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QUEST: Studies on Religion & Culture in Asia, **Vol. 3, 2018**

EDITORIAL

We are pleased to present the third issue of *QUEST*. Thanks to all who submitted their work, and congratulations to those whose articles made it through the rigorous peer-review process. These works indeed concisely reveal the way religious studies and theology are currently being done in Asia as well as globally. Let me explain.

In recent decades praxis has been given primacy, and boundary-crossing has emerged as a research approach, both now respected scholarly ways of thinking about religion and theology. Most of us welcome this, not only because these ways comprise a trend, but more importantly, because the practical reality scholars are seeking to theorize about and transform is becoming so complex that adopting such methods seems inevitable. It is no exaggeration to say that most current forms of theology (and religious studies) are both practical and boundary-crossing.

The six papers published here are all written with the practical intention of working for the transformation of the human world. Ram Rasad Aryal argues for the role of spirituality in the identity reconstruction of people living with HIV; Alona Ureta Guevarra's work examines the way Japanese religions provide a venue for the liberation of suppressed histories; Hadjie Cresencio Sadje's research is about grassroots Asian theologies that have liberation as their driving force; Yun Zhou explains the anti-Western attitude of many Japanese Christians from a perspective that stresses their own historical experience; Md. Abu Sayem's article focuses on the way Bangladeshi Muslims deal with the environment, using Islamic environmental teachings as a guiding source; Rishikesh Pandey's paper examines the ways the Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley are struggling to maintain their cultural and religious legacy in light of modernization, changing governmental policies, and shifts in global systems. In sum, reading these works we catch sight of how religions are transforming and have been transformed by practical reality on different levels in a number of Asian countries. Thinking is doing; theory and praxis are *de facto* bound up with each other.

Second, there are interesting crossings in a number of the papers. Guevarra's work is an intriguing crossing between *literary criticism* (novel analysis) and *religious studies*; Sadjie, a *Filipino* now teaching in the *Netherlands*, explores the work of a *Singaporean* theologian—an Assemblies of God pastor—on the tension between Asian *liberation* and Asian *Pentecostal/Charismatic* movements in the Filipino context; Zhou, a *Chinese* now living in *Australia*, takes a historical approach to the antagonism towards *Western powers* that was widespread among *Japanese* Christians during World War II. When I read these works, I find it captivating to see how such hyphenated locations have shaped the authors' "crossings."

We do hope you enjoy reading the articles in this issue. Let me repeat: *QUEST* welcomes submissions—research papers and book reviews—that span the full spectrum of religious, cultural, theological, and interdisciplinary studies on the cultures and religions of Asia. We hope to receive your manuscripts in 2019.

Simon Shui-Man KWAN (PhD)
Professor, Associate Director
Divinity School of Chung Chi College
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Angela Wai Ching WONG (PhD)
Vice President for Programs
United Board for Christian Higher
Education in Asia

SPIRITUALITY AND IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN NEPAL: LIVING WITH HIV IN KATHMANDU AND POKHARA VALLEYS

Aryal, Ram Prasad

ABSTRACT

Spirituality is an important means of reconstructing the identity of people living with HIV (PLHIV), irrespective of religious beliefs. Although there are some studies on stigmatization and discrimination attached to HIV and AIDS in Nepal, there is a dearth of studies on the role of spirituality in managing such stigmatization and on reconstructing the identity of people with PLHIV. This paper therefore investigates the role of spirituality in identity reconstruction. By following a qualitative methodology—in-depth face-to-face interviews with PLHIV sufferers in the urban valleys of both Kathmandu and Pokhara—the article investigates the role of spirituality in improving health, changing socio-economic status and reconstructing the identity of those affected. This paper has important policy implications for Nepal and for other countries with similar socio-cultural contexts with regard to PLHIV sufferers and other marginalised communities.

Background

Nepal is a multi-religious and multi-cultural country with 125 castes and tribes, and 123 languages (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012). Among the country's total population of 26.5 million, an overwhelming majority are Hindu (81.34 percent), followed by Buddhist (9.04 percent), Muslim (4.38 percent), *Kirat*, an indigenous religion, (3.04 percent), Christian (1.41 percent), with the remainder adhering to religions of various indigenous tribes (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012). Despite tolerance for one another's religious beliefs, prior to 2007, Nepal was officially a Hindu kingdom. In 2007, the interim Government declared Nepal a secular country. Both Hindus and Buddhists generally accept one other's practices and many people follow a combination of both religions. Likewise, others celebrate and practice religion in their own ways. In Nepal, people's lives are ruled by the concept that "God is everywhere and God sees everything," and people consider God a companion during times of either sorrow or happiness. Nepalese are taught about God from childhood and learn to pray for a better future. Their religious beliefs, irrespective of which religion they follow (and which have existed for centuries), seem to provide positive support for people, especially in the matter of helping and supporting other needy people in family and society.

There are main four caste groups in Nepal, namely, the uppermost rank of *Brahman,* followed by *Kshetree* (the second highest caste), *Vaishya* (the third caste group, which is considered lower than Brahman and Kshetree), and *Sudra*, the lowest and so-called "untouchable" caste (Dahal 2003; Hofer 2004; Jodhka and Shah 2010; Subedi 2010). Together with the classification of people into

Brahman, Kshetri, Vaisya and Sudra castes, people are now more recently also ranked according to class. This ranking is decided on the basis of background, employment and labour divisions, as well as societal perceptions of wealth (high class) or poverty (low class). Discrimination between caste, class and gender thus still exists in Nepal, especially in rural areas. Yet at the same time, religious and cultural beliefs are influential in improving communities that are marginalised because of caste, class, or gender, or because of the incidence of leprosy or HIV. From a cultural perspective, the general understanding is that everyone is equal, and should therefore be granted equal opportunities and rights. Furthermore, there exists also a strong cultural perspective that females, and poor and lower caste people should be given as much of a helping hand as possible for their betterment at every step of their lives.

