

Introduction

Few topics are as contested today as contemporary Islam. This book concentrates on some of its more attractive and positive features, without lapsing into a roseate view. All the chapters have been published previously. The first two thirds (Part I) are devoted to Islamic charities and humanitarianism, are mainly grounded in original research, and are fairly up to date with the state of scholarship in this field. The last third of the book (Part II) gives attention to what I have called Islamic humanism. Here (with the exception of Chapter 10) the emphasis is more on reviewing the work of other authors and should be read as tentative and provisional. I am well aware of the delicacy and complexity of the issues raised.

This Introduction has the dual role of providing a guide to the contents and of updating the book's coverage. A new prefatory note has been added before each chapter, mainly to bring it up to date since first publication, but also sometimes to explain the circumstances in which it was written.

Part I, Chapters 1 to 9: Islamic charities

Turbulent times

I began to explore Islamic charities over twenty years ago. The origin of my interest was as follows. I had organized conferences on 'the refugee experience' and 'societies in acute crisis' in the early 1980s as director of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and for some fifteen years had sat as a volunteer on a number of committees of Save the Children UK. It was the over-hasty remark of the chairman of its overseas committee one day in 1991, when we were faced by an accumulation of humanitarian crises – 'Journalists are parasites on human suffering' – that provoked the writing of a book called *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (Benthall 1993). This was a study of the symbiosis between humanitarian organizations and the media, including marketing techniques. In the preface to a second edition published much later (2009), I made more explicit the model – inspired by Sidney Mintz's studies of global

commodities – of a ‘stable system’, a ‘disaster–media–relief chain’, whereby representations of misery are exported from the ‘South’ to the ‘North’ as consumables, under the control of an oligopoly of media organizations and aid agencies, in return for aid flows. The stability is occasionally disturbed by a mega-disaster such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2010 Haitian earthquake, then returns to normal. (In other cases, such as the forced migration resulting from the Syrian civil war since 2011, the system fails to engage with the scale and gravity of the emergency.) The book included snapshots of the cultures of three major agencies that made sophisticated use of the media: the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières (plus its French offshoots), and World Vision; it also included an analysis of the logos and promotional devices used by the major aid agencies.

In 1996, given a six months’ sabbatical by the Institute, I decided to explore why some thirty countries use the red crescent rather than the red cross as their emblem – a problem, dating back to the Serbo-Turkish war of 1876, which remains delicate even today for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This led to field research in Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Oman and, later, Algeria to investigate the extensive Islamic literature on *zakat*, originally the Islamic tithe; *ṣadaqa*, optional charity; and *waqf* (plural *awqāf*), the equivalent of the European charitable foundation. Shortly afterwards, I met a French political scientist, Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, who had done complementary research in Sudan, Pakistan and Bosnia, and we pooled our resources to publish a jointly authored book, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of aid in the Muslim world* (2003). We agreed not merely to present our conclusion that the extent of Islamic charity had been underestimated in the ‘West’, but also to make use of the classic anthropological manoeuvre of ‘decentring’ – the unsettling of preconceptions. Our book anatomized modern Islamic charity since its efflorescence after the 1970s, with its various strengths and weaknesses and with an emphasis on its political aspects in such fraught contexts as Afghanistan and Israel–Palestine; but we went on to glance obliquely at the universalistic values of Western humanitarianism. The book also summarized the histories of the *waqf* and of Islamic finance and economics as they relate to charity, and it explored the origins of *zakat* and allied concepts in foundational Islam.

Perhaps we would have had difficulty in finding a publisher on a topic previously regarded as marginal, but for 9/11 and the allegations (though they were never proved) that those suicide attacks had been partly funded through the abuse of Islamic charities. The justification for publishing such a book on contentious aspects of contemporary aid and humanitarianism was simple. Our intervention was designed not only to add to the sum of knowledge but also more pragmatically to help voluntary donations of money and other resources by Muslims to achieve optimum benefit for the ultimate recipients; but we also underlined the risks that the privileges of charities may be abused. True, one can be accused of either whitewashing nefarious activities or, on the contrary, unjustly tarnishing good reputations, but all one can do is draw on the widest spread of evidence available and keep an open mind.

We may think of the principles underlying Islamic humanitarianism as being like a system of springs that feeds a river. This upstream system can be studied in itself, but the present-day realities when the river is observed downstream are of a different order. Others may dismiss the river as an essentially disruptive force. I prefer to see the consequences of 9/11 and other international crises as being like weighty rock-falls that alter the river's flow. There is no doubt that, owing to a refusal to recognize the special responsibilities of charities, lax management or criminal intent (or a combination of those reasons), some Islamic charities were used as conduits to fund military hostilities before 2001.¹ But if we set aside the exceptions of Pakistan and Kuwait – both considered later in this Introduction – the blame attached to the sector for the funding of violent extremism since 2001 has almost certainly been exaggerated. Smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, drug trafficking, raids on banks, and oil sales seem to be the major sources of revenue for violent Islamist extremists, as well as remittances from private individuals who may wear a cloak of humanitarianism. Abuse of the privileges of organized charities occurs everywhere from time to time. The remedy must be to establish systems of accountability, regulation and monitoring, which can minimize abuse though never totally eliminate it.

In the small, immensely rich and deliberately contrarian state of Qatar (Dorsey 2015), attempts were made in the early 2000s to bring control of the charity sector up to international standards, but they seem to have seriously faltered.² The Syrian civil war, in particular, provoked individuals in some of the Gulf states to arrange for financial remittances to the patchwork of opposition groups, sometimes through charitable structures. In the case of Kuwait, as noted below, the war had the ripple effect of inflaming the Sunni–Shia divide among Kuwaitis.

Some important monographs on different aspects of Islamic charities have been published since 2003 (Clark 2004; Singer 2008; Fauzia 2013; Juul Petersen 2015), and increasingly numerous articles, briefing papers and reports. A workshop concentrating on Gulf charities was held at the University of Cambridge in the summer of 2012, which resulted in a collection of sixteen articles, plus an introduction and afterword, that set out to summarize the current state of knowledge (Lacey and Benthall 2014).

Summary of the chapters

Since 2003, I published a number of overview articles, one of which is republished here as Chapter 1. I carried out some limited fieldwork with branches of British Islamic charities in Mali and in Aceh, Indonesia – both deliberately chosen as a contrast with hotspots, because the political temperature was at the time cool in both places and Islamic charities were functioning with some success. The results, documented here in Chapters 2 and 3, are a contribution to the literature on the question of 'cultural proximity': does a confessional NGO have privileged access when working in regions where most of the population shares its religion? Chapter 4, which

covers the zakat committees in the Palestinian West Bank during the ‘Oslo period’ (1993–2007), harked back to fieldwork in Jordan and Palestine during 1996, but also benefited from my experience of two kinds of professional, no longer strictly academic, activity which I did not anticipate when *The Charitable Crescent* was published, but which were made possible by the political salience of Islamic charities since 2001.

One of these activities was an advisory role with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Political Division IV, concerning its project to help remove unjustified obstacles from Islamic charities, an exercise in political mediation or ‘track two diplomacy’ which unfortunately never succeeded in surmounting all the challenges it faced. My personal account of this experience is given in Chapter 5. I argue in this chapter that there is a need for all Islamic charities, from the petrodollar states in particular, to be brought more fully into the international aid system subject to agreed procedures of regulation and monitoring.

