

Applying Islamic Environmental Ethics

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CARVING OUT A PATH

“Islam has much to say about caring for the earth, why aren’t Muslims doing anything about it?” This challenging statement was directed at me in 1991 by a Christian colleague at a gathering of people from different faiths seeking common solutions to a problem seen as dwarfing all others in the whole of human history. He had a sense that Islamic teaching on the environment and its protection had much to offer the world, which awareness appeared to be lacking amongst Muslims in general. I remember responding lamely to this and the truth was that I found it nigh on impossible to unearth any Muslim with an expressed interest in this subject at the time I began this work in earnest in the mid 1980s.

Committing myself to this endeavour didn’t need a conscious decision on my part; more a case of being pulled along, although willingly, by strong currents and it looked like the right direction to go. I had a deep interest in matters relating to global debt and poverty and at some point in the 1970s I discovered that the organisations associated with these issues were going through a metamorphosis. They appeared to be changing into a seamless movement, taking on environmental concerns as these came to the fore. OXFAMⁱ is a good example of this. Neither was my twenty three year stint with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)ⁱⁱ totally unconnected with this. I had a sense then that racism, poverty, debt and environmental degradation had common origins and that the same forces that thrust these problems on the human race were still at work resolute in their pursuit of domination.

Changes to society were taking place in front of our very eyes with lightening speed; people having less and less control of their lives; the tendency towards gigantism; the remoteness of the ruled from those who rule. The outward signs of this are the growing cities and their anthill like nature; rural depopulation that sucks the soul out of the land to feed the soulless cities with its human flotsam and jetsam; the destruction of cohesive communities; the emergence of the nuclear family as a poor substitute; the seductive tendencies of the cult of the individual and the increasing number of atomised people it appeared to produce; alienation sedated by rampant consumerism; a rapidly degrading environment.

Pursuit of prosperity it seemed was based on creating discontent; consumers seduced to vie with each other in the ownership of the latest gadgetry; television and advertising hoardings constantly making one feel inadequate; the media exploited as an instrument of manipulation. Our global civilisation looked very artificial, resting on industrial and financial systems in singular pursuit of profit. The very human ecology was collapsing. Tradition and the wisdom of the ages spurned, replaced by an iconic modernity based on the slavehood of man to machine.

This did not look like the way Muslims would want to run the world. As my reading list grew it opened avenues of exploration for me that proved to be compelling. I came across this observation in the 1960s -

No one – not even the most brilliant scientist alive today – really knows where science is taking us. We are aboard a train which is gathering speed, racing down a track on which there are a number of unknown switches leading to unknown destinations. No single scientist is in the engine cab and there may be demons at the switch. Most of society is in the caboose looking backwards.ⁱⁱⁱ

The futurist, Toffler, used this quotation in his discussions on *Technological Backlash*, which he concludes by saying, “The horrifying truth is that, so far as much technology is concerned, no one is in charge”.^{iv}

In common with other members of the general public there were Muslims with a more than superficial interest in environmental issues and the rare Muslim bureaucrat or activist in secular institutions the most notable being Mustapha Tolba^v of Egypt and S.M. Idris^{vi} of Malaysia. But, those looking to reverse the human assault on the natural world from a specifically Islamic stand point were a precious unknown rarity, if only I could find them. Indeed my initial search produced contrary results with one ‘Islamic scholar’ dismissing any interest in the environment as “nature worship” and another declaiming any responsibility on the grounds that “this was not our problem”. When asked for an explanation I was told that “they (meaning the west) created the problem so let them solve it”. The former represented a gross misunderstanding of the natural world and of how Islam defines man’s place in it and the latter a refusal to accept the fact that Muslims were very much part of the consumer civilisation which was having such a devastating impact on the planet. In spite of protestations to the contrary Muslims were mostly if not wholly seduced into the worship of modernity and were thus part of the problem.

There was no readily available literature in English concerning Islam and the environment in the 1980s. My first encounter with someone who was both a writer and an activist came in 1990. The late Al Hafiz B.A. Masri’s well researched book *Animals in Islam*^{vii} was published in 1989 and although frail of health when I met him he was full of enthusiasm for his chosen subject. His book was described at that time as the “only truly authoritative work on the Islamic concern for animals” and by all accounts it still is. Preoccupied as I was at that time with a taxing career in the CRE it was a matter of great regret for me that I had to decline an invitation from him to take over his work.

I found *The Island of Animals*^{viii} fascinating for its insights. This was a translation from the Arabic of a fable first written in 10th century that told a tale of a crew sailors shipwrecked on an island and their encounter with the animals who were its only inhabitants. The animals very soon rebelled against the way they were treated by the humans and sought justice through the intermediation of the King of the *Jinn*.^{ix} The illuminating lessons this book had to teach were that Islam expects both responsibility and accountability in our attitudes and behaviour towards other sentient beings and the rest of the natural world.

I was familiar with the name of Seyyed Hossein Nasr for about thirty years. He has had a reputation amongst Muslim intellectuals, Islamic study circles and indeed the academic world as a Muslim thinker and writer par excellence who wrote for a western audience. Although I had occasionally dipped into his writings over the years

I failed to recognise the significance of his work on the philosophy of nature until my own commitment to this subject ceased to be more than that of a passing character. I met him for the first time when I attended one of his lectures in London in 1990. It was then that I discovered his book *Man and Nature*,^x which had a universal appeal and incredibly it was first published in 1968. It was far ahead of its time and it is difficult to find writings of like quality from any tradition that matched that depth of scholarship and breadth of vision. Other books written by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in a similar vein were to follow.^{xi} It has been to my advantage that I have been able to turn to him for advice and support on many occasions over the intervening years.

Although first published in 1983, I did not discover *Environmental Protection in Islam*^{xii} until the 1990s. Brief and pithy this was a seminal work containing the major ingredients that showed the way to a possible formulation of a specifically Islamic expression of environmentalism in our times. This was published as an IUCN (World Conservation Union) law paper in collaboration with a number of Saudi Arabian scholars. Its specialist nature probably accounts for its limited circulation, but it was nevertheless reassuring to know that although considered at that time to be a minority activity, that there was scholarly interest in this subject in the early 1980s.

There was also much to be absorbed from the poetry of the Sufis.^{xiii} The compositions of Jalal ud-Din Rumi are perhaps the best known amongst them. His poetry^{xiv} has been on the best sellers' lists in the west for many a year. There are others no less expressive who exude a profound sense of the "limitless perfections of Allah". The following are a selection of eight stanzas from Reflections, one of the *qasidas* (poems) from the *Diwan*^{xv} (a collection of poems) of Shaykh Ibn Al Habib.^{xvi}

Reflect upon the beauty of the way in which both the land and sea are made,
and contemplate the attributes of Allah outwardly and secretly.

The greatest evidence to the limitless perfection of Allah can be found
Both deep within the self and the distant horizon.^{xvii}

If you were to reflect on physical bodies and their marvellous forms
And how they are arranged with great precision, like a string of pearls;

And If you were to reflect on the earth and the diversity of its plants
and the great varieties of smooth and rugged land in it;

And if you were to reflect on the secrets of the oceans and their fish,
and their endless waves held back by an unconquerable barrier;

And if you were to reflect on the secrets of many winds
and how they bring the mist, fog and clouds which release the rain;

And if you were to reflect on all the secrets the heavens –
the Throne and the Foot-stool and the spirit sent by the command -

Then you would accept the reality of tawhid^{xviii} with all your being,
and you would turn from illusions, uncertainty and otherness;

The literature I was able to access at that time although sparse was encouraging and provided clues regarding the depth of this subject. The insights I gained from thinkers

and writers like Nasr, Masri and others who I had the privilege of meeting suggested the existence of an Islamic environmentalism that needed to be expressed in a way that cut through the confusion of our times. We were in a pickle of paradigms and the essence of the Islamic worldview was lost in the acid of the dominant secular ideology. How can Muslims address the issues of today in a practical way based on the unique insights of Islam? But, where could I find an all-embracing articulation of this that was wholly Islamic in both its textual and practical manifestations?

