

RESEARCH

Building a Community: Disability and Identity in the Qur'an

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This article elaborates on disability and the Qur'an and accentuates how a grand narrative of moral codes held the community together and enforced a collective identity of the ummah, in which disability was interlaced with the shaping of an in-group grounded in a common set of values. This process of identity making in turn had implications for people with disabilities, since they could have trouble fulfilling religious requirements, something that was met with counter mechanisms of solidarity within the community of Muslim believers.

Keywords: Disability; The Qur'an; community; collective identity

Introduction

Disability as a phenomenon has increasingly been interlaced with the understanding of society and culture in a broader sense (Barton 1996; Oliver 2009; Barnes 1996; Perenboom & Chorus 2003). From this perspective, it is central to study the role of cultural perceptions of normalcy and deviance and the response of various societies to disability. According to Barnes (1996), speaking mainly from the perspective of the Western world, 'there has been a consistent cultural bias against people with impairments throughout recorded history, and that this phenomenon has been ignored, undervalued, or misinterpreted by the principal socio-political theorists working in this field' (56–57). Selway & Ashman (1998) note that throughout history, people with disabilities have been treated inconsistently and that disability has been interpreted differently in different cultures, while today international conventions speak of the necessity to grant people with disabilities full participation in society (UN 2007).

Concurrently, religion has affected people with disabilities throughout history, and it constantly affects various aspects of life domains (e.g. Miles 1995). We are also witnessing a development in which faith-based organizations, owing to limited state support, are given an increasingly important role in providing services, which raises further questions regarding how religious values and faith influence community work (Schuelka 2013; Furness & Gilligan 2012). One religion where these issues need further attention is Islam, since it has been noticed that problems regarding disability may exist in the Muslim community (Al-Aoufi et al. 2012). As noted by Ashencaen Crabtree (2007), social stigma related to disability is prevalent in Middle Eastern countries, despite Islamic values that promote 'tolerance of disability' (59). Simultaneously, as noted by Ghaly (2010), the Islamic world has, in collaboration with the international community, been involved in work concerning disability rights, which generally suggests a somewhat mixed response to disability within the Islamic society.

At the same time, disability and the Muslim society is a poorly developed area of research that requires more attention, since Islam is a fast-growing world religion that has had a huge social, cultural and political impact around the globe (Ghaly 2010; Al-Aoufi et al. 2012; Esposito 1999; Selway & Ashman 1998).

The Qur'an is also, along with *hadith*,¹ the most important source for Muslim law and customs (e.g. Armour 2002). As reported by Al-Aoufi et al. (2012), these texts promote a notion where disability is 'a natural part of human nature' (206). In line with this view, it is claimed that the Qur'an underlines how society has a responsibility to protect the rights of people with disabilities (Morad et al. 2001). In his overview of studies dealing with Islam and disability, Schuelka (2013) stresses that in the Qur'an, 'disability seems to be positively regarded' with an underlining notion of justice (505). In parallel to this, Bazna & Hatab (2005) state that in the Qur'an, disability falls under the concept of *disadvantage*, a term referring to a lack of possessions and attributes considered culturally valued. The authors argue that the Qur'an illuminates how society is to improve the status and inclusion of persons with disabilities, as they call

¹ *Hadith* refers to the reported sayings and deeds of Mohammad.

for the community to consider various premises of individuals, a view that is supported also by Miles (2002) and Ghaly (2010). Simultaneously, there are, even though it has been contested, problematic passages in the Qur'an that through history have been used to call into question, for instance, the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities (Groce et al. 2014).

The reasoning above suggests that disability is important in relation to Islam and its sense of self-understanding and identity in relation to cultural ideas of normalcy, deviance and the organization of society. The objective of this article is, therefore, to further elaborate on these dimensions and to analyze disability in the Qur'an. How, and in what domains, is disability depicted in the text? What kind of meaning is attached to disability as a phenomenon, and how can this be understood in relation to the concept of collective identity in the emerging community of Muslim believers?

