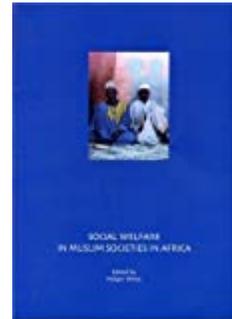




Holger Weiss, ed. *Social Welfare in Muslim Societies in Africa*. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002. 189 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-91-7106-481-3.



Reviewed by Roberta Ann Dunbar (Department of African and Afro-American Studies, University of North Carolina)

Published on H-Africa (July, 2003)

Historical Difference, Social Justice, and Islamic Economics in Africa

Historical Difference, Social Justice, and Islamic Economics in Africa

The variety of historical example and depth of analysis concerning social welfare in Muslim Africa that appears in this collection fulfills the editor's hope "to capture both ideas about the provision of social welfare, and the theoretical issues surrounding it currently being debated by Muslim intellectuals" (p. 5). These articles, novel for both their topic and their focus on sub-Saharan as well as North Africa, will interest scholars of several disciplines, especially historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and scholars of religion.

Holger Weiss begins with a discussion of *zakat*, in classical Islam a mandatory tax levied by the state on the wealthy to provide for the poor. He then examines *zakat* organizations established by the state and by private institutions in recent years.[1] With the expanding economic crisis of the 1980s, scholars throughout the Muslim world debated the adaptation of *zakat* to meet the needs of the modern welfare state. Drawing on examples of Muslim societies elsewhere, Weiss demonstrates

the array of choices concerning the role of the state and its relationship to the non-governmental organizations (or NGOs) that came into existence to provide social welfare in a declining state. Calling for more research on the history of social welfare in West Africa, he notes that *zakat* was known to be a state function in pre-colonial Sudan, Masina, and Sokoto. Despite efforts to establish state *zakat* collection committees in the northern Nigerian shari'a states, mosques and other private organizations are the primary institutions for collecting funds for social welfare purposes. Given the dominance of secular states, Weiss concludes that in pluralistic societies the resolution of the state-versus-private debate may be the "establishment of an Islamic order within the Muslim community but without the Islamisation of the state" (p. 36).

In chapter 2, which might usefully be read together with chapter 5 by Rudiger Seesemann, Endre Stiansen makes two important points about Islamic economics in Sudan that have relevance for discussions elsewhere. First, many of those developing the theoretical frame-

works are also activists dealing with the practical problems of implementation of reform. Second, despite their critique of the West, Islamic economists operate within a neo-classical framework. Outlining the status of non-Muslims in pre-colonial Sudanese history, Stiansen turns to the major shifts in their status caused by the expanding authority of Islamic law in Sudan during the last thirty years. He highlights the Judicial Decisions Act of 1983 and the Constitution of 1998. The latter in particular coupled a language of tolerance with a narrowing of the legal framework: Article 65 states that no legislation should contravene Islamic law (pp. 58-61). Islamists failed “to appreciate why non-Muslim minorities oppose national legislation on the basis of the sharia” (p. 62), and the author sees little cause for optimism. Since even Islamist legislation has not alleviated the plight of the vast majority, the strong Islamic juridical basis for minority rights provide what hope there is for the future (pp. 63-66).

Franz Kogelmann in chapter 3 provides a primer on the character of *waqf* (*pl awqaf*), more familiarly called hubs (*pl ahbas*) in the Maghreb, and an illuminating discussion of the history of social welfare in Morocco. In contemporary Morocco, state benefits cover only government employees, leaving the vast majority of the population dependent on the beneficence of family or religious foundations (p. 66). Throughout Morocco’s history the foundations, many of which contained numerous sub-foundations, were important vehicles for the development of religious law and education in addition to more mundane needs. His case study of Sidi Fredj, a *maristanat* or hospital, illustrates the historical depth of foundations, and narrates their transformation under French colonial rule.

