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Islamic Public Administration in Sunlight and Shadow: Theory and Practice

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Abstract

The combination of theoretical principles and centuries-old, yet still functional, practices and institutions that together form the Islamic paradigm of public administration (PA) have customarily been absent from both academic literature and PA reform policies, not least in the NISPAcee region. With, e. g., the arrival of *Peter's Administrative Traditions* last year, however, Islamic PA has now been positioned within the mainstream, that is, recognized as a legitimate, contextually relevant alternative to the global-Western paradigm. Accordingly, this article aims to further delineate the Islamic PA tradition by discussing its positionality and significance within Non-Western PA, surveying its normative principles, exploring a set of contemporary case studies in Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Morocco, and concluding with a broader reflection on the importance of contextuality and heterogeneity for good PA.

Keywords:

Islamic public administration, non-western public administration, vakıf, mahalla, zawāyā

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1. Introduction

Non-Western public administration – NWPA – presents a fundamental yet fruitful challenge to the global-Western mainstream, despite hitherto not receiving much academic attention (Drechsler, 2013a). One of the key non-Western paradigms, Islamic Public Administration, is a tradition replete with normative principles accumulated across centuries of scholarship. Yet it is also accompanied by a general dearth of contemporary scholarship of practice, which has somewhat hindered its potential to serve as a tenable paradigm in the academic literature. The current essay contributes to filling this lacuna by both laying out the theory and showing some real and functioning practices of various levels of public administration (PA).

This is especially relevant in and for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the Caucasus, and Central Asia – the NISPAcee region, in other words. As one of us already pointed out over a decade ago, ten of the countries it encompasses are Islamic, in the sense of having a Muslim majority, and many others were influenced or indeed administered by Islamic empires for centuries, even half a millennium. (In fact, there are no Muslim-majority countries in Europe *outside* the NISPAcee region.) And yet, NISPAcee research generally, and this journal in particular, has devoted very little attention to Islamic PA (Drechsler, 2013b, pp. 57–58; next to our work, Urinbojev, 2011 is a notable exception), perhaps not in small part due to the lack, or perceived lack, of a theoretical scaffolding.

But this intellectual situation has markedly improved by today. As a key example, we can now utilize B. G. Peters' recent very positive, if brief, treatment of Islamic PA in his "instant classic", *Administrative Traditions* (2021, pp. 163–166) – something that, given Peters' towering presence in the field of PA and public policy, not only academically but also regarding PA reform, and especially in CEE (see Randma-Liiv & Drechsler, 2019), makes eminent sense. Peters takes up several of our earlier discussions of Islamic (and other Non-Western) PA, and he focuses on the relevance of Islamic PA today, as the subtitle, *Understanding the Roots of Contemporary Administrative Behavior*, suggests. This fits the approach of this present essay very well, while at the same time giving us the opportunity to elucidate these points and add, in a reminding way, some concrete cases. Peters' observations (2021) that Islamic PA has a tendency towards the communal, the participatory, and the bottom-up dovetails with our choice of three highly relevant, contemporary institutions that broadly fall into these categories.

To do so, we first offer a survey of some of the theoretical principles of NWPA and Islamic PA. Then, we utilize a small but emerging niche of geographically diverse case studies on the practice of Islamic PA, and specifically on community- and cooperative-oriented institutions. Cases come from Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Morocco. Our results flesh out how theoretical Islamic principles of public administration play out in practice and also inductively emphasize previously often un(der)-theorized ones.

From the perspective of moving beyond unidirectionality, this brief study therefore looks at both the operational mechanics and guiding ethics of a functional, real-existing paradigm of NWPA. Our findings support the idea that at least one of the reasons why already-existing administrative systems are successful is precisely because they emerged in and preserve a local (and Islamic) context – thereby contributing to the decentering of Western PA, which is a point that has recently moved, if not to the forefront of the agenda, then certainly towards it.

