The Public and the Private, an Exploration of *Zakāt* and the Islamic Tradition for Contemporary Social Work Values and Practice

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The aims of the paper are to subject the ontologies of social welfare in Britain to critical scrutiny, in respect of examining political ideologies of neoliberalism and austerity; and the impact of these upon the value-driven role and remit of professional social work, which has developed as an essential arm of the post-War, British Welfare State.
THEORETICAL BASE: Although the erosion of the Welfare State has been subject to a number of social policy critiques, here the authors offer an alternative understanding of social welfare, as inspired by the Islamic principle of *zakāt.*
METHODS: This paper offers a conceptual, discursive analysis.
OUTCOME: Operating as a socio-religio-political concept, *zakāt* provides a sharply contrasting alternative understanding to social weald, capitalism and the State, serving to reframe prevailing political rationalisations and policy measures as that which are fundamentally harmful to social cohesion in generating rising social need.
SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS: Growing social need, artificially inflated through political ideology, carries ruinous implications for social work provision in terms of State (un)accountability for social welfare and overtly politicised social work mandates.

Keywords

zakāt, Welfare State, austerity, values

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INTRODUCTION

Social welfare, and its periodic cycles of reform, forms the mainstay of British social welfare history in which we can trace the early nascence of early social work models, including a rudimentary casework approach through almoner work and State provision (Burt, 2020; Parker, forthcoming). Despite remedial and sometimes pivotal changes, exemplified by Beverage's post-War Welfare State, a repetition of familiar discourses can be traced down the centuries in rehearsed and tired arguments that tends, with one eye on the balance sheet, to exploit the rhetoric of morality in arguing for fiscal generosity or against impecunious shaking of 'magic money trees' (Dearden, 2017). What, however, can be learned from alternative understandings of the social construction of welfare and the moral obligation, if any, towards social weald in the context of neoliberalism? In this discursive paper, employing both social work and social policy lenses, social welfare and the common good are considered from alternative value-based perspectives, far removed from pervasive givens of both neoliberalism and the neo-Keynesian emphases on economic growth and stability. Here, we turn to Islamic principles, which offer alternative and, consequently, refreshing ethical vistas. We do not offer a review of religious practice, but instead offer an exploration of the premises and principles mandating social wellbeing in this world religion, extending its revelations to a socio-political application. In so doing, we inquire into what lessons, if any, can be usefully derived for non-Islamic, Western societies like Britain, standing at the ideological crossroads of the Welfare and the Minimal State with due implications for a critical social work positioning.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL WELFARE: LEGACIES OF AMBIVALENCE, AMBIGUITY AND RE-COMMITMENT

The Welfare State in Britain occupies an ideological terrain of active contestation, where the monolith of health care in the form of the National Health Service (NHS) has been particularly focused on in the mind of the politicians and the public alike, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and perhaps not unsurprisingly so. In consequence, one of the only positives that has emerged from the pandemic in Britain has been the spotlight cast on the NHS as offering both a critical and irreplaceable resource in British civil life, where even the Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in clear contrast to previous Tory (Conservative Party) positions, praised the NHS for, in this case, saving his life (BBC, 2020). A year later, the NHS became the proud and worthy recipient of the highest civilian and military honour that can be bestowed in Britain in recognition of outstanding heroism and courage, the George Cross (BBC, 2021a).

Thus, the public popularity of the NHS has never been higher in recent memory, and the critical role it has played recently, may have preserved it for the time being from right-wing, neoliberal attempts to dismantle it, although adequate resourcing continues to threaten its survival into the future. However (*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*), the derisory figure offered initially by the Government to nurses in their appeal for a salary raise, indicated that the brief Party truce with the NHS was now over (Quinn, Allegretti, 2021), although this was perhaps presaged in revelations of the Prime Minister's alleged disbelief that the NHS was under significant strain (Elgot, 2021).

