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Exploring the Impacts of Religion on Pro-Environmental Attitudes and Behaviour

A Quantitative Analysis within Muslim Samples and Its Contribution to Interreligious Knowledge

Introduction

When I was a child, my grandfather and I used to go to the forest near our house to cut wood. Instead of simply cutting down the nearest and easiest tree, my grandfather had a different approach. He would search for dried, decaying logs from trees that had previously been cut down. With a pickaxe, he would carefully dig out the root sides of the log and then break it into pieces using an axe. This process required a lot of time and effort, and as a young child, I would often find myself waiting for him for what felt like an eternity. My already limited patience was put to the test during these moments. However, my grandfather had a reason for his method. He could have easily cut down the first fresh tree he spotted, fulfilling our daily or weekly wood requirements much faster. But he chose not to do that. When I pointed to the little newly grown oak trees and asked him why we didn't cut them down, he would stop, wipe the sweat from his brow and explain his philosophy to me kindly. He would say, "Is it alright, my dear? These trees will grow and flourish. They will put down roots and spread their branches. The dried ones are the ones that need to be cut. As custodians of the natural world, we must not harm the young saplings that Allah has entrusted to us." My grandfather had a special relationship with trees, forests and the environment. He considered them a sacred trust (*amanah*), seeing himself as a guardian of nature rather than its master. As the years went by, I saw how deeply he cared for the forest near the plateau. Even when the state cut down the trees for renewal

purposes, he accepted the situation, but it saddened him deeply, and he shed tears for the loss. Now, reflecting on those memories, I realise that my own connection with the natural environment is vastly different from my grandfather's. Today, I see my children growing up in an urban environment, far removed from the beauty of the forest. Their interaction with nature is limited to the potted flowers they see in our apartment and the greenery they watch in documentaries. I think that my grandfather's profound respect and love for nature is a rare and precious mindset that might be fading away with each passing generation. His wisdom and appreciation for the natural world have left a lasting impact on me, and I hope to instil some of that reverence for nature in my children, even though their experiences may be quite different from my own childhood adventures in the forest with my beloved grandfather.

In this chapter, I delve into the intricate interplay between religion and environmental issues. My primary objective is to scrutinise the relationship between religiosity and environmental orientations, encompassing both dominion and stewardship orientations, as well as environmental behaviour, which encompass a spectrum ranging from active environmentalism—such as attending information meetings about environmental problems, participating in demonstrations against environmental pollution and engaging in tree planting campaigns—to waste management practices—such as minimising waste of resources like bread, water, and energy, critically evaluating draft papers and adopting energy-saving technologies.

My contribution to the scholarly discourse emanates from a synthesis of data sourced from various studies conducted among Muslim populations (including Turkish, Jordanian and British Muslims) spanning the years 2010 to 2022. By meticulously evaluating and deliberating upon these empirical findings, I aim to address a conspicuous void in research literature characterised by a dearth of investigations involving non-Judeo-Christian samples.

Moreover, beyond the mere compilation and analysis of empirical evidence, my scholarly endeavour aspires to enrich interreligious learning. Through a nuanced examination of the human–nature relationship from an Islamic theological perspective, I endeavour to contribute to the broader tapestry of interfaith discourse. To this end, I compare and interrogate findings derived from four distinct

empirical studies with the theological underpinnings articulated within Islamic texts. This comparative analysis seeks to elucidate the convergence and divergence between empirical observations and doctrinal precepts, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the religious dimensions of environmental discourse.