Conceptual frames

Culture and disability

Disability as a concept has been understood from a multitude of perspectives and models (Thomas 2004). The medical model, which highlights bodily limitations, has been challenged by a social model, which focuses on disabling environments (Oliver 2009). In the relational model, the interplay between the individual and the environment means that some activities result in disability, whereas others do not (Shakespeare 2006; Bickenbach 2010). Leaning on critical realism, Bhaskar & Danermark (2006) underline the notion that disability relates to a stratified reality with various mechanisms on different levels.

The perspective used in this article takes the sociocultural level as a starting point with an anthropological understanding of disability as discussed by Whyte & Ingstad (1995). In employing this approach, the researcher strives to understand disability in relation to a certain culture and shifting contexts. A *norm reflective approach* is utilized here that puts the understanding of normality and deviance in relation to sociocultural interpretations and meaning, and the individual's own agency within these frameworks (cf. Goodley 2014), rather than as an analysis of the researcher's personal experience of living with a disability in a religious community.

The ambition is to discuss disability in the context of Islam that was established in the early seventh century Near East through the achievement of the prophet and political leader Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah'. At that time, the Near East, as stated by Donner (1999), was a culturally and politically complex region that also held a heterogeneous population with, for instance, a considerable population of Jews and Christians in Arabia. It also harbored local animist cults, and parts of Arabia were characterized by a nomadic, tribal society. Muhammad's efforts ultimately led to conflicts in which the number of Muslim followers grew. The 'ideal' was to build a 'community of Believers (*ummah*)', which adopts 'the Quranic notion [...] in which Muslims [...] constitute a solidarity group whose members have a binding responsibility to help each other' (Donner 1999, 18; Alimi et al. 2015, 129). In the Ridda Wars that followed upon Muhammad's death, Islam expanded further. For the caliphs, spreading Islam was part of *Jihad*.² Internal turmoil concerning, for instance, leadership soon led to disruptions that eventually divided the Islamic community.

Collective identity

Concurrently, the Qur'an promoted an overall ideology that strengthened the Muslim identity and turned Islam into a religion that permeated all of society (Donner 1999; Armour 2002). Thus, the emerging Muslim community entails notions of self-images of the in-group, which touches upon the concept of identity. Although collective identity is an elusive concept that can only, theoretically, be briefly addressed, it will be used here to discuss disability in the Qur'an. Strathern & Stewart (2005) argue that identity-making remains a crucial component of religious practice in the context of Islam. Collective identity can, as suggested by Polletta & Jasper (2001), be a fruitful approach to understand more about social movement, since it relates to cultural dimensions and feelings concerning who we are or who we would like be, and entails narratives, symbols and rituals. The mobilization of identities is therefore intertwined with recruitment campaigns that entail frames of interpretations that distinguish *us* from *them*. A collective identity is a dynamic phenomenon that evokes 'positive feelings for other members of the group' (285). In parallel to this, a collective identity entails the notion of 'the other'. As discussed by Triandafyllidou (1998), a collective identity requires a process of considering some other community, in the sense that 'the contrast to the significant other shapes the identity of the ingroup' (602).

In this article the concept of collective identity is used as an analytical tool to understand aspects of identity-making and to discuss a central dimension in *the rhetoric* of the Qur'an, which promoted a sense of belonging based on a common set of values (Donner 1999; Strathern & Stewart 2005; Armour 2002). Using the concept of collective identity is not to state how something actually was, since it is often hard to speak of one single religious community (e.g. even today we are witnessing various directions within Islam). The actual outcome of the ambition to build the *ummah* and to shape a collective identity is not addressed in this article.

² The meaning of Jihad has been disputed, since it refers to both a military *and* a spiritual struggle (e.g. Armour 2002).

Methods

Analytic procedures

The Qur'an contains the revelations of Muhammad in Arabic and deals with the revealed law, social issues, 'general guidelines for a righteous existence', and criticism of polytheism (Donner, 1999, 7). The text, compiled after the death of Muhammad, consists of 114 Suras (chapters) of varying lengths (Arberrey 1996). The analysis was guided by a thematic approach that seeks meaning in an ongoing dialogue with the research question (Padgett 2008). First, the Qur'an was read in its entirety (meaning all Suras). In doing so, passages were identified that relate to *activity* and *participation* in relation to bodily functions. The coding of the text was also sensitive to the Qur'an's recommendations regarding the consequences of certain limitations (e.g. bodily weakness as an excuse for not going on pilgrimage). These units were then coded into common themes, and subthemes, addressing similar topics. With this method, the analytical process is never instrumental, since there is an interaction between parts of the text and the whole. The interpretation is also an ongoing pendulum in relation to theoretical links, i.e. previous research and collective identity as an analytical concept.

