Islamic public administration and Islamic public value: Towards a research agenda

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Abstract
This essay explores whether religion has a place in addressing public challenges, particularly in the context of Non-Western Public Administration paradigms such as Confucian, Buddhist, and Islamic. The authors focus on Islam as a case study and highlight the need for real-life cases to build a grounded theory. To this end, the essay documents the authors' ongoing research on Islamic Public Value. We argue that to understand Public Administration in a global context, it is essential to recognize the limitations of a Western perspective, from which the dichotomy of religious versus secular emerged, and in so doing, consider alternative departure points, i.e. paradigms incorporating religious or semi-religious elements.

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Introduction

"Does religion have a place in addressing public challenges?" This question was posed for a Harvard Kennedy School faculty discussion very recently (Hughes, 2023), and for the editors, authors, and likely potential readers, too, at least as a potentiality, the answer very likely lies in the affirmative, because otherwise, why deal with the topic at all?

This also reflects the enterprise of which the current issue of PPA, and hence this essay, is a part – and here, with a special emphasis on Public Administration (PA). But while dealing with religion in larger political-philosophical dimensions has been somewhat re-established as a perhaps minor but not anymore atavistic field, earlier decades showed no such interest. One can say that the relation between religion and PA was truly off the agenda, the extent of which recent serious engagement by the editors of this issue, both in a literature review (Ongaro and Tantardini, 2023a) and in a forthcoming book (Ongaro and Tantardini, 2023b), amply documents. Part of it may be a laggard, particularly mainstreamish, anorakish, copycatty attitude of global-Western PA that has made the entire discipline be particularly behind even the general social science discourse (Drechsler, 2019a; see Massey 2023).

But as the endorsements for the latter book by serious mainstream PA scholars show, this is not the case anymore, firstly because, "If there's anything Max Weber might have been wrong about, it's the disenchantment of the world – there is very little of the sort, or if there is, it is hardly ever complete. And even where rationalization has set in, few things inform values and institutions in time and space as much as its respective religion(s)." (Drechsler in Ongaro and Tantardini 2023b)

Second, the perhaps most eminent public philosopher of our time, Jürgen Habermas, published in 2019 a late magnum opus on religion and philosophy, from the perspective of the latter but with great respect and taking-seriously of the former (2019), and as he states here:

> Secular modernity has turned away from the transcendent for good reasons, but reason itself would wither away with the disappearance of any thought that transcends the totality of what exists in the world. (Habermas 2019, p. 2:807)

Thirdly, although the global West may have basically discarded its own traditional religions, greater attention to the often very-religious-indeed Global South, and the fact of the Global South coming to the Global North, have changed this perspective as a matter of need. Indeed there are growing movements to decolonise politics and institutions, often related to indigenous cultures and religious practices (e.g. Althaus 2020).

However, we must also realize that this is a very Western question – whether religion matters for addressing public challenges – to ask in the first place. One aspect that speaks for our object of study, the Islamic paradigm of PA, 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, 2013).

But (how) does this carry over to PA? In what follows, we will first address the question of Religion and PA from the context in which it is most of the time seen, given the abovementioned, i.e. not the secularized global West (without diminishing the great potential and the value in history of this discourse even there), but rather Non-Western Public Administration. We will then conclude with the theoretical-methodological relationship of the two.

Non-Western public administration

The old standard perspective of 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 different, valid PA paradigms exist. 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 taken ground around a decade ago, or more precisely, in 2013 (Drechsler, 2013; Pierre, 2013; Raadschelders, 2013). However, also within Western PA, we have demonstrably different traditions, as B. Guy Peters has recently shown (2021). 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 Habermas has reminded us in the abovementioned tome, "the moral conduct of a population is measured, as a whole, by those convictions and norms valid in their society" (2019, p. 2: 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 and societal objectives 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 Max Weber's Occidental Rationalism and Modernization theses (see Schluchter, 1979).

This is the West's "project of modernity" not as one tactical roadmap or option, but as a strategic umbrella, a broad 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), steadily resulting in a "drive towards global uniformity" (Latouche 1996).

Regarding PA in particular, as we said, what we tacitly do is to largely equate good with global PA, and global PA with modern PA, and that with Western PA – more and here, specifically contemporary Anglo-American PA (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.

