BOOK REVIEW

MUSLIM ENVIRONMENTALISMS: RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS

Gade, A. (2019). *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

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What are Muslim environmentalisms? Are they another example of anthropocentrism? Or are they a way to utilize Islamic doctrines for the purpose of meeting sustainability goals? In *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*, Anna M. Gade, Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, critically responds to and goes beyond these kinds of questions by examining diverse accounts of Muslim approaches to the environment, which involve not only engaging with the environment for the sake of development agendas but also making ethical commitments to nature.

This brilliant book argues that Muslim commitments to the environment – as analyzed historically, theoretically, and ethnographically – provide a path to rethink the crisis-based framework that is prevalent in the environmental humanities. Gade draws from a rich set of materials, ranging from Islamic scriptural, legal, ethical, philosophical, and Sufi interpretations, to field notes from her own fieldwork in Southeast Asia. Her interdisciplinary approach is grounded at the intersection of the history of religions, Islamic studies, and environmental humanities. Indeed, one novel contribution of the book is that it reorients the study of environmental humanities through the field of the history of religions. Furthermore, it critically examines Muslim understandings of the environment through a critique of the world religions paradigm, which tends to juxtapose Islam and the environment as if they are in binary opposition to one another. She also takes issue

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with global development frameworks, arguing that Muslim environmentalisms constitute a varied, overlapping set of commitments that include not only how environmental agendas shape Muslim interpretations of the environment but also how Muslims themselves deploy environmentalism as an ethical commitment. Her examples range from non-governmental organizations that instrumentalize Muslim commitments to the environment in their development-based projects–such as creating green infrastructure–to Muslims who participate in environmentalism in the pursuit of religious piety–such as devotional Sufi practices.

The text is organized thematically, in a way that provides a wide range of Muslim engagements with the environment. Chapter 2 focuses on "programs that deploy Islam for the sake of 'the environment' especially projects propagated by development-based organizations" (p. 37). According to Gade, these initiatives, including programs by global environmental groups like the World Wildlife Fund, tend to take a universalist approach while localizing global environmental statements, which "casts the environment in a decontextualized and generalized form" (p. 37). Specifically, she focuses on the co-participation of Muslims and non-Muslims in these kinds of projects, which include educational programs and actions such as 'green hajj' or 'green Ramadan,' which aim to fit Muslim religious practices into a particular environmental agenda.

The remaining chapters set out Muslim environmental commitments through the traditional division of the Islamic studies, while underlining the social and political contexts of specific environmental commitments. Gade first examines scripture-based arguments by providing a particular critique of an approach that juxtaposes 'Islam and the environment.' This approach is based on well-known verses of the Quran that confirm the need for "stewardship" and "balance," while dismissing the eschatological dimension of the Quranic approach to the environment. The eschatological dimension here raises the question of human accountability within networks of creatures, which gets at one of the main concerns in the environmental humanities: the question of anthropocentrism. According to Gade, Islamic scriptural reading of the environment suggests anthropocentrism inasmuch as humans (along with jinn) are tested. Yet Gade also underlines the Qur'an's support for non-anthropocentrism when taking into account the fact that other creatures are seen as natural worshippers of God contrary to human's 'exceptional deficiency' that is tied to their testing process (p. 113). Although Gade does not explicitly say this, Gade's approach to the scripture and other textual materials also sheds light on a

methodological question. Gade's approach, which puts scriptural and textual interpretations alongside field notes, goes beyond divisions between textuality and 'lived religion.' In addition, she is able to better understand how and why alternative interpretations of the scripture and other textual materials are being followed or dismissed in her field site.

In addition to scripture, Gade looks at Islamic legal and ethical sources for insights into Muslim environmentalisms. By juxtaposing classic and contemporary sources, she argues that Muslims' use of legal sources in their interpretations of the environment has transformed recently. In our current times, there is a particular focus on *maqasid*, which are "aims of the law" and *maslaha*, which is considered the public good (p. 139-144). Furthermore, Gade explores how legal and ethical sources situate the relationships between human and non-human beings within a system of creation, and at some point, intersecting with the idea of "rights of nature." She argues that humans are not "ontologically privileged creatures" in these sources; rather, all creatures are considered to be accountable for their part in relationships of "cause and effect" in the afterlife.

Another angle that Gade considers is exploring Muslim environmentalisms through the Islamic humanities; following a recent focus on non-legal structures in Islamic Studies, she emphasizes science, philosophy, and art (p. 159). According to Gade, Islamic classical literature and its 'extension' in contemporary systems appeal to symbols to explain the interactions between human, nature, the unseen, and the unknown (p. 158-162). One of the most prominent examples in this context is the allegorical narratives centering animals (p. 169-180). Furthermore, these accounts of environmentalism potentially bring together scientific interests and social and ethical responsibilities, as Gade observes in practices of *harim* in Indonesia. *Harim*, which means "protected zone," "represents a protected area designated by a perimeter established around a water source, such as a river, in which there cannot be activity that disturbs or depletes the source" (p. 190-191). Gade underlines that *harim* is endorsed "for symbolic value as much as conservation efficacy, and the key point here is that these aspects work with mutual reinforcement" (p. 191).

In other chapters, Gade also turns to Sufism, with a focus on communal connections and Islamic ethical commitments in Sufi writings and practices. Through rich details from her fieldwork in Indonesia, Gade discusses how Muslims appeal to the environment for their religious commitments, in devotional practices such as *eco-salawat*, *eco-dhikr*, and *eco-dakwah*. In all these practices, the main characteristics of South Asian Muslim environmentalisms are "mercy for creation,"

"compassion to creation," and "care for creation," all of which intermingle with devotional practices within these communities (p. 215-219). Unlike developmental accounts of environmentalism, for the Sufi communities discussed in Gade's account, religious goals are at the center, and the environment is a path to obtain these goals. Gade further notes that these practices of Islam are hardly visible in the Orientalist accounts of humanities. The discussion of Sufism and the environment includes a very engaging, critical examination of the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prominent Muslim intellectual who has advocated for Islamic environmentalism since the 1960s. According to Gade, Nasr's reading of nature as a cosmological and "spiritual" code referencing "elite traditions" contrasts with devout Sufi communities in Indonesia.

Muslim Environmentalisms describes Muslims' ethical commitments to the environment through complex relational practices, senses of responsibility, and accounts of the unseen. Crucially, Gade's reading of these practices provides interdisciplinary insights that not only contribute to the environmental humanities, as Gade suggests, but also to Islamic Studies. *Muslim Environmentalisms* opens a path for scholars, students, and activists alike to focus on ethical commitments and the environmental justice.

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