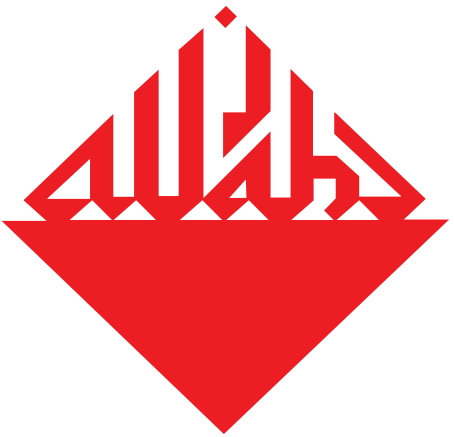
ستودي اسلاميكا

مجلة **إندونيسية** للدراسات الإسلامية

السنة الثانية والثلاثون، العدد ٣، ٢٠٢٥



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STUDIA ISLAMIKA

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 32, no. 3, 2025

STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492; E-ISSN: 2355-6145) is an international journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta, INDONESIA. It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular, and Southeast Asian Islamic studies in general, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines. All submitted papers are subject to double-blind review process.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal (Decree No. 32a/E/KPT/2017).

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has become a CrossRef Member since year 2014. Therefore, all articles published by STUDIA ISLAMIKA will have unique Digital Object Identifier (DOI) number.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA is indexed in Scopus since 30 May 2015.

Editorial Office:
STUDIA ISLAMIKA, Gedung Pusat Pengkajian
Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Jakarta,
Jl. Kertamukti No. 5, Pisangan Barat, Cirendeu,
Ciputat 15419, Jakarta, Indonesia.
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Website: http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika

Annual subscription rates from outside Indonesia, institution: US$ 75,00 and the cost of a single copy is US$ 25,00; individual: US$ 50,00 and the cost of a single copy is US$ 20,00. Rates do not include international postage and handling.

Please make all payment through bank transfer to: **PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, Indonesia,** account No. **101-00-0514550-1 (USD), Swift Code: bmriidja**

Harga berlangganan di Indonesia untuk satu tahun, lembaga: Rp. 150.000,-, harga satu edisi Rp. 50.000,-; individu: Rp. 100.000,-, harga satu edisi Rp. 40.000,-. Harga belum termasuk ongkos kirim.

Pembayaran melalui **PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, No. Rek: 128-00-0105080-3**

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Climate, Sustainability, and Future Generations: An Ecotheology for Indonesia's Ummah of 'Nonidentity'

Abstract: *The idea of "future generations" is fundamental to discussions of sustainability, climate and "ecotheology." However, it also poses a philosophical problem of "nonidentity": i.e., future people do not really exist. Applied issues regarding intergenerational responsibility, risk and justice in climate policy and practice complicate the nonidentity problem beyond the abstract to the realm of the material. Trends in Anglophone philosophy as well as emerging national ecotheology within the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) increasingly view such empirical problems to be grounded in moral and ethical systems. The Quranic idea of ummah (community) renders legible what are otherwise intractable problems in climate and sustainability ethics in regard to justice for future "nonidentities," that is, generations who are yet to face climate danger. With this come wider implications for morality regarding communities that are invisible and erased in human and more-than-human worlds in Southeast Asia and beyond.*

Keywords: Climate, Sustainability, Ethics, Islam, Indonesia.

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

Abstrak: *Gagasan tentang "generasi masa depan" adalah ide yang fundamental dalam diskusi mengenai keberlanjutan, iklim, dan "ekoteologi". Namun, gagasan ini juga menimbulkan masalah filosofis "nonidentitas", yaitu orang-orang di masa depan tidak dianggap ada. Isu-isu terapan mengenai tanggung jawab antar-generasi, risiko, dan keadilan dalam kebijakan dan praktik iklim memperumit masalah nonidentitas dari ranah abstrak ke ranah material. Tren dalam filsafat Anglophone serta ekoteologi nasional yang baru muncul di lingkungan Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia (Kemenag RI) semakin memandang masalah empiris semacam itu didasarkan pada sistem moral dan etika. Konsep Al-Qur'an tentang* ummah *(komunitas) mampu memperjelas dan memberikan solusi terhadap isu-isu yang sebetulnya sulit diatasi dalam etika iklim dan keberlanjutan, khususnya terkait keadilan bagi "nonidentitas" masa depan—yaitu, generasi yang belum terwujud tetapi akan menghadapi ancaman bahaya iklim. Hal ini kemudian membawa implikasi moral yang lebih luas, menyangkut komunitas-komunitas yang terabaikan dan terhapus, baik dalam konteks dunia manusia maupun dunia bukan-manusia (ekosistem dan entitas lain) di Asia Tenggara dan wilayah lainnya.*

Kata kunci: Iklim, Keberlanjutan, Etika, Islam, Indonesia.

