Spiritual and Material Development

The politics of Islamic charitable action in North India

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the politics of Islamic charitable action in India. Based on sixteen months of ethnographic research conducted in Uttar Pradesh, it focuses on how Muslim charitable organizations address Muslims' social and economic marginalization, an issue recently evidenced by national commission reports (Sachar Report 2006). The research findings bring together the everyday practices of Sunni Muslim charitable organizations in the poor urban neighbourhoods of Lucknow as well as the organizations' humanitarian aid in Muzaffarnagar, following anti-Muslim riots that led to more than 50,000 Muslim villagers' displacement. These two locations capture ordinary forms of structural violence, but also how extraordinary forms of targeted violence shape Muslim charitable organizations' discourses and practices of economic development.

I argue that Muslim NGO volunteers and workers promote privatized, market-oriented development as a new, pragmatic form of social and political mobilization. However, their approaches do not necessarily increase the processes of individualization or sidelining of the state—as critics of neoliberal economic development would expect. Instead, Muslim workers and volunteers' attempts to "optimize" Islamic charity and mobilize communities through discourses of self-responsibility and economic integration remain firmly grounded in religious ethics of giving, familial duty and collective well-being. This new focus on the figure of the "poor Muslim" and self-development nonetheless puts the responsibility on Muslims to "reform" themselves, and paradoxically, might deflect attention from forms of enduring marginalization faced by certain Muslim communities in the postcolonial Indian context. My research thus highlights the local variations, complexities and paradoxes characterizing the projects of social and economic improvement imagined by these organizations.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine les discours et pratiques d'organisations caritatives musulmanes en Inde. À la suite de seize mois de recherches ethnographiques menées en Uttar Pradesh, j'analyse comment les organisations caritatives musulmanes répondent aux enjeux liés à la marginalisation sociale et économique des Musulmans, une situation qui a récemment été soulevée par différents rapports gouvernementaux, dont le Sachar Committee Report (2006). Mes résultats de recherche mettent en lien les pratiques quotidiennes d'organisations musulmanes sunnites dans des quartiers défavorisés de Lucknow ainsi que leurs interventions humanitaires à Muzaffarnagar, faisant suite à des émeutes contre les musulmans qui ont forcé le déplacement de plus de 50 000 villageois. Ces deux terrains de recherche démontrent comment des formes « ordinaires » de violence structurelle, mais aussi des formes « extraordinaires » de violence ciblée façonnent les discours et pratiques de développement économique que ces organisations mettent de l'avant.

Je soutiens que les bénévoles et les travailleurs dans ces organisations caritatives encouragent une forme de développement privatisé et orienté vers le marché comme un nouveau modèle pragmatique de mobilisation sociale et politique. Cependant, leurs approches ne renforcent pas nécessairement les processus d'individualisation ou de réduction des responsabilités de l'État, que les analystes associent généralement aux modèles de développement économique néolibéral. Les efforts des travailleurs et des volontaires musulmans pour « optimiser » la charité musulmane et mobiliser les communautés par le biais de discours sur le développement de soi et l'intégration économique restent fermement ancrés dans une éthique religieuse du don, du devoir familial et du bien-être collectif. Ce nouvel accent mis sur la figure du « pauvre musulman » et le développement personnel oblige néanmoins les musulmans à se « réformer » eux-mêmes et, paradoxalement, peut détourner l'attention portée aux formes de marginalisation persistantes auxquelles les musulmans sont confrontés dans le contexte indien postcolonial. Ma recherche met donc en évidence les variations locales, les complexités et les paradoxes que suscitent les projets de progrès social et économique imaginés par ces organisations.

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NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

All non-English words are italicized in the text, apart for some frequently-used words (eg.: zakat). Hindi and Urdu words have been transliterated without diacritical marks. To simplify reading, I used the English plural ending for Hindi and Urdu words (eg.: *waqfs* instead of *awqaf*).

All quotes are translated from Urdu or Hindi expect when I mention otherwise in the text. All translations from Urdu and Hindi to English are mine and have been verified by a native Hindi speaker. In interview quotations, I kept some original words in brackets when they give additional texture to the English translation.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIMPLB: All India Muslim Personal Law Board

AIMWPLB: All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board

ANHAD: Act Now for Democracy and Harmony

BeK: Bazm-e-Khawateen

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

BKU: Bharatiya Kisan Union

BMMA: Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan

BSP: Bahujan Samaj Party

DM: District magistrate

FIR: First Information Report

GOI: Government of India

JIH: Jamaat-e-Islami Hind

JUH: Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (Association of Islamic Scholars of India)

IDP: Internally displaced person

MLA: Member of Legislative Assembly

MP: Member of Parliament

NCRLM: National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SP: Samajwadi Party

SSP: Senior Superintendent of Police

UP: Uttar Pradesh

UPA: United Progressive Alliance

VHP: Vishva Hindu Parishad

Chapter One. Introduction

A disadvantaged minority

"You know why Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind is so involved in relief work in Muzaffarnagar? It is because we [Jamiat members] are also the victims." This is what Irfan Qasmi told me in the office of a small printing company in Muzaffarnagar in 2014. We met to discuss the involvement of Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) in providing aid to the victims of the anti-Muslim riots that disrupted the region a few months before. In September 2013, organized riots erupted between Hindu and Muslim villagers, leaving sixty dead (70% Muslims) and hundreds injured. Around 60,000 villagers, mostly Muslims, fled from their villages out of fear that they would be attacked, and resettled in temporary relief camps scattered across Muzzafarnagar and Shamli districts. JUH, the largest Muslim nongovernmental organization in India, was one of the main providers of humanitarian aid after the conflict. Many of the *Jamiat* workers involved in the relief work were also local residents who were directly affected by the event. Some members of the organization told me that their own business had crashed after the riot because Hindu farmers did not want to purchase goods in their shop anymore. Irfan Qasmi was alluding to this multifaceted position when he explained the reasons for *Jamiat*'s active participation in humanitarian aid efforts.

My doctoral dissertation examines the politics of Islamic charitable action in North India, focusing on how Muslim charitable organizations approach issues of Muslims' social and economic marginalization. Though referencing an "extraordinary" event of violence, Irfan Qasmi's comment on JUH's involvement in humanitarian aid illustrates some of the specific

aspects of the positioning of Muslim charitable organizations in India. Muslim charitable organization workers and volunteers are part of a marginalized minority, but also responsible for providing aid to that minority. They are confronted with a number of paradoxes: the paradox of being considered state partners in welfare provision while harboring critical views on the state's treatment of religious minorities; and the paradox of using their own resources and religious charity to solve political problems. My dissertation is thus an ethnography of the complexities and politics of social improvement.

I document Muslim NGOs' work as a lens through which I examine the broader relations between Islamic practices of aid, national integration, and politics of economic development in a context where Muslims form the minority. I draw on sixteen months of ethnographic research that I conducted in Uttar Pradesh, North India, between 2013 and 2015. Research findings are based on two main sources: an ethnography of the everyday practices of Sunni Muslim charitable organizations in the poor urban neighbourhoods of Lucknow, and an analysis of the humanitarian relief interventions that followed the anti-Muslim communal violence in Muzaffarnagar that I describe in the beginning of the Introduction.[1] These two field sites highlight the links between everyday practices and exceptional interventions, and how both ordinary forms of structural violence and extraordinary forms of targeted violence shape Muslim charitable organizations' discourses and practices of economic development.

What is particularly compelling in the Indian context is that in the past fifteen years, national commission reports such as the Sachar Committee Report have published statistical evidence indicating that Muslims form a disproportionate part of India's most socially and economically

[1] In South Asia, the term "communal" usually has a pejorative connotation and is used to refer to tensions between religious groups (Pandey 1990).

marginalized citizens (Ranganath Mishra Commission Report, GOI 2007, Rajinder Sachar Committee Report, 2006). The Sachar Report was commissioned in 2005 by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance—to draw a comprehensive portrait of the socioeconomic status of all religious minorities in the country. The commission was thus not created explicitly to examine the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims, but because Muslims form the largest religious minority in India, this part of the report was the most eagerly awaited and captured governmental, public and media attention. The Sachar Report findings indicate that despite being the largest religious minority in the country—by constituting 14,23% of the population (about 172 million people)—Muslims are highly disadvantaged and underrepresented in the educational, economic and political sectors (GOI 2013d; Basant and Shariff 2010; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012).[2] For example, the report shows that 31% of Indian Muslims live below the poverty line, which is almost equivalent to the proportion for *Dalits* (the lowest groups in Hindu caste system) and *Adivasis* ("tribal" groups), the groups that are generally the most highly disadvantaged and subject to discrimination in India (Jaffrelot 2009).

The relative condition of the largest minority in India has been declining since Independence, so the conclusions of the report were not entirely surprising. The media regularly reports cases of communal violence targeting Muslims, often resulting in dispossession and displacement for victims. Different studies indicate, for example, that since the 1990s, several urban spaces have been reconfigured into more religiously segregated pockets, in part as a measure of protection against potential acts of communal violence. This rearrangement has resulted in a concentration of poverty in predominantly Muslim areas (Jaffrelot 2009; Zoya Hasan and Menon 2005; Hansen

[2] Around 20% of Indians associate themselves with a religion other than Hinduism (79,8%), mainly Islam (14,23%), Christianity (2,3%), Sikhism (1,72%), Buddhism (0,7%) and Jainism (0,37%) (GOI 2011).

2001, 2000; Van der Veer 1994).[3] The media also frequently reports more subtle and generalized cases of discrimination or exclusion of Muslims—such as being refused a public service employment, or being underrepresented in police forces—which constitute what scholars have termed forms of structural violence (Gupta 2012; Farmer 2004).[4] Muslims tend to be excluded from "three sites of power:" the judiciary, administration, and police (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 4). With the rise of Hindu nationalist movements and the increase of tangible discrimination and violence against Muslims over the last two decades, the socioeconomic situation of Muslims has started to receive some public and political attention. The Sachar Report cast a spotlight on this situation, by compiling existing but disaggregated statistical data on religious minorities produced by various state ministries.

To a certain extent, the findings of the Sachar Report represent a historical shift in the relationships between the Indian state and religious minorities. As India's secular constitution protects the religious rights and educational autonomy of religious minorities, governments have generally limited their involvement in "religious minority affairs"—especially regarding Muslim personal law—on the grounds that such involvement would interfere with religious and cultural autonomy (Subramanian 2014; Narain 2008).[5] Since the eighteenth century, British colonial authorities have tried to keep religious personal laws apart from direct colonial jurisdiction and have favored an approach of "non-interference" in Indian customs, religions and traditions (Cohn

[3] The dynamics between Hindus and Muslims are of course more complex than these spatial reconfigurations suggest. I discuss this question in more details in Chapter Six, in relation to the communal conflicts that took place in Muzaffarnagar. See also Singh (2011), Das (2010) and Chatterji and Mehta (2007) for examples of how boundaries and meanings of violent events fluctuate through everyday living and interactions between Hindus and Muslims.

[4] Gupta draws on Galtung's definition of structural violence to designate "violence" that cannot be attributed to a single actor; structural violence is "built into the structure of power" (Galtung 1969, 170-71 in Gupta 2012, 20).

[5] The principal religious denominations in India have separate personal laws, which mainly cover conjugal and familial matters, such as marriage, divorce, alimony and inheritance (Lemons 2013; Subramanian 2014).

1989; Beverley 2011; Van der Veer 2001).[6] But by doing so, ruling parties have remained relatively uninvolved in recognizing and acting upon the socioeconomic disparities between religious groups, as well as systematic prejudice and insecurity faced by Muslims in India (Fazal 2010). During the drafting of the Indian Constitution, preferential policies, such as reserved access to certain higher education institutions and government institutions, were established for "backward castes and classes" that were said to represent a disadvantaged socioeconomic group. Religious minorities were not considered a disadvantaged group and were not eligible for special welfare treatment (Bajpai 2011).[7] With these new statistics on the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims, Indian Muslims are experiencing a shift—from being perceived as a distinctive religious and cultural minority in whose affairs the secular state should not interfere, to becoming an economically disadvantaged socio-religious group whose "backwardness" should be rectified (Fazal 2010; Bajpai 2011).[8] This shift challenges the role of the state, which now must face the fact that it has not been very proactive in furthering minorities' socioeconomic integration.

In response to these new statistics on Muslim disadvantage, the last Indian National Congress-led government established a 15-point political program to address this imbalance between religious minorities and the Hindu majority (GOI 2013c). The program mainly includes recommendations for improving access to education, employment, and the prevention and control of "communal" riots. Little to none of these recommendations have however been implemented, and many doubt the actual willingness of the government to intervene in issues related to the

[6] In practice however, colonial and post-colonial authorities have been involved in codifying religious laws, as well as in regulating, administrating and also funding religious institutions (Cohn 1996, 1989; Dirks 1992).

[7] Indian reservation policies are a form of affirmative action usually consisting in the attribution of a percentage of places in educational and governmental institutions to caste-based discriminated groups (Bajpai 2011; Jayal 2015).

[8] The term "backwardness" is often employed in popular language because of its use in official policies. Some marginalized groups can for example qualify for the *Other Backward Class* (OBC) status to access specific services and become eligible to affirmative action programs (see Fazal 2007).

Muslim minority (see Chapter Five and Six). How do Muslim charitable organization workers and volunteers perceive these alarming statistics—or, to borrow Bajpai's expression (2011), this passage from "difference" to "disadvantage?" Does this shift impact their role and the type of work they conduct, and if so, in what ways?

I mentioned earlier that Muslim charitable organizations are confronted with a number of paradoxes. While their role has grown in response to increased attention on the social and economic deprivation of Muslims, measures to solve this issue are not self-evident. Notably, there are diverging views regarding the roots of Muslim poverty, and few studies provide a comprehensive analysis of the possible causes (S. Wilkinson 2007).

Scholars working on Muslims and nationalism in India suggest that the current situation bears witness to a process of historical marginalization (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Hansen 2001, 1999). This marginalization may have a variety of political causes: changes in Muslim demographics after the massive cross-border population movements following the Partition of Pakistan and India; underrepresentation in government institutions; discrimination in access to education, housing, employment or other services; or an increase in acts of violence since the rise of Hindu nationalism and the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* [mosque] in Ayodhya by Hindu Nationalist groups in the 1990s.

However, part of the population and some political actors dispute the very idea that Muslims form a disadvantaged minority. Hindu nationalist groups frequently spread rumors on the rising number of Muslims in India and their potential capacity and intention to overpower Hindus.[9] Such discourses, of which I give a few examples in my last Chapter on the Muzaffarnagar riots, often

[9] See Jones (1981) on how censuses in the colonial period contributed to the "politics of numbers" between religious groups in India.

serve to trigger acts of communal violence against Muslims in North India. In Muzaffarnagar, for example, anxieties over Muslims gaining power and destabilising Hindu Jat farmers' control of the area played a role in the explosion of violence. Other common public beliefs on Muslims' socioeconomic disatvantage, often advanced by politicians, are more nuanced. While not challenging the idea that Muslims might be disadvantaged compared to the Hindu majority, these discourses nevertheless suggest that these lower socioeconomic performances have cultural causes that emerge from the community itself. For example, a widely-held belief is that Muslims are less competitive because they are educated in *madrasas* [Muslim religious schools]. As Gayer and Jaffrelot suggest, this idea might result from "deep rooted prejudices and stereotypes since the Sachar Committee Report concluded [...] that only 4% of enrolled Muslim students go to madrasas" (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 4; see also Sikand 2005).

My dissertation thus asks the following questions: 1) What kind of projects of social and economic improvement do Muslim NGO volunteers and workers imagine to address socioeconomic inequalities between religious groups? 2) Do these projects reshape Muslim minority politics and if so, in what ways?[10] 3) On a larger scale, what does attention to NGO projects of social and economic improvement tell us about the forms that neoliberal economic development models take in different contexts?

My dissertation argues that Muslim NGO volunteers and workers promote privatized market-oriented development as a new form of social and political engagement. Volunteers and workers develop discourses and activities that prioritize values associated with neoliberal economic

[10] I use the expression "Muslim minority politics" to refer to all forms of political mobilization and demands related to Muslims—understood here as a socio-religious category, be it the demands Muslim groups make vis-à-vis the state, or how the state interacts with religious groups (Ahmad 2009). Hefner also defines Muslim politics as "any and all kinds of political actions based on a person's conviction as a Muslim, whether or not resulting behavior embraces the idea of an 'Islamic' state" (Hefner 2011, xix).

development strategies, such as sustainable development oriented towards economic independence, private entrepreneurship, and self-responsibility. But they do so as a collective project, in a way that does not necessarily increase the processes of individualization and sidelining of the state that critics usually associate with such approaches.

This finding has two important implications. First, it gives insight into the transformations of relations between Indian Muslim organizations and the state, and contributes to literature on Muslims and religious minority politics in India. Muslim NGOs are not positioning themselves against neoliberal economic development solutions promoted by the state, which put communities and individuals at the forefront of their own development. On the contrary, in a context where the government's willingness to improve Muslims' situation is unclear, Muslim NGOs focus on economic integration as a pragmatic form of social mobilization. Second, the way Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers frame their projects of social improvement calls for a better contextualization and nuanced analysis of "civil society" organizations' engagement with market-based development and the privatization of social welfare. "Civil society," a term which I discuss in the last section of this chapter, is either praised as the voice of resistance from below that can keep states in check (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), or disavowed as an agent of neoliberal economic models that weakens state responsibility and depoliticizes social problems by focusing on individual improvement (Kamat 2004; Fraser 1989). The projects of social and economic improvement imagined by the organizations I researched bring these critiques into question and highlight the local variations, complexities and paradoxes of neoliberal economies.

My dissertation demonstrates these arguments by closely examining the projects of social and economic improvement developed by different Muslim charitable organizations. I look both at how Muslim workers and volunteers use charity to promote economic integration, and how they

mobilize communities through discourses of self-responsibility and entrepreneurship. I introduce Muslim workers using religious charitable donations to promote income-generating activities, such as providing sewing machines or *cycle-rickshaws* [three-wheeled passenger cart] to people in need. I present Muslim charitable workers and volunteers who orient charitable donations towards people who show potential for sustainable development: a successful student or a practicing Muslim who can guarantee his honesty and commitment to spend money responsibly. I also introduce Bazm-e-Khawateen, a women's organization that encourages women's social and moral personal development to help them better manage spending and afford quality education for their children, who will in turn be able to seek better employment. In parallel, I show how fostering economic autonomy is framed as a collective project strengthening families, communities, and national integration. Finally, I illustrate that while workers and volunteers have slightly moved away from state-centred social welfare as "their locus of mobilization" (Iqtidar 2011), charitable workers and volunteers do not downplay the importance of state responsibility.

On a broad level, my dissertation contributes to the field of critical anthropology of development and humanitarianism. While anthropology has made important contributions to the critical analysis of international development systems and discourses (Ferguson 1990), ethnographies of religious charitable organizations expand conversations about aid, ideas of improvement, and governance that have centered around Western and "secular" models of development and humanitarianism (Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Bornstein 2005). I examine religious organizations not as a representation of a more traditional form of aid, but as new institutions that merge with translational development discourses and structures, while also setting themselves apart, and imagining alternative forms of development.

Amidst studies of the relationships between Islam, politics and economy in anthropology, there is a small but growing interest in the study of contemporary organized Islamic charity. The scholarship on Islam, charitable giving, and development in anthropology locates itself at the crossroads of the anthropology of religion, anthropology of development and humanitarianism, and political and economic anthropology.[11] Benthall's seminal work on contemporary Islamic charities constitutes one of the most important contributions to this field; it has renewed interest in the study of non-Western forms of social welfare and relations between the international development sector and Islamic zakat (obligatory alms), *waqf* (endowment) and finance (Benthall 2016; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). However, apart from a few exceptions (Taylor 2015; Osella and Osella 2009), the scholarship on Islamic charity has mostly focused on Western-based transnational Muslim charitable organizations (Petersen 2016; A. A. Khan 2012; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003) and Muslim organizations located in Muslim majority countries (Mittermaier 2014a; Atia 2013; Fauzia 2013; Retsikas 2014; Clark 2004). Moreover, although Islam, politics and public participation have received considerable attention in the discipline (Osella and Soares 2010; Hefner 2011; Eickelman and Piscatori 2004), as well as in relation to South Asia (Jalal 2002; Ahmad 2009), there has been little focus on Muslim charitable workers, and on NGOs as unique sites in which values and ideas surrounding care, development, and welfare entitlements take shape. My dissertation is a contribution to filling this gap.

In the rest of this chapter, I clarify the definition of "Muslim charitable organization" and present the theoretical framework on which I ground my research. I first introduce the concepts of charity and improvement, and discuss how the concept of charity, usually associated with forms of immediate relief, can integrate notions of improvement and change. I then look at improvement

[11] For a historical perspective on Islamic charity, see (Singer 2008).

through the literature on Islam and economic development. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the notions of state and civil society, with attention to the historical relationships between the state, religious minorities, and nongovernmental associations in India. Finally, I provide information on my study sites and methodological approach, and discuss some of the methodological challenges in working with nongovernmental organizations.

Muslim charitable organizations

Although part of this thesis proposes an ethnography of Muslim charitable organizations, the concept of a "Muslim NGO" is itself contentious. The issue with the concept revealed itself clearly one day when I phoned M. Khan, a businessman who had been referred to me because he was running a Muslim religious organization. I asked him if we could meet for an interview and explained that I was researching Muslim charitable organizations, their work, and their perspectives on the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in Lucknow. M. Khan interrupted me and said: "Oh, we are not a religious organization, but we do work with Muslims, so you are welcome to come." I was intrigued by his comment and decided to meet him. While speaking with him, I learned that his organization was functioning entirely through religious donations, namely zakat (obligatory alms) and *sadaqa* (voluntary/optional alms). The beneficiaries of the organization were also exclusively Muslims. Nevertheless, the founder did not consider his NGO to be a religious organization and preferred to be categorized like any other NGO.

The term "faith-based organization," which is commonly employed in the academic and development sectors to identify Muslim and other religious organizations, seems less adequate when confronted with this case. The organizations I describe in this thesis are founded, funded, and run by Muslims, but their founders' level of religiosity, personal faith, and practice vary

tremendously, and are not the only bases on which organizations can be qualified as "religious organizations." The terms "faith-based organization" or "Islamic organization" might also convey the idea that these organizations follow a more or less uniform model, based on shared understandings of Islam. However, the organizations I met during my fieldwork could not be more diverse in their religious orientations. In fact, many organizations had tense relations with each other because of divergences in religious opinions. Some organizations, such as the one I describe in the above paragraph, do not self-identify as religious, while others such as Jamaat-e-Islami or Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind actively participate in shaping contemporary Islamic reformist movements in South Asia (Metcalf 2004). The term "faith-based organizations" also sets strong boundaries between the sphere of religious organizations and nonreligious NGOs. While the Muslim NGOs I researched propose a distinctive approach to social and economic development, they also share many commonalities with nonreligious NGOs in terms of their goals and organizational structures. In this dissertation, I examine religious charity and "secular" humanitarianism and development as co-constructed spheres, rather than as well-demarcated fields (Barnett and Stein 2012; Benthall 2012a; Bornstein 2012a).

I thus use the terms "Muslim charitable organizations" and "Muslim NGOs" as alternatives to the notion of "faith-based organizations." The terms qualify formally registered non-profit organizations founded by Muslims, which collect—at least as a part of their budget—religious donations to conduct activities related to social welfare or economic development. Zakat and *sadaqa* are two such religious donations. One of the five pillars of Islam, zakat is obligatory alms corresponding to a fixed proportion of one's wealth, which Muslims are required to give to those in need each year (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). *Sadaqa* is also a form of religious donation, but it is optional and can be given in addition to the prescribed zakat. Most Muslim NGOs I

surveyed depended partially on these religious donations to operate, but also received other individual voluntary donations and private company donations.

I prefer the term "Muslim NGOs," or "Muslim charitable organizations" to the term "Islamic organizations" because the former terms refer to both Islam as a religion and as a marker of a socio-political category in India (Jalal 2002). Most volunteers and workers I spoke with decided to get engaged with Muslim charitable organizations as part of their faith, but a lot of them also got involved because of their concern for the socioeconomic problems Muslims face in India. A significant part of my research examines how Muslim NGOs imagine their role in improving the socioeconomic condition of Muslims, so it is important to stress the socio-political dimension of the term "Muslim" in addition to its religious meaning. Some studies on Muslim NGOs, such as Peterson's, prioritize an emic perspective by considering Muslim NGOs only those who self-identify as such (Petersen 2016, 8). However, I argue that this approach is less suited to the Indian context, since some Muslim NGOs are reluctant to identify as such, due to the sensitive topics of nationalism and the rights of religious minorities in the Indian secular democracy. My definition is thus closer to Taylor's notion of "new Islamic charities," which considers the collection of religious donations as a defining characteristic of these organizations (Taylor 2015, 13).

Finally, I use the term "non-governmental organizations" [NGOs] to refer to formal non-profit organizations that consider themselves distinct from the state, even though some might receive funding from it, and participate in the same governance practices (A. Sharma 2008). Such non-state organizations take different names in the literature, such as "community-based organizations" or "grassroots organizations" (Kamat 2004). But "NGO" is a common term in India, used both by the government and the public. Many research participants also used the term to identify their organization.

Muslim charitable organizations are fairly new actors in the global field of Islamic charity. They started emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, a period marked by a global development of the NGO sector (Benthall 2016; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). Some transnational religious NGOs are now prominent actors in the field of international development. For example, Islamic Relief, a UK based organization created in 1984, is one of the most well-known Muslim organizations in the world (Barnett and Stein 2012). In India, most Muslim NGOs were created after the state's economic liberalization in the early 1990s, during the second wave of expansion and consolidation of the NGO sector. The large majority of the organizations I researched in Uttar Pradesh were founded after 1995.[12]

Muslim NGOs represent a new alternative in the field of Islamic charity. In India, this field was predominately characterized by *waqf* institutions [endowments made for a religious or a charitable purpose], individual donations to *madrasas* [Muslim religious schools], and donations given directly to the poor. *Waqf* institutions thrived mostly from the Mughal Empire to the early twentieth century, but now play a less significant role in Indian charity (Beverley 2011; Kozlowski 1985). The second form of Islamic charity in India, structured around the personal giving of religious donations, remains very important. Zakat and other religious donations in North India are often given to *madrasas*, which use these funds to provide free education, food and boarding to poorer students (Taylor 2015). These alms are also often donated directly to relatives and neighbours in need (see Chapter Two). While Muslim NGOs have not replaced these forms of Islamic charity, my findings, corroborated by Taylor's study, show that these new institutions are now increasingly

[12] It is difficult to know how many Muslim charitable organizations exist in India because many of them remain unregistered, like a significant portion of Indian NGOs (Verna 2007; A. Sharma 2006). Those that are officially registered are not always distinguishable from other organizations, since Muslim charitable organizations get registered under the same laws as all other NGOs (see Chapter Two). Moreover, organizations can register as "societies," "charitable trusts," or "non-profit companies," either under national, or regional laws.

able to secure a part of these religious donations. Muslim NGOs propose a new way of practicing efficient and organized charity, as I show throughout this dissertation.

As a relatively new alternative in the field of Islamic charity and development, Muslim NGOs also diversify the categories of people that have traditionally been viewed as representing the Muslim minority—namely, politicians and the *ulamas* [religious scholars/authorities]. While religious clerics remain actively involved in many of these charitable organizations, volunteers and workers are also businessmen and -women, retired Muslim professionals, and social activists. Most workers and volunteers involved in these organizations belong to Muslim middle and elite classes. Their statuses inform the kinds of projects of social and economic improvement they imagine for impoverished Muslim communities; their own achievements, such as their education and professionalization, become examples of what poor Muslims should aspire to. Finally, while a majority of the oldest but still active large national Islamic organizations such as Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH) or Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) are led by men—often members of the *ulema*—the number of Muslim organizations led by women has increased since the 1980s and 1990s. Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh have always played an active role in social work and charitable aid, but this role often remained within the limits of the *zenana* [women's quarters] (Devji 1991). There are now a number of organizations led by women that participate in economic development efforts and are publicly visible, sometimes even more than organizations led by men.[13]

[13] The rise and increased visibility of women-led Muslim organizations are in part due to polarized opinions regarding the consequences of having separate religious personal laws on women's rights. Several Muslim women's organizations have taken public positions to protect women's rights without resorting to the implementation of a universal civil code (see Chapter Four).

Improvement

My research focuses on the unique projects of social and economic improvement imagined by the Muslim NGOs I describe above. Ideas about "improvement" and ways to achieve it take many shapes. In this section, I discuss how Muslim NGO workers and volunteers reconfigure common conceptualizations of charity by using charitable aid as a tool for social change and progress. I then draw on the literature on Islam and economic development to show how projects of social and economic improvement are grounded in moral understandings of what is good. Lastly, I discuss the connection between ideals of improvement and concrete actions through the frame of everyday practices.

Charitable aid

Charitable aid is one of the primary means through which Muslim charitable organizations seek to improve the communities in which they work and create tangible social and economic change. This conceptualization of charity does not correspond to the usual definitions of the term, since one of the main characteristics of charity is that it focuses on the alleviation of immediate suffering rather than on the resolution of deeper ongoing problems. I look here at how notions of religious charity intersect with ideas of social and economic improvement, and how the practice of Muslim NGOs help us understand the aims and changing character of religious charity.

A growing scholarship within the anthropology of humanitarianism has started examining such questions by focusing on religious charity and its connection to global development aid systems and discourses (Adams 2013; Zigon 2009; Bornstein 2005; Barnett and Stein 2012; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). In her book on international development organizations, Catholic charity, and relations of economic dependence in Uganda, Scherz (2014) draws useful distinctions between notions of charity, humanitarianism and development. She argues that the distinction between

religious charity, humanitarianism and development does not necessarily stem from differences in religious and secular ethics of care, but rather from differences in three aspects of aid: temporality, motivations, and relations of reciprocity. While she emphasizes the distinctions between these approaches, I show that the aid provided by Muslim NGOs blurs these differences. Examining differences is nevertheless important to situate the practices of Muslim NGOs within the larger fields of Islamic charity and international development, and to examine the implications of practicing care that does not correspond entirely to the usual aims of religious charity. In this research, I show that Muslim NGOs have integrated elements of other approaches into their practice of Islamic charity. Before discussing this integration, I first give an overview of the differences in ethics of care related to temporality, relations of reciprocity, and motivations.

For Scherz and most scholars of development and humanitarianism, temporality is the first aspect of care that distinguishes charity from other approaches. For example, Redfield and Bornstein (2011) state that the concept of humanitarianism refers to a concern for people's physical and psychological immediate well-being, whereas development-oriented and human-rights discourses focus on economic matters such as poverty alleviation, material and technical progress of societies for the former, and on political liberties, framed in legal and philosophical terms for the latter. Scherz proposes similar distinctions and suggests that development has long-term teleological aims, whereas charity and humanitarianism are oriented towards immediate action. While also focused mostly on the present, humanitarianism differs from charity in that it requires an exceptional moment of crisis. The term humanitarianism is in fact commonly associated with the beginning of organized emergency relief interventions in war zones, and most notably with the foundation of the Red Cross in 1863 (Calhoun 2008).[14] Likewise, Iqtidar argues that, in medieval

[14] The differences between charity, humanitarianism, and development are less demarcated than what I present. See

and early modern contexts at least, Judaism, Christianism, and Islam did not conceptualize charity as an act intended to bring social transformation, and did not consider poverty as something that could be eradicated (2017, 808).

Scherz argues that motivations behind the act of giving and helping are also different in charity versus development approaches. In many religious traditions, charity represents a duty, whereas in other forms of giving and helping, personal motivations to improve the world or sentiments of compassion for the (biological) human life might drive action (Fassin 2012a). Giving zakat, for example, is not a choice, but an Islamic religious obligation (Singer 2013). This has implications for the ways ideals of improvement are imagined: in a context where charity is a spiritually-guided action, and before all, an exchange with God, the desire to improve society is not what first and foremost underlies acts of giving and helping (Singer 2013, 345).

Finally, the temporal difference between charitable aid and development, as well as the different motivations underlying charity and development, tangibly impact relations of reciprocity between donors, NGOs workers, and beneficiaries. Development interventions seek to eliminate dependence on aid and promote self-sustenance, while charity has less ambitious aims and maintains beneficiaries' dependence on donors and NGO workers. Since development interventions tend to focus on outcomes to achieve their objective of improvement, greater attention is paid to the ways in which recipients make use of donations and services. Charitable aid does not necessarily focus on what recipients do with their donations—especially if charitable aid is understood as a relationship between the donor and God, more than as a relationship between a donor and a recipient (Laidlaw 2000; Kochuyt 2009; Bornstein 2012a).

for example Redfield (2006) on how humanitarian organizations rethink their role.

The organizations I researched complicate these distinctions between religious charity, humanitarianism, and development. Most organizations focus on the present moment by providing direct financial and material aid to the poor—such as food, clothing, and health services—and emergency aid after natural disasters or violent conflicts. However, they also combine these forms of immediate charity with longer-term social and economic reform and development projects. Their charitable interventions are thus grounded in broader objectives of social improvement. In this sense, contemporary Muslim NGOs' charitable actions also transform the relations with recipients that are created through the act of giving (cf. Mauss 1923). Charitable workers and volunteers try to promote beneficiaries' economic autonomy and, in doing so, create new forms of reciprocity and obligations binding givers and receivers that Islamic charity does not usually entail (Kochuyt 2009). Beneficiaries have to prove that they use charitable donations responsibly and that the donations will tangibly affect their lives. Finally, while workers and volunteers engage in charitable work partially to fulfill a religious duty, they are also strongly motivated by a desire to improve the well-being of their communities. The charity practiced by these NGO workers and volunteers has both a religious and social aim.

Islam and economic development

Muslim charitable organizations practice and view charity in a way that is rooted in a broader project of improvement and a specific imagining of a "good life." Focusing on improvement means examining how people envision possibilities for a better, good life. Regardless of whether it is conceptualized in religious terms, improvement is thus always a moral project (Bornstein 2005). My dissertation analyzes how Muslim charitable workers and volunteers create a project of social reform that goes beyond the simple act of religious giving. They seek to initiate tangible social, religious, and economic changes in their communities based on specific moral values.

Since the 2000s, the anthropological study of aid has begun to pay closer attention to the moral grounds of development and charitable aid, notably by re-engaging with classical gift theory (Lewis Forthcoming; Gardner and Lewis 2015; Benthall 2012a). Marcel Mauss's (1923) seminal work on the gift explored the social relationships created through the process of giving. His theories, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, later served as an anchor point from which to analyze religious traditions of almsgiving (Parry 1986; Bornstein 2012a; Scherz 2014; Laidlaw 2000). Moreover, the analysis of development aid and philanthropy in light of classical anthropological understandings of the gift has drawn attention to the ethics, morals and beliefs that fuel ideas and practices of aid across the world (Lewis Forthcoming; Bornstein 2005; Scherz 2014; Bornstein 2012a).

By focusing on the religious or moral dimensions of aid and economic development, anthropological analyses of humanitarianism have complicated the notion of "neutral and universal aid." These analyses have highlighted how historically and geographically constructed values and understandings of the self inform aid practices and outcomes, notably regarding the selection of aid recipients (Calhoun 2008; Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Hyde 2011). In the case of religious charity, certain religious injunctions establish criteria regarding who deserves to be helped (e.g.: donations given to the "renouncing" in Hindu traditions; zakat given to the eight categories of eligible recipients defined in the Quran) and consequently create unique forms of inclusion and exclusion. Secular humanitarianism does the same. People who correspond to specific conceptions of a genuine and deserving victim will be prioritized in receiving help (Fassin 2012a, 2005; Ticktin 2011). Paying attention to the moral ideals behind charitable activities is therefore important to figure out how aid works, who it reaches, and what it demands from potential beneficiaries.

Analyzing ideas of progress and improvement as moral projects is also important to understand the ways in which people engage with economic development, and the conditions they impose on participation in the global economic system. To analyze how the values and beliefs of Muslim NGO workers and volunteers intersect with discourses on economic development and modernity, I ground my research in the literature on Islam and economy.

Since Weber's work on Protestant ethics and the development of capitalism, several scholars have tried to unpack the relationship between religion and economy; and, more specifically, between Islam and economy (Tripp 2006; Rodinson 1974; Iqtidar 2017; Ismail 2013). Weber argued that through the Protestant Reformation, religious transformations in Europe laid foundations for a secular capitalist state. More than the Catholics, Protestant "sects" conceptualized salvation as based upon actions and individual moral conduct, rather than upon religious rituals, celebrations or personal religious value. This conceptualization was more conducive to the development of capitalism (Weber 1905, 117). Weber did not find a similar pattern between Islam and economy, although his work on this topic is less substantial (Mittermaier 2014b, 274). Other studies have since depicted Islam and Islamic law, as impediments to capitalist development (Kuran 2012). However, a number of recent studies in anthropology and related disciplines propose contrasting interpretations of the relation between Islam and modern capitalist economy (Rudnyckyj 2010; Atia 2013; Osella and Osella 2009; Mittermaier 2014b; Sloane-White 2017; Sloane 1998; Haenni 2005). By analyzing global contemporary trends in Islamic finance and charity, this new literature highlights the possibility of a "market Islam" (Haenni 2005). Some specifically look at possible connections between Islam and neoliberal capitalism (Mittermaier 2014b; Iqtidar 2017; Atia 2013; Rudnyckyj 2010).

Neoliberalism, according to Harvey (2007), is a theory that promotes "individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" as the best way to "advance human well-being" (Harvey 2007, 2; Rudnyckyj 2010, 4). In this form of capitalism, the state does not "disappear," as some critiques of neoliberalism tend to suggest, but is supposed to provide an institutional framework that allows strong private property rights and the proper functioning of free markets (Harvey 2007, 3). However, neoliberalism decouples "individual transformation from political processes at the level of political imagination" (Iqtidar 2017, 794). This means that it is not the state, but the market that becomes the main vehicle for individual and, incidentally, social transformation (Iqtidar 2017, 794). Drawing on Foucault's (2008) understanding of neoliberalism, Rudnyckyj adds that neoliberalism is also a "specific form that introduces economic rationality in places that were outside economy" (Rudnyckyj 2010, 20–21). Brown also refers to neoliberalism in the same way: as an "economization" of political life and all other noneconomic spheres of life (2015, 17).

Basing myself on these definitions of neoliberalism, I suggest that there are many aspects of Muslim NGOs' discourses and practices that correspond to logics of neoliberal economic development. Muslim charitable organization workers and volunteers aspire to change the situation of Muslims in India through activities and discourses that prioritize individual accountability, self-development, and private entrepreneurship. They also adopt—to a certain extent—a calculative logic by trying to develop efficient forms of charity focused on tangible outcomes. However, there are also major points of friction. For instance, the state is still seen as an important agent of social transformation, at least on a symbolic level. Moreover, although Muslim NGOs seem to focus at least partly on individual development, values such as familial duty and care for the community remain central.

Some of the studies exploring the links between Islam and neoliberal economic development resonate well with the arguments I make. For example, writing on a spiritual development program implemented in an Indonesian steel company, Rudnyckyj shows how Islamic religious practices are reconfigured to improve the efficiency of company workers in a globalized economy (Rudnyckyj 2010, 19). The form of Islamic practice promoted in these programs emphasizes an "ethics of accountability, personal responsibility, and self-discipline" (2010, 19). In this context, religious virtues are put to the service of economic productivity. In presenting this dimension of religious practice, Rudnyckyj argues against scholars who suggest that Islamic resurgence has been partly constituted in resistance to economic globalization.

In her book on contemporary Islamic charity in Egypt, Atia reaches similar conclusions. She coined the term "pious neoliberalism" to illustrate the merging of religion and neoliberal capitalist subjectivity. Atia suggests that pious neoliberalism "reconfigures religious practices in line with principles of economic rationality, productivity, and privatization" (Atia 2013, xviii). In doing so, she wants to highlight the compatibility between Islamism, "modern" development, and neoliberalism. One explanation for this trend, she argues, is the increasing involvement of businesspeople in the voluntary sector, who view poverty as requiring market-based solutions.

Relatedly, but in the South Asian context, Osella and Osella's study (2009) follows Muslim business entrepreneurs involved, each in their own capacity, in charitable activities. The authors demonstrate how these businessmen hope to transform local communities in a way that responds to the requirements of neoliberal economy, via the promotion of charitable projects such as support for education to "produce" future skilled workers.

Finally, Taylor recently examined how new Islamic charities and *madrasas* in Lucknow, where I conducted my fieldwork, reform practices of zakat giving to foster local communities'

development (Taylor 2015). Taylor describes this reform as a passage from a "purity ethic" to a "developmentalist ethic" (2015, 13). In its purity ethic orientation, donating zakat is essentially understood as a spiritual act of purification for the donor, whereas the "developmentalist ethic" turns attention to the recipient and the social outcomes of the donation.

The studies of Osella and Osella (2009) and Taylor (2015) are especially useful since the authors conducted their research in India. However, in my fieldwork with charitable organizations led by women, I emphasize how, besides men, women also play an active role in projects of economic improvement, and discuss the crucial influence of gender in shaping the relationship between Islam and economic development. Moreover, my analysis of Muslim charitable organizations' emergency aid after the politically orchestrated riots against Muslims in Muzaffarnagar provides a unique perspective on the impact of specific events and politics on projects of social and economic improvement. Post-conflict interventions and interactions with government authorities notably point to the limits of strategies capitalizing on privatized, market-oriented economic development.

When analyzing the connections between Islamic moral principles and neoliberal economic development, it is particularly salient to emphasize that the links between economic development and religion are bi-directional. In the context of a globalized economy, asking whether Islam is compatible with economy makes little sense: like anyone else, Muslims necessarily engage with capitalist economy in their everyday lives. Here, I do not seek to understand whether there is something "inherently capitalist or anticapitalist about Islam or any of its particular institutional configurations" (Zencirci 2015, 535); rather, I focus on how religious institutions such as Muslim NGOs come to be viewed, by the state, global development discourses, and volunteers themselves,

as solutions for alleviating poverty, and on how Muslim volunteers in these NGOs imagine social and economic development.

Relatedly, Rudnyckyj (2010) focuses on the mutual influences of religious principles and economy; he argues that the spiritual programs for businesses he observed both translate a process of "neoliberalization of Islam" and of "Islamicization of neoliberalism" (2010, 22). He uses the concept of neoliberalization of Islam to refer to the way in which the spiritual reformers he followed emphasize religious virtues that have an economic use—whereas, the term Islamicization of neoliberalism points to the idea that religious ethics are not just at the service of economy but are also viewed as a moral guide for company workers. In this sense, the project of moral reform is also a way to shape an ethical economy (Rudnyckyj 2010).

In my research, projects of social improvement imagined by charitable workers and volunteers promote economic development while establishing the moral conditions necessary to achieve this development. Through examples drawn from the public teachings of the Muslim women's organization Bazm-e-Khawateen, I illustrate that religious and neoliberal economic principles combine when women are encouraged to improve their worldly and religious education. According to the organization, this enables them to more successfully engage in social, professional or business activities in ways that respect ideals of piety and modesty.

My research thus situates itself in the contemporary scholarship that does not examine whether Islam is compatible with economic development, but rather the multiple ways in which Islam and neoliberal forms of economic development interconnect. I contribute to this literature by focusing on how this relationship takes shape in India, as well as its implications for the sharing of social welfare responsibilities. It is certainly important to look at religious principles surrounding care and the accumulation and repartition of wealth when analyzing Muslim NGOs' ideas about

progress and economic development; but it is equally important to situate these ideas in political contexts. For the organization volunteers and workers I met, promoting a better integration with the market economy did not mean a reduction of state responsibility, but was instead a pragmatic approach developed in a political context they did not perceive as supportive to Muslims. Projects of privatized social and economic improvement are thus combined with a strong emphasis on nationalism and the common interests of the country, both as a way to legitimize organizations' actions and to hold the state accountable. They become social and political collective projects. This relates to the broad argument I make in this dissertation, that neoliberal models of development do not pervade all spheres of life or take the same shape in all contexts. Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers embrace certain aspects of neoliberal development models, but also imagine alternative forms of development, based on Islamic ethics and local social and political contexts.

Everyday practices of care and development

When examining projects of social improvement, I also draw attention to the connections between aspirations and actual actions. For this, I use the concept of everyday practices.[15] First, attention to practices allows differentiation between moral projects of improvement, actual actions, and outcomes (Ortner 2006, 135). Focusing on everyday practices of actors within organizations allows the exposure of uncertainties and dilemmas behind projects of aid, and the internal diversity among organizations.

Earlier ethnographies of humanitarianism and development used to focus on those targeted by aid projects: those "being developed." Studies looked at power relations and the translations of discourses of development in local contexts, or at the impact of aid projects at the local level (Lewis

[15] The concept derives from practice theory in anthropology (See Ortner 1984; Hyde 2007).

Forthcoming; Mosse 2013). Recently, anthropological analyses of humanitarianism and development have turned their gaze towards actors from non-governmental organizations and other non-state institutions. These studies are helpful to my research because they pay attention to individual subjectivities, personal life trajectories, the intentions and meanings given to humanitarian and development work, and how individuals reshape institutional ideas and objectives through their actions (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2013; Yarrow 2011a). For example, in an edited volume on professional development workers, David Mosse (2011) focuses on the personal and professional lives of aid workers to look at how knowledge about global poverty and solutions to reduce it gets shaped and transmitted in international aid social networks. Redfield (2012) also looks at workers and volunteers in Médecins Sans Frontières and in doing so, does not confine his analysis to the official aims and discourses of the organization. On Islam and charitable aid workers in particular, the ethnographies of Deeb (2011) and Mittermaier (2014a), based respectively in Lebanon and Egypt, offer interesting comparative perspectives to my study. Their analyses go beyond the official discourses of Islamic charitable organizations and examine how Muslims volunteering for these organizations make sense of their social engagement.

From a methodological point of view, the study of everyday practice encourages a clear distinction between intentions, actions, and outcomes that helps underscore tensions between official organizational public discourses and actual practices. NGOs such as the ones I study are constantly constructing and cultivating a public image through their interactions with government officials, media, other NGOs, and the communities they serve. Many NGO actors are also used to speaking to media and to giving interviews, and it is a challenge for the ethnographer to go beyond the official discourse of organizations.

I am not suggesting that actual practices are more important than official discourses, nor that the former is more "true" than the latter. If practices do not always coincide with intentions and official discourses, it does not mean that intentions are less valid or less sincere. Rather, I look at how both feed and are also sometimes in tension with each other. For example, while Muslim charitable organizations aim at using charity to foster long-term changes and economic independence, the magnitude of poverty to which they are exposed in their everyday work leads them to sometimes fall back on the modes of direct assistance that are more characteristic of Islamic charity.

The second purpose of paying attention to everyday practices is to examine how charitable workers engage with religious principles in their everyday actions. For example, I examine how charitable workers relate to religious norms of Islamic charity, refer to them, and draw on them when deciding how and to whom to distribute charitable funds and goods. With this focus on everyday practice, I consider religion as a historical, political, and social configuration that changes through time and space. In this line of thought, Asad writes: "the essence of each religion is […] not something unchanging and unchangeable but something that is at once to be preserved and defended as well as argued over and reformed in the changing historical circumstances that the tradition inhabits" (Asad 2001, 208). I thus depart from interpretations that conceive religion as a uniform and distinct system of symbols, beliefs and institutions that determine actions of believers. In her study of Islam in South Asia, Barbara Metcalf adopts a similar position and argues for the importance of studying religion in specific contexts and paying attention to personal interpretations and experiences. For her, Islamic practices, discourses and experiences are not rooted in fixed set of symbols or meanings; she consequently suggests focusing on Muslims rather than Islam, and looking at how Muslims of different backgrounds "engage with the historic Islamic

tradition as they themselves practice it" (Metcalf 2009, xix; see also Das 2010; Pandian and Ali 2010).