2. Context: non-western public administration

Unidirectionality in PA is the position that there is one global way of doing PA, that PA is not contextual, and that what is now global PA is without alternative. Moving beyond this perspective requires acknowledging that there exist different, valid paradigms of PA. This, in turn, implies that there is not one global best (practice of) PA, but that what we call global PA is actually Western PA, a perspective that seems to have become established around a decade ago, or more precisely, in 2013 (Drechsler, 2013a; Raadschelders, 2013; de Vries, 2013b; Pierre, 2013). If PA has – with Geert Bouckaert – two dimensions, ethics (goals) and performance (mechanics), linked though they may often be, “good PA” is both well working and ethical by its own standards (Bouckaert, 2011). And as Jürgen Habermas has reminded us, “the moral conduct of a population is measured, as a whole, by those convictions and norms valid in their society” (2019, p. 789).

But there is a larger, indeed fundamental and actually truly wicked problem here. The underlying general question is whether all human beings are basically the same and will eventually end up in one global society with the same values, or whether large cultural differences will legitimately remain as they are, at least for a long duration, and that to respect this is crucial. The wickedness comes to fruition once values from the same system that prompt the former conflict with the latter. Implicitly, the former position extrapolates the Western model as the goal of convergence, and it holds that empirically, globalization is the way thither, often in a somewhat folklorized version of Weber’s Occidental Rationalism and Modernization theses (see Schluchter, 1979). This is the West’s “project of modernity” not as one option, but as an umbrella, a roof under which other systems can and must accommodate themselves – and actually only as long as they do not challenge the ascendancy of the West itself (Siemons, 2020). Such an approach is reinforced by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, which in turn is potentially somewhat delegitimizing for non-Western solutions, at least in the short-run, even though just about all Russian ideology deployed in this case uses Western tropes (in the sense of Christian, non- or even anti-Asian ones, i.e. “East of the West”, not “West of the East”) (see, e. g., the foundational Berdjajew, 1927).

Regarding PA in particular, as we said, what we tacitly do is to largely equate good with global PA, and global PA with modern PM, and that with Western PA – and that,

as PA usually has it, is contemporary Anglo-American PA; it is certainly so in scholarship (see only Drechsler, 2020a; Raadschelders, 2013; Pollitt, 2014). In other words, countries and places that do not adhere to or at least move towards the global-Western standard (even if this is allowed to include significant regional variations, which is not always the case) are somehow remiss; they do not provide optimal PA and thus governance. The only excuse they may have is that they are laggards, that they are in transition, but they are expected to eventually arrive at global (Western) PA. Much of the sad state of PA reform in non-Western countries is arguably related to this – countries were and are not allowed to develop their own strengths based on their own traditions, but were and are told to adopt Western formats, or else (e.g., otherwise they would not receive vital funding).

It is, however, bold to assume convergence, especially seeing that what constitutes good PA obviously hinges on public policy, government, governance, and indeed cultural context (Pollitt, 2013). Therefore, there really is no reason to believe that if one transfers what works in Boise, Idaho (if it works, which is not something one can assume *prima facie*) to Dhaka, it will work there as well. In fact, the track record of PA transfer, rather than PA learning, often pushed by the international organizations, has at least been mixed; histories of failures abound, and it may even well be that there are more of these than successes (Andrews, 2013). The CEE region is arguably a prime example of this (de Vries, 2013b).

Nevertheless, the alternative way of thinking, that is, recognizing that there is such a thing as NWPA, is only slowly (re-)surfacing and entering the mainstream PA discourse (Drechsler, 2020a). Certainly, there are no areas left in the world, including the carrier countries of NWPA, that are not hybrid – one is almost tempted to say “contaminated” – by global-Western PA (Drechsler, 2013a, 2015), and this makes recognizing non-Western features difficult. And yet,

We should expect to find substantial movement toward a common model of administration ... But the evidence, even among European countries, is not very strong in that direction. Indeed, one can make an equally strong case for the persistence of national patterns in the face of homogenization, and further that in some cases there has been divergence as well as convergence (Peters, 2021, pp. 202–203).

At this point, we should note that global-Western PA is not homogeneous either but rather has a very wide, internally contradictory scope. For example, the anti-state destructionism of NPM versus state-affirming, citizen-focused approaches such as the Neo-Weberian State makes for very different contexts (and outcomes) indeed (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Peters, 2021; Drechsler, 2005). But depending on the level of abstraction, there is clearly such a thing as the, albeit moving, target of global-Western PA.

