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## Book Review

Anna M. Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 324 pp., $35.00 (pbk), ISBN: 9780231191050.

Anna Gade's *Muslim Environmentalisms* is an extraordinary work of comparative religious ethics, and a welcome addition to the literature on environmental humanities. It represents work that she has done in Indonesia, Cambodia, New Zealand, and the United States, and her research across continents is only one of many strengths of the book. In seven chapters, Gade deftly moves 'from considering how environmentalisms, Muslim, and non-Muslim, seek to deploy Islam instrumentally to viewing how Muslims cast environmentalism as a means to achieve religious ends' (p. 34).

If there is one concern that I have about the book, it is the opening chapter, which is rich in jargon and soaked in theory. For some readers, this will be a strength, and instead reveals more about the bias of this particular reviewer. While I am aware that the book is published by a top university press where theoretical concerns are at the forefront, I learned a different song at the feet of my master, the blessed Wilfred Cantwell Smith. He insisted that we should study subjects and not methods, and Gade's book is too important to be left among theoreticians. It needs to be out here in the world, in the hands of those of us who labour in the university, doing our own research and writing, teaching our next group of students. My other objection to a complicated theoretical weave is that it becomes easy to pull at the strands, leaving one with lengths of multi-coloured yarn. To take only one example, Gade points out the work that still needs to be done 'in the academic study of Islam, decades after Edward Said put forward the case definitively in *Orientalism*' (p. 5). *Orientalism* is referenced throughout the book, particularly in chapters 2 and 6.

In 1989, as a graduate student studying Islam at the University of Toronto, I first became aware of Said's *Orientalism* (1978), with the attention given to it in the decade after its publication. I took the copy I had just purchased to one of my teachers of Islamic philosophy, the blessed Michael Marmura, and asked if he had heard about the book or its author. Professor Marmura smiled his usual shy smile, and said 'Edward was one of my students at St. George's in Jerusalem'. They were part of the same small Anglican Arab community in Palestine, and although only a few years older, Marmura had taught Said in what would have been the equivalent of secondary school. Professor Marmura personally introduced me to Professor Said, and from that introduction to Said's death in 2003, I was deeply taken with his work and its impact and importance. Therefore, while I worship at the altar and revere both the man and his body of work, I also realize that *Orientalism* is a deeply problematic work. The issue it describes, the ways in which scholars have covered Islam (to use the title of another of Said's books), is real, but Said was also selective in the sources that he used. This was made clear in the magisterial review of the book by

Malcolm Kerr, published in 1980 in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. To this day, when I assign *Orientalism* to my students as a historical artifact, I assign it along with Kerr's review.

However, these are my own, solipsistic concerns with theoretical pieces as a whole and *Orientalism* in particular. I would have preferred if Gade began the work with the 'Overview' section on page 34. There, she writes brilliantly that 'The environment is not assumed from the start to be determined by a problem or in crisis, but through bundled commitments here shaped by Muslim historical tradition; constructively, these help to illuminate what could be our shared project in the environmental humanities overall' (p. 34). At the start of the second chapter, she has another beautiful sentence about what the reader can anticipate in her book: 'Programs that deploy Islam for the sake of 'the environment' may differ significantly from the projects of Muslims who cast environmentalism for religious goals, a key point being that both modes overlap productively' (p. 37).

The second chapter 'considers Islam within an environmentalism that takes the shape of popular global as well as secular messages, like environmental fatwas that accompany conservation initiatives' (p. 34). Her third chapter, which looks at the Qur'an, is magisterial. This is not surprising, since Gade is among other things an extraordinarily accomplished scholar of the Qur'an. Her comparative skills are also evident in this chapter, discussing how the Qur'an is understood in Muslim communities, and how different that is from biblical materials, so the usual 'proof text' approach to comparisons is quite problematic. Her descriptions and discussion of Qur'anic rhetoric (especially pp. 104–16) and the 'signs of God' is also brilliant. Gade's work advances our understanding of the humanities, and 'represents the bolder step of allowing Muslim systems to generate central humanistic theory that does not remain marginalized only as Islamic studies' (p. 81).

In subsequent chapters, she examines law and ethics, jurisprudence, Islamic disciplines of knowledge, and religious practice. The work is extraordinary, and 'Islam as presented by *Muslim Environmentalisms* recenters the very idea of the environment and should reshape some prevailing understandings in environmental humanities along the way' (p. 243). One hopes that Gade's book is not just widely read, but widely incorporated into the work that we do.

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