South African Muslim Philanthropists and Humanitarian Organizations: Making a Difference, Making a Mark

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ABSTRACT

South Africa’s Muslims have been actively involved in humanitarian aid throughout the 20th century; many newspaper reports recorded their contributions towards natural disasters such as Turkey’s earthquake, Indonesia’s Tsunami, and Mozambique’s floods. They were, of course, represented by numerous organizations that extended their services to these affected communities, and as a result, their humanitarian acts have been recognized by the government for their giving spirit. During the past two decades – and earlier - many Muslim organizations have emerged that made serious inputs in the humanitarian sector; from among the reasonably long list is: the Gift of the Givers, Al-Imdaad Foundation, Muslim Hands, and Islamic Relief South Africa; each of these organizations has filled significant gaps within this particular quarter. And they have been complemented by another set of organizations such as the South African Muslim Charitable Trust, Mustadafin Foundation, and the Imam Abdullah Haron Educational Trust; each of these underlined that the South African Muslim community, despite their own depressing conditions during and after the apartheid era, has been concerned with the welfare of their fellow human beings nationally, regionally and internationally. The essay’s objective is threefold. The first briefly concentrates on the notion of ‘Muslim Activism’ that acts as a useful conceptual frame for this essay. The second places Muslim NGOs in text and context; the latter is divided into the local and international scenes respectively. The third selects samples from both Muslim trusts and foundations that participate in charitable activities and that address humanitarian aid, and it evaluates these organizations to demonstrate to what degree they helped to depict South Africa as a giving nation.

Keywords: South Africa, Philanthropy, Humanitarian, Charity, Muslim Activism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout and subsequent to the post-Cold War era the world has witnessed rapid socio-political, economic, and developmental changes in world affairs. Processes of globalization, modernization, and secularism determined the role of religious organizations in the public arena; since modernists and secularists disdained religion, they called for its marginalization and rejection with the fervent hope that it would gradually disappear by the end of the 20th century. These proponents who were supported by the views of scholars such as Peter Berger had to reconsider their views about religion when it resurfaced as a critical player in international affairs. Religion’s forceful return to the public arena under the leadership of the revolutionary Muslim Ayatollahs and Christian liberation theologians respectively in Iran and Nicaragua caused social scientists, who had wished for its disappearance, to make a u-turn and reconsider their definitive opinions about the death of religion.

With religion’s dramatic return into the public sphere and its representation as aid agencies and relief organizations in the developmental arena, fresh questions were raised as
regards their qualitative contribution towards transforming poverty-stricken communities and others through their myriads of networks. When preliminary observations confirmed by the World Bank under James Wolfensohn’s chairpersonship that these were making a difference in that sector, Wolfensohn immediately opened opportunities for dialogue with Christian and other religious leaders. The idea behind this was to strike possible partnerships that would assist in transforming this sector; one that has been served by numerous (secular oriented) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have not been as successful as anticipated (Marshall & Keough 2004).

As a consequence of the rapprochement, a working relationship was struck between the World Bank as a funding body and various Faith Based Organizations (FBOs). The reason for this outcome was that these international institutions and related bodies arrived at the conclusion that FBOs compared to the NGOs have a longer reach and a sturdier religious network. In addition, unlike the NGOs, the communities had greater trust and confidence in the religious organizations than the secular ones. So from the late 1990s onwards, the World Bank and its sister institutions have been investing in FBOs as alternative partners to combat and deal with, among others, refugee crises, and natural disasters. The synergy that was struck between the secular and religious institutions have contributed towards a healthy understanding of the relationship between the two (see Marshall & Keough 2004; Ter Haar 2011) and this has been observed in many countries including South Africa to which this essay turns its attention.

Its objectives are threefold. The first briefly concentrates on the notion of ‘Muslim Activism’ that acts as a useful conceptual frame for this essay and that assist in understanding the nature of South Africa’s Muslim philanthropic activities (See Charles 2016). The second places Muslim NGOs in text and context; the latter is divided into the local and international scenes respectively. And the third selects samples from both Muslim trusts and foundations that have participated and that are still very much involved in both charitable activities and humanitarian aid as influential players (Krafess 2005); it essentially evaluates these organizations demonstrating to what degree they have helped to portray South Africans as a giving nation (Habib & Maharaj 2008).

