

# Undoing Economic Progress, Unraveling Nation-States.

Think about the Unthinkable in the Anthropocene

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Taking the prospect of the complex social-political implications of climate change and the converging ecological crisis, this paper seeks to explore the potential roles that Islam can play to help its follower preparing for the worst. Against this background, my PhD thesis (2015) seeks to offer a supposedly more 'achievable' vision where at least one sector of humanity can possibly advance socio-ecological resilience movement on a global scale under its own "sacred canopy." That is, a "global network of localization movement by, and addressed to empower, local Muslim communities." Thereby, the thesis envisions decentralism as opposed to centralism, and Dar al-Islam Environmental governance for the Ummah within 'minimal' or "night-watchman" states where the state's legitimate function is only the protection of the individual from assault, theft, breach of contract, or fraud. Citizens are free to choose any social arrangements. Extrapolating from Hallaq's "The Impossible State", I argue, since the state in the Islamic sense should be organised organically around the centre of God's sovereignty, the weaker or more "minimal" the state, the more compatible it is with Islam. Furthermore, the present paper offers a framework for analysing micro and macro levels of Muslim's day-to-day life that might ensure the survival of Islamic way of life through the gloomy prognosis about the world in the Anthropocene with existential threat to human civilization. In the former, this work focuses on the literature review of the complex framework of happiness, well-being and contentment, and in the latter, I delve into the sociology of cooperation. Eventually, this paper might suggest to redefine the genuinely 'Islamic' good-life in solidarity economics.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene; Degrowth, Transition, Resilience, Happiness-Well Being-Contentment; Islamic good-life; Solidarity economics; Minimal State

# 1. Introduction

“Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction”  
– Albert Einstein

This study seeks to initiate a discussion on the future of the Islamic world against numerous ecological challenges and a tremendously hard task of decarbonization<sup>1</sup>. Central to the paper are the notions of *degrowth*, *transition* and *resilience*. The potentially catastrophic climate change has changed the conversation around modernization, development, and progress -- the dominant paradigm is starting to reverse course. “Climate change is a more serious threat to the world than terrorism”, says UK’s chief scientist David King (Brown and Oliver 2004). This paper argues that Muslim intellectuals need to get themselves up to speed about the changes, and begin to disengage with the outmoded dominant western worldview. We are being forced, whether we like it or not, to enter a *transition* from a modern industrial worldview to an ecological one, from fossil fuel civilization to an uncharted territory fraught with uncertainty. Along this line, my work contends to reverse the secularization premise held as a dominant paradigm in Muslim majority countries. Accordingly, this work advocates to empower devout Muslim communities, including the Islamists, who have been marginalized as the state continues to secularize the Muslims even further, and to build their capacity with the required skills and knowledge to cope with the challenges.

For this study, qualitative data from observations, interviews and ethnographic notes which are part of a longitudinal study since my doctoral research commenced in 2009 to date, was used. There are several major theoretical and conceptual frameworks to be employed where I intend to fill in gaps of knowledge and practice. Those are, Max Weber’s rationalization or *entzauberung prozess*; decolonization of knowledge; religion

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<sup>1</sup> Decarbonisation refers to the process of reducing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and greenhouse gases emissions resulting from human activity in the atmosphere. To achieve deep decarbonisation, we need to rethink how we produce and consume energy and operate a radical switch to renewables and low carbon energy sources.

and ecology; postcolonial theory; and the concept of lifeworld in the phenomenology of Husserl<sup>2</sup>.

The paper begins with presenting the outlook on life in two distinguishable lifeworlds, namely, (i) the lifeworld of Muslim communities, and (ii) the lifeworld of western-modern scientists and environmentalists<sup>3</sup>. Section 2 outlines numerous challenges to the communication of the ecological emergency in emerging market economy in the Global South, taking a cue from Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population. This study examines the knowledge and capacity gaps that exist between grass-root communities in the developed world and that in Muslim societies. To do so, I probe into the likely scenarios for the future of life on earth through the lens of ecologists and climate scientists. Section 3 discusses community-based initiatives that have been advanced in the developed world's societies under that light, to cope with the present-day problems and to prepare for the grim prognosis about life in the future. Climate change and the multitude of ecological events are threatening to both our physical and mental *resilience*, thus, hope and self-efficacy<sup>4</sup> are considered as the source of mental well-being. People need both to maintain their motivation. Dealing with uncertainty, hope and self-efficacy as the source for mental *resilience* are gaining importance in developing the coping strategies. Examples of community-led initiatives in Section 3 demonstrate this point clearly. Eventually, Section 2 and 3 help to identify the knowledge and capacity gaps between Muslim-majority societies and the developed world in the face of decarbonization, and at the same time point out that a major reform in rationality and rediscovering the moral forces of religion are urgently needed. Along this line of argument, the paper ultimately emphasizes the significance of religious lifeworld to effectively communicate about the ecological emergency and the needed

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<sup>2</sup> In phenomenology, lifeworld, German *Lebenswelt*, means a person's subjective construction of reality which he/she forms under the conditions of his/her everyday life, as sharply distinguished from the objective worlds of the sciences. Therefore, lifeworld is not a scientific world.