At this point I decided to research this myself and opted to enrol for a master's degree in Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1990. I was fifty eight at the time. My first term at the university convinced me that this was no part time matter. The issue was the big one of our times, if not of all time and it needed a commitment to match it. What I discovered was that Islam was inherently environmental in scope and it was a belief and value system deeply embedded in the natural order. It was a puzzle that Muslims have allowed this knowledge to lapse. Unravelling this should throw some light not only on how and why we were detached from these teachings but also on what caused it. The following year I resigned from my position in the Commission for Racial Equality after twenty three years service. The choices in front of me were a further seven years service behind a desk or working on something that was fresh and dynamic and open to exploration. The second option was compelling.

I had the good fortune to have as my lecturer on the subject of the Qur'an Ibrahim Surti^{xix} who had a deep and profound knowledge of the subject. When he discovered that I had enrolled to understand the approach of the *Qur'an* towards the environment he said, "do you know Allah describes His creation as His *ayat*?" The *Qur'an* refers to creation or nature as the *ayat* of Allah and this is also the name given to the verses it contains. *Ayat* means signs, symbols or proofs of the divine. As the *Qur'an* is proof of Allah, The Creator, so likewise is His creation. The *Qur'an* also speaks of signs within the self and as Nasr explains,

“...Muslim sages referred to the cosmic or ontological *Qur'an*...they saw upon the face of every creature letters and words from the cosmic *Qur'an*...they remained fully aware of the fact that the *Qur'an* refers to phenomena of nature and events within the soul of man as *ayat* ...for them forms of nature were literally *ayat Allah*”.^{xx}

The *Qur'an* asserts,

“There are certainly signs in the earth for people with certainty; and in yourselves as well. Do you not then see?” (51:20,21).

The human species itself is an *ayat* of Allah, very much part of the pattern of creation, blurring the distinction between subject and object.

As my focus on this work intensifies in the mid 1980s I persuade a small group of people close to me to collaborate in the creation of an Islamic “eco-community” in a rural setting. Its *raison d'être* was the increasingly alienating influences of urban life and a pent up desire to escape this. It also had the hallmarks of the emerging eco-village movement: environmental protection, energy conservation, commitment to simple technology, self-sufficiency and so on. That this project is yet in its nascent stages is both an indication of the complacency of Muslims and the tight grip that urban life imposes on those caught in its web.

What became clear in the meantime was the need for an organisation that expressed this work in specifically Islamic terms. The need for a focal point was highlighted by the steadily increasing demands for advice and direction from students and information from organisations ranging from NGOs to universities. Our original experiment produced the World Islamic Foundation for the Environment – WIFE – which did not go down well in certain quarters. Then the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences – IFEES – emerged and it appeared to express our aspirations reasonably accurately. It wasn't long before recognition as an international NGO came in the form of invitations for speaking engagements and the offer of writing commissions. IFEES was officially recognised as a charity in 1994 and from tentative beginnings in the mid 1980s it had established itself as perhaps the only internationally recognised body articulating the Islamic position on the environment, which at the same time gave practical expression to it.

It is customary for writers and others involved in activities that leave very little for the pleasures of domestic life to acknowledge the support given by their spouses in the completion of their tasks. In my case it would be wholly proper to do it at this point as I have had much more than the patience and tolerance a wife can offer in such circumstances. This undertaking extends far beyond the scope of a project and Saba is involved in this work with me, for if she weren't much of what I do or say will have lost its impact. In addition to being involved in a very practical sense I have had the privilege of her insights on a day-to-day basis starting usually with breakfast. Besides she readily shares my disappointments of which there have been many over the years and has been generous with her encouragement when it was badly needed.

LOOKING OVER THE CHASM

I was invited in 1992 by the International Consultancy on Religion Education and Culture (ICOREC) run by Martin Palmer^{xxi} to edit Islam and Ecology. This was one of a series of faith and ecology books that was being sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and I was able to draw contributors for this volume from the growing network of scholars and activists I was beginning to build. This initiated a decade long partnership with ICOREC and WWF, which brought me in touch with people from other faiths and traditions involved in this work.

I received another invitation in April 1995 to chair an international workshop of faith based environmental organisations in Japan, which had as its objective the discovering of common ground between all the major traditions. The outcome of this was the Ohito Declaration for Religion Land and Conservation (ODLRC) named after the location in which this gathering took place. This was part of a wider initiative held under the auspices of WWF and the Mokito Okada Association (MOA).^{xxii} An extension of this gathering reconvening in Windsor Castle, England, a month later created the Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC). ARC was to be the hub of faith based environmental activity and one of its foundational projects was the promotion of the ODLRC. Having chaired the workshop that produced this declaration I was invited to promote it. I thus slipped into the role of a roving ambassador for ARC and conducted this work for over five years.

What followed was a period of intense travel, which shows no sign of abating although my role in promoting the ODRLC was curtailed in 2000 for lack of funds. What made the weariness imposed by the travel acceptable was the wide range of people I was meeting and the perspectives that were opening up for me. Much fruit can be harvested by listening to people from other places and persuasions and it had nothing to do with the old cliché that all religions have much in common, although this seems not to have made much difference over the centuries. The two truths I discovered for myself about this affair was that the human race was faced with a common threat of unprecedented proportions and we are the threat itself. I increasingly began to feel that there was something profoundly unreal about what we have now come to loosely define as modernity and some if not all the answers I was looking for would come from an understanding of this.

Until quite recently the human race, both rebels and conformists, the ignorant and the enlightened, whether in small self-governing communities or vast empires, barbarian tribes or points of high civilization, functioned unconsciously within natural, unwritten boundaries. This was an existential reality, neither idyllic nor utopian.^{xxiii} However expressed, all the religions whether major or minor, traditional cultures whether “native american” or “aboriginal australian” are deeply rooted in the natural world and draw their inspiration from it. Given this, how was it possible for them, us, to mount this sustained attack on it? It is as if we have excised the umbilical chord that had anchored us to the natural world ever since we came into existence as a species. Not only that, we are now devouring the very womb that continues to nurture us, with unmitigated ferocity. In our eager push for universal prosperity we have lost sight of the finite and delicate nature of planet Earth and our place in it.

The irrigation works of ancient Java, Sri Lanka, Iran and Yemen, amongst many others, were not part of a monetised global economic order. They evolved over the centuries as a result of human need. The monster systems of today are based on dams that ravage the wilderness like the proposed Talo Dam in Mali^{xxiv} or desecrate huge areas of human habitation like the Three Gorges project in China.^{xxv} Not that people in previous epochs did not divert rivers or cut down trees or mine for minerals, but none of these activities were obscured with labels like “progress” and “development” whose meanings have been emasculated to suite the model of economics we have today. Not that the ancients did not plunder or pillage as the predispositions of the human species tend to carry it periodically in these directions. That we are still saddled by these destructive instincts today with no sight of their diminution is not in question, although we manage to obfuscate our motives by deluding ourselves as purveyors of a high-tech civilisation.

A NON BIODEGRADABLE CIVILISATION

People in previous times, that was before they were told that nature was there to be plundered, were basically no different from us. They had the same positive and negative human attributes, but the results of human profligacy were contained by the natural order of things, which transcended technological and political sophistication and even religious disposition. Excess in the natural order was contained because it was biodegradable. When old civilizations, however opulent, profligate, greedy, or brutal died, the forest just grew over them. They left no pollutants, damaging poisons or nuclear waste.

By contrast, and assuming we survive as a species, archaeologists excavating our present rampant civilization are going to need radiation suits.^{xxvi} Dioxin has entered the food chain and it ultimately seeps into breast milk thus making it possible for toxins to be passed on to infants by their mothers.^{xxvii} Heavy metal poisons now form part of the sediment of the oceans and rivers thus poisoning the food chain of which we are the final link. Scientists have warned pregnant women in Norway not to eat whale meat because of high levels of toxic mercury found in them.^{xxviii} There are disturbing reports of the decline in the male sperm count in northern Europe because of the effects of persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The chickens of prosperity are coming home to roost.

