Entrepreneurship as worship: A Malay Muslim perspective

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1
2
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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS WORSHIP: A MALAY MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

While Islam is the second largest religion in the world with 1.6 billion Muslims, there are variations in the interpretations of that law (i.e. Sharia). This diversity and variation may hold the key in explaining the different behaviours among Muslim entrepreneurs because of their views on the concept of work as worship. In this study, we examine how Malay entrepreneurs are guided in their sourcing and shaping of entrepreneurial opportunities through Shafii practice. Our contributions include identifying five central values that guided the participant's sourcing of opportunities: *Fardhu Kifayah* (communal obligation), *Wasatiyyah* (balanced), *Dakwah*[1] (the call of joining the good and forbidding the bad), *Amanah* (trust), and *Barakah* (blessings). We also contribute to the entrepreneurship literature by demonstrating how these macro-level values of worship gave the entrepreneurs confidence in creating their new ventures.

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[1] We use the Malaysian form of dakwah because of the context specificity of this research, but acknowledge its Arabic roots of dawah.

1

INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of entrepreneurship in a national economy, understanding the impacts

and outcomes of culture, religion and values become significant in addressing the way that

work is done. One's orientation to work can have different meanings. In the West, work is

often viewed as a secular activity related to a job or a career; in other parts of the world the

distinction between human activity and the sacred can be less apparent (Richardson, Sinha &

Yaapar, 2014). While both orientations acknowledge that work goes beyond satisficing one's

psychological, financial and material needs, an Islamic perspective is distinctive in that work

is seen as an act of worship (Ali, 2014), a 'religious duty' for every Muslim (Al-Shaybani,

1986). Religion is, therefore, a synthesiser of cultural meanings that can shape the economic,

social and political structures of a society. It can provide a metaphysical legitimacy through

being affiliated to the same faith and sharing the same meaning system (Dodd & Gotsis,

2007).

Yet a monolithic perspective of Islam is often portrayed in the mainstream media

(Alam & Talib, 2016; Yusof, Hassan, Hassan & Osman, 2013). In addition to the two broad

sects within Islam, Sunni and Shia, are four school of thoughts (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, and

Hanbali) that signify Islam is more diverse, nuanced, and heterogeneous than what is usually

described (Hughes, 2016). In the context of entrepreneurship studies, this variation of

religious undertones may hold the key in explaining different behaviours, such as the

sourcing of opportunities that is the core of entrepreneurial activity (Alvarez & Barney,

2007).

In Malaysia, Islam is primarily represented by the Shafii version of Sunni theology

and jurisprudence. This means that in interpreting the Sharia, Shafii Muslims rely mainly on

the Quran (the Holy Book) and the Hadith (report of the words and deeds of the Prophet

Muhammad) as their main sources of reference. The internal diversity of Islam in Malaysia

2

is less pronounced that in other nations, and indeed, the Federal Constitution of Malaysia

states that while Islam is the official religion of the country, the rights and freedom of the

non-Muslim minorities to practice their religion is guaranteed (Ahmad, 2003), resulting in a

national tolerance of other religions and cultures. Indeed, Malaysia has been hailed as a

'model' Muslim country because of its moderate approach to Islam and its focus on economic

development (Musa, 2010). Further, Malaysia's institutional environment has also been

supportive in developing Islamic policies and plans that have shaped the country's landscape

of entrepreneurship (Winzeler, 1970). These two factors make Malaysia an ideal context to

examine religion as a macro-level influence (Dodd & Seaman, 1998) in creating

opportunities across many sectors (Fadzil, 2012). Supporting the contextual nature of this

research, Hindle (2010, p. 600) notes that most entrepreneurship studies examine "the who,

the what, and the how". While he agrees that the entrepreneur is the agent of change, he

claims that there has been little investigation into the effects of the 'where', in that context

and values "profoundly influences what kinds of entrepreneurial initiatives can and should be

undertaken and how they are and should be performed" (p. 602). Thus, there is a need to

examine the environmental context that has influence over the entrepreneur and how local

characteristics affect the entrepreneurial process.