And in fact, it is precisely a careful consideration of NWPA alternatives to the global-Western mainstream that has, next to understanding these systems themselves, the dual effect of both qualifying and illuminating the latter, making it possible to have a more thorough and more relevant approach to global-Western PA, potentially enabling scholars and practitioners to reposition themselves regarding more appropriate advice and reform. And so, looking at NWPA allows those stuck in global-Western unidirectionality to recognize, at least, that what they see as globally valid, natural, and given is highly contingent at best (Drechsler, 2015, 2020a).

3. The challenge of Islamic PA

The two most important NWPA traditions present today, that is, those that form genuine challenges to the universalism of the global-Western approach, are the Confucian and the Islamic ones (Drechsler, 2013a, 2015, 2020a). Confucian PA is an obvious case, and – even before the Covid-19 response results – obviously successful (Drechsler, 2018a; Nemeč et al., 2020). As Max Weber pointed out, it is indeed the one system of PA closest to “his”, meaning here the rational-modern mainstream that, in spite of the variants and shifts mentioned *supra*, are still at the core of the global-Western mainstream (Weber, 1989; Drechsler, 2020b).

What makes Islamic PA special is that this is the main NWPA tradition physically bordering, and thus challenging, the West. Since this happened, in the form that survived until today at least, historically from Southwestern Europe, it is also *inside* Europe (Drechsler, 2018b). This is not the case with the Confucian tradition, nor is Confucian PA perceived (at least to the same extent as Islamic PA) as being based on a threatening ideology. Islamic PA is challenging indeed: its sheer existence calls out the non-connectedness of religion and PA as a choice (and a wrong one at that), not something “given”, and it is something the West has to react to beyond insisting that it should not be so.

Compared to Confucian PA, Islamic PA is therefore the more tricky, the more controversial, and thus in some sense the more interesting alternative to the Western paradigm – not least because it also challenges the global West from the inside. As Hans-Georg Gadamer pointed out, 20th-century changes, such as the foundation of Israel as a state, oil money, and migration, have basically thrown the challenge of Islam right back into Europe and thus the global West (1993, p. 271) – if less so, so far, into CEE.

Yet Islamic PA has in general suffered from a bad reputation in the global-Western realm, partly because of propaganda, partly because of the lack of serious investigation, and investigation that takes the subject seriously, ever since Max Weber intended to, but never did, write a book on the topic and only left us with some quite disparaging – if less so than usually cited – remarks in more general texts (Schluchter,

1987).

But how important can religion possibly be for PA (Ongaro, 2021)? Surely it is not for global-Western PA nowadays. Once we accept that there is such a thing as NWPA, however, we must also realize that this is a very Western question to ask in the first place. One aspect that speaks for Islamic PA as such is that by and large, most people in most Islamic countries themselves would say that Islam – Islam as such, whatever their own tradition – matters, and that it matters very much (Drechsler, 2013a).

The obvious hypothesis would thus be that Islam – being such a strong determinant of context, of the world in which people live and the systems that they build there and that emerge – has had, and still has, a non-incident, important and actually crucial impact on how the public sphere is organized and even managed. As Michael Cook has argued, Islam simply is the one true world religion that has this influence on politics, international relations and the state today (2014). And as Noah Feldman has claimed, the demand of relegating history to history in public affairs may be Western, but it is not Islamic (2012). Thus, one of the most important variables for PA – not only governance – in Islamic countries would be Islam, not just the national tradition, even (albeit less so) if the society in question is quite secular (Drechsler, 2013a).

4. Theoretical points

One is tempted to justify the absence of a catalogue or list of what Islamic PA as a paradigm is all about by saying that to create such a list would still force a global-Western set of categories and criteria on another system, or to say that like the “emptiness of the Mosque” (Otto, 1923), Islamic PA provides for a more contextual, less rigid approach to PA. But certain basic principles and general, cross-cultural tendencies both do emerge, and seeing globalized hybridization of PA as well as the competition issue, moving towards elements of an ideal type of Islamic PA (and in PA, it should never be more than that) is still of interest.

