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Identity Tetris: Transnational Muslim NGOs within Global Contexts

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by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation uses an organizational communication approach to explore how Muslim NGOs negotiate the positioning of religious identity within the international, national, and local contexts. First, it considers Muslim NGOs working as faith-based organizations within the aid and development sector. Second, it examines them as political actors within the national civil society space. Thirdly, it explores their charitable role within their home community local context. To obtain a better understanding of Muslim NGOs' religious organizational identity, the study highlights two case studies examining western international Muslim NGOs (Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid) from 2010 to 2020. Using the four-flow model of the Communication as Constitutive of Organizing theoretical approach, it incorporates in-depth analyses of secondary literature including research articles, government and think tank reports, and internal organizational documents. To better understand the organization's own perceptions about the role of religion in their identity, the study proceeds with semi-structured respondent interviews with members of the organizations. To analyze the interview and organizational text data, the study uses discourse analysis highlighting macro discursive understandings of the organizations within the four constitutive flows. It includes theoretical implications advancing understandings of organizational identity, as well as practical propositions relevant to the NGOs.

INDEX WORDS: Organizational communication, Organizational identity, Muslim NGOs

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Salima Benzohra. The completion of my degree is a testament to her dedication to my education in three separate languages, and across four continents. I am blessed to be your daughter.

I also dedicate my dissertation to the country and people of Syria.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2017, humanitarian crises around the globe resulted in an estimated 201 million people from 134 countries in extreme need of assistance for survival. From political conflicts causing historic displacement and migration flows across the MENA and EU regions to climate change causing environmental issues in the Caribbean and droughts in the Horn of Africa, the combined crises prompted international aid efforts to rise to a whopping $27.3 billion. Private donors and governments distribute funds to a variety of first-level recipients ranging from multilateral organizations such as the United Nation's Children Emergency Fund to smaller civil society organizations within the public sector.

The 2018 Global Humanitarian Assistance report data indicates that NGOs received $4 billion in one year, making them the second most important actor on the list of first-level aid recipients. Muslim non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in particular, are a critical subgroup of NGOs engaged in providing humanitarian relief. Their prominence stems from the fact that in recent times ten countries worldwide receive sixty percent of all aid. Syria has served as the single top recipient of humanitarian assistance for the fifth year in a row, and the other leading countries receiving aid—Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, and South Sudan— are all Muslim majority countries (Collacott, 2018).

The wide scope and impact of humanitarian aid, along with the centrality of religion and faith to such efforts, is indisputable (Kidwai et al., 2014; Orji, 2011; Zaman, 2012). Thus, the ways in which Muslim communities of faith and development actors interface with one another is of key importance. To expand understandings of this nexus, this study seeks to explore the ways in which Muslim NGOs negotiate their identity as they engage with the various sectors that provide opportunities and constraints toward successful achievement of their humanitarian

missions. To explain., I will begin by contextualizing the Muslim NGO experience within the corresponding contexts in which they function.

1.1 Muslim NGOs in a Globalized Context

In today's globalized world, international Muslim NGOs operate within a complex network of variable contexts. Giddens (1997) defines globalization as "the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa" (p.22). In many ways, communities throughout the world are increasingly interconnected. As a result, multinational organizations such as NGOs are able to organize charitable aid events and operate across the world. This globalized context renders older understandings of the role of different actors within international relations as no longer useful. Governments, for example, have a decreased ability to mitigate various national issues, which permits nongovernmental actors to emerge as essential advocates for the needs, interests, and values of people at large (Castells, 2007). In such a context, Muslim NGOs now occupy different spaces, play different roles by concurrently defending local and sectorial interests, and serve as actors operating outside government channels to address global problems.

When it comes to the definition of a Muslim NGO, no consensus exists on the exact articulation of the concept. Muslim NGOs refer to a spectrum of organizations ranging from groups with an element of Muslim faith or religiosity to those with ethnic and demographic dominance. For the sake of this project, this dissertation adopts one of the latest policy-based research categorizations for the term. Barzegar & El Karhili (2017) define Muslim NGOs as "autonomous and independent transnational aid and development institutions who are directly or indirectly connected to, or dependent on state or religious networks for their ideological

orientation, financial support, and operational capacity" (p.23). This definition recognizes the wide range of actors who qualify as Muslim NGOs while maintaining a focus on the faith-based nature of such actors.

This study describes how Muslim NGOs negotiate their religious identity within three contexts that form their global networks. The first involves Muslim NGOs working as faith-based organizations interacting with intergovernmental organizations who distribute aid and development funding. The second context is national civil society where Muslim NGOs function as political actors and interact with government entities. Finally, the third is a localized context where Muslim NGOs focus on their role as religious charities within their local home communities. While the international, national, and local contexts are not entirely mutually exclusive from one another, they generally focus on different actors and roles involved in the distribution of humanitarian aid. Muslim NGOs simultaneously play three different roles in these three contexts. However, the competing interests involved across the sectors ensure that they must successfully negotiate their religious identity if they are to maximize their ability to impact those they serve.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Muslim NGOs have been studied from many disciplinary perspectives. The field of development studies has paid particular attention to Muslim NGOs efforts in majority Muslim environments (Benthall, 2007; Nejima, 2015; Weiss, 2007; Yasmin et al., 2018), along with their overall position within the international development space (Koehrsen, 2020; Petersen, 2015). Additionally, scholars in migration and refugee studies link the NGOs' faith identity to their impact in servicing beneficiaries on the ground (De Cordier, 2009; Ozkan, 2012; Salih, 2002).

Finally, religious studies' scholars highlight NGOs' role as organized communities of faith within civil society (Khan, 2015; Kieffer, 2015).

Yet interestingly, the only work focusing on the role of religious identity in Muslim organizations comes from regional, cross-cultural studies. Marie Juul Petersen's (2015) book, *For Humanity or for The Umma? Aid and Islam in Traditional Muslim NGO,* for example, tackles some of the complexities arising from religious discourse in the context of Muslim NGOs. Petersen's work uses an ethnographic analysis to examine the push and pull between the humanitarianism and religious ideologies of Muslim NGOs. Mainly, she explains how, in the environment after the 9/11 attacks, Muslim NGOs' environments changed radically in response to the aid sector's call for better integration, cooperation, and even assimilation. She describes the ways in which the NGOs reacted by embarking on a journey that emphasized their "professional" rather than their Islamic identities (Petersen, 2015, p.12). In Peterson's view, these organizations presented themselves as international relief and development charities first and Muslim organizations second. In order to showcase the complexities of these interrelationships, Petersen's work approaches these organizations as instruments of the aid sector caught in a secularized/sacrilized binary rather than as autonomous tools free to express their own identities. This study will use an organizational communication framework to expand on this insight and broaden understandings of Muslim NGO identity as the following sections will explain

1.2.1 Organizational Communication

Organizational communication presents a fitting framework to tackle the question of how Muslim NGOs negotiate the role of religion in their organizational identity. It brings a disciplinary focus on the significance of communication practices as primary means of internal

organizational sensemaking and relations with external constituencies (Jablin & Putnam, 2011). As a discipline, organizational communication originated during the Second World War (Redding,1985). Initially called "Business and Industrial Communication," the field primarily focused on filling "the need for basic communication classes for military and industrial personnel" (Osmond, 2010, p.79). At the time, the field used the "rational model" where organizations were independent "containers" that held communicative processes (p.80). Early on, the field assumed realist ontologies, positivist methodologies, and a strict focus on managerial applications.

The introduction of the interpretive turn in the 1980s broke away from an initial disciplinary focus on management research and shifted scholarly attention from a focus on "communicating in organizations" to one on the "organizing features of communication" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 25). This theoretical shift borrowed from continental philosophy in its newfound interest around "an anti-representational view of language as the medium of experience, rather than merely its expression" (Osmond, 2010, p.15). The shift pushed organizational communication scholars to understand organization as a verb, created by communicative processes, and anchored within larger social systems (Bisel, 2010). The revised view generated more sophisticated understandings of organizations as un-fixed and "called into being by interacting and sensemaking persons who attempt to coordinate their behaviors to accomplish goals" (Bisel, 2010, p.58). Amongst others, the works of Zaug and McPhee (2001), and Putnam and Nicotera (2009) ultimately articulate these theoretical approaches in practical terms through the conceptualization of communication as constitutive of organizing.

1.2.2 Communicative Constitution of Organizations

Studies of constitutive organizational communication emphasize the process of organizing (Boivin et al., 2017). This approach views organizations as complex discursive formations where communication is both in organizations and productive of them (Putnam & Mumby, 2013). Understanding communication as a constitutive form of organizing rather than an effect (Deetz & Eger, 2014), the theoretical framework views organizations as "socio historical creations that are humanly constructed and produced through power and political interests that privilege some form of social constructions over others" (Deetz, 2003, p.95). This conceptual view enriches organizational communication in that it broadens the study of organizations from mere sites of communicative acts to active participants anchored within a larger process. CCO focuses on the ways in which communication is central to the organizing process (e.g., see Alvesson & Karreeman, 2000; Bisel, 2010; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Putnam & Mumby, 2013; Reed, 2010). In 2000, CCO emerged as a focal point in studies of communication and organization by recognizing that communication is the "key process for the emergence, perpetuation, and transformation of organizations" (Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017, p.1). In short, CCO presents communication as the "means by which organizations are established, composed, designed, and sustained" (Cooren et al., 2011, p.1150). Heavily influenced by the linguistic turn in the humanities, CCO theory breaks with both pure social constructivist and materialist theoretical frameworks to offer a perspective that suggests that organizations and the act of organizing "are invoked and are maintained in and through communicative practices" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 286). By recognizing the centrality of communication to the organizing process and underscoring organizational agency, CCO approaches allow for in depth analyses of organizations through their sense-making processes.

In particular, McPhee and Zaug's (2000) Four Flow model has emerged as particularly useful framework for examining the intersections of organizational communication. Overall, the four flows "link the organization to its members (membership negotiation), to itself reflexively (self-structuring), to the environment (institutional positioning), and to adapt interdependent activity to specific work situations and problems (activity coordination)" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 1). More specifically, membership negotiation links individual members to create and maintain organizational boundaries. Self-structuring controls and designs organizational processes through reflexive interactions. Activity coordination occurs through a dynamic adaptive process by which members adapt to situation-specific demands. Finally, institutional positioning is the process through which the organization relates to its institutional environment (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Together, the Four Flows model gives communication scholars a valuable set of tools for understanding the communication complexities that build, maintain, and test an organization's identity. By highlighting the need for "contextualized mutual adjustment" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294) between organizations and their target contexts, the Four Flows model of CCO theory is well-positioned to adapt to the current challenges of organizations interfacing with globalized environments. Long recognized as ongoing products of both routine and goal-directed action (Browning, et. al., 2009), organizations must often pursue loyalties of diverse audiences (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). Yet, as Boivin, Brummans, and Barker's (2017) meta-analysis of CCO scholarship reveals, examinations of the Four Flows Model of CCO in empirical contexts remain quite limited, resulting in the need for further exploration of the theory's full potential.

1.2.3 (De)Constitutive Contexts of Muslim NGOs

The fourth flow of McPhee and Zaug's (2000) model, institutional positioning, is arguably the most relevant to the study of the contemporary identity of Muslim NGOs in globalized contexts as it deals with external communications of organizations. Originally, McPhee and Zaug (2000) conceptualize institutional positioning as a communication flow operating at the macro-level to link the organization to other entities. This flow of communication is vital for the organization as it positions it within broader institutional systems that we have previously outlined as contexts. Moreover, institutional positioning involves a practical understanding of modern organizations as part of larger global systems. Particularly, McPhee and Zaug note that "'identity negotiation' is an appealing label for this type of communication," (2000, p.8), opting for institutional positioning as a broader and more representative term. In essence, institutional positioning is a transmissional flow communicating negotiated organizational identity to outside entities.

More recent CCO studies delve deeper into the nature and function of institutional positioning flow. Notably, Bisel (2010) argues that "the gap between communication's constitution of interpersonal relationships and communication's constitution of organizing should be proving ground for CCO theory to clarify and qualify the mechanisms and processes by which communication comes to constitute organizing" (p. 129). To bridge this gap, he encourages organizational communication scholars to evaluate "how communication relates to the material necessities of organizing" (Bisel, 2010, p. 129). Answering that call, Bruscella (2016) presents the fourth flow of institutional positioning as a transactional process whereby outside entities also have an effect on the organizations through intuitional positioning. Her study on clandestine organizations' institutional positioning outlines a contextual ability to 'de-

constitute' through counter-messaging. Her findings suggest the need to focus on the cooptation of the organization's messaging, along with counter positioning messages by the organization's competition. This finding shifts from previous views of a sender-oriented institutional positioning towards a reflexive process emphasizing both the "transactional and socially-constructed nature of organizational identity and positioning in an organizational field" (Bruscella, 2016, p.87). Drawn from case studies of clandestine organizations exclusively, these examinations of a transactional institutional positioning, are limited to openly hostile contexts of dedicated counter-messaging by the west that de-constitute the organization (Bruscella, 2016). Beyond the secretive/hidden aspect of these

This dissertation will contribute to understandings of how communication is constitutive of organizing by considering how the transactional nature of institutional positioning functions beyond the clandestine organizational context. As a response to Bisel's (2010) call for additional CCO theorizing, this study aims to articulate contextually constitutive communication by Muslim NGOs along with their interactive contexts. Muslim NGOs are similar to their clandestine counterparts in that they operate within competitive, and multiple contexts. However, unlike clandestine organizations, they are not secret in nature nor do they routinely face open hostility by their competitors. Instead, Muslim NGOs face sophisticated contexts with complex histories and interactions. This study of Muslim NGOs tests the potential replicability of transactional institutional positioning in non-clandestine organizational contexts and opens opportunities to expand its conceptualization. Thus, this study is guided by the following research question: How do Muslim NGOs expand transactional understandings of communicatively constitutive organizing in non-clandestine organizations?

1.2.4 Organizational Identity

Organizational communication scholars have paid particular attention to articulations of organizational identity to expand the resonance of their findings. In 1985, Albert and Whetten introduce the concept of organizational identity, defining it as "the unavoidable core of an organization that shapes its choices and defines its integrity" (p. 264). Since then, organizational communication scholars have emphasized a focus on the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of organizational identity (Balmer, 1995). In opposition to early simplistic notions of organizational identity formulations as static phenomena, the field gradually accepted identity formulations as more fluid in practice. Weick, for example, describes the boundaries of organizations as "never clear cut or stable as (we) many think. They shift, disappear, and are arbitrarily drawn" (1979, p.58). Subsequent studies presented a more layered, nuanced version of the concept as "unfolding and stylized narratives about the soul or essence of the organization" (Ashforth & Mael, 1996, p. 21). Further studies echoed this perspective of narrative's role as the central component of organizational identity, but emphasized this component as always growing (Dunne, 1996), changing (Rasmussen, 1997), context-specific (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001), and dependent on the environment for its meaning (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). In essence, contemporary understandings of organizational identity recognize that the concept evolves based upon environmental context, institutional boundaries, and narrative constructions.

Early on, studies in organizational communication began by exploring the internal processes of identification within organizations. These close analyses of internal member identification explained the ways in which individuals develop and maintain a sense of identity within their respective organizations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Such evaluations of individual-organization bonds had their roots in the psychological tradition (Sato, 2014). The

field then moved on to more of an external perspective rooted in sociology, with its deeper interest in organizational boundaries and surrounding environs. The shift placed a heightened emphasis on "an active process by which individuals find themselves in terms of their social organizational scene" (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p.133). It also focused on organizational identity as a "contextually defined aspect and product of the collective self" (Haslam et al., 2003, p.359). The field's research now showcases the versatility of identity as an applied construct with the "capacity to be both an externally shared and negotiated product and an internalized aspect of the collective self" (Haslam et al., 2003, p.359). Overall, the field now strongly emphasizes the connections between a complex internal identification and the continuously evolving external identity constructions.

Current understandings of organizational identity also push beyond early misconceptions of environmental factors as a homogenous concept. The latest research in organizational communication presents identities as pluralistic (Jancsary et al, 2017, Thornton et al., 2012) and directly interacting with various demands and expectations of both external and internal constituencies (Greenwood et al., 2010). Organizations, thus, strive to maintain legitimacy by negotiating competing identity formations (Kraatz & Block, 2008). Previous studies exploring various strategies for responding to competing identities including a focus on hiring and socialization policies, an integration of practices of social enterprises, an expansion of creative human agency, the use of regional and family logics (Greenwood, et al., 2010). They also examine micro actors in pragmatic collaborations, the support of evolving leadership messaging, and considerations of institutional logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009). However, these previous explorations have yet to combine these elements into a holistic view of organizational identity, and to explore beyond a corporate, profit making organizations.

This study of identity negotiation of Muslim NGOs will expand theoretical understandings of organizational identity in religious, non-clandestine contexts. Thus far, identity studies of religious organizations have been relatively limited within the field of organizational communication. While the field on the whole posits a complex conceptualization of organizational identity, very few studies analyze religious groups. Of those that do, most assume the ready generalizability of corporate identify articulations to the religious organizational context (Forward et al., 2009; Frye et al., 2007; Leeman, 2006). Additionally, the previous research that has examined identity formulations of religious entities mainly focused on religious identification as deployed within Christian organizations. Although previous research establishes the structural uniqueness of religious organizations, along with the significance of faith as "the most compelling form of identification" (Mael & Ashforth, 2001, p. 202), research on Christian organizations has monopolized the field. This disciplinary limitation opens the need for organizational communication studies that focus on other religious traditions.

This dissertation will examine Muslim NGOs as non-profits who base their organizational structures on religious values. Here, religion is central to the organizational identity of Muslim NGOs especially since international political trends tend to affect them more than their secular counterparts (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2010; Oliver & Roos, 2007; Rodrigues & Child, 2009; Sillince & Brown, 2009). Using a constitutive view of the process of organizing, this study expands the field of organizational communication by supplying the first non-corporate, non-Christian approach of constitutive organizational identity.

The study will also add to religious studies of organizational communication through its emphasis on the varied contexts facing Muslim NGOs. As previously outlined, Muslim NGOs function within three main contextual spheres: international, national, and local. These three

contexts directly link to the NGOs' identity through a variety of constitutively communicative exchanges. Depending on the context, those communicative links can be constraining to the NGOs' religious identity, and therefore de-constitutive in nature, or supportive to the NGOs' religious identity, and therefore constitutive in nature. To best conduct this analysis of these subtle contextual de-constitutive constraints and constitutive opportunities, this study considers non-intentional contextual factors guided by the following research questions: 1) How do Muslim NGOs communicate their religious identity in the international context of humanitarian aid? 2) How do Muslim NGOs communicate their religious identity in the national context of political actors? 3) How do Muslim NGOs communicate their religious identity in the local context of charity?

1.3 Methodology

To obtain a better understanding of the negotiation of Muslim NGOs' religious organizational identity, the research project highlights two case studies examining western international Muslim NGOs working in the humanitarian development and aid sector. The organizations are Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid. Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid are the largest international relief and development charities in the US and UK respectively (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2018). Both organizations self-identify as Muslim NGOs providing support regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender and without expecting anything in return (IRUSA, 2020; MAUK, 2020). Their organizational missions focus on amplifying Islamic values by mobilizing resources, building partnerships, and developing local capacity. The two NGOs are active all around the globe, reaching over 50 countries combined (IRUSA, 2020; MAUK, 2020). They also work extensively with both domestic and international partners to best

complete their goals such as the Equal Exchange Interfaith Program (IRUSA, 2020). Their programming includes providing basic necessities of water and sanitation, initiating shelter construction projects, sponsoring orphans, building economic empowerment opportunities, and strengthening openings for educational advancement. Additionally, they participate in national political advocacy efforts in their respective countries, and are heavily involved in their corresponding home communities in the United States and the United Kingdom.

This study examines religious identity articulations in the organizations from 2010-2020. This timeframe focuses on the most recent and available data of the activities of these organizations, and corresponds to a period of heavy engagement by the Muslim NGOs throughout all three contexts. As previously mentioned, both organizations have grown considerably over the past decade and have invested in better integrating themselves into international aid and development, national civil society, and local charitable sectors.

The study utilizes the interpretive theoretical tradition to examine international, national, and local contexts of Muslim NGOs. It will follow the lead of Mumby (2014) by paying special attention to discursive environments, power, and identity as the main foci of the analysis. It will begin by reviewing secondary literature related to the two NGOs, including research articles, government and think tank reports, with a close examination of any mention of the religious nature of these organizations. This step will bring an external perspective about how sources not officially linked to the NGOs perceive the religious identity of the groups. The goal is to gain a deep understanding of the contexts, the strength of the actors within each space to become personally immersed in the contextual power dynamics and histories, and to showcase specific challenges and opportunities through purposeful study.

In order to better understand the organization's own perceptions about the role of religion in their identity, the study conducts semi-structured respondent interviews with members of the organizations. The study includes eight in-depth interviews per organization. The respondents include the head of the organization, the organization's communication manager, and other members of the executive and programming teams. The interview questions focus on the contexts and the constitutive flows related to the respondent's role within the organization (Appendix A). Institutional positioning questions tackle communication between the organization and others in the sector. These included internal artifacts such as brochures, webpages, or internal review documents that speak to the institutional positioning. Membership negotiation questions address the NGO's collaboration including norms and processes around the NGO's funding and partnerships. Questions regarding internal activity coordination investigate the NGO's interactive internal planning processes between different departments and offices. Finally, questions related to self-structuring address internal structures and norms that the organizations have institutionalized. The purpose of this step is to gain a deep understanding of the actors, to become personally immersed in the organization's discourse through experiencing the use of its language firsthand, to gather information that is unavailable through other means, and to efficiently address the issue of organizational identity through purposeful questioning.

Subsequently, the analysis involves an examination of the official (external) and unofficial (internal) organizational texts of the two Muslim NGOs. These texts include yearly and project reports, financial reports, organizational mission and vision, grant proposals, and public relations materials crafted around the organization's specific events and activities. These documents represent the official articulation of the organizational identity of the NGOs. The

documents are pre-approved by the NGOs and offer rich textual information about how the groups choose to communicate their religious identity to external audiences.

In order to analyze the interview and organizational text data, the study uses discourse analysis to highlight macro understandings of the organizations while taking into account nuances and details that can sometimes be lost through the use of other methods (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). The analysis examines both the relationship between the discourse and Muslim organizations generally, as well as the understanding of the organizations as independent agents who actively construct their own identity (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Deetz, 1992). Specifically, the analysis sorted the data into three major categories depending on what context they are relevant to, and then a subsequent sorting of the constitutive flow that they address. After sorting the data for its relevance to international, national, and local contexts, as well as the constitutive flow that it informs, the study identifies significant strategies, specific patterns, repetition across flows, and contextually dependent and independent organizational displays.

After this categorical aggregation, the case studies' analysis makes a detailed description of each organizational case in its contextual setting (Stake, 1995). Here, the interpretation process links various contextual data points focusing on constraints and opportunities to religious identity formation and reformulation. Specifically, it outlines organizational communicative approaches within each of the three situational contexts as well as the four constitutive flows linking contextual history, relevant actors, interview findings, and organizational artifacts.

1.4 Chapter Outline

Chapter two will focus on showcasing the role of religion within Muslim NGOs' organizational identity within international contexts. First, it will discuss the state of the organizations' relationships in this context as humanitarian international NGOs operating within the larger aid and development context. The chapter will then highlight the situational constraints, as well as opportunities that the organizations face within this context. Finally, the chapter will showcase the ways in which Muslim NGO actors articulate their religious identity throughout the four constitutive flows.

Chapter three will focus on showcasing the role of religion within Muslim NGOs' organizational identity within national contexts (in the United States and the United Kingdom respectively for the two case studies). First, it will discuss the state of the organizations' relationships in this context as political actors operating within the civil society context. The chapter will then highlight the situational constraints and opportunities that the organizations face within this context. Finally, the chapter will showcase the ways in which Muslim NGO actors articulate their religious identity throughout the four constitutive flows.

Chapter four will focus on showcasing the role of religion within Muslim NGOs' organizational identity within local contexts. First, it will discuss the state of the organizations' relationships in this context as Muslim NGOs operating within the larger charitable local context. The chapter will then highlight the situational constraints and opportunities the organizations face within this context. Finally, the chapter will showcase the ways in which Muslim NGO actors articulate their religious identity throughout the four constitutive flows.

