

Islamic Education, Eco-ethics and Community

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Abstract Amid the growing coalescence between the religion and ecology movements, the voice of Muslims who care for the earth and its people is rising. While the Islamic position on the environment is not well-represented in the ecotheology discourse, it advances an environmental imaginary which shows how faith can be harnessed as a vehicle for social change. This article will draw upon doctoral research which synthesised the Islamic ecological ethic (eco-ethic) from sacred texts, traditions and contemporary thought, and illustrated how this ethic is enlivened in the educational landscape of Islam. Knowledge of the relationship between human beings and the natural world, of the creative order upon which the world was created, and of right living, is essential in this educational project and the global ecoIslamic movement employs a range of institutes, from the *masjid* to the *maktab*, to impart the environmental message of Islam. Despite the manifestation of environmental education activities across the educational establishment, much of what passes as Islamic education today is not representative of the holistic, integrated and comprehensive educational philosophy of Islam. Contemporary social concerns, such as the environmental question, can, in my view, act as an impetus to develop a pedagogy which endeavours to be true to the religious traditions, values and ethics of Islam, while also displaying the transformative force of this faith. Muslims, at more than one-fifth of the world population, own a fair share of global concern around the earth's health and well-being. Across the world, many continue to base their life and lifestyle decisions on the teachings of Islam, and are showing the relevance of traditional resources and institutions in meeting one of the greatest challenges facing humanity—the health of our planet.

Keywords Environmental education · Ecological ethics · Islamic education · Ecotheology · Environmental philosophy

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Introduction

The coalescence between the religion and ecology movements is among the most fascinating trajectories of twenty-first century environmentalism. In the last three decades, faith communities have stepped up their activities in the environmental sphere. People of faith, who often stood at the forefront of battles for human justice, are now reclaiming their roles as guardians of planet earth and advocates for her well-being. In shaping a contextual *and* practical theology, they are directing religious resources towards contemporary ecological concerns giving rise to what is now commonly known as ecotheology.

Ecological thinkers are in broad agreement that the ecological questions we are facing today have metaphysical and philosophical roots which shape human treatment of, and conceptualisation of nature. For many, religion, which provides a conception of key metaphysical questions relating to the human-environment relationship, continues to provide a rich metaphysical basis for developing an ecological ethic (Tucker and Grim 2001; Gottlieb 2003; Latour 2009). They argue that the beliefs, values and knowledge embedded in religion provide environmental conceptions which can inform environmental action. The growing environmental discourse in Islam, often neglected in the ecotheology discourse, is now increasingly coming under discussion.

Despite the fact that Islam remains a strong religious and social force in the lives of the majority of its adherents, scholars have commented about the silence of the Muslim voice on the environmental crisis (Foltz 2000; Kula 2001; Ramadan 2009). However, closer scrutiny reveals a burgeoning movement, actively voicing its concern about the ecological crisis; unearthing the ethical teachings of Islam as it relates to the human-environment relationship; and increasingly striving to implement practical initiatives based on the ecological teachings of Islam. Across the world environmental scholars and activists are delving into the teachings of Islam to “extract from them a new value system that fits modern human beings, without rejecting the bedrock of Islam and the environmental elements that it supports” (Izzi Dien 1997: 52). This praxis-oriented environmentalism, which is motivated by religious teachings, relies extensively on educational interventions to spread awareness and garner action on a range of ecological questions. From the pulpits of the mosques in Canada to the *pesantren* in Indonesia, the educational landscape of Islam is being drawn upon to broadcast this green message and promote action for the earth.

The work of this growing ecoIslamic movement, both theoretical and practical, alludes to the important position of the Islamic educational establishment in imparting environmental teachings (Al-Naki 2004; Haddad 2006; Abu-Hola 2009). Boasting an extensive educational establishment, both traditional and modern institutions, the mosque and Muslim school for example, continue to play a vital role in the educational life of Muslims the world over. In this paper, I will argue that Islam can make both an ethical and educational contribution to the environmental movement since it possesses both ethical reference systems which guide human interaction with creation, as well as educational visions which impact upon environmental teaching and learning.