Judeo-Christian Approach to the Human–Nature Relationship

Almost all religions have dealt with the human–nature relationship in their main texts, although they have different contents and intensities. Again, it can be said that all religions put forward principles that support environmental awareness and morality and advise the protection of the environment. In this regard, the teachings of religions on the human–nature relationship have been discussed in many works.¹

In the current chapter under consideration, significant attention is directed towards elucidating the perspectives of both the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam concerning the subject matter discussed, alongside their practical implications. Notably, within Western scholarly discourse, the topic has garnered considerable attention, particularly within the purview of social scientific inquiry. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to acknowledge that investigations within Western academia predominantly emanate from a Judeo-Christian vantage point. Explorations into the nexus between humanity and nature within Western scholarly endeavours encompass a multifaceted approach, drawing from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics, politics and theology. When the subject is associated with religion, relevant social scientists generally sought answers to the following questions: What is the relationship between religiosity and environmental awareness and morality? Does religiosity affect individuals' orientation towards the natural environment? How does religiosity support individuals in exhibiting environmentalist attitudes and behaviour?

Addressing the eco-theological discourse in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Harper identified four foundations regarding the rela-

1 Tanner/Mitchell, 2002.

tionship of man with nature. According to him, this eco-theological view and these foundations are based on the theory of creation in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the environmental stewardship approach.²

- (a) Nature is endowed with spiritual values and has a sacred meaning.
- (b) As a part of nature, humanity is obliged to protect it.
- (c) Religious groups with these principles should have and develop a viewpoint that ascribes holiness to nature.
- (d) These beliefs can create an ecologically sustainable society.

In the studies carried out in Judeo-Christian culture, investigations have delved into the intricate interplay between attitudes and behaviour concerning environmental stewardship and various dimensions of religiosity, encompassing religious commitment, beliefs and values. Diverse findings have emerged from these inquiries.³ Certain studies have posited a positive correlation between environmental consciousness and behaviour and indicators of religiosity, including religious commitment and beliefs. This suggests that religiosity serves as a facilitator, augmenting individuals' proclivity towards heightened environmental awareness and protective actions, bolstered by an imbued sense of stewardship. Concurrently, empirical evidence has underscored the role of religious inclinations in engendering environmentally conscious behaviour, such as refraining from purchasing products deemed detrimental to the environment and adopting lifestyle modifications conducive to environmental preservation. However, scholarly discourse also reflects a divergence of perspectives. Some investigations have yielded inconclusive findings, thus indicating a lack of substantive correlation between these variables. Conversely, certain studies have even posited a negative association, suggesting that heightened religiosity may impede environmental awareness and behaviour, ostensibly diminishing their prevalence.

In this research, religious people who could not reflect the teachings of religion in their lives were held responsible for the emer-

2 Harper 2008, 8–9.

3 Wolkomir/Futreal/Woodrum/Hoban 1997 / Briguglio/Garcia-Muñoz/Neuman 2020 / Ayten 2021 / Aydemir 2022.

gence of environmental problems, rather than religion's understanding of nature and environmentalism. However, in general, in the last quarter century, many researchers around the world have dealt with religious traditions and the basic principles that these traditions create about the human–nature relationship in order to develop more environmentally friendly, responsible and sensitive environmental ethics. In the West, social scientists, who are interested in environmental problems, especially global warming and climate changes, and who think that religion can contribute to solving these problems and to the development of effective environmental morality, show an interest in Eastern and Far Eastern religious cultures apart from the Jewish Christian tradition. Within this framework, they refer to these cultures in solving environmental problems.⁴ The current chapter does not include evaluations of the Far East religions on the human–nature relationship and the research on the pro-nature attitudes and behaviour of the individuals belonging to those religions.

Islamic Perspective on the Human–Nature Link

According to Islam, the Almighty Creator created everything using a scale (*mizan*). He created a balance and fundamental laws (*hududullah*) for the occurrence of events in the universe and nature to take place appropriately (“We have created everything in due measure” 54/al-Qamar, 49; “. . . We have ensured that various plants grow there in a balanced way.” 15/Hijr: 19). When we look at the other verses in the Qur’an, it is understood that man was created as a caliph and exalted, and nature was given to his use. In addition, people have been given important responsibilities and duties in terms of the protection of nature and ecological balance. It is stated that human beings will be responsible for the deterioration of the ecological balance as well (“We have made human beings a valuable and skilful creature. . . . We have made them superior to most of the creatures we have created.” 17/Isra: 70; “There has been deterioration in the land and sea because of what people have done