In the last fifty years global water withdrawal has quadrupled while world population doubled.^{xxix} As a result of our addiction to the motor car we pour millions of tones of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and yet, because of our voracious appetite for timber we destroy the very forests that act as sinks for the green house gases we generate. We perpetrate acts of self-flagellation in the name of progress. The world on the whole appears to be run by well balanced people in blue suits but the renowned scientist Edward Wilson observes that the human species is an environmental abnormality and suggests that intelligence has a tendency to extinguish itself. What other species would consciously destroy its habitat deliberately within a rational framework that justifies such actions?^{xxx}

It does not require much intelligence to come to the conclusion that that there is something profoundly wrong with the way our affairs are being conducted and this has nothing to do with the superficialities of governance of which we have much to complain about. The problem is systemic.

The conservation ethic as epitomised by organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)^{xxxi} came into existence only in the second half of the last century. This agency was put together in 1961 by a team of scientists and naturalists and its original objectives were quite modest. The expansion of its work to the huge programme it is today traverses a trajectory of escalating concern.

Societies for the protection and welfare of animals have been in existence for much of our history and until recently the general populace has seen these as fringe activities. Now they are part of the global conservation movement. Rachel Carson did much to shake the world out of its complacency when she wrote *Silent Spring*^{xxxii} in 1962. There was nothing like it before and it triggered a completely new genre of literature. However, there were others who wrote about the growing human incapacity to treat nature with the reverence it deserved long before this. Thoreau's *Walden* first published in 1854, although reputedly not about nature itself is "treasured around the world by all those who resent and fear the encroachment of our mammoth technological civilisation upon the freedom of the individual".^{xxxiii} He wrote in more sedate times but the shape of things to come were being recognised one hundred and fifty years ago. Buzz words and terms like global warming, deforestation, ozone layer depletion, genetic modification and persistent organic pollutants were unfamiliar to many if not unknown even as recently as the 1980s. It was difficult to find universities offering degrees in the new environmental sciences in the 1970s and now it is a growth industry.

There was and unfamiliar, uncomfortable quickening of pace which Alvin Toffler described in *Future Shock* as “the roaring current of change, a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots”.^{xxxiv} Toffler adds, “Change is avalanching upon our heads and most people are grotesquely unprepared for it”. It has also been observed that there has been a large scale overshoot in the way “...the human population and economy extract resources from the earth and emit pollution and wastes to the environment. Many of these rates of extraction and emission have grown to be unsupportable. The environment cannot sustain them”.^{xxxv} There is no longer any doubt that exponential growth is the driving force causing the global economy to breach the physical limits of the earth.^{xxxvi}

MIREN IN MODERNITY

The scientist and historian Henry Adams propounded a theory in the early part of this century, which suggested that the acceleration of technological change was forcing the acceleration of history.^{xxxvii} I have drawn the conclusion that *riba* (usury in its Islamic definition; see discussion below) is at the root of this.^{xxxviii}

Given the nature of the human animal, change, however defined, is unstoppable but there is now an increasing awareness that the changes we are subjecting the planet to are both rapid and violent. It is also an article of faith in Islam that every thing comes to an end, that there will be a final day, a day of reckoning – “It (*The Qur'an*) contains guidance for ... those who have *iman* (faith) in what has been sent down to you and what was sent before you, and are certain about the *akhira* (the final day)”, (*Qur'an* 2:1,3). Our solar system will come to an end although this is calculated to be in the far distant future. Like the other species that no longer tread the earth the human race will disappear long before the demise of the solar system.

But the indications are that as we have caused the extinction of other species we are also contriving our own demise much before our allotted time. Micahel Boulter observes in *Extinction* -

“But if human behaviour cannot evolve (for the better), the response to fast changes in the environment will be very different. There will be no reprieve, no stopping the progress of mass extinction, and man surely will be a victim within that. Our most damaging behaviour is selfishness and aggression, and unless they can change rapidly there is no hope for the ecological destruction to be halted. Our power to do damage has grown to make our aggression terminal, not just dangerous”^{xxxix}

Boulter wrote as a secular scientist and I am drawn here to supplement his assertions by asking why the insights provided for us by our traditions, teachings and cultures concerning “selfishness and aggression” not prevented us from creating this unprecedented debacle. And importantly for me, how could Muslims have been a part of this? Our “scholars” notwithstanding we are as culpable as the rest. Islam has been reduced to ritual.

Twenty thousand years ago man was a forager and a hunter. Ten thousand years ago he had begun in some places to domesticate animals and cultivate plants. “There must have been an extraordinary explosion about 10,000 BC” and there was. But, it was a

quiet explosion. It triggered the cultural evolution of the species “to become the creatures that you and I aspire to be: artists and scientists, city builders and planners for the future, readers and travelers, eager explorers of natural fact and human emotion, immensely richer in experience and bolder in imagination than any of our ancestors”.^{xi}

Toffler writing in 1970 estimates that man has existed on this planet for 800 lifetimes and of this 650 were spent in caves. Effective communication between succeeding generations was only possible from about the seventieth lifetime. Only in the last two has anyone used an electric motor anywhere. “The overwhelming majority of all the material goods we use in daily life today have been developed within the present, 800th, lifetime”.^{xii} We are by Toffler’s reckoning now in our 801st lifetime, very late comers to what was and still is in many ways a bountiful earth. We managed to co-exist in harmony with the natural world for eons. Progressing, regressing, prospering and decaying, but advancing a little step at a time with each succeeding civilization and each epoch during our very brief time on this planet. Change though perceptible was subtle and then as Toffler remarks pointedly, “Western society for the past 300 years has been caught up in a fire storm of change”.^{xiii} It has dragged the rest of us with it. In terms of the historical epoch of the human species the events that created our present global predicaments had occurred in the twinkling of an eye.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century post renaissance Europe was the time and the place when the new secular religion was invented and the whole of humanity is now in its deathly embrace. Uniquely, it does not appear to matter much that people do not declare their open allegiance to it - this allegiance is the expectation of its ghostly priesthood. Its major ritual is filling up petrol tanks, super market trolleys and our stomachs.

Like other religions it has its prophets and sages and there are three who are noteworthy in the secular hierarchy. The first was the French philosopher mathematician Rene Descartes (d. 1650), who proclaimed that man was “lord and possessor of nature” from which point we began to worship our brains if not ourselves. For what he was “proposing was a new religious revelation, a radical revision of nature that had not really occurred to any other social animal”^{xliii} or to any previous civilisation in all of history. The second was Isaac Newton (d.1727), English mathematician and physicist, considered by many to be the greatest scientist that ever lived. His “world view led to the well known mechanistic conception of the universe and totally away from the holistic and organic interpretation of things. The result was after the seventeenth century science and religion became totally divorced”.^{xliv} He reputedly turned the cosmos into a “clockwork machine” and whose science has led us to the cloning of ourselves. The third was Adam Smith (d. 1790) Scottish economist and moral philosopher, the prophet of “market forces” in whose name we build temples we call banks in every high street in the world. The followers of these secular prophets have between them established the World Bank with plenty of credit to build big dams, bullied the world into creating the World Trade Organisation and produced global eco-system collapse. We have managed in a matter of three or four centuries, a mere blip on the cosmic scale of life on this planet, to include ourselves amongst the endangered species.

This secular world religion is based on an idiosyncratic interpretation of democracy based on capitalism. Its objective is the pursuit of prosperity and the levels to which the expectations of people are raised can only be met with a massive assault on the natural world. The system in reality is a plutocracy and democracy merely its veil. The much vaunted liberalism and freedoms that democracy espouses are achieved by keeping the population comatosed by consumerism and a contrived prosperity that has brought us to the edge of ecological disaster. No thought of where it is all going to come from, of the finiteness of planet earth, of the increasingly heavy ecological footprints we leave behind. We ourselves are the collective victims of this self-inflicted plunder.