In this study, we therefore examine the impact of work through entrepreneurship as

worship, stemming from the decision that people make to adhere to religious requirements

that necessitates significant personal and financial sacrifices (Word, 2012). The question

guiding this study is: *How does the Shafii tradition influence how opportunities are sourced*

by Malay entrepreneurs? Using a narrative approach, we interviewed 15 Malay Muslim

entrepreneurs with experience ranging from one to 28 years. Using a narrative research

design, we asked these participants to share their stories of how and why they started their

ventures. Our contributions include identifying five central values that guided the participants

sourcing of opportunities. We also contribute to the literature on entrepreneurship

demonstrating how these macro-level values of worship give these entrepreneurs confidence

in creating their new ventures. Third, we provide links between the concepts of work as a

calling and as worship. The following sections describe the related literature and context, the

method chosen for this investigation, and then the findings of this research. Finally, we

conclude this study with a discussion of contributions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship

There has been rich debate on the meaning and sources of entrepreneurial opportunity

(Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2016; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), in particular, whether an

opportunity is discovered through external market imperfections (Kirzner, 1997; Shane,

2003), or is created through social construction or enactment that stem from entrepreneurial

insight (Alvarez & Barney, 2007; Alvarez, Barney & Anderson, 2013). More recently, the

focus has turned to improve construct clarity of an opportunity (Davidsson, 2015) and the

links between creation and discovery (e.g. Hmieleski, Carr & Baron, 2015).

Acknowledging the complexity of the entrepreneurial opportunity concept, Davidsson

(2015) developed three underpinning constructs that traverse the space between the

individual and the opportunity; that is, the concept of the person alone (creator or discoverer)

does not alone account for opportunity enactment. The three platforms that he claims need to

be considered include: First, 'external enablers' that aggregate e.g. regulatory, demographic

and technological change that may affect new venture creation but cannot be guaranteed to

ensure success. Second, 'new venture ideas' that highlight imaginary combinations of, for

example, products and services in developing a future that may be evaluated differently

across individuals. Third, 'opportunity confidence' that highlights an entrepreneur's

4

subjective evaluation and perceived favorability of these prior two constructs. This evaluation

forms the basis for entrepreneurial activity. These three platforms, we suggest, may provide a

means to examine how Malay entrepreneurs evaluate the notion of opportunity.

The nature of entrepreneurial action arises from an alignment between the core values

and religious belief of the entrepreneur. From an 'individual' psychological perspective, these

values can include personal risk taking, need for achievement, empowerment and relationship

building (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991). Further, a 'cultural' lens focuses on the

attitudes, values and beliefs that dominate a particular population, which may then lead to a

common mind-set on entrepreneurial behavior (Morrison, 2000). Hence, taking a religious

perspective to entrepreneurship requires an understanding of how the outputs of material

success may arise in a socially responsible manner that aligns with the respective (e.g.

Muslim) belief system (Yaacob & Azmi, 2012); regardless whether an opportunity is

discovered or created (Hmieleski et al., 2015). Our intention then, is to examine how religion

plays a macro-social role in the sourcing of these entrepreneurial opportunities.

Worship and calling

A core tenant underpinning Islamic entrepreneurial opportunity through its evaluation of the

Shafii tradition is the integration of work and everyday life (Toor, 2011). This tradition

argues that one's role on earth is to be a trustee of Allah and all activities should be an act of

worship. Both physical and intellectual labour are valued, and there is no differentiation

between highly and lowly ranked positions as long as each contributes to the betterment of

society. It is the process of doing work that is respected (Possumah, Ismail & Shahida, 2013).

Hence, in the Malaysian context, entrepreneurship is seen as an act of worship; or in western

terms, a calling, where one's purpose is to contribute to the collective well-being of society.

Indeed, idleness is strongly discouraged as it detracts from establishing a balance between

5

one's own life and that of society (Alam & Talib, 2016), while also demonstrating a lack of

faith (Possumah et al., 2013).

The Quran therefore 'calls' those to engage with work as a value-driven behaviour.