4 Tanner/Mitchell 2002.

with their own hands...” 30/ Rum: 41).⁵ For this reason, it is man’s duty to maintain the natural balance within the limits of creation. To sum up, it can be said that the basis of the human–nature relationship from the perspective of Islam is based on the principles mentioned in these verses; in other words, the principles of *tawhid* and that Allah creates a balance (*mizan*) in the universe and nature in creation. The duty of the believer is to act responsibly in line with these principles and not to own nature, but to take care of it.

Some basic principles that human beings, who are held responsible for maintaining the balance in nature, must comply with in this process are also stated in the basic sources of Islam. In Islam, avoidance of waste is recommended as a method of conserving natural resources, and waste is described as an action that the Creator dislikes. (‘Eat and drink, but do not waste! For Allah does not love the wasteful’ 7/Araf: 31). Humans are encouraged not to squander resources vulgarly, to use the resources appropriately, taking into account the rights of the poor, and to act moderately in this regard. (Enam: 141).

It is emphasised that the Creator built an order into the natural environment and that this order should not be disturbed (“Do not make mischief in the world after its correction.” 7/Araf: 56). There are various verses in addition to the above that point to the importance of preserving the natural environment and the delicate balance therein. Again, in line with protecting the environment and transferring it to future generations, there are principles laid down by Islam on the protection of plants and animals, the encouragement of tree planting, the promotion of environmental cleanliness and the prevention of air, water and soil pollution.⁶

Drawing from the theological precepts enshrined within Islamic scripture, specifically the Qur’an and prophetic traditions (*hadiths*), we can delineate a comprehensive perspective on the natural environment and its inherent virtues. The recognition that the natural environment is a divine gift, ordained by God for human utilisation, is central to this viewpoint. Within this framework, humanity is entrusted with the stewardship of the environment, which necessitates responsible custodianship characterised by conscientious usage and gratitude towards the bestower of blessings.

5 al-Mu’minin 2006.

6 Martı 2018 / Ayten 2021.

The imperative to utilise natural resources judiciously, eschewing wastefulness and extravagance, is integral to Islamic teachings. Therefore, emphasis is placed on mindful consumption, wherein resources are utilised in a manner that respects their intrinsic value and conserves their longevity. Moreover, the Islamic ethos encompasses a profound sense of reverence for the sanctity of nature, mandating the safeguarding of its beauty and myriad of resources. This conscientious custodianship extends beyond mere preservation, encompassing a proactive commitment to ensuring the sustenance and flourishing of future generations through the prudent management of natural assets.

In essence, the Islamic perspective espouses a holistic ethos of environmental stewardship, underpinned by the principles of gratitude, moderation and preservation. Through this lens, the natural environment is perceived not merely as a repository of resources for human exploitation, but as a sacred trust imbued with divine wisdom, which is deserving of reverence, protection and sustainable utilisation for the betterment of both present and future generations.

The human–nature relationship of Islam is evaluated by theologians in a moral framework.⁷ This chapter also deals with the issue from a moral point of view. In this context, environmental ethics can be considered attitudes and behaviour formed in the triangle of nature, human experience and reason, as in general morality. At this point, humans innately have the ability to distinguish between good and bad and to realise the basic problems of the natural environment and what needs to be done to find a solution to them. They have the capacity to be aware of the technological advances they have achieved thanks to their minds and the damage they cause to the environment. What is needed is for humans to show a determination in this direction and to keep awareness alive and spread it to generations through education.