It is however a bold assumption 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).

Nevertheless, the alternative way of thinking, that is, recognizing that there is such a thing as Non-Western Public Administration (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 with global-Western PA (Drechsler, 2013, 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, 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 de-structionism of NPM versus state-affirming, citizen-focused approaches such as the Neo-Weberian State make for very different practices and contexts (and outcomes) indeed (Peters, 2021; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). But depending on the level of abstraction, there is clearly such a thing as the, albeit moving, target of global-Western PA, particularly as an ideology.

And in fact, it is precisely carefully considering 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).

But where does this leave us with religion and PA? So far, this argument might hold even for secular, non-Western alternatives to the global-Western mainstream, and indeed

it would theoretically – only it doesn't empirically, because, as we will see if we did not know already, all major non-Western PA paradigms are more or less – religious. Indeed, rather than being an inescapable trajectory or outcome, it may be considered whether it is only because secularism is indigenous to a specifically Western (initially Europe, then America and beyond) geographical and historical context (Asad 2003) that a functioning, non-religious PA could and did emerge at all.

This may, of course, have broader ramifications for theory – indeed it does – but they are not the topic of the current essay. Rather, what is important for us is the fact that at least one of the main challengers of global-Western ascendancy may also work in a secularized legacy version, but in fact is by its own standards deeply and strongly religious, and that is 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 one (Drechsler, 2013, 2015, 2020a). Buddhism is the third, and while it has the disadvantage of not many of its PA traditions being alive today, its advantages are that through its critique of the purpose of public policy as normally perceived – in line, e.g., with more recent trends from social justice and inclusion to degrowth – it seems particularly relevant today, and that it seems the least threatening and therefore particularly congenial to the global-Western, Davos kind of elites (see Drechsler, 2019b, 2016). Buddhism is also, most certainly, a religion.

However, Confucian PA is the most obvious case for non-Western PA today, and obviously successful (Drechsler, 2018a). 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 (Drechsler, 2020b; Weber, 1989).

It is not entirely clear whether Confucianism is a religion in the Western sense, however, and not just a world view – in fact, by its own understanding, generally speaking, is not a religion, and devotion in other realms such as Buddhism was and is often encouraged. The existence of Confucius temples and shrines the world over, as well as Confucius' and his disciples' inclusion in what is called Traditional Chinese Religion (or TCR; if previously often not recognized as a "real religion" by Western religious studies experts), obscures this tremendously (Drechsler 2018a; on Confucianism as a religion, Billioud 2017; Xu and Wang 2018). Unfortunately, we have to disregard this very interesting discussion, because our focus in the current essay is the third alternative.

Islamic public administration as non-Western public administration

Other than its obvious religiousness, 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 survives until today at least, and 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 – never mind Buddhism, essentially embraced by

spiritually wanting techno-economic Western elites. Islamic PA, on the other hand, is challenging indeed: arguably more than any other, and of high relevance to our current focus, 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.

As Hans-Georg Gadamer pointed out already three decades ago, 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). More recently, ongoing conflicts and the climate emergency across Africa are creating additional long-term migratory and border externalization pressures for European societies (Buehler et al. 2022), increasing touch points between the Western PA and Islam. If we want to have a look at the connection of PA and religion, dealing with Islam is therefore a must. Unsurprisingly, however, within the global-Western discourse, there has been very little discussion of Islamic PA today (see Ongaro and Tantardini, 2023a).

Why is this unsurprising? It is unsurprising because Islamic PA has in general suffered from a particularly bad reputation in the global-Western realm, part because of propaganda, part because of the lack of serious global-Western investigation, ever since Max Weber intended to, but never came around to, 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). The result, it must be said, is that for many, perhaps most, scholars, Governance and PA are not terms one readily puts the word Islamic in front of without some degree of apprehension or hesitation. The latter applies particularly to scholars from the Muslim-majority world, where the pressures of publishing in mainstream (i.e. global-Western) journals have practical implications on the framing and overall topics of research and, more broadly, career trajectory.