By taking activity and participation as a starting point in identifying themes in the text, the coding process was linked to the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF), that highlights body functions and contextual factors in relation to activity and participation (Stucki et al. 2007). Simultaneously, the ICF does not fit easily in historical texts. For example, the division of various life domains (e.g. leisure, work and religion) may prove problematic in historical settings, in which religion often was 'the social context' (Miles 1995, 51). Even though a modern concept, disability is used, as a unifying concept, in this article to denote a limitation of bodily function in relation to activity and participation. One must also keep in mind that the understanding of an historical text is always affected by its linguistic and cultural distance, which limits the degree of comprehension (Jeanrond 1991). Another aspect that must be considered is that the analysis has been conducted on translations of the Qur'an, which prevents a semantic analysis.³ Another limitation is that theological reflections (e.g. the meaning of suffering) are beyond the scope of the article.⁴ The same applies to gender. Even though some tentative remarks are made in this regard, an in-depth analysis of gender has been left out of the current scrutiny in favor of a more general focus concerning overall categorizations based on activity and participation.

Findings

Solidarity and cohesion

System of charity

An important story line in the Qur'an seems to address the issue of collective identity in the sense that the text urges community members to unite under a common value system. One important feature in this respect dealt with the material dimension and the inherent resource gap (e.g. Pervez 1990). For example, when the Qur'an instructs the community not to 'make a circuit between the wealthy among you' (59: 7), it suggests a quest for a uniform society that recognizes the downside of a stratified society.

One way of promoting a more uniform community was to enhance a collective identity built on economic solidarity. From a disability perspective, this is crucial since the Qur'an explicitly states that there should be a financial transfer system that moves resources from the rich to 'the needy'. '[T]hose who [...] practice regular charity', the Qur'an reports, 'to them shall We soon give a great reward'. (4: 162). Pervez (1990) observed that this call for relief was turned into an obligatory tax (Zakat) that 'ensures subsistence for the needy' (261). As stated by Ghaly (2010), the Qur'an stresses the principal that a community member is obliged to support and assist his or her own family members. However, the Qur'an also demands that community members should devote themselves to regular charity that reaches beyond family members and occasional alms giving. As noted by Al-Aoufi et al. (2012), zakat touches upon the notion of social justice, where disabled people are 'considered as having a rightful share' (208). Furthermore, Ghaly (2010) notes that this system of support is not considered a favor but rather 'a due (haqq) that Allah has entrusted into the hands of the rich to give to the poor and distribute among the deserving' (158). In line with this, al 'Alwani & DeLorenzo (1995) stresses that a crucial component of Islam is 'the realization of justice and the eradication of injustice' (3).

What is also interesting is that charity and the category of the distressed seems to be linked to the incapacity of mobility and work:

(Charity is) for those in need,⁵ who in Allah's cause are restricted (from travel), and cannot move about in the land, seeking (for trade or work): the ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are free from

³ Any translation is an interpretation marked by difficulties regarding the lack of lexical equivalents and how to capture the style of the original text (Solihu & Abdulhameed 2015). To address these shortcomings two English interpretations have been used; the first by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Ali 2000) and the other by Arthur J. Arberry (Arberry 1996). Both these versions are used by scholars (Armour 2002; Cook 2000). By using both these versions, a higher degree of validity can be achieved. In the following, all references made to the Qur'an are, unless otherwise stated, to the version of Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

⁴ How Islamic theology has addressed these issues have been discussed in detail by Ghaly (2010).

⁵ Arberry's (1996) interpretation speaks about 'the needy' and 'the poor' (e.g. 51, 68). Both signal a state of dependence and a lack of necessary resources.

want. Though shalt know them by their (unfailing) mark: they beg not importunately from all and sundry. And whatever of good ye give, be assured Allah knoweth it well (2: 273).