We are faced today with a ‘humanitarian deficit’ – almost unprecedented suffering and poverty experienced by Muslims in many countries, despite the potential of more materially fortunate Muslims to bring relief – exacerbated by the pressures on the overseas aid budgets of major Western nations. Equally important, a ‘humanitarian vacuum’ is created in complex zones of conflict, where for political reasons reputable Islamic charities have a much reduced presence, leaving a space open for violent extremist groups to bring a measure of succour to victims, or at least to pretend to be doing so. This issue was coming to a head in early 2015, when the so-called ‘Islamic State’ (ISIS), in control of some 3.6 million living under the ‘caliphate’, was accused of ‘re-branding’ cardboard boxes marked World Food Program, full of aid supplies. ISIS, unlike other jihadi groups, set out to create a functioning Islamic state with its own simulacrum of a zakat system.³

The other extra-academic activity was serving as an adviser and expert witness in a number of legal cases, both criminal and civil, relating to Islamic charities. Confidentiality clauses preclude me from writing about the more important of these cases, but Chapter 6 – written for a law journal, describing a publicly documented civil case in the United States that hinged on the status of Palestinian zakat committees – benefited from my involvement in some other cases where the same issues arose. Chapter 7, with its introductory explanation, gives an account of another legal incident with similar content, though paradoxically it is clear that the gravamen of the case was quite different: the attempt by the US government to exclude a prominent European Muslim, Professor Tariq Ramadan, from American soil on ideological grounds. Upon reconsideration, however, it eventually changed its mind and allowed him the non-immigrant visa that he had applied for.

Chapter 8 goes a little way to compensating for the book’s emphasis on the Middle East, Europe and America, republishing a review of Amelia Fauzia’s monograph on Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia.

Chapter 9, 'Puripetal force in the charitable field', is the most theoretical and speculative in the book and may be seen as a link to the second part, devoted to 'Islamic humanism'. It sets out to clarify the wide range of relationships between religions and humanitarian traditions as ideological movements, taking Islam as an instance. It postulates that the concept of the 'sacred', which is culturally restricted, is a special case of boundary maintenance or 'purism'. Metaphorically, 'puripetal force' is defined as a tendency common to all ideological systems, a resistance to social entropy or anomie. The importance of purity in Islamic doctrine is well attested, but within that wider sphere we may identify the specially puritan version of Islam known as 'Wahhabi-Salafism'. As for humanitarianism and philanthropy, these occupy in the West a 'space' protected by special laws and conceived of as untainted in principle by politics and economics. Within the wider sphere of humanitarianism we may locate a more concentrated form which has underpinned the world-view and habitus of the International Committee of the Red Cross, represented by its main founder, Henry Dunant. The chapter outlines how the policies and programmes of various Islamic charity and welfare organizations – originating in Britain, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia – interact differentially with, on the one hand, Islamic doctrines and, on the other hand, humanitarian traditions. Meanwhile, US government policy towards charities sometimes seems dominated by an urge to peer into purity of motives. Finally, it is suggested that this explanatory model could equally be applied to Christian and other religious traditions, with the concluding thought that the common ground between the institutions of international humanitarianism and religious traditions is currently expanding.

Some recurrent themes

In any collection of previously published material, there is a risk of undue repetition, which can be irritating for the reader. I have omitted some brief material – signalling this by means of [...] – but have decided not otherwise to tamper with the original texts, except to correct a few misprints and other minor errors, and to apply some spelling and style consistencies for the purpose of this book. Where repetitions remain, it is because they relate to some important running themes.

Faith Based Organizations and 'cultural sensitivity'

I see Islamic charities as belonging to the wider category of Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), though this is a contested term because 'faith', in itself an equivocal concept, can inspire or authorize non-profit organizations in many different ways (Clarke and Jennings 2008; Fountain 2013a). A turning point in the recognition of the importance of religion in development – in particular, the immense extent of religious networks as ready-made forms of 'civil society' with the potential to bypass corrupt political structures – was the faith and ethics initiative overseen at the World

Bank by Katherine Marshall between 2000 and 2006, under the presidency of James Wolfensohn (Marshall 2011b; 2013; see also Fountain 2013a; 2013b). Marshall's personal contribution to enhancing this awareness worldwide has been permanent, but in 2006 she moved to the Georgetown-based Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, heading its programme on Religion and Global Development. It appears that within the World Bank itself a gruelling battle was lost, for in 2015 there were no signs of its survival in the Bank's policies. Marshall is opposed to lumping FBOs together: her preference is to 'focus instead on specific groups of institutions, on countries, and on specific issues' (Marshall 2011a: 200).

The aid world is generally agreed on the need for 'cultural sensitivity', the effort to avoid imposing metropolitan assumptions when working with local communities, though there is dissent on some specific issues such as the gender roles, reproductive rights and the economic contribution of children. (Homosexuality in particular is a 'taboo' subject for all mainstream Islamic charities, as noted by Khan 2012: 106). The substantive issue of 'cultural proximity' is at least as old as the Serbo-Turkish war of the 1870s, as mentioned above. The issue as currently defined has arisen mainly in the context of work in the Muslim world, and 'cultural' here becomes a euphemism for 'religious'. An earlier debate about 'comparative advantage', dating back to the 1970s, focused on whether it could be shown that NGOs (of all types) performed better than governments in service provision. This developed into an ideological debate in the 1980s about states vis-à-vis civil society, where NGOs represent the alternative to the rollback of the state.

'Communitarian aid' has clearly been practised by all religious groups for centuries. It is still legal and acceptable in most Western countries to set up a charity for the exclusive benefit of adherents of a particular religion or for proselytizing purposes. I have attempted elsewhere a comparison in more detail between the work of Christian and Islamic aid agencies today, examining the issues of 'cultural proximity' that they raise (Benthall 2012b).

Islamic Relief Worldwide

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), formerly just Islamic Relief, is the largest Islamic relief and development agency, founded in 1984 by the charismatic Dr Hany El-Banna, then an Egyptian medical student in Birmingham, England, after he had visited refugee camps in Sudan. (It is not to be confused with the International Islamic Relief Organization, based in Saudi Arabia.) It has an impressive record of growth and acceptance by British and European authorities, largely avoiding political problems, as will be clear from many favourable references in this book. (Helpfully, it has been welcoming to researchers such as myself.⁴) It seems that it was El-Banna's own initiative, when developing Islamic Relief's policies in the 1990s, to allow funds that it collected as zakat contributions to be disbursed for the benefit of non-Muslims as well as Muslims, without seeking authorization from Islamic

scholars. Meanwhile some Islamic scholars were arriving at the same interpretation of the Qur'anic rules on zakat, and some other important Islamic charities followed Islamic Relief's lead. The rules pertaining to zakat are the subject of endless debates among Islamic scholars, and it is the cornerstone of Islamic humanitarianism, though in practice a typical Islamic charity may receive more donations as *sadaqa*, which allows it more flexibility as to how they are disbursed.