The NHS, laudable though it is, also serves to obscure the role of other ‘key’ workers. For example, the fact that in addition to NHS and other critical staff, social workers also both worked beyond the call of duty and died in its service both during and owing to the pandemic, was notably not recognised (Parker, Ashencaen Crabtree, 2021). Social workers, predictably, were no-one’s ‘angels’, whilst nurses publicly portrayed as such (Morgan, 2021). Indubitably in these current Welfare State ideological ‘culture wars’, some workers provide more propaganda leverage than others, where social workers are too often subject to public hostility and immovable political indifference (Parker, 2020). Social work as a body and concept is quite another matter for political parties in Britain, and it is to social work, which we shall now turn.

Social work has long regarded itself as a value-based profession; occasionally indulging in the hubris of viewing itself as absolutely epitomising a profession indubitably grounded in the practice of ethics (Parker, Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018). While social work is not alone in this respect, as certainly medicine, would be viewed in a similar light (Banks, 2006), it is true that the allegiances, roles and tasks of social work, place it in highly contested terrain of competing tensions and vested interests to a far greater degree than found in most other ‘helping’ professions. As is well recognised, social workers are caught between the pull towards State-mandated control of subaltern service users and resources and clinging to professional, ethics mandates towards enablement and advocacy (Parker, Doel, 2013).

Unlike other ‘helping professions’, whose status is perceived as higher, social work and her practitioners are also subject to the besmirchment of stigma by association with the marginalised of society (Burke, Parker, 2007). Social work is subject to deep ambivalence, it is grudgingly seen as both essential to society but accordingly, is premised on the integral ills and inequities of society, an uncomfortable notion. Those it serves are equally subject to Manichean conceptualisations, the innocents who are failed (by social work), the feckless who are rewarded (by social work) (Parker, 2020). The social work practitioner wears simultaneously, Janus-like, two masks, the competent/good, the incompetent/bad. Yet in either case, they are vilified; unusually this is an emotive exercise in scapegoating that shared by societies on both the right and the left political divide (Midgely, 1997). For if good, why is such capability socially needed? If bad, why impose tainted and unwanted wares on society? The impossible paradoxes facing social work, along the lines of ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’, has often been lampooned in professional circles. However, more to the point, social work as a profession exists as an implicit critique of social functioning and social policies implemented by political will that is designed to address such malfunctioning. It is hardly surprising therefore that social work takes on the role of the unloved child of the Welfare State, and is thereby constantly and continually subject to political correction: the stigmatisation of social work serves as very useful purpose, being the favourite ‘whipping boy’ of politicians, the media and general public alike. Social work as a profession in Britain, has offered many an angry academic polemic against these reactionary, self-serving postures (Parker, Doel, 2013). Sadly, regardless of strong advocacy within the profession, the endless cycle of reforms and readjustment towards ‘improvement’, lead to damaging professional disorientation and loss of confidence. Approval seeking and blame avoidant adaptive rewriting of the profession leads to a dangerous conformity with shifting political opinion and policies of division. While what is needed: a coherent, confident and consistent stand setting out what social work is, why it is needed, whom it will serve and how as mandated by the ethics of social justice, is unheard in the hubbub.

Taking a more expansive purview of social work, high above the functions and dysfunctions dictated within national boundaries, the much larger professional corpus, acknowledges its complex mosaic, which is characterised by unity, variety and fragmentation across the globe (IFSW, 2014).