Ecological Ethics (Eco-ethics) in Islam

All ecoIslamic writers, while approaching environmental concerns from different angles, refer to the relationship between humans and the environment as an ethical one (Nasr 1997; Ouis 1998; Özdemir 2003). Pedersen (1998) lists the religious resources of interest to environmental ethics as beliefs, values and practices. While these might not necessarily

centre on nature but on issues such as compassion, justice and simplicity, religious traditions, Islam included, possess resources for the construction of an eco-justice ethic which “holds together concerns for the natural world and for human life, that recognizes that devastation of the environment and social and economic injustice go hand in hand, and that affirmations that human rights and environmental rights are indivisible” (Pedersen 1998: 254).

In a recent study, Schwenke (2012) delineated a range of approaches or discourses in the growing field of Islam and ecology. The approach adopted in this study, while drawing upon the foundation of eco-ethical thought in Islam, i.e. the theological principles and teachings of the Qur’an and example of Prophet Muhammad (the Sunnah), is oriented towards socio-political and ecological reform. It rests on the liberatory tradition in Islamic thought which maintains that Muslims need to understand the Islamic universe of reference; assess its sources, instruments and methodologies (interpretive, legal, ethical); and apply these to meet the challenges of our time (Castelli and Trevathan 2005; Ramadan 2009). Kazmi (2000: 388) refers to this as being-in-history in which spirituality is not life-negating but life-affirming—an approach which makes it abundantly clear that “the spiritual battle is won or lost on the plains of this world”. This, of necessity, includes Muslim participation in and engagement with history to achieve an ethical life and therefore centralises the pressing social concerns of our time—the ecological question included.

Muslim ecotheologians are extending Islam’s liberatory discourse to the ecological question by constructing an alternative environmental imaginary based on the sovereignty of God and the responsible trusteeship of humankind. EcoIslamic scholars have, since the late 1960s, applied central ethical precepts detailed in the Qur’an and Sunnah to construct the theocentric ecological philosophy of Islam. The eco-ethic put forward below centres upon five key principles which foreground the fundamental aspects of the environmental message of Islam—these have been highlighted by several scholars (Nasr 1997; Ouis 1998; Manzoor 2005; Abdul-Matin 2010; Khalid 2010).

Tawhīd, which relates to the position of Allah as the Creator, Owner and Sustainer of the universe, infuses the environmental worldview of Islam with the recognition that nature originates from Allah, is purposive, and functions in accordance with His Will. Humans have only been appointed as trustees on earth, holding it in usufruct, answerable for the just and responsible discharge of this trusteeship in accordance with Divine Laws. Trusteeship (*khilāfah*) is further shaped by the belief that humans, in their servanthood, are accountable for all the goods in their care. The notion of *khilāfah* or human vicegerency entails living in accordance with the expectations of its Bestower. *Khilāfah* thus has profound implications for the life and lifestyle choice of a Muslim. Creation (*khalq*), which is a reflection of divinely-arranged structure and order, is deserving of care and respect since it possesses inherent value as the signs of Allah, ecological value as part of the integrated system which He designed, and utilitarian value in sustaining both humans and the rest of creation. Thus while humans have the right to partake of the natural bounties of the earth, these rights must be tempered with moderation, balance and conservation. When nature is disrupted by evil human forces, such as misuse, destruction, extravagance and waste, corruption (*fasād*) will appear on the earth. This trend can only be reversed if humankind delves deep into their selves to uncover the innate goodness (*fiṭrah*) which they have been given to live in harmony with all of creation.

These eco-ethical principles, which define the relationship between the Creator, humankind and creation, is put into motion by a system of juristic methods, laws and institutions—the *Sharī’ah*—which seeks to secure the universal common good and welfare of creation. The *Sharī’ah*, at once, seeks to rectify humanity’s relationship with the

Creator, inculcate just and moral behaviour in society, and mitigate all creaturely harm (Llewellyn 2003; Jenkins 2005). Thus, Muslims are meant to actualise the precepts of their faith by implementing the *Sharī'ah*, the roadmap for navigating life on earth. The *Sharī'ah* thus advances the norm incumbent on all believers. Even in the absence of enforcement, every Muslim is aware of her responsibility to live in accordance with its teachings since she will be called to account for every atom's weight of good or evil committed on this earth.

The eco-justice ethic of Islam constructed here is comprised of cogent ecoethical precepts and a dynamic legal system which promotes just, responsible and respectful interaction between humans and nature. The religious duties of humankind, in the Islamic worldview, extend to the environment since caring for the earth is an act which can earn reward and lead to punishment. Thus, the Muslim should “not only feed the poor but also avoid polluting running water. It is pleasing in the eyes of God not only to be kind to one's parents, but also to plant trees and treat animals gently and with kindness” (Nasr 1997: 9). Within the context of diverse Muslim societies, Foltz (2005) argues in his seminal publication, *Environmentalism in the Muslim world*, that a successful indigenous environmental movement in the Muslim world requires demonstrated compatibility with Islamic norms. It is therefore not surprising that, for the ecoIslamic movement—across the world, the theology of nature outlined above, forms the basis of environmental thought and practice.

