

Muslim Charity in a Non-Muslim Society – the Case of Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

This article presents empirical data on trends in charitable giving among Muslims in Switzerland. It provides insight into mechanisms of mutual aid within a relatively young migrant community, looks at how Islamic charity is practiced in a non-Muslim society, and clarifies the importance of Islamic aid agencies. I argue that the charitable behaviour of Muslims in Switzerland is characterized by their migration situation, and by giving preferences and habits of the home country. Traditional Islamic charity, though subject to changes, is widely practiced and actively promoted by Islamic charities and local Muslim associations. It enforces the sense of religious belonging and group identity.

KEYWORDS

Muslims in Switzerland, charitable giving, *zakat*, *sadaqa*, aid agencies, transnational networks, solidarity

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Switzerland has a strong giving culture. It ranks among the top countries in the World Giving Index¹ and among DAC-donors,² i.e., in terms of individual giving and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Data from a national survey, the *Schweizer Freiwilligen-Monitor*³, help us better understand individual giving preferences and motives for donating to charities or volunteering time in Switzerland. Unfortunately, the survey results do not allow us to draw conclusions on

¹The index by Charities Aid Foundation has been published annually since 2010. Country ratings are based on data collected by Gallup in its Worldview Poll which includes questions on money donated to a charity, volunteering time to an organization and helping strangers in need. The Swiss nation ranked 5th in 2010 and 21th in 2011; there are no data for 2012. For more detailed information see <https://www.cafonline.org/research/publications/2010-publications/world-giving-index.aspx> (last accessed 10 March 2013).

²In the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) a number of OECD-member-states discuss issues related to foreign aid and co-operation with developing countries. The OECD provides reports and statistics on aid flows; view <http://www.oecd.org/statistics> (last accessed 10 March 2013).

³The *Schweizer Freiwilligen-Monitor*, conducted in 2006 and 2009, is a comprehensive survey on giving and volunteering in Switzerland. The questionnaire and data sets (in German and French) can be obtained from <http://www.freiwilligenmonitor.ch/> (last accessed 10 March 2013).

the giving behavior of Muslim citizens and residents in the country and the role of culture and religion in shaping this behavior.

While Islamic charity has become a popular research topic in recent years, little is known about the present-day charitable commitment of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim societies.⁴ The principal aim of this contribution is hence to present first empirical findings on trends in charitable giving among Muslims in one such country, Switzerland.⁵ I focus on financial donations, referring only occasionally to other, nonfinancial forms of engagement such as volunteering. The article gives special attention to the application and adaptation of traditional Islamic charity in a non-Muslim Western environment. I will address the following questions: 1. Do Muslims practice religiously motivated charity and make use of “Islamic” models of giving? 2. How do Muslims in Switzerland learn about “genuinely Islamic” forms of charitable giving, and how to implement them? What is the role of Islamic charities and associations in communicating and promoting concepts of Islamic giving? 3. In what contexts are donations made? Do donors and recipients know each other? Who and where are the beneficiaries? In what sense do Islamic charitable organizations and mosques play an intermediary

⁴ Much of the existing research is on the pious endowment (waqf), focuses on Islamic societies and provides historical perspectives on the subject.

⁵ So far there is no research available on Muslim charitable practices in Switzerland. (The only resource that I am aware of is a brief working paper by Alioune Ndiaye “Islamic Charities in Switzerland and the Practice of Zakat,” PSIO Occasional Paper 2/2007, online available at http://graduateinstitute.ch/webdav/site/ccdp/shared/5072/Switzerland_Islamic_Charities.pdf (last accessed 10 March 2013).)

role?

The information presented in this article is based on my recent dissertation in which I analyze how, for what and why Muslims in Switzerland donate and volunteer their time. The research is based on various sources. Between May 2008 and February 2011, I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with representatives and members of charitable organizations and Muslim associations, and on a lesser scale also with Muslims unaffiliated with these associations (altogether 50 interviews). A second source of information was a paper-based survey on donations and volunteering by individual Muslims (more than 100 respondents); the survey was repeated in electronic form (more than 400 completed questionnaires). I also gathered information through direct observation at charity events and religious festivals. A final source were a large number of articles and materials from websites, reports and other publications of Islamic aid agencies based in or active in Switzerland as well as from Muslim associations in the country.⁶

In principle the study aimed at a high-contrast, representative sample that includes Muslims of all walks of life. But due to practical constraints there was a bias towards a sample of respondents that are above-average educated, above-average affiliated with Muslim associations and structures of representation, as well as above-average active in volunteering and donating to charitable causes.

The aim of this article is to provide a “selective introduction” to Muslim charity in Switzerland. The focus is on general tendencies in giving practices and not

⁶A detailed description can be found in Silvia Martens, *Muslimische Wohltätigkeit in der Schweiz* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013).

on specific details. Therefore, I will not clutter up the text with footnotes listing interviews or dates and places of participant observation; wherever no other references are given, the information is based on my observations, interviews and survey results. However, I will indicate explicitly whenever I refer to one specific interview or source.

The Muslim population in Switzerland

Historically, Switzerland has been a predominantly Christian, culturally heterogeneous country. In recent years it has become more and more religiously pluralistic with Muslims being now the third largest religious community (about 5% of the population) after Roman Catholics (39%) and Protestants (31%).⁷

The new religious diversity is to a large extent a result of immigration from the 1950s onwards, especially of Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Initially, Muslims from Turkey and former Yugoslavia were recruited by Swiss firms to meet labor demand (guest-worker immigration). In the 1980s and 1990s, Muslim immigrants were mainly political refugees and asylum seekers from the Balkans; in recent years refugees

⁷ Swiss Federal Statistical Office data from the 2010 national census: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, "Strukturerhebung der eidgenössischen Volkszählung 2010: Ein Fünftel der Bewohnerinnen und Bewohner ist konfessionslos," press release, 19.06.2012, http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/news/01/nip_detail.html?gnpID=2011-557 (accessed 8 August 2012). For the religious landscape in Switzerland see Martin Baumann and Jörg Stolz, *Eine Schweiz – viele Religionen. Risiken und Chancen des Zusammenlebens* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007); for Muslims see Brigit Allenbach and Martin Sökefeld, editors, *Muslime in der Schweiz* (Zürich: Seismo Verlag, 2010).

came from the Middle East, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.⁸

Muslims in Switzerland are not only of various ethnic, national, and linguistic background. They follow differing religious currents and differ widely in their religiosity. Having settled in Switzerland only recently, the majority of Muslims has ties to their home countries which – as I will argue in this article – also influences their charitable behavior, i.e., the causes and individuals they support as well as the channels they use to inform themselves about aid projects or charitable giving and volunteering opportunities, and to make donations. At the same time, these Muslims actively build their lives in Switzerland.