The next two chapters present the variety of ways charitable workers and volunteers interpret and apply religious principles and norms of religious giving—but I do not suggest that this necessarily illustrates tensions or oppositions between religious norms and actual practices, as some scholars do (cf. Fadil and Fernando 2015). In trying to promote a form of charity oriented towards economic self-reliance, Muslim workers do not set aside the core principles of religious giving; instead, they try to develop a practice that remains aligned with their values. What I rather highlight is how the merging of Islamic charity and development objectives sometimes leads to unintended consequences (Ferguson 1990)—such as the exclusion of eligible and deserving recipients—which pose dilemmas for charitable workers and volunteers. Mittermaier conveys this idea well while writing about her own fieldwork on Islamic charitable practices in Egypt: "my interlocutors are not capitalist subjects at one moment and pious Muslims the next. Capitalist modes of being-in-the-world merge and converge with states of piety. It is this merging, this convergence, but also what Schielke calls "uneasy coexistence," that deserve our close attention" (Mittermaier 2014b, 280).

Finally, a focus on practice means that I do not seek to assess the textual accuracy of what people say about Islam, and instead pay attention to how religious values are understood and enacted. At the same time, Asad (1993, 1996) reminds anthropologists that Islam is a discursive tradition and that one cannot simply separate scriptures from practices, since Muslims relate to the Quran and Hadith to orient their everyday lives. Here, I refer to the scripture on a few occasions to stress differences in some of my interlocutors' interpretations of Islamic charity, and provide religious textual references when the interlocutors did so themselves while talking with me.

Civil society, the state, and politics of welfare

The relation between Islam and projects of social and economic improvement takes shape in specific political contexts. This research is thus concerned with how the interrelations of state and non-state social institutions produce the particular forms of developmental projects addressing marginalized Muslim populations in North India.

In addition to its conclusions on the relative socioeconomic deprivation of Muslims in India, the Sachar Report formulated recommendations regarding how "civil society" institutions, alongside the state, should help develop programs and activities for Muslim marginalized communities. The Report especially stressed the importance of involving Muslim social institutions in efforts to mitigate the critical situation of religious minorities in the country. The report states that there are only a few credible NGOs with the necessary expertise to address problems faced by Muslim communities, and that more organizations should be registered (GOI 2006, 253). It indicates:

> These institutions [trusts set up by the Community, such as Wakf institutions and mosque committees], being closer to the community can indeed play an important role as intermediaries between policy programmes announced by the government and their beneficiaries within the Muslim community. Besides, there is need to encourage the setting up of civil society organizations from amongst the Muslim community as well (GOI 2006, 253).

This citation shows that the Sachar Report promotes increased participation of Muslim NGOs, as well as the bolstering of "civil society," an approach that is now part of many contemporary global governance agendas (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Hann 2004; Ferguson [1998] 2014). Although the Sachar Report explicitly states that increasing NGO participation should not diminish the state's responsibility in providing support to religious minorities, measures to involve nongovernmental organizations generally reflect a global trend of increased devolvement of responsibilities for

social welfare on nonstate "civil society" institutions (Bernal and Grewal 2014; A. Sharma 2006).[16] Many scholars describe this division of social welfare responsibilities as a neoliberal mode of governmentality. "Empowered" individuals are expected to participate actively in economic growth instead of relying on state-led social and economic support (Gupta and Sharma 2006; Rudnyckyj 2010; Kamat 2004).

NGOs have indeed become an inescapable part of local and global politics. Estimates suggest that India counts almost a million voluntary organizations (Bornstein 2012a; A. Sharma 2008). As mentioned previously, religious non-governmental organizations emerge partially from this global development of the NGO sector. Despite some criticisms, the NGO sector continues to expand throughout the world (Bernal and Grewal 2014). But how do these reconfigurations of welfare responsibilities and shifting modes of governance impact Muslim NGOs? Is the state's responsibility and authority over welfare and development reduced by the increasing role played by nonstate institutions? How can we conceptualize state-NGO relationships in India, and Muslim NGOs' place within them?

I retain, with *caution*, the notion of civil society as a useful way to think about the social and political public action of the institutions I researched and their relationship with the state. Many critique the concept of civil society for being too associated to Western forms of liberal democracies (Hann 2004; Ferguson [1998] 2014). Following Gellner (2010, 2009), however, I argue that the concept remains relevant as it is a feature of modern democracies, albeit with distinctive characteristics everywhere. Van der Veer (2001) shows how in India, notions of the "state" and "society" were constructed at the same time as they were taking shape in Britain, so it

[16] Regarding state responsibility, the report indicates: "But once again, the reach of such organizations [NGOs] is going to be very limited and the responsibility of the State in providing basic health and other infrastructure facilities remains the main hope of all poor, including Muslims" (GOI 2006, 253).

would be equally reductionist to try establishing clear boundaries between "Indian" and "Western" forms of social institutions. Analogously to common definitions, Gellner describes civil society as "associative (self-chosen) action that is neither part of the state nor undertaken for economic reason" and includes in this category all forms of "in between" institutions, such as clubs, movements, churches, and political parties (to a certain extent), that are neither part of the state apparatus, nor of business, nor belonging to the private kinship sphere (2009, 4).[17] NGOs are generally defined negatively—different from the state and different from the corporate sector—and are thus often considered part of this "separate" sphere of civil society (see Gellner 2010; Bernal and Grewal 2014). Muslim NGOs also view themselves as being separated from the state. I thus pay attention at how they define their role in comparison to the state, as well as how they collaborate with government institutions and imagine state welfare responsibilities.

A definition that singles out civil society from kinship structures and the state is in part problematic because it is based on a conceptualization of state and society as two independent spheres, and presumes certain capacities and functions of civil society that are far from generalizable (Kamat 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). While I argue that Muslim NGOs represent a social institution that is different from the state and family, I acknowledge that such civil society institutions can rarely be completely distinguished from states, markets, or kinship networks. Like any other form of civil society organizations, Muslim organizations are often embedded in private familial or community networks. The subsequent chapters show how many of the Muslim organizations I researched are founded and run by families that have been involved in social work and activism for generations. Conversely, drawing on Birla's (2008) and Bornstein's

[17] For an overview of the use of civil society in anthropology and the origins of the term see (Herbert 2017; Hann 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Hann and Dunn 1996).

(2012b) work, I show that charity has been shaped as a modern, public utility in India by regulations to which Muslim NGOs, as institutionalized forms of religious charity, must conform. Like any other NGOs, registered Muslim charitable organizations must work for a public benefit, which leads some workers and volunteers to rethink how zakat and other religious donations can be distributed in the interest of the "general public."

I am also cautious about not presenting civil society institutions and state as freestanding and distinct entities. Scholars examining interactions between state institutions and other social institutions now stress the importance of a detailed ethnographic approach that pays attention to contextual differences and the complex ways people engage with state policies and global economies (Gupta 2012). Gupta and Ferguson (2002) argue that looking closely at various forms of governance and authority, and how they interact contextually, can help dismantle the imaginary topography of a vertical hierarchy placing family at the bottom, civil society in the middle, and state on the top (see also Mitchell 2006, 1991). Ferguson suggests that instead of asking whether civil society as an autonomous entity challenges state legitimacy, weakens state power, or strengthens it, it is better to adopt a more horizontal way of thinking about politics (Ferguson [1998] 2014). He proposes looking at the numerous ways in which nonstate actors' social and political interventions overlay and coexist with state governance. While Ferguson calls for a horizontal analysis of state and nonstate actors' interactions, he also argues that it is important to examine how the *idea* of a vertical hierarchy, with the state at the top, is perpetuated. Hansen also discusses this perception of verticality, in which the state presents itself and is perceived as a just, impartial body, above any party or ethnic group (2001, 129). He writes that the state is an "organizing concept" through which people "imagine the cohesion of their own society" (Hansen 2001, 128).

Although multiple actors across India have always been involved in the organization and provision of social welfare and care for the population, the image of the postcolonial state as an entity above society carries a certain weight. Since social welfare responsibilities have always been shared, to a certain extent, it would be misleading to argue that the liberalizing economy has removed state intervention from social welfare and left nonstate institutions to fill the vacuum. As different studies and my own research show, neoliberal forms of economic development do not necessarily mean a rolling back of the state, and in fact take different forms throughout the world (Bernal and Grewal 2014; Elyachar 2002).

Some scholars argue that the Indian state never completely took the form of a welfare state in the first place. Jayal argues that the Indian state can be more appropriately qualified as interventionist (Jayal 1999; Watt and Mann 2011). The state started playing a larger role in welfare activities in the nineteenth century, across India and the UK (S. Sharma 2001; Jayal 1999). However, scholars of the colonial period demonstrate that British rulers in India, at least in the early colonial period, did not devote much effort and resources to welfare, particularly in the field of health (cf. Rigillo 2015, 51). After the 1947 Independence, the Nehruvian state was actively involved in redistributive programs, but its main priority was alleviating poverty through heavy industrialization. The key goal was to nationalize all major industries to control and orient the country's economic development (Jayal 1999; A. Sharma 2008).

Second, non-state institutions have always played a fundamental role in welfare provision. Mughal rulers, for example, relied on the distribution of gifts and patronage among the communities in their territories (Cohn 1996). During the nineteenth century, informal practices of patronage and support by elites, traders, and large landowners were also common (Birla 2008). In rural areas, for example, elites would feed peasants in times of drought (Sharma 2001). Later,

during the British Rule, many voluntary and missionary societies assisted the colonial state in its social welfare and "civilizing" role (Watt and Mann 2011, 25). Social welfare work was conducted by newly constituted religious institutions such as the Hindu organization *Arya Samaj* and Christian missions.[18] Business associations also funded large philanthropic trusts (Rigillo 2015; Watt and Mann 2011; A. Sharma 2008; Jalali 2008; A. Sharma 2006). Watt and Mann add that many Indian voluntary associations led by middle-class educated liberal Indians took up the "civilizing" mission of the British by trying to educate and "uplift" the rural and urban poor (2011, 23). Finally, religious donations such as Hindu *daan* and Islamic zakat, whether given directly to the poor, to registered organizations or to temples, shrines and mosques, remain one of the most important forms of nonstate social welfare in the country (Bornstein 2012b).

This involvement of multiple actors continued in the post-colonial period. While after Independence the state became the most important actor in welfare provision, government planning did not succeed in eradicating poverty. Government failures eventually led to a rise in protest movements in the 1960s and 1970s and an increasing distrust in the state, especially under Indira Gandhi's Emergency measures in the late 1970s (A. Sharma 2008; Bornstein 2012a). This political context, along with a global increase in funding for non-governmental organizations and influence of multilateral organizations, has led to the expansion of the "secular" NGO sector, but also to a revival of nonstate charity and voluntarism more common in the early twentieth century. Lastly, India's economic liberalization in the 1990s led to the final increase and consolidation of the NGO sector. This glimpse into the history of social welfare shows that a variety of actors have shared responsibilities for the care of the Indian population, although nonstate actors' role may be

[18] Jalali indicates that contemporary Christian registered charitable organizations still receive the most part of international funding in India (Jalali 2008).

increasing now compared to the Independence period. The role of Muslim NGOs follows this trend.

At the same time, the state has occupied an important symbolic role in popular imagination since Independence. Muslim NGOs and marginalized communities I researched perceive the state as the major actor in social welfare despite recent changes in modes of governance (Williams 2011). In addition, the state continues asserting its authority and presence in matters of social welfare and development, even since its phase of economic liberalization in the early nineties. While the state may be more involved in supervising than in directly providing welfare, its reach and legitimacy are no less important. The Indian government, for example, closely regulates NGOs, notably by putting restrictions on foreign funding (Bornstein and Sharma 2016). It also continues running numerous welfare and development programs in the fields of nutrition, housing, health, education or employment, to name a few. Nayar states that investments in welfare programs have actually increased in proportion since economic liberalization (Nayar 2007 in Rigillo 2015, 71). Furthermore, Gupta (2012) argues that state indifference and absence of care are not the main factors explaining the persistence of poverty in India. He suggests instead that the state is extremely present in poor people's lives, but that modern bureaucratic structures produce arbitrary outcomes in the process of delivering care to people. According to him, this partially explains the failure of states to alleviate poverty (2012, 23).[19]

It is therefore important to examine the modes of governance and social and political contexts through which Indian Muslim NGOs function to understand their experiences and expectations towards government. Although I showed that the state is not an independent entity and that social

[19] While focusing on the role of bureaucratic procedures in perpetuating poverty, Gupta still acknowledges that some forms of discrimination that are institutionalized and consistently reproduced also contribute to inequalities (Gupta 2012, 24).

welfare practices have historically involved a variety of actors, I also argue (in more detail in Chapter Five) that Muslim NGOs consider the state an important actor and have strong expectations for its role in taking care of its citizens (Shehabuddin 2008a). In doing so, I locate Muslim NGOs' social action in the larger field of Muslim politics in India.

Jalal (2002) explains that Muslims only started representing themselves as a distinct social and political group around the Independence period. Their demands have thus been shaped by the promises of democratic constitutional secularism at Independence (Ahmad 2009, 19). Chapter Five discusses how Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind has been one of the main figures orienting Muslim politics in India. Through the *Khilafat* campaign, a pan-Islamic movement aimed at preserving the Ottoman Caliphate after the First World War, JUH supported the Congress and Gandhi in the fight for Independence (Minault 1982; Jalal 2002). JUH leaders were staunch supporters of Hindu-Muslim unity and the principle of a single nation. They frame current Muslim demands towards the state in light of Muslims' past contribution to the Indian nation.

A large part of Muslim political mobilization has rallied around the rights promised by India's secular constitution to religious groups, which are related to the protection of religious and cultural autonomy. Such political activism has focused on the maintenance of separate religious personal laws, the control of different religious sites and properties, and the protection and promotion of Urdu. However, in the name of secularism and the equal rights of all Indian citizens, Muslims have looked up to the state for protection against communal violence and political discrimination, and for access to social services and state resources. While developing strategies focused on personal economic improvement in response to perceived state neglect, Muslim NGOs also support and preserve an idea of the state as potentially just and equal towards all groups.

Finally, while I use the concept of civil society to think about state-NGO relations and Muslim NGOs' social and political action, it is also important to note that civil society institutions are not a synonym for society; they do not represent all modes of sociality in modern nation-states. One of the main criticisms directed towards the concept of civil society is that it creates a confusion between social institutions like NGOs and other social groups. The argument is that this conflation overshadows other patterns of sociality that might explain how people imagine political participation, rights and accountability (Hann 2004). As a result, some scholars contend that the notion of civil society obscures analysis more than it helps (Ferguson [1998] 2014; Hann 2004).

Partha Chatterjee is among those who argue that civil society does not represent all forms of engagement with the state. He suggests that the notion of political society might best capture how popular social and political action takes shape in many parts of the world (P. Chatterjee 2004, 2009). For Chatterjee, civil society is useful in referring to a small elite and bourgeois form of sociality that is present in India, but it does not represent how people generally mobilize and relate to each other (2004, 38). In global development and public policy discourses, NGOs often stand for "civil society" and are used as a measure of the health of a society, even though they are often constituted by educated elite and middle-class workers who represent only a fraction of the society (see Lewis and Mosse 2006; Hann 2004; Ferguson [1998] 2014; Schuller 2007).

Chatterjee instead proposes the concept of "political society," arguing that it better represents the more widespread strategies of collective mobilization and relation to state institutions. He uses the concept of political society to encompass the relations between population groups and government agencies instead of between state and civil society. He writes: "political society refers to collective movements and groups that bypass the law, organize themselves, demand rights, speak for collective units based on kinship, caste, or religion, and are treated by the state as

recipients of welfare, eligible to certain benefits and protections more than as citizens" (Chatterjee 2001 in Gellner 2009, 8; see also P. Chatterjee 2004, 40). This dynamic reflects the fact that in India, allocation of resources is not based on individual citizens' entitlements, but mostly on groups and community entitlements (Jenkins 1999).

I disagree partly that civil society institutions represent only an elite bourgeois society in Marxist understandings of the term. To a certain extent, the Muslim NGOs I researched provide a counterexample. While some of them are run by elite educated Muslim families who have been instrumental in the movement for Independence and the creation of the Indian state, many middle-class citizens and religious clerics without an elite liberal education also run NGOs and mobilize their communities around their project. Especially in poor urban areas, small NGOs are becoming an integral part of the social fabric. Nevertheless, it is important to situate Muslim NGOs as only one form of social institution representing Muslims, among many others. Muslims are divided by caste, class, and language, and interact with government institutions based on these multiple forms of belonging and identity (Sikand 2004).

Sites and study

I conducted my doctoral research between 2013 and 2015 in two districts of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar. Parts of the research and interviews were also realized in New Delhi, where the head offices of some of the organizations I studied are located.

Figure 1. Uttar Pradesh and Fieldwork Sites

Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar

I initially chose to conduct my fieldwork in Lucknow because the city has a large Muslim minority and holds a unique place in the history of Islam in South Asia. In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims form a higher proportion of the population than in the rest of the country (Hindus (80%), Muslims (19%), Others (1%)) (GOI 2011). In the Lucknow district, these proportions are even higher, with Hindus constituting 77% of the population, and Muslims, 21% (GOI 2011). Shias constitute approximately 25 to 30% of the Muslim population in the city (Susewind and Taylor 2015; Verniers 2012).

Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, is known as city of the *Nawabs*, the Muslim rulers of princely states in precolonial and colonial South Asia, and became the capital of the Awadh province in 1775. The city had its shining period in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when it became a centre of Perso-Islamic culture, arts and intellectual life (Susewind and Taylor 2015; Robinson 2001). In the eighteenth century, the Shia rulers built large *imambaras* for the mourning rituals of the month of *Muharram* (Metcalf 2009). Many of these monuments still mark the landscape of the city. Throughout that period, Lucknow was a global city, attracting people from various regions while spreading its cultural and intellectual influence beyond its South Asian borders. For example, the writings and teaching manuals of the *Firangi Mahalis*, a lineage of reputed Muslim scholars and teachers, travelled throughout India and beyond (Robinson 2001, Hasnain 2016, see also Chapter Three).

Lucknow was also a key city in the movement for Independence and in Muslims' participation within the movement. It was one of the primary cities in which the 1857 Indian Rebellion took place—a major uprising against the British Rule that was marked by the rebel forces' temporary occupation of the British Residency in Lucknow (Metcalf 2014, 80). The centrality of Lucknow in Muslim cultural, religious and political life matters because it informs current charitable workers' perspectives on their role and state responsibility. For many volunteers and workers in Lucknow, the current economic decline of Muslims in India contrasts with a better past where Muslims occupied powerful social and political positions.

Contemporary Lucknow has lost some its prestige, and many city-dwellers speak nostalgically about its past. Like in many other Indian cities, Muslims in Lucknow are increasingly segregated in pockets of the city, notably in Old Lucknow (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012). Raphael Susewind's study of religious demographics in Lucknow shows that even the emergence of new suburban

developments has not changed Muslims' tendency to cluster in the old city (Susewind and Taylor 2015, 13; Susewind 2015).[20] Since the publication of the Sachar Committee Report in 2006, the district of Lucknow has been designated as a "priority area for the development of religious minorities," on the basis that minorities (mainly Muslim) have socio-economic or basic amenities indicators below national average in that district (GOI n.d.).[21]

However, Lucknow remains an important location for Shia and Sunni Muslim institutions and politics. Major Sunni Islamic seminaries, such as the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, are located in the city, as well as prominent Shia institutions such as the Imambara Ghufran Maab, or the Sultanul Madaris *madrasa*. Lucknow is also the location of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), a self-appointed nongovernmental body that aims to protect and guide the application of Muslim Personal Law in India. Many Islamic feminist organizations that are most visible in the media are settled in Lucknow (Tschalaer 2015). The city also counts many Muslim charitable organizations, mosques, and madrasas that are working to improve the lives of the poorer strata of the Muslim population. Most of these charitable organizations are located in the poorer Muslim-dominated areas of Old Lucknow. In addition to religious organizations, several non-religious organizations in the city have developed programs to address issues concerning Muslim women and women of other religious minorities. The landscape of NGOs working with religious minorities in Lucknow is thus uniquely dynamic.

In addition to Lucknow, I extended my fieldwork research to Muzaffarnagar. A month after I started my fieldwork, the riots I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter—which were organized

[20] However, Susewind (2015) argues that increasing poverty and discrimination are not the only explanation for this spatial segregation in Lucknow.

[21] The city of Lucknow is listed among the ninety "Minority Concentration Districts" (MCDs) prioritized for multi-sectorial development programs (Verniers 2012; GOI n.d.).

between Hindu Jats and Muslims—started in that district. While I had not initially planned to follow this conflict as a part of my research, the number of Muslim charitable organizations from Lucknow that started fundraising to help the displaced population and that travelled to emergency relief camps compelled me to include this site in my study.

Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts are located in Western Uttar Pradesh, about 130 km north of Delhi, and 600 km west of Lucknow. The proportion of Muslims in these districts is even higher than in Lucknow, with Muslims forming 41% of Muzaffarnagar district's population (GOI 2011). As Lucknow, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli are also categorized as priority areas for the development of religious minorities. A high percentage of Muslims in the Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts live in rural areas, which is unusual, since Muslims in India are predominantly concentrated in urban areas (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 10; see also Chapter Six). Prior to the conflict, formal religious and non-religious NGOs working in the area were few and far between. But as past cases of "communal" violence, the event came to occupy an important place in debates about secular democracy and the protection of minorities in India, so several NGOs, women's associations, social activists from various horizons, and Islamic charities started working in the area. Apart from immediate relief assistance, some NGOs and charities started long-term projects similar to those running in Lucknow (education funding, technical training, etc.), since the displaced population was mostly constituted of poorer and low-educated daily-wage Muslim workers.

Fieldwork research

My fieldwork in Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar consisted of three main activities: 1) semi-directed interviews with Muslim charitable organizations workers and other NGO staff working with the Muslim minority in Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar; 2) an in-depth participant observation in three

Muslim charitable organizations; and 3) an ethnography of the relief activities of organizations in the conflict-affected areas of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli.

First, the semi-directed interviews with Muslim charitable organization workers were designed to draw a preliminary map of Islamic charity in these regions. My aim was to overview the charitable organizations' functions, purpose, perspectives, and relationships with recipients, donors, communities and government agencies. I met 40 different organizations, 26 of which were Muslim charitable organizations, and 14 of which were non-religiously affiliated organizations developing and implementing projects for the Muslim minority in addition to their regular activities.[22] I visited several of these organizations on multiple occasions, and conducted up to three semi-directed interviews in each organization, for a total of 65 interviews. I mostly contacted these NGOs through a snowball sampling method.

After each interview, I asked the charitable workers to identify other religious and non-religious organizations they knew in the city, even if they were not in direct collaboration with them. I then contacted these organizations. I started this snowball method with different unconnected NGOs (such as Shia and Sunni organizations) to access organizations part of distinct networks. I also found other organizations through NGO directories that organization members gave me. Although the organizations I met are not necessarily a representative sample of all Muslim charitable organizations in the region, many important recurring themes emerged from the interviews, and these themes can be compared to other related studies.

The size and scope of the NGOs I surveyed is wide-ranging. I include, for example, organizations like Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind that conduct charitable activities, but only as a part of their

[22] The non-religious organizations working with Muslims do not feature as central actors in this dissertation, but interviews with them were used to draw comparisons with religious organizations, as well as to get information on policies and programs for religious minorities, relations between NGOs, and state-NGO relations.

main objectives; Jamiat is also a political interest group (see Chapter Five). Most of the organizations I met had a local or state-level outreach—apart from Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind, which are among the largest Muslim national organizations in India and have branches throughout the country. My interviews and fieldwork with these latter organizations were not intended to capture the views of the entire national organization. Instead I focused on local branch workers' perspectives on social welfare and the role of Muslim charitable organizations.

The second research activity consisted of participant observation in three organizations, Community Trust, Bazm-e-Khawateen (BeK), and Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH).[23] To have regular and frequent access to the organizations, I volunteered for them in different capacities. In BeK, I volunteered as an English teacher in the women's *madrasa* run by the organization. I also travelled back and forth to the Muzaffarnagar camps with the organization team on several occasions. In Community Trust, I volunteered in a weekly health clinic and assisted with different tasks in neighbouring slum areas. I also conducted semi-directed interviews with the core members of each organization and open-ended interviews with participants. JUH is led exclusively by male religious clerics and scholars who usually follow principles of gender-based separation of roles and physical spaces, so as a female researcher, I did not have the same extensive access with them as with the other organizations. I compensated for this obstacle by engaging in more frequent meetings, fieldtrips, and conversations with JUH workers and volunteers. I conducted interviews with the leading members of the organization in the Delhi, Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar branches of both sections of JUH.[24] I also discussed with several members, did fieldtrips to the JUH relief colonies

[23] I chose to keep the original names of Bazm-e-Khawateen and Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind because they are well-known and easily recognizable organizations. However, I anonymized the names and biographic details of the workers and volunteers I met within these organizations. The name of the third organization is a pseudonym.

[24] Following leadership disputes in 2006, the organization split into two distinct branches, see Chapter Five.

with the organization team, met with JUH activists at the Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband, and attended meetings in Muzaffarnagar.

The third fieldwork activity consisted of following relief activities in the emergency camps that were set up in Muzaffarnagar after the riots. While I followed and interviewed different organizations involved in relief activities, I focused on the work of BeK and JUH. I travelled to Muzaffarnagar every month, for 10 to 15 days at a time.[25] Apart from interviewing organization workers, I also conducted around 20 open-ended and group interviews with displaced villagers (both men and women) and key interviews with government authorities. Moreover, I collected several hours of recorded and noted informal conversations with relief providers, government officials, and displaced people in the camps. Although the emergency camps of Muzaffarnagar and the poor neighbourhoods of Lucknow represent tremendously different field sites, focusing on the organizations involved in Muzaffarnagar deepens our understandings of the relationships between the state, NGOs, and religious minorities in general. Emergency relief and rehabilitation processes are periods of intense interactions between state officials and other nongovernmental agencies that can bring to light already existing patterns (Chatterji and Mehta 2007). The Muzaffarnagar relief camps and resettlement colonies constitute spaces and moments wherein organizations workers and volunteers form perspectives on development, state responsibilities, and the place given to religious minorities in India.

The majority of my interviews and fieldwork activities have been conducted in Hindi and Urdu, with some interviews conducted in English. Most interviews and fieldwork activities were

[25] For most of my visits, I was hosted by Joint Citizens Initiative (JCI), a collective of non-religious organizations from Lucknow, Delhi, and Chitrakoot that I introduce in Chapter Six. JCI rented a house in one of the affected area to set up a temporary office. I was residing with the team and traveled with them to the camps on a regular basis. On other occasions, I was hosted by local villagers and local Muslim NGO workers, which enabled me to visit camps located in different areas.

conducted alone, and a small portion was conducted with the help of two female research assistants.

Working with, on, and in NGOs

A study focused on NGOs raises unique ethical and methodological challenges. Fassin argues that NGOs and humanitarian action resist critical analysis because their main aim is to help those who suffer and live in hardship. This makes research difficult, since the intention to help others is commonly perceived as an "absolute social good" and touches on core moral and social values (Fassin 2011 in Lashaw 2012, 16). Moreover, anthropologists and NGO workers often have shared political commitments (e.g.: "solving" poverty and inequalities), which complicates the process of critical research. Scholars often start working on NGOs because they feel a certain affinity to NGO workers, or have shared personal and professional trajectories (Markowitz 2001; Lewis Forthcoming).

Robbins (2013) argues that at one of its crucial turning point in the late 1980s and early 1990s, anthropology moved away from its focus on the "radically other" and distant societies because these subjects of inquiry raised considerable issues regarding representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986), and tended to crystallize differences between Western and non-Western societies in an increasingly globalized world (Trouillot 1991 in Robbins 2013, 449). One of the new object of attention instead became the suffering subject: those who "live in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression" (Robbins 2013, 448). This shift brought anthropological subjects of investigation closer to the field of NGO interventions, which might make distinctions even harder to see.

Robbins suggests that in parallel to studies on suffering, new promising lines of inquiry increasingly point towards an "anthropology of the good." The author argues that while studying suffering is a crucial and much needed endeavor, such ethnography often builds on a preformed knowledge of what is good, and what directions should be taken to overcome suffering and achieve progress. An anthropology of the good requires a very different analytical stance, which, I argue, might be a productive way to approach the study of NGOs. It involves looking at how people "understand the good and define its proper pursuit" (2013, 457). The aim becomes to explore different values, moral systems, imaginations of better futures, and ways people organize their personal and collective lives to follow their hopes and aspirations.

This does not mean that the anthropologist cannot have personal engagement with NGOs— and NGO workers often hope that researchers will engage with them tangibly, either through financial aid, volunteerism, or the kind of research produced. However, in the aim of trying to understand the "construction of notions of the good [and] the attempt to put them in practice" (2013, 458), I suggest that anthropological work requires some analytical distance. This is the stance I tried to adopt during my fieldwork.

Structure of the thesis

The first part of the dissertation (Chapters 2, 3, and 4) examines how ideas and practices of aid are shaped within Muslim NGOs and through interactions with the population they work with. The second part (Chapters 5 and 6) engages with the political views and actions of Muslim NGO workers and volunteers. It focuses on their perception of state responsibility in welfare provision and development, as well as their involvement in emergency aid in a context of political violence against Muslims.

Chapter Two traces a brief history of Islamic charity in India, discussing the regulation of charitable institutions during the colonial and post-colonial period. My main goal is to show that Muslim NGOs form a distinct institution at the crossroads of two normative orders: Islamic religious-giving principles, and the rules and structures pertaining to registered charitable organizations. This unique position opens up the possibility for imagining new ways of caring for society and communities. I demonstrate this unique realm of possibility by discussing Lucknow Muslim residents' motivations to get involved with Muslim NGOs, and by showing that while people volunteer for different reasons—religious, personal, or political—most see NGOs as an opportunity to "do more" than what they can do through customary practices of Islamic giving.

Chapter Three and Four focus on how these aspirations to create new forms of charitable action and social change play out in practice. Both chapters are centered on the everyday discourses and practices of two different Lucknow-based Sunni Muslim NGOs. In Chapter Three, I use examples from Community Trust to demonstrate how the will to bring tangible social changes and improve the conditions of Muslims in India informs how zakat and *sadaqa* are distributed to those in need. Although they follow the Quran's guidelines on eligible zakat recipients when deciding who should receive assistance, Community Trust workers and volunteers also emphasize values of self-responsibility and economic empowerment. The chapter discusses the tensions between intentions and actions, showing that workers' aspirations for social change and long-term development are concretized only part of the time. Pressures to respond to immediate needs and the reluctance to adopt an entirely "calculative" logic also determine the form that everyday practices of aid take. Such factors temper charitable workers and volunteers' intentions of developing practices that foster social reforms and long-term economic development.

Chapter Four further explores the projects of social and economic improvement imagined by Muslim charitable workers and the way they perceive relationships between Islam and economic integration. I discuss Muslim women's organizations' involvement in these projects. I then analyze how the teachings of Bazm-e-Khawateen emphasize values compatible with market integration, by representing successful and exemplary Muslim women as pious, responsible and entrepreneurial. In doing so, Muslim women running the NGO shape an ideal of progress that contradicts commonly assumed divisions between Islam, women's rights, and development. Both these chapters demonstrate, from different angles, that organizations tend to support neoliberal forms of economic development as a solution to Muslim poverty. However, they also engage critically with neoliberal models and use Islamic values to set the parameters of economic development.

The two chapters forming the second part of the thesis have a dual focus: first, the political dimensions of Muslim NGOs' work, and second, how the history of relations between the state and religious minorities influences charitable workers' conceptualisation of social and economic improvement. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork with two branches of Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind, Chapter Five examines members' ambivalent feelings toward major political parties and their role in planning and implementing development programs for underprivileged Muslim communities. Similarly to many other Muslim organizations, *Jamiat* workers and volunteers feel that although Indian secularism protects religious freedom and separate personal laws, Muslims remain marginalized in political and economic life. They also believe that even political parties claiming to be neutral do not take responsibility for this marginalization. My chapter presents how *Jamiat* members formulate criticisms of the state's disengagement in social welfare by contrasting their critiques with public demonstrations of concern for national unity and Indian modernization.

Finally, Chapter Six examines the political ramifications of the endeavor to solve the social and economic marginalization of religious minorities through private economic development and community-based forms of welfare. The Chapter approaches this problem by exploring Muslim NGOs' humanitarian interventions during the displacement of more than 50,000 Muslims in Muzaffarnagar district, in August 2013. I show how the regional state government tried to conceal the conflict by delegitimizing Muslim victims' experiences of violence, recasting them as poor Muslims trying to benefit from the flow of humanitarian aid. For practical and political reasons, many Muslim NGO workers also turned the spotlight on Muslim refugees' "underdevelopment" and economic needs, even though most of them believed that the conflict constituted yet another example of politically organized "communal" violence against Muslims (Brass 2011; Hansen 2001; Hansen 1999; Van der Veer 1994). While organizations succeeded in gaining incremental rights for the non-officially recognized victims—notably, through the establishment of housing colonies—this event illustrates how projects focused on economic development can partially overshadow forms of systemic discrimination, which become more visible during episodes of widespread violence.

Chapter Two. Crossroads

Zakat *Foundation of India* was established in 1997 as a grassroots level organization by concerned residents of New Delhi […]. We are a Non-Governmental/Non-Profit Organization which collects and utilizes 'zakat' or charity for socially beneficial projects in a transparent and organized manner.[26]

***

[…] It is clear that no other area deserves more attention than Health, Education and Hunger. *Tayyab Hospital & Educational Trust* has developed projects to tackle these problems in a systematic and organized way. Some of the key features of our organization are listed below.

- Transparency and honesty throughout the organization
- Young, energetic, focused and dedicated team with a sustainable result in mind.
- Verifiable activity log showing our work through pictures, documents and testimonials […]
- Efficient use of digital media to unite more people to our mission.[27]

***

These short excerpts from the websites of two Muslim NGOs tell us much about this unique form of organized Islamic charity present in North India and globally. Both organizations are less than thirty years old, with the latter having been created less than five years ago. They primarily identify as NGOs rather than as religious institutions, and propose work that is transparent, organized, and sustainable.

In this chapter, I examine the singular characteristics of organized Islamic charity and analyze how ideas about Islamic charity and volunteerism are reshaped within contemporary Muslim NGOs. I make two arguments. First, I suggest that the institutionalization of Islamic charity and

[26] Zakat Foundation of India. "About us". Accessed July 25, 2017. http://www.zakatindia.org/.
[27] Tayyab Hospital & Educational Trust. "About us". Accessed July 25, 2017. http://www.tayyabhospital.com/about-us.html.

its organization in the form of NGOs has a significant impact on the meanings and aims of religious charity. Indian laws regulating charitable institutions have participated in shaping institutional forms of Islamic charity into modern public modes of welfare, which influences how workers and volunteers imagine and practice charity. Second, Islamic charity practiced within NGO structures responds to founders' and volunteers' aspirations for social reform and progress that are not realizable through customary forms of Islamic charitable giving. I demonstrate that although Muslims in Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar get involved in a religious organization to fulfill their religious duty of charitable giving, many of them also do it in hopes to improve the socioeconomic situation of their neighbourhoods. These motivations go beyond the act of charitable giving and are informed by the current troubling socioeconomic condition of Muslims in India, as well as the failure of the state and, to some extent, other Muslim institutions, to address this situation. Muslim NGOs are thus at crossroads: they answer to religious motivations of charitable giving, but also to current social and political concerns. Ultimately, this demonstrates how, beyond a religious act, Islamic charity has gradually been reshaped as a form of public social action.

To analyze the legal and social configurations of religious charity as a public form of welfare, I build on the work of Bornstein (2012b) and Birla (2008), who have analyzed the interrelations between legal frameworks on charitable institutions and religious charitable practices. Both Bornstein's and Birla's work focus on India; they principally base their findings on the relation between law and Hindu charitable and commercial practices. Relatedly, Moumtaz (2012) examines *waqf* practices in Lebanon, looking at how they came to be understood as forms of charity belonging to the public sphere (2012, 3). Although from different angles, these studies and mine all highlight the transformations of religious charity in modern states (Moumtaz 2012).

In the following section, I briefly present how Islamic charity has historically been structured and practiced in Uttar Pradesh, and how formal Muslim NGOs have become an integral part of the local field of Islamic charity. I then discuss the regulation of charitable organizations in India to illustrate how, historically, laws have created a distinction between private, "traditional" forms of charity and public, "modern" forms of welfare. In the second part of the chapter, I present some shared characteristics of current Muslim NGOs, and show how workers and volunteers conceptualize public charity and their care for underprivileged Muslim communities. Finally, I illustrate the new aims of institutionalized Islamic charity by highlighting charitable workers' motivations for engaging in their practices.

Islamic charity and the regulation of charitable organizations in India

Muslim NGOs are new actors in the field of Islamic charity in India as in many other parts of the world. As I explained in the Introduction, Muslim NGOs have not replaced other forms of Islamic charity, but play an increasingly significant role in this field. Moreover, they represent a new avenue that, both on a formal and substantive level, is at the crossroads of other forms of Islamic charitable institutions and of "secular" philanthropic and development institutions.

Organized Islamic charity existed in the Muslim world well before the constitution of the modern "secular" humanitarian apparatus in nineteenth century Europe (Singer 2008, 2013). In India as in many other Muslim contexts, Islamic charity mostly took the form of *waqfs,* of donations to mosques and madrasas, or of personal donations to those in need.

The practice of *waqf* is a common form of Islamic charity that is present throughout the Islamic world, with many local variations (Moumtaz 2012, 18). *Waqfs* generally designate inalienable endowments, such as lands or buildings, that have been donated for religious or social purposes

such as the construction of mosques, Shia *imambaras* [shrines], educational institutions, and hospitals (Beverley 2011; Kozlowski 1985). In Lucknow, waqfs were mostly established through donations of noble and wealthy families, some of which were directly part of familial properties (J. Jones 2011). For example, many Shia houses in old Lucknow had built-in *imambaras* in their courtyard. Waqfs, in this sense, were initially based on a combination of social and familial purposes; they could be used both as religious sites for the neighbourhood and as a way to preserve the transmission of private familial wealth (see also Moumtaz 2012; Zencirci 2015; Singer 2013).

The combination of 'private' familial and 'public' social purposes in South Asia is not specific to the Islamic *waqf* institution. In her work on colonial rule of law governing Indian market practices, Birla shows that in the early nineteenth century, such arrangements were common among other religious communities, as well. Many Hindu family-led private endowments were multifaceted: "family-managed gifts to deities […] operated simultaneously as social gifts and commercial investments" (Birla 2008, 79; see also Vevaina 2015).

The practice of *waqf* no longer holds as much importance in North India. Many *waqf* properties have been damaged over time or abandoned. Despite their inalienable character, their ownership has been contested, and some have been seized or repurposed (Kozlowski 1985). Several Muslim charitable workers I met deplored the loss of *waqf* properties in Lucknow and argued that Muslims' living conditions would be much better if *waqf* properties in the city still belonged to them.

Negotiations with the government for the preservation and reallocation of *waqf* properties are still very much alive, however, there are also disagreements among Muslim religious leaders regarding their management. For example, the leadership of the Husainabad Trust, one of the main trusts managing Shia *waqfs* in Lucknow, was a highly contentious issue at the time of my fieldwork: the trust board members were suspected of corruption and mismanagement. I was living

with the extended family of one of the clerics contesting the leadership, who would organize regular demonstrations to take over the management of the Trust.

Personal religious donations to madrasas, mosques and directly to the poor—the other common form of Islamic charity—have usually combined familial and broader social purposes, as well. To decide how and to whom to give their donations, most Muslim residents I spoke to referenced the Islamic guiding principle of placing primacy on eligible relatives, then on people related to the family, then on neighbors in need, and so forth.[28] Therefore, personal donations serve a social welfare purpose in that they are given to people in need, but are also closely tied to kinship and community networks. In this matter, Islamic personal religious donation practices differ significantly from the moral ideals of neutrality and universal care for all humans that characterize "secular" models of humanitarianism and development (Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Calhoun 2008).

Muslim NGOs that are formally organized to collect religious donations are in line with these two traditions of Islamic charity, but also reshape Islamic giving practices by turning towards the concept of "public, modern charity." This feature comes partially from the laws on charitable institutions in India that have created distinctive fields of charitable action: a field of private, religious, and traditional charity versus a field of public, modern, and scientific charity.

By the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Indian government passed a series of laws regulating charitable and religious organizations. Many of these laws established boundaries between "modern" charity, based on the concept of a formal contractual relation between donors and beneficiaries, and "customary" religious traditions of

[28] See Moumtaz (2012, 239) on the Quran's and hadith's positive injunctions to prioritize support to the family.

giving, based on caste, community or religious ties (Haynes 1987). In *Stages of Capital. Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (2008), Birla argues that these boundaries started to become more sharply demarcated in the 1860s. Until then, charity had not been standardized as "endeavours on the behalf of the public" (Birla 2008, 78). In 1860, the Government of India passed the Societies of Registration Act to promote "modern" forms of civic association, and in 1863, the Religious Endowment Act to supervise religious endowments of a public nature, which included Muslim mosques and *waqfs*.

Laws passed during that period established a clear distinction between private (familial) welfare and public welfare, with similar distinctions being made in England at the same time (Bornstein 2012b). For example, laws such as the Charitable Endowments Act (1890) separated public charitable trusts from private trusts. A public trust was conceptualized as for the benefit of all, whereas private trusts were designed for "the benefits of dependants such as widows and children" (Birla 2008, 69). These laws introduced the concept of an "abstract public," and specified that charitable activities could not benefit specific individuals. For example, *waqf* properties that served both familial interests and public interests could not be protected and preserved by the laws on public trusts. The Charitable and Religious Trust Act (1920) further identified religious trusts that were for the public good and distinguished them from private familial religious institutions.

These laws thus considerably shaped the field of charitable action in the pre-Independence period. Birla (2008) argues that the successive legislative measures were a colonial effort to supplant forms of charitable action that were caste-based or religious-based, and therefore considered less advanced (see also Watt and Mann 2011). Late nineteenth century laws in Europe and India reflect the development of a modernist narrative of scientific philanthropy (Calhoun 2008, 36). Likewise, Bornstein writes:

> Public discourse in Britain and India began to associate beneficiaries' rights with procedures used to protect shareholders, linked to public accounts and audits. […]. The language of rights and beneficiaries, and the notion of trust, became contractual in relation to the charitable gift governed through colonial capitalism. The discursive shift from charity to rights fit into a modernist narrative of scientific philanthropy, distinguished from charity (2012b, 149).

These laws illustrate a twofold process. On the one hand, they represent an attempt to reform "customary practices of charity" by transforming them into public scientific forms of social welfare. On the other hand, the laws also set apart forms of religious charity that do not correspond to the criteria of modern public charity and modern institutions.

Tax laws passed during the colonial and postcolonial period also accentuate this public-private distinction. In the tax laws of the 1880s, trusts and institutions having a religious or charitable purpose for the public became officially exempted from taxes (Birla 2008, 55). In the 1960s, the Income Tax Act (1961) further defined the field of charitable activity by providing tax deductions for donors giving to specifically approved organizations. According to the Act, charitable organizations can apply to obtain a certificate of approval—called an 80(G) certificate—and donors giving to these certified organizations can benefit from tax deductions. Section 80(G) of the Act indicates that donors can receive a 100% tax deduction for specific government-sponsored programs, or half the deduction for registered charities that obtained an 80(G) certificate. This Act applies to all voluntary organizations registered as Trusts, Societies or Companies.

Tax exemptions and deductions for donors thereby became an incentive for many charitable institutions to claim a public charitable status and to shape their activity in a way that complied to the requirements of the certificate of approval (Birla 2008; Bornstein 2012b). To obtain the certificate, the Section 2 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 defines charitable work eligible for deduction as "relief for the poor, education, medical relief, and the advancement of any objects of

general public utility not involving any activity for profit." The Act (Section 80G) also specifies that organizations working for the benefit of a specific caste or community cannot be granted an 80(G) certificate (Bornstein 2012b, 154).[29] In this legal context, this means that religious institutions such as shrines and *waqf* are tax exempt because they belong to the realm of religious personal laws, but donors giving to these institutions are generally not entitled to tax deductions unless these institutions have formally applied to obtain a certificate for public charitable purposes. A sizeable proportion of personal donations given to temples or mosques, for example, are not directly regulated by the state (Bornstein 2012b).

Despite collecting religious donations, Muslim NGOs—as other religious NGOs—are registered as public charitable organizations. Most of them are registered under the different national and regional laws for NGO incorporation in India, apply for the tax exemption certificate, and abide by the rules regulating public charitable institutions and activities.[30] In my field sites, most of the organizations were registered under the Societies Registration Act (1860), one of the most common national laws under which organizations can be registered. Most of them had also applied for, and obtained, the 80(G) tax donation exemption certificate for donors.

In this way, laws on the registration of charitable institutions as well as tax regulations contributed to the creation of a specific mode of doing and conceptualizing charity—notably, by

[29] There are several exceptions to this requirement. One concerns specific temples and mosques that have a historical value. Donors can receive a tax deduction if they donate money for the restoration and maintenance of these religious sites. For example, Darul Uloom Deoband, one of the main Sunni Islamic seminaries in India, has an 80(G) Certificate that allows donor to claim tax deductions for their donations. A charitable work of "general public utility" can also serve a subset of the public.

[30] Currently, there are no uniform rules for NGO registration in India. NGOs can be registered under different national and regional laws. The main national legislations to obtain a nonprofit status in India are the Societies Registration Act (1860), the Indian Trusts Act (1882), the Cooperatives Societies Act (1904), the Trade Union Act (1926), the Public Trust Acts (different acts in each states), the Indian Companies Act (1956), and the Charitable and Religious Act (1920) (A. Sharma 2006, 85; Kudva 2005, 236). In addition, nonprofits are also governed by the Income Tax Act, 1961, and the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act, 1976.

providing tax benefits to organizations that correspond to the criteria of a public charitable institution, and by leaving the field of charity considered part of private religious and cultural forms of welfare out of direct control of the state. If, as Bornstein (2012b) argues, a substantial part of religious donations has fallen in the domain of religion and private affairs and is now ungoverned by the laws on charitable giving, I suggest that these laws have not completely separated the realms of religious and secular charity either. Muslim NGOs are a prime example of this complexity, since they function through religious donations but are registered under the same laws governing all types of NGOs. The successive laws have compelled, with various level of success, religious charity to adopt a public "modern" model of action that is distinct from private "traditional" forms of religious giving.[31] In the next section, I highlight characteristics shared by most contemporary Muslim NGOs, and discuss how this unique NGO status influences how workers and volunteers envision the distribution of charity within Muslim communities and the larger public.

Continuities and changes

Contemporary Muslim organizations in North India have common features that reflect the guiding principles of Islamic charity, and which are common to many other Muslim organizations on a global level (Petersen 2016; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). The transition to NGO institutional structures and "public welfare," however, challenges certain aspects of Islamic charity rules and customs, such as the principle of giving donations in secret and prioritizing Muslim recipients (Singer 2013). It is important to specify that Muslim charitable organizations in Uttar

[31] Traditional here does not mean older practices or practices that belong to the past. It refers to the *perception* that some practices, while still ongoing, are outdated compared to more "modern" forms.

Pradesh are very diverse, and that identifying common features should not overshadow the fact that there are, as I show throughout this thesis, a wide variety of organizations with ideas and practices that are often in open conflict with each other.

First, as I said in the Introduction, Muslim charitable organizations operate at least partly through religious sources of funding by receiving zakat (obligatory alms), and *sadaqa* (voluntary or optional alms).[32] To collect religious alms, several organizations appeal to donors' generosity by invoking religious obligations. Some organizations' websites display verses from the Quran and passages of the hadiths on religious giving. A few organizations, like Charity Alliance, also offer an online zakat calculator program on their website, so that donors can find out what should be the prescribed amount of their yearly donation. Most organizations with a website also specified that donations were tax exempt and uploaded their 80(G) certificates. While Islamic traditions of charity generally recommend giving donations in secrecy, many organizations organized collective fund-raising events and publicly displayed the names of their most generous contributors. Some NGOs had flyers or monthly reports containing donors' names or donors' business advertisements. Others thanked donors through commemorative plaques displayed in their offices.

