

THE ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF PEOPLE AND PLACE : Theoretical Analysis on Muslim Communities Environmental Responsibility

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Abstract: This article discusses the theoretical analysis of environmental responsibility based on Muslim communities' perspectives. By exploring a variety of theoretical standpoints from Muslim environmentalism to discussion on environmental responsibility this article aims to construct a clear theoretical framework of Muslim communities' environmental responsibility in dealing with environmental crises. Focusing on Muslim environmental movements in Indonesia, this article employs a textual study on Islamic environmental ethics also non-monolithic Muslim community experiences. Findings show that moral imaginaries of sustainable communities in Islam provide an expression for Muslims to engage in environmental movements. However, for Muslims, this expression is highly dependent on the experiences, cultural interpretations, and social bonding that contribute significantly to shaping community perception of environmental responsibility. Without exploring the multidimensional factors, indicating Muslim environmental responsibility is difficult task to do.

Keywords: Environmental responsibility, Islamic environmental ethics, Place-based narrative

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Introduction

Environmental crisis faced by many Muslim communities has triggered various Muslim environmental movements. Schwencke¹ noted that the growing eco-Islam movement has reached, not only the scope of global activism but also in academic platforms and policy framework. In a similar vein to global initiatives, local Muslim movements also emerged and contributed widely in seeking solutions for contextual environmental problems. Indonesia offers sundry examples of local environmental movements which are referred to by Schwencke² as the “Green Indonesia movement”. In addition to Schwencke, scholars such as Bagir³, Mangunjaya⁴, and Gade⁵, also contributed significantly in providing insights into environmental movements in Indonesia from multiple perspectives—from public and theological discourse (fatwa) to cultural disposition.

The robust study of Muslim environmentalisms in Indonesia as explained above, offers a variety of perspectives. These valuable insights, however, still lack of theoretical underpinning that connects multidimensional factors related to the problem, such as environmental change, environmental ethics, experience, and cultural disposition that trigger Muslim communities to engage in environmental movements. For this account, this article attempts to construct a clear discussion of Muslim environmental responsibility. A variety of theories and concepts contributing to the discussion will be explored. For example, the non-monolithic Islamic perspective will be employed to connect with the daily interpretations of environmental change based on Muslim communities’ perspectives⁶. Study on local Muslim experiences also offers a resourceful knowledge of how Muslim communities approach their environmental problems as marked by Tsing⁷ noted that social movements and cultural forms are moves in particularity and interact within complex encounters of multiple agencies.

In further construct a theoretical framework, this article aims to answer the question as follows: What theoretical discussion contributes to Muslim communities conception of environmental responsibility? Using the research question as a guideline, this article

¹ Schwencke, A. M. *Globalized Eco-Islam* (A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism). 2012, 2

² Ibid.

³ Bagir, Z. A. “The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia”. *Worldviews*, 19, (2015)

⁴ Mangunjaya, F., Tobing, I., Binawan, A., Pua, E., & Nurbawa, M. “Faiths from the Archipelago: Action on the Environment and Climate Change”. *Special Issue: Religion, Nature and Globalization: Voices from the Archipelago*, 19(2), (2015), 103–122.

⁵ Gade, A. M. *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. (Columbia University Press). 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tsing, A. L. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. (Princeton University Press). 2005.

structured as follows: firstly, it will engage discussion on theoretical underpinning of Muslim interpretation of the changing environment; secondly, it explores the relation between ethics, moral geography, and responsibility of Muslim community; and thirdly, this article attempts to provide a clear theoretical frame on environmental responsibility of Muslim community. The literature study conducted over 6 months period provides data from multiple sources, with a focus on the local context of Indonesia. The selection of method is based on the nature of this article and aims to present a foundation on the relationship between Muslim communities and environmental responsibility. Data from the literature study are categorized based on the above-mentioned structure.

Methodology

This research is designed by employing a literature study conducted in libraries (Universitas Padjadjaran, Universitas Gadjah Mada Library, Perpustakaan Daerah Jawa Tengah), online resources, official census population website, and local newspaper. The literature study aims to collect data related to theoretical aspect, as well demographic information and local environmental history from any available resources. Collected data from literature study and preliminary research are analyzed by following steps as follow: (1) Data from literature compared then categorized and sub-categorized according to themes derived from conceptual frames; and (2) Categorized and sub-categorized quantitative data are analyzed by employing conceptual analysis to understand the context Muslim environmental responsibilities.