Shaykh ‘Abdulqadir al-Murabit identified *riba* (usury or interest on money) as being at the root of the injustices of our times. In commenting on this matter he states

“The contrast between its (Islam’s) social justice and the gross gigantism of billion dollar debt the United States people owe to private banking underlines both the deep humanism and sanity of Islam and the demented nature of the usurious society.”^{xlv}

The *Qur’an* asserts –

“Those who practise *riba* will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by Shaytan’s (Satan’s) touch” (2:274)

Riba has a wider meaning than that conveyed by the terms usury and interest. It incorporates the notion of unnatural increase and is defined as asking something for nothing in a single transaction.^{xlvi} This makes the entire banking industry based on the fractional reserve model usurious and thus against the values of Islam. As the term implies this allows for the creation of credit based on a fraction of what is created, traditionally ten percent, which is retained by the bank as a reserve. The renowned American economist J.K. Galbraith said of this activity, “The process by which we create money is so simple that the mind is repelled”.^{xlvii}

But, this hasn’t stopped Muslims from whole heartedly participating in the banking system, which has not left any nook or cranny anywhere in the world untouched by its influence. This fictional money in the end underwrites democracy and destroys the planet. I first got wind of this in my youth when I was studying economics. Fredric Benham a writer of standard economic textbooks observed, “it seems like a gigantic confidence trick”.^{xlviii} But, having made this observation Benham defends the system on the grounds that it works and no questions asked about its ethical validity.

But can a fraudulent activity be justified on the grounds that it works even if it is thought to be for the common good? Are not our instincts for acquisition and possession easily manipulated by it? Is this not a system of globally legitimised fraud? Does this not smack of some form of collusion between banks, big business and government? “The role of the nation states has become to a large extent simply that of providing the public goods and infrastructure that business needs at the lowest costs and protecting the world free trade system”.^{xlix} Why is there no public protest over this? Is it because of gullibility, ignorance, complacency or compromise?

The answers are buried in the reasons why I myself did not do anything about this for most of my three score years and ten. It was too big to fathom out and get a

perspective on. Would our rulers, in this age of the liberal open society, be party to a fraud so basic that it shapes every minutia of our lives? This taxes the mind and our sensibilities. Could we be wrong about this? Why change something that seemed to work? If we were to change the system where would we start? Would not change of this magnitude and of such a fundamental nature turn all our lives up side down?

Ultimately one is forced to the conclusion that this civilisation and modernity itself has changed the nature of existence up side down. Standing with both feet planted firmly on the ground and not on our heads, now become the prime imperative. “Money, as the modern world has conceived it, assumes the characteristics of a virus that eats into the fabric of the planet. The consequences of this become visible as global environmental degradation”.¹ A finite planet will not for long be able to meet the demands of a system that deploys endlessly created credit against it.

Encouragingly there are people who having seen this set up for what it is want to change it. There are many alternative currency systems the most popular of which, at least in the west, is the ‘local exchange trading system’ popularly known as LETS.ⁱⁱ I was invited by the Christian Council for Monetary Justice (CCMJ) in May 1996 to join a panel of speakers at a meeting in the British House of Parliament.ⁱⁱⁱ I was asked to state the Islamic position on usury and support their speakers in their campaign to radically alter the fractional reserve system that gave so much power to the banks.

The Member of Parliament who chaired the meeting told me that he did not know where the banks got their money. He could not cope with the idea that they created it out of thin air. The CCMJ were proposing a shift of this magical activity from private banks to government. But, this will not stop the act of money creation being fraudulent and I could not convince my friends in the CCMJ otherwise. Additionally, the concentration of both political and financial power in the hands of the state brings about its own dangers as we know from the Soviet experience.

There have been many Muslim experiments to set up methods of financial intermediation free from the *riba* effect. However, the brave initiatives embarked upon by the Islamic banking movement are flawed for two reasons. Although they claim not to use the fractional reserve system they are both linked to it and attract deposits generated by this system. The most significant Muslim response to the question of money is the creation of the Islamic Mint in 1992 in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. It is now minting gold Dinars and silver Dirhams based on the coinage that was in circulation during the period of the *Khalifa Rashidun* (The Right Guided Caliphs) from the earliest period of Islam in the 7th century. The initiator of this programme is ‘Umar Ibrahim Vadillo, a Basque from Spain, who says, “Gold cannot be inflated by printing more of it. It cannot be devalued by government decree, and unlike paper currency it is an asset, which does not depend upon anybody’s promise to pay. Portability and anonymity of gold are both important, but the most significant fact is that gold is an asset that is no one else’s liability”.^{liii}

Perversely the education system that is universally now in place is “built on the factory model” as Toffler observes. Factories produce those who produce in factories. A short walk in any university campus should convince anyone of this. “Mass education” has an overt and a covert curriculum and conditions people to function within the industrial system. Toffler argues that the nature of education in the second

half of the last century changed through the introduction of a wider curriculum but the objectives were the same – to produce pliant, mobile work people.^{liv}

David Orr after listing the familiar litany of environmental disasters observes, “It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. It is rather, largely the result of work by people with BA, BSs, LLBs, MBA, and PhDs.”^{lv} This makes perfect sense. With minor exceptions education today is about careers and conspicuous consumption. People who graduate with degrees in environmental sciences may have the right attitudes but they are outnumbered by the huge army of people, who train as economists, scientists and engineers, all set to develop the planet to dust. Education as defined today fuels the modern drive to dominate nature rather than live within it. To say that we live “with” nature is too arrogant a claim to make.

The creation of the heavens and earth
Is far greater than the creation of mankind.
But most of mankind do not know it. (Qur’an 40:56)

CLEARING THE UNDERGROWTH

It will be observed that the construct of what we have now come to describe as modernity is deeply hostile to the natural world. At the same time as I absorb these lessons I was looking for responses to these issues that were uniquely Islamic. Articulating environmental concerns with copious quotes from the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith* (practices and sayings of the Prophet) literature does not necessarily make it Islamic. At best it is Muslims addressing these issues with an awareness of the moral foundations in the traditions. Inevitably this is expressed within the dominant paradigm and it doesn’t change anything except that it misleadingly produces a “feel good” factor.

But how did Islamic environmental teachings express themselves in the daily lives of Muslims in an Islamic milieu? The answers came in two stages and also serves to illustrate the subversive nature of the universally imposed secular education system and the reasons behind the dismissive attitude of the ‘*ulema* (Islamic scholars) to this matter.

The first was language and the inevitable jargon that builds around an issue that almost becomes a code for its practitioners. It also has snob value. “As the Islamic tapestry unfolded in its expression over the centuries, we discover that there are no references to the environment as we understand it today.^{lvi} The word nature, which is an abstraction cannot be found in the *Qur’an* and the closest modern Arabic usage is the word *bi’a*, which connotes a habitat or a surrounding. The *Qur’an* also speaks of creation (*khalq*) and it contains two hundred and sixty one verses where this word is used in its various grammatical forms derived from the root *kh l q*. These verses contain references to the human world; to the natural world of the planet from trees to turtles, from fish to fowl; and to the sun, stars and skies. The very first revelation of the *Qur’an* to the Messenger of God used this word in its verb form to dramatic effect, “Recite in the name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of blood” (96:1). Creation is the fabric into which the tapestry of life is worked.”^{lvii}

The second was that Islamic environmentalism expressed itself in personal behaviour. It was an integral part of life, an expression of existence in submission to the will of

the Creator in harmony with the cosmic pattern, unfettered by the trappings of career and consumerism. As there was an Islamic code of conduct that governed inter-personal behaviour and an individual's rights and responsibilities within a community, so there was a code of conduct governing an individual's behaviour towards other sentient beings and the rest of the natural world. As Muslim interaction with the environment evolved, it manifested itself into a range of rules and institutions, as an expression of life in all its manifestations embodying what is truly holistic.

As Islam expanded out of its sparse desert environment, it was confronted by many challenges, one of which was relative abundance. This brought about other problems like over exploitation and waste. The *Qur'an* asks us to be just to our natural surroundings, "We did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them, except with truth" (15:85). Thus a Muslim's behaviour towards the environment is based on the imperatives laid down in the *Qur'an*. They come under numerous headings but they could be distilled into just three categories for our purposes bearing in mind public good to be the ultimate objective.^{lviii} They are to do what is right, forbid what is wrong and act with moderation at all times: "Let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. They are the ones who have success" (3:104). The *Qur'an* again uses an environmental theme in exhorting humankind to be moderate -

"It is He who produces gardens, both cultivated and wild, and palm-trees and crops of diverse kinds and olives and pomegranates both similar and dissimilar. Eat of their fruits when they bear fruit and pay their dues on the day of their harvest, and do not be profligate. He does not love the profligate" (6:142).