In his history of the Sanusiya in chapter 4, Knut Vikor integrates the study of both religious ideals and their manifestation in particular historical and political contexts (p. 80). He suggests that “it is among such rare coincidences of an exceptional stature in both fields that we find the innovations in both Sufi organization and socio-political relevance” (p. 81). Vikor provides a densely textured description of the Sanusiya lodges that demonstrates their effectiveness in creating new social links and institutions. He also critiques the debate between advocates of anthropologists Evans-Pritchard and Emry Peters over the nature of the Sanusiya’s relationships to local tribes and the order’s role in the slave trade. He concludes that the Sanusiya realized the importance of the peace-making role of the brotherhood to the prosperity and security of the trade routes. Bedouin groups, on the other hand, used the Sanusiya as a kind of “symbolic cap-

ital” (following Bourdieu). The lodge communities provided spiritual and economic aid to those in need, providing them with an alternative to clientage. While French sources saw the Sanusiya as a slave-trading network hostile to the French presence, Vikor’s study makes clear the importance of this innovative order for social life far beyond the commercial needs of the trans-Saharan trade.

Like Vikor, Rudiger Seesemann, in his study of two Sufi orders in Sudan (chapter 5), examines the intersection of religious ideals and praxis. Critical of the failure of Islamist governments to alleviate conditions in Sudan since 1989, he recounts the experience of two Sufi orders combining both religious idealism and practicality. A member of the Tijaniya, Shaykh Ibrahim Sidi ran a rehabilitation program for street children in El Fasher, the capital city of Northern Darfur Province. While the Shaykh believed himself to be furthering the goals of Muslim society through his religious teachings, his innovation was to include practical skills that enabled the derelict boys to achieve some independence. In the second case study, al-Hajj Hamad Muhammad al-Ja’ali, the leader of a Qadiriya Sufi Order in Kadabas, established a charity hospital in 1997. The hospital was built by volunteer labor and initially funded by Sudanese working in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. While these two projects are not the outcome of explicit Sufi doctrine about social welfare, their activities enable observers to identify the Sufi orders with it (p. 115). Neither just religious nor just social welfare, activities such as those of the two orders represent a real fusion of religious ideals with ethical practice.

In chapter 6, Roman Loimeier traces the conflict between the reform movements and Sufi leaders of Senegal in the 1950s and again in the 1990s over education, and presents us with data on the relative dominance of Arabic as opposed to French literacy that may surprise even those familiar with the West African country (p. 124). Sufi leaders historically championed a form of religious education that emphasized moral education and memorization of the Qur’an as the basis of adult social competency, and that relied upon the students’ labor to insure the material functioning of the schools. In the explosive urbanization of the 1990s, many of the *talibe* or students lived in poor conditions and joined gangs of youths who harassed city dwellers in the name of charity. This latter feature provided the ostensible motive for a joint mass-media campaign in 1992 by the Senegalese government and the Islamic reform movement against Qur’anic schools. However, Loimeier discerns a deeper issue driving the campaign. The inspiration for the first

generation of franco-arabe schools in the 1950s was both to modernize and also to critique Sufi leaders, many of whom were perceived to be allies of colonial officials. By the 1990s, both of these themes were being played out by a second generation of Muslim reformists. For many current teachers, returned from Muslim universities of North Africa and the Middle East, Islamic reform assumes greater urgency in the face of Western dominance on the one hand and deteriorating economic conditions on the other. As they did in the 1950s, *marabouts* saw the campaign of the 1990s as another effort to wrest away their control of religious education. Although many of the Sufi leaders founded their own franco-arabe schools, Loimeier concludes that the pressure of the reform movements has eroded the older pedagogical style that focused on moral education by “de-sacralizing” education. The result is a “paradigmatic change in Muslim societies at least as far as their self-image and their concept of socialization is concerned” (p. 136).

In chapter 7, Sulemana Mumuni’s survey of Muslim non-governmental organizations in Accra, Ghana, focuses more on politics than on social welfare. His essay outlines the history of Muslim governance in Accra with particular attention to the last thirty years. Today Muslim organizations are sharply divided between those servicing indigenous Muslims, alien Muslims from other African countries, and “national migrants,” Muslims who came to Accra from northern Ghana. Among the three communities, Mumuni argues that the national migrants have been pushed to the margins by the other two. He shows that after 1972, many NGOs became tied to external funding from Saudi, Iranian, and African-American Muslim sources. History shaped a powerful legacy of political fragmentation and competition that characterizes the Muslim NGOs discussed. Efforts by the government to create a mediating institution or process have come to nothing. In Mumuni’s view, the Muslim organizations have made some positive contributions to education and worship. However he is critical of their failure to confront social issues such as teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and environmental pollution (p. 160).