In the past, Islam has not been very visible in public spaces. Being mostly liberal-minded and of European origin, the bulk of Muslims did not attract particular attention as Muslims. Before 9/11 Muslims were mostly perceived as Albanians, Arabs, Turks etc. respectively, i.e., as foreigners and not as Muslims.⁹ Prayer rooms were located in industrial districts and in the basements of residential buildings. Today, with their permanent establishment in the country, Muslims wish to build more visible places of worship and publicly prac-

⁸ Cf. Hans Mahnig and Etienne Piguet, "Die Immigrationspolitik der Schweiz von 1948 bis 1998: Entwicklungen und Auswirkungen," in *Migrationen und die Schweiz*, ed. Rosita Fibbi (Zürich: Seismo Verlag), 2003, 65–108; Gianni D'Amato, "Historische und soziologische Übersicht über die Migration in der Schweiz," *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik*, 27 (2008): 177–195.

⁹ Samuel M. Behloul, "Religion und Religionszugehörigkeit im Spannungsfeld von normativer Exklusion und zivilgesellschaftlichem Bekenntnis. Islam und Muslime als öffentliches Thema in der Schweiz," in *Muslime in der Schweiz*, ed. Brigit Allenbach and Martin Sökefeld (Zürich: Seismo Verlag, 2010), 43–65.

tice their religion. Islamic communities demand recognition of Muslims' legal needs and strive to gain the official status of corporation under public law. This is a source of tension between the Muslim minority and the majority society. Anti-Muslim feelings and the fear of "Islamization" are strong in the Swiss society and easily exploited by politicians of the right-wing Swiss People's Party.

Practice of Islamic charity – continuity and change

The Qur'an and the canonical hadith collections frequently refer to the principles of charitable giving and compassion. Indeed, the Muslim world has a long and well-established tradition of religiously based wealth redistribution in the form of *zakat* (obligatory alms), *sadaqa* (voluntary charity) and *waqf* (pious endowment).¹⁰ *Zakat* is collected through the

¹⁰For the normative and legal foundations of Islamic charity see, notably, Michael Bonner, "Poverty and Economics in the Qur'an," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35 (2005): 391–405, 2005. Insightful contributions on policies towards poverty and charitable practice in historical contexts have been provided by Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003); Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor and the Politics of Benevolence, 1800–1952*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Mine Ener, "Religious Prerogatives and Policing the Poor in Two Ottoman Contexts," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35 (2005): 501–511; Jean-Paul Pascual, editor, *Pauvreté et richesse dans le monde musulman méditerranéen / Poverty and Wealth in the Muslim Mediterranean World*. (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2003); Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). A good overview

public taxation system in some countries, but in most cases individuals give it to charitable organizations or directly to the recipients.¹¹

When Muslims from the Balkans, Turkey, and the Middle East migrated to Switzerland, they brought their charitable habits with them. Many Muslims in Switzerland may neglect other aspects of their religion, such as the daily prayers, but continue to regard charity as something that is inseparable from their belief. Despite the changed social and cultural environment many Muslims give *zakat* and make other religiously motivated donations, thereby continuing the tradition of Islamic charity. They have been able to adapt charitable traditions to the changed circumstances in a diasporic and transnational situation, although some aspects – concerning ritualistic proceedings and collective ritual practice for example – may have been lost.

The Feast of Sacrifice (*'id al-adha*), for instance, is not celebrated in the traditional manner. Since it is no official holiday in Switzerland, and Muslims find it hard to take the 3-day period off of work or to get an exemption from school, the celebrations of *'id al-adha* are shortened.¹²

of central findings of *waqf* research is provided by Miriam Hoexter, "Waqf Studies in the Twentieth Century: The State of the Art," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 41 (1998): 474–495.

¹¹ For contemporary interpretations of *zakat*: Ersilia Francesca, "The *Zakat* in Contemporary Muslim Countries: Interpretation and Assessment," in ed. Irene Schneider and Thoralf Hanstein, *Beiträge zum Islamischen Recht V* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2006), 141–174.

¹²For some time, Muslim advocacy groups have been voicing demands to add Islamic holidays to the list of national and religious holidays in Switzerland. So far, these appeals have been unsuccessful. However, on the request of their parents schools tend to grant Muslim pupils one to two days off for *'id al-adha*.

More importantly, in contrast to the situation in their countries of origin, Swiss law prohibits Muslims to slaughter the sacrificial animal at home, in the presence of the whole family. There are no exemptions for the performance of the ritual slaughter in a slaughterhouse either. Therefore, to perform the sacrifice themselves or in a slaughterhouse they would have to go to neighboring France or Italy, for which many have neither the time nor the money, or buy sacrificial meat from there. In both cases, the rhythm of the festivity is disturbed and there clearly is deviation from traditional ritual practice. The sacrifice is no religious obligation, but it is considered a good deed and recommended to those whose financial means allow for it. Most Muslims in Switzerland who celebrate *'id al-adha* and give *qurban* (sacrifice) choose to substitute the slaughtering of an animal with a monetary donation. Many transfer the necessary amount for a sacrificial animal to people in their country of origin, allowing them to slaughter the animal and distribute its meat in their place. Members of Albanian, Bosnian and Turkish Muslim associations may just as well transfer the money to their associations, which mostly forward it to the poor in the home country.¹³ It is also common to use Islamic charities¹⁴ to make such

¹³ Switzerland hosts about 250-300 Muslim associations including local mosques, cultural centers, women's associations, youth organizations, and national umbrella organizations; see Brigit Allenbach and Martin Sökefeld, editors, *Muslime in der Schweiz* (Zürich: Seismo Verlag, 2010), p. 17.

¹⁴ There are only few Islamic charities based in Switzerland. The biggest and best known Islamic charity with an office in Switzerland is Islamic Relief Switzerland, a branch of Islamic Relief Worldwide (cf. ft. 23). Also, there are a handful of Arab, Bosnian, and Turkish aid associations and local and temporary aid initiatives most of

a donation, especially for donors who want the sacrifice to benefit the poor and needy in a country where they have no personal contacts.¹⁵ These adaptations influence the reproduction of religious celebrations and the accompanying forms of charity in Switzerland.