These statements confront negative attitudes that could befall those who met difficulties in everyday life. To some degree, this passage also seems to touch upon the idea that disability derives from demands within societal structures, which is something that the community should take into consideration. In other words, it is not the bodily and material status alone that constitutes the dividing line between the in-group and the out-group but rather the grade of righteousness upheld by the individual. The system of distributive justice is thereby related to the notion of in-group solidarity, in which the Qur'an seeks to establish compassion within the community of believers based on ethical principles. 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', the Qur'an reports, 'and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other' (48: 29). In this way, a systematic form of charity becomes part of an individual moral project that a community member is supposed to live up to. At the same time, the system of charity raised questions concerning the magnitude of charity, or as the Qur'an puts it: 'They ask thee what they should spend (in charity)?' (2: 215).

With the call for systematic charity, persons with disabilities were also given a certain function within the community, since it gave other members of the community a possibility to assist 'the needy', and at the same time demonstrate their religious righteousness. All of this turned charity into a contract between man and God, which underlines some of the premises for support prior to the notion of modern welfare. The lack of a cohesive secular state thus promoted specific disability roles in which the recipient of charity was especially prominent. Disability was thereby associated with misery. This kind of disability role was accompanied with Qur'an's notion of qada – meaning that 'the overall fate of the human being [...] is governed by the fore-knowledge [...] of an all-powerful' God (Cornell, 1999, 71). Or as the Qur'an states: 'Say: "Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us [...]"' (9: 51). Thus, in the context of the Qur'an, disability became a part of Allah's plan, an idea that could also affect the individual's self-understanding and coping strategies (e.g. to accept one's fate). On a collective level, qadar interplayed with acts of solidarity. By exerting charity, the member of the community also recognized roles and destinies given by God. On the one hand, this promoted a collective identity based on certain obligations. On the other hand, it nourished a static system in which the individual's self-image might interplay with fixed roles of dependency.

Dignity and diversity

Child protection

As reported by Bazna & Hatab (2005), the Qur'an stresses that the community should subordinate to a moral and ethical virtue that reflects the notion of human dignity. In addition, the Qur'an proclaims that members of the community should '[s]tand out firmly for justice' (4: 135). The essence of this virtue in relation to the desirable collective identity were the principles of solidarity and justice—that a good society comprises individuals who can integrate other humans' well-being into their own thinking and actions. This is most clear in the case of orphans, where the Qur'an repeatedly calls the community to create systems of child protection. As mentioned by Morad et al. (2001), children hold an 'honored place' in Islamic society (68). At the same time, the issue of child protection in general seems to become more problematic in relation to disability, since a prerequisite for an orphan to receive his economic legacy was that they were not 'weak of understanding' and of 'sound judgement',⁶ which indicates that economic independence presupposed a certain cognitive status (4: 5–6). Another crucial factor concerning child protection is the prohibition set up by the Qur'an regarding infanticide. 'Kill not your children', the Qur'an states, 'We shall provide sustenance for them [...]. Verily the killing of them is a great sin' (17: 31). The exposure and killing of disabled children is a well-known phenomenon in ancient history (Stiker 2006; Barnes 1996); but the Qur'an states that there is no excuse for infanticide and that it should be the responsibility of the community to intervene and protect the dignity and life of the child. By implementing this principle, the Qur'an also strengthens the right of disabled children, turning infanticide into an abomination and an unacceptable element in the sought Islamic community.

Attitudes

There also seems to be a tendency in the stories of the Qur'an to promote a more positive attitude toward people with disability and to combat disregard. For instance, according to the Qur'an, Moses is a role model and a highly valued prophet. At the same time, he seems troubled by a speech impediment. Moses even asks Allah to 'remove the impediment from [his] speech, "So they [the people] may understand what I say"' (20: 27–28). Noteworthy is also the fact that the Qur'an shows how others might react negatively to disabilities, as when Pharaoh describes Moses in terms of 'a contemptible wretch [that] can scarcely express himself clearly' (43: 52). The fact that the Pharaoh disparaged him seems to underline the Qur'an's denouncement of such behavior regarding people with disabilities. Another passage regarding such prejudices concerns Muhammad's confrontation with a blind man:

(The Prophet) frowned and turned away,

⁶ Cf. Arberry (1996, 100) who speaks of 'fools' and 'right judgment'.