This way of relating to the environment explains in part why I could not find Muslim environmentalists, if there were such people, during my early search. They wore no labels, didn't belong to NGOs and didn't see the need to create a movement. They were close to nature until the corrosive influences of "education" and the pursuit of "careers" destroyed their beings. Having been processed through this system myself I was looking in the wrong direction. Paradoxically career orientated Muslim "environmentalists" are now growing in number.

Taken as a whole as it was intended to be, caring for Planet Earth our only home was integrated within the framework of the Islamic value system. This was an everyday concern for the Muslim, which the *Qur'an* draws attention to thus, "We have not omitted anything from the Book" (6:39) and "He said 'Our Lord is He Who gives each thing its created form and then guides it'" (20:49). Furthermore the *Qur'an* asserts that the universe was brought into being by Allah, "He is Allah - the Creator, the Maker, the Giver of form. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Everything in the heavens and on the earth, glorify Him. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise" (59:24). Everything belongs to Allah, "He to whom the kingdom of the heavens and the earth belongs; He created everything and determined it most exactly" (25-2); the real owner of the natural world is the Creator and He has "showered His blessings upon you both outwardly and inwardly" (31-19); He appointed mankind as His "*Khalifs* (stewards) on the earth so He could test you regarding what He has given you (6-167).

What emerged was a three-fold process, which we may classify as legislative principles, institutions and enforcement. The *Qur'an* laid down the basis from which the *Shariah* evolved, which in turn determined the nature of *Fiqh* (Islamic law) and the subsequent establishment of relevant institutions.

The body of the *Shariah* allows us to deduce three general principles as follows -

- The elements that compose the natural world are common property
- The right to benefit from natural resources is a right held in common
- There shall be no damage or infliction of damage bearing in mind future users

What we are now forced to refer to as “Islamic environmentalism” emerged from this foundational code and Muslim legalists have over the centuries worked out both principles and structures to give expression to this. These principles concern individual rights, obligations and responsibilities individuals owe to the community, accountability, benefits accruing to users from renewable resources held in common and penalties for improper use of natural resources.

Two of the most important institutions to emerge for this framework are the *hima* and the *harim*. The former lends itself to the setting up of a whole range of conservation zones, which may be established by a community or the state for the purposes of protecting land or species of flora and fauna. The latter permits the establishment of inviolable zones, not always but usually, for the protection of water courses. People have a right in the *Shariah* to create such zones managed by themselves and where use is severely restricted.

Having identified the ethical base and institutions the third element that was needed to complete the picture was a system of accountability. From its earliest years the Islamic state established an agency known as the *hisba* whose specific task it was to protect the people through promoting the establishment of good and forbidding wrongdoing (discussed earlier). A learned jurist (*muhtasib*) headed this agency and he functioned like the chief inspector of weights and measures and chief public health officer rolled into one. He was also responsible among other similar duties for the proper functioning of the *hima* and *harim* zones and acted as what one may describe as an environmental inspector.^{lix}

TEACHING ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES FOR CONSERVATION

Contrary to popular opinion the *Shariah* has been evolving continuously since the emergence of Islam in the 7th century. This process should be called upon to guide us in the formulation of a specifically Islamic science concerning the environment and its protection. This has not been necessary in the past but the challenge of our times is to have recourse to Islam's fluidity. I have in the past ten or so years attempted to lay out the foundations upon which Islamic conservation practices could be built on and which would make sense for us in the present day. This required

- the embodiment of the holistic approach which is intrinsically Islamic (*Thawhid*)
- the understanding of creation and the location of the human in it (*Fitra*)

- the identification of the quality of the natural order which is basic and all pervasive (*Mizan*)
- the identification of the role of the human species in the grand pattern of creation (*Khalifa*)

These principles have been incorporated into the “Islam and Conservation” training workshops^{lx} which I have conducted in various parts of the world with an encouraging degree of success and here they are in outline -

Tawhid - the Unity Principle

Tawhid is the foundation of Islamic monotheism, which affirms the unity of the Creator and His Creation. This is the bedrock of the holistic approach in Islam as this affirms the interconnectedness of the natural world: “What is in the heavens and the earth belong to Allah. Allah encompasses everything” (*Qur’an* - 4:125)

Fitra - the Creation Principle

The *Fitra* principle describes the origination of the human species within the bosom of the natural world. It is a profound reminder of our place in the natural order: “Allah’s natural pattern on which He made mankind” (*Qur’an* - 30:29)

Mizan - the Balance Principle

The natural world, which we are a part of, is held together because it is in *mizan* – a state of dynamic balance. This is another way of saying that the natural order works because it is in submission to the Creator. It is Muslim in the original, primordial sense. “He erected heaven and established the balance, so that you would not transgress the balance. Give just weight – do not skimp in the balance” (*Qur’an* 55:5,6,7)

Khalifa - the Responsibility Principle

This principle establishes our role as the guardians of the natural world. God created everything for humankind and appointed it the *Khalif* (vice-regent) on this earth. “It is He Who appointed you *Khalifs* on this earth” (*Qur’an* - 6:167).

These principles and the preceding discussion in this section are intended to start a process of dialogue and are in the nature of an invitation to others with greater understanding of the *Qur’an* and the traditions, as there is much to be drawn from these sources, to participate in extending and improving this knowledge base. (Encouragingly there had been an increase in environment oriented Islamic literature in the past decade.) I have presented these ideas in various forums^{lxi} and as they evolve both in their textual and practical manifestations it is hoped that this material could eventually become a comprehensive Islamic response to the alleviation of the environmental crisis. The following case studies illustrate how I have attempted to give a start to this work.

CASE STUDIES

IFEES has been working in many parts of the world with government agencies, NGOs, local communities and mosques attempting to give fresh expression to the Islamic Environmental ethic. The factors discussed above have influenced this work in various ways and the following examples will serve to illustrate the complexities

involved in both reviving Islamic environmental practices and doing so in a context where much of the teachings have lapsed into disuse. The *Shariah* evolved over fourteen centuries in what was an Islamic milieu and until it can regain its rightful place amongst Muslims once again there is a need to work piecemeal and be inventive in giving the best expression of Islamic environmental tradition within the secular dominated global system. The challenge is two-fold: firstly to discover the teachings and attempt to make sense out of them in their practical day to day usefulness (discussed above) and secondly to change attitudes and behaviour and reverse the negative impact of human activity on a finite planet. The following synopsis of three case studies appear chronologically and are as far as I am aware the first tentative steps in this direction

The application of Islamic environmental ethics to promote marine conservation in Zanzibar^{lxii}

This project was funded by CARE International (USA) and had the full support of both the Government and the Mufti of Zanzibar. IFEES acted in the capacity of consultants and trainers to the project known as the Misali Ethics Pilot Project. The project objectives were to sensitize a particular fishing community to the Islamic conservation ethic and implement these teachings within the parameters of an integrated conservation and development project bearing in mind sustainability issues.

Zanzibar is a devoutly Muslim country and its population is over 95% Muslim. The Misali Island Marine Conservation Area (MIMCA) the target zone of the project lies off the west coast of Pemba, the northern-most island of the two that comprises Zanzibar. MIMCA is 22 sq.km. in area and has at its centre a small uninhabited island of coral rag known as Misali. This island is forested and is surrounded by some of the finest coral slopes in the entire Indian Ocean. It is also a turtle nesting ground.

Fishing in this conservation zone provides direct livelihood support to an estimated 11,400 people on the island of Pemba, aggravated by rising population and depleting fish stocks. Dynamiting had become the last desperate resort for some fishermen in the struggle to maintain the level of their ever-dwindling catches.

The primary objective of the project was to sensitise those who depended on the conservation zone to the ethical base of Islamic Environmentalism. The resource used to do this was a pack of twenty four photographic slides accompanied by an instruction manual known as Qur'an, Creation and Conservation,^{lxiii} developed by IFEES. Experimental workshops using this resource were conducted by IFEES in November 1999 and the substantive workshop attended by leaders of the target villages was conducted in January 2001. Prayer leaders and Qur'an school teachers also participated.