Having said that, this intellectual situation has markedly improved by 2023. As a key example, we can now utilize B. Guy Peters' recent very positive, if brief, treatment of Islamic PA in his "instant classic", Administrative Traditions (2021, 163–166) – something that, given Peters' towering presence in the field of PA and public policy, not only academically but also regarding PA reform (see e.g. Randma-Liiv and Drechsler, 2019), makes eminent sense. Peters takes up several of earlier discussions of Islamic (and other Non-Western) PA, including some of the authors', and he focuses on the relevance of Islamic PA today, as the subtitle, Understanding the Roots of Contemporary Administrative Behavior, suggests. Peters' observations (2021, 163–165) that Islamic PA has a tendency towards the communal, the participatory, and the bottom-up are, as we will see, in line with the research project in conjunction with the agenda promised in the title.

Altogether, the obvious hypothesis is 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-incidental, 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 noted, 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, 2013). This would then prove the original assertion of the connection of religion and PA that just cannot be ignored.

Islamic public administration in theory

If "at the heart of Islam's message to humanity, one finds moral imperatives to the individual (for salvation) and to the community (for social cohesion)" (Yusuf, 2022, p. 137), then it is not surprising that Islam is inextricably linked with the common good, and therefore, arguably, public administration itself. However, to enumerate the essence of Islamic PA via a list or table would already impose a global-Western framework of PA categories and criteria – a topic on which we hope to say more in another publication. Instead, for now, like the "emptiness of the Mosque" (Otto 1923), dealing with Islamic PA encourages and espouses a more contextual and flexible approach to (the study of) PA. That being said, certain basic principles and universal tendencies do emerge, and considering both the globalized hybridization of PA and the issue of regional and paradigm-level competition, it remains worthwhile to explore elements of an ideal type of Islamic PA.

To start with the foundational source of Islam, the *Qur'an*, does not provide specific guidance on 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 and Lewis, 2009, p. 258).

In situations where the regular council of advisors lacks expertise or the matter simply requires additional insights, the *shura* process mandates seeking opinions from individuals who possess specialized knowledge and relevant experience (Talaat, 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 aspect carries significant implications, underscoring that impulsive and solitary decision-making, often associated with the archetype of the heroic businessman, cannot be justified (and in fact is normatively wrong) within the framework of Islamic PA.

Notably, the unprecedented speed by which Islam expanded since the time of the Prophet inevitably pushed the limits of governability and administrative capacity. Estimates of the total Muslim population at the time only hover around one hundred thousand (Ibn Sa'd 1900 [840]), which therefore explains the push for decentralization and the incorporation of local elites, as emphasized in Al-Baladhuri's 9th-century classic *Origins of the Islamic State* (2002). In such a context, regions under Islamic rule were unlikely to fully meet expectations, all of the time. Rather, the idea of Islamic PA was to acknowledge that obtaining something, albeit falling short from the ideal, was much

preferable to nothing at all (Drechsler, 2015), something that stands in direct contrast to the Western idea of statecraft as a self-functioning machine or clockwork (Kammen, 1986). Ongoing shifts in our understanding of governance and PA have opened up new avenues for assessing Islamic PA in this respect; most saliently perhaps Grindle's concept of "Good-enough Governance" (2004, 2007; De Vries, 2013 for a PA-specific take), which emphasizes the importance of achieving a minimum level of functionality in the face of daunting policy constraints rather than striving for perfection. This perspective acknowledges that governance often operates under adverse circumstances, emphasizing a pragmatic focus on workability.

There exists a substantial body of traditional literature that remains both influential and viable, dating back to the Prophetic *sunnah* (precedent) and the era of the *Rashidūn* (Rightly Guided Caliphs), specifically addressing Islamic governance. For instance, the *Siyāsatnāma* (The Book of Statecraft/Governance) authored by the Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092) presents a distinct and practical concept of state administration. The Nizam's recommendations and decrees certainly differ from contemporary global-Western perspectives aimed at improving governance in Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries – perhaps a key point in explaining why *Siyāsatnāma*'s excels in its realism and applicability despite its 11th century origins (1960).