Second, Muslim charitable organizations' fields of intervention correspond in a large part to the domains in which other forms of Islamic charity have usually focused. For example, the activities of Muslim charitable organizations usually follow the religious calendar, as donation and distribution practices vary according to certain Islamic celebrations. The month of *Ramzaan*, for example, is usually the busiest time of year for the organizations, as it is considered more

[32] Almsgiving rules differ for Shia communities, which give more importance to the payment of *khums*. For Sunnis, the amount to be given in the form of zakat is roughly equivalent to 2.5% of a person's wealth, and there are specific rules for the calculation of zakat on different types of wealth and annual earned income. Zakat is only payable by those whose wealth is above a fixed threshold [*nisab*] (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Singer 2008).

auspicious to make zakat donations during this period.[33] Moreover, charitable donations can replace the performance of certain rituals for those unable to do them (A. A. Khan 2012; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Singer 2008). In the next chapter, for example, I discuss a case where people unable to keep fast during *Ramzaan* instead donate money to people in need [*fidyah*].

Third, Muslim organizations collecting religious donations usually focus on specific categories of beneficiaries that are associated with zakat donation norms and principles, even though zakat forms only a part of their organizational funding. The Quran (9.60) indicates eight types of beneficiaries on which zakat can be spent; donations should be used for "the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer."[34] These categories are interpreted in different ways in Islamic jurisprudence and some of them, such as paying zakat to free slaves (those in bondage), are rarely referred to now, as they are no longer relevant to contemporary life (Benthall 2012b; Singer 2013). In Lucknow, my study of Muslim charitable organizations indicates that religious donations were essentially used for the "poor and the needy" (see also Taylor 2015; Singer 2013).[35]

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[33] At the end of Ramadan, practicing Muslims are also required to pay a small extra amount for the needy (zakat *al-fitr*) (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Singer 2013).

[34] There are different interpretations of these eight categories, I am citing here the explanations provided by Jonathan Benthall (2003, 10):

"1. The poor (*al-fuqara*). 2. *Al-masakin*: usually interpreted as the needy or very poor, a word paraphrased in Q.90. 16 as 'those down in the dust' (*dha matrabatin*). 3. The officials appointed over them' (*al-'amalina 'alayha*), usually interpreted as the people appointed to administer the zakat and negotiate with outlying groups. 4. 'Those whose hearts are made to incline [to truth]' (al-mu'allafati qulubuhum), interpreted as being to help those recently or about to be converted, and/or to mollify powerful non-Muslims whom the State fears, as an act of prudent politics. 5. Most Islamic commentators seem to have thought that 'captives' means Muslims captured by enemies who needed to be ransomed, but Décobert argues (1991: 226) that it means men from other tribes enslaved by the early Meccans and Medinans. 6. Debtors: particularly, argues Décobert, because those who cannot repay their debts lose rank and become clients of their creditors. 7. Those in the way of God, that is to say in jihad, teaching or fighting or in other duties assigned to them in God's cause. 8. 'Sons of the road' (ibn al-sabil) i.e. travelers."

[35] Some also kept funds to pay organization employees under the category "collectors." For additional ethnographic details on how zakat is currently used to pay those who collect zakat, see (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Singer 2008; Retsikas 2014).

Under the category of "poor and needy," the organizations I surveyed typically focused on giving aid to orphans, widows, destitute or elderly women; education; emergency relief after natural or man-made disasters, and other assistance to the poor. Organizations would usually run orphanages (e.g.: Maulana Kalbe Jawaad's orphanage) or offer monthly pensions to widows and elder women. In the field of education, activities were very diverse, ranging from running small schools and *madrasas* offering both religious and "worldly" education [*deen aur duniya ki taleem*], to administrating major colleges (e.g.: Tauheedul Muslimeen Trust and its Unity College), or distributing scholarships (e.g.: Anjuman Wazifa-e-Sadat).[36] Larger organizations, such as Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), Jamaat-e-Islami, or Zakat Foundation of India, are generally more involved in emergency relief. For example, there are several NGOs under Jamaat-e-Islami's umbrella, such as the Human Welfare Trust and the Society for Bright Future, which focus on emergency relief work. However, many smaller organizations also participate in emergency aid, either by themselves or by donating to larger organizations on the ground. Finally, most organizations provide general financial or material support to those in need, such as donating food, clothing, household material and basic medical consultation services. Studies on Muslim charitable organizations in different geographical contexts all report similar activities (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Taylor 2015; A. A. Khan 2012). As I discuss in the second part of the chapter, however, many contemporary Muslim organizations also combine immediate relief with longer-term social and economic reform and development projects.

Fourth, the Muslim organizations I surveyed tended to prioritize Muslims in their donations, although there was no consensus on this matter among workers and volunteers. This seems in part

[36] *Madrasas* remain an important way of using Islamic charity since a lot of students come from poor families and pay a minimal fee to study there. Students who cannot afford to pay, can reside and study in *madrasas* for free out of donations that the *madrasa* receives.

influenced by the fact that Islamic charity is practiced within the framework of an NGO, and by the concept of "public charity" instigated by the laws on charitable institutions. Consequently, workers and volunteers I met had divergent opinions on whether Islamic charity is a form of selective care, or whether it shares the ideals of universal care conveyed in Christian-originated, Western notions of humanitarianism (Barnett and Stein 2012).

Whether zakat should be reserved only for Muslims is a contested issue among Islamic scholars, as well. Some scholars of Islam argue that zakat must be given only to Muslims, while others argue that the terms "poor" and "needy" mentioned in the ninth surah can include "any poor" (cf. Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). Atia's (2013) study on transnational Muslim NGOs present organizations that follow both interpretations. Benthall's research on international Muslim organizations suggests that charitable organizations are increasingly flexible regarding whom zakat should be donated to (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Benthall 2012a; A. A. Khan 2012).

Among the Muslim charitable organization workers I met, a majority referred to the Islamic textual prescriptions that zakat should be first distributed to the immediate family, then neighbours, and only then to the larger community. But the notions of neighbours and community left considerable space for interpretation. Most workers suggested that neighbours and community could include anyone, and that if a person's neighbour is in need and happens to be Hindu or Christian, he should receive zakat. The thoughts of Lucknow's Jamaat-e-Islami Unit leader express well what others told me:

> In the Quran *majeed*, there is one *surah*, a section, *At-Taubah*, and in its sixtieth sentence, *ayat* number sixty, it is written that zakat can be spent on eight categories. When you expand this [*jab usko aap elaborate karenge*], then it reaches all mankind [*toh vah mankind tak pahunch jati hai*] […]. And if you squeeze these categories [*jab usko squeeze karenge*], their reach remains limited to Muslims [*toh Muslims tak reh jaati hai*]. Both are possible. Jamaat's thinking is that the *ayat* has to be expanded to

> include all mankind. […] So we are a little different. We don't work only for the good of Muslims [*Musulmanon ki bhalaai*], we work for the benefit of the entire humanity [*saare insaniyat ki bhalaai*].
>
> The categories are not a question of Muslims or non-Muslims [*gair-Muslims*], the categories are about who is most worthy [*kaun zyada mustahiq hai*], who is most in need [*kisko sabse zyada zarurat hai*]. So, if Muslims are the most in need [*zyada zaruratmand*], we too will first give to Muslims! If they are less in need, then others will receive! […] Islam is not just for the Muslim community, Islam if for the good of mankind [*Islam mankind ki bhalaai ke liye hai*] (C27, Lucknow, 2014-07).

In this interview passage, the Jamaat worker insists on Islam's universal quality and suggests that while some might keep zakat for Muslims, it is possible to do otherwise.

Other organization workers solved the zakat-giving dilemma by arguing that zakat should be prioritized for Muslims, but that their organization also received many other forms of donations apart from zakat that could be distributed to other people. In general, most charitable workers were uncomfortable saying that they mainly worked for Muslims, even if the overwhelming majority of people seeking out services from their organizations were Muslims. As I mentioned in the Introduction, most Lucknow-based organizations were in the older part of the city, where the Muslim population is larger—so participants were largely Muslim, though never exclusively.[37]

When organizations acknowledged that they did practice selective care, workers mostly resorted to "social" evidence-based arguments rather than to religious or cultural principles to explain why they worked mostly with/for Muslims. For example, M. Khan, the organization founder I presented in the Introduction, unapologetically stated that his organization's services

[37] It is difficult to assess this information for all the organizations. This was the case for the organizations in which I did prolonged participant observation. Non-Muslims would seek services, but they remained a minority. Geographical factors play a significant role, regardless of the organizations' position on providing charitable aid to non-Muslims. Organizations distributing funds and goods such as Community Trust tend to attract a large neighborhood-based population, which mostly hears about the services through word of mouth. However, ideological factors are also significant. For example, Shia and Sunni organizations generally work with relatively distinct population groups since divisions between Shias and Sunnis in the city are sharper than between Muslims and other groups (J. Jones 2011).

were directed exclusively at underprivileged Muslims. However, he argued that working for Muslims was not religiously-motivated, but rather motivated by the fact that Muslims are among the most economically disadvantaged of all religious groups in India. On another occasion, M. Hasan, a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami UP East Office who, following the path of his father, had worked for the organization for more than twenty years, expressed a similar opinion:

> […] After freedom, 1947, in India [*Hindustan*] there started to be a lot of poverty among Muslims [*bahut gareebi aa gayi*]. Before that, Muslims were stronger. In the British period also, they had good positions [*acchi jaghon par the*]. They had things, they were lords. After freedom, the government abolished 'landlordships'. Muslims had a lot of 'landlordships' in UP and Bihar, and the government abolished them [*khatam kar diya*]. Now Muslims are behind in education [*education me pichde ho gaye*], they are behind in business [*business mein pichde ho gaye*]. Slowly, slowly, conditions [*halat*] became such that Muslims are now even behind SC and ST [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes] people. […] So here we try to ensure that the money given by Muslims, zakat, etc. goes, in *first priority*, to Muslims…to poor Muslims [*gareeb Musulmanon par*]. And yet we aren't able to help everyone (C26, Lucknow, 2014-07).[38]

The logic of prioritizing Muslims because they are among the poorest was also applied at Community Trust, the organization I introduce in Chapter Three. On one occasion, I noted that poor Muslims who came to the organization requested to be given a "part" [*hissa*] during *Ramzaan*, and I asked the treasurer if the *hissa* necessarily needed to be given to someone practicing the fast and, thus, who was Muslim. She responded affirmatively, adding that any religious donations had to be given only to Muslims. Overhearing our conversation, Taheera *apaa*, the coordinator, interjected in an authoritative tone, saying that religious donations were not in fact reserved for Muslims. She went on to say that the organization had decided to serve mainly Muslims because they happened to be among the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in India. "Look

[38] For more information on the abolition of landownership systems [zamindari system] after Independence, see Gupta (1998).

around you," she said, pointing towards the crowd begging for money, "don't you see how necessary it is to work for Muslims?" On websites and promotional material, many organizations described their work similarly, by stating that they work for the general interest, but especially for Muslims and other marginalized minorities.

The organizations emphasized their "universal" approach to care or used socioeconomic justifications for practicing selective care partially due to their orientation towards public charity, which was spurred by the regulations on charitable activities from the colonial and post-colonial period. I explained earlier that the laws governing charitable organizations define a charitable purpose as contributing to general public utility. "General public" can refer to a subset of the public, and in her study of a *Parsi* charitable trust in Mumbai, Vevaina specifies that religious groups can, in certain cases, be considered as such (2015, 155). However, I suggest that since Muslims form a minority that is often pressured to prove its allegiance to the Indian nation, the principle of providing care that benefits "all Indians" has a unique incidence on Muslim NGOs' work. Muslim organizations are often accused of being "communal" and anti-national, and thus put a lot of effort in cultivating a positive public image for the media, other organizations, and, incidentally, researchers like me. Stressing how their work is beneficial for all might be part of this strategy. Using socioeconomic, evidence-based justification to prioritize aid for Muslims was deemed more "acceptable," because making the argument on religious grounds could reinforce the common bias that Islamic charitable organizations are less secular and therefore incapable of integrating into society. Moreover, since Muslims are now perceived as forming a marginalized socioeconomic category—in comparison to other religious groups—the resort to such arguments made even more sense.

Not every Muslim charitable worker shares this position, of course. One founder of a major NGO rightly pointed out to me that caring for one's own community is not an uncommon thing in India, and should not be concealed: "If you go to many other non-Muslim charities, there is hardly anybody not belonging to their particular religion. Everybody does it, it is just like that and there is no harm in that" (C29, Delhi, 2014-07).

Disagreements around the proper recipients of zakat and other Islamic donations are important because they highlight how Islamic charity takes on new forms within the framework of NGOs. Moreover, these disagreements illustrate how these organizations constantly interpret religious principles and practices of aid in light of social contexts, and shows the diversity of approaches between organizations and within them. I return to this last point in the next chapter, but I now turn to volunteers' motivations for engaging with Muslim NGOs. I draw on these motivations to illustrate again the unique hybrid character of organized Islamic charity. Muslims I spoke with got involved in charitable work for religious reasons—but also because NGOs offered the possibility to imagine a new form of "efficient" and modern charity, in response to the incapacity of the state and older Muslim institutions to address the plight of Indian Muslims.

Duty, reward, and social change

In our interviews, volunteers expressed diverse motivations for engaging in charitable work or starting an NGO. However, a few common reasons stood out. For some, the decision to engage in charitable work was directly related to a concern for zakat and similar Islamic alms. Some spoke of their involvement as an extension of their duty to give zakat; zakat is a *farz* [duty], so giving money in a proper way was part of this duty:

> I like doing this, *bas*. It is for God! [*upar ke Allah-walle ke liye*]! I am doing what he wants. It is a question of destiny/luck [*kismat*], it was meant to be spent on you [a recipient of donation], that is why God gave him that money, that is why he is giving it. If someone comes here in my house [to ask for help], he will not leave empty handed [*khali haat wapas nahee chalega*]. He will not leave with empty hands (C11, Lucknow, 2014-03).

For this founder of a small organization that provided scholarships to street children in old Lucknow, starting this initiative was not an act of charity in the sense of an impulse to alleviate others' suffering, based on personal feelings of empathy (Bornstein 2012a; Benthall 2012a; Fassin and Gomme 2012). It was fulfilling a duty: doing what God wants followers to do.

This is a common way to understand zakat donation practices. In her work on Islam and volunteerism in Egypt, Mittermaier explains that God is understood as the owner of everything. In this context, zakat is not a "human act of charity, but an enactment of God's provision and the "right of the poor" (*haqq al-faqīr*)" (Mittermaier 2014b, 287; see also Benthall 2012a; Singer 2013). The sense of duty is also based on the principle that all wealth belongs to God and has been given by God (Kochuyt 2009). Zafar Mahmood, the founder of Zakat Foundation of India, explained this to me when we met in the organization's head office in Delhi in 2014:

> I am with God's grace a very special Muslim from India and have been blessed by God like so many others haven't. So many people have to pull a *rickshaw* [three-wheeled cycle passenger cart]. I had a diplomatic assignment, I was chief officer and I always had a very comfortable life and an important position in the government. Very comfortable life. My children are medical doctors both living in North America. My wife runs her own educational institutions. She is a very busy person. All of us have been blessed, so the rest of my life belongs to others, not to myself, not to my family (2014-07, Original in English).

In his statement, Zafar Mahmood refers to the fact that his privileges were given to him by God and that the wealth that he does not need belongs to others. Like many other charitable workers, he extended this idea of duty to the accomplishment of voluntary work.

> I am aware that in Western societies the concept of charity is a little different and it is exclusive to helping financially. But if you go deep into even the scriptural mandate…charity is not only money…even if you smile to your neighbour, this is charity. Every good act is charity. Not necessarily financial also. […] It is interpreted by almost everybody…by most who are renown in Quranic exegesis…as whatever one has beyond his or her own needs. So it is obviously money, plus it is also time, resources, it is also love. That is what every human being has been blessed with. If we have to draw a formula….my feeling is that overall, what sharia says is that at least one third of what everybody has doesn't belong to him or his family (2014-07, Original in English).

Charity as a religious duty thus extends beyond the act of giving money; it also applies to volunteer work, which is accessible to anybody, not just the wealthiest.

For other volunteers, starting an organization or volunteering in an existing one was more than a religious duty: it was also a form of action that would generate a reward from God. *Maulana* Abdul Azeem Qasmi,[39] a preeminent Muslim cleric involved in JUH and running a large rural *madrasa*, explained this in the following way:

> Human beings should do charitable/benefaction work [*bhalaai ka kaam insaan ko karna chahiye*]. This is a very big reward [*yeh bahut bara thawab*]. There are obligatory prayers and voluntary prayers [*farz namaaz aur nafl namaaz*]. One man does plenty of voluntary prayers [*nafl namaaz*], while a second man does some kind of services for the community [*qaum ki koi khidmat kar raha hai*], the man who does the charitable work is much better than the one who does the extra prayers. His reward will be bigger. This is the lesson [*sabaq*] of the Islamic religion [*mazhabi Islam*] (C34, Muzaffarnagar, 2014-09).

In addition to praising voluntary work, this Muslim cleric expresses how charitable work is also beneficial for the person who does it. The reward he is referring to here has an influence on the after-life. Mittermaier (2014b) presents similar observations in her work in Egypt. She explains that Islamic charitable donations and voluntary work were often perceived as a means to secure a good life after death. For her interlocutors, alms-giving was commonly understood as a form of

[39] *Maulana* is a term commonly used in South Asia to designate a respected Muslim religious scholar.

"trading with God," based on the idea that fulfilling charitable requirements and additional charitable acts will, ultimately, be rewarded by God (Mittermaier 2014b). She demonstrates that in the same way as zakat donations can be precisely calculated according to an individual's earnings, every other "good deed" accumulates points that will potentially have an influence on the Day of Judgement. For example, choosing between listening to a song sent by a friend—in a context where listening to music is considered *haram* [un-Islamic]—or doing the right thing and deleting it also counts as a good action that may have an impact later (Mittermaier 2014b).

In Mittermaier's research, this calculative logic is thus not limited to donations, but to all practices of self-discipline and everyday ethics that pious Muslims try to maintain. This aligns with the way some of my interlocutors viewed their NGO involvement: they maintained that it was something that would be rewarded, in the same way as making religious donations is rewarded. A young Muslim journalist I met, who was writing a piece on one of the women's organization I followed, did describe zakat as "a business with Allah." She added that the principle of zakat is that "you give to the poor and God reimburses you."[40] Despite this example, only few volunteers explicitly used the language of trade and calculation that Mittermaier is referring to.

As my research and the work of other scholars indicates (A. A. Khan 2012; Mittermaier 2014b; Petersen 2016), workers' motivations to donate money or to engage in charitable or development work were far from solely "religious." People also get involved to perpetuate traditions of social involvement. Several of my interlocutors reported that their families had been active in charitable work and that their involvement in Muslim NGOs was a way to preserve familial values, albeit with different ways of doing charity. In the following citation, Maulana Aasif, a JUH branch leader

[40] Noted conversation. Lucknow, 2014-07, Original in English.

I interviewed who shares his time between business work and voluntary involvement in JUH, speaks about volunteering both as a general act of faith but also as part of a familial tradition.

> My father was in JUH. He was born in 1901, so before Independence, during Independence, he was with them. And he was with important people. Then he became treasurer for JUH in UP. Then my older brother joined. Now my *bhatija* [nephew] is JUH treasurer in UP and I am district president. So, we are linked by heart. Not by *paisa* [money]. Because our *bare maulvi*s, *maulana*s [religious leaders], they have this faith [*aqeeda*], and it is linked to this that we keep going (C18, 2014-05).

As I mention in the Introduction, it is important to point out that many of the Muslim organizations active in North India have been founded by middle- and higher-class Muslims who belong to families that had a strong political and public involvement at the time of the creation of the country. This influences the way these workers view the status of Muslims in India and the role they can play in improving the situation.

Beyond these religious and familial motivations, some of the most striking reasons people chose to engage in charitable work were to create more effective ways of providing help, and to more efficiently use religious donations to promote community development. In this sense, workers and volunteers wanted to follow the "efficient" model of formal NGOs. Given that many organization founders and volunteers were relatively wealthy, they were also part of the relatively affluent social networks of Muslims who could give large religious donations. These founders started their organizations precisely because they felt the need to build a more organized and systematized form of zakat distribution to make good use of these donations. Some launched their organization during retirement, like the women running Community Trust (see Chapter Three), while others started an NGO as a side activity.

For example, the founders of an organization started in the late 1980s in a new suburban part of Lucknow explained to me that a lot of relatively wealthy Muslims had settled in this

neighbourhood for their retirement and that, being new to the area, did not know who to donate their zakat to. Moreover, they had noticed that despite the relative wealth of the neighbourhood, there were significant pockets of poor Muslims. Some of these wealthy Muslims decided to collect money to try and change this situation. They first collected voluntary donations to build a mosque, as there were none in the area, and then opened a small office and a *madrasa* where people could register their children and ask for financial and material help.[41] Since then, the organization has become larger and more established. When I visited them, the founders had started the procedures to turn the madrasa into a registered school, to provide a better quality of education to the students and offer them the possibility to obtain a recognized primary school diploma.

The Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind member Maulana Abdul Azeem Qasmi also explained to me that a more systematic form of zakat donation was needed to respond to people's busy modern lifestyle:

> Some people give [their zakat] directly [instead of going through organizations], and this is also good. They look around them to find people who are poor, they notice that these twenty people are poor and they will spend for these people. You can do it this way as well. But there are probably few people like this [*aise kam log ho*], because it involves more responsibility [*zimedaari*]. And you know that life these days goes very fast [*is wakt jo life hai, vah bahut tez raftaar jaa rahee hai*], not everyone has free time [*fursat*] (Muzaffarnagar, 2014-05).

Some other organization workers started collecting zakat after networks requested a more efficient way of using religious charity in communities. For example, Imran, an import-export business owner in his mid-forties who divided his life between North America and New Delhi and who was closely related to the Darul Uloom Deoband direction—the largest and most influential Islamic seminary in India—had started an organization less than ten years ago. He wanted to stand out as a leader in new models of local development and empowerment by constructing a hospital for

[41] Voluntary donations were collected to build the mosque in the first place since obligatory zakat donations cannot be used to build infrastructures.

maternal health in his native region. Given the development of his project and his religious credentials and connections, people expressed the wish to donate their zakat to him.

At first Imran rejected these offers because he was seeking funds to build the hospital, and zakat donations cannot be spent on material constructions. As his close network began pressing him to accept these donations and respond to the faith that donors had put in him, he decided to simply diversify his activities. Imran started an international project of emergency food ration packs that led him to collaborate with some of the major transnational Islamic organizations currently active in the global humanitarian aid system. In doing so, he found strategic ways to develop more "NGO-like" work with religious donations. He also told me that relying heavily on religious donations was not a hindrance as he first thought, since his organization could exchange funds with other Islamic organizations to conduct more "development-oriented" activities.[42] Imran's strategy clearly indicates a turn to a different style of outcome-oriented charity since he was even ready to exchange religious funds in order to be able to build his "modern" hospital and participate in transnational humanitarian endeavours.

For many NGO workers, the desire to implement a new efficient, organized form of charity stemmed from their exposure to poverty in their immediate community. But more than the simple assessment of the poverty that surrounded them, people were especially driven by the injustices Muslims faced in India. The charitable actors I met unanimously believed that Muslims were socio-economically disadvantaged compared to the Hindu majority, and viewed inequalities between religious groups as an impetus to become more active in charitable and development activities. All of them knew about the Sachar Committee Report, and, without necessarily being

[42] Only one organization mentioned doing such exchanges, so I cannot confirm whether this was a common practice or not.

familiar with each of the Report's findings and recommendations, agreed nonetheless with its main conclusions regarding Muslims' socioeconomic disadvantages in India.

Volunteers were particularly alarmed by Muslims' lack of access to education—let alone to quality education. Every single organization worker I met believed that the most important avenue for changing Muslims' standing in India—both for men and women—was to improve their access to education and the quality of the education they received. The priority given to education is not particular to Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers; education holds a central place in local communities' imaginations of progress and development. For example, Jefferey, Jeffrey and Jeffery (2004) highlight how education is touted as the main stepping stone to achieve a better future in their study on Muslims, education, and unemployment in Uttar Pradesh. For NGO workers and volunteers, education was a crucial dimension of the long-term development objectives they wanted to put forward by getting involved in an NGO in the first place.

At a ceremony called "Women's Development" [*Mahila Vikas*] organized by the All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board[43] to celebrate the International Women's Day (March 8), an *alima* [female Islamic scholar] opened the public meeting by referring to a *hadith*, stating that one should seek knowledge even if one needs to travel to China to obtain it.[44] She used this saying to argue the importance of providing education to women to improve the conditions of Muslims in India. The following statement from a wealthy property dealer in Lucknow who had started his own charitable organization about fifteen years ago also summarizes these shared views on education:

[43] The AIMWPLB mainly focuses on Muslim women's legal rights in India, but also conducts charitable activities.
[44] Scholars of Islam suggest that these may not be the exact sayings of the Prophet, but that, in general, many *hadiths* stress the importance of seeking knowledge, both for men and women.

> Kids are poor. They cannot study. They keep roaming around [*ghooma karte hain*]. If out of twenty kids [that receive financial support from the organization], two kids come out and are able to do good studies, so that will be a lot for me, it will be a lot for the society. Who knows, if out of all, an engineer comes out, a doctor comes out, so that will be a lot! *Bas*, this is all…the good kids, we will find them, put them in a good school. […] Without education, everything is useless no? [*sab bekar hai, na?*] With education, somewhere at some point a job will come, no? Without education, everything is useless! [*Education bagair, sab bekar hai!*] You might have accumulated that much money, but if you are not literate, you are useless [*bekar*]. If someone is literate [*padhe-likhe*], so that is a lot [*bahut kuch hai*] (C11, Lucknow, 2014-03).

For this property dealer, education was the ultimate solution for bringing Muslims out of poverty, even if he himself had pursued little studies. Education was a way to access better employment, but also a way to lead a useful life ("without education everything is useless").

A prominent property dealer who had founded a charitable organization in the mid-2000s, which now included a women's *madrasa*, a health clinic, a scholarship fund and a charitable fund for the poor,[45] commented on the necessity for long-term development initiatives and his faith in education:

> There is a lot of poverty [*gareebi*] in India. Education levels are also very low. A job for the government should be to think that if it doesn't provide education to Muslims, then the country will not develop [*taraqi karna*]. […] If you want to develop your country and you have 20 crores [200,000,000] Muslims that are "backward" or poor, then it won't work. The impact will be on the country. If you want the development of this country, then each individual should be literate [*is desh ko taraqi chahiye to har admi ko literate hona chahiye*] (C22, Lucknow, 2014-05).

Here again, the organization's founder shows how beyond immediate charity, Muslim underprivileged communities need to be "developed" through measures such as providing education. Interestingly, the organization founder also linked the education of Muslims to the

[45] As for most organizations, charitable donations included pensions for widows, food distribution, blanket distribution during the winter season, and financial and material help for girls' weddings (see also Chapter Three).

progress and development of the entire nation, a topic that I discuss further in Chapter Five on Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind.

These comments from different NGO workers on the importance of education show how running a charitable organization is in part motivated by aspirations to progress and development. Furthermore, several studies on contemporary Islamic charitable organizations in other geographical contexts have highlighted how this strong focus on long-term reform and development is actively integrated in organizational agendas (A. A. Khan 2012; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Atia 2013; Taylor 2015).

Moreover, for the Muslim NGO workers and volunteers I interviewed, education is inexorably linked with their turn to projects of self-development and economic empowerment, as it is perceived as the means through which social change can happen. In their imagination of a brighter future, an important part of the efforts must come from the poor and underprivileged themselves: by investing in their education, poor Muslims qualify for better employment opportunities and, additionally, become "better people." In this sense, workers and volunteers' involvement in NGO work is grounded in a larger middle-class modernist project of socio-religious reforms to solve Muslim "backwardness."[46]

Osella and Osella's study on the community engagement of South Indian Muslim entrepreneurs illustrates a similar dynamic. The authors argue that Islamic reformists "join forces with the wider modernizing middle class on a platform of socio-religious reforms, producing a confluence of orientations towards 'community progress' which coalesce around a perceived fundamental need for 'modern education'—with considerable slippage between ideas of 'education' as reformism,

[46] "Backwardness" is used here in reference to the research participants' own use of the term.

modernized morality, technocratic qualifications, and civilizing process" (Osella and Osella 2009, 203). Chapter Four draws on Osella and Osella's comment that the shared opinion on modern education's importance hides a wide variety of ideological orientations. I discuss the perspectives of the Muslim women's organization Bazm-e-Khawateen to point out divergences among organizations regarding what constitutes education, progress, and development. Here, I focus on how common aspirations for progress and modern development motivate workers and volunteers to get involved in NGOs.

Working where others have failed

Workers' and volunteers' opinion that organized Islamic charity creates new opportunities for social change manifested in their perception of other forms of community and state welfare. For most, starting an NGO or volunteering in one was motivated by the perceived failure of both the state and prominent Muslim actors to prevent the socioeconomic decline of Muslim communities.

First, organization workers and volunteers I met were unanimously pessimistic about the outcomes of the Sachar Report, believing that the programs designed for minorities did not reach the population, and that the population could not count on the policies and changes recommended in the report.[47] One worker commented: "The things written about Muslims in this report are all true, but what does it change?" (C28, Lucknow, 2014-07). Another JUH staff member told me:

[47] The Ministry of Minority Affairs supports a number of welfare schemes and programs to which religious minorities can apply in India. These schemes are supposed to address the overall goal of "enhancing opportunities for education, equitable share in economic activities and employment, improving the conditions of living of minorities and prevention and control of communal riots" (J. A. Khan 2012, 11). Most of these schemes are related to the field of education (scholarships), while some facilitate access to credit, employment, and infrastructure development in minority concentration districts. In terms of education, the Ministry of Minority Affairs implemented five scholarship schemes to reduce the education deficit among minority groups: "Pre-matric for up to Class X, Post-matric for Class XI to PhD, Merit-cum-Means for technical and professional courses at UG and PG levels, Free coaching and allied scheme for competitive examinations, and Maulana Azad National Fellowship for minority students pursuing M.Phil and PhD" (J. A. Khan 2012).

"There are plenty of schemes for minorities, money reserved for this. Where did it go? Who ate it? That I don't know. I did not meet any boy who receives support. Sachar did a very deep and thorough study but the government [*hukumat*] does not follow. What difference do we see [*kya farak dekte hain*]!" (C24, Lucknow, 2014-05). Every person interviewed repeated the same.

Here again, this perspective on the outcomes of the Sachar Report is not unique to Muslim NGO workers; it is largely shared by other nonreligious NGO workers, journalists, researchers, and the government administration itself. A Post Sachar Evaluation Committee Report (Kundu 2014) published in 2014 indicates that the implementation of the recommendations has been mostly unsuccessful. Chapter Five discusses how for many Muslims, this failure is a proof that political parties have no true desire to support Muslims. For now, this shows how workers gave value to voluntary work in part because of this perceived lack of government support in their communities.

Relatedly, some organization workers and volunteers saw their engagement as a necessity because Muslim "communities" themselves had failed to efficiently develop a support system and promote economic development. A few times, I heard my interlocutors say that the Mughal emperors were very powerful but did not put much effort in community development like the Christians later did in India. They added that Muslim charitable organizations needed to "catch up" in the charity sector. For example, M. Jalaluddin, a Jamaat-e-Islami member who was running a charitable hospital in a low-income neighbourhood told me during an interview:

> Both Muslims and non-Muslims in India have no knowledge of what is the true Islam […]. People don't know that you should consider all the house inhabitants near your house as your neighbours, and care for them no matter their religion and their class. […] One problem is that during the so called Muslim period, Muslim rulers did not help create awareness. […] We got the Taj Mahal, Lal Qila [Red Fort], Qutub Minar,

> and a few others. No hospitals! They did not do any work! And non-Muslims in India think that this is Islam, the Islam of Akbar and all… (C19, Meerut, 2014-05).[48]

While M. Jalaluddin's thoughts reflect a specific Jamaat-e-Islami reformist ideology, the idea that social work had not been a priority in the past was expressed by other charitable workers, as well.

Other workers and volunteers blamed the *ulamas* for putting too much focus on religious orthopraxy at the expense of other important dimensions of Islam. The director of one Muslim women's organization, for example, was critical of Saudi Arabia's Islamic Development Bank's funding priorities in India because, she claimed, funding was never allocated to women and social issues and was only directed at *madrasas* or at the renovation of mosques. Women running Muslim women NGOs were not necessarily more enthusiastic about religious clerics running charitable organizations, as evidenced by this comment from an NGO leader and women's rights activist:

> 80% of Muslim women's problems come from inside the Muslim community, 20% from the state. We have to change from the inside. […] The Islamic welfare associations, it is the same [as the *Mullahs*[49]], if you are all covered only [*she makes a sign of having the head and face covered by a veil*], they will help you. But the help will be more for inside the house, money for household, feeding etc. Nothing that is about outside the house (N1, Lucknow, 2013-09).

For this activist, the main problem is that the *ulamas* did not recognize that development starts with women's education. Like others, she viewed her NGO as a counter-balance to *ulama*-led customary institutions.

While Muslim women's organizations were often critical of religious clerics and institutions, these critiques were shared by some members of the *ulema* themselves. Many religious clerics

[48] Akbar was the third Mughal Emperor (1556-1605).
[49] Term used derogatively to speak about Muslim religious clerics.

were involved in religious NGOs and shared similar ideas: that Muslim institutions did not adequately support the social and economic needs of underprivileged Muslims in the region. For many, the engagement with Muslim NGOs is a way to compensate for a general lack of attention given to Muslim communities' increased deprivation in Uttar Pradesh.

Muslim NGOs: A new avenue for social change

To summarize, I have shown that while charity practiced within Muslim NGOs align with "traditional" modes of donating and distributing alms, the institutionalization of charity and its organization into NGOs partly reshapes Islamic charity in ways that adopt professional, efficient and development-oriented approaches to community welfare. The consecutive laws governing charities have created different spheres of charitable action and have configured organized Islamic charity into a modern form of general public welfare (see also Moumtaz 2012; Birla 2008; Zencirci 2015). Organizations thus carry on customary practices, such as giving to specific categories of recipients, while readjusting certain dimension of their work, such as who donations should go to, and what the functions of charity are. Such legal and institutional reforms of religious institutions have also been highlighted in related studies. For example, Zencirci demonstrates how global development discourses and state policies in Turkey have reconfigured *waqf* institutions [vakıfs] into "welfare organizations focused on poverty alleviation," to respond to the new governance models promoted in free-market capitalist contexts (2015, 545).

Volunteers', workers', and NGO founders' motivations for getting involved in an NGO also reflect forms of continuity, as well as new avenues. On the one hand, reasons for engaging in Muslim NGOs are often rooted in religious preoccupations, such as fulfilling a religious duty and securing a better afterlife, and in desires to keep up with familial traditions. On the other hand,

motivations emerge from concerns over poverty in India, the disproportionate number of Muslims living in poverty, and the relative lack of success of other state and community modes of social welfare. NGOs are perceived as opening new possibilities, such as formalising charitable action and making a more efficient use of zakat money. They also constitute a way to centralize the donations for those who do not have the time nor the knowledge to properly distribute their zakat. Finally, NGOs represent a way to perform concrete actions that go beyond the simple act of giving: workers and volunteers favour long-term initiatives and self-development, mainly in the field of education, that rest upon social, moral and economic reforms, and that are formulated against the backdrop of India's global path towards "progress." Although Islamic charity practiced outside NGOs always partly had social aims, these aims were not necessarily explicitly focused on creating permanent social transformation and improvement (Iqtidar 2017). In contrast, Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers purposefully join charities to create tangible economic and social changes in their communities. As I describe further in the next chapter, they practice a form of charity focused on outcomes, a form of charity used to support the beneficiary's self-improvement and economic independence.

People's participation in religious NGOs is thus uniquely Islamic, but at the same time not (Osella and Osella 2009; Osella and Soares 2010). Participation is partly animated by a sense of religious duty and reward; but donating, volunteering, and organizing charity is also a mode of public action. The will to improve the fate of Muslims in India and to reduce the inequalities highlighted by Sachar and similar commissions have become important driving forces for joining a formal religious charitable organization. In this sense, Muslim charitable organizations share many goals of non-religious local and transnational NGOs. Muslim NGOs are in part a product of shifts in global international development discourses, which give NGOs an increasingly important

role in social welfare (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003; Barnett and Stein 2012). The social and economic functions that Muslim volunteers and workers now associate with their charitable work are reflective of the role attributed to NGOs and civil society organizations on a more global level.

To complete this section on the institutionalisation and transformation of religious charity, I should restate that the growing space occupied by formal Islamic organizations in India has nevertheless not erased informal modes of Islamic charity. A significant number of religious donations remains outside the realm of formally registered institutions (Bornstein 2012b). As a matter of fact, most of the staff and volunteers who I met did not give the totality of their zakat to the organization in which they were involved. A lot of the workers and volunteers divided their donations between different recipients: one part went to the organization, while the other was distributed personally. An employee of Jamaat-e-Islami explained during our interview that they even had to establish a policy asking their employees to give at least 20% of their zakat directly to the organization (C27, Lucknow, 2014-07).

There are many reasons why people may still hesitate to give religious donations to formal organizations. Among other things, some believe that the donation might bring greater reward if given personally to relatives and close neighbours in need. Some of my interlocutors also preferred continuing traditional familial donation practices that predated the constitution of most formal Islamic organizations. For example, a young doctor I met had started volunteering at Community Trust, the organization I introduce in the next chapter. But like many volunteers, the young doctor belonged to a family that had itself been very active in social welfare and religious activities for generations. Her family had opened one of the first *madrasa* in Uttar Pradesh and managed a large madrasa in Allahabad. So, while she volunteered at Community Trust, her family kept donating to

the *madrasa*. Lastly, hesitation to give everything to formal organizations stems partially from suspicion towards the NGO sector, a situation that I explain in the following chapters.

The next chapter explores Muslim charitable workers and volunteers' hesitations when transiting to a formally organized, development-oriented mode of Islamic charity. Drawing on my fieldwork with Community Trust, I examine how desires to create social change and improvement are enacted and adjusted in daily donation distribution practices.

Chapter Three
Aspirations and Actions: The Challenges of Doing Good

"I know you think I am harsh but I have to be fair. We have a huge responsibility on our shoulders; this is zakat money, you know, our donors are expecting us to give it to the right person and want to know that their money has been spent properly."[50] Tahira *apaa*[51] said this to me while we were walking back together to her car one Sunday, after spending the morning in the health clinic that she had been running for the past twenty years. That morning, as I was sitting in the clinic writing down the names of the patients waiting to see the doctors, a young woman entered the room and went to stand in the line in front of me. She was wearing a very clean *burqa* that seemed relatively new and had delicate embroideries and pearls woven on the lower ends of its sleeves. When it was her turn to be registered, Tahira, the coordinator of the organization running the health clinic, interrupted me and asked her in a very authoritative voice: "Do you know where the money used to buy the medicines distributed here comes from?" The woman shook her head in ignorance. The director replied: "This is zakat money (obligatory almsgiving). Do you think you should receive zakat money?" The woman looked puzzled, and did not seem to know how to respond. The director then ordered her to go out and told her that she did not look like she deserved zakat money because her *burqa* was too nice.

[50] Noted conversation. Lucknow, 2014-06.
[51] *Apaa* means elder sister, it is often used as a respectful term to call elder women. All name used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

As I explained in the last chapter, zakat donations are supposed to be offered to the poor and the needy. The embroideries on the woman's *burqa* gave the impression that she was not as poor as the other women who came to the centre wearing faded and worn-out *burqas* or *salwar-kameez* (a common two-piece women's clothing). Hearing that she had to leave, the woman burst into tears and started describing how she had been feeling ill for a very long time, had been unable to take care of her children and had no one around her to support her. But it wasn't enough; her *burqa* had spoken for her.

This event illustrates the conditional dimension of charitable donations and uncovers the moral project supporting the act of giving. In the interaction between Tahira and the woman seeking help, we see the struggle of a Muslim organization volunteer to distribute religious-alms to the proper recipients. In this case, the woman asking for a free medical consultation did not look sufficiently poor; she was standing out among the other women asking for services because of the style and quality of her clothing. Tahira also doubted she would make good use of the gift because the quality of her *burqa* gave the impression that she might not be spending money wisely on essential needs. However, the interaction between Tahira and the woman also reveals some of the everyday ethical dilemmas involved in doing charitable work and reducing the socioeconomic disparities between the Muslim minority and other groups. Tahira could not know for sure how the woman had acquired her *burqa*, nor if she was telling the truth about her situation. Ultimately, Tahira based her decision on her personal impression of the right decision, while she consciously knew that she might be wrong.

This chapter discusses how charitable workers' projects of improvement, focused on creating sustainable social and economic development and efficient charity, take shape in actual practices. In the first part, I show that workers and volunteers try to orient their donation distribution practices

in a way that promotes efficiency, economic independence and tangible social, economic and moral change within their communities. But I also describe how achieving this goal, especially in the context of formal NGO work, raises many ethical challenges. In Islam, donations given to the poor and needy are usually conceptualized as the right of the poor, but a gift managed by a third party—the NGO worker—and oriented towards sustainable development requires paying greater attention to how the gift is being used and what its outcomes are (Mittermaier 2014b; Taylor 2015; Atia 2013). To a certain extent, focusing on the outcomes of the charitable gift involves an "economization" of charity, where giving must yield results and turn "the poor into productive citizens" (Mittermaier 2014b, 275). Such forms of economic calculation are characteristic of neoliberal models of development (Rudnyckyj 2010). When following this calculative logic, the distribution of charitable donations sets many conditions on the gift recipients and even disqualifies potentially deserving people from receiving support.

Therefore, while NGO workers aspire to make more efficient use of charity to "help the poor support themselves," they sometimes move away from this goal, turning instead to a more "classical" dimension of charity: a form of aid that neither focuses on outcomes nor is designed to bring significant social changes (Scherz 2014; Fassin and Gomme 2012). This argument nuances my previous chapter and the claims of authors who suggest that contemporary Muslim organizations have embraced a professionalized, development-oriented model common to many NGOs. The Muslim NGO workers and volunteers I met remain very critical of "NGO-like" work and neoliberal forms of development, and try to develop practices that stay in tune with their understanding of Islamic charitable principles.

A second point I make in this chapter is that these ethical concerns stem in large part from the positioning of NGOs as intermediaries in gift-giving processes. The aspirations of Muslim NGO

founders and volunteers for sustainable development and efficient use of religious donations are embedded in norms and obligations of gift-giving accentuated in the context of organized institutional charity. The Muslim organizations I write about in this chapter are bounded by several normative frameworks: rules of Islamic alms-giving because they collect religious donations, and administrative procedures of accountability and transparency because they are structured and formally registered as NGOs. The organizations become part of a web of relations created by the circulation of charitable gifts. Institutionalized charity produces new requirements for accountability, transparency, and legitimacy that accentuate some problematic impacts of the charitable distribution methods, and confront NGO workers with ethical dilemmas regarding how to conduct their everyday work.

This chapter thus seeks to answer the following questions: What does it mean to do charity in a formal, institutionalized way? How are aspirations concretized in everyday practices? How do practices of NGO workers relate to previous (yet existing) forms of alms-giving distribution? To what extent does the NGO structure allow workers to develop a new model of charity based on sustainable development and efficiency?

To ground my answers to these questions, I analyze the NGO as an institution that participates in the social obligations linked to the gift-giving process (Lewis Forthcoming; Scherz 2014; Bornstein 2005; Stirrat and Henkel 1997). I explained in the Introduction that anthropologists have recently turned to classical theories on the gift, largely based on Mauss's work, to interpret a variety of practices of aid, including the charitable and development practices of NGO workers. Mauss (1923) explains that gift exchanges are a basis of economic and social life. The gift is embedded in a cycle of exchange and involves three obligations: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate (Mauss 1923, 50; see also Scherz 2014, 4; Kochuyt 2009, 100). According to him, gifts

maintain and create social relationships through the obligation of reciprocity between donors and receivers.

Authors who have revisited Mauss's theory to study practices of aid bring new layers to his interpretation of the obligation of reciprocity (Benthall 2012a; Silber 2012; Kochuyt 2009; Laidlaw 2000). Regarding the religious gift, for example, Bornstein (2012a), Parry (1986), and Laidlaw (2000) suggest that donations given to the poor do not necessarily create an obligation of reciprocity, since gift-givers are in relation with God more than with the gift's recipients. For example, Bornstein shows that the Hindu *daan* does not put obligations on the recipient; on the contrary, it releases the giver from any social contact with the recipient (2012a, 14). The religious gift instead has a spiritual importance since it might bring reward or purification from God. Kochuyt (2009) makes a similar argument in relation to Islamic religious giving. He suggests that obligations and reciprocity in Islam are not mainly between the donor and the recipient, because the gift exchange ties God and the zakat donor first; God gives wealth to Muslims who are then obligated to reciprocate. Instead of reciprocating with God, they reciprocate with someone designated by God: the poor. Several other studies on religious giving similarly show that most religions stress the importance of the anonymous, disinterested gift that does not expect anything in return from the recipient (Laidlaw in Benthall 2012: 362). What these interpretations demonstrate is not that the religious gift does not entail social obligations or creates social relations, but that the expectations of reciprocity can be directed towards a variety of actors, including between God and donors.

The organized forms of religious charity I analyze in this chapter bring yet another layer to Maussian concepts of gift exchanges and social obligations, and to these specific interpretations of religious gift exchanges. The social ties created through the process of gift-giving are

complicated by the inclusion of another actor, the organization worker, who acts as a facilitator in the gift-giving process involving Muslim donors, recipients, and God. What are the obligations of the NGO worker in handling the gift? Muslim donors give to NGOs, which in turn are responsible for ensuring the gift serves the purpose of its donation. This brings the issue of ethics and accountability to the forefront. NGOs are particularly vulnerable to scrutiny and suspicion because of their role in gift-giving exchanges, which has had tangible consequences for the ways in which they practice Islamic charity. I come back to this point in the last part of the chapter.

The next part of this chapter draws on my fieldwork with the organization I introduced in the opening ethnographic vignette, and that I call Community Trust. I examine how the projects of social improvement imagined by Community Trust workers are enacted on the ground. I present some of the ways in which the organization workers and volunteers concretize their aspirations in their day-to-day interventions and deal with the challenges that arise in the process. Five case examples of daily donation decision-making at Community Trust show that while organization workers try to promote efficient charity and sustainable development in their donation distribution practices, on certain occasions they choose to do otherwise because these goals have negative consequences for the beneficiaries. The last part of the chapter returns to the ways in which these tensions between aspirations and actions are increased in the context of formal NGOs, and ends with a discussion of how the concept of everyday practices is used within an anthropology of Islamic charity.

Community Trust

Community Trust is a small Lucknow-based Sunni organization founded in the mid-nineties by around ten highly-educated, elite-class Muslim women in retirement. Most previously had careers

as university professors or doctors, and were pioneers of women's access to education and the workplace in the region. Their husbands also had occupied important positions and many had children studying or settled in Europe and North America. In addition, most of these women and their husbands had been or were still involved in prominent Muslim institutions in North India. A few had taught at the Aligarh Muslim University, and two were among the few women invited to sit on the All India Muslim Personal Law Board.[52]

Community Trust's funding was entirely based on personal donations, mostly obligatory Islamic alms (zakat) and voluntary charity (*sadaqa*). As in other similar organizations, the month of *Ramzaan* [Ramadan] was the busiest time of the year, since there is additional merit in giving during that period (Benthall 2012a). Community Trust did not explicitly present itself as a Muslim organization in part because many of the founding women were very critical of the *ulamas* [religious scholars/authorities]. Tahira, the leader of the organization at the time of my fieldwork, complained that clerics were mostly preaching for a very restricted circle of people and not doing much for social welfare, a position echoed by most other women-led organizations I met. Like most organizations collecting zakat and *sadaqa* funds, the organization's activities broadly covered the domains of charity I described in the previous chapter (i.e.: help to the poor, orphans, widows and the elderly, support for children's education). Community Trust is thus representative of a "typical" Islamic charitable organization, but at the same time, it stands apart since it is run exclusively by women who are very outspoken and active in the public sphere.