2. MUSLIM ACTIVISM: INITIATING MUSLIM ACTIVITIES, FORMING MUSLIM NGOs

In Quintan Wiktorowicz’s (2004) opening chapter of his edited work he employed the phrase ‘Islamic Activism,’ and he appositely applied it as a ‘social movement theory approach’ and he further described it as a dynamic process. Whilst this researcher fully identifies with this process and accepts the phrase as a useful conceptual tool that helps to frame the contents of this essay, he wants to make a slight adjustment by replacing the descriptive word or qualifier with another more appropriate word in the context; so instead of talking about ‘Islamic activism’ he prefers the alternative phrase ‘Muslim activism. The basic reason lies in the English usage of the two terms and the meanings that each conveys within their respective (linguistic) contexts and usage; the latter understanding shall be abandoned and not elaborated upon as a result of space constraints.

The essay thus invokes the particular phrase in order to gain a better insight into the rationale behind the formation of specific types of Muslim organizations such as trusts and foundations; these organizations by and large adopt an activist approach when they undertake philanthropic work in and beyond their communities. A careful glance at the apartheid and post-apartheid eras visibly show that they had clear missions and visions as to how they desire to make a qualitative difference in the lives of the poverty-stricken communities and to those that in need such as the ill-treated orphans and mistreated women.
Wiktorowicz made the point that the study of this form of activism remained on the margins of theoretical and conceptual developments related to social movements that participate in the highly volatile political arena. He argued that Muslim activism’s social dynamics have generally been unexamined and downplayed to such an extent that it was essentialized and trivialized as unintelligible. One concurs with Wiktorowicz’s observation because it applies very much in the South African context where Muslim institutions and its concomitant organizations have been studied and commented upon by individuals who have little or no knowledge of social movement theory in general and Muslim activism in particular; these self-proclaimed experts, who infrequently interacted with Muslim activists to understand their thinking, repeatedly conveyed stereotypical notions of Muslim activism conflating their acts with those described as terrorists. It is a well-known fact that all sorts of Muslim organizations around the globe have come under the spotlight for having generated ‘jihad money’ and for having been implicated in unsavory money-laundering activities.

That aside, Wiktorowicz cited social movement theorists who argued that researchers should undertake an integrated approach by eliminating and dispensing with ‘an artificial bifurcation between the studies of religious and non-religious movements;’ the approach should see religious organizations on a broader social movement canvass and one that factors in Muslim activism as a part of the general social developments; it should not be viewed as a type of activism that operates on the fringes of communities and societies. Worded differently, the research outcomes should show sharp similarities, intimate commonalities, and possible cross-fertilization among religious institutions in general and Muslim organizations such as corporate trusts, family foundations, and charitable societies. So for this essay the phrase ‘Muslim activism’ will be applied throughout.

3. MUSLIM NGOs: INSCRIBED IN TEXTS, LOCATED IN CONTEXTS

Before sketching the context in which these Muslim NGOs operate it is necessary to list and comment on some of the literature that has been produced on this topic during the past few years. Since it has been and continues to be a neglected subject, only a handful of books, chapters, articles, and research projects have appeared. That being this case, the essay first catalogues without going into much detail those texts that directly relate to this essay’s focus.

3.1 In Texts

First in line is Sultan Khan and Mohsin Ebrahim’s (2006) chapter titled ‘The State of Philanthropy amongst the Muslim Diaspora in South Africa.’ Soon after this study, Khan formed part of a reasonably large team of researchers that were lead by Brij Maharaj (2008); this team interrogated the nexus between ‘Religion and Development’ that was part of Adam Habib and Brij Maharaj’s co-edited Giving and Solidarity. Not long after the publication of their teamwork, Khan (2011) followed up with a chapter ‘Faith-Based Humanitarian Assistance in Response to Disasters: A Study of the Muslims Diaspora’ that complemented his co-authored chapter with Ebrahim.

