



**Muslim Philanthropy And The Production Of Space:
The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library Case**

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Introduction

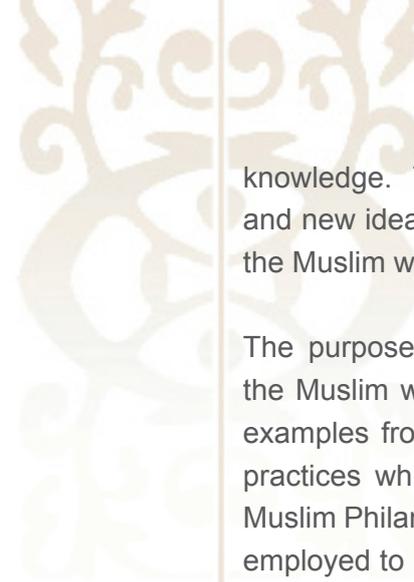
In *The Production of Space* (1986), Henri Lefebvre argues that space is not a static location or framework wherein content is poured, but is a production that results from the dynamic interaction of a cluster of relations spanning both the tangible (i.e. physical dimension of space) and the intangible (ideological dimension of space). Space, according to Lefebvre, is a symbiosis between an understanding of space as a product and as a process of relations as well as interactions.

Today's digital world provides a platform upon which new spaces are produced, while social media is intensifying relationships and accessibility. Together, these developments render Lefebvre's complex understanding of space inescapable. The physical space of traditional libraries is no longer bound to the physical limitations of a geographic location; within digital libraries, information is exchanged and shared wherever there is internet access worldwide. Open access libraries are now available online covering multiple topics, locales and fields of inquiry, including arts and literature, history, technology and cross-disciplinary fields such as philanthropy.

In the midst of a rising interest in Islam and the Muslim world [defined hereafter as Muslim-majority countries and Muslim communities worldwide], there is dearth of information and need for an open access resource on philanthropic practices in the Muslim world that takes a comprehensive approach to Muslim philanthropy. This paper argues for an understanding of Muslim philanthropy that is culturally rooted and not only religious-bound; one that acknowledges it as complex ongoing process that defines philanthropic giving and continues to evolve on historical, social and cultural levels.

The history of the spread of Islam in the world is instructive in this regard. Islam emerged at a time and place in which numerous philanthropic practices already existed; Muslim philanthropy as we know it was established in the Quran as well as through mutual interactions between early Muslims and other traditions. The teachings of the Quran and Prophet Muhammed (pbuh) were integrated within a larger framework that included indigenous ideologies, histories and cultures. And there are many contemporary examples of this today. While it is mostly held that zakat should only be given to Muslim beneficiaries, a growing number of philanthropic institutions which do not discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims as recipients of charitable giving. Some Muslim philanthropic institutions focus on providing to Muslim societies "including the establishment of mosques, community centers and community programs," whereas others such as Muslim Aid claim that they give to "the poor and the needy regardless of race, ethnicity, color or religion." (Cited in Weiss 28)

In order to uncover the historical and contemporary richness of giving in the Muslim context, it is necessary to draw on a diverse body of texts and artifacts from many parts of the world. The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library, recently launched by the Gerhart Center at the American University in Cairo, is an example of how a new space can be forged to house documents on the practice of philanthropy within the Muslim world. In line with Lefebvre's theory of space, the Library has established a new repository where multiple dimensions of Muslim philanthropy intersect: history, law, art and architecture, religion, economics and diaspora practices. The Library is a resource which is not limited simply to documentation and preservation but also to the active generation of



knowledge. Through video and sound recordings, the Library establishes a space for dialogue and new ideas. Users will get to listen to and watch interviews with philanthropists from all over the Muslim world. They will also get to see architectural representations of philanthropy.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon the complexity of philanthropic practices within the Muslim world using Lefebvre's theory of space as a backdrop for analysis. Contemporary examples from Muslim-majority countries are cited to expose the many layers of philanthropic practices which may not generally be considered purely 'Muslim' or 'Islamic'. Moreover, the Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library is used as a case study to explore how the digital world can be employed to introduce a new understanding of Muslim philanthropy that is more comprehensive, eclectic and not bound solely and exclusively to the religious context. The Library is a complex space encompassing a cluster of interactions and relations between the various dimensions of Muslim philanthropy that can be viewed metaphorically as a mirror or an extension of the intricate birth and development of philanthropic practices within the Muslim world.