The final chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study's findings. It includes theoretical insights that expand earlier understandings of the study of Muslim NGOs, organizational identity, and CCO theory. Additionally, it outlines the study's practical implications by highlighting a series of practical recommendations for the NGOs, along with other actors that interface with them as they navigate their various networked contexts. Finally, it closes with an assessment of the study's limitations and potential expansion for future areas of related research.

2 CHAPTER 2: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The successful planning, funding, and delivery of international aid requires the cooperation of various actors within a complicated global network working towards the common goal of providing assistance to those in need. The composition of the international context, however, encompasses various actors that play specific roles. To better understand the position of Muslim NGOs' religious organizational identity within the international context, this chapter examines the intergovernmental organizations, secular NGOs, FBOs, and Muslim NGOs participating in the international aid and development sector.

The chapter begins by tracing the shared history of the international actors working in the humanitarian aid and development sector. It then moves to a description of the key actors in the contemporary organizational network and the ways that the various entities interact with one another. Next, it analyzes the particularity of the position of Muslim NGOs and identifies opportunities and constraints that are a byproduct of these interactions. It concludes with an analysis of documents and interviews with two Muslim NGOs who have successfully negotiated the international context, with an emphasis on how they navigated previously understood constraints and opportunities through the four flows of communication.

2.1 Development and Aid: A Historical Perspective

As an area of focus, aid and development is a relatively new interdisciplinary field of inquiry that draws mostly from development studies, political science, and economics. After initially conceptualizing non-governmental agents as a distinct category of actors in the development and aid sector, scholars began with overly optimistic assumptions about the normative expectations for NGO performance (Clark, 1991; Edwards & Hulme, 1992; Korten, 1987; Mair, 1984). Heavily reliant on western models of development, scholars praised

humanitarian NGOs for their role as independent actors able to help realize global shared goals (Korten, 1990). Over time, however, critical studies of aid and development emerged that questioned these earlier sentiments. These studies interrogated the discursive foundations of development as a purely economic project where western cultural values and prosperity functioned as wholesale solutions that could benefit capitalism (Escobar, 1997). Such work perceived the development sector as problematic due to focus on western culture as central and superior, while relegating poverty to a largely cultural construct (Escobar, 1997).

Both the initial and critical strands of humanitarian development and aid research have since moved through different constructive critiques, conceptual definitions, actor categorizations, effort mappings, and understandings of the complex contemporary environment that these organizations occupy (Easterly, 2006; Power, 2003). Subsequent research distinguished between two aspects of development: the broad processes of change and specific interventions to achieve progress (Hart, 2018; Lewis, 2019). Current economic understandings of aid and development go further to push a narrative that features the global south as a region characterized by poverty traps, geographical and climatic misfortune, motivational deficits, cultural barriers, and a lack of industrialization. This perspective presents development as a fitting solution for countries seen as “third world nations” due to various quantifiable issues. Today, this position still heavily influences the field, given scholarly involvement in the prescriptive planning and construction of international development and aid agreements (Sachs, 2005).

Another historically consistent framework governing contemporary understandings of aid and development is the gap between secular and religious discourse. Modern aid and development efforts track back to the 1929 British Colonial Development Act designed to award

infrastructural loans and grants (Zeleza, 1985). Subsequently, a secular lens privileging western liberal assumptions about development framed the modern format of international humanitarian aid (Ager & Ager, 2011). Throughout the twentieth century, a secular humanitarian regime was established through the codification of humanitarian law and the institutionalization of humanitarian actors within the broader aid and development system (Calhoun, 2008; Maxwell & Walker, 2014). Secular development discourse separated basic religious values of charity from mainstream understandings of modern aid and development by treating neutrality as "one of the core, defining principles of humanitarian action" (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2003, p.1). Here, neutrality was positioned as inconsistent with the religious nature of faith-based organizations. The concept's incompatibility with religious conceptualizations of compassion and generosity diminished the roles available for religious groups within the network of international actors.

The secular vs. religious binary finds particular salience for Muslim NGOs operating within this context. Although the concept of charity and communal help is as old as religion itself, the Geneva Conference of 1863 established the framework for human rights actively excluded all religious actors including those in Muslim majority countries (Salek, 2015). Humanitarian aid discourse started by heavily challenging the inclusion of religion based on a belief that faith-based aid organizations were unable to be impartial (Ager & Ager, 2015). For decades, strict understandings of neutrality resulted in the marginalization of religion, promulgating a humanitarianism that was ill equipped to engage with the dynamics of faith within the world's population (Ager & Ager, 2011). This is not to say that religion had no place in development since the United Nations originally recognized the right to "religious belief" as a part of its founding charter in 1945. Rather, the role of FBOs in general and Muslim NGOs in

particular was pushed aside through a practice of systemic secularism that governed policymaking and the norm creating processes.

The relationship between western secularism and neutrality challenged the work of Muslim NGOs, despite the number of empirical cases where neutrality had failed (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2003; Petersen & Marshall, 2019). International development and aid were historically focused on concepts of neutrality and partiality that seemed at odds with religious organizational values (Ager & Ager, 2015). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for example, presented neutrality and impartiality as two of the main acting principles of humanitarian actors. Neutrality requires humanitarian actors not to "take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, or ideological nature" (UN, 2020). Impartiality, on the other hand, assumes that international aid actors work on the basis of "need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions" (UN, 2020). The field's professional standards effectively resulted in the silencing of religious actors in the humanitarian aid sector for 50 years because of the view that "religion, given its potential divisiveness, alignment to violence, intolerance, and its commitment to ultimate ideals, is not an appropriate domain for humanitarian engagement" (Ager & Ager, 2015, p. 5). The standards marginalized religious discourse and, by extension, FBOs within the development framework due to their explicit religious identification. Essentially, Muslim NGOs were present within the aid and development sector; however, they were not able to actively shape the process on their own terms through a clear, direct articulation of their faith.

However, as the aid and development sector grew more complex in the last thirty years, a critical view of the binary distinction between the secular and the sacred in the discourse of aid

and international relations emerged (Clarke et al., 2007). The rethinking resulted in an emphasis on the intersection of religion and development that pushed aside the imaginary distance that the neutral humanitarian engagement framework had enforced (Swart & Nell, 2016). The current post-secular move in aid and development recognizes the failure of secular constructions and understandings of aid. The counterproductive, marginalization of faith actors gave way to a new view that recognized the centrality of faith communities across the globe (Wilkinson, 2018). Faith in this context is actually separated from religion, as it focuses in on a belief in a higher power in the context of personal and community identity and overall part of everyday life (Clarke et al., 2007). This nuance continues the practice of distancing specific religious beliefs seemingly at odds with secular humanitarian structures of development and aid. The choice of the categorical label "faith-based organization" as opposed to "religious NGO" exemplifies the approach. The separation also mirrors the distinction between the substantive (sacred) and functional (what religion does) definitions of religion (Rakodi, 2012).

In the past decade or so, the humanitarian sector shifted away from the perspective of secular superiority towards a more open space for engaging religious actors and discourse in the public sphere. The trend towards including religious discourse in the public sphere, coupled with the reality of the current international humanitarian crisis affecting so many people of faith and the effectiveness of FBOs, explained the more inclusive posture (Ager & Ager, 2015). In essence, the international humanitarian development and aid sector faced their historic bias against religious discourse and begin to engage with FBOs especially as devastation of humanitarian crises rose to new proportions in the last decade. Events such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Dialogue on Faith and Protection in December 2012 and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development launch of a five-year research

program on religion and development in 2005 (further articulated it in its *Faith Partnership Principles* in 2011) showcased a new willingness to include religious actors and certain acceptance of FBOs (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017). Furthermore, the latest sessions of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 made explicit efforts to include religious actors and provide special sessions on religious engagement. As a direct result, FBO organized efforts in groups such as the ACT Alliance emerged to better structure the presence of religious NGOs within the humanitarian field.

The recent history of the international environment shows a renewed interest in religious engagement and the place of religion in aid and development (Ager & Ager, 2011). Pushed by increasing and pressing aid crises across the globe, actors such as the United Nations (UN) turned to faith-based NGOs for more robust engagement that openly acknowledges their religious beliefs (Calhoun, 2008; Maxwell & Walker, 2009). Thus, the humanitarian aid sector gradually recognized the fundamental position of faith as a powerful influence on aid and development (Bucar & Barnett, 2005; Barnett & Weiss, 2008; Ferris, 2005; Moorehead, 1998).

2.2 Mapping the Key Actors in the International Context

The global development and aid context hosts a variety of actors including intergovernmental organizations, foundations, secular NGOs, and faith-based NGOs (FBOs). Each of these agent categories functions in a unique way to facilitate the delivery of developmental aid. In general, intergovernmental organizations primarily play the institutional role of setting the agenda and establishing the networking structures for international actors. Foundations are able to virtually bypass government influence by directly championing causes of their choosing though financial support to various NGOs (Anheier & Leat, 2013). Secular NGOs

focus on aid implementation and delivery (Najam, 2000), and structural advising. Finally, religious FBOs play a collaborative role (Benedetti, 2006), which mainly aims to expand the presence of certain groups of faith in humanitarian efforts (De Cordier, 2009).

Within each of the four categories of international actors, particular groups have emerged as critical decision-makers in the aid and development sector. For example, the UN capitalized on the structural growth of international organizations in the 20th century to expand its role as a guidance provider and manager of governments, foundations, and NGO synchronization. Officially founded in 1945 after World War II by 51 countries, the UN is an intergovernmental organization whose mission is to maintain peace and security, disseminate social progress, and facilitate human rights around the globe. It joined the structured efforts for international foreign aid delivery via the 1947 Marshall Plan. The intergovernmental body offers its 193 member states and countless non-government actors with a space to inform, negotiate, and decide on the various issues facing the world today through forums, such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. Although governmental actors originally formed the membership of the organization, the UN has expanded to serve as a primary participatory body for non-state actors (Meisler, 2011).

Subsequently, various intergovernmental bodies began to supervise and monitor the flow and structure of aid under the auspices of the UN. For example, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) used the 1963 World Food Programme to focus on poverty alleviation by launching debt relief to developing countries that owed their former colonial lenders (King, 2011). Until the 1990s, interactions between humanitarian NGOs and the UN were limited to co-operation and implementation partnerships through bodies such as Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Central Emergency Response Fund

(CERF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO), among others (Martens, 2006).

Since the 1990s, however, humanitarian NGOs operating within the UN have assumed much more robust roles as "policy advisors, information providers, and policy formulators" (Martens, 2006, p.696). For example, since 1972, the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) is one of the most influential networks offering advice to the full UN body on recommended common codes of conduct and joint guidelines for aid distribution (Martens, 2006). SCHR is an alliance made up of the main agencies involved in disaster assistance including CARE International, Caritas Internationalis, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Save the Children Alliance, Lutheran World Federation, Oxfam, ACT Alliance, and World Vision International. Further, synchronized operations between non-governmental consortiums shaped the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Ager & Ager, 2016). The success of these 17 goals hinges upon an NGO-forward collaboration between the actors (Nilsson et al., 2016)

Beyond international organizations allied in various ways with the United Nations, philanthropic foundations hold a strategic position of influence in setting the global aid agenda. Seen as an outsider to the government versus non-government binary, such foundations have the ability to directly support causes of their choosing and bypass obligations that govern other actors and their activities (Anheier & Daly, 2004). The Gates Foundation, for example, plays an integral role in funding intergovernmental bodies (such as the United Nations) and building structures designed to enhance independence from state influence. Launched in 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest private foundation in the world with a vision based

in seeing "equal value in all lives, and […] being dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals around the world" (Gates Foundation, 2019). With a focus on reducing extreme poverty and bettering healthcare across the globe (Gates Foundation, 2019), the foundation is reportedly the single largest of private humanitarian assistance, reporting over $51 million to UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS) in the five years between 2009 and 2013 (Stirk, 2015). It also qualifies as the largest private grant-making foundation in the world by dedicating 90 percent of emergency funding to pre-approved non-state actors (Stirk, 2015). Seen as having remarkable agenda-setting power (Anheier & Daly, 2004), the Gates Foundation is actively engaged in influencing policy by strategically funding a combination of UN actors, NGOs, and corporate partners committed to the advancement of the foundation's goals. Critics, however, note that the foundation's power and influence is so strong that it is weakening government systems (McGoey, 2014) and is using UN organizations as contractors to reach its own goals (Seitz & Martens, 2017).

As a secular-based NGO, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (IFRC) is one of the oldest actors in the international development aid context. The mission of the IFRC is "to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by national societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world" (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2019). As a worldwide humanitarian NGO founded in 1919, the organization now reaches approximately 160 million people each year through its 190 national member societies. Its work includes preventative work before emergencies, as well as emergency response activities during and after crises or disasters. The IFRC coordinates the national Red Cross and Red Crescent

societies throughout the world that allows it to closely cooperate with governmental and intergovernmental organizations, along with other localized humanitarian NGOs. The IFRC has a long history of successful work exemplified through their lobbying efforts for the establishment of the United Nations and their continuous presence across the globe (Waugh Jr. & Streib, 2006).

Playing a similar role of implementing development aid while maintaining distance thorough a neutral secular humanitarian network, Doctors Without Borders (also known as Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF) is an example of a well-known NGO that has maintained its credibility in the international context (Redfield, 2017). As a small group of French doctors and journalist founded the NGO in 1971, MSF's mission is to "provide impartial medical relief to the victims of war, disease, and natural or man-made disaster, without regard to race, religion, or political affiliation" (Médecins Sans Frontières International, 2020, para. 1). The core concept of the right to interfere (which later evolved into the duty) guides the MSF based on the obligation to alleviate the suffering of people urgently in need of medical care (Fox, 1995). Since its creation in 1971, the organization's focus on independence and impartiality has allowed it to respond quickly and provide assistance to populations in distress and victims of emergencies or disasters (Hayden, 2015). Echoing its strong position within the international context, MSF received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for pioneering humanitarian work on several continents. The organization's dual commitments to neutrality and the duty to interfere have limited its funding to mostly private donors that mostly sidestep governmental regulations. However, due to its history, position, and credibility, MSF has managed to steadily remain one of the main agenda influencers among development aid-related NGOs (Redfield, 2017).

Representing a classical western based secular NGO, the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE) works within the modern humanitarian aid and development structures to achieve its advocacy and humanitarian mission. Originally founded in 1945, CARE began by helping the US government deliver surplus US-army food parcels to post-war Europe. Today, CARE operates as a leading organization fighting global poverty. Its mission is to work across the globe to "save lives, defeat poverty and achieve social justice" (CARE, 2020), with a special focus on women and girls as catalysts of effective global change. Working in 93 countries, the organization reaches 63 million people through 950 various programs designed to create effective emergency response, disaster relief, health care, food security, education, and women's empowerment (CARE, 2020). CARE partners with a variety of humanitarian organizations including foundations and trusts, research institutions, corporations, and other NGOs with similar aid missions. CARE is also the leading partner on a number of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) programs. For example, CARE's country offices are the main hosts for Everyone Counts: Using Citizen-Generated Data to Monitor Progress Against The SDGs, a program that focuses on helping progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The final set of actors in the global developmental aid arena is Faith Based Organizations (FBOs). World Vision, an Evangelical Christian humanitarian NGO, showcases a more classical example of a modern FBO focused on growing the position and collaborative potential of faith-based aid organizations within the international context. Founded in 1950 and active in over 100 countries, World Vision first functioned as a service organization helping missionaries throughout the world. By 1975, the organization shifted its focus to development work, with an overall commitment to transformational development, emergency relief, justice promotion, church partnerships, public awareness, and witnessing for Jesus Christ. For example, the staff

members routinely testify as experts at hearings before the UN and US Congress and lobby for improvements in aid and development policy (King, 2011). The faith-based organization openly acknowledges and promotes its Christian identity, its core belief in one God, and its direct link between its religious faith and its humanitarian work. Despite its open commitment to the Christian values, World Vision has partners across secular and religious sectors alike (Whaites, 1999).

Islamic Relief USA is one of the largest western-based Muslim FBO and a member of the Islamic Relief Worldwide group of organizations. Founded in California in 1993, the organization provides aid through development work and emergency relief in the United States and over forty countries across the world. Throughout its early years, the Muslim FBO began with a focus abroad through various relief missions in Bosnia, Kashmir, Sudan, and Albania. Since the early 2000s, however, IRUSA shifted its efforts to the United States through various programming across the country and solidifying its position as notable domestic aid organization. Today, IRUSA has established itself as a known Muslim NGO operating within the aid and development network that reaches populations all over the globe. IRUSA continues to anchor itself through annual events for national relief, such as the day of serving the homeless and low-income populations across the US, after-school meal programs, prison re-entry programs, food aid on Native American reservations, and assistance for victims of domestic violence. In accordance to the NGO's vision of "working together for a world free of poverty," IRUSA closely collaborates with other NGOs and FBOs including their efforts with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints after the earthquake in Indonesia in 2006 and their MoU signing with the American Red Cross as the first formal partnership of its kind between the Red Cross and a Muslim aid organization in the United States. IRUSA has also positioned itself

strategically through a strong presence and participation in international aid and development events such as the World Bank's Summit on religion in 2015 and UN summits on housing and women's empowerment.

Similarly, Muslim Aid UK emerged in response to the 1983-85 humanitarian famine in Ethiopia. A committee made of 23 Britain based organizations led the Muslim NGO. However, by the mid 90s, Muslim Aid UK was operating as an autonomous NGO. Throughout the 90s, the organization began with strategically targeted aid to various crises around the globe in countries such as Afghanistan, Palestine, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Muslim Aid UK continued to provide emergency relief programming, but also invested in long-term development projects such as water, healthcare, sanitation, shelter, and construction programs. For example, Muslim Aid UK raised considerable funds after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti to help those afflicted by the disaster, while also investing in reconstruction work focused on long-term prosperity on the island. Domestically, Muslim Aid UK has executed many programs including their 2016 efforts establishing food banks for the homeless population in collaboration with the East London Mosque and their emergency relief provisions after the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017. Today, the organization runs operations in 70 countries across the globe from its London office and continues to draw "upon a rich heritage of social action and working with various communities to improve the lives of others in need." (IRUSA, 2020, para. 3)

As emergent humanitarian actors, Muslim NGOs are in an extraordinary position to capitalize on the shift from a historically secular aid sector to a current engagement with faith-based actors. Research in the field goes as far as to say that Muslim NGOs have currently created a "Humanitarian Frontline" due to a series of factors currently facilitating their operations (De Cordier, 2009). Muslim NGOs have served as central players in the reconfiguration of bodies

such as the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Muslim Charities Forum in the United Kingdom. These organizations act in a continuing advisory and streamlining capacity to increase participating Muslim NGOs and counter widespread social and economic issues (Sharqieh, 2012).

Other Muslim NGOs are increasingly moving into the international context of aid and development. However, such organizations will still face a period of adjustment before they can reach the status now enjoyed between secular NGOs and networked structures such as the UN (Ager & Ager, 2011). To hopefully assist those groups as they encounter the international structures, the following section will describe key constraints and opportunities of the international context.

2.3 Contextual Constraints and Opportunities for Muslim NGOs

As Muslim NGOs attempt to navigate the complex context of international aid and development, previous literature has highlighted some of the various challenges and opportunities that influence the way they express their religious identities. The recent re-centering of the nexus between the secular and the sacred within the international context puts Muslim NGOs in a pivotal position to operate with an understanding of the secular history of this context, while also recognizing the potential opportunities presented by the recent religious revival in aid and development activity. Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK serve as useful models to better understand the international aid and development experience as both NGOs have experienced consistent yearly increases in their operating budgets throughout the past decade (IRUSA, 2010-2020). They have also become indispensable actors in the international

context as they combine historical religious practices along with those of the modern aid context (Clarke et al., 2014).

The context of the international aid and relief landscape presents various constraints and opportunities for Muslim NGOs to formulate their expressions and practices of religious identity. In order to gain a better understanding of what NGOs face as they interact with international actors in the development sphere, this research examines the literature on Muslim NGOs as aid and development actors. While the conclusions below do not represent an exhaustive list of all the constraints and opportunities facing Muslim NGOs, they do outline major dynamics impacting the ways in which religious organizational identity can serve as a beneficial opportunity or a potential challenge within the context of international aid and relief. Each section will begin by defining the constraint or opportunity, highlight exemplars within the context, and explore the interaction of the topic with the NGO's religious identity.

2.3.1 Lack of Trust

One key constraint for Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK is the lack of trust that has emerged between Muslim NGOs and conventional actors in the larger aid and development sector. Scholars and practitioners note that as Muslim NGOs have heightened their engagement within the international aid and development context, conventional institutions treat Muslim NGOs as instruments rather than autonomous agents actively involved in the production of standards and contextual norms (Petersen, 2015). This dynamic directly relates to the relatively recent engagement with and recognition of faith-based discourse within the larger secular aid and development context (Ager & Ager, 2016). From this perspective Muslim NGOs function as the tools of secular aid actors and structures to reach their goals particularly in times of crisis or in difficult-to-access areas (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017). Essentially, Muslim NGOs do not

function as central actors; rather, their activities and resources are only "relevant to the secular development agenda when they are utilized or, arguably, exploited, while the [religious] commitments, principles, and dynamics that gave rise to them are denied" (Ager & Ager, 2016, p. 103). Secular actors use and exploit Muslim NGO activities and resources relevant to the secular development agenda without addressing the commitments, principles, and dynamics that underlie them (Ager et al., 2011). This instrumentalization materializes through a disproportionate engagement with mainstream, liberal or moderate organizations more compatible with secular discourse and policy (Clarke et al., 2006). Furthermore, Muslim NGOs often see their mandate as extending well beyond the period of delivering emergency services and into assisting in providing solutions for long-term economic growth and community sustainability. This environment has resulted in an overall lack of trust and suspicion by Muslim NGOs such as Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK of the international aid and relief institutional landscape as a whole (Seybolt, 2009).

Securitization concerns also constrain Muslim NGOs from developing trusting relationships with other actors in the international context. As security and terrorism concerns came to the forefront of the global agenda in the last decade, the United Nations took a leadership role in countering and preventing violent extremism efforts through the establishment of the Security Council Resolution 2178 (Fink, 2014). The resolution specifically identifies NGOs as key community actors in these efforts. The UN's investment in securitization included its agencies such as the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). Furthermore, the focus on securitization resulted in heavy structural investments and funding of organizations such as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) which focuses on facilitating

non-government efforts to build resilience against violent extremism (Fink, 2014). Muslim NGOs find themselves in a particularly disadvantageous position due to the international network's emphasis on Islam's connection to security issues of terrorism (Othman & Ameer, 2014). Additionally, the possibility of intelligence agencies disseminating and legally using financial data against these groups creates an environment of overall fear and well-founded anxiety for Muslim NGOs (Adelsberg et al., 2012; Cole, 2008). As a result, Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK remain extremely apprehensive about the many efforts to gather financial data about their organizations and activities (Barzegar & Wear, 2018).

This mistrust between Muslim NGOs and other international actors disrupts the operational work of the organizations on the ground. The overriding climate of mistrust limits the productivity of preexisting advocacy partnerships and coalitions meant to combat negative stereotypes of Muslim NGOs (Petersen, 2015). Muslim NGOs report that they have withdrawn their efforts and programs in needed areas due to "fear of being implicated in the broad interpretation of [terrorism] material support" (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017, p. 19). Although Muslim NGOs operate on the principle of neutrality in humanitarian law in such areas, they report the "risk of misperception and potential prosecution as the reason behind their choice to withdraw" (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017, p. 3). By contrast, secular and Christian NGOs do not report the same reservations or fears about the data gathering operations around their groups even when they work with Muslim dominated constituencies. For example, Christian NGOs were directly able to distribute cash aid to beneficiaries in Iraqi conflict zones after the liberation of parts of Mosul in 2016 (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017).

2.3.2 Misaligned Priorities

Muslim NGOs are also constrained in articulating their religious identity due to the presence of misaligned, and even competing, priorities. One way the misalignment occurs because most actors in the international aid and development sector are more narrowly focused in specific areas of expertise, and guided by technical, data-driven, management logics. For instance, differences in basic organizational preferences such as methodological tools in monitoring and evaluation programs are a prime example of the larger misalignments at the organizational level. On the one hand, leadership in Muslim NGOs prioritizes qualitative research in the monitoring and evaluation of their programs as a way to improve the quality of services. Meanwhile, international governmental organizations expect quantitative big data research that can better inform their overall comprehensive strategic planning within this context (Barzegar & Wear, 2018).

