

Thijl Sunier

Virtuous Compassion or Parallel Society?

As among all citizens in Europe, Muslims are variously engaged in charitable work, or active as volunteers. However, there seems to be a strange contradiction in the ways charitable and voluntary activism among Muslims is currently perceived. Voluntary work and charity in Europe was historically connected to the church and based on principles from the Scripture about compassion and love for others. In addition charitable work was a necessity to meet the needs of the poor at the time when the state did not provide for that. Along with the secularization that took place after WO2 and the growth of centralized welfare states, voluntary work took on a new function and a new meaning. It became an activity that is said to originate in an authentic inner self rather than from a divine command. Voluntary work inspired by religious motivation may at best be accepted as sincere, but in the case of Muslims there is suspicion of a double agenda. Religiously inspired voluntary work among Muslims is often depicted as an inward activity for the benefit of the own community rather than outward compassion. I will elaborate this argument by drawing on cases of voluntary work among Muslims in the Netherlands.

J.T. (Thijl) Sunier, Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Chair: Islam in European Societies, VU University Amsterdam.

Executive editor *Journal of Muslims in Europe (JOME)*: www.brill.nl/jome

Chair board Netherlands Institute for the Study of Islam (NISIS):

<http://www.hum.leiden.edu/nisis>