In Britain particularly, social work's nascence emerged from a 'broad church' of faith-based origins but was later disavowed by moves towards socio-political rights-based discourses emerging from the soil of secularisation, State-mandate and professionalisation agendas (Payne, 2005). Yet, these two traditions: religiosity and political secularity in social work, have collided in places within the complex terrain of multicultural, multifaith Britain. Accordingly, arising from faith-based and secular ethic-driven discourses a dialectic has emerged over the recent decades of the millennium, where a renewed recognition has taken place within the profession regarding the importance of the spiritual domains in people's lives, influencing human services (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2021a). Social work in this respect has not been in the vanguard of acting upon such revelations, unlike psychology (Fernando et al., 1998). Nevertheless, social work can legitimately celebrate a renaissance in the surge of professional interest towards the spiritual and the religious in the lives of service users (Furness, Gilligan 2010), as well as practitioners (Parker, et al., 2018). Formerly rejected and overlooked as hugely underrated assets, faith particularly, can and does influence the moral integrity and decisions of individuals and communities; not merely as adherence to dead dogma and stultifying doctrine, but as engagement with a living religion which is directly embodied within the experiential, behavioural and aspirational ubiquity of human life (Aune, 2014). The proliferation of research into what social work can learn from religion and faith groups has therefore exponentially grown. Commensurately, Islamic concepts and precepts, which tentatively emerged from ethnological social work (Ashencaen Crabtree, Baba 2001; Hodge, 2005; Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2008; Al Krenawi, 2012; Ashencaen Crabtree et al. 2016), has over time, deservedly formed a rich research canon and social work resource in its own right (Schmid, Sheikhzadegan, In press).

ISLAM AND ISLAMIC VALUES

Islam notably offers a holistic way of being, in which faith is integrated entirely into everyday practices. In this respect, it is unlike Christianity, although forms part of the triumvirate of Abrahamic religions of which Judaism is the elder. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1990) points out that unlike Islam and Judaism, Christianity lacks a divine law governing daily practices. In not conforming to a pious, daily discipline regulated and expected of prayers, dress, diet and, to an extent, demeanour, Christianity is thought by some to lack the exotericism valued by Muslims and Jews (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2021a). While it may be so argued, it is debatable whether the stringency of a holistic, divine way of being, such as conformity with *shari'a* law, leads of necessity to greater citizen moral rectitude in the whole, and the amelioration of that which undermines social weald, and elides the many quotidian rule-based systems of earlier monastic elements in Christianity. Rather, a Foucauldian (1991) argument may be brought to bear, in which the self-regulation of the individual is closely monitored and supported by the structured envelopment of exacting normativities, such as *shari'a,* in terms of compliance to overt practice, irrespective of whether this also achieves an internal regulation of the mind towards absolute acceptance of sacralised precepts.
Accordingly, the obligation of the believer is to observe and submit to the ethical scaffolding of Islam, enacted within the divine Islamic law of *shari'a.* This religio-ethical structure is duly erected from the so-called five pillars of Islam, as follows:

Shahadah refers to testifying to the monotheism of Islam in which there is only God and Mohammed is His Prophet. Confirming conversion to Islam normally requires only the recitation of the *shahadah.*

Salat refers to the daily prayers, which are practised five times a day according to the sun's movements, facing the holy site of Mecca in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Zakāt is a tax of alms to relieve society's poor and needy.

Saum refers to the fasting that takes place particularly during the month of Ramadan.
The *hajj* is the sacred pilgrimage to the holy *Ka'aba* in Mecca that takes place at a certain time of the year; and which should undertaken at least once in the life of the faithful (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2016).

For Badawia (In press), the holistic frame of Islam creates a practical, rather than a contained cerebral theology, through which Islamic principles and concepts connecting with social wellbeing are enacted:

For Islamic practical theology this would mean: the establishment of desired general welfare (*maṣlaḥa*), according to the principle of social justice.

Zakāt is a particularly interesting portmanteau principle conceived as for the benefit of the *ummah* (global collective of Muslim believers); and one that is aligned to the allied concepts of *waqf* and *maṣlaḥa* as well. Loosely interpreted as a strictly calculated form of the charitable giving assets, and one generally shared by most faiths across the world, *zakāt* is indeed this, but it is also much more. As Ashencaen Crabtree et al. (2008) explain, it requires that a designated proportion of individual wealth, consisting of primarily, gold, silver, cash, savings and investments, above a specific threshold level, are contributed for the care of the poor and the needy in society, as well as other categories denoting hardship and marginalisation. So seriously is this duty taken that, for instance, the UK site of the worldwide charity, Islamic Relief offer a handy online *zakāt* calculator to work out exactly how much is owed in the due year, along with Q&A guidance of what, how, when and for whom this should be paid.

