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Blurring the Boundaries. *A Review Essay*

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Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Andrew. J. F. Morris, *The Limits of Voluntarism: Charity and Welfare from the New Deal through the Great Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Until recently, historians tended to think of government, the market, and the nonprofit sector as discrete entities. When they ventured into the voluntary sphere, they almost always focused on individuals and institutions, rather than the mechanics of government or the economy per se. Thus, the 1960s and 1970s saw a windfall of works on social control; scholars in the 1980s examined class relations; and those in the 1990s studied issues of political culture, nation building, and citizenship. With both Marxism and civil society paradigms now in retreat, a new crop of books has begun to reexamine the ties between the sectors in new ways, moving away from traditional "charity to welfare state" models that held that when the state moved in, philanthropy withered. Although written about very different geographical regions and times, each of the three books reviewed here delves into the jumbled "mixed economy" between markets, philanthropy, and the state, and combined, they provide a fresh lens for assessing historical developments.[1]

[1] For the United States, selected examples would include: Clifford Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1860* (New York: H. Wolff, 1960); Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822–1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

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Amy Singer's volume *Charities in Islamic Societies* and Ilana Ben-Amos' *The Culture of Giving* are the most compatible, sweeping across centuries to survey religious motives and the effects of governmental expansion, while Andrew Morris' *The Limits of Voluntarism* examines the shifting relationships between nonprofits and the federal government in the United States, beginning with the Great Depression.

Singer's volume is a gem, providing both a concise overview of the nuances of Islamic customs and philanthropy across the Muslim world, and a number of valuable insights into their changing relationships with the state. Her aims are twofold: to use charity and philanthropy to study larger historical changes across a wide swath of nations, and to test Marcel Mauss' theories about the role of gift giving in maintaining social cohesion. Her focus on Islamic beneficence also challenges enduring Western notions of the primacy of the Judeo-Christian ethic in shaping philanthropic traditions.[2]

She begins with the distinction between *zakat*, which is mandated in the Qur'an, and *sadaqa*, which is more voluntary. As she explains, *zakat* is "first and foremost a reflection of belief in God and obedience to a divine commandment, and not an expression of beneficent feeling or obligation toward other people." One of the five pillars of Islam, it is akin to a "Muslim tax" that is paid annually on "specific kinds of property and revenue," usually in the form of alms distributed to the poor. It is also a stepping stone to salvation, since "those who pay stand a better chance of entering Paradise than those who do not…."[3]

Sadaqa was often more systematic, providing funds for education, aid to travelers, food for the poor, and even dowries for impoverished girls. In addition to individual acts of charity, *waqfs* provided large endowments for good works in perpetuity (although *waqfs* can also be used as trusts for family members). Rooted in Roman and Byzantine law, these institutions began to appear in significant numbers in the ninth century. Property-based *waqfs* were the most common, since cash *waqfs* ran the risk of being tarred by Islamic prohibitions against receiving interest on loans, which was how many of the cash-based trusts were funded.

Singer provides a variety of examples of famous *waqfs*, from those that supported some of the major mosques in Istanbul, to Haseki Hurrem Sultan's public baths and kitchens in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Hurrem Sultan, a favored wife of one of the Ottoman Empire's most celebrated Sultans, Sűleyman, was one of many aristocratic women who siphoned their wealth into philanthropic projects. Another was Zubayda, the ninth-century donor of a still-functioning aqueduct for pilgrims in Mecca. Singer also makes the

[2] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, W. D. Halls, trans. (London: Routledge 1990).
[3] Singer, 32, 38, 64.

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interesting point that although many women in the Ottoman court were born as Christians (Hurrem Sultan was a Ukrainian princess) they ultimately shaped their donations according to Islamic templates. Women were able to assume the role of grand patroness because under Islamic law they controlled their own inheritances and funds, which was not always the case in Christian countries. Voluntarism, on the other hand, was a late arrival; in many Muslim nations it did not surface until in the nineteenth century, marking a striking difference between the West and predominantly Muslim countries.