Similarly, the month of Ramadan is experienced differently in Switzerland than in Muslim-majority countries. The fasting (*sawm*) – and the feasting at night – are not done publicly. And since normal life (school, work) goes on the usual way, fasting is more difficult. The special atmosphere of Ramadan that is experienced in Muslim countries is lost in the Swiss context. Nonetheless, community centers organize collective celebrations and thereby pass these traditions on to the younger generations. For the Muslims in Switzerland, Ramadan is not only a month of fasting and exceptional piety. It is also a period of increased generosity: The *zakat al-fitr* (or *sadaqa al-fitr*) is an obligatory charity paid in Ramadan before the Festival of Breaking the Fast (*'id al-fitr*) and distributed to the poor so that they too can celebrate the end of fasting. Traditionally, people donated food, grain or dried fruit – today

which are organized by Muslims but rarely refer to religion in their fundraising efforts. Swiss Muslims also donate to Islamic charities outside the country, mainly in the Muslim World, but also in neighboring France and Germany.

¹⁵ For such transformations in how the Feast of Sacrifice is celebrated in the Netherlands see Karin van Nieuwkerk, "Time and Migration: Changes in Religious Celebrations Among Moroccan Immigrant Women in the Netherlands," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25 (2005): 385–398; for France, see Anne-Marie Brisebarre, "The Sacrifice of Id al-kabir: Islam in the French Suburbs," *Anthropology Today*, 9 (1993): 9–12; and Anne-Marie Brisebarre, "Introduction: Le sacrifice ibrahîmien," in ed. Anne-Marie Brisebarre, *La Fête du mouton. Un sacrifice musulman dans l'espace urbain* (Paris: CNRS ÉDITIONS, 2003), 9–40.

donating money is more common, especially in diasporic and transnational situations like in Switzerland. Muslim associations and Islamic charities in the country calculate the amount of the donation to between 10-20 Swiss francs per person; the head of the household usually pays on behalf of family members. Thus, in Switzerland Muslims usually donate money for both, their *zakat al-fitr* and *qurban*, which, traditionally, are donations in kind. Although the *zakat* (al-mal), the obligatory charity which is calculated according to income and wealth, can be given at any time of the year,¹⁶ many Muslims choose to pay it during Ramadan. While religious discourse emphasizes personal spiritual improvement as meaning and goal of the Ramadan, most Muslims I spoke to rather stressed that God specially rewards piety and generosity during the month of Ramadan and forgives previous sins.¹⁷ Thus, it is not a fully disinterested choice to pay the *zakat* during Ramadan. However, the increased generosity during this time of the year may – at least in part – also be a result of other factors including heightened awareness of issues related to poverty and intensified feelings of personal responsibility as well as increased solicitation efforts by Islamic organizations and charities and individuals. Other, voluntary, forms of giving and volunteering were often described by my interview partners in terms of *sadaqa*.

¹⁶ To be precise, the *zakat* is due on wealth and property that exceeds the *nisab* (a specified minimum amount) and has been in the giver's possession for a full lunar year.

¹⁷ For similar observations among young Muslim men in northern Egypt compare Samuli Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15 (2009): 24–40.

These cover a wide range of activities and issues. Though most of the Muslims I interviewed relate *sadaqa* to financial aid, a smaller group emphasized that *sadaqa* is much broader than that. As activities in which they engage and which they regard as *sadaqa*, they named the volunteering for social, charitable and cultural organizations, actions that classify as *da'wa* (call), caring for children and sick or elderly people in their social circle, and donating blood; to name but a few. Those interviewees with especially high levels of religious adherence tended to think of all their charitable activities in terms of either *zakat* or *sadaqa*.

When one compares Switzerland with the countries of origin there are changes in which channels are used to give *zakat* and other religious donations, and which causes and individuals, communities and countries they benefit. Some changes are imposed by the social context in the new country of residence, including the limited access to certain services or the (perceived) lack of suitable recipients. Different living conditions, e.g., higher income, and increased possibilities to give to the needy in different countries via aid agencies sometimes leads to helping more people – for example by giving *zakat al-fitr* or *qurban* to several recipients in different localities. This is often a result of dual or multiple responsibilities felt by the Muslims in Switzerland. They continue to feel obliged to give back to their extended family and community in their country of origin. At the same time, especially the younger generations, increasingly wish to support causes and people unrelated to family and the home country. As a consequence, many split and divide their *zakat* between countries and between different groups of people within countries. Likewise, I en-

countered people who explained to me that they usually offer more than one *qurban*: some choose to donate money to finance several sacrificial animals to the needy in very poor countries (mostly in sub-Saharan Africa), thereby providing several families with meat instead of only affording one animal in their home country (e.g., Turkey or Bosnia). The better-off may transfer the money for a *qurban* to family members in their home country and donate an additional animal to the poor in another country.

Modifications in how traditional Islamic charity is performed are furthermore motivated by the wish to assist those people who most urgently need help. Charitable giving in general, and Islamic charity in particular, is first and foremost intended to help “the poor and the needy.” In their countries of origin, people would support local causes, and give to needy neighbors and the extended family. Most of my interlocutors donate mainly or exclusively to causes and individuals abroad; they comment this by saying that there are no genuinely poor people in Switzerland. Others, while acknowledging that even in Switzerland there is poverty, justify giving abroad by stating that Switzerland has a comprehensive welfare system and the needy can get help from state institutions or social organizations. In many African or Asian countries, however, they do not receive the same assistance. What is more, on an absolute scale, the poor abroad are poorer than the Swiss poor. Therefore, the donors feel that a small contribution does more good to a needy person abroad.

Differences between Muslims in Switzerland in how and for what *zakat* is paid (and other religious donations are made) stem to some extent also from the Islamic practice and the socioeconomic

situation in the home country. I will give examples for such national and regional preferences in charitable practice further below.