Results and Discussion

Muslim and Environmental Ethics

Before exploring Muslim and environmentalism responsibility, there is a need to outline the relationship between Muslims and the environment as an underlying study. Islamic ethics are derived from three sources: The Qur'an, Sunah, and Ijtihad. Qur'an compiles God's verses, Sunna refers to the practices of Prophet Muhammad, and Ijtihad is reasoning from Islamic scholars. While the previous two are fixed, ijthihad is open to innovations⁸. Hallaq⁹ explains Ijtihad as part of Islamic law resulted from the interpretative approach that involves inference, both linguistic and legal, and therefore, was a domain of probability. However, while change and innovations are encouraged, some principles remain unchangeable, such as maintaining equity and accessibility to water; or other environmental principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunna. In applying Ijtihad, Islamic communities adopt consensus and interpretations of Islamic scholars.

⁸ Gudorf, C. E. "Water Privatization in Christianity and Islam". *Society of Christian Ethics*, 30(1), (2010).

⁹ Hallaq, W. B. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. (Cambridge University Press). 2009, 27

Husaini¹⁰ also Wersal¹¹ linked religious practices and environmental awareness by emphasizing two foundations for Islamic ethical reasons: (1) the theological ethic of Shari'ah law based on the Qur'an and Hadiths; and (2) ethics in protecting the public interest and universal common good. Regarding the balance of man and nature, Islam emphasizes the ethical relationship between creatures—both humans and nature are creatures of God—therefore, the relationship is equal¹². In the Qur'anic verse (2:11), Allah commands us to avoid making mischief (fussad) on earth. The command is also applied to avoid environmental damage and degrading natural resources¹³. Natural balance (mizan), as a basic principle of Islamic teaching, follows an example of Prophet Muhammad in treating his surroundings: by placing back fallen bird nest on a tree, also by not polluting and misusing water, as two from many other examples¹⁴. Iqbal¹⁵, also recalls the teachings of Prophet Muhammad on the protection against exploitation and further relates the Islamic environmental ethics with the principles of sustainable development. Fatwa, a nonbinding legal scholarly consensus, is also a prominent source of environmental ethics in Muslim communities. Dallal and Hendrickson in Mangunjaya¹⁶ identify fatwa as “three different concepts associated with the term: management of information about the religion of Islam in general, providing consultation to courts of law, and interpretation of Islamic law”. In Indonesia, for example, the fatwa emphasizes environmental protection to reduce the environmental damage of mining, protection to wildlife, waste management, sanitation, forest burning, and equal access to water.

Another key understanding of Muslims' perspectives on the environment is argued by Sachadeva¹⁷ who points out the reflective position between religion and the environment. Yassin Dutton¹⁸ provides another example by referring specifically to the Qur'an verse (3: 104) “that Muslims are called to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, first with the hand, and if that is not possible, with the tongue, and if that is not possible,

¹⁰ Husaini, A. S. *Islamic Environmental Systems Engineering: A Systems Study of Environmental Engineering, and the Law, Politics, Education, Economics, and Sociology of Science and Culture of Islam*. (Macmillan Press). 1980.

¹¹ Wersal, L. “Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges”. *Zygon*, 30(3), (1995).

¹² Gada, M. Y. “Environmental Ethics in Islam: Principles and Perspectives”. *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization*, 4(4), (2014).

¹³ Shihab, Q. *Membumikan Al-Qur'an*. (Mizan). 1992.

¹⁴ Ashtankar, O. M. “Islamic Perspectives on Environmental Protection”. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2(1), (2016), 439

¹⁵ Iqbal, M. *Islamic perspectives on Sustainable Development*. (Palgrave Macmillan). 2005.

¹⁶ Mangunjaya, F. M., Parwita, G. “Fatwas on Boosting Environmental Conservation in Indonesia”. *Religions*, 10 (2019).

