

Call for Research Papers
Reassembling Creation: Green Ethics (GE)
and Scholarly Disciplines in the Islamic Tradition

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Background Paper

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Background

The last decades witnessed a growing amount of literature looking at ecological questions and initiatives of Muslim Cultures and Societies at large. However, the discourses appear, at times, quite flattened either by duplicating global ideas about the ecological crisis or by apodictically repeating doctrinal Islamic postulates. Both temptations shall be kept at bay, if not deconstructed, in this monitoring of Green Ethics. It strives to reassemble the richness of voices, practices and materialities in due historical perspective. In order to be sustainable for the 21st century, such an endeavour should also thoroughly conduct reconnaissance tours of different genres and cultural settings. This includes a thorough analysis of how a critical investigation of self-hailing anthropocentrism looks like.

Keywords

Air, animals, cosmography, desert(ification), environmental initiatives, eschatology, *hisba*, (hybrid) ethics, Islamic imaginary, Islamic jurisprudence and legal theory, (Islamic) philosophy, pollution, Islamic theology, *jinn*, legal studies, *mi'raj*, plants, Sufism, *ṭibb nabawī*, water (management).

(A) Broad Scope

Are there other ways to seriously engage with the past, present and future environmental challenges from an Islamically-informed perspective than schematically claiming upfront that “Muslims have always been Green” or by hastily equating Western concepts of environmental concern with genuinely Islamic ones? This call for gathering historical and contemporary voices is worthwhile not only to

revisit neglected pathways but also to map potentially shared interfaces. To start with, there is no dearth of apodictic declarations of the profound Greenness of Islam. However, schematic announcements that stops by just declaring how perfectly everything has been arranged by God often come at the cost of further and deeper reflection. Therefore, this seminar systematically asks whether the intellectual and cultural history of Islam might have given way to too anthropocentric readings of Koran and Sunna that infiltrated other disciplines of Islamic writing, thereby elevating the human species into a dangerous paramount (*khalīfa*) position? It understands Green Ethics (GE) as a complex and multifaceted mega-challenge that has to be systematically tackled and developed further. GE is embedded in as well a multiplicity of traditional Islamic and Islamically infused genres – plus practices and material manifestations – as in a large number of cross-cutting topics that need, to a substantial degree, to be retrieved, reassembled and looked at from different angles.

(B) Key Questions and Cross-cutting Topics

The broad question of the seminar reads: How can the challenge of a full-blown GE be addressed from the variegated perspectives rooted in the vast Islamic moral tradition and its global entanglements? How can we cast the web wide enough so that we do not stop short at contemporary NGO parlance and the straightjacket of modern sustainability (the practical importance of which shall not be denied, though)? Going more into detail, a number of cross-cutting themes of Islamic history and questions emerge that can be related to this grand task together with some tentative mappings.

• Evocation of Elements

Do we have enough in-depth cultural history accounts about the quiddity and function of different elements, such as air, water and sand, in beneficial and dramatic settings? In how far are especially heat, light and wind relevant? What are the Islamic imaginary stories attached to that part of creation? And how about their material usages and cultural representations in Muslim cultures and societies? How is their presence in waste land and in outer space imagined? In which ways are human and other beings related to them?

• Symbolism of Plants

Given the dearth of information in English-language reference works of Islamic Studies about flora (apart from the perception of the Prophet Muhammad as a rose), its rather generic treatment needs to be overcome. What are the exact plantation regimes of Paradise and Hell? Is the *Zaqqūm* tree the ethical focal plant in the dystopian realm of Hell? Are there bananas, cedars, palm trees and tulips in Paradise? In how far do its plants mirror earthly equivalents and what kind of ethical implications can be derived from that? Is there a *Baraka* of certain plants in this world and if so on which basis? How do they resonate in concrete plantation contexts and specific socio-cultural products, such as not only gardens and parks but also, for instance, Sultanic kaftans and national flags/banknotes of the so-called Islamic world?

• Agency of Animals

Although fauna has been comparatively better researched than flora in wider Islamic Studies, it also needs to be properly assembled. What kinds of impact are attributed to animals? Is their decisive Koranic presence translated into other spheres of cultural production? What about speaking animals and their explicit or implicit GE advice to humankind? Do they function as *alter egos*? How relevant are certain animals as companions or helpers of the prophets of Islam and other important figures? Don't we need to also rewrite the history and success of Islamic empires from the perspective of fauna and human/animal-relationships?

• Role of Invisible Creatures

Jinn are an age-old topic in the cultural and intellectual history of Islam. They are shaped by pre-Islamic settings and further environments in the course of territorial expansion. Nevertheless, they

have rarely been reflected upon from a GE perspective. Actually, *jinn* have a bad record of wrongdoing on earth before the creation of mankind. Nevertheless, they function as the oldest testimony and omnipresent (yet mostly invisible, but felt) reminder that man is not alone in this world and should be conscious about his surroundings, about the co-presence of other creatures and what he/she is doing. Their partially zoomorphic forms already signal a greater closeness to the whole of creation. They also exhibit a special relationship to wind, water and metal work. In addition, they are utterly important in food and waste management. Angels traverse an incredibly wider realm in space. Hence, information about their travels/missions and functions can provide deepened insight into what holds the worlds spiritually together.