Subsequent to this publication, both Khan and Ebrahim co-authored with A. K. Gabralla (2015) ‘The South African Indian Muslim community and its Role in Responding to International Disasters.’ The latter text was based on Gabralla’s (2009) MA thesis titled Islamic Institutions of Charity and International Disaster Relief: A Case Study of Gift of the Givers Foundation in South Africa. Amidst the appearance of these publications, Samadion Sadouni who had completed her doctoral study on Ahmad Deedat (d.2004) and his international NGO, the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) that was based in Durban with branches in Dubai and London respectively, completed three related studies.
Sadouni, as far as could be assessed, published the following texts: ‘New Religious Actors in South Africa: The Example of Islamic Humanitarianism’ during 2007 and ‘Political Engagements of Islamic NGOs in the South African Public Sphere’ in 2012. During this time Muhammed Haron (2010) published ‘Muslim Charities in the Development Sector: Fulfilling Political Ideals or Religious Duties?’

3.2 In Context
Each of these published texts underscored that there was a synergy that existed between the philanthropic communities and the humanitarian organizations; this was particularly highlighted in Khan and his co-authors’ writings. It essentially revealed that as these Muslim NGOs increased numerically on both the local and international scene that they succeeded to attract aid from various donor agencies. In the international arena organizations, Islamic Relief and a host of others that were well established received funds from a long line of philanthropists. Some of these philanthropists have formed private foundations that from the time of their inception up until this day have played and they continue to play a critical interventionist role in humanitarian disaster events. On this front, prominent organizations such as the Saudi Arabia-based Alwaleed bin Talal Charitable Foundation (est.1996), the USA-based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (est.2000), and the Emirates-based Mohammed Bin Rashid al-Maktoum Foundation (est.2007) have generously made funds available for, among others, educational institutions and poverty alleviation projects.

These organizations should, however, be separated and distinguished from corporate giving philanthropists such as the UK-based Wellcome Trust (est.1936) or the USA-based Pew Memorial Trust (est.1937) since they are private individual/familial structures that dedicated themselves to giving grants for projects and programs. Their financial injections, which are considered forms of investments in the developmental sector, have also caused them to become active in setting the developmental agendas globally (Salazar 2011). But whilst this is so, some scholars such as McGoey (2012) critically reflected on these philanthropic organizations in her text titled ‘Philanthrocapitalism and Its Critics;’ since McGoey’s ideas and her critique are not confined to secular philanthropic organizations, they should be extended to Muslim philanthropic organizations as well.

3.2.1 Local Context: Modest Structures, Noble Intentions
Setting aside these internationally known philanthropic organizations for a moment, the focus of this essay turns to the South African scene where the Muslim community established modest structures to address social welfare and healthcare issues over many decades. It should be stated that South Africa’s Muslims, who generally had noble intentions, have been actively involved in social welfare, educational, and health care work for much of the 20th century. This has been borne out by an assortment of regional and national newspaper reports that recorded and commented on their modest financial and material contributions on the local front towards South Africa’s communities that were heavily affected by the floods and storms (Haron 2010; Sadouni 2012). Similar activities were noted by these media on the international front; for example, Muslim organizations such as the African Muslim Agency and Islamic Relief that had the necessary infrastructure assisted in sending aid to Turkey’s earthquake fatalities, Indonesia’s Tsunami stricken communities, and Mozambique’s flood-ravaged victims. These organizations’ services to the affected communities resulted in their humanitarian acts being officially recognized by the South African government that commended them for their giving spirit.

During the past two decades – and earlier - many Muslim organizations have emerged that made serious inputs in the humanitarian sector; from among the reasonably long list is: the Gift of the Givers (www.giftofthegivers.org), Al-Imdaad Foundation.
Conference on Philanthropy for Humanitarian Aid (CONPHA) 2017

3.2.2 International Scene: Stereotypical Notions, Absurd Claims

Subsequent to the tragic and unforgettable destruction of the New York twin towers on 11 September 2001 Muslim organizations came under the USA’s spotlight for having allegedly aided and abetted ‘terror’ activities. The USA administration with the support of pro-Israeli lobby groups (in and outside the USA) such as Daniel Pipes’ Middle East Forum unfairly targeted Muslim organizations and accused many of them of having seemingly been engaged in terrorist activities. Two prominent charitable institutions, namely the Holy Land Foundation (headed by a Palestinian-American businessperson) and Benevolence International Foundation (sponsored by a Saudi businessperson), were, for example, among those that were ‘falsely’ accused and immediately closed down by USA’s law enforcement agencies (Muslim American Public Affairs Council 2003).