Those who can benefit from a *zakāt* endowment as loosely translated in the term '*waqf*', are defined in the Holy Qu'ran (9:60). These ancient categories benefit from some contemporary interpretation to take into account modern circumstances. In so doing, we take the liberty of including many underprivileged, marginalised and oppressed groups in Britain that are viewed as embraced within the spirit of the principle but also largely overlap with those for whom British social work carries a remit or once held due responsibilities. Accordingly, encompassed in potential recipients of *zakāt* are the following:

The poor: (families living in low socio-economic brackets and their children; those working below the Minimum Wage; those unable to gain sufficient waged work; those excluded from gaining waged work).

Those in need: (including those with physical and mental health disabilities; those addicted to substance abuse, the homeless and impoverished elders).

Those who administer: (including impoverished social workers, social care workers and nurses, particularly when forced by low wages and straightened circumstances to access charitable Food Banks).

Those in bondage: (embracing here, offenders, those trapped in domestic violence, modern slavery and sex trafficking or brutalised and fleeing civil conflict).

Those in debt: (of which there are many owing to low pay, inadequate or erratically paid Welfare Benefits and single parenthood, particularly women-headed households).

Those in the cause of God: (those who advocate, support and assist others in need but are themselves in difficult circumstances and/or on low wages).

Those who are wayfarers (refugees; the homeless; the impoverished pilgrim).

A religious imperative (Barise, 2005), *zakāt* is also a revolutionary social concept, markedly different from other forms of charity. Charitable giving as a religious duty has always been a well-established feature of Christian faith, and an act of paternalism as well as more laudably, atonement (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2008). Welfare therefore is by no means a new concept where prior to the sixteenth century ‘Reformation’ (inspired by the Protestant spiritual rebellions in Europe), welfare was primarily provided by the monastic/convent orders (Payne, 2005). Following the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, welfare fell to Poor Law provisions (Parker, forthcoming), which were in turn subject to many alternations in terms of welfare provisioning and philosophies of care between the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Spanning the administrative changes, traditionally the better-off had always been encouraged to perform benevolent acts towards the needy as promoted in sermon, prayer and song. For instance, the once popular ballad of ‘Lazarus and Dives’ is a sung morality tale, in which the wicked, wealthy Dives is condemned to hell for his cruelty and meanness to the beggar Lazarus who, as the meek and abused, is destined for heaven (Ashencaen Crabtree, In press).

Welfare reform for the great masses of the underprivileged during the Industrial Revolution went hand-in-hand with a stance of ‘muscular Christianity’: a moral theology-in-action; and the fruits of this religiously inspired philanthropy was seen in the abolition of slavery, fiercely driven by pious, if somewhat marginal, Christian argument (Hempton, 2005). While the consciences of the bourgeoise would be gainfully pricked during the Victorian period, and seen in the rise of many of Britain’s most venerable and longest serving charitable institutions (Prochaska, 2006). However, taken altogether, although furiously energetic at certain times, Christian charitable giving did not serve to alter the underlying social conditions, but rather provided only an erratically applied balm to social injustice alongside a moralising distinction between those who were ‘deserving’ of support and those who were not. The bloody example of the French Revolution generated class-based fears in England with pendulum swings towards either harsher crackdowns of the labouring classes or greater benevolence towards their suffering, as suited the temperament of the authoritarian times. Ironically, the later dying convulsions of the Edwardian, class-based status quo, and indeed entrenched denomination sectarianism, was the result, not of the appeal of Christianity, but rather a response to horrors shared in the trenches of the First World War (Roper, 2009).