ملخص: تُعد فكرة «الأجيال المستقبلية» أساسية في النقاشات حول الاستدامة، والمناخ، و«اللاهوت البيئي» (Ecotheology). ومع ذلك، فإنها تطرح أيضًا مشكلة فلسفية تُعرف بـ «عدم–هوية» (Nonidentity): أي أن أفراد المستقبل ليسوا موجودين بالفعل. إن القضايا التطبيقية المتعلقة بالمسؤولية بين الأجيال، والمخاطر، والعدالة في السياسات والممارسات المناخية، تزيد من تعقيد مشكلة اللا–هوية، لتتجاوز حدود التجريد وتصل إلى المجال المادي. وتتجه التيارات الفلسفية الأنجلوفونية، وكذلك اللاهوت البيئي الوطني الناشئ داخل وزارة الشؤون الدينية الإندونيسية، بشكل متزايد إلى النظر إلى هذه المشاكل التجريبية بوصفها متجذرة في منظومات أخلاقية وقيمية. وفي هذا السياق، يقدم المفهوم القرآني لـ «الأمة» (المجتمع) حلاً واضحًا لما يعتبر مشكلات مستعصية في أخلاقيات المناخ والاستدامة فيما يتعلق بتحقيق العدالة لـ «اللا–هويات» المستقبلية؛ أي الأجيال التي لم تواجه بعد خطر المناخ. ويترتب على ذلك تداعيات أوسع على الأخلاق فيما يخص المجتمعات غير المرئية والمهمشة في العوالم البشرية وما هو أبعد من البشر (more-than-human) في جنوب شرق آسيا وخارجها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المناخ، الاستدامة، الأخلاق، الإسلام، إندونيسيا.

The expression, "future generations," is foundational to the earliest environmental thought of the 20th century. It remains an essential moral concept in climate and sustainability ethics, including newly-developing ecotheology in Indonesia and elsewhere. This expression grew in significance right along with the idea of "the environment" in the last century, first born out of problematic post-war "crisis thinking" over global population (Warde et al. 2018). Such population discourse was concerned with "future generations" in terms of projected competition for global resources along with related environmental degradation (Cripps 2017; M.A. Roberts 2024). Since then, "future generations" remains a rhetorical staple of both academic and popular environmental ethics. This has occurred as frameworks have come more to turn towards sustainability and climate, now coming to express an imperative to protect future people and their interests. These perspectives also reflect Indigenous ethics, which have long held these values explicitly. Nevertheless and by philosophers' own accounts, the theory and practice of post-Christian moral philosophy remains inadequate to apprehend intergenerational justice with respect to climate, despite the ethical load that is constantly placed upon the English-language term, "future generations." Muslim and Quranic ecotheology, such as in Indonesian context, will naturally come to address these concerns looking forward.

To illustrate the fundamental importance "future generations" to present environmental thinking in Indonesia and the world today, consider the text of the "Brundtland Report" from the United Nations (produced by the World Commission on Environmental Development, WCED), which was published under the title, "Our Common Future" (WCED 1987). Along with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) (United Nations 2015), this document represents the principal textual basis for sustainability and its ideologies. It uses the expression, "future generations," as its normative basis dozens of times throughout. The latter is consistent with the field of sustainability more generally in that it lacks significant expressed concern with the more-than-human, as also represented by the widespread formulation of sustainability by way of the three-part slogan, "people-planet-profit." This is the kind of anthropocentric assumption that a Quranic ecotheology may directly challenge (e.g. Gade 2019, 78–117).

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

In its opening pages, the Brundtland Report defines the "problem" of sustainability in terms of "future generations" (literally, "our children") as follows:

> Many present efforts to guard and maintain human progress, to meet human needs, and to realize human ambitions are simply unsustainable -- in both the rich and poor nations. They draw too heavily, too quickly, on already overdrawn environmental resource accounts to be affordable far into the future without bankrupting those accounts. They may show profit on the balance sheets of our generation, but *our children* will inherit the losses. We borrow environmental capital from *future generations* with no intention or prospect of repaying. They may damn us for our spendthrift ways, but they can never collect on our debt to them. We act as we do because we can get away with it: *future generations* do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions. (WCED 1987, 16 emphasis added).

Although climate and sustainability are often popularly presented in terms of personal actions of individuals (such as by making "sustainable" consumer choices or reducing one's individual carbon footprint), which would reflect a classic Kantian standpoint in ethics (e.g. Taylor 2011), the document here offers a "systems-based" approach with collective moral agency (Cripps 2013). Furthermore, there is no social differentiation within the general category, "humanity" (also "we," "ours," "us"), expressed universally in the statement above. This raises further thorny questions about the stratifications of justice, such as between the Global North and Global South, including Indonesia (for discussion about global North-South equity, sustainability and climate see Paterson 1996; Roberts and Parks 2007; Shue 1999). Since the intergenerational emphasis of the passage above is entirely on "future generations," it thereby frames justice wholly to be a matter between collective entities who are living on the one side, and those who are yet unborn on the other.