As part of the project a Guide Book for prayer leaders and Qur'an school teachers based on the ethical messages of the Qur'an is now being produced. A set of posters for distribution to the villages and handouts for children are also being designed. Children attending Qur'an schools will be encouraged to produce poems and plays based on the material. The project will be monitored and records compared with performances by other villages outside the target area.

One of the recommendations in the Consultant's Report was the designation of MIMCA as a *hima* in accordance with Islamic conservation principles and the establishment of a modified form *hisba* to ensure compliance. The project is presently at an interesting stage where discussions to give expression to these aspects of the *Shariah* are taking place. Although there are many advantages to be derived from this approach there is an underlying inertia to its implementation and it would be useful to consider, however briefly, the reasons behind this.

The first of these is the distorted image that has been created around the *Shariah* as it is seen today to be concerned mostly with punishment and repression. This attitude is prevalent mostly amongst those who are outside Islam, and in this case amongst the funding agencies to whom the project beneficiaries feel obliged. The *Shariah* is vast and it defines human conduct in the areas of family law, civil law, commercial law and as we are now beginning to discover environmental law. These elements are normally incorporated in their totality in an Islamic state but much of it can be modified and adapted in states where Muslims are in a minority, or in a majority where political institutions are secular. Examples of this from the past are when the British as they colonised Muslim countries permitted the practise of Muslim family law, and from the present, where the secular governments of Malaysia and Indonesia grant similar privileges to their Muslim populations.

There is also inertia amongst Muslims themselves to the establishment of the *Shariah* and there are possibly two reasons for this. The first is in the Muslims' own lack of familiarity with the *Shariah* and its institutions, which with the advent of modernity have been allowed to lapse and the second, is the dominance of existing secular institutions themselves. It should be self evident that using secular institutions and methods to evaluate a project based on the ethical foundations of the Qur'an can only produce distorted results. It is proposed that the most sensible way of securing accountability in this situation is through the establishment of *Shariah* institutions modified to suit local conditions. Nevertheless CARE, USA, needs to be commended for funding this initiative. This funding also made it possible for the secondment of Ali Thani, formerly an employee of the Department of Commercial Crops Fruit and Forestry as the Islamic Conservation Officer to the project. This is probably the first such appointment ever.

An interesting outcome for this initiative was its acceptance by WWF International as part of the global Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet Programme. The Misali Ethics Project was offered to the world as a Gift of Islam at a major international gathering in Kathmandu, Nepal in November 2000. This was the only project on offer from the whole of the African continent.

The establishment of the Jabal Aja' Biosphere Reserve in Saudi Arabia

Plans for the setting up of Jabal Aja' as a protected area had existed since 1987.^{lxiv} It received a new lease of life in 2000 due to the interest shown by the Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet programme sponsored by WWF International. The reserve is located west of the town of Ha'il in north central Saudi Arabia and is managed by The National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD). It is approximately 2200 sq. km. in area, 100 km. in length and some 30 km. wide at its widest point.

NCWCD assumed responsibility in the year 2000 for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme in Saudi Arabia. This will enable the NCWCD to address the complexities of managing Jabal Aja' through the framework of the MAB programme, as this country's first biosphere reserve. Its main objectives will be to creatively apply the provisions of the *Shariah*, set an example to the rest of the Muslim world and set up training and education programmes to further these objectives.

In the national and regional context Jabal Aja' is characterised by the greatest concentration of biological diversity in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula.

Conservation benefits that are expected to be achieved through this project will be the Regeneration of wildlife habitats, conservation of key existing wildlife species including the Nubian Ibex and Arabian wolf, the reintroduction of the Idmi Gazelle and dispersion of native plant and animal species into the surrounding region;^{lxv}

As a biosphere reserve the site will lend itself to be classified under the flexible provisions of the *Shariah* into different kinds of conservation zones such as natural, biological and resource use *himas*. The enhancement of rural productivity through sustainable development is also being given serious attention.

This project will considerably enhance the prospects of the preservation of biodiversity and will be a benchmark conservation project for the region as a whole. It will embody principles and legal instruments in the *Shariah* and is expected to serve as a model for the Islamic world as a whole. It is also expected that the benefits of Islamic conservation practise will be shared with those from the other faith traditions who may wish to avail themselves of it.

It is observed that the NCWCD is an institution run on secular lines. The Jabal Aja' initiative is possibly the only project of its kind in Saudi Arabia to be focussed on the *Shariah* helped mainly through the efforts of Othman Abd ar Rahman Llewellyn (the only person I have encountered with a determination to foster specifically Islamic environmental practice) and a small group of dedicated individuals. It is also noted that there has been a steady decline of the *hima* system in this country over a number of years much of it giving way to unsuitable economic development projects. Saudi Arabia is uniquely placed in the Islamic world and it can demonstrate its leadership by giving credibility to Islamic conservation practices in the preservation of its fragile eco systems.

The Jabal Aja' Biosphere Reserve was also accepted as a Gift of Islam at the Kathmandu convention in November 2000.

Disseminating Islamic conservation ethics in the Spiny Forest Ecoregion Southern Madagascar^{lxvi}

This was part of a wider conservation educational programme aimed at the Muslim minority living in Southern Madagascar supported by WWF International. A three day workshop based on the IFEES resource Qur'an, Creation and Conservation was conducted in Teluar, the regional capital, in June 2001. As in Zanzibar the workshop was conducted by IFEES and participants came from two diverse groups; the

indigenous Sunni Muslims and the Shia Muslim community who are business people of Indo-Pakistani origin.

A consensus emerged between the participants to carry out an Islamic environmental education program amongst congregations attending Mosques; children attending Qur'an classes; both men and women attending informal Qur'an schools in homes and mosques; in schools especially through morning assemblies and the classroom; at special events and festivals. It was also agreed to produce a booklet for use by imams and teachers, and posters and leaflets for public consumption; to participate in TV and radio programmes; organize plays and poetry competitions and set up environmental committees and clubs.

These are responses by a powerless minority to enhance the contributions it could make to the general well being of the country. Nevertheless, it has the capacity working from an understanding of the unique insights of Islam to join with the main stream and contribute to the protection of the rapidly degrading environment of Madagascar.

Disseminating Islamic Conservation Ethics in Indonesia^{lxvii}

This was part of the World Bank initiated Faith and Conservation program and was mainly exploratory in nature. Two workshops based on Qur'an, Creation and Conservation were conducted by IFEEES in March 2002.

The first took place in the Kerinci Sebalat National Park (KSNP) region in West Sumatra in partnership with WWF Indonesia. The participants included ulema, madrasa teachers and leaders from the villages located in the buffer zone surrounding the park. KSNP is an interesting example of how in spite of best intentions the conflict of interest between local people and government policy, further aggravated by corruption, can not only impede the progress of conservation practices but also contribute substantially to the degradation of pristine eco systems. The park is 9,000 Sq. km. In area and is surrounded by a buffer zone which supposedly protects it from encroachment and exploitation. There are 134 villages in the buffer zone supporting a total 8000 households. Puzzlingly those who first demarcated the boundaries of the park had included within it Sungai Penu, which is a small town with a tendency to push out and into the park in all directions.

Protecting national parks in areas of population growth is a challenge. Traditional people have always relied on their surroundings for their livelihood and to deprive them of substantial parts of the land area they have depended on for centuries is to put them at a severe disadvantage. People who live in close proximity to KSNP now call it the world's largest prison, which is contributing to their poverty.

The people of Indonesia have over the centuries developed the *adat* (an Arabic term, which translates as practise or habits) system to suit their local conditions. These practices are rapidly dying out as survival has taken precedence over a measured long term approach. Some communities still regulate the felling of timber and there are others who still practise a method of fish conservation known as the "*lubuk larangan*" system. To contravene the *adat* rules would be to incur sanctions ranging from fines of quantities of rice or domestic animals to the isolation of the perpetrator and his

family. This isolation could in some instances take severe forms like the boycott of mourning and burial ceremonies in the event of the death of someone close to the perpetrator.