The history of HIV in Nepal can be traced back to 1988. As of July 2016, there were 28,865 reported cases across the country (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control 2016). Among the total reported cases of PLHIV, there were 17,949 males, 10,824 females and 92 transgendered people. However, in 2016 the estimated number of PLHIV cases across the country was estimated to be nearly forty thousand (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control 2016). The reason for the difference between the reported and estimated cases of HIV and AIDS is that a significant number of PLHIV sufferers conceal their HIV status from family and society (Beine 2002; Neupane and Mishra 2014). The prevalence of HIV in Nepal is a gendered phenomenon, with more than three-fifths of the total reported PLHIV cases being male. This is probably due to both the volume of temporary male migrant labour into the country and poor investigation of the incidence of HIV and AIDS among females (New Era and SACTS 2009). The epidemic of HIV and AIDS in Nepal is attributed mostly to heterosexual transmission, although there is evidence of homosexual relations also contributing to the epidemic (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control 2016; Nepal 2007). Concerning the stigmatization, discrimination and life disruption that usually surrounds PLHIV, Nepal is no exception, since people consider HIV to be the result of extramarital sexual activities and drug usage, and these are activities that do not conform to normal Nepalese societal values (Family Health International 2004).

Nepal's relatively recent socio-political transition to multi-party democracy in the 1990s is presumed to have created a supportive environment for the transformation of the identity and status of marginalized communities in the country. The "People's War" (or "Maoist War") from 1996-2006 was later followed by a "second movement" in 2006, with the then underground Maoist party joining with most other political parties to fight against feudalism and the kingship regime. These political movements weakened the pillars of feudal Nepalese society, and gradually restored people's human rights by focusing on marginalised communities in order to bring about gender, caste, and class equality (Yami 2007). This study pertains to one of the marginalised and ostracised groups of people in Nepal—PLHIV sufferers—following the discovery of HIV in the country (Joshi et al. 2004).

Research Problem

In Nepal, cultural factors play a dual role—both positive and negative—in determining the identity of marginalized communities. In general, Nepali culture teaches the necessity for love, affection, respect, and harmony, as well as support for helpless persons in the family and society. In reality, however, in many cases the cultural practices are different. People are treated differently according to their gender, caste, and class. Males and those of higher caste and class are generally treated as superior, whereas females and those of lower caste and class are treated as inferior. These discriminatory cultural practices play a negative role in shaping the identity of marginalized communities. In this study, Hindus and Christians are the focus, since the overwhelming majority of the total population adheres to the Hindu religion, and Christianity increased at a much faster rate (268 percent) than any other religion during the period 2001-2011 (Dahal 2014). According to

the 2011 census data, the number of Christian followers in Nepal is 273,723. However, Dahal (2014: 22) makes the following comment:

> …many Christian religion followers and associations are not satisfied with this number of the CBS [Central Bureau of Statistics]. While quoting an article of Subhas Sharma, Dhrubahari Adhikari (Kantipur 20 July 2014) writes that there are 1,000 Churches (Girgaghar), 805,000 Christian religion followers and 350 Christian mission offices, Bible colleges and Training Centres operating in Nepal.

This research begins from the basic premise that most previous studies of the Nepalese context have focused on a particular religion. There is, however, growing interest in spirituality, and its impact on the lives of people irrespective of religion, particularly in one of the most marginalized groups of people: those with PLHIV. There is very little research into the impact of spirituality on the lives of such people, especially in Nepal and other South Asian countries. With regard to those with PLHIV, there is "an endless process of negotiation whereby the individual's identity is reconstructed" (Tsarenko and Polonsky 2011, 466). Most PLHIV sufferers believe that at every step of their lives, God is always a supporter. They are thus able to reconstruct their identities by adopting various means of managing stigmatization and discrimination. PLHIV sufferers often give God the credit for this transformation, regardless of whether they are Hindu or Christian.

In my own family background, I also had the opportunity to learn about poverty and its impact on identity issues. I was born and brought up in Dhading, one of the rural hills of Nepal, and despite being of the highest caste (Brahmin), my parents were illiterate, because of a lack of schools near the village and their very poor socio-economic conditions. Being the oldest son of nine children, from a very young age I was exposed to stigmatization, ostracism, and discrimination because of the poverty of our family. At the same time, however, I was also exposed to typical Hindu norms and values. My parents considered all nine children as gifts from God, as per Hindu cultural understanding. Despite our socio-economic condition, these religious values and norms made life more bearable at that time. I therefore developed a religious and spiritual inclination from a very young age, and to this day do not neglect any opportunity to visit spiritual teachers and study religious philosophies. The religious philosophies I have read have encouraged me to go forward in my life, spiritually, socially, and economically. The opportunities that I have been given so far, and the position and the respect I have managed to attain in society, I deeply credit to God. From my understanding of the religious and socio-cultural perspectives of the country and because of my own life history as a Nepali researcher, I am greatly encouraged to conduct this research into one of the marginalised communities, PLHIV, and explore how people reconstruct their identities and cope with various challenges after being diagnosed as HIV positive. This paper aims to challenge our concept of the identity of PLHIV sufferers as forever devalued, and argues that lives can be changed positively, from both health and socio-economic perspectives, if individuals, families, society and the various organizations in the field of HIV and AIDS all work actively together (Parker and Aggleton 2003). In this way, spirituality can be a powerful tool for improving lives, and for helping people forge ahead and cope with the many challenges of PLHIV.