The statement from the Brundtland Report above also casts future generations as being just like extant moral agents, but voiceless ones nevertheless by nature of their temporal displacement. This is effectively an analogy to problems of the more-than-human in environmental ethics, such animal rights and as "rights of nature" (Gade 2023). At times this document, along with other UN publications, uses a language of rights, a formulation that is compatible with developmentalism along with neoliberal interests in both sustainability and climate discourse

(Elliot 1989). The passage above from the Brundtland Report makes an appeal not so much on the basis of such principles (like "human rights"), however, but more by affecting intuition. In other words, it imagines a dramatically interactive and face-to-face accounting, as if the future generations would initiate a direct confrontation if they could only "challenge our decisions." This rhetorical imaginary presents much like a Quranic encounter.

The UN's same Brundtland Report, whose total pages number in the hundreds, concludes once again by framing sustainability "solutions" in terms of a language of "future generations" as follows:

> We have been careful to base our recommendations on the realities of present institutions, on what can and must be accomplished today. But to keep options open for *future generations*, the present generation must begin now, and begin together, nationally and internationally (WCED 1987, 281 emphasis added).

This statement, more ambiguous than the previous one yet similar in tone and emphasis, captures more of an essential uncertainty with the temporal problem of "future generations." It bases urgency not in terms of projected risk or danger, but instead in terms of maintaining the scope of human freedom, choice and agency.

The expression, "future generations," is common not just in sustainability but it also permeates popular environmental discourse more widely, from ecology and conservation to climate. This is true in Indonesia as well. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) devotes a webpage to impacts on future generations ("children of tomorrow"), for example (IPCC, UN, n.d.). While some other concepts in environmental ethics, such as around "nature" and "wilderness," are rightfully deconstructed for their colonizing legacies (e.g. Cronon 1996), the expression "future generations" remains as meaningful in the Global South as it is in the Global North. For example, a Muslim woman with an academic degree in Islamic law who was a student in the inaugural climate ethics seminar in the Climate Change Masters of Public Policy (MPP) program at the Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII) framed a personal statement on environmental concern in terms of "future generations" in her own words as follows:

> Studying at MPP often makes me wonder: will *future generations* still harvest food from fertile fields, hear the rainforest sing, or dive among

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

> living reefs? My deepest concern is whether they will inherit abundance, resilience, and a planet that can still sustain life — or the consequences of our inaction. This is not just an academic question. It is a moral one, and it defines the urgency of every policy, every innovation, and every action we take today.[1]

The student presents her moral "triple bottom line" in terms of named natural resources in Indonesia (food security, rainforest, reefs, and so forth), echoing registers of the SDGs (UN 2015), along with an implied commitment to climate action.

For academic environmental ethics and ecotheology both theoretical and applied (the topic of the student's own academic class, above), in Indonesia and elsewhere, "future generations" is a notoriously tricky area. The intellectual problems began to be outlined comprehensively in a well-known work by Derek Parfit, *Reason and Persons* (Parfit 1984, 351–438). In moral philosophy, questions about posterity have proved to be especially intellectually difficult for reasons like Parfit's own hard-to-refute "repugnant conclusion"; the latter, for example, is his proposition that to have a large population that suffers in the future could be the equivalent, morally, to a small population that is well-off (Parfit 1984, 381–87). Such hard questions cannot be avoided, however, since calculating "just savings" for the future are at the basis of climate policy and negotiation, including for nation-states like Indonesia.

Along with the philosophical discussion of future generations comes a fundamental issue that is known as the "nonidentity problem" by Parfit and others. This stems from the realization that *future generations do not exist, they never have existed, and it is not even certain that they ever would come to exist.* This generational status as being "nonexistent" comes prior to any other question about what moral duty may or may not be owed to them. While the "nonidentity problem" may not yet have received the widespread scrutiny it deserves, its importance to understanding environmental discourse is nevertheless made clear by the prominence of the term, "future generations", in sustainability as well as the centrality of the theme of intergenerational justice to an area like climate (such as with the ubiquitous "polluter pays principle"). The problematic topic and its implications have also been discussed in environmental moral philosophy by others besides Parfit, and similarly without any satisfying resolution to the "nonidentity problem" (Carter 2001; 2002; De Shalit 1995; Partridge 2001; 2002; M. A. Roberts 2024; Sikora and Barry 2012; Woodward 1986). These scholars are confounded, for example,

by reasoning such as that who it is that would even be born in the future depends on choices made today. Relevant ethical and ecotheological problems are revealed by way of concrete and empirical complications of applied climate policy in Indonesia, such as is studied in the pioneering MPP program at UIII, along with religious ethics based on the Quran.