<sup>3</sup> The "lifeworld of western-modern scientists and environmentalists" as designated by this paper, refers to a lifeworld that gains some of its decisive features from science, or a lifeworld impregnated by science, as discussed in Stroker (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Self-efficacy is individuals' beliefs about their capabilities. According to Albert Bandura (1997), similar to hope, individuals with high self-efficacy can also strive for their goals and manage themselves without losing their motivation and belief in their abilities.

paradigm shift with the adherents. Against the background of these, Section 4 discusses problems that are inevitable within the statist<sup>5</sup> approach to religious communities and organisations, with an illustration of the United Nation's initiatives, Faith for Earth. Taking these into account, I put forward some insights into an alternative approach to collaborate religious communities into some global environmental actions, whereby the non-nationalist and non-secularist religious communities are able to participate, by way of capitalizing on the genuinely religious lifeworld. Hence, the aim in this instance is to put forth what Islam can offer to the adherents, to cope with the difficult, uncomfortable, and unfamiliar situations that climate change and decarbonization entail in the hard times called the Anthropocene, an epoch where the human impact on earth is profoundly threatening its own existence.

## 2. A Tumultuous Period of History

“When the Occurrence occurs.

There is, at its occurrence, no denial.

It will bring down some, and raise up others.” (Quran 56: 1-3)

We live in the most bewildering era of the modern history. As I write this paper, (i) we have Covid-19 and came to realize there is every possibility of bioterrorism in forms of other pandemics in the future, including one targeted to depopulate the world for environmental reasons; (ii) we have deepened economic inequality where the richest 10% of the world population own 76% of the wealth, which the Covid-19 pandemic has made worse; (iii) we see the Ukraine-Russia war erupted, fuelling global food crisis and political disturbances that make the World War-3 becomes possible, and (iv) we have climate change that urgently needs to combat the problems of too much dependence on fossil fuel, yet the Ukraine-Russia war has added a new hurdle to the energy transition that is needed (Meredith 2022, Mikulska 2022).

The impressions of floods, forest fires, storms, draught, heat waves, along with plastic debris in the ocean in all parts of the world, are too intense for humanity not to be

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<sup>5</sup> Statism is an advocate of a political system in which the state has substantial centralised control over social and economic affairs.

aware that something about our modern civilization has gone terribly awry. Climate change and industrial pollution are real, it reveals itself daily and is hitting with full force destroying livelihoods. Prolonged climate uncertainties will put pressure on food crops. The hunger figures that are rising again in the Global South attest it. In addition to that, industrial pollution has become the largest environmental cause of non-communicable disease and premature death (Landrigan et al., 2018).

Concurrently, we also live in an era where modern technological advancement made human life less and less troublesome. Digital communication technologies connect people across the globe easier and faster, and the industrial robots, artificial intelligence, and machine learning are advancing at a rapid pace. Latterly, 'industry 5.0' and 'society 5.0' have entered common colloquial, and the tech billionaires grab the headlines. All this surely makes a triumphant feeling in the air, assures us that humanity is on the right track of progress. Thus, boosted our confidence that technology will solve everything. While being confronted with multidimensional crises, we hold at the same time unwavering belief that nothing would stop science and technology from progressing. Hence, we will once again subjugate nature and stop the climate and waste crises from growing bigger. This paper argues that such an optimism is delusive and dangerous.

### ***Climate Change. What the science says?***

For too long since the first World Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, climate scientists and human ecologists have warned about the impending crises. The pursuit of endless economic growth is chewing through our living planet, producing poverty and threatening our existence. In the forlorn hope that people might do something about it before it is too late, climate scientists assert that we would not know exactly how the crisis will unfold until it becomes too late to stop. As a matter of fact, climate change is nothing new in the history of the Earth's evolution. In the past, it was caused by variations in solar energy, volcanic eruptions, in the tilt or orbit of the Earth around the Sun, changing oceanic circulation and melting permafrost releasing large quantities of methane gas. As modern civilization evolved and the demand for energy increased, it remained

renewable for thousands of years with windmills, waterwheels, gravity fed hydro power, use of animal and human power -- until coal was discovered, and eventually, petroleum and natural gas. From that point on, these fossil fuels were used on a massive scale to fuel the Industrial Revolution. It is important to bear in mind that it was only as recently as 250 years ago. These fossil fuels made possible a huge increase in the amount of cheap and productive energy available to humans. Since then, our energy-hungry consumer civilization has been damaging the Earth's ecosystems in twofold. Firstly, by gouging and pumping the fossil fuels, coal, oil, and gas, out of the bowels of the Earth where they were locked in by geological processes over millions of years, and secondly, by releasing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane, and other greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, mainly by burning these fuels.

Only recently did we recognize that excess atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> trapped heat, causing global climate change. Although this gas makes up only less than half of one percent of the Earth's atmosphere, it is crucial to life on Earth. By regulating its flow between the terrestrial, oceanic and atmospheric domains, the carbon cycle maintains the Earth's climatic equilibrium.

Our behaviour has drastically interfered with the Earth's climate equilibrium, the *mizan*, balance<sup>6</sup>, in the language of the Qur'an<sup>7</sup>. We are ruining the balance of the Earth's interconnected and unified planetary systems. Climate scientists admonish that the global emissions must be cut by half by 2030 if we stand a chance of averting the worst impacts of warming. The urgency to curtail by half by 2030 implies radical changes in all spheres of life. The costs of inaction would be far greater than the costs of taking immediate action. Yet, hardly any country in the Global North - the cradle of modern civilization - have laid the groundwork for the economic, cultural and political shifts that will be necessary to deal with the crisis seriously. Much less was, of course, in the

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<sup>6</sup> Nature relies on balance, such as balance between soil erosion and new soil formation, between carbon emissions and carbon fixation, and between trees dying and trees regenerating.