Because there came to him the blind man (interrupting).
But what could tell thee but that perchance he might grow (in spiritual understanding)? (80: 1–3; see also Arberry 1996, vol. 2, p. 324).

This episode is most interesting from a disability perspective. It seems to entail a moral rebuke that people with a disability should be treated with respect and that it is a virtue to see the potential in relation to disabilities. Morad et al. (2001) stresses, in line with this, how the Qur'an seeks to protect the honor and status of community members. This effort can also be traced to the rule that aimed to prevent mockery. 'Let not some men among you laugh at others', the Qur'an proclaims, 'nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames' (49: 11). As reported by Al-Aoufi et al. (2012), this passage underlines how the Qur'an expresses human-rights and respect regarding disability. Thus, the Qur'an seems to suggest the idea that mockery is considered a counterforce that could weaken the promotion of a sound collective identity of the community.

Inclusion

Parallel to this, there is no effort in the Qur'an to place people with disabilities under social control that isolates them from the rest of the community. By contrast, the text seems to highlight the right of people with a disability to be included in the everyday living in the community, as expressed in the following sura:

It is no fault in the blind nor in one born lame, nor in one afflicted with illness, nor in yourselves, that ye should eat in your own houses, or those of your fathers, or your mothers, or your brothers, or your sisters, or your mother's brothers, or your mother's sisters, or in houses of which the keys are in your possession, or in the house of a sincere friend of yours: there is no blame on you, whether ye eat in company or separately (24: 61).

These lines seem to reveal a notion that people with disabilities were running the risk of exclusion, which in turn required rules that aimed to fend off that kind of behavior within the community. As mentioned by Miles (2002), this passage might also signal an upgraded status of the disabled that also grants 'an extra credit for the householder magnanimously giving food to disabled people who have already "sufficiently suffered" from divine punishment' (80). Similarly, Bazna & Hatab (2005) argue that these verses call for people with disabilities to be included in the community.

The fact that the Qur'an does not provide an explanatory model, as such, regarding disability makes it a somewhat elusive phenomenon in the text. In addition, the question of bodily normalization is not a real issue for the Qur'an. Inclusion does not seem to presuppose normalization. Although stories within the Islamic tradition speak of miracles, there are little signs in the Qur'an of miracles in the sense that people with disabilities are healed or restored, even though some references are made to the miracles of Jesus (5: 110; Ghaly 2010; Armour 2002; Miles 2002). Simultaneously, the Qur'an contains tension regarding disability and dignity. On the one hand, it is surrounded by a discourse that aimed to strengthen the inclusion of people with disabilities. On the other hand, it outlines a penalty system that entails mutilation (5: 38). Thus, the deviant body could also be used as a moral warning sign. Hence, how a certain disability came to be could affect the level of stigma attached to it. Another example of this mixed approach to disability is that the Qur'an makes consistent use of a disability rhetoric, which depicts disabilities in a negative way, as in the following lines:

For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are the deaf and the dumb—those who understand not. If Allah had found in them any good, He would indeed have made them listen: (as it is), if He had made them listen, they would but have turned back and declined (faith) (8: 22–23).

However, as noted by Miles (2002), this rhetoric seems to have a metaphorical meaning and did not refer to people with disabilities as such. The metaphorical nature of the rhetoric is even addressed in the Qur'an, saying: "Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts" (22: 46). Hence, even if there seems to be some ambivalence concerning disability in the Qur'an, the text underlines how dignity and the understanding of human diversity were to be used as central components in the attempt to promote a certain collective identity and self-image of the emerging Muslim community.

Valued activities

Rituals

The ambition to build the ummah also influenced and promoted several rituals that had implications for disabilities. The meaning of religious rituals has been disputed (Hamilton, 1995), but one aspect highlights the rituals' 'solidarity-generating capacity' (131), and are thereby linked to 'practices of identity-making' within Islam (Strathern & Stewart, 2005, xv; Armour, 2002).

To start with, rituals in the Qur'an require the ability to learn to grasp the religious truth, or as it is stated: 'We explain the Signs in detail, for those who understand' (9: 11). Thus, the ability to learn is framed within a holy discourse. As mentioned by Schuelka (2013), the Qur'an highlights the concept of learning and the idea that the community should teach the Qur'an even to people with disabilities. In a way, this underlines the idea that man is dynamic and mutable.