The Nizam, for instance, emphasizes non-delegability, not of tasks or initiatives, but of the responsibility of accomplishing them, and more importantly, the responsibility to those over whom one rules (1960). This is because from an Islamic perspective, individuals are only responsible for their own (in)actions in Divine accounting (Kalantari, 1998). Throughout history, non-delegability of responsibility has been regarded as a fundamental characteristic of Islamic PA, even within Western contexts (Hebel in Stolleis, 2003), and shares direct parallels with Confucianism which Fukuyama has argued is, at least also, an "ethical doctrine designed to moderate the behaviour of rulers and orient them towards the interest of the ruled." (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 19, p. 19)

An area where Confucian and Islamic PA differ is the basis for obedience to rulers, and more broadly, the legitimacy of rule. The Mandate of Heaven, which in a Confucian context is manifest or lost based entirely on the performance of the government (Drechsler 2020b), is the metaphysical yet unmistakable metric by which rebellion against a ruler is determined to be either forbidden or necessary. As for the Islamic context, *ulema* (learned ones, i.e. scholars of Islam) widely agree that rebellion is only justifiable when a government "makes it impossible for believers to live in accordance with the *shari'a*" (Malkawi and Sonn, 2011, p. 120). Consequently, the legitimacy of rule relies on the ability to establish a society that safeguards and upholds the *shari'a*, i.e. the immutable and sacred law of God, or as described by the Damascene scholar Ibn Al-Qayyim (1292–1350)

> 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 (1973, p. 3).

Often, however, *shari'a* is wrongly assumed to be Islamic law itself (Auda, 2008) whereas 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 Andalusian 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 rewards in both worlds, i.e. on earth and in the afterlife. Put differently, *din* is sacred policy-making and sacred implementation (or administration) for a life of sacred purpose. The sacred purpose of policy-making and implementation places religious foundations at the heart of Islamic PA. However, understood as such, *din* may serve as a particularly useful concept for understanding societal good (i.e. public value) and the various institutions seeking to shape and create it – not only within but beyond Islam, i.e. regarding religious traditions more broadly. Indeed, a contextual system of social order based on, albeit perhaps in varying degrees, sacred tenets is precisely a common-ground lens through which discussions of religion and PA can proceed with a shared underlying objective (but also in shared contrast to the secular mainstream and the global West).

To return to the Islamic tradition, because the *shari'a* is the comprehensive guide for human (individual and community) life, it follows that the concept of *din* must include a significant degree of contextuality (Brown, 2011). While there are certain divine expectations that must be adhered to regardless of time or space, the ever-evolving issues and circumstances within societies necessitate human interpretation and sound judgment (informed by *fiqh* and *maqasid*) to discern God's will in specific cases (Auda, 2008). The legitimacy of rule in the Islamic tradition therefore ultimately rests upon the government's ability to foster a society that lives in accordance with the *shari'a*, i.e. creating an environment where *din* is paramount and can contextually flourish.

A value that emerges from Islamic PA institutions in such an environment is the concept of embeddedness, or the idea that economic and political forces exist within, and are subordinate to, a set of social norms, traditions, and customs (Chafik 2023; Polanyi, 1944; Peters, 2021). Up to the present day, culturally embedded Islam influences the practice of Islamic PA, imbuing ordinary actions with significance when viewed from an Islamic perspective. For instance, notions of cooperation and mutual assistance are not done simply out of fitting in with or winning the favor of others, but are carried out because they are considered fundamental requirements for qualifying as a good Muslim (Urinboyev, 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).

Islamic public administration in practice: First steps

The latter must be seen together with, as Peters has pointed out, a "feature that emerges from an examination of Islamic PA is that like the Scandinavian (and to a lesser extent the Germanic) tradition there is a significant reliance on non-state actors for the delivery of public services" (2021, 163-164). And: "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, two of the authors had chosen, for an earlier essay on the topic of Islamic PA, three cases of lived, relevant, and even striking examples that come from precisely this sphere (Chafik, 2023). 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.

This includes that each institution represents different levels of stateness. Although all three eventually contribute to a functioning state, the Uzbek example is one of *Ersatzvornahme*, 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 (2019; see Chafik and Drechsler, 2022), one could say that these are PA in the shadow, the semi-shadow, and right in the sunlight, respectively.