• Islamically Informed Practices

What is the range of practices that are constitutive for GE beyond the often-cited quest for ritual purity (*ṭahāra*)? Rituals and other forms of (habitual) behaviour are not only imbued by all sorts of jurisprudential regulations, customary laws and shared moral community decisions but also by the Islamic imaginary, processes of intercultural exchange and an increasing variety of global flows. It also needs to be asked in which ways modern Best Practices become – superficially – Islamized. A closer look will be taken at different sorts of Green Deen and natural heritage initiatives.

• Islamicate Material Culture

In how far do the products of material culture, like agriculture, carpets, gardening, jewelry, metal work, pottery, textiles and water architecture, unfold transformed ethical imperatives? Does the interest, intense production and engagement with pertinent products educate people in certain ways or function as a sort of actant, inducing certain manners to deal with the environment? Does, for instance, Mughal glassware translate a certain emotional landscape? In which sense do specific irrigation practices convey ideas of justice, social hierarchy, sustainability etc.?

Moreover, it has to be asked which theoretical concepts enable scholars of broader Islamic Studies to reach an enhanced understanding when conducting inquiries of allegedly familiar texts, artefacts and practices? Reassembling creation through a broad array of topics and genres shall help to flesh out GE in a more substantial manner and get also in conversation with the already existing secondary literature. In addition, it has to be asked in how far global ideas and flows are increasingly co-constitutive for also Islamic ethics. This is especially pertinent in the case of GE.

(C) Genres of Islamic Tradition

In this section, we identify some core disciplines and sub-disciplines, parts of which contain substantial strands of relevance for GE. In order to put together a systematic overview, the following genres deserve to be more thoroughly interrogated: cosmography, Koran and Sunna and their renderings in *tafsīr* etc., theology, *mi'rāj*, *ṭibb nabawī*, *fiqh*, *ḥisba*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, philosophy and poetry. Experts in all these disciplines are called upon to contribute to the following:

- Islamic **cosmology and cosmographies**, with their rendering of spatial imaginations and the limited role of this-worldly creation and mankind therein are pertinent. How does the sub-lunar sphere fit into the idea of world at large and what explanations are there for the elements and phenomena like e.g. weather?

- It remains an open question whether **Koran and Sunna** are genres in themselves, given the fact that the Koran is defined by its uniqueness and that all those hadiths that constitute the Sunna of the Prophet, his Companions, Followers and subsequent generations, serve as building blocks for a number of religious disciplines. While the agency of animals has recently been intensely reflected in secondary literature, plants still do not loom large in Islamic Studies, to say the least. Besides, legends of punishments are partly expressed in upheavals of nature. The Holy sources also inform what the *ṭayyibāt* of God are, for whom and how are they available.

- **Theology** is pertinent not only in telling people how Paradise is gained but also how it is shaped and what kinds of pleasure can be expected. The ways in which Paradise has been vividly portrayed reveal interesting patterns of what humans (should) crave for. There is no ecological footprint in Paradise but yes so in its materialized earthly invocations, created artificial environments and related attitudes. What is the exact role of plants and the elements therein? Are animals admitted and, if so, which ones? Theology also discusses closely related concepts, like *'ahd, amāna, fasād, khilāfa* and *mizān*, that are immediately relevant for GE. Furthermore, the signs (*āyāt*) of God discourse has to be included.
- More precisely the sub-genre of **prophetic anecdotes** (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) informs about certain prophets (of the *nabī* and *rasūl* type) who seem to have a particularly close relation to creation, especially Solomon, but also Yūnus or a figure like Khidr (who is disputed in his status but nevertheless utterly influential).
- The genre describing the miraculous **night journey** (*isrā'*) and the subsequent **ascension to the heavens** (*mi'rāj*) of Mohammad and his hybrid riding animal Burāq are decisive for GE. What kinds of scenarios does this section of eschatological literature provide? What types of creatures and created things are there in Paradise? Through traversing in time and space this eschatological dimension offers deep insights and all sorts of inter alia observations that should be assembled in its Green dimension.
- Concerning the discipline of **prophetic medicine** (*ṭibb nabawī* or *ṭibb al-a'imma* in Shiite circles), the references to herbal medicine and the health advantages of certain herbs and food items did not receive major attention in analytical and comparative studies. Of interest, would also be commercialized appropriations of this pharmacy of the Prophet.
- The **Fatwa** literature seems to be not intensely concerned with environmental issues, so that contributions in this regard would be highly welcome. Nevertheless, there is a number of monographic studies that could be addressed as Islamic eco **jurisprudence** (*fiqh a-bī'a*). Such authors have the tendency, though, to make extensive theological announcements but only mention several chapters from the manuals of Islamic law in passing, while claiming that Green regulations are all over the place. Related state law implementations in the form of *qānūn* are also of heightened interest.
- The historical jurisprudential sub-genre and governmental practice of market control (*ḥisba*) is variously evoked because it is relevant for the ethics of poverty, taking action against food riots, unhealthy ingredients, lack of hygiene, damage to animals/humans and enacting overall quality control.
- The jurisprudential hermeneutics and methodology of holy texts (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) is a major path of inquiry for GE. This concerns especially the extension of (contextually limited) interdictions and critical analysis of *maqāsid* ideas for their collaboration in boosting (over-)consumption. Does this jurisprudential sub-genre subdue to utter anthropocentrism to the detriments of nature in general?
- **Sufism**: it is advisable to pay more attention to the floral and fauna imagery of Islamic Mysticism as well as its appreciation of e.g. light. Furthermore, certain figures like the proto-vegetarian Rabi'a and her spiritual management of lust (*shahawāt*) etc. loom large in GE discourse.
- GE has to include Islamic **philosophy**, but not only the modern fashion that advocates perennialism, like Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Notably the here relevant specific character of Paradise and its embodied enjoyment are an old topic in the Islamic philosophical tradition. Furthermore, the famous trichotomy of *nafs* will also be relevant here, including the Irascible (i.e. appetitive or vegetative) power.
- It can be questioned whether **poetry** is a genre. However, its pervasiveness in Muslim cultures and societies can often be taken for granted. The poetical evocation of non-human creation in form of flora, fauna and certain spaces shall be followed up.