As a consequence of these developments in the USA, Muslim charitable and financial institutions around the world have generally been implicated by self-appointed ‘experts.’ Take as an example J. Millard Burr & Robert O Collins’ provocatively titled Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World. This unconvinced text complemented Loretta Napoleoni’s, another expert on the subject, Terror Incorporated: Tracing the dollars behind the terror networks; in it, Napoleoni persuasively labeled Muslim financial institutions as a form of ‘Islamist Financial Colonization’ (ch.9) and further described them as ‘The Economic Forces of Islamist Colonization’ (ch. 10). She (2005) simplistically and irrationally stated that “Islamic charities … are conduits through which billions of dollars reach the Islamist network every year.” And without thinking about the implications of her absurd assertions, she dispassionately added that “it is reasonable to assume that a large portion of charity funds acts as a sort of international pool of money, ready to be channeled to whichever armed groups is in need in the Muslim world.” She even averred that “(t)he Islamist colonization of the Muslim world was eased by the hawala system, which feeds into Islamic banks and into commodity trading in the east.” Along similar lines Annette Hubsche (2007), the South African researcher who also drew upon Napoleoni and others, echoed these views in her study Terrorists Financing in Southern Africa: Are we making a mountain of a molehill?

Though Muslim NGOs are still operating globally, they have experienced growing opposition in the western countries where they operate and their books have been carefully monitored by self-styled experts such as those referred to in the previous paragraph and a host of online sites such as ‘money jihad’ that questioned the legitimacy of these organizations charities and humanitarian organizations that have been actively involved in social and cultural projects that benefit all communities. When one considers the South African environment as compared to others where Muslim NGOs are encountering difficulties, South African Muslim organizations realize that they function in a fairly free and open environment. At this point, one should turn one’s attention to this particular
environment to assess the nature of charitable work that was and is being undertaken by Muslim organizations.

4. MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS: ESTABLISHING TRUSTS, ERECTING FOUNDATIONS

When scanning the South African Muslim landscape one cannot ignore the very many Muslim organizations that have been established to serve the needs of the Muslims and non-Muslims; one may visit the South African Muslim Directory site (www.samd.co.za) that list some of the organizations that contributed to the social welfare sector of the South African society in the major cities and outlying towns. Some of them were established more than twenty-five years ago and the foundations of others were only laid during the past decade. A few names that come to mind and that have been around for more than fifty years are the Cape Town-based Muslim Hospital and Welfare Society, the Durban-based Arabic Study Circle, and the Johannesburg-based Islamic Missionary Society; each of these organizations made remarkable contributions and so far only the Arabic Study Circle has been given attention by one academic scholar. Apart from these known organizations, there are numerous others that should be noted and be written into the historical texts in order to record their existence and jot down their contributions.

Be that as it may, during the five decades it was observed that the economically mobile Muslim movements such as the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (est.1970 www.mym.za.org) spearheaded the formation of a string of significant Muslim organizations such as the South African National Zakat Fund (SANZAF www.sanzaf.org.za), the Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA www.imasa.co.za), and the Islamic Dawah Movement of South Africa (IDM www.idmdawah.co.za); though they were not all charitable organizations, each of them made handsome inputs to the South African Muslim community in different parts of the country. Whilst SANZAF collected zakat (purificatory taxes) and sadaqah (charitable funds) as well as distributing bursaries and issuing soft loans, IMASA dedicated itself to giving medical services to those in poor low-income areas and IDM extended its hands to those who needed social welfare attention and to whom it also extended an invitation to consider joining the house of Islam.

These locally branded organizations were, moreover, complemented by a set of international organizations that concerned themselves with doing some of the activities that the locals were doing; besides also being keen on collecting zakat and sadaqah, they were more interested in offering humanitarian aid using South Africa as a strategic base for their operations continentally. Both Islamic Relief and Muslim Hands are international organizations that entered and settled in South Africa more than a decade ago; they did so because they observed that the South African Muslims - compared with many other Muslim minorities including those in the United Kingdom from where they come - were fairly well-acquainted with Western norms and ideals; and they noted that this community was well served by a plethora of organizations and associations that are found in all sectors of life.