However, Neubert and Halbesleben (2015) claim that most research on callings is devoid of

religious meaning, and instead focuses on secular views. This secular research includes

motivations for doing work (Hall & Chandler, 2005), such as on the energy and direction

components of motivation and guidance "to a person's choices for directing that energy"

(Elangoven, Pinder & McLean, 2010, p. 435). A second area relates to using one's personal

gifts and talents. Bunderson and Thompson (2009, p. 38) explain such a calling as ''that place

in occupational division of labor in society where one feels destined to fill by virtue of

particular gifts, talents, and/or idiosyncratic life opportunities". A third area of secular calling

focuses on understanding career choice and career making decisions that include pro-social

intentions and goals that promote clarity, passion, and a sense of personal mission

(Elangovan et al., 2010). Hence, a secular understanding of a calling is associated with the

meaningfulness internal to the work itself (Beadle & Knight, 2012). This means that a secular

form of calling is guided by an inner direction or compass (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Elangovan et al., (2010) provide such a definition whereby a calling is "a course of action in

pursuit of pro-social intentions embodying the convergence of an individual's sense of what

he or she would like to do, and actually does" (p. 430).

In contrast, a religious calling is an "external beckoning to work, with transcendent

meaning beyond benefits to self" (Rosso et al., 2010, cited in Neubert & Halbesleben, 2015,

p. 869). A religiously oriented sense of calling therefore originates from outside of one's self.

Dik and Duffy (2009, p. 427) define this as a "transcendent summons, experienced as

originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role (in this case work) in a manner

oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that

6

holds other-centered values and goals as primary sources of motivation". Embedded in a

religious understanding of a calling is that it critiques the notion of job satisfaction;

something core to a Western view of calling. Therefore, a commitment to a religious calling

goes beyond the experience of finding fulfillment and meaning within the organisation

(Neubert & Halbesleben, 2015). Schabram and Maitlis (2017) provide a potential connection

between the two approaches of worship and calling by questioning the universality of the

construct 'calling'. Their study breaks calling into three different paths: calling as an identity

(preserving one's special gifts), calling as a contribution (making a positive difference in

society), and calling as a practice (learning from engagement). We suggest that these three

paths may be helpful in building a connection between a western orientation of calling and an

Islamic orientation towards work as worship.

METHOD

Contextual Overview and Research Method

Within this Islamic context our study examines the role of Shafii values as a call to worship

in sourcing entrepreneurial opportunities for new venture creation. We use an inductive

qualitative research design, appropriate when seeking to discover and develop new concepts

(Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012) from an information-rich source (Patton, 1990). Taking

this approach allows us to illustrate and explain the phenomena where deeper insights emerge.

In addition, this approach overcomes the tendency to dismiss the illustrative nature of such

research, and, instead permits more direct investigation into the causal relationships between

the phenomena being investigated (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2012; Siggelkow, 2007).

Using an inductive approach we are able to get closer to the data, while also giving the

participants a voice.

7

Participants

Purposive sampling was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994), where the initial pool of potential

participants were required to have developed a new venture and practice Islamic values.

Using a snowballing approach, fifteen Malay Muslim entrepreneurs (12 females and 3 males)

participated in this study. This gender bias may reflect the nature of Malay society, where

social interactions between males and females are sometimes segregated and discouraged.

Hence, trying to get positive responses from the opposite gender can be a challenge.

Interactions between men and women in the context of Muslim society are guided and shaped

by Islamic principles in matters related to eye contact, dress, body language and tone of

voice. This can impact on studies that use face-to-face interviews such as this. The Malay

Muslim entrepreneurs that did participate in this research were involved in various types of

start-up enterprises. As these participants were all involved in the process of creating the

venture. Table 1 summarises the details of participants and their ventures that were involved

in this study.

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Insert Table 1 here

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Data collection and analysis

All data were collected within a 25 km radius around Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley,

Malaysia. These two locations were chosen as they are best known as Malaysia's heartland of

economic and business activities. This study utilised narrative interviews as the main data

collection technique. During the interviews we asked participants to share their experience of

starting a venture and their reason for pursuing entrepreneurship. On average, each interview

8

took two hours. With permission from participants, interviews were audio recorded so the

researchers could return to the original data source if required. This data was also transcribed

to become the central database for this study. Efforts were made to assure that the anonymity

and privacy of the research participants were respected, and pseudonyms were given to all

participants.

