

## **Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations**

*Anna M. Gade*

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While the global environmental crisis has escalated rapidly in recent years, work at the intersection of Islamic Studies and Environmental Studies is a newly developing area, to which Anna Gade's *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* presents a significant contribution. While the most immediate readership of the work would be those interested in the intersection of those fields, the book makes a broad claim that critically engages with questions of boundaries and constructions of both fields and is of interest to scholars of Islam as well as non-Islamicists in the areas of Environmental Studies and Environmental Humanities. The work is in conversation not only with previous Islamic Studies works on the environment, such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr's several earlier works in this area as well as Sarra Tlili's more recent *Animals in the Qur'an*, but also recent critical interrogations field-forming discourses such as Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic*. As a scholar of Islam who is only newly becoming acquainted with the field of Environmental Humanities, I consider the text here most specifically in terms of its contribution to Islamic Studies, but it is important to note that the book has a broad readership beyond this area.

*Muslim Environmentalisms* presents a theorization of Islamic knowledge and worlds through the lens of environmentalism and the environment. In this way, the book is understated in making an incredibly large and nuanced claim that brings together diverse areas of Islamic Studies as it investigates the intersection of the field with that of Environmental Humanities. Its main aim is to "expand frameworks" of both Islamic Studies and research on the environment in a way that accounts for Muslim discourses and practices (13). The main approach is from the history of religions, drawing on diverse sources from Islamic foundations such as the Qur'an and Islamic law, thought, and practice, but also the sciences, both Islamic sciences as well as those from the interdisciplinary area of Environmental Studies. The main intervention of the book is to present a theory of the environment that centers Muslims, which interrogates broader questions of the construction of frameworks of knowledge, such as the humanities.

Gade's fieldwork is a subtle thread that moves readers through the seven chapters of the work. The first chapter presents the book's claim and approach, but also introduces the striking example of the eruption of Mount Merapi in Indonesia (starting in 2010) as a way of demonstrating Gade's point that there are key Islamic narratives and practices in relation to the environment that "[exceed] the capacity of present humanistic frames for social, ethical, and symbolic analysis" (7). Chapter 2 considers most specifically the framework of "Islam *and* the environment," both critiquing the "Islam *and*..." paradigm in general, as well as demonstrating how this specific formulation has come about through interfaith engagement as well as state- and nongovernmental organization-environmental work. Here, Gade demonstrates the "Islam *and* the environment" paradigm both resembles but is also intertwined with the "world religions" framework and associated Protestantization, which is often critiqued more broadly in Islamic Studies. In this chapter, two key points emerge in relation to Gade's fieldwork. First, she describes the setting of Islamic schools in agricultural regions of Java (the "eco-*pasantren*," 50), pointing out that local religious leaders had much to say about sustainable farming practices in relation to Islam, but that these "were not presented as 'Islamic'. It was just farming" (51). This is one such example of a Muslim environmentalism that is overlooked when operating in a world religions "Islam *and* the environment" framework. Similarly, the discussion of the Cham Muslims of Cambodia beginning on page 59 also helps Gade demonstrate an example of environmental issues coming up in her fieldwork (in this case, declining fish harvests along the Mekong River) that were otherwise unaccounted for by traditional disciplinary discourses.

The middle chapters of the work, 3 and 4, consider formulations of the environment in foundational Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and texts of Islamic law and ethics. Here, Gade eloquently and succinctly states both why foundational texts are relevant to practice, but also the importance of how those texts are always interpreted in light of broader social contexts (78). Moreover, an interrogation of foundational textual sources demonstrates one major area of Islamic thought that is left aside when Islam is forced into the "Islam *and* the environment" framework: eschatology. Chapter 3 also serves as a broader commentary on modern modes of engagement with the Qur'an that could serve as a jumping-off point for similar considerations of modern Qur'anic hermeneutics on other themes,

particularly as the Qur'an and other foundational Islamic sources may be deployed in service of other global concerns.

Chapter 5 brings Gade's argument to its broadest conclusion, which is the presentation of an "Islamic Humanities," building on the specific areas of tradition employed throughout the book. The Islamic Humanities of course draws on areas of Islamic sciences, as well as *sciences*, that one engages in a full understanding of Islamic tradition and its history—the point here being that this area is a full regime of knowledge on its own terms, both overlapping with but diverging from the (European) Humanities as it is normally constructed in Western education and knowledge.

The final chapters, 6 and 7, return to the original argument and conclude the work, especially restating the recentering pointed out over the course of the previous chapters: "when Muslim commitments of environmentalism are primarily for the sake of religious goals and not the reverse, teachings that are not part of a standard interfaith menu, such as apocalypticism or the exemplary model of the Prophet Muhammad, emerge as central" (199).

Through much of the book, I found myself wanting more details of Gade's fieldwork. As a reader unfamiliar with Muslim environmentalisms, starting with a clearer impression of the issues and practices at stake in Gade's field research would help me more fully understand the broader claims throughout the work. The passages where fieldwork was featured most directly—for example, the discussion of Mount Merapi in chapter 1, or anywhere water resources were brought into conversation with traditional textual sources on water—were for me the clearest demonstrations of the specificities behind the book's argument. I am ambivalent about my desire for more details from the fieldwork, however, and as I indicate in the following paragraph, there is an easy solution to my desire for more. But first, my qualms: in wanting more details from the fieldwork, am I missing the point? That is to say, am I falling prey to an expectation for a Geertzian presentation of the details of life on top of which a system of meaning can be built? One answer may be in points made on page 58, where Gade points to Geertz's development of the idea of the "local," and how a focus on "local values" raises other kinds of questions. Perhaps I am just yearning for a second book that is the mirror image of this one.

But there is an easy solution to my desire for more details from the fieldwork. Gade has posted on Vimeo, linked from her personal website, a series of short videos from her interviews in Indonesia (<https://vimeo.com/hijau>). I wish that the videos were linked from the Columbia University

Press page for this book, as they offer a resource that could particularly aid in teaching the book. As Gade pointed out in her interview on the New Books in Islamic Studies Podcast, the individuals in the videos were already speaking in public and in educational capacities about environmental causes, and were perfectly fine with her recording their interviews to post online. These videos are a helpful resource and not to be overlooked as media that could potentially be used alongside the book.

This brings me to my final points in this review. This book makes a significant intervention into Islamic Studies on the level of critiquing disciplinary boundaries and conceptualization. The book is certainly of value to scholars most immediately interested in environment and environmentalisms, but also to any scholar interested in thinking critically about the history and shape of our area of study, especially if the lens through which this is conducted (the environment) is a relatively unfamiliar area to those scholars. In that regard, the text would make a fine addition to the library of any scholars or students who are engaged in critical assessment of the regimes of knowledge that we take as “natural” far too often.

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