¹⁷ Sachadeva, S. Religious Identity, Beliefs, and Views about Climate Change. In *Climate Science*. (Oxford Research Encyclopedias). 2016, 2

¹⁸ Dutton, Y. The Environmental Crisis of Our Time: Muslims Response. In R. Foltz, Denny, R., Baharudin (Ed.), *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (pp. 323–340). *Center for Study on World Religion*. (2003), 323

with the heart”. This verse, according to Dutton, is the call to activism for Muslim communities. He also refers to the hadith of Al-Bukhari¹⁹ that in times of crisis—which might be intentional or unintentional—there is a need to act and respond effectively to the situation. The hadith citation is as follow²⁰:

“The Prophet said, “The example of the person abiding by Allah’s order and restrictions in comparison to those who violate them is like the example of those persons who drew lots for their seats in a boat. Some of them got seats in the upper part, and the others in the lower. When the latter needed water, they had to go up to bring water (and that troubled the others), so they said, ‘Let us make a hole in our share of the ship (and get water) saving those who are above us from troubling them. “

Farrar²¹ provides an empirical example of the problem faced by the Muslim communities:

“Aggravating the situation still further, much of the Muslim World is experiencing first-hand the effects of climate change. From the oil-rich Gulf and the starved deserts of Yemen to the rapidly sinking Maldives and even Indonesia, environmental degradation is posing a huge problem in terms of food security, water scarcity, sustainable development and equitable access to resources, providing reasons for conflicts and complicating their resolution”.

Addressing the pressing matter, Muslims’ responses are varied: from theological discourse, scientific authority, or activism. Discussion in this article, however, will limit its scope to the principle of environmental ethics and the theoretical frame of Muslim environmental responsibility. The operating unit will be Muslim communities at the local level, thus plural interpretation of ethics will depict the distinct characteristics of culture and experiences of environmental change and responsibility.

In addition to the discussion of ethical sources in Muslim communities, Saniotis²² offers a substantial reading of the principles by detailing the three principles of environmental ethics in Islam. First principle is related to the concept of unifying principle or Tawhid. The unification is derived from balanced and harmonious interactions in nature that provide a “source of inspiration and guidance for understanding Divine action in creation”. Based on the principle of Tawhid, Divine inspiration and guidance should be the basis of every human action and interaction. Second principle is related the concept of Khilafah (stewardship) which is declared in the Qur’an that humans should refrain

¹⁹ Al-Bukhari (trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan). *Shahih*. (Hilal Yayinrary). 1976, 673

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 568

²¹ Farrar, S. *Islamic Ethics and Truth Commissions in the Muslim World: Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace?* In D. Camilleri, J., Guess (Ed.), *Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace* (pp. 135–164). (Palgrave Macmillan). 2020, 135

²² Saniotis, A. “Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics”. *Contemporary Islam*, 6, (2012), 157.

from the mischief that leads to the corruption of the environment. Saniotis also signifies the importance of ecology in Islam, as one-eighth of the Qur'an urges Muslims to meditate on nature. Thus, referring to the sociologist Ali Shariati, Saniotis noted that the notion of stewardship should not only include the physical balance of nature but also the spiritual dimension. Third principle is related to the concept of akhirah (the afterlife) which obligated humankind to take responsibility for their action on earth and improve the condition for the sake of the next generation. The concept of akhirah also indicates divine judgment and punishment for misconduct—that Saniotis²³ expresses an example: “note that cruelty to animals and wanton defacement of nature is forbidden and warrants Divine punishment. Alternately, kindness shown to animals bestows God's reward”. In addition to the three principles explored by Saniotis, Khalid²⁴ noted that the principle of fitra (the origin of the creation) also performs as a reminder of our place in the natural order.

On a more positive note, Deuraseh²⁵ offered an approach of *insan adab* (a person with a sense of responsibility). Adab which is generally included in Muslim education can perform as a basic ethical foundation of a Muslim to protect the non-human world. Another approach is offered by Keskin and Ozalp²⁶ in engaging Islamic ethics to environmental protection and ecological justice in the Age of the Anthropocene. This approach, however, is only possible due to the growing body of Global Islamic environmental activism²⁷ and Muslim environmentalism²⁸. They argued²⁹:

“When global issues are collectively analyzed through an Islamic theological lens, the need to change one's worldview becomes apparent. It is not sufficient to simply attempt to ‘fix’ problems that have been created over the years but to change the way one views every part of creation that exists on this earth. This would lead to justice and an ecologically sustainable peace”.

Applying Islamic lenses to global issues, according to Keskin and Ozalp, will promote and mainstream the potential, values, and purposes of Islamic ethics to broader Muslim

²³ Ibid, 157-158

²⁴ Khalid, F. M. Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics. In R. C. Foltz (Ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. (Nova). 2005, 103

²⁵ Deuraseh, N. “Maintaining a Healthy Environment: an Islamic Ethical Approach”. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(4), (2009), 528.

²⁶ Keskin, Z., Ozalp, M. An Islamic Approach to Environmental Protection and Ecologically Sustainable Peace in the Age of the Anthropocene. In D. Camilleri, J., Guess (Ed.), *Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace*. (Palgrave Macmillan). 2020.