To start, the *Qur'an* – famously for experts, not as obviously for outsiders – does not deal with specifics of governance, let alone administration. The one PA principle established, however, and of great and non-negotiable importance, is the consultative aspect of decision-making called *shura*, meaning that rulers cannot make decisions all by themselves, but that they need to discuss them in council. An inherently participatory and inclusive process, *shura* requires, at least to some extent, “freedom of thought and expression, right to assemble and converse, and encouragement to engage in healthy criticism and fruitful counsels among followers, be they rulers or subjects” (Iqbal & Lewis, 2009, p. 258). If the matter at hand goes beyond the expertise of the normal group of advisors or is particularly complex, the process of *shura* requires seeking qualified opinions of individuals with specialist knowledge and appropriate experience

(Talaat et al., 2016). And while it is true that “consultation will extend only so far”, because the decision can and may well go against the counsel received, “the presence of consultative methods does provide some checks on the hierarchy” (Peters, 2021, p. 165). This cannot be emphasized enough, with all its ramifications – rash, lonely, archetypically hero-businessman decision-making cannot be justified in Islamic PA.

Almost in contrast to this, ever since the Prophet’s own days, the rapid, indeed explosion-like, expansion of Islam must have led to an overstretch as regards governability and indeed administrative capacity that could only partly be countered by decentralization and the inclusion of local elites, already well-described by the historian Al-Baladhuri (820–892) in his *Origins of the Islamic State* (2002). Therefore, the dependent areas would likely not deliver fully – and the idea of Islamic PA then would have been that this would not even be expected, as getting something is better than nothing at all (Drechsler, 2015). The West expects the state, ideally, to be “a machine that would go of itself” (Kammen, 1986), a clockwork – that would not be the case in Islam. Shifts in how we see governance and PA have contributed to new possibilities of how to assess Islamic PA in this respect; Merilee Grindle’s important concept of Good-Enough Governance (2004, 2007; de Vries, 2013a on PA) is one of the most important ones in this context, underlining that very often, governance is about achieving minimal workability against the odds of heavy policy constraints, rather than perfection.

There is certainly a large traditional and still viable body of literature, beginning with the Prophetic *sunnah* (precedent) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, on the Islamic governance aspect (see only Samier, 2017; ElKaleh & Samier, 2013). For instance, the Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092) and his *Siyāsatnāma* (The Book of State Art / of Governance) (1960) present us with a specific, workable concept of state administration that may be as different from the usual Western recommendations for improving the governance of the Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries as it may be superior in realism and applicability, in spite of its great age. This includes, for instance, for superiors to avoid interference in routine administration or, in today’s parlance, not to micro-manage (Nizam al-Mulk, 1960).

Another highly relevant example from the Nizam is a strong emphasis on the absolute non-delegatability of responsibility for those over whom one rules (1960) – as ultimately, one is only responsible for one’s own actions in Divine accounting (Kalantari, 1998). This was seen as a key feature of Islamic PA, even in the West, for centuries (Hebel in Stolleis, 2003). Its importance even today lies in creating direct responsibility on the part of the ruler for his subjects, one that is crucial for him and his record, for how he will be judged. The idea is the same as in Confucianism: “An ethical doctrine designed to moderate the behaviour of rulers and orient them towards the interest of the ruled” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 19).

An area where Confucian and Islamic PA differ is the basis for obedience to rulers and, more broadly, the legitimacy of rule. For the former, the Mandate of Heaven, and

hence the performance of the government (Drechsler, 2020b), is the ultimate criterion regarding whether rebellion against a ruler is sanctioned (indeed required), whereas the near-consensus of Islamic scholarship agrees that the only context in which rebellion is possible is when a government “makes it impossible for believers to live in accordance with the *shari‘a*” (Malkawi & Sonn, 2011, p. 120). It follows that the legitimacy of rule in the Islamic paradigm is based on the ability to create a society in which the *shari‘a*, the immutable sacred law of God, is protected and upheld:

Shari‘a is founded upon wisdom and achieving people’s welfare in this life and the afterlife. In its entirety it is justice, mercy, benefit, and wisdom. Therefore any ruling that replaces justice with injustice, mercy with its opposite, commonweal with corruption, or wisdom with nonsense, is a ruling that does not belong to the *shari‘a*, even if it is claimed to be so according to some interpretation (Ibn Al-Qayyim, 1973, p. 3).

A common misconception, however, even amongst Muslims, is the assumption that *shari‘a* is Islamic law itself, or for that matter something that is able to be fully ascertained, let alone implemented (Auda, 2008).