Unlike other environmental issues like sustainability, for climate, futurity and its various scales across time is essential for apprehending ethical norms like global justice. Resonant with the basic idea that "the anthropocene" tends to convey (e.g. Nixon 2014), climate is no-analog as an environmental problem in an ethical sense, just as it is in its own scientific terms. To consider climate as a matter of policy for Indonesia or any other place requires an amplification of conventional thinking about environmental risk, since just as with nuclear threat, potential existential outcomes are catastrophic. With such ultimate measures of consequence, issues pertaining the understanding of justice are foundational, even in regard to practical matters such as negotiating agreements about limiting global greenhouse gas emissions. Future generations who do not exist in an absolute sense of "non-identity" nevertheless are still the fundamental moral parameter for cases of proximate ethics and policy. This brings up a host of new moral questions, particularly regarding environmental justice, for which religious and Quranic ethics have a constructive response.

Concepts for intergenerational justice that can grapple meaningfully with language about climate and "future generations" are not to be found within post-Christian philosophical tradition. This paper therefore presents Islamic ecotheological portrayals of future generations, such as in the Quran, to show how its depiction of future communities or the "ummah" implicates the present through accounts of reciprocal justice and equity. Although I do not consider myself a theologian (Gade 2025; see also Nguyen 2018), this is a work of "ecotheology" in the current terms circulating widely in Indonesia, as promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs[2]. The following discussion is ecotheological specifically in the contemporary Indonesian sense because it is (1) constructive (*i.e.*, within the field of ethics), and even religious in regard to Islam; and, (2) aimed at public outreach, also a key characteristic of the national ecotheology project, and as evidenced through the activities of the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat or PPIM), Religious Environmentalism Actions

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(REACT), including the present academic conference as supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Indonesia.[3]

Future Generations and Climate Ethics: Indonesia and Beyond

Climate change has a history both as a scientific idea and as a lived reality, and likewise does climate ethics have a history as a field and an academic discipline, in Indonesia and globally. In Anglophone environmental ethics, the unthinkable of climate disaster was "thought through" relatively early (although still some decades after the "greenhouse effect" was generally known) with the awareness of climate by figures like David Gardiner, Dale Jamieson and Henry Shue (Coward and Hurka 1993; Gardiner 2004; 2010; Jamieson 2010; Shue 2001). Generally these philosophers recognized at the outset that previous "nature-based" environmental ethics would not be effective for climate. Dale Jamieson, for example, claimed that climate ethics challenged Paul Taylor's classic framework of an environmental ethics on the basis of "respect for nature," which was coming to be rejected on the grounds that climate requires an added concept of global justice as a moral responsibility (Jamieson 2010, 431–45; Taylor 2011 [1986]). As Anglophone climate ethics has developed overall, there has been a general turn away from what Shue, presumably expressing his own voice of the Global North, terms "preferences of ours" toward what Shue writes are the corresponding "vulnerabilities of others" (Shue 2010). The latter would generally have been said to denote a region like Southeast Asia.

Ethicists of the North and South alike have agreed all along that climate change is a game-changer for moral philosophy and other fields in humanities and social sciences, which would now of course include ecotheology. Many in a first chronological stage contemplated the very "discovery" of climate, such as with Henry Shue himself noting that the issue was new to him, like nothing that he had ever been made to think about previously (Shue 2010). The general academic genre of climate-surprise usually appeals to a complete methodological reconstruction, as represented by work like Dipesh Chakrabharty's influential article, "The Climate of History," for the field of postcolonial history (Chakrabharty 2009). Amitav Ghosh's book, *The Great Derangement*, had a similar impact for the field literature, also written from the perspective of the Global South (Ghosh 2016). The exception to the general attitude that

climate requires radical rethinking has been Indigenous critiques of "crisis epistemology," tending more to cast climate "emergency" as yet another regime of colonial control (Whyte 2020).

In addition, another constant in climate ethics has been the notion that ethics itself is fundamental to all aspects of climate change, from science to politics, even if considered interdisciplinarily. For example, in an article with the same title as his book, "A Perfect Moral Storm," Stephen M. Gardiner points out that every climate policy is moral, and all policies essentially pose very "big questions." Gardiner also observes that the very nature of climate renders it especially difficult to make moral choices about climate issues. Finally, Gardiner offers that it is difficult to act on climate because of conditions like "corruption" (for which Gardiner himself offers his own moral theory). Gardiner therefore refers to the intersection of climate ethics and policy the "perfect moral storm" when viewed in such a metaethical lens (Gardiner 2006; 2011), and current top-level conversations in the MPP Program in Indonesia would validate this daily in both theory and practice.

The primary intellectual challenge of climate is thus simply to grapple with its complexity, Gardiner explains. When considered globally, he writes, climate change offers the following complicating features: (1) the dispersion of cause and effect; (2) a fragmentation of agency; and, (3) institutional inadequacy. These considerations are both spatial and temporal, and they all exceed the scope of classical ethical questions that are familiar in political ecology and environmental ethics such as "the tragedy of the commons" and "the prisoner's dilemma." Furthermore, from an applied perspective, trustworthy data for cost-benefit analysis are not reliable, whereas the science, while certain, is also variable. To conclude, Gardiner adds that there are also what he calls "skewed vulnerabilities" (Gardiner 2006, 399), more commonly recognized as matters of environmental justice, particularly salient such as with issues around climate impacts and extractive industries whether inside and outside of Indonesia.