<sup>7</sup> "He (God) set up the balance (mīzān) So that you may not exceed the balance (mīzān) Weigh with justice and do not fall short in the balance (mīzān) He (God) has spread out the Earth for all living creatures" (Q: 55:7-10)

Global South and Muslim-majority countries, where more pressing problems of everyday life dominating the social, political and economic realms. On individual levels, despite all the recent support from the international media, most people turn their face away from environmental emergency, no one likes to confront the possibility that they and their loved ones may one day see a world collapsing.

It is important to highlight once again that the ecological crisis at hand is anthropogenic. Technological fixes alone will not be enough, the consequences of climate change need to be addressed by changing people's behaviour and everyday practices. Oddly enough, while none of these predicaments have anything to do with Islam - it was not the Islamic philosophy that underpinned the modern civilization; nor the Islamic values that ushered the world society into consumerism<sup>8</sup>, nor Islamic economic principles that ruled the International Development Aids and Structural Adjustment Program, nor the Muslim leaders who had shaped the global social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of natural resources in ever-increasing amounts, this era is, nonetheless, characterized by Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in both, physical and cyber spaces (United Nations Human Rights 2021). Under this circumstance, a growing number of people in Muslim societies around the world are getting to believe that the coming of Al-Mahdi is near and some scholars even termed this era as the era of 're-appearance' because many of the signs and indications have been acknowledged. Thus, there is a great hope that the coming of Al-Mahdi is close.

Imam Mahdi is a divine figure who is believed to be on occultation and will reappear at the end times to establish justice in the world. He will establish a just government and will prepare the grounds for man's perfection in all dimensions. There are many traditions (hadith)<sup>9</sup> handed down both by Sunni and Shia scholars regarding

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of progress, on which the growth ideology was based, constituted not only the core of the Enlightenment but also a basic element of the two ideologies that were born out of it and have dominated since then all forms of modernity: liberalism and socialism. The fundamental principle of the Enlightenment was that the rational human being's aims are determined by themselves rather than by some "sacred" script, and are summed up by the triptych "knowledge-freedom-prosperity". (Fotopoulos 2005:121)

<sup>9</sup> Salman Farsi quotes the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as saying: "O people! Didn't I preach you for Mahdi?" they replied: "Yes!" He then said: Bear in mind that the Almighty God will rise a

his occultation and reappearance. According to many traditions, the Imam will reappear at a time when the world is full of oppression and suppression. He will reappear to save the world from oppression and establish justice. His governance will eradicate oppression and establish justice and peace<sup>10</sup>. During his rule the people will live in peace and brotherhood. Another eschatological events that Muslim believe and has become ubiquitous household words, are the return of Jesus and the restoration of Islamic caliphate, which they believed to have been prophesized by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Furthermore, while the Islamic leaders encouraged the devout Muslim men and women to pray for the re-appearance of a just government to rule the world and to turn the world of violence and injustice into a world of peace, the establishment of Western Counter-terrorism discourses and practices, with their attendant notion of 'deradicalization' project that specifically targets Islam and Muslim, have turned the Muslim society everywhere into a veritable garden of intra-Muslim conflicts. I am in the midst of writing on this matter in Indonesian, a country with the world's largest Muslim population (Alkatiri upcoming). The digital or information and communication technology has facilitated a sense of belonging to a global community wherein national identity is becoming less relevant. This said, the emergence of transnational Islamic movement such as Hizbut Tahrir in Indonesia prompted a fierce conflict with the home-grown Nahdlatul Ulama, ostensibly, an imperative against deradicalization on the name of 'the war on terror'. Nahdlatul Ulama is the largest mass-based Muslim organisation well-known for championing nationalism in a fusion with "*Islam rahmatan lil alamin*" translated as 'peaceful Islam'. The tension is best understood as a countermovement against anything perceived to threaten the status quo (Aswar 2020).

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righteous and judge man in my Ummah who will establish justice and equity in the entire world at a time when it is overwhelmed with oppression. He is the ninth son of my grandson Hussein (A.S). His name and sobriquet is the same as mine.

<sup>10</sup> Commenting on Imam Mahdi's method of governance, Imam Sadiq (A.S) says: "He will act like the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and follows his method. He destroys every oppressive system as the Holy Prophet demolished the foundation of ignorance era and establishes Islam from the very beginning based on the teachings of the Holy Prophet.



Through the lens of human-ecologist, I shall like to derive, from postcolonial theory perspective, the following hypothesis. The frantic ‘deradicalization’ project which has disproportionately dominated the administration, management and politics of president Joko Widodo from 2014 to 2024 at the cost of other more critical and pressing issues such as climate change, was a malicious manipulation by a lingering colonial power to create a veil of unconsciousness about the gargantuan problem at hand, as anthropologist Thomas Reuter once suggested its likelihood in the “exploited nations” or developing world (Reuter, 2010: 18-19)<sup>11</sup>. In my way of interpreting the Quran, the period we live today is what the Quran refers to in Surah Al-Rum: 41, “*Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea for what mankind's hands have earned, that He may make them taste the consequence of which they have done, that possibly they would return*”. Climate change is the greatest challenge we face as a civilization. Every single issue that modernist and liberal Muslim intellectuals care particular about – whether, it is economic inequality, racism, sexism, injustice, war, religious pluralism, intolerance – will be swallowed by this one, or is going to be made worse, to say the least. For too long, modernist and liberal Muslim intellectuals have been treating ecological issues as a third or fourth tier issue. They might include it in their platform, but rarely prioritize it. They never make it felt like the planetary emergency it is. This was not of course unexpected given that the failure is part of the larger failure of modern environmentalism that two US environmental activists, Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2004) argue in *The Death of Environmentalism*. In these circumstances, this paper encourages Muslim intellectuals to develop profound critical mindedness towards modernism, progress, and growth. Along other scholars on Islam and ecology such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr,