To return to *zakāt*, however, this offers a different path to social welfare as does the notion of *waqf*, translated as ‘endowment’ (Badawi, In press). Neither is associated with the idea of

duty combined with paternalism, but as fundamentally concerned with obligation to the wider social weald, encompassing all, regardless of status and wealth. The ethos is based on the belief that the better-off cannot prosper spiritually where another is deprived within the all-embracing community. This idea is not unfamiliar with other Abrahamic faiths, where we may recollect the Biblical proverb of the camel passing more easily through the eye of the needle than the rich man entering the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:21–24). Although this has been a disconcerting proverb to many affluent Christians (but maybe not to social workers of faith), in Islam *zakāt* carries additional expectations of the ordinary person as enmeshed in the community body. Social justice is served by the tapping of unequal reservoirs of wealth, owned by certain groups over others, in order to ensure some equitable redistribution of resources (Dean, Khan, 2007). In this schema we learn that for Muslims the canker of wealth develops where it is thickly clotted in some parts of the body *ummah*, yet trickles too thinly elsewhere, thus causing a pervasive social malaise. Premised on the assumption that this is fundamentally unhealthy to the functioning of the whole organism, it must therefore must be gently but piously purged annually for the good of all, via adherence to *zakāt*. It is therefore a position rejecting of, as well as an antidote to, the ideology of untrammelled capitalism. Rather than being placed in the position of the humble petitioner, the have-nots have the God-given right to demand equity of those who have, through *waqf*, which cannot be denied to the legitimate petitioner, without the other's relinquishment of an authentically recognised Muslim identity. To use the word in its proper sense rather than the populist one, this is a *radically* different understanding of community, citizen obligation and faith. It provides a contrasting alternative to the more familiar views of organised religion as too often the instrument of State hierarchical oppression, leading to secularised rejection, rather than organised religion as engaged in communitarian egalitarianism.

AUSTERITY AND WELFARE REFORM

These intriguing Islamic ethical prescriptions provide an alternative lens by which to scrutinise marginalisation and underprivilege, as well as social policy responses in the UK, particularly in terms of the of the most conspicuous areas of need facing public welfare: poverty; and the impact of privation that swells the social work caseload.

The UN Special Rapporteur Paul Alston's 2018 report on poverty and human rights in the UK offered a damning indictment of UK Coalition (2010–2015) and Conservative government (from 2015) welfare policy. The deployment of austerity measures, through welfare reform, was a political choice, sold to the public cynically as everyone being together in facing the common pain of the financial crisis, whilst exacting the highest human cost on people in poverty and those at risk of poverty.

Thus, in reference to the politics of austerity it is at this time that increased welfare conditionality, sanctions and individual blame for unemployment, poverty and social circumstances has risen, deflecting attention from the structural conditions perpetrated by Government (Machin, 2020; Veasey, Parker, 2021). These have a longer history than the current round of austerity measures, however, conditionality and benefit reductions have increased rather than alleviated poverty. Wright et al. (2020) interpret this moral, punitive approach as causing symbolic as well as material suffering. Rather than everyone working for the common good of reducing national debt together as a core social good, this represents State-perpetrated harm (Wright et al., 2020), or structural abuse (Parker, 2021; Parker, Veasey, 2021). Indeed, austerity measures affect those on the lowest incomes, women and children,

those in social and private rented housing, with the biggest losses occurring in older industrial areas, less prosperous seaside towns and some of the London boroughs (Mendoza, 2015).

Employing Islamic sentiments, we might associate the British Welfare State as although seeming to encapsulate the collective whole, it abjectly fails to acknowledge, as Islamic schemas do, the question of wealth inequities in society and the damage caused to the healthier functioning of the social body. This, perhaps is unsurprising, given the Thatcher legacy and the damage done to the concept of community and society (Parker, Ashencaen Crabtree, 2018).

The system however, allows for a remedial 'patching-up' political response, as we can note in a swift change in the architect of the current round of austerity and increased welfare conditionality, Iain Duncan-Smith. From someone who, on seeing the deprivation in Easterhouse in Scotland, vowed to address such poverty and conditions to becoming the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions who introduced some of the most punitive sanctions in British welfare history (Slater, 2012).