Conceptual Framework: Henri Lefebvre And The Production Of Space

Written at a time when Althusserianism and deconstruction were salient, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1986) examines the complexity of the notion of space, underscoring its ideological, social and physical dimensions. He dispenses with reductionist discourses which perceive of space as "an empty zone, a container indifferent to its content, but defined by certain unexpressed criteria: absolute, optico-geometrical, Euclidean-Cartesian-Newtonian." (Lefebvre 206) According to Lefebvre, space does not exist in vacuum but is essentially a product wherein processes of production and reproduction are central and emerge dialectically through the dynamic interplay of various forces and a cluster of intricate relationships.

Lefebvre's dialectical thinking departs from the Manichean views, prominent at the time, and is expressed in terms of a "triplicate," of three terms or dimensions. The third term deconstructs binary thinking, adding yet another third dimension to the process. This triple view opens up opportunities for a more complex discourse; space is "at once a physical environment that can be perceived; a semiotic abstraction... and finally, a medium through which the body lives out its life in interaction with other bodies." (Gottdiener 131)

For Lefebvre, space is a product and, at the same time, an active component in the process of production itself. He says: "As a product, interactively or retroactively, space intervenes in the production itself... In its productive role, and as a producer, space (well or badly organized) becomes part of the relations of production and the forces of production." (Lefebvre 208) In this manner, space is an interaction between product, producer and "underpinning social and economic relations." (Lefebvre 209).

Lefebvre maps a process for the understanding of space that links "the mental and the cultural, the social and the historical." Simultaneity, thus, informs much of Lefebvre's thinking and theorizing of space. Space, according to him, is both a spatial practice [material environment, physical or abstract entity], a representation of space [a mental concept or discourse, the mental] and a space of representation [a terrain wherein social interaction happens in relation to the environment, the social] (Gottdiener 131). Both abstract and social spaces involve this tripartite of the physical, the

mental and the social. He gives Greek space as an example to illustrate his point: Greek space is defined by their understanding of the divine and geometry. Rome, on the other hand, is governed by notions of power. Both cultures inform space each in its own manner. Thus, the Greek agora (an abstract space) is empty and proportionately influenced by notions of the golden mean; it is a place where Greeks meet and are one with the cosmos. The Roman Forum, by contrast, is cluttered with objects. Each space is a representation of the culture that informs it, the social relations that construct it and the organization of the space itself as an entity – be it physical or abstract (Gottdiener 131).

Lefebvre's theorizing of space provides a framework for this paper which seeks to explore the interface between Islam and other cultures within the philanthropic sphere in a manner that dispenses with simplistic Manichean discourses and espouses a more comprehensive approach. The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library [MPDL] will be used as a case study to offer insight into the need for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the dynamics of influence between culture and philanthropy within the geographic scope of MPDL. This will be proven superior to an exclusive approach that addresses Muslim philanthropy in an intellectual and cultural vacuum.

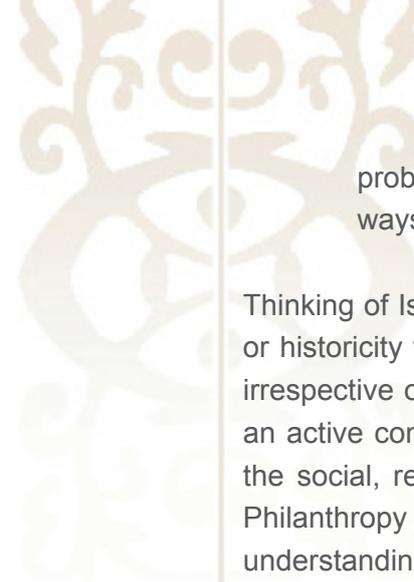
The Problem Of “Muslim Philanthropy”: The Need For A New Ijtihad

In Muslim-majority countries, the general approach to “Muslim philanthropy” has been generally directed towards the main forms of charity in Islam. One thinks of waqf, zakat and sadaqqa as the three main pillars of Muslim philanthropy which are, more often than not, distinguished in popular perception from Western institutionalized philanthropic practices. Moreover, according to Dwight Burlingame, for the West, concepts of charity and philanthropy are not necessarily features connected to Islam and “its moral universe” and that “the religio-ethical standards of behavior implicit in such words as ‘kindness,’ ‘generosity,’ ‘love of mankind,’ and ‘compassion’ are not particularly evident when Islam and its adherents are depicted in the electronic and print media.” (Burlingame 269)