²⁷ Schwencke, A. M. *Globalized Eco-Islam: A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism*. 2012.

²⁸ Khalid, F. M. Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics. In R. C. Foltz (Ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. (Nova). 2005.

²⁹ Keskin, Z., Ozalp, M, 2020, 120

communities. Overall, Saniotis reviews the general characteristics of Islamic environmental ethics as follows³⁰:

- (1) *the general view of the sacred of Nature;*
- (2) *the central role of humankind is as earth's steward;*
- (3) *there is an urgent need for Muslims to modify their behaviors to live more harmoniously with the non-human world; and*
- (4) *the moral and ethical dimensions of the non-human world need to be recognized.*

These characteristics help to frame the relation of Muslim communities and their ethical responsibility to their changing environment.

Religion, Place, and Responsibility

In describing the constructive role of religion in the Anthropocene, McKim³¹ mentioned the function of promoting good planetary citizenship—an understanding of the local characteristics of animals, birds, plants, insects, are locally indigenous species; and religion provides moral leadership in maintaining or restoring integrity in certain areas. Mckim defines a good planetary citizenship as³²:

“Understanding what animals, birds, insects, and plants are locally indigenous and what are their characteristics, habits, and needs; where these locally indigenous species are still flourishing; what might be done to enable them to flourish more widely; what are the local drainage patterns; and much more besides”

Further, McKim presents examples including Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, in which certain places are sacred and not to be despoil, also the ideas of compassion and mercy should be given to all beings. McKim’s insight on religion as a moral value is relevant to the purpose of exploring the local community’s environmental responsibility and their strategy in dealing with environmental change.

In addition to the intersection of religion in the Anthropocene, geography or place also plays a significant role in explaining human perception as stated by William³³ that “the intersections between moral, space, and power between human and non-human, and the material and the symbolic, with a dimension of life”. It also perceived as the moral understanding that people, symbols, and practices are fit in a specific place, and can be different from others. In her definition, William seems to disregard the difference

³⁰ Saniotis, A. “Muslims and Ecology: Fostering Islamic Environmental Ethics”. *Contemporary Islam*, 6, (2012), 167

³¹ McKim, R. “On Comparing Religions in the Anthropocene”. *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 34(3), (2013), 258

³² *Ibid.*, 252

³³ Williams, P. Moral Geography. In R. Richardson, D., Castree, N., Goodchild, M., Kobayashi, A., Liu, W., Marston (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Geography*. (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd). 2017, 1

between space and place, as she used it interchangeably; Grosz³⁴ on the other hand, emphasized to differentiation of the concept of space (physical extension, or territoriality) and place (dwelling, lived in). Smith³⁵, a key figure in developing the moral turn in geography, also mentioned the concept of “place” when depicting the study: “the fact of diversity, or pluralism, in moral beliefs and practices as they vary from place to place (and from time to time)”. However, like Williams, many used it interchangeably, as place and space possess contextual limits and history³⁶. The philosophical root of place or dwelling can be traced back to Heidegger and Levinas. Dwelling for Heidegger is the concrete approach of Dasein (being in the world); he stated: “To be a human being is to be on earth, which means to dwell”³⁷. Levinas³⁸, on the other hand, perceived dwelling and the idea of “home” as more than mean and instrument, but consist of privilege. The two oppositions remain as polar ideas in understanding the concept of dwelling.

In a sociological field, a classic work from Cresswell³⁹ offers a contextual reading of place within its relation to social norms and ideology; he perceived that the constant interaction of people and place shaped bodies, behavior, and interpretation. Smith, further added the differentiation of thin and thick morality as he refers to Michael Walzer⁴⁰; thin or minimalist derives from universal morality, while thick or particular, belongs to local morality. Following Walzer and Smith’s notion, Muslim communities as a unit analysis in this article also refer to the local community. A more focused study of moral geography related to environmental responsibility was conducted by Birdsall⁴¹ which mentioned:

“The significance of mundane daily experiences becomes established over the long term as they come to reflect cumulative, cultural views. They draw on or connect with our interests in location, landscape, human-environment interaction, and spatial expressions of human behavior.”