Though believing that Islamic rituals are unchangeable, my Muslim interview partners adapt traditional forms of Islamic charity to their situation in a non-Muslim, and fairly rich, society. Sometimes, they are not even conscious of changes in form and content of such rituals as the sacrifice on *‘id al-adha* and the giving of *zakat al-fitr* in Ramadan. This seems to pose no problem since, firstly, Islamic charity has always been a broad and encompassing concept. The relevant Qur’anic verses and traditions (hadiths) allow for interpretation. Unsurprisingly, historically, there has been a great plurality in what has been understood as worthy cause and which people were regarded as “deserving poor.” Besides material need, criteria of deservedness notably included religious and military merit.¹⁸ Secondly, as I will discuss

¹⁸ For theological and legal debates about the definition of and distinction between the poor (*fuqara’*) and the needy (*masakin*) in early Islamic society see Ingrid Mattson, “Status-Based Definitions of Need in Early Islamic Zakat and Maintenance Laws,” in ed. Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer, *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 31–51; and Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For interpretations of the eight categories eligible to receive *zakat* listed in the Qur’an (9:60) over time see also Roswitha Badry, “Zwischen ‘Armengabe’ und ‘Missionspfennig’. Zur Distribution der Zakāt nach klassischer und moderner sunnitischer Interpretation,” *Asiatische Studien*, 55 (2001): 885–916. That Islamic charity did not necessarily or exclusively benefit the materially poor has been suggested by a number of studies, for instance Amy Singer, “Soup and Sadaqa: Charity in Islamic Societies,” *Historical Research*, 79 (2006): 306–324. Among the materially poor, those of the religiously prestigious cities of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem were of-

in more detail below, many Muslim associations and aid agencies also promote a pragmatic handling of traditional concepts of Islamic charity and adapt them to the demands of modern humanitarianism.

To sum up, changes in the outward shape of religious rituals and charitable contributions do not seem to be of major importance to the Muslims who participated in my study. What matters to them is the purpose of the donation: It is important that certain donations are considered as *'ibada* (worship) and performed in the honor of God. Islamic charity nevertheless fulfills a social function. It strengthens solidarity and unites the Islamic community. By performing Islamic donations, Muslims in Switzerland feel connected to the global umma. The performance of Islamic rituals such as the fasting in Ramadan or the ritual sacrifice for *'id al-adha*, and the giving of zakat also serve as markers of identity and help establish a religious identity in distinction from non-Muslims in Switzerland.

Aiding the poor and other worthy causes

The Islamic tradition encourages engagement in charity and provides various institutions for it. It also names groups of rightful recipients (*mustahiqq*) and causes such as “the poor” (*fuqara'*), “the needy” (*masakin*), “the debtor” (*ghar-*

ten named as beneficiaries of pious endowments while the poor living in less prestigious places in the periphery of the Islamic world were less fortunate, cf. Gilles Veinstein, “Pauvres et riches sous le regard du sultan ottoman,” in ed. Jean-Paul Pascual, *Pauvreté et richesse*, 199–216; and Amy Singer, “The Privileged Poor of Ottoman Jerusalem,” in ed. Jean-Paul Pascual, *Pauvreté et richesse*, 257–269.

imin), “the traveler” (*ibn as-sabil*), “for the cause of God” (*fi sabil Allah*). Since the present article focuses on aspects of charitable practice and the relationship between theory and practice, it is crucial to examine how Islamic teachings on charity are interpreted and applied in Switzerland. Which precise causes and people are benefiting from the donations? Who are the “deserving poor” that Swiss Muslims give to?

When asked, at first, my interview partners tended to answer that they donated to “the poor and the needy,” never naming specific groups of people or giving details about the causes they donated to. Secondly, they named categories often mentioned in the Qur'an and the sunna: the eight groups listed in Qur'an sura 9, verse 60,¹⁹ but also and especially widows, orphans, and the sick and disabled. Clearly, they have internalized instructions from the Qur'an and from the Prophetic traditions to help others and are able to quote corresponding passages from Islamic sources. Rarely, however, did my interview partners detail whether they know the beneficiaries or how they choose them. Even if they had donated to a specific aid project of a charity, they found it difficult to indicate which domain (e.g., health, education, child care, disaster relief etc.) they had given to. The only exception are those who took part in an orphan sponsorship program. To better understand the relationship

¹⁹ The verse mentions al-fuqara' (the poor), al-masakin (the needy), al-'amilin 'alayha (those employed to collect [zakat]), al-mu'allafa qulubuhum (those whose hearts are to be reconciled – often interpreted as people who recently converted to Islam or may be expected to do so), fi ar-riqab (to free captives/slaves), al-gharimin (debtors), fi sabil Allah (in the way of God, i.e., for the sake of Islam – today often interpreted as including every kind of struggle for a righteous cause) and ibn as-sabil (the wayfarer/traveler).

between the donors and the recipients of aid, and to get an idea about the actual beneficiaries of Swiss Muslims' charitable efforts, I asked for details as to how my informants identified people whom they count among "the poor and the needy," the most frequently cited category of recipients. I asked, who, in practice, qualifies to receive zakat? And to whom were other donations made? There seems to be a consensus among Muslims in Switzerland that zakat should not be given to non-Muslims. However, most interviewees almost immediately added that other donations may and should be made to the poor regardless of their religion. While military and religious merit are still viewed by some Muslims as criteria for the eligibility to receive zakat, physical and material needs are seen as by far the most important criteria. Muslims in Switzerland at large do not use charity to pursue militant or missionary goals. They spend their zakat and voluntary donations on the alleviation of suffering in emergency situations and on satisfying most-immediate needs. The Qur'anic categories of rightful recipients of zakat hardly impact the choice of causes and people that are supported. All of my interview partners stress that they help the poor and the needy – regardless of the type of donation. Moreover, although many interviewees refer to the verse in question, empirically, they do not differentiate between zakat and other donations as to which concrete causes and people they support.²⁰ In fact, individual char-

²⁰ There are two exceptions: Firstly, there is a preference not to give the zakat to non-Muslims. However, since most informal giving is to members of the larger social circle and to the extended family, donations of whatever type are usually to Muslims and rarely to non-Muslims. If the zakat is given to a charity or some kind of intermediary to forward it to the poor, how-

itable giving preferences, including the choice of beneficiaries, are determined primarily by feelings of solidarity and responsibility which result from relationships between donors and recipients, rather than by the Qur'anic categories. Face-to-face interactions with family, friends, and acquaintances or community members are most likely to induce the giving of time or money, i.e., beneficiaries of the Swiss Muslims' charitable engagement are rarely strangers. As I will discuss further below, religious beliefs and values facilitate prosocial behavior, but the participation in social networks (extended family, neighborhood, religious community, school and workplace etc.) affects how much is given to whom and when.