As discussed by Cornell (1999), a crucial dimension in the Qur'an is the change in which the community member moves from belief (*iman*) to certainty (*yaqin*), which is interesting in relation to the passage where the blind man approaches Muhammad, as it seems, to be taught. 'what could tell thee', the Qur'an asks, 'but that perchance [...] he might receive admonition, and the teaching might profit him?' (80: 3–4). As reported by Al-Aoufi et al. (2012), this highlights how the Qur'an stresses that people with disabilities are entitled to education and to be included in society. Bazna and Hatab (2005) argue that this passage tells us not only that people with disabilities are entitled to the same 'subject-to-subject relations' as others, but also that the religious message should reach beyond the powerful and wealthy members of the society (13). The story of the blind man thus signals the idea that people with disabilities have some agency and the potential to learn and participate in the society. In concurrence, Bazna & Hatab (2005) stress that the Qur'an highlights that 'every person is potentially perfect so long as they work on developing their innate and individual qualities to the limit of their individual differentiation' (23). Noteworthy is also the fact that the text entails no similar story involving a female with disabilities.

In parallel to learning, praying is the one ceremony in which members of the community are expected to participate in the kind of activity that demonstrated and expressed their true submission, or as stated: '[T]hose who [...] establish regular prayers [...] will have their reward with their Lord' (2: 277). Praying therefore becomes a crucial component in promoting a collective identity. Simultaneously, the act of praying consists in modules of various bodily movements (Cornell 1999; Cook 2000), which is supposed to confirm the sense of community and solidarity:

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Though wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer), seeking Grace from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration' (48: 29).

In that sense, body function also became part of vital group binding processes.

Dispensation

Thus, the requirement of rituals could push people with disabilities from participating in crucial acts that confirmed a person's status within the community. Still, there seems to be a willingness in the Qur'an that the community must consider the variety of bodily capacities, an idea that can be found in relation to learning:

He knoweth that there may be (some) among you in ill-health [...] Read ye, therefore, as much of the Qur'an as may be easy (for you) (73: 20).

In other words, the lack of bodily strengths could be looked upon as an extenuating circumstance that had to be considered when the actions of the community member were assessed.

Passages concerning praying preparations constitute another example of the willingness to consider the individual's own circumstances in relation to the prescribed rituals, for instance, regarding washing rituals: 'If ye are in a state of ceremonial impurity, bathe your whole body. But if ye are ill', the Qur'an notes, 'then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands' (5: 6). This suggests an idea that the community member should address these rituals the best he or she could. The same goes for fasting rules: '(Fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill [...] the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later' (2: 184). Even the assigned pilgrimage (*hajj*) entailed exceptions, since it only applies for 'those who can afford the journey' (3: 97; see also Arberry 1996, vol. 1, 86). In line with this, the Qur'an liberates persons with disabilities from engaging in charity. 'There is no blame', the Qur'an reports, 'on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the Cause)' (9: 91). This also entails the idea that each member should participate in the charity system in line with their own premises, or as stated: 'Let [...] the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him' (65: 7).

This reasoning – which puts collective identity in relation to rituals and disability – can be related also to the conflictual political environment in which Islam as a movement emerged. As the Old Testament war is constantly present in the context of the Qur'an. Exhortations such as '[f]ighting is prescribed for you', or, 'fight in the cause of Allah' suggest an idea that it should be the duty of every true Muslim to defend the religious community and to shield and spread Islam (2: 216; 2: 244). In that sense, the Qur'an also reinforces a culture that seems to highlight bodily strength as something highly valued in society. In other words, upholding a strong body that could meet these standards could be problematic from a disability perspective. However, even though this kind of activity became crucial for the emerging Islamic society, it was not put forth as a mandatory feature, since the demand for martial activities was balanced against the individual's own bodily condition. The Qur'an clearly calls for a greater understanding of the fact that some community members could not contribute according to the social and cultural template of valued activities such as warfare:

No blame is there on the blind, nor is there blame on the lame, nor on one ill (if he joins not the war): but he that obeys Allah and His messenger—(Allah) will admit him to Gardens beneath which rivers flow (48: 17).