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<sup>11</sup> In regard to my hypothesis, a 2007 report on the US CSIS think tank publication in Washington, DC (CSIS 2007) that was quoted in Rees (2009:301) deserves further investigation. The US’s CSIS says “*the internal cohesion of nations will be under great stress, ... as a result of a dramatic rise in migration and changes in agricultural patterns and water availability. The flooding of coastal communities around the world, ... has the potential to challenge regional and even national identities. Armed conflict between nations over resources, ... is likely and nuclear war is possible.*” The link was taken down as I was checking into it in 2022, only the cover page remains (CSIS 2022). A striking contrast, climate change report in the Indonesia’s think tank CSIS website appeared for the first time only in 2021, with no ascription to economic growth and consumerism practices. Instead, it calls for the military preparedness (CSIS Indonesia 2021). [Note: CSIS stands for Center for Strategic and International Studies; TNI stands for ‘Tentara Nasional Indonesia’, the Indonesian National Armed Forces.]

Fazlun Khalid, Richard Foltz, and many more, I argue that modernization has obliterated the 'golden balance' in all sphere of the Muslims' life (Alkatiri 2021a). It corrupted all natural systems that support life while dangling us a promise of ever more progress towards a better future.

### 3. When things have to fall apart

"If you'd been born 1,500 years ago in southern Europe, you'd have been convinced that the Roman empire would last forever. It had, after all, been around for 1,000 years. And yet, following a period of economic and military decline, it fell apart. By 476 CE it was gone. To the people living under the mighty empire, these events must have been unthinkable. Just as they must have been for those living through the collapse of the Pharaoh's rule or Christendom or the *Ancien Régime*. We are just as deluded that our model of living in 'countries' is inevitable and eternal" (Bartlett, Jamie 2017)

There is mounting evidence that climate change and the converging socio-ecological challenges could bring us down to energy crisis, food crisis, natural disasters, and eventually, the decline or collapse of modern civilization as we know it (Titchener 2022, Rifkin 2019, Corn 2019, Spratt and Dunlop 2018, Kunstler 2006, CSIS 2007). Weary of waiting for top-down solutions, people in the developed world have been taking the initiatives and launching transformative process in their own neighbourhood or in some kind of intentional communities, to lead the way towards what is conceived as revolutionary transformations. Transition Town Network (TT) that was founded in 2008 by Rob Hopkins in UK is one of the widely-written about. The *transition* movement means a reform on all spheres of life. There are now estimated to be between 2,000-3,000 communities in over 50 countries involved in the TT *transition* initiatives. Rather than campaigning against globalisation or in favour of a 'globalisation from below'<sup>12</sup>, the TT project is premised on the end of globalisation and the inevitability of

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<sup>12</sup> A contrast to 'globalisation from above' in the debate on globalization that environmentalists and poor people's movement in the Third World and their supporters around the globe identified as a source of innumerable problems. 'Globalisation from below' is rooted in solidarity among people and groups who recognize their diversity but who nonetheless grasp their common interests. It can only succeed to the extent that the diverse elements that make it up are able to incorporate one another's needs and concerns while holding their own more xenophobic impulses in check.

environmentally induced socio-economic and political disorder. They see the time for seeing 'globalisation as an invincible and unassailable behemoth, or localization as some kind of lifestyle choice, is over' (Hopkins, 2008:15) and 'Small is Inevitable' (Hopkins, 2008:68). Despite all these, they hold positive and up-lifting visions of a more friendly post-oil future and seek to demonstrate the future with less oil could be preferable to the present (Hopkins, 2008:53). Along similar line, Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was founded in 1991 by Hildur and Ross Jackson. It is a global association of ecovillages. They are people and communities who try to live in a "human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, with multiple centres of initiative, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future" (Gilman 1991). In 2022, GEN connects approximately 10,000 communities and related projects in 116 countries (GEN 2022). For later discussion in the context of Muslim majority countries, I shall like to highlight the significance of 'like-mindedness' and 'radicality' (Hopkins, in Cara 2021) in such an arduous undertaking.

Although we cannot predict the future, there are three scenarios that have been mulled over about the impending socio-ecological events (Hopkins 2008:32). Science tells us that the future will have to conform to (i) the laws of nature, (ii) the restriction of small planet, (iii) the constraints of ecological systems, (iv) the availability of resources, and (v) the peculiarities of human individuals and human societies. The three scenarios in question are:

**Adaptation** scenarios, take for granted that technological innovation will solve everything.

**Evolution** scenarios, require a certain evolution and a radical change of attitude, but it takes for granted that society will manage to preserve its coherence, although in a more localized form that consumes less energy.

**Collapse** scenarios, are based on predictions the impact of climate change and energy crisis will inevitably result in fracturing and disintegrating, at once or gradually, society as we know it.