Unlike the fundamental notion of the corporate collective of the *ummah* and the *eu*-functional interdependence of Muslim communities, the moral discourse of welfare in Britain has been used to develop a politicised notion of 'fairness' in State financial support in which criticism has been levelled against a 'dependency culture' through political speeches and the consistent promotion of those discourses through visual, print and digital media into mainstream, everyday understandings (Morris, 2019). Dependency in the Muslim understanding is by contrast the condition of all people who not only on each other, but ultimately upon the goodness of God, without Whom nothing is possible. Dependency is not a personal failing in consequence, but a virtuous strength that acknowledges an ultimate truth regarding the human condition; a true rendition of social interdependence.

Political rhetoric and media responses set up destructive dichotomies by deeming that domestic benefit claimants on their own will be pilloried, and should blame themselves through the internalisation of the discourses of blame. This thereby can be used symbolically in contrast to the Other', such as migrants, and domestic minority ethnic groups. A shift ensues in which the recently pilloried becomes the 'deserving poor' unfairly treated in contrast to the demonised 'Other'; claimants who 'take' their benefits (Dagilyte, Greenfields, 2015).

Islamic perspectives, by contrast, offer a new construction of the recipients of *waqf.* Along with *zakāt*, the concept is elevated above the artificial divisiveness of personal culpability and desert, serving to justify inequalities and the ability to withhold welfare on the grounds of personal inadequacy and the continual reconstructions of criteria of need designed to gatekeep and limit scarce social work resources.

The effects of austerity measures have exacted a heavy toll on people in many ways, from healthcare, mental health, disability, unemployment. Whilst Britain has largely protected its health care spending between 2008 and 2014, there has been a reduction in health care professional salaries (Torfs et al., 2021). These cuts, driven by austerity reductions in budgets, increased health inequalities . Those working in health and social care saw wages reduced in real terms while those experiencing health inequalities were more likely to be poor or economically unviable – not quite everyone suffering together for a common goal. The

inclusion of such groups of helpers, as now in turn requiring the sharing of resources, would otherwise be implicitly recognised in a *zakāt* framework.

The change from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment, payments designed to cover additional costs of living arising directly from disability, introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 ss. 77–95, placed disabled people on par with other benefit claimants (Harris, 2014). The numbers of disabled people claiming benefits were reduced whilst those still claiming were cast in the blameworthy category of 'underserving' (Slater, 2012). Harris (2014) argues that these changes breached the rights of disabled people to independence, affirmed by the 2016 United Nations report that found a systematic violation of rights and a disproportionate adverse effect of welfare reform on disabled people, although the assessment was rejected by the UK Government (2016). The introduction of Universal Credit, that merged Jobseekers Allowance and the Employment Support Allowance and removed the 'limited capacity for work' payment worth at the time £29.05 per week, was experienced by disabled people as especially difficult. Increased conditionality and fitness for work assessments were considered uncaring and insensitive exacerbating mental ill health of respondents. Similarly, poor mental health outcomes have been seen amongst lone mothers who are unemployed, whereas employment, which requires investment rather than austerity, is seen to alleviate mental ill health (Harkness, 2016).

Social security has been, historically, implicated in creating a poverty trap in which individuals are financially better off unemployed. Attempts to address this perception have permeated welfare reform from its identification in the Speenhamland system of outdoor relief, and the resultant harshness of 'less eligibility' in the Poor Law (Amendment) Act 1834, through the removal of Family Income Support in the 1970s, family credit in the 1980s and addressed through individual blame, and recently in punishment through sanction, and behavioural conditionality for benefit receipt in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Larkin, 2018). These measures have done little to reduce unemployment but have reduced public expenditure in the most deprived and impoverished places and exacerbated poor mental health (Beatty, Fothergill, 2018; Dwyer et al., 2020).

