

**THE ISLAM AND THE GREEN PARADIGM
(A PROPOSED SOLUTION FROM ISLAMIC ECO-THEOLOGY FOR THE
EAST KALIMANTAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS)**

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Abstrak

Selama bertahun-tahun, Kalimantan Timur merupakan sebuah area yang paling menderita akibat pengerusakan hutan dalam skala besar. Kondisi ini memperparah situasi planet bumi yang sedang mengalami pemanasan global. Berdasarkan analisis documenter kritis, artikel ini menjelaskan kondisi hutan di Kalimantan Timur di bawah situasi politik global dan nasional yang berbeda. Artikel ini mengajukan penguatan kesadaran social pada para pemangku kebijakan dalam konteks lingkungan dengan memanfaatkan perspektif agama (Islam) yang ilmiah sebagai satu dari sekian banyak solusi untuk mengatasi pengerusakan hutan dan lingkungan di masa-masa mendatang.

Kata kunci: Perspektif Islam, pengerusakan hutan, Kalimantan Timur, dan Pemanasan Global.

Abstract

For years East Kalimantan has been one area that suffers from large deforestations. This condition worsens the ongoing global warming on earth. Based on critical documentary analysis, this article explains the conditions of East Kalimantan forest under different global and national political conditions. This article proposes social awareness raising among different stakeholders on environment using religious (Islamic) scholarly perspectives as one of many solutions to overcome further forest and environmental destruction.

Keywords: Islamic Perspective, deforestation, East Kalimantan, and Global Warming.

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Background

Global Warming is not strange to us nowadays. It has become one of the most-discussed environmental issues since it has such a big impact on human beings through floods, storms, erosion, drought, and extreme climate change. There are many explanations for global warming occurrence. There are also many strategies for better policies and action involving environmental problems. However, today we see the continuation of environmental damages. Obviously, we need to work harder to prevent the worsening global warming.

In some scholars' views global warming problems are getting worse because humans tend to see the realities of nature as not part of their own. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1996) suggests that the scientific revolution and a modernized world have divorced humans from the nature, creating ignorance about preservation of nature. He observes that this attitude is derived from the growing number of modern philosophical cults that view God merely as the "clock maker" of the universe, which works as a mechanical system and laws without any interference from God (Nasr).

Ziauddin Sardar (1985) says that our religious beliefs affect how we behave, including how we correlate ourselves with nature. He considers our environmental problems today are basically due to how we see nature. In his book Sardar says, "The roots of our ecological crises are axiomatic: they lie in our belief and value structures which shape our relationship with nature, with each other and the lifestyles we lead" (Sardar).

I believe religion can offer a powerful solution for environmental problems in Indonesia. The Indonesian state bases its foundation on the oneness of God, which is encapsulated in the recognition of religions as part of Indonesian state-affair life. The government requires that its citizens adhere to one of six official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This policy makes it quite clear that religion plays an important role in almost all of Indonesian society. Therefore, seeing environmental problems from a religious perspective will be a powerful drive of social change. Further consideration of why we need to take a

religious approach to environmental problem issues is that in most of our societies today the work of scientists and environmentalists hardly touch the grass roots realities. We need more than rhetorical theories on how ecology and nature work.

This paper discusses how religion, especially Islam, can become the foundation for nature-saving in such modern days problems especially in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, a Muslim-majority province with the major environmental problems.

East Kalimantan from Forests Production to Environmental Damages

Despite holding an important position as the lungs of Asia, Indonesian forest areas are continually decreased by the rapid deforestation for national economic development interests and world market demands. The Indonesian forest area in general has declined by 40 % between 1950 and 2005 (Arnold, 2008). In addition, the East Kalimantan forests, considered the oldest rain forest in the world and one of the only remaining habitat for endangered orangutans, face the same deforestation activities from the forestry productions in both the New Order government and the decentralized government following the 1998 reformation.



One of the endangered Orangutan from the tropical rainforest in
East Kalimantan

<http://www.orangutan.org/rainforest/indonesian-forest-facts>

East Kalimantan forest production began on a massive enactment of the Indonesian forestry constitution No. 5 1967, Chapter XIV, Article 33, Paragraphs 2 and 3 which states:

“Branches of production which are important for the State, and which affect the lives of most of the people, shall be controlled by the State” and “Land and water and the natural resources found therein are controlled by the State and are utilized to the fullest extent for the greater prosperity of the people” (Löffler, 1996).