Waqfs not only shaped Islamic charities, but they had a significant economic impact as well. A time-honored criticism of charitable trusts is that they remove property from market transactions—and often government taxation as well—in perpetuity. Conversely, Singer argues that they played vitally important economic roles in Muslim societies. Not only did trusts hire and sometimes house considerable numbers of people, they often ran businesses and bazaars, and occasionally even built infrastructure projects like Zubayda's aqueduct.

By 1800 there were approximately twenty thousand Ottoman *waqfs*, which controlled considerable amounts of land and yielded "a total annual income equal to one-third of annual government revenues." Not surprisingly, these institutions captured the attention of a variety of rulers at various points in time, beginning with Sultan Mehmed II, who in the fifteenth century sought to bring the *waqfs* and their revenues under his control. A similar effort to rein in Ottoman *waqfs* in the mid-nineteenth century ultimately diverted their funds from welfare to war and administrative needs. This allowed their charitable, educational, and infrastructure projects to sink into disrepair amid government mismanagement and corruption. *Waqfs* were also nationalized, banned, or subjected to other forms of governmental centralization in Egypt and Central and South Asia over the ensuing century. A few of these trends were later reversed, including more favorable Turkish legislation passed in 1967 that by century's end had given rise to a new crop of foundations. As Singer points out, the boundaries between the public and private spheres have continually been renegotiated between citizens and the state.[4]

Echoing Mauss, Singer notes, "pervasive ongoing gift exchanges … make [Islamic] societies cohere." Ilana Ben-Amos' volume on giving in early modern England casts a more skeptical eye on Mauss' paradigms, or at least on his economic hypotheses. Focusing on the transition from medieval to modern society, her aim is twofold: (1) to refute the notion that public relief and poor laws displaced private philanthropy; and (2) to test Mauss' notion that private giving was incompatible with market exchanges. While Singer

[4] Ibid., 186.

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examines Islam, Ben-Amos' study of the period from 1580 to 1740 encapsulates England's transition from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism.[5]

Within this framework, Ben-Amos argues that, far from being quashed by state and market incursions, private giving diversified and expanded. Four indices chart the course of informal gift giving and philanthropy during and after the Reformation: (1) "the sheer diversity of informal support"; (2) the increase in endowments, church collections, and bequests; (3) the advent of new vehicles for giving, such as subscription associations; and (4) the introduction of favorable legislation to encourage the creation of trusts under the Elizabethan Statute of Charitable Uses in 1601. Market expansion also had a positive effect, since many charities were deeply embedded in commercial activities.[6]

The scope of her research is ambitious, ranging from informal exchanges of gifts, money, and time within families to the activities of guilds, parishes, and formal charities. Some of the earlier chapters focusing on individual giving are highly detailed but reveal few surprises. Indeed, one wishes that she had made more use of Viviana Zelizer's highly imaginative work on the social meaning of money in addition to tapping Mauss. She also fails to explain some of the odd dichotomies that she unearths. For example, on page 99, she mentions that Lady Margaret Dane donated £2000 to the Fishmongers guild for charitable uses in 1580, but does not explain why a female aristocrat was patronizing fishmongers.[7]

By 1660, she estimates that there were ten thousand charitable trusts, many of which were managed by municipalities and guilds, and their numbers continued to climb. By 1740, their ranks had doubled and possibly trebled, placing them on a numerical par with Singer's figures for Ottoman *waqfs* over a century later. While older forms of private fundraising for the poor persisted, new associational forms such as subscription charities and mutual aid societies also began to appear in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. Sparked in part by the Mortmain Act of 1736, subscription charities promoted *inter vivos* giving and brought together widening pools of small donors and volunteers. Members also ran the schools and hospitals that they founded, linking charity to voluntarism in new ways. Far from severing charity from religion or promoting secularization, the transition to Protestantism sparked a new era of English largesse.[8]

Chapter 10 focuses on the "mixed economy" of charity and the increasingly fuzzy boundaries between the nonprofit sector, the market, and the state, and is by far the most innovative and interesting one. As Ben-Amos explains,

[5] Ibid., 9.
[6] Ben-Amos, 378.
[7] Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money: Pin Money, Paychecks, Poor Relief and Other Currencies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[8] Ben-Amos, 116.