At the operational level, the activities of Muslim NGOs and their peer institutions are also often misaligned. For example, both Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK focus on orphan sponsorship efforts at the top of their organizational programming priorities. In 2017, both Muslim NGOs spent a combined $15M to serve over 50,000 children (IRUSA, 2020; MAUK, 2020), while Christian FBOs such as World Vision spent a more limited $240,000 on the same goal (World Vision, 2017). Meanwhile, most non-Muslim NGOs focus on emergency relief and sustainable development efforts as the top priority for their aid work across the world. NGOs such as Care and Oxfam focus on sustainable development efforts through health and economic development programs with no mention of orphan care (CARE, 2020; Oxfam, 2020).

2.3.3 Rights Based Advocacy

The positioning of public advocacy as a marker of NGO success is an opportunity associated with the larger standardization of the rights-based approach to development work in the international context. At the initial establishment of modern humanitarian development, the needs-based approach focused on securing resources for aid delivery guided aid efforts and organizations (Ensor et al., 2015). More recently, a paradigm change occurred through the introduction of the rights-based approach. This shift towards the right to development advanced as a call for a comprehensive focus on the rights of beneficiaries to access the resources that aid organizations provide them (Kindornay et al., 2012). In the 1990s, the United Nations formalized the sector-wide norm by calling on all its entities to mainstream human rights into their programming as part of the UN Programme for Reform (Annan, 1997). This move towards a Human Rights Based Approach set a standard for in development work to move from simply being service providers, to tackle the underlying causes leading to humanitarian crises with an emphasis on public advocacy (United Nations, 2003). Seen as a critical component of the rights-based framework, public advocacy is the use of organizational tactics "focus[ed] on changing public opinion, behaviour, and policies about a specific human rights issue" (Davies, 2019, p. 253). The new standard requires aid actors to consider human rights conditions as a critical part of their planning efforts and to engage in local and international advocacy efforts to promote the rights of vulnerable groups" (Kindornay et al., 2012, p. 476). The UN Millennium Goal formally brings forth NGO advocacy as a main component of successful aid implementation of the rights-based approach (Redondo, 2009). More recently, several UN Sustainable Development Goals feature causes ranging from gender equality to peace and justice, which highlights the continued relevance of this approach. These structural standards push NGOs to increase the emphasis on

advocacy work as a critical part of their larger aid and development efforts (Kindornay et al., 2012).

Accordingly, Muslim NGOs' successful investment in advocacy efforts has allowed them to advantageously project their organizational identity within the international context of aid and development. Muslim NGOs' commitment to public advocacy efforts positions them as credible and active actors within the larger international context. Mirroring leading aid and development NGOs, Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK have explicitly articulated the importance of public advocacy and have made it a priority through their cause-related, advocacy efforts (Kirmani, 2011; Randeree, 2013). For example, Muslim Aid UK mobilized its advocacy team to raise awareness on issues of women's rights by taking part in the 2019 International Women's Day Better the Balance campaign. Furthermore, Muslim Aid UK invested organizational resources to continuously engage with various actors and policy makers ranging from the UN Commission on the Status of Women to the Muslim Council of Britain's Women's Conference. Muslim Aid UK publicly called on faith leaders and institutions to commit to upholding the rights of women and girls around the world by signing the Islamic Gender Justice Declaration (Muslim Aid, 2019). The Muslim NGO's participation and engagement in these advocacy efforts showcase its standing as an active actor in the international context which allows them to use this success to their advantage.

Both organizations have a long history of raising their engagement with the aid and development sector as a whole by working alongside public advocacy leaders in the field. For example, Muslim Aid UK was one of the original planning organizations that created the Muslim Charities Forum in 2008, which served as a collective platform for Muslim NGOs based in the United Kingdom (Muslim Charities, 2019). Although the effort focused on coordinating the

relief efforts of Muslim NGOs, it also emphasized public advocacy (Benthall, 2007). To showcase the centrality of public advocacy as a main function of Muslim NGO work, MCF invested considerable organizational resources to develop reliable research later used to develop good governance standards for the sector as a whole. While no comparable consortium of Muslim NGOs exists in the United States, Islamic Relief USA joined a group of U.S.-based NGOs in launching the Together Project in 2017 under the umbrella of the advocacy group InterAction. This project mainly focuses on creating "a hub of advocacy and solidarity for U.S.-based NGOs who provide necessary development and humanitarian relief around the world, but that also confront discrimination or targeted regulations in the United States based on operating principles or religious faith" (Interaction, 2020). The project has successfully mobilized and linked a number of humanitarian NGOs by existing as a third party hub for information sharing, advocacy prioritization, and sector-wide effort synchronization (Barzegar & El Karhili, 2017). The Together Project has amplified Muslim NGO voices by taking part in various inter-NGO consulting activities and facilitating working groups on specific advocacy issues. Overall, these examples showcase the advantage of public advocacy efforts that both Muslim NGOs actively engage in by transcending simple cause advocacy to working to build strong, lasting alliances of like-minded actors.

2.3.4 Targeted Collaboration

Similarly, engaging in targeted collaborative efforts with peer institutions opens the opportunity for Muslim NGOs to project their religious organizational identity within the international context of aid and development. According to scholars of relief and development, collaboration between non-government actors has long been seen as an indicator of efficiency, professionalism, and integration (Elbers & Schulpen, 2011). NGOs across the aid and

development spectrum use collaboration as a means to strengthen what is otherwise a decentralized sector (Hoffman, 2008). Also, the UN's explicit focus on partnerships and collaboration as the fundamental way to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals further centers the emphasis on strategic collaborations. Rather than attempting to tackle some of the world's most difficult crises through decentralized efforts, strategic collaboration points to the field's growth in its ability to synchronize collective action.

By engaging in strategic collaborative efforts with their counterparts, Muslim NGOs follow a long established precedent of other FBOs working in the humanitarian space. When operating on the ground, FBOs have a history of successful collaboration, as they usually find themselves having similar goals in conflict transformation, economic development, or community development (Benedetti, 2006; Kessler & Arkush, 2009; Thaut, 2009). More specifically, various Muslim NGOs have a record of collaborative work based on a shared recognition of religious approaches as a basis for humanitarian action that is both relevant to all FBOs and complementary to humanitarian principles (Dahan et. al., 2010; Salek, 2015). For example, Muslim and Christian organizations collaborated closely in Croatia during the Balkan wars to coordinate aid delivery (Ghandour, 2003). In fact, for both Muslim Aid and IRUSA, working in the Balkan context was a pivotal moment in their institutional maturation, (Salek, 2015). Such synchronization allowed these organizations to leverage their experience and push the boundaries of acceptable religious discourse. Similarly, other Muslim NGOs have also recognized the value added of targeted collaborations and used the strategy to their advantage. For example, Mercy Corps worked in close collaboration with other FBOs to combat faith-based violence in the Central African Republic in 2013 through their Stabilizing Vulnerable Communities project (Kidwai et al., 2014). This collaboration allowed the NGO to highlight

shared interests, goals, and values that resulted in a positive effort beneficial to all involved organizations.

2.4 Organizational Identity in the International Context

Operating within the international context, Muslim NGOs present their religious identity through the four constitutive flows. Findings from the NGOs' organizational texts, as well as in-depth conversations with numerous employees, showcase comprehensive examples of transactional religious organizational identity at work. These examples expand understandings of the ways in which Muslim NGOs navigate the constraints and opportunities in ways that preserve their religious organizational identity. In the pages that follow, I highlight the various ways in which the international context shapes the religious organizational identity of Muslim NGOs. In the following subsections, I showcase concrete examples that fall within each of the communicative flows, with a particular focus on institutional positioning. Within the discussion of each flow, I directly link specific contextual constraints and opportunities to the resulting identity constructions.

2.4.1 Institutional Positioning

Muslim NGOs have just recently turned their focus to positioning themselves within the larger sector of international aid and development. Only in the last decade have both organizations begun to build a public presence in this context. Previously outlined constraints such as the lack of trust within the international context affected the NGOs' priorities. Interviewees from both NGOs note that prioritizing their programming efforts was their first response to the lack of trust that they faced in the space:

> For a while, we weren't able to work on public relations, especially since we were dealing with a hostile environment. We could only work hard on the ground, and let our work speak for us. [. . .] Eventually when we decided to be more present in the space, we could just point to our work and show our values to the other actors. (Interviewee, NGO1)

Repeatedly, multiple interviewees echoed the link between the NGO's lack of initial engagement as a strategy to overall issues of trust in the sector:

> We just knew that going into a space and trying to engage with most people in the sector was a non-starter for a while. So, we just avoided that all together, put our head down, and did the hard work of humanitarian aid. We figured, at some point, that would show others that we're serious. And that once we try to engage, they should probably hear us out. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Specifically, an interviewee noted the recency of their institutional positioning shift towards the aid and development sector:

> It's only in the last 8 years that we've started to work on strongly building out our image in the sector. We really didn't feel like there was any space for us to engage with fellow NGOs so we just focused on aid programming rather than wasting our time with an unresponsive audience. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Once implemented, adopting a strategy of institutional positioning was successful in allowing the NGOs to directly point to their record of achieving effective aid delivery. It did, however, require a two-step process before the Muslim NGOs could project their religious organizational identities. First, the organizations had to establish a programmatic reputation and only then could they openly articulate their religious organizational identity. One senior

employee bemoaned the consequences of such a prerequisite, noting that the organization "became so operationalized in delivering programs that [they] lost touch with their identity for a while." Progressively, as the sector became more welcoming of faith actors and Muslim NGOs, both NGOs engaged in more robust efforts of institutional positioning.

In this expansive period, the NGOs shifted their institutional positioning strategy to one of investing in a strong presence within the international context. More specifically, NGO 1 established their presence by actively engaging within reputable networks such as InterAction, a U.S. based alliance of international NGOs operating since 1984. Some of the interviewees from NGO2 noted the significance of these networks by indicating their organization intentionally tried to "join every single group, coalition, and network that [they] could" (Interviewee, NGO 2). Additionally, other members echoed the significance of belonging to these networks for signaling the NGOs' "high ethical standards of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness" (Interviewee, NGO 2). The Muslim NGOs' organizational perseverance and presence in these networks throughout the years raised the status of the NGO from "simply being a member of [network name] to becoming a member of the executive committee" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Additionally, in an effort to reinforce their presence, interviewees from the same NGO noted a particular focus on regular attendance:

> We needed people to know who we are without introductions, so we showed up to any and every meeting we were invited to. We also volunteered our services to take meeting notes so we could have people's emails. This way, we would send them the notes and a bunch of our marketing materials. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Such strategies increased the NGOs' operational presence in the international context while still allowing them to stay relatively neutral regarding their religious identity. As a senior employee

of one of the NGO noted: “everyone knows that we are a Muslim NGO; it’s in our name so we had to start by treading lightly.” As a result, the NGOs chose strategic positioning that allowed them to lead through organizational efficiency, rather than emphasize their religious-based presence.

Finally, both organizations’ institutional positioning efforts have most recently included educating their fellow humanitarian actors about their faith identity. As one of the NGOs’ external affairs employees noted, “there still are a lot of preconceived notions about Muslim NGOs. Even though the sector is getting more open and welcoming to faith, Muslim NGOs still have to do a lot more educating than their peers” (Interviewee, NGO 1). At times, the NGOs educate by simply acknowledging the existence of allegations made against them and addressing them directly on their website. For example, Islamic Relief USA tackled charges of its association with terrorist groups by posting the following:

> Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA) acknowledges that certain fringe organizations and baseless online media outlets promote false claims that IRUSA and/or its partners have ties to extremist or terrorist organizations. However, these allegations are categorically false and completely without merit. IRUSA and its partners unequivocally condemn terrorism and violence manifested in any form [. . .] any claim that IRUSA has any affiliation whatsoever with any terrorist or extremist entities are frivolous and not grounded in fact (IRUSA, 2019).

In other instances, Muslim NGOs justify their choice of public priorities by explaining how their religious background serves as the foundation of their particular programming initiatives. For example, Muslim Aid UK rationalizes its focus on orphan and widow relief as a part of the

highest forms of Islamic charity called *Sadaqa Jarya* (continuous charity). The organization elaborates on the centrality of this type of charity by giving an expansive educational overview:

> Sadaqah Jariyah, meaning a form of giving that keeps on giving, is extremely beneficial for both the individual giving Sadaqah Jariyah and the recipients of their generosity. […]This is a long-lasting form of giving ongoing rewards, whereas Sadaqah is a gift that will only benefit the recipient once. […] Sadaqah Jariyah is highly rewarded in Islam. Kind and generous acts of Sadaqah Jariyah will continue to bring great rewards both now and in the Hereafter - as long as people continue to benefit from your good deeds. […] By giving Sadaqah Jariyah to support these vulnerable orphans, you are giving them the opportunity to work towards a brighter future filled with potential. Supporting these orphans now will influence their entire life – and the future of their community – which will continue to bring you great rewards. (Muslim Aid, 2019)

Similarly, Islamic Relief USA connects the Islamic concept of *Sadaqa* to the holy month of Ramadan in its 2020 statement online:

> The Prophet (peace be upon him) would give charity throughout the year but increase his sadaqa during Ramadan. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "The Prophet (peace be upon him) was the most generous of people, and he was most generous during Ramadan." (Hadith, Bukhari).Ramadan is therefore a good time to increase one's sadaqa, pay one's zakat if it is due or start giving regular charity as the rewards for good deeds are multiplied. (IRUSA, 2019)

Through these public statements, both NGOs strategically and explicitly address their religious organizational identity in their exchange with other actors in the international context. In opposition to previous approaches of a programming focus on an organizationally neutral

presence, both NGOs are now actively outlining their religious values and connecting them to their work in development and aid.

These contemporary NGO strategies to institutionally position themselves as key Muslim actors within the larger aid and development sector have changed the international landscape. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis, the World Health Organization contacted both NGOs as part of a multi-faith worldwide outreach effort to combat the pandemic. As leading Muslim humanitarian groups, the NGOs helped the organization draft religiously accurate COVID policies for NGO beneficiaries across the globe regarding Islamic Burials rights, sanitizing and washing dead Muslim bodies, and appropriate religious gatherings in time of pandemic. As a member of NGO 1's leadership noted:

> This would've never happened before. First, the fact that they reached out to us is something that a decade ago would've never happened. Second, they actually trusted our judgment and our theological positions to be accurate and applicable to Muslim populations across the globe. We were basically treated just like our fellow Christian NGOs, which is basically all we could ever hope for.

Here, other actors in the international network sought out NGOs specifically due to their religious identity. Rather than hiding it, the NGOs featured their religious identity as a main added value to the international development and aid sector.

2.4.2 Membership Negotiation

Muslim NGOs have had an especially selective process of membership negotiation when collaborating with other actors in the international context. Previously outlined constraints of instrumentalization and securitization deeply impact the NGOs' processes of organizational collaboration. An interviewee from NGO 2 highlighted that, "well-established NGOs had a

record of using faith-based groups as delivery partners. That's not a real partnership. We don't want or need this type of partnership, so we stick to the people that we know." Perhaps as a result, Muslim NGOs have focused on converting personal relationships into organizational collaborations. As one of the interviewees explained: "When it comes to collaborations, we relied on personal relationships that we spent years investing in. We basically treated every meeting we attended and every event that we would take part in as a space to find future collaborators" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Another interviewee also expanded on the process by clarifying:

> If we want to coordinate a program with another NGO, we mostly rely on people we know and have already built strong relationships with throughout the years. Either we connect with someone whose NGO we've worked with in the past, or we ask them for a reference that we then do our own research on. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Through this person-based strategy, the NGOs engage in collaborative efforts with actors that they trust. By avoiding unknown collaborators, the NGOs bypass introducing their religious organizational identity to new actors that have not interacted with their organizations in the past.

Muslim NGOs recruit partners based on a desire to leverage mission-driven, strategic collaborations rather than through an explicit focus on religious organizational identity. Muslim NGOs partner with collaborators in the aid and development sector that work across religious communities seeking to accomplish collective goals. For example, Muslim Aid UK publicly announced their decision to embed their values in a "rich heritage of social action and working with various communities to improve the lives of others in need" (Muslim Aid, 2019). The Islamic heritage activates through the NGO's "participatory approach from all levels to address the underlying structural and systematic causes of poverty within the communities" (Muslim Aid

UK, 2020). Similarly, Islamic Relief USA reaches out to a broad collaborative network to achieve its goals. The Muslim NGO justifies it inclusive collaboration strategy by explaining that it serves as an extension of their commitment to the Islamic conceptualization of compassion. For example, Islamic Relief USA commits to "join[ing] other humanitarians to act as one in responding to the suffering brought by disasters, poverty, and injustice" (Islamic Relief USA, 2019).

In practice, the Muslim NGO often downplay religious discourse when highlighting cases of successful strategic collaboration. By way of illustration, Islamic relief USA joined the Lutheran World Federation in an effort to provide Nepalese families with earthquake-resilient buildings following the 2015 devastating earthquake in Nepal. In their website commentary on the collaboration, the NGO notes, "With shared values and common vision to tackle poverty and suffering worldwide, Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Lutheran World Federation forged the world's first official cooperation between a global Islamic and a global Christian humanitarian organization in 2014" (Islamic Relief USA, 2014). The NGOs' choice of language positions Islam as a central religious referent in the collaboration effort without mentioning the long history of interfaith work in the Islamic tradition.

2.4.3 Activity Coordination

To best and most effectively infuse organizational religious identity through all NGO operations, communication departments are deeply connected to NGO-wide operations. Over the last decade, both NGOs have used interactive internal activity planning processes to position their religious organizational identity at the forefront of their humanitarian role. Particularly, interviewees note the centrality of the communication departments in all their operations by noting that "no one is just working on their own without checking in with the communication

folks first and seeing if they are presenting our organization in a way that's in line with our core values" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Additionally, an interviewee adds:

> It's only recently that we've connected religious messaging across the NGO, to a strong communications presence through all programming and activities. Teams that are fundraising have to run their events by us. Those who are initiating new collaborations or programs are connecting with us. Those who are advocating or making presentations at the United Nations are asking for our insight. (Interviewee, NGO 2).

This strategy allows the NGOs to consistently represent their religious identity before the group presents its activities to external publics. For example, as part of a larger move towards a rights-based approach, the NGOs' communication departments work closely with programming teams to position their shift from emergency relief to sustainable development by direct connections to religious identity. One interviewee expressed the approach this way: "We wanted to move from a simple orphan sponsorship programming to a more sustainable micro-loan programming. Thankfully, the communication department made sure that the language of the new programming was still in line with our religious values." As the examples illustrate, Muslim NGOs are now varying their presentations in ways that flexibly feature their organizational religious identity.

In parallel, another strategy of activity coordination includes the NGOs' communication departments directly engaging with other departments to draft public-facing organizational language. For example, one of the NGO's programming officers noted their direct work with the communications department while crafting language for the website. The programming officer explained that they "noticed that having open language as a baseline" was a common practice in the sector. Specifically, they explained that the NGO's communication department "kept sending us drafts of the language they want to have on the website until we approved it." Now, as a result

of this process, the NGO takes a faith-inspired approach through language choices that are reminiscent of universal values of humanitarianism vaguely related to religious obligations of helping those in need. According to these updates, the communication department adopts a more direct approach of directly presenting Islamic conceptualizations of aid that precede modern humanitarian discourse. The Muslim NGO explicitly cites the English transliteration of traditional Islamic concepts while simultaneously showcasing their complementarity to modern understandings of advocacy in aid and development. Although the practices of activity coordination by the two Muslim NGOs stand at varying distances from strict Islamic discourse, both organizations are able to make direct connections between their religious beliefs and universal concepts of advocating for those in need.

2.4.4 Self Structuring

Muslim NGOs have also promoted the role of religion organizational identity within their internal structures through the last decade. Primarily, Muslim NGOs have done so by conducting internal reviews that consider the place of faith and corresponding organizational structures. Leaders of both NGOs have noted that having the words 'Muslim' and 'Islamic' in their organizations' names has been up for debate and review multiple times. One interviewee in NGO 2 explained that," Having any reference to Islam in the name of your organization is basically a red flag before you even introduce yourself so yeah we've definitely considered changing the name." An interviewee in NGO 1 went farther by noting that they've "actually done research to see if we should change our URL to remove any references to our name and replace it with an acronym to increase website traffic." Although both organizational chose to keep their names, these internal review processes show their constant concern with external perceptions of their faith identity. Explicitly, IRUSA positioned this organizational institutionalization through the

creation of a separate presidential office to promote religious identity with actors across the aid and development sector. Today, the NGO's previous CEO fills the position of president where his main duties relate to external operations. Additionally, in direct relationship to the lack of trust in this context both NGOs have adopted hiring tactics that ensure them a stronger position within the aid and development sector. Specifically, one of the interviewees pointed to the NGO's shift away from promoting volunteers by explaining:

> We don't just hire good hearted brothers who can just run the organization to the ground with good intentions. We have a duty to fulfill our missions and we just can't do that by promoting volunteers into executive positions anymore. That's something we had to learn the hard way. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Specifically, an interviewee noted that the NGO focuses their efforts on hiring "people who have a reputation in the space so they can serve on our board" (Interviewee, NGO 2). Here, the NGO uses the board member's credibility and reputation in the sector to their advantage. Overall, from internal reviews to structural shifts in hiring methods, the processes of institutionalization deeply link the NGOs to their religious organizational identity. On the one hand, internal reviews allow for a periodic organizational self-examination to re-determine the alignment of the NGOs' religious identity with the contextual constraints and opportunities. On the other end, hiring practices and specific positions dedicated to a more permanent monitoring and management of the NGOs' organizational identity.

2.5 Conclusion

The religious organizational identity of both Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK directly interacts with the international context of aid and development. The context's recent

shift towards the acceptance of faith NGOs in development is evident as no situational conditions entirely block Muslim NGOs from articulating their religious identity. Rather, previously outlined constraints can pose delays and challenges, while contextual opportunities exist that can elevate and embolden the four communicative flows. Muslim NGOs have capitalized on the available opportunities as the recent shift towards external affairs and identity-based institutional positioning attest. As Muslim NGOs' priorities are set in direct relationship with their guiding religious beliefs, their organizations dilute, justify, and realign their religious identity to fit the context. Rather than strictly celebrate and emphasize the religious ideology's positive guidance, both Muslim NGOs also focus on the success of their programming to avoid further complications. At other points in time, the, aid and development sector's contextual opportunities bolster the NGOs' religious identity. Through their advocacy and collaboration efforts, the NGOs link some of their core religious beliefs to current issues and through impactful partnerships.

As a result of this interactive process, the Muslim NGOs organizational identity is in a position of adjustment within the international context. The overall strategy employed through all internal and external flows is that of a progressive amplification of religious organizational identity. This is particularly evident in the NGOs' strategy of delayed institutional positioning as a way to work around the lack of trust in the context. The outlined data point to the NGOs' focus on muting their religious identity, amplifying programming, and aligning with trustworthy and well positioned actors in the space. To amplify contextual opportunities such as rights based advocacy and targeted collaboration, the NGOs promote successful collaborations, and educate actors in the international context in regards to the existing alignments between humanitarian and religious values.

3 CHAPTER 3: NATIONAL CONTEXT

In addition to their global humanitarian roles, Muslim NGOs play a political role as civil society actors within their countries of origin. As such, an NGO's ability to effectively manage and implement its aid operation hinges on the support and collaboration of a network of national actors. This national context includes state government agencies, as well as civil society groups such as secular NGOs, FBOs, and Muslim NGOs. To better understand the position of Muslim NGOs' religious identity within the national context, this chapter sketches the political interactions between the state and civil society actors. First, it elaborates on the political nature of civil society by defining the concept, the position of the state, the extension of national political action through civil society, and the intersection of Islam and civil society. It then proceeds to describe the types of actors in this context, the roles they play, and their political position within the larger national environment. The chapter also highlights specific contextual constraints and opportunities at the national level that interact with Muslim NGOs' religious organizational identity. Finally, it outlines findings regarding the NGOs' religious identity within this context as well as its constitution through the four communicative flows

3.1 Civil Society: A Historical Overview

The first step towards understanding Muslim NGOs as political civil society actors is through a historical overview of the concept itself. The evolution of civil society encompasses three main interpretations emergent from the birth of civil society to the concept's contemporary definitions (Alexander, 2006; Hall & Trentmann, 2005; Keane, 1998; Seligman, 1992). Originally, classical Greek philosophical interpretations presented civil society as an extension of government that enabled citizens to act through their own civil rule (Tarrow, 2005). Rooted in the Latin *societas civilis*, the original conceptualization of civil society involved "a rule of law

and a political community" (Kaldor, 2003, p. 7). Civil society, by definition, encompasses peaceful orders with minimal violence in communities of social relations at the direction of "human rights law, the establishment of an international criminal court, and the expansion of international peace keeping" (Kaldor, 2003, p. 7). Civil society serves as a space for exchange and communication where "non-state actors in all their diversity – non-governmental organizations, social movements, the media, the private sector, the academic community, spiritual leaders, the artistic world, global public opinion – are crucial and play an active role" (Kaldor & de Oliveira, 2005, p. 4). Essentially, civil society functioned as a space for citizens to safely discuss, negotiate, and resolve social conflict (Hodgkinson & Foley, 2003).