In reality, *shari‘a* is the articulation – through revelation (*Qur‘an*) and prophecy (*sunnah*) – of God’s expectations or will. The human (imperfect) interpretation of these divine expectations by scholars, utilizing various methodologies and sources, constitute *fiqh*, which is the Islamic laws, jurisprudence, and rulings manifested in human society, i.e. the application of the *shari‘a*. In parallel, *maqasid* is the summarization and prioritization of the wisdom (i.e. telos) behind these divine expectations into the overarching goals of an Islamic society, which is a vastly underexplored source of Islamic PA ethics and values. The first scholar to put forth an elaborate *maqasid* framework, still utilized today, the Spanish theologian Al-Shatibi (1320–1388) in *al-Muwafaqat* (“*The Reconciliation*”, 1997), identifies the highest-priority goal of the *shari‘a* as the preservation of *din* or faith-based “binding customs or practices that allow communities to function” (Nongbri, 2013, p. 42).

In essence, *din* is a contextual system of Islamic social order premised on fulfilling divine expectations and, in so doing, yielding reward in both worlds, i.e. on earth and in the afterlife. *Din* must be contextual precisely because the *shari‘a* as such is held to be a comprehensive guide across time and space (Brown, 2011), and although there do exist (relatively few) divine expectations that must be implemented without alteration or attention to context, the new issues and circumstances that are continually unfolding within and across societies require human interpretation and best judgement (relying on *fiqh* and *maqasid*) of what God’s Will would be in said cases (Auda, 2008). The legitimacy of rule in the Islamic tradition therefore does indeed rest upon the government’s ability to uphold a society living in accordance to *shari‘a* – meaning, the ability to cultivate a space where *din* is paramount and can contextually flourish.

Finally, keeping *din* front and center, a rather salient, although contextually variant, value of Islamic PA institutions originates from the concept of embeddedness – the notion that economic and political forces are existing within, and subservient to, a set of social norms, traditions, and customs (Polanyi, 1944; Peters, 2021). Urinboev argues that culturally embedded Islam shapes the practice of Islamic PA: normal, quotidian actions are given a significance when understood from an Islamic vantage point (2014). In particular, much of the literature has shown that notions of cooperation, and mutual help are regarded as a fundamental requirement for qualifying as a good Muslim (Urinboev, 2014). The question of why it is important to qualify as a good Muslim in the first place and the fact that one does so via cooperation is important for an Islamic PA perspective in that it reveals the underlying values. Namely, there are two benefits for partaking in constructive social relations: an overt benefit in the form of social deference, and a subtler benefit in the form of providing an immaterial purpose and motivation (i.e. favourable Hereafter). Kalantari arrives at the same conclusion from a different route, pointing to a set of underlying principles that define theoretical Islamic PA, which “align the organization, the community, and the political leadership in serving and satisfying God” (1998, p. 1836).

5. Practical application

The latter must be seen together with, as Peters has pointed out, a “feature that emerges from an examination of Islamic public administration,” although also found “in the Scandinavian (and to a lesser extent the Germanic) tradition” which is the “significant reliance on non-state actors for the delivery of public services” (2021, pp. 163–164). “Islamic administration appears compatible with the participatory strand of thinking about administrative reform” (2021, p. 165; Peters, 2010). “To the extent that there is a ‘managerial style’ it is consultative and does not emphasize control over others within an organization” (2021, p. 166).

This being the case, and seeing the contemporary relevance and even tendency towards such forms of administration and organization, especially in the context that arguing for the validity of Islamic PA today is still an uphill battle, we have chosen three cases of lived, relevant, and even striking examples that come from precisely this sphere. These three cases – the Turkish *vakıf*, the Uzbek *mahalla*, and the Moroccan *zawāyā* – are all unambiguously Islamic and so recognized, but as a sample, they have further advantages as well.

First, the cases come from very diverse areas of Islam; one classically within the NISPACEE region (Uzbekistan), one from its newest member, which is somehow in the “semi-shadow” of NISPACEE and a special case (Turkey; see Drechsler, 2013b, p. 57, fn 1), and, as a helpful comparison, one outside of it (Morocco).