These verses seem to liberate male members with disabilities from certain obligations, which illuminates the Qur'an's willingness to observe the individuals own premises. However, the passage also indicates a fear that people with disabilities—because they might have difficulties in participating in valued activities—were threatened by societal devaluation and exclusion, something that had to be combated within the range of the community. The fact that this principle was delineated in writing indicates that it was not a given principle but had to be systematically implemented. Thus, even if the ritual, or valued activity, were important dimensions of a collective Muslim identity, it would not be put forward in terms of a universal obligation, which is interesting in relation to how the community might have observed and valued persons with disabilities.

Concluding Remarks

By establishing a wide category, such as the needy, people with disabilities were foremost integrated into the heterogeneous group of the poor, which created a link between scarce economic resources and disability. Although the lines of collective identity are drawn, not from the notion of bodily normalcy, but rather between *believers* and *non-believers*; the Qur'an indicates some differences concerning how disability was valued in terms of status. For instance, mental disability seems to create some uncertainty in terms of participation and rights, while persons with sensory or communicative disabilities are given more precious and active roles. The penalty system, as well as the use of a disability rhetoric, with its link to ignorance, are other examples of how the Qur'an has some contradictory traits regarding disability.

Furthermore, the text also seems to present disability either as a gender neutral (e.g. charity) or as a male phenomenon (e.g. war activities). There is also a tendency that it is foremost male persons with disabilities that are portrayed as having some agency. Thus, the religious text seems to be written mostly from an implied given male perspective, without highlighting any special premises concerning women and disability. This, in turn, might present special challenges for women within the religious community regarding, for instance, how to fulfill expected gender roles. Thus, gender issues are something that need to be studied more in relation to the Qur'an, since it underlines how the interpretation of disability is something movable that shifts depending on its socio-cultural context.

The Qur'an is also about solidarity. Perhaps one way to understand this is to consider the ongoing conflicts, which increased the risk of permanent injury in which the community member could easily end up in a position of dependence. The Qur'an thereby illustrates how a weak state paves the way for a system of religious- and individual-based charity. On the one hand, this system could inspire acts of solidarity and compassion. On the other hand, it put forth a regime of social support based on arbitrariness and problematic power relations between donors and recipients. In theory, charity could also be used as an instrument for shaping an obedient and dependent member of the ummah. The question is to what extent the system outlined in the text suggests that a person with a disability must submit to religious norms to obtain assistance. Thus, striving for a value-based collective identity might have had a profound significance for how disability as a phenomenon was understood. Thus, the formation of a collective identity, on a rhetorical level, carried mechanisms of both exclusion and inclusion processes. Even though the relationship between the individual and the collective identity is hard to analyze from the context of the Qur'an, one can imagine a certain tension between *us* and *them*. On one hand, being part of the circle of believers moved a person with a disability closer to the in-group. On the other hand, that same person was sometimes categorized as a deviant. In other words, the analysis suggests a rather variegated landscape when it comes to religion and disability. Firstly, the religious text presents a framework that regulates the conduct of the religious community. Secondly, it visualizes some of the individual's own agency and shifting positions within those frameworks.

Even though there are risks involved in trying to apply contemporary concepts in historical texts (e.g. the social model), the Qur'an, foremost, seems to link disability to bodily shortcomings that downplay structural and social barriers. Not least of these is the system of charity that put forth disability as an individual- and relation-based phenomenon. At the same time, there is the idea that disability, to some extent, should involve the whole of the religious community; and that disability was defined in relation to valued activities, which to some extent links to the social and relational model of disability. At the same time, it is somewhat anachronistic to depict the Qur'an as an equivalent to today's convention on disability rights (UN 2007), since it contains no explicit decree regarding obligations of the state concerning, for instance, accessibility and rehabilitation. On the contrary, religious scriptures must be understood in relation to its own context. That said, the Qur'an is an early example that touch upon the need to recognize persons with disabilities as extant members of our communities and to combat exclusion and prejudice.

To conclude, the Qur'an offered a grand narrative consisting of moral codes of action that aimed to hold the community together. In that sense, disability became an important dimension of a collective identity promoted by the Qur'an, a reflection that is not always present in previous research concerning disability and Islam. Altogether, addressing the issue of disability seems to have been a vital element in the effort to build a community of Muslim believers.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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