Birdsall further argued that there are three guideposts in understanding the environmental moral geography of everyday lives. First, is regard—he shared a similar

³⁴ Grosz, E. *Space. Time and Perversion*. (Routledge). 1995, 123

³⁵ Smith, D. *Moral Geographies. Ethics in a World of Difference*. (Edinburgh University Press). 2000, 14

³⁶ Danani, C. *Human Dwelling: A Philosophical Question Concerning Place and Space*. In D. George, M., Pezzoli-Olgiati (Ed.), *Religious Representation in Place*. (Palgrave Macmillan). 2014, 47

³⁷ Heidegger, M. “Building, Dwelling, Thinking”. In *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Harper & Row). 1971, 147

³⁸ Levinas, E. *Totality and Infinity*. (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers). 1971, 152.

³⁹ Cresswell, T. *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. (University of Minnesota Press). 1996, 13

⁴⁰ In Smith, D. *Moral Geographies. Ethics in a World of Difference*. (Edinburgh University Press). 2000, 18

⁴¹ Birdsall, S. “Regard, Respect, and Responsibility: Sketches for a Moral Geography of the Everyday”. *Annals of the Association of American Geographer*, 86(4), (1996), 620.

view with White⁴² in the sense that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” and their disregard of others (place and other living beings). Second is respect—which is often lost amidst the extremely narrow, view of rationality; disrespect follows from a loss of trust and value in the non-rational intangibles that sustain the human spirit. Third is responsibility—which is also lost when we disengage ourselves from the ideal in our everyday lives. As moral values, norms, and ideals are contextual, thus the concept of moral geography is relevant to the purpose of exploring the local community’s perception and community’ environmental responsibility—which are the objectives of this article. While community, borrowing Northcott’s definition⁴³, is “a ‘boundaries concept’, constituted by ‘some people’”.

In an attempt to draw the ethical relation between community and place, three key inquiry provides by William⁴⁴. The first is to apply moral understanding to the question of development, justice, and difference. In many cases, the moral problem of justice arises in regional planning or the relation between people and nature. However, it is also important to note that justice is contextual, and different communities can hold different views of justice. The second is to understand the complex relationship of distance, care, and responsibility. The three concepts are also contextual and particular. A strong link subsists between responsibility, care, and distance—a moral question stands on whether or not people feel responsible and care about a distant place or environment. While care lies in intersubjective relations, responsibility is ensured through collective rules, policies, and practices. The third is to relate to a particular space of “moral landscapes”, whereas space and social relations are imagined and organized based on particular meanings and values. Within the moral landscape, space, and society are organized in hierarchical construction governed by “moral order”. The constructions are varied, from economic class, social status, and religion. Religion as an order within a certain moral landscape is the key strand for exploring the Muslim community’s ethical relation with place.

Muslim and Environmental Responsibility

In depicting the relationship of community imaginaries, religion, and environment, Silvern & David⁴⁵ described:

“The sustainability and moral imaginaries of religious and spiritual communities...are explored as a social, economic and environmental discourse, intersects with religious beliefs and practices; how different faith traditions—with specific visions

⁴² White, L. The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis. *Science*, 155, (1967), 1209.

⁴³ Northcott, M. *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities*. (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc). 2015, 170

⁴⁴ Williams, P. Moral Geography. In R. Richardson, D., Castree, N., Goodchild, M., Kobayashi, A., Liu, W., Marston (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Geography*. (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.) 2017, 3-5

of the good life—can aid in the construction of ethical relationships of people, place and the planet’s ecosystems”.

Another note on moral imaginaries and sustainable community is argued by Northcott⁴⁶ by placing religious tradition as central in human ecology expression. He offers a concept of “parochial ecology”, “in which communities recover from the universalizing hegemony of State and corporate a collective sense of responsibility for their locale, including birds, grasses, shrubs, trees, waterways, and airways that delineate the pathways and rituals of local community life”. Whereas, in the study on Muslim environmentalism, Gade⁴⁷ also mentioned “place-based” narratives as a standard methodology to grasp the religious interpretation of local Muslim community. She elaborates further⁴⁸:

“Islamic rituals always resonate with present-day theory in environmental humanities insofar as they are place-based. For instance, Hajj, prayers for rain, and other community observances that were derived from documented Practices of the Prophet Muhammad are essentially tied to landscapes in their unique location of Mecca (Hajj) or in terms of situated environmental conditions (salat al-istisqa’). The concept of Qibla also indicate “the portable nature” as worship in Islam requires environmental orientation and place”.

More practically, Robinson⁴⁹ mentioned that the meaning and values of sustainability are also rooted in plural moral conceptions, thus, shaping the relations between humans and nature differently. Thus, achieving sustainability and environmental responsibility is not a matter of policy frames and technical guidance, but the moral interpretation of the community with its contextual experiences.