By the 18th century, these earlier understandings took a fundamental turn by separating civil society and government. Thinkers of the Enlightenment's new articulation of civil society during the French and American revolutions described the concept as a space to express personal freedoms and push back against state intrusions associated with market economies (Cohen & Arato, 1992). The shift in perspective rendered the political sector as a contradictory force to government. Current definitions move away from the state's centrality towards developing the promising potential of civil society. In parallel, a nation-state is understood as "an imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 2006, p. 27). As a result of this definitional evolution, present understandings of civil society are relevant to and active in all forms of modern political societies as a site of rebellion against government ideological hegemony (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Ehrenberg, 2017). Today, civil society refers to various forms of social participation, advocacy, and political engagement within the public sphere (Anheier et al., 2001).

In practice, the rich history of political activity in modern western democracies mirrors theoretical conceptualizations of civil society. More specifically, both the national contexts of the United States and United Kingdom relevant to this study celebrate the presence of a robust and vivacious civil society as an integral part of national identity (Harris, 2005; Garrard, 2017; Shaw, 2010). The United Kingdom's modern history paints a picture of a classical Western European democracy with an active civil society that the parliament and common law regulate "very lightly" (Wainwright, 2004, p. 3). This approach is present at both ends of the political spectrum ranging from the 1980s to the 1990s. Conservative government policies champion civil society as "an antidote to an unresponsive, bureaucratic welfare state that stifles choice and community initiative" (Fyfe, 2005, p. 537). While in the 2000s Prime Minister Tony Blair's progressive New Labour government program centered civil society as a part of its wider ambitions to foster active and civically engaged, diverse social capital (Biccum, 2005). On the other side of the Atlantic, the United States' modern western democracy anchors its history in the rejection of 18th century European old world political and social order committed to a rigid separation between state and church governance. The New World establishes a political context with a participatory democratic system of checks and balances that focuses on constraining government institutions while allowing for, and encouraging, civic political activism (Lipset, 1996). The U.S. political canon wholly advances civil society as a thriving, dynamic form of social governance through the "expression of formal political liberty, participation, and communal and individual obligations" (Anheier, 2004, p. 74). Accordingly, the modern political histories of both nations showcase a robust growth of the civil society sector.

Essentially, the theoretical and practical development of civil society has propelled the political role of NGOs as national actors. Initially, NGOs' emergency humanitarian focus

significantly restricted their potential roles as political organizations. However, as part of the sector's growth, current NGO operations focus on the realization that their humanitarian missions cannot, and should not, diverge from the political contexts within which they operate (Anheier et al., 2001). At the domestic level, this realization propels NGOs to manage their relationship with governmental structures based on their particular institutional interests and preferences for policy change (Najam, 2000). Depending on their respective national political climates, NGOs are able to play fundamental, influential roles in important political issues such as the use of weapons in conflict management (Kaldor, 2001).

Despite civil society's progress into a vibrant active space, the sector's relationship with various faiths ranges widely. On the one hand, civil society rejects religion due the possibility that certain ideological perspectives of the supernatural divine could foster conflict (Berger, 2006). On the other hand, civil society recognizes faith's role as an essential driving force in social movements. For example, the ability of the Catholic aggiornamento and the Islamic reformation to push their respective societies into tackling modern concepts such as women's rights, capitalism, and secularization is indisputable (Casanova, 2001). Specific religious traditions such as Islam have had an even more complicated relationship with civil society. Islamic political histories of organized civic activity, along with their traditions of direct and significant roles in social and political affairs, are undeniable. Traditional institutions such as the *ulama* (learned Islamic scholars), along with the operationalization of the most fundamental legislative system, s*haria*, are prime examples of Islamic variations of civil society (Esposito, 2000). These well-established structures are a testament to a "pluralistic system of the interpretation of religious resources, and their egalitarianism assist[ing] Muslims to build a democratic civil society" (Casanova, 2001, p. 1054). Although many iterations of civil society

often seem resistant to religion, faith traditions such as Islam ultimately have a rich history of harmonious synergy between institutions of communal organizing and modern conceptualizations of civil society (Kukathas, 2003; Tibi, 1997).

Western governments, in particular, have a negative view of Islam as a religious tradition compatible with civil society. Overall, Western political discourse highlights Islam as a religious tradition that is at odds with civil society (Mehregan, 2014). This presumed contradiction arises through problematic assumptions and damaging narratives regarding various aspects of Islamic ideology, practice, and religious organizational systems. Western understandings outline Islamic law as an extreme and strict legal structure with virtually no space for the development of an autonomous civil society (Berger, 2006). This framing greatly impacts modern political understandings of complex practical applications of *sharia*, and ultimately results in a conceptual incompatibility between Islam and civil society. Furthermore, sweeping orientalist interpretations of a concept of *ummah* that permit no sense of ideological pluralism support the supposed incompatibility between Islam and normative understandings of civil society. Western political discursive views on *jihad* are often one-dimensional and conflicting as to the overwhelmingly peaceful, organized, and constructive disagreement that usually leads to civil society. These views present Islam as structurally lacking in its capacity to "provide political countervailing institutions or associations, which is atomized without much individualism, and operates effectively without intellectual pluralism" (Gellner, 1994, p. 29). This perspective renders Islam an "enemy of civil society" (Hall, 2013, p. 14) and categorically unfavorable to its development. Consequently, the association of Islam with politics, along with the active implementation of the faith by Western Muslims through non-governmental organizing, can seem problematic for Western governments.

The progressions of civil society point to a current intersection between politics and religion at the national level. The decreased ability of governments to mitigate various national issues permits nongovernmental actors to emerge as essential advocates of the needs, interests, and values of people at large (Castells, 2008). NGOs are able to leverage their positions in their interactions with state actors to progressively mobilize pressure for political change (Mercer, 2012). NGOs operating as civil society actors are no longer exclusively dependent on national frameworks; rather, they are actively using the framework of governance. Through a pluralistic set of identifiable processes and mechanisms, these organizations are now able to intersect with domestic politics, and produce new differentiated paths of political change (Tarrow, 2005). More specifically, the overall growth of Muslim civil society organizations in western national contexts (e.g., in the United States and the United Kingdom) amplifies the need for more in-depth analysis of the sector. The purpose of the following sections is to specifically outline this growth in a way that accounts of the current state of actors present in the context, along with the effects of resulting interactions for Muslim NGOs' organizational identity. To best manage Muslim NGOs' political role, the rest of this chapter will outline some of the actors within this context, their political roles, and the constraints and opportunities that represent to Muslim NGOs operating in this context.

3.2 Mapping the Key Actors in the National Context

The national context encompasses multiple actors ranging from national governmental aid agencies, secular civil society organizations, and faith-based civil society organizations. Although many of these different actors do not specifically outline political activities as a primary component of their respective missions, they all play a political role within the national context. This chapter primarily focuses on the political environments of the United States and the

United Kingdom, given their standing as the home countries functioning as the national contexts of the case studies.

The first notable groups of national actors are federal-supported aid agencies that assume a central political role in supporting their respective country's foreign policies. National aid organizations primarily play a structural agenda setting role by establishing the networking apparatuses for civil society actors, as well as use their political leverage as a tool to negotiate with other actors (Clarke, 2018; Ritzer & Atalay, 2013). Both American and British governments heavily invest in their respective national aid agencies. For example, in 2020 alone, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) budget was 40 billion dollars, while the U.K.'s Department For International Development (DFID) had a 17.8 billion dollar budget (DFID, 2020; USAID, 2020). In the United States, USAID operates as an independent agency of the federal government. As one of the largest official aid agencies in the world, USAID's central goal is the furthering of "America's foreign policy interests in expanding democracy and free markets while also extending a helping hand to people struggling to make a better life, recover from a disaster or striving to live in a free and democratic country" (USAID, 2020). In parallel, DFID leads Great Britain's work in assisting developing countries. The organization closely follows the United Kingdom's foreign policy by tackling critical "challenges of [our] time including poverty and disease, mass migration, insecurity and conflict" (DFID, 2020). As central integrated components in their respective governmental structures, government aid organizations are a primary site for the exercise of state political power.

More specifically, government aid agencies act as robust political tools for assisting overall national security and development efforts abroad. Historically, these state organizations actively leverage their budgetary, logistical, and networking capacities in an effort to reach

various strategic national political goals, including the promotion democratic values (Carothers, 2009) and the reinforcement of political and military alliances (McKinlay & Little, 1977; Schraeder et. al., 1998; Wang, 2000). Essentially, these organizations became a site for the advancement of larger government policies such as the United Kingdom's securitized development policy during the War on Terror (Howell & Lind, 2009; 2010). DFID's Strategy for Security and Development, for example, promotes the complimentary nature of achieving development and anti-terrorism goals (Waddell, 2006). This intersection between aid efforts and security positions national aid agencies as strong, strategic actors within the national context.

Furthermore, national aid agencies play a significant role in promoting national economic goals. USAID and DFID demonstrate this function through a strong engagement in a robust industry of development contracting (Roberts, 2014). USAID, for example, consistently uses contractors as an essential factor in sustaining, and even increasing, foreign aid budgets (Krueger et al., 1989; Zimmerman et al., 1996). USAID's history of comprehensive interventions warrants extensive investment in consultancy in order to accomplish large structural and infrastructural development. The heavy reliance on the private sector also points to a broader investment in Western economic interests and political priorities (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006; Rahman & Gissen, 2017). For example, DFID echoes the focus on domestic economic growth through its investment in the British private sector generally and consultancy more specifically (Mawdsley, 2015). These types of national aid agency allocations showcase both the vast networks available to both governments and the impact they can achieve in promoting economic and political interests.

However, domestic political trends and the need to maintain national support for aid allocation are key influencers over government aid organizational goals (Fleck & Kibly, 2001;

2006; Milner 2006). In the United States, domestic political party shifts impacting the Department of State to the U.S. Congress greatly affect USAID operations (Lundsgaarde, 2012). The decision of the 1995 Republican Congress to heavily target allocations of USAID funding, for example, showcases the extent of this influence up to and including the possible dismantling of the organization (Fleck & Kibly, 2001). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the notable case of direct incorporation of Labour Government policy directives within DIFID's promotional language in the 2000s, along with the British Parliament's intensified prioritization of aid in the national agenda, both highlight the uncomfortable closeness of political trends and government aid (Biccum, 2005). Although occasionally beneficial to both involved parties, a close relationship between political trends and aid agencies can result in contradictory goals depending on the ideological power currents operational at a given moment. Such contradictions, for example, were notable in DFID's shift of aid spending targeting overall poverty reduction in the early 2000s. Working within the parameters of the 2002 International Development Act, DFID received a higher level of funding for distribution than it did under the narrower definition of the poverty criteria implemented through the 2006 International Development Reporting and Transparency Act. Such a shift required charities to implement annual direct reporting to the parliament (Mawdsley, 2015; Waddell, 2006). Together, these examples showcase the overall significance of domestic politics in shaping and molding foreign aid agencies in both the United States and United Kingdom, making such agencies largely dependent on the approval of current administrations in power.

Likewise, other standing national government organizations intersect with the civil society sector. Here, government agencies play a prominent role in the national context due to their ability to regulate civil society organizations through a variety of legislative mechanisms

and policies. Organizations such as the U.S. Department of the Treasury, for example, can severely impact U.S.-based civil society organizations through regulatory mechanisms such as their anti-terrorist finance requirements. Treasury guidelines enable the department to hold significant leverage and severely constrict civil society organizations by having overwhelming power to designate groups as terrorist organizations (ACLU, 2009). Further, the structural powers of national agencies allow them to play a streamlining role under the mandate of avoiding duplication. For example, the Department of Homeland Security's National Health Security Strategy specifically highlights the integration of civil society organizations in resilience building, as well as outlines ways to streamline government and NGO efforts (Chandra et. al., 2011). For NGOs, this type of integration can elevate their national recognition and potential access of their groups.

Government agencies' direct engagement and collaborative efforts is another way that national entities interact with civil society actors. For example, the U.S. Department of Defense's work in the health emergency response during the Ebola outbreak heavily relied on collaboration with civil society organizations for the delivery of critically essential assistance (Diehl et. al., 2016). Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Diversity and Civil Rights closely collaborated with a set of critical NGOs to assess the impact of ICE language on migrant communities (US Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Overall, government led efforts interfacing with civil society can be summarized into regulation, and/or collaboration.

Secular civil society organizations operate as another set of actors within the national context. They serve primarily to fill gaps resulting from inadequate national government efforts. Secular civil society organizations use their relative standing within a space or community to present alternatives to governments through a variety of avenues (Barrett & Kurzman, 2004). For

example, CARE originated as a relief program founded in the shadow of the US government's military surplus. Initially a consortium of 22 charities in 1946, CARE drew strong support from the American public and the United States Congress (Smith, 2014). CARE's position within the domestic political environment resulted in its increasing cooperation with the Truman administration. As a result, the first CARE packages were surplus "Ten-in-One" U.S. Army rations packs purchased in early 1946. Additionally, CARE directly used national government policies to its advantage. For example, CARE benefited from the 1954 Public Law 480, also known as the Food for Peace Act, which increased the availability of surplus U.S. food. CARE's ability to adeptly manage the surplus allowed millions of dollars of food commodities to flow into disaster relief and programs such as school lunch provision between 1949 and 2009 (CARE, 2019).

Similarly, in the European context, British secular civil society organizations have helped fill in gaps resulting from the government's history of failed efforts (Knight, 1993). The civil society response to the British crisis of asylum seekers and refugees is a fitting example of this mobilization. Although the British government has a responsibility to ensure a stable and safe environment for refugees and asylum seekers, it, in actuality, provides little support to these populations (Fitzpatrick et al. 2015). More specifically, refugees and asylum seekers have no access to the labor market (Mayblin, 2017). Here, civil society organizations offer a "buffer zone between state and society and mitigates social tensions and political conflicts" (Seibel & Anheier, 1990, p.14). This civil society buffer translates into various social programs, trainings, and resources available to refugee populations. For example, British civil society groups such as the Refugee Council and Refugee Action work closely with refugee populations to close the gap and ensure that refugees are not left destitute or impoverished (Mayblin & James, 2019).

Civil society organizations' ability to augment failing government structures heightens secular NGOs' negotiating role within this national context. Civil society organizations use a variety of political strategies as part of their political role within this environment (Barrett & Kurzman, 2004; Kaldor, 2001; 2003). For example, multiple civil society organizations in the United States and in the United Kingdom use their credibility as non-state actors to frame climate change as an important agenda item requiring urgent domestic action (Rietig, 2011). Additionally, various civil society groups lead multiple media campaigns rallying public opinion and raise awareness with the aim to make policy change (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). At times, civil society organizations also publicly denounce government policies. Civil society's opportunities to speak out against governments embolden them to directly use their platforms to weigh in on hotly debated political causes. For example, in the United Kingdom, 34 civil society organizations sent a letter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Commonwealth Affairs pointing to their disappointment with the government's current position on nuclear weapons policy. These public political stances and associated acts of dissent allow secular civil society organizations to help direct the conversation and help shape the political agenda to encourage governmental accountability.

Concurrently, secular civil society organizations also engage in collaborative political efforts and relationships with government entities. As previously mentioned, civil society organizations choose to work alongside government on projects where their political values align, or where the collaboration has the potential to deliver tangible results that are central to the organization's mission. For example, CARE worked closely with President John F. Kennedy during his 1961 establishment of the Peace Corps. At the time, CARE selected and trained the first group of volunteers, whom were later deployed to development projects. Overall, the

relative proximity of secular civil society actors to government institutions has the potential to strengthen their brokering and negotiating roles, ultimately connecting interests between communities and governments (Smith, 2014).

At times, however, civil society organization's choice to engage with governments can result in a failure to establish the critical distance necessary to avoid cooptation (Hearn, 2001; Mohan, 2002). Oxfam's relationship with the 2005 Tony Blair's New Labour government in the United Kingdom or CARE's overuse of government contractors such as in the Volunteers in Technical Assistance program are prime examples of a problematic, close relationship to government on the part of civil society organizations (Baitenmann, 1990). Although in both cases the collaborative campaigns were relatively successful in producing their intended outcomes, the type of access and strategic alliances signaled a certain closeness which contradicted the standard of critical distance usually understood between the NGOs and government agencies. This type of co-optive collaboration with governments can result in damaging NGOs' credibility with other civil society actors. Fellow civil society organizations criticized both Oxfam and CARE for their collaborative projects where closeness with government became synonymous with the promotion of government priorities (Smith, 2014).

Similar to their secular counterparts, faith-based civil society organizations also position themselves as critical political actors at varying levels of complementarity with national governments. In fact, some faith based civil society organizations have a long history of successful close work with government entities (Boris et. al., 2010). For example, the Young Men's Christian Association (known as the YMCA) has a multi-year track record of directly working with local and federal government organizations in various capacities including youth civic engagement programs, food bank collaborative efforts, and community post disaster

cleanups (Boris et. al., 2010). Meanwhile, other religious civil society organizations play an implementation role (Benthall, 2007), often executed due to their legitimacy on the ground and ability to formulate alliances to confront governments (De Cordier, 2009). Here, faith-based civil society organizations strategically position their ability to tap into a network of faith communities to make them politically valuable partners.

Finally, Muslim civil society organizations, such as Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. play an active role in their respective national and political environments. While politically anchored within their domestic social and political realities, both Muslim civil society organizations nevertheless function within national contexts that have an extensively well documented history of hostility towards the religion of Islam in general and organized Muslim social activity in particular (Beydoun, 2018). The American context has been especially Islamophobic after the events of 9/11 from a narrative broadly associating Islam with terrorism to the latest 'Muslim Ban' Executive Order 13769 of the Trump presidency. The resulting discourses of securitization and othering have had an enormous impact on how public opinion and the court systems perceive and treat Islamic (ACLU, 2018). Put simply, the sustained presence of Muslim NGOs in such a political context helps counter Islamophobic security discourses and strengthen the Muslim American community (Khan, 2015). Muslim NGOs such as Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. build on their political identity by addressing the central notions of social justice by organizing and structuring national civic engagement grassroots efforts. Consequently, their role in activating social capital and civic engagement is paramount to the democratic systems in which they operate and to the growth of their political impact (Salamon et al.,2000).

In particular, Muslim organizations' political identity functions through their active political projects. For example, Muslim Aid U.K. and Islamic Relief U.S.A. use their organizational capacity to mobilize Muslim communities during local and national elections (Pal & Tok, 2019). In an effort to propel their work as civil society actors, Muslim NGOs amplify their standing in the national context through their participation in larger political structures such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Latief, 2012). They also invest in organizations and projects that present political alternatives or showcase opposition to unsupportive government national and foreign agendas. For example, Muslim civil society organizations recently engaged in top-level, national political activities such as organized monthly fasts in protest of budget cuts and openly condemning politicians' policies on family separation (Latief, 2012). Additionally, Muslim NGOs play a political role in the national context by joining other faith-based and secular groups to pressure national governments. For example, Islamic Relief USA worked closely with local organizations to support with a Syrian refugee assistance program in Louisville, Kentucky. Their efforts to help Syrian refugees linked the local Muslim community in Louisville, KY to other local organizations and national political conversations around the broader topic of immigration (IRUSA, 2020). These forms of successful political activism through national civic engagement further empower the Muslim NGOs to drive their political role through civil society.

Within the national context, Muslim NGOs now leverage their position as civil society actors in their interaction with states. A primary characteristic of these organizations is their ability to act on a national level as "interlocutors on issues with which new social movements are concerned" (Kaldor, 2003, p. 89). The salience of FBOs is particularly recognized as impactful civil society couched within domestic communities and able to play an active role in the lives of

those most in need (Clarke, 2007). Muslim NGOs, specifically use this privileged status within civil society to establish their credibility and authority as effective national interlocutors and political participants (Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke & Tittensor, 2016). These actors work in tandem with the state through a set of strategically linked activities as "members of a principled network develop explicit ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal through the formation of a common frame of meaning" (Keck & Sikkink, 2003, p. 152). This creates a symbiotic relationship involving constant movement and negotiation. On the one hand, domestic environments and national political structures do play a major role in influencing organizational practices (Stroup & Murdie, 2012). On the other hand, NGOs are able to seek out national allies to exert pressure onto the state. This campaigning process, allows NGOs to actively challenge the traditional notions of national sovereignty by creating parallel structures that circumvent the state.

As seen by the variety of the actors and the complexity of their interactions, the national context can deeply impact the ways in which Muslim NGOs position religion within their organizational identity. Ranging from governments' extensive structural ability and financial powers to secular and faith-based civil society organizations' history of negotiated political positions, the national context presents its main actors with a multi-faceted terrain to navigate. As other Muslim NGOs increase their political activity in the national context and interact with a multitude of civil society and government actors, less entrenched organizations require a clear assessment of the space before they can reach the agility and know-how that their sector counterparts already enjoy. The following section will describe how previous scholars have defined key constraints and opportunities of the national context that face Muslim NGOs seeking heightened standing and political power.

3.3 Constraints and Opportunities for Muslim NGOs

As Muslim NGOs attempt to navigate the complex national political context of civil society, they face various challenges and opportunities that influence the expression of their religious identities. The growth of the Muslim civil society sector as a whole, coupled with the influence of the Muslim NGOs in this study, puts them in a pivotal position to actively address misconceptions about the role of religious organizations in politics, while also recognizing the potential opportunities presented by engaging with FBOs. Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. serve as useful models to better understand the civil society experience as both NGOs have consistently increased their annual political and advocacy programming throughout the past decade (Islamic Relief, 2010-2020). They have also become indispensable actors as they draw on a rich tradition of political engagement amongst others in the national political contexts of the United States and the United Kingdom (Clarke et al., 2014).

The political position of these organizations as civil society actors both constrain and propel Muslim NGO formulations of religious organizational identity. In order to gain a better understanding of what NGOs face as they interact with various actors in the public sphere, this research examines relevant United States and United Kingdom government documents (reports, regulations, etc.), the literature on Muslim NGOs as aid and development actors, and a close analysis of Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K.'s annual reports and other organizational texts starting in 2010. While the conclusions below do not represent an exhaustive list of all the constraints and opportunities facing Muslim NGOs, they outline major dynamics impacting the ways in which religious organizational identity can serve as an advantageous opportunity or a potential challenge within the context of civil society. Each section will begin

by defining the constraint or opportunity, highlighting exemplars within the context, and ends by exploring the interaction of the topic with the NGO's religious identity.

3.3.1 Anti-Terrorist Finance

Anti-terrorist finance policies acutely constrain the political role of Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. as civil society organizations. Broadly, post 9/11 counterterrorism and anti-terrorist funding policies took on previously discussed Islamophobic Western discourse and government views and transformed them into structural barriers that especially affect Muslim NGOs. This is particularly true in the United States and the United Kingdom where post 9/11 national policies were reflective of a larger state of emergency pushing the security agenda ahead of individual civil liberties (Cooley, 2015). More specifically in the American context, the government's position was mainly operationalized through the implementation of terrorism financing laws that effectively "impose guilt by association and punish legitimate humanitarian aid actors" (ACLU, 2009). This operationalization extends into today's American and British governments' restrictions on *zakat* donations and terrorist finance and exploitation (Petersen & Marshall, 2019; Zapor, 2016). Mainly targeting Muslim NGOs with no known affiliation with terrorist actors (Yasmin et al., 2018), these policies have created a climate of fear that chills American Muslims' free and full exercise of their religion through charitable giving (ACLU, 2009).

