the UK', *Social Policy and Society*, 13 (2), 177–88, doi: 10.1017/S1474746413000493.
- Benthall, J. (1999) 'Financial worship: the Quranic injunction to almsgiving', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 5 (1), 27–42, doi: 10.2307/2660961.
- Benthall, J. (2008) 'Have Islamic aid agencies a privileged relationship in majority Muslim areas? The case of post-tsunami reconstruction in Aceh', *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, 26 June, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/153>.
- Berghammer, C. and K. Fliegenschnee (2014) 'Developing a concept of Muslim religiosity: an analysis of everyday lived religion among female migrants in Austria', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 29 (1), 89–104, doi: 10.1080/13537903.2014.864810.
- Bolognani, M. (2014) 'Visits to the country of origin: how second-generation British Pakistanis shape transnational identity and maintain power asymmetries', *Global Networks*, 14 (1), 103–20, doi: 10.1111/glob.12015.

- Bolognani, M. and J. Mellor (2012) 'British Pakistani women's use of the "religion versus culture" contrast: a critical analysis', *Culture and Religion*, 13 (2), 211–26, doi: 10.1080/14755610.2012.674952.
- Borchgrevink, K. and M. B. Erdal (2015) 'Other voices, other choices?', Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), policy brief 15, available at: [www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=8863](http://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=8863).
- Borchgrevink, K. and M. B. Erdal (forthcoming) 'The circulation of transnational Islamic charity', in M. Nowicka and V. Serbedzija (eds) *Migration and social remittances in a global Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2012) 'Creating an enabling environment for diasporas' participation in homeland development', *International Migration*, 50 (1), 75–95, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00542.x.
- Carling, J. (2014) 'Scripting remittances: making sense of money transfers in transnational relationships', *International Migration Review*, 48 (1), 218–62, doi: 10.1111/imre.12143.
- De Cordier, B. (2009) 'Faith-based aid, globalisation and the humanitarian frontline: an analysis of Western-based Muslim aid organisations', *Disasters*, 33 (4), 608–28, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7717.2008.01090.x.
- Deneulin, S. and C. Rakodi (2011) 'Revisiting religion: development studies thirty years on', *World Development*, 39 (1), 45–54, doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2010.05.007.
- Dessing, N. M., J. S. Nielsen, N. Jeldtoft and L. Woodhead (2016) *Everyday lived Islam in Europe*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Durkheim, E. (1915) *Elementary forms of religious life*, London: Hollen Street Press.
- Erdal, M. B. (2012) 'Who is the money for? Remittances within and beyond the household in Pakistan', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 21 (4), 437–57, doi: 10.1177/011719681202100401.
- Erdal, M. B. and K. Borchgrevink (2015) 'Diaspora development engagements seen through the prism of Islamic charity', Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), policy brief 16, available at: [www.prio.org/Templates/Publication.aspx?x=8864&id=331&eps](http://www.prio.org/Templates/Publication.aspx?x=8864&id=331&eps).
- Foner, N. and R. Alba (2008) 'Immigrant religion in the US and Western Europe: bridge or barrier to inclusion?' *International Migration Review*, 42 (2), 360–92, doi: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2008.00128.x.
- Garbin, D. (2014) 'Regrounding the sacred: transnational religion, place making and the politics of diaspora among the Congolese in London and Atlanta', *Global Networks*, 14 (3), 363–82, doi: 10.1111/glob.12064.
- Gardner, K. and R. Grillo (2002) 'Transnational households and ritual: an overview', *Global Networks*, 2 (3), 179–90, doi: 10.1111/1471-0374.00035.
- Kelly, C. S. and B. Solomon (2011) 'The influence of religion on remittances sent to relatives and friends back home', *Journal of Business and Economics Research*, 7 (1), 91–102, doi: 10.19030/jber.v7i1.2253.
- Kivisto, P. (2014) *Religion and immigration: migrant faiths in North America and western Europe*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Levitt, P. (2003) "'You know, Abraham was really the first immigrant": religion and transnational migration', *International Migration Review*, 37 (3), 847–73, doi: 10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00160.x.
- Levitt, P. (2007) *God needs no passport: immigrants and the changing American religious landscape*, New York: The New Press.
- Lindley, A. (2009) 'The early-morning phone call: remittances from a refugee diaspora perspective', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35 (8), 1315–34, doi: 10.1080/13691830903123112.
