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Ecofeminist Theology in Islam: The Process and Application of Synthesizing Rosemary Radford
Ruether's Insights, Islamic Feminist Aspirations, and Ecological Concerns

By
Nayawiyyah U. Muhammad

Claremont Graduate University
2022

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Nayawiyyah U. Muhammad as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion with a concentration in Women's Studies in Religion.

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Abstract

Ecofeminist Theology in Islam: The Process and Application of Synthesizing Rosemary Radford Ruether's Insights, Islamic Feminist Aspirations, and Ecological Concerns

By
Nayawiyyah U. Muhammad

Claremont Graduate University: 2022

The focal point of this dissertation is theoretical and applicatory in scope; it incorporates three distinct areas of scholarship, the ecofeminist theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Islamic feminism, and Islamic environmentalism towards the primary goal of making a case for the construction of an ecofeminist theology in Islam. Specifically, I seek to consolidate Islamic feminists and environmental theories and approaches while utilizing and bringing to bear the insights and critiques of Ruether. This is accomplished through a process of synthesis and application. The intersection of environmental destruction and gender disparity is the hallmark claim of ecofeminism and thus, I begin with an ecofeminist appraisal of contemporary Islamic discourses on women and ecology by answering the question—what are the Islamic dimensions connecting gender inequalities with ecological imbalances?

I hypothesize that within Islamic contexts and worldview, the intersection of environmental destruction and gender disparities are critical to understanding the dynamics of both issues. I argue that Islamic feminist scholarship heavily addresses patriarchal components of Islam, while attention given to hierarchal structures is largely limited to gender analyses. This, I assert, situates the resulting need for critical ecological integration utilizing an ecofeminist framework of which Ruether offers tremendous theoretical and methodological

usability. From this, I construct what an ecofeminist theology in Islam could entail, its contours, constraints, and applicability. Finally, I apply the synthesized ecofeminist framework to specific Qur'anic examples. I examine the Arabic word "*khalīfa*" when translated as vicegerency. I also explore narratives of Adam, *Hawwāh*/Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the afterworld (Heaven and Hell) through the pursuit of answering some fundamental research questions—What are the theological implications of "*khalīfa*" translated as vicegerency and the Qur'anic narrative of Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the afterworld? Are there categorical and or dualistic hierarchies in classical and contemporary Islamic theology, which activate a gendered hierarchy of human over non-human creation and male over female? I argue that classical and contemporary Islamic interpretations prompted by those narratives directly influence body conceptions, gender roles, and environmental ethics in Islam. Thus, there are enduring consequences for women, the marginalized, and ecology.

Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my children, Neel, Nayawiyyah, Nasheed, Nazeer, Tasneem, Ibrahim, Khadijah, and Barbara, who, through birth and marriage, have given me unconditional love, support, and unyielding care. You most supported my journey and endured years of research without fully understanding what any of it meant. You only understood that it meant everything to me.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the prayers, aspirations, and lives of underprivileged masses everywhere. The longing for true equality lit my way to theorizing a path toward global liberation and healing. As stated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is my profound belief that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Be it in nature or the cosmos, biotic or abiotic, human or non-human, within an individual family setting, a society, a religious or secular setting, God willing, what I have written will initiate sustained reflection and action in the best ways possible.

Acknowledgements

In gratitude, I acknowledge the support of my family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Often, support for my research surprised me by presenting unexpectedly. Sometimes strangers, and sometimes it was those whom I have known for many years. Yet, until recently, we have never had a sustained conversation; your encouragement was life-giving and motivated me in unimaginable ways. The support and encouragement I received from my best friends N. and P. was remarkable. To those who remained by my side throughout, I extend my sincere appreciation. To Kiar, my love, appreciation, and adoration for you are immeasurable.

I extend profound thankfulness to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Ruqayya Y. Khan, Dr. Zayn Kassam, Dr. Sophia Pandya, and Dr. Ann Hidalgo. You all have set tremendous examples for me to follow. Thank you, Dr. Khan, for your guidance which kept me striving towards quality scholarship. Dr. Kassam, thank you for your thoughtful input and astute suggestions. To Dr. Pandya, thank you for being my dissertation whisperer. This process would have been much more arduous without you. I am fortunate to know you. Thank you, Dr. Hidalgo, for rounding out the most fantastic group of scholars. Your expertise has been just what was needed. Finally, I extend gratitude to Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether for providing the template and entry vehicle for my research. You have done us a great service with your brilliant scholarship and may it forever give us insight, hope, liberation, and healing.

Table of Contents

Table of Figures	xi
Table of Tables	xii
Notes, Transliterations, and Translations.....	xiii
Introduction.....	1
Disclosure and Positionality	4
Rosemary Radford Ruether	8
Research Questions.....	14
Hypotheses, Arguments, and Methodologies	14
Literature Review.....	17
Feminist Theories and Epistemologies	18
Ecowomanism, Islamic Feminism and Muslim Womanist Philosophy	21
Islam, Muslims, and Masculinity.....	24
Ecology, Islamic Cosmology, and Cosmogony	27
Islam and the Engendered Body	31
Synopsis of Chapters.....	37
Part I - Creating the Foundation.....	37
Part II - Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	38
Part III - Applying Concepts.....	39
Summary.....	41

Part I - Creating the Foundation

Chapter One: An Ecofeminist Appraisal of Contemporary Islamic Discourses on Women and Ecology	44
Overview of a Contemporary Problem.....	45
Discourse on Ecology and Islam.....	50
Islamic Feminist Discourse.....	57
Toward Integration: Ecofeminist Applications on the Discourses	60
Conclusion: Bridging Gaps.....	64

Part II - Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

Chapter Two: Synthesizing Feminist Aspirations with Ecological Concerns	68
Ecofeminist Appraisal on the Discourses: What we Learned.....	69
Why is this a Much-Needed Critical Turn to Feminism in Islam?.....	71

Conducting Theology and Synthesizing Ideas.....	72
Islamic Feminists	74
Islamic Environmentalists.....	78
Suggested Requirements for Conducting Ecofeminist Theology in Islam.....	81
Requirement One: Ontological and Epistemological Foundations.....	82
Requirement Two: Realigning Critical Relationships	86
Requirement Three: Addressing Dualism and Hierarchy.....	88
Precautions.....	94
Neutralizing and Divide-and-Conquer Techniques	95
Religious, Political, Legal, and Economic Fear.....	96
Fear for Personal Safety.....	97
Ecofeminist Alternatives.....	98
Conclusion: The Contours of an Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	100
Chapter Three: Suggesting a Model for Conducting Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	102
Synthesis	103
The Parameters of Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	107
The Process of Conducting Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	108
Conclusion: The Task at Hand.....	112

Part III - Applying Concepts

Chapter Four: An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Term “ <i>Khalīfa</i> ”.....	116
A Contemporary Problem: “ <i>Khalīfa</i> ” Defined as Vicegerency.....	117
Examining the Roots.....	122
Early Arabic Dictionaries and Tafsīr	131
Medieval, Classical, and Sufi Tafsīr.....	133
Islamic Revivalism and Reform.....	136
Contemporary Islamic Environmentalism and Feminism	139
Analysis.....	145
An Islamic Ecofeminist Re-envisioning	150
Conclusion: Original Connotations of <i>Khalīfa</i>	156
Chapter Five: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Adam, Eve, Eden, and the Afterworld	158
A Contemporary Problem: Normative Theological Narratives	160
Examining the Roots.....	165
Commentaries and Folklore.....	167
Mystical and Feminist Perspectives.....	171
Analysis.....	175
Engendered Bodies	178
Dualisms and Hierarchy.....	184
Contemporary Consequences.....	188
An Islamic Ecofeminist Shift.....	192
Conclusion: Raising Consciousness	194

Conclusion: Envisioning Equality, Liberation, and Sustainability	198
Concluding Reflections.....	206
Bibliography	211

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Ruether's three-step methodology applied to the current contemporary responses of most Islamic feminists and environmentalists	70
Figure 2: The Multi-directional Synthesizing Process of Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.....	104
Figure 3: Overview of the relationship between Eden, Heaven, and Hell in Islamic cosmology and eschatology.....	165

Table of Tables

Table 1: Comparison of epistemological positions of various feminist theologies in this research	83
Table 2: Popular English translations of the Arabic phrase “ <i>innī jā’ihun fī al-ardi khalīfatan</i> ” from Qur’an Chapter 2, verse 30	119
Table 3: Usage of the term <i>Khalīfa Allah</i> among The Rashidun (632-661 CE), the “Four Righted Guided Caliphs”	126
Table 4: List of Caliphates and Muslim Empires/Sultanates adopting the title <i>Khalīfat Allah</i> (successor of God) and or similar titles	130

Notes, Transliterations, and Translations

This dissertation makes use of a variety of English translations of the Qur'an: A. Yusuf Ali, Ahmed Ali, Sahih International, and others. The transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (henceforth, *IJMES*) will be employed. I have not transliterated Arabic terms that are increasingly common in English (i.e., Qur'an and hadith), or those having Anglicized transliterated forms such as Adam and Eve. Common Era (CE) dates follow figures and dates of Islamic history. The letter Q and two numbers with a colon between them, like Q 1:1-7, are utilized for Qur'anic quotations. The first number refers to the chapter, and the number(s) after the colon refers to the verse(s). In some instances, the name and number of chapters in transliteration are provided. In some cases, Qur'anic quotations in English may include slight modifications, wherein is substituted more gender-neutral terms (i.e., humanity or humankind for mankind). Furthermore, I avoid referring to God with personal pronouns.

Introduction

*What Islam says now about the environment is more important than what has been said in the past.*¹

Within these times of pandemic and the intensity of environmental decay, the most impacted populations worldwide are the marginalized, interacting with and worsening existing inequalities. As the world awakens to the correlation between ecological crises (air and water pollution, climate change, radiation, depletion of natural and human resources, the extinction of animals and plant life) with human injustices and greed, global action is critical and imperative. Among Muslim voices, acknowledging and responding to the correlations and the duty of the privileged to promote a sustainable environment and just society impacting all is at a minimum.

In the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Laura Hobgood-Oster (2005) posits the following definition:

Ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions form out the power dynamics of patriarchal systems.²

The purpose of this research is to address a highly underserved area of contemporary Islamic scholarship—ecofeminist theology and Islam. Since this study is theoretical and applicatory in terms of scope, I have introduced and juxtaposed the theories and methodologies of

¹ Richard C. Foltz, ed. *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology* (Belmont: University of Florida Press, 2003), xli.

² Laura Hobgood-Oster, “Ecofeminism – Historic and International Evolution,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London; New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 533.

ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether with those of prominent Islamic feminist theologians and Islamic environmentalists. This intersection promises plenty of theoretical insights into the conception of and value attributed to human and non-human creation, and the implications and consequences of environmental issues and gender disparity within Islamic contexts.

I have utilized the terms “Islamic” and “Muslim” when addressing the scholars, writers, and activists mentioned throughout this dissertation. It should be noted that by the term Islamic,” I am referring to “that which can be derived from the canonical sources of Islam, as opposed to the activities or attitudes of Muslims, which may or may not be directly motivated by these sources.”³ Therefore, Islamic environmentalists and Islamic feminists draw directly from the Qur’an, hadith literature, and classical Islamic scholarship, although Muslim feminists and Muslim environmentalists “may draw inspiration from a variety of sources.”⁴ The profile of my theories and responses are relegated to the aforementioned definitions.

My previous research focused on the significance of symbolism and communication in the physical location of women as opposed to men in major Islamic rituals such as the five pillars of Islam.⁵ I postulated that normative Islamic cosmological arguments and narratives reflect the significance and the symbolisms convey how the conceptualization of gendered bodies stem from Islamic cosmogony, formalized within the Islamic purity system (*tahāra*) and performed throughout Muslim societies in varying degrees of gender disparity. Additionally, I maintained

³ Richard C. Foltz, “Islam,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, eds. B. Taylor, J. Kaplan, L. Hobgood-Oster, A. Ivakhiv, and M. York. (London; New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 859.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nayawiyah U. Muhammad, “Body Situations Mirroring Belief Attitudes: Female Bodies, Impurity and Rituals in Islam,” Master’s Thesis, (California State University, Long Beach, 2013). In many significant ways, my dissertation continues from the premises made in this thesis.

that the physical location of female and male bodies in the performance of praying, fasting, offering, and pilgrimage rituals conveyed copious insights about social relationships within Muslim communities. The need to extend my research to include the ramifications of ecological degradation fuels this dissertation. Why choose to start by developing ecofeminist theories and methods for addressing Islamic theology and worldview? The response is quite simple: there remains an enormous void in the extant scholarship with potential for additional insights derived from the ecofeminist's goal of uncovering and challenging structures of domination.

To accomplish my ultimate goal, three distinct areas of scholarship—Islamic feminism, Islamic environmentalism, and the ecofeminist theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether— have been employed. This is accomplished through a process of synthesis and application by (1) showing how and why the intersection of environmental destruction and gender disparities within Islamic contexts and worldview are both critical to understanding the dynamics of these issues and in offering a holistic alternative; (2) setting the foundation for extending the discourse on the intersections by integrating the compatibility of Islamic feminists' and environmentalists' scholarship with Ruether's ecofeminist theology; (3) synthesizing foundational ecofeminist theological theories and methodology; and (4) applying the synthesized ideas to specific Qur'anic examples of *khalīfa*, defined as vicegerency, and the narrative of 'Ādam, *Hawwāh* (henceforth Adam and Eve), Muslim and Islamic views of the Garden of Eden, and the afterworld (Heaven and Hell). This application will exhibit two distinct strands—critical and constructive. The critical examination includes eco-feminist reflections, critiques, and inquiry of relevant normative Islamic paradigms. Constructive application involves re-visioning and aiming to construct theories of an alternative paradigm, which synthesizes Qur'anic principles and ecofeminism. This research will add to, seek to develop, and hopefully challenge existing scholarship in the following fields: religious studies; women's studies in religion; Islamic

studies; Islamic feminism and masculinity studies; Islamic environmentalism; ecofeminist theology; and Islam and conceptions of the body.

Disclosure and Positionality

Throughout the process of this study, several questions persisted that referred to issues of identity—who I am versus who others think I am. For example, consider the following questions: The general view of feminism stems from the privileged status of white feminists, why have I focused on ecofeminism? What is my relationship to other kinds of ecofeminist theologies, such as ecowomanism? What is my positionality? Is it Muslim, Muslim woman, African American Muslim feminist, or Muslim womanist? Admittedly, I had struggled to understand the basis for such questions, and I could not discern the need to respond to them until an advisor took me aside to explain the bottom line that who I am, my background, and experiences are not what many think of when they see me.⁶ Identity politics comes into play by assumptions made when I enter a room. How we see ourselves, as opposed to how others view us, involves critical signification. Signification concerns the issue of identity and naming.⁷ Signification has negatively affected African Americans, resulting in negative stereotypes and perceptions. The discourse and experiences of African descendants in America and colonized masses everywhere reflect the structures and attitudes of dominance and control forcibly imposed on them.

Assessing the utilization of signification versus self-signification offers essential insights into

⁶ Ava DuVernay, producer, *When They See Us* (Los Gatos: Netflix, Spectrum 5:92, 2019). The phrase “when they see me” refers to the 2019 Netflix series *When They See Us* based on the 1989 Central Park jogger case involving racial profiling.

⁷ Richard Brent Turner, “African Muslim Slaves and Islam in Antebellum America,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, eds. Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28–44. Turner defines signification as an issue of identity and naming. He employs Charles H. Long’s theme of signification in religious studies to refer to “both the system, by which stereotypes, names, and signs were given to non-European peoples and cultures during the western exploration and conquest of the Americas... and the process by which the enslaved constructed subaltern resistance strategies in their liberation struggles against the racism of the majority community” (28).

identity politics debates concerning religious authority. Reflecting intensely on the pressure to choose and ground my positioning in my racial identity, my woman-ness, my religion, or a combination of any of these or none of them, I instead chose the default option of what best resonates with my unique religious, racial, class, and gender particularities and sensitivities.

Epistemological theories form the basis of how we organize our understanding of the universe. How we make sense of the world defines our perception of reality. Human beings undergo various processes that influence their thinking (such as historical and dialectical processes) which support different theories or epistemes. One's episteme, in turn, establishes one's ontological situatedness. Throughout my academic career, Ruether's ideas have held much influence, yet my racial and religious background and experiences have often come into question concerning how I relate Ruether's ideas to being an African American Muslim woman. In response, I recall Melanie Harris' use of eco-memory as a counter-memory.⁸ Harris asserts that this first step exposes the truth and debunks myths and stereotypes about "women of African descent, peoples of color, and environmental history."⁹ To honor my eco-story, I evoked my experiences as a child indoctrinated in the Nation of Islam's (NOI) racial superiority episteme. I often struggled to find comfort in identifying my Blackness and Muslimness in the same way as other African Americans and global Muslims. Growing up in the Nation of Islam in the 1960s and subsequently leaving it in 1974, I now see the movement as an experiment in correcting social imbalances, a model with many pros and cons. On the bright side, we grew up in the NOI insulated and isolated from a societal perception about who we were as a race and what our place was in it. We were strongly self-signified as racially and culturally superior. Racial, cultural, and

⁸ Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (New York: Orbis Books, 2017), Chapter 2.

⁹ Ibid.

ethnic inferiority did not inhabit our worldview. I grew up with an attitude of privilege. As children we lived in a world where empowering messages, history, examples, and potential filled our young minds. Our all-present motto was, “Up you mighty nation, you can accomplish whatever you will!” The NOI’s self-signification did not bend to traditional Islamic authority. As I grew up and left the Nation of Islam, I accepted traditional Sunni Islam as my identity. Strong self-significations continued to be part of my identity. Although I believe this has benefited me greatly, I was often unable to understand or relate to traditional Islam’s cultural expressions and the ethnic expressions of American Blackness. I eventually realized that signification for oneself is liberation.

My physical appearance may signify a religious, racial, cultural, and sexual minority status to others. To myself, I am in no manner a minority, nor would I identify myself as a member of the majority. Both these terms, minority, and majority, are socially divisive and indicative of socio-historico-political power dynamics and the acceptance of a particular signification. One’s self-identity must be stronger than any attempt at assigning it negative stereotypes. My signification (my identity formation) reflects what I strive to leave for future generations, the positive benefits of my upbringing while negating superiority complexes.

For me, the articulation of and solutions to the problem I identify must have ecological, feminist, and Islamic dimensions. Social justice and environmental justice are interrelated with people of color as the most affected by environmental degradation.¹⁰ The solution must have feminist dimensions because, among marginalized populations, women suffer disproportionately.

¹⁰ See Paul English, Max Richardson, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Manuel Pastor, James Sadd, Galatea King, William Jesdale, and Michael Jerrett. “Racial and Income Disparities in Relation to a Proposed Climate Change Vulnerability Screening Method for California.” *The International Journal of Climate Change: Impacts and Responses* 4, no. 2 (2013): 1-18; and Phoebe Godfrey and Denise Torres, *Systemic Crises of Global Climate Change* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

With ecological disasters, such as war and global warming there is an increase of violence against women and girls.¹¹ Islamic dimensions are essential to finding a solution, as that is the foundation of my positionality. The Qur'an and the Prophetic example should not be underestimated as sources of guidance. These are concepts that best resonate with my unique experiences although the battles in my life were not fought on the grounds of being Black in America due to the isolationism of my rearing and the self-signification of my education. The greatest struggle of my life is over the familiar community situation of being female and Muslim among Muslims. Although, I do not require a womanist dimension, I understand that it is consequential. My perspective is Muslim and Islamic, and it is necessarily attentive to ecofeminist concerns. I aim to research and write on Islamic theology, incorporating a voice that some may consider Muslim-womanist or Muslim eco-womanist. I accept that as an African American Muslim woman, my voice should not only be included in discourses but necessarily identified as such.

My ideas spring from the notion that all theologies are constructs. The dominant or normative doctrines of religions are not necessarily a matter of the ultimate truth as much as they indicate who holds or has held the dominant power and influence. Focusing on the discourses of women and ecology in Islam should prove more productive in finding "truths" than both polemic and apologetic positions. Finally, I fully admit that I am proposing one possible perspective and interpretation resulting from this specific problematization. My theological construct is a theoretical framework.

¹¹ See Bharat H. Desai and Moumita Mandal, "Role of Climate Change in Exacerbating Sexual and Gender-based Violence against Women: A New Challenge for International Law," in *Environmental Policy and Law* (2020): 1-21; and Craig A. Anderson and Matt DeLisi, "Implications of Global Climate Change for Violence in Developed and Developing Countries" in *The Psychology of Social Conflict and Aggression*, eds. J. Forgas, A. Kruglanski, and K. Williams (New York: Psychology Press, 2011): 249-265.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Why choose Rosemary Radford Ruether? Ruether remains one of the first few theologians to articulate the interconnections between liberation theology and ecological concerns without imposing Western, Euro-centric standards. Ecofeminism stands for a commitment to address all forms of dominance and oppression. Her work is rooted in civil rights and liberation movements, involving activism with feminists in the United States, Africa, Palestine, the Philippines, and Latin America.¹² In a 2002 interview, Rosalind Hinton asked Ruether about what she sees as the most significant development of feminism and her part in making it happen. In response, she regarded the “contextualization of feminism across global communities as the most significant.”¹³ She further acknowledged that “these” women did not need her to organize, stating, “They knew their own problems and how to address them.”¹⁴ Her role in it was to encourage, support, and engage in dialogue. There is a remarkable history of inclusivity, mutual respect, and support in her scholarship and activism.

To outline Ruether’s methodology, it is broken down into the following three-step process: (1) identifying a contemporary problem; (2) critically examining the roots of that problem and recognizing the initial steps for solving it; and (3) identifying the practices that can take us toward a more liberated present and future.¹⁵ Ruether’s anthology provides us with many

¹² Rosalind Hinton, interviewer, “A Legacy of Inclusion: An Interview with Rosemary Radford Ruether,” in *Crosscurrents*, (2002): 28–37, accessed November 31, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24461140?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Several writers commented similarly on Ruether’s seemingly simple yet effective methodological process, including Mark Mann, “Rosemary Radford Ruether: Mann’s Quick Notes,” *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology: Rosemary Radford Ruether*, 1997, accessed May 5, 2017, http://people.bu.edu.wwildman/bce/mwt_themes_908_ruether/htm#Rosemary%20Radford%20Radford%20Ruether:%20Mann's%20Quick%20Notes; and Zhang Qiumei, “On

examples. In the article “New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation,” (1975) Ruether argues that “sexism and ecological destructiveness are related in the symbolic patterns of patriarchal consciousness, but they also take intensive socioeconomic forms in modern industrial society.”¹⁶ She affirms that symbolic patterns of patriarchal consciousness are prevalent with the rapid industrialization in the western world. Ruether concludes that industrial society has transformed the relationships between home (the domain of women) and economic production (the domain of men). Similarly, Ruether’s 1985 book *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, offers a collection of texts “as a springboard for constructing what must become a new expression of theology from the perspective of the full personhood of women.”¹⁷ Although the texts cited in *Womanguides* do not go “beyond the borders of the Western Christian culture,” Ruether acknowledges that creation stories for any whose history has been a part of those experiencing patriarchy “could indeed be revelatory.”¹⁸

Utilizing a dialectical methodology, she poses uncomfortable but necessary questions to all theologies.¹⁹ Ruether’s theological quest rethinks the origin and construction of the current

Methodology of Feminist Theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether,” in *Researchgate.net*, 2010, accessed May 5, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298956912_On_Methodology_of_Feminist_of_Rosemary_Radford_Ruether.

¹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation,” in *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: A Selection of Critical Readings*, ed. Carl Olson (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), 459.

¹⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), ix.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, x-xi.

¹⁹ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology: The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jurgen Moltmann* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12. A dialectical methodology entails the practice of examining ideas logically, often by the method of question and answer.

socio-religious circumstances by also employing historically critical methods. Her systematic treatment of Christian symbols in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983) exemplifies this dialectical process and historically critical method. *Sexism and God-Talk* seek to accomplish three tasks: to “recapitulate from a feminist, critical perspective of the journey of Western consciousness;” to uncover “repressed elements of the tradition and to move beyond them to new syntheses, which can integrate both poles of the dualism;” and to understand her experience of the clash between the worlds of antiquity and biblical faith.²⁰ As she points out connections between our destruction of the environment and the structures of social domination, she strongly manifests ecofeminist thinking. She identifies “the prophetic strand of biblical faith” as the critical norm and incorporates only “useable traditions.” She asserts that “with respect to feminism, the critical norm functions in a very simple way – that which promotes women’s full humanity is authentic, while that which does not promote it is inauthentic.”²¹ Ruether acknowledges the sources she draws from—Hebrew and Christian scriptures; she examines texts from traditions deemed “heretical” by traditional Christianity, theological themes of the leading Christian traditions, religious and philosophical ideas from non-Christians, Near-East and Greco-Roman worlds, and critical post-Christian reflections such as that provided by Liberalism, Romanticism, and Marxism.²²

Ruether again critically explored the heritage of Western Christian culture from the joint perspectives of ecology and feminism in her 1992 book *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, setting the following as her goal:

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 71.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ruether, *Womanguides*, x-xi.

The goal of this quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, between humans and the earth. Such healing is possible only through recognition and transformation of the way in which Western culture, enshrined in part in Christianity, has justified such domination.²³

In accomplishing this endeavor, she begins by defining the terms ecology, feminism, and ecofeminism and then by assessing the “cultural and social roots that have promoted destructive relationships.”²⁴ Ruether’s definition of ecofeminism offers us a look at not only these same parameters but also her particular solution: “Ecofeminism or ecological feminism examines the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. It aims at strategies and worldviews to liberate or heal these interconnected dominations by a better understanding of their aetiology and enforcement.”²⁵ Finally, she sifts through the legacy of cultural heritage to find useful ideas that might nourish a healed relation of humanity to God, humanity to each other, and the earth.²⁶ Utilizing the sources mentioned in *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether continues examining her primary sources toward the construction of feminist theology. Insisting on the need for a feminist re-visioning of Christian theology, she poses the question: How should we collect texts for feminist theology? Her response illuminates a theoretical and methodological gold mine:

We can read between the lines of patriarchal texts and find fragments of our own experience that were not completely erased. We can also find, outside of canonized texts,

²³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

remains of alternative communities that reflect either the greater awe and fear of female power denied in later patriarchy or questionings of male domination in groups where women did enter into critical dialogue. Whether anathematized and declared heretical or just overlooked...In so doing, we read canonical, patriarchal texts in a new light. They lose their normative status and we read them critically in the light of that larger reality that they hide and deny. In the process, a new norm emerged on which to construct a new community, a new theology, eventually a new canon.²⁷

In Ruether's 2000 article "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology," she theoretically presents us with suggestions for opting out of "classical approaches and conclusions traditionally held in religious thought."²⁸ Ruether points out that cultural-symbolic and socioeconomic are two levels that form the relationship between sexism and ecological exploitation. She contends that the cultural-symbolic relationship between sexism and ecological exploitation is an "ideological superstructure."²⁹ The ideological superstructure, as Ruether writes, "reflects and ratifies the second."³⁰ This base-superstructure metaphor (ideological superstructure) is borrowed from Marxist theory by Ruether.³¹ In her ecofeminist position, ideological

²⁷ Ruether, *Womanguides*, xi.

²⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism—The Challenge to Theology," in *Christianity Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans* (2000): 97-112, 97.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Renee G. Lee and Jeff B. Murray, "A Framework For Critiquing the Dysfunctions of Advertising: the Base-Superstructure Metaphor," in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 22*, eds. Frank R. Kardes and Mita Sujan (Provo: Association for Consumer Research, 1995): 139-143. Lee and Murray write that "the base-superstructure metaphor is associated with a critical-emancipatory sociology of knowledge. This view assumes that certain types of knowledge are selected and become dominant due to their consistency with existing social structures and relations. In other words, if ideas legitimate the existing power structure, they are more likely to be disseminated and therefore accepted. On the other hand, if ideas oppose the existing power structure, they are less likely to be disseminated and therefore will not be available for public debate" (139).

superstructures take the form of identifying and tracing deeply rooted distortions of gender relations with the rise of “patriarchal slavocracies in Ancient Near East that inferiorized women as a gender group.”³² In this dissertation, ideological superstructures take the form of tracing the roots of distorted gender and ecological relations with the rise of Islam. Ruether’s theology assumes a specific feminist consciousness throughout her writings, and her methodology guides the outcomes. Although Ruether speaks on behalf of Christian feminist theology, she asserts that much of what she says “could also be applied to other religions wherein formal systems of theology exist, such as Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism.”³³

Ruether’s theology remains reformative from both a feminist and an ecological standpoint. Her writings extend from the 1960s till well into the first decades of the millennium. Barbara Darling-Smith summarized Ruether’s approach and commitment to her “constructive theoretical work” as that which “requires thorough examinations of historical knowledge of traditions, nuanced with critiques of the elements of the sources, which contribute to social and environmental injustices while it brings our consciousness to the liberating aspects of the same sources.”³⁴ Throughout the study of Ruether’s ideas, I did not identify any area of insurmountable conflict between her work and conversations with contemporary feminist scholars and activists of various classes, ethnicities, and cultures. Ruether’s theories present us with suggestions for opting out of classical approaches and conclusions traditionally held in religious thought. She is critical of every religious position while engaging in self-criticism.

³² Ruether, “Ecofeminism,” 97.

³³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Methodologies in Women’s Studies and Feminist Theology,” in *Methodology in Religious Studies: The Interface with Women’s Studies*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: University of New York Press, 2002), 180.

³⁴ Barbara Darling-Smith, “Rosemary Radford Ruether,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor (London; New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1433.

Research Questions

This dissertation follows a particular trajectory in approaching its primary questions: Which definition of Islamic feminism and Islamic environmentalism will direct this research? Is it possible to construct an ecofeminist theology in Islam? What would Islamic ecofeminist theology entail? What are its contours, constraints, and applicability? How will Ruether's ideas be utilized to construct an ecofeminist theology in Islam? Answering these questions involves building upon, extending, and synthesizing previous research in three fundamental ways—theories, methods, and applications. Thus, I have formulated foundational theories and methodology to support further ecofeminist analyses. Other critical questions guiding my analyses include the following: What are the theological implications of Qur'an-based narratives on vicegerency and Adam and Eve? How do these implications correlate the hierarchy of the Divine over the human with that of man over woman and human over non-human creation? How do the concepts of human and non-human creation intersect with environmental and gender disparity issues in Islam? Lastly, I will apply my Islamic ecofeminist theological concepts to demonstrate a possible paradigmatic shift that is eco- and gender-conscious, leading away from anthropocentric and androcentric interpretations. Essentially, I have developed and demonstrated the contours of a Qur'anically informed, historically conscious, and creation-affirming Islamic theology.

Hypotheses, Arguments, and Methodologies

This research calls for the construction of an ecofeminist theology in Islam and aims to identify its contours, constraints, and applicability. As I attempt to situate environmental challenges caused by the impoverishment of nature within the position of contemporary Islamic feminist scholarship, I do so by synthesizing various streams of knowledge in three parts: (1) creating the foundation for Islamic ecofeminist theology, (2) suggesting an Islamic ecofeminist theological process, and (3) applying concepts.

Hypotheses

Creating the foundation for Islamic ecofeminist theology (part one) and applying concepts (part three) begin with detecting contemporary problems from which I hypothesize its likely rationale. The interconnections between women, gender, and ecology within Islamic dimensions present a significant contemporary problem. Therefore, a holistic approach that addresses them together has to be adopted. In part one, I hypothesize that a critical examination of the modern discourse on Islam, women, and ecology will highlight correlating gender and ecological fall-outs. In part two, I hypothesize that Islamic feminism and environmentalism are synthesizable as a possible remedy. In part three, the premise is that the theological implications of *khalīfa* defined as vicegerency and normative narratives of Adam, Eve, Eden, Heaven, and Hell are identifiable present-day problematics.

Arguments

Contending that understanding the interconnections are critical to understanding the dynamics of both and to offering a holistic alternative, in part one, I argue that contemporary scholarship on Islam and ecology focuses primarily on the “proper perspectives” of hierarchical creation in non-gender-specific ways, and the scholarship on women and Islam heavily addresses the patriarchal aspects of Islam. In contrast, the attention given to hierarchical structures is limited to gender analyses. Therefore, in part two, I argue that a fusion of Islamic feminism and environmentalism sets the contours of an ecofeminist Islamic theology, which is Qur’anicly informed, historically conscious, and creation-affirming. In part three, I reason that dominant classical and contemporary interpretations initiate human superiority and dominance, and therefore, societal and ecological degradation necessitating an Islamic ecofeminist paradigm in response. In adopting the developed concepts, I argue that normative perspectives of vicegerency

establish a hierarchical privilege for humans above all non-human creations. Therefore, this supports the current gender and body conceptions paradigm that fuels patriarchal social relationships. Also, normative interpretations of the cosmic narrative of the first humans establish the hierarchy of gender, that is, the dominance of men over women, while reiterating human hierarchical privilege. Exegetes, scholars, preachers, and authority figures of Islamic mythology have endowed these myths with gendered language and imagery. The gender-body differentiations are further manifested in societal gender roles, creating dichotomous physical and psychological categories.

Methodologies

This research aims to integrate Islamic feminism and environmentalism by employing a framework that heavily echoes the insights of Rosemary Radford Ruether. A combination of close reading, traditional philological methods, discourse analysis, textual analysis, and hermeneutics are heavily used methodologies throughout this dissertation. Notably, part one engages close reading and discourse analysis of current works by and on Muslim feminism and environmentalism, together with Ruether's ecofeminist three-step framework: (1) Identifying a contemporary problem. (2) Critically examine the roots of that problem. (3) Identifying the practices that will move us towards a more liberated present.³⁵ By employing Ruether's ecofeminist response to environmental devastation and the interrelated issues of gender disparity, one can offer a deeply critical and selective reinterpretation of the Islamic discourse on women and ecology. Therefore, the various perspectives are juxtaposed with Ruether's insights— to synthesize an “Islamic” ecofeminist theological position.

³⁵ The terms Islamic and Muslim correspond with different approaches in methodology. Islamic is employed when dealing with classical texts and primary sources. Muslim refers to works written by and about Muslim authors and their activities, attitudes, and perspectives. Also see footnote 3.

Critiquing hierarchy and patriarchy in Christianity, Ruether's theological quest seeks to thoroughly rethink the origin and construction of the current socio-religious circumstances. Ruether's ecofeminist theology stresses the consequences of hierarchical and patriarchal religious interpretations. Thus, part two, suggesting an Islamic ecofeminist theological process, integrates close reading, discourse, and textual hermeneutic analyses of current works by Muslim and Islamic feminists and environmentalists as a foundation for constructive theology.³⁶

I propose theological possibilities after analyzing gender conceptualizations and socio-ecological relationships through a problematization approach in part three. In doing so, I apply traditional philological methods, close reading, discourse, and textual hermeneutic analyses of Islamic primary sources, Muslim scholars from post-prophetic through contemporary times, and contemporary Muslim feminists and environmentalists perspectives.³⁷ Part three seeks to produce a constructive theology within a context of Islam and a framework of ecofeminist hermeneutics.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this dissertation and my positionality includes the following: studies on ecofeminism and religion focusing on Ruether's ideas; studies on Islam, women, and gender from Islamic feminist scholarship; the emerging subfields of feminism—ecowomanism and Muslim womanist philosophy; and critical for a holistic analysis of gender discourses—masculinity studies within Islamic/Muslim contexts. In addition, studies on Islam and ecology, followed by scholarship on Qur'anic cosmology and cosmogony, are substantial to this dissertation. Cosmology and cosmogony demonstrate how topics are interrelated and influence conceptions of the engendered body.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Feminist Theories and Epistemologies

The term feminism/feminist was coined in France in the 1880s by Hubertine Auclert. It made its way into English by the 20th century, first in Britain and then in the U.S. by the 1910s. The term was also adopted in Egypt by the 1920s as *nisa 'iyya*. The contemporary and normative conceptualization of feminism is derived from the history of “waves” of feminist activism in the West. The first wave of feminism that occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries focused upon the rights of women to be defined as full citizens under the law. Two streams of feminisms emerged: liberal and Marxist. Liberal feminists pushed for a change in the status of women under the law, as described in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft (2008) in *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*.³⁸ Alternatively, Marxist feminists contended that the roots of gender inequality and women’s oppression lies in the rise of private property or capitalism, as discussed by Nancy MacKinnon (1989) in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*.³⁹ Second-wave feminism in the 1960s–1980s focused on increasing debates among several variations and interpretations of Marxist feminism. Socialist feminism established connections between women’s oppression and other forms of oppression in society (Eisenstein, 1978; Haraway 1985).⁴⁰ Materialists and standpoint feminism emphasized capitalism and patriarchy as the source of women’s oppression (Delphy, 1984; Harding, 1998).⁴¹ Radical feminism held that the root cause for women’s

³⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women & A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (New York: Cosimo, 2008).

³⁹ Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴⁰ See Zillah R. Eisenstein, “A Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Collective,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); and Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism,” in *Movements 3* (2006): 15-21.

⁴¹ Sandra G. Harding, *Is Science Multicultural?: Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression* (New York: Verso Books, 1984).

oppression and subjugation lie in patriarchal power structures (Daly, 1978).⁴² Michel Foucault's study on power added significantly to this era of feminism.⁴³ Foucault theorized that discussion is more productive toward reaching truth than polemics. In turn, this has inspired many critical theorists into believing that his analysis of power structures holds the key to the struggle against gender inequality.⁴⁴

The so-called third wave of feminism (1990s–2000s) is seen as a further extension of the debates in which gender, racial and cultural differences, and consciousness-raising become prominent concepts. Patricia Collins (1980) introduced Black feminist theory and contended that it is crucial to include different races and cultures in the topic of feminism.⁴⁵ Nancie Caraway's (1991) *Segregated Sisterhood* held that "pivoting the center" was necessary to acknowledge the existence of racism and politics in Western feminism.⁴⁶ Some view the period from around 2008 until the present as witnessing the fourth wave of feminism whose focus includes sexual harassment, assault, and misogyny. In the digital era, consciousness-raising is utilized most often. It is sometimes regarded as important and necessary to include different races and cultures

⁴² Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

⁴³ Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984* (London: Penguin, 2019), 239-298. Shortly before his death in May 1984, Foucault did an interview with Paul Rabinow in which he was presented with four questions frequently asked by American audiences (239). Foucault's responses highlighted his philosophical outlook, his theory and methods that he described as his "approach."

⁴⁴ Amy Allen, "Feminist Perspectives on Power," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2016 ed.), accessed May 3, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-power/>. Allen states, "At this point, the feminist work that has been inspired by Foucault's analysis of power is so extensive and varied that it defies summarization (see, for example, Allen, 1999 and 2008a; Artky, 1990; Bordo, 2003; Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; Diamond and Quinby (eds.) 1988; Fraser, 1989; Hekman (ed), 1996; Heyes, 2007; McLaren, 2002; McNay, 1992, McWhorter, 1999; Sawicki, 1990; and Young, 1990)."

⁴⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁶ Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood: Racism and the Politics of American Feminism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

in feminism stemming from the privileged status of white women. In fact, feminism and feminist theology is not just a western phenomenon but is increasingly global, ethnically diverse and interfaith. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potts' (1993) *Feminist Epistemologies* confirm the realization that "once we realize that values, politics, and knowledge are intrinsically connected, the hierarchies and divisions within philosophy will be replaced by more holistic and coherent models."⁴⁷ Feminist epistemologies have developed and produced new configurations for problems and solutions. Their perceptions of gender hierarchal problems also involve class, race, sexual, cultural, and age disparities. Developments in feminist theories have several emerging fronts with multiple dimensions that particularize experiences. These themes are thoroughly discussed in feminist theories and theories on women's bodies in religion and can be extended to include ecological dimensions.⁴⁸

Among feminist scholars, ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s. Since then, several developments have occurred. Still, there persists an overarching argument and solution culminating in some common perspectives among ecofeminists. By and large, ecofeminists assert that "patriarchal structures" justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies (binary oppositional). They further claim that these "established systems of patriarchy" continue manifesting their abusive powers through the reinforcement of the binaries by making them sacred through religious and/or scientific constructions; as long as this continues as an integral component of societal structuring and justifications, patriarchy is justified.⁴⁹ Ecofeminists further assert that all binary oppositional or hierarchical dualism must be dismantled and replaced with "radical diversity and relationship, modeled on both biodiversity

⁴⁷ Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁴⁸ Allen, "Feminist Perspectives on Power," 3.

