

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTEs RENDUS / REZENSIONEN

DIVINE MONEY

Islam, Zakat, and Giving in Palestine

Emanuel Schaeublin. 2023. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Zakat, one of Islam's fundamental pillars, is a form of giving that requires every Muslim who qualifies based on wealth to support those in need materially. In his book *Divine Money: Islam, Zakat, and Giving in Palestine*, Emanuel Schaeublin examines the relationships and practices surrounding zakat in Nablus, a city in Palestine. In the context of political and economic repression, the absence of social welfare programs, and military occupation, the book shows how giving is conceptualized—understood and given meaning—and practiced by invoking the presence of God. *Divine Money* presents an anthropological perspective on Islamic giving, engaging in discussions of the ethics of giving, piety, and questions of wealth distribution. The author draws on the anthropology of ethics to analyze Islam as an ethical tradition manifesting through practice. He employs the concept of gift exchange (Mauss 2016), frequently referring to Islamic textual sources, such as the Qur'an and hadiths, following Talal Asad's call to study Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1986).

Schaeublin's analysis of zakat giving is presented through the triad model: a receiver, a giver, and God (Kochuyt 2009; Mittermaier 2014). This triad is perceptible in daily interactions and is rooted in Qur'anic and hadith traditions. The author presents two visualizations of this model, derived from interpretations of this gift form. In the first model the giver donates zakat, believing their act is recorded in a divine book of good deeds. In return, they anticipate blessings from God, either in this life or the Afterlife. The second model views all wealth as originating from God. In this view, the giver recognizes their possessions as a divine gift and, therefore, must share part of it with those in need, acting as a medium for God's provision. This second model accentuates the present world rather than the reward in the Hereafter. These two models are applied throughout the analysis of Islamic giving in various settings. They are outlined in the book's introductory chapter, which also situates zakat within the socio-political and historical context of giving in Nablus.

Before beginning his year-long ethnographic field research, which spanned from September 2013 to August 2014, the author had already spent time in the region studying, conducting research, and interacting with local communities. Thus, the author's extensive knowledge of Arabic, Islam, and the region contributed to the seamless start of his fieldwork. The chapter on fieldwork demonstrates how the author interacted with research participants in ways that adhered to local norms of respect through hosting and visiting. Schaeublin reflects on his positionality, research methods, and ethics of writing about his research topic. He acknowledges his mobility privileges across the region, considering his racial and national

identity in contrast to his research participants. At the same time, aware of the constraints imposed by these identities, the author hired a female research assistant who provided valuable insights from the women's perspective. Acts of giving are sensitive to personal dignity and pose ethical challenges, as illustrated through the recurring theme of shame in this study. The author approached these complexities through methodological and ethical attentiveness and reflections.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth examination of zakat committees, drawing on a range of sources, including historical records, official documents, interviews with committee representatives, and the author's firsthand observations. The zakat committees emerged in the early twentieth century and gained prominence in the 1970s. They successfully collected and distributed zakat funds from various local and international donors, earning public trust before falling under the control of the Palestinian Authority in the 2000s. It was primarily induced by suspicions of a potential security threat, allegedly linked to the diversion of zakat funds to support terrorism. US legislation on global counterterrorism, which provided for criminal liability for support to terrorist organizations, hindered donors from assisting zakat committees in Palestine, as any financial transaction could be construed as support for terrorism. Another reason for the sharp decline in funding was donor mistrust of the new zakat collection committees established by the Palestinian Authority.

Chapters Three and Four detail piety and the strategies behind the giving practices in Nablus. Acts of giving are integral to how Muslims shape their identities as pious individuals. Simultaneously, giving is related to how people portray themselves to others and express traits and behaviors that signify their goodness. The author explores the complexities and strategies involved in practicing zakat through the frameworks of Foucault's "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1997) and Goffman's "self-presentation" (Goffman 1959). Although zakat giving and receiving are perceived as fulfilling God's command and integral to ethical Muslim life, practicing zakat in Nablus necessitates a careful approach from both parties involved. Being a zakat recipient may reveal one's socio-economic vulnerability and affect one's family's reputation as well. Since receiving help is perceived as a sign of shame, people in Nablus use diverse ways to conceal acts of giving. Schaeublin illustrates these strategies through descriptions of his observations and conversations in public spaces such as grocery stores, cafes, and mosques, as well as information he obtained from his research assistant, who spoke with local women activists involved in identifying families facing economic hardship.

The concept of shame is profound in giving and is well illustrated by examples throughout the book. Thus, even when relatives offer help, some extended family members who are in need initially reject it; this rejection is often a display of shyness, which is considered a form of piety. Sometimes, people hiding their financial hardships employ tactics such as selling inexpensive goods like chewing gum or stickers featuring religious texts. Selling these goods prevents them from having to appear as beggars. The author contends that shyness and small-scale trading allow the people of Nablus to maintain their dignity and sense of moral equality before God despite the existing material inequality. At times, though, openly displaying one's need to apply moral pressure on the wealthy is another strategy. Targets of such tactics could include extended family members of those in need who are able to help. It may also be directed at persons who are not related. Nonetheless, this kind of exposure demands courage, and not everyone is prepared for it.

In Chapter Five, the discussion of the ethics of giving and exchange immerses the reader in the realm of market transactions. As demonstrated by multiple examples of ethnographic encounters in the markets of Nablus, there is a fine line between economic relations. Those situations transform the market relations into gift-giving. Such interactions between merchants and customers involve similar ethical considerations, such as shame, piety, and self-presentation, as seen in the relationship between the giver and the receiver. In the final chapter of his book, the author revisits his analysis of divine giving, illustrating it through depictions of funerals and stories about ethical Muslim life. He delicately demonstrates how differences in wealth are discussed among the people of Nablus, showing that foreign aid programs, as well as Palestinian entrepreneurial establishments, align with the political logic of occupation. In the conclusion, Schaeublin invites those who engage in discussions about wealth to study it comparatively and critically. He suggests that the experiences of the zakat committees in Palestine offer significant insights for imagining a new social contract that would provide a fairer distribution of wealth.

Divine Money is a nuanced examination of Islamic giving, explored in various contexts, including everyday life, households, public spaces, markets, mosques, workshops, cafes, and funerals, based on the triad model. Emanuel Schaeublin writes in clear and accessible prose, making the book engaging not only for academic audiences but also for general readers interested in Palestine and Islam. It would have been great if the author could have explored the economic power dynamics discussed in the final chapter in greater depth. While research indicates that certain strategies are ineffective for extremely wealthy families, readers may still wonder how their top-down donations are allocated and how the humanitarian aid channels that facilitate their contributions deliver them to recipients. How do recipients view these types of zakat? Putting aside this minor criticism, as a researcher interested in understanding the motivations behind people's desire to do good, I found the book's analysis of the ethics of giving to be a valuable read for those studying the interplay between various forms of humanitarianism, ethics, religion, and economics.

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