The Islamic public value project

In light of all this, it was the contention of the authors that, as interesting and important as some of those case studies are, it would be important to conduct more and wider studies of Islamic PA as happening and working in institutions today, and to derive from there, in an

embedded way, a theoretical definition of what Islamic PA could be i.e. to outline and pursue a research agenda. As such, of course, this would be an ambition for a large research institute, but at the present point in time, and given how global-Western academe functions in the 21st century, we were first – or at all – thinking of a research project, well aware that this could not be comprehensive.

In order to do so, we developed (an ultimately successful) grant application[1] focused on the Public Value dimension of the institutions to be studied, because in the field of governance, both in public policy and in PA, there is a growing emphasis in both policy debates and the academic literature on the importance of creating public value – achieving broad and widely accepted societal goals (Mazzucato and Ryan-Collins 2019; O'Flynn 2021).

We therefore proposed to investigate sometimes centuries-old autonomous indigenous institutions still operating across the Islamic world, in addition to the three already mentioned – for instance, Mahadhir and Ksur in North and West Africa, Aul in Central Asia, Khanqah and Dargah and Pesantren in Turkey, South and Southeast Asia (see El Hamel 1999; Knysh 2010). What is specific about them, and what therefore makes them part of PA, which is both our research interest and area of competence, is that they are not NGO's – a common-enough model – but institutions that are to various degrees part of the state sphere – some as, as we saw in the essay (Chafik, 2023), *Ersatz*, some as a secondary government, some semi-integrated with central administration, i.e., again, governing in the shadows (Peters 2019). They therefore dovetail with the more community-based approach to state service provision that is often at the core of the reinvention of the state in the 21st century (Kattel et al. 2021, Mazzucato et al. 2021). They form what we call Indigenous Cooperative Governance Institutions (ICGI), and they do so in an Islamic, and in particular in a Sufi, way.

The process of application and award cannot be the topic of a scholarly article such as this, but when talking about a research agenda, institutions and funding do matter, perhaps existentially. Suffice it therefore to say that in a particularly pleasant and unbureaucratic application process, the applicants – identical with the authors of this essay – received the applied-for sum, two million US dollars, over the relatively short period of 3 years. What may be important for context and emphasis is that this is a grant to the investigators; many partners and advisors and even institutions are involved, but there is only one host institution.

As for the agenda, we seek to uncover the perspectives of these otherwise under-represented and underexplored institutions which craft, coordinate, and deliver public services for and with their constituents for a better life, importantly for our context both as genuine PA and as genuine religious institutions, if with an emphasis, where possible, of public service provision beyond the religious community and its sacred manifestations. Taking up the tradition of Elinor Ostrom, we regard these institutions as a form of polycentric governance (Ostrom 2010) and public value creation that is based on their localized Islamic tradition. In doing so, we hope to work towards answering a few "Big Questions":

(i)   What is an Islamic society and what does it mean for it to flourish?

    (ii)   Where and when does Islamic governance and administration play a role?
   (iii)   How is public value defined and understood in a non-Western, Islamic context?
   (iv)   How can non-Muslims benefit from Islamic governance institutions?

Addressing these Big Questions has an important dual effect: It helps us to reflect on the Western aspect of global "best-practice" governance and administration, to recognize its framing power, and to notice its directionality. But even more important on a policy level, and moving therefore to some more explicit normativity, at the same time, it shows and showcases working Islamic models of cooperation and public value creation that could serve as models to learn from, but at the very least contribute positively to the rich fabric of integrated living-together (even of the West) in both state and society (Chafik and Drechsler 2022).

We set out to do so along three sets of poles: In time and space, in theory and practice, and in governance and faith i.e., we look at the rich, diverse group of successful Islamic institutions from all over the globe, generally with a contemporary and future orientation, but also including highly successful examples from – often relatively recent – history that fell by the wayside during the colonial period of Western ascendancy. In line with the religion and PA focus, we will not only look at the governance aspects, but how precisely they are anchored in, and express, Islamic values and principles of faith – both in a philological sense (the teachings of Islam as such) and in a sociological one (Islam as practiced). Consciously cherry-picking, our approach at looking for institutional successes and their foundation represents a recent, high-attention research program in governance and administrative studies that offsets the common critique of the public sector with consciously emphasizing "what works" (Compton et al. 2022), an approach especially legitimate in the context of the uphill battle of studying Islamic governance institutions.