The results of these benefit reforms are also seen in the quotidian experiences of people in poverty. Trussell Trust Foodbank Network data shows austerity measures and welfare reform/cuts have led to an increase in the number of families with children using foodbanks (Lambie-Mumford, Green, 2017), representing a swing
from the concept of universal welfare support to a mainstream dependence on charitable support and a change from recognising the structural causes of poverty to reinforcing individual culpability. In the meantime, the level of need among families so far exceeds the capacity of social work in Britain to meet such challenges, that resultant readjustment of resourcing and expectations for social work support is generated through the ever tightening and refining of criteria of need (Harris, 2019). Also, changes in housing benefit and the housing market have introduced a market-oriented system that sits at odds with social housing creating discourses of 'less desirable' and 'blameworthy for those in need and workers in the sector (Jacobs, Manzi, 2013; Manzi, 2015; Manzi, Richardson, 2017; Daly, 2018; Harding et al., 2018).

Austerity measures represent a political choice (Alston, 2018). That choice is predicated on the lie that everyone is taking equal portions of suffering – the rich are, we may suggest, as in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, 'more equal than others'. The argument of the common good

hides the political direction towards ‘less eligibility’, moral culpability and individual blame and away from State responsibility. It is wrapped in the notion of the ‘common good’.

The common good in its widest sense forms the earthly and material terrain where faith-based charitable bodies practice good deeds, as religion-in-action, as it were. While Prochaska (2006) charts the disinheritance of Christian charities in Britain from a rich legacy of community-based welfare, the rise of such faith-based care by Muslim British groups is considered by Jawad (2012). Brodard (In press) examines Muslim welfare initiatives across Britain, France and Switzerland Europe which include forms of ‘social work’ services. We consequently learn that there are three main forms of Islamic philanthropy operating across in these three European nations. These being: 1) transnational social activism; 2) community-based services run via mosques/Islamic centres; 3) independent Islamic associations offering their own ‘social work’/counselling services (Brodard, In press). Of course, this is not to suggest that Islamic welfare groups are in any sense unique in these countries, in offering religiously motivated, welfare services that are deemed to be especially congruent to identified and particular service user groups in faith communities. There are many other such examples and such groups have been particularly busy during the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused profound personal and community suffering, as well as considerable social and economic disruption.

ZAKĀT AND THE STATE

Islam was birthed and refined in a context of competing Middle Eastern faiths and has always been aware of other religions around it (Stillman, 2000). This has particularly been the case regarding Judaism upon which the early Islam modelled much of its holistic, daily codes (Azumah, 2011). While Christianity has also provided some spiritual inspiration to Islam with a reverence for both Christ and the Virgin Mary, albeit with some fundamental differences as well (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2021b). However, Islam’s incredible success in the early Middle Ages, as a powerful civilisation that absorbed so many regions under its influence, took on the characteristic of a dominant, international faith with other minority religious communities in its shadow (Shenk, 2003). Islam in much of the Global North, however, negotiates the terrain of being a minority faith in a host nation with other traditions concerning religion, citizenship and welfare (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2008). Political ideologies, legislation, social policy and sometimes, organised religion, shape the discourse, the context and the content of welfare. In Britain a rights-based, citizenship agenda served to nudge religion to one side, as we have seen, where, for example, in the twentieth century and the new NHS, medical and nursing care, moved away from its tenuously stretched, religious roots to assert a strong professionalism embedded in State-supported secularism (Prochaska, 2006), with similar developments taking place in social work (Burt, 2020). The new post-War ‘cradle-to-grave’ welfare state promise was seen as social necessity in moving decisively away from precisely the kind of grassroots care provided to neighbourhood that had always been associated with faith-based or faith-inspired, informal community support (Timmins, 2017). No longer was there a need to prove oneself a ‘deserving’, morally upright person to receive help, for under this new State model, all that was needed was to meet a new criterion of need, whether saint or sinner.