Holger Weiss summarizes the evolution of the theoretical basis of Islamic economics and discusses efforts to develop an academic program around the field in Sokoto, Nigeria. He argues that despite significant research in recent decades, there is still little agreement about the discipline of Islamic economics. Drawing upon the work of the Pakistani Islamic economist Naqvi, Weiss identifies widely embraced policy objectives and the instruments adopted to achieve them. Social justice is the corner-

stone of Islamic economics and should be achieved by taxation, especially the collection and distribution of *zakat* (p. 166). But as Weiss notes, this has posed a difficult problem for post-colonial states in that *zakat* taxes are insufficient to meet the needs of a modern welfare state.

At Usmanu Danfodiyo University in Sokoto, Sule Ahmad Gusau along with co-author Muhammad Bawa and Ibrahim Sulaiman pioneered research and an academic program on Islamic economics. Despite adversity, they created a major center for research on Islamic economics with ties to academic programs in Jeddah, Islamabad, and Bandung. Gusau characterizes the philosophical discourse of the Sokoto school as relatively conservative, tending to rely for its inspiration on the model of the classical works of Usman dan Fodio, Abdullahi dan Fodio, and Muhammad Bello. “Whereas some Islamic economists ... have stressed the need for a modern implementation of Islamic norms, including the need for land reform and universal education, the Nigerian scholars seem to regard such reforms as undesirable”; for instance, Gusau favors the continuation of seclusion of women (p. 181). Recent writings of banker Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, however, represent a novel and contrasting position. Writing in the context of the adoption of shari’a by several of the northern Nigerian states, Sanusi adopts a political economy approach. He advocates an important role for the state in social welfare through *zakat*, suggests the reassessment of Maliki legal principles governing it, and considers the possible adoption of *zakat* principles from other schools of Islamic jurisprudence (pp. 182-184).

The richness and detail of the material contained in this collection of articles can only be suggested here. Based on years of experience in the field or in analysis of historical texts, these authors exhibit balance and clarity in their arguments. This work’s importance goes beyond the realm of academic Islamic Studies by enhancing the visibility of recurring concerns clearly central to Muslims on the continent. Debated across the centuries, such issues testify to the long-term challenge of adapting theory to worldly realities. In summary, major themes include the potential and limitations of *zakat* for achieving social welfare in modern societies, as seen in Weiss and Seesemann. In addition, Stianson, Vikor, and Seeseman highlight a traditional schism in scholarship on Muslim politics and economics that contrasts the idealism of orthodox scholars with the empirical approach of anthropologists. But they successfully challenge an either/or framework, and demonstrate that both the ideal and the practical can exist within a single movement and

achieve positive results. This is perhaps most notable in the essays by Vikor on the Sanusi and Seesemann on the Sufi orders in Sudan. African and non-African observers who empathize with African countries' struggle to restore control over the destinies of their countries should hear the insights of these economists and political writers. The nineteenth century witnessed the combination of free trade and Christian "civilizing" impulses that led to colonialism. It is ironic that now in the twenty-first century, the shibboleths of industry, savings, and philanthropy should also be central to a philosophical debate about combating the legacies of colonialism. But the objective of social justice, however challenged it may be in

these days of globalization, is one that surely resonates with both Muslim and non-Muslim Africans. The authors deserve our thanks for the discussions of key principles and debates within that movement.

Note

[1]. Franz Kogelmann in chapter 3 notes that *zakat* is an obligatory tax in Pakistan, Sudan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. In Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, and Bangladesh, the collection of *zakat* is organized by the state and regulated by law, but the Islamic almsgiving is voluntary (p. 68).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-africa>

Citation: Roberta Ann Dunbar. Review of Weiss, Holger, ed., *Social Welfare in Muslim Societies in Africa*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. July, 2003.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7944>

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.