Even though, empirically, I found no differences between the causes and individuals supported by zakat and *sadaqa*, most interviewees insisted on a differentiation between these types of donations. This is because according to Islamic jurisprudence the religious act of giving zakat or making a voluntary donation is only valid if preceded by the declaration or intention (*niya*) to perform the act. Thus, the purpose of the donation and whether the believer fulfilled a religious obligation or a voluntary good deed is crucial to religiously motivated charity. So who actually benefits? The practice of charity among Muslims in Switzerland is strongly affected by the migration situation. It divides into two main areas of engagement: 1., helping the needy

ever, donors cannot always make sure that their (zakat) donation is not benefiting non-Muslims. My interviewees do not mind this. Secondly, a minority of the Muslims I spoke to hold that zakat should not be used for the upkeep of mosques or Muslim associations. But most individuals and associations accept such a use arguing that it falls in the category of "fi sabil Allah" (in the way of God).

abroad, i.e., in the country of origin as well as in other countries with a preference for countries with Muslim populations, and 2., material donations and volunteering to support the development of the Islamic community (or of a particular ethnic community) in Switzerland. With regard to monetary contributions for causes outside Switzerland I found that the better part of donations are transfers to the extended family and members of the local community in the country of origin. The seasonal Islamic donations, the *zakat al-fitr* and the *qurban*, are also often given to the extended family, either for the benefit of poor family members or to forward these contributions to the indigent in their vicinity. My interview partners also recounted events in which they spontaneously helped strangers while visiting the home country. This help was mostly provided in the form of in-kind donations or money handed to beggars. Their relative preoccupation with assisting people in their country of origin does not prevent Muslims in Switzerland from quickly responding to international emergencies. All major catastrophes of recent years – whether in Indonesia, Pakistan or Haiti – have been followed by calls for donations by the Islamic charities and Muslim associations in Switzerland.²¹ For instance,

²¹ Yet, the response is strongest to emergencies in Muslim countries. It is difficult to say whether this is a result of giving preferences among Muslims in Switzerland or of fundraising strategies and solicitation efforts by Islamic charities and mosques or both. Certainly, in the case of Muslim countries, donors may more easily identify with the victims. The importance of self-identification with others and with the needs of others – rather than altruism – as a factor motivating philanthropy has been emphasized, for example, by Paul G. Schervish and John J. Havens, “Social Participation and Charitable Giving: A Multivariate Analysis,” *Voluntas*, 8 (1997):

according to an imam of Geneva’s *Fondation Culturelle Islamique et Mosquée*, in October 2005 the mosque collected as much as 150000 Swiss francs in only one day for the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan.²² Some Muslims regularly make donations to charities – especially *Islamic Relief Switzerland*²³, *Muslime Helfen*²⁴, and *Fondation Humanitaire Suisse*²⁵, but also to organizations such as *Caritas* or the *Red Cross*. Assisting children in need, particularly orphans, is very popular.²⁶ Most Islamic charities

235–260.

²² Interview on 4 December 2008.

²³ Islamic Relief Switzerland is a branch of Islamic Relief Worldwide. Islamic Relief Worldwide was founded in 1984 by the Egyptian Hany El Banna, then a medical student at the University of Birmingham. It has become the world’s largest international Islamic humanitarian organization and has branches in most Western countries. For detailed information view the organizations website <http://www.islamic-relief.com/> (last accessed 29 August 2012).

²⁴ *Muslime Helfen* is a Germany-based humanitarian organization with links to the British Muslim Aid. *Muslime Helfen* was founded in 1985; today it is the biggest Islamic charity in Germany and enjoys a good reputation with Muslims in Switzerland. For additional information see <http://www.muslimehelfen.org> (last accessed 29 August 2012).

²⁵ The *Fondation Humanitaire Suisse* is a local charity based in Geneva that funds aid projects in the Palestinian Territories in particular. It was founded in 2004 when, because of allegations of terrorism, the assets of the *Association de Secours Palestinien* have been blocked and their operations disrupted. The *Association de Secours Palestinien* had previously been the most important organization in Switzerland that raised funds for the Palestinians. The website of the *Fondation Humanitaire Suisse* can be accessed at <http://www.secourshumanitaire.ch> (last accessed 29. August 2012).

²⁶ To sponsor an orphan (*yatim*, pl. *aitam*) in need is very common because the Qur’an and the sunna repeatedly call upon the believers to take care of orphans and the Prophet Muhammad has himself been an orphan. Note that orphan is understood as someone who has lost his father,

maintain an orphan sponsorship program which attracts the highest number of donors after the seasonal programs (*zakat al-fitr* in Ramadan and the *qurban* on the Feast of Sacrifice) and emergency aid.

Other causes frequently given to include education, food, health and medical care, and efforts at long-term poverty reduction (through microfinance projects for example). However, giving to particular causes or consciously choosing these causes is rare. Donors often select project countries according to their preferences. But much of the giving is rather ad hoc and untargeted. One of my interview partners, a project coordinator of *Islamic Relief Switzerland*, criticized that many Muslims in Switzerland only give to charity because it is a religious obligation, and that they give to *Islamic Relief* only because the organization is regarded as trustworthy within the community and known to act in accordance with Islamic values and principles, but not because they consciously try to support a particular cause. In general, people seem to be little interested in the details of the developmental projects of the organization. According to the aid worker it suffices for them to know that they have fulfilled their religious obligation. He suggests that this is also the main reason why much of the donations are for short-term emergency relief while long-term development issues still receive little support.²⁷ It needs to be stressed, however, that religiously motivated giving (based on *zakat* and *sadaqa*) should not be confused with giving to religious causes. Much of

that is, the mother may still be alive. Sometimes the word is used to denote children who still have both parents, but whose father cannot fulfill his role as breadwinner (because he is disabled, for instance).

²⁷ Interview on 12 February 2011.

the faith-motivated giving serves non-faith-related causes, especially the assistance of the poor and the needy. Yet, issue-motivated giving (based on specific issues of interest to the giver – for example the giving to environment and animal-related causes, giving to health-related causes or to the youth) is less frequent.