In a similar vein, Silvern & David⁵⁰ reaffirmed the argument of “the environment” as a purposive agent in religious ritual practice—and greatly contributes to the community sustainable practice—within the general context of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and indigenous belief perspectives. Islam in particular, perceived a place not

⁴⁵ Silvern, S., David, E. Religion, Sustainability, and Place. In E. Silvern, S., David (Ed.), *Religion, Sustainability, and Place Moral Geographies of the Anthropocene* (Palgrave Macmillan). 2021, 4

⁴⁶ Northcott, M. *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.) 2015, 101

⁴⁷ Gade, A. M. *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. (Columbia University Press). 2019, 6

⁴⁸ Ibid., 219-220

⁴⁹ Robinson, J. “Squaring the Circle? Some Thoughts on the Idea of Sustainable Development”. *Ecological Economics*, 48(4), (2004), 379.

⁵⁰ Silvern, S., David, E. Religion, Sustainability, and Place. In E. Silvern, S., David (Ed.), *Religion, Sustainability, and Place Moral Geographies of the Anthropocene*. (Palgrave Macmillan). 2021, 5

only as the site of dwelling or living but also symbolizes struggle and contestation. Desplat⁵¹ description signifies the importance of a place in Muslim society as it constitutes a spatial dimension of a religious, social, political, cultural, and economic network. Place, according to Desplat, also functions as the intersection of ideas and interests. He also noted three keys to understanding the accounts of place and space in Muslim communities. First, despite the vital function, many Muslims treated place and space in a meta-categorical manner without defining its importance. In this regard, space is only perceived as a “container”, without paying much attention to the interactions that shaped norms, values, and practices of the community. Second, the question of technical terms of space and place. Within Muslim communities, both concepts had been treated as dichotomies, without neglecting the fact that there are also Muslim communities that used it in terms of complementary. The important note is that in Islam, a sacred place is always made of diffusion—“an appropriation and movement in space”. Third, the transformation of sacred places did not only derive from textual interpretation, as sacredness in Muslim communities is related to a social practice that invests social meaning in a certain place. Without the social convention, it is less likely that a place will transform into a sacred place⁵². Thus, by employing the environment imaginaries and place-based Muslim narrative, this research will explore how local Muslim communities imagine their changing environment.

The decreasing use of the textual and monolithic approach is mainly due to the incompatibility of the approach in narrating different visions of social movements. Thus, fluid and more fragmented interpretation is applied to narrate the complexity of ideas in contemporary movements. Bayat also explores the methodological account of the fragmented movements and notes that the method should also be flexible; it requires understanding, form discourse, language, symbols also historical narratives. Bayat also refers to the culturalism approach which perceives social movement as a result of the negotiation process and communication actions. Diverse methodology, eventually, is another characteristic of contemporary social movements; however, despite the fragmented nature, it always leads to an open society⁵³.

In line with Bayat, Brockopp⁵⁴ noted that religions are complex traditions that contain plural visions and wisdom that can be best applied to a new problem and challenge. He also signifies the importance of reinterpretation and rediscovers old religious

⁵¹ Desplat, P. Representations of Space, Place-Making and Urban Life in Muslim Societies. In P. Desplat & P. Schulz (Ed.), *Prayer in the City: The Making of Muslim Sacred Places and Urban Life*. (the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek). 2012, 10

⁵² Ibid., 10-12

⁵³ Bayat, A. “Islamism and Social Movement Theory”. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(6), (2005), 893.

⁵⁴ Brockopp, J. “Islam and Ecology: Theology, Law and Practice of Muslim Environmentalism”. *Worldviews*, 6, (2012), 217

stories to be able to reflect the contextual narrative. This approach, according to Brockopp, is the true engagement of religious ethics in providing answers for current problems, he stated that “true engagement is a combination of practical engagement with the hands, intellectual appreciation by the mind, and emotional attachment. Brockopp refers to Gade⁵⁵ in addressing the example of Muslim environmentalism, which in practice, requirements for both a legal (shariah) and an emotional engagement. Thus, the growing body of Muslim environmentalism in the Islamic world applied a new theology based on rational arguments, and emotional reflection to interpret the sacred text and tradition.

