

Muslims in Global Societies Series

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Editors

Exploring Islamic Social Work

Between Community and the Common Good

 Springer

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Preface

The migration of people from a Muslim background into the Global North since the 1960s, firstly as “guest-workers”, later mostly as asylum seekers, has resulted in Muslim communities of significant size in various countries across Western Europe. Reacting to this demographic transformation, many practitioners, as well as theoreticians of social work, have time and again raised the concern that their conceptual tools and methods of intervention might not always be adequate for Muslim clients. There have therefore been calls for new social work technologies which are sensitive to the religious background of Muslims. Moreover, Muslim protagonists have themselves started initiatives, projects and reflections in the field of social work. Hence the rise of new approaches – be it concerning theological issues or questions of social work practice – that can be subsumed under the concept of *Islamic social work*.

Exploring Islamic social work in Western contexts is highly challenging, as it touches manifold activities, ideas, protagonists and contexts. Moreover, the development of Islamic social work is closely related to the dynamics of Muslims and Islam in specific constellations of time and space, calling forth both practical engagement and theoretical reflection. As Islamic social work is a young branch of research, many fundamental questions are yet to be clarified and the subject matter itself needs to be defined more precisely. We have therefore decided to place this book and the associated project under the programmatic title “Exploring Islamic Social Work”. At the same time, Islamic social work is proving to be a controversial subject – both within Muslim communities and in the social, media and political debates of Western contexts. Concerns about proselytism are often articulated, as are expectations for the positive participation of Muslim communities in plural civil societies. The subtitle “Between Community and the Common Good” expresses this area of tension and controversy. The diverse chapters in this volume examine the role played by different stakeholders, organisations, target groups, ideas and reflections. However, the chapters do not only refer to Muslim minorities, but also to the broader horizon of current debates in social work. We are therefore pleased to welcome a broad readership from different disciplines and fields of practice.

This book is the outcome of several research activities undertaken by the Swiss Center for Islam and Society (*Schweizerisches Zentrum für Islam und Gesellschaft SZIG/Centre Suisse Islam et Société CSIS*) at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Founded in 2015, the SZIG/CSIS explores the interfaces between Islam and society by integrating perspectives of theological self-reflection by Muslim scholars into interdisciplinary research. The Center maintains a close exchange with Muslim communities and develops its research priorities based on the needs and requirements of practice. In the context of the SZIG/CSIS doctoral programme “Islam and Society: Islamic-theological studies”, various topics with regard to both theoretical reflection and practice analysis are treated. Islamic social work happened to become one of these thematic fields in which empirical research, the further development of social science concepts, the analysis of the framework conditions of the welfare state and the development of Islamic-theological reflection flow into one another. Baptiste Brodard’s PhD thesis served as door opener towards a multiplicity of challenging research questions, especially in the field of local interactions. Workshops with Muslim communities in Switzerland on issues of Islamic social work also opened our eyes to current transformations, processes and challenges.

One may wonder why the initiative of publishing such a volume comes from Switzerland – a small country in which the history of Muslim presence is only a few decades old. This should, however, appear less surprising if one considers the fact that Muslims often act, and the social and scientific debates in this country largely occur, among international networks so that the view automatically falls not only on Switzerland’s neighbouring countries, with which the country is also linguistically connected, but also on other parts of Europe and the world. Moreover, given the fact that Islamic social work is, to say the least, an issue of interest across the Western hemisphere, Switzerland as a traditional host of international bodies and conferences should not be the least suitable site for such an enterprise.

Realising that it would be fruitful to look at the topic of Islamic social work from the basis of different country contexts and scholarly traditions, we decided to organise an international conference under the title “Islamic Social Work? From Community Services to Commitment to the Common Good” which was held on September 11 and 12, 2019. Already 1 year prior, in preparation for this conference, we invited various experts in this field to discuss and share their ideas and findings with us. Some of the chapters in this volume emerged from the above-mentioned conference. To broaden and deepen the picture we had obtained, we recruited some further chapters after the conference. This volume is the result of a long-standing process of discussion and exchange, and we are more than happy to see this exciting enterprise come to a provisional conclusion.

Numerous people have contributed to the preparations and the publication procedure. First of all, we would like to thank the 20 authors from 4 continents for their willingness to share the results of their research, to adapt their ideas to the collective endeavour of this book and to rework their chapters during the reviewing process. It is an inconceivably great joy and honour for us to bring together in this volume the varied and sometimes very different chapters and their contexts. Particular thanks

go to Sara Ashencaen Crabtree from Bournemouth University and our colleague Amir Dziri from the SZIG/CSIS for reviewing the introduction and giving us very valuable advice. Next, we would like to thank the collaborators from our institute who have contributed to the organisation of the conference and the publishing process: Arlinda Amiti, Valérie Benghezal, Nadire Mustafi, Nadia Seiler and Anna Zikeli. Catherine Nicholson Pfammatter ensured the proofreading with a high degree of accuracy and sensitivity. The collaborators from Springer Nature have supported the process with great interest and much patience. Our two anonymous reviewers helped to improve the manuscript and to deepen and express various aspects more clearly. David Tittensor and Serena Hussain readily agreed to include this volume in the Muslims in Global Societies Series that they manage as editors and provided constructive feedback. Thanks to all of you for the excellent collaboration!

Finally, we would like to thank Mercator Foundation Switzerland, as well as the Swiss National Research Foundation, without whose support the organisation of the conference and the publication of this volume would have not been possible.

Fribourg, Switzerland

Hansjörg Schmid
Amir Sheikhzadegan

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Amir Sheikhzadegan studied sociology and ethnology in Tehran and Zurich. Upon completion of his PhD in sociology at Zurich University, he took up research and teaching positions at Zurich University and later at the University of Fribourg. Lectureships at the Universities of Bern, Lucerne and Basel, as well as fellowships in Berlin and Sydney, were among his further academic activities. His research projects were supported by several grants, including those from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), Swiss Federal Department for Migration (SEM), and The Secretary of Judiciary and Internal Affairs of Zurich Canton. Sheikhzadegan is the author of a book on the rise of political Islam in Iran and Algeria, *Der Griff des politischen Islam zur Macht: Iran und Algerien im Vergleich* (Lang, 2003).

Furthermore, he has co-edited a volume on multi- and transculturality, *Gesellschaften zwischen Multi- und Transkulturalität* (Seismo, 2016), as well as one on political thought in Iran, *Beyond the Islamic Revolution: Perceptions of Modernity and Tradition in Iran before and after 1979* (DeGruyter, 2017). His published articles cover a wide range, from edited volumes to peer-reviewed journals such as *European Societies*, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, *Spiritual Care*, *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, *sozialpolitik.ch* and *Social Inclusion*. Amir Sheikhzadegan's fields of expertise include Islamism, Islam and modernity, spiritual transformation, volunteering, social and collective identity, and spiritual care.