⁴⁹ Hobgood-Oster, "Ecofeminism," 534. Hobgood-Oster summarizes the common goals and objectives of ecofeminist scholarship.

and the feminist emphasis on the strength of differences.”⁵⁰ As ecofeminism emerges as a major school of philosophical and theological thought and social analysis, many ecofeminist thinkers are extending this analysis from gender to class, race, and ethnic hierarchies.⁵¹

Ecowomanism, Islamic Feminism, and Muslim Womanist Philosophy

Ecowomanism is a standpoint feminist epistemology in which several academic disciplines intersect, including the intersection of environmental and social justice with womanism and/or Black feminism. In *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*, Melanie L. Harris (2017) argues that African American women make distinctive contributions to not only social justice but also the environmental justice movement.⁵² Harris further states that African American women come into “religious understandings about our relationship with the Earth” in a way that reflects the history of African Americans in the West.⁵³ Harris incorporates elements of her family history as she establishes an ecowomanist epistemology and methodology. She sees family history as an often neglected tradition. The methodology of ecowomanism, according to Harris, can be described as a reflective and contemplative approach that validates their lives, spiritual values, and activism as important epistemologies, shaped by the critical study and observation of praxis and vice versa.⁵⁴ The most primary analytical frame that is often highlighted in womanist thought is the race–class–gender analysis.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Harris, *Ecowomanism*, chapter 2.

⁵³ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.

Among Muslims and in the academic study of Islam, the term “feminism” first appeared in the 1990s with the preparation for the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women, titled “Women’s Rights are Human Rights.” Islamic traditionalists and Islamists saw the slogan as indicative of a Western agenda to undermine Islamic societies by promoting such ideas as pre-marital sex and homosexuality.⁵⁶ Mai Yamani, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Asfaneh Najmabadi are among the first to utilize the terms “feminism”/ “feminist” and/or “Islamic feminism/ feminists.”⁵⁷ Margot Badran (2009), in *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, writes about feminist activism in its various forms within Islamic contexts and among Muslim women everywhere.⁵⁸ She notes that within Muslim-majority regions and among Muslim women, in the East or West, feminist activism and scholarship have developed simultaneously with, and independent of Western feminism.⁵⁹ According to Badran, Islamic feminism particularly mandates a Qur’an-based gender equality and gender justice.⁶⁰ What is important to note here is that Muslim and Islamic scholars are split on the acceptance of the term “feminism” and the idea of identifying as feminists.

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (2014), in “The Emergence of Muslim American Feminism,” asserts that understanding the long history of European and American prejudices and the images and prejudices that continue to this day are important complexities concerning the issues involved with accepting the term.⁶¹ Among the scholars/activists who fall into the category of

⁵⁶ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Emergence of Muslim American Feminism,” in *Faith and Feminism: Ecumenical Essays*, eds. Lipsett, Barbara Diane, and Phyllis Trible (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corp, 2014), 139.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: One World Publication, 2009), 162.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 244.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Haddad, “The Emergence of Muslim American Feminism,” 138.

“Islamic feminists,” some commonalities exist, namely their belief in the primacy of the Qur’an; their critique of patriarchal Islamic exegesis; and their belief in their right to *ijtihad* (scriptural interpretation).⁶² Regarding the primacy of the Qur’an, Islamic feminists generally contend that a Qur’anic framework holds the solution to gender disparities. In general, Islamic feminists, see the Abbasid period of Islamic history as the key period when misogynistic tendencies and praxis became infused with Qur’anic interpretations, hadith literature, and law (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002; Ali, 2006).⁶³ They see this as a time when women became excluded, contending that this was not the case in prophetic times. Islamic feminists argue that the right to scriptural interpretation is the cornerstone of Islamic feminism and that reinterpretation is critical for empowerment. In the post 9/11 era, Muslim women have been pushed into the limelight as representatives of Islam, which since then has been reviled and maligned. Still, several prominent Islamic feminists have come to the forefront. They are skilled in offering analyses of the Qur’an, hadith literature, and textual interpretations on a variety of issues. For example, self-proclaimed progressive Muslim and feminist, Kecia Ali, critiques the Qur’an, hadith literature, and textual interpretations on the role of women in society, marriage, and LGBT rights of Muslims.⁶⁴

Debra Mubashshir Majeed (2016) offers another emerging perspective—Muslim womanist philosophy. Majeed critiques womanism as an “articulation of the experience and agency of African American Christian women.”⁶⁵ Her interaction with womanism led her to

⁶² Ibid., 139.

⁶³ Ibid., 139–141. Also see Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Women: Rereading the Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999); Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); and Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith and Jurisprudence* (London: Oneworld, 2006).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁶⁵ Debra Mubashshir Majeed, “Womanism Encounters Islam: A Muslim Scholar Considers the Efficacy of a Method Rooted in the Academy and the Church,” in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism*

construct a perspective that enables African American Muslim women to “portray themselves in their own situations.”⁶⁶ She characterizes Muslim womanist philosophy as an interpretive tool⁶⁷ and as a new framework engaging the voices of African American Muslim women and the authority of their experiences.⁶⁸ Drawing on the theoretical activism of Muslim scholars, such as Amina Wadud, and the African-centered ethos of womanist thought, Majeed identifies Muslim womanist philosophy as a philosophical perspective with a bent toward praxis that overlaps with American womanism and Black feminism.⁶⁹ That being said, Majeed sees Muslim womanism as containing elements distinct from both, particularly with regard to its attention to the varied conditions of Black womanhood, the diverse perceptions of justice as experienced by African American Muslims, and the values of Islam they articulate.⁷⁰

Islam, Muslims, and Masculinity

Gender studies has almost always meant a study of women’s lives. Masculinity studies within an Islamic context is another emerging field of scholarship. The current status of research surrounding the topic of masculinity has stimulated further discussion and discourse within Islamic contexts, thus adding to the visibility of Muslims and masculinity. Much of the relevant scholarship began to surface in the early 2000s. There are areas of agreement in the scholarship on this topic. Importantly, the relevant scholars seek to explore and articulate expressions of masculinities by acknowledging the diversity of Muslims and Islamic thought (Germani, 2005;

in Religion and Society, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 38-53.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 38

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Adibi, 2006; Ouzgane, 2006; Prado, 2011; De Sony, 2015).⁷¹ They are deeply conscious of the possible essentializing definition of utilizing the term “Islamic” and Orientalist notions that it may hold.⁷² Lahoucine Ouzgane firmly articulates the challenges he faced in putting together a book that would allow a discussion of gender issues productively and honestly without fueling Eurocentric, anti-Arab, anti-Islamic bigotry and essentialist definitions:

Islamic masculinity is necessarily selective and does not claim to cover every possible aspect...but I hope that the essays will stimulate further discussion and research because so much of the literature on gender in Islam over the last twenty or thirty years has been written and read with Muslim men as an unmarked category.⁷³

Another overlap in the scholarship includes the idea that Islamic and Muslim masculinity and hypermasculinity is a process constructed within the context of socio-historical, political, economic, and cultural dimensions (Germani 2005; Hossein 2006; Ouzgane 2006; Prado 2011; De Sony 2015).⁷⁴

Shahin Germani explores the ways in which men’s practices shape masculinities as he assesses the impact of those construction on men themselves and on others.⁷⁵ He seeks to address

⁷¹ See Shahin Germani, “Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), 448–457; Hossein Adibi, “Sociology of Masculinity in the Middle East,” in *Social Change in the 21st Century 2006 Conference Proceedings* (Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, 2006), 1-10; Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities: Global Masculinities Series* (New York: Zed, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Abdennur Prado, “Muslim Masculinities: An Open Process,” *International Congress on Islamic Feminism in Critical Muslim* (2008: Men in Islam), 31–46; and Amanullah De Sony, “The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities,” in *Erkeklikler: Kimlik ve Kültür Dergisi* 4 (2015): 111–116.

⁷² See Germani, Adibi, Ouzgane, Prado, and De Sony, footnote 63.

⁷³ Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities*, in *Global Masculinities Series* (New York: Zed, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁷⁴ See references in footnote 46.

⁷⁵ Shahin Germani, “Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), 448–457.

the politicization of masculinity and the masculinity of politics. Germani argues that a core tenet of the Islamic Revolution's ideology was the reformulation of gender discourse around an Islamic hypermasculinity that promoted three ideals of manhood: mullahs, "who are the interpreters of the Qur'an and Shari'at; martyrs, the young men who abide by the dictates of the mullahs and sacrifice themselves for the republic; and ordinary men, who are perceived to have benefited from this hypermasculinity."⁷⁶ Germani makes the following assessment regarding the importance and necessity of studying Muslim masculinities:

A study of Muslim masculinities is necessary, for it will aid women and gender studies in the Muslim societies; it will help Muslim men to understand and negotiate rapid social changes, and it will aid Western masculinity studies in going beyond self-absorption with sexuality and in further incorporating the discourse of imperialism into the mainstream of gender discourse and perhaps popular culture. Finally, it will help to make real Muslim masculinities visible.⁷⁷

Hossein Adibi similarly presents an analysis of masculinities in the Middle East.⁷⁸ Adibi argues that gender is a social construct in the Middle East that is shaped by, and works within, a patriarchal society. He further asserts that Islamist masculinity is grounded within cultural institutions and has endured through cultural practices.⁷⁹ In much of the same manner, Ouzgane explicitly adopts a social constructionist perspective to argue that masculinity is constructed

⁷⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hossein Adibi, "Sociology of Masculinity in the Middle East," in *Social Change in the 21st Century 2006 Conference Proceedings* (Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, 2006), 1-10; Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities*, Global Masculinities Series (New York: Zed, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

within particular social and historical contexts.⁸⁰ Ouzgane also takes into consideration the “local realities, religious and political agendas, the consequences of Western colonialism and imperialism, and the marked effects of globalization.”⁸¹ An important aspect of the scholarship on masculinity explores how religion and rituals are impacted, and how constructions of masculinity impact and is impacted by cosmology, cosmogony, and conceptions of the body.

Amanullah De Sony invites us to consider the differing masculine models found the Qur’an. He argues that rigid notions of masculinity are causing a crisis in the global Islamic community. These are articulated based on the Qur’an, its commentary, historical precedents, and societal, religious and familial obligations.⁸² He additionally maintains that those who constrain masculinity use God and women to think with and dominate through those rigid gender roles. De Sony concludes that this is the product of a misguided venture.⁸³ Abdennur Prado contends that the image of masculinity in the Islamic framework is not monolithic as it is subject to historical processes – the result of cultural, economic, political and religious factors.⁸⁴ He further asserts that in Qur’anic cosmology, there is a perfect balance between the masculine and feminine, which is at the core of Muslim spirituality.⁸⁵ This research helps us understand how patriarchy is not something given in the Qur’anic revelation, but is a model that has been imposed throughout the centuries. It can be argued that gender issues are incomplete without the consideration of masculinity. A broader understanding of gender is necessary for the study of Muslim masculinities.

⁸⁰ Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities* (New York: Zed, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

⁸² Amanullah De Sony, “The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities,” in *Erkeklikler: Kimlik ve Kültür Dergisi* 4 (2015): 111–116.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁴ Abdennur Prado, “Muslim Masculinities: An Open Process,” in *International Congress on Islamic Feminism Critical Muslim* (2008: *Men in Islam*), 31–46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

Ecology, Islamic Cosmology, and Cosmogony

Many contemporary scholars on Islam and ecology situate their theories in the Islamic view of the cosmic order and the “correct” relationship between “the Creator, humans, and the rest of creation.”⁸⁶ They draw upon primary sources in Qur’an, hadith reports, and the approaches of commentaries of both medieval and modern sources. Often among this group of scholars, some maintain that humans belong in a hierarchy of being, and they see environmental degradation as the symptom of a broader problem stemming from human societies not living in accordance with God’s will.⁸⁷

Scholars of this category include environmental philosopher Ibrahim Özdemir and L. Clarke. Özdemir insists on the “correct” relationship between the Creator, humans, and the rest of creation as stipulated in Qur’an and provides an environmental ethic derived from the Qur’an. L. Clarke explores and grounds her ideas in the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273 CE).⁸⁸ Clarke proposes that the entire universe is alive and that humans are one part of all creation, all of which worships Allah.⁸⁹ Another group of scholars’ challenges interpretations and re-interpretations of traditional paradigms and applies them to contemporary contexts. They look at how the establishment of an Islamic worldview can be applied to today’s environmental problems. Mawil Izzi Dien is one such thinker who discusses real-life environmental crises

⁸⁶ Richard C Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), xxxix- xl.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, xl.

⁸⁸ Ibrahim Özdemir, “Toward an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur’anic Perspective” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4–37.

⁸⁹ L. Clarke, “The Universe Alive: Nature in the *Masnavī* of Jalal al-Din Rumi” in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 39–65.

Muslims face today, such as pollution and water scarcity.⁹⁰ He attempts to show how Islamic values can be directly applied to such problems. S. Nomanul Haq examines normative sources of Islam (the Qur'an, hadith literature, and classical Islamic law) and attempts to demonstrate how traditional Islam can guide contemporary Muslims in dealing with environmental crisis.⁹¹

Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk impart an ecological reading to the traditional Islamic concepts of unity (*tawhid*) and peace (*salaam*).⁹² They suggest that environmental problems represent a lack of peace, which in turn results from a failure to acknowledge unity. From a Shia perspective, Kaveh L. Afrasiabi argues that while Islam does possess important resources that advocate valuing the environment, Muslim thinkers need to go further and reassess some basic interpretations if tradition is to respond effectively to the current crises.⁹³ Afrasiabi expresses doubts about the ecological viability of traditional Islam and points out contradictions in the reasoning of several contemporary Islamic environmental thinkers, focusing especially on the problem of Islamic anthropocentrism. He proposes that a radically new Islamic theology in which the anthropocentric element is dramatically reduced, will be required if Muslims are to adequately address the environmental crisis we face today.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Mawil Izzī Dien, "Islam and the Environment: Theory and Practice," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 107–120.

⁹¹ S. Nomanul Haq, "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 121–154.

⁹² Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "Peace in Islam: An Ecology of the Spirit," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 155–184.

⁹³ Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, "Toward an Islamic Ecotheology," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 281–296.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 292.

Some of the scholars' primary focus combines the environment with social justice issues, which they believe to be the main priority when addressing the topic of Islam and ecology. Fazlun M. Khalid, situating the roots of the crisis in Western modernity that he sees as being "imposed on Muslim societies for the past centuries", addresses the reality that Muslims constitute a disproportionately high percentage of the world's poor and dispossessed.⁹⁵ Khalid further shows connections between economic globalization and ecological degradation and relates Qur'anic passages to the current social, economic, and ecological crisis.⁹⁶ Other thinkers on Islam and ecology highlight sustainable societies. They look at real-life issues connected to environmental crises.

Among contemporary Muslim scholars, Seyyed Hossein Nasr stands out prominently on topics of ecology and Islam. Nasr is credited as the first Muslim scholar to recognize and address the urgency of the current ecological crises. He has spent significant time and effort on discussing the seriousness of the environmental crisis as well as the need for a revival of the cosmological basis of religions that regards humans as servants and vicegerents of God,⁹⁷ Nasr's works explore the spiritual dimensions of the ecological crises, discuss the many obstacles to practicing Islamic environmental ethics in the world today, and suggest ways to overcome these problems.⁹⁸ In 1966, he argued that the imbalances in nature "brought by human activities were rooted in the destruction of the harmony between man and God" and that "modern humans had lost the sense of the sacred that enabled them to know their true place in the universe." He

⁹⁵ Fazlun M. Khalid, "Islam, Ecology, and Modernity: An Islamic Critique of Environmental Degradation," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 299–322.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 307–309.

⁹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 85–106.

⁹⁸ Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment*, 11.

further stated that the resuscitation of this knowledge would allow religions all over the globe to enrich each other and cooperate to heal the wounds inflicted upon the Earth.⁹⁹

Scholars Nawal Ammar and Anna M. Gade add fresh perspectives on the intersection of Islam, Muslims, and environmentalism.¹⁰⁰ Ammar (2000, 2003, 2005) often incorporates Islamic and ecofeminist dimensions to her environmental degradation and gender disparity responses.¹⁰¹ In *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*, Gade (2019) investigates and explains Islamic or Muslim perspectives on environmentalism and environmental humanities.¹⁰² Gade focuses on religious and cultural foundations by blending textual and ethnographic examples. Both Ammar and Gade offer comprehensive legal, ethical, social, and empirical “genealogy of Muslims’ approaches to the environment,”¹⁰³ and attempt to show the diversity of Muslim communities and schools of thought. Chapter One provides an assessment of the theoretical insights gained from their works. In this study, I assert that the engendered body is directly related to resulting environmental degradation and human societal injustices influenced by religious narratives. Therefore, discussion on Islam and the engendered body is a relevant topic.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Nawal H. Ammar and Allison Gray, “Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed., John Hart (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2017), 301; Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

¹⁰¹ Nawal Ammar, “An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis: Issues of Justice,” in *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont: University of Florida Press, 2003), 376-384; Nawal Ammar, “Islam and Eco-Justice,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, eds. B. Taylor, J. Kaplan, L. Hobgood-Oster, A. Ivakhiv, and M. York. (New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 862–866.

¹⁰² Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19.

Islam and the Engendered Body

Although studies on the Islamic attitudes of the body are rather new, according to Lawrence I. Conrad, early views of Islam (7th–9th centuries) on the body were shaped by the drive to uphold strict monotheism and the belief that all parts of the body have a useful purpose in the functioning of the whole, with the God–man relationship being essentially positive.¹⁰⁴ As Islam was institutionalized (9th–12th centuries), Islamic views on the body came to be seen in social, religious, and legal terms.¹⁰⁵ Perceptions of the human body have been profoundly influenced by more general societal attitudes toward the gendering of society, the emphasis on ritual purity of the body, and the attendant metaphors and symbolisms. Many of these views on the body have been carried on into modern times and have been influenced to varying degrees from interactions with the West. Conrad contends that this interaction has served to “revive traditional ways.”¹⁰⁶ Historically, women have been primarily associated with wifhood, childbearing, motherhood, and virginity. Therefore, the starting point for exploring this area of study focuses on how cosmology, informed by various interpretations of cosmogony, has influenced conceptions of the human body and nature in Islam.

According to Bruce Lincoln (2005), the intersection of religion and the human body creates a religio-physiological problematic, which religions frame in two general ways. One is the dualism of the body and soul, which radically differentiates the life principle from all else. The second employs the homologization of microcosm and macrocosm that systematically correlates the body with the world outside.¹⁰⁷ Lincoln deduces, “The logic of this analogy,

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence I. Conrad, “Islam and the Body,” *Oxford Companion to the Body*, eds. Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jennett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed January 5, 2020, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/acref/9780198524038.001.0001/acref-9780198524038-e-550>.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

however, demands mythology, cosmology, and metaphysics that attempt to resolve the questions of how and why a divine, immaterial life principle can reside within a profane material body, and what the ultimate fate of this life principle may be.”¹⁰⁸

Scholars focusing on the socio-historical, theological, and experiential criticisms of various aspects of Islamic conceptions of the body include Michael Winter (1995), Fuad I. Khuri (2001), Fedwa Malti-Douglas (2001), and Scott A. Kugle (2007). Michael Winter addresses the dominant attitudes toward the body in Islam and studies canonical texts, the lived experiences within Islamic societies, and the attitudes of medieval Muslim scholars and activists (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Sufis, and modern Muslim fundamentalists) to show how “laws regarding bodily behaviors have been interpreted.”¹⁰⁹ Winter acknowledges that the soul–body dichotomy in Islam was drawn from a variety of sources.¹¹⁰ He however maintains that the textual views on the body within Islam exert a normative influence on tradition.¹¹¹ Winter also deals with a variety of gender and societal issues and offers an explanation of the “attitudes behind present-day gender roles for Muslim women.”¹¹²

Khuri examines the conception of the body in Islamic and Arab societies. He believes that the body becomes a tool used not only to communicate attitudes, desires, doubts, and intimacy but also to define social discourse and mores.¹¹³ Khuri conducts extensive fieldwork in

¹⁰⁷ Bruce Lincoln, “Human Body: Myths and Symbolism” in *Encyclopedia of Religion* vol. 4, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4158–4163.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4159.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Winter, “Islamic Attitudes Towards the Human Body,” in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 36-45: 36.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 36–37.

¹¹³ Fuad Khuri, *The Body in Islamic Culture* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), 18.

various Arab countries, and by utilizing Mary Douglas' theories, assesses the symbolisms, categories, and different meanings conveyed there.¹¹⁴ On Islam and the homologization of microcosm and macrocosm of the body, Khuri insists the following: "Body symbolism in Arab-Islamic culture permeates every area of social intercourse, including faith and religion, social and cultural norms, patterns of behavior, and various modes of communication...Much like human society, the body is divided into grades and strata beginning with the head, which represents high status, and ending with the foot, which represents low status."¹¹⁵ According to Khuri, the human body is a source of shame in Islam; therefore, it should be concealed. This sense of shame, he believes, goes back to Adam and Eve, as mentioned in Qur'an 7:22.¹¹⁶ How the human body is viewed ideologically has considerable impact upon behavior and interaction.¹¹⁷

Fedwa Malti-Douglas utilizes classical discourse on women and sin to uncover contemporary manifestations in metaphoric and literal writings from predominantly Muslim societies to argue that "woman's body, led by her face, becomes the locus for a kind of punitive Islamic religious discourse."¹¹⁸ She zooms in on this aspect of the discourse as she contrasts rules concerning women with views on the male body in Islam. Malti-Douglas' most critical assessment acknowledges that the entire body of women, and in some commentaries, this includes her voice, is *awra* (parts of the body that must be covered); this presents an important contrast to the *awra* of men, which include only private parts.¹¹⁹ Scott Kugle, in his

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18–19.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 16–17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Faces of Sin: Corporal Geographies in Contemporary Islamic Discourses," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 67-75: 67.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 70.

writing on Islamic mysticism as it relates to the human body, examines Sufi conceptions of the body in religious writings from the late 15th century to the 19th century.¹²⁰ Focusing on six saints from North Africa and South Asia, Kugle argues that the saints' bodies are treated as "symbolic resources for generating religious meaning, communal solidarity, and the experience of sacred power."¹²¹

Other scholars, such as Samer Akkach (2005), Brannon Wheeler (2006), and Nerina Rustomji (2009), indirectly discuss the aspects of body conceptualizations in Islam. Akkach, in his writing on Islamic spatial sensibilities in architecture, demonstrates how space-ordering in pre-modern Islamic architecture reflects the transcendental and sublime.¹²² Referencing a wide range of mystical texts and specially focusing on the works of the great Sufi master Ibn 'Arabi, Akkach introduces a notion of spatial sensibility, shaped by religious conceptions of time and space. Akkach asserts that religious beliefs about the cosmos, geography, human body, and constructed forms are all underpinned by a consistent spatial sensibility anchored in medieval geocentrism.¹²³ Within this geometrically defined and ordered universe, nothing stands in isolation or ambiguity; everything is interrelated and carefully positioned in an intricate hierarchy.¹²⁴

Brannon Wheeler investigates the symbolism of Islamic holy places and objects as social conventions. In doing so, Wheeler's purpose is to "illustrate how the mythology of the fall from Eden and the origins of Islamic civilization represented by Muslim rituals and relics can be

¹²⁰ Scott Alan Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 8.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 1.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relic, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12.

interpreted as a narrative expression of an ideology stipulating the necessity of religion and the state.”¹²⁵ To accomplish this task, Wheeler’s methods require the use of Robertson Smith and J.Z. Smith’s theories and close readings of the Qur’an, hadith literature, and Qur’anic exegetical and Islamic legal traditions. He contends that the rules and rituals concerning purity in the practices of the five pillars of Islam, in essence, correspond to the state of Adam and Eve.¹²⁶ Wheeler’s conclusion uses Mary Douglas’ ideas on purity, danger, and society to analyze his findings. He asserts that myths associated with particular rituals relate to the structure and maintenance of social order, as he states that the “definition of impurity is the disjuncture between the ideal cosmic order and the actual state of the world.”¹²⁷ Anyone threatening the common conception of the society will invite danger.¹²⁸ Wheeler concludes that Islamic rituals and relics fit a model of religion in which an absolute distinction is made between heaven and earth, and that Muslim exegetes and jurists define rituals and relics as symbols for reminding people of the loss of utopia and the need for civilization.¹²⁹

Rustomji’s study of Islamic cosmology and eschatology examines the development of the afterworlds, as found in Sunni perspectives. She employs primary sources and socio-historical methods to link earthly experiences with other-worldly sensibilities and the history of heaven and hell in Islam by focusing on material culture.¹³⁰ She also examines how human expectations, fears, longings, and imaginings inform sensibilities. In doing so, Rustomji provides

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 130.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹³⁰ Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xviii.

us with important insights on the physical and psychological aspects of body conceptions. What these various scholars have in common is that they closely examine cosmogony, creation narratives, and, most often, Adam and Eve's narrative in primary Islamic sources, classical exegetical analysis, and its contemporary manifestations. They all acknowledge the dichotomous and hierarchical elements of these sources, which support the perspective of theorists such as Seyyed Hussein Nasr who contends that "the Muslim cosmological and natural sciences are closely bound to the metaphysical, religious, and philosophical ideas governing Islamic civilization."¹³¹ In the *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Nasr aims to clarify some of the "cosmological principles and to bring into focus the contours of the cosmos in which Muslims lived and thought, and which to a certain extent still provides the framework in which they envisage the world."¹³²

Synopsis of Chapters

Part I - Creating the Foundation

Part one seeks to set the foundation for ecofeminist theology within an Islamic worldview. This is covered in the Introduction and Chapter One. In Chapter One, I will examine contemporary Islamic discourses on ecology and women separately and then perform a critical analysis of their intersections in light of Ruether's specific questions and comments concerning Islamic worldviews in her book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (2005).¹³³ Additionally, an in-depth analysis of Nawal Ammar and Anna M. Gade's ideas aids to answer whether there is a significant difference between "greening" Islam and "Islamicizing" environmental efforts, and how the response impacts gender disparity. I will then utilize

¹³¹ Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xxiii.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

Ruether's method as an ecofeminist appraisal and present decisive outlines of Islamic feminists and environmentalists' solutions.

Part II - Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

Chapter Two begins by discussing the results of my ecofeminist appraisal on the discourses from the previous chapter. Here, I have concentrated on synthesizing the ideas of Islamic feminists with Islamic environmentalists by cohesively including a much-needed ecologically critical angle to the topic of feminism in Islam. To do so, I have probed into what this means by evaluating the ontological and epistemological foundation that I believe is necessary for conducting Islamic ecofeminist theology. I have investigated the relationship between epistemology and ontology to argue that the analysis of their relationship is a prerequisite for conducting Islamic ecofeminist theology. From this analysis, I have hypothesized that a systematic process will unfold. Islamic feminist scholars addressing and seeking to dismantle patriarchal interpretations of Islam have already laid much of the foundation for ecofeminist theology in Islam, whether knowingly or not. Chapter Two addresses the likely objections to my position and offers suggestions for a paradigmatic shift, one that is eco- and gender-friendly and leads away from anthropocentric and androcentric interpretations. I have explained and provided the foundational definition of an Islamic ecofeminist theology which will direct the application section of this research. Essentially, I have presented an argument for the necessity of an Islamic ecofeminist theology as opposed to Muslim ecofeminist aspirations. The finished concept must be a Qur'anically informed, historically conscious and creation-affirming Islamic theology.

Chapter Three seeks to complete the synthesis to suggest an efficient and systematic procedure for an ecofeminist theological rationale. A systematic process will unfold from an investigation into the relationship between epistemology and ontology, and how contemporary Islamic discourses of women and ecology utilize the concepts. The synthesis of the ideas of

particular Islamic feminists with Islamic environmentalism are also finalized in the chapter. I then solidify Ruether's ideas that are utilized as a catalyst to formulate a theoretical and methodological framework to support further ecofeminist analyses. The end result is a new catalyst design that seeks to formulate an efficient and systematic procedure for conducting ecofeminist theological rationale, not just within Islamic contexts but as an integral component of Islam. In summary, I will present a process for conducting an Islamic ecofeminist theology.

Part III - Applying Concepts

The research questions driving Chapters Four and Chapter Five seek to address and distinguish normative Qur'anic perspectives, pinpoint gender, and ecological consequences, offer an ecofeminist appraisal and propose an ecofeminist theological paradigmatic shift. Chapters Four and Five also review body conceptualizations. In Chapter Four, I discuss how Qur'anic narrative grounds conceptualizations of human and non-human creation, and juxtapose it with environmental and gender conceptions and disparity issues in Islam. Critical questions that have guided my analyses include the following: What are the theological implications of vicegerency? How do they correlate the hierarchy of the Divine over the human with the hierarchies of men over women and humans over non-human creation? How do these implications intersect with environmental and gender disparity issues in Islam? I will argue that there are categorical or dualistic hierarchies in classical and contemporary Islamic theology. Additionally, the assumptions presented by the hierarchy continue to be an integral component of the normative "Islamic" worldview, justified by so-called Islamic authorities. Consequently, I will argue that categorical dualism and concepts of the body inform hierarchy, as I will also offer commentary on how these correlations are further applied to express and reinforce the domination of nature, women, and certain social/political classes (i.e., class, race, and sectarian politics). Lastly, I will employ my Islamic ecofeminist theological concepts to demonstrate a paradigmatic shift.

In Chapters Four and Five, I propose that the theological implications of *khalīfa*, defined as vicegerency, and the narratives of Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the afterworld (Heaven and Hell), provided by the interpretation of classical exegetes and scholars and carried over by dominant contemporary scholars, correlate the hierarchy of the Divine over the human with the hierarchies of men over women, and humans over non-human creation. After showing that vicegerency establishes species hierarchy; I address the narrative of the first humans not only establishing patriarchy but also re-establishing species hierarchy in the next chapter. Chapter Five continues to trace how vicegerency and Adam and Eve’s narrative informs contemporary gender and ecological concerns. Chapters Four and Five employ a variety of theories and methodological approaches to show how speciesism and gender are perceived and enacted, and how it is interconnected with environmental concerns. Among these concepts and approaches are philological methods, discourse analysis, and textual hermeneutics within a framework of ecofeminism. In Chapter Five, I will argue that gender and species differentiation is further manifested in the roles of society, created by dichotomous religious, physical, and psychological categories. I will further present the contemporary gender and ecological consequences of such manifestations and offer, as examples, the lived experiences of women navigating globalization, environmental issues, and ritual spaces (the mosque) in an Islamic setting.

In the Conclusion of this dissertation, I reaffirm that an ecofeminist theology can instill a cosmology of justice and earth-healing in Islam in a holistic way. I will also reassert how and why making an ecologically critical turn is as vital as making a gender-critical turn in the study of Islam and restate my theories on ecofeminist theology in Islam.

Summary

This dissertation will contribute to the fields of religious studies, ritual studies, women's studies, and Islamic studies through its integrative analyses of cosmology, ecology, and feminism. The amount of scholarship on women and Islam is profound and outstanding. This research combines feminist aspirations with ecological concerns. Contemporary Islamic scholarship strongly indicates the necessity of a deeper excavation of how and why hierarchical and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic primary sources became the dominant outlook of Islamic authority in a manner that brings together social and ecological justice. This dissertation is unique in that it builds upon the intersections of these areas to offer a potential entry point for future research. Focusing on the discourses of women and ecology in Islam is expected to be more productive in discovering truths than both polemic and apologetic positions. Thus, this research's approach is to engage in the discourse of an Islamic ecofeminist theological possibility, utilizing a "problematization approach" to analyze gender conceptualizations and socio-ecological relationships. Admittedly, what is proposed represents one possible perspective and/or interpretation resulting from this specific problematization. Finally, creating this theological construct is meant to be a theoretical framework.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to offer new insights into normative assumptions. By highlighting the lived realities of Muslim women amidst environmental decay, globalization, and mosques, it becomes evident that intersections that contain many complexities also hold paradoxes. Seeking to bridge the divide between Islamic feminists and environmentalists, both in academia and lay communities, is a recurring theme throughout this dissertation. In summation, acknowledging and connecting the works of Muslim feminists and environmentalists have become increasingly important. The methodology of Ruether illustrates how to proceed from a fundamental shift in consciousness, opt out of classical approaches and interpretations, which are not reformative and critical of religious positions that support injustices while being

self-critical. Most crucial to the undertaking is never to be afraid of asking uncomfortable but necessary questions. Richard C. Foltz contends that “what Islam says now about the environment is more important than what has been said in the past.”¹³⁴ The application of Islamic principles in environmental protection is an ever-developing process. Thus, the intersectional area of environmental issues with social and gender justice issues need a meaningful contribution.

Contemplating the many layers of what signification entails—race, gender, economic class, sexuality, religion, unravels power dynamics and dominations. The radical idea to challenge and end all dominations is the motivation of this work. The term “ecofeminism” carries this meaning and with it the notion that all creation has the same intrinsic value. Ruether’s scholarship offers well-developed theories and methodology to draw from. For these reasons and for being a scholar of religion, this dissertation topic is compelling. In terms of positionality, self-identifying as a Muslim ecofeminist could have positive and negative outcomes. As a brown person of African descent born in America, considered a Muslim womanist and or Muslim eco-womanist, the decision to advance this work is self- initiated and sustained. I do so from a position of full liberation of thought and expression. This research is motivated by care for the planet as a whole and concern for its current condition. I feel no need to behold sexist, racist, culturally ethnic, androcentric, patriarchal, or anthropocentric significations. Holding on to Islamic significations (including Qur’an and accommodating hadith literature) that support an end to dominations and ensuring the healing of relationships is my ultimate goal.

¹³⁴ Foltz, *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment*, xli.

Part I - Creating the Foundation

Chapter One: An Ecofeminist Appraisal of Contemporary Islamic Discourses on Women and Ecology

This Islamic environmental view overlaps with ecofeminism's argument that women and the environment must be treated similarly— that is, free from exploitation."¹³⁵

One of the most intensely discussed contemporary issues on Islam is its relationship with women. Until recently, there has been far less discussion on Islam's relationship with ecological issues, and is even lesser concerning the intersection of the two. As environmental degradation has increased globally in recent decades, so has the need for addressing environmental issues among world religions. The responses of Islamic scholars regarding environmentalism in Islam have highlighted several positive ecological elements in an Islamic worldview; yet, as noted by Rosemary Radford Ruether in 2005, "with very few exceptions, the connection between women's subordination and the impoverishment of nature is not drawn by (male) Muslim environmentalists."¹³⁶

The primary focus of this chapter is an ecofeminist appraisal of the contemporary Islamic discourses regarding its relationship to women and ecology by drawing on the insights and critiques of Ruether, as discussed in *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. Hypothesizing that within Islamic contexts, the interconnections between women, gender, and ecology present a contemporary problem, underlining correlated consequences. I argue that this requires a holistic approach in addressing them together. The goal of this chapter is to also show how and why the intersections within Islamic contexts and worldview are (1) critical to understanding the dynamics of both, and (2) crucial to offering a holistic alternative.

¹³⁵ Ammar and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?" 310.

¹³⁶ Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization*, 74.

I propose to adopt Ruether's three-step methodology in the following manner: First, by identifying a contemporary problem, of which I seek to answer the question—what are the Islamic dimensions connecting gender inequalities and ecological imbalances? Pertaining to the second step in the process, I examine and engage discourse analysis of contemporary Islamic discourses on ecology and women separately to answer the following: How can we understand Islamic feminism and environmentalism? How should we define them? How do Ruether's ideas shape this scholarship? I then proceed to a critical discourse analysis of their intersections and correlations. Finally, by identifying practices that will take us toward a more liberated present, the works of scholars that deal with an "Islamic" intersection on women and ecology as a backdrop for making a case for ecofeminist theology in Islamic discourse is highlighted. The goal is to present an outline of their solutions as I begin to formulate a theoretical stance.

Overview of a Contemporary Problem

In the famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. writes, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."¹³⁷ Within the meaning of this statement is a perspective that we are not separate entities. Whether it is a matter of religion, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and even species, everything is interconnected. How is gender and eco-justice related to religious worldviews? Bron Taylor (2005) attempted to comprehensively address the relationships between human beings, diverse religions, and the Earth's living systems.¹³⁸ Taylor brings to our attention the

¹³⁷ Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *Readings in American Religious Diversity: The African American Experience*, Volume 2, ed. Jon R. Stone (Dubuque: Kendall Hunt, 2007), 148.

¹³⁸ Bron Taylor, "Introduction," in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, eds. B. Taylor, J. Kaplan, L. Hobgood-Oster, A. Ivakhiv, and M. York (New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), vii.

complexity of such a task: “The question animating this encyclopedia can be simply put. The answers to it, however, are difficult and complex, intertwined with and complicated by a host of cultural, environmental, and religious variables.”¹³⁹

In the 1990s, a series of conferences on world religions and ecology were held and sponsored by the Harvard Center on Religions at which Ruether delivered comments. Ruether, noting that each world religion present did indeed have “environmentally friendly potential,” began to ask critical questions on how “gender, as well as race and class, is a factor in each tradition?”¹⁴⁰ Ruether posed a challenge for all major world religions to “critique patterns that may have contributed to environmental destruction and recover environmentally friendly traditions” and, therefore, make “real connections between theory and practice.”¹⁴¹ Commenting that most world religions have patterns that justify the domination of women, both in religious practices and in society, Ruether asserts the following:

The challenge of ecological theology and ethics is to knit together, in the light of both earth knowledge and the crisis of human history, a vision of divine presence that both underlies and sustains natural processes and also struggles against the excesses of the powerful and reaches out to the victimized to create communities of mutual flourishing.¹⁴²

The quote above spotlights several challenges and goals. It spotlights that the challenges of revision and construction must direct theology and ethics towards the goal of unification and healed relationships.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, ix-xi*.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

In directing specific critiques and questions to Islam, Ruether recognizes its patterns of cosmology and ethics in the conception of God, and the role of human and non-human creation found in contemporary Islamic and Islamic mystic thought.¹⁴³ Ruether further acknowledges the position of Islamic environmentalists who stress that ensuring the “right care for the earth is an integral part” of the duty of Muslims.¹⁴⁴ She also comments on the hierarchical framework present in the Islamic worldview. Ruether further mentions that no religion is so embattled on the question of women and gender roles as contemporary Islam, in this statement:

Yet Muslims today insist that the Qur’an defends women’s full equality before God. Women simply have different rules than men in society, but that does not make them spiritually inferior. Muslim feminists, like Muslim environmentalists, insist that the outbursts of misogyny in the tradition and from fundamentalists...are not truly representative of the original spirit of Islam as intended by the prophet.¹⁴⁵

Responses to Ruether’s critiques serve to pinpoint a contemporary Islamic problem which manifests in the disconnection between theory and practice. Similar responses from many Islamic feminists and environmentalists become very telling of a critical intersection, i.e., the insistence that the Qur’an defends gender and environmental justice. Furthermore, they insist that the problem lies in traditionalists’ and fundamentalists’ interpretations, which do not represent “true” Islam; thus, Ruether’s view that Muslims largely do not draw the connection between women’s subordination and the impoverishment of nature. The position of this study aligns with Islamic feminist hermeneutics regarding the Qur’an on this grave point in critical ways.

Since the early 2000s, more religious views have begun to link their worldviews with environmental ethics, and in agreement with Ruether, “more absent is attention to issues of class,

¹⁴³ Ibid, 72-73.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

race, and cosmology.”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, the positionality in this research strives for inclusivity of not only gender issues (binary and non-binary), but matters of class, race, ecology and cosmology as well.

Gender, social justice, and eco-justice problems are cross-cutting with substantial proof that the most adversely affected by environmental degradation are women, children, the economically disadvantaged, and people of color.¹⁴⁷ In an article on the 2018 United Nations Climate Summit, one writer identified the biggest takeaway as the “importance of promoting gender equality and women’s leadership in climate policy.”¹⁴⁸ The writer noted the statement of a woman in attendance: “There cannot be climate justice without gender justice.”¹⁴⁹ The Islamic discourses connecting gender inequality and ecological imbalance requires taking into account the vast cultural, ethnic, and regional diversity of Muslims. What would come close to being universally acceptable by Muslims entails understanding the importance and elements of Islamic authority.

First and foremost, the Qur’an remains the foundation of religious knowledge, followed by hadith literature as supplementary material to the Qur’an. For Sunnis, the analogical reasoning of classical jurists (*qiyas*) and consensus of (*ijma’*) of Islamic scholars from among the four “approved” classical schools of Islamic thought is deemed essential. As for Shias, authority remains with the charismatic leadership of descendants of Muhammad. Yet another orientation, Sufism, relies heavily on individual Sufi masters.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹⁴⁷ Maya Lewis, “5 Reasons We Need Gender Conscious Responses to Climate Change,” in *Everyday Feminism Online Magazine* (December 13, 2017 edition), accessed January 1, 2018, <https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/12/gender-conscious-climate-change/>.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

In 2015, Richard C. Foltz analyzed the current environmental policies of countries claiming Islam as the basis of their legislature in an effort to assess whether Islamic sources offer models for an increased environmental responsibility, as claimed by contemporary Islamic environmentalists.¹⁵⁰ Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran were the three countries he reviewed. In Foltz's assessment, Saudi Arabia formulated an Islamic policy on the environment, but it has not been widely circulated, nor does it serve as a basis for any government policy. Pakistan created the National Conservation Strategy Unit in 1992 and also has several environmental NGOs having limited success. However, specific Islamic rhetoric has not been part of their approach to making environmental concerns part of the legislature. Foltz reports that "in Pakistan, as indeed in many other Muslim countries, environmentalism is often seen as a 'Western' ideology and thus dismissed, if not actively opposed."¹⁵¹ Of the three, Iran offered the strongest evidence of applied Islamic environmental ethics, particularly on topics of climate and birth control.²¹ Therefore, as Foltz surmises, formalized environmental ethics across the "Muslim world" holds observable regional differences if there is one at all.¹⁵² This is why, according to Foltz, "to date, Islam has not figured prominently in contemporary discussions on religion and the environment."¹⁵³ He also contends that "some of the most severe environmental problems in the world today is found in countries where the majority of the inhabitants are Muslims."¹⁵⁴ This is a grave issue, as it is a privileged stance to be able to worry about the environment versus starving from a famine or fighting a war.