This is coupled with the prevalence of the Huntingtonian paradigm of a Muslim-Western clash of civilizations, has led to a polarized, binary mode of thinking and an overlooking of the fact that philanthropy, inherent in Islam, emerged in the Muslim world diachronically as a result of a dynamic interaction with other philanthropic practices and cultures. As such, Muslim philanthropy is not purely Muslim in the traditional sense. The attempt here is to open up a conversation about Muslim philanthropy using a more inclusive paradigm that dispenses with the exclusive bifurcations which have permeated discourses about this field.

According to Mohammed Arkoun, a new ijthihad for Muslim and non-Muslim scholars is needed to rethink Islam within the context of a history of thought or epistemology. The same is needed when thinking about Muslim philanthropy. He argues that this project of rethinking Islam would respond to two major needs in Muslim societies:

- 1) the particular need of Muslim societies to think, for the first time, about their own problems which had been made unthinkable by the triumph of orthodox scholastic thought;
- and 2) the need of contemporary thought in general to open new fields and discover new horizons of knowledge, through a systematic cross cultural approach to the fundamental



problems of the human existence. These problems are raised and answered in their own ways by the traditional religions. (Arkoun 28)

Thinking of Islam within an epistemological context would bring up the problem of historicization or historicity which contradicts the general Islamic perception of Islam as fixed and unchanging irrespective of the passage of time. However, rethinking Muslim philanthropy as a product and an active component in the production processes of philanthropic trends is necessary because the social, religious and human elements are paramount in the study of Muslim philanthropy. Philanthropy as stated in the Koran needs to be rethought within a context that opens up a new understanding of philanthropic institutions. This rethinking must acknowledge the interface between Muslim philanthropy (as perceived in the popular mind) and other socio-historical factors.

First, a semantic distinction between the ideological and intellectual spaces of Islam and Muslim is relevant. The reference here is to Muslim philanthropy rather than Islamic philanthropy. Islam is the faith and, as such, Islamic philanthropy would denote philanthropic practices stated within the Quran and Sunna [the faith]. However, the word “Muslim” introduces human and social considerations into the equation which is at the very heart of philanthropy. Philanthropy is a space of interaction between the self and the other. This interaction occurs within a collective and for its overall benefit. That said, the concept of philanthropy is a space in which interaction and communication are a must; isolation is unthinkable. No one can practice philanthropy on his/her own. Philanthropy is by definition an act of belonging to and benefiting a collective. It is interaction that is dialogic rather than dialectic.

The spread of Islam bore witness to a dialogic exchange between multiple spaces. Islam spread into a world where philanthropic institutions already existed; each institution was a product of the indigenous culture and history from which it emerged. Today, philanthropic practices in the Muslim world are the result of an interface between Islam and the cultures it encountered. This interface actively produced and reproduced new spaces wherein Islamic philanthropy adapted to the indigenous cultures of the geographic space in which it existed.

A historical review of the waqf provides a good example of the complexity of the Muslim philanthropic space within the global context. According to A. A. Fyzee, the first account of the Islamic waqf pertains to Omar ibn al-Khattab who, after procuring land in Khaybar, approached the Prophet Muhammed PBUH to consult him about it. The Prophet responded: “If thou likest, make the property itself to remain inalienable, and give (the profit from) it in charity.” (Cited in Morgan 21) So Omar made it a charity to serve the needy and to free slaves. This is considered the first account of Islamic waqf. However, there are other accounts that point towards the existence of similar institutions in biblical times.

The Jewish heqdesh had its origins in biblical times and it took the form of “consecrated property donated for the upkeep of the Jerusalem Temple and its officials, including the purchase of sacrificial animals for the cult.” (Cohen 200) In the post-biblical period, the role played by the heqdesh was expanded and extended to benefit both the religious institution itself and the poor. In this way, the Islamic waqf mirrored the Heqdesh as a sustainable vehicle for delivering charity (Cohen 201). The only major difference between the two is that the Islamic waqf had at its very essence the service of the poor from the beginning as a sadaqqa jariyya, while that of the heqdesh

evolved historically. Both the heqdesh and waqf created a space where philanthropy changed and was rendered more complex as a result of the interplay with one another. The processes of producing space and reproduction are concurrent: one feeds into the other. An incomplete picture is developed if each is treated individually.