Theoretical Framework

This study follows Goffman's stigma theory, even though he developed his framework in 1963, before the diagnosis of HIV (Carnevale 2007). Goffman's work is still important for understanding stigma because he considers how a person with a health deformity is discriminated against in family and society and how the stigmatized person then develops his or her identity through personal resilience and with the support of family and social groups (Burns 1992; Carnevale 2007). People who share the same stigma can provide one another with instruction on the "tricks of the trade": i.e., how to navigate through society as a stigmatized person and how to

find a social sphere within which it is possible to feel "normal" (Carnevale 2007). Stigmatized people may become involved with a group of other people sharing the same disease, through which they can acquire skills for handling and interpreting their lives as substantially normal, and thus not underestimate themselves (Carnevale 2007).

Stigmatization, discrimination and disruption are part of the identity of PLHIV sufferers, an identity which then becomes "spoiled" (Anderson et al. 2008). Consistent with the existing stigma literature, such negative impact on human lives is termed a "spoiled identity" in this study also. "Transitional identity" describes the movement of those with PLHIV from a spoiled identity toward "identity reconstruction." This movement involves positive change in their lives as they make "a transition to ordinariness after the diagnosis of a chronic illness" (Baumgartner 2007, 920). From this transitional identity, PLHIV sufferers then move further into identity reconstruction, managing stigmatization, discrimination and disruption more effectively as a result of better health and positive socio-economic change in their lives. In this study, this entire process is termed "identity reconstruction." In the Nepalese literature, especially in the field of migration, the term "resources" is widely used to describe the availability of public services, overseas employment, and land in various forms, mostly in terms of economic opportunities, motives, and access, including aspects of economic family support (Subedi 1988).

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research method in order to understand the kinds of experiences people have after being identified as HIV positive. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with thirty-three participants from two urban locations, Kathmandu and Pokhara Valleys, the regions most affected by HIV and AIDS. The data for this study were collected through eight organizations working in the field of HIV and AIDS during the period July-November 2012, after ethical approval was granted by the host institution, Massey University (New Zealand) and the Nepal Health Research Council (Nepal). Because of the social and cultural issues of stigmatization and discrimination attached to HIV and AIDS, I maintained confidentiality carefully by using pseudonyms for research participants, and numbers, such as one, two, three, and so on, for organizations where I collected the field data. The snowball sampling method was used to recruit additional participants, based on information provided by earlier participants through the organizations.

The study follows a thematic analysis and takes a meaning-making approach. This approach allowed me to understand how those with PLHIV experience social stigmatization and discrimination, and how they manage these issues in their lives. During the course of the data analysis, this study adopted Bourdieu's (1986) "forms of capital," in terms of which one form of capital (e.g., social capital) can be converted into another form (e.g., cultural or economic capital). The categorization of forms of capital (social, cultural and economic) suggested by Bourdieu was applied to PLHIV sufferers. A PLHIV's social capital (their nuclear and extended families, friends and other social networks), their cultural capital (knowledge/training), and their economic capital (employment, income, property) are interchangeable (Sen, Aguilar, and Goldbach 2010). Bourdieu's ideas about capital have been widely extended to include access to resources such as social support in the field of health (Carpiano 2007). This formula has been applied in various ways in the field of HIV and AIDS, especially in terms of including access to networks of support people in social capital (Sen, Aguilar, and Goldbach 2010). Bourdieu (1986) also highlights the importance of reciprocity and association, i.e., the act of giving among equals often generates some sort of a return, whereas this same act among people who are perceived to be unequal can bind the weaker party (for example, a widow with HIV and her children) to the stronger party (e.g., her extended uninfected family members) and can create feelings of obligation.

Findings of the Study

<u>Transitional Identity</u>

Important ways of managing stigmatization and discrimination against PLHIV sufferers (even if they face their identity becoming spoiled), include developing migration strategies and pursuing effective treatment from various practices of traditional and modern medicine. Such strategies, for example migrating if something bad happens in family and society, help PLHIV sufferers move to a transitional identity. Likewise, when people undergo HIV treatment, their health and appearance improve, which ultimately reduces the stigmatization and discrimination in their lives. In the Nepalese context, where physical appearance is considered to be a measure of an individual's identity, a healthy physical appearance following HIV treatment is an important element in reducing stigma and discrimination, as well as reflecting an improving health status.

The research participants generally enjoy good rapport with those of their friends who are also living with HIV. These relationships help them develop migration strategies that protect them from stigma and discrimination in family and society should anything bad happen. There are examples of people who have already developed strategic plans of migration to cope with the expected social ostracism. They develop such plans in the course of their HIV treatment at hospitals in the cities and during their first stays at organizations where they form circles of friends also living with HIV. Sarita B, is separated from her husband, and, just as she imagined before going home after spending nine months receiving HIV treatment at an organization in the Kathmandu Valley, she encountered a problematic situation at her home. Her home environment was not suitable to her HIV status, as she had foreseen before she left the healthcare organization. She shares her experience of having a migratory strategy as part of coping with HIV stigma and discrimination. "After finding organization housing for such persons like me in Kathmandu, I stayed there. I spent nine months in Kathmandu….I was thinking whether my family members would not treat me well because of HIV. That is why I had taken phone numbers of my friends living with HIV when I met them in Kathmandu."