Even Islamic Relief, known for its scrupulous administration, found itself under attack towards the end of 2014 by the governments of Israel and the United Arab Emirates because of allegations that its work in the Palestinian Territories had indirectly supported Hamas. The UK Disasters Emergency Committee issued a statement confirming that it had reviewed an independent audit report and was not aware of any evidence that Islamic Relief had used funds inappropriately in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.⁵ A similar episode had occurred in May 2006 when its head of operations in Gaza was detained by the Israeli authorities for three weeks and deported. The charity commented then that 'the allegations appear to be a mixture of confusion and malice' (McGreal 2006). Any historian of Islamic humanitarianism will need to record the indefatigable contribution of El-Banna, who founded not only Islamic Relief but a number of umbrella organizations including the Muslim Charities Forum, with members of most of the leading British Islamic NGOs that have operations overseas.

The West Bank zakat committees

The special conundrum of the West Bank zakat committees as they were organized between 1993 and 2007 recurs, because it brought together the conflict resolution or mediation efforts described above and numerous legal cases.⁶ The allegation that these zakat committees were merely fronts for Hamas was still the subject of intense litigation in the summer of 2015. I remain sceptical about this allegation, but have always tried to maintain an open mind, conscious that at any moment 'smoking gun' evidence might be produced to substantiate the charge. The names of two charities recur in this Palestinian context: the Holy Land Foundation of Richardson, Texas – the fate of which is described in the introduction to Chapter 6⁷ – and the London-based Interpal, which in the summer of 2015 remained a cause célèbre in London since the views of the British and US authorities were so divergent – the former giving it lukewarm support, for it was in good standing with the Charity Commission, but the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office declining to challenge the US Treasury's determination to keep it on a blacklist as an alleged 'terrorist entity'. Specific attention is given to the Interpal question in Chapter 5. Until late 2014, it seemed that most of the substantial sympathy for Interpal in Britain came from the Left, but a turning point may have been reached with the publication in November of a supportive article in the centre-right *Telegraph*, co-authored by its chief political commentator at the time, Peter Osborne (Delmar-Morgan and Osborne 2014a).

Banking problems

The international banking system has become increasingly sensitive to the risks of having Islamic charities as clients, especially those that work in 'high risk areas' such as conflict zones, whereas regulatory authorities generally require charities to use the banking system rather than cash. This can become an almost insuperable difficulty when donors want to remit humanitarian funds legally to places such as Syria where people are dying in agony. One important reason for 'de-risking' by banks is the extent of civil litigation in the United States, on whose currency, the US dollar, all banks depend for international transactions and where they nearly all have branches, which makes them liable to be sued for massive sums in American courts as alleged accessories to terrorism (De Goede 2012; Keatinge 2014). In 2015, British Muslim charities were taking urgent steps to influence government to make it easier for them to operate bank accounts and so respond to almost unprecedented needs in the Middle East and elsewhere. They argued in a meeting in the House of Commons on 25 February 2015 that, though there was supposed to be an excellent understanding between the US Treasury and the British Treasury on policy issues in general, it was a one-way relationship in this case, in that the US Treasury appeared to be impervious to influence. In the meantime, frustration among British Muslims who wanted to send relief aid to high-risk areas such as Syria was almost certainly one of the drivers that impelled some of them to sympathize with violent extremism. A working paper published by the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group in 2015 gave comprehensive coverage to the tensions afflicting UK humanitarian aid in the 'age of counter-terrorism', with a special emphasis on Muslim charities but also addressing wider risks, and perceptions of risks, from the viewpoints of international aid agencies, the financial services industry and governments (Metcalf-Hough et al. 2015).

Towards a more complete description

Islamic charities operate in virtually all countries where there are either Muslim donors or Muslim recipients or both. Until recently these charities occupied a kind of parallel world, unrepresented in official statistics of aid flows and unrecognized in the Western media. A recently published collection of essays on Islam and development was given the subtitle 'Exploring the invisible aid economy' (Tittensor and Clarke 2014), though this understates the efforts made since the turn of century to make it more visible to the Western mainstream. So far, no comprehensive mapping of the sector has been prepared and I cannot claim that my book covers this rapidly expanding field with the balance that one would wish for.

In addition to Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, the Shia majority in Sunni-ruled Bahrain, substantial Shia minorities in Kuwait and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, and the Houthi insurrection in Yemen, threaten Sunni regimes with the spectre of an

extended 'Shia crescent'. This book is limited to Sunni Islam, thus overlooking the huge and highly controversial religious foundations in Iran and the equally strongly politicized Hizbullah charities in Lebanon. Shia believers are required to pay a religious tithe (*khums*) to their imam or *marja'*, equal to one fifth of their annual income after deduction of expenses. Shia philanthropy is little documented in Western publications, but it is likely to attract more academic attention in future.⁸

Regrettably, many debates about Islamic charities are highly politicized. I rely on my own research and on open-source publications, having no access to intelligence reports and thus no doubt missing out on some important information. But we need to be sceptical about the swirl of propaganda. The political turbulence of this century has facilitated the emergence of so-called 'counter-terrorist studies', which often seem to bypass normal peer review and scholarly conventions – partly by means of dissemination via think tanks and political assemblies rather than academic institutions and journals, and by means of the United States legal system of eliciting expert testimony in a partisan manner, which tends to present contentious issues as black or white whereas in real life disagreements there are nearly always shades of grey.

Pakistan

Pakistan today gives us the clearest example of a major national charity that is almost certainly a front for a banned terrorist organization – Lashkar e Taiba (Army of the Pure), which was responsible for the 2008 attacks on Mumbai and has been an illegal organization since 2002. This is Jamaat u Dawā (Assembly for Propagation), which is affiliated to the Falah e Insaniyat (Humanitarian Foundation). Its version of Islam, Ahl i-Hadith, is close to the Saudi Wahhabism (Candland and Khan Qazi 2012). It appears to have violent political objectives relating to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, but not further afield. Its founder, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, who was also the head of Lashkar e Taiba, had in 2015 been three times arrested by the Pakistani authorities under Indian pressure on charges of terrorism, but released on the grounds that there was not enough evidence. He continued to direct Jamaat u Dawā, though the USA had announced a \$10 million bounty on him. Jamaat u Dawā was a leading agency in the emergency aid to the victims of the 2005 earthquake, which left hundreds of thousands of people seriously injured or homeless; national and international agencies were at that time willing to cooperate with it because it was able to get unique access to remote areas. It was also active in emergency aid after the 2010 floods. The policy of the US government is that Jamaat u Dawā should simply be extirpated. It seems that Jamaat u Dawā's welfare and emergency services in Pakistan, including hospitals and ambulances, are so extensive that the government does not dare to close it down (Kohlmann 2006). The moral dilemma that such a case throws up, in contexts of acute humanitarian need, is examined here in Chapter 9.