In both the American and British contexts, civil society organizations in general, and Muslim NGOs in particular, have become the direct targets of counterterrorism efforts. To be clear, the U.S. Criminal Code has included terrorism as a law enforcement matter as part of larger establishments of the principles of international law prior to the 9/11 attacks. Originally,

terrorist financing issues were treated as a law enforcement issue with the ultimate goal of fighting political violence through legal proceedings and the rule of law (Breinholt, 2005; Wittig, 2011). However, in the United States, the Bush Administration's 'War on Terror' moved Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) to the center of the national political stage. In 2001, the Bush Administration expanded the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) mandate to cover special recommendations on Terrorism Financing. As a multilateral U.S. government organization, FATF aims to "develop and evaluate the implementation of international AML/CFT standards" (U.S. Department of State, 2020). While the multi-organizational efforts led to a comprehensive crack on terrorist finance and significantly increased the capacity of international law enforcement agencies to restrict the freedom of violent terrorist networks, they have also adversely impacted the freedom of civil society actors. What appeared as a beneficial regulatory body actually required Muslim NGOs to abide by excessive regulatory expectations, and enforcements that involved a risk-based approach (Eckert & Gatzert, 2018). This FATF approach positions terrorism financing at the forefront of organizational financial transfer which, in turn, results in long-term restrictions on the NGOs ability to allocate funds to areas that need it the most. Additionally, the approach involves "derisking" which limits NGOs' relationships in the field on the basis of avoiding potential financial issues.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Muslim NGOs face mechanisms that require excessive standards of fiduciary responsibility and financial management, along with mandates for performance evaluation and public reporting (Unerman et.al. 2006). In 2014, the U.K. government's Charity Commission also proposed a Charities Protection Bill with a specific focus on expanding regulations and powers including the ability to directly oversee the NGOs'

processes of trustee nomination (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2015). Additionally, the Commission requested regular meetings with Muslim NGOs to discuss emerging issues related to terrorism (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2015). These complicated structural requirements directly affect Muslim NGOs' ability to positively influence social and political recovery in areas where their work is most sensitive, such as the conflict-stricken MENA region technically considered as a financially risky area. Although both national governments present these policies and regulatory bodies as necessary for national security, the breadth and extensive requirements of the regulations are damaging to Muslim NGOs' ability to push their own political identities forward.

More often than not, the various legal structures promoting surveillance and obstruction negatively impact Muslim NGOs' work (ACLU, 2009). These regulations damage the 8,665 United States NGOs operating abroad by hindering their ability to freely manage and use their financial structures. The financial issues in question range from delays of wire transfers for 37 percent of total NGOs, unusual documentation requests for 26 percent, increased fees for 33 percent, bank account closures for 6 percent, and a refusal to open accounts for 10 percent (Benthall, 2016). In addition, indirect legislation, such as the Counter Terrorism Act (2008), the Bribery Act (2010) and the Money Laundering Regulations (2007) also burden Muslim NGOs as the laws specifically target fund circulation that is Islamic in nature (Belaon, 2014). Faced with the various accountability requirements, Muslim NGOs find themselves in a constant state of having to prove their legitimacy and compliance (Belaon, 2014). In essence, anti-terrorist finance structures deeply constrain Muslim NGOs by assuming a presumed link between extremist violent financial networks and Muslim NGO political engagement. Due to this constraining environment, anti-terrorist finance regulations deeply impact the political potential of Muslim NGOs. Furthermore, government structures excessively monitor Muslim NGOs'

organizational activities and their political engagement. For example, the U.K. government's counter-terrorism strategy— CONTEST —specifically targets faith-based civil society actors through violent extremist violence prevention efforts (Kwayu, 2020). More specifically, the PREVENT strand of CONTEST directly targets Islamism (political Islam) and greatly limits any religiously motivated or inspired political activism (Kwayu, 2020). Overall, this complex transatlantic network of financial restriction creates a climate of public suspicion directly linked to the organizations' religious identity (Durner & Shetret, 2015).

3.3.2 Government Funding

Government entities have a history of providing opportunities by funding civil society organizations within the national context. Overall, governments use their extensive infrastructure to actively place themselves within the civil society space. Partnerships between the United States government and nonprofits during the Carter and George W. Bush administrations, for example, produced cautious optimism as to the possibilities in the nonprofit sector's ability to constructively benefit citizens and mediating structures (Hall, 1994; Berger & Neuhaus, 1977, Salamon, 1981; 1987). The Bush faith-based initiative was a major U.S. government step towards helping religiously oriented organizations compete for federal grants and contracts, as well as for delivering social services to their communities. President Bush created the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives in order to help nationally based, religious organizations identify, access, and apply for federal funding. He also strongly promoted the Charity Aid Relief and Empowerment (CARE) Act (S.476) and the Charitable Choice provisions contained in Section 104 of the Personal responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This latter effort allowed religious organizations to use federal money to supply various social services without altering their fundamental religious character.

Here, the Act presents funding as a beneficial tool for governments as they aid civil society organizations and encourage their healthy democratic organizing.

However, the more readily available government funds gradually co-opted civil society organizations (Mohan, 2002). Principally, these early government funding opportunities pushed civil society organizations to "become voices of – rather than watchdogs over – official agencies, political parties and powerful individuals in global governance" (Scholte, 2004, p. 224). By agenda setting power alone, the government's measured funding resources led to the takeover of civil society in ways that built an interdependent relationship (Milward & Provan, 1993). Government funding requirements tied to extreme oversight ultimately resulted in various pressures on NGOs (Ndiaye, 2009). For example, in 2015, the U.K. government adopted a cross-governmental approach using funding schemes such as the Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPAs). The schemes essentially required NGOs to partner with their government funders while bearing the burden of excessive program reporting and impact measurements (Kwayu, 2020). Such erasures of the critical distance necessary between civil society and government agencies ultimately weakened civil society's structures along with levels of non-government sector independence which traditionally provided a level of checks and balances for government (Hearn, 2012).

Additionally, government funding exclusively constrains religious civil society organizations through requirements that define acceptable religious discourse in the public sphere. More specifically, these requirements structurally establish and systemically perpetuate heavily critiqued categories such as moderate (synonymous with good) versus radical (synonymous with bad) Muslims (Mahmood, 2006; Mamdani, 2018). Here, government criteria for funding generate a particular definition of what organizations qualify as liberal, transparent,

and cooperative Islam for preferential funding (Mahmood, 2006). In this case, governments exert their power by identifying who they believe to be moderate, while excluding radical voices. As a result, organizations receiving government funding are, by default, agreeing to the governments' definitions and criteria of what is religiously acceptable. This focus constrains the NGOs' ability to position religion within their own broader presentations of organizational identity and further restricts other Muslim civil society organization in the sector.

3.3.3 Muslim Political Organizing

The Islamic history of political pluralism and progress, as well as the surge in Muslim political organizing and civic activism, also presents Muslim NGOs with an opportunity. One of the most honored Islamic organizations such as the *Ulama* (learned Islamic scholars) is a great example of this tradition. The institution of the *Ulama* is a result of organized civic activity that has a direct and significant role in social and political affairs (Esposito, 2000). Here, Islamic *sharia* is not an impediment to associative life. Rather, traditions of decentralization of religious authority – especially in Sunni Islam – highlight a "pluralistic system of the interpretation of religious resources, and their egalitarianism assist Muslims to build a democratic civil society" (Casanova, 2001, p. 426). In the rich history of the Islamic tradition as well as Islamic doctrine, current Muslim political organizing echoes examples of "opposition and disagreement, consensus and consultation, and the freedom of thought and expression" (Casanova, 2001, p. 423). Ultimately, this history demonstrates the success of harmonious synergy between Islam and modern conceptualizations of civil society (Kukathas, 2003).

This civil society tradition in Islam translates into a gradual, political organizing effort by Muslim communities in Western democracies. In the 1980s, Muslim NGOs' mobilized for political motives by applying the *ummah* concept and engaging in the task of creating a form of

charitable relief based in religious practice (Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan, 2003). The modern Islamic charity sector, which Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. are a part of today, is a direct outcome of modern applications of traditional practices related to *zakat* and *waqf*. Also, the growth of smaller activist groups such as the United Kingdom's Student Islamic Societies and their American equivalent Muslim Student Associations similarly mirrors this political mobilization (Choudhury, 2017). For many first generation young American and British Muslims, these groups are a site for an articulation of political identity where their religious beliefs can be a source of social mobilization. In fact, the last decade's levels of higher Muslim American and British involvement along with their modern views of overall compatibility between Islam and democracy showcase a notable level of Muslim political university organizing in the 2000s (Pew, 2019). Most recently, the elections of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib as the first Muslim women elected to Congress, along with the election of Sadiq Khan as the first Mayor of London, suggest an evolving, new era of American and British Muslim political presence. Taken together, the rich history of political organizing along with recent Muslim political activism present Muslim NGOs with an opportunity to boldly highlight religion as a facet of their organizational identity.

3.3.4 Digital Activism

With the modernization of communication and possibilities of online platforms, digital activism is a considerable opportunity for Muslim NGOs such as Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid UK. Historically, NGOs have relied on the mainstream news outlets to expose human rights violations and call for emergency aid during national crises (Rieff, 2019). Their efforts were successful in generating government action and indirect pressure on third-party human rights abusers (Murdie & Davis, 2012). Today, digital activism and the overall strategic

use of online platforms offers civil society actors with an alternative to pressure states to better align with the goals of the NGOs. These means are particularly useful as the state's domestic structures continue to structurally block civil society organizations practices through previously mentioned anti-terrorism financial policies (Stroup & Murdie, 2012; Tarrow, 2010). However, modern realities of online social media platforms and website direct accessibility place states and civil society organizations with direct un-censored access to publics sympathetic to their goals and beliefs (Lupel, 2005). Today, NGOs harness this growth in political capital through a strong presence on alternative digital public spaces such as social media platforms (Raja-Yusof et al., 2016). Particularly, digital platforms allow NGOs to bypass traditional media and clearly articulate and amplify their political positions within larger online ecosystems (Segerber & Bennett, 2011). In essence, this context promotes Muslim NGOs as they build an effective information and communication system for sustaining their successful political efforts and as they leverage the Internet's reach and its diverse network of partners to take effective actions, both online and offline.

Today, NGOs use online strategies as a central tool in crafting and positioning their organizational identity. In general, Muslim NGOs are investing in expanding their organizational resources to compete effectively for either traditional news coverage or for public attention (Khan, 2015). Additionally, they have also begun to position their online presence to their advantage in the ecosystem of political communication. Specifically, Muslim NGOs use the digital sphere for political advocacy and digital activism through interactive communication as a "new form of socialized communication: mass-self communication" (Castells, 2011, p. 32). In this digital framework, Muslim NGOs draw on their strong local roots to unleash unprecedented digital efforts allowing them to impact the domestic context through online outreach (Castells,

2011). As actors outside government channels addressing common problems, they concurrently defend local and sectorial interests, as well as specific values lying beyond the formal political process. For example, consolidated online campaigns on social media platforms allow NGOs to share their religious values in a strategic way by targeting specific audiences of their choosing (Raja-Yusof et al., 2016).

3.4 Organizational Identity in the National Context

Operating within this national context, Muslim NGOs present their religious identity through the four constitutive flows. Findings from the NGOs' organizational texts, as well as in-depth conversations with numerous employees, reveal a plethora of examples showcasing transactional religious organizational identity operations in progress. These same examples expand understandings of the ways in which Muslim NGOs navigate the constraints and opportunities in ways that sustain their religious organizational identity moving forward. In this chapter I provide empirical examples that fall within each of the communicative flows. To highlight the transactional nature of the NGOs' identity, I directly link specific contextual constraints and opportunities to the resulting identity formations.

3.4.1 Institutional Positioning

Muslim NGOs have just recently turned their focus to positioning themselves within the larger sector of national civil society. Before the last decade, the NGOs spent most of their organizational histories avoiding political activity. One interviewee noted that most of their organization's focus instead had been on "dealing with the fact that everyone pointed to us as if we're some type of financial funnels to terrorist groups," with the result that they were unable to "be out there engaging in any kind of politics" (Interviewee, NGO1). Additionally, interviewees also focused on the Muslim NGO's lack of awareness about their potential as political actors in

the national arena. One interviewee described their NGOs' lack of awareness about their group's political potential this way: "a lot of people from [their] own leadership had no idea that [they] had the option of being a political organization" (Interviewee, NGO 2). Combined, such contextual constraints deeply affected the NGOs' perceived ability and desire to position their organizational identity as political actors within the larger national context. As an interviewee surmised:

> Honestly, for a while we had zero political presence. First, it was because we were drowning with work so we just wanted to stay under the radar, but it also was because we didn't really know that organizations like ours had a role in the space, or where to start. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

As a result, both NGOs generally avoided any political engagement between 2010 and 2013. Instead, the NGOs invested in reputable transparency practices around financial reporting as an organizational priority. In short, both Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. focused their organizational credibility efforts in non-political spaces. An interviewee in one of the NGOs' public affairs department noted, they "focused on winning awards instead of messing with politics." For example, Islamic Relief U.S.A. earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, the largest charity evaluator in the United States, as well as accreditation by mainstream bodies such as GuideStar and the Better Business Bureau.

As the organizations became more knowledgeable in the potential that the national context offers political actors, both NGOs progressively changed their position and engaged in more robust efforts of institutional positioning. The NGOs began by shifting their institutional positioning strategy to investing in a neutral, but continuous, presence within the national context. As a starting point, one member noted that their Muslim NGO dedicating a government

affairs team to explore their potential political role. One of that office's founding employees noted that having an exploratory approach required "attending every relevant meeting." Additionally, another interviewee echoed that, "for a while, it was all about just being in the room. We would ask our colleagues what meetings they thought we should attend, and we would just come in and sit in quietly" (Interviewee, NGO 2). The second NGO also noted a persistent, but silent, presence within their national political context in their ramp up period between 2011 and 2014. An interviewee recalled their relatively modest goals for engagement by explaining that they

> [. . .] just wanted [their] people to be in the know, and for politicians to see that [they] were here. [They] weren't going to say anything or advocate for specific issues yet, but [they] were just present [….] At the start, it felt like as long as [they] were included in the press releases post-event, [they] had made it. Like if [they] were a part of the group photo, then it was proof that [they] were at least there. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

As a guide through the somewhat unchartered territory of the national political terrain, an interviewee from one NGO highlights the significant role of fellow faith-based civil society organizations:

> We became really good friends with people like [redacted name], the executive director of [redcated name of faith based NGO]. They would give us last minute calls to make sure we showed up at an event. If we weren't on an invitation list, they would always ask for us to be included in things that we weren't included in previously. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Through these strategies the NGOs progressively increased their presence in the national context while staying relatively neutral in terms of political positions and advocacy. As a senior

employee of one of the NGOs noted: “we didn’t want to ruffle any feathers because we were like the new kid in town.” In this early period, the NGO’s choice of strategic positioning allowed them to lead with this focus on presence without strong references to their religious identity.

Eventually, both organizations’ institutional positioning efforts moved to strong advocacy efforts focused on their faith identity. Both have adopted an active engagement with national politics through participation and advocacy. As an employee from one of the NGOs noted:

> We have entirely embraced our political role and can clearly articulate it today. We absolutely are a political organization. We are involved in the political process in that we advocate for issues rather than just deliver aid [….] We’ve made the transition from being quiet and just dumping funds into disaster relief to engaging with politicians and affect legislation to work at the root of these issues [….] We’re past photo opportunities and the public spectacle of political engagement. We now roam the halls. People know who our team is and what the main issues that we advocate for are. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

The NGOs are accordingly now in a position to embrace their political role as faith-based organizations and fully engage in the national political process through their advocacy efforts.

Assisting them in this shift, both NGOs pointed to key figures in their national political networks as well as an overall strong connection to liberal progressive politicians. As an interviewee from one of the NGOs’ leadership noted:

> Engagement with [right wing party politicians] can be really difficult. We’ve met four in the last 12 months. That is four more than we’ve met through the last 27 years. We had met zero [right wing party politicians] on our own through all of our years. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

This intentional strategy of relationship building is particularly visible through Islamic Relief's online yearly video postings. The posts include members of Congress or representatives of government agencies sending religious holiday greetings to the Muslim American community with the following tagline included on its website:

> Seventy members of Congress from across the United States have shared video messages and letters of recognition with Islamic Relief USA, expressing their "Ramadan Mubarak!" greetings and commending the Islamic Relief family for its humanitarian and advocacy work. IRUSA thanks them for their engagement with the Muslim community and their recognition of this blessed season (Islamic Relief USA, 2020).

Here, the NGOs leverage their relationships with well-known national politicians as a way to elevate the position their religious identity with their online followers. One interviewee explicitly mentioned the intentional nature of such positioning as a way to showcase the NGOs' acceptance within the larger national political sector.

Finally, one of the most impactful strategies of institutional positioning has been the NGOs' public focus on certain national political issues. Interviewees and survey respondents from both NGOs pointed to an operational trend in outside expectations of their group's advocacy efforts. Specifically, an interviewee noted that government members expect Muslim NGOs to focus on international causes:

> When we started to seriously invest in advocacy, we were only expected to advocate for international affairs for some reason. We would be on in meetings and staffers would ask if we're here to talk about Syria or Gaza. We would grin and say "nope, domestic violence" or whatever the domestic issue would be. They would be surprised that Muslims are interested in government aid to marginalized communities, and access to

> health care [….] They are under the impression that since we are a Muslim NGO we must be here to talk about terrorism or international issues. They always think that Muslims are foreign, they are other, and they must not be talking about domestic issues. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

In response, interviewees from the Muslim NGOs both remembered their added investment in understanding national advocacy agendas. One interviewee explained that their organization "spent so much time learning about national issues and understanding where we could play a role through our advocacy efforts just to prove that we had a voice when it came to national issues" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Another interviewee from the second NGO noted their progress and current positioning:

> Now, we come prepared to meet the politicians with stacks of data on the national issue. We show them that as a Muslim NGO, we're serving national communities and are here to talk about national issues. We've spent so many years getting rejected that now we come prepared, and we've become the go-to Muslim advocacy organization. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Through careful preparation, a focus on national concerns, and committed advocacy efforts, the NGOs have positioned themselves as key Muslim actors within the national civil society sector despite the continuing presence of islamophobia and other biases.

3.4.2 Membership Negotiation

Muslim NGOs collaborate with other actors in the national context by strategically connecting with government agencies. Previously outlined constraints associated with government funding opportunities deeply impact the NGOs' processes of organizational collaboration with government agencies. Interviewees from both NGOs highlighted the link

between the NGOs' choice of refusing government funding while still capitalizing on the collaborative potential with certain government organizations:

> Since we try our best to refuse government funding, we complement that by collaborating with them as much as possible [….] We stay away from any security programming but since we already keep government at a distance by not taking their funding, we always are looking for opportunities to work with them. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Through this strategy the NGOs engage in collaborative efforts with government as active civil society political actors while avoiding issues related to constraints posed by government funding guidelines. For example, representatives from both organizations note that much of the governments' grant language is "not inclusive" and/or "ties funding to an understated religious identity." In response, the NGOs have a nuanced strategy to negotiate their membership regarding government funding. NGOs such as Islamic Relief U.S.A. strive to stand at a distance from government, while also ensuring their stakeholders that distance does not negatively impact their relationships with government. For example, Islamic Relief U.S.A. notes on their website:

> Islamic Relief U.S.A. receives no government funding. We have an excellent working relationship with the federal government. We work with US agencies such as the US Department of Agriculture on project […] Islamic Relief USA's leadership and staff also serve on boards and regularly attend US government meetings related to the work we do. Each year, US Office of Personnel Management lists us in its Combined Federal Campaign catalogue (CFC #10194) as an approved charity to which employees are encouraged to donate (Islamic Relief, 2020).

This type of statement categorically disassociates the NGO from government funding, scrutiny, or expectations. However, the organizational articulation also highlights that the lack of

government funding does not negatively affect the NGO as they continue to engage in collaborative efforts with government agencies. In fact, the NGO specifically promotes their collaboration with government.

Muslim NGOs manage constraints related to governmental funding by repeatedly referencing their history of collaborative efforts with government agencies despite their refusal to take governmental monies. To do so fruitfully, Muslim NGOs such as Islamic Relief U.S.A. publicly identify their previous positive experiences with governmental organizations. For example, the NGO notes in a public statement:

> We educate, engage, and partner with various agencies within the federal government, including the US Department of Agriculture, Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Health and Human Services. We facilitate dialogue with members of Congress and with state and local officeholders, such as mayors of the cities where we have offices and members of city councils. The Mayor of Alexandria visited our Alexandria, Virginia and read the City Council Statement of Inclusiveness, and are regularly invited to attend the New York City Mayor's annual Ramadan iftar [….] Beyond the wide array of events that we host, we also engage extensively on policy, especially in coalition on matters related to our humanitarian work and protecting the space for non-profit organizations to implement their missions. (Islamic Relief, 2020)

Essentially, Muslim NGOs strive to avoid the potential consequences of governmental funding while building their legitimacy as credible political actors.

3.4.3 Activity Coordination

To best synchronize organizational religious identity through all operations, the public affairs departments of Muslim NGOs are deeply connected to their organization's national operations and programming. Throughout the last decade, both NGOs have begun to use interactive internal activity planning processes to position their religious organizational identity at the forefront of their political role. Particularly, interviewees note the centrality of the government affairs and advocacy departments to all their operations:

> Our public affairs teams always include us in their work. Our work in programming counts on them, and they count on us. If we don't give them the latest data about a specific national program, then they can't make the case to a specific politician and advocate for an issue. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

This strategy of integration allows the NGOs to build synchronized programming across the organization as they "share documents, folders, and make sure that they have the similar priorities" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Through their deep connections to the various offices, the public affairs teams collate national information that they can then later present to specific politicians as part of their advocacy efforts. As one interviewee explained:

> We work really hard internally across the country to make sure we arrive prepared. We worked hard to establish a political presence so now the last thing we want is to get in the room with someone important and not have the numbers to back up whatever cause we're there to discuss [….] It's simple things really like having a shared file in the cloud with national programming folks. I can just pop in and have their latest numbers and that makes my life a lot easier. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

As a result of this strategy, the NGOs internally synchronize their religious values between programming data and national political advocacy needs. Here, the NGOs position their religious identity by being deeply connected to Muslim communities' political causes as they arise in the national context. Both Muslim NGOs are able to make direct connections between their religious beliefs and political national advocacy efforts.

3.4.4 Self-Structuring

Muslim NGOs have also created internal structures to promote the role of religion within their organizational identity through the last decade. Primarily, Muslim NGOs have done so by creating a public affairs department that is entirely dedicated to their political role in the national context. As interviewees noted:

> Internally, we knew we needed to have a structural shift and that the way the organization was operating couldn't sustain government affairs. So, we hired a new team for the job. […] We quickly understood that we needed a whole department that could just be dedicated to our advocacy work. It couldn't just be something that we could add onto our executive teams' to-do list. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Adding to the new structural change through the public affairs departments, the NGOs' also highlighted particular hiring strategies that enforced their religious identity through their political work:

> There was a very conscious decision from our leadership to make sure that the team that would work directly with politicians was particularly inclusive and filled with as many types of 'Muslim' sects and demographics as possible. […] They hired me because I had a lot of experience organizing for years. So I knew the politicians they needed to contact, and where to direct us when it came to specific advocacy campaigns. They told me

> during the interview that they're trying to fill the new department with political insiders. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

In addition to the creation of the public affairs office and the hiring priorities, one of the NGOs noted that the office's public affairs team gets privileged access to the leadership: "Their work can have time sensitive issues and that requires a direct line to leadership. The public affairs office has bi-weekly debriefs with leadership while your programming officers might have a monthly meeting at best" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Though these internal structural processes and varied strategies, the NGOs reinforce their constant concern with external perceptions of their faith identity throughout their political engagement activities. Both NGOs made internal choices with deep implications for external needs in order to promote a strong religious identity through their political role.

3.5 Conclusion

The religious organizational identity of both Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK is directly associated with specified elements of the national political context. The context's previously outlined constraints can delay and challenge the presentation of that identity, while other contextual opportunities elevate and embolden it. In opposition to the more open, interactive process in the international context, the NGOs' political role is much more precarious at the national level. The less than sure footing is particularly evident through the organizations' only recent understanding of their role within this space and resulting shift towards external affairs and organizational focus on institutional positioning. Here, the NGOs' organizational priorities are set in line with their religious beliefs, but constantly negotiated to with the immediate context. Rather than strictly celebrate and emphasize the positive guidance provided by the religious ideology of Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK, the Muslim NGOs also

focus on the success of their national programming to deflect attention from any further misalignments. Through their organizing efforts, their collaborative partnerships, and their structural priorities, the NGOs link some of their core religious beliefs to current national issues.