Greening Islamic Education

From the foundational metaphysical principles and ethics of the Islamic worldview, Muslim societies produced a vibrant literate tradition. This was evident in the formation of a range of educational institutions; as well as the burgeoning of knowledge, from the religious sciences to scientific disciplines. Educational endeavours sought to inspire within the Muslim “a consciousness of his obligations as the vicegerent of God and to teach him to treat the world as a great trust which must not be abused” (Husain and Ashraf 1979: 41). Education is regarded as central to the development of the Islamic personality and Muslims are not only charged with seeking knowledge, but are entrusted with acting upon this knowledge.

Muslims believe every child to be born in a state of *fiṭrah* (essential human nature), with an “innate predisposition to believe [in] and worship God” (Haron and Mohamed 1991: 5). Through the revealed books; the words and actions of prophets and messengers throughout the ages; and the wondrous gift of the intellect, humankind has been given the criteria to distinguish between right and wrong and, has been entrusted with establishing a just societal ethic. Humankind has been given the position of *khalīfah*, trustees of Allah on earth, which carries the attendant responsibility of living in concordance with Divine laws, worshipping Him, and working towards establishing the universal common good, justice and welfare of creation. In this way, every Muslim strives to be the best *khalīfah* (steward) and *'abd* (servant) which she can be. The determining factor in fulfilling these roles successfully and achieving human destiny is knowledge. Knowledge which will guide humanity towards understanding their relationship with the Creator and creation, their place in the universe, and which will assist humanity in meeting and fulfilling its needs is the starting point in exercising human trusteeship on earth. Knowledge should also lead to the “...actualization of *fiṭrah* in all its dimensions within a social context” and is “thus concerned with the development of the whole person...in and for society” (Mohamed

1991: 15). In the just fulfillment of the status of a *khalīfah*, knowledge and education play a pivotal role since.

Reason, intelligence, language, and writing will grant people the qualities required to enable them to be God's *khalīfahs* (vicegerents) on earth, and from the very beginning, Qur'anic Revelation allies recognition of the Creator to knowledge and science, thus echoing the origin of creation itself. (Ramadan 2007a: 31)

The Words and Works of Allah, the Qur'an and the Cosmos, has been laid open to the human mind and heart—to understand, to contemplate, to reflect, to question and to respect. Knowledge acquisition is thus a central requirement of stewardship, the failure of which could result in *fasād*, corruption in the human and non-human realms. Environmental destruction, for example, has been regarded as the deliberate disturbance and disrespect of *mizān*, the balance and creative order manifest in the universe (Abdul-Matin 2010). As a responsible trustee, humankind is charged with knowing and living in accordance with her *fiṭrah*, and establishing justice in the world. The Qur'an, which is also known by the name, *Al-Furqān* (The Criterion), provides the basic configuration of meaning with which to make judgements on all other knowledge (Kazmi 1999), and is therefore the starting point for constructing the eco-ethic of Islam. Islam combines the religious, contemplative life and the material, practical life and presents an epistemology of holiness and wholeness which "...urges its followers to unify knowledge and action to create a synthesis of unitive knowledge and realize the Islamic worldview of *tawḥīd*" (Al Zeera 2001: 56). Knowledge acquisition in Islam embodies an integral and holistic view by encompassing both revealed and non-revealed knowledge, or as Sardar (1985) states, revelation as well as reason, observation as well as intuition, tradition as well as theoretical speculation.

The ecological knowledge structure of Islam thus draws upon *all* existing knowledge, revealed sciences (the Qur'an) as well as non-revealed sciences (the religious, natural and social sciences), to understand and formulate a response to the ecological question. It presents a holistic and integral epistemology which exhorts humankind to seek knowledge across a wide spectrum—from the Qur'an and from nature—of benefit to individual and societal welfare, including the non-human realm. To take an environmental slant on the holistic view on knowledge, the Qur'an says that.