¹⁵⁰ Foltz, "Islam," 862.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 860-861.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 861.

Foltz provides some critical insights into the Islamic dimensions of the interrelatedness of social inequalities and ecological imbalances. Situating an examination of why the connection between worldview, ecology, and gender has not been central in much of the contemporary Islamic scholarly writings fulfill the first step of Ruether's methodology. Along with critically examining the roots of the problem, in the next step, it is important to look for its solutions. Islamic feminists and environmentalists should address gender, social and eco-justice issues together because they are intertwined; where you find issues of social injustice, you're likely to find environmental issues. Ruether's critiques encourages us to ask some very difficult questions. If we are to consider Ruether's insights, locating the roots of the problem within Islamic dimensions highlight some key concerns regarding interconnections and correlations.

Firstly, as described by Foltz, among traditional Muslim majorities, both environmentalism and feminism are viewed as "Western" ideologies and are typically dismissed or opposed. Islamic environmentalists and feminists have made very similar responses to ecological and gender issues respectively. Deconstructing the systematic nature of patriarchy, hierarchy, and environmental destructive attitudes and behaviors are imperative to the shifting of the paradigm.

Discourse on Ecology and Islam

Contemporary scholars identifying as Islamic environmentalists, and writers on Islam, ecology, and ethics draw upon primary sources found in Qur'an, hadith reports, and the approaches of commentaries of both medieval and modern sources. Historically, it was not until the 1960s that Muslim intellectuals and scholars began to turn their attention to ecology in reaction to Lynn White Jr.'s essay regarding the origins of the ecological crisis and monotheistic religions.¹⁵⁵ Among the first Islamic scholars to respond were Fazlun M. Khalid and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

¹⁵⁵ Foltz, *Islam and Ecology*, 25.

Khalid is the Founder-Director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science. He has been described as “the single most active ‘Islamic’ environmentalist alive today.”¹⁵⁶ Credited as the founding father of Islamic ecotheology, Nasr stands out prominently among contemporary Muslim scholars on ecology and Islam.¹⁵⁷ Nasr’s contributions to the discourse focus upon the connection between cosmology and environmental destruction, stemming from a disjunction from the ideas of early Islamic thinkers. Both Nasr and Khalid have devoted their lives to raising ecological consciousness among Muslims.

The growing ecological dimension of Islamic theology has resulted in an increase of articles, various blogs, and numerous Muslim organizations and initiatives worldwide, which are dedicated to the topic of Islam and ecology.¹⁵⁸ Among these blog-sites are www.theecomuslim.com and www.khaleafa.com, as well as organizations and initiatives such as “The Green Guide to Hajj,” “The Green Khutba Campaign,” “The Muslim Green Guide to Reducing Climate Change,” “Greening Ramadan,” and the “Clean Medina Campaign.” In 2013, Zaytuna College, the first Muslim liberal arts college in the U.S., hosted a five-day workshop on environmental education in Islamic schools entitled “Planting Seeds for a Greener Tomorrow.”¹⁵⁹ The workshop opened with Zaid Shakir, co-founder of Zaytuna College, making the following statement:

¹⁵⁶ Richard C. Foltz, *Environmentalism in the Muslim World* (New York: Nova Science, 2005), xiii.

¹⁵⁷ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim. “Ecology and Religion: An Overview,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones. vol. 4 (Detroit: Macmillan, 2005), 2611.

¹⁵⁸ Monika Zbidi. “Islamic Environmentalism: The Call to Eco-Jihad,” in *Qantata Goethr-Institute* (2013), accessed June 1, 2019, [14.11.2013https://en.qantara.de/print/17226](https://en.qantara.de/print/17226).

¹⁵⁹ Elaine Pasquini, “Zaytuna College Hosts Historic Workshop on Environmental Education in Islamic Schools,” in *Northern California Chronicle* (2013): 48-49, accessed December 21, 2019, <https://www.wrmea.org/013-april/northern-california-chronicle-zaytuna-college-hosts-historic-workshop-on-environmental-education-in-islamic-schools.html>.

Ecological consciousness is something integral to our religion. Historically, we didn't need a concerted effort to focus people's attention on environmental issues. This was something that our religion did and we did not have to talk about it. It was something we lived. The Qur'an calls our attention to nature and to be in harmony with nature.¹⁶⁰

Another highlight of the workshops was that they included Ameena Jandali, a co-founder of Islamic Networks Group. Jandali discussed her efforts toward a "green" Ramadan and stated that "being environmental is being Muslim and vice versa."¹⁶¹ She added that "for some reason, Muslims do not see environmentalism as part of Islam, but I think we need to educate our community that this is as much of our religion as growing a beard or wearing hijab."¹⁶²

One of the most comprehensive and substantive scholarships regarding Islam, Muslims, and environmental ethics to date is Anna M. Gade's (2019) *Muslim Environmentalisms*. She brings together case studies in "disaster management, educational programs, international development, conservation projects, religious ritual and performance, and Islamic law to rethink key theories."¹⁶³ Gade suggests that Muslim environmentalisms may "shift the foundation of humanistic fields even further for ultimate concerns, like environmental crisis."¹⁶⁴ Moreover, by bringing Islam and the approach of history of religions to bear on environmental humanities, she builds upon the history of religions, and the topic of Islam and ecology by re-orientating environmental humanities.¹⁶⁵ Gade characterizes Muslim environmentalisms this way:

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, 1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 28.

As per standard theory and method in the study of religion, what can be considered to be replicated are the patterns of interaction of local and global formations, not any regional traits indexed as to how strongly or weakly they might be normatively indexed to be “Islamic.” The Qur’an, for example, has authority across diverse systems and expected presence in religious thought and practice; it is not presented here to be a predictor of Muslim attitudes.¹⁶⁶

She further insists that Muslim diversity illuminates their diverse perspectives. According to Gade, patterns to the processes are linked to a common textual tradition “which are to be accessed historically-textually or anthropologically.”¹⁶⁷ She explains that her objective is to clarify global patterns extending across space and time:

Sources like Quran and established Muslim traditions of religious thought and practice, as well as historical experiences like European colonialism, are shared all across the world in differing registers. Generalized conclusions... both inductive and deductive are not the final word, but rather here represent an invitation to others to test frameworks with the same rigor and depth.”¹⁶⁸

Each chapter in Gade’s book demonstrates descriptive and critical approaches and reflects “pivotal questions in Islamic studies and history of religions familiar from the past twenty years,” such as the consideration of local and global connections.¹⁶⁹ This includes the religion as studied from anthropological and postcolonial perspectives; a look at systematic

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

theology and ethics as they are usually deployed in “environmental” Islam, as with Qur’anic verses, programs to “green” the pillars of Islam, and so forth; linkages of law, ethics, and politics and practice; religious symbols across history and culture; integrating the awareness of the long-standing impact of Sufi tradition into conversations about lived Islam; and the consideration of how the environment emerges from Muslim thought and practice.¹⁷⁰ Gade summarizes her arguments on Muslim environmentalisms in combination with several interdisciplinary fields (i.e., religious studies, Islamic studies, and environmental studies).¹⁷¹

Remarkably, several intriguing conclusions are made by Gade as she looks at the traditions and resources that Muslims draw on to address ecology and environmental change. Her ideas bear noting that they offer comprehensive insights into constructing a more liberated future. Gade’s analysis of Islam, Muslims, and environmentalisms indirectly spotlights the prospect for an ecofeminist agenda:

Most recently, the growing academic study of women and Islamic legal reform, and Muslims and gender, more generally, consider some lived dynamics of development and social change. However, many questions remain understudied and under-theorized, primarily through an explanation of how Islamic social thought and practice combine in such contexts, which is a nexus for the understanding of the transmission, reception, and possibly even effectiveness of messages about Islam and the environment.¹⁷²

She distinguishes two modes or rationales of which environmental ethics “overlap productively”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 246-247. See Gade’s full list from her book.

¹⁷² Ibid., 53-54.

among Muslims in her analysis. She identifies these as “Islam for the sake of the environment,” and “Muslims who cast environmentalism for religious goals.”¹⁷³

Islam for the sake of the environment involves Islamic recognition for an environmental message exemplified in “greening” of normalized rituals and theology; the use of prescriptive messages (such as interfaith outreach); and requires essentialization of Islam to assert authority to the desired degree.¹⁷⁴ In addition, it is motivated by some “form of care and concern to address a problem or to address a crisis; may include environmental programs already underway and given an authoritatively Islamic, and usually scriptural, justification as sources of “solutions” to the environmental challenge and crisis.¹⁷⁵ They focus upon religious teachings e.g., *khilāfah*—stewardship, a ritual like a “greened” pillar of Islam, or an authoritative public pronouncement, interfaith declaration, or *fatwa* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority).¹⁷⁶ Gade evinces the advocacy of non-governmental organizations as prime examples of the kinds of structures that utilize Islam for the sake of environmentalist goals.¹⁷⁷ According to Gade, “It opens, in fact, with a discussion of “Environmental science” and “problems,” casting the environment in terms of “crisis” and with overtones of the “contextual” examination of liberation theology.”¹⁷⁸ To achieve her primary goal of challenging inherited colonial frameworks, Gade brings our awareness to the embedded Orientalist, Anglo, and Euro-centric definitions (i.e., environmentalism and feminism), and the history and development of religious,

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 37-40.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

environmental, and feminist studies. Gade maintains that not only have this led to an essentialization of Islam, this have subjugated Islam under “monolithic frameworks.”¹⁷⁹ Embedded Orientalist, Anglo, and Euro-centric definitions have overshadowed the modes in which Muslims engage in environmentalism.

Muslims who pursue environmentalism for religious goals have a “growing genealogical recognition that Muslim sources represent autonomous systems of knowledge not only for European sciences but also for its humanities.”¹⁸⁰ Gade asserts that they deviate from customary paradigms that identify and describe the theory and practice of environmental studies in response to a crisis, or as “problems” to solve.¹⁸¹ This is exemplified in the historical ethnography of Muslims, among whom Gade did extensive fieldwork, as well as in the impact of Sufi traditions on conversations about lived Islam.¹⁸² She describes them as committed Muslims practicing self-conscious environmentalism as they view environmentalism strictly as a religious practice:

The environment is not assumed from the start to be determined by a problem or in crisis, but through bundled commitments here shaped by Muslim historical tradition; constructively, these help to illuminate what could be our shared project in the environmental humanities overall. I develop the proposition that religion, as informed by human endeavors like law, science, and art, may create the very structures through which humans understand their environmental problems, formulate committed

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 248.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸² Ibid., 28.

environmentalisms, and construe how “the environment” ought to matter as an ethical and humanistic result.¹⁸³

Gade suggests that advancing beyond “inherited colonial frameworks and other misplaced totalizations” requires elucidating worldwide patterns across space and time. This, she insists, is the grand “invitation to others to test frameworks.”¹⁸⁴

Islamic Feminist Discourse

Influential foundational thinkers of Islamic feminist discourse include Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed. Their endeavors deserve special mention. Mernissi’s writings in the 1980s and 1990s advocated a focus on women-centered efforts in transforming the discourse from within Islam. She was convinced that women must participate in creating Islamic knowledge. Her scholarship explored and illuminated the female viewpoint of Islamic history, challenged the practices in the historical disciplines on women, addressed the exclusion of Muslim women, and tackled issues of reinterpretation.

Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate by Leila Ahmed (1992) is likely the most influential scholarship on the contemporary discourse.¹⁸⁵ Ahmed’s work integrates all scholarship categories on women and Islam—religious language and thought; religious and mystical experiences; and social and institutional aspects. Situated in Arab culture and Islamic manifestations, Ahmed identifies the contemporary problem Muslim women face in Islamic societies. She contends that multiple variables are acting upon the current discourse that

¹⁸³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸⁵ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

coalesces with the “reemergent emblem of the veil.”¹⁸⁶ Ahmed critically examines the roots of the problem, offers potential seeds for solving the problem, and suggests how to move toward a more liberated present by showing how the status of Muslim women changed over time.

According to Ahmed, by the Abbasid period, women’s rights, which she believes Prophet Muhammad had established in his example, were largely absent. Ahmed asserts that “the acceptance of women as participants in and authorities on the central affairs of the community steadily declined in the ensuing Islamic period.”¹⁸⁷ She, like many Islamic feminists, contend that those in power misrepresented the Qur’an to achieve their own ends. The forces of this transformation have placed Muslim women in the middle of a controversial battle, which persists to this day. Ahmed’s historical and analytical look at women in the Middle East and Islam points us toward the present-day factors in which gender disparity struggles continue.

A core similarity among Islamic feminists includes scholarship that seeks to analyze, revise, and reinterpret primary texts (Qur’an and hadith reports), Islamic history, and normative teachings (i.e., *fiqh* – jurisprudence) from a “feminist” perspective. Islamic feminists tend to stress the distinctions between the aspects of the Qur’an that are universal and timeless and aspects that are contingent on particular historical settings. Core differences surround particular hermeneutical and epistemic positions of a given scholar/activist as to whether or not the Qur’an affirms the principle and practice of equality for all human beings without addressing possible hierarchical elements. Amina Wadud (1992) and Asma Barlas (2002) are thinkers belonging to this group.¹⁸⁸ They utilize the classical Islamic methodology of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning)

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 235.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁸ Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999); and Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in*

and *tafsir* (interpretation) along with the tools of linguistic and literary criticism, feminist socio-historiography, and anthropology. They have two broad aims: (a) tracing and problematizing patriarchal religious knowledge that sanctions gender inequality; and (b) producing alternative readings that are egalitarian and, meanwhile, based on Islamic ethical and theological principles.¹⁸⁹ Their general argument follows a particular pattern: first, they note that Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was constructed and consolidated from the patriarchal thinking and behavior in the classical period of institutionalization (c. 9th–12th centuries); then, they posit that patriarchal jurisprudence informs various contemporary Islamic ideologies, law (*shari'a*), and Islamic practices, further asserting that selective hadith reports are used to support and reinforce patriarchal ideologies and practices.¹⁹⁰ They hold that since it is a given that patriarchal ideologies and practices impede and subvert egalitarianism, a revision with new hermeneutical insights are imperative.¹⁹¹

Islamic feminists prefer referring directly to the Qur'an and provide important re-visions. Islamic feminist hermeneutics formulated from the notion that the Qur'an has a gender-egalitarian episteme refers to verses from the Qur'an such as 49:13 as evidence: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female, and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous

Islam (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); and Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁹ Mulki Al-Sharmani, "Islamic Feminism: Transnational and National Reflections," in *Approaching Religion* (2014), accessed June 1, 2019, File:///G:/Feminism%20and%20Islam/67522-Article%20Text-81438-1-10-20171119.pdf.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”¹⁹² After making distinctions between the aspects of the Qur’an that are universal and timeless imperatives, and aspects that are contingent in particular historical settings, they approach what they find as problematic in three ways. They revisit verses from the Qur’an to correct the stories in circulation, such as human creation accounts and narratives on the Garden of Eden. They cite and highlight the verses commonly interpreted to justify male dominance (4:34).

Kecia Ali (2006) and Aisha Hidayatullah (2014) are other thinkers who have since disagreed or noted conditional elements in their epistemic positions. Hidayatullah identifies what she deems as hierarchical verses of the Qur’an, such as 2:223, 2:228, and 4:34, and argues that these verses “promote male control over female.”¹⁹³ She also contends that Islamic feminists must consider what this means for the “Qur’anic feminist project.”¹⁹⁴ Other Islamic feminists concentrate their efforts in critical examinations of *fiqh* (Ziba Mir-Hosseini), hadith literature (Kecia Ali and Sa’diyya Shaykh), and shari’a law (Aziza al-Hibri and Shaheen Sardar Ali).¹⁹⁵

Toward Integration: Ecofeminist Applications on the Discourses

Likely the most prominent thinkers on the feminist and environmental topics respectively, both Ahmed and Nasr’s inquiry methods identifies a contemporary problem in Islam. Ahmed focuses on the declining role of women in Islam, and Nasr tackles ecological degradation. They both critically examine the roots of the problem. Furthermore, they both

¹⁹² The Quran.com Team. Sahih International translation of 49:13, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://quran.com>.

¹⁹³ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld Productions, 2006); Ayesha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁹⁴ Al-Sharmani, “Islamic Feminism.”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

acknowledge that the Qur'an carries a strong message of social justice and assert that "traditionalist" misinterpretations of the Qur'an and hadith literature have led to the current problems. They utilize historical and source criticism of some primary sources and employ a rationalist approach toward resolutions. Nasr's resolution seeks to heal through a deep and intellectual reconnection with the sacredness of God and all of God's creation. Ahmed's resolution includes the retrieval of the lost egalitarian aspects of Islam.

Ruether's methods of inquiry coincide with much of contemporary Islamic feminist writings, particularly with Ahmed's. Ahmed contends that "throughout Islamic history, the constructs, institutions, and modes of thought devised by early Muslim societies that form the core discourses of Islam have played a central role in defining women's place in Muslim society."¹⁹⁶ Contemporary Islamic scholarly writings strongly indicate the necessity of a deeper excavation of how and why hierarchical and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic primary sources became the dominant trend of Islamic authority, in a manner that brings together social and eco-justice. Therefore, combining these feminist aspirations with ecological concerns is imperative. Similar responses from some contemporary Muslim feminists and environmentalists indicate fascinating commonalities. The green movement and feminism are both developing movements among Muslims in the contemporary world. However, scholarship on their intersection is sparse and disconnected.

Muhamad Ali and Nawal Ammar are among the first to write on the integration of ecofeminism and Islam. Some of the questions Ali and Ammar investigate lead to significant insights regarding ecofeminist thinking within Islam. In 2014, Muhamad Ali surveyed "the ways in which some Muslim scholars and activists have quite recently begun to address environmental

¹⁹⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 1.

issues at the intersection of Islam and ecofeminism.”¹⁹⁷ He remarks on the need to rethink the interconnectedness between ecology and gender holistically. Ali insists that although Muslim environmentalists have played their part in interfaith and ecological meetings, a more holistic approach requires joining forces with feminists.¹⁹⁸ He further argues that Muslim feminists have yet to incorporate environmental concerns and solutions to the Earth’s crisis.¹⁹⁹ In conclusion, Ali contends that the sacred, ecology, and gender are disconnected entities in Islamic ideologies and studies; and that although feminists agree that women have become the primary victims of ecological decay, there is still no direct connection with gender issues and other forms of injustices among Muslim environmentalists and feminists.²⁰⁰ Ali further acknowledges that Nawal Ammar is among the rare thinkers who combines an ecofeminist critique with ideas based on Islamic social justice.

Nawal Ammar (2000), on the topic of eco-justice and Islam, asserts that “the root of the problem of population growth for many Muslim countries lies in the marginalized condition of women.”²⁰¹ Ammar further states that environmental issues such as overpopulation are the result of the patriarchal interpretation of Islam and are in “direct opposition to early Islamic history and the holy texts.”²⁰² Ammar argues that environmental issues must be addressed within a broader

¹⁹⁷ Muhamad Ali, “Integrating Islam and Ecofeminism: A Monotheistic Approach to Earth Crisis,” in *Body memories: Goddesses of Nusantara, Rings of Fire and narratives of Myth*, ed. Dewi Candraningrum (Jakarta: Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan Press, 2014), 113. Ali notes that currently there are only a few scholars who connect Islam and ecofeminism.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁰¹ Ammar, “Islam and Eco-Justice,” 865.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

context that designates women's rights of equal access to both natural and social resources.²⁰³ She emphasizes the concepts of *tawhīd* (God's oneness), *khalīfa* (human viceregency), and *amana* (the bestowing of Divine trust to humans), as she connects ecology and women's rights in Islam.²⁰⁴ In another essay with Allison Gray (2017), Ammar, asserts that ecofeminism is indeed compatible with Islamic texts if read as inherently ethical and egalitarian in spirit as proposed by such female scholars and activists as Asma Barlas, Fatima Mernissi, and Amina Wadud.²⁰⁵ She also points out that Muslims are inclined to frame any discussion on environmental problems in terms of a social justice paradigm that characterizes traditional Islamic thought on environmental problems as the direct result of human injustices. Ammar's solution for establishing a just society is grounded on the notion requiring the empowerment of women.²⁰⁶

Like Nasr and Ahmed, Ammar believes that a solution requires retrieving a forgotten Islam that focuses on equity, distributive justice, and respect for the environment. Unlike Nasr and Ahmed, she draws particular attention to the overlapping oppression and exploitation of women and nature. Ammar makes a quick note of the perspectives among Muslims. One being a traditionalist perspective, which views environmental crises as the "divine will of God," signaling end-time scenarios of world destruction.²⁰⁷ This perspective of predestina-

²⁰³ Ammar, "An Islamic Response to the Manifest Ecological Crisis," 131-146.

²⁰⁴ Nawal Ammar, "Ecological Justice and Human Rights for Women in Islam" in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, eds. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 377-379.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 379.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 383.

tion, according to Ammar, dominates among Muslims today.²⁰⁸ Ammar also acknowledges that the overwhelming majority of Muslims who live in developing countries are largely poor, encounter water supply and quality problems, and desertification and public health issues. Additionally, she notes that most Muslim societies have significantly high birthrates, and population control has been a sensitive matter, further stating that Muslims generally have difficulty “seeing that environmental destruction is a direct result of “human injustices and greed.”²⁰⁹ Muslims view themselves as the victims of “post-colonialism, racism, poverty, enslavement, and unfair demonization.”²¹⁰ She takes a rationalist position as she offers an Islamic response that assumes a “confident and responsible world community of Muslims that sees itself engaged in the problems on this earth as active contributors to a global solution.”²¹¹ Fulfilling Ammar’s vision requires a fundamental shift in “Islamic” consciousness.

Conclusion: Building Bridges

The life of Prophet Muhammad, the onset of Islam, the subsequent development of Islamic empires, and systems of law provide many insights into how Muslims reason across time and space. Historically, contexts with social, economic, and religious imbalances have produced socio-political and religious manifestations in response to those imbalances. Islam was no different in this manner. Pre-Islamic Arabia was marked by its power imbalance—the rich over the poor, Arabs over non-Arabs, a clan over other clans, elders over the young, and men over women. The Prophet, whose ideas were revolutionary in many ways, was one such response to the social imbalance that marks the setting of 7th century Arabia. His “new religious movement”

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

attempted to change the attitudes and behavior of the society in which he lived. Texts record that he sought to give a voice and rights of agency and authority to the so-called under-classed—poor, minorities, the enslaved, and women. Texts also document his concern for animals and the environment, referencing his insisting on the well-treatment of animals and environmental conservation. The life example of Muhammad went against the cultural and religious grain of Arabian society. His teaching went against the ideas and practices of much of the world at that time. Several contemporary feminist and environmentalist Islamic scholars contend that the traditional culture was reinstated after his death and took over many aspects of what he struggled to change. What followed were more hegemonic structures of cultural, environmental, and gendered hierarchy. Gender and social disparities and ecological degradation are interconnected and multi-layered.

Leila Ahmed provides a wealth of historical insights on the discourse in *Women and Gender in Islam*. She highlights the problem various interpretations of the Qur'an have posed for Muslim women. Ahmed indicates that approaching Islam through theology is of utmost importance, and Ammar reminds us that around the world and within Muslim majority regions, the factors of ecological destruction and social injustices are inseparable. Gade offers critiques and suggests constructions. Her book leaves us with three points of profound theoretical relevance—“moving beyond a ‘crisis’ paradigm; articulating notions of ultimate environmental justice sensibly, measuredly, and in both proximate and ultimate frames; and ethical responses to environmental conditions enacted concerning a universal and socially plural human situation.”²¹²

Several commonalities surface when applying an ecofeminist perspective to contemporary Islamic discourses on women and ecology. Islamic feminists and environmentalists employ

²¹² Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, 253.

similar methodology, have similar responses, and view Islamic traditionalists similarly.

Rosemary Radford Ruether's insights and critiques directed at probing questions toward Islam, if taken seriously, would prompt an ecofeminist inspection resulting in new scholarly insights.

Thus, Ruether is a catalyst for critique and is less necessary for construction. What does this mean for the possibility of a more liberated future? How and why are the intersection of environmental destruction and gender disparities critical to understanding the dynamics of both? Within Islamic contexts, scholarship is scarce. The development of this claim is front and center in the next chapter. It is a starting point for more in-depth analyses on many interconnections of ecology, race, class, and gender issues within an Islamic worldview. The outcomes would potentially offer a crucial, holistic alternative. Many of Ruether's insights on the healing of Earth and relationships can offer some insight. Focusing on the crucial etiology and enforcement factors and consequences could also provide avenues for a more just and sustainable global society. Bridging the gap between theory and practice is possible. In sum, acknowledging and connecting the work of Muslim feminists and environmentalists continue to grow in importance. Ruether's ecofeminist theology stresses the consequences of hierarchical and patriarchal religious interpretations. Therefore, an ecofeminist response to environmental ethics and the interrelated issues of gender disparity are offered for a profoundly critical and selective reinterpretation of Islamic discourses.

Part II - Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

Chapter Two: Synthesizing Feminist Aspirations with Ecological Concerns

*Muslims have pointed to the Qur'an, hadith, Sufi poems, and legal thought, and some have proposed some normative recommendations to governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as individual and groups, but much more are critically needed for them to rethink ecology and gender in a more holistic manner so that human and nonhuman societies could live in peace, in a better, interconnected world.*²¹³

Muhamad Ali emphasizes the need to rethink the interconnectedness between ecology and gender holistically. Islamic feminist scholars who have addressed and sought to dismantle patriarchal interpretations of Islam have, knowingly or unknowingly, helped undermine normative assumptions about the relationship between ecology and gender. This chapter argues that ecofeminist theology in Islam synthesizes environmental ethics and feminism to produce an egalitarian socio-ecological theology. Therefore, the anticipation of an imperative and inevitable paradigmatic shift. Ruether's ecofeminist theories and methodology offer examples that implore a line of questioning that could prove beneficial. This chapter aims to explain components of the proposed ecofeminist theology in Islam, provide a foundational definition and contours, and offer possible pitfalls in moving forward. I integrate close reading and discourse analysis of various feminist theologies, as well as close reading, discourse and textual hermeneutic analysis of Muslim and Islamic feminists and environmentalists as a foundation for constructive theology. The critical questions of this chapter are as follows: Why is this much-needed turn critical to the topic of feminism in Islam? What is required to synthesize Islamic feminists' and environmentalists' ideas? These questions evaluate the ontological and epistemological foundations necessary for conducting Islamic ecofeminist theology in contrast with contemporary Islamic discourses. Such an analysis indicates the need for establishing prerequisites to conducting Islamic ecofeminist theology. In addition, I identify the systems currently in place, upholding power imbalances—hierarchy and patriarchy, and how these ideas

²¹³ Ali, "Integrating Islam and Ecofeminism," 115.

lead us to how we relate to God, ourselves, fellow human beings, and the rest of creation. It is hypothesized that a systematic process will unfold from the study as mentioned above.

Ecofeminist Appraisal on the Discourses: What We Learned

Current trends in Islamic environmental ethics portend that while Islamic environmentalists agree that Islam does possess great resources that value the environment, their positions after this point tend to fall into these particular categories: (1) those who believe humans belong in a hierarchy of being and they see environmental degradation as a symptom of a broader problem stemming from human societies not living by God's will; (2) those who challenge normative interpretations and offer re-interpretations of traditional contexts into contemporary; (3) those whose solutions are inspired by sectarian perspectives, who, similar to the second group, argues that Muslim thinkers need to reassess some basic interpretations of the Islamic tradition to respond effectively to the current crisis; and (4) those focusing primarily on the problem of Islamic anthropocentrism and propose a radically new Islamic theology, which drastically reduces the anthropocentric element. They contend that this is required if Muslims are to adequately address the crisis we face today. In essence, the majority scholarship on Islam and the ecology mainly pertains to Islam for the sake of the environment, that are prescriptive theologies rather than constructive theologies, which are either apologetic or in the genre of religious exhortation.

Feminism within Islamic contexts is not monolithic. Islamic feminists' perspectives, even more than that of Islamic environmentalists, are diverse and multiple and continue to evolve. Female Muslim scholars with various backgrounds and perspectives undertake Islamic feminism, and many are committed to their religious knowledge. The academic journey has been continuous, and many Muslim women have never given up. The movement labeled as Islamic feminism is responsible for critical onto-epistemological shifts regarding primary Islamic sources

and exegetical analyses. These are significant milestones in the development of projects on Islamic knowledge.

With few exceptions, there is currently a disconnection between ecological and social concerns in Islam. An examination of Islamic feminist and environmentalist thought informs us that classical interpretations of primary Islamic sources have laid the current foundational structure of Islamic societies, ideology, and dogma. Furthermore, conceptions on both women and ecology are corroborated and enforced by these interpretations. This chapter contends that one must change the paradigm in the same way it was created—through the repetition of information.

A paradigm is a model or framework. A paradigm is also a worldview underlying the theories and methodology of a particular subject, which are wedged in the mind that inform concepts. Contemporary Islamic feminist and environmentalist responses have been insufficient in addressing the interconnection between gender and global ecological crises. A conscious and deliberate alternative is therefore essential to avoiding a theological vacuum. Figure 1 shows recent responses of most Islamic feminists and environmentalists overlaid onto Ruether’s primary three-step methodology.

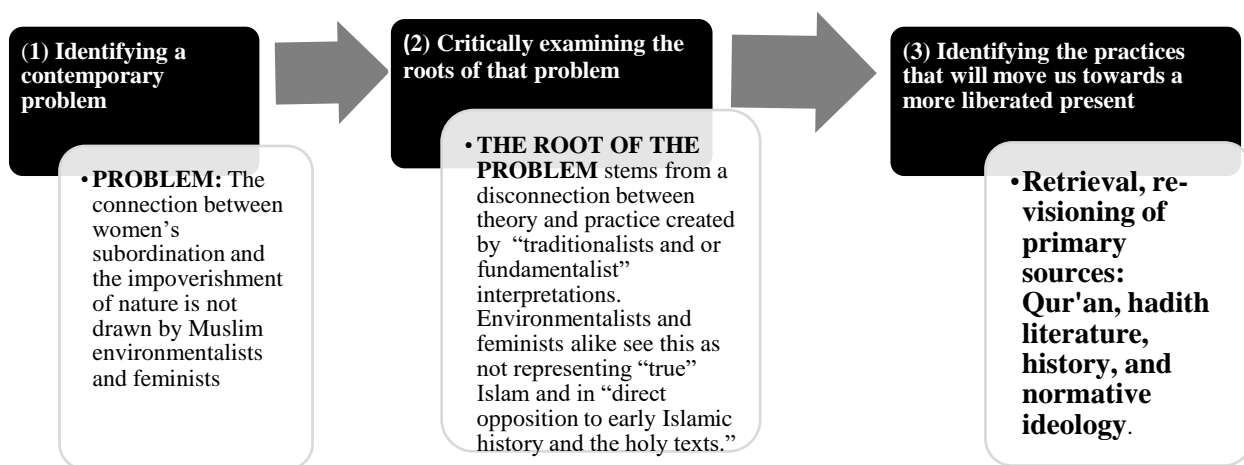


Figure 1: Ruether’s three-step methodology applied to the contemporary responses of most Islamic feminists and environmentalists.

Ecofeminist thinking in Islam offers a paradigm wherein the rights of nature are as necessary as social rights among humanity. Islamic ecofeminist theology is put forth as an alternative paradigmatic shift from most contemporary responses among Islamic feminists and environmentalists. Eco and gender-conscious theology lead away from anthropocentric and androcentric interpretations. As an alternative theology, the finished process of this endeavor must be a Qur'anically informed, historically conscious, and all-inclusive creation-affirming Islamic theology.

Why is this a Much-Needed Critical Turn to Feminism in Islam?

An Islamic ecofeminist theology is an alternative, integrative theological approach. Applying disjointed solutions to the common root of ecological and social issues have worked only marginally. The shift is indispensable for three reasons: (1) research shows that the current responses of contemporary Islamic authorities insufficiently address the current global ecological and social crises; (2) ecofeminism offers a holistic approach; and (3) ecofeminism can address immediate environmental and social justice concerns. The process of consciously choosing Islamic ecofeminist theology seeks to align with the desired ideas of equality of value and replace humanistic positions in Islamic ideology. The intention of this paradigm shift is so that Muslims and non-Muslims will find it relatable in the contemporary world and for future generations.

Solutions that do not address the root causes of a problem are incomplete. Striving toward the goals mentioned above offers a holistic approach that does not presume that the problem of Islam and ecology, or Islam, women, and gender, is a simple one or begins from a state of crisis management, nor does it negate meaningful dialogue, insights, and critiques from “outside” sources. Instead, for those dissatisfied with the “rhetorical recycling of pre-modern

norms” of contemporary theologians and scholars of jurisprudence, the proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology seeks to take hold of Muslims and non-Muslims imagination.²¹⁴

The proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology rethinks conceptions and relationships of nature, human beings, and the cosmos. It is a model of self-actualization, pro-actively based on the Qur’an, and incorporates relevant hadith literature. Synthesizing feminist discourse with ecological factors are pivotal in healing relationships between humanity and its relationship with the rest of creation. Healed relationships and liberation are among the central goals of ecofeminism. Consequently, with healing, we need connection. Ecofeminist theology connects feminist aspirations and ecological concerns to heal relationships among creation as a whole. Ecofeminism challenges all dominations; social and species dominations, and healing and liberation are the central goals of its strategies and solutions.

Conducting Theology and Synthesizing Ideas

Interestingly, history bears many similarities between the institutionalization of early Christianity and early Islam. Many feminist scholars on early Christianity propose that women were prominent members of the Church during the formative periods. Marked by the distinct involvement of leadership, some scholars maintain that their loss of power in the Church directly results from the concerted efforts of male Church leaders.²¹⁵ Elisabeth Fiorenza argues that women were not marginal in early Christianity.²¹⁶ Scholars dealing with women in Islam

²¹⁴ Afrasiabi, “Toward an Islamic Ecotheology,” 288-289.

²¹⁵ See Mary C Grey, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1989); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation,” in *Theological Studies* 36, no. 4 (1975): 605-626; and S.A. Johnson, “The Distinctive Role of Women in Early Christianity and Islam,” in *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* (1984): 97-111.

²¹⁶ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998).

make much of the same claim regarding the decline in women's leadership roles.²¹⁷ Women in early Christianity were leaders, teachers, and among the first to convert and become prominent scholars, similar to women in the prophetic period of Islam.²¹⁸ There is a prevailing ethos established by male elites (i.e., rulers, senate, caliphs, priests, and religious scholars).²¹⁹ Both Christian and Muslim women claim that male elites have misinterpreted religious texts, resulting in women losing leadership positions, a strict gendering system, and ritual and body controls. In the past few decades, feminists have taken active leads in dismantling patriarchal normative structures and reconstructing various theologies. Feminist theologies, i.e., Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Womanist, and ecofeminist, reflect the diversity of various feminist positionalities. Nancy R. Howell (2000) constructs a feminist theology by "sorting through feminist/womanist relational principles, and then organizing and connecting them with the assistance of Whitehead's cosmological framework."²²⁰ The result is joining voices that offer a critical response to a Christian patriarchal normative worldview.

²¹⁷ See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and Riffat Hassan, "Feminist Theology: The Challenges for Muslim Women," in *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 5, no. 9 (1996): 53-65.

²¹⁸ See Amira Abou-Taleb, "Gender Discourse in Ibn Sa'd's Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kubra: Deconstructing Ibn Sa'd's Portrayal of the Model Muslim Woman," M.A. Thesis submitted to the American University of Cairo, 2012; and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²¹⁹ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1998); and Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²²⁰ Nancy R. Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysic* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000), 14.

Helene Tallon Russell (2011), like Howell, notes the importance of experience and process philosophy to feminist reconstructions of feminist theology.²²¹ According to Howell, the typical characteristics of Christian and Jewish feminist theologies include an experiential or relational dimension and critical hermeneutics, interpreting the Bible and other authoritative texts as a women's liberation theology, and re-envisioning theological doctrines.²²² How have feminist and environmentalist Muslims gone about re-envisioning Islam when conducting theology?

Islamic Feminists

Arguably, contemporary feminist exegesis of the Qur'an by Muslim women scholars constitutes the "emergent field of Muslim feminist theology in the United States."²²³ Accordingly, when studied as a whole, their works form a cohesive field of scholarship, warranting collective study based upon the observation of three common textual strategies they employ to interpret the Qur'an: (1) Islamic feminist theologians must find an alternative to relying exclusively on the techniques of historical contextualization, (2) holistic/intra-textual reading; and (3) the *tawhidic* paradigm.²²⁴ It is curious that Islamic feminist theologians have not been able to account for specific claims about the Qur'anic episteme and still remain "Islamic" and not considered heretical.²²⁵ Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hasan fit prominently in

²²¹ Helene Tallon Russell, "Introduction to Feminist Theology," in *Creating Women's Theology: A Movement Engaging Process Thought*, eds., Monica A. Coleman, Nancy R. Howell, and Helene Tallon Russell (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 5.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5-9. This is Hidayatullah's summary of Muslim feminist theology.

²²⁴ Ibid., 98. Hidayatullah borrows this phrasing from Amina Wadud, who coins the term "the *tawhidic* paradigm" in her *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 24.

²²⁵ Ibid. Hidayatullah make note of this dilemma.

this category of Islamic feminist theological thinkers. In addition, Fatima Mernissi, Sa'diyya Shaikh, and Kecia Ali also influence this area of scholarship.

Like Jewish and Christian feminists, Islamic feminists have recovered the stories of female figures in early religious history (Hassan and Wadud). Furthermore, Islamic feminists such as Wadud, Barlas, and Shaikh have called for the re-interpretation of the Qur'an in light of women's life experiences. By criticizing male normativity, Wadud and Shaikh utilize the "hermeneutics of suspicion."²²⁶ Many Islamic feminists hold that the Qur'an does not speak of women as an ontologically inferior creation.²²⁷ Besides that, generally, Islamic feminist scholars do not claim epistemological finality.²²⁸

Islamic feminists, such as Riffat Hassan, correspondingly argues that "the sources on which the Islamic tradition is based, mainly the Qur'an, the Hadith literature (oral traditions attributed to the Prophet), and *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), have been interpreted only Muslim men, who have arrogated the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women."²²⁹ Riffat Hassan's work is also influenced by her conversations with "Jewish and Christian women in the United States beginning in 1979."²³⁰ Wadud and Hassan exemplify other insightful strategies for conducting feminist theology.

²²⁶ Ibid., 82.

²²⁷ Aysha Hidayatullah, "Muslim Feminist Theology in the United States," in *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, eds., Ednan Aslan, Marcia Hermansen, and Elif Medeni. New York: Peter Lang GmbH (2013): 81-100, 96-97.

²²⁸ Ibid, 97.

²²⁹ Riffat Hassan, "Equal before Allah? Woman-man Equality in the Islamic Tradition," in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1987): 2-14, 2.

²³⁰ Riffat Hassan, "Feminist Theology: The Challenges for Muslim Women," in *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 5, no. 9 (1996): 53-65.

For Amina Wadud, performing theology proceeds from articulating the Qur’anic ethos of the oneness of God, which she identifies as the *tawhidic* paradigm. It is with this episteme that she engages hermeneutically with the Qur’an. Wadud’s outcome unpacks and demystifies normative interpretations, providing new ethical standards. She demonstrates this position by acknowledging that “no method of Qur’anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices and not necessarily the intent of the text. Yet, often, no distinction is made between text and interpretation.”²³¹ She classifies the various interpretations of women in the Qur’an into three categories: traditional, reactive, and holistic.²³² Classical *tafsir* (exegetical works) form the corpus of traditional interpretations. Although commentators differ in the *tafsir*, their similarities start at the beginning of the Quran’s first chapter and go one verse at a time until the end of the Book. Wadud states that “Little or no effort is made to recognize themes and to discuss the relationship of the Qur’an to itself, thematically.... A methodology for linking similar Qur’anic ideas, syntactical structures, principles, or themes together is almost non-existent. However, what concerns me most about ‘traditional’ *tafsir* is that they were exclusively written by males.”²³³ A reactive translation, according to Wadud, consists primarily of modern scholars’ reactions to severe handicaps of women as an individual and member of society. She asserts that reactive translations “have also failed to draw a distinction between the interpretation and the

²³¹ Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam*, 1.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

text.”²³⁴ Wadud locates her research in the third category—holistic. She proposes a reading “from within the female experience” without stereotypes associated with male interpretations.²³⁵

Wadud’s hermeneutical model utilizes the method of Qur’anic interpretation proposed by modernist scholar and philosopher Fazlur Rahman. Rahman asserts that “the message is not limited to that time or those circumstances historically.”²³⁶ Some Qur’anic passages were revealed at specific times in history, indicated general and particular circumstances. Wadud, therefore, insists that “believers from another circumstance must make practical applications in accordance with how that original intention is reflected or manifested in the new environments.”²³⁷ Wadud argues that this is what is meant by the “spirit” of the Qur’an. She emphasizes that when illuminating the spirit of the Qur’an, there must be a comprehensible and organized hermeneutical model.²³⁸ Wadud’s hermeneutical model scrutinizes (a) the context in which the Qur’an was revealed, (b) an examination of the grammatical composition of how the text says what it says, and (c) the worldview of the texts to arrive at the “spirit” of the Qur’an.²³⁹ The essential conclusions in her final analysis demonstrate that “gender distinction, an inherent flaw, necessary for human communication in the Arabic, is overcome by the text in order to fulfill its intention of universal guidance.”²⁴⁰ Analyzing keywords and expressions concerning humankind in general, and women in particular also reveals contextual understanding, so that

²³⁴ Ibid., 4.