As she expected, she faced discrimination when she returned home, and so she followed her strategy of migrating to Pokhara, by first contacting her friend by phone.

> When I reached home, my husband's first wife did not allow me to get entry into our home. I did not say anything and also did not force to get in. Then, I slept outside my home on the ground at that night… I thought deeply and remembered that if my family members showed such misbehaviours, villagers outside home would do the same, and I should not stay there anymore. With the situation, I realised I could not stay at home any longer. So I phoned a sister [Lila] in Pokhara. I received a positive response to come to Pokhara on Friday and I had phoned her on Wednesday… I left home for Pokhara at 4 am in the morning, taking my sick son. Sometimes, I wonder how I could do such things at that time.

There is also family migration from rural areas to cities after people have been stigmatized and discriminated against at home and in their local societies, especially in cases where both partners are living with HIV (Rita A).

Some participants follow both herbal and modern medicines one after another in the course of their HIV treatment. Lila, a widow, shares her experiences of treatment, describing how she followed the instructions of a traditional healer to limit most food items and not even drink water: "I did not drink even a drop of water for a year as a traditional healer suggested that I should not drink water at all for HIV treatment and my two children, son and daughter aged below 10 years, who were also HIV positive, did the same; we drank the urine of cows, buckwheat, and millet without any fruits."

Lila and her children followed the instructions of the traditional healer for one full year, and felt their health was deteriorating day by day. After fainting and falling unconscious to the ground for many hours, Lila realized herbal medicine did not work well for HIV treatment. That day all three family members living with HIV, herself and her two children, started breaking the instructions of the traditional healer and turned to modern medicine provided by an organization. Lila describes how she ignored the instructions to refrain from eating most foods and not even to drink water given to her by a traditional healer, and how she then turned to modern medicine:

> After regaining consciousness, I asked my mother-in-law to give me and my children normal food from then on and that we would eat to our heart's content. She said there were six more months to go after which we would be free of HIV for ever [as instructed by traditional healer]. I retorted that I was going to die anyway, better die with a full stomach. Then I went to an organization where the health personnel told me to eat well and to take proper care of myself; the organization was in its early days then. If any medicines for the disease are discovered, we will provide them to you, they told me then.

Identity Reconstruction

The participants in this study manage their stigma and discrimination by following various approaches, depending on the degree to which they are able to access resources. The overwhelming majority of participants with limited access to resources manage their stigmatization and discrimination by leaving their place of origin after experiencing heavy ostracism and discrimination. Thus migration helps in managing HIV stigma and discrimination in their place of origin, and in keeping their HIV status secret in their new locations (Misa, Sushma, Mamata, Buddha, Sarita A, Pratima, Durga, Sarita B, Gita, Rita B, & Anu). When they move to a new place, most do not disclose their HIV status to other people, except to certain health personnel: doctors, nurses and the people working in organizations related to HIV, who are committed to keeping personal information confidential. This strategy protects the confidentiality of their HIV status in their new location, because those who have been living in urban areas for a long time often know how to maintain confidentiality.

Regardless of their degree of access to resources, many participants record feeling their health status improved following health counselling and after obtaining modern medicines at hospitals and other organizations working in the field of HIV. They appear as physically well as HIV negative people. Most participants are now physically fit to work any job, just as they did before, and just as other HIV-negative people do. Some participants, especially females who have been HIV positive for a long time, start to look dark and physically weak before taking modern medicine, but after starting modern medicine, they begin to look as good as others physically. Sushma, a female, comments as follows: "When I got sick due to HIV, I thought that I would die immediately. At that moment, I had thought that this was end of my life. But after treatment at hospital, nobody can say by looking at my face and body that I am an HIV positive person. I am more content now than before."

Like Sushma, most participants express the view that they are now as physically fit as HIV-negative people. HIV treatment (Anti-retroviral Therapy) has prolonged life expectancy of the PLHIV sufferers in this study substantially. After being informed by their doctors they have had HIV, almost all participants start counting the days to the end of their life; maybe that day or the next, in accordance with their earlier thinking about their future life. Yet in my field visits, I had the opportunity to obtain data from people who have been living with HIV for up to sixteen years (Jwala & Buddha).

Participants in this study feel certain that HIV is not considered as serious as other health problems, such as diabetes, blood pressure and cancer. This indicates that HIV is not like those other conditions, because it is not a life-threatening condition if people receive timely treatment.

Patients do not need to abstain from any type of food, whereas those with diabetes, blood pressure or cancer etc., have to be careful about many foods (Jwala, Buddha, & Rita A). In addition, they see that people suffering from those other diseases often die from them. Most research participants express similar feelings:

> HIV is nothing for those persons who have enough money. Of course, I can eat anything I like. The main thing is that I have to eat a balanced diet and if I can eat and take good care of my health, that's it. I have come across many people who have had this [HIV] infection and have been surviving for fifteen years without taking any medicine. That person whom [in an economically better position] I met at the hospital has not reached such a stage of HIV infection that he has to take the medicine. –Buddha, Female

Participants compare HIV with other diseases, and consider it a lower level problem. It is better to have HIV than cancer, diabetes or high blood pressure (Lila & Buddha). HIV is not a disease, but an infection (weakening the immune system) research participants explain. Jwala (a male) compares HIV with other diseases, using his father's disease as an example:

> Disease is disease whatever it is. Every disease causes suffering to its patient in one way or the other. My father has a transplanted kidney and stays at home…. My father does not eat some types of food even if he wants to have them. I am free to eat anything. So my mother gives me everything that she cooks. I only have to take medicine. In fact HIV is far better than diabetes. If one can spend one's normal life having nutritious food, HIV is not a disease for that person. This is not a disease but an infection.