The conclusion that they seemed to have reached was that each of these organizations – whether it operated in the educational sphere (such as the Muslim Private Schools Association) or in the economic sector (such as the Muslim asset management companies) or in the health care arena (such as IMASA) - was reasonably structured and organized. These two organizations, in fact, became aware of the prominent status that these Muslims held and the connections that existed between them and the South African democratic government. They were aware of the fact that it was a community that transformed itself into a developed, influential community despite its numerical weakness; that is, this community makes up only 2% of the total population of about 54 m according to current 2017 estimates.
Leaving that aside, it is perhaps prudent at this point to offer a critical profile of, at least, two local/national Muslim organizations. But before doing that it is imperative that a distinction is made between those that operate as philanthropic organizations from those that function as humanitarian organizations. It is important to bear this in mind because each of them has a unique set of objectives that differ from each other in some cases and overlap in others. For the purpose of this essay, one should make a clear distinction between those organizations that describe themselves as ‘trusts’ from those that labeled themselves as ‘foundations.’

Even though this essay does not intend to undertake a detailed discussion regarding the two legal concepts, it only wishes to state that from a technical perspective they share similarities but they also reflect differences. Technically, a trust has its roots in common law with no separate legal identity and a foundation has its origins in civil law with an independent legal identity; both have been set up to assist in protecting the company or one’s personal assets and factor in succession planning. And whilst the trust’s charter remains private, the foundation’s document is open to public scrutiny (see www.careygroup.eu). Taking this into account these remarks about these two legal entities, one will observe to what extent they differ and to what degree they overlap when profiling them in the following section; so instead of just describing and discussing one from each category, the essay shall consider two samples from each to highlight their commonalities and differences. It is perhaps necessary to state that the two South African Muslim Trusts acted in their capacity as philanthropic agencies, and their counterparts (that is, the two foundations) functioned as humanitarian agencies. In the light of these points, it first lists the two trusts that were established as philanthropic agencies; thereafter, it catalogues and discourses about the two foundations that function as humanitarian organizations.

4.1 Trusts: Philanthropic Agencies

4.1.1 Iqraa Trust (IT)

Iqraa Trust, which was established in 1994 by Al-Baraka Bank, undertook a mission to transform the lives of South Africa’s impoverished communities by holding onto values that underscored justice, fairness, and equality. IT, through empowerment projects, ensured that it made a qualitative input by making a positive contribution to the building and the formation of a sound and healthy nation. Among the variety of activities that it was involved in during the past twenty-five years were: its concerns with education and training, its attention to social welfare development, and its obsession with providing good health care services.

Apart from having given its support to organizations such as Al-Imdaad Foundation that have been actively involved in social development and disaster relief, it gave special consideration to poverty alleviation long before the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the UN. As far as IT was concerned, two areas that would assist in alleviating and reducing this aspect were creating educational chances and offering health care facilities for both needy and poor. In line with its mission, it thus gave ample financial support to organizations that have been facilitating health care for these sections of the communities, and to those that provided vocational training and skills.

As a consequence of its interest in assisting the South African society as a whole and organizations, in particular, IT acted as an enabling facilitator and capacity builder for and within organizations. It did so by financially purchasing equipment for hospitals, funding infrastructure for educational institutions, and investing in empowerment processes that train staff in acquiring specific skills. One of its important contributions has been offering its assistance for setting up projects that have been designed to alleviate the effects of poverty and diseases organized a national conference that deliberated and discussed various
humanitarian projects that were reviewed with the idea of implementing them on a partnership basis; the chairperson, Mr. Mahmoud Youssef-Baker stressed this point when the revamped website was launched and at the national conference that took place during July 2009.

The IT based itself on the following three objectives: (a) to evaluate and enhance the role of the Muslim communities and humanitarian organizations in the social upliftment sector and the development of the society’s needy; (b) to give attention to the challenges and opportunities of making optimum use of the resources in order to maximize the benefits for all South Africans who are in need; and (c) to promote partnerships between NGOs and government departments. Since IT’s chairperson laid much stress on the last-mentioned, it is interesting to observe that the South African Muslim Charitable Trust followed in the footsteps of IT by also encouraging the idea of partnerships.