The Welfare State has aged in Britain, and not very well, given all the political abuses it has been subject to over its chequered seventy years; it’s ‘age asks ease’ to paraphrase the metaphysical poet, John Donne (1633). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which ironically has both hugely overburdened the NHS, whilst underlining its critical national importance,

successive Conservative governments, in particular, have deliberately sought to undermine the Welfare State as part of an ideological allegiance to the so-called Minimal State (Nozick, 2001). Here the State, as corporate welfare provider, is reduced, in favour of placing the burden on so-called citizen self-reliance as exercises in neoliberal politics.

In times of austerity, another form of political ideological thinking, a decided and divisive rolling back of the State and the promotion 'civil society' is witnessed; which in practice in the UK has meant reliance on food banks rather than civil society as understood throughout the rest of Europe. Reflecting on this it might be assumed that Islamic ethics in terms of *waqf* and *zakāt* would align well with such situations. It is within the scope, it would seem, of that which we might associate with small-scale, neighbour community-level responses. However, Islamic ethics does not preclude the role of State welfare, and accordingly we come to a theological social position in Islam from the starting point of the common good. Using these reference points, we may rhetorically question how the common weald is best served in social contexts of such inequality. Illuminated by a deeper exploration of the Islamic religio-ethical framework, we may confidently respond that social work can only be liberated to achieve its highest aims most effectively, by the reduction of capitalist inequalities that cause such devastating social division among the spiritually equal. In Islam it is through these means that the *ummah's* covenant towards social cohesion is renewed and strengthened, which otherwise would see a withering away. The ineluctable deduction provided by Islam is that the few cannot thrive at the expense of the many; and societies that do not actively check growing divides of wealth and privilege are corrupt and deeply unhealthy, spiritually, morally and materially.

CONCLUSIONS

Seen from a Western dualist position, *zakāt* might be thought to occupy an interestingly singular position within this rehearsal of fundamental Islamic principles. While less unambiguously devoted to sacred doctrine, *zakāt* can be read to straddle the secular domains of ethics and politics in the form of a diachronic welfare policy for all Muslims across time. This singularity, however, is based on a mistake of applying a secular-sacred divide, characteristic of most Western societies, with Islamic counterparts, actual or idealised. Islam notably refutes any such conceptual or pragmatic bifurcation of sacred law and secular practice. Beyond the enacted or imagined, Muslims seeks a harmonious spiritual entwinement of doctrine and daily life. The principle of *zakāt* requires a deliberate enaction into practice, particularly so where Muslims live as minorities in societies that carry other mainstream beliefs. It would therefore seem natural that *ad hoc* Muslim community activist groups in host societies informally organise themselves to gather and offer relief to fellow Muslims living locally; and indeed, this clearly does occur (Jawad 2009), particularly where social services are not seen as responsive to the needs of Muslim service users (Ashencaen Crabtree et al., 2016).

Yet, *zakāt* was never conceived of as merely confined to small-scale neighbourhood distribution schemes, but rather it is based on the idea not of micro-activism, but macro, continuous social responsiveness to recognisable human need within a societal framework that regards gluts of wealth existing besides wastelands of want, as fundamentally against the laws of God and thus, inextricably, humankind. The deep impacts of austerity in Britain have caused enormous damage to health and life expectancy in Britain (Alston, 2018), and where the impact falls as heavily on underprivileged children as much as the adults, despite the landmark British legislation, the Children Act 2004, that provides guidelines for anti-poverty

social work with children. Today, as write this paper and note gloomy statistics of growing need and privation in Britain, the media are reporting the antics of the transatlantic 'mega-rich' who compete in hubris and vast expenditure in the personal race to launch billionaires into Space (BBC, 2021b). We may equally reflect on the enormity of such cruel disparities in society; and what utility might emerge from the harnessing of the spirit of a 'zakāt' inspired social work for the much-needed social transformation of neoliberalism's bleak landscapes.

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