- Lucas, R. E. B. and O. Stark (1985) 'Motivations to remit: evidence from Botswana', *Journal of Political Economy*, 93 (5), 901–18, doi: 10.1086/261341.
- McGuire, M. (2008) *Lived religion, faith, and everyday life*, New York: Oxford University Press.



- Mason, J. (2004) 'Managing kinship over long distances: the significance of "the visit"', *Social Policy and Society*, 3 (4), 421–29, doi: 10.1017/S1474746404002052.
- Mazzucato, V. (2009) 'Informal insurance arrangements in Ghanaian migrants' transnational networks: the role of reverse remittances and geographic proximity', *World Development*, 37 (6), 1105–15, doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2008.11.001.
- Mercer, C., B. Page and M. Evans (2009) 'Unsettling connections: transnational networks, development and African home associations', *Global Networks*, 9 (2), 141–61, doi: 10.1111/j.1471-0374.2009.00248.x.
- Orji, N. (2011) 'Faith-based aid to people affected by conflict in Jos, Nigeria: an analysis of the role of Christian and Muslim organizations', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24 (3), 473–92, doi: 10.1093/jrs/fer034.
- Ozkan, M. (2012) 'Transnational Islam, immigrant NGOs and poverty alleviation: the case of the IGMG', *Journal of International Development*, 24 (4), 467–84, doi: 10.1002/jid.1766.
- Page, B. and C. Mercer (2012) 'Why do people do stuff? Reconceptualizing remittance behaviour in diaspora-development research policy', *Progress in Development Studies*, 12 (1), 1–18, doi: 10.1177/146499341101200101.
- Petersen, M. J. (2012a) 'Islamizing aid: transnational Muslim NGOs after 9.11', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 23 (1), 126–155, doi: 10.1007/s11266-011-9185-5.
- Petersen, M. J. (2012b) 'Trajectories of transnational Muslim NGOs', *Development in Practice*, 22 (5–6), 763–78, doi: 10.1080/09614524.2012.685876.
- Pollard, J., K. Datta, A. James and Q. Akli (2015) 'Islamic charitable infrastructure and giving in East London: everyday economic-development geographies in practice', *Journal of Economic Geography*, published online ahead of inclusion in an issue, doi: 10.1093/jeg/lbv020.
- Raghuram, P. (2009) 'Which migration, what development? Unsettling the edifice of migration and development', *Population, Space and Place*, 15 (2), 103–17, doi: 10.1002/psp.536.
- Rosenow-Williams, K. and Z. Sezgin (2014) 'Islamic migrant organizations: little-studied actors in humanitarian action', *International Migration Review*, 48 (2), 324–53, doi: 10.1111/imre.12061.
- Rytter, M. (2014) *Family upheaval: generation, mobility and relatedness among Pakistani migrants in Denmark*, New York: Berghahn.
- Sagmo, T. (2014) 'Return visits as a marker of differentiation in the social field', *Mobilities*, 10 (4), 649–65, doi: 10.1080/17450101.2014.891860.
- Salih, R. (2002) 'Reformulating tradition and modernity: Moroccan migrant women and the transnational division of ritual space', *Global Networks*, 2 (3), 219–31, doi: 10.1111/1471-0374.00038.
- Sinatti, G. and C. Horst (2015) 'Migrants as agents of development: diaspora engagement discourse and practice in Europe', *Ethnicities*, 15 (1), 134–52, doi: 10.1177/1468796814530120.
- Singh, G. (2013) 'Religious transnationalism, development and the construction of religious boundaries: the case of the Dera Sachkhand Ballan and the Ravidass Dharm', *Global Networks*, 13 (2), 183–99, doi: 10.1111/glob.12005.
- Smith, P. (2007) 'Ritual', in G. Ritzer (ed.) *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Vásquez, M. A. and J. DeWind (2014) 'Introduction to the religious lives of migrant minorities: a transnational and multi-sited perspective', *Global Networks*, 14 (3), 251–72, doi: 10.1111/glob.12058.
- Wong, D. and P. Levitt (2014) 'Travelling faiths and migrant religions: the case of circulating models of *da'wa* among the Tablighi Jamaat and Foguanshan in Malaysia', *Global Networks*, 14 (3), 348–62, doi: 10.1111/glob.12063.