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“Green” Islam and social movements for sustainability

Socio-ecological transitions in the Muslim world

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Abstract

Sustainability is an overused term in global politics. Yet, deciding on what to sustain indefinitely, and over time, in the face of the current ecological crisis is essentially a matter of moral-ethical concern. The primary objective of this dissertation is to investigate whether Islam, as a religion and spiritual tradition, has something to say about present-day sustainability problems. A secondary, but no less important objective of the present work is to examine the cultural, social, and political aspects of sustainability mobilisation and activism in predominantly Muslim contexts. The qualitative ethnographic study, which is based on fifteen semi-structured interviews and two focus groups conducted between 2015 and 2016, focuses on permaculture and eco-justice movements presently operating in Arab-Muslim countries (namely, Morocco and Tunisia) and uses methodological triangulation of frame and narrative analysis. Its main purpose is to empirically detect whether, among the motivational framing strategies deployed by sustainability movement actors to provide reasons for sustainability engagement and action, there is indication of moral-ethical motives that are consistent with the “eco-Islamic” worldview. The study shows that, especially in the Moroccan case, some religious-spiritual motives echo “eco-Islamic” wisdom and its foundational tenets. Overall, however, the normative and performative nature of Islamic ‘eco-tradition’ is unorthodox and syncretic.

Keywords: eco-Islam; religion; ecology; commons; social movements; sustainability; socio-ecological transitions.