This constitution has become the basic justification for the state to take control of all Indonesian lands and forests over its people for the sake of national economic development. Based on this constitution, too, there are waves of forest production in East Kalimantan. Between 1968 and 1982 the East Kalimantan forest was the major Indonesian resource for timber exports, annually exporting 11 million cubic meters of timber to China, Korea, Japan, Malaysia and European countries. Not only processing timber exports through legal and illegal logging within the forest, the Indonesian government also maintained mining industries for minerals, coal, oils and gas extraction and palm trees plantations.

In 1968, together with many other foreign companies, Unocal, a US mining corporation, opened mining activities in the Kutai Kartanegara regency. East Kalimantan mining industries have rapidly developed since then. Between 2004 and 2010, there were 33 coal mining concession contracts (PKP2B) and 1.212 mining rights managements endorsed by the local government, involving 3.12 million hectare mining fields (Naim, 2010). Unfortunately, logging and mining are not the only activities in the East Kalimantan forests. This province is also home to massive palm oil productions. Since 2000, the oil palm estates have been concentrated in East Kalimantan, and the provincial government intended to expand it up to 1 million hectares by 2018 (Urano, 2012). As a result of massive forest production with no

thought to preserving the land and nature, East Kalimantan is endangered with huge tracts of forest lost.

Citizens of East Kalimantan province, in different regencies and cities commonly share the problems related to environmental damage such as floods during the rainy seasons and drought during the dry season. Samarinda's flood, for example, has gotten worse within the last five years, especially after coal mining and palm industries projects were widely released. Between November, 2008, and May, 2009 alone, there were four floods within four of Samarinda's regencies. These floods affected economic activities of lower middle class in Samarinda. The small-scale businesses rely mostly on public transportation, which was effectively inoperative due to flooded roads.

Environmental problems also affected Samarindan women and children. According to 2011 draft report of East Kalimantan BPPKB, women empowerment and family planning boards, women and children are among the most vulnerable groups for environmental problems occurring in the city. For example, due to water and air pollution, problems related to health and reproduction and babies born with autism have increased in the last few years. From this growing number of problems that stem from environmental destruction, it is time for us to understand how religion sees nature and the universe as a whole. Therefore, we will reconsider respecting and loving nature for a sustainable environment for future generations.



Samarinda's regular flood (Jatam, 2010).

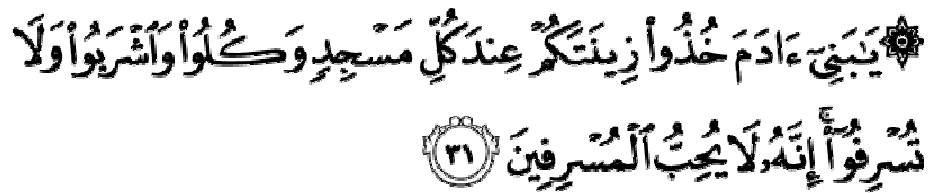
Islamic Ethics of Environment

Islam, as many Muslims believe, is a holistic religion, a blessing of the whole universe (*rahmatan lil-alamin*). It has views and concepts on every aspect of human life including the relationship of humans with nature and the environment. Many Qur'anic verses tell Muslims to respect and love nature because God created it perfectly and compassionately. One such admonition is mentioned in chapter 67 (Al-Mulk), verse 3-4:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَا تَرَىٰ فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفْوُوتٍ
فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَىٰ مِن فُطُورٍ ﴿٣﴾

"He who created the seven heavens one above another: No want of proportion wilt thou see in the Creation of (Allah) Most Gracious. So turn thy vision again: seest thou any flaw?"

Another verse often used by Muslim eco-theologians to harmonize religion and nature is Al-A'raf 31, which tells humans to eat, drink and clothe as they wish but never waste.



“O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.”

This verse prohibits all Muslims to overuse nature for their own benefit. One word of wisdom understood from this verse is that overusing nature will break its balance. The Qur'an also says that the destruction of the world on land and sea is caused by human acts and disasters that befall human beings could be ended by referring back to their good acts.