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beginning in the early eighteenth century, newspaper advertisements for subscription drives and charitable events commercialized and expanded the gift relation. Even trusts, which ostensibly isolated property from the market, were actively involved in commercial activities; they sold property for cash to invest in more lucrative loans, products such as milled flour, and gifts of personal property such as jewelry. As markets expanded, so did their profits.

The state played a role as well; far from obliterating charities, state charters, land grants, and favorable legislation protected and encouraged their growth. As a result, private funding for the poor continued to rise, despite governmental incursions, providing a social geography of giving that bound together people of different classes and the objects of their largesse, on both the public and private stages. As in Islamic societies, giving was part of the "social glue" that held societies together, even as governmental responsibilities and the market expanded. Some trusts even provided funds for infrastructure developments such as building roads, underscoring the "mixed economy" of overlapping public and private responsibilities.

Andrew Morris traces the constantly shifting boundaries between government and the nonprofit sector in the United States. Beginning with the collapse of private charity as the Great Depression worsened in the early 1930s, he examines the rise of America's fragmentary welfare state, the changing roles of nonprofit organizations as governmental responsibilities expanded, and the heyday of public/private partnerships during Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

President Herbert Hoover hoped to address the problems generated by the stock market crash of 1929 by encouraging private business and labor leaders and charities to work in tandem with government in lieu of building federal bureaucracies for relief. By the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered the White House, it was clear that Hoover's bets on the power of the "associative state" had failed, and this paved the way for expanded governmental action and the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in mid-1933. Charities in turn embraced the prospect of "new alignments" that would cede responsibility for poor relief to the government while they developed more specialized programs to aid both the poor and the middle class. By the 1940s and 1950s, many former charities had taken the lead in promoting what Morris terms "the therapeutic state," providing counseling and therapy for both the middle class and "multiproblem" families among the poorest segments of society.

Another major shift occurred in the 1960s with the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty. While some observers criticized private welfare agencies for failing to adequately address the needs of minorities and the very poor, the civil rights movement pressured charities to integrate their staffs and reach out more aggressively to African-Americans. The War on Poverty also began to funnel federal funds into the coffers of private charities, and created a larger and more diversified nonprofit sector that was far more dependent

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on public funding. In effect, the notion that government programs and nonprofits had separate but complementary responsibilities, as embodied in the "new alignments" template, unraveled amid growing skeins of public/private partnerships, federal contracting, and government largesse.

The common thread that unites these three volumes is their concern with the ways in which the "mixed economy" of public and private funding played out in different settings. As more research has been done on the nonprofit sphere outside the United States, it has become increasingly clear that that government grants and contracts to ostensibly "private" charities are surprisingly pervasive and have a long and venerable history, as does nonprofit participation in commercial activities. Even within the United States, there has been an enduring myth that philanthropy traditionally was—and still should be—the sole support of the nonprofit sector. This was a foundational notion of Reaganite efforts to downsize the nation's fragmentary welfare state in the 1980s. But a careful examination of the historical record reveals that state and local nonprofit subsidies have been a mainstay of nonprofit development since the early nineteenth century. The Great Society programs built on these templates, expanded them exponentially, and supported them from the federal till. Although Morris' study is far more narrowly calibrated than the other two, he does a good job of tracing the ongoing expansion, contraction, and reiteration of these practices during the mid-twentieth century.[9]