²³⁵ Ibid., 3.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., 5.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

compatible, mutually supportive, functional relationships between men and women are the goal of society.

In her hermeneutical process, Wadud creates the basic paradigms with which she examines and discusses the Qur'an and how its interpretation was generated. She also recognizes the differences between Islamic practice and theory, mainly when it comes to gender issues. In her concluding remarks, Wadud sums up the impact of cultures on Islam and women:

If readers of the Qur'an assumed in any manner that men are superior to women intellectually, spiritually, ontologically, etc.; that men are 'in charge of women'; that men have a more significant role in the continuation of society; that men are natural leaders; that men should 'rule' the family and get obedience from women; that women do not have to participate and contribute to maintain the family and society or that her participation is marginal; then those readers will interpret the Qur'an with those assumptions.²⁴¹

As alternative Qur'anic hermeneutics, Wadud's approach is not exclusively feminist; instead, it is female inclusive, and bypasses traditional gender restrictions.²⁴²

Islamic Environmentalists

S. Nomanul Haq and Kaveh L. Afrasiabi are two Islamic environmentalists holding complementary perspectives and approaches to solving ecological degradation and patriarchy, respectively, with Islamic feminism. Haq asserts that comprehending the environmental crisis from an Islamic stance involves grasping the magnitude of the tasks at hand. Additionally, we must understand the complexities of the so-called modern world and the substance and historical

²⁴¹ Ibid., 51.

²⁴² Ibid., 97.

context of Islamic legacy.²⁴³ He contends that reconstruction, adjustment, and revision are necessary, stating, “The issue cannot be handled meaningfully if its real dimensions are glossed over by theoretical discourse. The questions of power and control, distributive justice, economics, and finance, the currents of market forces, policy-making and tactical politics, and lifestyles and social values are all directly relevant here.”²⁴⁴

Haq begins his analysis of Islam and ecology by considering a fundamental observation: “the question of Islam and ecology ought, to begin with, one of a historical kind.”²⁴⁵ His methodology incorporates recovering what he believes is possible in traditional Islam and direct contemporary Muslims regarding Islam and ecology. Haq concerns himself with reconstructing particular Qur’anic concepts, expanding certain imperatives of the prophetic tradition, and focusing on specific Islamic legal categories.²⁴⁶ He describes his goal as to “illuminate how Islamic culture regards our current global environmental concerns and guide Islamic thinking about them.”²⁴⁷ Many of Haq’s conclusions are informative and instructive. For example, he looks at the attitude and nature of normative sources—the Qur’an, hadith literature, and jurisprudence. He mentions that the scholars of normative perspectives usually assign an epistemic finality to the Qur’an and rarely characterizes it as “a rich and subtle stimulus to religious imagination,” as he does.²⁴⁸ In Haq’s reconstruction, he posits that “if the text is to yield a concrete system, it requires an imaginative reconstruction on the part of the reader...this

²⁴³ Haq, “Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction,” 124.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 124.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

reconstruction cannot claim epistemological finality even though it may stand firm on the grounds of overwhelming community consensus.”²⁴⁹

In a more radical undertaking of Islam and ecology, Kaveh L. Afrasiabi addresses anthropocentric criticism leveled at monotheisms among environmentalists. Afrasiabi believes that humanism in Islam is problematic and insists that it is not enough to show pro-ecology aspects to Islam.²⁵⁰ There are two common Islamic responses to this criticism: one defense is that Islam is based on an “alternate reading of Islam and Islamic history,” and the other moves toward constructing a “viable Islamic concept of nature.”²⁵¹ The first response, he states, is the dominant response. Afrasiabi cites the thinking of Seyyed Hussein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar as prime examples.²⁵² Nasr and Sardar assert that there is no need to redress the wrongful neglect of nature, and Muslims only need to recover their “authentic faith.”²⁵³ In response, Afrasiabi asserts that the perspectives of scholars like Nasr and Sardar reinforce the anthropocentric image of Islam. Afrasiabi asks the pertinent question—can religious humanism be reconciled with the ethical concerns of ecology?²⁵⁴ In Afrasiabi’s assertion, the relationship between Islam and ecology is at a dead-end due to the “conspicuous absence of past tradition to build upon which are void of ecological parameters in contemporary discourse.”²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Afrasiabi, “Toward an Islamic Ecotheology,” 285. Afrasiabi summarizes the criticism and responses of contemporary Islamic discourses on ecology.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 290.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. Also see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (London: Routledge, 2013), accessed June 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315888170>.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 290.

Afrasiabi addresses anthropocentric criticism in the concept of *khalīfa* in Islam.²⁵⁶ Critics assert that the idea not only favors human creation above all non-human creation but also regards nature as its tool and “mandates the human subduing the earth,” which Afrasiabi calls the “technical rationality” of human progress.²⁵⁷ Afrasiabi asks more pertinent questions, the first being—is there an Islamic foundation for the evolution of technical rationality that has led to the wanton exploitation of nature in the name of human progress?²⁵⁸ In response, he again addresses humanism in Islam as problematic, requiring deconstruction before there can be an eco-theology in Islam. His process of deconstruction employs ideas from Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. According to Afrasiabi, “Islamic humanism and the West have anthropocentricity as a common core.”²⁵⁹ Alternatively, he provides a cautionary stance to any who dares to attempt the “task at hand,” asking, “Will this lead us to give up on this project altogether?”²⁶⁰

Suggested Requirements for Conducting Ecofeminist Theology in Islam

In Islamic ecofeminist theology, one can undertake a similar procedure to Islamic feminist hermeneutics, which suggests that the Qur’an is understood through a creation-equalitarian episteme. Three requirements logically follow as the process of conducting ecofeminist theology in Islam moves forward. Each of the following is a suggested Islamic ecofeminist theological prerequisites:

1. The realigning of ontological and epistemological foundations.
2. Addressing dualism, gender, species, and creation hierarchies.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 282-295.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 282-283.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 282.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 283.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

3. The realigning of critical relationships—Deity and creation, human-to-human, and humans and non-humans.

Requirement One: Necessary Ontological and Epistemological Foundations

Three broad areas directly influence theories, methodologies, and teachings in philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. Metaphysics answers questions about what is real. Ontology and cosmology are branches of metaphysics. Ontology deals with the nature of being. Hierarchies include the basic categories of being, how they relate to each other, and how those entities are grouped (i.e., according to their similarities and differences). Throughout human history, humans have been deconstructing the universe and creating underlying structures for everything. Thus, ontologism exists in every facet of human endeavor—from medical research, e-commerce, software engineering, banking, and linguistic processing to theology.

Epistemological theories are the basis for how we organize our understanding of the universe. The term “epistemology” comes from the Greek words “episteme” and “logos.” “Episteme” can be translated as “knowledge,” “understanding,” or “acquaintance,” and “logos” can be translated as “account,” “argument,” or “reason.”²⁶¹ In essence, how we make sense of the world corresponds to how truth and reality are defined. Human beings follow various thinking and reasoning methods (such as historical, dialectical, etc.), supported by different theories. These methods and theories seek to conclusively establish the “objective” nature of reality and truth. Essentially, our perspective matters in reaching an epistemological finality often included in interpreting religious views deemed traditional. Epistemology addresses how we know what is

²⁶¹ Matthias Steup and Neta, Ram, “Epistemology,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2020), ed., Edward N. Zalta, accessed May 26, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/epistemology/>.

real. In regards to its methods, validity, and scope, epistemology or “knowing” happens through one or more of the following: experience, reason, authority, institution, and active construction.²⁶² Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.²⁶³ Understanding how we compile and organize knowledge matters and determines how we approach, treat, conceive, and interpret a given thing. We can also assert that all knowledge is likely affected and influences interpretations of the nature of truth and reality. With the emergence of feminist epistemologies, are more critical, interpretive, and constructive paradigms. Table 1 outlines the various epistemological positions of the feminist theologies used throughout this research along with that of the proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology.

	Ecofeminist Theology	Eco-womanist Theology	Muslim Womanist Theology	Islamic Feminist Theology	Islamic Ecofeminist Theology
Critiques	All Patriarchal superstructures	Patriarchal superstructures, emphasizes colonization	Patriarchal superstructures, imposed through colonization	Patriarchal superstructures in theology	All superstructures supporting dominations
Proposed Construction	Yes, through retrieval of past	Yes, emphasizes historiography/ experience	Yes, emphasizes historiography/ experience	Yes, through retrieval of prophetic era/reinterpretation	Yes, through lens of creational equality
Voice/ Positionality	Emphasizes concerns of ecology, women, socially marginalized	Emphasizes African American women experiences	African American Muslim women experiences	Emphasizes Muslim women experiences	Emphasizes onto-epistemology equality of creation (all creation is Muslim), multi-perspectival
Methodology	Intersectional, inter-religious, inter-denominational	Intersectional	Intersectional	Intersectional	Intersectional, inter-denominational, inter-religious applications

Table 1: Comparison of epistemological positions of various feminist theologies in this research.

Riffat Hassan insights about the necessity of feminist theology present an essential position to begin and conduct Islamic ecofeminist theology. On the challenges faced by women

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

when conducting feminist theology, Hassan states that:

The challenge before women in general and Muslim women, in particular, is to shift from the reactive mindset, in which women must assert their autonomy over their bodies in the face of strong opposition from patriarchal structures and systems of thought and behavior to a pro-active mindset, in which they can finally begin to speak of themselves as full and autonomous human beings who have not only a body but also mind and a spirit.²⁶⁴

Contained within Hassan's statement mentioned above are critical elements to consider.

Changing mindsets, pivotal self-inquiries, and crucial self-reflections reverberate throughout her statement. What has brought women toward conducting theology is well-documented in Islamic feminist discourse. The idea of shifting from a reactive mindset to pro-active mindset warrants a closer inspection. Hassan describes this as the necessity of women to "assert their autonomy over their bodies in the face of strong opposition from patriarchal structures and systems of thought and behavior."²⁶⁵ A pro-active mindset pertains to women who "can finally begin to speak of themselves as full and autonomous human beings who have not only a body but also a mind and a spirit."²⁶⁶

There is an indication that one's ontological position is as critical as one's episteme. What one believes about the origins and nature of their being is as crucial as how one perceives knowledge. For example, in Hassan's study on how women's inequality occurred, she cites three theological questions: How was woman created? Was the woman responsible for the Fall? Why was the woman created? Normative responses to these questions offer profound directives concerning the conceptualizations of women in Islam. Therefore, to overcome negative

²⁶⁴ Hassan, "Feminist Theology," 55.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

conceptualizations of one's ontology, theology must happen out of a profound sense that one's creation (referring to humans in Hassan's case) is on par with and has equivalent intrinsic value as every other human being. Hassan describes this as the value that results from the shift to a pro-active, self-actualized mindset.

At this point, one should ask oneself some questions. Hassan's analysis initiates these questions: What is man's understanding about his life, as the vicegerent of God on earth, designated by the Quran? What kind of self-actualization model(s) might be developed within the framework of normative Islam, which also takes into account the Qur'anic ideals as well as the realities of contemporary Muslim society?²⁶⁷ Her reflective inquiry forces us to contemplate the meaning of life and self-actualization in accomplishing life's goals, utilizing Qur'anic examples in light of the current situations. Hassan asserts that God is characterized by justice in the Qur'an.²⁶⁸ Thereby, she attempts to conduct theology from a "corrected" ontology, which she describes as the ontology of women's full humanity and episteme of Divine justice. Ruether identifies this aspect of her theology as the "critical norm"— "that which promotes women's full humanity is authentic, while that which does not promote it is inauthentic."²⁶⁹

Therefore, an ecofeminist turn is founded on the episteme of Divine justice, reflected in an ontological model of equal intrinsic value of all creation. The first fundamental shift in consciousness is to impart onto-epistemological awareness to the realization that our creation in its essence is already perfect. We are not created as sinners, criminals, or inferior, nor are we derivatives. Creation is in and of itself innately worthy because it is God's creation. The purpose of Divine justice must challenge and eradicate all social and species dominations. The definition

²⁶⁷ Ibid. These questions are posed by Hassan.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18-19. Ruether's critical norm.

of an egalitarian ontology is to assure the inalienable value of everything and everyone on this planet. An egalitarian ontology must liberate creation as a whole from all ideological exploitations.

Requirement Two: Realigning Critical Relationships

Ruether stresses that we need to look more closely at the causes of the particular distortion of our relationship to one another and the earth through myths of separation. As a result, “subjugated persons who have internalized patriarchal-hierarchical view of themselves, others and nature, require less and less overt control by the authority in power relations. Acknowledging that internalization subdues impulses to resist exploitation establishes the need for healthy selfhood, which entails acknowledging that existence is dependent and interdependent. Many feminist scholars see this as essential to the emergence of feminist selfhood.”²⁷⁰ Ecofeminists insist that relationship-differentiation-mutuality models replace self-separation-individuation models. As noted earlier, accomplishing this and establishing the discussed onto-epistemological goals requires redirecting one’s thinking and actions toward a consciously relational worldview.

Patriarchal ideology produces several forms of gender-inequity practices in society. In every social, political, cultural, and religious aspect, male figures are ranked higher than female figures in the hierarchy. In such cultures, societies, institutions, and theologies, men have control over women. Therefore, women always come second and are considered inferior to men.²⁷¹ Gradually, practices of gender inequity have become part of the culture and traditions of such

²⁷⁰ Nader Said-Foqahaa, “Arab Women: Duality of Deprivation in Decision-making under Patriarchal Authority,” in *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, 9(-), 2011, 234-272, accessed May 2, 2019, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/963448682?accountid=10141>.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

societies. Leila Ahmed (1992) has tracked the evolution of the male-female relationship in Islam and how these changes have since determined their respective roles.²⁷² According to Kecia Ali (2010, 2016), over time, the role of women in general, wives in particular, and the practice of slavery and concubinage became conflated within Islamic family law and societal structures.²⁷³ These types of dynamics have led many feminists to conclude that different forms of oppression are an analogous dominance-subordination model that describes some male-female relationships and are applied to oppress humans and the environment.²⁷⁴

As the second step, here lies another shift in consciousness. We must come to know and sincerely believe that God has endowed us with innate abilities to distinguish between good and evil.²⁷⁵ This then means that God has endowed us agency. If relationships are a reality, then “relationships are a fundamental part of all reality.”²⁷⁶ Importantly, what should be the relationship between God and humans, humans and humans, and humans and non-humans?

Asserting that an Islamic ecofeminist theology must be conscious of the limitations of non-Islamic sources, it must consider all types of inclusive relationships, human and ecological, biotic and abiotic. Thus, this Islamic ecofeminist theology posits a relational aspect of God, with the root metaphor being that “God cannot be unjust.”²⁷⁷ The proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology seeks to instill a model of intrinsic value that many Islamic feminists believe is the

²⁷² Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 1.

²⁷³ Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Simon and Schuster, 2016); and Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁷⁴ Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology*, 46.

²⁷⁵ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, trans., *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Qur'an 91:8 states, “then inspired it (the soul) with its (instincts of) evil and piety.”

²⁷⁶ Howell, *A Feminist Cosmology*, 46.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

root of Islam in Muhammad’s example—inclusivity and Divine justice. This relational quality must be evident in theologies claiming Islamic sources. This Islamic ecofeminist theology commits to the idea of “all creation, human, non-human, living, and the non-living are interconnected, interdependent, and inclusive in the definition of nature”—in relationships that are non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, and non-anthropocentric.²⁷⁸

Requirement Three: Addressing Dualism and Hierarchy

Binary opposition is the system of language and thought by which two ideological opposites are strictly defined and set off.²⁷⁹ The “presence-absence” dichotomy is a classic example of binary opposition.²⁸⁰ These opposites are a fundamental element of thought in many cultures, whereby “people value one part of a binary opposition over another; we give superiority to be privileged, and the other one is usually put aside as having the second priority.”²⁸¹ Many major world religions, spiritualities, and philosophies recognize traditional dualisms of spirit and body, sacred and profane, and purity and impurity. Ruether asserts that to uncover dualisms, one should look at the myths of separation and domination of religions.²⁸² The overarching argument of ecofeminism is that categorical or dualistic hierarchies are forms of patriarchal and hierarchical structures used to justify oppression and domination of nature, women, and the marginalized. Also, these interconnected forms of domination and oppression continue to manifest their abusive powers in the “reinforcement of the categorical or dualistic hierarchies by

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁷⁹ Greg Smith, “Binary Opposition and Sexual Power in ‘Paradise Lost’” in *The Midwest Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1996): 383-400, 383.

²⁸⁰ C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2004, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1056-binaryopposition.html>.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ruether, “Ecofeminism—The Challenge to Theology,” 8.

making them sacred through religious and/or scientific constructions.”²⁸³ As long as this continues as an integral component of structuring and justifications, patriarchy is also justified.²⁸⁴ How does traditional dualisms arise in the history and development of Islamic theology? How might a theological position that liberates creation as a whole from all exploitations dismantle oppositional binaries and hierarchies?

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues that dualism refers to dichotomies that categorize things, persons, and ideas based on their differences.²⁸⁵ The results are in the meaning attributed to the cost of opposition and objectification. The constructed oppositional pairs are rarely equal with dominance enforcing objectification. The tension created requires the subordination of one over the other as a way to resolve the tension. In the end, exploitation results from one being regarded as superior (supremacy) and the other inferior (subordination).²⁸⁶ Due to this, dualisms such as culture/nature and spirit/mind were historically developed as rationalities for dominance and hierarchy.²⁸⁷

Several scholars have acknowledged the dichotomous and hierarchical elements of Islamic primary sources, classical interpretive analysis, and contemporary manifestations by closely examining cosmogony and creation narratives (Winter, 1995; Khuri, 2001; Malti-Douglas, 2001; Kugle, 2007).²⁸⁸ A close examination of two of these cosmogonies and narratives

²⁸³ Hobgood-Oster, “Ecofeminism,” 533.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Political Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 68-70.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 70.

²⁸⁷ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 73-74.

²⁸⁸ Michael Winter, “Islamic Attitudes Toward the Human Body,” in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 36–45; Fuad Khuri, *The Body in Islamic Culture* (London: Saqi Books, 2000); Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “Faces of Sin: Corporal

is performed in Chapters Four and Five to highlight how religious and political authority has supported an alienation worldview by appealing to separations. Normative worldviews often present oppositional binaries. Consequently, dualism informs hierarchy applied to class, race, and sectarian politics. Dualities expressed and justified by Islamic authorities continue to influence the dominance of women, social classes, and nature itself. Justification for the positioning of women draw from culture-based accounts that enshrine the hierarchical power structure of a particular culture and era. For example, in Michael Winter's assessment, the soul-body dichotomy is adopted in normative Islam from various sources.²⁸⁹ By closely examining primary Islamic sources, exegetical analyses, and contemporary manifestations, Winter exposes several dichotomous attitudes behind present-day gender roles for Muslim women.²⁹⁰

The *Encyclopedia of Religion* notes that early normative Islam was notably strictly monotheistic and antidualistic.²⁹¹ Dualist tendencies eventually appeared as Islam expanded and encountered many other religious traditions, which heightened the incorporation of dualities and polarities.²⁹² How the term *umma* is understood and applied over time reflects the rise and historical development of Islam's heightened hierarchal duality. The word *umma*, meaning "community," is distinguished from *sha'b*, defined as "a nation with common ancestry or

Geographies in Contemporary Islamic Discourses," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Scott Alan Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

²⁸⁹ Winter, "Islamic Attitudes towards the Human Body," 42.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

²⁹¹ Lindsay Jones, ed. "Dualism," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 2504-2517, accessed May 1, 2018, go.galegroup.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=clar46892&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CCX3424500845&asid=768fc12dcc1e9870.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 2505.

geography.”²⁹³ There is some uncertainty about the root of the term. The synonyms of the word offer a hint at its usage in Islamic cultures over time. In its Islamic sense, as the Muslim community, the word is preceded by the definite article in Arabic, i.e., the *umma* or *ummat al Islamiyah* (the Islamic community); *jamaa’a*, the Arabic word for the community in the sense of a dominant group or *dar al Islam* (the abode of submission), is a synonym describing the lands and peoples under Islamic law and rule (having administrative and legal dimensions).²⁹⁴ The opposite of *dar al Islam* is *dar al harb* (the abode of warfare), meaning the non-Muslim lands and peoples.²⁹⁵ The term *umma* developed over time; it began as an inclusive concept and evolved into a more exclusive and specific definition, highlighting the tensions between Muslims’ desire to maintain continuity with their legacy and the recognition of the need to adapt to changing conditions.²⁹⁶

The pre-Islamic concept of community was ethnically based and inherently tied to tribal identity and affiliations. In the Prophetic period (609–632 CE), the term signified a developing universal community. The *umma* was not just for Arabs; it transcended Arab tribalism and was faith-based.²⁹⁷ While in Medina, Muhammad founded the Constitution of Medina, which extended and established community, including various faith, ethnicity, and economic statuses for the community’s common good.²⁹⁸ Upon the fall of Mecca in 629 CE, membership in the *umma* required a commitment to Islam. At the time of the Prophet’s death in 632 CE,

²⁹³ Frederick M. Denny, “Community and Society in the Qur’ān,” in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, vol. 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 367-386.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 367.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 368.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the *umma* had extended throughout Arabia. Though not all tribes became Muslims, they were required to enter into a covenant with Muhammad and pay the *jizya* (poor) tax.²⁹⁹

In the post-Prophetic period of the Caliphate (632–750 CE) following Muhammad’s death, the Ridda Wars (Wars of Apostasy) compelled recalcitrant groups to return to Islam and the *umma*.³⁰⁰ In the Caliphate era (632–661 CE), the term *umma* evolved and was associated with political and state power instead of primarily shared faith. The Umayyad caliphate (661–750 CE), a predominantly Arab period, could not continue as non-Arab Muslims had the privilege of being attached as a client among the Arab rulers.³⁰¹ During the rise of dynastic orders, the term *umma* signified the expansionism of the Muslim state. Its meaning denoted a religious and political community and remained unconnected to a particular ethnicity of geographical location. By 750 CE, the *umma* included different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups of people who gradually converted to Islam. At the end of the Abbasid period (1258 CE), the Mongols sacked Baghdad, and the subsequent attempts at restoring the Caliphate never materialized.

In the pre-modern to the modern period, an independent Umayyad dynasty developed in Spain until Muslims were ejected, around 1492 CE.³⁰² As Islamic empires arose in Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, the term *umma* meant final authority (under God) to oversee the leadership of Muslims.³⁰³ European colonialism in vast areas of Islamic lands instigated a renewal of *umma* awareness with 19th-century Muslim thinkers’ sustained discourse on the

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 370.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 371.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid., 372.

³⁰³ Ibid.

meaning and connotations of the term *umma*.³⁰⁴ From the 1800s to the present, political purposes overshadowed the term *umma* during post-colonialism and the rise of nation-states. The concept referred to a Commonwealth of the Believers (*ummat al mu'min*) under Pan-Islamism.

Proponents of Pan-Islamism cited goals from the Prophetic and early Caliphate era as the Muslim world's model was stable, unified, and free from corruption.³⁰⁵ Jamal al-Din al-Afghani sought unity among Muslims, resisted colonialism, and feared nationalism would divide the Muslim world.³⁰⁶ Muslim unity was more important than ethnic identity. In transnational Islam, the notion of *umma* envisioned various forms of international movements and organizations.³⁰⁷ Transnational Islam spans across global space, encompassing a plurality of discourses, actors, funds, and ideological and political interests.

What this signifies is that inscribed in the social hierarchy of the changing meaning of *umma* are social relations. Religious authorities are part of one such hierarchy that manifests in constructing value systems of social dominations, i.e., gender, racial, and class hierarchies. Traditionally, these manifest in the social meaning, roles, and rights in marriage, the family structure (i.e., the concept of harems, legal children, concubinage, divorce, inheritance, and the articulation of virtue in private and public domains). These categorical or dualistic hierarchies serve to “turn on” social hierarchy of men over women, class, and sectarian hierarchies.

The protection/oppression dualism offers evidence regarding how ideas of impurity concerning women have played out in the conceptualization of women in some Muslim communities. An analysis of Qur'anic exegesis and specific hadith literature shows concepts in

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 380.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 381.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 382.

depth. Examples include the structure, logic, and symbolism attributed to the *taharah* (purity) system.³⁰⁸

Islamic theology rarely addresses species hierarchy. There is no initiation in addressing inequality and disparities unless crises arise, as seen with the current environmental and social justice issues. Consequently, moving beyond a “crisis” paradigm requires sensibly articulating the notions of ultimate ecological justice, which has “both proximate and ultimate frames; and ethical responses to environmental conditions enacted concerning a universal and socially plural human situation.”³⁰⁹ Therefore, the proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology seeks to resist classical dualism in favor of a non-dualistic frame of reference to end dominations.

Precautions

Beginning from a position of ontological egalitarianism and epistemological Divine justice is foundational to correcting relationships that eradicate patriarchal and hierarchical structures. Addressing the deterrents of these goals is equally as crucial. Breaking free of domination is historically met with conflict by authority figures. Those dominating and the dominated constitute what Michel Foucault identified as a power relation of human subjectivity. On how humans become subjects, Foucault postulated three modes: (1) the modes of inquiry, which try to give themselves the status of sciences, (2) the mode of objectivizing a subject through “dividing practices,” and (3) the mode in which a human being turns oneself into a subject.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Muhammad, “Body Situations Mirroring Belief Attitudes,” 48-50.

³⁰⁹ Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, 205.

³¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-795, 777.

Referring to different time periods as epistemes, Foucault, asserted that each had different “underlying assumptions, codes, and rules, mostly unconscious or at least structural, about how to think about things in the world.”³¹¹ He states that “the main point is not to accept this knowledge at face value but to analyze these so-called sciences as very specific truth games related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves.”³¹² Historically, marginalized populations find themselves in an off-and-on power relation with political/state, economic, and religious authorities. The “authorities” generally employ a list of strategies designed to confuse, distract, and end progress, keeping the marginalized in a tug-of-war power relation. These stratagems typically manifest in one or more of the subsequent forms: neutralizing and divide-and-conquer techniques; inciting political, legal, economic, and religious fear; and especially instilling fear of personal safety. Following are descriptions, manifestations, and stratagems of each.

Neutralizing and Divide-and-Conquer Techniques

Dichotomies such as protection/safety and victimizer/victim often arise when searching for equality and agency. Language use is a significant distraction, as Mary Daly contends:

This is revealed/re-veiled in the language of the “gross-dichotomizing” in the training of warriors, the military. It is seen in the gross victimization of women in times of war by warrior/rapists, and the aggressive bonding experiences of men. The purpose of these tactics is to keep all women in a state of fear... The War State’s symbolic universe

³¹¹ Youtube, “Introduction to Foucault,” in *Then and Now*, accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGQ4qkp4i-8>).

³¹² Ibid.

not only attacks the Female Self as The Enemy, but also continually guise and dis-guise this fact through the use of erasure, reversal, false polarization, or false inclusion.³¹³

This technique includes a wide range of tactics that have been used historically and even presently to deflect goals centered on social and environmental justice. It is not uncommon for ideas to spread throughout larger society that confuses and mislead people, such as the notion that feminism and environmentalism are Westernization and hence not Islamic. In general, feminists are often perceived as being anti-man and anti-family. Masses of people are frequently distracted from severe social issues by sensationalism.

The additional risk is that activists are distracted when they spend too much time answering counter arguments and explaining their views, distracting them from their goals, thereby neutralizing their efforts. It is also to the benefit of the “authorities” to keep feminists and environmentalists arguing among themselves in non-productive ways. Productive ways include sharpening theories, increasing activism and goals in a way that does not negate one another and in which the interchange of techniques and ideas is for the betterment of all. Whether or not a religious leader (Muslim or otherwise), “the academy,” activist, theorist, or a particular standpoint is better at supporting relevant causes is not as crucial as every feminist and environmentalist who continues to do something until all creation is valued and free of exploitation. It is better to assess a given situation and then apply what is needed, and where it comes from should never be problematic. Religions, along with the language and culture, are commonly used as obstacles in this regard.

Religious, Political, Legal, and Economic Fear

As Muslim feminists and activists attempt to pursue their aspirations, laws are passed,

³¹³ Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 362.

and *fatawa* (plural of *fatwa*, religious rulings) are issued, often inciting fears. Foucault contends, “In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle, there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking, and a perpetual reversal.”³¹⁴ Religious, political, legal and economic fear may be the most used tactic of “the authority.” For example, although intended to protect women in the workplace, the passing of the Equal Opportunity Act and the Equal Pay Act instead, safeguarded men’s jobs.³¹⁵ Often, with a legal or political gain, new hurdles are quickly put into place. Therefore, activists would be wise to expect that fear-invoking strategies, real or imaginary, will follow improvements so that they can plan accordingly. The “authority” already has a process in place to counter it. Within this type of fear lies the potential for continued neutralization and divide-and-conquer tactics. Foucault remarks that the relationship between a power source and its subject are marked by the constant countering of movements, tactics, or reactions between one and the other.³¹⁶

Fear for Personal Safety

The fear for personal safety is an issue for feminists because women’s “special protection” is prevalent in patriarchal societies. Radical feminist Mary Daly explains that “the primordial, universal object of attack in all phallographic war is the Self in every woman.”³¹⁷ Protectors interact with women in ways that promote the image of women as helpless.

³¹⁴ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777.

³¹⁵ Leo Kanowitz, “Sex-Based Discrimination in American Law III: Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act of 1963,” in *Hastings LJ* 20 (1968): 305. The Equal Opportunity Act and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 instead protected the jobs of men

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, 355.

Violence or the threat of violence is a standard method for controlling the behavior of women and the marginalized. Hannah Arendt (1970) argued that violence is an effective short-term strategy when power fails or disintegrates.³¹⁸ She offers us some illuminating insights into violence. Arendt viewed power and violence as opposites, stating that “where one rules absolutely, the other is absent.”³¹⁹ The inducing of fear, especially economic fear and scarcity, is often done using the “struggle” itself as a tactic.

Ecofeminist Alternatives

A key element in equalizing nature and marginalized humans requires realigning the ontological and epistemological foundations of conceptualizing ourselves, others, and our surroundings (ecology). Addressing how “others” perceive us is less critical than how we perceive ourselves. Feminist epistemologies have historically accomplished this by consciousness-raising, self-definition (self-signification), and, most importantly, controlling or eradicating mental fears and physical threats. First, begin by changing one’s mental positioning—one’s episteme. Many feminists have proposed different methods in each of these areas. Enhanced awareness of the opponents’ strategies in the power-relation must make continued and substantial progress. Constantly checking one’s vital thoughts is also necessary to avoid becoming distracted and swayed by the opponents, ensuring an egalitarian ideology for Divine justice. Only focusing upon crisis management strengthens the opponent as it is distracting. Instead, studying, interpreting, analyzing knowledge and making it available to the masses of women, men, the “poor and affluent” in a way that is not reactionary is imperative. The process must begin from an ontological awareness of the divinely bestowed egalitarian value, not superiority, nor inferiority.

³¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970), 56.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Consciousness-raising must happen first. Awareness that a problem exists starts the process of addressing it. Mary Daly suggests, “Sometimes it is necessary to reject entirely the contaminated language; sometimes we prune them into adequate instruments so that they will point the way into the background, rather than blocking it.”³²⁰ Patricia Collins proposed pulling together ways of talking about different perspectives of race, genders, and cultures.³²¹ Her method required us to open up to various values and societies to assist us in our goals by changing the way we see our own experiences and relationships. For Nancy Caraway, consciousness-raising meant “pivoting the center” as a way to acknowledge that there are others.³²² She looked for what would unite people to take action. Catharine Mackinnon sees consciousness-raising as a way to go from the specific to general.³²³

Manifestations of consciousness-raising is a current trend in environmentalism. The idea of environmental personhood (regarding non-sentient creatures such as mountains or oceans) comes into focus. Self-definition allows us to analyze our position and the power of the language used to fuel subjectivity. Self-definition introduces us to our agency by offering us the capacity to make choices that will solidify agency. That is why the control of fear is so imperative. Agency requires the ability to make choices unencumbered by fear, although the threat of violence may be present. It removes the constraints of language and actions. The aim must be to acknowledge one’s position, analyzing the tools at one’s disposal, and deciding on the goal.³²⁴

³²⁰ Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, 355.

³²¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 70.

³²² Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood*, 22.

³²³ Mackinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 104.

³²⁴ Daly, *Gyn/ecology*, 367.

How does consciousness-raising “unpack” within Islamic contexts? The Qur’an recognizes humanity with the same ontological status as the rest of creations (Q. 6:38).³²⁵ This is critical to establishing an egalitarian consciousness. Islamic feminist Riffat Hasan suggests a shift from a reactive mindset, calling upon Muslim women to reflect upon “what kind of model(s) of self-actualization can be developed within the framework of normative Islam, which also takes into account the Qur’anic ideals as well as the realities of the contemporary Muslim world.”³²⁶ In agreement with Hasan, “no matter how many socio-political rights are granted to women, as long as they are conditioned to accept the myths used by theologians or religious hierarchies to shackle their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, they will never become fully developed or whole human beings.”³²⁷ Moving forward, engaging in a historical-critical study of primary sources in Islam and developing a theology focused on inclusivity of gender, social, and environmental-related issues are a must within this specific context of the Islamic tradition.

Conclusion: The Contours of an Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

The challenges to Muslims articulating a sound ecofeminist theology are many. In essence, the proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology coincides with many of Afrasiabi’s suggestions. Afrasiabi lists nine challenges to Muslims seeking to construct a sound eco-theology.³²⁸ The proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology takes into consideration the critical

³²⁵ The Qur’an Team, accessed June 18, 2019, <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=6&verse=38>. Sahih International Translation of Q, 6:38 in entirety reads: “And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered.

³²⁶ Riffat Hassan, “Women in Islam: Body, Mind and Spirit,” in *Christian Social Action: The United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society* (2000), accessed June 18, 2019, http://www.umc-gbcs.org/csamay2_jun2000. Htm.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Afrasiabi, “Toward an Islamic Ecotheology,” 281-296.

reflection of the ecological and social realities of the pre-modern, modern, and contemporary world. It does not prioritize humans over non-human creation nor neglects immediate environmental and societal concerns. Studies on topics of gender and environment in Islam have already provided important historical context. The cosmological position, roles, and purposes of human and non-human creations need to be explored further. Research is required to investigate the theological and ethical implications of viceregency and a species-gender-driven cosmic hierarchy. Islamic ecofeminist theology must deconstruct humanism in Islamic theology to prove that the Qur'an does not regard non-human creation as having just utilitarian value. Islamic ecofeminist theology must show that all creation has equal intrinsic value. It must also provide practical solutions and strategies to the current global issues. An ecofeminist theology must be less reactive and much more pro-active than traditional Islamic theology has been in the past. Finally, an Islamic ecofeminist theology must bridge the gap between theology, gender, and ecological disparities by articulating concepts that, although they have critiques, do not succumb to Westoxification and are based upon the Qur'an and supported by appropriate hadith literature.

Chapter Three: Suggesting a Model for Conducting Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

These many examples of the integration of spirituality, religious vision, and ecological practice express a contagious energy moving around the world. They suggest a new perspective on the dictum of Lynn White in 1967 that “since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious.” ...Ecofeminist rereading of religious traditions, with its vision of humanity as part of one life-giving matrix, offers promises of helping to provide the spirituality for such life-giving community.³²⁹

As a noun, synthesis is the combination of ideas to form a theory or system; the production of chemical compounds by reaction from simpler materials; or the final stage in the process of dialectical reasoning, in which a new idea resolves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis.³³⁰ This chapter aims to synthesize Islamic feminists’ and environmentalists’ ideas to produce a systematic procedure for conducting ecofeminist theological rationale within Islamic contexts and as an integral component of Islam. The ecological manifestations of concepts led to logical conclusions in Chapter Two’s investigation of the relationship between epistemology and ontology in conjunction with Islamic discourses. The unfolding of the systematic process culminates in this chapter with the synthesis of particular Islamic feminists and environmentalists. Ruether’s ideas are solidified as a catalyst to formulate a framework for supporting further ecofeminist analyses. Suggestion for a new catalyst design is brought forward in this chapter.

Admittedly, this theological construct is theoretical. It is a process that includes sorting through, collecting, and organizing complementary theories and methodologies while utilizing Ruether as a theoretical frame of reference. Therefore, I incorporate traditional philological methods, close reading, and discourse and textual hermeneutic analysis. It starts by first visualizing the finished process—Islamic Ecofeminist Theology. Working back to its components (feminism and eco-theology in Islam), the next course of action relies on pertinent

³²⁹ Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, 177-178.

³³⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, accessed July 1, 2018, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/synthesis>. The definition of synthesis.

questions purposed in Chapter Two: How has gender been a factor in Islamic/Muslim worldviews of nature? Is there a hierarchy of gender in Islamic theology that correlates with a hierarchy of men over women and humans over non-humans?

How best to move forward in this highly underserved area of contemporary Islamic scholarship is a matter of serious contemplation. At first glance, it appears that a collaboration of Islamic feminism and Ruether's ecofeminism would be the most advantageous way. The goal is to bridge theoretical gaps between Islamic feminist and ecofeminist theology to construct foundational theories. Islamic feminist scholars have already prepared a significant foundation for ecofeminist theology in Islam.

Synthesis

Is it possible to synthesize the theories and methodologies of Islamic feminists and environmentalists and thereby develop Islamic ecofeminist theology? Recalling that Ruether points out the hierarchical framework present in the Islamic worldview when she asks, "Is there a traditional subordination of women in the Islamic cosmology, as well as correlating hierarchy of the divine over human, the spiritual over the material, and with elites over subjugated groups, and related to environmental ethics?"³³¹ This dissertation's goals are to develop a holistic alternative to contemporary responses. It considers paradigms that parallel those goals. An Islamic ecofeminist theology represents a synthesis of specific theological ideas. In essence, synthesis involves amalgamating two or more ideas to produce a new outcome or design. The synthesis of two or more knowledge streams is likely to create a fresh take on traditional theology. The crystallization of theological concepts is inevitable. Therefore, applying an ecofeminist lens while looking for critical parallels is how we will proceed. The primary goal is to construct a "new" paradigm.

³³¹ Ibid.

As noted earlier, before Lynn White’s criticism of monotheisms, the topic of Islam and ecology was not a priority in Islamic theology. Apologetic dialogue has since dominated the discourse as a reaction to White’s criticisms. It may be argued that Islamic feminist discourse primarily focusing on the dissatisfaction of Muslim women under patriarchal conceptions are reactive. A vital concern here is to avoid merely “mixing” Islamic feminism and environmentalism in a manner that their properties remain the same. For example, shying away from addressing problems holistically by recycling eco- and gender-friendly verses and interpretations. Instead, a redistribution of the parts toward a viable Islamic ecofeminist theology are necessary. In this manner, Ruether’s ideas offer optimal utilization. Significantly, Ruether’s insights accelerate the process by targeting the heart of the issues without affecting its “Islam-ness.” Figure 2 outlines the proposed multi-directional process.