The Adaptation scenario has been casted aside by many for being very unlikely due to its reliance on a number of miracles on technological, social, political and economics realms. Even if one believes, as senior ecologist James Lovelock (2004) does, that nuclear power is the most appropriate green energy solution which is proven to be the safest of all energy sources, many experts maintain that transitioning to nuclear energy represents an even higher risk. This is particularly true in the Middle East context considering the uniqueness of the region, whose drinking water relies heavily on desalination plants, thus, any nuclear accident in that environment amounts to a mass killing. On top of that, the region is rife with rivalries between countries, making nuclear power even more dangerous (Mahoozi 2022). With that in mind, the Evolution and Collapse scenarios are held to be more likely. In view of the heavy reliance of our modern living on fossil fuels and petrochemicals, we must be prepared that any disruption to oil supply will have massive geo-political, economic and social consequences. Accordingly, the notion of *resilience* came to the fore. *Resilience* refers to the ability of a system, from individual people to whole economies, to hold together and maintain their ability to function in the face of change and shocks from the outside (Hopkins 2008). At this point, it is worth highlighting that Evolution and Collapse scenarios are no different, both demand radical changes. What would be needed to prepare the Evolution is tantamount to the changes needed to cope with the Collapse scenarios.

For some time now, the Collapse scenarios have been contemplated in the literature of environmental movement under the rubric of *peak oil* and climate change, addressed to both, the permanent shortfall in oil supply due to exhausted reserves, or the potentially catastrophic climate events (e.g., Jackson 2002; Jackson and Jackson 2002; Jackson and Svenson 2002; Bang 2005; Dawson 2006, 2013; Hopkins 2008, Leonard and Barry 2009; Bailey, Hopkins and Wilson 2010). These literatures provide insights into pragmatic and strategic issues involved in a *transition*, from the unsustainable present to the more sustainable forms of production, exchange, and consumption. The thinkers and activists of the movement hold a radical vision of a *degrowth* world where the overall energy and consumption is reduced and where

economy is circular, a contradistinction to the economic growth paradigm that was held as the dominant model until yesterday. Nonetheless, prosperity and happiness continue to be sought after, albeit shifted from materiality to unworldliness. Thus, the discussion on spirituality, ethics, contentment, happiness and well-being came to the fore. Members of the movement generally shares belief about what is wrong with modern society.

A key feature of the *transition* movement in most places is the concept of shifting the society from the power of globalisation and centralisation. They often aim to achieve this by turning to the local economy, putting the means of production under social control instead of market forces and profit, and having human-scale self-governance. Thus, the term 'relocalisation' is often used to describe a movement towards an opposite direction. The attempts have been experimented by activists who dare to challenge the assumptions underlying established systems. While the *transition* movement belongs to the long-tradition of grassroots and other environmental-social movements that have campaigned against environmentally and socially damaging practices, the advocates of TT, GEN and relocalisation movement in general have arrived at the conclusion that 'it's too late for sustainability'. Accordingly, the only realistic response would be to adapt creatively the global resource shortages, and thus, transitioning into post-carbon world (Bailey et.al, 2010; Barry, 2012). The concept of *resilience* as a key human capacity to deal with uncertainties and vulnerability, is the central theme in *transition*, "just as we cannot eliminate vulnerability, *resilience* must be the capacity to withstand and recover from 'wounding' and 'harm' we cannot eliminate" (Barry, 2012: 80). Thereafter, the word *resilience* is used as replacement for catchword 'sustainability', and 'less unsustainable' for sustainable (Bailey et.al, 2010; Barry, 2012). In a nutshell, the holistic approach taken by TT and GEN are dissimilar to conventional environmentalism, or, 'the exhausted, co-opted and compromised connotations of orthodox UN's Sustainable Development', or 'the naïve techno-optimism', or, 'ecological modernization', or 'the green version of business as usual' (Barry, 2012; Bailey et.al, 2010).

Obviously, it is a due season for Muslim scholars to call time on adulation to the 'superior' west, associated with ideals of progress, growth, liberalism and rationality. Sadly though, this has been far from reality in developing countries like Indonesia (Alkatiri 2021b). Economic progress continues to fit into familiar narrative of 'modern', juxtaposed to anything 'Islamic' as pre-modern, backward, primitive, despotic, static, undemocratic, and rigid. The dominance of liberal Muslims scholars and their support of neoliberalism continue to reign. Having said that, it is relevant to note that much of the international community continues to laud Indonesian Muslims are among the most 'moderate' and 'inclusive' in the world (e.g., see Eliraz 2018). The politics of Indonesia is touted as among the world's largest democracy (Davidson 2018)<sup>13</sup>, and was once modelled for post-Mubarak Egypt (Kassim 2011). Against this background, my doctoral research in sociology (Alkatiri 2015) set out to address the provocative insight of James Radcliffe, according to whom "*the non-Western religious societies do not reveal any less destructive trends and are not less industrial-attracted than the West?*" (Radcliffe, 2000:93-4). Obviously, the aim of my work was to contribute to the 'religion and ecology' field of study.