Newer still is the emphasis on the intersection between the nonprofit sector and market activities, which both Singer and Ben-Amos address. To date, very little attention has been devoted to the ties between philanthropy, nonprofits, and economic growth, particularly in the United States. Robert Putnam speculated on this theme in his work on Italy, and suggested that widespread participation in nonprofits builds social capital, which in turn builds trust, encouraging people to pool their investments and promote economic development. But as both Singer and Ben-Amos point out, nonprofit organizations and endowments are also economic actors in their own right, employing workers, running businesses, making loans, and seeding new ventures. In the United States, they were important investors as well, turning cash donations into cash for development through their investments in railroads, emerging industries, public works, and small business development. Singer presents stunning figures on the economic holdings of nineteenth-century Ottoman *waqfs*. An equally interesting, but still under-researched topic is the impact of investments by heavily capitalized nonprofit institutions such as universities and charitable

[9] One of the most important early examples of this type of research was the multi-country, comparative, interdisciplinary study coordinated by the Center for Civil Society at Johns Hopkins University. For an introduction to their findings, see Lester Salamon , *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society, 1999).

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trusts in bankrolling local and national economic development in different countries and times.[10]

The role of women donors is another important theme that both Singer and Ben-Amos discuss. A great deal of interesting work has been done on female donors and volunteers in the United States, in part because their activities enabled feminist scholars to trace the trajectory of middle-class women's efforts within the public sphere before they gained the right to vote. Initially, the emphasis was on writing women into the record, and recounting how they used their charities and associations to forge bonds of "sisterhood" across class lines. Later, class differences became an important theme, while by the 1990s comparative work began to reveal the differential roles that women played in the rise of the modern welfare state. Religion was another principal focus. Earlier research emphasized the role that different religious traditions played in determining the ways in which elite women could forge their public lives. Singer reiterates some of these themes, noting that elite Muslim women initially made their greatest contributions as donors, and only embraced voluntarism in the late nineteenth century—the antithesis of the American model. Whether one is looking at Europe, North America, or the Middle East, it is difficult to understand the scope and nature of philanthropy without including religious practices in the equation, particularly before the twentieth century.[11]

So, following Singer's stated ambition of using charity and philanthropy as a lens for refocusing our understanding of historical change in widely differing societies and times, what questions do these three volumes collectively pose that may recalibrate how scholars study these practices in future? The first concerns the constantly shifting relationships between donors, philanthropic institutions, and the state. If, as these authors contend, philanthropy is part of a "mixed economy" that often lies at the heart of how states conduct their business, what are the political and social implications of governmental efforts to co-opt philanthropic activities, to fund them, regulate them, promote them, piggyback on them, or pass responsibility for social welfare

[10] Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). To see how this played out in antebellum America, see Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700–1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ch. 4.

[11] For the United States, see, for example, Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Women's Sphere' in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986); and Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). On the role of different religious and ethical traditions in shaping women's philanthropy, see Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Women, Philanthropy and Civil Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

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increasingly into their domain? Moreover, since these alliances are inherently political—given that they shape and enact public policies and are sometimes run by citizens with limited political rights (as in the case of American women before they could vote)—how does this temper our notions of citizenship, the political arena, and the scope, nature, and practice of democracy?

Similarly, if nonprofits are important economic players, to what extent have they fostered, or hampered, economic modernization and development at the local, national, and imperial levels? How much of a critical institutional mass is needed before they begin to leave a noticeable imprint? What roles did heavily capitalized philanthropic institutions such as charitable trusts and *waqfs* play in stimulating new industries and national economic advancement? Under what conditions did they become a drag on modernizing economies, and when were they most beneficial? How much property did they control in cities and nations, and does it make a difference that these resources were set aside for charitable ends? How important was it when groups that were generally barred from access to credit—such as laborers, women and minorities in the nineteenth-century United States—managed to get and give out loans through their nonprofit organizations, and how does this change our understanding of their roles in local economies?

Perhaps the most exciting contribution of these three studies is how each helps to move philanthropy and generosity from the margins to the center of national narratives. Taken together, they provide important clues as to how we can use the history of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector to understand national and imperial histories in new ways.

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