Khalid⁵⁶, however, notes the failure of the textual approach to environmentalism in Muslim communities is mainly due to the lack of reflexive experiences. Therefore, Bagir and Martiam⁵⁷ mentioned the need to reframe religious discourse in today society. The challenge of plural interpretation presents a new approach to the discourse known as Muslim environmentalism. Hamed⁵⁸ addresses the need to make a clear distinction between Islamic environmentalism and Muslim environmentalism. The previous demonstrated a textual approach based on the scriptural sources of Islam (derived from two foundations: Qur’an and Hadiths), the latter draws its inspiration from a variety of sources, possibly including but not limited to religion (daily ritual, religious symbol and also cultural interpretation).

Even though this paper will emphasise the theoretical frame of Muslim environmentalism, the historical backdrop of Islamic environmental movements is important to note. Hancock⁵⁹ provides a historical context as follow, “*The study of Islam, and the study of social movements, has developed in parallel—both underwent sweeping transformation in the 1960s and 1970s, rejecting Orientalist modes of thought and collective behaviour models respectively*”. In later development, Islamic environmental movement also uses “eco-theology” as one of their approaches. The need for plural interpretations, however, is not new in the formation of the Islamic social movement. Bayat⁶⁰ revealed the trend of moving beyond monolithic and totalising narratives as a common characteristic of many social movements in the Middle East. The decreasing use of the textual and monolithic approach signifies its incompatibility to narrate different visions

⁵⁵ Gade, A. “Tradition and Sentiment in Indonesian Environmental Islam”. *Worldviews*, 16(3), (2012), 263–285.

⁵⁶ Khalid, F. M. Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics. In R. C. Foltz (Ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. (Nova). 2005.

⁵⁷ Bagir, Z. A & Martiam, N. Islam. In W. Jenkins, M. Tucker, & J. Grim (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. (New York, USA: Routledge). 2017.

⁵⁸ In Foltz, R. C. The Environmental Crisis in the Muslim World. In R. C. Foltz (Ed.). *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. (pp. vii-xiii). (New York, USA: Nova Science Publisher, Inc). 2005

⁵⁹ Hancock, R. “Is There a Paradox of Liberation and Religion? Muslim Environmentalists, Activism, and Religious Practice”. *Journal For The Academic Study Of Religion*, 28(1), (2015), 44

of social movements—thus, a more fragmented and fluid interpretation is. Bayat also explores the conditions for plural interpretations that require a wide-range understanding of discourse, language, symbols also historical narratives.

Indonesia, in one hand, has sundry examples of local ecology and environmental movement, refer by Schwencke⁶¹ as “Green Indonesia movement”. Four primary movements can be observed:

(1) the active involvement of the religious establishment; (2) the development of Fiqh al-Bi’ah (Islamic environmental Law); (3) the active involvement of the pesantren, Islamic boarding schools; and (4) The engagement of Indonesian political movements, manifesting a merging of Islamist and environmentalist movements.

Gade⁶² further explores the concept of Muslim environmentalism in Indonesia as a living practice. From her observation on the practice of Islam and environmentalism, she noted the relations of religious piety and environmentalism as follow:

“Commitments here called Muslim environmentalisms do not derive from a monolithic Islam; instead they emerge through layering of the material, the ethical, and the symbolic in religious, scientific, social, and experiential frames. Over decades, the disciplines of history of religions and Islamic studies have developed tools for recognizing such patterns in their respective methodologies.”

However, besides the growing movement, Hancock⁶³ reveals a paradox of liberation and religion subsisting in the new theological approach. On one hand, the rich interpretation and reflexive experience in Muslim environmentalism, has succeeded in integrating environmental ethics as a worldview, attitude, and even the way of life. On the other hand, the plural interpretations are often framed as pragmatism and accused of bid’a practice (unwritten innovation) which is avoided in many Muslim ideologies. Hancock, further explained, that in avoiding the practice of bid’a, there are Muslim environmentalists who turn to indigenous religious traditions to explain their interpretation of nature—however, the criticism remains. Hancock refers to Dawud who mentioned that the effective engagement of Muslim environmentalism occurs in small communities, as they can blur the boundaries between activism and religious practice. Despite the criticism, Muslim environmentalism has succeeded in expressing Muslim experiences and practices in engaging environmental ethics.

⁶⁰ Bayat, A. “Islamism and Social Movement Theory”. *Third World Quarterly*, 26(6), (2005), 892.

⁶¹ Schwencke, A. M. *Globalized Eco-Islam: A Survey of Global Islamic Environmentalism*. 2012.