By contrast, the Edhi Foundation (mentioned in Chapter 1), founded in Pakistan by a twenty-year-old refugee from Gujarat in India, in 2015 the country's best-known philanthropist, is one of the most remarkable Islamic charities. Coverage of it in *The Charitable Crescent* (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 18–19) was based only on published sources including the founder's own memoir (Edhi 1996). Now, however, Christopher Candland, an American political scientist, has filled in some valuable information. Abdul Sattar Edhi only registered his charitable activity as an association in 1983 after his wife's heart attack forced him to address the question of how his work would continue after he and his wife died. There is now a group of several associated Edhi foundations, which in 2015 he was continuing to run with his family. Together they manage in Pakistan numerous hospitals, 335 welfare clinics, many orphanages and dispensaries, and the de facto national ambulance service, among other things. They also have a presence in thirty-four countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany, attracting substantial donations from the Pakistani diaspora, and their international section provides extensive emergency relief services. It seems that – because many Pakistani Muslims still contend that only Muslims are entitled to benefit from zakat, yet the foundations serve anyone in need without regard to religion – they keep separate accounts for Muslim and non-Muslim beneficiaries.

Candland writes (forthcoming) of the 'high degree of respect and often a palpable loving atmosphere' surrounding Edhi, who 'is one of the more charming, appealing looking, and pleasant people one is likely to meet'. He and his family 'have devoted their entire lives – from dawn to dusk, from childhood to old age – to serving those in need'. Deeply rooted in religious morality, Edhi's achievement is one of the most convincing illustrations of the potential of Islamic charity, though situated in one of the world's most deviant religious polities. Edhi himself has observed 'Pakistanis give wholeheartedly. They just walk in and give ... This is a good country. It's just run by bad people'. If Islamic philanthropy in some other countries, such as those in the Gulf, were to emulate Edhi's high ideals and earn through example the right to be allowed to function without political impediment, a surge of volunteering and charitable giving could be unleashed.

Turkey

A notable gap in this book's coverage is Islamic charities founded in Turkey, which is gaining an increasingly salient presence on the humanitarian scene. This country, which had been identified with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secularism since the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1922, came under the control in the early 2000s of the populist and pragmatically Islamist AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or Justice and Development Party), which asserted an active foreign policy, sometimes called 'neo-Ottomanist', with a view to establishing the nation as a global power. These ambitions have been reflected in the work of the Turkish Red Crescent Society

(mentioned here in Chapter 3), which like all components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is legally non-confessional, but also in a major NGO, the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation. This was founded in 1992 at the time of the Bosnian war in the Balkans and is active in over a hundred countries suffering from poverty and the consequences of wars and natural disasters. I visited its headquarters in Istanbul in 2011 but otherwise am dependent on published sources.

IHH has a strongly Islamic character, for instance with its emphasis on giving for *qurbani*, the festive sacrifice at the end of the annual hajj pilgrimage, on Eid al-Adha or 'Id al-Kabir. As a proxy for this traditional animal sacrifice, donors may contribute funds to IHH to facilitate ritually prescribed slaughters for the benefit of poor people in such countries as Bosnia and Kyrgyzstan. The holy month of Ramadan, as with all other Islamic charities, is the prime season for fundraising: in 2011, 1.5 million people received food pack distributions for *iftar* (the Ramadan evening breakfast), clothes and educational assistance. Like every other Islamic charity I know of, it runs an orphan programme – 'orphan' being defined in the Muslim world as a child who has lost his or her father, that is to say the family breadwinner. The spiritual merit to be gained by helping orphans, a marked feature of Islamic moral teaching which dates back to the Prophet Muhammad's own upbringing as an orphan, is put to use by means of an online sponsorship scheme that, in 2011, was claimed to be supporting some 20,000 orphans in thirty-one countries including Turkey itself.

As a result of its experience in responding to earthquakes, IHH has on occasion carried out projects in earthquake-stricken regions where there are virtually no Muslims, such as Haiti and Japan. However, its efforts are normally almost entirely concentrated on assisting Muslims, including in regions such as Latin America where they are in a minority. 'The fact is that Islam is growing like a snowball in Latin America. Islam's message of rights and justice empowers the pro-revolution and rebellion Latin people who have long been repressed but who do not like this ... Polite, sensitive, sympathetic and always-smiling Latin people want to get rid of Western clothes choking them for centuries.'⁹

IHH is best known internationally for its prominent participation, with the flagship *Mavi Marmara* and two other ships, in the multinational but non-governmental aid convoy that set out to breach the naval blockade of Gaza in May 2010. Israeli forces intercepted the flotilla in international waters and, as a result of violent clashes, nine Turkish activists were killed and seven Israeli commandos, as well as many activists, were wounded. A UN report, chaired by Sir Geoffrey Palmer, concluded in September 2011 that Israel was justified in intercepting the flotilla because of the real threat to its security if weapons were to enter Gaza from the sea, and that the attempt to breach the blockade was reckless. 'Serious questions' existed about the conduct and objectives of the flotilla organizers, particularly IHH. However, Israel's decision to board the vessels with substantial force at a great distance from the blockade zone was excessive and unreasonable, and there was also 'significant mistreatment' of passengers after the takeover of the vessels until their deportation.¹⁰

The incident contributed to deteriorating relations between Turkey and Israel, which had been cordial for some twenty years. In March 2013, Prime Minister Netanyahu apologized to his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and some compensation by Israel to families of the deceased was negotiated. But Israeli–Turkish relations had not recovered by the summer of 2015. IHH is treated as a terrorist organization in Israel on account of its supposed cooperation with Hamas. However, my impression is that IHH as a whole is one of the most professionally administered Islamic NGOs, comparable in its effectiveness to Islamic Relief or Muslim Aid, though – unlike those British charities – refusing to renounce proselytism.

The other international Islamic relief agency that I visited in Istanbul in 2011 was Kimse Yok Mu ('Is there anybody there?'), mentioned in Chapter 9, which is affiliated to the well-established Gülen (or Hizmet) movement, though this is not advertised in its publicity. It was founded quite recently in 2002 and has grown rapidly to work in over 100 countries, claiming over 180,000 volunteers worldwide. It claims to deliver its assistance regardless of religion, language or ethnicity. I have no reason to doubt its professionalism, but, having studied many NGOs, I have never come across one so devoted to self-congratulation through the collection of testimonials, plaques and the like. On the other hand, it has experimented with a new way of establishing personal links between donors and beneficiaries – the Sister Family programme – whereby well-off families can apply to sponsor a family in need and help to alleviate its problems in practical ways, such as helping to find employment, as well as merely giving money.¹¹

Fethullah Gülen, born in Anatolia in 1941 and now resident in a kind of exile in Pennsylvania, is an enigmatic figure who spans the two main themes of this book: charity and humanism. The political scientist Olivier Roy, one of the most perceptive commentators on contemporary Islam, has hailed him as 'a scholar of extraordinary proportions':

In addition to his great contribution to the betterment activities of education in Turkey by encouraging people to open private schools, he is renowned for his painstaking endeavors for the establishment of mutual understanding and tolerance in society. His social reform efforts, begun during the 1960s, have made him one of Turkey's most well-known and respected public figures ... His belief and feelings are profound, and his ideas and approach to problems are both wise and rational. (Roy 2004: 225)

Relations between the Turkish government and the Gülen movement were previously friendly, but since 2013 became embittered after corruption allegations against the ruling AKP. Prime Minister Erdoğan accused the movement of setting itself up as a 'state within a state' by infiltrating the police and judiciary, and in 2014 a Turkish court issued an arrest warrant for Gülen on the grounds that he was operating an armed terror group (Letsch 2014). Also in 2014, the government set out to revoke

Kimse Yok Mu's rights as a charity because of its affiliation with the Gülen movement and blocked its bank accounts. This move was criticized by opposition politicians, however, and it appears that the charity has been able to continue collecting funds.