...none is awakened to the wonders of creation and truly fears God among His servants but those filled with knowledge and the way of God. [Sole Originator Chapter 35: Verse 28]

There are two other characteristics of the Islamic knowledge structure which impact upon the development and actualisation of the eco-ethics of Islam: the purposive nature of seeking knowledge and the ethical dimension of Islam's knowledge-structure which 'runs through the fabric' of knowledge in Islam. Ecological knowledge should reflect the purposive nature of knowledge acquisition which behoves every Muslim woman and man to seek knowledge as per divine instruction and, by extension to come to understand the position of humanity in relation to the Creator as well as creation. This nexus is further illustrated by the fact that the proper application of knowledge, in accordance with the teachings of the Creator, is in fact the foundation of *taqwā*, God-consciousness, the only criterion for human excellence in Islam since a *muttaqī*, one conscious of God, embodies "all the attributes of a knowledgeable servant and a responsible and just vicegerent of God on earth thereby fulfilling the purpose of man's creation" (Wan Daud 1989: 114).

Knowledge in Islam is also coloured by and inextricably linked to an ethical framework which is the 'soul' of Islamic education (Hashim 2005). Knowledge acquisition in Islam is governed by, and inextricably linked to ethical development, and most especially the establishment of justice in human relationships (Waghid 2010). The acquisition of knowledge, regarded as an obligation and an act of worship which garners reward, must manifest itself in right action ('*amāl ṣālihāt*). Wan Daud (1989: 74) defines '*amāl ṣālihāt*' as "all those actions that emerge out of and in conformity to, the Islamic world-view" and include "ritual obligations and other religious duties as well as efforts of personal or social significance", including, environmental care. In scores of verses in the Qur'an the link between knowledge and action is made explicit, and Allah repeatedly gives glad tidings to "those who believe and do righteous deeds". As Izutsu (2007: 204) confirms, "Just as the shadow follows the form, wherever there is *iman* there are *salihat*, or 'good works'...the *salihat* are 'belief' fully expressed in outward conduct." Responsible and just action is not only inseparable from Islamic ethics but from Islamic education as well.

Islamic education is thus at once vertical, in establishing a just relationship with the Creator, horizontal and outward-looking, seeking to transform society and inward-bound, striving to transform the individual. Who better to illustrate this than Prophet Muhammad who was at once a prophet of God, a social reformer, liberator and a servant, humbled in gratitude before his Lord. Islamic education, to my mind, aims to bring an individual back toward their *fiṭrah* and should "provide the basis from which we may find the guidance to submit to God's Will and hence come to know ourselves, our place in the universe and our relationship to God [and creation]" (Mohamed 1991: 15). It is thus expressly transformative in its intent to achieve harmony and justice on earth.

Underscored by the *tawhīdic* (monotheistic) worldview and holistic epistemology of Islam, environmental education (EE) in Islam, in line with the Islamic educational ideology outlined above, aims to develop a good and just person, in relation to the human and non-human worlds. As a *khalīfah* of the Most-High, the Muslim exhibits mercy, compassion and justice in her interaction with creation. As a partner of creation (*khalq*), worshipping and praising the Creator, she is mindful of the rights of this living planet. The ecoethic of Islam seeks to develop this person, 'who walks softly upon the earth', who 'gives thanks' for the bounties which have been placed on earth for all creation, and who does 'not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order'.

From the first report detailing with environmental protection in Islam (Bagader et al. 1994) to the scores of works published thereafter, ecoIslamic works have played a key role in opening "people's eyes to Islam's potential for education and promotion of sustainable living and its ability to serve as the building block for regulations in a modern legal system" (Arensberg 2005: 13). Most ecoIslamic works provide substantive input on the following aspects of the EE process: why Muslims should be educated about the environment (why EE); the content such an educational programme should include (what EE); and the target audience of EE (EE for whom). Very few deal with the other ingredients of an EE strategy in any depth: by whom, where, how to teach and how to assess and evaluate—all essential parts of the EE process. Nevertheless, they have provided convincing arguments for environmental care in Islam and have constructed the eco-ethics of Islam, largely ignored in mainstream environmental ethics, as a plausible basis for environmental education and action.