Second, the three cases represent different levels of stateness. Although all three

eventually contribute to a functioning state, the Uzbek example is one of *Ersatzvor-nahme*, i.e. an Islamic institution (re-)emerges because the national government cannot manage public service provision (and other features); the Moroccan example embodies a parallel yet more than just state-sanctioned PA system to the colonial-heritage, global-Western “main” system; and the Turkish one is by now again a state-institutionalized arrangement. Coming back, once again, to Peters, and here his notion of “governing in the shadows”, which posits that not only governance but also PA are carried out not only by the state, but also through alternatives such as the market, experts, and more generally social actors and institutions (Peters, 2019; see Chafik & Drechsler, 2022), one could say that these are PA in the shadow, the semi-shadow, and right in the sunlight, respectively.

6. Case studies

6.1 Turkey: vakıf

Islam has made inroads into Europe from the South, but the Southwestern (Spain and Portugal) and Southern (Sicily) ones are distant memories. However, as already mentioned *supra*, from the Southeast, the Ottoman Empire came to dominate a significant part of Europe for centuries (1299–1923), and its core successor state, Turkey, has a European part with Eastern Thrace and key areas of Istanbul, a global megalopolis. Since the Empire had a highly sophisticated PA system, and since it only dissolved relatively recently (in fact, shortly after Max Weber died), this is the main legacy of Islamic PA in Europe. In the last 25 years, the Ottoman Empire has been reassessed by historians and sociologists as “not so bad” in many ways (Finkel, 2007). Ottoman PA is paradigmatic NWPA: a specific, different, highly sophisticated form of PA – in some respects, the radically other to Western PA, in others, exactly the same. The former is well known or assumed, the latter not so much. But regarding the former, the relaxed attitude towards modest delivery that was mentioned as Islamic was a functional part of Ottoman PA (Ágoston, 2015; Barkey, 2008; Drechsler, 2018a).

But while Ottoman PA is gone, or better was removed, the religious charitable foundation, the *waqf*, *vakıf* in Turkish, a specific Islamic PA institution, and one with great importance in the Ottoman Empire, is still here. It was perhaps the key Ottoman welfare institution: Inalienable private foundations, sometimes endowed by the rulers and their relatives, financed much of social care or charity as a religious institution, such as madrassas, soup kitchens, and the like (Barnes, 1987). In spite of their inalienability, the system as such changed over time, if slowly; in this respect, Çizakça and Deligöz stress its anti-colonialist resilience (Çizakça, 2000; Deligöz, 2014). As Deligöz has argued, the re-establishment of *vakıfs* in Turkey from the 1960s does belong into the context of the re-Islamization and indeed re-Ottomanization of the country (2014). The main reason for its most recent consolidation was, according to him, the creation

of easily implementable options to deliver social services in the post-2001 crisis period (2014). Today, new *vakıfs*, state-funded and private, also cover education and public health aspects, such as through respective university foundations and endowments (Drechsler, 2018a).

Vakıfs have been heavily criticized, both for their inflexibility and conservative heel-digging generally (Kuran, 2013, 2016) and thus serving as a convenient justification for why colonial powers needed to take over their lands (Sait & Lim, 2006), the answer to the famous conundrum of why Islam was not competitive in or with capitalism (Rodinson, 1966), and for enabling the neoliberal state by moving charity outside of it, without taking responsibility (Isik, 2014) – in other words, for being both not sufficiently NPM and too much so. But as Peters has pointed out, “Islamic administration is almost diametrically opposed to the market-based values of NPM” (2021, p. 165), and by today, in light of health and hospital crises and the emphasis on infrastructure which Covid-19 has shown to be vital for a working response, the inalienability of endowments seems to be more attractive and indeed more modern in the sense of contemporary than too much flexibility. But in any case, what both directions of attack show is not so much what is wrong with the *vakıf* but that the *vakıf* is different and best understood from an NWP perspective that takes Islamic PA and its principles seriously.