Formal charitable organizations run exclusively by women remain marginal, even though Muslim women have always been invested in "social work" in the region. Tahira was in her late

[52] The Aligarh Muslim University and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board are two of the most prominent institutions marking the religious and political history of Muslims in India.

seventies; she was descendant of an elite Western UP family and had graduated from Aligarh Muslim University. She headed a smaller organization in addition to Community Trust, only intended for women. Through this parallel initiative, women belonging to higher and poorer economic classes gathered once a month in her own house to discuss the Quran and exchange clothes and household goods that could be of use to the poorer women. Around twenty women, half from lower economic strata and half from elite socioeconomic classes, regularly attended these meetings. While identifying as practicing Muslims, most of the Community Trust founding members were also critical of some expectations surrounding Muslim women's roles and behaviour. Most of them, for example, did not wear the *hijab*, and would comment on other local organization leaders who did. Tahira would also regularly scold the poor women coming to the clinic if they kept on their *niqab* or *burqa* once inside the building, where very few men were present.

The organization's range of interventions can be divided into two main activities: the provision of free medical services, and the distribution of financial and material donations. The clinic was set up in the first floor of a building that had been donated by a prominent local Muslim cleric, who was himself involved in the creation of many charitable initiatives in the region, including a hospital; he taught at Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, the main Sunni Islamic Seminary in Lucknow. Interestingly, while the organization leaders were critical of religious clerics, they also worked in close collaboration with them. This paradoxical relation of tension and collaboration between lay Muslims and religious clerics—that I also observed in many other Muslim charitable organizations—reflects the unique position of contemporary Muslim NGOs. Namely, they are at the crossroads of "secular" NGOs and religious institutions that customarily handle religious charities, such as waqfs, mosques, and *madrasa*s.

The clinic was in a tiny alley of a poor neighbourhood in old Lucknow, primarily populated by Muslims. A paid staff of three people were responsible for running the Community Trust clinic, accompanied by two to four volunteers each week. The paid staff included a local physician and two self-taught assistants, who were responsible for dispensing prescribed drugs and offering homeopathic consultations for minor illnesses. The three staff members had all been working in the clinic for more than six years. Each told me that they kept working at the clinic as a charitable gesture, since they earned a nominal income (the doctor received ₹300/week while the assistants were paid ₹250/month, roughly Can$6.00/week and Can$5.00/month). Each week, the volunteers included two to three retired female physicians who were friends of Tahira *apaa* and who would offer patient consultations free of charge; one journalist working for a local Urdu newspaper who had been volunteering for the past ten years; and the founding board members, who would frequently assist in the activities. Since I knew enough Hindi and Urdu to interact with the patients, I was assigned the task of registering the patients who came to the clinic, collecting fees, and dispatching them to the doctors seated in the clinic's two rooms.

Patients were given free treatments and free medication at the clinic in exchange for a five-rupee registration fee. Even though this consultation fee was minimal, Tahira *apaa* insisted that patients pay the fee and complete the required forms, because she believed this would increase their sense of self-responsibility. The main ailments treated at the clinic were skin and digestive problems, while patients with severe illnesses were usually referred to the public hospital that offered care free of charge. Mothers were also allowed to come to the clinic to obtain milk formula prescriptions for their newborns. Community Trust would often reimburse some healthcare fees requested by public hospitals, such as payments for X-rays and certain operations.

The distribution of donors' money and goods also occurred at the health clinic. At a small table in the main room, workers carried out consultations for donations, which included widow pensions (₹200/month); the reimbursement of children's education fees and healthcare fees for services not covered by the clinic or public hospitals; marriage "kits" for future wives,[53] and financial support for individual cases such as repair costs for a broken cycle rickshaw [three-wheeled passenger cart]. Occasionally, other goods were donated, such as second-hand clothes or cuts of raw meat on special religious or national celebration days.

The organization had also "adopted" a slum [*basti*] from the neighbouring area that received more donations than everyone else who frequented the office. The residents of this slum, which consisted of about twenty families, were prioritized for most donations, children's school registration, and their most urgent housing needs (tarp to waterproof their semi-permanent housing structures which were made out of wood pillars and bamboo lath netting covered with plastic bags; *chulhas* [mud stoves]; essential dishes for cooking; etc.). After a few months volunteering for Community Trust, I was sent on "fieldtrips" to the slum on a few occasions, to evaluate the families' most urgent needs. This seemed to be a convenient arrangement for all of us, since the board members had noticed my overly enthusiastic desire for "participation," and many had difficulties going to the slum themselves due to limited mobility from old age. Some of the board members also preferred staying within the boundaries of the clinic, as they usually travelled by car in the city and were not eager to enter the slums by themselves.

[53] Marriage kits more or less included the following items: a blanket and bed sheets, one pressure cooker, dishes, and nice clothes for the marriage such as a new *chikan* salwar-kurta. *Chikan* is a famous embroidery style from Lucknow.

Every week, between forty and ninety patients, almost exclusively Muslims,[54] would stand in line in front of the small table inside the clinic to register for medical consultations. Sometimes over a hundred people would show up, although the organization did not formally publicize its services. People mostly heard of Community Trust through word of mouth and came from the slums that surrounded the neighbourhood. The number of visitors would easily double during *Ramzaan* because of the increase in donations,[55] and the same people would often come back over and over for medical consultations and to see whether new donations were available. Because of the regular distribution of money and goods, a core group of women and their children used to come every week to spend the day sitting and chatting with the other women, while waiting and hoping to get a share of the donations. Some had been coming every week for the past ten years.

Out of all the organizations that I researched, both Muslim and nonreligious, Community Trust was unique in that they helped people who were poorer and in more critical situations than any other organizations. People coming to the organizations suffered conditions that were more than alarming: cases like a seventy-years old woman abandoned by her family, who was literally folded in two and who, barely able to put one foot in front of the other, took close to an hour to walk the 300 meters that separated her slum from the organization just to ask for a small plastic tarp to cover the leaking roof of her makeshift house. The people coming to the clinic or to seek donations were almost exclusively women with their children. On a few occasions, men would show up, either to

[54] I occasionally met non-Muslim patients, but the overwhelming majority was Muslim (as confirmed per the registry of patients).

[55] People tend to visit more the organization during *Ramzaan* [Ramadan] because recipients of aid know that they can receive a *hissa* [part] during this period. Usually, a person who is financially stable but unable to keep the fast during Ramadan for legitimate reasons (health issues, old age, and handicap) has to feed a poor person (or make a monetary donation) during all the days where he or she did not fast (the practice of *fidyah*). The recipient should ideally be someone who keeps the fast. At the organization, the number of people coming increased dramatically during Ramadan as everyone came to request this *hissa*. Each were claiming that they were the most deserving because they had been assiduously doing their prayers and keeping the fast, and that as a result, they should duly receive the *hissa* to be able to purchase food for the *roza iftar* [breaking of the fast].

accompany their wife if she was too ill, or when they were themselves ill. A limited number of men visited the charity because it was run by women, most men worked during the day, and women are commonly responsible for the care of children.

Community Trust also served the poorest of the poor, and it is often women who are located at the lower end of the poverty scale (Z. Hasan 2004). In almost all cases, the people seeking help from the organization belonged to the lowest castes and classes. They were wives of rickshaw pullers, *chikan* and *zardosi* workers (traditional crafts), and street vendors. The few women who did work were generally house cleaners (*jhadu paucha*, "broom and wipe"), and a minority were school or *madrasa* teachers.

But their low income was the least of their problems. Most of them had also experienced some kind of misfortune, a "critical moment" (Han 2012) that had left them entirely dispossessed (husband's alcoholism, severe illness in the family, loss of support from extended families due to migration in urban centres, etc.). Every women visiting the organization was experiencing the violence of ordinary life that turns quasi events into events when the crisis cannot be contained by ordinary support structures (friends, family, neighbours) (Das 2015). As Gupta writes, the poor have very little capacity to absorb risk, and minor life events can thus rapidly turn into a catastrophe (Gupta 2012, 21).

Working the low-income professional occupations I enumerated above, a household can normally earn up to ₹6,000/month at most (Can$120/month). Female domestic workers earn about ₹300 to 500/month (Can$6-10/month) per house they clean, and are rarely able to clean more than three or four houses in a day, since clients prefer for them to come around the same time in the mornings or evenings. The most successful rickshaw pullers can reach ₹6,000 to 8,000/month

(Can$160/month).[56] These earnings are below the necessary income to raise a family and are far from being sufficient to absorb risk and respond to unexpected events. Women are also financially dependent on men. That a woman could earn an income was not something that was generally well-considered in these communities, and rare were those who had paid employment outside the house. In cases where women could not count on a husband or a son to earn the familial income, they ended up in situations of extreme vulnerability.

This brief presentation of Community Trust's activities and scope, and of the population that seek its services, provides an idea of the context in which the organization works. I showed that the organization has formulated its services around the typical categories of zakat recipients, and that it shares the ideal of efficient charity oriented towards sustainable development that was expressed by many workers and volunteers I met. At the same time, the organization is confronted with unspeakable misery that challenges the application of its ideals and distribution rules.

Everyday donation practices

In the last chapter, I explained that many workers and volunteers share an idea of long-term development, social change, and empowerment that distances them from the more immediate and informal modes of donation characterizing Islamic almsgiving in the region. On an everyday basis, however, organization workers juggle situations that sometimes render these development goals unrealizable. Organization workers navigate respecting the prescribed domains of almsgiving; responding to new pressures for administrative accountability and transparency spurred by the institutionalisation of charity, and responding to the most pressing and urgent humanitarian needs

[56] I base this estimation on my personal conversations with the people attending the clinic and on the surveys conducted by the All India Women Democratic Association (AIDWA) in Lucknow slums. The estimate given for rickshaw pullers is a gross income and does not include daily work expenses such as the rickshaw's rental fee.

of local populations. Following are five examples representative of a typical day at Community Trust that illustrate the everyday pressures and dilemmas underscoring donation practices.

The first three examples show how charitable workers try to make donations that will be adequately and efficiently used, and how that requires paying close attention to the recipient's moral character. The latter two examples introduce situations in which workers do not follow their goals of promoting self-development and economic independence when these goals are at odds with their ethics surrounding how donations should be distributed.

Case 1: The genuine poor

The first case involves two women in their twenties who came to the organization to ask for a little money to support their family. After managing their way up to the donation distribution table and catching Tahira *apaa*'s attention, the women were subject to an intense inquiry. Tahira asked the first woman whether her husband was working. The woman said no. Tahira then asked her if she was herself working. The woman again responded in the negative. Hearing her response, Tahira concluded that she would not help her because, she said, people should try to find solutions by themselves before asking for charity.

Turning to the second woman, Tahira asked a similar set of questions. Unlike the first woman, the second provided a justification for why she and her husband were unable to work. She and her husband were illiterate, which reduced considerably the possibilities of finding employment, and both had long-term medical conditions that prevented them from doing most other jobs that did not necessitate literacy or a diploma. The second woman had also brought a reliable 'witness' with her to confirm the veracity of her situation.

Fatima, a woman in her mid-twenties and mother of four, often acted as a witness who could testify that the claimant was genuine because she lived in the "adopted" slum and Tahira had

known her for ten years. Like Fatima, some of the most outspoken women from the adopted slum had become trusted witnesses. Tahira would often rely on them to assess whether a claimant's demands were genuine. Based partially on Fatima's testimony, Tahira decided to give money to the second woman.

This example stresses the importance that Tahira attributes to ideals of self-development and self-responsibility. What disqualifies the first woman from receiving a donation is not the state of her material living conditions but her potential capacity to work. Tahira often asked the women who would come to the centre whether they worked, and encouraged them to do so even if this meant performing a "degrading" job like *jhadu paucha* [sweeping and wiping].[57] Here, the fact that the claimant could find other ways to come out of poverty ruled out her request.

Tahira's decision aligns with the organization's goal to use charitable donations efficiently. For instance, the genuine character of the claimant was of the utmost importance to make sure that zakat went to the prescribed category of "the poor." The second woman seemed "genuinely poorer" than the first woman since she was physically unable to earn an income, and she was accompanied by Fatima, the witness, who could certify the authenticity of her hardship.

This insistence on finding the "real" poor to insure efficient charitable practices is not particular to organized forms of charity, but seems to be accentuated in this context. Taylor's study indicates, for example, that while individual donors giving directly to people in need among their relatives and neighbours in Lucknow did care about giving to someone *genuinely* in need, they were not excessively concerned with this matter (Taylor 2015). Likewise, in Mittermaier's study on Muslim

[57] Encouraging women to find employment is not a common practice among other organizations. In the next chapter, I argue that although many organizations (including the ones that followed more closely Islamic reformist movements) included "women's empowerment" in their project of economic self-development, several did not support women's employment.

volunteers in Egypt, some of her interlocutors argued that one should not pay too much attention to who receives the gift and to whether the gift really helps the recipient, given that religious giving and volunteerism are essentially religious duties intended to please God and not recipients (Mittermaier 2014b). Iqtidar also specifies that while there are specific categories of people who can receive aid, there is no classification based on a division between deserving and undeserving poor in Islamic thought (2017, 807). As I mentioned above, these relations of gift-giving change because organization workers become involved in the sacred relation that normally unite Muslim donors, recipients, and God. While I stated that donors do not give simply to fulfill a religious duty or to be rewarded in the afterlife, organizations do bear a unique responsibility in handling "religious money." Members of the organization generally felt that zakat donated to someone undeserving would affect the donor. The organization counted several friends and relatives living abroad that donated to the organization and expected it to be a "serious" and "trustworthy" initiative.

In the context of organized charity, NGO workers share the donors' concerns because it is they who ultimately choose how the money will be spent. The pressure of handling donations thus has a strong influence on donation distribution methods and choices, and leads to increased screening and selection procedures. For example, while walking in the heart of one of Lucknow's poorest neighbourhoods, a Jamaat-e-Islami volunteer who was introducing me to some food store owners with whom his organization had partnered to distribute food to people in need lamented that finding genuine "poors" in the city was increasingly difficult (2014-03).

Organizations thus continue to develop methods to ensure that donations are properly distributed. The witness system I introduced above was a common technique used by several organizations. Some had further systematized this witnessing process by asking the claimant to fill

out a form requiring personal contact information, a written description of the demand, and the signature of, usually, two witnesses who could attest to the authenticity of the demands. Organizations could also control donation distribution and outcomes by focusing on selected slum areas. At Community Trust, volunteers would try, as often as possible, to do field trips to evaluate situations that might affect their funding (funded student's attendance in school, number of people living in a family, living conditions in the slums, etc.). Other administrative practices of accountability and transparency included keeping a record of all donations received and distributed, keeping tight financial reports, producing donation receipts for tax exemptions, and publishing newsletters and annual reports about the organizations' activities.

The next case serves as another example of how charitable donations are distributed efficiently and sustainably, and of the implications for recipients. I show how, in addition to selecting the "genuine" poor, charity workers select deserving recipients depending on their moral "worth" to ensure an efficient use of the donation.

Case 2: Good Muslims

One Sunday, Alia, a woman in her thirties residing in the "adopted" slum, came to request a sewing machine for her husband in the company of a designated witness. Her husband used to be a *rickshaw* puller but had an accident and could not walk anymore. She could not work herself, as she had to take care of a newborn and three other young children. Providing money for a sewing machine or a *rickshaw* was in line with the organizations' objective to support sustainable development and self-responsibility, because that meant providing the means to ensure a sustainable source of income.[58]

[58] Another Lucknow-based organization I visited had also invested many efforts in making income-generating donations. The organization founders would donate mobile fruit and vegetables selling carts bearing the name of the organization, along with start-up funds for this selling business. For more details on this initiative, see Taylor

Tahira, however, refused to buy the sewing machine, even if a trusted witness asserted that the situation was real, because, she told me, people had asked for a sewing machine in the past and had then resold it. Hearing this, Alia and her witness appealed to their Islamic credentials to support their case, as women coming to the NGO would frequently do. The witness who introduced Alia first specified that Alia was a Muslim, like her. Unlike most other women around, Alia was not wearing a distinctive sign of her faith such as a *hijab* or a *burqa*, so her religious affiliation was not self-evident. Although the organization did fund non-Muslims from time to time, the witness probably expected that Alia would increase her chances of getting funded if she was Muslim. The witness then tried to convince Tahira to buy the sewing machine by demonstrating how Alia's husband was a good Muslim: she mentioned that contrary to her own husband (who Tahira knew), Alia's husband did not consume alcohol, did not smoke, read the Quran, kept the fast, and would thus not resell the machine. Convinced, Tahira finally promised to send a volunteer to buy a machine for Alia's husband.

In this example, we see how charity is used to promote sustainable development, but also how this donation is accompanied by an obligation to make appropriate use of it. Giving someone in need religious money to support self-development and empowerment entails finding someone worthy of that donation. Not only must the donation go to the genuine poor—as in the prior example, where only the woman who was unable to work received funding—but the person should also be virtuous and use it properly. In my opening example, for instance, the woman wearing a nice embroidered *burqa* simply did not fit the model of what the "genuine" poor should look like or how a "good" Muslim should spend his or her money because, in the organization leader's opinion, she had spent her money on frivolous clothing.

(2015).

This example again points to ethical implications of the project of social and economic improvement that Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers aspire to carry on through organized Islamic charity. While most, in line with Islamic injunctions on the subject, stated that the religious gift was the right of the poor, they also ended up selecting recipients based on their moral worth to ensure proper utilization of the gift.

Another good example of this calculus comes from a meeting [*istema*-assembly/congregation] conducted by Baji, an organization founder I introduce in Chapter Four. In front of the women attending her organization's meeting, Baji narrated the story of Saleem, a man who had been solicited for money by a poor woman and her two children at the Lucknow train station. The women told Saleem that she needed money to buy a train ticket and travel back to her village. Saleem gave her the money. A few days later, Saleem crossed the family in another area of the city and asked the woman why she remained in the city. The woman was uncomfortable and avoided the question, which is when Saleem realized that she had lied and used the tickets as a ruse to receive money. Baji gave this example to criticize both the act of begging and of lying as unworthy of donation.[59] She then told the assembly:

> Ramadan is coming and we will all have to give our zakat. Do not give your zakat to anyone you see in the streets. Give it to people you know in your neighbourhood first. Otherwise, keep it preciously and we [the organization] will tell you who you can give it to. We will make sure that the zakat goes to different people in need in different areas. You should also look out for who really deserves zakat (Lucknow, 2014-06).

In this example, as in the case of the woman seeking a sewing machine, the idea of efficiency influences the distribution process. The woman obtains the sewing machine for her husband only because his worthiness and religiosity count as an evidence that he will dedicate his time to try

[59] Begging is generally considered as a reprehensible act among Muslims in Lucknow.

earning a living as a tailor. In the next chapter, I discuss how Muslim NGOs view moral development as hand-in-hand with economic development. Many Muslim NGO workers and volunteers conveyed the idea that if one is a good Muslim, one will develop a sense of how to properly spend money and the desire to get educated, which will lead to better employment. What I stress here is that the new aspirations of Muslim NGOs, to promote sustainable development and efficient charity, create moral obligations on the poor to use the donations in the expected way, and that these obligations are accentuated in the context of organized charity. The third example below introduces a case in which the project of social improvement comes with significant consequences for the recipients of aid.

Case 3: Terminal illness

One day, Shabnam, a woman well-known to Community Trust, came to ask for help with hospitalization fees. She was a young widow in her mid-twenties, mother of three, and a practicing Muslim. She had reached the terminal stages of an untreated tuberculosis, and had just been discharged from employment as a primary school teacher, where she had been earning a meagre ₹900/month (Can$18/month). By the time Shabnam reached the organization that day, Tahira and the team had distributed almost all funds reserved for medical aid. A few patients with severe illnesses remained in the room to ask for funding.

Tahira, the leader of the organization, did not know how to handle Shabnam's situation. Shabman had lost a tremendous amount of weight, was pallid and coughing heavily. We were all very moved by the woman's plight, and Tahira did not want to decide between allocating the remaining money to her or the other patients. She first turned to me and asked me to do it. I refused because I did not want to bear the weight of the decision. She then turned to her colleague, who refused for the same reason. Finally, Tahira decided to send Shabnam back to her home without

paying for the hospitalization, because she said that she would die anyway and that the money would not be properly spent.

In this situation, Tahira prioritized efficiency and used a form of calculative reason that suggests an "economization" of charity. However, I show in the final part of the chapter that she was very uncomfortable with the consequences. In contrast, the two final cases I introduce show situations in which the charity workers set aside their objectives of initiating long-term changes and "efficient" charity when confronted with immediate needs.

Case 4: English-medium schools

Community Trust regularly funded children in two primary level schools: one was the RM Madrasa, a *madrasa* registered with the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama Islamic institution that followed the seminary's official curriculum, as several other *madrasa*s in Lucknow did, while the other was a small, charity-run private school headed voluntarily by a woman committed to social work in a nearby slum. Community Trust used to fund a second *madrasa*, but the leader of the *madrasa* was taking too much time to formally register despite Tahira's requests, and Tahira felt that the *madrasa* was not professional enough as a result. In short, parents soliciting the organization for financial support to register their children in a school would usually be referred to one of those two schools.

I was once asked to take thirty children through the narrow lanes of the neighbourhood to the *madrasa* to get them registered one by one, pay their annual fees (₹20/month – Can$2.40/month), and buy school uniforms and books (₹250 – Can$7) with the donations received by the organization. Focusing on these two schools greatly facilitated the organization's verification process, as they would report when the funded students did not attend classes or did not use their funds to pay for the school books and uniforms. On several occasions, however, parents would ask

Community Trust for funding support for private English-medium schools.[60] Although public education is free in India, the quality of education in government-run schools is usually very poor, and the chances of being accepted to competitive secondary and tertiary educational institutions is limited (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey 2004). The quality of private educational institutions varies tremendously, as do the admission fees. However, most people prefer sending their children to a private institution (especially if it is advertised as an English medium school) even if the quality is similar to a public institution. Studies on *madrasa* education also indicate that most Muslim parents prefer to send their children to private mediums rather than in a *madrasa*, except for girls in rural areas (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey 2004; Sikand 2005; P. Chatterjee 2004, 124).

Whether or not to fund students in private English schools was one of the most difficult decisions for the organization. The dilemma was between using zakat funds to help the poorest of the poor, or to help fewer children but give them a greater chance to come out of poverty. Ironically, even the *maulana* [religious cleric] in charge of the RM Madrasa once came to the organization to ask for funding to send his own children to a private school.

Earlier that day, when a woman came to ask for financial support to send her children to a private school, Tahira refused to help her. Later, her husband came to reiterate the request, which was when we realised he was the prominent teacher from RM Madrasa. Placed in a delicate situation given her partnership with the *madrasa*, Tahira decided to help him out and gave him ₹5,000 (Can$100). Tahira never wanted money to be "wasted." Like most organization leaders, she would ask to see a child's grades before providing funding to be sure that he or she was "worth" funding. Funding was also not renewed for students who failed or did not attend school regularly.

[60] The term English-medium school designates schools that use English as the primary medium of education. The actual level of English spoken and used in these schools varies considerably depending on the quality of the school.

But Tahira had more difficulty conciliating the idea of helping the most in need and spending precious funds on private school registrations. In the end, she chose to refuse most funding requests for private English-medium schools. The *maulana* heading the RM Madrasa became an exception, after which she resorted to funding only students attending the small public school based in a slum or the RM Madrasa.

Funding private, quality education does not contradict Islamic principles of alms-giving, and fits the self-development and long-term goals that most organization workers wish to instil among local communities. It respects the prescribed categories of zakat distribution while giving people the tools to improve their socioeconomic status. In fact, distributing scholarships and grants means doing Islamic charity and empowerment simultaneously. Tahira's choice in this matter is thus reflective of her own ethical sense of what is best to do. Although the founding members of Community Trust—who had all themselves attended prestigious private colleges in Lucknow—were unanimous that English education would lead to much better outcomes than a *madrasa* education, they also felt that funding a larger group of students to simply give them an opportunity to get out of their houses and stop wandering in the streets without expecting any outcomes might be a better thing to do.

Many other organization workers chose otherwise, and were keen on supporting not only broad access to education but also better-quality education. In fact, the educational sector was one of the main fields where almsgiving prescribed rules and long-term self-development perspectives could be combined in the most harmonious way. In Lucknow, many Muslim charitable organizations focused exclusively on using religious donations to give out grants for higher education or technical schools. For example, one post-graduate researcher from Lucknow University introduced me to All India Anjuman Wazifa-e-Sadat Wa Momineen, a Shia Muslim charitable organization

that had financially supported his doctorate in anthropology. Other charitable organizations in Lucknow with more resources were running renowned schools such as the Tauheedul Muslimeen Trust Colleges. The Zakat Foundation of India was also well-known for giving grants up to ₹200,000 (Can$4,000) to students who wanted to train for the *Indian Administrative Service* entrance exams.

In the same vein as the complex choices related to education funding, the next and last example illustrates another ethical dilemma where the urgency of needs oriented the organization's practices more than the organization's own aspirations.

Case 5: Weddings

At Community Trust, many women requested help with the costs of their daughters' wedding. The Community Trust staff was ambivalent regarding whether to provide help to families about to marry their daughters, or to intervene in a way that would initiate changes in marriage customs, such as the dowry, that put a strain on families raising girls. Most of the Muslim charitable organizations I researched did provide material or financial support to cover wedding costs to some extent.

The most obvious example is the group weddings organized by Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind in the relief camps of Muzaffarnagar. A few months after the riots, JUH funded and organized large collective weddings in the relief camps, with the aim of providing young, displaced girls of a marriageable age a way out of the camps. Many non-religious organizations viewed this action as a flawed intervention that reinforces the patriarchal dowry system, confines women into their traditional roles of mother and house-wife, and supports women's subordination instead of

empowering them to become independent.[61] This practice was far from unquestioned in other Muslim charitable organizations, as well.

Members of Community Trust were divided on the issue of funding weddings, and incidentally, dowry. On the one hand, they agreed that financially supporting families for their daughter's dowry was perpetuating a controversial custom which, although practiced by Indian Muslims, is not part of Islam. On the other hand, they viewed marriage as an important institution that is honorable for families and women, and thought that women should be helped to ensure they are married properly. In addition, many of my interlocutors expressed that, on a practical level, it is necessary to recognize that Islam is practiced in India, and that dowry is an Indian custom that will not disappear quickly and generates a lot of burden on families.[62] Thus, they felt people in need should be supported no matter one's opinion on the dowry system.

As in the last example on education, here again different ethical dilemmas inform organization workers' opinions and actions. Although reforming society and bringing long-term changes involves transforming cultural practices (I discuss this further in the next chapter), here the immediacy of needs takes primacy. What I want to emphasize here is how workers set aside goals of efficiency and generating outcomes to respond to what they feel are more pressing concerns.

On several other occasions, organization workers based their decisions on the ramifications of each individual cases and could not, consequently, completely achieve their ideals of efficiency

[61] JUH was widely criticized by women's rights activists, "secular" NGOs, and the English media, but the camp dwellers I spoke with had a different opinion. Some mothers told me that getting their daughters married and settled outside the camps was the best way to preserve their "honor." In addition, one of the most virulent criticisms against JUH was that many girls getting married were under eighteen. However, since child marriage is a relatively widespread practice in the area, it did not create a big controversy among camp dwellers.

[62] Some scholars nuance the claim that dowry is a "traditional Indian custom." For example, Majumdar argues that the emergence of newspaper matrimonial advertisements and of an arranged-marriage "market" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increased the value and importance given to dowry (Majumdar 2009, 24).

and sustainable development. For example, each week the number of people showing up at the clinic to receive donations exceeded the amount of money and goods available for distribution. Although Tahira would try to systematically and carefully hear every claimant's story to identify the most pressing needs, the process often became chaotic, as everyone would rush and shout in an effort to stand out and capture Tahira's attention. The ability to master the register of pity counted a lot in determining which case looked more genuine. Women would often cry and be persistent, and those who did not insist enough usually did not get funding. Tahira admitted that she was more responsive to certain complaints. Beyond religious principles of giving and administrative measures to systemize and rationalize the donation process, decisions to provide aid to one person over another remained within the charity worker's discretion—and in the claimant's ability to be convincing enough to provoke an empathic response.[63]

Trust and the pressures of institutionalized Islamic charity

My fieldwork with charity workers and volunteers across Muslim organizations demonstrates that organized charity is designed to reach different goals than the everyday informal practice of charity, but that it also raises ethical dilemmas for organizations. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, charity workers and volunteers adopt the model of the "professional NGO" because they hope to create social change and reduce the discrimination and marginalization that Muslims face in India through the promotion of economic independence and efficient charity. The first three examples I provided show how the organization tries to promote a new form of charitable activity—sharing

[63] For other examples of the role played by arbitrariness and pity in humanitarian aid triage practices, see (Ticktin 2011; Nguyen 2010).

resemblances with neoliberal models of development—that is efficient, oriented towards sustainable self-improvement, and focused on outcomes.

First, I describe how Tahira tries to find genuine poor people through elaborate witness and verification systems. She excludes people who she deems fit for employment and encourages women—and men—to find an employment before resorting to humanitarian aid. Second, I show how the organization attempts to foster self-reliance by donating income-generating resources such as sewing machines. I also show how the moral value of the recipient becomes an essential condition for receiving this donation, because it ensures the donation will produce outcomes and be used to serve its intended purpose. In an extreme case, I show how the organization prefers funding patients with chances of survival rather than a terminally-ill woman to make a better use of a charitable donation. Finally, I explain that many organizations view education grants as a key means to foster empowerment and long-term development. Funding children's education was also one of the most important objectives of Community Trust, despite Tahira's decision not to fund private English-medium schools.

These novel ways of orienting charitable practices to foster economic autonomy and development did not contradict religious principles of giving. Organizations still give to the prescribed categories of people who are eligible to receive zakat, and do not provide donations for unauthorized purposes such as infrastructure building. In most cases I observed, charitable donations were given within the broad parameters of religious principles and norms of giving. However, these new donation practices also change some aspects of the gift-giving, such as by creating an excessive attention on the moral worth of the receiver and favoring a calculative logic in certain donation choices.

I argued that the new expectations behind the charitable act that emerge through the charitable workers' everyday interactions with the needy are accentuated in the context of professional NGO work. As I have touched upon in the introductory part of the chapter, the fact that NGOs handle charitable gifts puts them in a delicate position. They become bounded by social obligations to donors, subject to suspicion, and pressured to prove their integrity. Gift-giving is related to an idea of doing good; Bornstein explains, for example, that NGOs come "under great scrutiny to be moral barometers of social welfare" (Bornstein 2012a, 60). These pressures for accountability and integrity are also due to the very nature of NGOs, which are neither private and profit-oriented nor public. Bornstein summarizes this idea in describing Delhi NGOs, and her argument can very well be extended to Muslim charitable NGOs: "NGOs in Delhi, situated as they were in a nexus that contrasted suspicions of government corruption to a corporate sector model of accountability, embodied both the potential for corruption (self-interest) and the model of accountability (to ensure general good)" (Bornstein 2012a, 63). Without the authority and legitimacy of state institutions, NGOs fundamentally rely on principles of trust to exist. They are thus particularly "vulnerable to abuse" (Benthall 2012a, 370).

The strong suspicion toward NGOs, and its ensuing impact on the care with which Muslim NGO workers verify where donations are going, can also partly be explained by the global economy of giving, in which organizations are inevitably absorbed. Muslim organizations, like most other organizations, are competing to safe-guard their niche, whether to gain better funding, recognition, or to maintain their participation base. During my interviews and day-to-day fieldwork, organization workers would sometimes complain that another organization with a similar agenda had tried to steal their "members." Even Community Trust workers, who were generally overwhelmed by the flow of people coming to ask for aid, would from time to time

criticize other NGOs that had settled in the area and were trying to integrate the same local communities.

I share Bornstein's (2012a) view that there is an "imaginary truth" specific to India that NGOs are corrupt, which comes from historical relations between the state and NGOs. Civil society organizations and the Indian postcolonial state have oscillated between relationships of collaboration and opposition (Bornstein and Sharma 2016; Bernal and Grewal 2014). This relationship is even more extant with Muslim NGOs, which belong to a religious minority that is a major source of political debate in India. Since several Indian NGOs have emerged in close partnership with the state, corruption allegations against the state do have repercussions for NGO perceptions, as well (Bornstein 2012a, 66–67; Bornstein and Sharma 2016).

This concern over trust and integrity did not leave religious organizations untouched, either. One could presume that since Islamic organizations are guided by religious principles, Muslim organization workers and volunteers would have greater trust in the reliability, transparency, and moral righteousness of fellow organizations. This is not the case. All the organization workers I spoke with were as much sceptical of Islamic organizations as they were about any other organizations. For example, instead of viewing a relationship with God as a token of just and honest charitable practices, Imran, the import-export business owner and organization founder I introduced in the last chapter, argued that it is specifically *because* of their relation to God that some Muslim charitable organizations were corrupt and did not function properly. He argued that because workers in charitable organizations volunteer for the sake of their afterlife, they do not care about the actual "earthly" effects of charitable work:

> I say…the other non-Muslim charities work for the creation and we work for the creator. When the work goes towards, you know, an unseen creator, where, you know,

> [whether you] deliver or not…really the result would come in after you die. But till I'm alive there is no accountability! So there are those who would dare, you know, just as you would miss prayers [*namaaz*], just as you miss other Islamic rulings…in a similar way, if you would misuse the zakat, at least in *this* living, in *this* life, there is no accountability. […] But the idea is to serve the creation to please the creator. The creator is pleased when you serve the creation. But somehow we lost it. It's only zakat money, it is for God, it is for Allah. But [in fact] it is not really for Allah, it is for Allah while you use it for the poor people you know. And through them the pleasure will come. We are not being thought properly, you know, what charity means in Islam. There is this great need of empowerment, teachings, trainings, workshops… (C23, New Delhi, 2014-05, Original in English).

In this statement, Imran suggests that a better knowledge of Islam would ensure religious donations are not given out without consideration for their earthly implications in the lives of the poor people who receive them. At the same time, Imran made this statement to emphasize how his own organization relied on documentation, reports, fact checking, and administrative regularity in donations to prove its integrity and show that gifts have been properly distributed and serve their intended purpose. Several studies on contemporary NGOs argue that bureaucratization and the increasing culture of audit has become the new model of ethical conduct guiding organizations' work (Merry 2011; Alvaré 2010). Even if it collects religious donations, Imran's organization does not stand apart, and has been influenced by this culture of maintaining legitimacy, trust and accountability. Imran's opinion that working for the creator is not a guarantee of accountability is somewhat singular, since most other workers and volunteers believed they must be accountable at all times because God sees everything.[64] His statement is nevertheless relevant in that it illustrates how the religious character of Muslim NGOs, while being one possible proof of honesty and legitimacy, did not completely exempt them from potential suspicion.

[64] For example, my interlocutors were often repeating that a good Muslim cannot donate money that is not *halal* for charitable purposes (money that would have been stolen or extorted for instance). This money would not count as one's obligatory zakat donation because even if the 'recipient' might not see the difference, God knows that this money has been acquired wrongly.

In her ethnography of a Ugandan charitable organization run by Catholic sisters, Scherz (2014) describes a similar situation. Unlike the organizations I researched, the sisters she worked with refused to engage seriously with the practices of audit adopted by the international aid system and NGOs engaged in sustainable development activities. They instead relied on an ethics of virtue and faith in the divine providence to orient their charitable activities (2014, 112–13). Doing so, however, marginalizes them from the international aid community and disqualifies them from being recognized as legitimate and efficient NGOs. They are instead criticized for their lack of structure and for the inconsistent ways in which they make use of religious donations. While Scherz argues that the sisters did not aspire to join the "mainstream" secular aid system and develop practices of sustainable development, this was not the case for the Muslim NGOs I surveyed. Muslim NGOs workers and volunteers I met do feel the pressure to follow an ethics of audit to prove that they can develop a new and efficient way of doing Islamic charity, oriented towards sustainable development.

This discussion about trust and accountability requirements is important to show that organization workers are pressured to prove their integrity, and that efforts to develop methods to ensure transparency and accountability, often based on the same bureaucratic practices employed by most NGOs, sometimes lead to consequences that workers and volunteers neither anticipate nor wish. These consequences include excessive attention to the recipients' moral worth, or exclusion of deserving recipients, such as Shabnam, the woman dying from tuberculosis.

Making choices

Organization workers did not simply remain passive towards the challenges of institutionalized charity and its consequences on the selection of recipients. The last two examples I gave—funding

low-quality education and women's dowry—show that there are also many instances in which organization workers deprioritize efficiency because of its ethical implications and the complexity of the poverty they encounter. For example, emergency needs push Community Trust to go back to a more "classical" form of charity when Tahira decides to fund *madrasa* students instead of English private medium school students. On many other occasions, the pressures drawing from the intensity and urgency of needs lead to responses based on personal feelings of compassion and empathy rather than on efficiency, administrative rationality and transparency (Fassin and Gomme 2012; Bornstein and Redfield 2011).

Organization workers and volunteers I spoke with were conscious that they could not, and *should* not, entirely control the distribution process. While giving me a ride from the centre one afternoon, two staff members criticized NGOs for their calculative logic and corporate style: where each travel expense must be counted and reimbursed, each *chai* offered must be refunded, with no space left for the free gift. The day they refused to help Shabnam, the woman suffering from tuberculosis, the director and other staff were reflecting on their choice; they were preoccupied that an attempt to be professional and efficient had diverted them from the sacred ethics of giving and the obligation to attend to the most in need.

In her analysis of Islam and voluntary work in contemporary Egypt, Deeb (2011) reports similar tensions. One the one hand, volunteers she met highlighted the bureaucratic structures and practices of their organizations to illustrate that they were practicing "modern" and efficient forms of Islamic charity (2011, 176). On the other hand, they criticized these same bureaucratic approaches for being too close to Western notions of modernity, where recipients are treated as an anonymous public. They instead suggested that Islamic values emphasized human relations in practices of aid over bureaucratic practices. Volunteers in Deeb's research were thus constantly

negotiating between presenting themselves as modern subjects, and preserving what they viewed as a more humane and Islamic approach to charitable work.

In Community Trust, the excessive requirements placed on recipients were also a source of dilemmas for organization workers, echoing the struggles of the Egyptian volunteers that Deeb writes about. While inviting me for tea at her house in an affluent Lucknow neighbourhood, one of the founding members told me that she did not think the organization should focus on the moral behaviours of poor people to ensure an "efficient" use of the donation. In an attempt to explain that distribution should not be based exclusively on moral behaviours, she told me "Poor have no morals, how can we ask them to do their prayers with an empty stomach" (2014-08). Many volunteers also believed that comportments could not and should not always be controlled. Tahira believed that some people came to the clinic to receive free medication and resell it elsewhere. Volunteers in Community Trust said they were aware that some people claimed to be exemplary Muslims simply to increase their possibilities of getting donations. Tahira's following statement summarizes perfectly the other volunteers' feeling: "It breaks my heart to see them all each week you know. In truth they all deserve the money, they are all so poor. But what can I do". Overall, most of the Islamic charitable organization workers and volunteers I met during my fieldwork had mixed feelings about the "NGO culture," even if they were themselves involved in an organization, considered their work to be a necessity, and were making sure to adopt strict accountability practices.

This brings me to discuss the role of personal choice in charitable aid practices. In contrast to studies focusing exclusively on Islamic exegetical traditions, one trend in anthropology has been to look at the importance of everyday interactions in the formation of one's moral and religious values (Osella and Soares 2010; Deeb 2011; Schielke 2010). In other words, some scholars have

recently proposed a shift in focus from the study of "Islam" to "being Muslim"(cf. Marsden and Retsikas 2012, 2; Metcalf 2009). Das (2010), Pandian (2009), and Pandian and Ali (2010), for example, draw attention to the role of the ordinary and everyday life in the formation of one's moral values and religious belonging in South Asia. Supported by fieldwork conducted among Muslims living in a poor neighbourhood of Delhi, Das argues that the Muslim sense of belonging in India, and notions of what it means to be a good Muslim, are dimensions of everyday life shaped by religious practices (religious text readings; poetry reciting; ways of dressing), but also by the commonalities of their everyday living with Hindus and other religious groups (Das 2010). Religious and moral subjects thus constitute themselves through everyday life events and relations. In a similar way, Deeb (2011) insists that it is through their everyday interactions with other youth that young Muslim women in Egypt come to shape what piety means for them in a modern context. The analytical perspective developed by Das and others who focus on everyday practices contrasts to studies that focus exclusively on Islamic exegesis and texts. For Das, this analytical perspective is important because it goes beyond the idea that individuals belong to already constituted religions and have an initial religious identity.[65] In the current global political context, where discourses on what "Islam" is or is not are mushrooming, the focus on everyday practices also serves as an important analytical tool to highlight the diversity of Islamic traditions, their adaptation to local contexts, and the flexible character of religion (Osella and Soares 2010; Marsden and Retsikas 2012). These are features I emphasize throughout this thesis by showing how practices and institutions of Islamic charity incorporate and merge with new approaches to economic development.

[65] As Fernando and Fadil (2015) rightly point out, the focus on everyday practices is not particular to the anthropology of Islam and reflects a larger turn towards practice theory in anthropology.

However, in a recent critical commentary on the concept of everyday Islam, Fernando and Fadil argue that the focus on everyday practices can be problematic because it often draws an opposition between social or moral norms and individual agency (Fadil and Fernando 2015, 74). In the literature on everyday Islam, they argue, everyday practices are conceived as spaces of disruption, of contradiction with norms, and even as forms of resistance to religious norms (Fadil and Fernando 2015, 69). They suggest instead "considering the complex discursive and affective attachments one holds to religious prescriptions and practices, and not only the extent to which they are being realized" (2015, 70–71). This approach, according to them, allows analysts to pay attention to how people themselves make sense of discrepancies between moral ideals and concrete actions, rather than interpreting actions that differ from one's religious values as signs of resistance, or of critical engagement with social and moral norms.

My own findings build on these nuances that Fadil and Fernando bring to the study of Islam and everyday practices. By aiming to concretize a project of self-improvement and economic development through charitable action, workers do not seek to reinvent or resist Islamic norms of charitable giving. When they try a development-oriented approach to charity, they do not purposefully contradict religious principles. Charitable workers and volunteers are thus not picking elements of different normative orders, or setting aside Islamic principles in certain contexts to favour more development-oriented ethics. On the contrary, the workers try to combine these "complex moral landscapes" in a way that is coherent with their religious values (cf. Deeb and Harb 2013, 10).

At the same time, I show that attempts to "do good" and develop a form of charity based on Islamic principles and oriented towards social change bring unintended consequences (see also Mittermaier 2014b). Many ethical dilemmas emerge from the practice of institutionalized charity

and the nature of unique, individual cases that charitable workers and volunteers did not necessarily foresee. Islamic charity practiced in an institutional context gives rise to complex situations for which neither Islamic principles of religious giving nor bureaucratic principles of efficiency and regularity provide clear guidelines. Decisions about donations therefore often vary in response to charitable organization workers' attempts to act in the most ethically coherent way possible.

To summarize, my work stands contrary to certain theorizations of "everyday Islam" that emphasize individuals' contradictory behaviours and desires. I do not use the lens of everyday practices to suggest that workers and volunteers contradict or circumvent strict moral norms of religious giving in their attempt to foster efficient and development-oriented use of religious donations. Rather, I focus on how they deal with the consequences of choices in the everyday, and reshape their practices when they fail to follow the principles that these workers believe in (Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2011). The attention to everyday practices therefore remains important because it draws attention to the varieties of ways in which people seek to follow the religious principles in which they believe, even in novel and changing contexts such as in formal Islamic charitable institutions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how moral projects of social improvement imagined by Muslim charitable workers and volunteers are concretized in everyday actions. I show that while organizations try to develop a novel, efficient mode of doing charity, this intention leads to unintended consequences—such as the exclusion of certain deserving recipients—that organization workers and volunteers try to deal with in their practices. These consequences reflect

a feature of neoliberal development approaches, that involve a calculative logic and lead to an "economization of social life" (Brown 2015; Rudnyckyj 2010). Overall, however, organizations workers and volunteers do not try to push the goal of efficient charity to a point where it might conflict with religious principles. The aid we see in these organizations thus oscillates between a development-oriented logic and more immediate forms of support; it follows bureaucratic rationality, but also rejects it in certain circumstances.

While many studies, including this one, focus on how Muslim charitable organizations become part of a larger neoliberal development system (Atia 2013), I show that it is also important to examine how organizations do not adopt all the features of "development-oriented" NGOs, because workers recognize the consequences of these models and view Islamic ethics as counterbalancing "economic development by all means." Moreover, I show how organization workers are faced with a range of possible "good actions," and that the activities developed by the organization depend on circumstances and the personal opinions of each volunteer. Donation decisions are contextual, in that they depend on how each worker makes sense of the religious ethics of giving and the administrative ethics of efficiency, accountability and transparency. This is also the case in many other types of NGOs, both religious and non-religious, and an attention to the ethical dilemmas that arise in everyday practices helps us understand the concrete implications of humanitarian aid and development interventions (Gardner and Lewis 2015; Mosse 2013; Yarrow 2011b; Redfield 2012).

In the next chapter, I turn to Baji, another Muslim charitable organization leader who aspires to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in North India, especially for women. I highlight how her vision of improvement is grounded in specific values regarding development

and women's empowerment. She promotes women's self-development and active participation in the economic development of their communities, but not at all costs.

Chapter Four
Moral Underpinnings of Development: Muslim Women and Pious Empowerment

One by one, women were entering the *zenana* park [women's park] in the heart of the bustling *Aminabad* market in old Lucknow, settling down in the large tent that Baji[66] and a few Bazm-e-Khawateen [BeK] volunteers had set up.[67] Owned by the organization since its inception and sought-after by many businesses because of its prime location in one of the main markets of old Lucknow, the park was famous for hosting the monthly gatherings of the *khawateens* [women] since 1934.[68] Once they were in the tent and far enough from any male gaze at the outskirts of the park, women started removing their *hijab* or *niqab*, remaining only in their long black *burqa*. Baji waited for the joyful chatter to quiet down and for the women to find a seat before inviting the *alima* [female Islamic scholar] to open the monthly meeting with a prayer. The assembly of about sixty women, from all backgrounds and ages, joined her. Baji then took her place in front of the microphone and started that day's speech: "Sisters, as you know, BeK has two goals: educate women and develop our society. So many Muslims now live in precarious conditions. We cannot let this go."

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[66] I call the leader of the organization Baji [elder sister], a term of respect that many participants were using to address her.

[67] *Bazm-e-Khawateen* means the "Association of Women." All names of BeK participants and members are pseudonyms.

[68] The park belongs to the organization but is administered by the municipal corporation [*nagar nigam*]. The ownership of the park is contested since it is located right in the middle of a commercial market and is thus coveted by many business owners. The organization faces constant struggle to preserve its right over the park.

In the two previous chapters, I examined how NGO workers perceive their role in improving the living conditions of Muslims in India, notably through their handling of religious donations. By introducing the *zenana* park event, I want to delve further into how NGO workers imagine the role of the communities themselves in coming out of poverty, and how they convey these ideas via their social and charitable activities. I examine the values they want to inculcate to the communities they work with, such as individual responsibility and moral conduct, which they believe will help the needy improve their social and economic conditions. In particular, I aim to illustrate how projects of social and economic improvement are also profoundly gendered. In the *zenana park* example, to which I return later in this chapter, pious Muslim women actively engage with development issues affecting women and Muslim communities at large, and imagine their role on a path towards "progress."