Working alongside environmental scholars, Muslim educationists have reiterated the centrality of EE in furthering the educational goals of Islam which is concerned with understanding the Words and Works of the Creator (Al-Naki 2004; Castelli and Trevathan 2005; Abu-Hola 2009). Ecological knowledge, related to the human-nature relationship as

well as the workings of the earth—contemplating and understanding the signs of the Creator, appreciating its bounties and expressing gratitude, is thus central to the Islamic educational project. EE, which assists in the actualisation of the ethical mandate of trusteeship, should thus equip Muslims with the knowledge required to fulfill a religious obligation, environmental care. It must also promote awareness of the environmental teachings of Islam, instilling an attitude of respect, justice and care towards the natural world; the knowledge and skills to understand the workings of the earth and the patterns of human use and abuse which impact upon people and nature; and the motivation to act for both personal and societal transformation.

EcoIslamic discourse is poised to take its places alongside other liberatory traditions in providing alternative environmental imaginaries of the human-environment relationship. Ignorance of this discourse will result in a continuation of the monocultural dialogue which drowns out alternative forms of knowledge, beliefs, and voices which speak about the earth. Fortunately, Muslim thinkers and activists are beginning to articulate the environmental message of Islam, and are developing EE strategies which bring to light the moral and spiritual imperative to care for creation and provide practical direction in “returning to the environmentally conscious traditions and lifestyles of Islam” (Manzoor 2005). How have Muslims utilised curriculum spaces in the educational establishment of Islam—old and new—to raise awareness and achieve action on ecological issues?

Environmental Education Across the Muslim Educational Landscape

The emergent interest in the Islamic position on the environment is reflected in the steady growth a ‘green’ movement amongst Muslims the world over. Drawing upon the eco-ethics of Islam, these ‘green’ Muslims have started to establish ecoIslamic projects in the cities of Canada and England, the forests of the Philippines and Malaysia and the coral reefs of Zanzibar. The green banner of Islam is also surfacing on the internet through the vibrant discussions on blogs, Facebook and various mailing lists. These initiatives reflect the fact that Muslims are increasingly looking towards the environmental teachings of Islam to change the direction of not only their own lives and lifestyles, but that of their communities and societies. This is evidenced in the timely publication of the books, *199 Ways to please God: how to (re-)align your daily life with your duty of care for creation* (ten Veen 2009) and *Green deen: what Islam teaches about protecting the environment* (Abdul-Matin 2010) which provide practical suggestions on ways in which Muslims can live in harmony with nature.

Environmental scholars and activists have started developing educational strategies to revive Islam’s environmental teachings and practices. These have involved the articulation of the ecoethics of Islam; and the development of teaching and learning materials to introduce these ecoethics into the rich educational landscape of the Muslim world. While Makdisi (1981) provides a useful typology of traditional Islamic institutions, the emergence of Muslim schools and universities, as well as the plethora of formal and informal learning opportunities offered by civil society bodies, has expanded this educational establishment. In keeping with the centrality of knowledge in Islam, many Muslim communities thus boast a range of institutional structures which have been harnessed to impart the green message of Islam. The ecoIslamic initiatives outlined in Fig. 1 illustrates how the enduring network of Islamic institutions, the *masjid*, *maktab* and *madrasah* as well as new and evolving establishments, such as Muslim schools, engage with the ecological question.