The transcribed interviews were read several times to develop a 'general sense' of the

data (Creswell, 2009), while at the same time, notes, comments and queries were jotted

down. Engaging with this 'open coding', we were as expansive as we could be in identifying

core parts of the data that could be useful in addressing our research question (Merriam,

2009). This process initially included identifying the rationale for pursuing entrepreneurial

opportunity and the nature of this opportunity, as well as the participants' broad following of

Shafii values. As a result, data were coded for as many themes as possible. We then

performed 'axial coding' (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) where we reviewed and reworked the

themes again until we reached agreement and all coded data fit into five main identified

themes. Finally, we analysed these overall findings to interpret the extent to which they

helped us understand and extend existing literature in this area. As the Shafii school

predominantly relies on the Quran for guidance on Sharia, these narratives are referenced to

the Quran to illustrate the contextual nature of Malaysian Islamic spirituality.

FINDINGS

In addressing our research question, how does the Shafii tradition influence how

opportunities are sourced by Malay entrepreneurs, we identified five key themes that

emerged when the Malay Muslim entrepreneurs discussed their views on work. These themes

are: 1) *Fardhu Kifayah* (communal obligation), 2) *Wasatiyyah* (balanced), 3) *Dakwah* (the

call of joining the good and forbidding the bad), 4) *Amanah* (trust), and 5) *Barakah*

9

(blessings). The themes represent the values that these Malay Muslim entrepreneurs were able to express and manifest in their pursuit of entrepreneurship.

i. Fardhu Kifayah (communal obligation)

Fardhu kifayah was most frequently cited as an influencing value by the Malay Muslim entrepreneurs. Briefly, *fardhu kifayah* refers to legal obligations that the Muslim community must carry out (Al-Qaradawi, 2010). If there is enough people taking on these responsibilities, then the whole community is free from sin. If not, the whole community carries this sin for not performing their duty.

Our first participant describes the value of fardhu kifayah. Haris entered the hajj-specialised skincare market because he wanted to help fellow Muslims. He elaborated:

When I looked at other brands, I found that they contained alcohol, animal-based substances and perfumes. These are strictly prohibited for people who are going for hajj, especially when they are in the state of ihram. So when a Muslim has to use skincare products because his or her medical condition demands it, there was no product available that was halal or did not contained perfumes for sensitive skin. So, what made me do this? It is because I wanted to help other Muslims. For some serious skin conditions, you have to use skincare products (Haris, Hajj-specialised skincare entrepreneur).

A second participant, Aida, an entrepreneur who saw the need for Muslim styled swimwear that took account of hijab, also explained the impact of fardhu kifayah. She discussed:

It is a fardhu kifayah for us to fulfil the needs of all Muslim women. So, I said ok . . . .there's a need for this. Why don't we develop, design and create

10

(swimwear) for men, ladies, and also children (Aida, Muslim swimwear

entrepreneur).

Similarly, another participant, Nani developed a salon and spa that caters for Muslim women

based on an 'Islamic Spa Practice'. She discussed how she was driven to start the business

based on the value of *fardhu kifayah*:

> *. . . there are demands from people who are practising Islam, who can't get a*
>
> *comfortable place that can conform to their religious needs. Because there was*
>
> *no salon or spa that observed this ruling, I decided to do it. It became my fardhu*
>
> *kifayah to open such salon and spa* (Nani, Islamic spa practice entrepreneur).

These examples illustrate the influence of communal obligation in the sourcing of the new

venture idea. This relates to Schabram and Maitllis' (2017) concept of a calling as

contribution; when entrepreneurs utilise their skills to make a positive impact on the world. It

also correlates with a study by Yaacob and Azmi (2012), that entrepreneurs' commitment to

social responsibilities does not only benefit their business performance but also positively

impacted their community. These participants' quotations show how *fardhu kifayah* is

sourced within the Quran. "When the prayer is finished, then disperse through the land (to

carry on with your various duties) and go in quest of Allah's bounty and remember Allah

always (under all circumstances), so that you may prosper (in this world and the Hereafter)"

(Quran 62:10, Tafsir Ar-Rahman). In another verse in the Quran, God reminds the Muslims

to fulfill their obligations, which He refers to both divine obligations (that arise from spiritual

nature and Muslim relation to God) and obligations that relate to Muslim's human and

material life: "O ye who believe! Fulfil (all) obligations." (5:1, Text, translation and

commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

11

ii. Wasatiyyah (balanced)