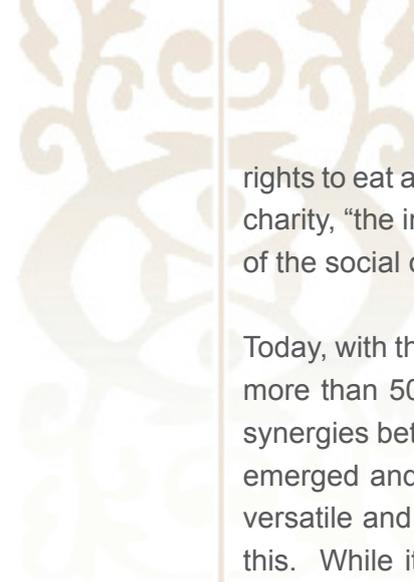
Although the existence of the heqdesh preceded that of the Islamic waqf, their influences on one another can be perceived both ways; the Middle Eastern Jewish pattern was reinforced and influenced by the Islamic waqf. Muhammed Amin noted that the emergence of waqfs during the Mamluk period was at least partly “the quest for prestige” through the building of religious institutions. Similarly, for Egyptian Jews, heqdeshim were named after their founders (Cohen 203). The Egyptian Geniza frequently mentions the religious obligation to help the needy. There is evidence that the Jews took this duty very seriously and that this was heightened by the diligence of their Muslim neighbors (Cohen 243).

The synergy between the Islamic waqf and other institutions, both biblical and post-biblical, are further highlighted in the description of the beneficiaries: the poor. It is significant that the language used to describe them in the Geniza reverberates with very little semantic change in Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The poor were described as trying to avoid “uncovering their faces” or *kashf al-wajh*, a description that appears in Medieval Islamic sources and in al-Ghazzali’s writings as well as “in the Egyptian Christian chronicle of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church.” (Cohen 244)

In addition to this historical interface, cultural and sociopolitical interfaces are also possible. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century city of Surat in western India, philanthropic practices were part of a culture of symbolic investments which merchants developed in building social relationships with members of their community and their rulers. This is further evidence as to the interface between philanthropic trends and institutions as well as the environment in which philanthropy is practiced. Philanthropy was part of a person’s commitment to Hindu and Jain religious values, but also a part of the sociopolitical environment around them: “Gifting was a means of establishing one’s identity as a member of a mahajan (guild).” (Haynes 340) Religious gifting or charity took two major forms: the collective duties paid to merchants’ guilds and donations of families to specific religious institutions or persons (Haynes 344).

The payment of cesses was a means of belonging to a collective. Philanthropy had a religious and social purpose. There are records which show that even Muslims had to donate funds to Hindu shrines (Haynes 344). As such, the environment influenced the practice of philanthropy. The philanthropic space created in Surat, initially born of Hindu and Jain religious values, is also influenced by the sociopolitical environment, thereby becoming an active component in the creation of another space where philanthropy is no longer tied to religion alone. Rather, philanthropy is firmly embedded in cultural and social practices. The philanthropic space resulting from this interface is the very arena in which social, political and religious threads are brought together.

Turkish imarets or large soup kitchens also blurred the line separating philanthropy from existing social hierarchies and structures. Religious obligations were, in a sense, personal obligations as well as indicators of one’s position in a collective. In her investigation of the imarets, Amy Singer examines the lists of people who were qualified to be fed in the Ottoman Empire: “She discovers that the line between need and privilege was neither clear nor necessarily relevant in assigning



rights to eat at a public kitchen.” (Cohen 357) She concludes that, as is the case with other forms of charity, “the imarets served not only to deliver assistance but also to reinforce existing hierarchies of the social order, marking status through the idiom of food.” (Cohen 357)

Today, with the presence of print, broadcast media, digitization techniques, over 158 million blogs, more than 500 million active Facebook users and over 65 million tweets a day, the question of synergies between culture and philanthropy has become an inescapable reality. New trends have emerged and previously fixed concepts of philanthropy have been challenged and rendered as versatile and dynamic as the inter-connected global environment. There are many examples of this. While it is mostly held that zakat should only be given to Muslim beneficiaries, there are examples of philanthropic institutions that do not discriminate between Muslims and Non-muslims. Furthermore, in a study conducted on philanthropy in Egypt, almost 40% of the sample expressed readiness to give zakat and sadaqqa to people of different religions. When the data by religion was cross-tabulated, 37.3% of the Muslim community compared to 34.3% of the Christian community stated that they had no objections to giving to charities linked solely to their faith. (El Daly 64)