As a result of these interactive processes, the Muslim NGOs organizational identity remains in a position of adjustment within the national context. The overall strategy employed through all the internal and external flows of the organization is that of a progressive establishment of religious organizational identity. To avoid contextual constraints such as issues around anti-terrorist finance and government funding, Muslim NGOs focus on muting their religious identity, highlighting their national programming, and aligning with trustworthy and well positioned actors in the space. To amplify contextual opportunities such as Muslim political organizing and activism, the NGOs promote successful collaborations, and educate actors in the national context in regard to the existing alignments between humanitarian and religious values.

4 CHAPTER 4: LOCAL CONTEXT

Muslim NGOs that fulfill political roles within the national context and global aid roles within the international context originated within local communities in their home countries. Local contexts present Muslim NGOs with a dynamic and complex environment where their work can flourish. While the national and international contexts focus on the structural and political capacities of the NGOs, here the work of charity and communal assistance efforts emerge in the forefront with a particular focus on local faith traditions. To understand the Muslim NGOs' foundational environment and how it influences Muslim NGOs, this chapter begins with an exposition of the history of communal religious charity. Then, it gives an overview of the multiple actors ranging from local donors, local faith leaders and communities, government entities, beneficiaries, secular charitable groups, other faith-based charitable organizations, and Muslim NGOs. The chapter subsequently identifies unique opportunities and constraints that are a byproduct of these interactions. Moreover, it outlines articulations of the NGOs' religious identity within this context through the four communicative flows.

4.1 Local Charity: A History

Early articulations of charity appear in all three Abrahamic traditions. Charity, while practiced somewhat differently in all major world cultures and religions, encompasses the fundamental value and practice of "individual benevolence and caring" (Anheiner, 2000, p.8). In Judaism, the Torah cements charity as a way of life through the concept of Tzedakah. Jewish religious traditions consider charity as a way of expressing thanks to God, to ask forgiveness from God, or to request a favor from God (Bird, 1982). In fact, Judaism presents this charitable tradition in the Talmud in Tractate Baba Bathra as "equal in importance to all other commandments combined" (9a). Forms of assistance to the poor, synagogues, or health-care

institutions all fulfill the religious duty of Tzedakah. In the Christian tradition, charity is a service or loan to God as a direct way to reject material wealth and its deceptions, as well as an embodiment of the goodness trait of creation (Anderson, 2013). The Bible notes the importance of charity in multiple ways. As mentioned in Isaiah 58:10 "Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon." Similarly, the concept of *zakah* in Islamic theology echoes this conceptualization as a "transfer payment from the wealthy to the poor for the purpose of redistribution of wealth and income in the society" (Kahf, 1989, p.14). Practically, *zakah* is a means for wealth distribution allowing for communal sharing. As the third of the five pillars of Islam, *zakah* is a tax system requiring the believers to give alms to the poor (Kochuyt, 2009). The Quran (believed by Muslims to be the direct word of God) repeatedly orders the faithful to "Worship none save Allah (only), and be good to parents and to kindred and to orphans and the needy, and speak kindly to mankind; and establish worship and pay the poor- due" (The Qur'an, 2: 83). The Quran does not consider wealth as private property. Rather, in Islam, wealth is a gift from God and practicing Muslims must fulfill their religious responsibility by displaying generosity towards others (Benthall, 2007; Güner, 2005). Similarly, in terms of the beneficiaries of the *zakah*, the Quran specifies:

> The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and (for) the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is Knower, Wise. (Qur'an, 9: 60)

Although central to all three monotheistic faith-traditions, theological articulations of charity vary from an honorable moral value to a religious requirement with regulatory guidelines.

Based on these varying religious ideologies, faith communities apply their spiritual beliefs into daily social practice. In Ancient Israel, for example, priestly families (Levites) outlined norms of charity through simple structures guiding landowners and hospitality directives, along with larger social expectations like public communal offerings. This decentralized system was a defining trait of the ethnic collectivity of Jewish communities through Rabbinic Judaism (Bird, 1982). Additionally, the elaborate social directives directly tied communal practices of Zedakah to the religious attributes of God's righteousness. Social charitable practices are also present in Christian traditional life. Christianity centers the ethic of charity around the idea of waiting and preparing for the Day of Judgment or the coming of the kingdom of God. This Christian ideology led communities to live by "a communal ethic of mutual assistance" (Bird, 1982, p. 89). In practice, early Christian communities translated these ethical beliefs into robust traditions of traveling missionaries, vows of poverty, and communal distribution of wealth (Anderson, 2013). Likewise, early Muslim communities followed Prophetic guidelines and systems for the collection and distribution of *zakah* (Bukhari, 1981). To best manage the collection of communal charity, the Islamic institution of *Bayt al-Mal* (House of Wealth) emerged in the seventh century as the sole organization responsible for collecting taxes and *zakah* (alms) and helping the needy (Hayette, 2018).

Although based in pre-established religious traditions, modern secular understandings of charity play a significant role in articulating more contemporary legal definitions of the concept. In early modern Europe, the conceptualization of charity departed from strict religious understandings. Meanings of charity progressively shifted towards processes of "examination, categorization, and regulation of the poor in order to try to limit their numbers and control their activities" (Safley, 2003, p. 3). The 1522 Holy Roman Empire reform ordinances, for example,

brought about a radical reorganization placing relief in the hand of political authorities, who in turn prohibited begging and centralized financial resources (Nistor, 2018). Consequently, charity quickly became a "rationalized enterprise and its religious significance was eliminated or even transformed into the opposite significance" (Weber, 1978, p. 589). Departing from previous faith-based conceptualizations of charity, this period presents a shift towards a modern bureaucracy of secular aid that is separate from social religious beliefs.

Gradually, modern nations states formalized the definition of charitable organizations into their legal structures. For example, the United States formally recognized the nonprofit sector in the decades following WWII to better regulate tax policies (Gruber & Hungerman, 2007). Specifically, the term charitable organization refers to “entities classified in 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 and subsequent revisions: nonstock corporations and trusts formed for charitable, educational, religious, and civic purposes which are exempt from taxation and to which donors can make tax-deductible contributions” (Hall, 2016, p. 15). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Charity Commission of England and Wales, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator oversee the registration and maintenance of charitable organizations. Moreover, Section 1 of the NGOs Act of 1996 specifically defines a charity as an organization “established for charitable purposes only, and calls to be subject to the control of the High Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction with respect to NGOs” (Connolly et al., 2013, p. 62). Such detailed legal frameworks and requirements shift religious conceptualizations of charity to more secular understandings of the concept.

Today, local American and British communities have embraced charity as a crucial component of a healthy social environment. Local communities in the United States and the

United Kingdom benefit their respective citizenries through direct action and impactful participation in a complex philanthropic network and social programming. As of 2018, the non-profit sector in the United States encompassed a total of 1.6 million organizations (United Nations, 2020). Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, the voluntary sector numbered 166,592 organizations (United Nations, 2020). The latest boom of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) sector has added to this extensive presence (Chen & Bouvain, 2009). As a product of the for-profit sector, the proliferation of CSR points to an upward trend of social moral obligation to the betterment of communities across the Atlantic. Working in tandem with complex philanthropic networks, local charitable efforts have the ability to operate (relatively) independently from complex local politics while engaging in socially impactful, collaborative efforts (Hall, 2016). Specifically, grassroots charitable efforts skillfully leverage local communities during instances of impactful catastrophes ranging from health crises to natural disasters (Colten, et al., 2008). To better assist American and British communities in need, local communities use charity as the speediest mechanism for social impact today.

While modern democracies have secularized social systems involving charity at the local level, faith-based charitable organizations are at the center of this large non-governmental aid apparatus. Due to increasingly negative connotations associated with public welfare and the rising call for a social commitment to non-governmental charity efforts, local faith-based NGOs across the United States and the United Kingdom are at the forefront of community assistance (Loseke, 1997). More specifically, Muslim NGOs vigorously participate in the vibrant sector of community charity. To better understand Muslim NGOs' charitable activities along with the place of religion withing their organizational identity, this chapter will now map the local actors and their accompanying roles in the charity sector.

4.2 Mapping the Key Actors in the Local Context

The local context includes multiple actors including donors in the home community where the NGOs are based, local government actors, beneficiaries on the ground, secular NGOs, and faith-based NGOs. Although these different actors play diverse roles within the local context, they all interact with and are reliant upon one another. This chapter, in particular, focuses on the local environments in the United States and the United Kingdom due to the fact that the two are the home countries of the religious NGOs utilized as case studies. Home community donors play a managing role by funding charity, along with a supporting role by setting the priorities for local charitable actors. Beneficiaries play an agenda setting role, as their needs can drive the NGOs' focus areas of priority. Local government entities play a structural role by providing local NGOs in general, and religious groups in particular, with supportive spaces and administrative assistance. Secular NGOs play a connective role by using their position in the space to elevate other faith-based NGOs and their communities along with their own status. Finally, other religious NGOs play a leadership role as strong community coordinators and representatives.

Community donors are central actors within the local network due to their ability to foster the success of NGOs' establishment, operation, and growth. Donors' individual financial support, along with their elaborate supportive financial networks, allow secular charitable organizations, religious NGOs, and Muslim NGOs to exist and operate as charitable organizations with a certain level of independence form government entities (Ramanath, 2016). Charitable giving is generally high in American and British households, but the motivations for participating in such activities differ. American donors tend to gift to causes with a visible

nearby impact, while British donors contribute to more faraway causes that they deem to be more in need (Wright, 2001). In both the United States and the United Kingdom, donors' strong links to charitable giving result in high donor retention rates (Ramanath, 2016). As powerful stakeholders, donors leverage their financial contributions along with shared values to influence NGOs' overall agenda and programming priorities (Clarke et al., 2014; Ramanath, 2016).

Communities of faith use charitable work as a way to practice their shared beliefs and ideologies in their localities. More specifically, the religious identification of donors plays a significant role in their willingness to give to charitable causes both at home and abroad (Ranganathan & Henley, 2008). In the United States, Americans donate most to organizations and causes that they feel connected to through a shared faith (Andreoni et al., 2016). For example, in the case of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, donations were highest when both donors and recipients shared a similar religious background (Fong & Luttmer, 2009). In turn, high levels of association with faith-based NGOs also result in a higher level of volunteering commitment (Kang, 2016). Ultimately, donors leverage their position within the local context by playing a foundational role in the creation of NGOs, along with a more supportive role over the long term through their financial commitment (Uddin & Belal, 2019).

Local governments in the United States and the United Kingdom are more open to religious actors than their counterparts in at the international and national levels. While secular discourse strongly steers national government institutions, American and British government structures at the city and the state levels tend to welcome, and even favor, religious forms of social organizing (Butler, et al., 2008). In the United States, local governments depend on the strong partnership and support of local religious organizations as a way to bolster their credibility with national federal actors (Anderoni, et al, 2018). Furthermore, American local communities

have a long tradition of religious diversity resulting in close ties between city or town governments and their religious community organizations (Butler & Balmer, 2008). The central role of churches and mosques in local American communities is a testament to this relationship. For example, local governments directly connected with churches and mosques serve as primary sites for interfaith local programming, local political visits, political campaigning, and voter registration (Hayette, 2018). In the British context, local governments have historically had close conversations with local and suburban mosques (Naylor & Ryan, 2002). Currently, government connections to religious organizations boost local programming by expanding the network of beneficiaries. For example, local British religious groups work closely with local governments to lead community welfare services for some of the most at-risk populations. Particularly, in moments of crisis, local governments rely on the distinctiveness of religious NGOs' work and their deeply rooted networks for immediate and long-term volunteer efforts (Gazley & Brudney, 2005; Smith, 2002). Local governments support religious NGOs through extensive funding, long term contractual commitments, and access to elaborate bureaucratic assistance (Bennett, 2008).

Recipients of charity find themselves in an increasingly advantageous position in local contexts. In the past, local beneficiaries suffered the consequences of poor aid management (Beamon & Kotleba, 2006), misaligned aid priorities (Bridges, 2010), poor humanitarian aid execution, and unsafe environments (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010). However, in the contemporary environment, the charity sector is progressively placing a growing focus on the prioritization of beneficiaries' role within program creation and execution. As recipients of aid, beneficiaries interact directly with NGOs through community advocacy, social development programming, and local leadership development efforts to make their voices heard (Chowdhury et al., 2018).

Here, local beneficiaries play a pivotal role in informing and guiding charity operations and programming goals (Crowley & Ryan, 2013). For example, local NGOs in the United States and the United Kingdom depend on beneficiary insight and participation for the creation of successful programs ranging from low-income housing programs, to soup kitchens, to public health awareness campaigns. A strong beneficiary presence during the NGOs' planning process allows community representatives to voice their priorities and advocate for accountability mechanisms such as independent program measurement and evaluation (Bennett, 2008). This type of close communication and inclusive process allows beneficiaries to forge strong links to non-profit NGOs.

Secular NGOs are another vital set of actors working within the local network of community aid efforts. In the United States and the United Kingdom, local NGOs spearhead community efforts tackling social issues such as domestic abuse, homelessness, after school programming, food security, veteran support, and public health (Pearce & Doh, 2015). Secular charitable organizations hold a central position as the ambassadors of local ideals of community altruism and assistance (Profatilov et al., 2015). Here, NGOs use their position as credible community representatives as an advantage to engage with local publics directly. For example, organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Feeding America work in close collaboration with local religious organizations and NGOs in various capacities (Handforth et al., 2013). Many of the NGOs in this context not only partner with religious groups, they also invest in positioning wholesome grassroots collaborations as a marker of excellence in the field (Orgut et al., 2016). Secular NGOs function as a central node between various local actors as they bridge the gap between local governments, American and British donors, beneficiaries, and faith-based NGOs.

Overall, faith-based NGOs play a leadership role in the local context. In times of crisis, faith-based charitable organizations strategically leverage their long history of communal religious giving to access hard to reach communities. Due to their closeness to local beneficiaries, faith-based NGOs use targeted programming to empower the community and extend their efforts into more systemic local issues (Chowdhury, et al., 2018). For example, a handful of faith-based organizations led the effort to combat the homelessness crisis in Seattle (Mejido et al., 2020). As part of their programming, religious NGOs directly coordinated with local places of worship, as well as other local intermediaries, to reach a growing population of homeless beneficiaries (King, 2019). However, in order to play a leadership role and service a wide spectrum of beneficiaries, most religious NGOs design their programs with an initial focus on the universality of religious charitable values (Siddiqui, 2014). Simultaneously, religious NGOs link these values to common local social developmental issues through the provision of direct aid, financial assistance, structures of community microfinance, and rights-based advocacy (Chowdhury et al., 2020). Faith-based NGOs do so through activities such as accelerated direct engagement, community capacity building, local leadership development, or community resource mobilization (Islam et al., 2019). Religious NGOs elevate their position in the local context by using their history of charitable traditions in modern secularized communities.

Additionally, faith-based NGOs are highly effective in connecting people of faith in their home communities to other localities. Religious NGOs use the “cultural proximity thesis” (Palmer, 2011) to their advantage by aiming to accomplish more comprehensive charitable goals on the ground than their secular counterparts. This school of thought maintains that NGOs (and in this case Muslim NGOs in particular) work more effectively within groups identifying with the same religion, as these affiliated organizations are both more culturally adept to the situations

at hand and welcome by other actors within other local contexts (Palmer, 2011). For example, local faith organizations have strong ties with internally displaced persons and refugee populations. In the last decade, a total of about 700,000 people were granted asylum and resettled in local American and British communities (UNHCR, 2020). The majority of the refugee populations in the United States and the United Kingdom also identify with a faith-tradition (Fountain, 2013; Parsitau, 2011), and a strong link exists between refugees' ability to survive the conditions of forced migration and their ability to connect with local faith-based organizations. Research on refugee populations highlights the centrality of local churches in closely working with the NGOs on the ground to provide beneficiaries with spiritual and emotional support (Feener & Fountain, 2018). Here, charity operations provide cultural, faith-based comfort and the physical structures of host houses of worship to deliver aid to their beneficiaries (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; Moyer, 2012). Local religious charity programming also embraces a deep understanding of the refugees'

> own vehicles for expressing their faith, permitting them to inhabit a world of their own construction rather than one that is wholly contingent on others. […They also serve as] a space for refugees to practice their faith through the nurturing of relationships, enabling them to participate in 'home-making' despite the constraints set by the state and the UNHCR. (Zaman, 2012, p. 145)

Faith-based NGOs present these cases to home communities as a means to connect and link through religious beliefs (Uddin & Belal, 2019). In turn, cultural proximity allows faith-based NGOs to be more efficient, comparatively sustainable, and more readily available for mobilized efforts (Orji, 2011).

Finally, Muslim NGOs play an active role in their respective local charitable environments. Religious traditions and a variety of faith practices are central to the local contexts within which these Muslim NGOs operate. Local and communal spaces present religious practice with a communal place "at the heart of the story of America itself" (Butler et al., 2008, p.11). More specifically, the narrative of religion in the American context as a "story about people" significantly elevates religious NGOs' position in their respective localities (Butler et al., 2008, p.12). Similarly, in the case of the United Kingdom, religion plays a central role within the narrative of local identity's overall social discourse (Spalek, 2005). Although personal religious identification is in decline, British communities heavily depend on traditional religious structures such as churches, and social networks of religious assistance, to support communal functions (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, 2015). However, in both cases, the religious discourse in question is historically Christian. By extension, the role of Muslim NGOs within this overwhelmingly Christian local environment is in and of itself an emerging phenomenon with limited experience (Abdullahi, 2019; Chowdhury, Wahab & Islam, 2018).

Muslim NGOs play a substantial role of representing the social impact of Muslim communities in both the United States and the United Kingdom as the populations of Muslims grow in both countries. As a result of the NGOs' presence, Muslim populations in both countries can publicly perform religious duties (*zakah*) in their respective communities by financially investing in projects that present local Muslim alternatives or showcase common ground with other faith-based and secular agendas. For example, Muslim Aid UK and Islamic Relief USA use their organizational capacity to present Muslim local communities across the United States and the United Kingdom with pre-vetted projects that align with *zakah* requirements (Salek, 2015). To expand such initiatives, Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK have built extensive

outreach networks throughout numerous cities and various local communities. Additionally, although both organizations base their local efforts within the Muslim American and British communities, they also work closely with multiple Christian and Jewish communities and other charitable organizations (Khan, 2017). These broad charitable networks further empower western Muslim communities to proudly position their religious practices as a practical tool to serve their local communities (Khan, 2015; Salek, 2005).

Additionally, Muslim NGOs bridge the gap between other local governments and less accessible communities of faith due to their familiarity with religious traditions and their credibility within their faith communities. For example, Muslim NGOs are able to take part in programming dealing with socially delicate issues such as educational programming to combat terrorist rhetoric, as well as issues of domestic violence, homelessness, and food shortages (Jafar, 2017; Orji, 2011;Thaut, 2009;). Current research links the organizations' success to Muslim charity workers' ability to more authentically engage with beneficiaries through the basis of common or related religious interpretations (Austin, 2014; Clarke & Ware, 2015; Lunn, 2009). In other instances, Muslim NGOs play an integral role in the helping impoverished communities maintain culturally specific traditions and structures such as matchmaking (Clarke & Ware, 2015), wedding services (Kidwai et.al, 2014), and access to interest-free loans (Wiktorowicz & Forouki, 2015). Regardless of their recent organizing efforts within their respective local contexts, Muslim NGOs are well positioned in localities across the United States and the United Kingdom to actively participate in their respective localities.

The variety of local actors and the complexity of their interactions emerge as an intricate terrain for Muslim NGOs to navigate. The variety of the actors and the complexity of their interactions in the local context can deeply impact Muslim NGOs' religious organizational

identity positioning. In order for Muslim NGOs to grow their operations and maximize their interactions with various actors within the local context, they must capitalize upon the contextual opportunities that are available to them while sidestepping consequential constraints. To best assist those organizations as they encounter these complex local structures, the following section will describe key constraints and opportunities operating within the local context.

4.3 Constraints and Opportunities for Muslim NGOs

While navigating the complex local environment, Muslim NGOs face various challenges and opportunities that intersect with the ways in which they express their religious identities within local contexts. The Muslim charitable sector as a whole actively amplifies the potential impact of faith-based NGOs and highlights the ability of American and British Muslims to assist their local communities. Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK serve as useful models to better understand religious NGOs' experience in those two countries as both organizations have grown out of local religious community efforts (Islamic Relief, 2010-2020) and become indispensable actors at the local level (Clarke et al., 2014).

Muslim NGOs' current standing in the local landscape can both constrain and propel their formulations of religious organizational identity. In order to gain a better understanding of the environment that these religious NGOs face as they interact with various actors in the local context, this section examines the literature analyzing Muslim NGOs operating within western localities. While the discussion below does not represent an exhaustive list of all the constraints and opportunities facing Muslim NGOs at the local level, they outline major dynamics impacting the ways in which Muslim NGOs face advantageous opportunities and potential challenges within the context. Each section begins by defining the constraint or opportunity, highlighting relevant literature, and showcasing specific exemplars within the context.

4.3.1 Social Islamophobia

Conceptually, social Islamophobia is a multifaceted and complex notion. Previous studies articulate adjacent formulations such as private Islamophobia as the "fear, suspicion, and violent targeting of Muslims by private actors" (Beydoun, 2018, p.32) and soft Islamophobia as a social environment that "transforms 'Muslim' into a cultural category" (Islam, 2018, p. 279). As noted in previous chapters, structural Islamophobia concretely results in suspicions on the part of government institutions and actors manifesting through the enactment and advancement of laws, policies, and programming. In contrast, soft Islamophobia is deeply anchored in fears, suspicions, and social targeting of Muslims by community actors such as individuals or institutions acting in the capacity that is not directly tied to the state (Beydoun, 2018). Lying at the intersection of these articulations, Husain identifies social Islamophobia in her work on Muslim Community Organizations in Australia as "more harmful than the crude, structural, and explicit manifestations of the problem" (2019, p. 480). Specifically, her research underlines the extensive challenges it presents to Muslim organizations operating within western communities. Within the parameters of this project, and more specifically these local contexts, localized social Islamophobia refers to a socially comprehensive, anti-Muslim sentiment present in American and British localities with great impact on Muslim communities.

The long history of anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States and the United Kingdom informs a culture of localized, social Islamophobia. Overall, residents of Western Christian majority countries have practiced various forms of Muslim community alienation. This record of social othering and vilification of Muslims and Jews as direct enemies to western Christians dates back to the unification of Christendom in the Middle Ages. It ranges from religious

background separation of neighborhoods to blocking Muslim and Jewish communal participation (Medovoi, 2012). Later, throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, Western Christians' utilized "existing hostility towards the Muslims to invoke a case of unity and community" across local European communities (Mastnak, 2003, p. 207). Specifically, historians point to the Spanish Inquisition as a focal point in the conceptualization of modern social Islamophobia and overall communal practices exclusionary of Muslim populations (Rana, 2007). During that period, the Spanish Inquisition amplified previous historic events of transatlantic slavery and European colonialism through an explicit othering of Muslims and Jews (Pierre, 2013). In the American context, Muslim communities had a similar history of alienation and demonization. This rejection of the Muslim faith at the personal and communal level manifested through various moments in American history where being 'Muslim' was openly used as a slur. Various historic examples from Thomas Jefferson's vilification as a 'Muslim' in the late 1700s, to similar accusations that President Obama faced in the 2008 elections clearly showcase a problematic history of social Islamophobia (Khan, 2015).