### 3.1 Some notes for comparison and contemplation

From the project scoping fieldwork, I roughly identified two groups in Indonesian Muslim society, which many colleagues commented to be in perfect correspondence with the Muslim-majority societies everywhere else. The two groups are, (i) 'community Muslims', those who are actively engaged in religious communities, organisations and activities, hence, having a stronger sense of community and thereby the *Ummah* might be their primary concern or focus; and (ii) 'non-community' Muslims, those who do not belong to any sort of religious community, and thereby the *Ummah* is nonessential. The latter group contains individuals who choose to live separate lives similar to the majority of the population in the Western world. They range from the mosque-goers who get together with other Muslims every once in a while, and whose males come at least once a week

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<sup>13</sup> In Davidson's book review, Van Klinken (2019) provides notes to criticize the acclamation: "On closer inspection, though, Indonesian democracy is fraught with problems. The rule of law remains weak. Vote-buying is rampant and out in the open. In 2014 Indonesians very nearly elected a retired general as president who openly said democracy was un-Indonesian."

in the Friday prayer congregation; to the ones who no longer consider themselves a member of the *Ummah* although Islam might still be stated as their religious affiliation (See Appendix-A). An important finding from the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation and ethnographies suggest that the 'community Muslims' have more potentials to engage in community-led initiatives like TT and GEN compared to the 'non-community' Muslims. On account of that, my thesis argues for a political structure that allows this group to take collective actions within their communities for their own survival and sustainability in the face of imminent crisis. Thus, it promotes the minimal or night-watchman state political philosophy for decentralist *resilience* movement based on local communities (Alkatiri upcoming). As it might be clear already, the holistic approach of relocalisation movement exemplified by TT and GEN does not seek a nation-state-scale of changes. Rather, it comes close to 'survivalism' (Barry, 2012). It draws upon pragmatic strategies to "save as much as we can of civilization, and as many people as we can" (Barry, 2012:83). Nor does it strive for power in representative democracy, because no matter how powerful or ruthless or benign the state is, it simply cannot survive in the Collapse scenarios. Moreover, large countries may not survive as a nation in any meaningful sense – they will plausibly devolve into a set of autonomous regions (Kunstler 2005) . Thus, any political ideology for a nation-state will be rendered redundant. For the purpose of discussion in the context of Muslim-majority societies, I shall like to highlight the following.

Contrary to the ongoing trends in the developed world, the preoccupation with nationalism and nationalist sentiment in Indonesia have been getting stronger in the last few years, wherein the state's dominance and coercion against the Islamists gained more legitimacy (Fealy 2020a, 2020b). I have been working as a volunteer environmental educator in both raising environmental consciousness among Indonesian Muslims and demonstrating the inherently ecological nature of Islam and the environmental worldview Islam espouses. As my PhD dissertation suggests, the Indonesian modernist Muslim intelligentsias, the liberals in particular, are among the gravest problems to the dissemination of *degrowth* and *transition* paradigms. These westernized elites are in good company with nationalist elites for being 'naïve techno

optimist'<sup>14</sup> in their predilection toward 'progress'. Besides a positivist belief in science, the dominant paradigms that these intellectuals continue to cling to are: (i) the economic growth, (ii) capitalist-development ideology, (iii) market economy with the attendant problem of consumerism, and last but not least, (iv) nationalism.

The unholy legacy of nationalism and an absolute sovereignty of nation-state have been an obstacle on environmental causes on many fronts. At an international level, my previous (Alkatiri 2017) and soon to be published works (Alkatiri upcoming) concern the national sovereignty that continuously stands in the way of creating international framework for collective actions. The lack of success of climate diplomacy from the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 to the COP26 in 2021 tells this home truth. The impasse in environmental diplomacy was caused by different interests between capital-rich-developed North versus capital-poor-developing South. Therefore, treaties are hard to attain. On a national level, the all-time high narcissistic nationalist sentiment held by the Indonesian elites, according to which the 'community Muslims' are dangerous to the "unity of our nations" has impaired the vital role of community lives (Alkatiri 2018). They have been largely intimidated and forced to become 'moderate' and 'adaptive to Western secular life', be 'reformed' and 'privatized' altogether along the secularization thesis. It is worth considering the way nationalism foisted unity unto diversity that fits nicely the secularization theory is tantamount to the state's oppression to national minorities. '*To change the master is not to be free*', is a hard and fast rule of minorities in the Global South. Anarchist Rudolf Rocker describes lucidly in a 'prophetic' passage (in Dolgoff1977: para 1):

“...the same nationalities which before World War I, never ceased to revolt against the foreign oppressor, reveal themselves today, when they have attained independence, as the worst oppressors of national minorities within their own jurisdiction and inflict upon them the same moral and legal oppressions, which when they were subjected peoples... this ought to make plain even to the blindest, that a harmonious living together within the framework of the national state is definitely impossible... These peoples who have in the name of liberation shaken off the yoke of the hated foreign rule have gained nothing thereby... in most cases

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<sup>14</sup> See for instance, an interview with Luthfie Asyaukanie on a question of what Islam will look like in 2050 (Maula 2022). Asyaukanie is a co-founder of Liberal Islam Network (JIL–Jaringan Islam Liberal) with Ulil Abshar Abdallah.



they have taken on a new yoke which is frequently more oppressive than the old... ..the change of human groups into nations, that is, State peoples, have not opened out a new outlook... it is today one of the most dangerous hindrances to social liberation... behind everything, the term “National” stands for the will to power of privileged few and the special interests of caste and class...

In this respect, I concur with Pringle’s portrayal of Indonesian Muslim. While Muslim is the majority of the population (87% in 2021) but Muslims who are ‘not nationalist, nor secularist’ and ‘who vote for an Islamic political party’, “*have always been a minority of the Indonesian population and remain so, despite the increase in Islamic religious observance in recent years*” (Pringle, 2010:11). In regard to the marginalization of the ‘non-nationalist, non-secularist’ Muslims as minorities, other scholars contend that the Indonesian Muslim community attitudes are typically those of a minority group (Wertheim, 1975; Schwarz, 1997). Two case studies in my previous work (Alkatiri 2015, 2018) describe their situation plainly. Against this background, what might be an important contribution to the studies of Islam and nationalism is, the long-standing political stance of traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), that oftentimes been considered as the world’s largest Muslim organisation, against the ‘non-nationalist, non-secularist’ Muslim groups.