In Egypt, religion, both Christianity and Islam, is embedded in the culture and religious traditions. In fact, philanthropy as perceived by many Egyptians is strongly connected to the faith and to the duties of paying zakat, ushur (Christian tithe) and sadaqqa. The executive director of a Cairo-based NGO noted that “Philanthropy for me is what the Prophet Mohammed said in his hadith: ‘None of you will have faith until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.’” Another held that “Philanthropy is important in every civilized society, because it takes the poor and the marginalized into account. The NGO facilitates philanthropy: the rich give through donations and the not-very-rich volunteer their effort. Religion asks us to do this, whether Islam or Christianity.” (El Daly 51-52) NGOs’ role in development interacts with religious and social roles; all are interconnected spaces that make up the fabric of philanthropy in a Muslim-majority country like Egypt.

Another example is how philanthropic institutions brand themselves to collect donations. The messages used respond to the culture in which they operate. This blurs the line separating religious/faith-based philanthropy from secular philanthropy. Al Orman provides a good example in the Egyptian context: it is a decidedly secular philanthropic organization. When asked about whether the organization’s director considered Al Orman a faith-based organization or not, he insisted that Al Orman is not necessarily faith-based. However, throughout the conversation, he still used Islamic terminology and cited the Quran. This example demonstrates how the line of demarcation between religion and culture can be blurred within the philanthropic space. Muslim philanthropy is a product of, and an active component in, the production of each in people’s minds.

There needs to be a platform that espouses an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to Muslim philanthropy. This platform must shed the Lefebvre’s “empty zone” mode of thinking which ignores the interconnectedness between philanthropic practices and culture. This platform would open up a conversation about new comparative methodologies to be used in the study of Muslim philanthropy and would integrate it within the global philanthropic realm.

The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library: Bringing Muslim Philanthropy Into The Digital World

The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library was born of the need for a digital platform that would meet the needs of practitioners and researchers as well as anyone interested in learning about philanthropic practices within Muslim-majority countries and Muslim communities worldwide. While there is a growing interest in Muslim politics, ideology and culture, there is very little literature on Muslim philanthropy within a comparative, inclusive context. Whatever information out there is, for the most part, extremely difficult to obtain. There is a need to aggregate knowledge on Muslim philanthropy with an understanding as to the amount of diversity encompassed within the boundaries of that term. That was how the idea of the Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library emerged. The next few pages will present an outline of the library as a digital space where culture meets philanthropy. It will also describe the different mechanisms used to make this library more than a simple repository of documents but an actual platform for ideas and identifying research gaps.

With initial funding provided by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement (Gerhart Center), in partnership with the Center of Excellence for the Middle East and Arab Cultures (CEMEA) based in the American University in Cairo, set out to establish a digital library on Muslim philanthropy. Over twenty five meetings with university administrators, professors, librarians, and Egyptian non-profit professionals were held in order to gain a better sense of the landscape the digital library would cover. A research consultation was held in mid October 2010 which included a group of interested researchers, practitioners, professors as well as the directors of the Gerhart Center and CEMEA to discuss current trends in philanthropy within and outside the region. Additionally, the participants discussed the scope of the Library and its potential importance to broaden the scope and depth of research in this area.

Key Conclusions Derived From Meetings And Research Consultation:

The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library was born of the need for a digital platform that would meet the needs of practitioners and researchers as well as anyone interested in learning about philanthropic prac

- **MPDL's Scope:**

The realm of Muslim philanthropy is a complex one and should not be taken at face value. The Library should cover both theory and practice; the ideas and thought behind the actual giving, as well as the various ways philanthropy is practiced in the Muslim world. To avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding as to the mission of the Library, MPDL's definition of Muslim philanthropy is geographic and cultural, not limited to faith-based philanthropy. This is an important distinction which opens up the scope of the library to the rich historical and contemporary influences on philanthropy as it is actually practiced. MPDL spans Muslim-majority countries and Muslim communities worldwide. As such, it is necessary to take into account the cultural, social and historical factors which influence philanthropic practices within MPDL's geographic scope.