In this chapter, I thus look at the intersection of gender, development, and Islam; more specifically, I examine how a pious Muslim women's organization links these three elements in its discourses and practices. I ask the following questions: In what terms do organizations such as BeK imagine socio-economic progress and women's contribution to local Muslim communities' development? How does the relation between Islam and economic development take shape when taking gender into account? In what ways do the perspectives of these organizations converge with or differ from other discourses on women's empowerment in the development sector, and how does this affect the positioning of Muslim women's organizations among other development actors?

Over the past thirty years, women's rights and gender equality have become key priorities in the field of international development and global human rights, as exemplified by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (United Nations 2010; Bernal and Grewal 2014; Rai 2008; Moser and

Moser 2005; Desai 2004; Kabeer 1994). Of course, India is not apart from this global tendency; gender and women's rights issues have been integrated into the country's development frameworks since the 1980s—even more so since India's economic liberalization in the 1990s and the expansion of NGOs' place in development and social welfare planning and provision (Bernal and Grewal 2014; A. Sharma 2008). Recently, Muslim women have also become prime targets of "development" on a global level (Abu-Lughod 2013, 2011).

In India, where the main religious groups have separate personal laws, development discourses have, among other things, focused on how to protect Muslim women's rights in a secular democracy. Given that women's status and role often represent central symbols of collective identities, and most importantly, of national identity, gender has also been a major concern in issues related to the integration of religious minorities (P. Chatterjee 2010; Das 2006). This has been especially true since the mid-1980s, when a court judgment on Muslim divorce sparked many debates on the compatibility between women's rights and religious rights (Vatuk 2008; Lemons 2013; Subramanian 2014; Agnes 1994).[69]

[69] The Shah Bano case (1985) marks a turning point in debates around the maintenance of religious personal laws in India. Shah Bano Begum, a divorced Muslim woman, filed a complaint to the court to receive alimony from her former husband, who refused to comply on the basis that he had fulfilled his obligations to his ex-wife under Muslim Personal Law. However, basing itself on the secular Criminal Procedure Code rather than on the Muslim Personal Law, the Supreme Court of India favoured Shah Bano and requested the husband to pay a higher amount for maintenance. Given that this judgement was passed during the growth of the Hindu nationalist movement—a period of increasing political tension between the Muslim minority and the Hindu majority—and included arguments about the need for a Universal Civil Code instead of a separate Muslim Personal Law, it led to massive protests from various conservative Muslim groups and clergy arguing that this judgement was an assault on their religious freedom. In this climate of politico-religious tension, the state was reluctant to take position against Muslims opposing the court's judgement, even though these Muslims were not necessarily representing the opinion of the majority. Consequently, to reduce the discontentment of the Muslims opposing the Court's ruling, the state passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights Upon Divorce) Act (MWPRDA) in 1986, which, among other things, prevented divorced Muslim women to request spousal support under the general Criminal Procedure Code, like other Indian women could do (Subramanian 2014, 2008, Narain 2008, 2001; Mullally 2004; Menon 2007; Sunder Rajan 2003; Pathak and Sunder Rajan 1989). Several feminist activists and women's groups from different religious backgrounds criticized the Muslim Women's Act's ratification for curtailing women's rights, although some analyses show that judgments following the Act were not necessarily detrimental to Muslim women. Controversies around the maintenance of personal laws have continued to arise since, the most recent being a court judgment banning the practice of "triple *talaq*" (instant divorce pronounced by the man) (Express Web Desk 2017;

The Sachar Report (2006) on the relative socio-economic disparities affecting Indian Muslims added new debates to the question of Muslim women's status and development. In addition to serving as a symbol of national identity, "women's development" is often used as an indicator of a society's development. In her work on women, Shia piety, and politics in Lebanon, Deeb argues that "women are frequently cast—as signifiers—in the role of 'barometer' of a society's location on a hierarchical and linear axis of 'civilizational status'" (Deeb 2009, 115; see also Abu-Lughod 2013, 2011). According to this line of thought, while the Sachar Report was not analyzing the condition of Muslim women exclusively, many interventions addressing women in particular were planned after its publication. Many began to perceive women who were also religious minorities as shaped by "multiple axes of discrimination": "a higher social, political and economic vulnerability combined with the absence of equal protection under the law" (Narain 2008, 18, 2001). In response to the report, one of India's interventions focusing specifically on Muslim women was to allocate funds to NGOs, regional state agencies, and educational institutions to implement the national Scheme for Leadership Development of Minority Women (also called *Nai Roshni* [New Light]). The plan aimed at empowering minority women to improve gender justice and equality (GOI 2013a).[70]

Apart from state policies and programs, non-governmental initiatives for Muslim women also increased significantly in the years following the publication of the Report. In Lucknow, many non-religious women's organizations, such as Sanatkada/Sadbhavna Trust, Nirantar, and the

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The Wire Staff 2017).

[70] According to government documentation, around sixty NGOs had been deemed eligible for funding in 2012 in the state of Uttar Pradesh, around fifteen of which were situated in Lucknow (GOI 2013a, 4). At the time of my fieldwork however, only three organizations in Lucknow had been able to receive the funds available from this program, although several NGOs had applied for funding. Many NGOs workers believed that this was a consequence of state corruption. After the failure of the scheme, the central government designed two new schemes for Muslim women that, reportedly, are now being implemented.

Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI), created empowerment programs for Muslim women. Those that already had projects on Muslim women and law—such as special counselling or workshops on women's rights in Islam—added programs on women and education, access to the job market, and access to special government schemes and programs.

Finally, most Muslim charitable organizations have not been staying at the margins of this effort to "develop Muslim women." As I stated in the Introduction, women-led Muslim organizations have been emerging for the past twenty years and focus on empowering poorer Muslim women.[71] Moreover, the vast majority of Muslim organizations do include activities broadly related to "women" in their scope of interventions. This concern for women's development seems to have increased across organizations at large—even in older, male-led organizations that used to include fewer female members and did not specifically set out to support women's empowerment.[72] There thus seems to be a consensus that women need to be "empowered" to improve the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in India.

While this shared focus on poor Muslim women's social and economic conditions is certainly important to reverse prior neglect, different parties imagine women's empowerment in distinct ways. Some social workers and activists view religion, especially Islam, as an impediment to women's participation in social and economic development. The Sachar Report's conclusions, for example, triggered many debates surrounding whether Islamic values and women's role in Islam might help explain the relative deprivation of Indian Muslims. A common opinion is that rules for

[71] Several of these Muslim women's organizations have gained more visibility since they started integrating issues of legal reform in their agendas (Vatuk 2008). Their objective is to support the development of gender-sensitive intervention and the protection of women's rights from *within* Islam. They request and support reforms of Muslim Personal Law that would protect gender rights but without questioning the validity of separate religious personal laws *per se* (Vatuk 2008).

[72] As an example, see Shehabuddin (2008b) for a detailed analysis of how *Jamaat-i-Islami* Bangladesh has started integrating issues related to the protection of women's right to study, work and vote in their agenda.

gender separation are generally stricter for Muslim women, which prevents them from being active in the public sphere and contributing to political and economic life.

I argue in this chapter that while Islam, and religion in general, is often viewed as a limit to women's empowerment, the pious women's discourses I describe here contradict these views; rather than limiting women's development, these discourses shape an ideal of social and economic improvement in which women play a core role. Drawing on my observations among BeK members, I show that the organization's discourses support a form of economic participation that challenges both the idea of achieving economic independence that used to inform the women's movement in India and elsewhere, as well as positions of Reformist Islam that essentially conceive of women as guardians of moral values in the familial sphere. Instead of limiting their members to that sphere, BeK organizers encourage them to contribute to the economic and social development of their families and neighborhoods through self-improvement, professional work—under certain conditions—and social work for the community. In doing so, BeK proposes a form of pious empowerment that fits with global neoliberal economic development discourses, but that challenges certain feminist liberal ideas such as the need to exercise autonomous and free will to become "empowered."

There is a rich literature on how some Indian Muslim women's organizations attempt to debunk the commonly perceived friction between Islam, women's rights, and modernity by advocating for the protection of gender rights within Muslim Personal Law in India (Tschalaer 2017; Lemons 2013; Subramanian 2014, 2008, Narain 2008, 2001; Vatuk 2008; Sunder Rajan 2003; Agnes 1999, 1994; Pathak and Sunder Rajan 1989). Vatuk (2008) has characterized the leaders of these organizations as "Islamic feminists." The organization leader I write about in this chapter is also an active advocate of maintaining separate religious personal laws. She offers Islamic legal

counselling services and regularly presents her position in the media on issues regarding Muslim Personal Law and the protection of Muslim women's legal rights. Along with the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB), and the Lucknow Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA), BeK represents one of the three major Islamic feminist organizations in Lucknow that actively fight for women's rights within Muslim Personal Law, albeit from different perspectives. The issue of legal rights is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.[73] I instead contribute a new perspective to the literature by focusing on how female Muslim activists such as Baji break the perceived discrepancies between Islam and women's development through their conceptualization of women's role in economic revitalization and community improvement.

In the rest of the chapter, I discuss some key transformations in the relationship between the women's movement and religion, and discuss the literature on Islam, gender and economic participation. I then give an overview of Bazm-e-Khawateen's history and structure. Next, I describe two of the monthly *zenana park* meetings that were briefly introduced in the opening of this chapter to analyze how the organization articulates the relation between Islam, women and local community development. In the last parts of the chapter, I situate the pious empowerment project proposed by the organization among other perspectives on women's empowerment. I conclude by discussing how the organization's vision uniquely impacts its position in Muslim religious networks and larger development networks.[74]

[73] For more information on these three organizations' agendas regarding the protection of Muslim women's rights, see (Tschalaer 2017, 2015; Lemons 2013).

[74] My objective in this chapter is not to evaluate the outcomes and implications of the organizations' work for the women who use its services. I focus on the organization workers themselves, and on how they imagine their role in community development.

Muslim women, development, and economic participation

The first "women in/and development" (WID/WAD) models used in international development interventions focused on giving women access to spheres of economic development and other advantages of modernization from which they were previously excluded. These approaches were based on the argument that women constitute a universal category facing similar forms of oppression in patriarchal systems (A. Sharma 2006; Young 2002; Warren and Bourque 1991).[75] By the 1990s, gender and development (GAD), women's rights, and empowerment approaches started replacing these models in most international development frameworks. This shift was partially spearheaded by postcolonial and subaltern scholars of the 1980s and 1990s, who highlighted the inequalities underlying the production of knowledge about women and development (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1984). These scholars argued for a critical examination of who has the power to define the categories of "women" and "women's needs," and for creating space for women's own voices (Fraser 1989; Ong 1988).

The increasing importance of the concept of "gender" in third wave feminist and gender studies and, more broadly, in the social sciences also helped amplify a variety of women's voices. Assuming that gender is a social construct, scholars focused on the heterogeneity of women, showing that being a "woman" could be experienced in different ways depending on factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, or religion (Rai 2011; Lewin 2006; Mills 2003; Berry 2003; Kabeer 1994; Di Leonardo 1991; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Ortner and Whitehead 1981). In doing so, they

[75] There is a rich scholarship on the inclusion of "women" and "gender" in global development discourses that provides detailed information on the transition from WID and WAD models to gender and empowerment. See for example (Parpart et al. 2002; Desai and Potter 2013; Jackson and Pearson 1998; Staudt 1997; Visvanathan et al. 1997; Kabeer 1994; Tinker 1990).

stressed the importance of giving women the agency to express their own desires in order to overcome hierarchies and gender inequality.

Replacing the older approaches to women and development was thus part of a self-reflexive process of the women's movement on an international level: acknowledging that women are not all equal, that power dynamics shape relations among them, that more space should be given to the multiplicity of women's lived realities and their self-determination, and that religiosity and religious identity could be determining dimensions of some women's lives (Govinda 2012; A. Sharma 2008; McIlwaine and Datta 2003).

In India, too, by the mid-1980s and 1990s, more voices started to emerge among women activists suggesting that the so-called "secular women's movement," mainly directed by urban upper caste Hindus, was knowingly or unknowingly conflating upper caste Hindu values with secular "universal" values (Govinda 2012; A. Rao 1998; Agnes 1994).[76] Activists, among whom were "Islamic feminists," voiced the concern that minority groups (Muslims, but also other religious minorities, lower caste groups, and ethnic minorities) could not find their place in this movement.

Until then, Muslim women had not been the subject of much attention, given that many of the earlier feminist activists—similarly to Western feminist activists—believed the women's movement to be based on secular principles and to represent all women. Moreover, the growing popularity (notably among women) of Hindu nationalist forces and their communal discourse in the mid-1980s led some to realize that religion, as a social identity marker, had political importance

[76] I use Govinda's definition of the Indian women's movement: "All the mobilizing and organizing of women intended to make some sort of social change, which in direct and indirect ways contributes to a change in gender relations" (2012, 3). This interpretation is useful to emphasize the links between different actors; from gender rights advocacy activists to party-affiliated women's organizations or welfare-oriented development agencies.

and impacted women's lives in ways that could not be overlooked (Sunder Rajan 2003).[77] One journalist and women's rights activist, reflecting on her own privileged position, told me:

> There are certain milestones in Indian, you know, history, modern history of the women's movement which really makes one wonder why we never thought of it before [the impact of religious identity on women]. We were brought up in the Nehruvian euphoria for the first thirty-forty years [after Independence of India] [but] the discourse changed. For instance, religion, caste, all these things didn't matter when we were growing up. I didn't know that one could figure out the caste by the sir names. I didn't know that! My children are far more smarter. […] I, for instance, till I entered the real world and started journalism, I was clueless that Muslims did not have education because everybody in my [Muslim] family was educated! (N6, Lucknow, 2013-11, Original in English).

Many activists like her now claim it is necessary to adopt "religion-sensitive" approaches to women's rights and development that take into account the importance of religious experience and sense of belonging. However, many others remain rooted in a fundamental opposition between women's rights and religion, based on the idea that women of religious minorities should be freed from their double subordination by patriarchy and religious norms. In a large part of the feminist and development scholarship, women's development and empowerment remain tied to public participation and achieving economic independence, notably through professional work.

A few recent studies have tried to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relations between gender and economic participation among Muslim communities (Kongar, Olmsted, and Shehabuddin 2014; Shehabuddin 2008a). For instance, some studies have shown that Muslim women's limited economic participation in certain contexts is not necessarily associated with Islam, but with variables such as class, caste, level of education, and political power (Zoya Hasan and Menon 2005). Other studies have highlighted how economic participation does not always

[77] See for example the work of Bacchetta (2004; Bacchetta and Power 2013), Sen (2006), Banerjee (2006), Sehgal (2007) and Sarkar and Butalia (1995) about the participation of women in right-wing Hindu nationalist parties and groups.

have a positive, empowering effect for women when it is not combined with other changes, such as the division of household responsibilities or adequate payment (Olmsted 2005; C. Wilkinson-Weber 2004). Finally, like this chapter, recent scholarship analyzes how women might give different meanings to economic participation as one of the main forms of public participation and empowerment, and shape the parameters of their economic contribution in several ways.

In that direction, the scholarship on the links between Islamic ethics and economy is relevant to understand how Muslim women imagine their economic participation, even though many of these studies do not specifically focus on women (Rudnyckyj 2010; Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). Deeb's (2011) and Mahmood's (2005) work on women and public piety is also useful to understand the modalities of engagement with economy and development, since questions of women's economic integration are closely tied to questions of participation in the public sphere.

Bazm-e-Khawateen

Bazm-e-Khawateen is the oldest and one of the largest Sunni Muslim women's organization located in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Founded in 1934, it started as a small collective of women who would gather for prayers and religious teachings. In the early 1990s, the organization took a different turn with the arrival of a new director. By trying to "modernize" its structures and goals, the organization followed the path of many other Islamic charitable groups that emerged after India's economic liberalization, along with a multitude of "secular" non-governmental organizations.

BeK expanded its scope beyond religious activities to conduct different religious and social services for women, such as running a *madrasa* for adult women, offering free legal counselling, organizing dowry-free marriages for low-income families, offering a variety of training courses

for women (computer training, yoga day, starting small businesses), and coordinating the transfer of charitable donations from richer members to poorer members. BeK is, however, mostly known for the monthly gatherings of its members in *zenana* park [women's park] as illustrated in the vignette introducing this chapter.

The organization claims that over 60,000 women have become members throughout the state of Uttar Pradesh. This information is hard to verify, since membership forms are not renewed each year, but the organization does have branches in many towns of Uttar Pradesh.[78] In Lucknow, the organization is largely administered by Baji, its charismatic leader, but also has a board composed of women from modest and wealthy backgrounds.

Baji and her predecessors belong to different generations of the same wealthy family, the *Firangi Mahal* lineage. The *Firangi Mahalis* are a renowned family of Muslim scholars, some of whom were involved in the fight for Indian independence (Robinson 2007). The founder of BeK, Begum Sultana Hayat, was the wife of Hayatullah Ansari, a major figure among the *Firangi Mahalis*, Member of Parliament for the Congress Party, and founder of the Urdu newspaper *Qaumi Awaz.*[79] Baji, who took the leadership of BeK after Begum Sultana Hayat's death, was herself married to the son of the late Hayatullah Ansari, and her own maternal family had been very involved in social activism and national politics. Her mother, like her husband's parents, was the first Muslim woman to join Gandhi's *ashram*. By the time of independence, they were thus all closely associated with the Congress party—and not with the Muslim League, who led the movement for the creation of Pakistan, a fact that Baji often publicly reiterates to illustrate how Muslim socioeconomic development is an asset for Indian nationalism (see Chapter Five).

[78] I had the opportunity to meet the leaders of the Meerut and Moradabad branches on my way to Muzaffarnagar.
[79] The movie Neecha Nagar (Chetan Anand, 1946) is about the life of Hayatullah Ansari.

Baji herself started getting involved in social and political work early in her life. In college, she opened a small school for economically disadvantaged students in Moradabad. She also became president of her college, and recounted proudly that she was the only women in *burqa* in the college to do so. Baji told me that her mother and maternal grand-mother [*nani*], especially, had always followed strict *purdah* rules[80] and did not let her apply to become an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, the higher rank in government administration. As her mother, however, she found many other avenues for public engagement, and described her mother and herself as women with strong characters.

Baji was indeed an extremely outspoken person; she regularly expressed her opinions in newspapers and media and presented herself as an independent candidate for the Regional State Elections in 2009. When she got involved in BeK in 1994, it was with the clear objective of bringing a social and political component to the organization, to help women get educated and overcome the socioeconomic "backwardness" of the Muslim community.

The location where Baji decided to set up her office was a political act in and of itself that denotes this kinship tradition. Although she and her family lived in a wealthy neighbourhood at the outskirts of old Lucknow, she decided to buy an ancestral property in the *Firangi Mahal* neighbourhood to establish her madrasa and run her centre. The neighbourhood looked nothing like it had in the eighteenth century, when the *Firangi Mahal* family of highly educated teachers and religious scholars had a remarkable influence in religious networks, and were engaged and visible in the public sphere (Robinson 2001). The neighbourhood, located in the heart of old Lucknow, now consisted of a few dark and overcrowded alleys mostly occupied by *chikan* and

[80] *Purdah* literally means curtain, it is used to talk about Muslim women's veiling practices but also refers more generally to all rules of modesty applicable to Indian women in public and private spheres.

zardosi fabrication shops, a fairly unprosperous embroidery industry largely dominated by Muslims (C. M. Wilkinson-Weber 1999; Hasnain 2016). In settling her organization there, Baji was hoping to bring back to the neighbourhood some of its lost pride. Part of her office had been turned into a small museum commemorating the history of the *Firangis Mahalis* and their participation in the Indian national movement. On the walls of the office, one could see framed pictures of famous *Firangis Mahalis*, some even posing with Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister.

As in the two other organizations I present in this thesis, the people behind BeK are part of a long history of social and political involvement. Kinship relations, familial genealogies and reputations are crucial to understanding the position these organizations occupy in local communities, the kind of messages they can convey, and the channels though which their messages circulate. The regular members of BeK—those attending at least the monthly *zenana* park meetings and special activities—were largely multi-generational and regrouped women from diverse socio-economic classes. Most of the women participating in the various activities came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but a small regular group of wealthier women—many friends with the director—used to attend, as well. Women generally resided in neighbouring areas of old Lucknow. Some had been attending BeK's meetings and activities for several years, first with their mothers and elder female relatives, then by themselves.

One of the oldest women had been attending the monthly meetings for more than sixty years when I met her. Women in their fifties and sixties who had been attending for the last fifteen or more years were not rare, but the gatherings also attracted newcomers every month. Most of the women I met had learned about the organization through other female members, or, along with

their families and husbands, had heard about Baji on the radio, read about her in Urdu newspapers, or learned about the organization through word of mouth.

Because of its background and reputation, the organization did not have to actively recruit as much as the non-religiously affiliated women's organizations in Lucknow that generally struggled to reach out to poor Muslim women. Baji's affiliation to the *Ansaris* of the *Firangi Mahal* lineage gave her significant notoriety, and her religious knowledge was generally well-respected. Many members of the organization mentioned to me that the director's religious credentials had played a key role in their or their parent's decision to let them participate in the organizations' activities. A lot of the women attending BeK's events had limited freedom of movement out of the domestic sphere, and were allowed to come out of their houses for these meetings specifically because of their religious nature, the director's good reputation, and her knowledge of Islamic law and principles.

Members' motivations for attending the organization's activities or using its services were quite variable. Many of the regular members told me that the *zenana* gatherings were a good occasion to socialize with their female friends and other women who they would not have the opportunity to meet otherwise. Others started coming to learn more about Islam. Tanveer (25 years) mentioned, for example, that she attended meetings to be able to pass on what she learned about "what is good" and "what the good Islamic practices are" to others.[81] Some like Safia (50 years) first came in contact with BeK through its other activities and services. A mother of four daughters and two sons, Safia asked the association's help to pay the fees for her daughter's Bachelor in Technology, which she received. She has now been attending the *zenana* park meetings for the last seven years.

[81] Noted conversation, Lucknow, 2014-06.

Others became members because it was an opportunity to practice singing or preaching in public. New young *alimas* were often invited to give religious teachings to the women. Finally, some women (and their families) would only come a few times for specific services offered by the organization, mostly the legal counselling services or the "match-making" services. Baji had taken the initiative of arranging weddings for poor families who could not afford dowry and wedding expenses for their daughters, and would organize collective dowry-free weddings in the park. Somewhat against her wishes, she ended up collecting personal profile forms for potential husbands and wives, which people would then consult to see if they made a good match.[82] Baji did not like the fact that women would come only for that purpose, and encouraged women to attend the other activities, as well. Her organization had a religious, social and political vocation and she did not want it to become solely a matrimonial agency.

The structure of this organization is slightly different from other NGOs, as it does not directly collect any type of funding, be it government grants, personal donations, corporate donations, or religious alms. The director of the organization did not want to bear the responsibility of handling donations, and wanted to avoid suspicion and accusations of corruption, as discussed in the previous chapter. The organization has therefore relied partly on the organization leader's personal funds to organize activities and purchase necessities; for example, the organization purchased a three-story building with the director's family's personal funds, which now hosts a computer centre, the women's *madrasa* and the director's office where the legal consultation sessions and other daily visits of members take place. To bolster its resources, the organization occasionally requests donations for specific activities. The director works voluntarily, and most of the activities

[82] The profile form that people left in her office for consultation generally consisted of a page with a profile photo indicating their age, caste, skin colour, occupation, and requirements regarding the future bride or groom. This profile document was in all point similar to profile advertisements posted in Indian newspapers and match making websites.

are run by volunteers, as well, with the exception of two madrasa teachers, one office administrator, and the cleaning staff. All other activities are made possible by the wealthiest members, who pay directly for what the organization needs (e.g. snacks and beverages for the *zenana* park meetings, funds for publications, etc.) upon the director's request, instead of giving their donations in advance to the organization.

Relatedly, the organization served as a platform to put wealthy women in touch with poorer women for zakat distribution purposes. All through the year, but especially during the month of Ramadan, the director would connect members who wanted to give their zakat to women in the neighbourhood who might need their donation. Zakat and other voluntary donations usually went to young women needing support to fund their studies or for hospitalizations.[83]

To summarize, this overview of the organization, its leader, and its members is important to show BeK's similarities with the other Muslim charitable organizations I have introduced. Like the other organizations, BeK and its new leader aim to reach beyond "traditional" religious education and charitable work, instilling social and economic changes in the community and promoting ideals of middle class, pious, active, and educated women. While I explained that members join BeK to benefit from a variety of services and activities, Bek encourages all women to follow her teachings and get involved in her project of moral, social, and economic reform. I have also showed that like in many other organizations, the leader builds on a familial tradition of political and social commitment to carry on her projects.

At the same time, BeK has a unique position as a women's organization. Baji identified herself as a progressive Muslim women's rights activist, but also wanted to preserve her legitimacy in

[83] Like Community Trust, BeK would also verify that religious alms would be distributed to people with genuine needs. She would use the *zenana* park events as a verification system to meet women in person or, as in the witness system, rely on other trusted members' assessment.

more religious circles. As such, she carefully crafted her public image "in between boxes." For example, she did not wear a full black burqa, but had designed an ample long sleeve office uniform coming in a variety of colours that she and her staff would wear with assorted headscarves. She would, at times, celebrate the contribution of the *Firangi Mahali* to Islamic culture in India, while at other times dissociating herself from the "liberal" reputation of the lineage, depending on her audience. For example, I once saw her tell a man who had come to see her to inquire about the *madrasa* for his daughter that she was not fully supporting the *Firangi Mahal* legacy because she knew that he belonged to the *Tablighi Jamaat.*[84] Later, she told me that most contemporary *Firangi Mahalis* were not following their ancestors' path anyway—some had become *Deobandis* or even *Tablighis*; however, she was afraid that some families would refuse to send their daughters to the *madrasa* and the other activities because her office was situated in the heart of the *Firangi Mahal* neighbourhood.

I now turn to two events that illustrate how BeK imagines women's contributions to the social and economic development of local marginalized Muslim communities.

Being a good Muslim woman: *Zenana* Park meeting 1

The monthly gatherings in *zenana* park, which I attended throughout my fieldwork year and then again in 2015, usually attracted fifty to a hundred women. As in the introductory example, the director of the organization would set up a large tent under which there were rows of chairs and a small stage where she would sit, in the company of various guests. The guest speakers usually always included one senior *alima*, a few women who would sing devotional songs, and experts in the topic of the month.

[84] *Tablighi Jamaat* is a large pietist, proselytizing organization founded in the 1920s in India, but that gained worldwide popularity in the 1980s. For additional information see Iqtidar (2017) and Sikand (2002).

The monthly gathering that I describe here was organized around the theme of time management. As usual, the meeting lasted about two hours and started with devotional songs, followed by the teachings of the director (thirty to sixty minutes), the senior *alima*, one to two younger *alimas* and/or special guests. The speeches were interrupted by the call [*azaan*] for the afternoon prayer [*asr*]. Women would then readjust their veils, do their prayers together [*namaaz*], and follow-up with the meeting after.

On that day, the director restated a comment that was said over and over in the gatherings: Muslims are "backward," and the only way to escape this backwardness is through proper religious and "wordly" education [*deen aur duniya ki taleem*]. Similarly to several other Islamic charities that I met, the director frequently referred to the findings of the Sachar Committee Report to shake up the crowds: "The Report has evidence that we are poorer than the Dalits [lowest group in the caste hierarchy]! We cannot let this go!" Diverging from the theme of time management, she commented that contemporary Indian Muslim families preferred to invest in superficial consumer goods rather than make the necessary sacrifices to purchase a good education for their children.[85] More specifically, her critique focused on women's lack of education.

As she often did, the director argued that one of the reasons for this Muslim "backwardness" uncovered by the Sachar Committee Report was that women did not know how to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. "You don't know how to fulfill your tasks on time and you waste the money of your husbands on un-useful things!" She added that this was largely due to the local *ulamas*' [religious scholars/authorities] own ignorance of the proper prescriptions regarding women and education in Islam. Through literacy and proper religious education, women would learn, at

[85] She refers here to private education, based on the widely shared perspective in India that free public schooling has no value (see Chapters Two and Three).

minimum, how to maintain a tidy house, cook healthy meals for their family, maintain a tight budget, and overall, insure that the atmosphere of the domestic sphere would be conducive to stimulate children in their studies and husbands in their work. She adds:

> *Allah taala* [The most glorified] also asks you to follow the world. We think we are good because we wear the burqa but this is not enough to be good Muslim. Do your work in good ways for God. So many of us misuse our time, we don't even do our cooking on time because we don't know how to manage our time […] When a mother is educated you don't have these kinds of problem, her children go to school and turn out well. All this because of illiteracy...
>
> When you choose a *bahu* [daughter in law], you only choose the one who knows the Quran and don't check for anything else. But there is no age to get educated… (Lucknow, 2015-06).

In this part of her speech, Baji stresses how religious conduct is not just about prayers: education helps women become good Muslims and, relatedly, helps them manage a household efficiently.

The director went on to insist that women should stop waiting for others to help them, and should instead take responsibility: "all day women are complaining about their problems. It is true that Muslims here have a lot of difficulties, but Allah said do your work, do hard work [*mehnat karo*]. We are not beggars." She then commented on the poor living conditions of many of her organization's members, mentioning that some Muslim families earn only 250 to 300 rupees a day, that the public services are in very bad condition, and that medicines were all outdated in public hospitals. "How will our community [*qaum*] progress in these conditions?" Her answer to her own question was that Allah had asked its followers to show discipline and make good use of their time, and that following this command was now even more crucial given the difficulties of the Muslim community.

As this example highlights, Baji and many other Muslim community workers and volunteers who I met believed Muslim "communities" could overcome underdevelopment by rectifying their

misinterpretations of Islam, such as focusing excessively on the "religious" dimension of their practice at the expense of other important aspects of Islam. As Baji underscored in this event and others, religious practice meant much more than observing prayer times, keeping the required fasts, or being able to read the Quran in Arabic. Being a good Muslim (man and woman) also involved "worldly" practices such as maintaining a budget, working hard or investing in children's education to improve their employment prospects.

In many ways, the teachings and events presented in this example resemble the new ideals of womanhood that started appearing in the Islamic Reformist movements of the late nineteenth century, and in society in general (Metcalf 2014; Devji 1991). Under British occupation, Muslim reformists came to view the private familial sphere as the fortress of Islam and went on a "civilizing" mission to educate women so that they become proper bearers and transmitters of Islamic values (Devji 1991; Minault 1998). This new ideal of womanhood, combined with the importance given to independent reasoning [*ijtihad*], made women's education a central concern. This led to the emergence of large public *madrasas* for women from the beginning of the twentieth century and throughout the 1950s (Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey 2004; Winkelmann 2005).

Reformist Islam thus aims to cultivate women who must become good housewives and pillars of Islam, so that they can raise the next generation of Muslims. Discourses such as Baji's speech, which focus on household management and good *tehzeeb* [culture/manner], are still part of the curriculum taught in most girl's madrasas (Winkelmann 2005; Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey 2004). As Jeffery, Jeffery, and Jeffrey (2004) argue and as I have observed during my fieldwork, though, women's education in these curriculums is not designed to facilitate women's access to employment.

While this approach represents how several contemporary Muslim charitable organizations that have included women's education in their agendas perceive women's participation in development, BeK's perspective does more. BeK's activities and messages denote a focus on material development and on a form of engagement in community development that, to a certain extent, challenges Reformist ideals of womanhood. This *zenana* park meeting, and the example below, illustrate how being a good Muslim has both a spiritual and a material component; bringing changes in communities involves a "dual emphasis on both material and spiritual progress" (Deeb 2011, 5). While advocating for strong, gendered role divisions, Baji and other community workers have also insisted that women provide a necessary contribution to social and economic development, and that women must take responsibility for helping their community "improve." In this sense, the organization promotes an ideal in which women are central to familial religious and moral upbringing but should also be concerned about their community's economic well-being. The second vignette further illustrates how women's specific contributions to socioeconomic development take shape and promote entrepreneurship.

The solution is within you! Zenana Park meeting 2

The yearly *Eid Milan* celebration held at the end of the Ramadan was a much-awaited event among BeK's members, and would easily attract up to 300 or 400 women in the *zenana* park. Baji would invite journalists from the most popular media channels, allow food stalls in the compound of the park (which was unusual, given that the park is reserved for women, and street food sellers are usually men), and hold her BeK Yearly Award Ceremony. When the event took place while I was there in 2014, she had also invited a *qawwali* group [Sufi devotional music], which included a BeK member in its ranks, to perform on stage.

The celebration started with the singing of the national anthem and Baji's speech on the importance of national unity. Baji then told the story of Noorbano, one of the singers, who came out of poverty—with BeK's support—by entering the public sphere and using her devotional singing talents to work for the ETV Urdu channel.

The yearly award distribution followed. On stage, Baji and volunteer members had set up a table with large trophies, award certificates and bouquets of flowers. The awards were given to members who had distinguished themselves in the organization or showed an outstanding commitment to community social work. One by one, women were called up on stage to receive their award, and each time, a different person was asked to hand them their certificate, the organization's yearly report, and a bouquet of flowers. Journalists would then line up to take photos, along with a photographer hired by the organization, and myself (the director occasionally asked me to cover her events since I had a good camera).

The first award was given to one of the oldest members of the organization, Hasrat Jahan, for her involvement in women's education. In a conversation we had, Hasrat Jahan described herself as a housewife who would never come out of her house until she met BeK's founder. Inspired by this meeting, she decided she would no longer stay at home and would instead help women get educated. She then opened five Urdu learning centres for girls with BeK's financial support. Although the centres are now closed, since she feels too old to look after them, she expressed how happy she was to have volunteered for the community and contributed to women's education. Later, Hasrat Jahan also explained that she had stopped veiling after this transformation in her life, and that she was proud that her daughter was pursuing graduate studies—in engineering—something that she would never have thought imaginable.

The second award was given to Shahina, a twenty-four-year-old woman who had opened a small women's handicraft centre that year in her neighbourhood of old Lucknow. While introducing her at the microphone, Baji stressed that her work had not only empowered women in her neighbourhood, but also helped her family, as her parents were deceased and she had to support her sister and two children, one of whom was blind.

I met Shahina several times in and out of the organization and visited her centre on one occasion. Shahina told me that she initially wanted to become a tennis player, but her mother felt that the neighbourhood was getting unsafe because of Hindu-Muslim tensions and forbade her from straying far from the house. Taking advantage of her fluency in English, she applied for two government jobs after passing the necessary qualification exams. But she was then asked to make a bribe of five lakh rupees (Can$10,000) to obtain the position, for a salary rate of ₹13,000/month (Can$260/month). Since she was not able to gather these funds, she decided to start her own business and, as she told me, now puts all her hopes in this initiative.

She learned about BeK through a newspaper column that Baji had written, and enjoyed Baji's teachings. Shahina went to meet her for advice on how active women could manage their lives and Baji supported her in starting her centre. She now tries to pass on Baji's teachings to the fifteen to twenty women who joined her handicraft centre. She gives them advice on starting one's own business, obtaining a husband's consent to do so, combining work and *namaaz* [prayers] schedules, and following rules when going out of the house. At the time of my fieldwork, her handicraft centre was not yet profitable, but she was hoping to secure income for the centre soon with the sales of the women's crafts (e.g.: baby clothes, purses, wallets).

After giving the award to Shahina during the ceremony, the director distributed a few more awards. In each case, the director insisted on the religious exemplarity of the women receiving the

award, and on how they were respected in their professional endeavours for not compromising on their Islamic principles.

Towards the closing of the *Eid Milan* celebration, the *qawwali* group performed a few songs and then invited the crowd to join them in singing one last song, *Saare jahan se accha*, a popular anthem of national unity.[86] Baji closed the celebration by advertising BeK's services. She invited parents to register their daughters in the *madrasa* for the computer classes, the English classes I was providing, or the three-year full *alima* program. She also took the time to assure parents that they should not be worried about sending their daughters to the *madrasa,* because wearing the headscarf was mandatory inside the building.

The *Eid Milan* celebration example is significant because, since it was a public event covered by the media, its content and structure were carefully planned to reflect the director's objective and message. It is not a surprise, for example, that given the presence of the media, the celebration started and ended with songs of national unity (see Chapter Five). The inclusion of a *qawwali* group was also a way to publicly acknowledge a certain level of liberalism and critical stance towards Islamic reformist movements, since there are conflicted opinions as to whether listening and playing music is permitted in Islam, on the basis that it could encourage improper conduct. However, Baji also wanted to reassure parents that her *madrasa* respected *purdah* rules.

[86] The choice of this song is particularly significant because it is a reference to Muslims' participation in the building of the Indian nation. *Saare jahan se accha* is a *ghazal* [form of poetry] written in Urdu by Muhammad Iqbal in the beginning of the twentieth century, that came to be used as a patriotic song of opposition against the British Raj. While it has now persisted as a generic song of national unity, it is also a reminder of Muslims' contribution to the Independence movement, and to Indian unity and nationalism. As I discuss in the next chapter, Muslim charitable organization's projects of economic improvement were closely tied to nationalist claims and reminders that Muslims should also benefit equally from development programs and policy given that they are an integral part of the Indian nation.

More importantly for the focus of this chapter, the distribution of awards to highlight the social contribution of lay Muslim women in their communities is significant because it shows once again the dual emphasis on both spiritual and material development. Shahina and Hasrat Jahan provide reference models of exemplary Muslim women. They are both spiritually empowered, know and follow the Quran, and make positive changes in this life. Through their own self-improvement, they also help others.

Pious Empowerment

The *zenana* monthly gatherings and *Eid Milan* celebration focus on women making effective changes in this life. By improving themselves, they improve their status and that of their community. The awardees did not wait for someone else to support them, not even the state. Hasrat Jahan gave other girls the means to eventually come out of poverty by providing them education; Shahina started her own business to support her family instead of counting on an employment opportunity that might never have materialized in what she perceived as a corrupted state. Many of the women registered in her handicraft centre and in Baji's computer and English classes echoed this desire for personal development and "progress" [*aage badhana*].

> I wanted to do something to progress [*aage badhe*], I am a housewife [husband is a *zardosi* (embroidery) worker]. I had no skills in sewing, I was not even able to hold a needle and now I can sew many different things after just 2-3 months.
>
> I want to progress [*aage badhe*] and I want to work (Participants, Handicraft centre, 2014-07).

The director herself epitomised this self-empowerment model, since she was running a successful house furniture business that partially funded the organization. Moreover, her goal was to start a handicraft centre for women under BeK's umbrella. The more experience she gained running her

organization, the more she came to the realisation that economic self-sustainment—through the creation of enterprises—would be the key to bringing women and their families out of poverty. Starting an enterprise would achieve what neither state programs and schemes nor charitable donations and grants would ever be able to. In that sense, the discourses of BeK shared remarkable similarities with other Muslim and non-religious women's organizations that have focused on Muslim women's empowerment as the entry point to reduce the socioeconomic disparities between Muslims and the Hindu majority.

This strategy also appears to be in line with the transnational development discourses on gender and empowerment that I presented in the beginning of the chapter. These discourses position women at the centre of development processes and view personal empowerment as the best way to challenge unequal power structures, giving women the power to express their autonomous will (Govinda 2012; Rai 2008; A. Sharma 2006; Cornwall and Anyidoho 2010). By promoting an example of self-made women, women participating in business, women succeeding independently from the state, the discourses of the organization—and of many participants—echoed neoliberal development approaches linking individual empowerment to economic progress (A. Sharma 2008).[87]

There is now a growing scholarship providing examples of the compatibility of Islamic ethics with logics of neoliberal development (Atia 2013; Rudnyckyj 2010; Osella and Osella 2009). Through fieldwork conducted among South Indian Muslim entrepreneurs, for example, Osella and

[87] The concept of empowerment draws from multiple sources, including feminist critiques of previous development models and neoliberal visions of the state's role in development. Sharma argues that "empowerment" is not a concept that emerged only from development-related transnational sites like the United Nations or the World Bank to then become geographically localized. She rather associates "empowerment" to Ong and Collier's (2004) concept of translocal assemblage. Widespread global gender and development discourses now commonly integrate an amalgamation of various notions of empowerment (Moodie 2008; A. Sharma 2008; Andersen and Siim 2004). In this sense, BeK is also proposing a form of empowerment.

Osella have examined how successful business elites combine the development of their economic activities in India and the Gulf countries with efforts to promote local community development. The authors argue that these entrepreneurs articulate Islamic reformist discourses of personal transformation, responsibility and self-improvement that fit well with the requirements of "contemporary forms of capitalism" (2009, 216). Osella and Osella add that these subjectivities represent a unique Muslim middle-class project—creating distance between the new, successful, moral Muslim businessmen, and the old, uneducated Muslims who are ignorant of proper Islam and stuck in traditional, marginalizing occupations. The examples I provide here seem to follow the same logic. For BeK, it is women's ignorance and low level of education that blocs them from becoming better Muslims and improving their living conditions.

However, the form of empowerment that BeK puts forward is far from rooted in the logics of personal choice, individual liberty, and economic self-realization that are generally associated with concepts of neoliberal development. First, the model proposed by BeK is a form of self-empowerment rooted in duty and obedience. While many of the Muslim women part of the organization were very vocal against the *ulamas*, their critiques were not against Islam, and did not convey a desire to erase gender differences. Gendered role divisions were understood as integral to their religious principles. The desire to empower themselves was thus grounded in their religious and social duties as women. For example, in Bazm-e-Khawateen, as in other pious Muslim women's organizations that I visited, the *alimas* and volunteers would often refer to Hazrat Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, as the ultimate model for working women. They would restate how she was able to become a respected and successful merchant while remaining consistent with her *shareek-e-hayat* [husband]'s judgement as well as being a respected wife and

mother. Hazrat Khadija's involvement in commercial activities was, for the *alimas*, an act of support for her husband that did not impede her role as mother and wife.

The women who joined Shahina's handicraft centre clearly expressed this imbrication of self-development with duty and obligation. Below is an excerpt of a discussion we had about women and work one afternoon while I was visiting:

> *CL*: Why did you choose to join this centre?
>
> *Woman 1*: There are many similar centres in my neighbourhood; there is even one in front of my house! I came to this one because of the religious education [*deeni taleem*]. Here we get religious education and sewing classes, in the other centres there is no religious education. And both women and men can enter [in the other centres]. [All other women agree and restate that they appreciate the religious knowledge they gain by coming to the handicraft centre].
>
> *Woman 2*: We don't want to work outside because we keep *purdah* [veil; gender separation rules]. We don't have permission of our families to work outside. We are happy to have obtained the permission to come to the centre.
>
> *Women 3 and 4*: We have to respect the choice of our husband and families. It is Allah that has given them to us. Our desire [*marzi*] doesn't count.
>
> *Woman 5* [talking specifically to me]: But you know, it is good that way, I want to develop and do something in my life but I wouldn't want to do it if it goes against the will of my husband.
>
> *Woman 3*: It is not that we cannot work outside the house, we can come and go freely and work but in a certain atmosphere [*mahaul*]. We have to keep *purdah* and work in a context where we are with women.
>
> *Woman 6*: Here for example we are only women, so it is fine, and we get religious education. I wouldn't want to work where there are men. We do not do this here (Participants, Handicraft centre, 2014-08).

In these comments, we see how learning a craft or having an employment outside the house is never placed above respecting a husband's desire or following religious principles regarding public

appearance (*purdah* rules). Participants undertake their craftsmanship training because it pleases their family and simultaneously improves their religious knowledge. Acquiring tailoring skills thus remains grounded in the respect of familial and religious duties.

Mahmood (2005) makes similar observations in her study of pious women's involvement in the mosque movement in Egypt. She questions the feminist liberal scholarship's tendency to define agency as an act of resistance to religious norms and patriarchy and as the exercise of individual autonomous will by introducing pious women who act without trying to achieve such goals (Mahmood 2005, 14). For Mahmood, acts of resistance to relations of domination are only one of the forms agency can take. Her case study deliberately challenges feminist scholarship and secular liberal thought by presenting an example in which women do not contest religious norms but rather develop active practices to fully enact, or *inhabit*, these norms. She describes, for example, how women part of the mosque movement tried to find practical ways to follow certain religious prescriptions—like avoiding male-female interaction—that could be challenging to apply in certain situations, such as having to study in mixed-sex universities or to use mixed-sex public transportation modes.

BeK members often discussed similar concerns during their smaller meetings in the BeK office. It was the main topic of one of their monthly teachings that I attended (2014-09). During that lesson, the invited *alimas* discussed how to combine active life and rules of *purdah* with a group of about twenty regular BeK participants. BeK's senior *alima* explained that efforts to combine both represented a form of *jihad* for women, a statement that Baji also reiterated. While the term *jihad* is now frequently understood as meaning "holy war," its root signification is "effort" or "struggle" (Metcalf 2002, 11). Self-discipline and personal purification represent the greater *jihad* (Metcalf 2002, 11). Deeb also reports that pious Shia women referred to their community social

work as a form of *jihad* (2011, 204). In the same way as the *alimas* presented it in front of BeK members, *jihad* for Deeb's interlocutors meant a form of struggle within oneself and against social problems such as poverty. The *alima* in the session I observed explained that there were many possible forms of *jihad*, such as fighting for religion and fighting for truth, but that the main *jihad* [*aslee jihad*] was self-control.

Second, BeK's position on how women's employment can contribute to the project of social and economic improvement of marginalized Muslim communities in India reveals her unique vision of what constitutes women's empowerment. Like many charitable organization workers, Baji did not encourage a stronger role for women in the professional domain. As in reformist traditions, Baji believed that it is the men's responsibility to earn for the family. For her, the push for women to undertake professional employment was driven by *need*. She did not support the idea of working for the sake of working and making more money, but believed that the current socioeconomic situation of Muslims in India created a *need* for a greater responsibility, mobilisation, and self-development of women. The living conditions of most of the Muslim women who attended Bazm-e-Khawateen's activities represented such a situation of need. For example, Humeira, a woman in her early twenties who had little financial support because she was recently widowed, started attending the English and computer classes offered at BeK regularly, in the hope of finding employment as a receptionist later. To describe situations of need, Baji regularly pointed out that many Muslims in old Lucknow rely on unprofitable and exploitive traditional occupations (*chickan-zardosi* embroidery work). In this context, women's empowerment and education is a necessity so they can support their husband and contribute to the material well-being of the family. Noorbano's poor background and her ability to come out of misery by joining a *qawwali* group, or Shahina's new handicraft business to help her orphan

siblings, showcase the relationship between female employment and need. Resorting to professional employment for empowerment and economic independence is thus not a goal in itself, but rather a social duty to support a family in crisis.

Beyond professional employment, Baji regularly insisted on the many other ways through which a woman should participate in the social and economic development of the community. The first vignette showed how for the organization, women should play an active role in material development by responsibly managing the domestic sphere. The second vignette showed how community social work is also another way in which women can play an active role. Finally, political participation in elections was strongly encouraged to help one's community.[88]

Empowerment and self-reliance are thus not focused on the individual alone, but are understood as a duty towards the family, the community, and the nation. The leader of BeK's youth wing presented a similar line of reasoning to me when we met for an interview: "Other organizations for women are extreme left radicals. We try to make a balance, consider the family. We are very different from mainstream, extreme left radical organizations. Out here, we talk to the women, but the husband also, and the mother, etc. If you only look at one side, I don't think it is a solution. So they are very extreme" (C33, Lucknow, 2014-08, Original in English). Although the youth wing leader insists on the stark differences between "secular" feminist organizations and BeK, the differences in views surrounding the importance of kinship duties versus individual empowerment are not always so pronounced. For example, in her study of a New Delhi-based *mahila panchayat*

[88] Not long before the May 2014 national elections, Baji organized a special meeting to discuss voting strategies with her members. She had invited the Congress candidate Rita Bahuguna Joshi to join the meeting, but the candidate did not attend the gathering. Baji nevertheless encouraged her members to support the Congress, but also criticized the Party for its negligence towards Muslims, and stated that voting for that party was only a pragmatic choice to prevent the BJP from being elected. Baji often encouraged her members to speak to the media and demand more state services and support for poor Muslim women.