“Evil has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds, etc.), that Allâh may make them taste a part of that which they have done, In order that they may return (by repenting to Allâh, and begging his Pardon).” (Q.S. al-Rum [30]: 41)

Syed Hossein Nasr (1996) in *Religion and the Order of Nature* explains that modern humans who have been detached from the spiritual values of nature created such modernity principles as science, technology and materialism, which ignore the sustainability of the earth. This kind of ignorance, in my point of view, leads humans to exploit nature exploitation in order to take its full benefits.

It is not easy to find sources or books in the works of early Islamic scholars and jurists that directly address the environmental problems because such issues in the times of those scholars were not as bad as they are today. Facing extensive

modern environmental problems, the current Islamic scholars/jurists began to discuss these issues, and then proposed *fiqh lingkungan* (Islamic laws on environment). Scholars and jurists use the term “*fiqh lingkungan*” because most Muslims consider faith to be their fundamental realm. Faith constitutes the Islamic worldview that becomes the paradigm of Muslim thought and action. According to Ahmad Khoirul Fata (2006), this Muslim paradigm is then translated into an “Islamic normative ethic” (*fiqh*). The term *fiqh lingkungan* is used because awareness of the environment is part of the faith, and faith is not merely concepts about God; it is also about the creations of God (nature).

According to the Qur’an, nature is the sign of God’s existence. Nature is Muslim, because Muslims’ work is based on the divine laws, they obey God’s will at all time. As a result of its position nature does not and cannot disobey God’s command, and cannot violate natural laws (Q.S. al-Hajj: [22]: 18) (Ozdeimer, 2003). Therefore, anyone who wants to be called Muslim must do as nature does: Don’t disobey God’s command, don’t violate natural laws, and don’t disturb and destroy other creatures. We human beings have the same position as the nature has. If we serve the universe with full love, the universe will in return serve us with full love, too, but if we bother and destroy the universe, it also will bother and destroy us. What the universe does for us is a mirror of how we serve the universe. For example, soil erosion, floods, natural disasters, global warming, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanoes, etc. actually result from our irresponsible acts toward the universe.

Nevertheless, if we look deeper into the heritage of Muslim philosophers and/or Sufi, we will find the ancient works also mentioned the relationship of God, humans and nature. This is not merely superficial mentioning, but goes much deeper than that, explaining how nature and human beings have to understand each other in order to understand God. One of these philosophers, who we will discuss in the next chapter, is Syekh Jalaluddin Rumi who formulated a great work, the *masnavi*.

Rumi's Thoughts of the Universe and Its Ecological Value

Jalaluddin Rumi is one of the greatest Islamic philosophers and mystical Sufi leaders, of the *mevlevi* order. He was born on September 30, 1207 in Balkh city, Khurosan, now recognized as Afghanistan. He wrote many influential works such as *Divani-shams* and *Masnavi*. He stated that the universe is alive and scholars consider this thought as one of many foundations for Islamic theology that goes along with the current global issues: global warming and deforestation.

Through many of his poems Rumi explained the life existence of universe, referring to Qur'anic verses. According to L. Clarke, Rumi's idea that the universe is alive recalls Plato's idea of the universe as a living being regulated by the world soul (Clarke, 2003). However, other scholars argue that although Rumi believed the universe is moving under one cord that causes it to move, there are differences between Rumi's and Plato's ideas about the universe. Rumi's idea is not a metaphor as it is for Plato. The life of the universe, as Rumi conveys it, is in its actual meaning, as real as the active world. Universes speaking and conversing, according to Rumi is constant and they speak to God to praise and glorify Him. Even Rumi considers the way the universe glorifies God is much better than human's way. Rumi's poetry in *masnavy* said

"Inasmuch as thou have made everything a glorifier of thee- both the discerning and undiscerning entity. Each glorifies thee in a different fashion, and that one is unaware of the state of this one. Man disbelieves in the glorification uttered by inanimate things, but those inanimate things are masters in performing worship."

In addition, Rumi also considered nature to have sense, just as humans do. Nature sees, hears, and records what people do on earth. In this explanation of nature's sense Rumi definitely based his idea on the Qur'anic verses that explain that the earth and universe will give their witness on human deeds on the Day of Judgment. In one of his poems, Rumi said *"for that reason I am laying my head (humbly) on the earth, so that she (the earth) may be my witness on the Day of Judgment* (Clarke, 2003).

The idea of the universe as alive, speaking to glorify God, and witnessing to God

about what humans do on earth definitely means that humans should keep the earth in good condition, that they are also creation just like human. Humans are not alone on this earth because nature is their companion. If humans share this belief in the universe from that perspective, they would not destroy earth.