Some might expect that the issue of uncertainty, which has long come to be enmeshed into the politics of climate denial, would have played a larger role in the development of global climate ethics. However, this has not been the case ("uncertainty" in the form of probability never weakens empirical argument, after all). Gardiner and other philosophers further point out that uncertainty, morally, is

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

not the same as an issue like risk (Gardiner 2010). Moreover, many climate ethicists have attempted to work seriously in the area of policy, engaging in the same conversations as policy-makers in terms of treaties, and agreements for nation-states.[4] In theory and practice, many have applied ethics of rights, value, and justice in epistemological registers such as that set to the Enlightenment key of John Locke.

With these approaches to climate ethics, the primary questions about responsibility and risk have come to double back on concerns of fairness and justice for future generations, now in more pragmatic terms as matters of "practical ethics" (Singer 1979). This has opened its own field of challenges since the secular, neoliberal tradition seems to falter intellectually at every ensuing juncture of climate consideration. This shows the need for an ecotheology not only in Indonesia, but globally as well. In this context, the nonidentity problem reemerges not only as a theoretical concern but now also an applied one with regard to environmental decision-making. This is because to delve into the specific details of climate policy brings about increasingly intractable questions about "future generations," for which there is still no cogent apparatus to express principles of intergenerational justice (Elliot 1997; Shue 1999; 2014). Because of essential problems such as the very "identification" of future generations, climate ethicists like Ernest Patridge conclude that there needs to be a "moral overhaul" to handle climate as an ethical responsibility in light of such considerations (Partridge 2001, 382–84; See also Johnson 2003; Parfit 1982).

It is not only the case that justice still needs adequate explanation, or that climate will by its very nature complicate any ethical terms posed. More foundationally, arguments in climate ethics continually underscore challenges to the understanding of its fundamental concern, the very idea of posterity or "future generations." Who are these people, and are they even *people* at all? The question is not trivial. Patridge writes that the idea of "posterity" as it appears in the work of Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1999 [1971]; See also Paden 1997), remains a "neglected category." In considering the "moral status of future persons" following work like Parfit's, Partridge questions whether posterity could really just be said to be a matter of extending "moral community," or not? While this might seem intuitively to be the case, Partridge claims that these respective present and future categories are nevertheless not the same, ontologically and epistemologically. Some reasons Patridge

gives for this are: (1) future generations do not exist now, when all the burdens are only on the present; (2) different policies enacted now will actually impact different outcomes in terms of who is to be born in the future; (3) these are not actually people, but just a conceptual category; (4) future generations are in a nonreciprocal relation to the present (thus, there is no reward or punishment for actions affecting them); (5) finally, Partridge asks, do we even know what they would want, and also who is entitled to act on their behalf (Partridge 2001, 387)? To answer such questions requires a constructive imagination that exhausts mere "reason alone," requiring responses in such normative and ethical registers to be constructive, if not outright theological.

Such concerns in Indonesia also arise worldwide with respect to two key themes in climate ethics and ecotheology, namely, responsibility and risk. Each of these circles back to the elementary "nonidentity" problem, which as yet has no accepted solution at least within post-Christian and secular neoliberal frameworks for apprehending climate justice for posterity. Fundamentally the problem stems from the need to define what are "future generations" in order to understand the most basic terms of climate justice. Climate thus fundamentally alters what ethics is to mean against ultimate horizons of responsibility. Through an accepted imperative to intergenerational justice, climate further shapes how even to imagine what could be the human communities to come. Out of this emerges an imagining of community in religious ethics and ecotheology that exceeds the neoliberal limitations of post-Christian moral philosophy by offering clear description, temporal precision, and ethical validity.

The Quran offers register for the discourse of intergenerational climate ethics, along with understanding and coherent guidelines for practice directly relevant to Muslim ecotheologies. For this, the Quran renders a clear ethical picture while depicting dialogical accountability among "ummahs" (here, understood to be moral communities) while they are experiencing the very process of complete, transformative environmental destruction. This may represent a distinctly Quranic model of intergenerational climate justice, and as inflected through Indonesian ecotheology, it is also one from which global climate ethicists might benefit.

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

Religious and Islamic Climate Ethics

The pervasive and at times catastrophic futurity of environmental thought can employ the same expressions as the ethical reasoning of religious moral thought. In fact, the unprecedented nature of present environmental conditions means that only through the imagination can one apprehend radical temporal incommensurabilities such as climate. This is compounded by the existential nature of environment, climate and sustainability, problems of the same order as threats to annihilation. Even short of expressing matters of "ultimate concern," practical policy in neoliberal frameworks like rights, wealth and property cannot work out answers to questions like responsibility-as-equity and risk-as-danger that expose the intractable problems of intergenerational climate justice. Without expanded horizons, the tools of European philosophy are inadequate to resolve the nonidentity problem, much less to apprehend other modes of erasure, including the more-than-human in the case of species extinction. It is exactly at this historical and intellectual juncture that a promising turn to ecotheology appears.