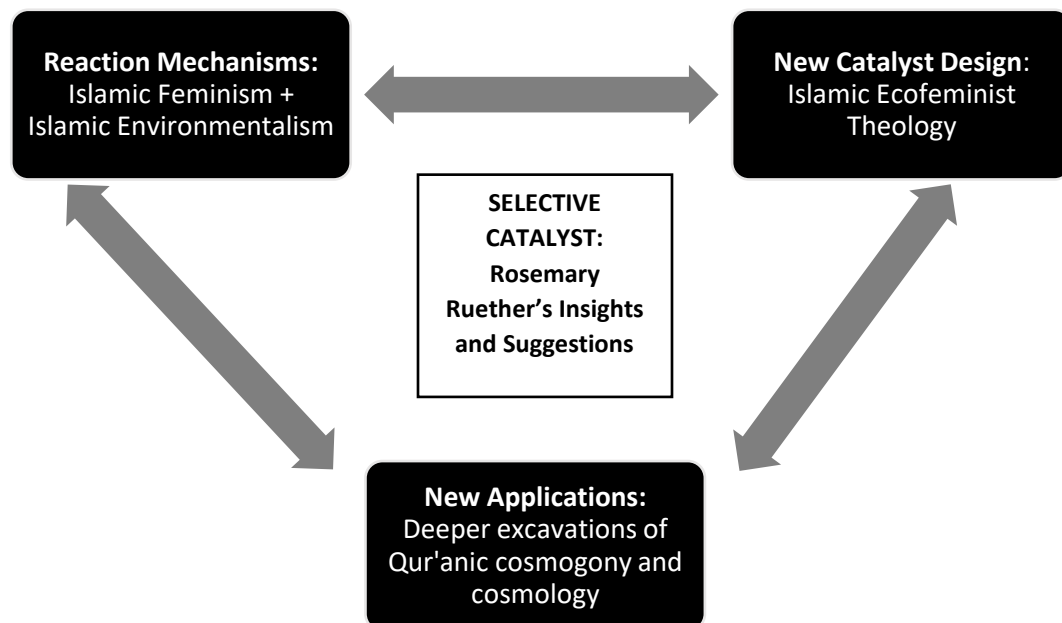


Figure 2: The multi-directional synthesizing process of Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.

The model employs Ruether's insights and suggestions as the selective catalyst towards deeper ecofeminist excavation of Qur'anic cosmogony and cosmology in the construction and development of an Islamic Ecofeminist Theology.

Since Ruether's book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religion*, Muhamad Ali and Nawal Ammar have written on ecofeminism and Islam.³³² Whether or not Ali and Ammar directly responded to Ruether's questions and concerns, assessing how closely their ideas coincide with her concerns are essential for establishing an ecofeminist episteme in Islam. Ammar (2017), focusing on the compatibility of ecofeminism with Islamic environmental teachings, concludes the following:

While engaging with environmentally damaging behaviors and indifference to ecological protection, the Muslim community cannot effectively practice the custodial duty entrusted to it by God. The same argument extends to both the environment and women's well-being, status, and treatment. This Islamic environmental view overlaps with ecofeminism's argument: women, the marginalized, and the environment should be free from exploitation.³³³

It is thus essential for scholars to continue their work on "unreading" patriarchy in Islamic texts.³³⁴ It is possible, necessary, and desirable to bridge diverse, discrete perspectives to conceptualize the realities of today's world. While agreeing with the methods and interpretations

³³² Nawal Ammar and Allison Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?" (2017); Muhamad Ali, "Integrating Islam and Ecofeminism: A Monotheistic Approach to Earth Crisis," (2014); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (2005).

³³³ Ammar and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?," 302.

³³⁴ Asma Barlas uses the term "unreading" in her book, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

of Wadud and Barlas, Ammar suggests one way is to research “the spread of the Islamic message at the local level. Such research could contribute to a better understanding of how a religious tradition about mercy, justice, and protection of God’s Creation is paradoxically leading to environmental depletion and other corruptions on Earth.”³³⁵

There is a deep and abiding sense that we have only begun to scratch the surface of the problem. Both Ali and Ammar lay down the first fundamental arguments on the discourse. By locating facts about gender disparity with ecological degradation, Ammar’s solution goes further than Ali’s, which stops giving us the usual reactive commentary of most Islamic feminists. Research on the scale and magnitude with which Ruether engaged is needed. Ruether has worked on a vast array of academic, leadership, and historical topics throughout her career.

Is it possible to synthesize theories and methodologies of Islamic feminists and environmentalists to develop Islamic ecofeminist theology? Accomplishing the task at hand requires energy to get to the desired outcome. With Ruether’s analyzing technique, we are given additional suggestions to identify the “right balance between justice and sustainability.”³³⁶ Ruether stresses the following point: “[We] need to look more closely at the set of causes of our particular distortion of our relation to one another and to the earth through myths of separation and domination; then we must question and reconstruct the cosmological framework out of which the worldview grew (what are its roots)?”³³⁷ There are many ideas of Ruether’s that can facilitate the formulation of a framework to support ecofeminist theology in Islam.

³³⁵ Ammar and Gray, “Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?,” 302.

³³⁶ Ruether, “Ecofeminism,” 23.

³³⁷ Ibid.

The Parameters of Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

The desired outcome of this research is an Islamic ecofeminist theology by developing a theology of healed relationships and liberation. The driving need for a theological approach that integrates Islam and the themes of nature and social justice becomes imperative when articulating the issues separately. The difficulty is primarily due to what Afrasiabi identifies as “fundamental theological roadblocks.”³³⁸ Both Islamic feminists and environmentalists alike identify theological roadblocks in much of the same way. Islamic ecofeminist theology proposes an alternate Islamic theological plan based on the Qur’an and supporting hadith literature. It critiques humanism in Islam and seeks to eradicate it. In addressing the dynamics and consequences of ecology and human societies, Islamic ecofeminist theology aims to provide a renewed sense of hope and a genuinely Islamic, contemporary, non-dogmatic theology, and inclusive of a variety of lived experiences.

The proposed Islamic ecofeminist theology suggests that the various ecological and social issues are not as simple as “the arsenal of Islamic insight to handle the thematic and practical issue.”³³⁹ Will there be anything retrievable for a viable Islamic theology once we apply the proposed deconstructionist method, or will this lead us to give up on this project altogether?³⁴⁰ Feminist reconstructions of Islamic theology give priority to sociopolitical and cultural concerns rather than interconnected ecological problems. Muslim environmentalists have focused on environmental issues due to an “incorrect” reverence for nature, primarily ignoring gender and social justice issues.

³³⁸ Afrasiabi, “Toward an Islamic Ecotheology,” 290. Afrasiabi frames the criticism and responses in contemporary Islamic discourses on ecology.

³³⁹ Ibid., 286.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 285.

The objections to such an endeavor (constructing Islamic ecofeminist theology) are likely to fall under the same categorization that Islamic feminists and environmentalists encounter—typically dismissed, opposed, and viewed as “Western” ideology imposed on “real” Islam, therefore, not Islamic or even heretical. A critical tool that emphasizes re-envisioning primary sources are *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Some have criticized Islamic feminism for not having methodological and epistemological links to classical Islamic sciences, which Muslim feminists and compatible environmentalists generally reject.³⁴¹

In response, scholars like Yasmin Moll (2009) argue that “while Islamic feminism derives its legitimacy from the Islamic tradition, it transforms the very methodological framework that has long defined classical religious knowledge and the actors producing this knowledge.”³⁴² New knowledge constructions are required to shift the classical Islamic interpretive tradition. The theoretical and methodological contributions of contemporary Islamic feminist scholars use historical, literary, and deconstructionist approaches. Moll contends that Islamic feminist scholars such as Omaima Abou-Bakr and Asma Barlas emphasize applying *ijtihad* more than traditional religious scholars.³⁴³ Islamic feminists are critical to Islamic knowledge-projects, and they seek intellectual continuity between Islam and the modern world by shifting to a pro-active, self-actualized mindset.

The Process of Conducting Islamic Ecofeminist Theology

The unfolding outline of the systematic process for conducting Islamic ecofeminist theology is multi-directional, yet each step of the process is interlocking and dependent upon

³⁴¹ Al-Sharmani, “Islamic Feminism: Transnational and National Reflections,” 85. Al-Sharmani quotes Yasmin Moll.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

what precedes it. The process is as follows:

1. Establish the prerequisites of an ecofeminist ontological position of equal intrinsic value of all creation and episteme of Divine justice; realign critical relationships; address and deconstruct dualisms and hierarchies not aligned with an ecofeminist ontological position.
2. Establish the critical norm and critical definitions based upon the above prerequisites.
3. Conduct an ecofeminist appraisal of a contemporary problem utilizing Ruether's three-step process as a guideline—identify the problem, critically examine its roots, and identify practices that will take us toward a more liberated present.
4. Construct a new expression or paradigm of Islamic theology from all creation's full and equal intrinsic value. The culminating outcome must produce healing and liberation.

The significance of each prerequisites cannot be understated as they are the foundation for conducting exegetical analysis.³⁴⁴ Placing unequal and inferior value on some creation entities has historically set the stage for patriarchy, hierarchy, and thus, oppression. One of the most critical aspect of core ritual practices in Islam requires establishing intention/purpose (*niyya*). Integrating an ecofeminist onto-epistemological understanding of God, human and non-human creation, intentionally brings to the forefront of conscious awareness Divine equality, unity, and justice.

Islamic ecofeminist theology is a work in progress based on the definitions presented by Muhamad Ali, Nawal Ammar and Allison Gray, with the guidance of Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ali defines ecofeminism as “the interconnection between the destruction of nature and the oppression of women... The starting point of ecofeminism is that, as Karen Warren put it, ‘the domination of women, other humans, and non-human nature are interconnected, is wrong, and ought to be eliminated.’”³⁴⁵ Ammar and Gray offer additional information and suggest how to

³⁴⁴ Recall that the significance of an egalitarian ontology is to insure the inalienable value of everything and everyone on this planet. An egalitarian ontology must liberate creation as a whole from all ideological exploitations.

³⁴⁵ Ali, “Integrating Islam and Ecofeminism,” 115.

conduct ecofeminism. These include observing intersectionality and avoiding hierarchies by involving more-than-human relationships.³⁴⁶ In recollection, Ruether's definition of ecofeminism offers us a look at the same parameters, and her particular solution examines the interconnections between the domination of women and nature.³⁴⁷ Resolution occurs by understanding the cause or reason for the dominations. Historical, mythical, scientific, and religious explanations provide etiology and enforcement. In addition, developing strategies and worldviews to liberate or heal from these interconnected dominations is intertwined in the solution.³⁴⁸

The above definitions underline the insights, information, and procedures for ecofeminism, based upon the all-present insistence of the interconnection between environmental degradation and the oppression and domination of women, "other" humans, and animals. There is also an underlying assumption that domination and oppression are categorically wrong. Therefore, the elimination of domination is imperative for the course. Ammar and Gray contribute to the contours of the definition by adding an intersectionality approach that is more-than-human."³⁴⁹ Ruether furthers our understanding of ecofeminism by including action within her definition. For Ruether, strategies must be developed and executed, as it is not enough to be not racist, not sexist, not elitist, or not speciesist—one should be actively anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-elitist, or anti-speciesist. Furthermore, the aim of healing and liberation is an absolute must. Therein, a working definition for Islamic ecofeminism follows: Islamic ecofeminism broadens Islamic feminism's analyses of relationships to include all creation, non-human, and human

³⁴⁶ Ammar and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?," 302.

³⁴⁷ Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 23.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Ammar and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?," 302.

through the examination and understanding of its interconnections, consequences, and ideologies of domination within human and non-human species, human gendering, social and hierarchical settings. Islamic ecofeminism employs intersectional perspectives in advocating liberation from dominance and healing of relationships.

The critical norm develops from Divine egalitarianism, unity, and justice among all creation, biotic and abiotic. The critical norm includes ecofeminist re-visioning and guiding questions about how to examine classical and contemporary exegetical readings. Ruether's critical norm functions effortlessly and directly: "that which promotes women's full humanity is authentic, while that which does not promote it is inauthentic" is enveloped in this Islamic ecofeminist theology as follows: that which promotes the full and equal intrinsic value of all creation (human and non-human) is authentic, while that which does not promote it is inauthentic.³⁵⁰ Although articulated by Ruether, this position cannot be considered an un-Qur'anic ethical position, and with evidence exemplified and supported in some hadith literature, it is therefore fully Islamic.³⁵¹ Seeking out hierarchal frameworks present in Islamic worldviews to deconstruct the systematic patriarchy, hierarchy, and environmentally destructive attitudes and behaviors are imperative to shifting the paradigm. Shifting the paradigm identifies the practices that will move us towards a more egalitarian and liberated present. This process utilizes the

³⁵⁰ Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18-19.

³⁵¹ Sunnah.com, *Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad*, accessed January 20, 2022. Examples include the following hadith transmissions: Sunan Abi Dawud 1541, Reported by Anas b. Malik: I used to serve the Prophet (ﷺ) and often hear him say: "O Allah, I seek refuge in You from grief and anxiety, from the hardships of debt, and from being overpowered by men;" and Sahih Muslim 2577d, Reported by Abu Dharr reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying that he reported it from his Lord, the Exalted and Glorious: "Verily I have made oppression unlawful for Me and for My servants too, so do not commit oppression."

critical norm and constructs a new expression of Islamic theology from the perspective of the whole and equal intrinsic value of all creation.

Critique is undeniably the first step in conducting an ecofeminist appraisal, as it is one of the two objectives of this study (critique and construction). Performing an ecofeminist appraisal activates the critical norm. As outlined previously, this process involves identifying a current problem, critically examining its underlying causes, and recognizing methods that will allow for a more liberated present. Identifying a contemporary problem involves critiquing hierarchical frameworks present in the current Islamic worldviews. Asking poignant and often thorny questions along the way are significant at this point. Upholding optimism grounds consciousness to the potentiality of resolution. Also, examining the problem's roots deconstructs the systematic nature of patriarchy, hierarchy, and environmentally destructive attitudes and behaviors imperative to shifting the paradigm. The practices that will take "us" toward a more liberated present requires constructing a new theological expression from all creation's full and equal intrinsic value.³⁵²

Conclusion: The Task at Hand

In explaining the components and providing a foundational definition and contours of Islamic ecofeminist theology, Islamic feminist and environmentalist ideas are synthesized. Employing Ruether's ideas offers a path for applying ecofeminist hermeneutic, deconstructionist, and constructionist methods. Much of the scholarship on gender and the environment in Islam has already provided essential theoretical groundwork.

Expressing the overwhelming task at hand for those who dare, Afrasiabi questions whether this "will lead us to give up on this project altogether."³⁵³ Our concern should oblige

³⁵² By "us," I am referring to creation as a whole in general, and to humanity in particular.

³⁵³ Afrasiabi, "Toward an Islamic Ecotheology," 293.

pointed questions such as does sacred texts on women, gender, and environmentalism become troublesome at the least and problematic at best? In the past, general responses to this type of question included an Orientalist criticism of Islam (particularly on the role of women), secular modernists, feminists, and fundamentalist's insistence on traditional gender roles as anti-colonial as key to reinforcing their authority (neopatriarchy).³⁵⁴

Among critiques by women, responses include reformation, loyalism (acceptance of normative authority), revisionism (seeking feminist-centered interpretation), reconstruction, rejectionism of all as patriarchy, and calls to transform the social order.³⁵⁵ Like most of the world, within Muslim majority societies, the factors interconnecting culture, gender, class, and ecology is inseparable. Much of the world reflects the same problem—religious and philosophical ideology mixed with the need to dominate the marginalized masses and exploit environmental resources. As a result, global socio-cultural, political systems of oppression develop. How are systems of hierarchy and patriarchy upheld (i.e., how the Qur'an is read, hadith literature, or interpretations)? How does this influence how we relate to God, ourselves, each other, and the rest of creation? Since an Islamic ecofeminist theology proposes to be less reactive and more pro-active than traditional Islamic theology has been in the past, in doing so, it seeks to neutralize the pitfalls, distractions, and fears incited by the opponents. There is a need to address all these religious, socio-cultural, and political systems to find solutions that can eventually cause the desired change.

The execution of an Islamic ecofeminist theology requires careful planning toward the visualization of the results. It is possible that instead of "giving up the project," this theoretical framework will yield seeds to benefit waves of scholarship. Either way, it is hopeful that

³⁵⁴ Haddad, "The Emergence of Muslim American Feminism," 139.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

putting these ideas forward can and should serve as a missing link to bridging the gap between egalitarianism in theory and actual practice. The process of Islamic ecofeminist development is not dependent on the current ecological and societal crisis. It is, however, critically conscious of it.

To summarize, we first reviewed our components, Islamic feminist theology, and Islamic environmentalist theology. Second, we focused on their interconnected and overlapping elements. Third, we noted that these relationships are essential to proceed to the next steps—formulating goals. The resulting foundational definition included the contours and constraints of Islamic ecofeminist theology. The next step in applying an ecofeminist epistemology to the intersections could take several avenues. The junction of Islamic creation narratives and cosmic hierarchies with environmental and gender issues is one such choice. Ruether contends that creation stories for any whose history has been a part of those experiences “could indeed be revelatory, opting out of classical approaches and conclusions traditionally held in religious thought.”³⁵⁶

As re-envisioned, Islamic ecofeminist theology (henceforth, IEfT) is a rationale within Islamic contexts that anticipate being an integral component of Islam.³⁵⁷ The following two chapters demonstrate its applicability and analyzes the cosmological positions, roles, and theological implications on the concept of *khalīfa* (translated as vice-regent and vicegerent) and narratives of Adam, Eve, Eden, and the afterworlds, Heaven and Hell. As a result, I explore the ethical implications and effects of a species-gender-driven cosmic hierarchy. As a conclusion, I propose an ecofeminist paradigm.

³⁵⁶ Ruether, “Ecofeminism—The Challenge to Theology,” 33.

³⁵⁷ The symbolic representation for Islamic Ecofeminist Theology is henceforth, IEfT.

Part III - Applying Concepts

Chapter Four: An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Term *Khalīfa*

*Once again words are going to reveal what, over the past 15 centuries, has modulated Islamic mental attitudes, conscious and unconscious, at the most profound level.*³⁵⁸

The opening quote is from the renowned feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi. In her 1993 book, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, she wrote about the “two most specific titles of power in Islam: caliph and imam.”³⁵⁹ Mernissi illuminates why an Islamic ecofeminist theology is much needed to challenge domination and heal relationships. As discussed in Chapter Two, concepts have a way of evolving. This is exemplified in how the word *umma* has changed from its pre-Islamic meaning, the Prophet’s time and Qur’anic revelation, and throughout Islamic history. This chapter investigates the word *khalīfa* and shows how it evolved; discusses the normative position of the term; and offers an ecofeminist critique. This chapter demonstrates that the Islamic normative doctrine of *khalīfa* leads to a hierarchical organization. Therefore, current definitions and translations have led to theological, societal, and environmental problems. The manifestation of the current social and environmental issues will highlight the trajectory of its contemporary impact. This examination of *khalīfa* employs the systematic process for conducting the suggested Islamic ecofeminist theology. Traditional philological methods, close reading, discourse, and textual hermeneutic analyses of Islamic primary sources and history and contemporary Muslim feminists’ and environmentalists’ perspectives are primary methodological active tools in this chapter. The primary research questions driving this chapter are: Has the current paradigm of *khalīfa* as “human vicegerency” in Islam contributed to ecological destruction and gender and societal issues? What is the theological basis and

³⁵⁸ Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (New York, Oxford Press, 1993), 10.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

implications of *khalīfa*? Does the concept of *khalīfa* necessarily include humanity as a whole, or males only? ³⁶⁰ In response to the preceding questions, how do we foster alternatives, and is a hierarchy of creation necessary? I conclude the chapter by proposing a paradigmatic shift.

The Contemporary Problem: “*Khalīfa*” Defined as Vicegerency

Throughout religious narratives, we learn about our identity, what nature is, where we come from, and where we are going. Interpretive stories comprise a worldview of a society. Religious worldviews suggest ethical values regarding how we treat ourselves, others, and nature. Since in critical ways, humans’ attitudes are directly shaped by religious belief in both its institutional expressions and dogmatic forms, a re-examination of religious ideology is imperative in light of the current societal and environmental crises.³⁶¹ Cosmology, which pertains to the origin, order, development, and the fate of the universe, and cosmogony, which deals with the narratives supporting a given cosmology, are elements which compose the foundation of religions. Serving etiological purposes, one of the functions of cosmology is to inform and explain the origin and existence of everything.

The theological basis for understanding *khalīfa* prominently stems from an exegesis of two particular verses; Q 2:30 and 38:26, along with excerpts from the Qur’an known as the *istikhlaf* verse (the verse of succession) Q 24:55 as follows respectively:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.” They said: “Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? – whilst we do

³⁶⁰ This questions can also include men, women, binary, non-binary, intersex, Muslims, and non-Muslims.

³⁶¹ Foltz, *Islam and Ecology*, xvi. Foltz states that religious belief have two forms, “both its institutional expressions and dogmatic forms.”.

celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" Allah said: "I know what ye know not."³⁶²

O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth; so judge thou between men in truth (and justice), nor follow thou the lusts (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah, for those who wander astray from the Path of Allah, is a Penalty Grievous, for that they forget the Day of Account.³⁶³

Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that Allah will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as Allah granted it to those before them; that Allah will establish in authority their religion - the one which Allah has chosen for them; and that Allah will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me. If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked.'³⁶⁴

As a contemporary understanding, dominant normative interpretations utilize Q 2:30 as the primary theological basis of *khalīfa*.³⁶⁵ Therefore, this verse is at the heart of investigation in this chapter as I examine contemporary gender issues and environmental degradation. It is a common idea among contemporary Muslims and Islamic scholars that "man," or "humans," is the referred to vicegerent.³⁶⁶ There is ambivalence on whether or not this refers to males only, humanity as a whole (females, males, intersexes, and non-Muslims), or Muslims only. Table 2

³⁶² The Quran.com Team, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://quran.com>. A. Yusef Ali's translation of 2:30.

³⁶³ Ibid., translation of 39:26.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., translation of 24:55. Subsections of Sunni Islamism argue that to govern a state by Sharia is, by definition, to rule via the Caliphate, and use the following verses to sustain their claim.

³⁶⁵ Jaafar Sheikh Idris, "Is Man the Vicegerent of God?," in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 99-110, 100.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. Idris contends, if asked to give an Islamic characterization of the human being, "the description "vicegerent of God" would almost certainly be among the first things to occur."

demonstrates popular English translations of Q 2:30’s Arabic phrase “*innī ja’āilun fī al-ardi khalīfatan.*”

Translators	Popular English Translations of Qur’an 2:30’s phrase “ <i>innī ja’āilun fī al-ardi khalīfatan</i> ”
Muhsin Khan	“Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on earth.”
Muhammad Pickthall	Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth.
Sahih International	“Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.”
Dr. Ghali	“Surely I am making in the earth a successor.”
A. Yusuf Ali	“I will create a vicegerent on earth.”
Abul Ala Maududi	“Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent on earth”
Mufti Taqi Usmani	“I am going to create a deputy on the earth!”
Dr. Mustafa Khattab	“I am going to place a successive ‘human’ authority on earth.”
Abdul Haleem	‘I am putting a successor on earth.’
Laleh Bakhtiar	Truly, I am assigning on the earth a viceregent.

Table 2: Popular English translations of the Arabic phrase “*innī ja’āilun fī al-ardi khalīfatan*” from Qur’an chapter 2, verse 30.

Of the ten translations in Table 2, five translate *khalīfa* as “viceregent,” “viceroy,” or “deputy,” and four translate *khalīfa* as either “successive authority” or “successor.” Muhsin Khan translates the phrase as “(mankind) generations after generations.”³⁶⁷

The history of changing the meaning and emphasis of *khalīfa* reveals a history of meshing spiritual and secular authority.³⁶⁸ Mernissi asserted that the simplest way to locate the origin of conflict between politics and women is to go back to the vital concept.³⁶⁹ In this case,

³⁶⁷ The Quran.com Team, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://quran.com>. Muhsin Khan’s translation of *khalīfa* from Q 2:30.

³⁶⁸ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens*, 29.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

she traced the history of the two titles, caliph and imam, and uncovered an attitude of domination and patriarchy. Mernissi insists:

The very nature of power is religious; the political leader's function is to enforce the law of God on earth. This is the only way to guarantee order and justice. The caliph's duty is to use religion to harmonize the political administration of the universe, politics and religion being inextricably linked. The cosmic entangling of Heaven and earth, the caliph as the executor of divine will on earth, necessarily imply the exclusion of women, the divine being both One and male. We are taught in school that the caliph is the representative of God on earth, and repeating this formula mechanically makes women's exclusion an inevitable cosmic law.³⁷⁰

Is it possible that the history of monopolizing and altering a term conveyed an elitist, ethnic-engendered meaning? Moreover, could such an outcome facilitate the disconnection and domination of the masses (the marginalized and women) and earth's resources by those who dominate Islamic power and religious authority?

The *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*'s entry for "caliph" states that "there is little in the Qur'anic occurrences of the term that prepares for its politically and theologically charged meaning."³⁷¹ In Wadad Kadi's (2001) assessment, the term *khalāfa* (plural for *khalīfa*) has three primary meanings: (1) the most prevalent meaning in the Qur'an is "successor, substitute, replacement, or deputy." Kadi explains the basic notion the term *khalāfa*: "As human history has repeatedly shown, and as it will show in the future—God warns a people when they go astray; God destroys them and replaces them with another people who obey God's messengers, worship

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 30.

³⁷¹ Wadad Kadi, "Caliph," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, ed., Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 276-278, accessed October 3, 2020, [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2686400106/GVRL?u=claremont_main&sid=GVRL&xid=eb0648ff" data-bbox="111 875 886 907">xi d=eb0648ff](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2686400106/GVRL?u=claremont_main&sid=GVRL&xid=eb0648ff).

him, act morally and are consequently rewarded by inheriting the land and the scripture of their predecessors (see Q 6:133, 165; 7:69, 74, 129; 10:14, 73; 11:57; 24:55; 27:62; 35:39);” (2) the second, rarer, and “philologically less obvious” meaning of the term is “inhabitant – settler on earth.” This meaning is expressed in Q 2:30, “clearly meaning Adam;” and (3) the third meaning “has political and juridical implications,” as in Q 38:26 where David exercises authority as a *khalāfa* who is “ordered to judge between people with truth and not follow vain desires.”³⁷²

As a noun, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “vicegerent” as a deputy regent or a person who acts in the place of a ruler, governor, or sovereign.³⁷³ As an adjective, “vicegerent,” relates to occupying the position of a viceregent.³⁷⁴ In the *Han Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, the root “kh-l-f” takes the meaning of “successor, descendent, offspring, or substitute,” and the word *khalīfa* and *khalāfa* (pl.) mean “vicar, deputy, successor, the caliph.”³⁷⁵

How has the current paradigm of human vicegerency in Islam contributed to environmental destruction, and gender and social issues? The etymological meaning of the word *khalīfa* as “successor” became fused with the politico-religious caliph. As a result, the word gradually acquired the connotation of the “vicegerent of God.” This connotation became accepted as a leadership title after the Prophet’s death, established with the Umayyad Caliphate, and has been continuously used. The current common usage and translation of *khalīfa* connote that humans are God’s vicegerents, and with this, the idea that humans are God’s representatives on earth. Also, as environmental degradation increases and the scramble for environmental consciousness is front and center, Muslims and Islamic scholars have begun to tweak the idea of

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Merriam-Webster. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vice-regent>.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1961), 257.

khalīfa from humans as “God’s vicegerents on earth” to humans as “God’s stewards or trustees of the earth.”

These definitions, translations, or positions have added to theological, societal, and environmental problems by facilitating a severe disconnect between gender and ecological issues. The translation of “vicegerent” contradicts the Qur’anic emphasis on God’s oneness (*tawhīd*). Within gender terms, the current idea of *khalīfa* as a vicegerent facilitates patriarchal views on the role of women in society, in the family, and male-female relationships. Furthermore, it delineates who is privileged in leadership and authority. Less obvious, historically with the manifestation of *khalīfa* as the vicegerent there is a tendency to cherry-pick ideology to benefit one ethnic group over others. Thus, the marginalized group is categorized as and treated similarly to women. In an overall ecological sense, this lays the framework for a hierarchal model in which men are privileged over women, the elite over the poor, and humans over the environment.

Examining the Roots

As for the above assertions, lexicology, dictionary, encyclopedia entries, and Qur’anic translations provide evidence regarding the term. It is imperative to examine the roots of the problematic. The chronology of how the Qur’anic concept of *khalīfa* has developed historically in exegesis, and various Islamic scholarships continues to serves this purpose.

In 632 CE, Muhammad’s death was a defining time in the history of Islam, as Islam was rudimentary and still defining itself. Under the leadership of the Prophet, the traditional tribal system of authority had ended. He had instituted a different social structure, the *umma*. In Medina, membership in the *umma* included Muslims, the client tribes, and the *dhimmi* (non-Muslims protected by the Muslim community).³⁷⁶ The changes after his death re-defined

³⁷⁶ Reza Aslan, *No god but God: The Origins, Evolution and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2011), 57-58.

the *umma*, leadership, and authority, and those changes have reverberated until contemporary times. The challenge before his followers was to build a cohesive religious system. It would take centuries of development to establish the modalities of practices, theological thought, and institutionalization, which we have defined as Islam.³⁷⁷

After Muhammad died, Abu Bakr, one of his closest companions, was “elected” to lead the *umma*. Historically, there has been a skeptical consensus over this event and the process of his election.³⁷⁸ The Medinan Muslims (*Ansars*) had chosen an *Ansari*, but the Meccan Muslims and Meccan aristocracy strongly rejected this.³⁷⁹ Abu Bakr, as a compromise, seemed to appease all. He embraced the given title, *khalīfat rasul Allah*, “successor to the Messenger of Allah.”³⁸⁰ As unclear as to the meaning of *khalīfa*, this title also “punctuated the confusion surrounding the relationship between political and religious matters.”³⁸¹ Abu Bakr viewed the position as secular, holding that as *khalīfat rasul Allah*, he would be responsible for upholding the faith and not defining the religious practice.³⁸² Therefore, after the Prophet’s death, religious authority remained with the Prophet, although slightly different. The Khalifa/Caliph was leadership in the form of political power. The companions of the Prophet “transmitted” religious knowledge. Two years later, nearing death, Abu Bakr appointed his companion, Umar, as his successor. Umar maintained the title of *khalīfat rasul Allah* but preferred the title, *amir al-mu’manin*,

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 114.

³⁷⁸ Ibid. Also, see Frederick Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 74.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 115.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid., 115-116.

“commander of the faithful.”³⁸³ Under Umar’s leadership, he defeated the Byzantine army in 634 CE, captured Damascus a year later, subdued Persian forces, and captured Egypt, Libya, and Jerusalem.³⁸⁴

In 644 CE, Umar was attacked while leading the morning prayer in a mosque by a Persian slave.³⁸⁵ Nearing death, he prompted an election for leadership succession, which ended with Uthman becoming the third Caliph. Uthman gave himself the title, *khalīfat Allah*, “successor to God.”³⁸⁶ This title was never used or accepted by Abu Bakr, Umar, and most importantly, it was not within the traditions of the Prophet. History records Abu Bakr and Umar explicitly rejecting the title because it does not connote the Messenger’s deputy but God’s representative on earth.³⁸⁷

Uthman’s most outstanding achievements included the completion of a codified Qur’an and rescinding several of Umar’s misogynistic decisions.³⁸⁸ He also grossly mismanaged the community and practiced nepotism, which eventually led to him being despised by many in the *umma* who insisted upon his stepping down from power. To Uthman, his position as *khalīfat Allah* meant that it was “bestowed upon him by God,” not something that men could take away.³⁸⁹ Despite giving himself this title, some disagreed, and fellow Muslims assassinated

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22.

³⁸⁸ Aslan, *No god, but God*, 131.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Uthman.³⁹⁰ This event shook the *umma*'s stability, and thereupon Ali reluctantly became the leader. Initially, Ali had refused the title of Caliph, seeing it as "permanently tainted by Uthman."³⁹¹ Instead, Ali insisted on the title "commander of the faithful."³⁹² During his reign, Ali attempted to restore order and effect reconciliation in the *umma* by replacing nearly all of Uthman's relatives from their posts with local leaders.³⁹³ Uthman's clan, the Banu Umayya, and the Prophet's wife, Aisha, organized militarily against Ali. They cited disagreement with his handling of Uthman's murder, precipitating the first civil war in Islam led by Aisha.³⁹⁴

While Ali was tending to unite the *umma*, others were planning a take-over.³⁹⁵ The early Muslims were unanimous in that there must be a single leader, but there was no unanimity on who should be the leader and how to conduct leadership.³⁹⁶ The partisans of Ali (*Shi'atu Ali*) maintained that the kinship of the Prophet defined leadership. The most extreme views came from those who broke from Ali, the Kharijites. According to them, the *umma* was "divinely founded only to be led by the most pious person, irrespective of tribe, lineage, or ancestry."³⁹⁷ All factions stressed the need for authority in terms of a caliphate, but the meaning of *khalīfa* varied. Interpreted as "successor," the question of a successor to whom also varied. Ali's view on the Caliphate had elements of the Kharijites' ideas on seeing the *umma* as a divinely founded

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 32.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 133.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 134.

community.³⁹⁸ However, it was unclear whether he had considered himself to be divinely appointed.³⁹⁹

Ali's reign significantly suffered. Mu'awiya, a nephew of Uthman, raised an army against him, and in 657 CE, after a long and arduous battle, Mu'awiya's general called for arbitration by hoisting the Qur'an on their spears.⁴⁰⁰ Ali ordered his army to put down their weapons in favor of arbitration.⁴⁰¹ Being coerced into accepting arbitration eventually led to Ali's assassination.⁴⁰² Over the course of the arbitration agreement, Ali lost the support of the Kharijites. In 660 CE, while in prayer, Ali was attacked by a dissident Kharijite and died two days later. After Ali's death, Mu'awiya was able to gain control, thus, inaugurating the Umayyad Dynasty in 661 CE. See Table 3 for the usage among the "Four Rightly Guided Caliphs."

Name	Rule	Preferred Title	Usage of the term <i>khalīfat Allah</i> (Successor of Allah)
Abu Bakr 1st Caliph	632-634 CE Elected	<i>Khalīfat rasul Allah</i> (successor to the Messenger of God).	Rejected the title
Umar ibn al-Khattab 2nd Caliph	634-644 CE Appointed	Maintained the title of <i>khalīfat rasul Allah</i> , but preferred <i>amir al-mu'manin</i> (commander of the faithful).	Rejected the title
Uthman ibn Affan 3rd Caliph	644-656 CE Elected	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i> (successor to God).	Gave himself the title
Ali ibn Abu Talib 4th Caliph/1st Imam	656-661CE Elected	Preferred the title, <i>amir al-mu'manin</i> (commander of the faithful)	Rejected the title

Table 3: Usage of the term *Khalīfat Allah* among The Rashidun (632-661 CE), the "Four Rightly Guided Caliphs."

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

Mu'awiya represented a combination of traditional tribal leadership with the aspiration to establish an empire, much like the Byzantines and Sasanians.⁴⁰³ The establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty transformed the “Caliph into a king, and the umma into an empire.”⁴⁰⁴ According to Patricia Crone and Martin Hind, the Umayyad Caliphate used the expression “*khalīfat Allah*” to mean “deputy of God,” with its first occurrence during the reign of Uthman.⁴⁰⁵ Also, “those who called themselves “*khalīfat Allah*,” customarily invoked two verses of the Qur’an, 2:30, referring to Adam and 38:25.”⁴⁰⁶ The interpretation of *khalīfat Allah* as successor or deputy of God implies a solid and inherent claim to religious authority, in addition to the explicitly stated political one. The Umayyads went as far as utilizing the title as the official designation of all Umayyad heads of state.⁴⁰⁷ Crone and Hind contends,

That “*khalīfat Allah*,” was an official title of the Umayyad head of state is clear from the attestations given already. It was not of course the title commonly used for purposes of address and reference to individual Umayyad caliphs...But *khalīfa* was nonetheless the official designation of the caliph’s function, and what the attestations just given show is that it stood for *khalīfat Allah*, not *khalīfat rasul Allah*, ‘successor of the messenger of God.’⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁰⁵ Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 5. According to Crone and Hind, the Umayyad Caliphate used the expression “*Khalīfat Allah*,” to mean “deputy of God,” with its first occurrence happening with the reign of Uthman.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 11.

Crone and Hind gives evidence of this direct attestation of the term *khalīfat Allah* about individual Umayyad caliphs, Umayyads in general, and in correspondence, poetry, and prose.⁴⁰⁹

In 750 CE, the Abbasid caliphs overthrew the Umayyads with support of non-Arab Muslims and the Shi'atu Ali factions. Claiming their legitimacy to leadership from Muhammad's uncle al-Abbas, they too appropriated the title "*khalīfat Allah*," for all Abbasid Caliphs in general and every Caliph 750-862 CE.⁴¹⁰ It was the official designation of the head of state.⁴¹¹ The Abbasids went even further as Caliph al-Ma'mun (833 CE) sought to impose an imperial orthodoxy upon Muslims, leading to an inquisition on the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) who disagreed with him. Eventually, the *ulama* constructed the comprehensive code of conduct known as Islam under Islamic dynastic orders' for developing political structures. Reza Aslan analyzes the contentious and the continuously evolving debate within Islam over the role of the Caliph and the nature of the *umma*:

Too often, this debate has been portrayed as strictly polarized between those who considered the Caliphate to be a purely secular position and those who believed it should encompass both the temporal and religious authority of the Prophet. But this simple dichotomy masks the diversity of religio-political views that existed in seventh- and eighth-century Arabia with regard to the nature and function of the Caliphate.⁴¹²

Broadly classifying two significant approaches to politics and rule, Sunnism and Shi'ism, the Caliphate and the *umma*'s definition remain compelling ideas.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 6-11.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴¹² Aslan, *No god, but God*, 133.

Both the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750) and the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258) used *khalīfat Allah* as an official title of the head of state. Subsequent Sunni and Shia Caliphates and dynastic orders followed suit. The Umayyads of Spain also adopted the caliphal title *khalīfat Allah*, as evidence in the period’s poetry.⁴¹³ After the Abbasids’ transfer of power to Mamluks in Egypt, the latter maintained the *khalīfat Allah* title.⁴¹⁴ When the Ottoman Empire (1517–1924 CE) had gained control of power over much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa, they claimed to have inherited the role of *khalīfat Allah*.⁴¹⁵ The Seljuk Empire (1037–1194 CE) also adopted the title. Indian and Moroccan rulers used *khalīfat Allah* or *na’ib Allah* (delegate or substitute of God).⁴¹⁶ Among the Shi’ites, the Imamiyyah, also known as the Twelvers, explained that their imams were “*khalīfat Allah fir ardhī*” (the deputy of God of the earth) and stressed their rights to the title as successors of the Prophet.⁴¹⁷ The Fatimid Dynasty’s founder was officially proclaimed “*khalīfat Allah ala’ alamin*” (the deputy of God of the universe) to establish a Fatimid state in Spain.⁴¹⁸ The Fatimid Caliphs were also described as deputies of God in poetry and prose.⁴¹⁹ Among the Shi’ite groups, the Zaydis have never used the title.⁴²⁰ By the 18th century, the title surfaced in Java, Southeast Asia.⁴²¹ Some African rulers

⁴¹³ Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 17.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

have also adopted the title “*khalīfat Allah tāla fil ardhī*” (the deputy of the high God of the universe) and “*khalīfa Rabb al-‘alamin*” (the deputy of the Lord of the universe).⁴²² Crone and Hind write that the “idea that *khalīfa* stood for ‘*khalīfat Allah*’ was not unknown, and some African rulers conflated it with the title *khalīfa Rabb al-‘alamin*.”⁴²³ An overview of various Caliphates and Muslim empires, dynasties, and sultanates who adopted the title *khalīfat Allah* and or similar titles is shown in Table 4.

Caliphates / Muslims Rulers	Title(s) used
Umayyad Caliphate (661 – 750 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
Abbasid Caliphate (750 – 1258 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
The Umayyads of Spain (711–1031 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
Isma’ili Fatimid Caliphate (909 – 1171 CE)	Their imams were called “ <i>khalīfat Allah fir ardhī</i> ” (the deputy of God of the earth) and stressed their rights to the title as successors of the Prophet.
The Seljuk Empire (1037 – 1194 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
Mamluk Sultanate (1250 – 1517 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
Ottoman Caliphate (1517 – 1924 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i>
Indian Sunni Emperors: Alauddin Khalji (1296 – 1316 CE), Aurangzeb (1658 – 1707 CE), Hyder Ali (c. 1720 – 1782 CE) and Tipu Sultan (1782 – 1799 CE)	<i>Khalīfat Allah</i> or <i>na’ib Allah</i> (substitute of God).
Berber Almohad Caliphate in Morocco (1121–1269 CE)	The founder was officially proclaimed “ <i>khalīfat Allah ala’ alamin</i> ” (the deputy of God of the universe).
Bornu Empire, Mali (1381 – 1382 CE) Songhai Empire, Mali (c. 1464 – 1591 CE) Fula Sokoto Caliphate, Nigeria (1804 – 1903 CE)	Adopted the title “ <i>khalīfat Allah tāla fil ardhī</i> ” (the deputy of the high God, of the universe) and “ <i>khalīfa Rabb al-‘alamin</i> ” (the deputy of the Lord of the universe).
Southeast Asia Sultanates (12 th -19 th century)	Adopted the title “ <i>khalīfat Allah tāla fil ardhī</i> ” (the deputy of the high God, of the universe) and “ <i>khalīfa Rabb al-‘alamin</i> ” (the deputy of the Lord of the universe).