The research will try to cover the wide array of public service domains that these institutions operate in, such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social services – reflecting their (self-understood) role of helping create a space where human life can thrive, ideally for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For both accuracy and balance, our cases are an attempt to span the classical five spheres of Islam (Monteil 1989), i.e. African, Arab, Indo-Persian, Turkic/Central Asian, and South East Asian, with the addition of the European (and original Western) sphere.

Over the course of the grant period, our findings will take the form of academic and non-academic publications, and additionally, visual media (e.g. podcasts, short videos), and organize workshops, conferences, and public and community events so as to promote accessibility, engagement, and impact. We have set up a board of advisors comprised of scholars, clerics, and practitioners to help ensure our project remains relevant and impactful. The case studies so far include institutions from Cambodia, Greece (Western Thrace), Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Spain (Andalucía), Thailand, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan. Cases from Mauritania, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, e.g., are hoped to be added later. In addition, with this project, the chance presents itself to explore the potential of creating an overall Islamic Governance academic and policy network, which we therefore intend to do as well.

Contents-wise, again, we aim to empirically ground the foundational thought and objectives of Islamic PA. This might not only call into question the approach of con-textless wholesale export of the global-Western model to the rest of the world, but will encourage further research on other indigenous and faith-based governance and ad-ministrative models and their contributions. By focusing our research on the Islamic practices, values, and objectives of Indigenous Cooperative Governance Institutions operating across the globe, our project aims to achieve four overarching goals:

  (i)   Goal 1: Design and implement empirical case studies and, in close conjunction, a theoretical framework of contemporary Islamic governance and administration to broaden and diversify the academic, policy, and public discourse.
 (ii)   Goal 2: Evaluate the (Islamic) theological status of contemporary Indigenous Cooperative Governance Institutions and their governance and administration.
(iii)   Goal 3: Investigate historical, especially pre- and non-colonial, case studies of Islamic governance and administration to inform and enrich present-day ap-proaches and solutions.
 (iv)   Goal 4: Explore the viability of an academic and policy network/association whose aim is to promote scientific research and theological inquiry in the field of Islamic governance and administration, and perhaps even Islamic Governance generally.

We expect this work to draw the interest of the academic community (e.g. scholars of public administration and policy, governance, and also economics) and practitioners from governments, NGO's, and international organizations, as well as lead to new debates, discoveries, and considerations in the field of PA and even governance more broadly.

Conclusion

"Does religion have a place in addressing public challenges?" we opened with as global-Western a source as one could think of (Hughes, 2023). It is important to recognize, in our context, that to ask this question is already global-Western, coming as it does from a very secular background. Once we recognize that in the field of PA, good, modern, and global are not the same, but that this is a Western way of looking at things, we are automatically drawn to the concept of Non-Western PA, and as we saw, the three main challengers to global-Western (and that is largely Anglo-American) PA are, as a matter of fact, religious or at least semi-religious paradigms: Confucian, Buddhist, and Islamic.

Of these, we pursued Islam, indubitably religious, as a case study because it is a direct, a strong, a formidable challenge on many levels, partially because, and not in spite, of apparent incompatibilities. But there is no comprehensive theory – nothing that could be put into a global-Western table, unless one asks a chatbot – and there are too few contemporary case studies: For an alternative to really work, one needs real-life cases, both in practice and to build a legitimate theory. We had set out earlier to look at some of such cases, in Morocco, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, and they all shared, not by accident – given both tendencies of Islam and the

options for governing in the shadows (Peters 2019) –, membership in the realm of the communal, the service-oriented, and the cooperative.

In order to study this further, the authors conceived of, applied for, and received a relatively large-scale grant to study Islamic Public Value, as a dimension of Islamic PA, which is currently ongoing and by the time of publication probably approaching halfway. We document this grant as a form of scholarly reality of the research agenda, and in a way, this alone answers our basic question, and that of this issue, once again in the affirmative – religion and PA can, should, and occasionally must be studied together.

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Note

1. Website available at: https://www.islamicpublicvalue.org/

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