A balance of philosophical and religious ethics proves to be essentially productive in order to continue to address policy and practice effectively in regard to environmental "future generations." Philosophical and religious ethics represent two strands in ethical tradition. They could both be considered ecotheology, however, by the standard of current Indonesian formulations. Religious ethics usually takes the form of meta-ethics, known formerly as comparative ethics, and this approach is becoming increasingly common within the field of cultural anthropology. Comparison in this sense does not so much evaluate different stances, but instead the term denotes drawing on multidisciplinary tools of the academic study of religion (rather than the more narrow field of philosophy). The nomenclature of religious ethics here may appear misleading at first since the subject matter (climate) is not even or always "about" religion. The material examined is also not necessarily theology or faith-commitments, although it may include them (Little and Twiss 1978; Twiss and Grelle 1988), as in the case of the Quran. Finally, religious ethics may or may not involve unverifiable claims or confessional faith commitments, and whether or not it is guided by faith tradition, it is nevertheless consistently a legitimate academic enterprise (Schweiker and Clairmont 2019).

Religious ethics is particularly helpful for climate policy and

philosophy, and environmental ethics more widely, because it may decolonize the moral philosophy in the Enlightenment tradition. These same regimes were responsible historically for the colonial resource extraction that initiated the environmental inequities and degradations of late-stage capitalism. Religious ethics' moral claims, furthermore, are grounded in lived and embodied experiences, while at the same time religious thought also characteristically manipulates scale (such as from "microcosm" to "macrocosm"), a feature that has at times even been definitional of the very concept of "the environment" (see Warde et al. 2018). Such characteristics are emphasized especially by the popular framework of the Anthropocene, for example. Finally, religion is often considered to be about the unseen and the unknown, key features of climate futures.

Islamic ethics, including Quranic anticipations of the future, provides an apparatus for apprehending the incommensurability of climate, including intergenerational justice. This is the current horizon for an ecotheology, as well as an ethics of climate. Not merely a case of "an Islamic perspective on *x*," this is more of a matter of shifting a truncated conversation toward grounds that may more freely integrate ideas like future generations and climate justice. This is a developing area; for example, a recent article whose title references "Islamic Intergenerational Equity" and "Environmental Justice" does not actually treat posterity or future generations, but instead only cites standard ecological verses from the Quran such as those on stewardship (*khalīfah*/*khilāfah*) and balance (*mīzān)* (Gul et al. 2023). For an expanded ecotheological purpose, "Islamic ethics" would mean religious ethics that draw on robust Muslim tradition, in a sense that would be relatively more broad than the more narrow tradition of formal normative ethics in tradition (*akhlāq*), just as The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA)'s present "ecotheology" exceeds formal *kalām* (i.e., Islamic dialectical theology). Discussion of such possibilities below remains close to Quranic expression due to the text's authority. It indicates how rich is the revealed material with regard to the topic at hand, beginning with the text's ecotheological depiction of natural human tendencies to denial, forgetfulness, "covering" (*takfīr*) the truth, and so on.

Intergenerational Justice and MORA's Muslim Ecotheology

The Quran offers multiple bases for theories of justice in this world

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

and the next. These have been discussed in my own work, not only as an ethics of consequence but as consequential ethics (Gade 2019; 2023). The Quran presents a texture to temporality beyond direct cause and effect, by which the text narratively interweaves accounts in the past, present and future into an exquisite experiential tapestry (Gade 2010). The Quran depicts environmental destruction along with a companion discourse of accountability and responsibility at judgment, content that occupies about a fifth of the text overall. This material echoes the illustration of other, natural non-apocalyptic "signs" (*ayāh*) in the Quran, which emphasize order and stability in God's creation, in contrast to final destruction. Such features might inform a distinctive ecotheology, especially in regard to intergenerational justice and climate disaster.

The Quran's dynamic and vivid depictions of Judgment Day feature actual voices as conversations among past, present and future generations. Moral environmental horizons thus reach back as palpable relations across space and time. This is sometimes chaotic, such as in the presentation in *Sūrah* 7 *al-A`rāf*, which places readers' perspective within the same disorienting scene as those depicted to be grappling with a new landscape that is being remade in "real time," and whose very disrupted coordinates are determined by ethical awareness in the past and the present. In another, more personal instance elsewhere in the Quran, a subject looks around to find his companion within an overlapping temporal and moral orientation, yet forever cast below in space down to the Fire (37 *al-Ṣaffāt* 50-57). Quranic depictions of justice emphasize relations of intergenerational responsibility in this same dynamic cosmology set by the terms of the ultimate "promise and warning" coming inevitably to pass.