6.2 Uzbekistan: mahalla

As for the Islamic PA legacy in Uzbekistan, for centuries the broader region of Central Asia – which included independent states such as Bukhara and Khiva, located in present day Uzbekistan – generated a long tradition of state administration and, more broadly, produced many of the most renowned and influential scholars and practitioners of the Islamic intellectual tradition, such as Al-Biruni and the aforementioned Nizam Al-Mulk (Starr, 2009). In more recent times, however, the general Islamic legacy of Uzbekistan faced a setback with nearly seventy years of Soviet-led “aggressive eradication of traditional value systems, institutions and practices” (Klebleyev, 2014, p. 149). Indeed, the Uzbek state still maintains a strong continuity with the Soviet era with regards to the heavy-handed tactics defining national identity and culture for social control (Adams, 2010), and even in terms of the same political elite retaining power (Klebleyev, 2014), although it has failed to preserve a Sovietesque social-welfare system (Urinboyev, 2011). And it is precisely because of this latter central government failure that the Islamic PA legacy of Uzbekistan lives on in the form of traditional local institutions known as *mahalla*.

Urinboyev defines *mahalla* as centuries-old Islamic neighbourhood-based communities “united by common traditions, language, customs, moral values and reciprocal exchange of money, material goods and services”, which remain a ubiquitous part of life in Uzbekistan today, basically the form of Local Government (2014, p. 161). As is well-documented by his ethnographic field work, *mahalla* leadership traditionally

includes three leaders informally chosen by residents: “the *oqsoqol* (whitebeard, who is the informal leader of *mahalla*), *boylar* (a wealthy resident from the community), and *dasturhonchi* (a woman leader)” (2011, p. 40), with the *oqsoqol* in particular being judged on “personal reputation”, i.e. character (2014, p. 165). Under this leadership team, local residents create “an informal *mahalla*-based administration system which is based on Islamic values and principles”, the most salient of which in the present context is that “every Muslim is expected to share his or her economic resources with relatives and neighbors ... this is a precondition for a ‘good Muslim’” (Urinboyev, 2014, p. 174). This communal engagement is embodied in a well-established social norm known as *hashar* (mutual assistance), in which “under the absence of any legal mechanisms, *mahalla* residents cooperate with each other by providing labor for the construction of houses, for the preparation of the logistics of wedding and funeral ceremonies and many other informal services that are necessary for human livelihood” (Urinboyev, 2011, p. 48).

These informal but genuine *mahallas* therefore fulfil the dual role of maintaining the Islamic values and traditions that shape their service delivery to local constituents, as well as picking up the slack regarding the state’s failure at providing the basic necessities of life for citizens – in other words, they provide the public services, and on a very Islamic level too. And although the informal *mahalla* is the paradigmatic (Islamic) PA in the shadow, it ultimately, and almost ironically, contributes to the socio-political stability of Uzbekistan.

6.3 Morocco: *zawāyā*

Any search for the vestiges of Islam’s inroads into Southwestern Europe would point to present-day Morocco, which is home to the largest monarchy in Africa and the oldest in Arab world – the Alawites. The legitimacy of the monarchy is rooted in Islam, in fact uniquely so, based on lineage from the Prophet and being the sole inheritors of the Umayyad Andalusian legacy, such that any Alawite King “possesses the only authentic claim to an Islamic Caliphate, if one were to be established” (Esposito & Kalin, 2009, p. 26). To reinforce the legitimacy of their claim to the Prophet’s temporal and spiritual authority (apart from the genealogical), the Alawites employ a tactic known as “the ritualization of soft power” (Daadaoui, 2011), which involves direct support and religiously symbolic engagement of popular Islamic institutions in Morocco – the most salient of which are *zawāyā* (this section is based on Chafik & Drechsler, 2022)

Zawāyā (singular: *zāwiya*) are local spiritual organizations, often indistinguishable from a mosque in form, that were historically organized around professions (i.e. guilds), provided lodging all along the pilgrimage route from West Africa to Mecca, and were led by a charismatic Shaykh (male or female) alongside numerous prominent members (*mqadam*). However, there has been, and continues to be, another dimension to *zawāyā* apart from the strictly spiritual: the crafting and delivery of alternative public-service provision.