Some differences in giving preferences may be observed between Muslims from Turkey, the Balkans and the Maghrib. While Bosnian and Albanian Muslims recurrently stated to give to the sick, the disabled and to victims of war in the Balkans, helping cover the costs of necessary surgeries, medication and care, my Turkish respondents spoke of contributions to support “poor students” (including students of religious studies) in Turkey. Although donations to aid the Palestinians are popular among all groups of Muslims in Switzerland, Arabs are more actively providing assistance to them. I also found differences in the channels used to make donations: Bosnian Muslims give more readily to *Islamic Relief* than the other groups. This is in part because they remember the aid agency’s work in their home country themselves; they have experienced it firsthand in the 1990s and therefore trust the organization’s effectiveness. If they do not use informal channels of giving Turkish Muslims prefer to transfer donations using their own Turkish umbrella organizations such as the Swiss representation of the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Directorate of Religious Affairs, hereafter *Diyanet*)²⁸ or the Islamic Community *Milli Görüş*²⁹. Giving pref-

²⁸ The *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* is the state agency for religious affairs in Turkey, the highest Islamic religious authority in the country.

²⁹ The Islamic Community *Milli Görüş* (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüş*, or *IGMG*) is a leading Turkish diaspora organization in Europe

erences are thus influenced by the organizational structure of the respective subcommunity in Switzerland and by sociodemographic conditions in the home country among other factors.

I should add that donations are not always in money. In-kind giving (giving of goods that have a monetary value to the recipient such as books, school materials, clothes, food, household items) is sometimes preferred and meant to prevent misuse by the recipient or an intermediary.

With regard to donations for causes in Switzerland it became apparent that my interview partners actively contribute to the establishment and maintenance of Islamic community centers or mosques. Given the precarious financial circumstances of the majority of Islamic centers in Switzerland, Islamic associational life is only made possible by regular contributions of community members in time and money. Almost all of the mosques in Switzerland are associations (rather than foundations). They charge a membership fee – however, poor families are usually exempted from paying, or they pay a reduced amount. Moreover, formally, one does not have to be a member to use most of the services provided by the mosque. Hence, voluntary financial donations and doing some form of voluntary work are very welcome.

Promoting faith-based giving

In this section I look at the role of Islamic charities and Muslim associations in communicating and promoting concepts of Islamic giving. One of my research questions was: How do Muslims in Switzerland learn about “genuinely

and rival of the Diyanet.

Islamic” forms of charitable giving and how to implement them? Being brought up as Muslims and having lived in Muslim societies at least during part of their childhood, most of my interview partners explained that they learned about generosity in Islam and specific Islamic donations from their parents and from the world around them in their community. Some of the interviewees, though being now well into their adulthood, still regard their father or mother as role models and recounted situations in which he or she displayed exemplary munificence and hospitality. Others, especially converts and young Muslims who grew up in Switzerland, actively seek information on the religiously prescribed zakat and Islamic perspectives on voluntary philanthropy in Islamic literature and on Islamic websites. Most notably, they consult the webpages of Islamic charities such as *Islamic Relief* which provide information on charity in Islam. Those who frequently visit their local mosque said that the imam often addresses issues related to charity in his Friday sermon (*khutba*) and especially during Ramadan, which is why Muslims who regularly attend the prayers and celebrations in the mosque internalize Islamic teachings.

Donating to faith-based charities and mosques is popular among the Muslim respondents of my study. For the most part, when giving to an aid agency they opt for an “Islamic charity” – preferably *Islamic Relief Worldwide* (and its Swiss branch) and *Muslimen Helfen* – or the *Fondation Humanitaire Suisse*, an aid organization that focuses on Palestinians. The first two faith-based charities adopt an Islamic discourse and use religious concepts to guide the structuring of their organization. These charities advertise the giving of zakat, *sadaqa*,

*waqf*³⁰ and *qurban* and offer campaigns accordingly. This includes focussing their most important fundraising campaigns around religious celebrations. As it happens, Islamic charities collect a large amount of their annual operating budget through zakat donations, mostly during Ramadan.³¹ Consequently, the fundraising efforts of these charities concentrate on Muslim populations. The organizations' religious identity helps them win the trust and financial support of religiously minded Muslims.

The fundraising material of *Islamic Relief* and *Muslime Helfen* provides extensive information on religious forms of giving and actively promotes religiously motivated civic engagement. On the one hand this material stresses the fact that the caring for the poor and the needy is a religious duty in Islam and that neglecting this obligation – at least when it comes to zakat – is a great sin (*kabira*). On the other hand it repeatedly announces the manifold reward to be expected for good deeds and generosity. Islamic charities make “genuinely Islamic” giving easy – e.g., by offering an online zakat calculator, and proposing approved causes and channels for donations – and thereby attract donors.

Similarly, Muslim associations in Switzerland promote religiously motivated giving and offer their members and visitors concrete opportunities to

spend their zakat and voluntary donations. Usually, there is a charity box affixed in a prominent place in mosques and Islamic centers into which people drop money after prayers.³² The collected money is mostly, at least in part, used for the upkeep of the mosque. Part of the donations are disbursed to other worthy causes and groups of “poor” people. There are special collections after the Friday sermons or during religious festivals.

The money collected like this is often forwarded to poor families in the home country of the respective community.³³ Turkish, Bosnian and Albanian mosques regularly receive letters of people who ask for money for a necessary medical treatment or to allow the continuation of their studies and the like. Sometimes these requests are approved and forwarded to the diaspora associations by the mother-organization in that country. In the past, individual members of the Muslim associations in Switzerland also collected for needy friends and acquaintances in the home country. This practice ceased because it led to disputes among community members. However, individuals still ask community members or the leadership of the mosque for financial help. Mosque representatives I interviewed said, however, that today because of impostors and possible misuse money is rarely given to strangers. That

³⁰ For instance, Islamic Relief proposes a cash-waqf: Donors can buy “waqf-shares,” Islamic Relief invests the money, and the returns are used for a specified project or group of beneficiaries. <http://www.islamic-relief.ch/irv19/spip.php?rubrique31> (accessed 29 August 2012).

³¹ Professional Islamic charities collect about 80% of their annual revenue in the seasonal programs for ‘id al-adha and the Ramadan; see Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, *Jihad Humanitaire – Enquête sur les ONG Islamiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 127.

³² Sometimes there is a note on the box saying what the money is used for and whether only voluntary donations (*sadaqat*) or zakat money may be put in the box. In some centers I have been to zakat is collected separately.

³³ The Muslims in Switzerland are mostly grouped according to region of origin, i.e., there are Turkish, Albanian, and Bosnian Muslim associations usually further subdivided. Arabic-speaking Muslims have their own mosques in which they accommodate Muslims of various nationalities – including also Swiss converts and Pakistanis for instance.

is, they only respond to such requests after inquiring about the person in their social circle and in other mosques of the area and only if they deem the person trustworthy.