As Chittick (1983) argues, the key concept to understanding the worldview of Rumi's anthropocosmic is theocentricism so that the goal of his thought is God the Almighty. Chittick further clarifies that Rumi's poetry reflects his attempts to glorify the grandeur of God, which is revealed in different aspects of life, including God's creation of the universe. So among Rumi's beliefs, God wants to be known, so that He manifests Himself out through His creations, which exposes His impeccable and eternal qualities.

Ozdemir (2008) in *Jalaluddin Rumi and Confucius* says that two of God's attributes are relevant, especially in viewing God and the universe, including natures. First, God is the nurturer of all realms and beings; He creates and sustains His creation with love. This understanding of God's nurturing universe is also understood among other Muslim scholars, and recognized as *Tauhid Rububiyah*. *Tauhid* is derived from the word *wahhada* means acknowledging the oneness of God, and *Rububiyah* is derived from *rabba* which means creates and nurtures. The phrase *Tauhid Rububiyah*, then, is a belief that only God the Almighty is able to form the great creations and nurture them afterwards. Second, God is not a static Absolute, but as Ozdemir explains, He is eternally pouring a fountain of eternal life, manifesting His Majesty, Wisdom, and Knowledge through the universe. Wisdom of nature will be an inspiration to those who understand and care to investigate, and this wisdom can only be heard by those whose focus is on practical use. Consequently, in the cosmic system as Rumi comprehends it, everything occurs based on the great plan conveyed by the Divine Will and Wisdom. Bees, in one of Rumi's poems, build their houses based on the will and inspiration of God. Hence, as Ozdemir explains Rumi's understanding of the universe, everything shares common characteristics, such as interconnection as God's creations and inspirations. Ozdemir further clarifies that besides viewing this interconnectedness of the universe, Rumi also wants to convey that everything has also its own specific meaning, duty, and importance.

For example, different animals have different lives and characters; different plantations will also vary in function and nature. Thus cosmos in Rumi's view becomes a meaningful book and a great piece of art, which symbolizes the magnificent characteristics of its owner.

The whole of Rumî's poetry can be viewed as an appreciation of eternal Beauty as revealed in the cosmos. Therefore, he often uses a mirror as a symbol for the created world, which reflects the eternal Beauty of God. Since the natural world is a mirror of divine beauty, God is closer to human beings than their jugular veins. Rumi saw the signs of God's loving everywhere, and he never tired of echoing the geniuses of God's creation, which reflect the Divine Will and Power.

Love in Rumi's idea has an essential place in God, nature and human beings. For him, love lies beneath the spiritual and material world. It is originated from God and will move towards God. According to Rumî, love is the positive energy connecting everything with everything else in the universe, so that everything in the universe is interdependent and is bounded with love. Humanity is the central figure in God's creation and therefore is the vicegerent of God on earth in the sense that it is humans responsibility to take care of the whole system. The whole creation is a gift from God and a sign of His creative power. Since God created and sustains all eco-systems, human beings must interact with the natural world wisely and use its resources carefully, nurturing a relationship with it founded on love and compassion, which is the essence of all reality (Foltz, 2003).

Conclusion

I believe religion can be a powerful force for social change, especially in a society where religion is one of the most essential elements in societal life. Islam, as the major religion in East Kalimantan, is one way to overcome the environmental destruction, which brings so much distress to the local people. If the Muslim scholars and jurists formulate the conceptions of *Syariah*/Islamic law that promote ecological preservation I think it would raise a new awareness within society about the

understanding of an eco-theological paradigm. This common understanding of an eco-theological paradigm, which consists of not only theoretical assumptions but also establishes methods for application, among important numbers of people, I believe, can become the folds of resistance to government policies on forest, lands and mining industries in East Kalimantan. In addition, understanding the Sufi path of love towards others, including nature as the creations of God can also strengthen the harmony among human, nature, and the environment. After understanding the love way that Rumi articulates, in my vision, there will be no more attempts to greedily exploit nature for maximum capital benefits, no more conflicts among different groups based on resource claims and no more floods and other natural disasters that occur due to the destroyed environment. Hence, although they were formulated six centuries ago, Rumi's notions on love and nature are relevant to present environmental concerns, and understanding what religion, in this case Islam, prescribes on how to value nature.

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