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- MPDL's Strengths:
 1. MPDL should be the 'one-stop shop' for practitioners, researchers and those interested in finding out more about philanthropy in Muslim majority countries and communities. Although there are resources already available, they are dispersed or unpublished; MPDL has the unique advantage of having them all in one place.
 2. One major problem for researchers is access and mobility. MPDL's geographic scope will allow researchers from any part of the world to get a comprehensive picture of philanthropic practices in Muslim-majority communities without the need to travel to another country. MPDL also facilitates comparative studies and exchange of information and ideas.
 - MPDL's Sustainability:

Digital libraries are often not sustainable largely because of two major factors: lack of proper outreach and lack of funding, which are highly interconnected problems. This can be addressed in the following ways:

 1. Using social media can be an effective means to generate interest in the library by making it a growing and dynamic entity instead of a stagnant repository of documents. Facebook can also be a valuable mode of interaction. Uploading video and sound recorded interviews or a visual exhibition can be effective means of outreach by putting a human face to the practice of philanthropy. Readers and scholars are interested in not only in learning about philanthropic practices, but also knowing the story behind the practice. They are eager to read creative and original research, and not all philanthropic practices are covered by research and academic papers.
 2. Developing an outreach and communications strategy which will ensure MPDL's presence in major conferences on philanthropy within and outside the region.
 3. Producing and encouraging research can be another means to help the library realize its mission and vision. There is very little comparative research conducted on Muslim philanthropy and even less on the role of libraries and digitization in enhancing the infrastructure of philanthropy in the Muslim world. The creative structure of MPDL should establish a mechanism whereby research gaps are identified and more research is conducted in this field.

Based on those meetings, the structure of the Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library was designed to make widely available a repository of the world's knowledge on all forms of philanthropy through original documents, reports, graphics, waqf registrations, as well as scholarly analysis from Muslim majority countries and communities worldwide. The focus, for the first phase of the library project, is on twentieth and twenty-first century material.

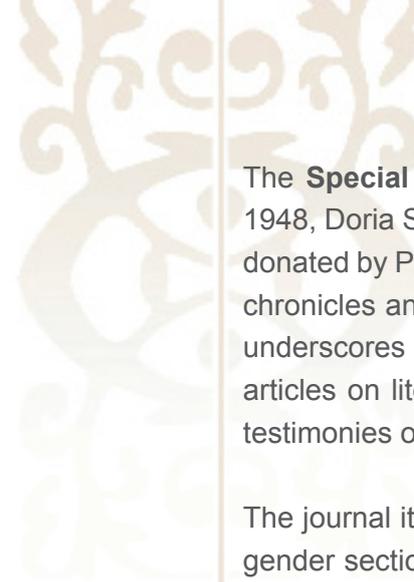
The Library's mission is to create an open-access global information resource and virtual library on the range of philanthropic practices in Muslim-majority countries and communities worldwide. Its vision is to establish Muslim philanthropic practices and knowledge as an integral part of the contemporary global philanthropic realm.

While the initial idea was to establish a repository of documents, the project's structure expanded significantly to incorporate digital documents, a visual exhibition, video and sound recorded interviews, as well as a research component. Below is a diagram representing the current framework of MPDL:

Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library				
MPDL DOCUMENTS	SPECIAL COLLECTIONS	VOICES OF PHILANTHROPY	VISUAL EXHIBITION	RESEARCH
This section features documents covering the various dimensions of philanthropic practices within the Muslim world under the following categories arts and architecture, cultures of giving, diaspora, economics, history, law, philanthropic institutions and religion.	Bint Al Nil Collection: In 1948, Doria Shafik created the Bint al-Nil journal funded by Princess Chevikar to fuse new energy in the Egyptian feminist movement. It chronicles the period before and after the 1952 Revolution and features articles on literacy programs, cultural, political and social campaigns led by women.	This section includes documentaries, video and sound recorded interviews with major philanthropists and business leaders from all over the Muslim world.	This section includes visual representations of philanthropy in the twentieth and twenty first centuries.	A workshop or conference will be held on an annual basis to encourage original research on Muslim philanthropy.

Each section of the Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library creates a new paradigm whereby the digital space is a platform which allows for an understanding of the various dimensions of Muslim philanthropy. MPDL's digital space can be regarded as a new resource which facilitates an inclusive perception of Muslim philanthropy and expunges old, exclusive misconceptions.