4.1.2 South African Muslim Charitable Trust (SAMCT)

During 2008 the SAMCT, which was set up jointly by Al-Baraka Bank, Old Mutual, and CII Holdings and chaired by Mr. Mahomed Omar, was formed. From that time it acted as a vehicle to make available funding, offer services, and provide resources that would benefit organizations. But like it sister organization discussed in the previous section, it also encouraged partnerships with others in order to achieve its goals that were concerned with the contribution of funds towards community empowerment responsibilities, upliftment projects, sustainable development initiatives, and poverty alleviation tasks. Since SAMCT underlined the idea of partnering with well-established organizations to ensure that the funds that were set aside and donate to these reach those that it identified, it did so with IMASA that has been deeply involved in the healthcare sector since the 1970s when it was formed.

SAMCT, as already indicated, was concerned with developments in both the educational arena and the healthcare sector. As a result of its core interests in these two areas, it has donated large funds since it was established. Addington Primary School, for example, received more than 100,000 rands to refurbish its infrastructure, TIBA Services for the Blind’s Remedial Centre received more than 3000,000 rands to build three new classrooms, KwaZulu Natal’s Inchanga area got more than 600,000 rands to set up a Mobile Clinic, and during 2014 it partnered with MASA to open Isipingo’s Malukazi Clinic; the latter had its beginnings in the late 1970s when members of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa set up a basic structure to provide water for the community that lived in the informal settlement. Nonetheless, all of these contributions illustrated to what extent SAMCT committed itself to make a difference in these two sectors.

4.2 Foundations: Humanitarian Agencies

4.2.1 Gift of the Givers Foundation (GoGF)

Way back during August 1992, Dr. Imtiaz Sooliman had an audience with his Istanbul-based spiritual mentor and guide, Shaykh Muhammed Saffer Effendi al-Jerrahi who instructed him to set up the Waqf-al-Waqifin (Gift of the Givers); from that date onwards Sooliman never looked back. He had by then got deeply immersed in humanitarian aid that consisted of various activities that ranged from coordinating ‘search and rescue’ teams, gathering medical personnel to attend to disaster areas, offering vaccines to those affected by diseases such as malaria, and donating energy & protein supplements to undernourished communities, and providing medical supplies to those in poverty stricken regions (Gabralla 2009; Haron 2014; Khan, Gabralla & Ebrahim 2015).

After having set up this organization as a disaster response agency, Sooliman realized that apart from responding to disaster relief there was a need to tackle numerous other related
matters. Consequently, Sooliman’s organization grew exponentially with offices in South Africa and Malawi; to date, it covers numerous kinds of projects that include, among others, providing water for some communities, establishing primary health care clinics, launching feeding schemes, distributing food parcels, supplying hygiene packs to households, and caring for the physically & mentally challenged individuals.

As a result of being highly motivated and committed to addressing all of these issues, Sooliman was spurred on to become very inventive and creative as a trained medical doctor and disaster relief manager. He thus pioneered, inter alia, the world’s first containerized mobile hospital that comprised of 28 units; he came up with the world’s first groundnut-soya high energy and protein supplement in the use of severe malnutrition and other debilitating conditions, and he opened Africa’s largest Open Source Computer Lab. By the time Mall (2005) wrote her piece on GoGF had given aid to more than 22 countries that were worth more than $26 million. For all of these ingenious and resourceful schemes, GoGF’s CEO, Sooliman received more than hundred accolades that included four presidential awards.

From GoGF’s online Diary of Events, one gets a glimpse of its activities in and far beyond the borders of South Africa. In 2017 alone since the beginning of the year it has been occupied with among others the distribution of hygiene packs to members of the Eastwood and Welbedact communities during February, the inauguration of a new water well in Yemen’s Sujairah towards the end of March, the allotment of mosquito coils to communities in Zimbabwe’s Kwe Kwe at end of March, the functioning of Gaza’s Child Care Center during April. And during this period GoGF signed a 1.08 million rand Grant Agreement with the Embassy of Japan to construct irrigation facilities in Malawi’s Blantyre and Chiradzulu districts respectively.

All of these activities underline that over the past twenty-five years GoGF gained the trust and confidence not only of the communities that it served but it also managed to get the support of governments; in the previous paragraph it was shown that the Japanese government through its Embassy was quite convinced that GoGF as a partner would be able to carry out the agreed task and complete it within the scheduled timeline. In fact, when Morton (2014) narrated how they landed in Niger without having had to have visas it was ample evidence that GoGF’s reputation as a trustworthy humanitarian organization had preceded it wherever it went on the continent. Whilst its reputation has been established across the continent for delivering and serving the continent’s communities without fail, critical questions regarding its operations have been raised (Desai 2009).