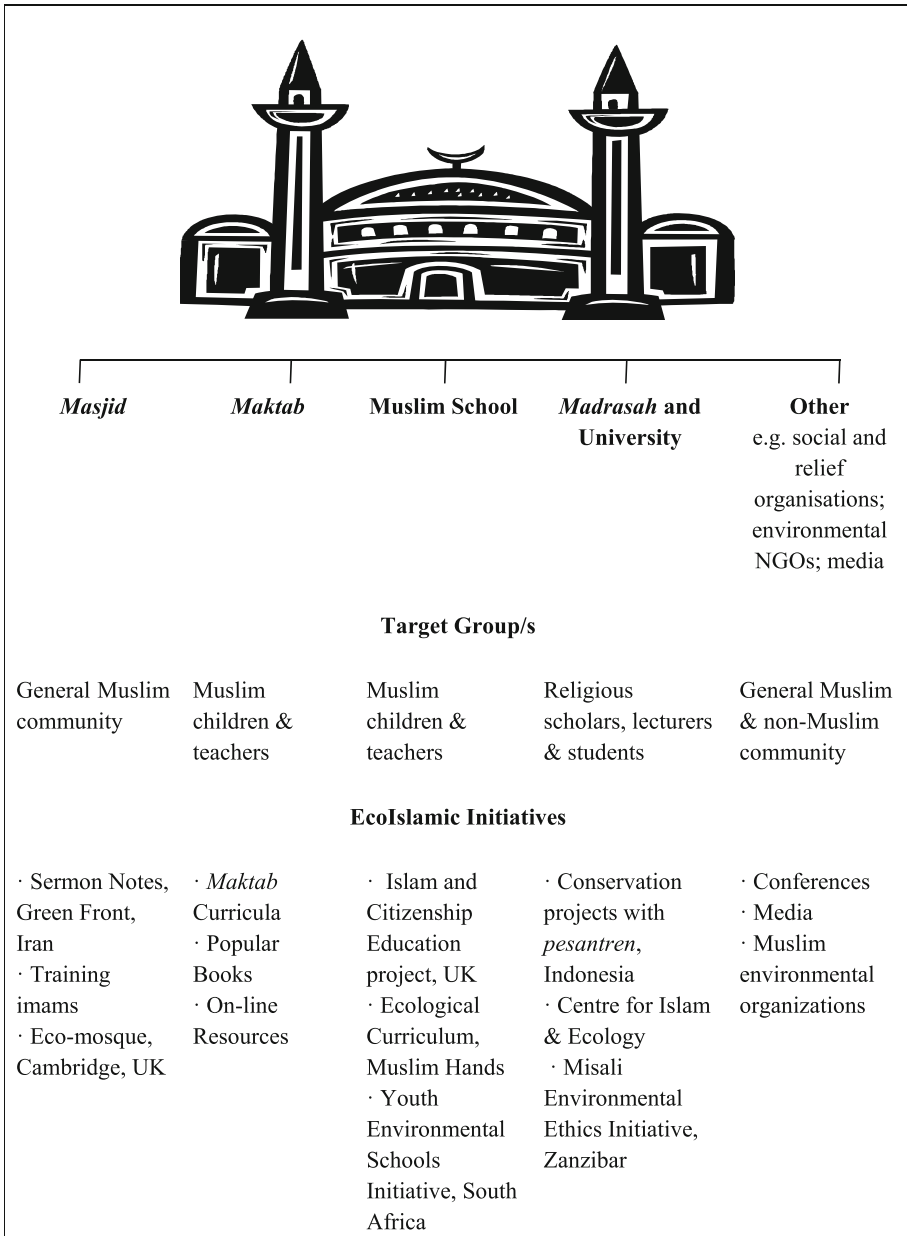


Fig. 1 EcoIslamic activities across the Muslim educational landscape

The *masjid* (pl. *masājid*) or mosque is one of the most visible symbols of Islam and has acted as both a place of prayer and learning throughout Muslim history. It fulfills a multifaceted role in the life of a Muslim—a place of prayer and meditation, a centre of religious instruction and political discussion, and a place of safety and refuge (Fathi 1981; Zaimeche 2002). Several scholars have highlighted the important role of *masājid* as

community education centres and as “perfectly appropriate locations for conducting informational sessions and community discussions on environmental issues” (Foltz 2000: 70). Siddiq (2003) suggests that in addition to training *imāms* in environmental matters, “[m]osques, whose number far exceed even the total number of primary schools in many Muslim countries, should be used as centres for mass education and for creating environmental awareness” (Siddiq 2003: 461).

This is precisely what the Green Front of Iran (*Jabheh-ye Sabz-e-Iran*), a secular environmental NGO (ENGEQ) seeks to achieve when it compiles and circulates Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth* (prophetic sayings) to religious leaders and organisations (Foltz 2000). Muslim environmentalists are also working towards increasing the environmental knowledge among *imāms*, making the necessary links with their religious knowledge, utilising the “power” which religious leadership still holds within the Muslim community to great effect (Arensberg 2005; Özdemir 2005; World Wildlife Fund 2009). By training religious leaders and equipping them to respond to one of the most challenging social issues of our times, ecoIslamic activists aim to ensure that environmental concerns become a central issue in Muslim communities. Another opportunity to introduce the ecological teachings of Islam via the *masjid* has been the construction and upkeep of *masājid*. In this respect, the historic university city of Cambridge is in the process of developing an eco-mosque by using heat pumps, conservation technology and green roofs which will yield an almost zero carbon footprint (Aburawa 2010). EE programmes, which set out to build ecological literacy, must therefore recognise and exploit the pivotal role of the *masjid* as an instrument of lifelong education in Muslim society.