Table 4: List of Caliphates and Muslim Empires/Sultanates adopting the title *Khalīfat Allah* (successor of God) and or similar titles.

⁴²² Ibid., 18-19.

⁴²³ Ibid., 19.

Therefore, from about 644 CE to modern times, Muslims from the most diverse political, religious, geographical, and ethnic backgrounds have taken the title *khalīfa* to stand for “*khalīfat Allah*,” meaning “deputy of God,” to the result that “practically all modern scholars accept the claim of the *ulama* and some historical leaders who identify the caliphal title *khalīfa* as meaning *khalīfat Allah*.”⁴²⁴

Early Arabic Dictionaries and Tafsīr

Early Arabic dictionaries depict various meanings of the word *khalīfa*. In *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*, the earliest Arabic dictionary (8th century), author al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 786) defines *khalīfa* as “someone who succeeds someone else in his or her place.”⁴²⁵ In another Arabic dictionary, Ibn Fāris al-Lughawī (d. 1004) defines *khalīfa* as “successor” and “the supreme authority.” “Supreme authority” referred to the political position of the caliph.⁴²⁶ Both Ibn Fāris’s and al-Khalīl’s definitions referred to “generations succeeding in new generations.”⁴²⁷

The shift in the connotation between the eighth and eleventh centuries and the impact that ruling caliphates had on it stands out, as exemplified in the Arabic dictionaries by al-Jawharī (d. 1009), al-Ṣaghānī (d. 1252), and al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 1414). The word *khalīfa* is defined as “someone who succeeds another in his place;” “the supreme authority;” and “someone who follows in someone else’s place” by al-Jawharī and al-Ṣaghānī,⁴²⁸ while al-Fīrūzābādī defines it as both “the supreme authority” and “successor.”⁴²⁹ What is significant to

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-‘ayn* (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1980), s.v. “kh-l-f.”

⁴²⁶ Ibn Fāris al-Lughawī, *Mu‘jam Maqayis Al-lugha* (Beirut: Dār Iḥya‘ al Turāth al-‘Arabi, 2001), s.v. “kh-l-f.”

⁴²⁷ Crone and Hind, *God’s Caliph*, 15.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

notice is that none of these dictionary entries mention the vicegerency of God. Crone and Hind argue that in the early caliphate, all religious and political authority was concentrated in it, asserting that, “it was the caliph who was charged with the definition of Islamic law...and without allegiance to a caliph, no Muslim could achieve salvation.”⁴³⁰

Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), from its inception to contemporary times, also illuminates the evolutionary details in the interpretations of *khalīfa*. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās (d. 687 CE) was one of the Prophet’s companions and one of the earliest exegetes of the Qur’an.⁴³¹ In ibn ‘Abbās’ commentary, *khalīfa* meant “replacement.”⁴³² He particularly interpreted it as “creation from the earth that is in place of you all.”⁴³³ In his interpretation, Adam, who represents humanity, is the successor to angels and jinn on earth.⁴³⁴

Wadad al-Qadi (1988) examined interpretations of the term in early exegetical literature, noting the importance of the term *khalīfa* in Islamic history, institutions, political theory, law, and theology.⁴³⁵ Al-Qadi sought answers to the following questions: (1) How did early Muslim exegetes living under the Umayyads understand the Qur’anic term *khalīfa*? (2) Did they also make a connection between the political reality and the divine word? (3) Can such a study shed light on how a small but significant section of Islamic society intellectually functioned during the Umayyad period? Al-Qadi’s investigation explores the exegetical history in the “earliest Islam era.”⁴³⁶ She comments on several exegetes living during the Umayyad

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 40.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Wadad al-Qadi. “The Term “Khalīfa,” in Early Exegetical Literature” in *Die Welt des Islams* 28, no. 1-4 (1988): 392-411.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 393-394.

caliphate (661-750 CE) who also defined *khalīfa*. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), Muqātil ibn Sulayman (d.767), Mujahid (d. 721), and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 777) were among those exegetes. Al-Qadi’s essay heavily utilizes the *tafsīr* of Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE). She cites that al-Ṭabarī recorded his work as well as most of the exegetical traditions before him,⁴³⁷ and finds the following: al-Baṣrī interpreted *khalīfa* as a collective noun meaning “a posterity who will succeed” and ibn Sulayman, Mujahid, and al-Thawrī interpreted it as “succession.”⁴³⁸ In al-Qadi’s conclusion, she uncovers five further, but related meanings: (1) “to succeed, to follow, to come after another;” (2) “to replace, to substitute, to take the place of another, mainly in a temporary or supposed manner, to deputize for;” (3) “to replace someone after he or she has gone;” (4) “to inhabit, to cultivate;” and (5) “to rule or govern.”⁴³⁹

Agreeing with al-Qadi’s conclusion, among the earliest exegetes, “nobody advances the possibility that humanity was God’s *khalīfa* on earth.”⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, the conflation and the institutionalization of the term first occurred during the late Umayyad–early Abbasid Caliphate period. Given this evidence, it is deduced that when used on its own, as in the case of Q 2:30, *khalīfa* means successor, as Adam (who represents humanity) is the successor to angels and jinn on earth. David was the successor to some previous king (Q 38:26). *Khalīfat Allah* is a gross alteration to what the term originally meant when referencing leaders of the *umma* after the Prophet, state heads of a Caliphate, or man/humanity as the successors of Allah.

Medieval, Classical, and Sufi Tafsīr

Medieval and classical exegesis show clear signs of conflation of the term *khalīfa* with

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 393.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 394-395.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. Also see David L. Johnston, *Earth, Empire, and Sacred Text: Muslims and Christians as Trustees of Creation* (Hollywood: Equinox Publishing, 2013), 274.

caliphs and caliphates. It is not clear if this was due to duress and caliphal pressure. Among the Qur'anic exegetes in this period are Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 932), Fakhruddin al-Rāzī (d. 1209), Abu al-Qasim Maḥmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143), Abu' Abdullah al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), the *muhaddith* (hadith scholar), theologian and judge ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), and the highly influential historian, exegete and scholar ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). These scholars were from different schools of thought, broadly identified as Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite. During the most formative period of the emerging Sunni orthodoxy, they wrote and taught.

In the classical meaning of the word *khalīfa* in the Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and classical commentaries al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Qurṭubī defined the word *khalīfa* as “successor” and “God’s deputy.”⁴⁴¹ Commentator al-Rāzī, an Ash'arite held that “the prophets who communicate God’s laws should be invested with political authority;” while al-Zamakhsharī, a Mu'tazilite, interpreted 2:30 as God teaching Adam “all the names of things” as the “human gift of rationality, as connecting human trusteeship given to Adam with humanity’s higher rank in creation under God from the beginning.”⁴⁴²

Al-Ṭabarī is one of the first classical exegetes to connect the Qur'anic word *khalīfa* to its political usage.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, according to his interpretation of 2:30, *khalīfa* refers Adam as the *khalīfa* of God because Adam succeeded the jinns. It could also refer to Adam’s progeny and their successive generations, or to someone who would judge among God’s creatures per God’s ruling.”⁴⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī’s had no problem defining the Qur'anic *khalīfa* as the “supreme ruler.”⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Idris, “Is Man the Vicegerent of God?,” 100-101.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 100. Also see al-Qadi, “The Term “Khalīfa,” 397, footnote 17, and Johnston, *Earth, Empire, and Sacred Text*, 288. According to Al-Qadi, Johnston, and Idris, al-Ṭabarī is one of the first classical exegetes to connect the Qur'anic word *khalīfa* to its political usage.

⁴⁴⁴ al-Qadi, “The Term “Khalīfa,” 397.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

The commentators ibn Taymiyya and ibn Kathīr were adamant against interpreting humans as “God’s vicegerent” or “God’s representative on earth,” because of the theological danger in associating others with God.⁴⁴⁶ So, regarding 2:30, they reasoned that *khalīfa* refers to both Adam as a successor of the jinns, and Adam’s progeny and their successive generations.⁴⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya makes the most powerful statement against defining *khalīfa* as a vicegerent of God: “whoever does so commit polytheism (*shirk*), and is a polytheist (*mushrik bihi*).”⁴⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya believed no human power deserved unconditional obedience.⁴⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr, a disciple of ibn Taymiyya, held that although humanity is a significant creation, it is not correct in identifying Adam as God’s caliph on earth.⁴⁵⁰ The geographical locations and time in which the scholars lived may have influenced their exegesis.⁴⁵¹

Sufi commentators also identified *khalīfa* as God’s deputy on earth and elevated the status of humanity in its theology.⁴⁵² Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), likely for political and social stability, combined political and mystic views to support the understanding of *khalīfa* as God’s appointed deputy.⁴⁵³ In his *Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn al-’Arabī (d. 1240) professes that humans could reach an

⁴⁴⁶ Idris, “Is Man the Vicegerent of God?,” 101.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ al-Qadi, “The Term “Khalīfa,” 397.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Idris, “Is Man the Vicegerent of God?,” 10; and Johnston, *Earth, Empire, and Sacred Text*, 305.

⁴⁵³ al-Qadi, “The Term “Khalīfa” in Early Exegetical Literature” 405.

archetypal state of “the perfect man” and “God on this earth” by connecting the adjective “high” to the position of being a *khalīfa* in 2:30.⁴⁵⁴

Islamic Revivalism and Reform

Twentieth century reformers and revivalists Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Sayyid Ibrahim Husayn Shadhili Quṭb (d. 1966), Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), Abul A’la Mawdudi (d. 1979), and Ali Shari’ati (d. 1977) defined *khalīfa* as God’s vicegerent.⁴⁵⁵ These thinkers on Islamic revivalism and reform had widespread appeal. Muhammad Abduh was one of the first nineteenth-century Islamic reformers to advocate the understanding of *khalīfa* as “God’s vicegerent.”⁴⁵⁶ Abduh’s states in his commentary of 2:30:

God informs the angels that he is placing on earth his khalifa, and they understood from this that God had implanted within the nature (*fiṭra*) of this species – which he is making a khalifa – the capacity of absolute will of unlimited choice in his work, and that the discernment between the works that present themselves to him should be made according to his knowledge; and that this knowledge, if it is not endowed with the qualities of welfare and utility (*al-maṣaliḥ wa-l-manafi’*), is corruption (*fasad*). This is a necessary requirement, because perfect knowledge can only belong to God – the Exalted!⁴⁵⁷

Abduh’s interpretation is similar to the classical scholar al-Zamakhsharī’s.⁴⁵⁸ Abduh also cites Q

⁴⁵⁴ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 85.

⁴⁵⁵ Johnston, *Earth, Empire, and Sacred Text*, 339.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Muḥammad Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-ḥakīm al-shahīr bi-tafsīr al-manār*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘arifa, 1990), 1: 255 -56 (Cf. Johnston, *Earth, Empire and Sacred Text*, 330 - 31).

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

2:31 wherein Adam names the things God commands him to name.⁴⁵⁹ The characteristic of reasoning is what he believes distinguishes humans from non-human creation.⁴⁶⁰

Egyptian reformer Sayyid Quṭb concluded that humans' role is as God's caliph on earth because "God enabled them to act in such a way."⁴⁶¹ Writing about the traits of the *khalīfa* in 2:30, Quṭb reasons:

God, in His infinite wisdom, decided to hand over the earth's affairs and destiny to man and give him a free hand to use, develop, and transform all its energies and resources for the fulfillment of God's will and purpose in creation, and to carry out the pre-eminent mission with which he was charged. It may be assumed, then, that man has been given the capability to take on that responsibility, and the necessary latent skills and energies to fulfill God's purpose on earth... This clearly indicates that man is held in high regard in God's sight and occupies a prominent position in the system of the universe.⁴⁶²

Notably, Quṭb appears to be one of the first twentieth-century Muslims to identify the *khalīfa* as a steward of the earth.⁴⁶³

Iqbal's definition of *khalīfa* as vicegerent hints at the pressures of colonialism, believing that Western European politics' divorce from religion led to "disastrous conflicts between narrowly conceived interests."⁴⁶⁴ Iqbal characterizes human beings as "co-workers with

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Johnston, 330 - 331.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1973), 1: 41.

⁴⁶³ William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 129.

⁴⁶⁴ Mustansir Mir, "Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938)," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic and Political Thought*, eds., Bulliet, Richard, David Cook, Roxanne L. Euben, Khaled Fahmy, Frank Griffel, Bernard Haykel, Robert W. Hefner, Timur Kuran, Jane McAuliffe, and Ebrahim Moosa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 259.

God” because of their ability to apply mastery over the earth and contends that humans can “exert mastery over nature while simultaneously bearing the burden of freedom due to the *amana* (trust) they accepted.”⁴⁶⁵

Although Muhammad Mawdudi defines *khalīfa* as vicegerent, his explanation differs in some ways from Abduh, Qutb, and Iqbal’s. Mawdudi held the following view:

Khalifa is thus not the master, but the deputy of the Master; his powers are not his own but delegated to him by the real Master. Therefore, he has no right to have his own will, but he is there to fulfill the delegating Authority’s will. It would be dishonesty and treason if he assumed sovereign powers, or used them according to his own whim, or if he acknowledged another as his sovereign and submitted to his will.⁴⁶⁶

In some ways, Mawdudi’s understanding of *khalīfa* resonates with how Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates viewed themselves. Mawdudi supported an Islam state, believing that heads of states would be God’s vicegerents (*khulāfa Allah*). According to Mawdudi, Divine sovereignty meant that only Muslims could be God’s deputies in an Islamic state.⁴⁶⁷

Ali Shari’ati sees humanity as the most exalted creature because of the role of vicegerency.⁴⁶⁸ He reaches a similar conclusions to Iqbal and Ibn al-’Arabī’s. Shari’ati views man in a partner-like, co-working relationship with God. Shari’ati asserts:

First, God addresses the angels, saying, “I wish to create a vicegerent for Myself upon earth.” See how great is the value of man according to Islam!... God, Who in the view of Islam and all believers, is the greatest and most exalted of all entities, the creator of

⁴⁶⁵ Johnston, *Earth, Empire, and Sacred Text*, 326.

⁴⁶⁶ Abū al-’Alā’ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, 6 vols., trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Islamic Publications: Lahore, 2005), 1, 66.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁴⁶⁸ Ali Shari’atī, *On the Sociology of Islam* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979), 73.

Adam and the master of the cosmos, addresses the angels and presents man to them as His vicegerent. The whole mission of man according to Islam becomes evident from this divine address. The same mission that God has in the cosmos, man must perform on earth as God's vicegerent. The first excellence that man possesses is, then, being God's representative on earth.⁴⁶⁹

Therefore, according to Abduh, Quṭb, Iqbal, Mawdudi, and Shari'ati, *khalīfa* is God's vicegerent. With this meaning, they held the idea of human beings working with God's endorsement in ruling over both the social and physical environment. Humans can exercise mastery over the environment, although it is the property of God. Since the last dismantling of the Caliphate, Muslims have argued whether or not to restore it.

The discourse of a Caliphate offers a critical debate that all of these commentaries and perspectives have in common—they reinforce hierarchy and patriarchy as the natural order of things. They did not take the opportunity to interpret the term to mean something less dominating. In contemporary times, *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant stand out as groups or organizations calling for the Caliphate's re-establishment and unification of the *umma* recycling these same points of view.

Contemporary Islamic Environmentalism and Feminism

Several contemporary environmentalists and feminist scholars of Islam have weighed in on the term *khalīfa*, whereby a definite shift in its meaning is evident. They focus upon three particular intersecting areas—definition/translation, characterization, and overall conclusion. These categories will serve to engage their perspectives on how they understand the term critically. Among Islamic environmentalists, it is common to find the word “vicegerent” as the first translation given in their definitions. Reflective of living during an era of ecological crises are the growing usage of the term “steward”/ “stewardship” in addition to “vicegerent.”

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

Among the first scholars to address the current ecological degradations were Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fazlun M Khalid. Nasr argued that human beings are servants and vicegerents of God (*'abdAllah* and *khalīfat Allah*).⁴⁷⁰ Also employing the translation, “steward,” Nasr characterizes the role of being a *khalīfa* as having “the right to practice our vicegerency on earth,” but only on the condition that we remain mindful of being God’s servants, obeying “His Will and His Laws.”⁴⁷¹ Nasr interprets this as having “permission to dominate” the earth but insists that “submission and servanthood of God” are maintained as “God dominates over His creation, but also cares for it.”⁴⁷²

Khalid describes *khalīfa* as having the role of stewardship and viceroy. He characterized the role as a “sacred duty,” “appointment,” and “ascribed” to the human race.⁴⁷³ Khalid also perceives this term as granting “permission to dominate,”⁴⁷⁴ giving humans a special place in creation is God’s scheme.⁴⁷⁵ In much of the same way as Nasr, Khalid acknowledges that it is critical to keep in mind that humans are “first and foremost submitters, slaves of God (*'abdAllah*).”⁴⁷⁶ Furthermore, Khalid regards this “special” role as being in a kind of “partnership” and having “added responsibilities,” as human beings are accountable for their actions. He therefore concludes:

Humankind has a special place in God’s scheme, that of viceroy (*khalifa*), bearing in

⁴⁷⁰ Nasr, “Islam, the Contemporary Islamic World, and the Environmental Crisis,” 97.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 97-98.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Fazlun M. Khalid, *Islam, Ecology, and Modernity: An Islamic Critique of the Root Causes of Environmental Degradation*,” 316.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

mind that we are first and foremost submitters, slaves of God (*'abdAllah*). This is our relationship to the Creator... We are decidedly not its lord and masters... The role of humans—who uniquely have wills of their own and are thus capable of interfering with the pattern of creation—is that of guardianship. This added responsibility imposes on their behavior, showing the way to a conscious recognition of their own fragility. They achieve this by submitting themselves to the Divine law, *shari'a*.⁴⁷⁷

Impacting current trends on environmentalism in Islam and the definition of *khalīfa* scholars like Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti, S. Nomanul Haq, Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Fink, and Othman Abd-ar Rahman Llewellyn provide some nuance. Their definitions usually start with the word “viceregent,” and then they add “steward,” “custodian,” “trusteeship,” and the like.⁴⁷⁸ It is not lost among them to equate *khalīfa* with “God’s regents on the earth.” In Chishti’s explanation, the Qur’an “establishes humankind’s position in the physical world as one of vicegerent, or steward, of creation” in 6:165. She states that “the earth is presented to the vicegerent in the Shari’a as a ‘usufruct,’ with attendant duties of maintenance and, where possible, improvement for the survival and good condition of various communities within the physical sphere.”⁴⁷⁹ Insisting on the need for “human sensitivity” to its earthly co-inhabitants as mentioned in Q 6:38 and 16:68, Chishti emphasizes the moral dimension of the *khalīfa*.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 316-317.

⁴⁷⁸ Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti, “Fitra: An Islamic Model for Humans and the Environment,” 67-84; S. Nomanul Haq, “Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction,” 121-154; Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Fink, “Peace in Islam: An Ecology of the Spirit,” 155-184; Othman Abd-ar Rahman Llewellyn, “The Basis for a Discipline of Islamic Environmental Law,” 185-248. All are in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed*, eds., Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁷⁹ Saadia Khawar Khan Chishti, “Fitra: An Islamic Model for Humans and the Environment,” 75.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 75-76.

S. Nomanul Haq asserts that although humans are considered vicegerent, servants, and “custodians of the entire natural world,” as *khalīfa*, humanity is “reined in by a set of moral and metaphysical controls.”⁴⁸¹ Haq characterized humans as theomorphic, supreme creatures:

Human beings exist by virtue of a primordial covenant (*mīthāq*) whereby they have testified to their own theomorphic nature, and by virtue of a trust that they have taken upon themselves in pre-eternity. There is a due measure (*qadr*) to things, and a balance (*mīzān*) in the cosmos, and humanity is transcendently committed not to disturb or violate this *qadr* and *mīzān*; indeed, the fulfillment of this commitment is the fundamental moral imperative of humanity.⁴⁸²

Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Fink also note the special privileges and responsibilities of humans. They emphasized the covenantal role of trust (*amana*). Performing the function of *khalīfa*, or vicegerent is the human challenge. They see every human’s potential to fulfill the role of vicegerency and human dignity.⁴⁸³ Interestingly, Othman Abd-ar Rahman Llewellyn, in his take on “stewardship,” articulates *khalīfa* as a “shepherd” who will be asked about His “flock” at the end of time.⁴⁸⁴ Llewellyn characterizes *khalīfa* as “managing the earth,” and sees it not as a privilege, but as an honor, “trust, a responsibility, and a trial.”⁴⁸⁵

Islamic feminists who have directly addressed understanding the word *khalīfa* include Asma Barlas, Asma Lamrabet, Sa’diyya Shaikh, and Amina Wadud. What each of them adds to

⁴⁸¹ Haq, “Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction,” 126-127.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁸³ Said and Fink, “Peace in Islam: An Ecology of the Spirit,” 155-156.

⁴⁸⁴ Llewellyn, “The Basis for a Discipline of Islamic Environmental Law,” 190.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

the discourse reflects divergent angles of feminist perspectives. Among them, the translation of “vicegerent” remains consistent, but its characterizations are unique. Barlas, writing on the Qur’an’s position on “human subjectivity (vice-regency),” characterized *khalīfa* as being “finite and a trust from God, and is not meant to further one’s own personal power or Glory.”⁴⁸⁶ Barlas focuses on how some exegeses used the concept of *khalīfa* to support gender superiority in Islam. Importantly, Barlas notes that “the idea of viceregency is not contingent on sex, and while it is a relational term, it does not mean that humans are viceregents over one another. Rather, they are viceregents on earth, on which they nonetheless have been warned not to walk ‘with insolence.’”⁴⁸⁷ Barlas, like many environmentalists, emphasizes the notions of trust, responsibility, and the rights and duties she sees as implicit in the term.

Asma Lamrabet translates *khalīfa* as “God’s vicegerents on earth.”⁴⁸⁸ Lamrabet investigates the different formulations of the word “*istikhlaf*,” from which *khilāfah* is derived.⁴⁸⁹ According to Lamrabet, the term appears several times in the Qur’an in three different formulations or meanings: “The general sense of succession or *khalifah* (caliphate), the *khalifah* (caliph) is the successor, i.e., one who occupies the place of another in his domain (e.g., 6:162, 10:14, 10:73, 2:30, 38:26, etc.), the plural form *khulafa* or *khala’if* denotes peoples, tribes, and even generations that succeed one another (e.g., 7:69, 7:74, 7:15, 7:169, etc.).”⁴⁹⁰ She characterizes the term as “equal responsibility that is required of both women and men to

⁴⁸⁶ Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*, 111.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ Asma Lamrabet, “An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah*” in *Men in Charge?: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, eds., Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 84-106, 84.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 85

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

contribute to the building of human civilization.”⁴⁹¹ Therefore, according to Lamrabet, vicegerency is a privilege granted to all human beings (men and women) over other creatures. This privilege is a preference over angels, as chosen by God and worthy of grave responsibility. She stresses that humanity as *khilāfah*, or representatives of God on earth, is not “in a literal sense of actual representatives of God on earth. Rather, they are trustees of a mission: they are responsible for managing life on earth.”⁴⁹²

Sa’diyya Shaikh offers yet another dimension to the meaning of *khalīfa* in her essay on family planning, contraception, and abortion in Islam.⁴⁹³ Shaikh holds that reflected in the understanding of the social purpose and potential is “a pervasive Qur’anic concept called *khilāfah* that can be translated as trusteeship, moral agency, or vicegerency.”⁴⁹⁴ She believes that each individual, community, and society have the responsibility to realize a just and moral social order in harmony with God’s will.⁴⁹⁵ Just like Barlas and Lamrabet, Shaikh maintains that “each person, irrespective of gender, race, and nationality, possesses the birthright to be God’s khalifah in this world.”⁴⁹⁶ Placing great emphasis on the principle of *tawhīd* (divine oneness), Shaikh contends that *tawhīd* has an explicit intersection with the concept of *khalīfa*, stating, “bearing witness to God’s absolute oneness in Islam is intrinsically related to an enactment of that awareness into the world for justice and human well-being.”⁴⁹⁷ The misunderstanding and

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Sa’diyya Shaikh. “Family Planning, Contraception and Abortion in Islam: Undertaking Khilafah,” in *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*, ed., Daniel C. Maguire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 105-128.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

misinterpreting of these concepts are the driving forces behind structural injustices relating to economic and gender hierarchies, according to Shaikh.⁴⁹⁸

Amina Wadud, like Shaikh, utilizes *tawhīd* as a lens to understand the role of *khalāfa*, insisting that *tawhīd*, as a social principle, “mandates a relationship between human beings only of equality and reciprocity.”⁴⁹⁹ Thus, Wadud contends that women’s role is also of *khalīfa* on the earth.⁵⁰⁰ Wadud also adds to the definition and understanding of the term. She defines *khalīfa* as “a moral agent of Allah within the Sacred order of balance and harmony in the universe.”⁵⁰¹ According to Wadud, 2:30 supports and defines women as agents on the earth.⁵⁰² Wadud argues further that women’s role is no different from men’s.⁵⁰³ A discussion on these ideas and their ramifications follow.

Analysis

Sorting through the history of the concept of *khalīfa*, a clear trajectory of development, alteration, and addition to its meaning has emerged. A focus on how the Islamic creation narrative influences attitudes toward the environment, Roger E. Timm (1993) considered the “conceptual implications” of whether the authoritative literature of the early Islamic religious

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Amina Wadud, “Islamic Feminism by any Other Name,” in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories*, eds. El Omari, Dina, Juliane Hammer, and Mouhanad Khorchide (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), (33-45), 36.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 36-37.

tradition justified the exploitation of the environment.⁵⁰⁴ He asserts:

On the one hand, some material may support an anthropocentric approach to the environment, exploiting it for human purposes...From this point of view the non-human creation will likely be appreciated, not for its intrinsic value but only for its instrumental value for humans... The Islamic emphasis on divine sovereignty outweighs this possibly detrimental understanding of human vicegerency. Allah bestows authority over creation on humans, not as an absolute right to do as they please, but as a test—a test of obedience, loyalty, and gratitude to God.⁵⁰⁵

The human drive for power and authority is older than Islam itself. When conflated with the rise of Islam, we find two dominant perspectives in contemporary times that are both human-centric. There are two historical strands of interpretation throughout Islamic traditions. Concerning the effect on the environment, it depends on how *khilāfat Allah* is interpreted. If it is interpreted in an anthropocentric way, then the results may be exploitation of the earth and marginalized populations.⁵⁰⁶ When human viceregency is seen as ultimately subordinate to Divine sovereignty and will, human “authority over creation becomes responsibility to care gratefully for the environment that belongs to God.”⁵⁰⁷

Even though the issue of minorities is not explicitly explored, the question of minorities is closely allied to the question of women. Muslim women, like minorities, have fewer legal rights than Muslim men, according to Islamic belief.⁵⁰⁸ Women’s inferiority and differentness

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁰⁶ Roger E. Tim. “The Ecological Fallout of Islamic Creation Theology,” in *The Bucknell Review* 37, no. 2 (1993): 83.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

within this system cannot be changed, unlike men outside the system who might join it by converting. Class, ethnicity, and local culture have a critical impact on women's experiences, which explain the way women are affected by gender discourses within their society.⁵⁰⁹

In the field of social psychology, the term speciesism is “the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species.”⁵¹⁰ Since the time of Lynn White Jr.'s article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), the narratives of moral problem and crisis at the heart of modern environmentalisms are more explicitly religious.⁵¹¹ The cultural and social impact of speciesism drives destructive relationships through a social dominance orientation. Philosophers and social psychologists argue that there is a direct correlation between our attitudes toward animals (speciesism) and other prejudices, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia.⁵¹² Therefore, the desire for group-based dominance can also explain the links between discrimination in ideology and concepts.⁵¹³

Social dominance orientation explains patriarchy and hierarchy. Social dominance orientation derives from social dominance theory as a relatively new approach toward integrating intergroup relations with social attitudes. Its premise is that all human societies tend to be structured upon “group-based hierarchies” due to an economical, surplus-producing social group:

⁵⁰⁸ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Oscar Horta, “What is Speciesism?” in the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23, no. 3 (2010): 243-266.

⁵¹¹ Lynn White Jr. “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” in *Science*, vol. 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

⁵¹² Jim A. C. Everett, “Speciesism, Generalized Prejudice, and Perceptions of Prejudiced Others” in *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations: GPIR* vol. 22,6 (2019): 785-803, 785, accessed May 23, 2020, doi:10.1177/1368430218816962.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

This hierarchical social structure consists of one or a small number of dominant and hegemonic groups at the top and one or a number of subordinate groups at the bottom... While dominant groups possess a disproportionately large share of positive social value, subordinate groups possess a disproportionately large share of negative social value, including such things as low power and social status, high-risk and low-status occupations, relatively poor health care, poor food, modest or miserable homes, and severe negative sanctions.⁵¹⁴

Social dominance theory then attempts to identify the various mechanisms that produce and maintain a group-based social hierarchy and how these mechanisms interact. They are “an age-system, in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults;”⁵¹⁵ a “gender-system in which males have disproportionate social and political power compared with females (patriarchy); and an arbitrary-set system. The arbitrary-set system consists of socially constructed group distinctions that happen to be relevant within specific situational and historical contexts”⁵¹⁶ The age and gender systems have some degree of malleability (young or old, male or female). The arbitrary-set system determines how insiders and outsiders are defined,⁵¹⁷ and is associated with the highest degree of violence, brutality, oppression, and brutal forms of social control.⁵¹⁸ The cruelty associated with arbitrary-set systems exceed that of the other two systems in intensity and scope and is generally

⁵¹⁴ Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto. *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 31.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

characteristic of economic surplus production.⁵¹⁹ Therefore, human social systems become subject to the counterbalancing influences of hierarchy-enhancing forces by producing and maintaining ever-higher levels of group-based social inequality and hierarchy-attenuating forces.⁵²⁰

The “scripturalist images” influence of *isra’iliyyat* (Bible and Bible-related traditions) reflects Adam as God’s chosen agent on earth.⁵²¹ Barbara Freyer Stowasser (2015) contends that the exegetic texts are a valuable record of the “scholarly debate on sociopolitical questions.”⁵²² Thus, in contemporary Islamic sociopolitical debates, topics like “women’s questions” have served as “indicators of direction and a parameter of Islam’s search for its identity and role in modern times.”⁵²³ Environmental debates among Muslims are very similar to this—the search for identity and role in the modern world. By the time of the classical Qur’anic exegetes and historians “Islamic tradition and law had formulated a theological-legal paradigm that enshrined cultural assumptions about gender, women, institutionalized structures governing male-female relations which mirrored the social reality and practices of the post conquest, acculturated Islamic world.”⁵²⁴ These medieval models are not viable. Consequently, Stowasser explains, wherever medieval models no longer seem relevant or completely relevant for contemporary Muslim societies, they have been eliminated as well as reinterpreted.”⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 6. Stowasser defines scripturalist images as fundamentalism, insisting on a literal interpretation of scripture.

⁵²² Ibid., 5.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 134.

An Islamic Ecofeminist Re-envisioning

An Islamic ecofeminist theology (IEfT) seeks to end all dominations by correcting such relationships. Prophet Muhammad's twenty-three years of prophethood left a legacy of an attempt at remedying relationships—humans to God, men to women, humans to humans, and humans to God's creation. Leila Ahmed describes it as the “consistent elements of the ethical utterances of egalitarianism,” and writes:

There appears, therefore, to be two distinct voices within Islam, and two competing understandings of gender, one expressed in the pragmatic regulations for society...the other in the articulation of an ethical vision. Even as Islam instituted marriage as a sexual hierarchy in its ethical voice—a voice virtually unheard by rulers and lawmakers—it insistently stressed the importance of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of being and the equality of all individuals. While the first voice has been extensively elaborated into a body of political and legal thought, which constitutes the technical understanding of Islam, the second—the voice to which ordinary believing Muslims, who are essentially ignorant of the details of Islam's technical legacy, give their assent—has left little trace on the political and legal heritage of Islam.⁵²⁶

The earliest Islamic concepts of man as *khalīfa* are vague and inconsistent. Consequently, as al-Qadi, Idris, and Johnston demonstrated, the Qur'anic word *khalīfa* is best interpreted as “successor” or “inheritor.” The meaning of “inheritor” is associated with humanity as successive generations that come after angels, jinns, or other humans on earth. The interpretation of *khalīfa* as “vicegerent of God” has no Qur'anic foundation. The contemporary interpretation of *khalīfa* as “trustee” or “steward” continues to employ an anthropocentric worldview.

⁵²⁶ Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 65.

Considering an ecofeminist onto-epistemological position of Divine justice, which initiates, supports, and sustains all creation's full and equal intrinsic value, what is the proper understanding of *khalīfa*? Will our working definition result in an adjustment? Finally, grounding theology in an ecofeminist onto-epistemological position and purpose, what will be the resulting corrected relationships?

Inspired by feminist scholars Asma Barlas, Asma Lamrabet, Sa'diyya Shaikh, Amina Wadud, environmentalist Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, and the example of Rosemary Radford Ruether, the ecofeminist perspective of *khalīfa* as presented in this dissertation requires correction through the utilization of the *tawhīdic* principle. In the end, we shall see that focusing on *khalīfa* should not be essential in understanding the concept and role of humanity. Once critical relationships are corrected, then the need for relying on vicegerency dissipates.⁵²⁷

The theological concepts of *tawhīd* and *khalīfa* explicitly intersect. The utilization of *tawhīd* as a lens to understand the role of *khalīfa* is critical to ending humanism in Islamic theology. Translating *khalīfa* as "God's vicegerent/deputy" elevates the human to a God-like position. An anthropocentric worldview counters the concept of *tawhīd*, as it contradicts a theocentric worldview established by the *tawhīdic* paradigm. As Wadud states, "bearing witness to God's absolute oneness in Islam is intrinsically related to an enactment of that awareness into the world for the purposes of justice and human well-being."⁵²⁸ Therefore, as a principle, *tawhīd* mandates a relationship of equality and reciprocity among human beings. This notion of the *tawhīdic* paradigm can and must also extend to justice, and well-being toward creation as a whole, as nowhere in the Qur'an are humans called to represent or deputize for God.

⁵²⁷ Idris, "Is Man the Vicegerent of God?," 109.

⁵²⁸ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 36.

Humanity's place in creation does not take center stage. Qur'an 40:57 states: "The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though most people do not know it."⁵²⁹ All creation has its place and value, and this is contrary to the anthropocentrism and separatism inherent in vicegerency and stewardship.⁵³⁰ The Qur'an "humbles humanity and reminds humans that they do not have an exclusive claim to the earth."⁵³¹ As evidence, Q 51:56 states: "I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me;" and Q 112:1–4 states: "Say, the truth is: Allah is One. Allah is Besought of all, needing none. God neither begot anyone, nor was begotten. And equal to God has never been any one;" and the observation that the Qur'an frequently refers to God as "the Lord of the worlds" (*Rabb al-'ālamīn*).⁵³² Therefore, humans are not at the center of creation.⁵³³

Why is it necessary to correct relationships that privilege humans as trustees of God? A notion of privileged trust and responsibility should not find support in the concept of *khalīfa*. This as an overly simplistic view of the human to non-human relationship on earth, which reflects an inadequacy in dealing with complex life systems on the planet.⁵³⁴ As a second weakness, the vicegerency/stewardship model assumes that nature is a human resource and that humans control it and are responsible for its management.⁵³⁵ The perception that human beings are in control assumes that God has allowed humans as representatives to tend to the earth. This

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁵³⁰ Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

perception acknowledges God’s sovereignty but assumes that humans are the most capable of taking care of the environment.⁵³⁶ In reality, human societies are part of a complex ecosystem interconnected to all of “life’s processes and with all other created beings.”⁵³⁷

In her explanation of *khalīfa*, Asma Barlas suggests, “It is not meant to further one’s own personal power or glory.”⁵³⁸ The vicegerency/deputy and stewardship/trustee models do not fit this ecofeminist interpretation and highlight two dominant streams of thought. Both places humankind at the top of a creation hierarchy. The stewardship/trustee model is based on benevolent humanism. Altering the term to trustee/steward further indicates what happens with responses in crisis mode. Monotheistic religions adopted the stewardship/trustee model due to Lynn White assigning “blame” on Christianity for the environmental problem.⁵³⁹ The proposed IEfT supports the view that humanity is irrelevant to God’s authority, and that God’s creation is entirely independent of humanity. God’s creation can become an inspiration “for those who reflect,” but it is not a commodity for humankind.⁵⁴⁰ The vicegerent/stewardship model of humanity is counter to this IEfT model.

Essential to correcting human-to-human relationships is converting the influence of the term *khalīfa*. It refers to the relationship between God, humans, angels, and jinns. All humanity has a responsibility to contribute, so it implies equal responsibility. The purpose and potential of an individual, a community, and a society are reflected in it. It demonstrates an understanding

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Barlas, *Believing Women*, 111.

⁵³⁹ Tlili, *Animals in the Qur’an*, 115.

⁵⁴⁰ Several places in the Quran call for the reader to observe and reflect, such as Q 3:137, 6:11, and 10:6.

that each has the responsibility to realize a just and moral social order in harmony with God's will, not as God's representative. As established, one aspect of God's will is Divine justice. The Qur'an emphasizes that human beings who are God-conscious, gracious, and righteous shall inherit the earth and succeed other generations.⁵⁴¹ Ruether points out that cultural-symbolic and socioeconomic are two levels on which sexism and ecological exploitation are formed and intersect. The cultural-symbolic relationship is the "ideological superstructure, which reflects and ratifies the second."⁵⁴²

Within Islamic developments, the rise in the authority of the caliph-imam and the role of *'amma* and *umma* has situated boundaries and liminalities, evidenced by the discourse of the veil, the harem, and Muslim women. Mernissi challenged us with several critical questions: First, "Why has no one contended that the position of caliph violates the principle of equality, which is the base of Islam?"⁵⁴³ Second, "How could Islam reconcile these two points; the principle of equality among all believers and the very restrictive criteria of eligibility for the caliphate?"⁵⁴⁴ Mernissi asked us to imagine another political Islam:

One can imagine the transformation of the *masjid*, the mosque, into a popular assembly with the expansion of the *umma* and the growth in the number of Muslims. The Prophet left everything in place for moving in that direction...We would have given to the world well before other nations, that ideal, which inspired the Prophet and his whole strategy: a group led by a *hakam*, an arbiter, the title he loved the most and was most proud of.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴¹ Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, 223.

⁵⁴² Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 97.

⁵⁴³ Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 80.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Within the recollections of resistance and counter-resistance, there are seeds of liberation, and nothing expresses the betrayal of the Prophet's egalitarian thrust more than the attitude toward women's access to mosques.

In the Prophetic example, the mosque was more than just a place of worship. It was a place where dialogue between the leader and people took place. The whole community, including Muslims, non-Muslims, all ethnicities, women, and men, had direct contact with the Prophet. With the Constitution of Medina, the Prophet equalized the blood worth of every member of the community.⁵⁴⁶ After the Prophet's death, the Caliph, was always an *imam* (prayer leader), but an *imam* was not necessarily a Caliph. As the *umma* came to signify the Muslim community, the *'amma* signified negatively the common masses under the caliphate's rule. The word *'amma* denotes the uncultivated, ignorant, and undisciplined masses, incapable of reflection or reason and therefore excluded from power and authority⁵⁴⁷ Only the elite, the "*ahl al-hal wa al-'aqd*" (those who can tie and untie), are capable and are in a position to lead."⁵⁴⁸ The caliph-imam roles separation gave rise to another group of male elites, the *ulama* (religious scholars). Mernissi concludes that "for many religious authorities the lesser imamate, the simple act of leading the prayers, already excluded women, one understands that for the greater imamate (Caliph) the question seems superfluous."⁵⁴⁹ Over time, the private space of the household or harem became the domain of women. As the epitome of public space in Muslim settings, the disappearance of women from mosques holds significant meaning.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 73.

Conclusion: Original Connotations of *Khalīfa*

Kaveh L. Afrasiabi asks a pertinent question: Is it possible to reconcile religious humanism with ecology's ethical concerns? According to IEfT, as long as Q 2:30 focuses on humanity's purpose as God's representative, it is not likely. Moving toward establishing an ecofeminist ontological position, we have come to discover two contemporary perspectives informing normative Islamic ideology on the concept of *khalīfa* and humanity's role. One instills an attitude of human superiority and is strongly hierarchical and patriarchal. Inspired by current ecological and feminist discourses, the other is categorized as a "benevolent" humanistic position of *khalīfa*. There is an attempt to incorporate stewardship or trusteeship in humanity's superior position over creation. Both are human-centric and support human dominations as factors in a hierarchy of creation, promoting social and environmental disparities in its worldview. Although benevolent stewardship claims to incite social and environmental justice as an integral aspect of Islam, species domination is upheld.