4.2.2 Al-Imdaad Foundation (AIF)

The foundation came into existence during 2003 and it described itself as a non-profit humanitarian aid relief organization. Though its historical trajectory is different from GoGF, it has similar aims and that is to be committed to offering humanitarian services to the needy such as orphans, widows, and destitute irrespective of creed, culture, or colour. Unlike GoGF that did not indicate who forms part of its main team, AIF mentioned that it had, among others, theologians, academics, professionals, businesspersons, and medical personnel. It states that it is a sister organization of ‘Friends of the Suffering’ that is also a South African registered NGO.

Being a ‘Proudly South African’ organization like GoGF it ensured that it met up with members of South Africa’s Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRC) to enhance its commitment and to reaffirm its South African identity as a dedicated humanitarian aid organization. Unlike GoGF that seems to have closer connection with DIRC (with another branch in Malawi), AIF branched out to the UK, Kenya, Chile, Australia, Indonesia, and Jordan; from this, one observes that it has a presence in South America, in Southeast Asia/Australasia, in Southwest Asia (aka the Middle East), in Europe via the UK,
and in East Africa. And since it has stretched its tentacles far and wide to make its presence felt globally, it also registered with the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Compared to GoGF that boast 21 activities, AIF listed 13 activities; these comprise of the following: emergency relief, disaster preparedness, social welfare, counseling, winter warmth, orphans & child welfare, widows care, housing & shelter, water & sanitation, food aid & nutrition, health & medical, education & skills development, and sukuma sakhe (i.e. accessing resources). In addition to these, it has an AIF Volunteer Group that is similar to what GoGF depends upon but it also included a special Islamic Programme that GoGF does not have as part of its many activities. AIF’s Islamic Programme, it states, consists of ‘Islamic projects’ that aims to uplift the underprivileged and needy Muslims and this is done in accordance with Shari’ah rules. This begs the question: are the other activities not strictly pursued in accordance with the sacred text and the prophetic model? One assumes that they do and if so then they should rather rephrase without implying that the opposite applies to the other activities.

Speaking of activities and when looking back at 2015 and 2016, AIF was active on different fronts in the country; in 2015 and 2016 the respective communities of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal and of Mount Frere/Mount Ayliff in the Eastern Cape were affected by severe hailstorms and AIF responded by giving these communities its assistance. The drought in 2015 and the floods in 2016 also forced AIF to extend its support. AIF like the Trusts teamed up with Polokwane Muslim Trust during November 2015 to distribute food hampers to thousands in Polokwane’s Emmerdale area, and earlier that year it partnered with Air Mercy and the KZN Department of Health to distribute blankets and winter wear to isolated rural communities. and on the international front, AIF was as quite busy in regions such as Southwest Asia and South Asia; in the latter there were the floods that ravaged Sri Lanka and the hurricane that hit Bangladesh, and in the former Syria’s Aleppo was devastated by the indiscriminate attacks on its population and its Madaya community was starving and malnourished. AIF directed its activities to all of these communities with the support of their volunteers from South Africa and from those regions.

5. CONCLUSION

In ending this essay, the first part explored briefly the notion of ‘Muslim Activism’ that helped to act as an appropriate conceptual tool when assessing the status of Muslim organizations that have been set up by various representative groups within the South African Muslim community. It then went on to undertake a descriptive literature review so that one has an idea where this contribution fits in the ‘Religion and Development’ scholarly environment.

Thereafter it placed these Muslim NGOs in their respective national and international contexts; the reason for doing this was to illustrate to what extent Muslim NGOs have encountered difficulties to operate freely in the international environment as compared to the freedom that they experienced in the South African environment where they have even partnered with the government to perform their tasks. And it concluded by describing and discussing the activities of two Muslim trusts and two Muslim foundations that have made a difference in the lives of many and that have indeed made an indelible mark in the developmental sector. And whilst it highlighted the distinctive tasks of the trust vis-à-vis the foundation, it demonstrated in which way these organizations depicted South Africans as a giving nation.
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