The seasonal Islamic donations of *zakat al-fitr* and *qurban* are collected by the mosques and often transferred to the mother-organization or movement abroad (e.g., the *Diyanet*, *Milli Görüş*, and the Bosnian and Albanian umbrella organizations). Members receive a letter in which they are informed about the special program held at the mosque during the holiday, and asked to donate a certain amount of money as *zakat al-fitr* or *qurban* using the enclosed bank transfer form. The percentage of members who make their religious donations via these organizations varies from community to community. The president of the Swiss *Diyanet* estimated that about 1200 of their member families in the country are in the financial position to make the sacrifice on *'id al-adha*. In 2008, only 550 of these families donated a *qurban* using the *Diyanet* infrastructure.³⁴

Muslim associations sometimes host charity events: In Turkish communities the so-called kermes, a kind of charity bazaar, is common. It mostly serves to raise funds for renovations of the community center, to buy supplies and to finance the services offered by the center. Spontaneous collections for disaster relief are sometimes organized in collaboration with charities such as *Islamic Relief* and *Fondation Humanitaire Suisse*. They collect sizeable sums of money to help victims of catastrophes and thus demonstrate their solidarity with the needy abroad. It should be mentioned that organizations like *Islamic Relief* stress that they distribute aid to all communities without distinction, benefit-

ing Muslims as well as non-Muslims. In the same vein, mosque representatives were quick to point out that they help raise money for non-Muslim beneficiaries. Nonetheless, my observations are that, firstly, mosques and Muslim charities (i.e., Islamic charities as well as charities that do not particularly use an Islamic discourse but are led by Muslims and address Muslim donors – or specific subgroups such as Turkish Muslims, Palestinians etc.) more actively promote aiding Muslim “brothers and sisters” than they promote giving to the non-Muslim poor. There are more charity events organized for Palestinians than for any other group of beneficiaries. Secondly, the sums actually collected by the charities and the mosques for Muslim recipients (or the poor in Muslim-majority countries) by far exceed the funds raised for the needy in areas mainly populated by non-Muslims. Evidently, one reason for this is that Muslim countries are among the poorest countries in the world. More importantly, however, Swiss Muslims more easily identify with Muslim victims of catastrophes and feel empathy for them. Arguing that the Qur’anic category “*fi sabil Allah*” may include anything that serves the Islamic community (umma), most of the mosques I visited use not only the membership fees, but also all kinds of donations (including *zakat*) to cover their monthly rental costs and the salary for the imam, to purchase teaching material and the like. Interestingly, although to prevent showing off by the giver anonymous giving is said to be favored, Turkish and especially Bosnian and Albanian centers display lists of names and the amount of their donations to the community. This is clearly meant to encourage members to donate regularly – and to contribute according

³⁴ Interview on 24 June 2009.

to one's social status.³⁵ Bosnian-Muslim communities motivate generous donations also by honoring donors who contribute more than 10 000 Swiss francs as what they call *vakuf*³⁶ with a plaque, a Qur'anic recitation, and *du'a'* (supplicatory prayer) by community members.³⁷ In summary, my findings suggest that Islamic organizations in Switzerland respond pragmatically and with an undogmatic flexibility to the changed social circumstances created by migration. They promote interpretations of Islamic charity that are practical for Muslim donors in a non-Muslim society and help establish a religious infrastructure in Switzerland.

³⁵In most communities people I spoke to raised the question of how much individuals should contribute. It was stressed repeatedly that poor families are not expected to contribute financially, although their volunteering and playing an active part in the community is appreciated. The better-off members, however, are expected to more generously give money. Almost all of my interview partners complained that "the rich" often give comparatively little. And some of the interviewees stated that they feel obliged to give more than others because they consider themselves economically privileged.

³⁶The word *vakuf* is derived from the Arabic *waqf*. In the Bosnian communities in Switzerland it denotes donations that are used to eventually buy off the building used as community center.

³⁷Charities and religious organizations such as the Bosnian *Sadake* or the Turkish *Diyaset* also publish such lists on their websites. The public displays of the individual's donations do not seem to be an innovation only found recently or only found in the diaspora context. Nadir Özbek describes that daily newspapers published the list of donors and their donations to official disaster relief campaigns on their front pages in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), for instance. (See Nadir Özbek, "Philanthropic Activity, Ottoman Patriotism, and the Hamidian Regime, 1876-1909," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37 (2005): 59-81.) It should be mentioned that I have not encountered such public displays in Islamic centers that are frequented mainly by Arabs and converts.

Donors, beneficiaries, intermediaries, and the motives for charitable giving

Theories of reciprocity and sociopsychological approaches typically explain social behavior through interactions of the individual with his social environment.³⁸ Accordingly, charitable activities of Muslims in Switzerland can be regarded as part of a continuing system of exchanges between donors, recipients and intermediaries – and not as independent, unilateral actions of individuals.³⁹ Basically, charitable giving is induced by networks of relationships to which people are associated.

The respondents of my study all stated

³⁸For instance, Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1997): 281-317; Jan A. Fuhse, *Relationistische Soziologie: Zur kulturellen Wende der Netzwerkforschung* (Wiesbaden: vs Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010).

³⁹On reciprocity and the applicability of Marcel Mauss's ideas on the gift in his classical "Essai sur le don" to contemporary giving practices and forms of exchange see Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift* (Montreal: McGill-Queens's University Press, 1998); and Frank Adloff and Steffen Mau, *Vom Geben und Nehmen. Zur Soziologie der Reziprozität* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005). Motives for helping others and donating may not necessarily be truly altruistic or selfless; see, for instance, Gary S. Becker, "A Theory of Social Interactions," *Journal of Political Economy* 82 (1974), 1063-1093. Recent studies abandon the classical altruism-egoism dichotomy and suggest that charitable contributions are always driven by several motives at the same time, including egoistic as well as altruistic concerns; cf. Frank Adloff and Steffen Sigmund, "Die gift economy moderner Gesellschaften – Zur Soziologie der Philanthropie," in eds. Frank Adloff and Steffen Mau, *Vom Geben und Nehmen. Zur Soziologie der Reziprozität* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2005), 211-235.

to give to “the poor and the needy.” Yet, what constitutes need and who is regarded as deserving of assistance depends on the social contexts in which possible donors and recipients interact. The majority of donations are made in response to a solicitation for a contribution. Being connected to social networks such as ethnic and religious communities and the extended family, Swiss Muslims become aware of needs of certain people and choose to respond; often they are directly asked to make a contribution. Of the people I interviewed only a minority recounted instances in which they had made a donation without having been asked to do so.