The second most frequently cited value was *wasatiyyah,* being 'balanced' in one's life. Shafii

Muslims believe in a life after death, which is one of the pillars of faith in Islam. Therefore,

how one acts in this world determines one's position and place in the hereafter. This value

motivated participants to pursue entrepreneurship because they believed in the reward that

they will get for a 'good' life in the hereafter. Hence, work is viewed not solely as a way to

earn a living, but also as a way to earn after-life benefits. This was explained by one

participant who ventured into an Islamic early education centre:

> *We believe in having the right intention. We are not doing this for now, in this*
>
> *life, but we are also looking at it as a way to help us in the hereafter* (Laila,
>
> Islamic playschool entrepreneur).

Another participant referred to this value as being balanced in one's life. Raihan's

opportunity related to starting up an Islamic finance enterprise. He explained:

> *We want to aspire people to have a good life . . . to have a balanced life. A good life*
>
> *in this world and in the next world* (Raihan, Islamic wealth management
>
> entrepreneur).

Similarly, Soraya created a publishing company that targets young teenage readers. She

explained why the value of *wasatiyyah* is important to her:

> *We believe that our mission (in life) is not just for this world, but also for the*
>
> *hereafter* (Soraya, publishing entrepreneur).

Laila, Raihan and Soraya's examples of *Wasatiyyah,* therefore, illustrate a belief in the balance of life today with after-life rewards from doing good deeds. This source from The Quran reminds us, "Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy, will be in a life of good and satisfaction. But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light, will have his home in a (bottomless) pit" (101: 6-9, Text, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

iii. Dakwah (the call of joining the good and forbidding the bad)

The third value is *dakwah*, a calling back to the Islamic faith by practising a lifestyle guided by the Sharia law. The participants of this study asserted that it is through their enterprises that they were able to practise the value of *dakwah*. For instance, Aisyah, an entrepreneur of skincare and healthcare products that are based on *halal* (permissible) and natural ingredients, explained what she had managed to accomplish through her business:

> *We believe that if we produce a certain product and people use it, that product*
>
> *is like a 'call to goodness', which means a call towards using halal and safe*
>
> *products* (Aisyah, skincare and healthcare entrepreneur)

Another entrepreneur, Sabrina who owns a multimedia company, viewed the role of her business as bringing her customers closer to Allah by understanding the religion better:

> *We are selling the Quran and books that make people better understand their*
>
> *religion. This makes them closer to God* (Sabrina, Islamic media entrepreneur).

Meanwhile, Omar stated that it was the value of *dakwah* that drove him to pursue the comic book business for promoting Islamic values. He explained:

13

Luckily I always surround myself with good people who always invite me to

goodness (Omar, comic book entrepreneur).

These entrepreneurs endeavoured to uphold the practice of *dakwah* as being the core purpose

of their enterprises. This value can be likened to Schabram and Maitlis's (2017) concept of a

calling as practice – the daily practices and routines that enable us to learn and grow through

worship. In these examples, these entrepreneurs highlight the importance of the practice of

dakwah, a value that is central to the Quran. The following verse reinforces: "Invite (all) to

the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in way that

are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and

who receive guidance." (16: 125, Text, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

iv. Amanah (trust)

The fourth value is *amanah* (trust), which in the context of this study, relates to being

responsible and honest. The value of *amanah* is highly regarded and emphasised in the

Quran: "O ye that believe! Betray not the trust of God and the apostle, nor misappropriate

knowingly things entrusted to you." (8: 28, Text, translation and commentary by Abdullah

Yusuf Ali). The Muslim entrepreneurs related this value to the value of *fardhu kifayah*

(communal obligation) because as Muslim, one is entrusted with the obligation to serve the

community. The participants believe that in discharging their communal obligation towards

the Muslim community, the value of *amanah* is very important. According to Hakeem, it was

the value of *amanah* that drove him to focus on serving the Muslim market:

We would like to serve the Muslim market first, because it is an amanah and

responsibility that we haven't really fulfilled yet (Hakeem, healthcare products

entrepreneur).