The concept of "generations" is multifaceted within the Quran, such as teachings on parent-child relations. For example, guidance coming with verses on "inheritance" communicates senses that are both metaphysically spiritual and materially jurisprudential. There also appears frequent language about "your fathers" (*ābā'ukum*), often conveying a negative sense of received tradition that should be rejected. However, on the Day of Judgment, cross-generational rhetoric becomes reciprocal and dialogical as voices testify across expanses of space and time at the end of the world. At that time the Earth herself bears witness to what has burdened her (99 *al-Zalzālah* 2-5), the dead

come to life and may even speak from the grave (such as an child victim of femicide in 81 *al-Takwīr* 8), and the future ultimately comes to bear on the present in a thorough, ecolotheological and intergenerational reckoning.

Here is an example of such a Quranic conversation already, and always, in process. Surat 7 *al-A`rāf* 38 presents an account of reciprocal intergenerational dialog as follows:

> Allah will say, "Enter the Fire along with the ˹evil˺ groups of *jinn* and humans that preceded you." Whenever a group enters Hell, it will curse the preceding one until they are all gathered inside, the followers will say about their leaders, "Our Lord! They have misled us, so multiply their torment in the Fire." He [God] will answer, "It has already been multiplied for all, but you do not know."

The word translated from Arabic as "groups" in the passage above is ummah, one of several Quranic alternative terms with similar meaning, with *qawm* ("people") being yet another example. There is much that could be said about the foundational term, ummah, not only in Quran (a *locus classicus* would be 23 al-Mu'minūn 51-52), but also in politics, theology, and many other fields (Denny 2001). Ummah often denotes the "Muslim community," implying Islamic unity, identity and mutual care. In early Islamic history (such as in the Medinan period), Jews and Christians were also part of the ummah, not just Muslims. And, there is an even a wider sense of meaning in the Quranic context. The *ummah* may here even include the more-than-human, as in the case of the verse stating that animals are "communities like you" (6 *al-An`ām* 38), although the text depicts final judgment brought to bear only on the "communities" of humans and *jinn*.

From the perspective of what is coming officially to be called ecotheology in Indonesia today, the Quran affirms the ethical and perceptual faculties needed to apprehend an intergenerational cosmology. An example comes with the verse of the "Day of '*Alast*" or *Yawm Alastu* (from 7 *al-A`rāf* 172). This is a moment at which all future generations were present together to respond to the divine query ("Am I not [*alastu*] your Lord?"), all testifying for the sake of the future in the primordial past. One need not venture to the extent of the esoteric piety of the Sufis to see, similarly, how the notion of *ibn al-waqt* ("child of the moment") expresses a model of temporality that spans dimensions while still informing action and experience in the

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present. The Quran indicates a more esoteric faculty of `*ilmu laduni* (a reference to al-Khidr's *gnosis* in 18 *al-Kahf* 65) that confounds even the Prophet Moses precisely on the basis of a capacity to anticipate the future and its just outcomes in terms of unknown effects and consequences. As an embodied epistemology, this could be considered an ecotheology in the form of experiential knowledge as theorized by Al-Ghazālī (Moosa 2005) and others. These ideas have been expressed explicitly as public ecotheology by Nasaruddin Umar, the current Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs, who has also developed ecotheology on the basis of esoteric *wujudīya* doctrine in his 2025 public lectures (following Ibn Al-`Arabī, e.g. UIII 2025; Chittick 1989; Gade 2019, 199–141 for general discussion on "ecosufism"). This aptitude may "lift the veil" from the unseen or the non-existent (in the sense of the "nonidentity" of "future generations") with a capacity for a robust measure of temporal, ethical and Quranic scales of intergenerational justice, whether in this world or into the next.

To return to the practical considerations of this essay, such as concrete concerns of climate risk and responsibility, the future climate-ummah of ecotheology indicates a register for policy through both semantic polysemy and perceived empirical connection. One need not affirm Muslim confessional faith commitments any more than one would need to identify ideologically as capitalistic in order to appreciate how significant is the idea of future generations to sustainable development. Indonesia is now an emerging world leader in climate thought and action in the Global South such as with the historic MPP Program in Climate Change at UIII (which hosted the PPIM-REACT conference and also has inspired this essay), and moreover with programmatic ecotheology as expressed explicitly by the MORA (MORAs, Republic of Indonesia 2025). In this context, Quranic models resonate as they depict intergenerational climate realities not only for Muslim, but for all, past, present, and future.