[arbitration centre], Lemons shows that the institution considers its role to be helping women actualize their desires, but that it also often emphasizes "family unity" and "collective well-being over individual desire" (2016, 256).

Third, the project of pious empowerment is distinctive in that it situates religion as an asset for development and women's empowerment, not the opposite. For the BeK members, Islamic rules and obligations were not perceived as a limit to progress and women's empowerment, but rather as a way to set the conditions for a "proper" empowerment: a proper way to get involved in community development and participate in the betterment of Indian Muslims. As in Mahmood's (2005) study, the formation of proper ethical selves—such as cultivating one's sense of modesty by wearing the veil—ultimately gives access to the public world (Mahmood 2005). For example, Baji hesitated to push her members to seek employment outside the household partially due to her belief that poor women "are not yet educated enough on Islam to be able to enter the workplace in a proper way." By this, she did not only mean that women are not educated enough to be able to work without compromising their religious practice and commitments, but that without education, women know less about their rights and are less apt to deal with delicate workplace situations such as harassment. Other Muslim women's organization leaders that I met were more supportive of women's involvement in professional work, but did share the same idea of religion being an asset. For example, one Muslim women's rights activist told me:

> Indonesia is a developed Muslim country because over there a lot of women do work equally like men. From town class to upper class, they all work because they are highly educated. And this is possible because they do not read the Quran in Arabic like us, they read the translation and they understand the meaning, they know their rights. I am surprised to see all the housewives here, the *Quran sharif* does not say that women cannot work, no it is not like that. […] But *maulanas* do nothing to change these perceptions (C5, Lucknow, 2013-11).

While this activist adopts a position on woman and professional work that is quite different from Baji's, it nevertheless shows a similar link between religion and women's empowerment. Her statement does not suggest that highly educated and professionally active women have put religion aside in order to become professionally active and participate in a developed country. On the contrary, her statement suggests that because women are highly educated and have a good understanding of Islam (by reading the Quran in their own language), they know that they are authorized to work and are not mislead by clerics who would say otherwise. Her comment thus links knowledge of the Quran with the assertion of rights and work capacity.

Overall, the process of self-improvement promoted by BeK involves a tightly knit relationship between religious empowerment (knowing what is "proper" Islam) and material development. Pious empowerment, grounded in duty and obligation instead of being based on individual free will, was not seen as a limit to women's public and economic participation, but rather as a way to shape the contexts and spaces that will allow for this participation. Similarly, Osella and Osella show in their ethnography of Muslim businessmen's social projects that the combination of Islamic reformist principles and economic development is necessary to build a proper "Islamic globalized modernity" that embraces capitalist economy without adopting all "Western ideals of development:" "entrepreneurship—combining material success with moral connectedness—is coming to be seen as the exemplary contemporary way of being a modern, moral, Muslim" (Osella and Osella 2009, 204).

To a certain extent, then, neoliberal approaches to development are not only compatible with pious empowerment, but also create the possibility for it. For pious Muslim women, private entrepreneurship and self-improvement were seen as fitting avenues for economic development because they could control the means of this development. As I have explained above, for many

of my interlocutors, professional work could only be realised in specific conditions; if it responds to an economic necessity, if it does not impinge on the roles of mothers and wives, and if it does not compromise the maintenance of *purdah*. Community work or self-led business activities were viewed as preferred activities for women because one can control, to a certain extent, the environment in which one works, and the people with whom one interacts. It is a form of public engagement through private development. At the same time, as a woman becomes more knowledgeable about Islam, she improves her ability to navigate the public sphere and professional domains in a proper way. The key to a better life starts by working on one's self.

Conclusion

As in global development agendas, women are a central concern in the projects of social and economic improvement imagined by Muslim charitable organizations. I have highlighted that Muslim women's organizations have played an active role in developing their local communities and viewed women as the central point through which improvement could be achieved. This chapter shows that Muslim women's participation in community development through pious empowerment—increasing one's religious and "wordly" education level, becoming a "good" Muslim, and doing what is necessary to improve one's and others' socioeconomic status—does not fit the dichotomy between religion and modern progress that has marked many debates on Muslim women in the development field in India and elsewhere (Abu-Lughod 1998).

While some aspects of the pious empowerment advanced by BeK are in continuity with Reformist movements' ideals on Muslim women as housewives and mothers, transmitters of good Islamic values, and participants in community social work, they also attest to changes in the relationships between Islam, gender, and economic development. Like the pious Lebanese women

who participated in Deeb's research, Bek members' efforts to become responsible women and engage in community work is a visible form of participation. Deeb argues that while women were involved in community development activities in the past—for example, through the distribution of zakat and *khums* among their relatives and neighbours—their current engagement in voluntary community service is different, because it is now understood as a public activity that is necessary to modern forms of piety (Deeb 2011, 208).

In a similar way, Baji publicly celebrates the exemplary women who have improved their life conditions and helped others in their communities to do so. Moreover, acts that seem intimately linked to the private sphere and the traditional role of women, such as managing wisely food and household expenses, are reinterpreted as forms of social mobilization. Women are invited to take part in these activities in response to the urgent need to "rescue" Muslims from their growing marginalization in India. This relationship is exemplified by Baji's frequent references to the government statistics on the socioeconomic disparities between Muslims and other groups in India when enjoining women to become active and responsible.

I have also showed that the pious empowerment proposed by BeK shares similarities with neoliberal empowerment logics that seek to enable individuals and communities to take care of their own development. In BeK, this unfolded into discourses on the value of education, on the importance of self-control and improvement, as well as in critiques of certain interpretations of Islam that overemphasize the religious practice and underemphasize civic and economic participation. Although the concept of pious empowerment engages with certain aspects of neoliberalism, it suggests a different relationship to economic development: one grounded in religious and familial duty rather than independent self-realization, and one that puts religion at the forefront.

These conceptualizations of women's empowerment and social mobilization highlight the complex relationships between local histories of religious minority politics, and a global assemblage of discourses on gender, religion and economic participation. Nevertheless, like all other Muslim women's organizations, BeK must always return to the question of possible incompatibilities between Islam, women's rights, and modern progress in its interaction with a larger public. For example, Muslim women's organizations' nuanced positions on how to improve the socioeconomic conditions of women were often overshadowed by their stance on maintaining separate personal laws and veiling practices. Deeb's argument once again applies particularly well in this context:

> […] questions of Muslim women's status have focused on two related areas: the headscarf and women's public participation. This is due in part to the long history of symbolic potency of the headscarf and assumptions about its relationship to limitations or facilitations of women's public participation (Abu-Lughod 2002 ; Ahmed 1992 ; El Guindi 1999 ; MacLeod 1991) and in part to particular Western feminist assumptions that public participation is an accurate indicator of women's status in society (2009, 113).

In the North Indian context, the symbol of the headscarf is perhaps slightly less negative than how Deeb describes it since many women's rights activists disapprove the intense public attention on veiling that distract from other critical issues. For example, Naish Hasan, a Muslim women's rights activist leading Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan told me in an interview that she disliked how media always focused on the issue of the headscarf even if she herself was extremely critical of veiling practices: "all the time when we have meetings and there is a woman who is wearing a *burqa*, the media will go to her and take her in photo. They are playing a very bad role" (N1, Lucknow, 2013-09). The nonreligious women's rights activists who I met also argued that the "level" of women's empowerment was not always correlated with their veiling practices.

Despite these nuances, Muslim organizations would regularly be judged and judge themselves according to the image they projected through their veiling habits. As I mentioned in the introduction, Muslim women's words, actions and bodies are intimately linked to how groups or nations represent themselves and are represented by others. Muslim women activists are thus scrutinized and judged according to certain indicators of their own level of "empowerment," such as their use of Islamic dress. They are a symbol of a community's progress and are expected to represent it through their appearance, discourse, and action.

In the first three chapters, I have analyzed how Muslim charitable organizations seek to transform their charitable practices, and poorer Muslims' behaviour, knowledge and aspirations. I have argued that although Muslim NGO workers' improvement projects fit with neoliberal approaches, they also take specific shapes, since religious ethics set the conditions of engagement with economic development. The next chapter introduces the political dimension of these projects. I show that while NGO workers focus on "internal" reforms and self-development strategies, they consider the state as a key player for ensuring social justice and access to social services.

Chapter Five
Political Expectations and Performances of Secularism

On our way back from a visit of the resettlement colonies that Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH)[89] built after the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, Faizal Qasmi, a young member of the JUH district committee in Muzaffarnagar, asked me if I would mind if we stopped for a JUH local committee meeting in a village on the way.[90] Six JUH local committee members were waiting for us, sitting on a few *charpais* [woven beds] in front of one of the largest houses in the village. The committee members quickly noticed our arrival because of the two black and white striped JUH flags that adorned Faizal's car and all other cars used for JUH activities. The house in which the meeting was taking place belonged to a local Muslim Jat sugarcane farmer.

As we arrived, the men moved the *charpais* into the main hall, where we all sat together to start the meeting. One JUH Delhi representative had also traveled to the region for the occasion. Faizal first asked the committee leader for some updates on the committee activities, but the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the upcoming 2014 national election and the possibility of a *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) victory in Uttar Pradesh.[91] Less than ten days were left before the election, on May 16, and Faizal presented the results of a survey on the number of constituencies that Narendra Modi was likely to win. The men started talking about their apprehensions about the BJP and the problems that were likely to occur in the region if such an "anti-secular" party was to win the elections. Less than a year after the Muzaffarnagar riots—which led to the displacement

[89] JUH means the "Association of Islamic Scholars of India."
[90] All names of research participants in this chapter are pseudonyms. Some biographic details have been omitted to preserve anonymity.
[91] The BJP is one of the two major national political parties in India; it won the latest national elections in 2014.

of thousands of Muslim villagers—relations between Hindus and Muslims were still very tense, and the men feared that the BJP's rise to power would only worsen the conditions of Muslims in the region. There are controversies surrounding the involvement of BJP politicians in past communal riots in the country, and there were clear signs that local BJP members played a role in mobilizing Hindus against Muslims in Muzaffarnagar.

Anxious about the rise of the BJP, Faizal read a news report from his mobile phone out loud, detailing how three Muslims had been attacked in Meerut, a city in the neighbouring district. Two men had survived, but one had died. The news report did not specify whether the incident was related to a Hindu-Muslim issue, so the six men searched for more information in the newspapers lying on the *charpais*.

They then began discussing possible strategies to adopt before the election. One was to mobilize members to vote, and the other was to contact the local authorities to plan measures to supervise the winner's post-election rally [*juloos*]. Turning to me, Faizal explained that after an election in the area, the winning political party traditionally parades throughout the city and villages, often leading to skirmish and tensions. They feared that the situation would be worse with a "communal" party leading the parade.[92]

This chapter focuses on Muslim charitable organization workers' political aspirations and expectations regarding state welfare. The JUH meeting I describe in this introductory vignette is only one example of typical JUH local meetings, but is significant for two reasons. First, it illustrates an instance of political mobilization that bring nuance to the previous chapters on Community Trust and Bazm-e-Khawateen (Chapters Three and Four) by showing that

[92] As I mentioned in the Introduction, the term "communal" has a negative connotation in India.

organizations' turn toward self- and community-led development does not preclude political participation, forms of collaboration with the state, and strong expectations regarding state welfare. In this example, JUH mobilizes against a political party, but simultaneously seeks the support of the local administration to do so—a balance between criticism and collaboration that is representative of what I noticed in BeK and other organizations. Second, the meeting is significant because it focuses on the BJP, which, because of its association with Hindu nationalism, epitomizes anti-secularism for many participants I met, a large portion of the Muslim population, and many activists and scholars in India. Ideas about secularism have shaped and continue to shape Muslim activists' political subjectivities: their expectations regarding the state, their sense of having been neglected by consecutive governments, and their strategies to improve Muslims' lives.

In this chapter, I argue that Muslim charitable workers' promotion of self-development and individual autonomy has not diminished the primacy they place on state welfare and state-led development. In this sense, while their strategies resemble neoliberal development approaches, they also differ on certain levels since the state remains viewed as an important agent of social transformation, if not practically, at least symbolically. If some organizations are reluctant to collaborate with the government, it is mostly out of a pragmatic pessimism regarding the potential outcomes of this collaboration than because of an 'inner turn' towards the privatized sphere of the community and the family. Instead, many of the organizations' initiatives to promote self- and community-development are paralleled to a reassertion of the symbolic role of the state as a neutral body responsible for the welfare of all. Secular modes of governance that characterize Indian politics largely drive this persistence of the symbol of the state as protector and guarantor of equality (Ahmad 2009; Duschinski 2007). Charitable workers invoke India's secular principles and display their own secular values to hold the state accountable for the socioeconomic

inequalities that a segment of the Muslim population in India currently faces, based on an understanding of secularism as a moral commitment to provide equal protection and support to all citizens.

To support these arguments, I draw more specifically on JUH members' narratives on political responsibility and collaboration. I focus on JUH because it is among the Muslim charitable organizations that most often proclaim its religious and political positions in the Indian public sphere. They are well-known for their political advocacy and are as much a "pressure group" as a charitable organization. Media and politicians often seek their opinion when they want to obtain the "conservative Muslim voice," based on the idea that religions necessarily have spokespersons who speak on behalf of the interests of a united community of believers (cf. Sullivan, Hurd, and Mahmood 2016).[93] Although some of the discussions around JUH and their rhetoric of secularism take us in a slightly different direction then the past chapters, these discussions are useful to understand the politics of humanitarian aid after the Muzaffarnagar riots, which constitute the topic of the next chapter. JUH played a core role in relief interventions after the conflict, and this chapter helps situate the organization's strategies.

The chapter is divided in the following way. After a brief discussion on the construction of the state symbol and its role, I sketch out JUH's history, aims and political alignment. I then present two ethnographic vignettes depicting two young JUH activists'—Tahir and Faizal—political expectations and understandings of the secular state's responsibilities, as well as the positions of their team in Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar. Finally, I provide a few possible explanations of their

[93] JUH is a large nation-wide organization, and I neither pretend to represent the organizations' official positions nor the perception of all its members. My observations are based on interviews I conducted at the head office in Delhi, and on fieldwork with two JUH district branches, in Lucknow and Muzaffarnagar.

political expectations regarding the state's responsibility to provide equitable access to services for all citizens in the context of India's secular democracy.

State, secularism, and welfare responsibilities

Recent scholarship on state and "civil society" relations have stressed the importance of analyzing these two concepts not as distinct entities, but rather to look at the multiple ways they intersect and influence each other (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Mitchell 1991; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Mitchell suggests that theories on the state should not focus on finding definitions that can clarify the boundaries between state and society because the "elusiveness of the boundaries" between these two concepts is what characterizes them (Mitchell 2006, 170).

While it is important to deconstruct the idea of a well-defined, discrete entity called the state, it is also important to see how the state represents a powerful symbol, as it seems to be the case for the Muslim NGOs I researched (Ferguson [1998] 2014; Mitchell 2006; Hansen 2001; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Hansen argues that the "myth of the state" is a historical construction, emerging from the Western world, that imbues the state with authority as just, rational, impartial, and beyond any specific party, class, caste or religious group interest (Hansen 2001, 129). This does not mean that the state as an overarching idea and the state as a concrete system of people, programs and institutions are separate entities, but, rather, that political processes produce powerful distinctions between society and the state (Mitchell 2006, 170).

In India, for example, several authors argue that the emergence of new forms of neoliberal governance, leaving a larger space for NGOs to operate, has not erased the belief in vertical power or state-led social welfare (A. Sharma 2008; Gupta and Sharma 2006). Different ethnographic studies highlight the strong ideological importance that the state holds in people's imaginations.

For example, Williams shows that lower-caste Muslim weavers in Banaras have an enduring perception of a "socialist" state, despite its absence in their everyday lives (2011, 264). Here I show that for Muslim NGO workers, too, the state has important symbolic significance, and that expectations regarding the state's role in providing social services are largely framed in terms of the promises of the secular constitution.

The notion of secularism refers to a political form of organization based on the separation between state and religion. The Indian constitution upholds secular principles by granting state neutrality towards all religions and the right to freedom of religion. For religious groups, this includes the possibility of establishing their own religious institutions, of providing religious instruction, and maintaining separate religious personal laws (GOI 1949).[94] Some scholars argue that Indian secularism is different from other forms of secularism in that it neither marks a clear separation between state and religion nor "privatizes" religion (Bhargava 2007; Madan 2006; Amartya Sen 2005). In fact, secular constitutional provisions did not "secularize" the public sphere and erase religion from it: religion and religious institutions remain very visible in India (Van der Veer 1994).[95] Scholars such as Asad (2003, 1999) and Mahmood (2005) have rightly pointed out that secularism ubiquitously represents more than the separation of religions and states, private

[94] According to the Constitution, all religious denominations have the freedom to "profess, practice and propagate their own religion." Article 28 specifies that educational institutions like *madrasas* can receive state funding but institutions entirely funded by the state must remain secular since there is no mandatory religious instruction in India (GOI 1949).

[95] The secularization theory is the assumption that modernity brings a decline of religion, and that consequently, secularism—in the sense of a strict separation of religion from politics, economy, and science (Casanova in Van der Veer 2001, 14)—is an essential condition to the development of modern democratic nation states (Berger, Davie, and Fokas 2008; Van der Veer 2001; Levey 2009)). These ideas are partly influenced by the work of scholars such as Durkheim (1893), who has suggested that modernization and industrialization decreased the importance and purpose of religious institutions.

spheres and public spheres; it is a redefinition of what counts as "religious" and "secular," and of how religion can enter the public sphere.[96]

Since the aim of Indian secularism is not to "privatize" religion, but to allow all religious groups to practice their faith and be respected, the question of state neutrality and equal treatment of religious minorities is one of the core elements people gauge to evaluate the success or relevance of Indian secularism.[97] Here, I follow Ahmad (2009), who suggests examining secularism from the perspective of religious minorities themselves; for people subject to it, secularism is not just a question of freedom to practice, but also the provision of equal citizenship rights, a form of impartiality that obliges the state to take care of all its citizens. Secularism is also more than a constitutional matter and has a "social" signification. In popular language, the term "secular" is often contrasted to "communal:" one is either "communal" or "secular" depending on whether one discriminates or respects people belonging to other religious groups (Tejani 2007, 45; Pandey 1990).

In this chapter, when charitable workers criticize the state for not being secular in its development policies, and enjoin it to respect its secular constitution, they seem to be referring to this understanding of secularism. The notion of secularism here is thus closely associated with the

[96] Asad and Mahmood argue that the notion of "secular" is more than a political doctrine; it encompasses specific Western liberal sensibilities that shape religion as a personal individual choice that has no incidence on public life (Fernando 2010; Mahmood 2009, 2005, Asad 2003, 2006; Scott and Hirschkind 2006).

[97] Bhargava argues that Indian secularism does not exactly mean that the state is neutral towards all religions, it functions instead according to a form of "principled distance," meaning that the state is mostly neutral in its way of treating religion but intervenes more or less in some religious traditions with respect to certain sets of values (Bhargava 2007: 39). The Constitution does not mention whether the state should stay completely unengaged in matters related to religious freedom and personal laws. It is however implied that a lot of freedom should be given in this area since in the period of the creation of the Constitution, many were advocating that personal laws were an inherent part of the right to freedom of religion (GOVT of India 1949, Bajpai 2002: 183). Despite this, religious personal laws in India were revised, standardized, and codified under the British colonial administration (Cohn 1989). For a historical portrait of Indian secularism see Chatterjee (2010) and Needham and Sunder Rajan (2007).

ideas of equal citizenship, state neutrality, and non-discrimination. These are the grounds on which JUH workers perceive state responsibilities concerning the welfare of religious minorities.

Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind

JUH is the largest Islamic organization in India and counts ten million members throughout the country. It has 17 State Units, all divided in District Units, and 1,700 offices across the country (C24, Delhi, 2014-05). Membership is highest in Uttar Pradesh, particularly in Western UP cities such as Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bijnor and adjacent areas.[98] JUH has transnational connections, such as with Jamiat members in the United Kingdom. Different organizations inspired by the JUH model are also present in other South Asian countries, as well as in South Africa, and the Mauritius islands. Founded in 1919, it is one of the oldest formal Islamic charitable organizations in India. It is closely associated to the main Sunni Islamic seminary in India, Darul Uloom Deoband (Metcalf 2014). All local and national leadership positions are occupied by *ulamas* [Islamic scholars], most of whom completed their education in that institution. Maulana Arshad Madani, the leader of one of JUH's faction, also teaches at the Deoband seminary.[99]

[98] Conversation with the Muzaffarnagar JUH Committee, Muzaffarnagar, 2014-05.

[99] The organization split into two factions in 2006, following leadership disputes between Maulana Arshad Madani and his nephew, Maulana Mahmood Madani. The dispute was brought to the Delhi High Court in 2008 and led to the existence of two distinct organizations operating under the same original name. In practice, this factional division is not always apparent and there are attempts to reunite both groups. The national head offices are still located at the same place in Delhi (although in two different buildings on the compound) and while the leaders of each JUH are different and often in open confrontation with each other, the members are not yet so well separated. In Muzaffarnagar, I could often find active members of the two different factions in each other's meetings. Furthermore, although informed people in Muzaffarnagar knew which faction was which, most people did not realize that there was in fact two separate organizations operating on the ground. In most cases in this chapter, I refer to the JUH factions interchangeably because I met members and leaders of both organizations, albeit in different areas. In Delhi I interacted with the representatives of the Mahmood Madani branch only. In Lucknow I interviewed the representative of the Mahmood Madani branch but did most of my research with the Arshad Madani branch as it is the most active one in that city. In Muzaffarnagar lastly, most my research was conducted with the Mahmood Madani branch, but I also met and interviewed a few representatives of the Arshad Madani branch.

As an association of *ulamas*, JUH has gained legitimacy and authority in the eyes of some Muslims, and gathers tens of thousands of participants at its annual meetings. However, it does not have unanimous support. JUH is often criticized for not investing enough in 'modern' education and focusing too much on "madrasa" education, or for their official opposition to the adoption of a Uniform Civil Code, an issue that is hotly debated in India (Agnes 1999).

JUH is a multi-purpose organization with both a religious and a charitable vocation. The head office in New Delhi oversees a range of trusts and departments in the field of education (running primary schools and madrasas, providing certification to madrasas, administrating a higher education scholarship fund); in the field of general charity (charitable funds for eligible zakat recipients), and in the field of emergency relief work. JUH also coordinates activities and services that are essentially religious, such as the maintenance of a *Halal Trust* to provide certification for *halal* meat, and the restoration of degraded historical mosques. It also produces its own publications, such as the Urdu *Al-Jamiat* magazine. District and regional branches are fairly free to implement their own projects and initiatives, as well.[100] The JUH constitution states the following roles under *Article 3: Aims and Objectives*:

(a) Protection of Islam, Islamic culture, tradition Islamic heritage and places of worship.
(b) Protection and promotion of religious, cultural, educational and citizenship rights of the Muslim community.
(c) Reformation of religious, social and educational life of the Muslim community.

[100] JUH follows a democratic organizational structure. All national and state branch leaders are elected by the organization members. While their main national office is in Delhi, JUH is divided into state committees, regional committees and district committees (C24, 2014-05). For each 1,000 members in a local district [*zila*], one delegate will attend the annual assembly and other meetings, and report news to the local group afterwards (Conversation with the JUH Muzaffarnagar Committee, 2014-06). Through this institutional structure, JUH is easily able to mobilize large numbers of people for their meetings. One of its leading members told me: "In which ever state you go to in India, we can very easily unite four to five *lakh* people [400,000 to 500,000 people] for any kind of event." JUH is thus one of the Muslim organizations that has the highest public visibility.

(d) Establishment of such institutions which could empower Muslims educationally, culturally, socially, economically.
(e) In accordance with the teachings of Islam promotion of cordial and friendly relations among members of different Indian communities.
(e) Revival of Arabic knowledge and establishment of educational institutions that could fulfill contemporary needs.
(f) Spread of Islamic education.
(g) Protection of Islamic endowments i.e Awqaf.

The aims and objectives in the organization's constitution are wide-ranging and reflect the plurality of activities JUH undertakes. These activities include goals for Muslims as a religious category (i.e.: protection of Islam) and as a social and political category (i.e: protection of citizenship rights; social and economic empowerment).

However, JUH's level of involvement in political advocacy is not precisely defined and has fluctuated through time. When JUH was founded in 1919, it did start as a political religious movement that emerged out of the *Khilafat* (Caliphate) Movement (1919-1924). Organized by Muslims in South Asia at the end of World War I, the Movement was aimed at pressuring the British government to maintain the authority of the Ottoman Sultan over holy places, following the Turkish Empire's defeat (Minault 1982; M. Hasan 1981; Jalal 2002). This cause strengthened the anti-British sentiment among Indian Muslims. Gandhi and the Congress[101] strategically gave their support to the *Khilafat* Movement, and the Movement became a central component of the first non-cooperation movement in India.[102] One of JUH's founders, Maulana Abdul Bari, was one of the most well-known Lucknow *Firangi Mahali* leaders involved in the movement at the time (see Chapter Four on the *Firangis Mahalis*).

[101] The Congress is one of the two major national parties currently existing in India, along with the BJP. It was the first party in power in Independent India, and has always cultivated its image of a secular, non-partisan, and neutral party.
[102] For more information on the *Khilafat* movement, see (Jalal 2002; Qureshi 1999; Minault 1982; M. Hasan 1981).

Following the *Khilafat* Movement, JUH approved a resolution of non-cooperation with the British rulers in 1920. It also opposed the resolution of the Partition of Pakistan from India in 1947, remaining allied to the Congress. Maulana Hifzur Rahman, one of JUH's General Secretaries, rose to become a Congress Member of Parliament who played a key role in shaping the contour of the Indian secular constitution (Ahmad 2009, 22). Syed Asad Madani—former JUH President and father of Maulana Mahmood Madani, one of the current General Secretaries of JUH—was also a Congress Member of Parliament for eighteen years (M. S. A. Madani 2007). JUH has thus always positioned itself as the defender of the Indian secular democracy and, in a large part, oriented "Muslim politics" in India in that direction (Ahmad 2009). For example, many of the members I spoke with were keen to highlight the contrast between JUH and the "Islamist" movement *Jamaat-e-Islami*.[103] It is worth noting that the majority of studies on JUH focus on its role during Independence (Metcalf 2012; Parveen 1993), or on the discourses of its leaders (Syeda 2014; Malik 1995), while few studies examine their current activities.

After Independence, JUH decided to take a less active role in politics. Most of JUH's activities post-Independence were focused on providing relief to the millions affected by the Partition. A few organization members have nevertheless continued to occupy important political positions, such as Maulana Badruddin Ajmal, who became Ministry of Parliament in the State of Assam while serving as the Head of the JUH Assam State Branch. However, the members of the national working committee I met insisted that JUH was not actively involved in politics anymore, and was essentially a charitable organization. Maulana Aasif, a branch leader who had followed his father's

[103] Although, as Ahmad's study convincingly shows, Jamaat-e-Islami has now mostly abandoned the idea of creating an Islamic state and embraced the principles of Indian democracy and secularism (Ahmad 2009). This is also what I observed in my own interactions with the Jamaat-e-Islami team in Muzaffarnagar. As the other organizations I describe in this dissertation, Jamaat-e-Islami is also promoting autonomous economic development as a new form of mobilization (see Iqtidar 2011)

path by joining JUH, stressed the importance of the organization's non-political status: "Look, after the *azaadi* [freedom/Independence], our leaders have decided that we would not stay involved in politics, that we would focus on social issues. And it is the case that if we work for the 'public,' [on social issues, not for votes] then the people will stay with us" (C18, Lucknow, 2014-05).

Lobbying for Muslim rights and religious freedom remains one of JUH's defining dimensions, as one of the leaders accurately described to me: "We are not a political group but we deal with politicians, so we are a pressure group!" (Delhi, 2015-06). However, as the next section shows, the organization's relationship with politics and the Congress party has grown considerably weaker since the movement's inception, which influences how JUH members now imagine projects of social and economic improvement.

State neglect

In contrast with the organization's early years, JUH members' feelings toward the state are now marked by strong pessimism and a sense of betrayal. Workers and volunteers who I met claimed that political parties have little will to improve the conditions of Muslims because of their bias against Muslims. For example, like every other Muslim NGO worker I met, JUH volunteers believed that the government never had the intention to implement the Sachar report recommendations.[104] A *maulana*, member of JUH in Muzaffarnagar, explained this to me:

> There is another reason [why the Sachar recommendations have not been implemented]. Here, most important things are in the hands of Hindus. And they do not want Muslims to get developed. Only a little to show. If you gave some worthy

[104] JUH members are not alone in sharing this opinion. Professor A. Kundu, who the Ministry of Minority Affairs appointed to lead the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee (2014), told me himself during an interview that his team had been appointed with no real political conviction and desires to implement any changes. According to him, neither the current BJP-led government nor the previous UPA-led government can argue against the findings of the Sachar Report and his team, but they prefer staying silent on the subject instead of trying to find solutions (I3, Delhi, 2015-07).

> [*qabil*] Muslims a chance, they could become very successful [*kamyab*]. So why no implementation? After all, what is the reason? Because they [the government] just wanted to give a little to show. They wanted to get the Muslim vote [*vote lena chahte the, Musulmanon ke*]. But they knew that if the recommendations of the Sachar Report were implemented [*shifarishat lagu kar dee*] then, there would be a lot of advantages for Muslims [*bahut faida ho jayega*]. Muslims can rise. Now twelve-fourteen years have gone by, and it is still pending. The report has, of all the commissions, proven [*sabit karna*] that in India the state of Muslims is bad [*Musulmanon ka halat kharab hai*]. But no one is ready to take any actions about it [*sudharne ke liye koi tayar nahee hai*]. […] Because the government is not secular (C35, Muzaffarnagar, 2014-09).

For this member, programs are not implemented because ruling parties are partial and do not make an effort to assist religious minorities.

Importantly, JUH members' criticisms were not formulated only against the BJP—a party closely associated with Hindu nationalist movements—but against political parties in general, including the Congress with which JUH used to have strong ties. For example, during a conversation I had about the implementation of the Sachar recommendations with the JUH office staff in Lucknow, I asked why they believed the implementation was such a failure, since the Congress-led, reputedly "secular" United Progressive Alliance was leading the government at the time. Members all exclaimed and laughed at my comment; one insisted in pointing out the Congress's own bias towards Muslims.

> Oh, but the Congress has nothing of a secular party, nothing of a secular party [*koi secular nahee hai*]! Record my words (looking at my recorder on the table), they work hand in hand with RSS, under their *dhotis*, they wear the khaki pants! You can release this on whatever international level you want, I am not afraid to say the truth![105] (C31A, Lucknow, 2014-08).

[105] The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a militant Hindu nationalist organization. Khaki pants were part of the RSS uniform.

On another occasion, Tahir, a young JUH member I introduce later in the chapter, accused the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) [106] of "not being secular" by telling me that when the *Babri Masjid* was destroyed by Hindu nationalist groups in the early nineties, Mayawati, the BSP leader in power at the time, did nothing to stop the violence against Muslims. Tahir added that since then, violence against Muslims has frequently occurred in Uttar Pradesh.

Large sections of the Indian Muslim population share this impression of increasing disenfranchisement—even more so since the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* and the consolidation of Hindu nationalist movements (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Jaffrelot 2009). Studies on Muslims and politics in India suggest that Muslims viewed the Congress Party as a natural protector for the first fifty years after Independence because of its commitment to secularism (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, 5). However, the Congress's incapacity to stop communal violence, among other things, has shattered many Muslims' confidence in the party and triggered anger and frustration (Hansen 2001, 127). Like JUH members, voting patterns indicate that Muslims' allegiance to the Congress has now changed. According to Vernier's study, although the Congress remains a popular choice for Muslims at the national level—and the Samajwadi Party, at the UP state level—there is no "Muslim vote" directed at a single party (Verniers 2014; see also Verma and Gupta 2016; Susewind and Dhattiwala 2014).[107]

In this atmosphere of disappointment and pessimism, many Muslim charitable organization workers I interviewed were relatively unengaged with the provision of information about

[106] The *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP) is the third largest national political party in India and was formed to represent *Scheduled Castes* (SCs), and *Other Backward Classes* (OBCs). It won the Uttar Pradesh state elections in 2007. Recently, it has tried to reach out to the Muslim minority as well in an attempt to create solidarity among all "oppressed groups."

[107] Small Muslim parties exist in Uttar Pradesh, but are usually not very successful. Such initiatives are often discredited on the basis that they reinforce religious polarization. Moreover, since Muslims form a heterogenous group with different needs and aspirations, many do not feel represented by these parties (Verniers 2014).

government sponsored schemes and programs for religious minorities, in facilitating access to them, or in negotiating with administration on these matters. Only a few organizations among those I met were very active in this sense. The head of one of these organizations in Lucknow had set up a helpline to provide information on government programs for religious minorities; people could call to receive information and receive application support. His helpline became very popular, such that he soon struggled to respond to the demand. Most other organizations had flyers in their offices for those interested, but their involvement did not go much further. On the walls of the BeK's office (Chapter Four), one could see a small poster listing the Prime Minister's New 15-Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities. However, BeK's director rarely spoke about the available state-sponsored programs, nor did she provide significant help to her members interested in applying to them. In Community Trust (Chapter Three), the leaders purposefully avoided talking about government programs to the population they served. They thought applying would be detrimental to the poor Muslim slum-dwellers who came to their organization, because it would give them false hopes.

Many organizations also reported having few formal interactions with government officials regarding the government's efforts to reduce inequalities between religious groups since the publication of the Sachar Report. The largest organizations, such as Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), or Zakat Foundation of India, regularly participate in government consultations and planning initiatives, such as during the enquiries of the Sachar Committee and actions that have since been taken by the Ministry of Minority Affairs. However, irrespective of their level of direct interaction with government officials, all organizations were unanimously pessimistic about the outcomes of such consultations. Finally, among the organizations I met, very few reported benefitting from government funding to implement government programs. Apart

from two well-established Shia NGOs running prestigious private schools with minority status in Lucknow, most organizations also mentioned that they were not interested in seeking government funding.[108] For example, Baji and her husband had obtained a grant from the government to support a primary schooling program, but she never received the third installment and had to interrupt the project. Since then, she decided to work independently and not seek government funding.

This feeling of being neglected and abandoned by the state thus influences how NGO workers imagine projects of social and economic improvement. I now turn to Tahir, Faizal, and their team to examine their expectations regarding welfare- and responsibility-sharing. Like many other NGO workers who I met, JUH members develop a two-fold strategy: they focus on developing their own autonomous community development initiatives while continuing to convey and reinforce the image of a responsible, impartial state.

A secular and nationalist past

Maulana Tahir, a JUH member in his mid-twenties, is the first who introduced me to JUH in Lucknow. I first met him in a meeting at another charitable organization, but through his female relative, who was teaching in a *madrasa* I used to visit frequently, I started having regular interactions with him. Given that JUH members are all men and that most of them respect principles of gender separation with varying intensity, many of my interactions with members outside office settings took place in private residences, in the presence of female members of the family. Tahir used to invite me for dinner with his family, since we were living in the same old

[108] The National Commission For Minority Educational Institutions can grant a minority status certificate to educational institutions that apply for it. Minority educational institutions do not have to follow the reservation [quota] policies for discriminated groups that apply to other private educational institutions.

Lucknow neighbourhood, so I had the opportunity to learn about his sisters' social involvement in charitable organizations, as well. Tahir and his parents, sisters, and younger brothers had moved in the city a few years before and had settled in a modest three-bedroom apartment that they rented for ₹3,500/month (Can$70/month), in the narrow streets of the old city.

Like Tahira *apaa* at Community Trust (Chapter Three), and Baji at Bazm-e-Kawateen (Chapter Four), Tahir believed that Muslims themselves were in part responsible for their socioeconomic disadvantage in India:

> Why do Muslims remain less developed? Do you know? It's because they themselves do not make efforts to come out of this. People here are idle. And all this charity thing, the zakat you are talking about and the organizations, the Muslim community [*qaum*] gets used to this and just wants to receive. Muslim community is neither ready to give nor ready to make efforts and work. We need to change that (C25B, Lucknow, 2014-07).

Tahir's statement suggests that part of the reasons why some Muslims live in dire conditions is because they do not make enough effort to improve their situation. His position is thus very similar to that of many other charitable workers, as I illustrated throughout the past chapters. His comment also hints at Muslim charitable organizations' new adoption of development-oriented approaches; for him, Islamic charity in itself is not enough, and underprivileged Muslims should be more involved in their own development.

Tahir started an organization of his own, dedicated to the religious reform of Muslim male youths. He wanted to "put Muslim men back on the right track" by encouraging them to do their prayers and follow Islamic rules more closely. This was, for him, the first step to leading a better life. However, Tahir also wanted to do something more socially oriented. Like all other Muslim charitable workers I met, he wished to improve access to what he called 'modern' education and quality of education in local schools. With this objective in mind, he registered a second NGO to

focus on education and other initiatives for the "uplifting" of socioeconomically underprivileged groups.

His entire family strongly valued education; all members had backgrounds in religious education. He (*maulana*) and all other family members had completed their *alimiat* and *fazilat* (equivalent of BA and MA in the *madrasa* system) in a well-known Jamaat-e-Islami-led *madrasa* in Eastern UP, and some of them were also pursuing graduate studies in Urdu and Arabic literature at Lucknow University. Tahir was extremely pious and praised madrasa education, especially the education provided by Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, the main Sunni Islamic seminary in Lucknow. But he also saw the limitation of religious education in terms of employment perspectives. He was consequently hoping to get his younger brother registered in a good English university to study business or administration, even though he knew it would be very difficult to do so because of funding, among other things.

In parallel to his involvement with his own NGO and his work in a small computer-service business, Tahir regularly volunteered at JUH. He was not widely attached to JUH or any other organizations because, as he told me, they were only human creations. However, he considered JUH a good platform from which to advance his community development objectives focused on education. He liked the experience he was gaining from being part of the large JUH network. As such, he tried to spend as much time as possible in the main JUH office to follow day-to-day cases—from people seeking financial help, to those demanding legal aid for a Muslim family member imprisoned without trial—and broader campaigns led by the organization.

For him, the difference between JUH and other organizations was JUH's involvement in political advocacy. While he believed that Muslims needed to be more proactive in their own development and was himself involved in JUH and in his own NGO, Tahir also told me that

Muslims' situation in India would hardly change without clear efforts from the government. He said that JUH's purpose was to call attention to the state's responsibility, and that, overall, the capacity of charitable organizations was very limited. For example, according to Tahir, the recommendations of the Sachar and Mishra reports were very relevant, but far from anything charitable organizations could handle alone. Consequently, it was important to pressure the government to uphold its responsibilities to provide equal access to services and welfare for minorities. By the end of my fieldwork, Tahir had decided to fight the local elections himself as an independent candidate to improve access to education for young Muslims. "It is our government, after all. We have put our fingers in ink, we have the right to speak" (C25, Lucknow, 2014-07).

Tahir's trajectory as a charitable worker and political activist shows that while he embraces ideas of community self-development and moral reform as a solution to poverty, these solutions do not diminish his sense that the state should fulfill its social welfare responsibilities, especially regarding access to "mainstream" education for all citizens.

Relatedly, during discussions we had in the local JUH office in Lucknow, Tahir and other JUH staff often stated that the government's responsibility to ensure minorities receive equal access to social services was reflected in India's secular constitution. In fact, both Hansen (2000) and Ahmad (2009) demonstrate that the goals behind the inclusion of secularism in the Indian Constitution were not just to accommodate religious diversity but also to ensure that India would not become ruled by the Hindu majority and would provide equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens, including Muslims. After the 1947 partition of Pakistan, where the "communal" or sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims climbed dramatically, there became an urgent need to calm tensions between the Muslims remaining in India and the dominant Hindu population.

Hence, the aim behind the creation of a secular Constitution was also to ensure that minorities would have an equitable place in the Indian nation and in its government institutions.

JUH committee members in Lucknow regularly referred to their own secular and nationalist credentials to call to mind this obligation of the state to protect Muslims and ensure they receive equal services. Members used to emphasize their contribution to the nation as a contrast to the government's alleged inaction. For example, the JUH staff I interviewed all highlighted the contribution of the organization to organizing the fight for Independence and supporting Gandhi's resistance movement. Kursheed Khan, one of the members of the coordination committee in Lucknow, commented:

> What the *Khilafat* did in India was Gandhi *ji*'s marketing [*Gandhiji ki marketing*], we provided the funds from the movement, we backed his campaign. *Maulana Abdul Bari Firangi Mahali* told Gandhi that he would support him and that is why the movement succeeded. The people that were the most hurt and sad [*dukh*] [because of the British Rule] were the Muslims because it is from the Muslim government [*hukumat*] that the British took India (C31A, Lucknow, 2014-08).

In this statement, Kursheed associates JUH's participation in the *Khilafat* movement with the accession to Independence, and suggests that Independence was possible because of Muslims.[109] This emphasis on a nationalist and secular past is largely visible in all of JUH's current public speeches, publications, and websites. Flyers for the organization typically reinstate JUH's contribution to the nation by using headlines such as "Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind was established to carry on non-violent freedom struggle in cooperation with fellow countrymen" or "JUH was the first to raise the call of 'Quit India'" (Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind Flyer; Saga of an Unfinished Struggle, Undated).[110] JUH leaders' public speeches also systematically reinstate JUH's past participation

[109] Part of my interlocutors' insistence on JUH's contribution to the creation of the nation might also in part be explained by the fact that they were interacting with a foreign researcher. Members I interacted with were acutely aware of the negative representations of Muslims in the West and wanted to change these misperceptions.

[110] "Quit India" was a movement launched in August 1942 by the All-India Congress Committee to demand the end

in the freedom movement and its nationalism. For instance, the following is a passage from a public speech delivered by a leading member of the national secretary office; he gave the speech during *Minorities Under Attack,* a public event I attended that was organized in September 2014 in Delhi by a coalition of non-religious NGOs, on the topic of minority discrimination in India:

> JUH is a philosophy [*falsafa*], a vision [*nazariah*], a principle [*usool*], and we stay focused on this vision only. And this vision is that we are all one community [*vah nazariah hai ki ham sab ek qaum hai*]. And even when our country was divided, our vision remained the same. So, when we say that 'minorities are under attack,' I have a feeling that actually secularism is under attack. […] These secular values that we have fought for with our blood [*khoon*], in which ways are they being destroyed now [*khatham ho jaye*].

In his speech, the Jamiat national committee member refers to the fact that while some Muslims decided to form their own country at the moment of Independence ("even when our country was divided"), JUH always maintained its allegiance to a united Indian nation. This brings even more weight to JUH's contribution to the building of the Indian nation. This idea is clearly expressed in a statement given by Maulana Aasif, who told me about JUH's participation in the *Khilafat* movement and its contribution to Indian Independence:

> I want to stay that you can notice by yourself how during the freedom movement [*Hindusthan ki azaadi mein*], Muslims have played a major role [*Musulmanon ne bahut bara hissa liya*]. Some have even been hanged. Then in the fight with Pakistan, Major Abdul Hamid gave his life.[111] Why then are we not given consideration, not trusted? We [JUH] stayed in India by choice! [*hum toh by choice India mein rahe*] (C18, Lucknow, 2014-05).

In referring to JUH's choice to remain in India, this cleric suggests that Muslims could have decided to do otherwise, but instead purposefully supported India instead of Pakistan. This

of British Rule of India.

[111] Abdul Hamid was an Indian Army soldier who died in service during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. He received India's highest military decoration after his death.

contribution should thus be acknowledged by the contemporary state. By invoking JUH's past contributions, JUH members are, to a certain extent, imagining the secular state not only as responsible for all its citizens' security and well-being, but also as having a moral debt to the Muslim minority.

This recollection of JUH's past contributions—which Maulana Aasif's above statement generalizes to Muslims' contributions overall—is in part reimagined in view of present times, to draw attention to the moral obligations that the state should have to Muslims. Scholars argue that the relation between the movement to support the *Khilafat* and Indian nationalism was not necessarily as straightforward as JUH workers and volunteers present it. Most scholars suggest that the alliance of the *Khilafat* movement with the fight for Indian Independence was at least partly strategic and circumstantial (Metcalf 2004). In his study of the *Khilafat* movement, Hasan (1981) argues that the unity between the *ulamas* supporting the *Khilafat* movement and the Congress was relatively short, and that by 1924, Gandhi had distanced himself from the movement.

Jalal (2002) too suggests that the relation between the *Khilafat* and the fight for Independence is more complex than what the JUH volunteers I met reported. She argues that for Muslims, the preservation of the *Khilafat* became a question of preservation of Muslim religious liberties in India. Muslims were not unanimously supporting the *Khilafat* initially, but when Muslims leaders in India saw that the British were about to put someone they chose at the head of the *Khilafat*, they started to publish writings and argue that the *Khilafat* was central for the Muslim *ummah*. Therefore, support for the *Khilafat* among Indian Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders grew out of local political circumstances. It became a defensive political posture stressing "Muslim cultural distinctiveness in the maelstrom of an Indian nationalism that was becoming increasingly suffused with the ethos of Hindu majoritarianism" (Jalal 2002, 193). The reason why it became

linked with the movement for Independence then is because Muslims knew that they would not survive alone much longer and needed an alliance with Hindus (Metcalf 2002).

These analyses show that Muslim institutions' participation in the Independence movement was more complicated than what JUH volunteers report. They help demonstrate how history is currently used and reimagined by members, to justify strong moral expectations for the state's role: namely, improving the situation of Muslims in the country.

The perspective of Baji, BeK's director, is one of the most evocative, acutely representing this historically-constructed feeling that Muslims' contributions to the nation should entitle them to a better treatment by the government, especially by political parties such as the Congress, which present themselves as the vanguards of secularism. In the middle of a discussion one day, she started telling me how difficult it was to see political actors dismiss her organization's demands for Muslim women when her parents had sacrificed all their life for the country. With tears in her eyes, she said:

> My mother was the first Muslim women to go study in Gandhi's *ashram*, she gave her life for the country. My step-father belongs to the *Firangi Mahalis* who counted so many freedom fighters. He served his whole life as an MLA [Member of the legislative assembly] in the Congress [party]. When he died, not a single Congress member showed up to his funeral. When I asked help to Rita Bahuguna Joshi [former Congress MLA in Lucknow] to reach out to poor Muslim women and told the women in *Bazm-e-Khawateen* to vote for her, she did not respond. After all we did for this country; that is the recognition we get (Lucknow, 2014-09).

Baji's statement thus shares resemblance with the thoughts of Tahir and the JUH Lucknow Committee on the state's responsibility toward religious minorities.

To summarize, both Tahir's trajectory and some of the JUH Lucknow Committee's thoughts on political responsibility and secularism show the concomitance of private, economic integration-focused development, and strong expectations towards the state. I showed how Tahir started his

own NGO to educate youth in his neighbourhood to become better Muslims and, consequently, more proactive in improving their lives and their communities. In parallel, his feeling that NGOs and other Islamic institutions have little power to make significant changes illustrates the primacy placed on state welfare. By contrasting their secular and national commitments with the government's failure to uphold its own secular principles, JUH members go even further in emphasizing the state's responsibility to ensure the welfare and well-being of all citizens. Their nationalist past is what legitimates their claims and political activism; it is a moral standpoint from which to criticize the government.

The next vignette on Faizal Qasmi and the Muzaffarnagar JUH Committee shows the same dual effort of stimulating personal economic development and reinstating state responsibilities, here again grounded in JUH's rhetoric of secularism. I show that in parallel to their charitable activities, JUH resorts to the principles of secularism to put pressure on local state representatives, by insisting on unity and common belonging to the nation.

