



A Review of “Islam and Environmental Ethics” by M. Y. Gada

M. Y. Gada'nın “Islam and Environmental Ethics” Adlı Eserine Dair Bir İnceleme

“Gada, Muhammad Yaseen. *Islam and Environmental*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024, 94 p.”

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Abstract

Muhammad Yaseen Gada's *Islam and Environmental Ethics* explores the intersection of Islamic theology, environmental ethics, and climate change. Through Islamic principles like *tawhīd* (unity of God), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *ākhirah* (accountability in the afterlife), the book offers a comprehensive view of how Islam can address contemporary environmental challenges. By comparing Islamic and secular ethical frameworks, Gada advocates for a theocentric approach to environmental stewardship. The book serves as a vital resource for understanding Islam's potential role in promoting sustainable practices.

Keywords: Islamic environmental ethics, Tawhīd, Khilāfah, Climate change, Theocentric ethics, Ecological crisis, Environmental stewardship.

Öz

Muhammed Yaseen Gada'nın *İslam ve Çevre Ahlakı* adlı eseri, İslami teoloji, çevre ahlakı ve iklim değişikliği arasındaki kesişimi inceliyor. Tawhīd (Tanrı'nın birliği), khilāfah (Halifelik) ve ākhirah (ahirette hesap verme) gibi İslami prensipler üzerinden, kitap, İslam'ın günümüz çevresel zorluklarını nasıl ele alabileceğine dair kapsamlı bir bakış sunmayı amaçlıyor. Gada, İslami ve seküler etik çerçevelerini karşılaştırarak, çevre problemlerine yönelik yaklaşımlarda teosantrik bir yaklaşımı savunuyor. Eser, İslam'ın sürdürülebilir uygulamaları teşvik etme potansiyelini anlamak ve diğer akımlar ile kıyaslama imkanı sunuyor olması bakımından önem teşkil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslami çevre ahlakı, Tevhid, Hilafet, iklim değişikliği, Teosantrik ahlak, Ekolojik kriz, Çevre yönetimi.

Introduction

Muhammad Yaseen Gada's *Islam and Environmental Ethics* is an introductory scholarly work that addresses one of the most pressing global issues, the climate crisis, through the perspectives of environmental ethics, Islamic theology, and jurisprudence. Published as part of the Elements in Islam and the Sciences series, the book is well-referenced and offers a comprehensive exploration of how faith, ethics, and ecological sustainability overlap within Islamic thought. By situating Islamic environmental ethics alongside contemporary Western frameworks, Gada convincingly argues for the relevance and depth of Islamic perspectives in tackling contemporary ecological challenges. This review examines the book's strengths, areas for improvement, and its contributions to the field of environmental ethics.

1. Structure and Content

Gada organizes the book into thematic sections that navigate through various topics, beginning with an overview of environmental challenges before delving into the philosophical and ethical dimensions of Islam's approach to the environment. This structure ensures accessibility for scholars, practitioners, and students alike. Foundational definitions and views are provided to clarify Islamic environmental ethics, aligning the discourse with contemporary ethical and philosophical approaches.

The introductory chapters establish key terms and concepts essential for understanding subsequent discussions. Gada balances theoretical discourse with practical examples, enabling readers to comprehend philosophical questions and their real-world applications. This balance is crucial for bridging abstract ethical principles with tangible environmental actions. A hierarchical

progression of ideas, from broad general concepts to specific Islamic teachings, allows readers to follow the arguments step by step. Each chapter builds upon the previous ones, creating a cohesive narrative that emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental ethics and Islamic theology.

2. Global Environmental Problems and Ethical Solutions

The book begins with an analysis of 21st-century environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, and water scarcity. Gada presents a data-rich examination of these issues, highlighting their interconnected nature and adverse effects on both human and non-human life. By utilizing statistics from reputable sources like the WHO, UNESCO, and the IPCC, he underscores the urgency of addressing these crises through ethical and sustainable practices.

Gada emphasizes that environmental problems are not merely scientific or technical but also rooted in social, economic, and political structures. This interdisciplinary approach sets the stage for his exploration of environmental stewardship within Islamic ethics.

A significant portion of this section critiques existing secular approaches to environmental ethics. Gada acknowledges their contributions but argues that they often lack the moral and spiritual dimensions necessary for fostering long-term behavioral change. He compares secular and Islamic ethical frameworks, asserting that theocentric views in Islam offer a more comprehensive foundation for environmental stewardship compared to humanistic or utilitarian principles prevalent in secularism.