The *maktab* (pl. *makātib*) also called Qur’an or mosque schools as well as *kuttāb*, provides elementary education to Muslims and is often attached to the *masjid*. Zaimeche (2002: 3) reports that “the first school connected to a mosque was set up at Medina in 653, and by 900 nearly every mosque had an elementary school for the education of both boys and girls”. While Makdisi (1981) suggests that historically there might have been a difference between the *maktab* and *kuttāb*, both provided elementary education. *Makātib* “contribute to the preservation and promotion of Islamic values, Islamic epistemology and Islamic spirituality and they have an important role to play in the nurture of Muslim children in a society that operates on the basis of a different set of values” (Mogra 2007: 389). The *maktab*, which is known by different names across the world, still fulfills an important role in Muslim society and has evolved, in most instances, into supplementary schooling which students attend in addition to secular studies.

The *maktab*, according to Hossain-Rhman (2006), “unconsciously” educates for sustainability through the spiritual development intent of values education which aims to nurture right action, with the Creator, with humankind, and with the natural environment. While *makātib* curricula constitute one source of introducing Muslim children to the environmental teachings of Islam, children’s books which focus on the environmental teachings of Islam (Murad and Gamiet 1981; Jafri 2003; Ibrahim Shah n.d.); as well as on-line curriculum materials which expand on the ecological teachings of Islam (Ana 2010; Entrusted Environment 2011), are also being used at this educational stage.

Muslim schools, both primary and secondary, aim to operate according to an Islamic ethos and fulfill an important function in the modern Islamic educational landscape. In addition to the learning opportunities in Islamic sciences, faith schools adhere to national curricula, many of which incorporate EE. Since the 1980s, there has been an upsurge in the number of Muslim schools in the Western world. These privately-run, yet state-approved schools are seen as alternatives to the public system. However, in practice, “most Islamic schools continue to borrow heavily from surrounding public and private schools for ideas on the school charter, lesson plans, textbooks and pedagogical concepts” (Merry and Driessen 2005: 419).

In the UK, the Islam and Citizenship Education (ICE) project has developed a citizenship curriculum for Muslim schools by adding Islamic guidance to the national citizenship programmes of study. ICE's project resources and lesson plans include a lesson plan entitled 'Islam and the Environment' which include guidance notes for teachers as well as activities and follow-up work on the various themes (ICE 2009). Muslim Hands, an international relief and development agency, aims to develop an ecological curriculum for its schools around the world by combining the experience of local experts with innovative teaching materials on environmental care (Muslim Hands 2009). And in South Africa, Muslim learners are actively involved in an annual city-wide environmental initiative called the Youth Environment Schools (YES) initiative (Islamedia 2009/2010), and participate in a nation-wide Green Schools programme, an annual greening competition amongst Muslim schools which encourages schools and learners to engage in tree planting and food gardening in needy communities and neighbouring schools (Awqaf South Africa 2010).

The *madrasah* (pl. *madāris*), in addition to the *masjid* and *maktab*, is one of the enduring institutions of Islam. Established in the tenth century, these colleges of Islam centred on the teaching of Islamic law, offer post-elementary education. Makdisi (1981) regards the *madrasah* as the institution of learning par excellence in Islam. One such institution, the *pesantren*, has been pivotal in faith-based environmental activities in South-East Asia. *Pesantren*, Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, are independent self-governing schools which "exist as a community with a compound, mosque and boarding system where students and teachers eat, sleep, learn and generally interact throughout the day" (Anzar 2003). In this populous Muslim country, teeming with ecoIslamic activities, Islamic institutions such as the estimated 17 000 *pesantren* are seen as pivotal in propelling Muslims to become more practically involved in environmental action (Gelling 2009; Mangunjaya 2009). A river conservation programme, piloted by a *pesantren* near Bogor, Java, and modelled on the *Sharī'ah* conservation model of *ḥarīm* (buffer zones around sensitive areas), illustrates this point. It is hoped that the project which showcases an 'Islamic' form of conservation, can bolster environmental awareness in Indonesia, in which the rural populace still remains heavily dependent on natural resource to sustain their livelihoods (Mangunjaya 2009).

The proposed Centre for Islam and Ecology, a much-needed institution, is set to be established at a university in Wales. It is envisioned that this initiative will produce theological and legal handbooks; educational resources; training programmes in practical ecology; and raise the profile of ecoIslam globally (Alliance for Religion and Conservation 2010). Perhaps the most publicised and celebrated ecoIslamic initiative is that of the Misali Environmental Ethics project, Zanzibar (Barclay 2007; Ooko 2008). The project is a partnership between several international environmental organizations and address marine conservation through religious ethics. The *Teachers guide book for Islamic environmental education* (Khalid and Thani 2008), one of the outcomes of this project, was developed as a resource to be used by religious schools in teaching environmental ethics to Muslims.