Kuwait

As outlined in a Brookings briefing paper published in December 2013 (Dickinson 2013), the case of Kuwait is complex. The State of Kuwait was the first government in the Gulf to launch a development fund, as early as 1961: the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. Kuwait has been the largest non-Western humanitarian donor for the crisis in Syria, and the fourth largest donor overall. The International Islamic Charity Organization, in particular, is recognized as one of the most effective and experienced in the region (Juul Petersen 2015). Kuwait's regulation of charities has been less strict than that imposed in Saudi Arabia. This has facilitated the collection and transfer of funds with strictly humanitarian intent. There is evidence, however, that some of the money raised by Kuwaiti Sunnis was applied for military purposes and these remittances had the effect of encouraging both the fracturing of the military opposition to the Bashar al-Assad regime and the growth of Islamist extremism in Syria. These financial transfers were mainly organized by prominent individuals, often with the trappings of charity, but also through a few established charities such as Sheikh Fahad al-Ahmed Charity. Meanwhile, members of Kuwait's Shia minority were attempting to do the same in support of the Syrian regime. The Syrian war thus had the ripple effect of aggravating the Sunni–Shia divide which hitherto had been relatively free from tensions in Kuwait. Kuwaiti support for the Syrian opposition began to decline by the end of 2012 and the government pushed through new anti-money laundering laws in 2013.

The Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS, *Jamiaat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami*) in Kuwait, an umbrella organization of Kuwaiti Salafis, was designated as a terrorist entity in 2008 by the US Treasury on account of its activities in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh since 2005. However, in 2015 it was still functioning freely in Kuwait. Zoltan Pall has shown (Pall 2014) that a schism between 'purists' and 'activists' in this association is at the heart of the internal dynamics of Salafism in Kuwait. The purists mainly focus on peaceful proselytism, obedience to the ruler (often backing autocratic Arab regimes) and daily religious practices, while the activists, or *haraki*, believe in broader political involvement and often see violence as an acceptable means to an end. Kuwaiti Salafis have an extensive worldwide influence, which has extended to backing a variety of Salafi armed groups in Syria. The activists gained ground after the 2011 'Arab Spring'. Pall considers that probably a purist majority within the RIHS has limited itself to sending humanitarian aid, especially for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Syria itself, though this was also seen as an opportunity for proselytism. The activist faction, on the other hand, openly supported the armed opposition and, even after a clampdown by the Kuwait

government in 2013, the flow of funds to Islamist opposition groups such as Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam), supported by the Kuwaiti ruling family, has not ceased.

It is clear from Pall's lucid analysis that the regional and indeed worldwide impact of Kuwaiti Salafism has been underestimated. But the 'purist' current seems compatible with the norms of international charities (proselytism not being a monopoly of Islam) and it is open to the Kuwaiti authorities, as Pall suggests in his concluding recommendations, to encourage it further through regulation and monitoring.

Domestic Islamic charity in the United Kingdom

When Islamic charities constituted under English law began to grow in the 1980s, the Muslim diaspora was well acquainted with the living conditions of poor people in its various countries of origin, who had no government 'safety nets' to fall back on. These Muslim charity organizers saw their overwhelming priority as being to remit funds for the relief of poverty and suffering overseas. More recently, it was appreciated that there was plenty to do in Britain and the rapid growth of food banks all over the nation has made the extent of needs evident to all. Thus Muslim Aid diversified with its Warm Hearts Winter Campaign, reaching out to the elderly and homeless, its Prisoners Rehabilitation Project, and its Employment Training Project.

A rare exercise in the scholarly analysis of 'domestic' Muslim charity in Britain has been undertaken by Sufyan Abid in his research on Muslim business people and entrepreneurs of South Asian origin living in Birmingham. Common to their local and very public charitable giving is the conviction that by doing so they purify their profits and ensure their future commercial success; however, the choice of charitable organizations is determined by their particular religious affiliations: Barelvi, Deobandi or Salafi, with subdivisions within each group (Abid 2013). As well as remitting funds overseas, these Birmingham Muslims are committed to such local services as Muslim funerals, daycare centres, radio transmissions, vocational courses and anti-narcotics programmes, as well as assisting poor communities with access to state benefits.

One of the first Islamic charities concentrating on domestic British needs to be formally registered with the Charity Commission (in 2010) was the Al-Mizan Charitable Trust. This provides small grants and interest-free loans of up to £500. According to its 2013–14 Annual Report, most of its donors and volunteers are British Muslims, but 'over three-quarters of our beneficiaries subscribe to a faith other than Islam or no faith at all'.

In 2011, a new charity, the National Zakat Foundation (NZF), was launched in London under the inspiration of a charismatic Muslim leader, Sheikh Tawfique Chowdhury, of Bangladeshi origin, now resident in Australia after pursuing studies at the Islamic University of Medina. NZF was registered with the Charity Commission in 2013 and is part of an informal international network of charities that also includes the Mercy Mission. By 2015, NZF had already raised £2.7 million

in zakat contributions. By way of compensating for the concentration by the first 'wave' of British Islamic charities on overseas operations, NZF emphasizes the origins of zakat as an essentially local initiative, which can now respond to serious needs in Muslim communities. It recommends that Muslim donors should distribute their zakat in a three-way split: one third to international relief, one third to friends and family, and one third to meet neighbourly needs. NZF's work has two main strands. The first enables individuals to apply for funding by filling in a form and some £60,000 per month has been distributed in this way. Cash is only given in emergencies; the norm is to provide food or clothing vouchers, or to pay rent to a landlord rather than directly to the applicant. The second strand is to supply shelters: one for ex-offenders and three for single Muslim women (catering for their cultural and religious as well as material needs). The headquarters is in Wembley, London, with a small paid staff of fifteen, including an immigration lawyer, complemented by volunteer case workers. The policy is to respond to local priority needs, which may be unemployment in an inner-city borough or a narcotics problem in a Home Counties town, and gradually to expand from the south-east to cities such as Birmingham and Bradford, building local links with mosques (but eschewing all proselytism).

With regard to the question of non-discrimination, NZF has outlined its policy as follows:

Currently the majority of our work is focussed within the Muslim community. We have chosen to channel our initial efforts in this manner due to our limited resources as a young organisation, the particularly high level of poverty and deprivation within the UK Muslim community and our expertise in faith-sensitive provision. Our long-term ambition is for the National Zakat Foundation to be of benefit to all, regardless of colour or creed.¹²

The high rates of homelessness, drug addiction, juvenile incarceration and involuntary prostitution are specific to parts of Britain, but NZF's emphasis on working at the local level illustrates a wider principle which is a theme of this book: the malleability of zakat and the Qur'anic rules which are open to diverse interpretations and practical implementation.

A zakat movement?