Performing secularism

Faizal Qasmi is a maulana in his late twenties part of the leading committee of the JUH Muzaffarnagar branch.[112] I used to meet him regularly because he was one of the JUH members in charge of the relief operations after the August-September 2013 riots in the district (see Chapter Six). Faizal's whole family has been part of JUH for generations. Like many other Islamic scholars and members of JUH, Faizal's family lives out of a combination of religious and non-religious occupations. His family owns agricultural lands, but they also earn by teaching in *madrasas* and

[112] Qasmi is the name that many Deoband students take once they have completed their degree, in the memory of one of the founders, Hadhrat Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (Metcalf 2014).

leading prayers in mosques [*masjids*]. Faizal's father is *hafiz* (has memorized the Quran). He and other male relatives regularly travel to the Mauritius Islands and South Africa to lead special evening prayers during Ramadan [*taraweeh*] because, they claim, the knowledge of *Deoband* scholars is highly valued throughout the world. Tahir's family is also actively involved in a variety of charitable activities. Mainly, they participate with others in running several JUH *madrasas* in their village, a few kilometers away from Muzaffarnagar.[113] Their most recent one is a large girl's *madrasa*, with 450 students, out of which 150 are in residence.[114] Like Tahir's mother and sisters, Faizal's mother and sisters consider themselves very 'advanced' compared to other Muslim women in the village, because according to them, most villagers do not approve of girls' education. Faizal is very proud of the *madrasas* they have established, but he also admits that they are weaker in "regular" education, and seeks to improve access to mainstream education in the region.

Faizal's *madrasa* runs on personal donations and organization funds. Like most JUH madrasas in the area, it is not supported by the U.P. Board of Madrasa Education (Ministry of Minority Affairs). This was not because of a refusal to collaborate with the administration, but rather due to a pragmatic calculus about the infrequency with which government programs are implemented. Faizal believed that government programs to support *madrasa* students did not reach his area.

By the end of my fieldwork, Faizal and the JUH Committee had started the construction of a major school for boys registered with the Uttar Pradesh Board. However, according to him, it is generally too costly to open a government-approved school, and most Muslims cannot afford to do it. Like Maulana Tahir and the JUH members in Lucknow, Maulana Faizal was thus relatively

[113] Many other JUH members run large *madrasas* in the region, such as the JUH President of District Shamli who runs a 1,500-student *madrasa*, and the vice-president of District Muzaffarnagar who runs an 800-student *madrasa*.

[114] Most girls in Faizal's *madrasa* were from U.P. but I also met students who came from Uttarakhand, Punjab and other states.

pessimistic regarding access to government programs for minorities. He also recalled the difficulties he had trying to get his stepbrother, who wanted to study medicine, registered in a local private school. Faizal helped him apply to post-matric scholarships for religious minorities offered by the Minister of Minority Welfare, but his stepbrother never received any funding. Finally, Faizal abandoned the idea of registering him in the school because just the admission required an (illegal) donation of one *lakh* rupees [Can$1,908]—on top of the astronomical fees that many private schools in India ask for.

Despite his pessimism, as a JUH member, Faizal was actively involved in political advocacy. He and the JUH team maintained close relations with local administration officers and local politicians; Faizal had frequent direct interactions with the District Magistrate (DM), for example, and he was particularly close to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) local leader that we visited once together. When I met them, both stressed that they were from a younger generation: one was Hindu and the other was Muslim, and they nevertheless worked well together and were friends. But like Tahir and the JUH Lucknow team, Faizal shared a sense of historical betrayal and did not trust one political party more than the other. Despite his personal friendship with the BSP leader, he told me that apart from the BJP, he would cast his vote for any party that would show actual effort to improve the conditions of local communities.

As for the Lucknow Committee, appealing to the secular responsibilities of the state and demonstrating their own secular credentials were prevailing strategies for political advocacy that the JUH Muzaffarnagar team members often used. Faizal and the JUH team would regularly organize public programs on secularism and the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims, to which all political party representatives and local administration were invited.

Not long after the Muzaffarnagar riots, Faizal and the team organized one such public program in his home town, which I attended.[115] Although this program focused on the special theme of "communal harmony," it is representative of the other periodical public meetings organized by JUH in the area. About two hundred Muslim villagers showed up (most of them also JUH members), all wearing their white, above-ankle length *kurta-pyjama* and white caps for the occasion. As in all JUH meetings, "prestigious" Hindu and Muslim guests had been invited to the meeting and were seated on the main front stage. Among them were the District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma, the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Hari Narain Singh,[116] a former Congress Member of the legislative assembly, a former army officer and NGO worker, and local journalists.

One by one, guests were invited to give a speech about Muslims' situation in the region, and on ways to improve their living conditions and foster communal harmony. The speeches started with respected elders [*bare-buzurgh*], who were members of JUH, expressing themselves in Urdu. First, a passage from the speech of Muzaffarnagar JUH's General Secretary:

> This *Eid Milan* program is close to our heart. In this town, in this district, in this state, in this country, the progress and prosperity of the people is in the unity of Hindus and Muslims. This country is the golden bird [*sone ki chidiya*], it is a great country but since the last 65 years, some powers are breaking our unity. Friends, you are intelligent, this country has to be led shoulders to shoulders [*kandhe se kandha milakar*]. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christians, all together. Brothers, brothers [*bhai, bhai*].

[115] JUH made many exceptions to let me attend meetings that are generally only open to men. In this case, I waited with Faizal's female relatives on the third floor until the beginning of the meeting, at which point I was invited to join the men downstairs. Part of my access to these meetings was possibly facilitated by the fact that I was a female foreigner and that this was useful for JUH's public image in the national and global media, which generally portray them as conservative, especially regarding topics related to women. In this case, for example, the JUH staff asked me to sit in the front row with the 'prestigious guests' and to introduce myself to the audience.

[116] SSP Hari Narain Singh was posted at Muzaffarnagar at the end of September 2013.

JUH *maulanas*, members of the leading district committee, then made similar statements on the unity of Hindus and Muslims in one nation:

> The mistakes that happened [referencing the Muzaffarnagar riots], forget them. Muslims, forget them. Hindus, forget them. Now is time to move ahead [*aage raftaar badhao* – "increase the speed"]. Let's not remain frustrated [*mayusi mein nahee rehna*]. Our motherland [*vatan*], our country [*mulk*], our district [*zila*], we are among brothers [*hum aapas mein bhai hain*]. We cannot be apart from each other, there is a single electricity connection, the water from a single river, a single road on which we walk, this is our Hindu-Muslim culture [*Hindu Muslim sanskriti*]. We are all humans living in the same territory first. Hindus-Muslims, there are no differences, we are all citizens of India.

The speaker ended his speech by reciting a poem [*shayri*] in Urdu that reinforced these remarks, which was met by enthusiast exclamations in the assembly.

In a last example, a member of the JUH leading district committee goes a step further: in addition to restating that Hindus and Muslims belong to a single nation, he suggests that because these groups belong to the same "family," Hindus should also take responsibility for the plight of Muslims:

> I had a meeting recently and I said these words: Hindus are big brothers [*bare bhai*] and Muslims are the younger brothers [*chote bhai*]. And the trouble that happened for Muslims should have been recognized by Hindus. They should have come forward and denounce the Hindus who committed the crimes. They should have said: we will provide houses and you Muslims, should stay in this village only. Hindus should accept that their children have done wrong.

Towards the end of the program, the District Magistrate finally addressed the assembly. He too started his discourse by restating the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Magistrate then made a few general statements regarding his administration's effort to support dialogue and unity between communities, improve access to education for Muslims—especially those displaced by the riots— and improve material conditions (roads, access to water pumps, etc.) for the Muslims displaced by the riots living in camps and resettlement colonies.

The speakers whom Faizal and the local JUH team invited to this special program all stressed the importance of religious unity, as well as the link between religious harmony and national progress. These "secular values" were reaffirmed by the presence of distinguished Hindu and Muslim religious leaders and guests. The term "secular," here again, refers to its popular understanding as the opposite of "communal." By affirming their secular and nationalist values, speakers also asserted that responsibility for the security and well-being of Muslims should be shared by everyone, not only Muslims. In part, Faizal's communal harmony program was thus a public performance of secularism and nationalism designed for the local Muslim villagers but also for the local political elite and public administration. JUH showed its willingness to collaborate with state authorities by inviting police and local administration officials to their program, reminding the assembly that India is a single nation in which the concerns of one should be the concerns of everyone.

JUH has always put a lot of effort in publicly proving their secular credentials. The speeches from this event are directly in line with the ideas advanced by Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani on "Composite Nationalism and Islam" (M. H. A. Madani 2006, 2001) and Maulana Syed Asad Madani (M. S. A. Madani 2007) in the first years of Independence. These public displays of secular and national values are a way to confirm JUH's good willingness to participate in the national project, and its concern for India's modernization and progression as a whole. But they are also a way to hold the state accountable; the state's moral responsibility is conferred to all its citizens, including religious minorities.

Pragmatism and politics

Many other organizations shared this dual focus on community self-development and the reaffirmation of the secular state's responsibility towards all citizens. While several held similar programs emphasizing religious unity and nationalism, on a day-to-day basis, many kept their distance from state-led programs to instead focus on their own activities. The idealization of the secular state as responsible, impartial, and situated above society, with a focus on self-development and economic empowerment, is what I call Muslim NGOs' politics of pragmatism. This dual approach focuses on outcomes without abandoning ideals of state-led equal redistribution of resources and advantages.

In this sense, Muslim NGOs' approach contradicts the argument supported by some scholars and popular opinion that Muslim charitable organizations are mostly focused on internal reforms and privatized forms of development.[117] The continuous resort to a rhetoric of secularism and nationalism to emphasize the state's responsibility and moral debt towards Muslims indicates otherwise. Muslim NGOs' political expectations also challenge the idea that the combination of religion and political advocacy is necessarily anti-secular. Here, the political mobilization of the religious clerics part of JUH is grounded in secularism—understood as the protection, anti-discrimination and equal treatment of minorities. Like Williams' findings in lower-caste Muslim neighbourhoods, this chapter shows that "community social improvements were more quietly pursued through independent but complementary welfare spaces which replicated rather than rejected the ideals of secularism" (Williams 2011, 278).

[117] See also Hefner (2011) on "civil Islam" in Indonesia for other examples of engagement with democratic politics.

Several factors might explain why the state remains important despite Muslim NGO workers' pessimism and focus on autonomous development. First, Hansen's (2001) argument on the "myth of the state" can provide some answers. Hansen argues that there is a stark distinction between actual governance and the constructed *idea* of the state. Less orderly modes of governance marked by incoherence, partiality, and brutality coexist alongside images and ideals of a just and rational state. In other words, Hansen maintains that the imagination of the state includes its "profane dimensions" and its contrasting "sublime qualities" (2001, 130). This dual dimension might explain why the state remains important as a symbol, despite the fact that Muslim NGOs resort to pragmatic solutions in their actual practices.

Second, I suggest that some Muslim NGOs' reluctance to be too critical towards the state but simultaneously to collaborate too closely with state agencies comes from the local and global prejudices against Islam that influence how Muslims are perceived in India. Since the rise of Hindu nationalism and the current global "war on terrorism," the notion of "a homogenized fundamentalist Islam" (Asad 2006, 507) as the prime enemy of modern secularism has a lot of sway on public perceptions of Muslim charitable organizations and other Islamic institutions in India and abroad (P. Chatterjee 2010; Sikand 2005). Muslim charitable organizations tend to be viewed with suspicion, which reduces their political engagement in a Muslim-minority context. The two JUH examples show that to subvert this view, JUH has developed an effective strategic use and performance of secularism. This strategy emphasizes injustices towards Muslims (being treated as second class citizens) while cultivating JUH's secular public image and political relations to offset potential accusations that members are anti-national, anti-democratic or anti-secular.

However, not all organizations have had the same success. Each organization has had a story of misrepresentation and public suspicion. For example, Charity Alliance, a Muslim charitable organization headed by the leader of the old Delhi-based Muslim advocacy organization All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat, had a troubling experience when it established an office in Kairana to coordinate its relief activities in the Muzaffarnagar refugee camps (see Chapter Six). As soon as the office was opened, Dainik Jagran, the most widely read Hindi newspaper in the region, published an article stating that a "control room" of terrorism had been established in the city. The article made links between the organization's arrival in Kairana and rumors that members of the Pakistani militant organization Lashkar-e-Taiba were capitalizing on the anger caused by the Muzaffarnagar riots to recruit young Muslim men in the relief camps (Dainik Jagran 2014). Although the leader of the organization sent an official letter in protest to the newspaper, which did not publish similar articles afterwards, the event stained the organization's image.

Maulana Aasif, of JUH Lucknow, also told me: "Muslim organizations' role should be to help poor people. We are not just for Muslims, we are for all. But how to give? You start collecting a lot of zakat, and then police will say, close them. Funds still come to us, we do things […]. But we have to face a lot" (C18, Lucknow, 2014-05). As M. Jalaluddin, a Jamaat-e-Islami worker coordinating emergency aid in Muzaffarnagar rightly pointed out, suspicion and scrutiny regarding Muslim organizations' activities at a global level often demonstrate a double standard in perceptions of charitable organizations (C19, Meerut, 2014-05).

Even NGOs that do not identify as religious but work with Muslim marginalized populations experience these problems. For example, a Muslim feminist activist who runs an organization for Muslim women's rights told me about the difficulties she regularly experienced in trying to find funds outside "Muslim circles."

> I receive one fund from the National Commission of Women, but the rest is all from different sources. Funding is a big problem. Once I asked Ford Foundation for funding and I had a big list of questions to answer, but they said no because my organization was looking too communal. I am not Al-Qaeda!!! UNICEF also refuses to give us funds and same for USAID (N1, Lucknow, 2013-09).

This activist wanted to receive funding to support Muslim women's rights surrounding domestic violence, divorce, and marriage. In her opinion, her failure to secure foreign funding was undoubtedly related to misperceptions about Islam. While she insisted her organization was non-religious, she was nevertheless associated with the movement that scholars have called "Islamic feminism" (See Chapter Four, and Tschalaer 2017; Vatuk 2008). While some Indian Muslims might consider themselves as forming a socioeconomic category and develop charitable activities in this perspective, international funders often only consider the religious dimension of their identity.

Another possible explanation for the dual approach in which the state is criticized but retained as a collaborator is related to what I explained in the Introduction: that socioeconomic rights have generally been viewed in India as an issue pertaining to discriminated caste groups more than to religious groups (Bajpai 2011). Consequently, while JUH is extremely vocal when it comes to issues concerning the maintenance of Muslim Personal Law, or the control of religious sites such as the *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya, they tend to favor cooperation with the government on issues related to socioeconomic development.

Finally, non-Muslim NGOs share Muslim NGOs' ambivalence surrounding collaboration with the government for the implementation of government programs (Bornstein and Sharma 2016). This ambivalence is closely related to narratives on government corruption that are not unique to Muslim organizations, but that pervade imaginations of the state in India (see Gupta 2012). Many NGOs thus prefer not losing their time trying to obtain government funding or trying to support

the government in implementing programs, knowing that their efforts will be undermined by a highly corrupted system.

Conclusion

To a certain extent, Muslim NGOs' turn to "private" economic development channels is in part an outcome of their distrust towards the State and their feeling that minority groups have been neglected by the government. Their pessimism towards the Indian welfare state and sense of 'betrayal' is magnified by personal experience of being unable to benefit from promised government programs for minorities, as Tahir's and Faizal's attempts to receive scholarships for their families demonstrate. Many organizations keep a distance from government schemes and programs to instead focus on their own charitable and development projects. Like other Muslim charitable workers and volunteers, Tahir and Faizal are involved in community work, and want to invest in education so that Muslims become self-reliant and do not have to wait for government programs.

Nevertheless, the chapter shows that organizations do believe in state responsibility, and that the turn towards strategies that are similar to neoliberal economic development approaches is more a pragmatic choice than a dismissal of state authority and responsibility. In Jamiat's activities and discourses, we see how the organization reinstates state responsibility by conveying ideals of national unity and secularism. In summary, a shared understanding of the state as corrupt, partial, and absent, and yet powerful and indispensable, informs charitable and political action.

In the next chapter, I examine how relations between Muslim NGOs and state agencies take shape after an event of politically supported anti-Muslim violence. More specifically, I discuss the

challenges these politics of pragmatic development raise in the particularly tense context of "exceptional" collective violence.

Chapter Six
Emergency Relief and the Muzaffarnagar Riots

On September 7 and 8, 2013, politically-orchestrated riots broke out between Hindu Jats[118] and Muslims in the rural parts of the Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts. The official death toll was sixty (70% of them were Muslims) and hundreds were injured across nine villages. But over 50,000 people from more than 35 villages also left their homes, seeking shelter in refugee camps (GOI 2013b).[119] In several villages, Muslim homes were burned, plundered, and looted. In other villages, Muslims fled, fearing that the same would happen to them.

This was the largest communal conflict in India since the 2002 Gujarat riots, and the first of this size in rural Uttar Pradesh (UP). Almost all displaced people were lower-caste Muslims who escaped from Hindu Jat dominated villages. They sought refuge in temporary relief camps set up in *madrasas* and unoccupied government forest lands, close to Muslim-dominated villages. Although a majority of the displaced returned to their villages in the months following the conflict, a significant proportion refused to do so in fear of new demonstrations of violence from Hindu Jats. A year after the conflict, thousands of people still had not found a permanent resettlement option, but were determined not to return to their villages. They were resigned to endure the precarious living conditions in the camps for as long as it would take, even if some of these camps were located barely a few kilometers away from what was left of their home. Several signs suggest

[118] Jats are a peasant caste, mostly localized in northern India and Pakistan. They represent one of the main Hindu caste groups in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts (Ramakumar 2016). In large parts of North-Western UP, they dominate landownership (Jeffrey 2010, 42).

[119] Independent "fact-finding" teams from, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD), and Joint Citizens' Initiative (JCI) have evaluated that the number of displaced people ranged somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000. The number of injured people is also higher, according to some of them.

that this event was more than an upsurge of violence between two religious communities; local political leaders—including some from UP's ruling party at that time—contributed to the mounting tensions by capitalizing on long-lasting prejudices against Muslims.

When such a humanitarian emergency remains within state boundaries, in this case Uttar Pradesh, providing relief to internally displaced people (IDPs) does not fall within the responsibility of the central government, but is left to the discretion of regional state-level governments. Moreover, cases of communal violence do not fall under the purview of the National Management Disaster Authority; they are treated as state-level matters of law and order. This raises two issues. First, there is no standard formal recognition for victims of communal violence; whether they are considered as "proper victims" is left to the discretion of regional states. In the context of the Muzaffarnagar riots, this has significant consequences for the victims because of the ambiguous role played by the party in power during the riots. While the Samajwadi Party (SP) government provided more compensation to the victims than in past communal riots, it also tried to quickly erase the conflict by delegitimizing victims' experience of violence and recasting them as poor Muslims trying to benefit from humanitarian aid. The government thus had a lukewarm commitment to the victims. Second, the absence of a national intervention policy and clear directions regarding emergency measures and justice tends to leave much responsibility to provide relief to nonstate actors—namely residents, NGOs, and activists.[120] Muslim NGOs and other nonstate actors in fact played a crucial role in the emergency measures, which had a decisive impact on who received aid and the type of aid received. While local responses to conflicts can be more effective on many levels, they cannot necessarily provide legal and political accountability.

[120] The implementation of a "Communal Violence Bill" was debated in Parliament but the proposition was dropped in 2014.

In each of the past chapters, I examined how Muslim charitable organizations mobilize to aid impoverished Muslims in India. I discussed how workers and volunteers promote self-help and a stronger participation in the capitalist economy to counteract the everyday "ordinary" forms of discrimination and exclusion affecting the Indian Muslim minority, and the government's inaction in resolving the situation. This chapter focuses on how organizations' work and perspectives unfold in episodes of extraordinary violence—more accurately, in moments when everyday, systematized violence against Muslims is made particularly visible.

Here also, many Muslim NGOs did not limit themselves to charity or emergency help. Instead, they concentrated efforts on the "developmental needs" of displaced people, building resettlement colonies, schools, and promoting self-reliance, as they did in their everyday activities in Lucknow. While they were all critical of the government's role in the conflict, most did not favor strategies of outright opposition to local political actors, but used poverty alleviation and "development" as pragmatic political strategies to benefit victims and create "incremental rights" (Das 2011) to resettlement. Yet, the local government also appropriated this "development-focused" framing of the crisis, and to a certain extent, deflected the organized and systematic character of violence. This situation raises questions regarding the extent to which NGOs, especially religious NGOs, can address and change the roots of political conflicts, and the possible outcomes of humanitarian aid.

One of anthropology's concerns in the study of humanitarianism has been the potential politicizing and depoliticizing effects of relief work (Bornstein and Redfield 2011; Fassin 2012b). Calhoun (2008) argues, for example, that humanitarian response to emergency crises inevitably influences the popular understanding of political conflicts just by the fact that the term "emergency" implies a unique localised event, a spontaneous crisis, and disregards the more

profound, organized and enduring character of conflicts. Others argue that the technocratic and bureaucratic dimensions of relief work also depoliticize conflicts (in the same way as it occurs in any development project; see Ferguson 1990). Moreover, there are debates surrounding whether humanitarian organizations should focus on emergency relief or seek deeper changes (Fassin 2012b; Redfield 2006), since, some have argued, the neutral stance taken by many humanitarian organizations in contexts of political conflict—such as the decision to treat both victims and perpetrators—can have adverse effects (Malkki 1996).

Simultaneously, many studies have highlighted that humanitarian action, whether it focuses on immediate relief or the implementation of longer-term social and political transformations, is always political. For example, the way humanitarian action represents and categorizes victims is a form of politicization, since it prioritizes some people and excludes others. Similarly, Adams (2013) writes that humanitarian action produces different kinds of vulnerability. Victims are framed as objects of compassion fueling an economy of affect (Adams 2013), as subjects of trauma in need of psychological and medical help (Fassin 2012b; Ticktin 2011), or as categories of people eligible to particular kinds of refugee and citizenship status (Feldman 2007). In this chapter, I argue that humanitarian action, in the Muzaffarnagar context, is not only depoliticizing—organizations take a political stance by turning to "development" after "relief"—but this strategy has certain limits when states fail to recognize violence.

The chapter is structured in the following way: the first part briefly describes how the riots were "produced" and some of the probable causes behind them. The second part provides an overview of the humanitarian aid process in the aftermath of the conflict, and discusses how victims' legitimacy was challenged, mostly by the UP government. Finally, I analyze how NGOs tried to further victims' claims by navigating narratives of violence and economic disadvantage.

Given the recency of the riots, few in-depth academic studies provide a detailed analysis of the events. Ramakumar's article (2016) is a notable exception, and provides an excellent analysis of the important roles played by local politicians, farmers' unions, and caste *panchayats* [councils] in adopting and spreading communal discourses in the region.[121] Moreover, little scholarly attention has been given to the role of NGOs, especially religious organizations, in the relief process. One of the aims of this chapter is to fill this gap.[122]

The production of communal riots

Large-scale incidences of communal violence are frequently described as moments of unexpected collective hysteria and loss of control. In India, this interpretation of communal riots, as unexpected outbreaks of violence, builds on the theory that interreligious violence results from primordial religious or ethnic animosity between Hindus and Muslims. This explanatory framework attributes equal responsibility for violence to both Hindu and Muslim parties. As Hansen (1999) and Brass (2011) argue, this is a comfortable position for politicians to adopt because it absolves them from any participation in the conflict. Instead, the blame can be displaced onto irrational fanatic crowds, where both groups are equally portrayed as victims and perpetrators of violence.

While the importance of religious feelings in sowing disagreement should not be downplayed, other explanatory factors, such as political interests, also play a significant role in triggering such conflicts (Van der Veer 1994). Reducing the riot to Hindu-Muslim religious antagonism obscures

[121] A few other scholars analyze the causes of the conflict in shorter articles (see Fazal 2013; Berenschot 2014; Ahmed 2013). Coalitions of scholars and activists have also produced reports on the potential causes of the conflict (see footnote 123). Furthermore, the documentary *Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai…*(Singh Sawhney 2015) provides vivid images of the conflict and its repercussions on local Muslim villagers.

[122] On Muslim religious organizations' relief work after past events of communal violence in India, see Jasani (2008).

a key part of the conflict. Hurd makes a similar argument in her analysis of how international public policies and global human rights advocacy tend to treat certain conflicts as essentially "religious." She writes: "Privileging religious difference as a causal factor in politics obscures the broader fields in which social tension, discrimination, and conflict take shape" (Hurd 2015, xii). Although Hurd's work relates to a different topic, her argument that singling out religion as the only explanatory factor can reduce the complexity of certain conflicts applies here, as well.

In the following sections, I present evidence suggesting that the riots were, at least partly, politically-supported forms of anti-Muslim violence. I go on to show how caste politics made Muzaffarnagar a particularly fertile terrain to orchestrate the riot. While there were, and always have been, tensions between Hindus and Muslims in Muzaffarnagar, I emphasize that religious animosities in themselves do not normally lead to riots. Looking at the political dimension of the riot matters because it helps understand the humanitarian response to the crisis, as well as the unique strategies adopted by Muslim charitable organizations.

An "institutionalized riot system"

Political science and anthropology scholars such as Brass (2011), Hansen (2001, 1999) and Van der Veer (1994) have convincingly demonstrated how past instances of Hindu-Muslim violence in India were partly politically motivated (e.g.: Gujarat riots in 2002, Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya and Mumbai riots in 1992-1993). They argue that the creation of communal division is a tool of electoral politics, linked with the rise of Hindu nationalist political movements, to polarize votes along religious lines. The Muzaffarnagar riots occurred a year before the national elections, and there is probable cause to think that local Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders were hoping to pit Hindus against Muslims to consolidate a Hindu electoral base. The SP party's interest in the conflict is more ambiguous. One of the most plausible hypotheses is that communal riots could

also have helped the party increase its popular support. The party had a reputation for standing "on the side of Muslims" in Uttar Pradesh (UP), and was relatively confident in keeping the "Muslim vote." However, distancing itself from Muslims by letting a riot targeting this group break out might have been a strategy to help secure new Hindu voters, as well.

Brass and Hansen's analyses of prior riots in India are useful to understand how the Muzaffarnagar crisis was "produced" to achieve this electoral goal. In *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (2011), Brass argues that communal violence in India is part of an "institutionalized riot system" divided in three phases. The first phase involves preparation/rehearsal, during which communal discourses are created and maintained in preparation for riots. According to Brass, these communal discourses involve historical rectification, or more specifically, the reinterpretation of history to suggest that periods of Muslim conquest have destroyed a former glorious Hindu civilization. Communal discourses also reference particular sites of memory, such as mosques and other Muslim religious sites, on the pretext that they have been built over Hindu religious sites. Finally, they demonize Muslims by portraying them as violent, anti-national, and as having secret allegiances to Pakistan. Veena Das and Paola Bachetta also point to the specific demonization of the Muslim man as a threat to Hindu women and, incidentally, to the entire Hindu nation (Das 2007; Bacchetta 1994). Brass demonstrates that these communal discourses are not only produced right before riots but can be a continuous activity in riot endemic areas. The second phase in Brass's "institutionalized riot system" corresponds to the activation/enactment of a large-scale riot, and is often triggered by exceptional circumstances such as upcoming elections. As I illustrate below, this includes local political leaders inciting people, forming alliances with local strongmen, etc. Third, once the riots are over, actors such as state representatives control the narrative of violence and the interpretation

of its causes. This narrative-building happens through formal investigations and commissions, which have historically exonerated perpetrators and put the blame on both communities (M. Chatterjee 2016; Hansen 2001).

Certain aspects of the Muzaffarnagar riots differ from previous instances of communal violence and contradict some of the main theories on communal violence in India (Fazal 2013). First, the Muzaffarnagar riots do not have the amplitude of some of the prior events of communal violence, such as the Gujarat riots (2002). Second, the fact that the Muzaffarnagar riots broke out in rural areas confounds scholars of communal violence, since past riots have usually been concentrated in urban areas (see Varshney 2003). Third, the relative absence of prior communal tension in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts, and the common involvement of Hindus and Muslims in local associations such as the farmers' union contradict Varshney's study (2003) indicating that riots are more likely to happen in regions where there is less "civic" or "associational" links between Hindus and Muslims. Finally, the presence of a "pro-Muslim" political party (Samajwadi Party) in power at the time of the riots challenges Wilkinson's theory (2006) suggesting that riots are less likely to occur in cases where political parties depend on Muslims' votes to get elected. For the most part, however, the Muzaffarnagar event contains most of the ingredients of Brass's "institutionalized riot system." In the following overview of the events, I demonstrate the correspondence between the Muzaffarnagar riots and Brass's interpretation of prior events of communal violence.[123]

Reportedly, an incident of sexual harassment involving both Hindu and Muslim parties in the Kawal village on August 27, 2013 triggered the violence. But at the time of the riots, rumors

[123] I cannot provide all the details about the conflict since the chapter focuses on its aftermath and humanitarian aid. A detailed description of the sequence of events can be found in NGO and independent "fact-finding" teams' reports (ANHAD 2013; M. Rao et al. 2013; Joint Citizens' Initiative 2013) and in the government's report (2013b).

surrounded different versions of what actually happened that day.[124] One story indicates that two young Hindu Jat men from the neighbouring Malikpura village, Sachin and Gaurav Malik, allegedly killed Shahnawaz Qureshi, a young Muslim man residing in Kawal, for having flirted with their sister. A group of Muslims from Kawal then retaliated and killed the two Hindu young men. The other accounts of the events suggested that Sachin, Gaurav, and Shahnawaz actually died after a motorbike collision. In fact, two different First Information Reports (FIRs) were lodged to the police at that time, each recounting these two different scenarios. However, it was the first version that was mostly advanced by local BJP politicians and Hindu Jat *khap* leaders,[125] because it can easily be tied to the widespread discourses that portray Muslim men as potential sexual predators of Hindu women (Das 2006; Bacchetta 1994). The Meerut BJP Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Sangeet Som, contributed to the ambiguity of the event by circulating a Youtube video of the Sachin and Gaurav murder, which was later found to be a fake. The video was actually two years old and had been shot in Sialkot, Pakistan.[126] Some argued that the sexual harassment version of the story was fabricated. In the end, the only sure thing was that these three people died the same day.

BJP politicians and allied Hindu Jat *khap* leaders had already been accusing the SP government of being too lenient towards Muslim thugs and creating an unsafe environment for Hindu women; tensions grew even further in the area following the August 27th incident. On August 28 and 29, clashes broke out between Hindu Jats and Muslims. Then, on August 30, a Muslim protest was held in Muzaffarnagar, during which Kadir Rana, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Member of

[124] Three other "communal" incidents related to sexual harassment have also preceded this one (Lisarh, June 5, 2013; Tawli, August 9, 2013; Sohram, August 18, 2013) (M2, Shahpur, 2014-03).
[125] *Khaps* are social institutions governing different *gotras* [clans]. Most of the Hindu Jat *khaps* started supporting the BJP after the 1990s.
[126] Sangeet Som and Suresh Rana, another BJP leader, were booked for allegedly encouraging enmity between Hindus and Muslims and then quickly released.

Parliament (MP), allegedly gave a provocative speech. Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind (JUH) members present at this meeting gave me a different interpretation of the event, and said that it was not an organized Muslim protest. According to them, Muslims regrouped because they were coming out of the mosque after the *namaaz* [prayers].

The next day, on August 31st, a large *panchayat* [assembly] was organized at Nagla Mandaur, after the BJP successfully mobilized all Hindu Jat *khaps.* Muslims were excluded from the event. *Khap* leaders and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (the farmer's union under the leadership of Naresh Tikait, member of the *Baliyan khap*) incited their members to attend the *panchayat*. However, Ramakumar specifies that Naresh Tikait called for a cancellation of the *panchayat* at the last minute, at the demand of the district administration (Ramakumar 2016, 16). On September 5th, another *panchayat* took place in Lisarh and created more agitation. The government then imposed a curfew in Muzaffarnagar and all shops were shut down on September 6th (C20, Muzaffarnagar, JUH, 2014-05). Before the riots, Ramakumar (2016) reports that a campaign against allegedly illegal meat processing plants owned by Muslims had also been organized by the BJP and one of the regional Hindu Jat *khaps* (*Gathwala khap*). This campaign makes a deliberate reference to the sensitive history of cow slaughter fights in North India (Bayly 1985).

To regain its lost support after trying to cancel the August 31st panchayat, Naresh Tikait organized another grand *panchayat* [*mahapanchayat*] at Nagla Mandaur on September 7th (Ramakumar 2016). The riots began in earnest after this grand assembly. The *mahapanchayat* possibly attracted a hundred thousand people, including local leaders and BJP politicians.[127] The *mahapanchayat*'s theme was *Bahu Beti izzat Bachao* [Save our daughters' and wives' honour],

[127] Estimates of the number of people who attended the *mahapanchayat* vary widely, going from 20,000 to 100,000, depending on the sources.

and the leaders raised the Sachin, Gaurav and Shahnawaz event as an example of the threat that Muslim men represent for Hindu women. Available footage shows BJP politicians, alongside Naresh Tikait, holding inflammatory speeches in front of a crowd of Hindu Jats waving weapons in the air. Exactly what was said during the *mahapanchayat* remains uncertain, as do the events that followed. People left with shovels, knives and other weapons, shouting anti-Muslim slogans such as *Ya Pakistan ya kabristan jao* [Go to Pakistan or in the graveyard]; altercations that followed led to both Hindu and Muslim deaths. Following this phase of preparation and heated confrontations, a large-scale riot broke out.

Throughout the evening of September 7th and the next morning, riots took place across different villages. Mosques and homes were burnt, people killed, and women raped. Several Muslim victims told me—and the media—that on the day of the riots, they phoned the police department repeatedly without receiving any answer. Police and army forces reached most villages by the end of the afternoon, but the riots had started early in the morning.

Many Muslim victims and local residents felt that the district magistrate (DM) had not taken sufficient measures to ease tensions between Hindus and Muslims that had been building through small clashes, rumors, and local panchayats. The local administration was also criticized for letting the August 31st *panchayat* take place. For example, a local journalist from Shahpur—one of the affected towns—who had witnessed and covered the events felt that some police and administrative officers were biased against Muslims [*pakshpat*] and were supporting the riots. For him, this was because most officers were from the "Hindu community" [*Hindu samaj*] and a majority among them were Jats [M2, Shahpur, 2014-03]. Relatedly, some questioned why the government had not made changes in the police department prior to the riots, given that regional tensions were rising, and that many police officers were Hindu Jats. The UP government did

eventually remove the head of the police department and the district magistrate from their positions not long after the riots, but people remained suspicious of the government's motives and intentions.[128]

The progression of the Muzaffarnagar riots thus seems consistent with what Brass has called an institutionalized riot system. The use of an incident of sexual violence to build a campaign to protect Hindu women from "violent" and "cunning" Muslim men; the slogans portraying Muslims as anti-nationals by suggesting that they should go back to Pakistan, and the allegations that law and order was disturbed by Muslim thugs and the SP government's laxity all echo the processes described by Brass.[129] Despite this deliberate construction and dissemination of rumors and communal discourses, however, riots can neither be produced just anywhere nor at any moment in time; in many cases, they must build on pre-existent local issues. The next section builds on Ramakumar's (2016) detailed analysis to show how politicians capitalized on local caste politics to stimulate Hindu-Muslim antagonism in the area.

Caste, class and voting patterns

Communal violence in this particular area of Western UP might have been made possible by at least two factors: first, changes in the agricultural business sector, and second, the rising influence of certain sections of the Muslim population. Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts are largely agricultural areas that rely principally on the culture of sugarcane. According to the 2011 Census,

[128] Many changes were made to Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) postings right after the riots. SSP Subhash Chandra Dubey was first removed for his incapacity to prevent and control the riots. Dubey was then replaced by SSP Pravin Kumar who, in turn, got replaced by SSP Hari Narain Singh.

[129] The image of the violent and sexually perverse Muslim man was also circulating through rumors of a "*love jihad*." The *love jihad* theory has been disseminated by Hindu nationalist groups and implies that there is an organized movement of young Muslim men using seduction to convert young Hindu girls to Islam and increase, through this method, the Muslim population in India. A few days after the riots, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader stated that the riots had occurred because of *love jihad* activities prior to the conflict (Bhatnagar 2015). The campaign against *love jihad* was again on the rise in UP during the 2014 election campaign.

Hindu Jats own the majority of agricultural lands (see also Ramakumar 2016, 4). Muslim Jats (called *Muley* Jats in the region) also own a small proportion of the land, but the majority of Muslims in the region are landless workers, and own fewer material assets (Jeffrey 2010, 41).

In the late 1980s, both Muslim and Hindu elite peasants (including the Jats) used to support Charan Singh's Bharatiya Lok Dhal party and were involved in the farmers' Bharatiya Kisan Union, headed by Mahendra Singh Tikait (father of the current leader, Naresh Tikait) (Ramakumar 2016, 6). Voting patterns prior to the 2014 elections show that religious polarization was not a characteristic of the area, since votes were historically divided along caste and class lines rather than religious lines (Verniers 2014). Some residents I interviewed told me that *Muley* Jats used to attend local panchayats, where they would discuss agricultural matters of relevance for all.

After Charan Singh's death, Bharatiya Lok Dhal voters went in two directions, some supporting his son, Ajit Singh—who eventually gave his support to the BJP—and others supporting Mulayam Singh Yadav, the SP Chairman (Ramakumar 2016, 7). This increased the divisions that already existed between *khaps*. Muslims eventually started deserting the Bharatiya Kisan Union, sensing growing support for the BJP. In the 2012 state elections, Muslims then largely supported the SP. While Muslims had been traditionally underrepresented in the State Assembly, they became close to a near-proportionate representation (Verniers 2014).[130] Ramakumar argues that the BJP needed to create unity between Hindu *khaps* to counter this trend, and used the growing power of Muslims in the region as a pretext to consolidate Hindu sentiment. Many told me that the riots were thus not a Hindu versus Muslim issue, but rather a Hindu Jat versus *Muley* Jat issue. The leader of the Muslim Jat Association I interviewed shared this opinion, although he added that they had been

[130] Since the *Babri Masjid* demolition in the early 1990s, Muslims in UP have largely supported the SP. However, with the exception of the BJP, Muslims' votes in the region remain divided between many parties (Verma and Gupta 2016; Verniers 2014).

made to fight by "upper levels:" "Before these riots and since 1947 [after the Partition of India and Pakistan], there has never been conflicts between Jats. Hindus and Muslims have not fought; they were made to fight by the upper level, for votes" (M1, Shahpur, 2014-01).

Muley Jats, however, were not the prime target of the riots, nor were any of the other higher caste Muslims. For the most part, people who sought refuge in the relief camps were lower caste Muslims who occupied the bottom rungs of the economic ladder. This partly contradicts the above argument regarding internal divisions between Jats, and some have instead argued that the BJP succeeded in creating communal division because of rising conflicts between landowners and workers. Ramakumar's position and my own analysis suggest that lower caste Muslims were simply an easier target. Many villagers I spoke to told me that Hindu Jats did not necessarily have the strength to attack villages dominated by *Muley* Jats. Moreover, most riots happened in villages where Hindu Jats were demographically dominant compared to Muslims, probably because these villages represented easier targets.

For example, a few months after the conflict, I had a conversation with a *Muley* Jat sugarcane farmer from *Purbalian* village, who was present during the killing of four Hindu men right after the September 7th grand assembly [*mahapanchayat*]. The farmer was now facing murder charges. I asked him whether Muslims and Jats had started to speak to each other again in *Purbalian*. He said: "Yes we talk, but people don't come in our neighbourhood [*mohalla*]. Jats are on one side [of the village], and *Muley* Jats are on the other." I then asked him how the "atmosphere" [*halat*] now was in the village, to which he responded: "Great, *ji*, great [*bahut badhiya*], there is no fear/terror in us [*hamare logon ke andaar koi dahshat ki baat nahee hai*]. Young men [*ladke*] have a lot of work to do in the area. We didn't fear, we do not have any troubles [*koi pareshanee nahee hai*]."

The farmer was referring specifically to the expression "*dahshat*" [terror] because this was a term used by all camp-dwellers to justify why they had left their villages, and he wanted to show me that it did not apply to *Muley* Jats. He was rather proud to say that *Muley* Jats had been able to defend their village, and did not seem too concerned by the murder charges against him. He also wanted to let me know that *Muley* Jats were the most powerful Muslims [*sabse takatwar hain*]. The leader of the Muslim Jat Association also confirmed that Muslim Jats had kept Hindu Jats away from their villages.

Many camp dwellers I spoke to also felt that they had been attacked because they were less powerful and thus easier targets. Here is how Akhbar, a refugee from *Lisarh*, puts it:

> The riots, it's just on us the poorest that it happened. There are Muslim Jats too…in *Shahpur*, it's only Muslim Jats. But in those places, nothing happened. There are Muslim Rajputs and Muslim Gujjars too. It's written in books [*kitab mein likha hai*] that they were all Hindus before. They have the same strength as the Hindus Jats so they were not attacked (*Basikalan* camp; 2014-06).[131]

It thus seems that more than religion *per se*, changes in economic power and caste politics played out in the conflict. Moreover, not all Muslims were targeted equally; it was mostly poorer Muslims who paid the price for these tensions.

Everyday Hindu-Muslim interactions

A closer look at the everyday relationships between Hindu and Muslim communities in the region supports the theory that the riots were politically organized, and that religious differences alone are not a sufficient explanation for the riots. For most camp dwellers, the attacks were unexpected. Many insisted that they had harmonious relationships with Hindu Jat landowners before the riots.

[131] People commonly say that Muslim Jats and Rajputs were former Hindus who converted to Islam in the region.

For them, the absence of prior tensions demonstrates the suddenness of the conflict and the probability that the conflict was motivated by a larger political goal.

> Before the conflict, for ages we [Hindus and Muslims] have lived there together [*sadiyon se mil-julke rehte the*], we loved each other, we lived together [*ek dusre se piar se, mohabbat se mil-julke rehte the*]. I stayed home [when everyone started escaping] because I thought that they [Hindu villagers] were on our side, they are our neighbours; we stay at the same place. In our village, the way of living was very good [*acchi sharam-lehaz*]. We respected [*izzat*] them. Now, how can we ever trust them again… (2014-04).

These were the words of a 75-year-old man from *Phugana*—one of the riot-affected villages—who lost his son during the riots. He was now hosted by Muslim local villagers in *Jhogia Kila* and trying to explain his feelings of betrayal and incomprehension. Others alluded to the fact that Muzaffarnagar used to be called "*Mohabattnagar*" [the city of love], in reference to the mutual respect between religious communities in the region.

Being of different *jaatis* ["castes"; group of clans], lower caste Muslims, Hindu Jats, and *Dalits* [lowest caste groups] generally live in relatively separate areas of villages, but are linked to and have interactions with each other through work, economic transactions (e.g.: more fortunate people in the villages use to act as moneylenders), participation in village organizational structures, and religious, cultural and daily life celebrations and exchanges. A high proportion of Muslim IDPs used to be seasonal workers in the sugarcane fields predominantly owned by Hindu Jats, along with other lower-caste Hindu groups. The other IDPs were mostly part of the "unorganized sector" [*mazdoor wala*]. Common professional occupations included carpentry, house building, and tailoring. In the camp where I did most of my fieldwork, the majority of men hawked and resold

clothes and goods [*kapde-pheri wala*].[132] The least fortunate were daily-wage workers involved in the brick-making industry.[133]

In describing their relationships with Hindu Jats, riot victims emphasized examples that reduced these hierarchical links to prove that relations between groups were generally harmonious. They stated that both groups would invite each other to marriages or other celebrations, and, most importantly, that they would share the same food.

> There were a lot of gatherings before [*bahut uthna-baithna tha pehle*], in weddings, eating and drinking… People used to eat and drink with us, just like you when you ate with us; there was lots of love [*jaise aapne hamare paas khaya, aise bhi log hamare saath khana, pina, prem bahut tha*] (Ajmal, Former Kutba resident, 2014-08).

> We got along fine with the Jats before. Our family was friends with the Jat *pradhan* [leader]. If he passed in front of our house, he would stop to drink tea (Dilshad, Former Kutba resident, 2014-06).

Camp-dwellers purposefully used the food-sharing example as it was an effective symbol to illustrate relationship proximity. It hints at the religious and caste prohibitions surrounding food consumption, suggesting that Hindu Jat landowners and lower-caste Muslims were able to overcome their religious differences and caste hierarchies to foster harmonious neighbourly relations (e.g.: Muslims make sure there are vegetarian food available at weddings for Hindus; higher caste Hindus accept food prepared by different castes; etc.).

As I discuss below, camp-dwellers continuously had to prove they were genuine "victims" and used various rhetorical strategies to do so. Camp-dwellers' emphasized the pre-conflict love and respect between Muslims and Hindu Jats partly to prove that the riots were single-sided and they

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[132] Hawkers usually buy small bulk of clothes in the Muzaffarnagar market and travel in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh to do door-to-door reselling. They can earn up to ₹50,000 per month in high "wedding season," and as low as ₹500-700 per month in low season. Some men travel three to four times a month for this trade, while others leave the region for periods of three weeks to one month at a time. Most of them interrupted their travels after the riots, because they did not want to leave their wives and children alone in the camps.

[133] Many camp dwellers also had to resort to this source of income after their displacement.

had no role to play in them. It was designed to help convince the public of the depth of their betrayal, and how camp-dwellers could not imagine resettling in the villages. By spending time in the camps, I learned that their relationships with Hindu Jats were punctuated by everyday tensions. In one camp, for example, camp dwellers were teasing a refugee who owed a considerable amount of money to a Hindu Jat back in the village, and were suggesting that the real reason why he was not eager to go back to his village was because he did not want to have to pay back his loan. Hindu-Muslim relations in the region can thus be described by what Singh (2011) calls agonistic intimacy: a copresence of conflict and cohabitation.

While relations between Hindu and Muslim communities were less harmonious than the way some of the riot victims described them to me, it does not mean that everyday conflicts lead to an escalation of violence, as during the riots. On this matter, it is interesting to examine how local residents talked about the transformation of "usual" violent incidents into abnormally large-scale events. For example, many argued that the type of incident that triggered the conflict—a Muslim man flirting with a Hindu woman—was a relatively common matter that rarely resulted in more than minor disputes between the concerned families. Maulana Faizal Qasmi, the JUH Muzaffarnagar Committee member told me that larger altercations due to sexual harassment allegations often occurred, but that they would very rarely turn into fights: "It happens every day here [clashes over love affairs]. This type of event, murder one, it was neither a communal issue, nor anything like that. In a normal society…Hindu boy, Muslim girl…this just keeps happening [*chalta rehta hai*]. People don't pay too much notice to these things [*uske upar to notice nahee lete*]" [C20, Muzaffarnagar, 2014-05]. Others in the refugee camps told me that Hindu/ Muslim "love affairs" were actually an important matter of concern: it was unthinkable for them that an

interreligious marriage would ever happen in their region, but they also argued that people could frequently reach agreements to solve these kinds of matters.

For instance, Mustakeem, a victim from Kutba who lost his father during the riots, recounted to me a case of sexual harassment that had happened in his village a few years ago. A Hindu young man had teased a Muslim girl from the same *biradree* [affiliated kin; from the same "caste"], the *Sheikhs*. The Hindu Jat *pradhan* [village leader]—the same who turned against the Muslims during the riots—immediately called a *panchayat* meeting [village council meeting] to deal with the situation. He ordered that the Hindu boy's family should offer public apologies to the Muslim girl's family, and if they failed to comply, the boy would have his head shaved, be covered in mud, and seated on a donkey to ride around the village (a punishment by humiliation sometimes practiced in the area, which Mustakeem reported to me half-jokingly). The whole family offered their apologies to the Muslim family members by publicly touching their head and feet, and the young man kept a very low profile from then onwards. Mustakeem added that this was such a humiliation for his family [*kitne bezati*] that the boy could have never imagined approaching a Muslim girl again.