⁶² Gade, A. M. *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. (Columbia University Press). 2019, 4

⁶³ Hancock, R. “Is There a Paradox of Liberation and Religion? Muslim Environmentalists, Activism, and Religious Practice”. *Journal For The Academic Study Of Religion*, 28(1), (2015), 52

In later development, Gade⁶⁴ provides a theoretical frame for Muslim environmentalism by exploring Islamic social and religious foundations. She depicts the roots of environmentalism in Islam as follows:

“Since the Qur’anic tradition in text and practice does not come with root keywords to be translated unambiguously as “environment” or “environmentalism,” these are also concepts that guide developing a humanistic theory to make a grounded contribution to studying Islam, religion, and environment. For the humanistic discipline and enhanced community-focused and textually informed depth expected of the history of religions, this approach would divert an otherwise superficial application of post-Christian terms in religion and ethics that commonly circulate in the environmental humanities like the sacred or stewardship.”

By employing humanistic theory, Muslim environmentalism corresponds to religious practice; whereas environmental ethics is integral in one’s daily life⁶⁵.

The relationship between Islamic ethics and activism mentioned by Hancock shared a similar view with Levitt’s notion on the role of religion in providing a vision of good society and civic engagement⁶⁶. In the context of Muslim environmentalism, the community also plays a significant role as a driver for activism⁶⁷. As mentioned by Putnam⁶⁸ religious communities offer networks, norms, and trust, which are the basic foundations for collective action and civic engagement. A further elaboration on internal cohesion is made by Wood & Warren⁶⁹ who differentiate bridging and bonding aspects within the community as follows: “Where bonding social capital, as the name suggests, creates internal cohesion and cooperation in any particular community or group; bridging social capital creates cohesion and cooperation between communities and groups”. In this regard, Muslim environmentalism provides a bonding social cohesion that drives Muslim communities to engage in tackling environmental problems. Based on the mentioned definitions and theoretical frames, the concept of Muslim environmentalism relates ethically to the environment by reflecting the community experience within a

⁶⁴ Gade, A. M. *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*. (Columbia University Press). 2019, 12

⁶⁵ Khalid, F. M. Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics. In R. C. Foltz (Ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World* (Nova). 2005.

⁶⁶ Levitt, P. “Religion as a Path to Civic Engagement”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(4), (2008), 766.

⁶⁷ Hancock, R. Muslim Environmentalists, Activism, and Religious Duty. In M. R. Peucker, M.; Kayiké (Ed.), *Muslim Volunteering in the West*. (Palgrave Macmillan). 2020, 142

⁶⁸ Putnam, R. “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America”. *Political Science and Politics*, 28(4), (1995), 672

⁶⁹ Wood, R., Warren, M. “A Different Face of Faith-Based Politics: Social Capital and Community Organising in the Public Arena”. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 22 (9/10), (2002), 9

distinctive cultural interpretation. Both, the community experience and cultural interpretation hold a significant position in the community perception of environmental responsibility.

Conclusion

Exploring the Muslim community's perception of environmental change and responsibility requires multiple approaches. Firstly, there is a need to understand how Muslim communities construct environmental ethics by exploring the theoretical frame of Muslim environmentalism and interpreting the contextual experience of local Muslim communities. To avoid theologizing the problem, the theory of Muslim environmentalism will be applied as an effort to move beyond the monolithic interpretation of Islam and get in touch with the plurality of narratives that live among Muslims. Secondly, the theory of moral geography is applied for two theoretical reasons: (1) to limit the broad scope of Muslim environmentalism derived from broad ethical foundations, and (2) to understand how the place-based narrative in Muslim environmentalism relates to environmental responsibility. A three inquiry of justice, responsibility, and moral landscape will be employed to further analyze the place-based narrative within Muslim environmentalism. The Muslim ethical interpretation of environmental change and the moral geography of Muslim communities will be performed as a basic assumption to further explore the relationship between religion and responsibility.

Thirdly, the interpretation of Muslim environmentalism will be the key indicator in understanding the Muslim perspective of environmental change. The concept of moral geography will also be applied to explore the community imaginaries, decision-making of adaptive strategy, and responsibility toward their changing environment. Another important step to understanding the perception of Muslim communities is identifying the local aspect of environmental change. By engaging in discussion on Muslim environmental ethics and responsibility, findings of this research show two contributions: (1) construct a clear theoretical underpinning that explores relations between two units of analysis, the Muslim community and the physical environment; and (2) explore the subject of religious discourse in today society for Muslims community, interpretation of religion is related to their experiences and conception of place and their living environment

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