3. Foundations of Islamic Environmental Ethics

Central to the book is the exploration of key Islamic principles that underpin environmental ethics: *tawḥīd* (the unity of God), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *ākhirah* (accountability in the afterlife).

Tawḥīd (Unity of God): *Tawḥīd* establishes the divine origin of all creation, affirming the intrinsic value of nature as a manifestation of God's will. This perspective challenges anthropocentric views that treat nature merely as a resource for human use. Gada cites Quranic verses and prophetic traditions that emphasize harmony and balance in creation, advocating for a relationship with nature based on reverence, gratitude, and humility.

Khilāfah (Stewardship): Building on *tawḥīd*, *khilāfah* outlines humanity's role as caretakers of the Earth. Islam mandates responsible stewardship to safeguard the environment for future generations. This principle aligns with sustainable development, emphasizing the ethical imperative to balance human needs with ecological preservation. Gada discusses practical guidelines such as prohibiting wastefulness (*isrāf*) and promoting moderation (*i'tidāl*), integrating ecological sustainability with broader ethical concerns.

Ākhirah (Accountability in the Afterlife): *Ākhirah* introduces a moral dimension to environmental ethics by framing stewardship as a divine obligation for which individuals will be held accountable. This belief instills a sense of responsibility and urgency, encouraging actions that

benefit both current and future generations. Gada notes that this spiritual accountability distinguishes Islamic environmental ethics from secular frameworks, providing a long-term perspective that complements rational self-interest and legal enforcement.

4. Islam, Action, and Practicality

Gada effectively links theological principles with practical applications, illustrating how Islamic teachings have informed environmental policies and practices historically and in contemporary contexts. He highlights sustainable practices in historical Islamic societies, demonstrating that these were not merely technological innovations but were deeply intertwined with Islamic ethical imperatives.

In contemporary settings, Gada discusses organizations like the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES), which promote environmental awareness and action within Muslim communities. These organizations integrate Islamic ethical teachings with modern environmental initiatives, fostering responsibility and action among believers. Additionally, he explores the role of Islamic finance in promoting sustainable development, showcasing how ethical banking principles can fund environmentally sustainable projects.

While grounded in Islamic theology, the book critically engages with modern environmental philosophies, including anthropocentrism, biocentrism, sentiocentrism, and ecocentrism.

Anthropocentrism: Gada critiques anthropocentrism for its exclusive focus on human interests, which can lead to the exploitation of nature. In contrast, Islamic environmental ethics advocate for recognizing the intrinsic value of all creation, promoting a more balanced approach.

Biocentrism and Ecocentrism: Gada challenges biocentrism and ecocentrism for potentially overlooking human responsibilities. However, he acknowledges their valuable insights into the interconnectedness of life and the importance of preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. He advocates for a theocentric approach that harmonizes human responsibilities with ecological preservation.

Sentiocentrism: While sentiocentrism aligns with Islamic compassion towards all creatures, Gada suggests it may lack the comprehensive ethical framework provided by Islamic principles like *tawhīd* and *khilāfah*. These principles offer a holistic understanding of human-nature relationships, encompassing moral, legal, and spiritual dimensions.

5. The Role of Islamic Jurisprudence

A significant portion of the book explores how Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) shapes environmental ethics. Gada discusses legal principles such as the prohibition of waste (*isrāf*) and the encouragement of moderation (*i'tidāl*), providing practical guidelines for sustainable living. He also examines the concept of public interest (*maṣlaḥah*), which allows Islamic law to adapt to contemporary environmental challenges.

Islamic Legal Principles: The prohibition of waste mandates the avoidance of extravagance and unnecessary consumption, directly addressing issues like resource depletion and pollution. The

encouragement of moderation advocates for balanced and responsible behavior in environmental interactions, aligning with sustainable development.

Public Interest (*Maṣlaḥah*): *Maṣlaḥah* allows flexibility within Islamic jurisprudence to respond to changing circumstances and emerging environmental issues. Gada illustrates how *fiqh* councils can issue environmentally focused fatwas and policies, promoting renewable energy, pollution controls, and sustainable agricultural practices.

Gada demonstrates the adaptability and contemporary relevance of Islamic jurisprudence in addressing modern ecological challenges. He emphasizes principles like *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *maṣlaḥah*, which enable Islamic law to remain dynamic and responsive. However, he notes the need for greater efforts to integrate environmental considerations into Islamic legal discourse, advocating for interdisciplinary collaboration between environmental scientists, policymakers, and Islamic jurists.