Addressing and deconstructing dualisms and hierarchies invoke the critical norm of all creation's full and equal intrinsic value. The theological basis for the concept of *khalīfa* stems from the interpretation of three verses in the Qur'an, 2:30, 38:26, and 24:55, with 2:30 as the most often cited. The translations and interpretations of *khalīfa* have had lasting effects. Nawal Ammar eloquently expresses the contemporary problem of the current paradigm of human vicegerency in Islam and how it contributes to environmental destruction and gender and social issues in the following statement: "The real problem—it is not difficult to understand the ecological crisis in its apparent manifestations as polluted air, radiation, contamination of water, and the eradication of entire species of animals and plants. It is however more difficult to

ascertain that the processes that lead to environmental depletion on our earth today are the result of human injustices and cultural arrogance.”⁵⁵¹

The contemporary understanding of *khalīfa* as God’s vicegerent on earth positions humanity in a divinely appointed, unique, managerial, and privileged position at worst; and as a Divinely appointed trustee with symbolic, limited, or conditional use at best. In both cases, humanity is in varying degrees of theomorphism. Thus, human creation is at the top of God’s creation, standing in as God’s representative. The changes to the concept of *khalīfa*, from its Qur’anic meaning, initiated support of a hierarchical and, by extension, a patriarchal worldview to become Islamic theology, correlating the divine hierarchy over the human with men’s dominance over women and humans over non-human creation. Utilizing the same verses and an onto-epistemological shift in consciousness facilitates a new paradigm that incorporates social and eco-justice in response to humanity’s role in creation.

Admittedly, there remains much more development needed in constructing an ecofeminist position on the role and purpose of humanity. The focus must always remain that there are ways to live that do not harm the land we live on, the air we breathe, and people in the societies we build. An IEfT must also remain vigilant that being a member of the broader ecological community and an equal part of the web of God’s creation is at the forefront of Qur’anic interpretations.

⁵⁵¹ Ammar and Gray, “Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?,” 301.

Chapter Five: An Ecofeminist Analysis of Adam, Eve, Eden, and the Afterworld

*The ordinary Muslim believes, as seriously as the ordinary Jew or Christian, that Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib. If confronted with the fact that this firmly entrenched belief is derived mainly from the Bible and is not only extra-Qur'anic but also in contradiction to the Qur'an, this Muslim is almost certain to be shocked.*⁵⁵²

The report about the creation of the first humans holds significance in monotheisms. This chapter considers the relationship between Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, and the afterworld (Heaven and Hell) in Islamic interpretations and Muslim conceptualizations of gender, societal, and environmental roles. Like Eden, the eschatological heavenly afterworld is called *jannah* and depicted as a garden setting. Eden, human origins, Mecca, and the afterworld collapse in various accounts of their narratives, and how Muslims speak and write about them provides a complex connection between their daily lives and beliefs.⁵⁵³ The primary focus of this chapter is an ecofeminist analysis of Adam, Eve, Eden, Heaven, and Hell in Islamic cosmology, cosmogony, and eschatology.

The previous chapter argued that classical and contemporary interpretations of *khalīfa* initiate human superiority and dominance, supporting speciesism and societal and ecological degradation. As asserted in this study, societal gender roles and dichotomous physical, psychological, and environmental categories are manifestations of contemporary gender and environmental consequences. The ways in which women and men engage in ritual space (i.e., mosque) illuminate the intersections of gender disparity and globalization. Similarly, the contention in this chapter is that some normative interpretations of Adam, Eve, Eden, Heaven, and Hell are reflective of the same patriarchal attitudes of superiority and domination. The

⁵⁵² Riffat Hasan, "The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition" in *Women's and Men's Liberation: Testimonies of Spirit*, (1991), 65–82, 70.

⁵⁵³ Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 11.

critical difference between the concepts is that while *khalīfa* situates humans (particularly men) at the top of a hierarchy, the narrative of Adam and Eve situates gender, class, and nonhuman roles. Various interpretations of the cosmogony have led to hierarchical structures, negative perceptions, and usufruct positions, as evidenced in the creation hierarchy, socio-cultural patriarchy, and viceregency models. The additional conditions placed upon women in ritual performances in Islamic theology provide valuable examples that in turn connects Adam, Eve, Eden, and the afterworlds.⁵⁵⁴

Traditional philological methods, close reading, discourse analysis, and textual hermeneutics are employed in the analysis portion of this chapter. I examine how a contemporary ecological and human problem has evolved within Islamic worldviews from narratives of Adam and Eve— hypothesizing that Adam, Eve, Eden, Heaven, and Hell’s cosmological stories powerfully shape attitudes and concepts of gender and ecology. This chapter approaches the question of hierarchy from an ecofeminist perspective. Accordingly, I suggest an eco- and gender-conscious paradigmatic shift that avoids anthropocentric and androcentric interpretations. The critical questions regarding the contemporary problem for humans and the environment in Islamic worldviews are: What is the connection between the construction of gender, cultural traditions, religious attitudes, and Adam and Eve’s story? Do theological doctrines regarding normative interpretation on Eden, Heaven, and Hell support gender and ecological disparity? How do Muslim women navigate the challenges regarding globalization, environmental issues, and the use of ritual space (the mosque) within

⁵⁵⁴ Muhammad, “Body Situations,” 107. I argue that the five pillars of Islam serve as reminders of the loss of Eden. The restrictions in executing the pillars emphasize social distinctions between and among genders. Therefore, “body situations” (the physical position/location of bodies) in the performance of the pillars mirror social hierarchies that reinforce the logic of added restrictions for women instead of men.

contemporary Islamic contexts? Which gender and ecological considerations are needed to move toward an ecological and socially just world? How do we foster alternatives to prevalent hierarchical and masculinist interpretations of Islam?

A Contemporary Problem: Theological Narratives

In many belief systems, the disconnect between ideologies, teachings, and reality looms large, often creating social patterns that are influenced by and influence theological narratives. Ruether asserts that these narratives are⁵⁵⁵ It is common to hear Muslims claim that Islam gives women more rights than any other religion. In this age of awareness of ecological crises, Muslims express strikingly similar environmental responses. Muslim social settings, Friday sermons, religious manuals, booklets, pamphlets, and eschatological manuals all shed light on the patriarchal nature of contemporary belief and practices.⁵⁵⁶ Nerina Rustomji (2009) point out that eschatological manuals, in particular, provide contemporary narratives which assert the following:

Typically, the texts contained references to both the Qur'an and hadiths. Yet, those texts did not merely compile verses and traditions. Instead, they ordered the canonical textual fragments within a framework in order to develop a fuller picture of the afterworld. As a result, authors of eschatological manuals often presented their own dramatic rendering of life after death in order to create a narrative that reinforced the reader's moral and spiritual welfare. The composition of these eschatological manuals continued over the centuries (even until the present day) and eventually shaped the way that Muslims

⁵⁵⁵ Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 97.

⁵⁵⁶ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 159. Rustomji writes that Muslim settings, Friday sermons, religious manuals, booklets, and pamphlets are sources of religious stories and hadiths that have often been omitted from theological guides over the centuries because the textual material did not meet theologians' criteria of verifiability and the formation of popular theology for the Muslim individual, family, and community.

understood and accessed eschatological traditions.⁵⁵⁷

Oral and written eschatological warnings provided in sermons, books, and manuals may instill fear, and work to control undesirable behaviors. Whether written by orthodox religious authority (the *ulama*) or heterodox theologians (contemporary preachers and storytellers), they continue to employ dramatic warnings about the punishments that awaited misguided believers.⁵⁵⁸

The Qur'anic and hadith descriptions of Heaven show that the afterworld is a model of earthly realities, "but relieved of earthly burdens."⁵⁵⁹ Compared with the conditions of Adam and Eve in Eden, there is a similar sense of ecological abundance in the Heavenly garden of the afterworld. What stand out prominently in the afterworld are developed social structures that are not a focus in Eden.

Nawal Ammar and Allison Gray point out that while "a society's religion is one of the many intersecting variables contributing to maldevelopment and environmental degradation, the record of the Muslim world shows a disregard for God's Creation even when other structural impediments are absent."⁵⁶⁰ They identify the contemporary problem for women and the marginalized, as they summarize the following critical points: (1) patriarchy prohibits the growth of scholarship among women, particularly in religious thought; (2) androcentric societies violate women's rights, and marginalize people and nature; and (3) the majority of Muslim women and the marginalized have accepted this situation passively.⁵⁶¹ Ammar and Gray attribute the problem to patriarchal interpretations of Islam's primary sources, economic systems, and

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 121–122.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁵⁹ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 33.

⁵⁶⁰ Amma and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?" 304.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., 308.

cultures that enable “a discourse of Islam filled with inequality, domination, and exploitation.”⁵⁶²

Concentrating on the theological roots of the problem of “man–woman inequality in the Islamic tradition,” Riffat Hasan states:

As a result of my study and deliberation, I came to perceive that not only in the Islamic but also in the Jewish and Christian traditions, there are three theological assumptions on which the superstructure of men’s alleged superiority to women (which implies the inequality of women and man) has been erected. These three assumptions are (1) that God’s primary creation is the man since the woman is believed to have been created from man’s rib, hence is derivative and secondary ontologically; (2) that woman, not the man, was the primary agent of what is customarily described as the “Fall,” or man’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hence all “daughters of Eve” are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt; and (3) that woman was created not only from man but also for man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not of fundamental importance. The three theological questions to which the above assumptions may appropriately be regarded as answers, are: How was woman created? Was woman responsible for the “Fall” of man? Why was woman created?⁵⁶³

The above quote implicates a close link between Eden, Mecca, human origins, and Islamic civilization. This relationship is expressed in the objects, actions, locations, lived realities, and imagined afterlives of eschatological manuals employing “canonized traditions to create fully

⁵⁶² Ibid., 307-308. Concerning patriarchal interpretations in Islam, they also note “al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī’s anthropomorphizing God in their attempt to make the *khalifah* only Adam by making God masculine.”

⁵⁶³ Hasan, “The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition” 70.

formed narratives.”⁵⁶⁴ These expressions shape and are shaped by Muslim attitudes, behaviors, and ethics. For example, according to Ibn ‘Abbas, “because of Adam’s sin, God commanded him to build the Kaaba and circumambulate it, remembering God, just as the angels circumambulate the throne of God.”⁵⁶⁵ Various examples reflect the relationship between narrative and ideology in Islamic rituals’ ethics which, albeit a complicated relationship, connects the “pillars of Islam,” the Gardens of Eden, Heaven, and Hell’s ecology with Islamic interpretations of female and male bodies.

The Qur’an has many references to gardens. *Jannah* is the Arabic word for garden. Often seen in translations as “heaven” or “paradise,” *jannah* refers both to the Garden of Eden and Heaven, the rewarded location for believers in the afterlife (*al-ākhirah*). The punitive place for disbelievers and sinners is Hell, *jahannam*, or *al-nār*, the fire (i.e., Q 2:29 and Q 78:12). The Garden of Eden is the primordial garden of paradise, Adam and Eve’s original dwelling place. The Garden of Eden is where humans were created and later expelled due to disobedience (non-submission to God’s Will), as outlined in Q 7:19–25. The eschatological garden of paradise is where believers’ good deeds and righteousness (those who submit to God’s Will) are rewarded in the afterworld. Early in the development of Islam, the rewards of Heaven and the punishments of Hell was at the center of the Prophetic message, which established Heaven as the ultimate reward for believers, Q 9:72. Only two people inhabited the entire Garden in Eden, and everything was new. After removal, they occupied the realm called *al-dunyā*, the temporal world of earthly concerns and possessions. According to Christian Lange (2015),

Historical time begins with the Fall from the primordial garden; it is followed by three

⁵⁶⁴ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, xiv. Also see, Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 11.

⁵⁶⁵ Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 64.

major successive eras of world history: the pre-Islamic period, a time of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) that is sporadically illuminated by the appearance of prophets; the Islamic period, in which God’s revelation is available, though not to all of humanity; and the apocalypse (the “history of the future,” which ushers in the end of the world, and the end of history.⁵⁶⁶

Islam’s eschatology describes the end of historical time, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment of the Day of Reckoning (*yawm al-qiyāmah*). At the advent of judgment, the afterlife (*al-ākhirah*) begins with two eternal afterworld possibilities—Heaven or Hell. The primordial garden (Eden) and eschatological garden (Heaven) is thus distinct (see Figure 3). Therefore, “Muslims spoke and wrote about the Garden and the Fire as places of existence, and like most places, they were filled with things.”⁵⁶⁷

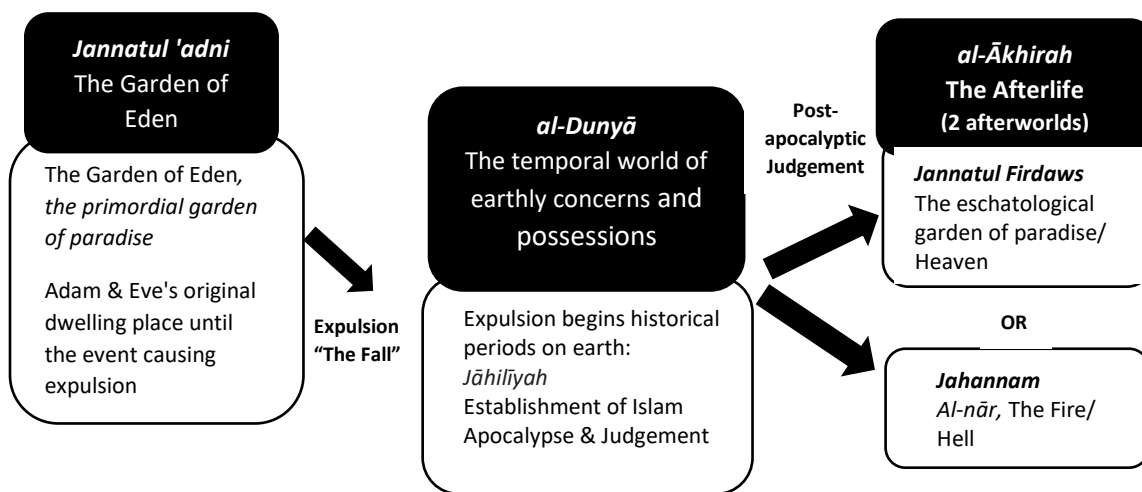


Figure 3: Overview of the relationship between Eden, Heaven, and Hell in Islamic cosmology and eschatology.

A contemporary ecofeminist problem arises because the “two most enduring objects of Paradise are the *houri* and the Lote tree.”⁵⁶⁸ The reason why the *houri* and the Lote tree are both

⁵⁶⁶ Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139014847.

⁵⁶⁷ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, xvi.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

objectified and enduring “things” connects gender disparity and environmental degradation. *Houris* are female companions in Paradise. In classical Arabic, the word *ḥūr* is the plural of both *’aḥwar* (masculine) and *ḥawrā’* (feminine).⁵⁶⁹ The tree of immortality explicitly forbidden to Adam and Eve is the only tree in Eden mentioned in the Qur’an. Trees are a universal symbol of order amid chaos.⁵⁷⁰ Trees, such as the boundary Lote-tree, in *jannah*, indicate the Garden’s beneficence, and *houris* traditions are the central focus of life in the Garden.⁵⁷¹ The imagery of and relationship between the *houris* and earthly women continue to give rise to a “host of questions and possibilities.”⁵⁷² Rustomji theorizes that “interestingly, most mentions of houris are qualified by the term *abkaran*, “virginal,” signifying the calcification of a popular belief about their virginity,” as popular expressions of Islam still draw on the material dimension of the Garden and Fire.⁵⁷³

Examining the Roots

There are narratives on Adam and Eve in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Qur’an, with some similarities and differences between them. Eve is called *Ḥawwāh* in Islamic theology and *Ḥawwāh* in Hebrew; all sources regard Adam and Eve as the first man and woman and all humanity’s parents.⁵⁷⁴ The Old (Hebrew Bible) and New Testaments provide us with two creation narratives. In Judaism, the Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible tells us that Adam was

⁵⁶⁹ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (O. Harrassowitz, 1961), 247. Definition of “*Houris*.”

⁵⁷⁰ Noble Ross Reat, “The Tree Symbol in Islam,” in *Studies in Comparative Religion* 19, no. 3 (1975): 1–19; 2.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁷² Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 42.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, accessed July 1, 2020, <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=eve>.

created in the “image of God,” after which God gave Adam custodianship of everything God had made.⁵⁷⁵ Christian ideas about humans’ creation stem from the Old and New Testaments, which describe how God created Adam from the dust, placed him in the Garden of Eden, and then gave him custodianship over creation (Genesis 3: 17–19).

Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs because he needed companionship. God tells Adam and Eve to be fruitful and procreate (Genesis 1:26–30). Genesis 3:20 states, “The man called his wife’s name Eve because she was the mother of all the living.”⁵⁷⁶ God created a tree in the Garden and commanded them not to eat its fruit. Regardless, Eve later gives Adam some fruit to eat, after which God’s wrath is “brought down” upon the serpent, Adam, and Eve. Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden and how the serpent tempted Eve to eat from the forbidden tree. Consequently, God cursed the serpent and expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, punishing their disobedience. God also tells Adam and Eve of the consequences of their disobedience. Genesis 1: 17–19 describes the result for Adam:

Then to Adam, He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it;” cursed is the ground because of you; in toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you, and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face, you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”⁵⁷⁷

Genesis 3:16 describes the consequence for Eve: “To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply

⁵⁷⁵ The Holy Bible. *King James Version Online*, accessed December 3, 2018, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1&version=NKJV>. Genesis 1:27.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Genesis 3:20.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Genesis 1: 17–19.

your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”⁵⁷⁸

The Qur’an 4:1, 32:7–9, and 39:6 offer us a simplified rendition of Adam and Eve’s creation. Compared with the biblical description, the Qur’an never mentions Eve/*Hawwāh*, and commentators only infer her creation; thus, she is ambiguous in Islam. The Qur’an states, “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.”⁵⁷⁹ These verses are described by commentators as God giving a mate or spouse to Adam and the Garden to live and eat as they pleased. Furthermore, God instructed them not to go near a particular tree. The Qur’an suggests the naiveté of the first humans, while in the Judeo-Christian version, Eve is solely culpable. The Qur’an depicts a joint decision to disobey the order to not go near the tree. Qur’an 7:19–25 outlines the events that led to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden.

How do the concepts in the Old and New Testaments of Judaism and Christianity square up Islamic settings? Eve is a “living part of the contemporary Islamic religious worldview.”⁵⁸⁰ Exemplified in the exegetical commentary of al-Ṭabarī, the folklore from *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā’ī*, and Ibn al-‘Arabi’s mystical perspectives, are classical conceptualizations of Adam and Eve, and by extension, their sons and daughters (humanity).

Commentaries and Folklore

Al Ṭabarī’s exegetical commentary on the Qur’an comprises a collection of the first three

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., Genesis 3:16.

⁵⁷⁹ The Quran.com Team, accessed May 3, 2020, *Quran.com*. Sahih International translation of 4:1.

⁵⁸⁰ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*, 3.

centuries of Muslim exegesis by several companions of the Prophet.⁵⁸¹ Three narratives appear in al-Ṭabarī's reports on early commentators on Q 2:35–36: (1) reports of how Eve was created from “the lowest of Adam's ribs (*quṣayra*)—which is sometimes also understood as the shortest rib (*al-dil'alaqṣar*)—or from a rib on his left side. This was done while he was sleeping, aiming “that he might dwell with her” (Q 7:189); (2) reports of how *Hawwāh* was created while “Adam was dwelling in the Garden of Paradise, where he had roamed alone;” and (3) reports of how she had been created before Adam entered the Garden.⁵⁸²

Al-Ṭabarī relays similar commentaries by Ibn Humaya, Salamah, and Ibn Ishaq: “He (God) then cast slumber upon Adam, as we have heard from the people of the Torah, among the people of the book, and other scholars on the authority of Abdallah b. Abbas and others.”⁵⁸³ Regarding how Iblis caused their fall and the ensuing effects and punishments, early and classical commentators have voiced several opinions.

After God commanded Eve and Adam to enjoy Eden (paradise), God imposed a single restriction, “Do not go near this tree, lest you become wrong-doers!” (Q 2:35; cf. 7:19). What caused their fall was that Satan/Iblis had prompted them to disobey God and eat from the forbidden tree (Q 7:20–2; 20:121). The consequences and the punishments were that they descend from Eden to earth (Q 2:36; 7:24–5; 20:123). Early commentators “do not question that Adam sinned.”⁵⁸⁴ According to the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, “the later commentaries,

⁵⁸¹ Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler, eds. *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 154.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 158–159 (Tabari, *Tafsir*, iv, 224; Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqat*, i, 39; Tabari, *Tafsir*, iv, 224–5; and Tabari, *Tafsir*, i, 229–30 respectively).

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵⁸⁴ Cornelia Schöck, “Adam and Eve” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, ed., Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001) 25.

influenced by the dogma of the prophetic impeccability (*'isma*), emphasize that Adam and Eve were made to 'slip' by Satan (*azallahuma*, Q 2:36) and Adam forgot (*nasiya*, Q 20:115); or they characterize the disobedience as an error in judgment (*khata' fiil-ijtihad*).⁵⁸⁵ The forbidden tree, is identified as "an ear of grain (*sunbula*), wheat (*burr*, *ḥinṭa*), a vine (*karma*, *shajarat al-'inab*, *shajarat al-khamr*), or a fig tree by most commentators (*tīna*, Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, i, 231-3)."⁵⁸⁶

Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Kisā'ī's (d. 805 CE) collection is a hagiography from popular culture rather than from Qur'anic commentary. He includes many stories about Adam and Eve, providing examples of God's creation of Eve, their temptation and disobedience, and the aftermath of their sin.⁵⁸⁷ For example:

Eve was as tall and as beautiful as Adam and had seven hundred tresses studded with gems of chrysolite and incensed with musk. She was in the prime of her life. She had large, dark eyes; she was tender and white; her palms were tinted, and her long, shapely, brilliantly colored tresses, which formed a crown, emitted a rustling sound. She was of the same form as Adam, except that her skin was softer and purer in color than his was, and her voice was more beautiful. Her eyes were darker, her nose more curved, and her teeth whiter than his were. When God had created her, He seated her at Adam's side. Adam saw her in his sleep on that long-ago day and loved her in his heart. "O Lord," he asked, "who is this?" "She is my handmaiden Eve," He said. "O Lord," asked Adam, "for whom hast thou created her?" "For one who will take her in trust and will persevere in thanks for her," said God. Then Adam said, "O Lord, I will take her on one condition,

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Rustomji, *The Garden and Fire*, 70.

⁵⁸⁷ Kvam, Schearing, and Ziegler, *Eve and Adam*, 159.

that thou marry me to her.” And so, Adam was married to Eve before entering Paradise.⁵⁸⁸

Furthermore, on the “Address of Eve,” al-Kisā’ī writes:

“My God and Master, it is mine own sin, which I was made to do,” she said. “Iblis led me astray with his deception and evil whisperings and swore to me by thy Majesty that he was advising me well. I never thought that anyone would swear by Thee if he were lying.” “Depart now from Paradise, deceived forever henceforth,” said God. “I make thee deficient in mind, religion, ability to bear witness and inheritance. I make thee morally malformed, with glazed eyes, and make thee to be imprisoned for the length of days of thy life and deny thee the best things, the Friday congregation, mingling in public, and giving greetings. I destine thee to menstruation and the pain of pregnancy and labor, and thou wilt give birth only by tasting the pain of death along with it. Women shall experience more sorrow; more tears shall flow from them; they shall have less patience, and God will never make a prophet or a wise person from among them.” “O God,” cried Eve, “how can I leave Paradise? Thou hast denied me all blessings.” Then the Voice of God cried out: “Leave! For I have bent the hearts of my servants in sympathy with thee.”⁵⁸⁹

While examining the essential points regarding Eve—how and why she was created; why she was named *Hawwāh*; how Iblis caused Adam and Eve’s expulsion/fall; the effects of the expulsion/fall; and the punishments received; several gender stereotypes arise. Many of these “motifs concerning the first woman was circulating in Islamic centers of learning.”⁵⁹⁰ These

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 193-94.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 187.

commentaries and folklores mimic negative religious conceptualizations regarding women, as well as societal dispositions, value, and roles assigned to women.

Mystical and Feminist Perspectives

Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *The Bezels of Wisdom*, a work from his later years, incorporated his reflections on the line of prophets, beginning with Adam.⁵⁹¹ Following are some of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s excerpts from his section on “The Wisdom of Singularity in the Word of Muhammad”:

He was a prophet when Adam was still between the water and the clay and he is, by his elemental makeup, the Seal of the Prophets, first of the three singular ones, since all other singulars derive from it.⁵⁹²

Three things have been made beloved to me in this world of yours,” because of the triplicity inherent in him. Then he mentioned women and perfume, and added that he found solace in prayer. He begins by mentioning women and leaves prayer until last, because, in the manifestation of her essence, woman is a part of man.⁵⁹³

Women were made beloved to him, and he had great affection for them because the whole always is drawn toward its part. This he explains as coming from the Reality, in His saying regarding the elemental human makeup: “And I breathed into him of My spirit!”⁵⁹⁴

The greatest union is that between man and woman, corresponding as it does to the

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 197.

⁵⁹² Ibid., 200.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 201.

turning of God toward the one He has created in His own image, to make him His vicegerent, so that He might behold Himself in him.⁵⁹⁵

Thus, he says “women.” He loves them only because of their [lower] rank and their being the repository of passivity...Just as woman [ontologically] is of a lower rank than man, according to His saying, “Men enjoy a rank above them,” so also is the creature inferior in rank to the One Who fashioned him in His image, despite his being made in His image.⁵⁹⁶

Providing critical insights into the conceptualizations of gender roles, Ibn ‘Arabi sets out his interpretation of the significance of man and woman’s creation. His cosmology stresses an ordered hierarchy that he believed was established by God at the time of creation.

Social activist Sayyid Mawdudi’s translation and commentary of the Qur’an further endorses gender and social hierarchies as conforming to God’s will. Playing a prominent role in the Islamic revivalist movement, Mawdudi urged for “a return to the piety and practices of ‘authentic’ Islam.”⁵⁹⁷ The Islamic revivalist movement reignited debates about the role of women in Islam and society. Women’s seclusion to private sectors of society and insisting or forcing them to “veil” their hair, bodies, and faces usually correlate to a return to “authentic Islam.”⁵⁹⁸ Mawdudi comments on Q 2:35:

Since man had been invested with authority on earth, the angels were told that whenever man wanted to make use of the powers with which he had been invested by God, and which God of His own will had allowed him to use, they should cooperate with him and

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 375.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 376.

enable him to do whatever he wanted to do, irrespective of right and wrong.⁵⁹⁹

God's order to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam was similar. Prostration may signify the fact of their becoming yoked to man's service. At the same time, it is also possible that the order to perform prostration is a sign of the envisaged relationship between angels and man. In my view, the latter seems more plausible. This narrative indicates that before Earth—the realm of vicegerency—Adam and Eve were kept in Paradise to test their proclivities.⁶⁰⁰

Mawdudi states, "It is unnecessary to delve into a discussion about what that tree was and what was the particular reason underlying the prohibition to approach it. The actual reason for the prohibition was not that any particular evil inhered in the tree, which could harm Adam and Eve, but rather to test how far they would follow the instructions of God and overcome the temptations of Satan."⁶⁰¹ That is why the description and name of the tree are not necessary. It served the purpose of only posing a test. He states, "What God wanted to impress on man was that the only place that befits man's station is Paradise."⁶⁰² Therefore, Mawdudi reasoned that "the only way he (man) can recover his true status and reclaim the lost Paradise is by effectively resisting the enemy who is always trying to drive him off the course of obedience to God."⁶⁰³

Many feminist theorists postulate that Adam and Eve's story expresses the patriarchal conception of gender roles. They see the narrative as told in the Qur'an as non-patriarchal and insist that patriarchal dimensions were added on over time by various Islamic exegeses and scholarship. The superiority of Adam and its transfer to all men is an apparent social assignment,

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

given this insight. Female participation in Islamic rituals is a reminder of the expulsion wherein women are scapegoats. Women are conceptualized as “controlled by passion and emotion” or weak and inferior, leading to additional restrictions.⁶⁰⁴ Eve’s perceived culpability and inferiority further support this point. Since Eve represents the nature of all women, it necessitates that men, as God’s viceregents, must have authority over them. It keeps Muslim society from “falling.” Thus, early Islamic theology often lamented the loss of Paradise and fell back into patriarchy. Manifestations of this perspective are seen in the present-day *fiqh* (rulings) about women performing central rites and rituals in Islam.

Interpretations by Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas insist that the Qur’an utilizes “Adam” as “both a universal and a specific term to define human creation.”⁶⁰⁵ Further, they contend that “Allah never planned to begin creating humankind with a male person” and that the Qur’anic version narrating humankind’s creation is not expressed in gender terms.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, according to the Qur’an, no one gender is to blame, although significant rituals in Islam serve to remind and correct the results of the fall.⁶⁰⁷ A state of ritual purity is mandatory to perform the rituals, reminding the Muslim community of the contrasts between life on Earth and the existence of Eden. Hajj then is pointedly linked to Eden and serves as an example that every central ritual in Islam (the five pillars) is associated with—remembrance of the expulsion.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Barlas, *Believing Women*, 138.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., also see Wadud, *Women and Gender*, 20.

⁶⁰⁷ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*, 28. Also see Barlas, *Believing Women*, 43, 163; and Wadud, *Women and Gender*, 26.

Analysis

Ruether (1992) posits that “stories of a lost paradise have two major roots in Western thought, the biblical story of Eden and the Greek story of the Golden Age.”⁶⁰⁸ Ruether contends that men designed both of these to scapegoat women.⁶⁰⁹ The Garden of Eden highlights a utopian past that every Muslim’s goal is to reach the Garden of Paradise (Heaven), representing humanity’s redemption. The abundance of resources in such situations (the Gardens) is conceivable. The bounty of resources and delights in Heaven contrasts with the increasing lack of resources on earth, in addition to ever-encroaching problems like overpopulation, climate change, and water shortage. Rustomji notes that “aside from the specific meanings associated with the river, the mere image of the river acts as a trope for plenty.”⁶¹⁰

Heaven is marked by an abundance of water, specifically in the forms of rivers and fountains, “when interestingly, there are no rivers in Arabia.”⁶¹¹ In addition, the presence of various trees that provide shade (Q 13:35), beauty, and nourishment, and the recall of different senses, such as sight and touch, highlight Paradise’s depictions.⁶¹² The presence of animals in Paradise is not mentioned in the Qur’an, but it is discussed in Hadith literature. In the afterlife, believers’ bodies become more beautiful than their former bodies,⁶¹³ and there is no bodily pollution.⁶¹⁴ Also, bodies are adorned with silks (Q 22:23) and bracelets of gold and silver (Q

⁶⁰⁸ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 144.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁰ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 33.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34-38. The mentioned vegetation including fruit trees, pomegranate, Q 23.19, 55.28–29, grapevines Q 78.32, and other fruit-bearing trees in never-ending clusters, Q 69.3, 76.14, and 54.55, hang low and in humility, Q 76.14.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

56:19). They walk upon luxurious carpets (Q 88:8-16) and recline on couches and cushions (Q 55:76).⁶¹⁵

Certain aspects of the eschatological Garden of Paradise and Fire of Hell are privileged within such narratives. The development in the descriptions of *houris* (otherworldly female companions) and the “objects,” architecture, and social dynamics of the Garden and Fire are particularly informative. Historically, the metaphor of the Garden conveys images of Paradise. Particularly among several historical Muslim rulers (Caliphs), the tendency is to regard gardens as paradises on earth.⁶¹⁶ The descriptions and architecture of some palace gardens reinforced the vision of the Garden of Paradise. Rustomji insists that “developing Sunni traditions of the Garden and the Fire is a theological and historical phenomenon with a cultural life reflecting theological concerns.”⁶¹⁷ By the thirteenth century and after, the Garden became an ideal of perfection and wonder, representative of Paradise on earth.⁶¹⁸

The Gardens of Paradise is linked to “how Muslims related their lives to the world of the unseen.”⁶¹⁹ There are metaphors and descriptions of the Garden throughout the Qur’an. While the prohibitions of hajj serve as a reminder of Eden’s ecological state, the Gardens of Paradise’s ecology provides a striking example of the longing for the interaction between elements,

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 39. Concerning body pollution, “they would neither pass water, nor void excrement, nor will they suffer from catarrh, nor will they spit, and their combs would be made of gold, and their sweat will be musk...When they are relieved of these bodily processes, it is as if their body is fully restored to its pure state, as opposed to being corrupted by worldly experiences.”

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 151–153. Examples include Ghaznavid gardens memorialized in verse; Ottoman Kağithane gardens of the Tulip period (1718–1730); and many “Mughal funerary gardens built with the explicit intention to house the deceased in a paradisiacal setting until the end of time.”

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Khuri, *The Body in Islamic Culture*, xviii.

humans, vegetation, and, to a lesser extent, animals. So significant is the desire to belong to the Garden that Islamic ideology emphasizes reaching that “pure” state through depictions of Paradise. Reaching the Garden of Paradise after death amounts to returning to a utopian state.

The developing image of the Gardens and Fire in texts “may have allowed believers to approximate glimpses of the Garden and the Fire on earth.”⁶²⁰ By the twelfth century, an image of the Garden and Fire had begun to “crystallize and assume a more definite vision with a repertoire of set themes and motifs”: “From this point onward, the Gardens and the Fire were not dynamic, developing realms; rather, they were becoming more static. Instead of being places informed by earthly realities and expectations, they presented a form that shaped how believers understood their future lives and provided a model by which artists could provide reflections of heaven on Earth for their patrons.”⁶²¹ Eschatological manuals reflect a shift in “how the afterworld was presented.”⁶²² The eschatological Garden and Fire are described from “the vantage point of individual experience.”⁶²³ While hadith collections reflect a tension between individual desire, replicating earthly and familial life, “by contrast, eschatological manuals erase markers of earthly life and social dynamics and replace them with visions of pleasure palaces for the soul.”⁶²⁴

Regarding conceptions about the Fire, the transformation from hadiths to eschatological manuals are equally dramatic as the latter are both “compilations of previous material and

⁶²⁰ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 33.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 121–122.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

records of what concerned theologians and perhaps their readers.”⁶²⁵ Because eschatological manuals primarily draw on hadiths for their subsections, Rustomji notes that one way to determine how much attention is given to a specific topic is the number of traditions they present, of which “the *hourī* is one of the most enduring motifs of the Garden.”⁶²⁶ The popularization of the *hourī* occurred as early as the ninth century and continued well into the twelfth century. By then, it had become a kind of metonymy for the Garden, as well as an accepted object through tradition and the structure of the text; the term “*hourī*” became conflated with “woman.”⁶²⁷ The utopian Garden of Paradise (Heaven) influenced both doctrine and aesthetics. As a doctrine, “eschatological manuals dramatized the events at the end of time by creating narrative frameworks that reinforced the Garden and the Fire’s power as realms of existence.”⁶²⁸ As aesthetic, the Garden manifested some ways whereby Muslims highlighted aspects of the afterworld on Earth.⁶²⁹ The legacy of the belief in the Gardens manifests in the various ways Muslim rulers, painters, poets, and architects incorporated cosmologies of heaven and earth within earthly productions.⁶³⁰

Engendered Bodies

The tropes of Eden and its relationship with Mecca and the Kaaba become part of a larger narrative framework “incorporating the Prophet Muhammad and Islam into a history of prophets

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 111–112.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 157.

and kings going back to Adam, following his expulsion from the Garden of Eden.”⁶³¹ In an example, Brannon Wheeler (2006) connects Eve, Adam, the Garden of Eden, and hajj by (1) showing how reclaimed treasures and relics of the Kaaba evidence the historical succession of prophet-kings from Adam to Muhammad; (2) demonstrating how Adam represents the beginning of human creation and the “fall” represents the need for prophets’ succession, culminating in Muhammad’s establishment of Islamic civilization; and (3) showing that Islamic legal definitions of purity and impurity symbolize the conditions in the Garden of Eden, subsequently forming the backdrop for performing Islamic rituals.⁶³² Wheeler concludes that “Muslim rituals contrast civilization, focused on Mecca as the origin of human civilization (Adam) and Islamic civilization (Muhammad), with the garden of Eden.”⁶³³ Of the rituals he evidenced, prayer, alms-giving, fasting, hajj had the most direct correlations to the Garden of Eden conditions.

The events leading to expulsion is described in Q 7:19–25. These verses describe how God gave Adam and Eve the Garden to live and “eat” as they will, instructing them not to go near a particular tree. Muslim scholars generally contend that equating the “fall” with original sin in Christian ideology is inaccurate. Nonetheless, some Qur’anic exegeses, and hadith make reference to a fall that often contradict the Quran that the decision to disobey God’s order was jointly made. Therefore, some Qur’anic exegesis and scholarship have confounded “the idea that woman’s creation is a derivative of man’s, that woman was made from the rib of man, and that it was Eve’s fault for the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.”⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 11.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 69-70, summarized.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶³⁴ Barlas, *Believing Women*, 138.

Examining the stories of women in the Qur'an and their medieval and modern exegesis, Barbara Freyer Stowasser, a Lutheran Christian, adds valuable perspectives to the discourse.⁶³⁵ To Stowasser, the differences between medieval and modern interpretations of the Qur'an's female images always reflect "their own larger worldview and sociopolitical agenda."⁶³⁶ Stowasser asserts that paradigmatic meanings and symbolic functions regarding the role and status of women in Islam are the outcomes of the system, which was continually reinforced by "theological-legal sanctions" and this is why—

T[t]he medieval exegetic sources presented, while differing in methodology and intellectual outlook and agenda, largely agree on issues related to a woman's place in moral society and, hence, also a woman's 'nature.' For the medieval theologians, the Qur'an's female images and models both symbolized essential aspects of the Islamic order as they knew it and also aided them in its preservation."⁶³⁷

Several critical points come to light based upon Stowasser's investigation. The Bible and Bible-related traditions and misogynistic hadith transmissions significantly influence classical Islamic exegesis, cultural practices, and religious attitudes that coincide with Adam and Eve's story.

The connection between the construction of gender and the formation of theological accounts justify men and women's characteristics and roles as "natural" or the "will of God." Classical and medieval Qur'anic interpretations, according to Stowasser, depart from the "scriptural referent."⁶³⁸ Instead, classical interpretations of Adam and Eve often originate from

⁶³⁵ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28. Also see footnote 319.

Bible and Bible-related sources “that not only flesh out the story but also drastically change it, especially in regards to women’s roles.”⁶³⁹ In classical interpretations, Eve represents the entire female sex, “she is a religious symbol that serves as model “of” as well as “for” the value structure of the community of its formation.”⁶⁴⁰ Accordingly, Stowasser notes that medieval interpretations of woman’s origin and nature deny female rationality and female oral responsibility signifying both a “social base of gender inequality and the existence of structures (such as clerical institutions with legislative or juridic powers) bent on its preservation.”⁶⁴¹

Interestingly, exegetes like al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhsharī, and ibn Kathīr circulated many misogynistic hadith traditions while remaining cautious about their reliability.⁶⁴² In al-Ṭabarī’s case, for example, although most of his *tafsir* blamed the woman, he often “indicated mental reservations with the phrase *wa-llahu a’lam* (God knows best), or by expressing the hope that (his sources like) Ibn ‘Abbas and Wahb ibn Munabbih, “God willing,” are trustworthy, or by opining that their accounts represent interpretations within the realm of possibility (1:532).”⁶⁴³ Throughout the history of Qur’anic interpretation, the same hadith material found in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsir* continued to be used.⁶⁴⁴ With this, “scholarly consensus continued to support the woman’s responsibility for Adam’s fall, even though many interpreters continued to follow al-Ṭabarī’s example in registering mental reservations concerning the traditions’ Islamic authenticity.”⁶⁴⁵ In

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

Stowasser's assessment, "Once the Hadith had "recorded" the woman's guilt in humanity's primeval tragedy, the basic tenor of the Hawwa's story remained constant. It served the scripturalist proof of women's lower moral, mental, and physical nature, and the consensus of the learned doctors of Islam supported and perpetuated this teaching as a doctrine of faith."⁶⁴⁶ It was not until premodern reformists in the eighteenth century began to question the legitimacy of hadith literature on women's inferior nature that they were accepted and propagated by the consensus of the Islamic scholars.⁶⁴⁷

Scot Katz regards Adam and Eve's story as a "legal myth" with substantial and far-reaching social and psychological implications. Katz asserts that, "Historically, the meaning of the myth lived in a mixture of implications for political geography, theology, jurisprudence, and what we would term the social sciences."⁶⁴⁸ He, therefore, considers "the story as a 'case' against Adam and Eve."⁶⁴⁹ Katz believes that the bible confuses "gender-based attribution of fault and the condemnation of sexual appetite," despite pro- and anti-patriarchal readings.⁶⁵⁰ He concludes that "Genesis is not simply a myth that explains humanity's uniquely intermediate cosmological place. It is also an experiment in the theoretical imagination that produces a highly compressed social psychology."⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Jack Katz, "The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve," in *Theory and Society* 25, no. 4 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) 545–82, 548, accessed December 6, 2019, <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/katz/pubs/AdamAndEve.pdf>.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 548.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 551.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 557.