14

Hakeem had the resources to produce halal products that the Muslim community needed, and

was therefore entrusted with *amanah* (trust) to carry out the communal obligation.

Another entrepreneur, Laila, a playschool owner, regarded *amanah* as very important

in carrying out her duty:

Being honest with your amanah is very important, because when parents send

their children here, they entrust us with what we are going to teach the children.

So we try the best we can to meet the objective that the parents want (Laila,

Islamic playschool entrepreneur).

Similarly, Jasmine also believed in the value of amanah in advising people on how to dress

according to the Sharia:

I believe in honesty. For instance, if a dress is not pretty, I will say that it is not

pretty. If the colour is not suitable, the dressing is not right (shariah-compliant),

I would say, sorry the dress doesn't look good on you . . . it doesn't do justice on

you (Jasmine, image and fashion consultant).

v. Barakah (blessings)

The final major theme that Malay Muslim entrepreneurs associated with their work is the

value of *barakah*. They linked this value with experiencing blessings from *Allah* (God).

These Muslim entrepreneurs describe the blessings as 'help' from Allah that enabled them to

be successful with their new venture creation. They believed that they were blessed because

Allah was pleased with their good deeds, which was establishing a business venture in order

to fulfil the needs of the Muslim community. As Hakeem elaborated, it was due to barakah

that helped him to be persistent in starting the venture:

We believe that, if we remain steadfast in our cause, the help from God will

come (Hakeem, healthcare and household products entrepreneur).

Similarly, Aida also regarded *barakah* as the value that pushed her to strive in realising her

business venture:

The most important thing is barakah. We want to gain God's barakah. Without

barakah we won't be able to achieve our objective (Aida, Muslim swimwear

entrepreneur).

Following the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad also is one of the sources of *Barakah*

(Mohammed Faris, 2011). Mumtaz, an entrepreneur who ventured into a food supplement

business based on the Islamic tradition, explained how she sourced the opportunity based on

the value of *barakah*:

At that time, there were not many supplementary food products like today, not

many…maybe one or two. But their emphasis was more on the product as good

supplementary food, not on the habit of taking the food as part of the Sunnah

(Mumtaz, food supplement entrepreneur).

In one hadith, the Prophet Muhammad was reported to have said, "If only you relied on Allah

a true reliance, He would provide sustenance for you just as He does the birds: They fly out

in the morning empty and return in the afternoon with full stomachs" (Ahmad, An-Nasa'I,

Ibn Majah, Al-Hakim and At-Tirmidhi cited in Mohammed Faris, 2011). In the Quran,

Muslims are reminded to put their trust in Allah and to be constantly reminded of Him in

their every actions, "If the people of those societies had but believed and been conscious of

Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (All kinds of) blessings from heaven and

earth; but they rejected (the truth), and We brought them to book for their misdeeds" (7:96, Text, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

Thus, these entrepreneurs' belief in *barakah* meant that they would receive blessings from Allah if they served the Muslim community through their enterprises. Barakah also enabled them to endure the challenges associated with new venture creation. Hence, this value connects these entrepreneurs with God that compels them to act on the opportunities. Table 2 summarises the Shafii values that guide Malay Muslims' process of entrepreneurship.

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Insert Table 2 here

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DISCUSSION

By examining how Islam influences the sourcing of opportunities by Malay entrepreneurs, our research acknowledges Hindle's (2010) observation that context and values "profoundly influence what kinds of entrepreneurial initiatives can and should be undertaken and how they are and should be performed" (p. 602). This is reiterated by Syed and Pio (2017) who claim that we need to delve more deeply into the contextual factors that shape management and organisations. We have responded to these concerns by examining the interplay between values, entrepreneurship, and Malay Muslims interpretation of Islam through the Shafii tradition. We examined the sourcing and shaping of entrepreneurship through the values that stem from worship.