As stated above, there are many participants who do not feel seriously ill from their HIV. Sarita A shares her experience of HIV in this way: "I never felt seriously sick due to HIV. After becoming infected with HIV, I felt the same as other general [HIV-negative] people. After I was diagnosed with HIV, I started receiving treatment from the concerned organizations."

Pratima shares her experiences of becoming engaged in various activities as a social worker, compared with her life prior to her diagnosis. This activity as a social worker has enhanced her self-esteem, and she concludes that HIV is not the end, but is instead the start of life, now that she has received liberty from family members and is engaged in social work activities.

> Now my philosophy about life has changed. An interest in doing social welfare has developed within me. I think I have to be involved in awareness programs concerning PLHIV. What happened to me should not happen to others. My attitude towards life has been totally changed and I desire to serve as a social worker and now many people know me. Now I have visited almost all the places of [the] district. I now think that HIV is not the end of life but a start of life for me. I was just concerned about my life before, but now I think about others. I have reached a very high level in [my] life now.

Publicly disclosing HIV status after forming a network of fellow PLHIV sufferers wins the sympathy of people working in government bodies (both VDC and Municipality) and also in non-government organizations related to HIV. This disclosure of their condition helps participants resist the prevalent stigmatization and discrimination. In my study, I came across a few participants who have disclosed their HIV status publicly in order to cope with the challenges related to HIV stigmatization and discrimination collectively, with the assistance of people working in this particular field. Females with limited access to resources are more likely to disclose their HIV status publicly than males. Disclosure is often motivated by the need to seek the collective strength and support of other people in resisting stigmatization and discrimination, as well as for improving social and economic status. Lila shares her experience of improved self-esteem and the support of

public inspiration after publicly disclosing her HIV status. People expressed appreciation, telling her that she was a "brave woman" after she gave a speech on her experiences of living with HIV:

> When I spoke in front of everyone, they were all praises for me, calling me "a brave woman." I had a talent to speak in public, one I had never realized. I think my life has been easier since I came clean of the fact I had HIV in public, if not in my personal life then my social life at least. I don't know what people say behind my back but they don't say anything bad to my face.

Like Lila, there are other participants who have publicly disclosed their HIV status (Misa, Nimesh, and Santosh). They have been able to win public sympathy and reduce HIV stigmatization and discrimination with the assistance of others working in the field of HIV. This disclosure also opens doors to work with HIV stigmatization and discrimination management programmes launched by various organizations working in this area.

Discussion

Many participants have a strong faith in God in accordance with their childhood backgrounds, and use their spiritual beliefs to aid their transitional identity and thus cope with stigmatization and discrimination. There are various ways of coping with their situation and progressing into their future lives. These include relying on God to save their lives (preventing suicide attempts), finding means of HIV treatment, and receiving deep love from family members despite their HIV status. Some participants feel that God punishes people who discriminate against them; they pray for continuity in their children's education and that their children might have peaceful lives while facing discrimination at school. In addition, they give credit to God for help in finding jobs, regardless of which religion they adhere to or their access to resources. They have been able to change their social capital into cultural capital, and their cultural capital into economic capital while going through their own life journeys.

Many PLHIV sufferers consider spirituality a powerful tool for managing family and social issues of stigmatization, discrimination and disruption. Irrespective of their religion, they believe God helps them solve the family and social issues they face after being diagnosed HIV positive. They believe that if they face less stigmatization and discrimination from their families and communities than other PLHIV sufferers (especially receiving love instead of discrimination from their parents), it is because of their longing for God (Jwala & Raju A). They also attribute finding jobs, better HIV treatment, and obtaining leadership training and informal education through organizations working in the field of HIV to the grace of God. Participants consider spirituality a reliable resource for their betterment, and a directive force for the remainder of their lives. They also redefine the purpose and meaning of their future lives and many say they pray to God. In Nepalese society, it is believed that God sees everything (Gita) and God is considered a companion in times of both pain and happiness. People learn about God from their families and societies from childhood, and the survey participants pray for better future lives. Rajesh, a male, shares his experience as follows: "I remember God. When I have a deep grief, I remember God. I have in faith of God. Every time I take medicine and sleep on the bed, I remember God". Similarly, Lila shares her experience of how she learned about and developed a strong faith in God:

> I am a Hindu. I prayed to God since I was a child and have faith in God. I used to take *brata* [fasting] and attend *puja* [a ritual associated with worshiping God]. My parents also had immense faith in God. They used to go on different pilgrimages in hope of recovery for their disabled sons. Both my brothers couldn't eat or drink by themselves. My father bought a he-goat and worshipped it and offered it to the Goddess. After that my younger brother who couldn't even get out of bed started eating and drinking

himself. Then, my parents' faith in God grew further still… I have immense faith in God.