Unproportionately much has been written in Islamic Studies and beyond about human actors, but much less so about factors and narratives like those listed above that are co-constitutive for the yet-to-be-fleshed-out and thoroughly theorized Islamic GE. This task has to meet several challenges. It has to

monitor a very long timeline. Ideas produced in the secular horizon of modern nation states should not be conflated with premodern imagery and regulations. Terms and concepts need comprehensive testing in that regard. These are but some of the distinct headings that they can be of help for interested researchers while preparing their submissions for the seminar.

(D) Selection Criteria

The suggested questions outlined above and the proposed scholarly disciplines to engage with are not comprehensive. Thus, researchers can always address other questions and engage other disciplines, as long as the submitted papers pay attention to the following criteria:

- The paper falls within the scope of the seminar, as explained in Section (A) “Broad Scope”, and addresses some of the questions, as outlined in Section (B) “Key Questions”, by engaging one or more of the scholarly disciplines illustrated in Section (C) “Genres of Islamic Tradition.” We invite researchers not only from Islamic theology and jurisprudence as well as Islamic and religious studies but also from the philologies (Arabic, Ottoman/Turkish, Persian etc.), literary and cultural studies, including art history, political sciences and philosophy.
- The paper shows full and critical awareness of previous studies with relevance to its key questions. The submitted paper is meant to go beyond published studies rather than replicating their purport or paraphrasing their results.
- The paper explores new research frontiers, provides rigorous and in-depth analysis of the material it deals with in a way that leads to producing scholarly knowledge with added value to the addressed topic.
- All submitted abstracts and full papers will be evaluated by an academic Review Committee whose members will collectively decide which submissions are accepted/rejected.

Practical Information & Deadlines

Prospective applicants are kindly requested to send:

(a) An abstract (300-500 words), describing the research’s core ideas, main and sub-questions, and how they will be addressed in the light of this Background Paper, and

(b) A brief biography (max. 500 words) outlining the applicant’s academic background, main research interests and key publications.

Authors whose abstracts are accepted will receive an invitation to send their full papers (between 7,000 and 9,000 words) within the deadline specified below.

Languages

Submissions (abstracts, bios and full papers) can be written in either **English or Arabic**.

Plan of the Peer-Reviewed Publication with Brill:

After the seminar, the full proceedings will undergo a double-blind review process. The papers which will successfully go through this process will be published as part of a thematic issue in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Islamic Ethics (JIE)* and/or an edited volume in the peer-reviewed book-series *Studies in Islamic Ethics*, both published by Brill.

Benefits

CILE will offer the authors of accepted papers the following:

- Peer-reviewed publication
- Cover of the costs of making the publication available via open access.
- Travel and accommodation costs during the three days of the seminar (If the circumstances would permit having a face-to-face seminar).
- Simultaneous Arabic-English translation throughout the seminar.

Important Dates:

- **30 June, 2021:** Deadline for receiving abstracts and bios. Please read this Background Paper carefully before writing the abstract.
- **15 July, 2021:** Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be notified and invited to write the full papers.
- **1 August, 2021:** Deadline for receiving full papers.
- **1 September, 2021:** Authors whose papers are accepted will be notified.
- **12-14 October, 2021:** The proceedings of the seminar
- **10 December, 2021:** Deadline for submitting a revised version of the post-seminar full papers, based on the remarks raised by the Review Committee and the deliberations during the seminar.

Contact Us:

Submissions must be sent to greenethics@cilecenter.org

Please note that only submissions sent to this e-mail will be considered and evaluated.

For any inquiries about this call-for-papers, or about the accompanying Background Paper, please contact

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