Our findings first identified five values that characterise Shafii interpretation of Sharia law: *Fardhu Kifayah* (communal obligation), *Wasatiyyah* (balanced), *Dakwah* (the call of joining the good and forbidding the bad), *Amanah* (trust), and *Barakah* (blessings); and second, how these values guided the entrepreneurship process. Our first contribution, then,

identifies the values embedded in religion that act as a macro-level influence (Dodd &

Seaman, 1998; Sidek, Pavlovich & Gibb, 2013). We identified how these five values within

the Shafii tradition of the Quran acted as a guide on how to live one's life. These values are

context-specific (Hindle, 2010), and created a sense of destiny for the entrepreneurs. Our

findings demonstrated the importance, for example, of the value *Amanah*, trust, in the

sourcing of entrepreneurial opportunities. Participants revealed how they trusted Allah to

look after them as they engaged in the creation of the new venture through work as worship,

and that they would receive blessings (*Barakah)*. By uncovering these values, we therefore

present a more nuanced interpretation of Islam based on geography, culture and knowledge

accumulation (Alam & Talib, 2016; Syed & Pio, 2017). Identification of these values, as

macro level contextual factors can, therefore assist in the support and generation of

entrepreneurship.

Our second contribution relates to the role these values played in the sourcing of

opportunities for new venture creation. Davidsson (2015) argues that an important attribute of

sourcing opportunities is the confidence an actor has in the idea. He defines this confidence

as an "actor's subjective evaluation of the attractiveness—or lack thereof—of a stimulus [that

stem from external enablers or new venture ideas) as the basis for entrepreneurial activity"

(Davidsson, 2015, p. 675). While this confidence can be captured by the entrepreneurs' self-

efficacy, our findings demonstrated that the belief and confidence in these Shafii values is an

ultimate expression of worship as a major initiator in the sourcing of opportunities. For

example, in practicing *Dakwah* as a call for goodness, participants explained how they had

the confidence to create new enterprises in the sectors of halal skincare and Islamic media

consultation (Aisyah, Sabrina and Omar) because they understood they were living a life of

worship through a path of practice (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). These values again

demonstrate how religious beliefs supported a sense of destiny and confidence in the

potential success of the new venture opportunity.

We also identified that the very nature of doing this work is an act of worship. Our

third contribution connects this act of worship to a western perspective of work as a calling.

The data demonstrated how *Fardhu Kifayah* (communal obligation) can be considered as a

path of contribution regarding a calling (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). Embedded in this

communal obligation is also a pro-social intention, a factor identified by Elangoven et al.,

(2010) as significant in being 'called' to do a particular work approach. Integral to such a

calling that includes a communal obligation then, is an awareness that the notion of work

goes beyond self-interest and job satisfaction, and includes a desire to make a difference in

society. Both western and Shafii traditions embody a moral component of calling and destiny.

Being called to worship through a communal obligation (*Fardhu Kifayah)* that includes a

contribution to society (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017) and a pro-social intention (Elangoven et

al., 2010), therefore links secular and sacred forms of work as worship. This contribution also

confirms that work as worship, in this context, is embedded in the moral values of society

rather than the values of the individual (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009); a transcendental

summons that originates beyond the self (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

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Insert Figure 1 here

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These three contributions are illustrated in Figure 1. The Shafii values are context-

specific (Malaysia), where they act as macro-level influencers in shaping entrepreneurship.

They inform the action of entrepreneurship through confidence and callings. In having a

belief in something greater than themselves, these entrepreneurs had increased confidence to

embark on their entrepreneurial journey, believing that they would be guided and blessed as

19

their work symbolised their worship. Engaging in living these values as a practice of worship

can result in the confidence to act (Davidsson, 2015) and create the new venture because of

the belief and trust in Allah. At the same time, these values articulated a path of calling that

comes from an external source that originates beyond the self. The three paths identified by

Schabram and Maitlis (2017) are evident in the Shafii values. The path of contribution was

evident in the values of communal obligation *(Fardhu kifayah)* and doing good work

(Dakwah). This path of contribution included the giving of self in order to make a greater

impact and a positive difference in the world. The second path of identity is realised through

being balanced *(Wasatiyyah)* and trusting *(Amanah)*. These values are important to serve and

sustain the individuals' sense of themselves, and hence their entrepreneurial identity. The

final path of practice can be seen through being blessed *(Barakah)* that gives grace to

overcoming challenges and a receiving back of blessings through trust in the significance of

one's worship. Hence, through a sense of worship, these three paths of callings can be

enablers of entrepreneurship, along with the confidence to act.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

The three contributions noted above (the importance of context, the role of values associated

with new venture creation, and work as worship) have theoretical and practical implications.