Across various domains, the non-Western, specifically Islamic nature of the *zawāyā*'s service provision is unmistakable. Within infrastructure, for instance, the construction of wells and basins for public use, carried out by *zawāyā* bureaucrats and everyday members alike, is not just a communal approach to public works. Rather, it is an opportunity to take part in a *khidma*, i.e. a menial service or task for the commonweal that induces humility, promotes social cohesion, and qualifies as an act of worship. Essentially, participants in *khidma* are undergoing a spiritual exercise in that they perceive an opportunity to gain the favour of the Creator by serving creation. Another example is that of *zawāyā*'s educational system not consisting of class and subject-based curriculums and learning, but rather a fundamental emphasis on personalized mentorship and character development through emulating spiritual masters (e.g., the Shaykh and *mqadam*).

But why and how can the Moroccan state allow *zawāyā* this much autonomy? Especially when *zawāyā* are not exactly following OECD, World Bank, or any other global-Western standards? The answer, we argue (Chafik & Drechsler, 2022), is due to the bifurcated nature of Moroccan PA. Being a geographic, economic, cultural, and ideological crossroads, it is not surprising that there exist two distinct but parallel systems of PA in Morocco: (1) a “modern”, formal system that represents urban Moroccan elites and reflects global-Western standards or at least objectives (Zemrani, 2014) and (2) a traditional, indigenous Islamic system embodied by *zawāyā* that operates throughout municipal areas.

The precise arrangement between the Alawite monarchy and *zawāyā* is as follows: in exchange for the *zawāyā*'s ceremonial pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) and “brought to you by the generosity of the monarchy” attitude to their extremely popular spiritual and service provision activities, the monarchy grants *zawāyā* in-kind financial support and, most importantly, autonomy to conduct their own affairs. This is a process known as “relaxed centralization”, that is, the concept whereby a firmly established central government can only then be comfortable enough to allow ex-state institutions to succeed and receive fervent support and approval from their constituents – without being perceived as a threat by the central state, as non-state peripheral success is frequently perceived to be (Bekkaoui & Larémont, 2011). In fact, the Alawites benefit both from the ritualization of soft power and the resulting stability of allowing *zawāyā* to operate as local agents of administration. Ultimately, this results in *zawāyā* governing in the semi-shadow of the Moroccan state, i.e. simultaneously supported and left to be, but relied upon as a source of sacred soft-power legitimacy.

As a result, the Moroccan government is able to experiment with modernizing its formal PA system based on global-Western standards, because in reality it relies on the traditional, truly Islamic and Islam-based PA system to provide legitimacy and stability. Therefore, unlike the Uzbek case, it is not that the Moroccan government cannot manage public service provision on its own but purposefully allows the centuries-old delivery of it by overtly loyal traditional institutions in the periphery – which also work,

work very well, and even with particular contemporary meaning, given its more consensual, cooperative shape and nature.

7. Conclusion

Unidirectionality of PA is bad both for what the “good” messages of global-Western PA and its discourse are, and for the wider world on which it is imposed, especially when looking at how important a well-working and equitable PA is for human living-together. Recognizing this does not mean that everything will always stay the same:

There may have been overlays of other ideas and different interpretations of underlying ideas over time, yet there is some DNA in administrative systems that continues to influence contemporary behaviors. ... However, arguing that there is some level of persistence of traditions does not negate the possibility of change. (Peters, 2021, p. 214)

Yet, the history of Western Imperialism and of the effects of Occidental Rationalism on the world seem to suggest the pursuit of a modest approach, rather than one looking for, and emphasizing, change, especially when coming from an outside-positioned, aggressive perspective. The reality of Islamic PA, theoretically and practically, be it in full sunlight or the semi-shade, or even when hidden (and serving to prop up peoples’ lives not supported by deficient versions of global-Western type governments), is something to recognize for all sides, and to their benefit. In the end, globalization is real, but so is specificity. As Gadamer put it,

It may not be too daring to say ... that perhaps we will survive as humans if we should manage to learn that we must not simply use our means of power and possibilities of impact, but that we learn to stop in front of the other as the other, of nature as well as of the grown cultures of people and states, and that we thus must experience the other and others as the others of our self, so that we can gain participation in one another (1985, p. 34).

And indeed, as the Islamic tradition would have it, not being mindful of both the existence of, and our inextricable connection to, others is tantamount to not being mindful of Allah, and thereby having missed an essential element of faith:

And from Allah’s signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues (languages) and colors (appearances). Surely in this are signs for the mindful (*Qur’an* 30:22).

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