NU claims to be the founder the nation-state and accordingly, a time-honoured bastion of ‘national unity’. Many among the contemporary NU leaders received western scholarship, including Ulil Abshar Abdallah who founded Liberal Islam Network (JIL) and Nadirsyah Hosen, a senior lecturer at the faculty of law, Monash University, Australia, also known as the chief “Ra’is Syuriah” of the NU Australia and New Zealand branch. Strangely enough, NU political aspiration does not seem to have the slightest inkling about the planetary emergency being discussed in this paper, and continues to maintain NU’s culture of political subservience and collaboration, and being lack in the absolutely necessary critical view of the dominant paradigm that characterize the entire state system of Indonesia.

## 3.2 The tasks ahead of Muslim intellectuals

This paper has a pragmatic orientation. Along with the worldwide effort to combat climate change and waste crisis by making radical changes in all spheres of life, the paper aims at persuading Muslim intellectuals to mainstream the *degrowth*, *transition* and *resilience* paradigms in Muslim-majority societies. In the interest of advancing religiously motivated 'Islamic' community-led initiatives comparable to TT and GEN being discussed, there are a number of caveats that Muslim intellectuals need to be cognizant of:

### **Faith matters**

Before everything else, I argue that religion matters. Faith in God helps people to remain strong during troubled times. Religions are proven to have provided comfort and sense of security throughout the history of human civilization. Nonetheless, faith can also lend itself well to complacency and feelings not need to change anything. It is here where the significance of Islamic lifeworld falls in place. Section 4 talks about sociological and psychological concepts appertain to the macro and micro levels of Muslim's everyday life.

### **The significance of like-mindedness**

Committing to radical green lifestyles would involve a lot of explaining, and the eco-living plan would surely disrupt the idea of life that many people have. While most people might be supportive, there are definitely many who would think that those who are committed to eco-living as being ridiculous or are extremely worried. The negativity would be frustrating. So, getting together with like-minded people who can relate to this frustration and who really understand each other's reasoning is a necessity. This implies the need to liberate Muslims to choose any social arrangements, a contrast to the re-strengthened nation-building enterprises in the Muslim-majority countries as the case of Indonesia has shown.

### **Go against "unity of our nation"**

The community-led initiatives like TT and GEN does not seek a nation-state-scale of changes. They seek a whole new way of creating a new society, an alternative

society. 'Instead of doing battle with the 'ponderous dinosaur' of the old society with all its fault and wrongs, they would just go out and create a new one'. Definitely, such an idea is obnoxious and frightening to the reigning nationalist "unity of our nation" ideals.

### **Introspection**

*Transition* from unsustainable present to more-sustainable future is uncertain and not automatic. It requires contribution from all, and requires in particular of each of us a critical examination of our individual lifestyles and values. This could be the hardest part.

### **The loss of *Tawhidi* worldview**

As I attempt to argue elsewhere (Alkatiri 2021a), modernization and secularization forces have led to the demise of *Tawhidi* (unitive) worldview in Islamic world. Yet, this said worldview is so desperately needed in this critical juncture of history, as an integrative framework for science, faith, and ethics within the Islamic sensibility, thus, the Muslim's lifeworld. This constitutes a new task that Muslim intellectual must bear the responsibility for.

In addition, the paper as a whole reveals several important contributions to the field of sociology of Islam and religious environmentalism.

### **Re-enchantment**

This work offers some important insights into the critique of Weber's disenchantment or *enzauberung*, a grand sociological theory that Muslim scholars on Islamic studies have all too easily adopted as a theory having a normative authority. Therefore, this work lends support to Seyyed Hossein Nasr's proposition to re-enchant the Islamic world that was once stated explicitly: "Certainly my goal is to move in the opposite direction than what Max Weber called the *Entzauberung prozess*" (Nasr, 2001: 305). Correspondingly, this paper shall make an original contribution to the Muslim's reconstruction of knowledge project (Zaidi 2006, Alkatiri 2021a), by way of providing

empirical studies that substantiate the needs to decolonize knowledge from the hegemony of Western knowledge systems.

### **The significance of Lifeworld**

This work reveals what has been hardly recognized in majority literature on environmental studies. Beyond the scientist and environmentalist lifeworld, people in the Global South in general - the Muslim communities included - live in disparate lifeworlds, according to which the scientific statements about climate change and the scientifically derived solution are merely empty talks, lacking of communicative relations to their lifeworldly understanding. They live in non-scientific lifeworlds, giving sense and meaning to and receiving sense and meaning from those lifeworlds which are independent of scientific characteristics. The failure to recognize this gap, in my judgement, has accounted for the larger failure of environmental movement in the Global South.

### **Religion and ecology**

There is a large volume of published studies describing the role that the world religions - Islam included - can and should take in environmental movements. The empirical studies in this work raise questions about the generalisability of assumption in much of these works whenever it fails to incorporate the socially and politically stormy environment in the Global South in general and the Muslim world in particular. Post-colonial theory perspectives are needed to throw light on the issues. The UN's Faith for Earth initiatives in the following section demonstrates the need for a better strategy in capitalizing on Islamic lifeworld.