In terms of religion and law, Islam presents itself as an ideal to which the believer must strive continuously.⁶⁵² Fuad Khuri points out the troublesome realities that conflate physical attributes with spirituality: “What concerns me...are the ideological assumptions held about the human body—assumptions that are thought to be *sui generis*—true for the simple reason that people believe in them. These assumptions are acts of faith, ideological givens, that could not, and should not, be put to the test.”⁶⁵³ According to Khuri, “ideologically and behaviorally, there are many fields of interaction in which one is transformed into the other.”⁶⁵⁴ In brief, Khuri sees the human body as a source of shame that must be concealed and guarded. The discrepancy between men and women in observing the stipulation suggests that women’s bodies do not correspond to men’s, even though created from the same source (Q 4:1).⁶⁵⁵ The discrepancy between men’s and women’s bodies is more apparent in the conditions Islam stipulates for prayer: maintaining a state of purity and clarity of intent, facing Mecca, and covering the body. These are equally applicable for both men and women, although the difference lies in what constitutes shamefulness for men in contrast with women. While men’s source of shamefulness refers to the part of the body that lies between the navel and the knee, women’s shamefulness pertains to the whole body.⁶⁵⁶ Rituals provide the means for demonstrating what we believe ought to happen and what should have happened. Nevertheless, because it is ritualistic action, it indicates that we know the case.

⁶⁵² Khuri, *The Body in Islamic Culture*, 15.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Dualisms and Hierarchy

Overall, the Garden (Heaven) and Fire act as symbols for reward and punishment.⁶⁵⁷ There are explicit, implicit, descriptive, and prescriptive components to each level, cultural-symbolic and socio-economic, of which Ruether insists reveal the relationship between sexism and ecological exploitation.⁶⁵⁸ Both levels are laden with what becomes the framework of the normative code of behavior grounding Islamic ethics.⁶⁵⁹ There are four attributes to the Gardens and Fire: (1) two classes of humanity; (2) categories of people; (3) embodiments, architecture, and objects of the Gardens and Fire; and (4) social dynamics.⁶⁶⁰ As it relates to sexism and ecological exploitation, the social patterns of environmental and gender relations developed historically are displayed in the contemporary problem presented previously.⁶⁶¹

Physical conditions transform into spiritual realities in requirements and performance of the pillars of Islam. Heaven is the final aspiration for a Muslim. It is a space wherein creatures know and submit to their stations and roles. Eden represents the utopian past. In Eden, as the first two humans, Adam and Eve lacked the need for clothing, grooming, human labor, and commercial exchange. There was no need for domesticated animals. There was no sex and marriage, and they were ignorant of having genitals. Eden was ecologically rich, and plants and trees became part of the consequences of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

⁶⁵⁷ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 40–42.

⁶⁵⁸ Ruether, "Ecofeminism," 97.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Rustomji states that "many descriptions of the Garden and the Fire are accompanied with explanations of which action leads to one realm or the other, and many traditions about daily life are followed by how the action will result in the calculus of entering the Garden or the Fire."

The consequences resulted in bodily pollution, sex, marriage, clothing, grooming, and the lack of abundance led to human labor and commercial exchange. Human labor, slavery, commercial exchange, the domestication and use of trees, plants, and animals, and the ravaging of the earth's resources are by-products of human endeavor. If Heaven symbolizes human redemption, the Garden of Paradise and the Fire of Hell's distinct binarism demonstrate ideological and ontological distinctions. Rustomji notes that while the notions of an afterlife and afterworld is often conflated; they occupy different conceptual spaces:

The afterlife signifies life after death and transforms earthly experience into merely one stage in the greater progression of life, death, judgment, resurrection, and final judgment...By contrast, the afterworld provides a setting. Accompanied by an afterworld, the afterlife is transformed from an abstract state to a detailed vision about life in cosmological time. The afterworld is not just the eschatological space where one happens to live afterlife; instead, it is a place that operates according to a distinct logic.⁶⁶²

This distinct logic illuminates the contrast between constructed narratives and lived experiences. Material conditions inform the positions of bodies and objects of earthly affairs and expectations. Rustomji maintains that initially, the "descriptions of the Garden and the Fire in the Qur'an were tied to the material realities of the Hijaz region of Arabia; however, traditions expanded Qur'anic descriptions until they acquired other symbolic earnings."⁶⁶³

Considering the symbolic meanings of the Garden and Fire uncovers another ideological and dualistic superstructure. The two landscapes symbolize the two classes of humanity, believers, and non-believers. They further signify the results of earthly behavior. In early Islam, this defined who a member of the *umma* is "both in terms of afterlife and in terms of daily

⁶⁶² Ibid., 124.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., xvi.

behavior.”⁶⁶⁴ The Garden is for believers, whereas the Fire is the abode of disbelievers and sinners. Hierarchy, presented in the Qur’an, is a result of “righteous behavior on Earth that is rewarded by proximity to Allah. The earthly hierarchy within the family, tribe, or economic society is not evident.”⁶⁶⁵ Remnants of familial, tribal, economic, or societal hierarchy still exist in some hadiths and commentaries, such as in al-Tirmidhi’s hadith transmissions.⁶⁶⁶ The different levels of Heaven describe the Garden’s hierarchy. The highest level is for the most eligible, and reflected by an individual’s adornments and beauty. Rewards and punishments also symbolize the categories of people.

Again, some distinctions are explicit, such as believers and non-believers, whereas some are implicit such as the categories of men and women. Rustomji asserts that:

The most visible way to locate this gendered distinction is within the texts that describe the rewards of believing men: men of the Garden are awarded houris for their good behavior on Earth. There is no indication that women are awarded houris or a corresponding being. For this reason, some have suggested that Islamic Paradise is a realm that caters to men’s pleasures. Other significant traditions indicate that women will form the majority in hell.⁶⁶⁷

There are different variations of the hadith transmission that women will form the majority in hell. Regarding the different versions of this type of hadith, the most basic form of this hadith damns the category of women providing another ontological standard.⁶⁶⁸ The standard is

⁶⁶⁴ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 42.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

reinforced by the vision of hell having primarily women who lack faith according to normative Islamic standards.⁶⁶⁹ In two other versions, women predominate in the Fire because of their ungrateful relationship with their spouses.⁶⁷⁰ Therefore, the “justification for punishment is not that women are ungrateful to Allah, which could constitute a lack of faith; rather, they are ungrateful to their husbands.”⁶⁷¹ These traditions indicate that women’s ethical behavior is never on par with men. Women’s different status is made clear by their few allowances—such as enjoying silk—and the many injunctions to be grateful, charitable wives. In this sense, Islamic tradition intimates that women have the same opportunity to enter the Garden, but they have more obstacles to overcome than men. Women must be grateful not only to God but also to their husbands.⁶⁷²

Parallel structures reinforcing embodiments, architecture, and objects of the Garden and Fire, symbolizes moral judgments and the “polarity of these two classes of humanity.”⁶⁷³ Social dynamics is symbolic of reward or punishment, as well as purity and pollution; “to be placed in the Fire is to forgo meaningful connections with other humans.”⁶⁷⁴ Social life is nonexistent for the unbeliever. Unbelievers have no companions to provide comfort and no opportunities to reunite with their families.⁶⁷⁵ In the Garden, believers, are served, whereas, in the Fire,

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 56

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 57.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 64.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

unbelievers serve themselves.⁶⁷⁶ While the Garden's perfection does not require labor, some helpers ensure that believers live ecstatic lives. In the Garden, beings form a retinue to serve inhabitants. This retinue includes angels and various human-like characters (youths and pure companions). The function of the *wildan* (young men) and *ghilman* (slave boys) is to serve. The Qur'an explicitly mentions them in Q 52.24, 56.17, and 76.19. Contrastingly, the female servants of the Garden do not serve. Instead, they offer companionship. Over time, within the traditions, the female companion (*houri*) has emerged as the highest-ranking woman in the Garden.⁶⁷⁷ In fact, what becomes apparent over time is that "families have been removed from the landscape of the Garden, and houris have become the main source of companionship."⁶⁷⁸

Contemporary Consequences

The question of leadership and authority provides additional insights into how these realities manifest in Islamic constructions of societies and how theological doctrines on Eden and Heaven supports gender and ecological disparity. The significant decline of female scholars in Islam and the women's mosque movement are prime examples of how physical conditions are transformed into spiritual realities. Both these situations reflect restrictions on women's leadership and authority to what is considered women's domain (private spaces, the household's, harem).

Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (2011) specifically investigate the intersection of Islamic authority and female Islamic leaders.⁶⁷⁹ Their study's aim emerged from a conference

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁷⁹ Masooda Bano and Hilary E. Kalmbach, eds., *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2011).

held at the University of Oxford in 2009. Looking at several case studies on the increasing way Muslim women exercise authority worldwide, the scholars studied female Islamic leaders in Morocco, China, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Kazakhstan, Bosnia, Germany, and Saudi Arabia. They focused on the causes, parameters, and consequences of Islamic authority in general and female Muslim leadership in particular, mainly using three dominant themes: What factors are relevant to the emergence of female Muslim leadership? What factors are related to the consolidation of female Muslim leadership? What factors are linked to its impact specifically, or in other words, in multiple ways, how do these women use their Islamic authority to reinforce or change norms within their communities?⁶⁸⁰ Starting from the premise that religious authority equates to religious legitimacy in Islam, Bano and Kalmbach assert that religious authority is a crucial concept in studying religion.

Religious authority dictates who has the right to “interpret religious texts and apply them to the lives of followers.”⁶⁸¹ In early Islamic history, many female religious authorities appeared in Islamic biographical sources; they were mainly the prophet’s companions, hadith transmitters, Sufi saints, and patrons of religious endowments.⁶⁸² Contemporary female Islamic leaders often cite these examples as historical precedents to legitimate their positions. They see female Islamic leadership not as a new phenomenon but as a matter of re-emergence. History shows us that most prominent female scholars came from the families of established male religious scholars, despite facing many challenges of contention and imposed limitations. Contemporary female leaders face similar challenges. Their efforts are called innovation, or their leadership and legitimacy are

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸² Ibid., 15.

limited, “as a result, female Islamic leaders can find themselves expected to conform to the teachings of prominent male authority, and limit their teaching and preaching to female-only audiences.”⁶⁸³ The absence of women is a powerful depiction of public space in Muslim contexts.

Friday congregational prayer is a vital, weekly mandated religious service held at midday for Muslims. With very few exceptions, it remains a historically male-dominated religious event all over the world. Historical discourses on women’s presence in mosques coincide with the decline of female Islamic authority figures and the rise of an elite class of male scholars, rulers, and lawmakers. Therefore, a historical overview of the formative period of Islam (610–925 CE) the centrality of mosques, and the institutionalization of Islamic authority “goes a long way in explaining the background for the debates over women’s place during prayer.”⁶⁸⁴

During the prophetic period, Muhammad remained the only authority on religious knowledge; textual and material sources reveal that in this period, there “appears to be no indication of gender apartheid; rather, evidence points to the conclusion that women had full access to the mosque.”⁶⁸⁵ The second caliph Umar’s reign ushered in an interactive period (644–925 CE), marked by rapid growth and conquests when most of the primary textual sources of Islam (Qur’an and hadith literature) were recorded or codified.⁶⁸⁶ Religious authority in this period was held by a class of elite, male scholars who debated many issues. Of these, women’s presence in mosques was a critical issue. Nevin Reda notes three particular trends in the then-

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁸⁴ Nevin Reda, “Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 2 (2004): 77–97, 93.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 86.

ongoing debates reflecting conflicting reports in hadith literature: The attempt to legitimize gender segregation in the mosque uses early Islamic examples or “selected” prophetic traditions; the attempt to oppose gender segregation because it was not the prophet’s practice; and the effort to keep women from mosques altogether.⁶⁸⁷ By the second century, following the death of Muhammad, “the system of total segregation and seclusion of women had been instituted, and women no longer had the right to participate freely in public life.”⁶⁸⁸ By the end of Islam’s third century, a definite pattern of women’s marginalization emerged, especially among the ruling classes; the lasting results of the gendering of ritual space in Islam led to separate entrances, separate prayer areas, and even the prohibition of women in some mosques.⁶⁸⁹

In recent years, many Muslim women worldwide have taken the initiative to establish women’s mosques. Some have expressed their growing sense of feeling unwelcome, marginalized, and resentful at being relegated to a small, often dingy, uncomfortable room, basement or balcony, or behind a partition. Some voice feeling cut-off from the imam (religious leader) and thus, their place within the mosque and Muslim community. In the significant findings of “2011 Mosque Studies Part 3: Women and American Mosques,” Sarah Sayeed, Aysha al-Adawiya, and Ihsan Bagby point out that women historically prayed in the same area as men, yet “many mosques in the United States continue to physically separate women from the main prayer area by using architectural or physical barriers such as dividers or a separate room for women.”⁶⁹⁰ Their survey showed that between 1994 and 2000, the percentage of mosques

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁰ Sarah Sayeed, Aysha Al-Adawiya and Ihsan Bagby. “The 2011 Mosque Studies Part 3: Women and American Mosques” in *Washington, DC: Islamic Society of North America*, 2012, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/The-American-Mosque-Report-3.pdf>.

that used curtains or dividers to separate women's spaces increased from 52% to 66% by 2011, indicating a possible change in thinking regarding women's presence in mosques.⁶⁹¹ Further into their study, Sayeed, al-Adawiya, and Bagby indexed mosques based on their friendliness toward women. Their findings revealed that only 14% of all mosques in America meet all four criteria of a "women-friendly mosque."⁶⁹² In their conclusion, this was attributed to the low percentage of women's presence in mosques.⁶⁹³

An Islamic Ecofeminist Shift

Ethical frameworks are never universal. Several overlapping motifs appear in the narratives of Eve, Adam, and the Gardens in Islam. Some commentaries depict Eve as subservient, whereas others portray Eve as menacing. There is also a recurring theme that Eve was created secondarily from Adam's rib while he slept to be a source of comfort for him. The very etymology of her name refers to the fact that she was created from something living. As Eve is often depicted as presenting, encouraging, or enticing Adam to eat from the forbidden tree, many attribute the fall to her. Some commentaries provide different narratives, such as the depiction of Iblis/Satan taking on the disguise of a slave to deceiving Eve.⁶⁹⁴ Hierarchical interpretations of gender relations speak of Eve as "deficient in reason," thus deficit in religion, the ability to bear witness, and inheritance are common perspectives. Therefore, the two strands expose themselves again: one, expressively hierarchical and patriarchal, perceives the "natural"

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁹² Ibid., 13. Their 4 indicators of women-friendly mosques are: (1) female attendance on Friday above the average of 18%; (2) the mosque did not have a barrier separating women from the main prayer area; (3) the mosque had women's programs and/or women's group; and (4) they had women serving on the mosque board.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ See footnotes 561 and 562.

inferiority and culpability of women, the masses, and nature. The other, representing benevolent sexism and speciesism, advocate for kindness toward women and nature while upholding the idea of natural inferiority as God's will. In the proposed IEfT, neither perspective is satisfactory.

As many people of various ethnicities and backgrounds choose to reinterpret scripture and define Islam on their own terms, the balancing of Islamic ideology with personal realities is altered. An IEfT might use some of those ideas of empowerment by setting examples regarding agency and teaching the next generation to do the same. An IEfT would stress that the Qur'an never states that God created the first woman from the rib of man, nor that women are either inferior or subordinate. The most significant problem with traditional perspectives denies the contemporary problem or provide apologetic responses to current issues.

Women and men remaining true to the presently assigned gender roles is not a solution. Every man and woman will not fit into those constructed categories. The whole world reflects the same problem – the combination of religious or philosophical ideology mixed with the need to dominate the Earth's masses and resources, resulting in socio-cultural, religious, political, and ecological systems of domination. Inequality, oppression, and dominance should always be addressed wherever they exist. There is a need to address all these systems, and on multiple fronts—religious, socio-cultural, and political, toward finding solutions that will affect essential changes.

What gender and environmental considerations are needed for an eco-socially just world? We live in a world where social, political, and religious systems; patriarchy; and violence play out on the marginalized in general, women in particular, and the environment, as collateral damage. The proposed IEfT offers to make a conscious and sustained connection to God's creation, ensure deliberate and sustained inclusion, and empower all people. Each circumstance

of injustice and oppression must be addressed accordingly, analyzed individually, and then remedied by handling all the circumstance's dimensions. Social constructions distance and hide agency and empowerment from the masses by creating distractions of fear and disillusionment. Hence, the overarching goal of an IEF is to facilitate agency and empowerment. If we view individual techniques as prescriptive to particular situations, we can see that one is not better. There are pros and cons to each teachable moment, and there are pitfalls to which all sometimes fall prey—fears and social, political, economic, educational, and religious distractions.

Alternatives to hierarchical and masculinist interpretations are fostered by establishing an ecofeminist ontological position. This position is the starting point to realigning critical relationships. The practices that will take us toward a more liberated present, in this case, focuses on changing how we think about ourselves and creation as a whole while insisting that interpretations promoting the full and equal intrinsic value of all creation is the authentic theology in Islam. If this is not the case, we are obligated to construct a new expression or paradigm of Islamic theology whose outcomes must produce healing and liberation. To reiterate the preceding discussion on the issue of woman's creation, according to the Qur'an, God created woman and man as equals. They were created simultaneously of like substance and in like manners.

Conclusion: Raising Consciousness

The distinct logic of the Garden and Fire is that their inhabitants uncover ideological binarism: Muslim/non-Muslim, believer/non-believer, the umma/the 'amma, pure/impure, paradise/hell, man/woman, and male/female. These conceptualizations, inhabitants, and object's roles are illuminated by where their "bodies" are. Body and object placements (males, females,

young and old, organisms, or objects) expose dualisms and hierarchies in cosmogony that are misaligned with an Islamic ecofeminist ontological perspective.

Religion is a meaningful way whereby the roles of the present and future generations are defined and imposed. Gender differentiation stemming from religious ideologies results in different expectations for men and women. According to expectation state theory, the “different positions of power perspective stress the idea that people have different expectations for males and females simply on the basis of sex determination. Such expectations result in different opportunities, evaluations, and behavior.”⁶⁹⁵ Since Eve is held accountable for Adam’s fall, in Judaism and Christianity, and in some Islamic exegesis, purity rules and rituals directly affect women practitioners.⁶⁹⁶ These rules either restrict women’s movement or ostracize them. Within these faiths, women are assigned unequal positions of power.

The Garden of Eden is where the first humans emerged, and Heaven, the eschatological Garden is the final last stop of the righteous. Consequently, the Gardens are physical locations that are rarely given priority in and of themselves. The Garden of Eden is mentioned much less in the Qur’an, yet it provides a critical relational position for Muslims about the Garden of Paradise, Heaven. Eden signifies human disobedience to God, and the Garden of Heaven represents redemption. While the concept of the *khalīfa* as God’s vicegerent establishes humanity at the top of the hierarchy of creation; the narrative of Eve, Adam, and the Gardens establishes the role of men and women in society. Eve and Adam’s story reinforces the idea that masculinity is superior and femininity is inferior. The development of institutions adhering to these ideas reveal how gender stereotypes are enforced. Even though this is not the only way

⁶⁹⁵ Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Chris Bourg, “Gender as Status: An Expectation States Theory Approach,” in *The Psychology of Gender*, eds. A. H. Eagly, A. E. Beall, and R. J. Sternberg (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004) 217–241, 223.

⁶⁹⁶ See footnotes 642-647.

patriarchal concepts of gender is perpetuated, it is a leading factor. Eve and Adam's story tells us what the role of men and women should be in society: the role of men is vital, logical, and worthy of leadership, and women's role is subordinate to that. These stereotypes have influenced every aspect of society. Scientific discoveries have proposed a "natural" explanation of why women are in subordinate positions worldwide. Feminists contest these biases.

The construction of gender has been influenced by Eve and Adam's narrative, resulting in cultural traditions and religious attitudes expressed in society. Using the example of pollution and purity, gender stereotyping creates an apparent hierarchy and dichotomous thinking based on gender conceptualizations. There are strong similarities in Eve and Adam's gendered language and imagery between Judeo-Christian accounts and the Qur'anic commentaries. The ecological fallout of the gender discrepancies between participants in Islamic rituals supports an anthropocentric and patriarchal worldview. There is evidence for the psychological effects on gender due to events of the expulsion/fall. Equally striking is that ecological degradation is a far easier topic of discussion among Muslims than the topic of women and Islam. Holding the viceregency position appears popular and more comfortable. Perhaps crucial to correcting humanism in Islamic theology is correcting women's conceptions and the notion that the ideal human form is male. Similarly, also concerning the environment, as long as theology places humankind at the top of a hierarchy of creation, we are left with a theology of two choices—domination or benevolent domination.

An essential element of an ecofeminist epistemology is self-definition, for it introduces one to one's agency. It enables the capacity to make choices that will solidify agency and help diffuse oppressive authoritative systems. Absolute agency pertains to the ability to make choices unencumbered by fear. However, the threat of violence may be present in situations, awareness

removes the constraints in different spheres, producing a way for women and marginalized populations to act on a problem without being reactionary. That is why the control of fear is so important. Controlling fear is difficult if one lives in poverty, in a war-torn environment, or suffers from the ravages of environmental degradation. The proposed IEfT starts by creating egalitarian safe spaces by asking different questions, approaching objectivity from different standpoints, and raising consciousness to eradicate traditional ideas of sexuality, racism, and speciesism.

The spiral method of thinking becomes a good fit for IEfT, as it is not just positional. It allows for different perspectives and experiences and recognizes the validity of each person's perspective. This type of thinking can change the negative attitude the so-called authorities have toward the so-called marginalized. An IEfT endorses safe spaces, free of male elitism and female body-policing, for consciousness-raising through reasoning without the mediation of patriarchal interpreters. Look for examples that demonstrate how one may altogether bypass the tug-of-war in power relations because their actions often highlight avenues of agency in a manner that the so-called authorities cannot easily contest. Self-definition (self-signification) allows us to analyze our position. It is also essential to explore the power of the language used to fuel subjectivity. To reiterate, self-definition introduces us to our agency and offers the capacity to make choices that solidify empowerment.

Conclusion: Envisioning Equality, Liberation, and Sustainability

*Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change their own attitude and conduct.*⁶⁹⁷

Imagine a vast, dreadful, circular flying object hovering over the United States of America. Inside this object, called the Mother Plane, are 1500 smaller planes. Each of these small planes can shoot flames and drop three bombs designed to penetrate the earth six miles deep, explode, and then release a poisonous gas that destroys everything within a fifty-mile radius. As a child, this story was told to us to reassure us that we are God's people. In this childhood eco-story, we (Black-American Muslims) were to be saved from the destruction of America as it met a fiery end for its sins against people of color all over the world. Instead of feeling safe and reassured, these stories had the opposite effect that resulted in recurring nightmares. It scared me to think of seven-foot-tall black men, raised from the age of six to pilot them, coming out of flying saucers to save us. I was afraid to think of who might be left behind. What most scared me was that the impending loss of lives and destruction of everything in the environment did not seem to bother anyone else.

The Mother Plane's presence in this apocalyptic narrative, indicates that the doomsday of the War of Armageddon looms close. Apocalypse, addressed in the eschatology of religion, is a by-product of systems of domination. Ruether states, "Apocalyptic is the offspring of prophetic thought. It has often carried messages of protest against the dominant system."⁶⁹⁸ Apocalyptic narratives deeply reflect the hopes of the oppressed and marginalized. Apocalypse in religion reflects the fears of the destructive possibilities of our own making. Human actions have led to

⁶⁹⁷ The Quran.com Team, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://quran.com>, Ruwwad Center translation of 13:11.

⁶⁹⁸ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 81.

impending scenarios of world destruction, redemption, and renewal in contemporary religious and secular imaginations. Some religious expressions spend much time on these narratives. Sometimes the impending end does not always seem religious or fiery. The end sometimes takes the form of mass hysteria, widespread illnesses, and fanaticism, moving “the end” from a strictly religious phenomenon, as seen in the current pandemic events.

Monotheisms often focus on imagining the fiery end of the cosmos and a God who is justified in expressing displeasure and anger toward humanity. This imagery is a projection of the marginalized wants, needs, and hopes to be valued and to know that their suffering and struggle will not go unaddressed. For, if they are God’s chosen, they are the most valuable and are deserving of a great force exacting retribution for their suffering to place them at the front of life’s pleasure. In Islamic thought, as in other religious apocalyptic stories, the outcomes are often explicit: the final battle of God vs. Satan or good vs. evil, separation (destruction), resurrection, and renewal.

Ruether addresses what happens when groups of people are marginalized and points out that “those at the bottom of social hierarchy, women and oppressed men have felt mandated to speak critically over and against the world that had marginalized them.”⁶⁹⁹ As evidenced in the apocalyptic imaginations from my childhood, imbalance of power and privileges will continue to set in motion human projections of a God who is justified in expressing displeasure and anger. Hierarchical dualism is as prevalent in the apocalyptic narratives as it is in the underlying social structures of race, gender, and class. Apocalypticism is how the dominated hope to escape domination; it involves a “despairing “shortcut” to salvation and “magical shortcuts to problem solving.”⁷⁰⁰ Religious narratives have shaped their relations to other people, the earth, and the

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 82

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 84.

cosmos. If apocalyptic narratives point to societal imbalances in power, then what happens when the environment is marginalized? Do the current environmental and pandemic crises also speak to an imbalance? The following Qur'anic verse supports an argument about every Muslim's responsibility:

God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: God instructs you, and ye may receive admonition. Fulfill the covenant of God, when ye have entered it and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made them. All your surety; for God knoweth all that ye do. And do not like a spinner who breaks into untwisted strands that yarn she has spun after it has become strong... Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, we will give them a new life and life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their rewards.⁷⁰¹

In her essay, Nawal Ammar connects ecology to culture and looks to ecofeminism's critical ideology. Ammar finds Ruether's definition of ecofeminism compatible with Islamic texts.

Ruether attributes the earth's crisis to injustice issues.⁷⁰²

As humanity thinks it above the rest of the creation, there is an imbalance in the universe. There is an imbalance of power in society when maleness is prioritized. Further, there is a power imbalance in Islam's leadership and authority regarding sectarianism, sexism, classism, and racism. As a theoretical framework, this dissertation argues for ecofeminist thinking and applications within Islamic contexts in three ways:

1. It sets a foundation for conducting an Islamic ecofeminist theology (IEfT).

⁷⁰¹ The Quran.com Team, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://quran.com>. A. Yusuf Ali translation of *Surat al-Nahl*, verse 78.

⁷⁰² Ammar and Gray, "Islamic Environmental Teachings Compatible with Ecofeminism?," 305.

2. It synthesizes the ideas of Islamic feminists with environmentalists resulting in a systematic process.
3. It demonstrates applicability to normative Islamic narratives.

Initially, an ecofeminist lens was applied to the contemporary disconnection in Islamic thought regarding women, marginalized peoples, and ecology. The disconnection manifests in how Muslims structured and continue to structure their societies, based upon hierarchical and patriarchal systems following the Prophet's death. These systems are supported in some classical and contemporary interpretations found in Islamic cosmology, cosmogony, and eschatology. The disconnection further manifests in the everyday responses of Islamic and Muslim feminists and environmentalists.

The foundation for conducting an ecofeminist appraisal required locating the disconnection, crucial etiology, enforcement factors, and consequences. Afterward, mining out egalitarianism and inclusivity are critical to reconstruction. There is much scholarship by contemporary Islamic feminists supporting reconstruction. Choosing Ruether as a catalyst for drawing out vital areas of interconnections, review, and critical questions proved fruitful, particularly in synthesizing the ideas of Islamic feminists with Islamic environmentalists.

Insisting that an ecologically critical shift is needed in feminism in Islam led to evaluating onto-epistemological foundations as a requirement for conducting IEfT and establishing a systematic process. It proved impossible to continue the process without addressing complete ontological egalitarianism and Divine justice as a necessity for conducting IEfT. The requirement centered on correcting critical relationships between God and humans, humans and humans, and humans and God's creation. A commitment to relationships that are non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, and non-anthropocentric and scrutiny of "stories of separations" counter to this IEfT position is essential. The challenges and pitfalls to these types of adjustments

in perception are many. Among these are remaining vigilant of specific ways of thinking that prioritize some humans over others and humans over non-human creation while not neglecting immediate ecological and societal concerns. Simultaneously, remaining attentive to the neutralizing, divisive, and fear tactics of authorities is essential. An Islamic ecofeminist definition is developed: Islamic ecofeminism broadens Islamic feminists' analyses of relationships to include all creation, non-human (biotic and abiotic) and human through the examination and understanding of its interconnections, consequences, and ideologies of domination in human and non-human species, human gendering, social and hierarchical settings. Islamic ecofeminism employs intersectional approaches toward creating and applying solutions and strategies for liberation from dominations and the mutual healing of relationships.

The above definition is a starting point and is open to further scholarly insights for perfecting egalitarian standards across time and place. The concept is applied to Islamic theology by deconstructing humanism, showing that the Qur'an does not endorse non-human creation as having only utilitarian value for humans, and that all creation holds intrinsic value. An IEfT must provide practical solutions and strategies to the current global issues more proactively than traditional Islamic theology has been in the past. Finally, an IEfT must bridge the disconnection between theology, gender, and ecological disparities by articulating concepts that include critiques and Islamic knowledge construction.

The final section of this study involves an IEfT's treatment of cosmological, cosmogonical, and eschatological positions, roles, and purposes of human and non-human creation. The IEfT's treatment includes theological and ethical implications and consequences of a species- and gender-driven cosmic hierarchy of *khalīfa* (defined as viceregency and steward) and the narratives of Eve, Adam, Eden, Heaven, and Hell in Islam.

When defined as viceregency or vicegerent of God, the Qur’anic term *khalīfa* (Q 2:30) shows a distinct trajectory in the history of Islamic rulership and authority. Additionally, over time, the term is conflated with elite Arab men, dynastic orders, and titles of rulers. The transformation for the word was initially defined as “successor,” as humans are successors of earth’s previous inhabitants (other humans and jinns). There is evidence that the term *khalīfa* transformed into the title *khalīfat Allah*. Uthman, the third caliph, initiated full acceptance of the title *khalīfat Allah* as successor or vicegerent of God, although it was not used by the Prophet and rejected Abu Bakr and Umar. Until modern times, *khalīfa* denoted and connoted as *khalīfat Allah* has endured. In traditional and contemporary commentaries, *khalīfa/ khalīfat Allah* is explicitly human, and implicitly male. In contemporary feminist commentaries, *khalīfa/ khalīfat Allah* is explicitly human, and gender inclusive. In the wake of ecological crises, Islamic environmentalists have adjusted the meaning of *khalīfat Allah* to mean a steward or trustee of God, explicitly human, with ambiguous gender distinctions.

An IEfT appraisal noted that a focus on interpretations and commentaries of Q 2:30 uncovered theological implications of vicegerency. It correlates the Divine hierarchy over humans with men over women and humans over non-human creation. Additionally, normative, contemporary, feminist, and environmentalist interpretations of *khalīfa* and the role of humanity fall into two categories—of human superiority that is hierarchical and patriarchal, and of a “benevolent” humanistic position of a trustee. Both are human-centric and supports speciesism, thereby promoting social and environmental disparities as a factor in its worldview.

As long as humanity sees itself as a privileged creation, with aims to replace God on earth, and the like, it is not possible to establish the desired ecofeminist onto-epistemological position. An IEfT requires a return to the original and simplified meaning of *khalīfa* as

successors of earth's previous inhabitants. From its initial Qur'anic purpose, the changes in the concept of *khalīfa* cultivated a hierarchal and, by extension, a patriarchal worldview into Islamic theology. Utilizing the same verses, Q 2:30, 38:26, and 24:55, and in light of the critical norm and an onto-epistemological shift in consciousness facilitated a new paradigm of healing and liberation.

After showing that *khalīfa*, defined as vicegerency, establishes patriarchy and species hierarchy, the narratives of the first humans, the Gardens of Eden, and Heaven was addressed as informing contemporary gender and ecological concerns. The Qur'anic report on the first humans have a sense of vagueness with an absent of elements found in its Jewish and Christian counterparts. Classical Islamic commentaries, folklore, mystical, and feminist perspectives uncover that the construction of gender is influenced by Eve and Adam's narratives, impacting cultural traditions and religious attitudes in society. The similarities in the gendered language and imagery of the reports between Judeo-Christian accounts and the Qur'anic commentaries highlight the ecological fallout. Eve and Adam's descriptions tell us what the role of men and women should be in society. Instances that tell us what the role of men and women should be in society found in this dissertation include:

- The discrepancies between male and female participants in Islamic rituals (the five pillars).
- The idea of leadership and authority in Islam privileges males.
- The issue of women's presence in mosques.

These issues continue to support an anthropocentric and patriarchal worldview. Consequently, with the concept of *khalīfa*, and the narratives of Eve and Adam, we are led toward a theology of two choices—domination or benevolent domination.

The Gardens and Fire provide a template to the logic, location, and placement of bodies and objects—men, women, young, old, biotic, and abiotic creatures. The Garden of Eden signifies the location of human disobedience to God and the consequence of non-submission. Earth signifies the human consequence of disobedience. As the primary instigator of disobedience, Eve represents all women.⁷⁰³ Heaven is a longing for the utopian past of Eden, signifying the location of human redemption. Adult male bodies of believers dominate the scene in Heaven, while female bodies form the majority in the Fire. Heaven is filled with objects that provide joy, comfort, delight, and servitude. The embodiment of young males and youth provide a servant class, while the female-bodied *houri* offers companionship. Heaven is a space where bodies know and accept the stereotypical positions found in societies on earth. While the concept of *khalīfa* situates humanity at the top of the hierarchy of creation, the narratives of Eve, Adam, and the Gardens, Eden and Heaven position the roles and consequences of bodies in society. The environment (plants, animals, sites, and scenery) is there to provide delight for the inhabitants.

An essential element for this IeFT is an internalized insistence that domination and oppression is categorically wrong while challenging its etiology and enforcement. These narratives are etiological examples. Their execution and manifestation historically, exemplify its enforcement. Healing their distortion equates to healing critical relationships. Filtered through the lens of IeFT's critical norm, that which promotes the full and equal intrinsic value of all creation (human and non-human) is authentic, while that which does not promote it is inauthentic. The design of egalitarian and safe spaces in theology follows a change in aspirations and desires. Humanity has made the choices of which we are living the results. Different decisions are in order if different outcomes are desired. Asking further questions, perceiving

⁷⁰³ Eve is perceived as the primary instigator of disobedience, and representative of all women according to several classical exegesis. See footnotes 642-647.

from different standpoints, and engaging in consciousness-raising lead away from and eradicates traditional ideas of sexuality, racism, and speciesism to form a new theological expression.

Concluding Reflections

In our eco-memories and eco-stories, how we see ourselves, collectively and individually, is as critical as how we perceive and are perceived by others, perhaps more so. The power to correct the imbalances in our lives lie within us. Addressing and correcting injustices does not require the acknowledgment and permission of the authority. It is within our power, which awaits activation. It often takes a crisis for humans to stop and reflect. By doing so, we discover that we were sabotaging ourselves and generating self-fulfilled prophecies. Some believe there is a link between the current COVID-19 pandemic and religion that it is the outcome of wrongdoings over nature.⁷⁰⁴ If this is the case, then the evil we do to ourselves stems from our wrong choices and decisions. The imbalances indicate “worth” or “value.” There are some among humanity who see themselves as not worthy of a share of God’s abundance. Some think that they are better than others, so they believe they deserve God’s lot more than others. Thus, they think that their lives are more valuable than others. Muslims are to live in balance, not as superiors or inferiors.

Religious conceptions are at the heart of how we structure our world as they give us knowledge about ourselves, others, our values, and others’ value. If we are not conscious, these messages might become a source of harm while they should be a source of healing and

⁷⁰⁴ Richard Horton, *The Covid-19 Catastrophe: What’s Gone Wrong and How to Stop it Happening Again*. John Wiley & Sons, 2021; Bhawani Shankar Adhikari, *Exotic Fearology*. Xlibris Corporation, 2020; and Hasan Basri, “Religious Community Responses to COVID-19: Case Study on Muslim Small Community,” *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* 24, no. 8 (2020):10439–10446.

empowerment (liberation). Empowerment requires the consciousness of agency evidenced by pro-activity, autonomy, and self-management. Without this, humanity falls into hierarchal and patriarchal social systems that always result in apocalypticism. Ruether proposes a solution to the problem of apocalyptic thinking. She states that “we can work our way back from the problematic to see the roots of the social hopes more realistically and more lovingly.”⁷⁰⁵

In light of, and alignment with, the discussed insights and suggestions, the first ten verses of the 91st chapter of the Qur’an, *Ash-shams*, states:

And by the sun and its brightness; And by the moon as it follows it (the sun); And by the day as it shows up (the sun’s) brightness; And by the night as it conceals it (the sun); And [by] the sky and its construction; And by the Earth and its (wide) expanse; By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; Truly s/he succeeds that purifies it; And s/he fails that corrupts it!⁷⁰⁶

Purification of our soul occurs when we take full accountability for nurturing ourselves.

Humanity can get to a place of nurturing souls by understanding that creation as a whole is innately worthy and raising consciousness about it by creating safe spaces. Positions of marginality and continuous servitude are the hallmark of the holders of authority. They do not have systems of inclusivity to ensure success for all. Marginalization is a predicament for millions, particularly women. Women have the reputation as “the backbone” of religious institutions, nations, communities, and families, yet they suffer disproportionately. The multitude is indoctrinated to continue servitude and accept authorities who have not made the space for

⁷⁰⁵ Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 84.

⁷⁰⁶ The Quran.com Team, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://quran.com>. A. Yusuf Ali’s translation of Q 91:1–10.

their success. The indoctrination manifests when religious interpretations place some humans within roles of limitation while others claim the “crowns of creation.”

Marginalization occurs when justice is withheld for some in society and not for others. It appears where there are glass ceilings for some genders, races, and economic classes, but not for others. Marginalization happens in families when love and attention are withheld for some and lavished on others. Marginalization is people defining the standard of success and then deciding value and worthiness. If one is not deemed worthy, one’s worth is relegated to perpetual servitude.

Believing one’s self unworthy is why many people are not going after what they want in life; they are going after what they think is possible and believe they deserve. According to the Qur’an, when God calls us to serve, it is after making a promise on creation. Unlike human beings, servitude to God is predicated on the worthiness of existence, love, and success. Remaining vigilant and knowledgeable is the best way to nurture and free one’s self. Authentic “success,” equated with the purification of self, is incomplete by service to others alone. Purification and nurturing one’s self are also required, which humanity is empowered to do. God has sincerely sworn an oath that creation is powerful, sound, and purposeful. Success and servitude is not balanced if this primary motivation is not in line. There is no social acceptance, just servitude to other people and their goals—marginalization. By accepting that all creation is loved and worthy and that success and servitude are balanced, humanity will become better and more focused on care and reciprocity.

The Qur’an reminds us that it was neither man nor women who constructed the sky and redirected our attention back to God’s-self as the source, who did indeed construct the sky, heavens, earth, sun, and moon. (Q 90: 1–9). The Qur’an states that our souls have an inherent

sense of order, proportion, and worth. It is not something fashioned outside of ourselves. Instead, it is something to cultivate within ourselves. What are order and proportion? We have an innate sense of what it means to act with virtues of justice, mercy, and forgiveness. When we cultivate that seed each of us was born with, we purify our souls through the acceptance of God's love and compassion for us. The Qur'an states that as success. However, if we do not participate in this process, we will corrupt and stunt our souls. The things that distract us from nurturing the soul is fear, doubt, false thinking, injustices to ourselves (feelings of unworthiness and being dominated), and injustices to others (dominating others), which stunt humanity. In the words of environmentalist Jeremy Lent,

We need to forge a new era for humanity—one that is defined, at its deepest level, by a transformation in the way we make sense of the world, and a concomitant revolution in our values, goals, and collective behavior. In short, we need to change the basis of our global civilization. We must move from a civilization based on wealth accumulation to one that is life-affirming: an ecological civilization.⁷⁰⁷

Changing conduct and attitudes requires changing what we think. There can be no justification for domination. If we desire to heal ourselves, our communities, nations, the environment, and the world, we must begin with a fundamental shift in our thoughts.

This dissertation highlighted the history and scholarship on the issues of the term *khalīfa*, narratives of Eve and Adam, and their societal and environmental impact. It must not go unnoticed that there will always remain those unconvinced by the suggested paradigmatic shifts. Many humans prefer and benefit from hierarchy and patriarchy and those unconvinced will remain unconvinced until the realization that we set into motion apocalyptic responses. For

⁷⁰⁷ Jeremy Lent, "What Does An Ecological Civilization Look Like?," in *YES! Magazine Online* (2020); What Does An Ecological Civilization Look Like? - YES!Magazine (accessed April4, 2021).

authentic and lasting socio-environmental changes, two changes must occur - how we perceive ourselves, and how we are perceived. The teachings of Qur'an chapter 13, verse 11 at the beginning of this chapter, tell us that how we perceive ourselves and our conduct is the critical starting point toward eradicating dominance and oppression.

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