In the words of Listya Kusumawardhani, the Manager of KSNP, the picture is “too pessimistic”. She and her team are assailed from all sides. The adat system is in decline; road construction is fragmenting the park; heads of villages are involved in illegal logging; a clear indication of the loss of the “moral” authority of the leadership; politicians and petty officials are on the make. This whole process can be summed up by an incident that took place in Kayu Aro village about one hour’s drive from Sungai Penu. In their frustration local people attacked ten park guards and burnt down park facilities in June 2001. Unfortunately the local mosque was used by the provocateurs as a rallying ground for this action.

Nature responds to the aberrations it is subjected to in its own way. In December 2002 over 1500 houses in Sungai Penu were overtaken by floodwaters. To add to the cynicism of national park staff the political establishment has concluded that this was because the eco systems have been degraded. Nature had lessons to teach in other parts of Indonesia also. For example, Jakarta experienced big floods and land slides in February 2002 because ten years ago the Ministry of Forestry authorised a project to build a multi million dollar housing complex and golf course which destroyed a mangrove swamp. This swamp acted as a catchment area for flood waters.

The people who live in the proximity of KSNP suffer the same pressures and disadvantages experienced by other traditional people. A whole way of life and a fluid relationship with their habitat is under attack. Paradoxically the very processes that have subverted the lives of these people seek to ameliorate them. As the ideas behind consumerism progressively seep into their psyches they are assailed by the wants of other more sophisticated consumers who have a hunger for what their forests and habitats have to offer. As they seek to benefit from what they consider to be their birthright, others not of their land seek by fair means or foul, mostly foul in the eyes of the people, to siphon off their resources and retain the benefits of this for themselves.

Listya Kusumawardhani feels that she and her staff must continue to work vigorously to protect the forest. In her words, nature is God’s creation, which humans and all other living beings depend on. By protecting it we protect ourselves and it is important to educate people about this.

The second workshop took place in Garut, West Java in collaboration with the Institute of Ecology, Bandung. The focus on this occasion was the Pesantren system. The Pesantrens are an alternative school system run on the Islamic model and with a network of ten thousand spread throughout Indonesia, the potential for spreading the Islamic environmental message in the country looks promising. This workshop was located in the premises of the Pesantren Luhur al Wasila in Garut, the lead organisation of the local network. The Pesantren system could in the medium term provide answers to conservation practices in Indonesia because its educational ethos is largely rooted in rural communities.

The relative merits of working with NGOs and specifically Islamic organisations in Indonesia are now being evaluated for putting together future strategies in the country. Power is now being devolved to local centres and there is a reasonable assumption that conservation programmes based on the *Shariah* could flourish in this situation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

These four attempts that seek to rehabilitate Islamic conservation practices in diverse locations provide for interesting comparisons. Ninety five percent of the people of Zanzibar are Muslim and they are part of the secular state of Tanzania. Although the Zanzibari Government has itself supported the project and continues to do so, there are clear impediments to the application of the *Shariah* that would disallow an objective evaluation of the results of the project which itself is based on *Shariah* parameters. It will be seen that this project consists of two parts. The first is the educational core leading to an understanding of the ethical basis of conservation in the *Qur'an* and the second, the reintroduction of Islamic institutions that will provide both a working infrastructure and establish a process where people could be held to account. Compromises are being sought on the issues surrounding accountability where Islamic modes can be built into the secular framework to make possible the best possible outcomes for the project.

Managing the *Jabal Aja* Biosphere Reserve in Saudi Arabia raises some interesting observations. Although Saudi Arabia is an “Islamic” country many secular institutions are included in the machinery of government, which is reflected in the fact that the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development is such an institution. Nevertheless, the application of *Shariah* institutions to cope with conservation matters has not met with any impediments. The results of this experiment are awaited with interest especially in the areas where specifically designated *himas* have been established. Mecca, the home of the holiest place in Islam is known as the *Haram Sharif*, which translates as the protected zone. This should be a benchmark for those interested in Islamic conservation practices and it would be interesting to know how closely the conventions have been followed in the light of the rapid urbanisation it has been subjected to particularly in the last twenty five years.

The Madagascar experience provides indicators for carrying out work of this nature in countries where Muslims are in a minority. Results of collaboration between Muslims are being awaited together with its impact on the wider community. The Indonesian project is now being evaluated to determine future strategies and being a populace Muslim country with a multiplicity of habitats should lend itself to a wide range of experiments.

The secular world view is based on the domination of nature by man, Islam on submission to the will of the Creator, which is expressed within His scheme, as part of its patterning. We are reminded, “Assuredly the creation of the heaven and the earth is a greater matter than the creation of man: yet most men understand not” (*Qur'an* – 40:57). We have to regain our understanding of Allah’s creation and our place in it. This needs to be re-taught. Current trends are inimical to humankind living in harmony with its natural surroundings and unless a balance is struck between the global thrust for economic growth and the conservation of the environment the situation will continue to deteriorate rapidly. Islam takes a different approach. Whilst

it does not deprecate material possession it abhors “conspicuous consumption”, waste, grandeur and gluttony.

There is a clear issue of conflicting paradigms. The conundrum for Muslims is not only how to implement the teachings and practices of their worldview into an institutional framework devised by another that has a diametrically opposite outlook, but also where to do it. Genuinely Islamic spaces are non-existent in the economic mindset. Although it may be possible to incorporate the principles of Islamic environmental law into the legislative programmes of Muslim countries, the problem will remain one of implementation unless appropriate institutional arrangements are made to replace the old and now virtually defunct ones. It should also be evident by now that for real change to take place this should go beyond the mere tinkering with technicalities. The solution is for Islamic countries to return to governance by the *Shariah* code followed by the reinstatement of the natural world to its rightful place in the hierarchy of creation. Conservation programmes will be rendered obsolete by this act alone.

There also needs to be a remodelling of education with an emphasis on the *fitra*, to nurture an understanding of the natural world and our place in it. Muslims should re-introduce to the world Islamic models of non-capitalistic trading systems based on tried and tested models based on the use of gold and silver money which are transparent and free from the God-like power of the banks to create endless money and from the obscurities of economics.

Eco-systems will continue decline with ever increasing rapidity if we, the human race, don't mend our ways swiftly. The clue to change is contained in this verse from the *Qur'an* -

“Corruption has appeared in both land and sea
because of what people's own hands have wrought about
so that they may taste something of what they have done
so that hopefully they will turn back” (30:41)

If we do not accept this challenge we will assuredly be part of the mass extinction we have wrought ourselves.

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Note – The translation of the *Qur'an* used in this essay is that by Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley. *The Noble Qur'an*, Bookwork, Norwich, England, 1999.

- ⁱ OXFAM emerged in 1942 to provide famine relief for war torn Europe. It is now seen as being an integral part of the environmental movement.
- ⁱⁱ The CRE is responsible for the implementation of anti discrimination and equal opportunities legislation in the UK.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ralph E. Lapp, *The New Priesthood*, Harper & Row, 1961.
- ^{iv} Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (p.390), Pan Books, London, 1971.
- ^v Mustapha Tolba was the head of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) from 1975 to 1992.