Conclusion

The book, *Muslim Environmentalisms* (Gade 2019), makes the claim is that the environment is, among other things, an inherently ethical concept. This and other work offers numerous empirical examples, from environmental law like applications of *waqf* (pious endowments) and fatwas to religious environmental education in Indonesian eco-

pesantren to new Muslim initiatives in Asian eco-*dakwah* such as waste management. However, the next phase of ecotheology in Indonesia will probe more deeply and more systematically what principles may underlie this, responsive to the terms of global climate ethics and equipped with the postcolonial capacity to decolonize. A proposition already offered within the field of applied climate ethics is a trend that has been anticipated in this context, namely, that all climate policy necessarily involves a moral consideration, whether explicit or implicit (e.g. Gardiner 2004). Echoing the critiques made by these very same climate ethicists (for example, Light 2002 on how morals guide environmental policy), this paper shares in acknowledging the limitations of the post-Christian philosophical tradition for understanding climate risk and responsibility.

Policy and political issues related to intergenerational justice, including the more perplexing root notion of "future generations," requires a philosophical and ecotheological register such as now is developing in Indonesia. Even as climate change ethics have changed in the 20th and 21st century, such as with a shift from "risk" to "danger" (after Shue), commitments have also held constant on concerns of justice for future generations. This underscores the need for productive climate ecotheology in a global context. Moral philosophers have called for some new way of thinking for climate ethics and intergenerational justice, and religious ethics promises such an ethical expansion in both theory and practice, represented by the movement now called "ecotheology" in Indonesia today.

Academic conversations have shown the extent to which "future generations" and "justice" are difficult conceptual areas, and further that the complications of climate render a theoretical issue like the "nonidentity problem" to be more than merely a theoretical paradox. It is also a real policy problem underlying pragmatic questions about climate responsibility, risk and "future discounting." In the case of the vexing "nonidentity problem," ethics and ecotheology such as in the experiential reading of the Quran render the presence of future communities through cultivated perceptions of embodied and ethical knowledge, along with valid imaginal encounter. One need not to be a pious Muslim reader of the Quran to hear the voices of the future made audible in the reading of the text, and to apprehend a moral call (*da`wah*) to respond in the present as an explicit, coherent imperative

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

to the responsibility (Jonas 1984) of intergenerational justice.

An Islamic depiction of interactive ummah in the context of climate disaster provides resources for understanding not only inclusively "Muslim perspectives", but also actual models for integrating politics, equity, morals and values. These applications are relevant to a world that is transforming beyond recognition as a "sign" (*ayāh*) of future things to come, in real times and before our very own eyes. Climate degradation and danger are prevalent in Indonesia, and globally, appearing as biodiversity loss and increasing catastrophic storm events, threats to food systems, public health and sea level rise. As the Anthropocene's "deep time" becomes cast as the temporalities of risk, reward and responsibility with climate, religious ethics that present intergenerational justice, such as in the Quran and Muslim ecotheology, reveal an identity for future generations otherwise obscured.

Finally, there is the more-than-human dimension, for which Indonesian perspectives have long been ecologically significant, such in the area of forest and wildlife conservation, and in the case of charismatic species like the Sumatran tiger, orangutans, and more. Sustainability and climate negotiations principally consider only humans. The Quranic collective expression of ummah, as a complement, opens the apprehensions of other worlds, other "ummahs", and communities "like us" (6 *al-An`ām* 38) to be critical in terms of human responsibility within more-than-human worlds. Extending even beyond environmental issues like climate and sustainability, such "ummahs of nonidentity'" are not just the subalterns of an environmental present, nor are they merely complex characteristics of an incomprehensible yet certain climate future. The standing of these "future generations" represents an urgent response to the problem of imagining justice of the right-now in the face of systemic and systematic un-existing and erasure. This includes imperialistic violences of extinction and genocide (Ysa 2006; Yusoff 2018) that affect the present Muslim world as well other worlds of creation (*makhlūq*), past and future. And God knows best.

Endnotes

1. "Belajar di program master perubahan iklim sering membuat saya bertanya: akankah *generasi mendatang* masih bisa memanen pangan dari lahan subur, mendengar hutan hujan bernyanyi, atau menyelam di antara terumbu karang yang hidup? Kekhawatiran terbesar saya adalah apakah mereka akan mewarisi kelimpahan, ketangguhan, dan bumi yang masih mampu menopang kehidupan — atau justru akibat dari kelambanan kita." August 8, 2025, used with permission, emphasis added.
2. MORA (2025) for a current description of official Indonesian ecothology; the initiative was largely inspired by the model of the Roman Catholic encyclical, Laudato Si' (The Vatican 2015).
3. For a broader consideration of sponsorship see Gade (2019, 37–77).
4. There were some philosophical alternatives that have posed economic objections to taking any global climate action, such as the "cost argument," which holds that it is better to help the world's poor than to try to solve climate issues. Another argument has been the adaptation argument, claiming that it is better to adapt to future climate effects than to abate or mitigate them (Gardiner 2010). Both of these are commonly heard in the Indonesian public and political sphere today.

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 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v32i3.46657

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INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 32, Number 3, 2025

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ISSN: 0215-0492 E-ISSN: 2355-6145