While examining the human–nature relationship from an Islamic point of view, researchers should handle the issue within the framework of the belief of *tawhid*. God is the creator of man and nature. It is very important for people to evaluate the natural environment

7 Nasr 1982 / Bayrakdar 1992 / Martı 2018 / Ayten 2021.

from this perspective, to see natural beauty and resources as a trust given to them by Allah, to protect and watch over them, and to look at environmental problems from this perspective and in terms of interpreting the human–nature relationship with an Islamic dimension. In the practical field, while the effect of religiosity is effective in developing an approach of entrusting the environment to believers, the same effect is limited in terms of environmental behaviour. The effect of religiosity in developing behaviour to protect the environment is more intense in not wasting basic natural resources such as bread, water and energy, which are also inherent in traditional culture. On the other hand, the effect of religiosity on the development of active environmental behaviour is weaker. There may be a number of reasons for this, both mentioned and not mentioned here. These interesting subjects are issues to be studied and await researchers who will work in different fields of the social sciences.

Analysis of Current Situations among Muslims in terms of Environmental Dominion and Environmental Stewardship: Assessment of Findings from Various Studies

A series of empirical inquiries, conducted across varying temporal contexts, has been undertaken to assess the environmental orientations and behaviour exhibited by Muslim individuals.⁸ Within this scholarly endeavour, environmental orientations have been examined through a bifurcated lens, characterised by the conceptual delineations of ‘Environmental Dominion’ and ‘Environmental Stewardship’. Concurrently, forms of environmental behaviour have been methodologically explained according to two distinct sub-dimensions, namely ‘Waste Management’ and ‘Active Environmentalism’. In light of the nuanced frameworks articulated across these studies, the environmental orientations and pro-environmental behaviour demonstrated by Muslim individuals have been subject to rigorous evaluation. Through a synthesis of findings derived from these discrete investigations, a comprehensive understanding of the

8 Ayten 2010 / Ayten/Hussain 2017 / Ayten 2018 / Ayten/Hussain/Farhan 2024.

environmental consciousness and actions within Muslim communities has been sought to illuminate the complex interplay between religious tenets, cultural dynamics, and ecological concerns.

In the aforementioned studies, the construct of environmental dominion is characterised by a set of beliefs emphasising human primacy and utilitarianism vis-à-vis the natural environment. This ideological stance posits that humans are the rightful rulers of the natural world, and despite awareness of potential environmental harm, they are justified in leveraging technological advancements for personal gain. Additionally, nature is perceived as valuable solely insofar as it serves human interests, with an implicit endorsement of its inexhaustible exploitation. Furthermore, certain beings within the natural realm, such as insects and vermin, are deemed superfluous and devoid of utility. The doctrine of environmental dominion also sanctions the notion that human intervention to the detriment of nature is permissible when deemed advantageous.

Conversely, the construct of environmental stewardship embodies a contrasting set of principles rooted in reverence and custodianship towards the natural world. The conception of the universe, replete with its aesthetic splendour, as a sacred trust (*amanah*) reflecting divine creation, is central to this ethos. Within this paradigm, nature is not merely a resource to be exploited but a manifestation of God's existence, warranting protection irrespective of its utility to humans. Moreover, the doctrine of environmental stewardship advocates lifestyle modifications aimed at minimising ecological harm, thus underscoring the imperative for individuals to adapt their behaviour to align with the principles of environmental preservation.

Moreover, waste management constitutes an array of environmentally conscious behaviour aimed at resource conservation and sustainability. These practices encompass judicious utilisation of water, food and energy, alongside the adoption of energy-efficient technologies in both domestic and professional settings. Additionally, waste management entails active participation in recycling initiatives aimed at mitigating the environmental degradation stemming from resource depletion and pollution.

On the other hand, active environmentalism represents proactive engagement in advocacy and activism aimed at addressing environmental challenges on a systemic level. This entails attending informational sessions on topics such as climate change and en-

environmental crises, as well as actively disseminating information through various channels, such as distributing brochures and delivering speeches to raise awareness among the public. Furthermore, active environmentalism encompasses participation in demonstrations and protests against environmental pollution and advocating for sustainable policies and practices on a broader societal scale.