Recognition of the practical potential of zakat as a resource for relief and development aid recently gathered momentum, especially in the light of the immense humanitarian needs in the Middle East and plans for the UN-sponsored Global Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. 'Opportunity knocks: why non-Western donors enter humanitarianism and how to make the best of it' was the title – perhaps excessively candid – of an article published in the *International Review of the Red Cross* in 2011 (Binder and Meier 2011). The BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) have not yet made a major contribution as 'new humanitarian donors';

whereas Turkey has emerged as one of the most generous donor countries (though it is also major recipient of aid). Huge wealth in the Gulf states and the mandatory character of zakat acknowledged by practising Muslims everywhere offer much promise. Charity organizers in Britain have urged that zakat is a religious and moral principle that should not be reduced to a fundraising device. Traditionally it was centred around mosques and there is a risk of losing the ‘spirit of zakat’ that respects local communities and aims to strengthen their resilience.¹³ ‘There is evidence to suggest that once larger institutions become involved, including the state and international NGOs, the effectiveness of Zakat in terms of its capacity to empower the person receiving it is reduced’ (Stirk 2015).

Prince Hassan of Jordan has been urging for some twenty years that an international zakat fund should be launched, but so far without success. There are strong arguments in favour of a revived ‘zakat movement’, not least the shortfalls in ‘traditional’ overseas aid budgets, but it will have to surmount stubborn political and regulatory obstacles.

It must be recognized too that zakat has always been a subject of controversy in the Islamic tradition. There can be no doubt that it began as a prescription to pay alms as a personal religious duty, but it soon became – perhaps even as early as under the Prophet Muhammad’s rule in Medina – a legal obligation or tax collected by the Muslim authorities (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 10–11; Sijpesteijn 2013: 181–99; Kennedy 2014). However, this was always contested (Singer 2008: 46). I touch on this question in Chapter 9. Proponents of a zakat movement in the humanitarian cause will have to deal with the criticism that some influential commentators have interpreted the aims of zakat as embracing military activities in defence of Islam (Qaradawi n.d.: vol. 2). Charities such as Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Edhi Foundation, returning to the original Qur’anic injunction to care for the poor and disadvantaged, have had considerable success in dispelling these objections by setting a practical example of ‘pure’ humanitarianism.

Tools for a more comparative approach

This study assumes Christian, or secular post-Christian, charity as an implicit baseline for comparison. Further research will no doubt seek to free itself from this constraint. As yet, few studies have been published comparing Christian and Islamic charitable activities. Mirjam de Bruijn and Rijk van Dijk, however, have compared local Pentecostal Christian and Islamic charity in West Africa, arguing that Pentecostalism and Sahelian Islam tend to maintain insecurities as part of a natural order whereby the well off give to the poor and in exchange receive heavenly salvation (de Bruijn and van Dijk 2009). This is a familiar criticism made of charitable giving in all contexts and is specially applicable to some strains in conservative Salafi Islam. The obverse of spiritual merit is the curse uttered by those unjustly treated. Capital on earth is not only financial but has symbolic, informational and cultural

forms, yet these are convertible into financial capital at varying exchange rates that are continuously being negotiated. Treasure in heaven may be accumulated as well, following the injunctions of both the Qur'an and the New Testament. As Fenella Cannell (2006: 21) writes, the believer's gift 'will, as it were, be converted from one economy to the other on the condition that he acts in the spirit of the heavenly economy while still on earth.'

I have suggested elsewhere how comparison might proceed, beginning with Marcel Mauss's dazzlingly innovative but enigmatic essay on reciprocity, *The Gift*, about which so much has been written (Mauss 1990; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003: 16–17; Benthall 2012c). In particular, a 'free' gift cannot admit that it has a dimension of reciprocity. This paradox is confronted in the teaching of all the world religions: alms are best given in secret. In Islam, intention (*nīyah*) is important: giving should come straight from the heart and its merit is negated by ulterior motives. It is in India that we find the most sophisticated working through of this paradox, suggesting that all the founders of great religions must – whatever privileged revelations may be ascribed to them – have also been accomplished anthropologists. Celibate Jain renouncers collect alms from families as they proceed from house to house, but are precluded in their spiritual quest from expressing gratitude or appreciation (Laidlaw 2000: 632). Erica Bornstein in her study of charity in India has shown how the beliefs and practices aggregated as modern 'Hinduism' interact with Buddhist, Islamic, Christian and secular traditions (Bornstein 2012).

At present, the study of Islamic charity is weighted towards the donor's side of the equation. Ethnographic skills are needed to gain access to the perspective of aid recipients as well as providers. Moreover, the need for security, both material and spiritual, is universal. It is catered for by a wide variety of risk-mitigating networks and caring institutions, some based on legal entitlements and others on customary obligation, but with increasing vulnerability in most regions because of the widespread withdrawal of the state from welfare commitments. An expanded concept of social security as 'the dimension of social organization dealing with the provision of security not considered to be an exclusive matter of responsibility', as defined by Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (Thelen et al. 2009: 2), may offer a framework for comparative analysis to supplement what anthropologists call 'emic' (insider) constructs such as 'charity', 'zakat', 'aid' and their lexical congeners, each of which is deeply embedded in an *idéologique*.

Part II, Chapters 10 to 17: Islamic humanism

From humanitarianism to humanism

The final third of this book stems from a long-standing interest in the anthropology of religion and specifically Islam, an immense and contentious field. Study of the

Islamic homologues of ‘charity’, a Latinate word with Christian and legal connotations, leads one inevitably to wider questions. Older interpretations of the rules of zakat (Qur’an 9: 60) – revised by some progressive Islamic authorities some two or three decades ago but far from defunct today – laid down in general that only Muslims could be beneficiaries; so what has been the general position of this traditional Islam with regard to non-Muslims? One category of permitted beneficiaries is those ‘in the way of God’, that is to say in jihad; so what does this key concept in Islamic theology mean? Another is ‘those who are inclined to truth’, which can authorize proselytism. Another is ‘captives’, which has been interpreted as including Muslims living under colonialism or in non-Muslim tyrannies. It is true that many of the Islamic charities discussed in Part I devote all or most of their efforts to the relief of poverty and suffering. However, the Qur’anic regulations on zakat may be seen as encapsulating concepts which go to the heart of current debates within Islam, and which are explored in Part II.

Since Chapters 11 to 17 consist of assessments of other people’s work, no claim to a systematic approach is made. Some readers may object to the phrase ‘Islamic humanism’. I have chosen this because other terms such as ‘progressive’, ‘liberal’, ‘reformist’ or ‘modern’ are all hard to use without seeming to assume a march of history in one direction only. But is not ‘humanism’ an imprecise term, and one that has been so eloquently deconstructed by Michel Foucault and others that it is no longer respectable?