Mustakeem's example represents a peaceful conflict resolution, but my interlocutors did frequently describe the region as particularly violent. I was repeatedly told that Muzaffarnagar was the capital of crime. Stories of honor killings, extortions, and political corruption were regular topics of conversation in the camps.[134] Small interreligious fights and other violent clashes were not banal, but people I spoke to tended to describe them as an unfortunate part of normal, everyday life. For them, these acts of violence were attributed to both Hindus and Muslims—and were not

[134] The local "mafia" was responsible for several numbers of killing during the year I spent going back and forth to Kairana and Muzaffarmagar. On a few occasions, the Kairana administration imposed a curfew on the town.

perpetuated only by "Muslim thugs," as rumors and slogans preceding the riot had claimed. A riot victim told me: "There are a lot of crimes here, before the riot [*danga*] it was like this. It is a dangerous region. Before it was not between Hindus and Muslims but between anyone" (Karimuddin, Kairana, 2014-06).

The point here is that for most villagers I met, violent clashes such as the Sachin, Gaurav and Shahnawaz incident existed, but did not trigger mass violence. For Mustakeem and the other refugees in the camps, these everyday forms of violence and of conflict resolution in their villages served as proof that riots would have never started without political planning and incitement. The riot was more than a manifestation of religious antagonism.

This is not to say that local people do not take part in riots. For instance, the riots grew to unexpected proportions, and their repercussions probably exceeded any prior political planning. Brass rightly argues that not all aspects of riots are planned and organized. He uses the following metaphor: "They [riots and pogroms] are best conceived as dramatic productions in which the directors are not in complete control, the cast of characters varies—some of them being paid, some of them acting voluntarily for loot or fun—and many of the parts have been rehearsed, but others have not" (Brass 2011, 32). Nevertheless, I stress here that the riots were more than a religious conflict, and that it is through this political lens that people and NGOs understood the conflict and made sense of it.[135]

[135] I primarily met people on the "victims' side" (Muslim victims, NGO workers and activists, and local politicians from the Congress, SP and BSP—the parties generally considered more supportive of Muslims), so it was expected that they would support the theory of politically organized violence against Muslims. However, some Hindu Jats also claimed that the conflict was provoked from "outside." In a conversation that ANHAD NGO workers reported to me, Hindu Jats villagers claimed they had nothing to do with the riots and that people from outside the area initiated the violence (ANHAD, Delhi, 2014-01).

I now turn to the second part of the chapter that focuses on the post-riot period. After giving an overview of the humanitarian landscape, I discuss how post-conflict interventions focused on the figure of the "poor Muslim," and how this conceptualization shaped riot victims' experience as well as their access to humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian aid

Within days following the riots, state-run and private relief camps were settled within the borders or on the outskirts of Muslim-dominated villages, sometimes only a few kilometers away from the villages hit by the riots. Some villagers reached camps on their own, by escaping through the fields, while others were escorted by army personnel. A few *pradhans* [village leaders], influential Muslim elites, and JUH members helped dispatch villagers to relief camp areas. Relief camps were, for the most part, set up in *madrasa* compounds, private lands and unoccupied state forest land. Many riot victims were also accommodated in local residents' houses, either directly in the houses or in the courtyards. Fifty-eight such camps—either state-run or unofficial—appeared in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli district landscapes.

Due to its ambiguous role in the conflict, the SP-led UP government was reluctant to devote much time or resources to humanitarian aid. Yet, after the Supreme Court ordered the government to provide relief, the government did get more involved.[136] It provided compensation to riot victims belonging to nine villages considered the most affected by the riots. Compensations totaled ₹90 *crores* (Can$18,000,000), and were distributed to 1,800 families who escaped from these nine affected villages. Each family received ₹5 *lakhs* (Can$10,000).[137]

[136] Mohd. Haroon & Ors. Versus Union of India & Anr. (2014) SCC 252
[137] The families of the deceased received an additional ₹20,000 in compensation.

After announcing that it would compensate riot victims, the government emphasized its generosity and firm intention to curb communal violence in Western UP. The Shamli District Magistrate (DM) proudly told me during an interview: "This is the first time in Indian history that a government does so much for riot victims. You can look everywhere, like what happened years ago in Gujarat [riots in 2002]; here the situation after the riots is much better" (Shamli, 2014-09).[138] Nevertheless, most humanitarian relief aid was provided by non-governmental organizations, individual donors, activists, and local residents and leaders.

NGO workers and volunteers in the camps, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, mostly came from Delhi, Lucknow and Western UP, with a few from farther away (e.g.: Siasat and Safa Baitul Maal (Hyderabad)). A few high-profile international organizations with branch offices in India such as Oxfam, CARE, Action Aid and Save the Children were also present, often in partnerships with small-scale Indian NGOs. I counted around sixty different organizations in the camps during the second humanitarian wave about five months after the conflict, when news about Muzaffarnagar resurfaced in the media because of several deaths due to the freezing weather in the camps.[139]

JUH was the largest relief provider and among the first to provide assistance. The organization was already operating in the region and thus able to mobilize relatively quickly after the conflict. JUH has strong local roots in Muzaffarnagar. The Shahpur *madrasa*, which hosted one of the largest temporary refugee camps, belonged to JUH. At least two *pradhans* [village leaders] I met from the villages that hosted IDPs were also JUH members. The organization also had a lot of

[138] The DM was comparing his interventions with those of the BJP, after the Gujarat riots in 2002.

[139] This is an underestimation of the number of organizations that were present on the ground since I focused on the main relief camps in which most humanitarian aid was concentrated. The number of organizations that donated money and goods via other organizations is also significantly higher. Humanitarian presence dropped precipitously after the first few weeks of intense relief activities, but peaked again when the winter season started. Media following-up on the conflict reported on deaths in the camps, including deaths of children, which attracted public sympathy. Temperature can drop to 0°C at night in the area, and camp dwellers had no protection against the cold.

unofficial members, sympathizers and local political alliances (see Chapter Five). JUH has its own relief fund for such emergencies (natural and manmade disasters), and channeled a lot of funding from other Muslim organizations to Muzaffarnagar, as well. In May 2014, members of the JUH national working committee told me they had already spent about eight *crore* rupees (Can$1,500,000) through relief activities.[140] In addition to JUH, Oxfam India and Joint Citizen's Initiative—a coalition of Lucknow- and Delhi-based "secular" NGOs—were among the most visible and largest relief providers.[141]

While both Muslim religious organizations and nonreligious organizations were present on the ground, many camp-dwellers were under the impression that the Muslim *qaum* [community] provided the majority of the help (e.g.: Jamaat-e-Islami – Delhi and UP; Zakat Foundation of India – Delhi; Charity Alliance – Delhi; Tayyub Hospital & Educational Trust – Deoband).[142] Baji (Chapter Four), had asked the *khawateens* [women] to donate money and goods for the victims. On a few occasions, Baji traveled by car from Lucknow to Muzaffarnagar to distribute collected material and organize medical camps, with a team of three doctors and myself. Taheera *apaa* and the Community Trust board members (Chapter Three) could not travel by themselves because of their age and health conditions, but collected money they donated to Jamaat-e-Islami, whose Meerut branch was providing relief in the area.

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[140] This only represents the direct expenses of the central national committee. The total relief aid expenditure, which includes the funds collected by local JUH units, is considerably higher.

[141] It is difficult to assess the contributions of each NGO as there are no records of all the aid provided in the region. Each village and camp held its own register of aid received; the district administration also kept a record of organizations. However, apart from the large international organizations, the majority of NGOs and individual donors simply came and went from the camps by themselves, without any official authorization.

[142] Part of the camp dwellers' impression can be explained by the fact that workers and volunteers representing nonreligious organizations on the ground were themselves Muslims. For example, Oxfam partnered with a local 'secular' women's rights organization called Astitva, which was headed by a Muslim woman. Astitva became an anchor point for most non-confessional NGOs, and many camp dwellers considered Astitva as part of the "Muslim community."

Most of the organizations' first activities included providing tents, food, basic clothing, goods necessary to live in temporary camps, and medical services. While most organizations left after the "crisis" became a more permanent "condition" (Feldman 2011, 205), a few stayed and transited from "relief" to "development." The remaining organizations became active in building resettlement colonies, which I discuss in the next section. At the peak of humanitarian aid during the winter season, campaigns to send warm clothes and blankets [*kambal*] were fairly successful, to the point that some relief camp committees started refusing the truckloads that were dropped off in their area. For example, camp leaders once refused the blanket load that the Bazm-e-Khawateen team and myself had carried from Lucknow, because they had already received enough of them.

Organizations organically divided relief work among themselves by trying to take care of different camps or cover different issues (e.g.: medical services, housing, legal aid). For example, while many NGOs used to stop in the large camps located closer to main roads, Charity Alliance—a Delhi-based organization headed by Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan, the well-known editor of *The Milli Gazette* and President of All India Muslim-e-Mushawarat—decided to cover the smaller camps that were harder to locate.[143] Each organization had their own assessment, survey and selection system, mostly because they did not trust the statistics produced by the local administration. Despite organizations' relative independence and "organic" separation of tasks, there were quite a few clashes and overlaps between the organizations' work. As in their everyday practice in

[143] Camps were dispersed in the rural areas of the district, and were sometimes difficult to locate and hardly accessible. The Malakpur Camp for instance, situated right beside the highway, received more help than others.

Lucknow, organizations were often critical and suspicious of each other, and worked relatively separately.[144]

The ambiguity of victimhood

Despite the relatively high quantity of help and attention surrounding camp dwellers—during the winter season, at least—people remained "doubtful" about victims' experiences. This doubt was due in large part to the government's response to the riots, as well as the absence of formal political and legal recognition of the conflict's causes and consequences.

As I mentioned above, the UP government provided significant compensation to victims after being ordered to do so, but its relief interventions were marked by significant backtracking. It seems like government representatives were shifting between roles of active relief provider and representatives of law and order, trying to quickly *erase* the riots and minimize the scope of their repercussions.[145] Moreover, providing compensation did not mean that political leaders took any responsibility for the event, nor did any of the BJP political leaders. This ambivalence cast doubt on riot victims' authenticity, which shaped the entire relief process for NGOs and camp-dwellers.

For instance, although people who suffered the crisis and their sympathizers unanimously welcomed the administration's financial compensation, these compensations also had a delegitimising effect on some camp-dwellers, by limiting the number of official riot victims to the

[144] Workers from JUH mentioned to me that they initially had wished to organize a relief coordination committee but that it was simply above their capacity. JUH did play a local assistance role, mostly for Muslim organizations, but they did not have the capacity to coordinate with all the organizations arriving in the region. A Muslim businessman from Muzaffarnagar who was helping JUH in relief activities and running his own organization told me: "at night news of Muzaffarnagar camps were showing on TV and the next morning, trucks of goods were arriving here. So much help came from throughout India. We tried to direct them everywhere but all was going too quickly!" (C20; Muzaffarnagar, Volunteer 2, 2014-05).

[145] This tends to support the hypothesis that the government had, at first, vested interest in distancing itself from the "pro-Muslim party" image built by its detractors—mainly the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—but had not anticipated that the conflict would take such a large scale and tried to re-establish a more benevolent image through relief work.

residents of the nine villages eligible for compensation.[146] The nine villages had been selected because murder cases had been reported in each of them. This criterion excluded villages from which residents had been forced to flee during the riots, but in which murders had not been committed. Three months after the riots (December 2013), the local administration stated that these "genuine" victims—the former residents of the nine villages—had either been permanently relocated or had resettled in their original home. Bulldozers were subsequently sent to evict camp-dwellers and destroy remaining camps.

In a sense, these state interventions suggested that *dahshat* [fear/terror] was not a valid reason to leave one's house permanently; people's experience of fear and violence was "rated" according to "objective" criteria: to have developed feelings of fear strong enough to justify leaving, one had to be living in a village were murders occurred. This is characteristic of the many other post-conflict situations in which victims' testimonies are superseded by bureaucratic procedures and administrative categorizations (Feldman 2007; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Gupta 2012). This also echoes, to a certain extent, the third stage of Brass's (2011) "institutionalized riot system," during which a variety of actors, such as political leaders, control narratives of violence and explanations of the conflict. Here, the scope of violence is reduced by the recognition of a limited number of victims.

Most of the camp-dwellers I met were very critical of the government's criteria to identify "genuine" victims eligible for compensation. People from villages adjacent to the nine villages felt it was unjust that their neighbours would receive compensation because they were located a few

[146] Additional villages were eventually added to the list.

kilometers closer to a murder location—an opinion that raises the issue of how to judge and assess experiences of violence and fear.

Camp-dwellers also believed that official lists of people eligible for compensation were inevitably skewed by corruption. In the camps, there were widespread rumors insinuating that some villagers had managed to get their names on the list by buying off local state officials. Government promises to implement schemes and programs are generally met with scepticism, and it was no different in this case.

Finally, camps dwellers criticized the way compensations were distributed among the residents of the nine villages themselves. The government's policy was to give five *lakh* to each nuclear family, but there were many irregularities and confusion in identifying nuclear families. A large majority of villagers lived in a joint family system, which means that four or five nuclear families often live under the same roof. Since a lot of families had lost their identification documents during the riots (e.g.: *Aadhar* and ration cards), state officials went through the abandoned houses in riot-affected areas and determined the number of families living under one roof according to the number of "*chulhas*" [mud cooking stove] in the house. Commenting on this process, a camp dweller exclaimed: "And if my wife likes to cook on the same *chulha* as her mother-in-law, how will they count that?!" (Jahid, Kairana, 2014-06). Given all these concerns surrounding the attribution of financial compensations, doubt and suspicion about who were genuinely "official victims" even started marking interactions between compensated and uncompensated camp dwellers.

As the months passed and people remained in the camps despite the government's efforts to push them out, new reasons emerged to discredit victims' experience of fear and violence. Local state officials claimed that people were remaining in the camps because they were poor,

uneducated, and hoping to take advantage of government and NGO relief activities to gain better living conditions than what they had in their villages [Shamli, 2014-09]. Both Shamli and Muzaffarnagar district administrations stated that some villagers only arrived in the relief camps several months after the conflict happened. For example, the Shamli administration stated that by August 2014, only 722 people out of 1766 remaining in the camps situated in Kairana district were "genuine" victims.[147]

Table 1: Number of people living in the six Kairana district camps

Local Administration Survey - August 2014

Nb. of people living in the camps since at least the last local administration survey (February 2014)	722
Nb. of people living in the camps since at least the last local administration survey (February 2014) and also listed as living in their original village	36
Nb. of people that settled in the camps after the last local administration survey (February 2014)	1008
Total	1766

Source: DM office, Shamli, (2014-09)

Many other parties shared the feeling that villagers were trying to take advantage of the situation. This idea was conveyed in local Hindi newspapers (e.g.: Dainik Jagran) and by many villagers I interviewed, including Muslims. I notably heard this comment from higher class/caste Muslims who were not especially close to lower class/caste Muslims.

Finally, victims' loss and their experiences of violence was hard to prove in the absence of an efficient justice process. Even a year after the conflict, no progress had been made on legal suits.

[147] It cannot be excluded that some people unrelated to the conflict did settle in the camps. Several NGOs and activists were still active in the camps months after the conflict and submitted petitions to the Supreme Court to extend the list of villages eligible for compensations. Therefore, some villagers unaffected by the violence may have hoped to make some gains out of the situation (I did meet a few people that had no relation to the conflict in the resettlement colonies and camps). As tensions persisted in the region even after the riots, it is also likely that some villagers who had not fled during the riots decided to do so afterwards, as a preventive measure.

Court cases against BJP political leaders, and accusations of murder, rape and destruction against villagers, were still pending. Most of the accused were roaming freely or had been acquitted.[148] For these reasons, camp occupants I met had to fight the doubt cast on them.

The goods and services that those I met received through humanitarian aid—even if substantial—did not come close to what they previously enjoyed in their villages. Apart from the fear of new tensions, there were multiple reasons not to return in their villages: lost houses, lost employment, broken trust. Camp-dwellers and the state were nevertheless involved in a fight to gain public support: the former insisted that *dahshat* [terror] was a legitimate reason not to return to their villages, while the latter argued that camp occupants were poor Muslims trying to take advantage of the conflict to get what they could. It is in this climate of doubt and uncertainty that NGOs had to plan their interventions.

Resettlement and the making of legitimate victims

Despite this ambiguity, one of the main strategies organizations used to legitimize victims' experience was to build housing colonies. For example, after the first period of the crisis, local JUH leaders concentrated on resettlement efforts. As I mentioned above, JUH was one of the most involved organizations in the relief process. JUH thus had a unique relationship to the conflict, violence and recovery. On the one hand, staff members were very critical of the government. On September 2nd, 2013, a few days before the major September 7th *mahapanchayat* that triggered the riots, Muzaffarnagar branch members went to meet SP Chairman Mulayam Singh Yadav in Lucknow to express their concerns regarding the tensions and planning of the *panchayat* (C20, 2014-05). They felt that the government could have done more to calm the tension, given that

[148] After the riots, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and a Justice Commission (Justice (retd.) Vishnu Sahai Inquiry Commission) were set up to investigate the causes of the conflict. The investigation was completed two years later and the Vishnu Sahai Report was submitted in March 2016 to the UP Government.

information on the situation had been communicated prior to the riots. On the other hand, JUH members needed to cultivate their relationship with local politicians and did not want to look biased in this conflict. While they eventually became one of the main nonstate actors in the humanitarian landscape, they simultaneously exercised a lot of caution while doing so.

Their building of housing colonies reflects such careful and measured interventions. To allocate houses to the victims in the colonies they were building, JUH decided to prioritize IDPs that did not receive state compensation. JUH bought land from local contractors and built rows of small houses, each costing about ₹130,000 (Can$2,600).[149] Nine months after the conflict, JUH had already established five colonies ranging from fifty to eighty houses each, and ended up constructing nine colonies in total (around 450 houses) within a year of the conflict. Each colony was named after one eminent JUH member or founder, and located near a Muslim dominated village.[150]

Housing colonies made a lasting mark on the district's landscape and rendered displacement permanent—a visible evidence of the conflict's consequences for Muslims. Moreover, because JUH did not follow the state's criteria to determine genuine victims and instead offered housing to villagers who did not receive official compensation, housing colonies legitimized the experience

[149] All the colonies in Muzaffarnagar were built on the same model as those in Gujarat (see Jasani 2008) and any other region where JUH provides emergency relief. Houses are built in rows and share a common wall. They comprise one room, one closed courtyard, a tiny kitchen place and a bathroom. Each colony has two plots reserved for the construction of a mosque and a madrasa. In the colony I visited the most, each plot measured 80 *gaj* [square yard] and cost ₹4,000.00/*gaj* [Can$80/square yard]. The land remained JUH propriety but IDPs were considered owner of the houses. They were however not allowed to resell the house for profit. In some cases, people also had the option to buy the plot on which the house was constructed while JUH assumed the cost of the house. Some could also stay in the house on rent for a limited period of time.

[150] Some of the colonies' names were: *Fidai Millat Nagar* (in reference to the name given to As'ad Madani, father of Maulana Mahmood Madani); *Shaikul Hind Nagar* (in reference to the name given to Maulana Mahmood Hasan, the first Darul Uloom student and an active participant of the Khilafat and freedom movements); *Rahmat Nagar* (in reference to Rahmat-ul Sahab, an 1857 freedom fighter who sought refuge in Saudi Arabia); *Madani Nagar* (in the name of Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani).

of loss and suffering for a much larger number of people than what the government was ready to acknowledge.

However, JUH built colonies in the name of humanitarianism first and foremost. In that way, they legitimized victims' experience of suffering without the appearance of bias. The JUH district committee members repeated to the media that they were building colonies for the riot victims like they do throughout India after disasters of all kinds, manmade and natural. They insisted that camp dwellers, regardless of whether they were "authentic" victims, were all poor Muslims needing support. Like I described in the last chapter, JUH also combined its welfare activities with several public demonstrations of the organization's support of communal harmony and secularism, to which leaders of the local administration, police officers, and even Naresh Tikait, the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* leader, were invited.[151]

In their work on the role of religious organizations in Sri Lanka's postwar context, Spencer *et al.* (2014) discuss paradoxical visions of religion and conflict that could help understand JUH's position. The authors argue that people often perceive religion as a source of fundamentalism that can incite conflicts. But that at the same time, "a starkly different vision continues to insist that religions, and religious leaders in particular should be active advocates of peace and harmony. […] Any departure from this expectation becomes an occasion for lamentation and surprise" (Spencer et al. 2014, 6). Religious organizations' interventions in conflict zones can thus be sensitive, because of these assumptions about religion. Religious leaders are expected to bring peace, but can also easily be accused of using religion in ways that create division. Several post-political conflict contexts thus show how religious organizations sometimes prefer avoiding direct

[151] See, for example, the photo of Maulana Syed Arshad Madani (president of one of JUH's faction) and Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP Chairman) holding hands during a press conference in Saharanpur in February 2014 (Siddiqui 2014).

contestation or explicit political mobilization to preserve their legitimacy to intervene (Benthall 2016). This might partly explain why JUH workers prioritized housing colonies over more direct forms of advocacy, even though local committee members believed the conflict was provoked for political gains.

After the first months of turmoil over, JUH focused almost exclusively on such housing activities, and ceased its involvement in legal services.[152] When I went back in 2015, committee members told me:

> We have lawyers that we can hire, and we are ready to do so if victims come to us. But you know, all victims are poor and uneducated. Legal cases are very long. If they get involved in this, the accused will probably try to buy their silence. They will receive threats. It is scary for people to go through a riot and then have to face that. So we will support those who want to go through this but we are more focused on at least providing houses to villagers who still don't have any.[153]

While JUH workers stopped helping victims in their legal procedures for pragmatic reasons—limited resources, length of the process, potential risk for victims approaching the courts—it is also plausible that they preferred focusing on housing to preserve harmonious local political and social relations.

Like JUH, at least five other coalitions of organizations built houses. In the year following the conflict, Jamaat-e-Islami was building a housing colony named Falah-e-Aam in the village of Parasoli and had plans to build an additional one.[154] The Muslim charitable organization Safa Baitul Maal (Hyderabad) built another colony. A few local political leaders contributed additional

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[152] Since the beginning, JUH had not been very active in providing support for legal suits. For example, JUH preferred withdrawing itself from legal aid to victims of rape and left ANHAD, a Delhi-based non-confessional NGO, support the cases because ANHAD had prior experience with rape cases and specialized lawyers.

[153] Noted conversation, Muzaffarnagar, 2015-08.

[154] The colony, with its 88 houses, was inaugurated in February 2015. Each house costed around ₹2.5 *lakhs* [Can$4,010].

colonies. Finally, Joint Citizenship Initiative (JCI), the coalition of (non-confessional) organizations, had a project of a hundred houses, initially funded by Ford Foundation.[155]

Like JUH, JCI invested in housing construction as a pragmatic strategy to gain incremental rights for victims. JCI was formed by activists formerly involved in the relief interventions that followed the 2002 Gujarat riots. Although not all members were Muslims, they were compelled to act against instances of politically orchestrated violence targeting Muslims in India. Contrary to JUH, JCI was actively involved in providing legal support to victims, but their main volunteer lawyer was also very pessimistic about the possibility of achieving any legal outcomes (N18, Lucknow, 2014-05).[156] For their housing project, JCI workers prioritized victims who had received government compensation, and asked them to share the costs of the construction to get better quality housing. In parallel, while building the housing colony, they actively campaigned to extend the list of riot-affected villages; ultimately, they succeeded in obtaining government compensation for one other village.

JCI staff used the category of "poor Muslim" to the advantage of both compensated and non-compensated victims by pressurizing the local administration to implement the programs planned under the Prime Minister's 15 Point Programme for the Welfare of Minorities (GOI 2013c). They contributed to the registration of displaced children in local schools, as well as the issuing of ration

[155] The project was put on hold in 2014 when the newly elected BJP administration cancelled the foreign funding licences of many organizations (FCRA Certificates). Ford Foundation could not support the construction project anymore. JCI finally managed to partner with *Hunershala*, an Indian NGO, and *Misereor*, a German Christian organization to continue the colony building project.

[156] Non-religious NGOs like JCI have potentially more freedom to voice their political positions because they cannot be accused as easily of being "communal."

cards. Like housing, these methods legitimized IDPs' permanent relocation outside their original villages.[157]

When I interviewed him, the Shamli DM mentioned that he was not pleased that NGOs were building houses for victims who had not received compensation, since they were illegitimate victims by state standards. However, this position was hardly sustainable, given that housing was provided with the intention to support poor people in need.

Thus, providing housing to non-compensated victims (JUH), and pressurizing the state to implement programs for underprivileged minority communities in the region (JCI) were effective ways of recognizing victims' experience and addressing their needs, in a context where IDPs had no formal recognition and depended mostly on humanitarian compassion. Although the building of housing colonies is not a political action per se, it had "politicizing effects" in the sense that it served as evidence of the scope of the conflict, and legitimized displaced people's need for resettlement and services. Moreover, for religious organizations like JUH, these methods seemed both pragmatic and politically strategic. By focusing on housing for non-compensated victims, JUH sided with the displaced villagers without compromising their role as peace keepers.

In the following section, I discuss how NGOs' focus on "development" has tangible ramifications for riot victims.

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[157] Camp dwellers had diverging views on whether they were actually "poor" or not, but adjusted their views according to the organization they would interact with and the pragmatic advantages that such a categorization would provide. For example, Nauchad, a camp dweller told me: "We are as rich as the Jats. It is just that we don't own lands like them" (2014-06). At the same time, he would insist that media and organizations take photos of his tent in the camp because he was conscious that it was conditions of poverty in the camps that attracted most media attention and humanitarian assistance. Salman, another riot victim insisted on telling me that he used to own acres of land, and was himself a money lender for Hindu *Dalits* in his village. In parallel, with the support of NGO workers, he lowered his annual income in government scheme application forms to become eligible for ration cards and a financial support program for laborers [*mazdoor*].

Between "riot victims" and "poor Muslims"

To maximize their access to NGO services, camps-dwellers tried to register on as many NGO surveys and lists as possible—but depending on the NGO with which they interacted, camp-dwellers had very different relief experiences. Approaching relief and resettlement pragmatically, camp-dwellers did not seem to care much about the type of organization—for example, religious or non-religious—providing help.[158] To further complicate these interactions, the constant flow of organization workers in the camps and a relief process only loosely coordinated by the local administration made it difficult to identify organizations or distinguish "religious" organizations from "secular." Many in the camps would simply call all NGOs "*bahar walon*" [people from outside]. This was even the case with the local JUH workers, even though they had a strong local base in the region. Some called them the *Deoband walas* [Deoband people], in reference to the Islamic scholars affiliated to the Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband. Others would simply call them the "*bare bare maulvis*" ["big" important clerics].[159] Camp dwellers' association with an NGO also depended on NGOs' selection criteria, and on the camps in which each NGO had decided to operate. Ultimately, it was mostly chance that determined whether refugees would fall within the hands of a non-confessional organization or a religious organization, and what kind of resettlement and legal strategy they would end up adopting.

[158] Jasani's work (2008) in the *Tablighi Jamaat*'s resettlement colonies in Gujarat (following the 2002 riots) reaches similar conclusions. She shows how people engaged in the religious reforms proposed by the *Tablighi* organizations while remaining critical of their intentions.

[159] In general, people were grateful for the presence of all kinds of organizations in the camps. Some of the Hindu JCI members did face a few bad reactions, such as when this woman residing in the camps teasingly said to one of the JCI volunteers in front of me: "Oh you are Hindu! So you are the one who burnt our *masjid* and village!" This was however a rare case; camp dwellers used to say that JCI workers had spent so much time with them in the camps that they had become Muslims just like them. In several camps, people also spoke fondly of a Sikh organization that had reportedly travelled from Punjab to distribute rechargeable solar lights. Women were especially pleased by this donation because it facilitated cooking and other activities at night. None of the camp dwellers knew the name of this organization, but I later found out that they were referring to Khalasaid, a Sikh international NGO.

Some, like Nasreen, had better luck. A mother of four, Nasreen told me that her husband was first approached by JUH about resettlement options. As the winter was arriving, Nasreen was excited to have this housing option, especially since one of her son had Down's syndrome and staying in the camps with him was a challenge. However, because Nasreen was among the "official" victims who had received compensation, she soon learned that her family could not qualify for JUH housing. At first, she told me that she was very disappointed to be refused housing. However, her family was later offered a space in the *Joint Citizens' Initiative* (JCI) colony project that was more advantageous. While participation was more expensive, JCI provided better housing options. The only disadvantage according to her was that the JCI colony did not have a reserved plot for a *masjid* like in the JUH colonies, but all the colony members combined some personal funds and were able to buy one extra plot to build a mosque.

For others, the relief experience was less fortunate. I interviewed residents in one of the JUH colony who were disappointed with their housing options. Most residents said that the main reason they had decided to move into a JUH colony was because JUH houses were ready to receive them earlier than the other resettlement colonies. Over the months, however, some colony residents became more critical of their housing because they felt abandoned by the organization. In the colony I used to visit, people complained that JUH had promised a livable space, but that there was no electricity, no water pump, and no irrigation system between houses, which caused alleys to fill up with water during the monsoon and become difficult to traverse.

Aamir, a colony resident, told me that JUH members only spoke with the contractor and did not speak directly to them, the "lay people" [*aam admi*] (JUH Colony, 2014-06); as I mentioned in previous chapters, *maulanas* are not necessarily more trusted simply because they represent the clergy. In general, camp dwellers' concerns about JUH arose from class divisions. Some camp

dwellers considered JUH workers elites who were not necessarily close to poorer Muslims. In addition to being members of the *ulema*, some of the JUH relief committee members were themselves Muslim Jat landowners (from the same Muslim-equivalent caste and socioeconomic status as the Hindu Jats who had initiated the riots), while, as I explained earlier in the chapter, victims all belonged to lower castes and socioeconomic classes (landless workers, daily-wage workers).

Of course, not everyone was disappointed with JUH's housing services. For example, Salma, a JUH colony resident in her sixties, told me that she was grateful to JUH workers for building relief colonies so quickly. For her, it was impossible to stay in a relief camp where she could not respect the *purdah* [veiling] rules. She was eager to find a private space again, away from the gaze of men.

Camp dwellers supported by JCI and JUH also had different access to justice and other services. While JCI had a lawyer who offered free-of-charge services to follow the *First Information Report* submitted by Kutba villagers (one of the main villages affected by the riots), Muslims who resettled in the JUH colony had to fund private lawyers themselves. Many abandoned their legal suits over time, since procedures are long, costly, and often inconclusive(M. Chatterjee 2016).

Finally, some people simply did not manage to access any form of humanitarian aid. Rozuddin's story is representative of many other unfortunate camp dwellers in this situation. When Rozuddin escaped his village, Bhaju, the army escorted him to the Burnow camp, with his brother Imran. They were both Muslim *Sheikhs* working in the cloth industry. Both used to run a little clothing shop in Shimla, while a third brother had a tailoring business in their own village. None of them received compensation because no deaths were registered in Bhaju; twenty families had left the village out of "*dahshat"* [fear/terror]. Rozuddin and his family spent the entire winter in the camp, where his brother's one-year old daughter died. In June 2014, the government closed the Burnow

camp and Rozuddin moved into a small rented room with his family. He and his brother later managed to buy a plot in Kairana from a distant relative, a contractor who had sold many plots at a relatively fair price to other riot victims (₹2,000 per *gaj*).[160] After buying the plot, Rozuddin had not enough savings left to build a house and sought the help of JCI, which was building its colony just beside Rozuddin's plot. However, the JCI colony was reserved for the Kutba and Kutbi villagers, who were all "official" victims. The organization unfortunately could not help Rozuddin. When I met him in June 2016, he was stuck camping on his land with his family, powerlessly gazing at the colony that was being built a few meters away for the "genuine" Kutba victims. He told me:

> The Jats had guns and other arms. We saw houses burn. We heard people were getting killed. It's the army who picked us up and brought us to the camp. No one from our village got compensation. What did the government want from us? Should we have waited till our house burn and our kids die? […] We left with nothing; the army was saying that if we thought of bringing a single chicken with us, they would not let us go with them. […] I sent my son to see the houses, everything has been stolen. They took all my animals and did a big hole in the house to take everything inside, how could I go back now? (2014-06).

All these examples show how camp dwellers turned out to have very different relief experiences depending on who assisted them. It also shows the coincidental and accidental dimension that partly constructs relationships between relief providers and victims of a conflict.

Several studies have observed similar consequences of relief work processes. In their work in the Mumbai slum areas that were touched by communal violence in 1992-1993 following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Chaterjee and Mehta argue that: "What remains after

[160] A *gaj* is equal to one square yard (0.91x0.91metres).

the riots is not a coherent moral and local world but a multiplicity of fractured communities, each charting, through rehabilitation work, its strategies of survival and co-existence" (2001, 202).

Beyond the role played by the state and NGOs, it is nevertheless important to remember that victims themselves are not passive actors in the process of development and resettlement. Chatterjee (2004) reminds us that organizations such as Muslim NGOs are only one form of civil society actors, and that claims for welfare and rights are negotiated in a multiplicity of ways: through the mediation of local political actors, personal networks, community leaders, and collective movements (see also Hansen and Stepputat 2001).

Conclusion

In the context of politically organized violence, in which the government's stand on the conflict is unclear, victims' faith essentially falls to NGOs. The Muzaffarnagar riots were more than an unpredictable communal frenzy; they were built on long-standing prejudices against Muslims, with politicians exploiting these ideas to a more visible effect than what is observed on a day-to-day basis. While doubt was cast upon victim's experience of fear and loss to minimize the scope of the conflict, NGOs tried to find alternative ways to legitimize victims' experiences.

This chapter showed that some Muslim charitable organizations, as well as nonreligious NGOs, transitioned from emergency relief to development activities—providing housing, facilitating access to government schemes, and registering children in schools—as a pragmatic and strategic mode of action. They turned the spotlight on "underdevelopment," and managed to make effective gains for camp dwellers by doing so. By focusing principally on "poverty alleviation" and framing riot victims' needs for reparation and resettlement as "economic needs," they even succeeded in

"making exist" the non-compensated camp-dwellers who the local administration did not consider real riot victims, challenging the administration's attempt to minimize the crisis.

What do these NGO interventions tell us about the role and impact of humanitarian aid in political conflicts—especially the impact of Muslim NGOs' interventions? While some argue that humanitarian action is depoliticizing because it focuses on emergency and the anonymous "suffering body" (cf. Calhoun 2008), I show that this is not entirely the case. Organizations were not neutral or distant, and made pragmatic and strategic choices to help Muslim victims in the long-term. At the same time, there are limits to what NGOs can do, and consequences in the absence of formal recognition of the causes and scope of a conflict.

First, NGOs' focus on development, in the absence of clear state coordination, creates different experiences of welfare. Relief work reshapes the lives of victims through the refashioning of space: it creates new "communities," but also new divisions.

Second, while NGOs' involvement in building housing colonies and facilitating access to government programs and services exposed the scope of the crisis, this does not directly put the spotlight on the causes of the conflict. The Muzaffarnagar post-riot period shows that political leaders can recuperate the idea of "development" to dissociate themselves from any political responsibility in the conflict.

Overall, the post-riot relief process indicates a slow shift in the framing of the conflict and its victims. By providing compensation, employment opportunities, and other resettlement services to a limited group of riot victims, the UP government proved that it did not turn a blind eye to the situation. However, it focused on the fact that most camp dwellers were poor Muslims and reframed their rehabilitation and reparation claims as desperate strategies to improve their living conditions. This limited the scope of people recognized as riot victims, and portrayed most of them

as poor, uneducated Muslims in search of better living opportunities. Echoing the Central State's non-involvement in post-riot emergency relief measures, the regional state depoliticized the conflict. It was thus able to shirk responsibility for the organized, systemic violence faced by Muslim communities, instead re-positioning itself as the bearer of impartial humanitarian values carrying the promises of economic development for all.

Beyond this specific event, the political response to the Muzaffarnagar riots shares similarities with the ways in which the discrimination faced by certain Muslim communities in India are generally addressed in "ordinary" circumstances. As Das (2007) and Khan (2010) suggest, although the riot is an extraordinary event, it also "expresses something more generally about the present" and draws attention to the "dimension of the everyday that runs through any event or condition and that cannot be delimited to crisis alone" (N. Khan 2010, 9). In the post-conflict relief process like in everyday actions, focusing on the "poor Muslim" has deep political implications. It may have many positive outcomes by shedding new light on communities that were already marginalised, but promises of economic development might not be sufficient to address historical and systemic sources of discrimination.

Conclusion

Religious charitable work is not automatically associated with social and political change (Scherz 2014). While contemporary international humanitarian and development approaches retain a Christian "aura," "secular" NGOs usually distance themselves from religious charity in trying to do "development" and improve people's lives (Barnett and Stein 2012; Benthall 2012b). My dissertation presents another interpretation of religious charitable action: I illustrate Muslim charitable organizations' shift towards neoliberal economic development-oriented approaches, in a context where Muslims have come to be understood as a socioeconomically marginalized minority. By this, I mean that Muslim NGOs do not perpetuate and expand religious traditions of giving and volunteering simply because these traditions constitute religious and social duties or acts of piety; these NGOs also believe they can lead to increased economic participation and, subsequently, to social improvements that tip the balance more in favor of the poorest among Indian Muslims.

Two striking elements characterizing Muslim NGOs' work support this argument. First, Muslim NGO workers and volunteers try to use Islamic charitable alms in an efficient and organized way, to make the existing frameworks for promoting social welfare among Muslims more "useful." Second, they promote individual moral, social and economic development in their localities, through their charitable acts and their teachings, discourses, and interactions with Muslims in need. Workers and volunteers promote Islamic knowledge, education, and self-advancement as steps to leading a good life, both spiritually and materially.

To a certain extent, these approaches share similarities with neoliberal development discourses: they focus on the individual as the primary agent of social change, and emphasize economic

integration as the main solution for improving the socioeconomic situation of poorer Muslims in North India. There also appears to be an "economization of Islamic charity," when organizations start focusing on efficiency and outcomes, or when the charitable gift becomes closer to a charitable investment.

Nevertheless, I argued that there are frictions and dissimilarities between Muslim NGOs' practice and neoliberal models of economic development. I highlighted the three most salient. First, NGOs do not engage in a complete economization of charity, since organization workers and volunteers often cleave to practices of giving that focus less on the beneficiaries' behaviour and utilization of the gift (Chapter Three). Second, while self-development appears to be an important focus among many organizations, organizations workers and volunteers do not encourage "free-will" and individual development at all costs; discourses of personal spiritual and material improvement remain attached to notions of religious, familial, and social responsibility. This becomes particularly evident in Bazm-e-Khawateen's discourses, which support women's "empowerment" but also reassert their primary role as mothers and wives (Chapter Four). Finally, for many organization workers and volunteers I met, the state [*sarkar/hukumat*] is viewed as an important agent of social change, though sometimes more symbolically than practically (Chapter Five).

These differences remind us that neoliberal models of development do not follow the same trajectory everywhere. This is partially because economic development is never only "economic." While neoliberal discourses of development tend to separate religion and economy (Iqtidar 2017), I showed how both can be deeply intertwined. Muslim NGOs decide on modes of engagement with capitalist development; they set conditions for economic participation based on their alignment with Islamic values.

These differences also remind us that the Muslim NGOs' efforts to merge religious practice and thought with development objectives is the result of unique historical, political and geographical configurations. To trace these configurations, I situated Muslim NGO's discourses and practices within the broader field of Muslim politics in India, arguing that the turn to privatized, neoliberal development was a form of social and political mobilization. Muslim NGOs' goals for stronger economic integration are partially a product of global neoliberal policies that reconfigure the role of states in social service provision and emphasize individual economic development as a solution to social inequalities (Harvey 2007). But they also take shape because of a sense of increased marginalization: the perception that governments have, historically, neglected religious minorities. Tragic events such as the Muzaffarnagar communal riots strengthen this impression and colour the everyday work of the organizations (Chapter Six).

It is thus important for anthropological studies to conceptualize the relationship between Islamic traditions and global economic development models through the lens of political contexts. While some authors have argued that Islam curbs capitalist development, others have shown, on the contrary, that Islamic values can be used to support, and even promote, capitalist development and its neoliberal forms. These authors have termed such phenomena "market Islam," "corporate Islam," or "pious neoliberalism" (Sloane-White 2017; Sloane 1998; Atia 2013; Rudnyckyj 2010; Osella and Osella 2009).

While my findings point in the same direction, I also argue that the compatibility between Islamic principles and neoliberal models of economic development emerges specifically because of Muslim minority politics in India. Current forms of capitalist development are globalized, and religious traditions are inevitably evolving and transforming across time and contexts. The question I tried to answer was thus not whether Islam is inherently compatible with neoliberal

models of development, but instead *how* and *why* the relationship between the two takes shape in North India.

However, I do not want to suggest that there is a direct causal link between Muslims' marginalization, governments' relationship with minorities, and the new directions taken by Muslim NGOs' practices of charity and development. Islamic charity has always combined spiritual aims with social aims. Waqfs, voluntary donations, and obligatory donations have been key to "create, preserve, and strengthen Muslim society and culture" (Singer 2013, 353). Moreover, Muslim practices of giving and volunteering have continually diversified and adapted to different epochs and contexts; the directions that they are taking in India reflects and is inspired by changes happening in the Muslim world at a transnational level. Yet during my fieldwork research, giving and volunteering practices were marked by a sense of urgency, and by strong aspirations to change the future of Muslims in India; these two elements are specific to the current context and have implications for the direction charitable actions and discourses take.

Describing Muslim NGOs' turn towards private, neoliberal economic development as a form of social mobilization can potentially erase important ideological differences between organizations. Although the organizations I surveyed are often part of overlapping social networks, many seldom collaborate with each other. The three organizations from which I draw many of my ethnographic examples, Community Trust, Bazm-e-Khawateen, and Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, have extremely different ideological positions—notably on women and economic participation—which I highlighted in describing NGOs' struggle over meanings and practices of aid. However, some ideas about progress, charitable efficiency, and self-development span organizational boundaries. To a certain extent, then, Muslim NGOs in Uttar Pradesh form a movement "loosely bounded" by similar ideas and networks (Clark 2004, 4).

Finally, while I drew on the anthropological literature on NGOs and civil society associations to describe and contextualize the work of Muslim NGOs, it is important to keep in mind their distinctive character. Muslim NGOs have embraced contemporary philanthropic structures and many development methods and aims of "secular" NGOs, but they remain shaped by religious norms. Muslim NGOs' work is not a drastic break from, or a resistance to, prior modes of Islamic welfare and charity, but instead represent a continuity. NGO workers and volunteers do not seek to reform Islamic principles of charity; they rather try to find ways in which these principles could be used most efficiently. Therefore, what I observed is not a transition from religious charity to "secular" forms of modern development, but attempts to adopt "secular" forms of modern development in ways that remain coherent with (and "optimize") Islamic traditions of giving.

While I discussed the organizations' aims and work, I only briefly addressed some potential political impacts of their strategies in Chapter Six, in referencing the Muzaffarnagar riots. The goal of this dissertation was not to judge the usefulness or effectiveness of Muslim NGOs' work. Nevertheless, in a global political and economic system in which NGOs or civil society associations are called on to play an ever-growing role in social service provision, discussing the potential social and political implications of such institutions becomes ineluctable (Fisher 1997). Let me present a few thoughts on this matter for the remainder of the conclusion.

The scholarship on the influence and political implications of NGOs is divided. While the growth of the NGO sector was first seen as a source of hope, numerous studies, inspired by a critical anthropology of development perspective (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990), have documented a number of problems: the failure and impermanence of NGO projects in local settings, the limits of community participation in NGO projects, and the corporatization of the

NGO sector (cf. Gardner and Lewis 2015). In doing so, these studies tempered enthusiasm about organizations' potential for fostering social justice and empowering local communities.

More importantly for the focus of this dissertation, some scholars have argued that NGOs—and the idea of "civil society" at large—are a product and an agent of neoliberalism that mark the global reconfiguration of state welfare and governance models (Bernal and Grewal 2014; Schuller 2009; A. Sharma 2008). Some argue that NGOs are a manifestation of the shrinking of states and have become, willingly or unwillingly, the new alternative for the provision of welfare (Schuller 2007; Kamat 2004; Leve and Karim 2001). Others push the critique further by adding that since NGOs tend to adopt an entrepreneurial model largely because of competition over funding, they participate in the same reduction of direct welfare as states do (Elyachar 2002). Finally, authors suggest that NGOs focus on individual empowerment to enhance well-being and make space for people's perspective about their own needs—but in doing so, they help strengthen schools of thought surrounding neoliberal development that contribute to the naturalization of social inequalities. Focusing on individual capacity for change can be depoliticizing, as it overshadows, for instance, the impact of state policies on populations, or the fact that access to higher education or good employment is largely determined by class and not individual motivations.

There are of course many nuances to these critiques showing that NGOs and their members are not pawns of neoliberal capitalist development (Moodie 2008). The Muslim organizations I researched focus on a type of work that challenges some of these critical visions. The way organizations promote charitable action and self-development creates new fields of social and political action; they forge pragmatic strategies to strengthen Muslims in India that work in parallel with forms of activism and political action that make direct demands of the state.

Nevertheless, critiques of NGOs and their relationships to neoliberal economic development models raise important questions about the extent to which Muslim NGOs can address the socioeconomic imbalance between religious groups in India. As I explained throughout this dissertation, the Sachar Report warned the country about the perilous state of Indian religious minorities, but debates surrounding these imbalances still remain. These debates are marked by disagreements on the causes of these imbalances, and on whether they exist at all. After all, it is hard to pinpoint who is responsible for structural violence. Even in cases of direct targeted violence like during the Muzaffarnagar riots, proving that such events represent organized anti-Muslim violence is a difficult task. Moreover, Muslims form an extremely heterogeneous group, divided by caste, socioeconomic status, sectarian affiliations, and regional variations. This heterogeneity complicates the pursuit of wide-reaching solutions.

In this context, increasing economic development becomes a solution that does not demand clear answers to these conundrums. Moreover, valorizing Muslims' customary systems of welfare and promoting Muslim NGOs' participation in helping and educating their community can return to the community the responsibility for solving its own problems. This elevation of Muslim forms of welfare transforms political problems into community problems, even if underemployment or lack of access to education often have little to do with religion. Workers and volunteers themselves had very humble aspirations and expectations. While they saw efficient charity, self-advancement and economic integration as potential solutions to Muslim marginalization in India, they also felt they had very limited capacity to change social situations. They all claimed that their work had a limited scope, and that while they hoped to make some difference in their neighbourhoods, their work only constituted a drop in the ocean.

This problem echoes the paradoxes that confront Muslim NGOs and that I raised in the beginning of the dissertation: While Muslim NGOs view stronger economic integration, more efficient charitable distribution, and self-reliance as potential solutions to Muslim marginalization in India, they end up adopting approaches that are in line with neoliberal state policies, even though many hold the government responsible for Muslims' condition in India. They also focus on "internal" solutions, such as self-reliance and the optimization of religious charitable practices, to address problems that many believe to be "external" and political. Perhaps anthropology should therefore pay more attention to the complex and sometimes paradoxical outcomes of religious charitable organizations' engagement with neoliberal models of development and governance.

When I went back in Lucknow in 2015 after Narendra Modi was elected as the new Indian Prime Minister, the charitable workers and volunteers who had participated in my study had ambivalent feelings. Some were nervous to see Modi taking the lead of the country given his controversial association with the Hindu nationalist movement [*Hindutva*]. However, a few told me that since they were disappointed in the Congress's government anyway, they remained open, and preferred to wait and see before forming an opinion on the implications of the BJP's election for Muslims. Since then, however, the government's ignorance—or, at least, its slow reaction to the "cow-protection movement" and rising cases of violence against Muslims (as well as against other religious minorities and lower-caste groups)—has raised serious concerns. In this political climate, it is possible that promises and hopes for independent, economic development will play an increasingly critical role in shaping Muslim charitable organizations' action and Muslim minority politics in India. Further anthropological studies could provide crucial insights into this trajectory's social implications for local populations and, at a conceptual level, on how

relationships between Islamic traditions and globalized ideas about progress and economy take shape in different political contexts.

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