Table 1. Arithmetic Mean Scores Indicating Individuals' Environmental Orientations

Dimensions of Environmental Orientations	Years	M
Environmental dominion	2010 (N = 243)	2.43
	2017 (N = 252)	2.42
	2018 (N = 292)	2.55
	2024 (N = 355)	2.81
Environmental stewardship	2010 (N = 243)	4.54
	2017 (N = 252)	4.58
	2018 (N = 292)	4.51
	2024 (N = 355)	4.63

Table 2. Arithmetic Mean Scores Indicating Individuals' Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Dimensions of Pro-Environmental Behaviour	Years	M
Waste management	2010 (N = 243)	4.18
	2017 (N = 252)	3.98
	2018 (N = 292)	3.91
	2024 (N = 355)	4.07
Active environmentalism	2010 (N = 243)	2.50
	2017 (N = 252)	2.34
	2018 (N = 292)	2.30
	2024 (N = 355)	2.30

Two contrasting perspectives exist regarding the individual's relationship with nature, which can be delineated as possession and trust. These divergent paradigms play a pivotal role in elucidating individuals' proclivity towards environmentally conscious behaviour. Drawing from the findings of four longitudinal studies conducted at distinct intervals and encompassing diverse Muslim cohorts, we can discern that respondents exhibit an average level of environmental dominion orientation. Conversely, environmental stewardship orientation is notably more pronounced, registering at a substantially higher level, with scores averaging nearly 4.5 out of 5 across the years spanning from 2010 to 2024. This signifies a prevailing inclination among Muslim individuals towards concepts intrinsic to environmental stewardship, such as the recognition of nature's inherent sanctity as a sacred trust and the acknowledgment of human responsibility in safeguarding nature, including the willingness to adapt lifestyle practices to mitigate harm to the environment.

Regarding individuals' pro-environmental behaviour, the amalgamated findings from the aforementioned studies divulge that inclinations towards waste management behaviour, encompassing practices such as water, food, and energy conservation, as well as the utilisation of energy-saving technologies, surpass those towards active environmentalism. This trend persists over the temporal continuum spanning from 2010 to 2024. Evidently, there exists a predilection among individuals for action geared towards resource conservation and sustainability, compared to more overt forms of environmental advocacy and activism, such as attending conferences on environmental issues and participating in demonstrations against environmental crises.

The findings from the aforementioned studies, exemplified by the β coefficients derived from regression models, illuminate nuanced relationships between religiosity and environmental attitudes. Specifically, the research reveals that religiosity correlates positively with inclinations towards environmental stewardship and waste management, while demonstrating a negative correlation with tendencies towards environmental dominion. Furthermore, the investigation indicates that religiosity exerts no discernible effect on active environmentalism. For further elaboration and comprehensive insights, readers are referred to the works of Ayten

(2010), Ayten & Hussain (2017), Ayten (2018), Çiçek & Ayten (2023) as well as Ayten, Hussain and Farhan (2024).

General Evaluation and Discussion

In the foundational sources of Islam, as with other Abrahamic religions, there is frequent emphasis on a sense of responsibility towards the natural environment and thus environmentally friendly behaviour. However, the translation of these teachings into the lives of individuals is also associated with various other variables such as education, lifestyle, socioeconomic status and ideological attitudes towards life. Therefore, research has revealed discrepancies between the ideal situation and the actual implementation of these teachings, influenced by a range of factors. In this chapter, this process is examined from a psychosocial perspective within the framework of empirical research.

In this chapter, the examination of the human–nature relationship within an Islamic framework is grounded in the belief of *tawhid*. *Tawhid*, the concept of the Oneness of God, serves as the foundation for understanding the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. According to Islamic teachings, God is the creator of both humankind and nature, who established a delicate balance within the universe. This perspective underscores the importance of viewing the natural environment as a divine trust bestowed upon people by Allah. It involves recognising natural beauty and resources as manifestations of God’s creation, thereby instilling a sense of responsibility to safeguard and preserve them. Furthermore, it prompts individuals to approach environmental issues with sensitivity and to interpret the human–nature relationship through an Islamic lens.