Some participants find their spirituality has been a life saver in terms of preventing suicide attempts. Homilies preached by priests have "recalled" participants and directed them towards their own and family obligations. Some participants say that they gave up thinking of suicide, realizing that suicide is considered a highly sinful deed (Lila). At the same time, fulfilling their family obligations, especially rearing children, is seen as imperative for a mother and a virtue in this present world, which one needs to do in every situation, as stated in their religious texts. Lila shares how she decided not to commit suicide after her husband's death from AIDS: "Then, I remembered the teachings of Garun Puran [a Hindu religious book] and decided that I would not take the poison and that I would live on, at least for my little children".

Some participants also believe that God has helped them in finding a traditional healer for HIV, and that things have been made simpler, just as they have wished, because of their *Bhakal* (promise) given to God. Lila shares her experience of finding a traditional healer and how life became simpler by the grace of God:

> [God] made things simpler. After my husband's demise, I heard people say that HIV could be cured by taking herbal medicines given by [a] Vaidhya [traditional healer] who lived in [a certain] district. So, I sold my gold locket to get there and seek treatment. While starting my journey, I saw a temple and pledged that I would get the medicines. I took his medicines for one year. I don't know if they worked or not....On returning, I told my mother about the *Bhakal* (promise) I had made at the temple. She said that my pledge had been fulfilled, that I had met the man and got his medicines and so now I had to offer something to that temple. So, I worshipped with a sheep's kid and prayed again that nothing happen to me and my children for the next five years. After the promised five years, I again went back to the temple and made offerings in the names of my father, father-in-law, my husband's grandfather, my husband and my step-mother. I also recently made offering in my late mother's name after her yearly rites were performed. Once a soothsayer told me that I had witnessed a lot of troubles in my life because the Goddess had come inside of me. To get rid of my misery I needed to observe difficult fasting and praying. My ageing mother told me that the whole process was very difficult to follow. I should only do as much as my body would allow. I did so. I had immense faith in God.

Some participants state that they receive deep love from their families, even with their HIV status, and they give credit for this to the grace of God. Certain Christian participants have not experienced any HIV stigmatization and discrimination from their family members. They believe that their family members have been taught to love others as per the philosophy of Christianity. Jwala (from a Christian background) describes his experiences of the love which overcame HIV stigmatization and discrimination from his family members in this way:

> I am from a Christian background. We believe in Jesus that God cures all kind of diseases. When my elder sister knew that I was HIV positive, she did not take it very seriously. When my mother knew it, she loved me….I have never seen God but I believe that God is the healer. I believe in God very much. My father also believes in God very much….I think it is Christianity that made our homely environment very lovely and cooperative. All the family members have learned to love and serve from Christianity and so they love me.

Spirituality is believed to have helped some participants in finding a job. Becoming economically independent by working is seen as a means of reducing stigmatization and discrimination. Participants pray and attribute their success in finding a job to the grace of God.

Buddha believes God and her ancestors have made efforts to save her life from many ordeals and helped her to get a job. She believes credit for this goes to God and to the blessings of the ancestors. She shares her experiences in this way:

> I believe in God and in blessings of ancestors. I am doing all the rituals of the anniversary of my late husband and mother in law… I think it is not good to leave everything that our ancestors had shown in the path of worshiping God and the ancestors. I think that the credit goes to God for helping me make a success of my life by saving me from many ordeals… It seems to me that God has sent me to work at this organization.

Sushma also shares her experience of God helping her become economically independent: "Although I lost my husband due to HIV, I had reached to the mouth of death, I am now able to live by myself [economically independent] and I do not need any support from others. I feel that all these things [HIV treatment and economic independence] are attributed to God."

Policy Implications

Spirituality is one of the major factors in living positively. To address issues of the identity of PLHIV sufferers, it is necessary to guide people towards God and to follow God's paths, as it is written in Hindu and Christian religious books. This study has found several examples of research participants believing deeply that God has saved their lives in one or other way after being diagnosed HIV positive. The following section is therefore aimed at urging people become involved in spirituality, irrespective of their religion, in order to make life meaningful for themselves and others. It also attempts to help people become clear in knowledge of HIV and its treatment, of management of HIV stigmatization and discrimination, and of socio-economic empowerment.

Spirituality

In this study, PLHIV sufferers perceive spirituality as playing a vital role in changing their lives positively, by enhancing HIV awareness and improving their socio-economic status. Irrespective of any religion, spirituality provides compassion, love, affection, respect, and family and social harmony, which helps marginalised people such as PLHIV sufferers. Many females, especially widows and single women, receive a greater degree support from family, society and organizations while suffering from health and socio-economic problems. They want to give credit for this to God. Some have given up thoughts of suicide, recalling the teaching that suicide is sinful in Hindu belief. Likewise, some PLHIV sufferers have not faced stigmatization and discrimination in their families because of Christian beliefs, which teach the importance of love in family and society. PLHIV sufferers, either Hindu or Christian, have thus benefitted from spiritual teachings in one way or another. There are important policy implications for impacting the lives of people positively, despite them facing the stigmatization and discrimination attached to HIV. This study thus aims to encourage the preservation of religious and cultural values for the present and the future, in order to reconstruct the identity of marginalized communities and those who are stigmatized and discriminated against because of gender, caste and class.