## **4. Capitalizing on Religious Lifeworlds**

“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,  
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.”  
(Hosea 14.1)

Having been assumed for so long that there will be no further need for religion, the United Nations in all of a sudden flipped the script on the secularization trajectory. In November 2017, it decided to engage with faith-based organisations as strategic

partners in protecting the environment toward achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the Faith for Earth initiatives, a multi-faith working group (Faith for Earth n.d.). In 2022, February 21 to March 4, the Faith for Earth dialogue was held in Nairobi. I was invited as part of the Muslim group, Al-Mizan. In the opening session a former VP of the World Bank, then secretary general of the UNEP, Inger Andersen, acknowledged that they had been too late in recognizing the potentials of, and bringing the faith communities to the table (High Level Launch 2022). Andersen says further:

“We can strengthen education and stewardship, so we can strengthen the linkages between religious values and environmental stewardship, so that together we can enhance behavioral change so that we can take care of our common earth. And when we mobilize the faith communities, we see very clearly that when that community acts on science the world shifts. And so how can we mobilize that community to adopt green building standard, to switch to renewable energy, to green our cities, to make more sustainable the consumption that we haven't thus the food print of our individual households, we can do that by the way we engage through our faith in our environment and by the way we engage in our community and our faith.”

The dialogue sought to explore the potentials of faith actors to inspire their followers to engage in environmental actions. Afterward, the program launched an accreditation system for faith-based organisations (FBOs), and invited FBOs around the world to apply. It was stated repeatedly that the Faith for Earth program will ensure that no one is left behind, but at the same time, the accreditation process was said to ensure that 'fundamentalist organisations' are to be excluded. Here I see the potential problems in the Islamic world context, in light of the overt and subtle forms of Orwellian control of 'official religion' against all other expressions of Islam.

Before everything else, I do not think we live in a time where we can afford the luxury of discriminating the 'moderate' from the 'fundamentalist' or 'radical' groups, or pick one and shove everyone else out of the way. As I stated elsewhere (Alkatiri upcoming), despite the laudable academic works in Western universities to disinter authentic Islamic views of nature, the failure in the mainstream discourse to stand up for

the rights of devout Muslims to develop themselves outside the rigid frames carved by the states and nationalist elites, is a bitter irony. My ethnographic accounts of two local Muslim communities in Indonesia attest it. (Alkatiri 2015, 2018). Furthermore, what needs to be put in mind is when Andersen astonishingly said that “Faith-Based Organisations (FBO) own 6-8% of the world’s wealth.” (Faith for earth 2022).

“At this point obviously, the power of reach of the faith communities is so enormous, it is worthwhile reckoning with. The power of reach also of the faith community in terms of economic power is not to be underestimated. Faith-based investments are significant. And there are faith-based investment institutions that can align their investments with the sustainable development goals and with the long-term security of our planet. In fact, faith-based investment is the fourth largest economic power on the earth when we added all together. Religion in the US alone contributes 1.2 trillion dollars a year to the social value of the US economy. ... Many faith organizations own land and ... that 5% of our commercial forests are in fact owned by faith-based organization. 8% of habitable land, 36 times the size of the UK, for example, are owned by faith-based organization.”

The statement was getting clarified in a session when an investment consultant, FIIND<sup>15</sup>, made a presentation about their program (Grassroot Climate Justice 2022). The FBOs that Andersen was referring to are mainly the churches, that have holdings in such industries as banking, insurance, chemicals, steel, construction and real estate. There is no doubt, churches are one of the wealthiest institutions on earth as some have written about. “Gold, Glory and Gospel” are motives of the overseas exploration and conquests between 1400 to 1750 that allowed European colonial empires to rise to world power and set the scene of enduring inequality between Christianity and everyone else from that point on. In my opinion, this condition is likely to precipitate into another problem in the implementation of the UN’s interfaith collaboration for the environment. Namely, patronizing of the non-Christian religious communities by the Christian. To make matter worse, due to historical accounts, the Muslim-Christian ‘inter-faith’ relationship in places like Indonesia has never been all roses (Alkatiri 2018).

Therefore, in my humble opinion, the UN leadership in attempt to capitalize on religious lifeworlds does not seem to be adequate to the task of delivering fundamental

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.fiindimpact.com>

changes that we so desperately need, particularly in cases of Islam, whose colonial and postcolonial contexts have not been sufficiently represented in the enterprise. Furthermore, the real place where the real works is done has always been within the 'intra-faith', rather than 'inter-faith', domains. Thus, this paper has gone some way towards enhancing an understanding of the need to capitalize on Islamic lifeworld *endogenously*, in which, the causes, goals, ideas and motivations are originating from within Islamic communities, rather than from without.

#### **4.1 Capitalizing on Islamic Lifeworld Endogenously – *to be continued...***

##### **A. Macro level, relates to the large group of people**

“Global network of relocalisation by local Muslim communities within minimal or night-watchman states, that stands shoulder to shoulder with the TT, GEN and other relocalisation communities (Alkatiri upcoming).

Lifeworld of Islam (Bamyeh 2019)

##### **B. Micro level, look at individual person**

- (1) Mindfulness as a source of hope and happiness (Satici and Satici 2022)
- (2) Mindfulness in Islamic perspective (*muraqabah* in Tasawwuf)

## **5. Conclusion**

The work reveals several important areas to consider in developing the civilizing missions of Islam in the Anthropocene. Before all else, it is in a nutshell, to get rid of the unnecessary, and in fact, un-Islamic, burdens of nationalism and all other worldly ideologies. It is high time that Muslims should begin to reconstruct the *Tawhidi* worldview as an integrative framework for science, faith and ethics within the Islamic sensibility, and to redefine the characteristics of the genuinely Islamic 'good life'.

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