The empirical findings discussed in this chapter shed light on the correlation between religiosity and pro-environmental behaviour, particularly environmental stewardship. Religiosity emerges as a significant driver in fostering attitudes that prioritise the protection and conservation of nature. Individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to perceive nature as a sacred trust, admitting the presence of God within it, and thus feel compelled to safeguard it for future generations. Conversely, the inclination to view hu-

mans as dominators of nature, solely exploiting its resources for personal gain, diminishes among those with greater religiosity. This behavioural pattern aligns with the Islamic principle that emphasises the ultimate ownership of the natural world by the Supreme Creator.

The discussion on pro-environmental behaviour is categorised into two groups: waste avoidance and active environmental awareness. Waste avoidance encompasses practices such as judicious use of resources like bread, water and energy, as well as measures to reduce paper waste. On the other hand, active environmental awareness entails engaging in activities such as disseminating information about environmental issues, participating in tree planting initiatives or supporting related campaigns, adopting environmentally friendly consumption habits and participating in demonstrations that address global environmental challenges like climate change. The distinction between these categories considers both the extent of the environmental burden imposed by behaviour and their direct contribution to nature preservation.

The tendency of individuals to engage in environmentally friendly behaviour, such as waste reduction, surpasses their inclination towards active environmental engagement. This phenomenon can be explained through various factors. Firstly, pro-environmental behaviour, such as prudent resource usage (e.g. bread, water and energy conservation), are deeply entrenched within cultural norms, thereby facilitating their adoption into daily practices. Secondly, the religious underpinning of waste avoidance reinforces individuals' motivation in this regard. Additionally, the economic benefits associated with such behaviour play a significant role in their adoption. Conversely, active environmental behaviour, encompassing more demanding activities like environmental education and advocacy, necessitate greater investments of time and resources.

Recent small-scale research conducted over the past fifteen years has revealed stagnation in this regard, particularly concerning waste reduction and overall environmental awareness. This stagnation can be attributed, in part, to the inverse relationship between economic development and waste reduction behaviour; as individuals' economic prosperity increases, so too may their consumption and subsequent generation of waste. To sustain environmental consciousness amidst economic progress, instilling values of conscious

consumption and environmental ethics within the education system is imperative.

Religiosity emerges as a significant determinant in shaping individuals' attitudes towards environmental stewardship. However, its impact on active environmental behaviour appears to be more limited. While religiosity positively influences behaviour aligned with traditional cultural norms, such as waste reduction, its effect on active environmental engagement, including participation in environmental protests, is less pronounced. The complex interplay between religiosity and environmentalism underscores the need for qualitative investigations to elucidate this relationship further.

The discrepancy between the conveyance of religious teachings and the adoption of active environmental behaviour may be attributed to the lag in updating religious knowledge to address contemporary environmental challenges. Additionally, factors such as economic considerations, cultural influences, consumption habits and awareness of environmental issues contribute to individuals' attitudes towards waste reduction.

In this chapter, a discourse emphasising moral responsibility and trust is advanced. It underscores the importance of integrating environmental education into religious teachings to foster environmental awareness and sensitivity across society. Religious educators play a pivotal role in imparting environmental consciousness to students, and incorporating environmental education into religious curricula can be instrumental in this endeavour. Moreover, religious broadcasting institutions can promote publications that advocate harmony between humans and nature, thereby fostering a culture of environmental stewardship.

As a global society, it is imperative to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of consumption that is balanced, prudent and sustainable. This awareness should be nurtured at various levels, encompassing not only individuals but also institutions, such as families, governmental bodies and educational institutions. Moreover, embedding this consciousness within educational systems, especially within the framework of religious education, through both explicit and implicit curricular elements, is paramount. Engaging in further systematic research in this domain would be beneficial, particularly given the intrinsic possessive tendencies inherent in human nature.

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