HIV Education and Nutritional Habits

Health is one of the major factors in reducing stigmatization and discrimination, not only from a physical and mental perspective, but also from an economic and social perspective. PLHIV sufferers need to follow HIV treatment after diagnosis and gain knowledge of the disease. This knowledge relates to dietary habits, transmission of the disease, and the meaning of HIV and AIDS. Such a requirement places the responsibility on the HIV person, and not on stigmatization by society or culture. Knowledge about HIV helps those diagnosed become self-confident about their

own health and identity management. Therefore, people working in the field of HIV need to enhance awareness and knowledge of HIV. Treatment is the backbone in lessening stigma and discrimination. Following HIV treatment in hospitals, PLHIV sufferers feel themselves to be healthy, and they also seem healthy in the eyes of others. Thus it is necessary to make effective HIV treatment available to all PLHIV, including people living in rural areas. At the same time, it is also necessary to provide information on the availability of HIV treatment and its positive effectiveness in achieving health and prolonging life expectancy. After HIV treatment at hospital, PLHIV patients can be found working equally with others, even in farming, where they are not considered inferior to HIV negative people from a health perspective. Thus it is necessary to make effective HIV treatment available to all PLHIV sufferers, including those living in the rural areas.

Nutritious food is essential for physical and mental health and wellbeing, and relates to the personality of a person and his/her identity. This claim is supported by participants in reference to the physical appearance of rich versus poor PLHIV sufferers. In this study, some participants, aged sixty years and above, found that they could work as actively as other people. It would thus be fruitful to deliver knowledge of the importance of nutritious food in maintaining the immune system of PLHIV sufferers. This knowledge will also help them manage their social stigmatization and discrimination. Most importantly, a balanced diet seems to be as important as HIV treatment as it keeps people healthy and enhances their identity from a health perspective.

Socio-economic Empowerment

Social awareness and economic independence assist PLHIV sufferers to integrate in their families and society. This study demonstrates that PLHIV sufferers, especially females, do not face family and social stigmatization and discrimination after becoming socially and economically independent. Empowering PLHIV people, especially females, is necessary for them to become socially active. This is achieved by providing informal education, leadership training (including counselling on HIV and AIDS), and involvement in a circle of friends also living with HIV. Therefore, government and non-government organizations working in the field of HIV need to provide education and income-generating skills for PLHIV patients, especially widows and other females without economic support, so that they can fit in everywhere, either in individual or collective society, or as part of either a nuclear or an extended family. Empowerment through becoming socially active strengthens people in resisting HIV stigmatization and discrimination. As some participants express it, PLHIV patients need education for their field of employment, especially in organizations where they are working. Thus, organizations working in the field of HIV need to provide education and leadership training, not only for enhancing people's work efficiency, but also for resisting stigmatization and discrimination.

Furthermore, with regard to the economic independence of PLHIV sufferers, collective efforts in engaging in economic activities appear to be a good way of generating livelihood, especially in rural areas. In this study, some illiterate participants report initiating collective agricultural food production of wheat, maize, millet, vegetables and fruit etc., after buying farmland, as well as working other people's land. This kind of initiative in collective farming would be very useful in other parts of the country, especially in rural Nepal where agricultural land is available cheaply. As observed in my field work, some participants, irrespective of gender, caste, or class, have started living together as an association of PLHIV (using the same kitchen and the same residence). After gradually becoming economically independent, they are now gaining respect from other villagers. To multiply this programme effectively in other parts of Nepal, it would be advantageous to receive the support of the Nepal government, through both government and non-government organizations that are working for the empowerment of marginalised people.

Conclusion

In this study, many PLHIV sufferers consider spirituality to be a powerful tool in managing family and social issues of stigmatization and discrimination, and in reconstructing their identities. They feel much softer in their lives with the names of God, irrespective of any religion, whether they are Hindus or Christian. Spirituality plays an important positive role in changing the lives of PLHIV patients in Nepal. Spirituality and identity reconstruction also are intrinsically related to each other.

Acknowledgement

Aryal, Ram Prasad (Phd)
Lecturer
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Pokhara University, Nepal

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IN A WORLD WITHOUT LOVE:
SOCIETY, RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S 1Q84

Guevarra, Alona Ureta

ABSTRACT

Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* is a near-past novel set in Cold War Japan, where the system is run silently by a powerful religious group that can undermine individuals who go against it. As we delve into Murakami's Sakigake/Akebono cult, we delve also into the complexities of a postmodern Japan where neither good nor evil are clearly demarcated. To understand the role of religion that surfaces in the novel, this paper contextualizes organized religions in relation to the suppressed histories of modern Japan. It is the contention of this author that contemporary organized religions in Japan provide a venue for the liberation of suppressed ideals and histories. As mainstream society turns away from such issues, Murakami suggests that religious groups (as in the case of his fictional Sakigake/Akebono) address it.

Introduction

It was back in October 1995 that I first set foot in Tokyo as an exchange student in the University of Tokyo's AIKOM (Abroad in Komaba) program. When I arrived, it was already six months past the ill-fated day of March 20, 1995—a singular day in contemporary Japanese history on which the Japanese witnessed terror in their own homeland. It was six months past the Aum tragedy and I saw how there still hung an unbearable sense of anxiety in Tokyo, hidden under a layer of frosty calm.[1] Wanted posters of the perpetrators hung in all public areas, their photographs showing faces of young men and women, most of them looking as if they were only in their twenties or thirties. These "wanted terrorists" did not at all match the stereotype I had at that time of what terrorists were like. Back then, my image of the "bad guys" was tainted by my exposure to cinema and its portrayals of depth-less villains, mostly middle-aged males, with their token voluptuous vixens, who committed acts of evil "just because." Today, global cinema, as a response to social realities, is slowly breaking free from the portrayal of the stock James Bond villain. A case in point is found in the multi-awarded 1998 film *The Terrorist,* directed by Santosh Sivan; here a young woman, the central character, volunteers to be a suicide bomber. Then there is Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006), where four seemingly disparate narratives are unmasked as enmeshed. In

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[1] 1995 was also the year when Japan experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, or Kobe earthquake. The January 17 earthquake had a magnitude of 6.9 and killed approximately 5, 502 to 6,434 individuals according to the U.S. Geological Survey (2009).

