

Generosity Instils Value in Everyone: Exploring how Islamic Ethos Shapes Food Aid as Spaces of Care

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Food aid has adopted a controversial role in both academia and government discourse. Some scholars (see: Poppendieck, 1998; Lane and Power; 2009) argue that food aid, like soup kitchens and food banks, only treats the symptoms of poverty and is a 'smokescreen' for government failures in welfare cuts (Williams et al., 2016). Despite these debates, recently there has been a new conceptualisation of food aid as spaces of care (Cloke et al., 2017). To explore this nuanced revision, this paper uses ethnographic research and interviews of Muslim students to understand how Islamic ethos shapes food aid as spaces of care – focussing on the LSE ISoc's soup kitchens held fortnightly in Central London.

By utilising the visionary sensibility approach throughout my research (Asad, 2003) and my positionality as a fellow Muslim student with a history of volunteering in this space, I unpacked how Islamic values, principles and teachings are understood by students and how this shapes their motivations, behaviour, and embodiments of care in the soup kitchen space. I demonstrated that using faith and Islamic values as the foundational organisational ethos in grassroots organisations promoted compassion and care amongst the Muslim students as played out by their routine and spontaneous practices in the soup kitchen space. This paper advocates for a more inclusive understanding of food aid and to diversify current academic understandings of faith praxis within food aid. Therefore, I build on existing approaches to spaces of care by transcending traditional research boundaries through incorporating rich imaginative insights into different cultural and religious practices. All in all, by discussing these values, this paper seeks to promote a more compassionate society driven by care for one another, as seen in Holborn, and resisting the polarised and individualistic society.



Comment from Gabi Froden, the Illustrator:

These are five Islamic principles represented in the layout of a soup kitchen. The student herself expressed the idea that each principle could be placed on a table. I loved hearing about the journey from intention to reflection. The bananas looked like smiles to me and so I placed them by the word Sunna.