Other learning opportunities, formal and informal, such as conferences; lectures, workshops and seminars; relief efforts; media and social movements are also being employed by ecoIslamic activists. One of the main features which these initiatives have in common is that they are located, for the most part, in the West where Muslims, have moved from "integration—simply becoming a member of a society—to contribution - to being proactive and offering something to the society" (Ramadan 2007b).

Muslim organisations are joining environmental activists in highlighting the environmental message of Islam. In 2007, a UK-based charity organisation convened an Islamic conference entitled 'Healing the Fragile Earth: Fulfilling Our Heavenly Trust'. JIMAS, the

Association to Revive the Way of the Messenger, brought some of the leading scholars in the Muslim world to speak about the environmental message of Islam. Electronic and social media have broadened the reach of the ecoIslamic movement. The *EcoIslam* newsletter, now in its eight edition, has been invaluable in providing up-to-date news on ecoIslamic initiatives around the world. Blogs and Facebook pages also play an essential role in broadcasting information and raising awareness of Islam's ecological message while Muslim environmental organisations, spearheaded by the Islamic Foundation of Ecological and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), are being established all over the world.

How do these ecoIslamic initiatives fare in building ecological literacy? Do they improve and enhance Muslim capacity to understand the environmental question and to take action to maintain, restore, or improve the health of the earth? Do they question dominant worldviews and agitate for the intellectual and practical space for expressing Islam's environmental knowledge? Most ecoIslamic initiatives are, for the most part, still at the stage of nominal ecological literacy—increasing knowledge and awareness of the environmental teachings of Islam. Islam's rich educational landscape, the *masjid*, *maktab* and *madrasah*, as well as the Muslim schools and universities, undoubtedly fulfill an indispensable role in developing engaged, ecologically-literate Muslims. However, for this establishment to take its place in revitalising the eco-ethics of Islam, it must reflect the action-oriented or lived spirituality which this ecotheology embodies. It must represent the holistic knowledge-structure and objectives of Islamic education in relation to environmental learning; facilitate knowledge of the relationship between human beings, the Creator and creation; and propel every Muslim towards living in justice with creation.

The ecoIslamic movement is still in its formative stages, and its focus remains, for the most part, on the revival of Islamic eco-ethics—thereby building the ecological literacy of Muslims. Renowned ecoIslamic activist, Fazlun Khalid, maintains that while educational interventions are pivotal in expanding the awareness of Islamic teachings concerning the environment, education needs to be remodelled “to nurture an understanding of the natural world and our place in it” (Khalid 2005: 111). The burgeoning ecoIslamic movement must move closer to reflecting the liberating eco-ethics of Islam which affirms that environmental care is a religious obligation, an act of spiritual obedience, and requires action to right environmental aberrations. It should evince the holistic epistemology which requires critical engagement with all existing knowledge, revealed and non-revealed, to understand and formulate a response to the ecological question of our time. And it needs to emphasise the transformative intent of Islamic education which strives to develop socially active, ethically aware, and compassionate human beings concerned with securing the common good, justice and welfare of creation.

The introduction of contemporary social concerns, such as the environmental question, can also act as an impetus for transforming Islamic education by introducing a holistic approach to knowledge; highlighting the relevance of religious understandings for contemporary concerns; and promoting social activism by encouraging Muslim learners to apply the teachings of Islam in their life and lifestyle decisions.

Conclusion

The theocentric eco-ethics of Islam presents an environmental imaginary which promotes just, respectful and responsible interaction between humans and the natural world. Environmental education, which assists in the actualisation of the ethical mandate of human trusteeship, equips Muslims with the knowledge required to fulfill this religious obligation

of environmental care. This educational process should not only impart knowledge about the workings of nature, but how to interact with the natural world—an ethic in which the well-being of all creation is accorded value.

The budding ecoIslamic movement is harnessing the educational institutions of Islam, both traditional and modern, as centres of environmental learning and teaching. It is seeking to enliven an ethic which recognises that living in justice with people and with the planet is an obligation for every Muslim who accepts the mandate to live as a trustee of Allah on earth. It is showing, in words and deeds, that the educational landscape of Islam remains a vital resource in broadcasting an environmental narrative which presents both an ethical and educational vision of relevance to the contemporary environmental movement.

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