6. Addressing Criticisms and Limitations

Despite its strengths, the book could benefit from a deeper analysis of criticisms and alternative perspectives within Islamic environmental ethics. Gada acknowledges institutional and political obstacles but remains relatively superficial in this discussion. A more in-depth examination of how contemporary *fiqh* councils address environmental issues and the specific barriers they face would enhance the book's comprehensiveness.

Additionally, the book occasionally overlooks the potential for cross-religious and intercultural dialogue. Engaging in comparative analysis with other faith-based environmental ethics, such as Christian stewardship, Hindu ecological philosophies, and indigenous spiritualities, could highlight common ethical grounds and unique contributions. This approach would foster mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse communities in addressing global environmental challenges.

7. The Call for a Theocentric Approach

One of the book's most significant contributions is its advocacy for a theocentric approach to environmental ethics. Gada argues that the environmental crisis is not merely scientific or technological but also moral and spiritual. By reconnecting humanity with its divine purpose and emphasizing the sacredness of nature, theocentrism offers a transformative framework for addressing ecological challenges.

Theocentrism vs. Anthropocentrism: Theocentrism places God at the center of ethical considerations, reframing the human-nature relationship from one of domination to stewardship and reverence. This contrasts sharply with anthropocentrism, which prioritizes human interests and often leads to environmental exploitation.

Integration with Eco-Theology: Gada's theocentric approach aligns with eco-theology trends that integrate religious values into environmental discourse. His emphasis on the Quranic worldview and the holistic integration of ethical, legal, and spiritual dimensions makes a valuable contribution to faith-based sustainability literature.

8. Relevance to Modern Environmental Discourse

In a discourse that often emphasizes scientific and technological solutions, Gada's theocentric approach complements these by addressing the moral and spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship. This holistic perspective recognizes that technological advancements alone are insufficient without corresponding ethical and spiritual transformations, fostering a deeper commitment to sustainability.

Gada's exploration of Islamic environmental ethics is thorough and insightful. However, the book could be enhanced by incorporating cross-religious dialogue and comparative ethics. Engaging with the environmental ethics of other religious traditions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous spiritualities, would provide a more holistic perspective on faith-based sustainability approaches. For example:

- Christian Stewardship: Emphasizes responsible management of God's creation, aligning with Islamic *khilāfah*.
- Hindu Principles: Dharma (duty) and ahimsa (non-violence) promote harmonious and non-exploitative interactions with nature.
- Buddhist Interdependence: Parallels Islamic *tawhīd* and the unity of creation.
- Indigenous Spiritualities: Offer deep-rooted connections to the land and sustainable living practices.

Highlighting successful interfaith environmental initiatives could demonstrate practical collaboration towards common goals. Additionally, a more detailed exploration of education and advocacy in promoting Islamic environmental principles would provide valuable insights into effective dissemination and practice.

Gada's analysis could benefit from a more detailed examination of how cultural and regional contexts influence the interpretation and implementation of Islamic environmental ethics. Muslim-majority countries vary widely in their cultural, economic, and political landscapes, impacting how Islamic principles are understood and applied. Addressing region-specific environmental challenges—such as desertification in the Middle East, deforestation in Southeast Asia, and water scarcity in North Africa—would demonstrate the adaptability and relevance of Islamic environmental ethics across diverse ecological contexts.

Conclusion

Islam and Environmental Ethics by Muhammad Yaseen Gada is a comprehensive work that effectively documents the relationship between Islam and environmental ethics. Through an analysis of Islamic principles, engagement with modern environmental philosophies, and practical examples, the book serves as a valuable resource for those interested in how Islamic teachings can address ecological challenges. Gada's exploration of *tawhīd*, *khilāfah*, and *ākhirah* lays a solid foundation for understanding the ethical imperatives underpinning environmental stewardship in Islam.

While the book offers significant theoretical insights and practical guidance, it could be enhanced by greater engagement with cross-religious perspectives, a more critical analysis of practical

implications, and a deeper exploration of socio-economic structures perpetuating environmental crises. Despite these limitations, Gada's work stands as a vital contribution to environmental ethics, advocating for a theocentric framework that integrates moral and spiritual imperatives essential for sustainable living. By drawing on rich Islamic traditions, *Islam and Environmental Ethics* underscores humanity's role as stewards of the Earth, urging a compassionate and sustainable vision for the future.

Bibliography

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