The **Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library Documents** section taps into the various dimensions of philanthropic practices within the geographic scope of MPDL. In doing so, MPDL acknowledges the multiple layers included within the practice of philanthropy: historical, social, legal, architectural and cultural. It also includes registrations of philanthropic institutions like waqf that go all the way back to 1900. By accessing this section, researchers are able to get a holistic image of philanthropy in context. Each dimension is a component of the wider context of philanthropy.



The **Special Collections** section features selected articles from a journal titled Bint Al-Nil. In 1948, Doria Shafik created the Bint Al-Nil [Daughter of the Nile] association and journal with funds donated by Princess Chevikar to fuse new energy in the Egyptian feminist movement. The journal chronicles an important period in Egyptian history; before and after the 1952 Revolution. It also underscores the role played by women as an integral part of the nation. The journal features articles on literacy programs, cultural, political and social campaigns led by women, as well as testimonies on womens' philanthropic activities in Egypt and the world at the time.

The journal itself is a form of philanthropy. Although MPDL does not have a separate feminist or gender section, including selections from this journal as a special collection adds to the vision of the library as inclusive of the different voices and dimensions of the philanthropic space.

An Egyptian feminist journal from the 1950s contained valuable insights into women's philanthropy at the time. During that period of time, activism and philanthropy were closely linked as the aristocratic "ladies of the salon" affiliated with Princess Chevikar actively engaged in public activism by starting associations, (جمعيات) charitable organizations and learned societies. The Egyptian University and Al Azhar relied heavily on grants from women. For example, when a school for the blind in Zaytun called for public support in 1906, a "charitable lady" donated a portion of her landed estate for the benefit of the school.

The women's press was also another form of activism and philanthropy. Women's journals and magazines were usually funded by women and provided a reference point on a variety of women leaders, activists and philanthropists from Europe, Asia and the Arab world. They also constituted a forum for the exchange of information and ideas as well as a record of women's meetings and activities.

In a similar fashion, MPDL will become a forum of ideas on Muslim philanthropy, using social media and digitization as its tools. Its **Voices of Philanthropy** section is maintained on both YouTube, and the American University in Cairo Digital Archive Repository [DAR] for preservation purposes. The Library's YouTube channel has allowed for a more interactive experience with viewers and a wider distribution of the interviews and videos uploaded.

The **Visual Exhibition** presents representations of philanthropic practices as seen through the lens of a camera instead of the mind of a researcher. Captions are provided for all the photographs and they are made available both on Flickr and DAR. The first collection was on the Egyptian January 25 Revolution; it gave users a glimpse of Egyptian philanthropy manifested itself during and after the revolution. Giving was not only financial, it was emotional, material and embedded within the very solidarity of the people. Tahrir Square was a microcosm of what was happening throughout Egypt. Pictures were accompanied by testimonials from professional and amateur photographers who were in and beyond Tahrir during the Revolution.

The last section, **Research**, is directly linked to this paper. There is a need to identify research gaps and promote the Library as a means of helping to address them. Through a comparative approach to existing material on Muslim philanthropy, MPDL will expose gaps in knowledge and encourage discourse on methods to close these gaps. A research conference, Takaful, will be held on an annual basis to encourage research on Muslim philanthropy and contribute to MPDL's sustainability.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here

The space of Muslim philanthropy is multi-dimensional yet its various dimensions are not adequately understood. There is a need to develop new platforms which bring new scholars to the field and encourage new methodologies and frameworks. That contributes to more inclusive, comparative approaches to understanding Muslim philanthropy and moves away from binary modes of thinking about an “empty zone” rather than a dynamic interaction between multiple variables.

Lefebvre’s theory of space opens up a new way of perceiving Muslim philanthropy as a space that results from the intersection of Islam, philanthropy and the surrounding environment. The digital world can provide a platform wherein this intersection can be negotiated, discussed and developed into new modes of understanding Muslim philanthropy as part of the global philanthropic realm.

The Muslim Philanthropy Digital Library brings Muslim philanthropy into the digital world. Using a mix of digitization and social media, the library is more than a mere repository of documents and data on philanthropic practices. Rather, it is a dynamic platform wherein a new understanding of Muslim philanthropy becomes possible. More collaboration is needed by philanthropists, researchers and non-profit professionals to expand this library even further in order to meet the need for a new understanding of Muslim philanthropy and the development of new methodologies of research that are dialogical rather than binary.

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