I defend my usage because the Arabic language makes no distinction between ‘humanity’, ‘humanism’ and ‘humanitarianism’, having one word, *insāniya*, for all three. ‘The use of *insāniya*’, writes Jasmine Moussa in an erudite historical and legal paper,

in a sense that reflects a transnational and universal empathy towards all members of the human race became widespread in the 1960s, particularly through the writings of scholars of ‘humanism’, who argued for the compatibility of Islamic principles with humanism’s core values, such as justice, dignity and human rights. Most scholarly works from the region have not used the words *insāni/insāniya* in a specialised sense that is distinguishable from charity, philanthropy or other forms of social work or development. (Moussa 2014: 25)

Islamic morality insists that self-realization as a human being – *ibn Ādam* – is achieved not merely by piety but by practical generosity towards the less fortunate, and by reasoning and the search for knowledge. Islam insists on the dignity and responsibility of individuals as well as on communal solidarity. The most sympathetic and persuasive account that I know of by a non-Muslim of Islam as a great moral and political force is Marcel Boisard’s *L’Humanisme de l’Islam (Humanism in Islam)*, 1979.

However, I would include also under 'Islamic humanism' a respect for the human sciences as they have developed over the centuries, not excluding the work of Ibn Khaldun and other great Muslim scholars. These give insights into religion which allow for questioning and criticism that are absent from the writings of those who believe that Islam has the answer to all problems, and who consequently are restricted to an insider's view of their faith. The very term 'reform' is anathema to many conservative Muslims since it has the negative connotations of *bid'ah*, or 'heretical innovation'.

A crisis of authority

A starting point for these chapters is that there is a crisis of authority in Islam today. For instance, in so far as any one figure might be recognized by large numbers of Sunni Muslims as a supreme spokesman for the religion, it would be the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar based in Cairo, but the current incumbent, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, was appointed by President Mubarak and, though he is relatively conciliatory in his views, he is deeply implicated in Egyptian politics. No non-Muslim should presume to advise how the crisis of authority should be resolved, but it is possible that reflections by outsiders, inspired by the human sciences, may be found stimulating.

It has been objected that 'theologocentrism' distorts, in that it assumes a direct connection between Islamic theology and politics in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Indeed, many forms of anti-Muslim prejudice can be seen as examples of scapegoating, a social pathology that floats free from evidence, comparable to anti-Semitism and especially likely to become viral at times of economic stress. 'Islamophobia' – a problematic word in that it implies a passive, quasi-medical condition – is indeed rooted in white supremacy and in the colonial manoeuvre whereby Muslim societies were both eroticized and stigmatized, not to mention the recent increase in Western–Muslim tensions that came to a head in the attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001. Islamophobia is a real threat to civic harmony and much more than an accusation used by Muslims to deflect criticism. However, the attribution to Muslims of a choiceless victimhood needs to be questioned. There seems to be an increasing recognition among commentators that theology – taken in a broad sense to include all relevant sources of information about a religion (Renard 2011) – does matter. Muslims in the USA and Europe today, being minorities, present no threat to religious freedom. But Muslims belong to the global *umma* (community), and it is not irrational for those who accept Enlightenment values to be phobic about the laws against apostasy and blasphemy current in some major Islamic states. In the 1970s, Marcel Boisard set out to convey to non-Muslims an informed and positive view of what he saw as 'Islamic humanism', which indeed underpins the daily life of millions of Muslims

today; however, today it would be negligent to avoid discussion of more awkward points. One of these is the popular habit of picking isolated verses from the Qur'an to validate arguments of different kinds, which more sophisticated commentators refrain from doing. It is clear that there are multiple reasons for the rise today of violent Islamist extremism and probably religion is not the most important reason, but, at the same time, one cannot understand this movement without including the religious factor.

The Somali-born writer and politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali deserves respect for her personal courage and integrity in calling for Muslims to embrace reformation, heresy and 'dissidence' (Hirsi Ali 2015). She has the right to express antipathy towards Islam in so far as the Islamic dimension in her own life has been mainly painful and distressing. Clive James memorably commented in her defence against a noted Islamic scholar who had upstaged her in reviewing her memoir, *Nomad*: 'She outranks him. She might know less than he does, but what she does know, she has felt on her skin' (Hirsi Ali 2010; James 2011). Militant atheists of all stripes tend to strongly approve of her writings. It is certain that ex-Muslim atheists will increasingly follow her example to 'come out' in criticizing fundamental doctrines such as the inerrancy of the Qur'an, whether retaining a sense of their Muslim cultural identity or rejecting it totally. I am interested here in reformist or progressive intellectuals who adhere to an Islamic framework, for their work has the potential to effect change from within the fold.

Perspectives on Islamic humanism

Chapter 10 compares and contrasts the histories of the Christian and the Islamic traditions of religious toleration, considering in particular the blurring of the distinction between 'People of the Book' and pagans or polytheists. It is argued that each tradition has strengths and weaknesses if we consider them both as contributions to a humanism acceptable to people today who subscribe to various religious beliefs or none. Chapter 11 evaluates the incidence of religious persecution and conflict in our own century as quantified and tabulated by two social scientists, Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke (2011), with special reference to the plight of Christians and other religious minorities in a number of Muslim-majority countries. Chapter 12 considers the argument put forward by the historian, Michael Cook, according to which Islam has a greater tendency towards politicization than other religions, alongside the views of the philosopher Akeel Bilgrami, who is more disposed to find fault with Western policies than with Islam but who underlines the need to listen to reformist voices from within Islam rather than the voices of outside critics. This leads the chapter into a brief consideration of the prospects for large-scale institutional reform instigated by Muslims themselves, as opposed to sporadic reformist initiatives that do not crystallize into organized movements.¹⁴

Four chapters then give sketches of the work of some leading personalities in contemporary Islam. Three are academics in Western institutions and in different ways representative of progressive trends, in that all have a talent for self-reflection: Tariq Ramadan (Chapter 13), Mona Siddiqui (Chapter 14) and Akbar Ahmed (Chapter 15). Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Chapter 16) I see more as a brake on progress, not so much for his political stances – widely shared in the Middle East, where he is often seen as a moderate figure – which make him unacceptable to Western governments (though some of his statements are indeed indefensible), but for his authoritarian literary style which seems to appropriate the right to interpret.

Chapter 17 concludes the book with reflections on the alleged special association between religion in general and violence, an association rebutted by both authors under review: David Martin and Karen Armstrong. It goes on to consider briefly the exorbitant reworking of Wahhabism that underpins the so-called ‘Islamic State’ (ISIS), and finally the obstacles that beset all attempts to found non-violent movements. The hope must be that millions of ordinary Muslims will be so repelled by the excesses of Al-Qaeda and ISIS that they will give a new impetus to the institutionalization of Islamic humanism from their own intellectual resources.

At the same time, Western countries must acknowledge that their foreign policies – in particular the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the pursuit of geopolitical interests at the expense of support for the ‘Arab awakening’, and the creeping extinction of hopes for a Palestinian state – have unleashed political and religious emotions that have a lethal backlash especially in the Muslim tribal periphery, as argued by Akbar Ahmed, whose book *The Thistle and the Drone* is considered in Chapter 15.

We must look back further in history too. Over forty countries with Muslim majorities were ruled in the past by European powers (including Russia), while a few others such as Iran and Afghanistan belonged to what has been called an ‘informal empire’. It is possible to apply towards Islam the same kind of decentering, or deprovincialization, of the West that social anthropologists have used to apply towards ‘indigenous’ societies, except that the Islamic tradition has been as universalizing and proselytizing as Christianity. Classical Islamic political thought had assumed an expansion of Muslim rule (*dār al-islām*) rather than its contraction. For some five to ten centuries an Islamic ‘world system’ was at the centre of world civilization and hegemony; now, as Abdelwahab Meddeb has written, Islam is ‘unconsolable in its destitution’. Muslims responded to their domination by Europe in various ways: through military resistance, through exodus or opting out of politics, and through accommodation (Broucek 2014).