By examining how Muslim values from the Shafii tradition increase entrepreneurial

confidence in sourcing opportunities (Davidsson, 2015; Dimov, 2010; Sidek et al., 2013), we

demonstrated how religion has acted as a macro-level influence through not only cultural, but

also regulatory changes. The impact of Islamisation in the 1980s and 1990s by the Malaysian

Government provided a strong context to support entrepreneurship (Tayeb, 1997). This

finding confirms Davidsson's (2015) claim that macro-level regulation impacts on the

sourcing of opportunities, as it is not the individual alone who is at the opportunity nexus.

20

Providing a supportive entrepreneurial framework is therefore central to policy makers wanting to encourage entrepreneurship, evident in Malaysia's continuing policy of 8% SME growth until 2020 ("Small is the New Big", 2016).

Our findings also extended our understanding on the values underpinning the way entrepreneurial opportunities are socially and culturally embedded, for example Western approaches and Islamic approaches to work. A Western perspective associated religious values as 'a calling' to do positive good in the world (Elangoven et al., 2010; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). Our findings however, demonstrated how the values underlying work within the Shafii tradition saw work as worship in the first instance with less concern for profit. Such a belief challenges our Western approaches to work and career as associated primarily with financial gain. Having these strong values embedded at a macro-level gives support to Davidsson's (2015) argument that the imagining of ideas and the confidence to act were defined within a broader context. Our findings also demonstrate how a strong macro-level value system reduces the awareness of risk-taking, as the need to achieve a greater purpose is stronger. The growing interest in purposeful and social entrepreneurship in the West acknowledges the presence of strong moral values underpinning society, an increasing trend that policy makers could attend too.

We also acknowledge the limitations of such research. It is context specific, and further research could investigate for the similarities and differences between the religious values of other Muslim traditions and those entrepreneurial characteristics more typically associated with other western associated input factors.

CONCLUSION

In addressing our research question regarding the role of the Shafii tradition in the sourcing of opportunities by Malay entrepreneurs, we have contributed by identifying the values and

21

impacts on the confidence and callings of destiny that are externally derived. Yet while the

very nature of this research is context-specific, along with its associated limitations, such

research articulates a more nuanced and heterogeneous interpretation of Islam from a Malay

perspective. Hence, the Shafii tradition provides a boundary around the nature of what

opportunities could be considered and how these opportunities are pursued and enacted. This

extends our current understanding of Islam, the purpose of this special issue, as this study

took a fine-grained view of the diaspora of Islam through identifying the variation of

religious undertones that shapes and influences entrepreneurship.

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Table 1: Demographics of the participants and their ventures

Participants	Gender	Age	Nature of Business	Year Founded
Aida	Female	38	Muslim Swimwear	2006
Hakeem	Male	40s	Skincare & Healthcare Products	1992
June	Female	34	Public Relations & Market Research	1999
Jasmine	Female	48	Training & Image Consultancy	2000
Sabrina	Female	50s	Islamic Media	1989
Farah	Female	40s	Islamic Fashion	2010
Nani	Female	52	Beauty care & spa	1989
Haris	Male	40	Skincare	2003
Soraya	Female	40s	Publishing	2007
Laila	Female	30s	Pre-School Education	2008
Mumtaz	Female	42	Healthcare	2006
Raihan	Female	52	Wealth Management	2007
Omar	Male	47	Publishing	1995
Aisyah	Female	30s	Skincare & Healthcare	1992
Maznah	Female	40s	Publishing	2007

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Table 2: Shafii values that guide Malay Muslims' process of entrepreneurship

Participants	SHAFII VALUES				
	Fardhu Kifayah	*Wasatiyyah*	*Dakwah*	*Amanah*	*Barakah*
Aida	✓				✓
Hakeem	✓	✓		✓	✓
June	✓				
Jasmine	✓	✓		✓	
Sabrina			✓		
Farah	✓				
Nani	✓				
Haris	✓				
Soraya	✓	✓	✓		
Laila	✓	✓		✓	
Mumtaz					✓
Raihan	✓	✓			
Omar	✓		✓		
Aisyah			✓		
Maznah		✓			

Figure 1: New venture creation through Shafii values