The active involvement and participation in a Muslim association seems to facilitate generosity. Feelings of solidarity and trust within the group motivate wealthy members to give to the community, while needy group members benefit by having access to services and goods made possible by the network. Or, to put it differently, to be part of the network means, firstly, that you are more often invited to contribute and may find it hard to defy the expectations of others in the group, and, secondly, that you are more likely to receive (financial) aid when in need. The latter, because community leaders or people who make the decision whether to respond to your request or not know you, i.e., they are confident that you are no impostor. However, members of such networks sometimes feel pressured into giving, and donations are not always completely voluntary.⁴⁰ Being a member

⁴⁰ In the literature this is often referred to as bonding social capital. For social capital in immigrant communities see, notably, the works of Alejandro Portes: Alejandro Portes, “Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): 1–24; and Alejandro Portes, “The Two Meanings

of a mosque may also increase the number of personal invitations to volunteer or provide knowledge about where and how to volunteer, and thereby facilitate the decision to volunteer time. Thus, group affiliation fosters philanthropic behavior.

Similarly, charities act as intermediaries between donors and recipients of aid. Many Muslims in Switzerland respond to mail appeals by charities. Having responded to such an appeal once, they continue to regularly receive information materials from the charity and are likely to contribute again. But even when people use a charity to donate, personal relationships often form the basis for the donations. That is, donors often know one of the aid workers of the organization they give to. Existing personal contacts between the charity staff and members of the local Muslim communities or the individual donors enhance the level of trust in the charity and thereby increase contributions. For instance, the *Islamic Relief* employee I mentioned earlier spends most of his time touring the Muslim community centers in Switzerland and building relationships with representatives and individual members of these groups. During Ramadan, when the number of Muslims visiting the mosques as well as the generosity of Muslims is at its highest, he stops at up to three Islamic centers in one day to promote his organization’s giving opportunities.⁴¹

So what are the main drivers of philanthropic giving by Muslims in Switzerland? Being asked and to encounter

of Social Capital,” *Sociological Forum*, 15 (2000): 1–12. For the bonding and bridging social capital among Albanians in Switzerland see Janine Dahinden, *Prishtina – Schlieren. Albanische Migrationsnetzwerke im transnationalen Raum* (Zürich: Seismo Verlag, 2005).

⁴¹ Interview on 12 February 2011.

concrete opportunities to give (both provided by social networks, namely family and acquaintances, and the ethnic and religious community) is a major mobilizing factor. The ability to identify with the recipients and to feel solidarity with others in need has been mentioned several times in this article as an important motivator. Furthermore, psychological factors (to feel good when helping others and to feel guilty when not helping) were often reported to influence the decision to engage in charity. Certainly, charitable behavior and especially the explicitly Islamic forms of giving are not least an expression of faith and stimulated by religious values. This, however, should not be understood as a purely altruistic or selfless motive. Rather, for most of my interviewees and survey respondents it is linked to earning religious merit for themselves, to ritual purification, the protection from illness and other harm and so forth.

Conclusion

Empirical data on charitable giving practices among the Muslims in Switzerland suggests that their engagement covers a wide range of activities and forms of donations including giving to formal organizations and networks as well as giving directly and using informal channels to make a donation. While this article focused on financial donations, the giving practices observed include contributions in money, in-kind donations, and the volunteering of time.

Much of this engagement was explicitly described in terms of *zakat* or *sadaqa* or is implicitly linked to Islamic ethics. It is connected to the Islamic religious calendar. Furthermore, traditions and the particular worship style from their homelands characterize my respond-

ents' philanthropic behavior. This also means that the giving to specific causes and making donations via specific organizations varies by subgroup affiliation. Therefore, initiatives by charities and Muslim associations tend to target specific subpopulations, and rarely all Muslims in Switzerland.

Overall, I did not observe marked differences in giving practices between the generations and between Muslim migrants and Swiss converts to Islam. Minor differences mostly concern the questions how the donors learn about issues related to humanitarian aid and Islamic charity, how they choose what to donate to whom, and which channels are used to make donations. Converts and the youth more frequently donate to formal charities than older Muslim migrants and seek information on the internet. The range of countries and causes they donate to is broader, and they more often target their donations to specific projects.

For the Muslims interviewed, Islamic charity is a way to express their belief, an act of piety. At the same time it also promotes social cohesion and enforces their sense of religious belonging.

Islamic charities active in the country have recognized the teaching on *zakat* and other forms of religious donations as an opportunity for professional fundraising. These charities facilitate religiously motivated giving and make "genuinely Islamic" giving easy for the donor. They offer concrete opportunities to make the obligatory *zakat* and engage in voluntary charity in accordance with Islamic principles. Most importantly, they reassure Muslim donors who live in a non-Muslim society by legitimizing changes in how traditional donations are made. Similarly, imams and mosque representatives in Switzerland sanction certain

adaptations of Islamic rituals to changed circumstances in the new sociocultural environment and offer interpretations of religious norms and directives that are reconcilable with the living conditions and the life style of Muslims in this country.

Apart from its religious significance, charitable giving has other functions and meanings to the individual. Much of the giving benefits people in the donor's social circle, including the extended family and the religious and ethnic community. To invest in such networks by contributing time and money helps build trust and solidarity among the group members. Over time, roles of donors and recipients of help may reverse.

As stated in the introduction international comparison reveals that Switzerland ranks among the top donating nations. With generosity being highly regarded in Swiss society, we could raise the question whether the Swiss environment encourages and promotes charitable activities of Muslims in the country. More precisely, does the fact that Muslim migrants have a specifically negative image in Switzerland lead them to donate to certain causes (including non-Muslim recipients) or organizations in order to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam and Muslims with the normative framework of the Swiss society?⁴² Most of my interview partners and survey respondents found it important to mention that they – in principal – give to

non-Muslims and to non-Muslim/Swiss charities, and that they have supported causes in Switzerland in the past. But the collected data also indicates that for the bulk of donations the Swiss context does not markedly influence the choice of beneficiaries and causes given to.

⁴² That the perception of a diaspora community by the majority society is a driving factor fostering social activities beyond the boundaries of the own ethnic and religious community was suggested by Stepick et al. in their research on religion and social capital among Christian immigrants in Florida; see Alex Stepick, Terry Rey, and Sarah J. Mahler, *Churches and charity in the immigrant city* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press).