Institution building and its problems

The example of the most successful Islamic charities in Britain, Pakistan and Indonesia, documented in Part I of this book, should inspire Muslims everywhere not only how to think creatively about how to adapt their religious practices to

modern exigencies and specific regional contexts, but also how to crystallize their thinking in durable institutions – not merely in the field of charity and humanitarianism, but in education, social sciences, the media and political life.

Efforts are indeed being made by Muslims to encourage the growth of reformist institutions, but they are – no doubt inevitably – an ideological battleground. In 2015, the Gülen movement, mentioned above, had offended the Turkish regime so severely that it had applied for Fethullah Gülen's extradition from the United States. In 2014, two meetings of reformist Islamic scholars were held in the Middle East, evidently competing with each other. One meeting, in Istanbul, was for a group of over one hundred 'World Islamic Scholars for Peace, Moderation and Common Sense Initiative', convened by the senior Islamic cleric in Turkey, Sheikh Mehmet Görmez. He argued in his opening speech that, rather than pin all the blame for violence in the Muslim world on others, 'those who really have any sense of responsibility would care to look inside their own fold and make an analysis and come up with evaluations'.¹⁵ A large Iranian delegation was attracted, for Görmez was able to draw on the Turkish traditions of Sunni and Shia coexistence by inviting Sufis from both sides, but neither Egypt nor Saudi Arabia was represented.¹⁶ The second meeting was held in Abu Dhabi, with some 250 participants, under the heading of 'Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies', which led to the launch in July of the Muslim Council of Elders, associated with the Abu Dhabi-based Tabah Foundation and presided over by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Egypt, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb. This consortium was critical of both Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood, favouring a neo-Sufism which has also been promoted by the Zaytuna College based in California, and which has elicited a sympathetic response from some American foreign policy experts.¹⁷ It remains to be seen whether Sufism can be successfully adapted as a counter to Islamist extremism. 'In Western democracies ... it represents a more palatable, socially acceptable Islam than the picture of tyranny and terrorism presented in the Western media' (Moad 2014: 455). As has been suggested by some commentators, international Sufism has become a kind of 'Buddhized' movement within Islam, but its adoption by the Egyptian military regime with a view to dissuading the public from organized political activity – including that of the execrated Muslim Brothers – places it in a different light. Those in Saudi Arabia who support an orderly movement towards reform within the Kingdom, while minimizing the risk of political chaos, regard both the Turkish and the Emirati initiatives as unnecessarily divisive, but they have yet to organize more unifying alternatives.¹⁸

Notes

- 1 Examples of these are discussed in Lacey and Benthall, 2014: 2 (Al-Wafa), and 199–225; 243–54 (Al-Haramain).
- 2 The reputation of Qatar's system of charity regulation, which underwent some changes since a new Authority for Charitable Activities was founded in 2005 (Mohamed 2014), has been

thrown into question by the designation by the UN Security Council (23 September 2014) of Professor Abdul Rahman Omeir Al Naimi as an alleged financier of Al-Qaeda. He was previously designated as a 'global terrorist' by the US Treasury on 18 December 2013. Al Naimi is said to have served as an adviser to government backed foundations in Qatar, including the Sheikh Eid bin Mohammad al-Thani Charitable Foundation; he was also a founding member and president of the Alkarama human rights NGO, based in Geneva. He has rejected the accusation as a political attack because of his opposition to US policies in the Arab world. A Yemeni national, Abd al-Wahhab al-Humayqani, was also designated. Al-Humayqani is also associated with Alkarama and is said to have been an adviser to the Qatari government on charitable giving (Warrick and Root 2013). Al-Humayqani robustly rejected the accusation and offered to face a court of law (Hauslohner 2014).

- 3 See Svoboda 2014; A. Rosen 2015a; 2015b.
- 4 Researchers like journalists who depend on an NGO for access to field operations run the risk of feeling an obligation to report favourably on what they observe, and have this in common with 'embedded' reporters in conflict zones.
- 5 See Price 2014; also Delmar-Morgan and Osborne 2014b.
- 6 A tabulation of these cases is given in Benthall 2011: 107.
- 7 For a denunciation by a British QC of what he calls the 'show trial' of the Holy Land Foundation see FitzGibbon 2015: 13–14; see also a letter, 5 February 2015, by Victoria Brittain deploring the conditions of incarceration in the Communications Management Unit in Illinois where the former chair, Ghassan Elashi, was serving his life sentence.
- 8 For a pioneering analysis of transnational Shia networks, see Corboz 2015. Sashiko Hosoya gives a sensitive ethnographic account of the work of religiously motivated female volunteers who assist impoverished elderly residents to bathe, in a charity care centre in Iran, the biggest welfare complex in the Middle East (Hosoya 2014). In the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Shia institutions such as the Saihat Charity and the Qatif Charity are largely supported by private funds and are mobilized by 'identity entrepreneurs' vis-à-vis the state (Montagu 2010: 76, 79; Matthiesen 2015: 171).
- 9 Yilmaz 2011: 61–2. The same issue contains an article on the Muslims who make up some 5 per cent of the population of Nepal, including women converts whom IHH is specially interested in making contact with.
- 10 'Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident'. The Israeli and Turkish representatives on the four-person panel registered their dissent on some important points. For a partisan defence of the flotilla, see Kor 2011.
- 11 Kimse Yok Mu, 2011 report.
- 12 FAQs, www.nzf.org (accessed 23 February 2015).
- 13 Meeting in London, 26 March 2015, for the launch of the briefing paper 'An Act of Faith' (Stirk 2015).
- 14 For a more extended discussion of this theme, see Benthall 2015. It should be added that rigorist schools of Islam, associated with Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and others, have also seen themselves as advocating 'reform' (*işlâh*).
- 15 'World Islamic Scholars meet for peace', Presidency of Religious Affairs, Republic of Turkey, 17 July 2014.
- 16 'The scramble for religious authority', *Islam Affairs* online magazine, 9 October 2014 (accessed 31 March 2015; link later broken).
- 17 'Muslim Council of Elders', Islamopedia online, 5 September 2014, <http://islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/muslim-council-elders> (accessed 9 August 2015); 'Zaid Shakir: Identity, reason,

and political Sufism', *Islam Affairs* online magazine, 4 November 2014 (accessed 31 March 2015; link later broken); see also Baran 2004.

- 18 'Abu Dhabi's network of political Sufism and its implications on the security of Saudi Arabia', *Islam Affairs* online magazine, March 2015, http://islamaffairs.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Islam_Affairs_Book_English.pdf (accessed 12 August 2015). This anonymous publication, strongly biased but very informative, gives biographies of a set of 'reformist' Muslim intellectuals whom the author sees as divisive. The question of Sufi support for the al-Sisi regime in Egypt is taken up hereunder in the prefatory note for Chapter 13.