Practically, local communities across the United States and the United Kingdom often encapsulate this history of social Islamophobia. Previously discussed structural Islamophobia in both the United States and the United Kingdom at the national and international levels draws on modern local anti-Muslim local sentiments (Alterman & Hunter, 2008; Singer, 2008). These views see Islam as a dangerous faith tradition, which ultimately fosters a hostile local environment of alienation (Cesari, 2011; Ogan, et. al., 2014). Additionally, at the communal level, social Islamophobia is usually displayed through a variety of discriminatory practices such as hate speech and/or crimes (Haddad & Harb, 2014), nativism (Zamalin, 2019), and xenophobia (Islam, 2018). Although progress is being made through locally led progressive efforts based in open

ideologies of social inclusion, social Islamophobia remains on the rise in the forms of religious harassment, retaliation, and hate crimes (Esposito & Mogahed, 2008). For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center reports a rise in the number of anti-Muslim hate groups from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016 (SPLC, 2020). Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, attitude surveys report that 67 percent of people in Britain link Islam to fanaticism, 68 percent consider it incompatible with modern and western values, and 64 percent believe that Islam treats women poorly (BBC, 2018). Moreover, acts of social Islamophobia include the desecration of mosques such as the Dar al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, Minnesota (CAIR, 2019), attacks on Muslim communities during religious holidays such as the vandalized Eid banners in Leicester (BBC, 2018), hate-crimes directed at women who are visibly identifiable as Muslims such as the brutal triple murder of Muslim medical students by their next door neighbor in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (CAIR, 2019). The Council of American Islamic Relations reported 78 attacks on local American mosques in 2015— the highest number since the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks (CAIR, 2019). On the other side of the Atlantic, social Islamophobia makes a similar mark on communities across the United Kingdom, with rising levels of hate crimes against Muslims and acts of vandalism of mosques and Muslim owned businesses (Allen, 2017).

Cumulatively, social Islamophobia constrains Muslim NGOs by creating a hostile environment for them within their local communities. As a result, Muslim communities in the United States and the United Kingdom are highly apprehensive within their local communities (Kortmann & Rosenow-Williams, 2013). Research conducted across 20 major cities in the United States finds that American Muslims feel most fearful while organizing in their home community (ISPU, 2020). Similarly in the United Kingdom, 87 percent of British Muslims residing in London and Manchester note that they are apprehensive of Islamophobic attacks if

and when they participate in Muslim student association events, group prayers at local mosques, or community gatherings during religious holidays (Malik, 2013). As a result, Muslim community organizations tend to limit their outreach efforts to familiar localities, take longer to build trust in inter-faith partnerships, foster caution in their engagement with local Christian communities, and spend disproportionate resources vetting and consulting before launching new programming. Even if attacks do not occur, Muslim community organizations in both the United Kingdom and the United States practice 'self-silencing' to avoid conflicts and social retaliation (Breen-Smyth, 2014). Overall, this hostile environment burdens local Muslim NGOs' current efforts and stifles their potential growth within their local communities.

4.3.2 The Range of Western Muslim Communities

Another factor that constrains Muslim NGOs in the local context is the breadth and diversity of western Muslim communal ideologies. Local Muslims comprise a breadth of ideological positions and backgrounds in American and British communities (Barzegar, 2015), including the Nation of Islam, secular Muslim groups, and Shia groups, among others. In turn, Muslim Americans and British Muslims often refrain from publicly sharing their commitments to particular theological schools within the Muslim faith or their participation in the differing traditions of worship practices (Siddiqui, 2014). Muslim communities, however, leverage an all-encompassing categorization of western Muslims as a unifying tool for easier local recognition, credibility, and assimilation into localities where their communities are just getting established (Ghaneabassiri, 2010).

As localized Muslim communities evolve and begin to present increasingly pluralistic identities within their western contexts, they have tended towards more public displays of their religious practices. Today, some western Muslim communities express their complex identities

including their various races, socio-economic backgrounds, ideological commitments, and traditional practices (Khan, 2015). As a result, the more developed Muslim communities across the United States and the United Kingdom may expect equivalent sophistication from the local organization representing them.

The complexity of modern-day, western Muslims presents a challenge to Muslim NGOs in the local context. Principally, the burden of representing diverse Muslim communities with a wide spectrum of religious commitment and priorities complicates the NGOs' programmatic priorities (Siddiqui, 2017). For example, conservative western Muslims understand *zakah* and *sadaqa* in direct relation to their particular religious school of thought's Islamic interpretation (Alterman & Hunter, 2004). This group is mainly composed of first-generation immigrant Muslims who prioritize causes in Muslim majority countries and serving Muslim beneficiaries within those countries (Khan, 2018). This segment of the western Muslim community is generally more pious, practicing, and reliant on orthodox understandings of Islamic theology (Yasmin et al., 2014). Liberal western Muslims, in contrast, have a more progressive understanding of *zakah* and *sadaqa* based on a strong link between spiritual practice and universal (more modern and therefore secularized) standards of charity (Barzegar, 2011). This group generally comprises second-generation Muslims who are comparatively disconnected from their parents' home countries and who tend to focus on investing their donations where the need is greatest regardless of the religious identity of the beneficiaries (Martens, 2014). While Muslim NGOs tailored simple and unified messaging to their Muslim donors in the past, the current pluralistic Muslim community necessitates a more sophisticated, targeted messaging strategy.

4.3.3 Western-Muslim Identity

Despite potential drawbacks, the rise of localized Muslim identity in western communities also provides a potentially fruitful opportunity for Muslim NGOs in the local context. The current state of identity of Muslim communities across the United States and the United Kingdom is the result of a communal sense of identity that is in continuous movement and always in process (Hall, 2016). As religious minorities, the definition of identity is that of 'becoming' a part of the local group rather than 'being' or belonging to' the group by virtue of their origins. Here, local Muslims in the United States and the United Kingdom are constantly negotiating and producing their sense of self through representation (Khan, 2015; Siddiqui, 2014). Today, Muslim communities across the Atlantic are currently embracing their hyphenated identities as American/British-Muslims. While recognizing real issues of lingering social Islamophobia, the current position of Islam in western culture is moving in an opportune direction for local Muslim NGOs to support Muslim communities as they build strong communal structures that promote their complex religious identities (Aldohni, 2008; Yasmeen, 2012).

Local communities in the United States and the United Kingdom are actively taking on decades of social Islamophobia in the West through a vivacious revival of Muslim identity in the last decade. In the United States, 97 percent of American Muslims completely embrace and celebrate their hyphenated identity (Pew, 2019). The rise in American Muslim youth activism showcases this pride and sense of belonging as they claim a "greater right to participate in communal life" (Khan, 2015, p.57). Here, the younger generations of American and British Muslims are heavily impacting the position of their community's religious identity (Madge et al., 2014). As a result, local Muslim identity in both the United States and the United Kingdom is infusing into the mainstream (Lewis, 2010; McGinty, 2012; Tarlo, 2010). Mainstream pop

culture is filled with images of Muslim Americans such as women wearing the *hijab* in films, television shows, and magazine cover images, as well as in many advertisement campaigns for famous beauty and fashion brands (Contractor, 2012; Minasian, 2020).

American and British communities' rising positive social presence creates a welcoming environment for local organizations. Building on a mainstream, yet layered Muslim identity, Muslim communities are organizing in unprecedented sophisticated ways. For example, the network of Muslim community organizations has grown exponentially over the last decade (Khabeer, 2016). This growth is the result of a multitude of African American Muslim Organizations (Khabeer, 2016; Mauleón, 2018), Latinx Muslim groups (Chitwood, 2019; Feldman, 2019; Mohamed, 2020), and South-East Asian Muslim organizations (Khabeer, 2016). Essentially, Western Muslims are heavily engaged in the building of their communal identities at the local level. As local organizations, Muslims NGOs can capitalize on this contextual opportunity by highlighting the role of religion in their organizational identity.

4.3.4 Religious Charitable Traditions

Finally, elaborate Islamic charitable traditions present Muslim NGOs with a remarkable opportunity in the local context in terms of a (relatively) secure, potential source of funding to assist those in need. Primarily, the extensive detailed guidelines around *zakah* and *sadaqa* practices in the Muslim faith are all part of a complex narrative promoting charity as a local duty. On the one end, *zakah* is an obligatory tax-like charity that is backed with an extensive system of references based in different Islamic schools of interpretations for Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, and other sects of Islam (Kochuyt, 2009). Debates still exist amongst Sharia scholars regarding the Islamic definition of one's wealth (all assets, debt, agricultural products, jewelry, etc.), along with the punishment and consequences for failing to pay one's *zakah* (Siddiqui, 2014). However, most

Sunni scholars agree on a 2.5% of one's total savings and wealth. In essence, this tradition of charitable giving can greatly benefit Muslim NGOs so long as they abide by its religious requirements as interpreted by different strands of the faith.

Similarly, *sadaqa* is voluntary charity that is religiously encouraged (Singer, 2008). In opposition to *zakah*, *sadaqa* encompasses a variety of acts of service, direct monetary donations, and small daily acts of kindness. Furthermore, individual beneficiaries can directly take *sadaqa*. Both the Quran and Prophetic Tradition highlight the significance of the religious practice of *sadaqa* as a selfless act that is reflective of one's piety and devotion to the Divine. Accordingly, Muslim NGOs have the opportunity to highlight the significance of the religious duty to local Muslim communities of donors, along with the impact they have on their operations in terms of program design.

In practice, the development of Islamic charitable giving (encompassing both *zakah* and *sadaqa*) has been particularly beneficial in local communities throughout the United States and the United Kingdom. While Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia mandate *zakah* donations at the state level, practicing Muslims have the ability of choosing their own *zakah* beneficiaries in the West. Historically, Muslim African slaves in the United States recreated the tradition of *sadaqa* (then known as *saraka*) through the offering of rice cakes by women in Antebellum Georgia (Ghaneabassiri, 2010). In more recent years, as Islam has grown in the United States and the United Kingdom, Western Muslims have shifted from dedicating their *zakah* and *sadaqa* towards their countries of origin to investing their *zakah* donations to more local causes and Western-based charitable organizations. Western Muslims actively participate in these religious practices personally and through communal structures such as mosques (Siddiqui, 2014).

Today, local Muslim community organizations rely on this long tradition of religious giving to bolster their ongoing financial viability. Muslim communities on both sides of the Atlantic actively adopt the religious practices of *zakah* and *sadaqa* as a main component of their local identity (Khan, 2015). These traditions propel local Muslim NGOs in their programmatic efforts ranging from local soup kitchens, to interfaith fundraising events. These built-in communal religious practices present Muslim NGOs with a definite donation pool (through *zakah*), along with a growing source of funding (through *sadaqa*).

4.4 Organizational Identity in the Local Context

As active actors operating within the local context, Muslim NGOs present their religious identity through all four constitutive flows. Findings derived from the NGOs' organizational texts, as well as in-depth interviews with numerous employees, showcase comprehensive examples of transactional religious organizational identity at work in the local context. These examples show how contextual constraints and opportunities interact have a transactional relationship with how Muslim NGOs preserve, contour, or propel their religious organizational identity. In the pages that follow, the sections will highlight the various ways in which the respective local contexts shape the religious organizational identity of Muslim NGOs. Next, it showcases concrete examples that fall within each of the communicative flows, with a particular focus on institutional positioning. Specifically, each section will explain how efforts to instill organizational religious identity intersect with contextual constraints and opportunities operative in the local context.

4.4.1 Institutional Positioning

Muslim NGOs have often paid particular attention to positioning themselves as critical actors within the larger sector of community-based charities. Originating from western Muslim

communities, both Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. prioritized centralizing their public presence as Muslim charitable organizations within local communities of faith. In contrast to the national and international contexts where the organizations have only recently begun engaging in institutional positioning efforts, the effort to establish a known, clear identity within the local context has been indispensable since the groups' inception. In fact, leadership from both NGOs highlighted their position with the local context as central to their operations in the national and international sectors. One of the NGOs' CEO noted:

> If it weren't for the strong support of our local communities, we would never be able to run this type of operation. We literally wouldn't have the credibility to go up to politicians and engage with them or to fund programming across the world. We owe it all to them. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Another executive from the second NGO highlighted the need for a steady stream of financial support as a key reason that local communities remain essential to the longevity and success of their organization:

> We are 100% a product of our communities. Without local Muslim support, and interest in having groups like us that can carry out their generous intentions, we wouldn't exist. […] They are our top source of funding and our biggest supporters so yea they're for sure our top priority. (Interviewee, NGO 2).

Another interviewee described the significance of the NGO's positioning within local communities as a strategy for handling social Islamophobia:

> I think that we've really spent the most time building a presence locally because that's what's made us. Through the years, we have fought so many battles on the Islamophobia front, but we could always count on our people back home to always cheer us through.

> Even when we would be dealing with some crazy allegations, they would always have our back so it's only natural that we really spend a lot of time and resources there. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Both Muslim Aid U.K. and Islamic Relief U.S.A. credit the establishment of a strong position in relation to local Muslim donors as a needed first step for expanding out to positioning themselves within the other international and national contexts.

Both NGOs elevate their religious identity by strategically associating themselves with conventional local religious networks. Within this strategy Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. focus their efforts on more traditional expressions of Muslim identities. For example, Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. feature religious figures in their local community outreach programming and lecture series. Similarly, the Muslim NGOs' fundraiser events mostly feature Imams and other religious scholars that appeal to local communities of faith. As one of the NGOs' local outreach officers explained, "most of [our] programming is done hand-in-hand with prominent religious figures that the communities' know and trust" (Interviewee, NGO 1). Notably, the respondent contextualized this speaker strategy as a way to afford western Muslim communities the spaces they need to congregate based on their religious identity:

> We have always known that there's a need amongst Muslims living here to gather beyond mosques, and still feel connected. Our charity work bridges that gap and we make sure to bring in religious scholars to our events so we can provide them with just that. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Interviewees from both NGOs explained that the inclusion of religious figures served as an influential strategy to attract "older, more traditional donors" (Interviewee, NGO 2) who, in turn, are vital for the organizations' financial viability from fundraising efforts. Together, the

examples highlight the need for the NGOs' primary investment in traditional articulations of religious identity as the NGOs showcase their sophisticated understanding of diverse religious practices through a focus on well-established communities of faith.

In tandem with strategic appeals to more traditional religious communities, the NGOs are also investing in modernizing their religious identity. They do so by developing approaches designed to connect to younger local Muslims. One interviewee noted their organizations' sophisticated understanding of the diversity present within younger progressive Muslim communities:

> We have been doing a lot more programming lately that is more attractive to younger people which is a huge step for us. These aren't the same folks we used to cater to but we finally are getting to understand their importance for our work. We have thrown concerts in big venues and have filled them up entirely. We have even had an entire event that was a golf tournament this past year due to COVID restrictions. The point is, we're not just doing small Mosque events anymore. We're not just doing big dinner fundraisers where only highly established, wealthy donors can attend. We're thinking bigger picture and connecting with a broader local audience. […] It's important to connect with tomorrow's donors today. We really couldn't do that back in the day because we couldn't really afford it. Every fundraiser had to generate certain numbers immediately or we would have to close shop. Now, we are running a well-oiled machine so we can dedicate events to younger Muslims. That may not feel worth it immediately in terms of raising money, but long term, it makes a huge difference. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

In many ways, these new strategies of evolving types of event sand engagements reflect a Muslim identity that is progressive, evolving, and diversifying. Although both NGOs anchor

their local religious identity with relatively traditional definitions, they are connecting with current movements defining Muslim identity in the West as an essential component of their longevity.

Recently, the NGOs have also sought to expand their institutional positioning strategies by investing in organizational professionalization. As a starting point, one of the Muslim NGOs recognized their need to "present [themselves] in a more professional manner" in order to be "taken more seriously." To craft new organizational brands that deeply connect with local communities, respondents from both NGOs emphasized need to benchmark their own work in relation to other successful local charities:

> For a while, all we did was study other local charities work and presentation. We wanted to be as recognizable as United Way or the Salvation army [….] We just wanted our brand to be recognized by our local communities especially since it's linked to our faith. I personally spent an entire year finding a shade of [color] that wasn't used by any other charity and that we could use to brand all our materials. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Similarly, the NGOs noted the significance of having an intentionally designed brand to foster their recognizability. As one interviewee shared:

> Ultimately, we definitely looked up to other charities' work and wanted ours to match. We knew from the very start that if we wanted to be the main local Muslim charity, we had to look and sound as professional as some of the most established charities out there because we could see the local impact that they had. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Strategies such as these enhanced the NGOs' presence in the local context while simultaneously allowing them to bolster their religious identity. The local communities' support emboldened the NGOs' continued openness around their faith values. As a senior employee of one of the NGOs

noted: “conversations about changing our name to something more neutral, something that didn’t have the words ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslim’ in it, were always shut down after a local fundraiser” (Interviewee, NGO 1). Guided by their professionalized rebranding, the NGOs continued to position themselves first and foremost as faith-based organizations.

Finally, both organizations’ institutional positioning efforts have most recently moved to building their own unique organizational traditions that increase connections to their faith identity. They actively engage with local communities via participation recurrence. Employees from both NGOs noted the significance of their recurrent events:

> Our events are basically local traditions! Ramadan isn’t complete in our communities without people going to a [charity name] fundraiser. It’s where people meet and mark the religious season. They will literally start calling and asking us about the event if we take too long to advertise it. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Here, the NGOs position themselves as part of the fabric of local religious traditions by embracing their role as faith-based charities. Both NGOs also pointed to key events that they’ve established their organizational presence outside of local Muslim communities, such as IRUSA’s day of Dignity event. An interviewee from the organization noted:

> This is one of our most important local events that we’ve been doing for over a decade. We brand it just like we would any other local event because serving the homeless community is basically the most Muslim thing that we could ever do, and we want everyone to understand the connection between those two things [….] It’s been so rewarding, and really significant, for us to do this event every single year. It makes our presence so undeniable when we’re chatting with the same local journalists every year

> and telling them what this year's event is going to be. They get to know us as "the Muslim charity." (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Not only do these recurring events establish the NGOs' presence in their localities, they also create undeniable links between their faith identities and their charitable work. Throughout the past decade, the NGOs have anchored their organization's religious identity deeply in their local communities.

4.4.2 Membership Negotiation

Muslim NGOs strategically collaborate with local partners in their local contexts. The previously outlined constraint of social Islamophobia, however, deeply impacts the NGOs' choice of local organizational collaborators. One interviewee highlighted:

> We know that a lot of time we're dealing with so much unspoken, and outspoken, Islamophobia. It makes us really vigilant even when we're operating in spaces that are supposed to be like home to us. So, we have to really be on the lookout for groups that seek us rather than ones that we have to go after. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Identifying a network of locally trusted collaborators, however, is not a simple process. As one interviewee explained,

> Just like programming partnerships, we have to be extra careful and work through long-term relationships. […] We can't just assume good faith. So, we focus on progressive trust building and strategically turning organizations that we got to know, slowly, into close local partners. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Recognizing the need to restrict their local collaborations to well-known organizations that they can trust, both NGOs dedicate much of their resources and time to building and nurturing these relationships.

Both NGOs also attempt to counter social Islamophobia by showcasing their engagement with other trusted faith communities and organizations. Through such associations Muslim NGOs work to establish their own credibility. For example, Islamic Relief U.S.A. dedicates an entire section of their website to testimonials from local donors, peer organizations, volunteers, beneficiaries, and other local public figures. The charity explicitly points to their inspiration:

> The hard work and dedication that the Islamic Relief USA community has put in day in and day out for more than 25 years to serve millions of our brother and sisters in need around the world has inspired officials, influencers, leaders, interfaith organizations, Islamic scholars, renowned speakers, community members and others to put in a good word (Islamic Relief, 2020).

The same NGO goes on to share multiple testimonials and videos of other renowned religious charities joining their efforts. This strategy allows the NGOs to showcase their influence as members who are part of larger networks that already acknowledge and approve of their presence.

Additionally, Muslim NGOs keep the majority of their organizational focus on Muslim communities as they negotiate their membership within their local environments. Both NGOs heighten their credibility by aligning themselves with other Muslim and other religious groups that already have deep established community ties. When asked about their relationships with other Muslim local organizations, one interviewee noted:

> We are very close to other local Muslim charities. Our work depends on the work of other Muslim charities in the community because in so many ways they either paved the way for our work, or they're complementing it in a way that allows us to actually keep operating at this level. […] We lean on them so much! (Interviewee, NGO 1)

Another interviewee agreed, reiterating that, “there is no way [their NGO] could have the impact that [it does] locally without the constant assistance of [other Muslim charities]” (Interviewee, Charity 2). For example, IRUSA closely works with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and its member organizations in an effort to actively elevate the image of Islam and Muslims in general through the release of certain *fatwas* (religious rulings).

Further amplifying their religious identity to local Muslim communities, the NGOs place a public focus on their interpretations of important concepts in the Islamic faith. Muslim Aid U.K., for example, features extensive materials on religious interpretations of *zakah, sadaqa, nisab, qurbani/eid,* and a *zakah* calculator. By demonstrating their religious knowledge and their ability to navigate its competing interpretations, both NGOs work to enhance their identity-based credibility with the larger Muslim charitable sector.

4.4.3 Activity Coordination

To most effectively coordinate organizational religious identity through all charitable activities, local NGO community offices are directly connected to the NGOs’ leadership and across programming efforts. Through the last decade, both NGOs have used interactive internal activity planning processes to position their religious organizational identity at the forefront of their charitable role. One respondent noted the centrality of their local departments and small community-based offices to all their operations by explaining that their “local teams are vital to [their] work” and that “without their close insight into the local communities [the charity] would have no way of putting together programming that the communities would get behind” (Interviewee, NGO 1). Moreover, another interviewee expounded on the operational processes that the NGOs use to carry out their charitable activities:

> We're constantly communicating with the local offices. We share documents, live folders, and make sure that every team has eyes on one another's information. Basically, we make sure that we are in constant connection across the board because we realized that just having weekly or monthly meetings, really didn't work. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

Here, the NGOs synchronize the realities and needs of local communities to their internal organizational activities and overall programming priorities. As a result of their deep connections to local offices, the executive teams collate local information that they can later present to specific actors in this context as part of their fundraising efforts. As an interviewee explained:

> We work really hard internally across localities to make sure we arrive prepared. We worked hard to establish a local presence so we can directly share that with our donors. […] When we're so close to our communities, our donors can tell. They feel safe to donate their money because they know that we're not some phony organization that's trying to fool them. They know that we're actually out there on the ground, locally. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

In short, the NGOs internally streamline their religious articulations through intentional activity coordination that caters to the various needs Muslim communities.

As a way of amplifying the previously outlined opportunity of growing Western-Muslim identity, the NGOs coordinate between their event planning departments and programming departments based on particularly relevant issues that concern the communities in the local context. For both conservative and liberal western Muslims, religious holidays are a point of consensus in terms of significance, celebration, and time for religious practice. As a result, both Muslim NGOs schedule over 80 percent of their fundraising efforts during religious Muslim holidays (e.g., the month of *Ramadan*, *Eid al Fitr*, and *Eid al Adha*). Additionally, as a result of

inter-departmental coordination, the NGOs intentionally invest in causes that appeal to both conservative and progressive Muslim audiences. For example, IRUSA specifically points to their rigorous religious alignment through their process of consulting "with a council of imams who follow the Fiqh Council of North America for information about religious donations" (IRUSA, 2020). Simultaneously, the NGOs ensure their progressive Muslim donors that their beneficiaries may be of "any gender, religion, or race" (Muslim Aid UK, 2020). Both NGOs communicate their commitment to impartiality in their local work while directly highlighting the significance of Islamic theology and sources. These strategies of activity coordination allow the NGOs to present their religious identity in ways that maximize their appeal across different interpretations of the faith.

4.4.4 Self-Structuring

Finally, Muslim NGOs have also created internal structures to promote the role of religion within their organizational identity through the last decade. Primarily, both NGOs have done so by creating a communication department that is entirely dedicated to their local charitable roles. As interviewees noted:

> We did a top-to-bottom revamp of our communications around 10 years ago [….] I was hired as a part of the new communications team and we were literally debriefed from the start that our main focus needs to be on local communities first and foremost. (Interviewee, NGO 1)

More specifically in order to appeal to important actors within the local context and not misrepresent the diversity of western Muslims, the NGOs emphasized religious language throughout the materials they created and distributed. As another interviewee explained:

> We put together communications materials that resonate in our local communities in that they sounded and looked like the community itself. We went through so many drafts of simple things like an event flyer that would have to get approved by so many people across the organization and everyone at every level always kept pointing to the fact that it has to primarily cater to our locals. (Interviewee, NGO 2)

In line with the previously mentioned external focus on strong articulations of religious organizational identity in the local context, these statements demonstrate that both NGOs highlighted the same focus internally.