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- vi S.M. Idris is the President of Sahabat Alam (Friends of the Earth) Malaysia and was a recipient of the Alternative Noble Prize called the Right Livelihood Award in 1988. He has been active in politics in the city of Penang, Malaysia since 1954 and started a tree planting campaign in the 1960s.
- vii Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri, *Animals in Islam*, Athene Trust, London, 1989.
- viii Denys Johnson-Davies (translator), *The Island of Animals*, Quartet Books, London, 1994.
- ix Beings created from smokeless fire invisible to humans.
- x Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature, The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990.
- xi Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1996. Described as “The most comprehensive and intelligent treatment of its topic that has been written...”. Also see *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Curzon Press, Richmond, England, 1993.
- xii Abubakr Ahmad Bagader, Abdullatif Tawfik El-Chirazi El Sabbagh, Mohammad As-Sayyid Al Glayand, Mawil Yousuf Izzi-Dien Samarraï, Othman Abd-arRahman LLewellyn, *Environmental Protection in Islam, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 20* second revised edition, Gland Switzerland and Cambridge UK, 1994.
- xiii Those who traverse the mystical path of Islam; Sufism also known as Tasawwuf. Jalal Ud-Din Rumi (d.1273) is perhaps the best known Sufi master in the west. He founded the Mevlevi Sufi order famous for its whirling dervishes.
- xiv Rumi’s best known work is *The Mathnawi*, a six volume epic didactic poem considered to be the “undisputed masterpiece on the teachings of Sufism”.
- xv *The Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn al-Habib* (p. 69), Madinah Press, Cape Town, South Africa, 2001. This Diwan was written over a period of forty years in the last century. (see next endnote)
- xvi Shaykh Ibn al-Habib a distinguished scholar of Islamic jurisprudence was also the last great Sufi Master of the Darqawi-Qadiri Order in Morocco. He was 110 years old when he died on his way to perform the Haj in 1972.
- xvii This is a reference to verses 51: 20,21 in the Qur’an. See footnote xx and the related text.
- xviii The doctrine of divine unity otherwise described as Islamic monotheism.
- xix Ibrahim Surti is the founder of the Qur’anic Arabic Foundation (QAF). See Ibrahim Surti, *Towards Understanding Qur’anic Arabic*, QAF, Birmingham, England, 1993.
- xx Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1993) *The Need for a Sacred Science* (pp.130, 131). Curzon Press, Surrey England.
- xxi Martin Palmer, working under the patronage of Prince Philip one of the past Presidents of WWF, was responsible for organising the Assisi initiative in 1986. This was the first gathering of leaders of the major faiths to consider responses to the environmental crisis. The Assisi Declaration emerged from this gathering.
- xxii The MOA is a Japanese spiritual movement that is committed to the conservation ethic.
- xxiii Fazlun Khalid, *Guardians of the Natural Order, Our Planet*, Journal of UNEP, Vol. 8 No.2, July 1996.
- xxiv This dam will have a negative impact on up to one million people downstream with and additional negative impacts on the historic town of Djenne. See <http://www.edie.net/news/Archive/4493.cfm>
- xxv The three Gorges project in China will displace 1.3 million people and the 600 km artificial lake that will be created will flood 100 towns, 800 villages and 100,000 hectares of China’s best farmland. See http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1993/09/mm0993_08.html
- xxvi See Fazlun Khalid, *Guardians of the Natural Order, Our Planet*, Journal of UNEP, Vol. 8 No.2, July 1996.
- xxvii Theo Colburn, Dianne Dumanski, and John Peterson Meyers, *Our Stolen Futures*, Dutton, 1996.
- xxviii *The Independent*, UK, news item - 13 May 2003,
- xxix Rory Clarke, *OECD Observer*, 19 March 2003. See <http://www.oecdobserver.org>
- xxx Edward O. Wilson, “Is Humanity Suicidal?” *New York Times Magazine* (p.26), 30 May 1993.
- xxxi See http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_we_are/history/sixties.cfm
- xxxii Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, New York, 1962.
- xxxiii Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Dent, London, 1976.
- xxxiv Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (p.11), Pan Books, London 1972

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- xxxv Meadows & Others, *Beyond the Limits* (p. 11), Earthscan, London 1992.
- xxxvi Ibid: See *The Driving Force: Exponential Growth*. This is a mathematical term which describes periodic doubling with shrinking time intervals between each period.
- xxxvii Hossein Amirsadeghi and Ritchie Calder (eds), *Future of a Troubled World*, Heineman, London, 1983. See *The Acceleration of History*.
- xxxviii For an extended treatment of exponential growth from an Islamic perspective see Fazlun Khalid, *Islam, Ecology and Modernity: An Islamic Critique of the Root causes of Environmental Degradation*, in *Islam and Ecology – A bestowed Trust*, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard, USA, 2003. It is concluded here that *Riba* (usury in its Islamic definition) is the cause of exponential growth and hence environmental degradation.
- xxxix Michael Boulter, *Extinction, Evolution and the End of Man* (p. 182), Fourth Estate, London, 2002.
- xl J. Baronowski, *The Ascent of Man* (pp. 59,60), Book Club, Associates, 1973.
- xli Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (p.22), Pan Books, London 1972.
- xliv Ibid, (p.18).
- xlvi John Gough, see “Rene, What Have You Wrought?” *The New Internationalist*, No.333, April 2001, UK.
- xlvii Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature, the Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (p.20) Unwin Hyman, London, 1990.
- xlviii Shaykh Abdulqadir Al-Murabit, *The Sign of the Sword* (p. 16), Madina Press, Norwich, England, 1984.
- l Fazlun Khalid and Joanne O’Brien, *Islam and Ecology*, Cassell, London, 1992. See *Trade and Commerce in Islam*, ‘Umar Ibrahim Vadillo and Fazlun Khalid (p. 73).
- lii Anthony Sampson, *The Money Lenders*, Coronet Books, London, 1988. Galbraith is quoted in p. 29.
- liiii Frederic Benham; *Economics*; Pitman, London, sixth edition, 1960; p.426
- lvi Noreena Hertz, *The silent Takeover* (p. 9), Arrow Books, London, 2001.
- lvii Fazlun Khalid, *Sustainable Development and Environmental Collapse - An Islamic Perspective*, paper presented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development parallel event Muslim Convention on Sustainable Development National Awqaf Foundation of South Africa, 1 September 2002.
- lviii Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit* (p.65), Green Books, Devon, England, 1996,
- lix See John Tomlinson, *Honest Money, A Challenge to Banking*, Helix, Deddington, England, 1993. This book was used widely in the CCMJ campaign.
- lvi ‘Umar Ibrahim Vadillo, *The Return of the Gold Dinar* (p. 57), Madinah Press, Cape Town, 1996.
- lvii Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (pp.43, 357), Pan Books, London, 1981
- lviii David Orr, *What is Education For?* *Annals of Earth*, Vol. VIII, No 2 1990. Falmouth, MS, USA. David Orr is Professor of Environmental Studies, Oberlin College, Ohio, USA. This article was also published in *Resurgence*, the journal of the Schumacher Society, England, Jan/Feb 1991.
- lix For a further explanation on terminology see Fazlun Khalid, *Qur’an, Creation & Conservation*, Islamic Foundation for Ecology & Environmental Sciences, Birmingham, UK, 1999.
- lvi Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and the Environment*, *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 5, Eds. Munn and Timmerman, Chichester UK, 2002.
- lviii Doi A.R.I *Shariah: The Islamic Law*. Taha, London. 1984.
- lix Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and the Environment*, *Encyclopaedia of Global Environmental Change* Vol. 5, Eds. Munn and Timmerman, Chichester UK, 2002. See *The Natural Order in Islam*.
- lx *PARKS – The International Journal for Protected Area Managers*, Vol.12, No.2, Local Communities and Protected Areas 2002, World Commission on Protected Areas and The World Conservation Union. See Misali (p. 33). Our training package based on the Qur’an was first used here. See note lx.
- lxi I have used various platforms in various parts of the world to persuade people to look at this subject holistically as the Qur’an presents it. The following are probably the two most important occasions. See “Guardians of the Natural Order” in Fazlun Khalid, *An Islamic Critique of the Root causes of Environmental Degradation*, in *Islam and Ecology – A bestowed Trust*, Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard, USA, 2003. Also see “An

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- Emerging Response”, in Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and the Environment*, Encyclopaedia of Global Environmental Change Vol. 5, Eds. Munn and Timmerman, Chichester UK, 2002. See.
- lxii Fazlun Khalid, *Misali Islamic Ethics - Consultant’s Report*, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham UK, 2001.
- lxiii Fazlun Khalid, *Qur’an, Creation and Conservation*, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham UK, 1999.
- lxiv Othman Abd ar Rahman Llewellyn, *Conservation in Islamic Law*, paper delivered in Venezuela at the ivth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, 1992.
- lxv Othman Abd ar Rahman Llewellyn, and Fazlun Khalid, *Jabal Aja’ Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet Program proposals*, Alliance for Religions and Conservation, Manchester UK, 2000.
- lxvi Fazlun Khalid, *Islamic Conservation Ethics Madagascar - Consultant’s Report*, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham UK, 2001.
- lxvii Martin Palmer, Fazlun Khalid, John Smith, *Religious Partnership in Bio-diversity – Progress Report to World Bank*, Alliance for Religions and Conservation, Manchester UK, 2001.