Adding to the new structural change through the communications departments, the NGOs also highlighted particular content requirement strategies that enforced their religious identity through their local work. In direct relationship to the previously outlined opportunity of religious charitable traditions, the NGOs communication departments noted that they leveraged the significance of their religious practices to the advantage of their religious organizational identity. Both Muslim NGOs did this internally by creating checklists that ensured the presence of religious requirements across all organizational content. Both NGOs employed these strategies in ways that consistently promoted their strong religious identity throughout the various instantiations of their charitable role.

4.5 Conclusion

The religious organizational identities of both Islamic Relief USA and Muslim Aid UK interact extensively with local communities. The local context has been the most significant for both organizations since their creation, as evidenced by the fact that both Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid are only slightly constrained by social Islamophobia and the diversity of

Muslim communities as they navigate their local contexts. Rather than being obstructed by these constraints, the NGOs rely on their local communities to embolden their religious identity. Additionally, the contextual opportunities drive certain communicative flows discussed above. Rather than simply emphasizing the rise of western-Muslim identity in Western contexts externally, the Muslim NGOs prioritize internally developing and aligning representative articulations of identity across departments. Through their nuanced, local efforts, the NGOs link some of their core religious beliefs to current issues and trustworthy actors that are important to their local communities. To amplify their presence, the NGOs also create their own traditions as integral parts of the local communal fabric.

5 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation has been to heighten understandings of how western-based Muslim NGOs craft their organizational identities within their complex, networked environments. Grounded in an organizational communication framework, the study analyzed two prominent Muslim NGOs in the United States and in the United Kingdom. It mapped three central contexts that connect to and are influenced by the NGOs' organizational identity. After defining the key actors within each context, along with specific contextual constraints and opportunities, each chapter presented findings from interviews, public documents, and internal communications that showcase the various articulations of NGO's contextually relevant identities and the strategies that lay behind them. This final chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study's findings. The theoretical insights expand earlier understandings of the study of Muslim NGOs, organizational identity, and CCO theory. The study's practical implications highlight a series of practical recommendations for the NGOs, along with other actors that interface with them as they navigate their various networked contexts. Finally, the chapter closes with an assessment of the study's limitations and potential expansion for future areas of related research.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

5.1.1 Muslim NGOs

Theoretically, this study contributes to previous research on Muslim NGOs by revealing the active agency of these organizations in the contemporary environment. Rather than restricting the NGOs within Petersen's (2015) secularized/sacrilized binary, the case studies demonstrate the richness and sophistication of Muslim NGOs as they present their faith values on a wide and dynamic spectrum. Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. simultaneously

present varying expressions of their identity to capitalize on particular openings and avoid present pitfalls to achieve their desired ends. They are charitable groups with deep connections to their local community donors, civil society actors that politically advocate for national issues, and international aid actors that contribute to highly impactful and extensive programming. From their successful navigation of the various contexts to the countless strategic approaches they utilize, the NGOs display their active agency and ability to capitalize on environmental factors. In short, they amplify their opportunities while recognizing and dynamically handling countless social systemic challenges.

The NGOs' organizational identity formulations range across a wide spectrum of religiosity. First, the presentation of the Muslim NGO's religious identity is mostly covert for the national context, perhaps because the groups have only recently decided to engage in political advocacy in their western environs. Secondly, they have an emergent, growing religious identity in the international context, likely due to that sector's latest shift towards and openness to faith-based actors. Lastly, the charities present innovative and open articulations of their faith identity within the local context as a result of the strong support they receive from community networks. Their strategic choices to implement long-term, diversified, and incremental approaches to establishing their identity should not to be confused with any fundamental change to their core beliefs. Across all three contexts, the organizations remain committed to their faith values.

This study also highlights the particularity of the NGOs' position. As western-based Muslim groups, Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. operate in challenging and sometimes even hostile contexts. Here, their position differs from that of other aid groups in that it presents them with a double-laden challenge: they are faith-based organizations operating in a modern western secular system and they are Muslim groups functioning within a Christian

dominated, faith-based setting. Such a positioning generates a lack of trust that directly impacts their operations. While other FBOs apply for government funding with a basic background check, Muslim NGOs undergo extensive review processes and, at times, legal challenges. In other cases where Christian FBOs celebrate and promote their programming capacity to reach hard-to-access conflict areas, Muslim NGOs repeatedly have to prove the legitimacy of their efforts by proactively and assertively disassociating themselves from the funding of terrorist groups. As a result, the NGOs have yet to attain high leadership positions in any of the contexts within which they operate. Regardless of the size of their independent funding operations, the reach and impact of their programming, or the specialized value add that their cultural proximity provides, they remain emerging groups with limited networking power.

Another implication of this dissertation project lies in the significance and variety of actors within each of the NGO's operational contexts. Within each one of the three contexts, outlined actors are the building blocks of the sectors, as well as the collective rule or norm setters for those who participation. Remarkably, the actors, along with their corresponding networks, intersect strongly with the NGOs' articulations of organizational identity. In the international aid and development context, the substantial efforts of fellow Christian FBOs laid the foundation for Muslim NGOs' current strong participation and position in the sector. Similarly in the national civil society space, government agencies have negatively impacted the NGOs' ability to openly and proudly show their religious identity. Finally in the local context, community donors' propel the NGOs' identity by providing them with secured financial support. Together, these examples showcase the impact that actors can have on the NGOs' articulations of their own religious identity

5.1.2 Organizational Identity

This study also expands earlier understandings of the transactional nature of organizational identity. Rather than restricting conceptualizations of identity to temporal growth, crisis response, or environmental effects as previous work has done, this study demonstrates that transactional identities are cross-contextually negotiated. The two case studies exploring the organizational identity of western-based Muslim NGOs showcase the ways in which organizational identity is in a constant state of interaction with material constraints and opportunities facing the organizations. The constraints and opportunities take the form of both structural and social elements. Structural constraints and opportunities refer to institutional systems inscribed through legal or other physical procedures. Social constraints and opportunities are link to contextual norms inscribed within each sector.

Structural constraints and opportunities deeply impact the organizations' organizational identity through various mechanisms. Structural constraints can institutionally restrict Muslim NGOs from open and creative articulations of their identity. For example, anti-terrorist finance rules and regulations attached to government funding can disqualify organizations' participation based on their faith-practices. In the most draconian terms, these structures can associate the entire religious belief system of Muslim NGOs with terrorist activity. Similarly, intergovernmental bodies and other dominant agents within the international context constrain the NGOs and their activities through sector-wide protocols. In response, Muslim NGOs often bear the burden of educating other actors in their networks and having to prove their good will rather than having it taking it for granted. As a result, structural obstacles can severely constrain how a Muslim NGO articulates its faith identity if it is to achieve its aid and development goals.

Conversely, structural opportunities can, at times, propel organizations to unrestricted, prominent articulations of their faith-based identities. Rights-based advocacy regulations and requirements drawn from religious charitable traditions can deeply empower Muslim NGOs to publicly share definitions of their faith practices. For example, both organizations distribute extensive materials regarding their religious charitable requirements throughout their online platforms, event programming, and advocacy collateral materials. These structures often bond the organizations' religious beliefs to fundamentally generous and humanistic values. Additionally, they allow the Muslim NGOs to amplify their humanitarian mission and benevolence. Overall, these structural opportunities strongly maximize the organizations' decision-making and articulations of faith identity and allow them to ultimately increase their influence.

Social constraints and opportunities also impact the organizations' public articulations of their faith-based, organizational identities. Social constraints operative amongst peers, funders, and even certain aid recipients collectively pressure the NGOs to limit and diminish the significance of their faith in their identity formulations. For example, a lack of trust and social Islamophobia can combine to encourage Muslim NGOs to publicly dilute the centrality of their religious beliefs. Additionally, social norms can lead to expectations that Muslim NGOs will be the ones who need to initiate contact and seek out collaborative efforts with other actors. As a result of these constraints, the organizations have to independently invest time and money in developing progressive trust-building processes. Overall, these social norms, while discreet, delay the organizations' abilities to explicitly communicate their full faith-based identities.

Concurrently, social opportunities collectively generate productive environments for the NGOs to boost articulations of their faith-based identities. For example, both the wide range of

western-Muslim identities and the surge in Muslim political organizing and civic activism considerably present opportunities for the organizations to advance faith-based definitions of their collectives. Furthermore, association with leading actors in the local context, such as donors and religious figures, allow the organizations to identify with their faith. Ultimately, these openings grant the organizations beneficial social capital and room to confidently present the significance of faith as a central and active component of their identity. These social opportunities subtly influence the organizations' articulations of faith identity and allow them to ultimately increase a public recognition of who they are.

In sum, a full understanding of organizational identity must consider the critical shift from transmissional (from the organization outward), to transactional (constructed through both outward and inward transaction) identity. This study found that structural and social constraints and opportunities play a major role in shaping, delaying, blocking, and propelling faith-based identities in Muslim NGOs.

5.1.3 Communicative Constitution of Organizations

This study expands theories of CCO by establishing the integral relationship between different situational contexts facing organizations and each of their four communicative flows. In short, the constitutive process includes significant connections between the contexts and the entirety of the communicative flows. More specifically, the international, national, and local contexts of Muslim NGOs directly connect to external and internal communicative flows. The findings expand current CCO theory by noting that the impact of contexts extends beyond external flows to similarly connecting to the internal flows. This implication shows the importance of an alternative approach to the study of the constitutive process whereby all

communicative flows intersect with outside influence. Moreover, the findings here illustrate that the four flows operate both in context independent and context dependent ways based on organizational goals.

Through the external flows of institutional positioning and membership negotiation, Muslim NGOs employ comparable and distinctive strategies based on context factors. Throughout the international, national, and local contexts, for example, the organizations rely similarly on personal relationship in their processes of institutional positioning and membership negotiation. Whether they are dealing with other humanitarian actors, government agencies, or local beneficiaries, the organizations use personal relationships as an entry point into larger networks, as well as a way to engage in a process of trust building at their own pace. They also rely on their history of successful partnerships and impactful programming as a way to project expertise throughout all contexts. Here, the organizations promote their previous accomplishment as a testament to their organizational effectiveness regardless of whether they are networking in international, national, or local contexts.

Conversely, both Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. engage at times in context dependent approaches to their four flows of communication. For example, the organizations are rather reluctant and have only recently invested in establishing a religious presence within the national and international contexts, but they have heavily participated in membership negotiation and institutional positioning efforts in the local context since their inception. Furthermore, the context directs them towards a more neutral, faith-based presence in the international and national contexts, while being much more vocal and explicit in the local context.

Through their internal flows of activity coordination and self-structuring, the organizations also employ context dependent and context independent strategies. Throughout

each of the international, national, and local contexts, the organizations connect their internal departments and coordinate their activities through associative structures. Whether they are coordinating aid programming, drafting political advocacy agendas, or outlining local priorities, the organizations use strong internal connections to streamline and synchronize their activities, as well as to consistently present their identity in ways that recognize contextual requirements. Similarly, they also rely on particular hiring tactics to project organizational competence regardless of context. Here, the organizations favor hiring professionals and experienced insiders to accelerate their growth and development.

Yet, both Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. also engage in context dependent approaches when it comes to the creation of their offices entirely devoted to particular contexts. The organizations have specific departments dedicated to their communicative outreach efforts within national and international contexts, but this function is merged within larger local programming offices in the local context. Moreover, Muslim NGOs rely heavily on religious language and inscriptions of religious traditions (e.g., *zakat* calculators) within their local programming, while being more implicit about their faith-based identities when communicating with their national and international networks.

Collectively, interactions between multiple contexts and the four flows expand the current constitutive model. Rather than placing the organizations within one context, this study shows that Muslim NGOs operate, and therefore should be analyzed, in at least three different contexts (if not more) to fully understand identity formulations. It also shows that internal and external communicative flows are impacted by outside, contextual factors. Therefore, the four-flow model should be updated to anchor findings within a specific context, as well as

acknowledge the impact of the context on the internal operations of the organization as well as external ones.

5.2 Practical Implications

While recognizing the multitude of challenges that western-based Muslim NGOs face in various situational contexts, this study showcases a number of the NGOs' organizational strengths. Over the last decade, Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. have consistently grown their influence as NGOs, their strategic presence and political advocacy as civil society organizations, and their authority as local charitable actors. However, the findings also reveal an overly reactive, sometimes even disorganized, articulation of organizational identity. Repeatedly, interviewees acknowledged their awareness of various challenges and their uncertainty about how they would want to present their identity in the future. With rare exceptions, both NGOs continue to operate with a burdensome sense of trepidation, as well as a constant need to prove their organizational value and significance in western contexts. The NGOs inconsistently capitalize on available, contextual opportunities to their advantage and, when they attempt to overcome or sidestep the constraints, they are still struggling to establish a baseline of legitimacy.

Although both organizations are aware of their game of identity Tetris, neither group has articulated an organizational plan, a set of rules, or a recognized set of social norms. These findings can assist both NGOs in better articulating their identities in the future, and embrace the multiple roles that they play within the three contexts. More specifically, the next two sets of recommendations focus on communicative strategies that can benefit the NGOs in the study and other networked actors functioning within their various contexts.

5.2.1 NGO Recommendations

To establish a better sense of organizational identity, Muslim NGOs like the ones examined in the study should invest in an internal process of identity formulation. Here, the organizational process would begin with an in-depth internal organizational review to better understand the role of each department's contributions to overall identity, the specific context(s) in which they are anchored, whether certain constraints should guide identity formulations, and whether they are fully capitalizing on the contexts' available opportunities. This process should help guide the organizations in mapping their programmatic activities, partnerships, and potential areas of identity expansion.

NGOs like Islamic Relief U.S.A and Muslim Aid U.K. should then use data obtained here to formulate their own plans for intuitional positioning and organizational identity. Both organizations should include members of leadership as well as programming and volunteer staff in this process, as the insights offered in the interviews, at times expressed unique viewpoints. In tandem, their insights should help craft the strategic plan priorities in line with on-the-ground programmatic realities and prevent discrepancies between departments and leadership groupthink. Most importantly, such plans should allow them to proactively create organizational rules and norms regarding external presentations of their identities, reduce defective replication, and avoid wasting valuable resources.

Both organizations should follow up with the creation of structures to support bolder articulations of their organizational identity. While fully recognizing the challenges the organizations face through the various roles that they play, the contexts in which Muslim NGOs operate have changed drastically over the last ten years. As both organizations progress in their process of institutionalization, they should move their leadership role into more structured and

impactful activities. For example, both organizations should invest in developing (or reinforcing in the case of Muslim Aid U.K.) interorganizational bodies for western-based Muslim humanitarian charities. This will elevate their position within all three contexts as leading Muslim charitable voices. This can allow them to not only amplify the impact of their programming, but it should also elevate their organizational position in order to project unapologetically loud and excitingly diverse Muslim identities.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Other Actors in the Contexts

Primarily, other actors working alongside western-based Muslim NGOs should invest in enhancing their collaborative opportunities with the more established organizations that served as the foundation of this study. This process should begin with forays into organizing programming dedicated to building trust and enhancing inter-organizational education. Well-established FBOs, intergovernmental bodies, and government organizations should dedicate themselves to outreach educational or exploratory programming, with designated funding specifically tailored to expanding relations with the Muslim NGO sector. Such programming would allow these actors to familiarize themselves with the numerous disadvantages that the NGOs face simply for believing in a minority religious ideology as well as a better understanding the opportunities that allow them to grow and effectively serve difficult to reach populations in need of aid. Such programming efforts should empower relationship building in ways to broaden networks to strategically engage with Muslim NGOs.

Other aid agencies, both faith-based and secular, should include Muslim NGOs in the design of their collaborative programming ventures. Rather than using the NGOs as aid delivery agencies only, a focus on joint programming could emerge from inter-organizational

brainstorming sessions that occur during the initiation period of new programming proposal. It would benefit the actors' future initiatives by building trusting relationships with the Muslim NGOs and by maximizing the value that the Muslim NGOs have to offer. Furthermore, this might result in more effective collaborative future programming, as well as an overall improved relationship between the actors where all parties feel included and valued.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Like all studies, this research project is subject to limitations that set the stage for future investigations. The first limitation is the limited sample size of only two case studies. This study did not analyze organizational texts or conduct interviews with employees from all U.S. and U.K. based Muslim organizations. As such, the findings may not be generalizable, as other groups might navigate their religious identities differently. Instead, these results should simply function as a base-line marker for the sector. Although Islamic Relief U.S.A. and Muslim Aid U.K. are not representative of the entirety of the Western-based Muslim charitable sector, they are notable organizations with a long history of successful charitable programming. The delineated contexts along with their corresponding constraints and opportunities, however, should be meaningful to all Muslim NGOs operating in this sector. Future research should apply organizational communication theories to the study of other Muslim non-profits to construct a more representative understanding of the sector. Studies should also expand the various contexts in which the organizations operate, consider their corresponding constraints and opportunities, and examine the full range of actors networked within those contexts.

Similarly, the study did not include an evaluation or measurement of the effect of the organizations' communication campaigns. Although it comments on both organizations' religious identities along with their overall positioning within each context, it does not speak to

whether or not they have been successful in those attempts. Given the NGOs' longevity and history of collaborations, one could argue, however, that they have been rather successful. Future research should explore the effects of these organizations' communication campaigns on their intended publics ranging across the network of actors within each context.

Furthermore, the four-flow model also proved to be too confining. Although the four flows offer more direction and structure than the other schools of CCO theorizing, it is limited to internal and external flows without addressing inter-flow constitution, and context dependence and interdependence. Future research should explore alternative formulations of the four-flow model and expand it to include various organizational contexts. Studies should also include in depth analyses of all flows' transactional function through time.

Finally, additional studies considering the application of CCO and the construction of organizational identity could further articulate transactional institutional positioning and ultimately expand the theory. Although the two Muslim NGOs examined here provided for exemplary case studies, a mixed methods approach could result in more comprehensive findings building a basis for in depth theory building and alteration. The addition of surveys combined with quantitative research methods would allow researchers to expand their data pool, and ultimately present much more comprehensive findings. Additionally, the study of faith-based organizations proved to be highly beneficial in showcasing the complexities of identity. Future studies should further investigate religious organizations' constructions of identity, while utilizing mixed method approaches.

Organizational communication research would highly benefit from a greater focus on faith-based, non-corporate groups. Although this analysis of the NGOs extended current CCO theorizing by showcasing the ability of non-clandestine organizations to interact with their

environments actively as a central way of articulating their identity, it also attests to the necessity of future research to explore how other faith-based NGOs tackle this transactional process, as well as to revise the four flow model. Organizational identity is arguably one of the most central components constituting organizations. Therefore, more research into the process through which they are built, in all of its complexity and interactive nature, deserves much more exploration.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Note to Participants: while answering to the questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask clarifying questions and DO NOT use any names or share information that can identify other people in or out of the organization you are being interviewed about.

Interview Goals:

1. Obtain specific examples of ways in which organizational identity is different depending on the context
2. Obtain information on various contextual constraints and opportunities
3. Obtain more information and examples on the ways in which constraints and opportunities affect organizational identity overall and the place of religion more specifically
4. Obtain more information and examples on the tactics deployed by the NGO to use constraints and opportunities to their advantage or to avoid them.

Personal & Organizational Information

1. Can you describe your role within the organization?
    A. In your role, do you interact with international actors or agencies related to your NGO? Please describe
    B. In your role, do you interact with national actors or agencies related to your NGO? Please describe

C. In your role, do you interact with local actors or agencies related to your NGO? Please describe

2. How long have you worked for the NGO?

International Context

1. How does the organization position itself within the broader aid and development sector?
    a. IF REPLY IS INSUFFUCIENT: Can you describe the position of your organization within the international context and what roles, if any, your organization performs as a humanitarian NGO?
2. Does religion play a role within this context?
    a. If reply is insufficient: What benefits does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the international context? What drawbacks does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the international context?
3. What are the key challenges you face in the international context of aid and development?
4. What are the key opportunities available in the international context of aid and development?
5. Has your organization changed its own positioning to navigate these challenges/opportunities? If so, how? If not, why not?

    Membership negotiation (external)

6. From the below list - What organizations do you seek funding from?
7. From the below list - What organizations do you collaborate with?

8. What factors play into your choices of partners? Are there factors that preclude your choice of partnership with particular actors?
9. What are the organizational processes and norms that govern collaboration and funding?
10. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?
11. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?

    Activity coordination (internal):
12. What are the responsibilities of your team? What activities is your team responsible for coordinating?
13. Does your team interact with other teams at the NGO? If yes, on what activities?
14. What kind of communication strategies help you coordinate those activities?
15. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?
16. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?

    Self-structuring (internal):
17. What internal structures does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
18. What internal norms and informal expectations does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
19. How does your team navigate deviations from the NGO's programmatic expectations?

20. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?
21. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?

    Closing

22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding the role communication played in the organizational identity at your NGO?

National Context

1. How does the organization position itself within the broader aid and development sector?
    a. If reply is insufficient: Can you describe the position of your organization within the national context and what roles, if any, your organization performs as a humanitarian NGO?
2. Does religion play a role within this context?
    a. If reply is insufficient: What benefits does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the national context? What drawbacks does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the national context?
3. What are the key challenges you face in the national context of aid and development?
4. What are the key opportunities available in the national context of aid and development?
5. Has your organization changed its own positioning to navigate these challenges/opportunities? If so, how? If not, why not?

    Membership negotiation (external)

6. From the below list - What organizations do you seek funding from?

7. From the below list - What organizations do you collaborate with?
8. What factors play into your choices of partners? Are there factors that preclude your choice of partnership with particular actors?
9. What are the organizational processes and norms that govern collaboration and funding?
10. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?
11. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?

    Activity coordination (internal):

12. What are the responsibilities of your team? What activities is your team responsible for coordinating?
13. Does your team interact with other teams at the NGO? If yes, on what activities?
14. What kind of communication strategies help you coordinate those activities?
15. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?
16. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?

    Self-structuring (internal):

17. What internal structures does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
18. What internal norms and informal expectations does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
19. How does your team navigate deviations from the NGO's programmatic expectations?

20. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?
21. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?

Closing

22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding the role communication played in the organizational identity at your NGO?

Local Context

1. How does the organization position itself within the broader aid and development sector?
    a. If reply is insufficient: Can you describe the position of your organization within the local context and what roles, if any, your organization performs as a humanitarian NGO?
2. Does religion play a role within this context?
    a. IF REPLY IS INSUFFUCIENT: What benefits does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the local context? What drawbacks does your religious affiliation bring to your NGO in the local context?
3. What are the key challenges you face in the local context of aid and development?
4. What are the key opportunities available in the local context of aid and development?
5. Has your organization changed its own positioning to navigate these challenges/opportunities? If so, how? If not, why not?

Membership negotiation (external)

6. From the below list - What organizations do you seek funding from?

7. From the below list - What organizations do you collaborate with?
8. What factors play into your choices of partners? Are there factors that preclude your choice of partnership with particular actors?
9. What are the organizational processes and norms that govern collaboration and funding?
10. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?
11. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to recruit and sustain funders and collaborators? How?

    Activity coordination (internal):

12. What are the responsibilities of your team? What activities is your team responsible for coordinating?
13. Does your team interact with other teams at the NGO? If yes, on what activities?
14. What kind of communication strategies help you coordinate those activities?
15. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?
16. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to coordinate activities? How?

    Self-structuring (internal):

17. What internal structures does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
18. What internal norms and informal expectations does the NGO have in place to ensure programmatic consistency?
19. How does your team navigate deviations from the NGO's programmatic expectations?

20. Do the opportunities described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?
21. Do the constraints described previously impact your ability to remain consistent with established program priorities? How?

Closing

22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding the role communication played in the organizational identity at your NGO?

List of Potential Partners and Funders

Act alliance

Adventist Development and Relief Agency

African Union

Ahimsa Fund

Alliance of Religion and Conservation

Arigatou International

Charity and Securities Network

Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE)

Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development

Cordoba Foundation of Geneva

Episcopal Relief and Development

Faith in Water

Faith to Action Network

The Gates Foundation

Global Affair Canada

Global Fund

Global Interfaith Wash Alliance

Global One

House of One

Institute of Development Studies

The Lutheran World Federation

The Jewish Theological Seminary

Muslims for Progressive Values

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

OXFAM

Penny Appeal

Red Cross and Red Crescent Society

Religions for Peace

The Salvation Army

Salam Institute for Peace and Justice

DFID (or any UK Government related organization)

United Nation (or any UN related organization)

USAID (or any US Government related organization)

United States Institute of Peace

Act Alliance

The World Bank

World Council of Churches

World Relief

World Vision