Babel, the dispossessed from two sides of the world experience parallel realities. In the process of connecting the narratives, viewers are left to question what and who truly are the terrorists. Stepping out of the audio-visual fiction of cinema today, one is confronted with mainstream media reports of the varied backgrounds, profiles and reasons of those who are deemed terrorists. During my stay in Tokyo, I saw how the photographs of the wanted perpetrators of terror were crossed-out one by one, assuring the public that the long arm of the law was in full force. Japan did its best to prove to its people and the world that the country still ranks high globally among the safest nations. However, even with the arrests of the perpetrators, two questions still loomed heavily: is Japan truly as safe as it would like to present itself to the world? Or, would other groups soon also create chaos following the Tokyo attack?

In the Spring of 2015, in a Global Attitudes Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, it was divulged that from among nine Asian countries, the five nations of Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Australia and Indonesia viewed Japan positively or favorably.[2] A less favorable view of Japan was held by Pakistan, India, South Korea and China.[3] Japan's role in Asia has changed considerably over a hundred years. From being an imperialist nation that participated in and then initiated war during the two World Wars across the Asian continent, to its present embodiment as a parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy, a staunch ally of the U.S., and a global economic giant, Japan has transformed itself from an enemy to a popular ally of most current Asian states. And yet, at the turn of the millennium, Japan as a nation must once again re-invent itself and this time look inwardly at its society, for the myths it has created to propel growth and unity as a nation have clearly begun to develop deep cracks. In the face of the double disasters of 1995, Matsudo Yukio writes:

> In the face of these apocalyptic scenes the Japanese are experiencing the breakdown of their modern myths: the myths of economic development and permanent employment based on a work ethic of loyalty towards one's company, the myth of a secure environment guaranteed by modern technology and government administration, and the myth of a harmonious society based on national ethnic homogeneity. (Yukio 2001, 163)

The goal of this paper is to engage in the critique of contemporary Japanese society through the lens of literature, particularly that of the novel *1Q84* by the Japanese, best-selling and multi-awarded author, Haruki Murakami. Murakami's novel *1Q84* not only fulfills the author's desire to write a long, comprehensive novel in the manner of his literary influence, Fyodor Dostoevsky, or a dystopian novel in the manner of George Orwell, but more importantly, just as it was with both those literary greats, it also allows him to use his fiction as a vehicle for social commentary. In this case Murakami turns his lens on the entangled interests of nation, religion and the individual in Japan.

Japan's Global Writer

Murakami was born on January 12, 1949, into a generation that, by a hair, missed the horror of the Second World War. His generation is the one that helped transform the defeated, economically ravished Japan into Asia's economic giant between the late 1960s up to the late

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[2] Countries that view Japan favorably in the 2015 Pew Research Center's Asians Views of Each Other Survey: Malaysia (84 percent), Vietnam (82 percent), Philippines (81 percent), Australia (80 percent) and Indonesia 71 percent (Pew Research Center 2015, 4).

[3] Countries that view Japan less favorably in the same Pew Research Center Survey are: Pakistan (48 percent), India (46 percent), South Korea (25 percent) and China (12 percent) (ibid.).

1980s—known as the age of the bubble economy. Murakami's generation introduced what no other generation prior had brought to Japan—economic affluence. During the 1980s, Japan became the second largest economy in the world. With this, the Japanese acquired enough economic capital (economic assets held, i.e. property owned, and earning ability) to make their overseas presence significant. For instance, during the peak of the bubble economy, the Sony Company purchased Hollywood's Columbia Pictures, while the Mitsubishi Company purchased the Rockefeller Center for US$846 million (Wile 2013). With its newly acquired purchasing power, this is the generation of affluence that Murakami and some of his own generation later would find to be suffering from an emptiness brought about by a culture of hyper-consumption. As a reaction to such a condition in Japan's history, Murakami's fiction has themes of emptiness, loneliness and isolation. These themes appear in his early works, which are mostly set in this period of the bubble economy in Japanese history.

When necessary, Murakami is not afraid to use the most popular technology today, the Internet, to engage his readers in a conversation, and in effect, to engage with his literary works (e.g. as an online agony uncle, and in other online promotions). As a writer who began to use the Internet to communicate with his readers as early as 1997, we can say that Murakami is one of the earliest novelists to effectively use this medium to make himself and his works appealing and relevant to an increasingly younger readership, not only in Japan, but overseas as well.

Over the decades, Murakami has been instrumental in introducing contemporary Japanese literature overseas, a feat that earlier Japanese writers found difficult to accomplish. For instance, in South Korea, Noriko Kayanuma, a professor of Japanese literature at Choong Euk National University in South Korea, wrote that "[r]eaders develop empathy for the Japanese of their age through Murakami's books. They realize that Japanese young people have similar sentiments, worries and problems" (Kattoulas 2002). Similarly, reception of Murakami's work in other countries overseas has been positive and that is why Murakami himself "feels that he can go overseas and represent Japan, give Japan a face for many foreigners who will never come to Japan or have not come to Japan" (Kelts, 2009). For Inuhiko Yomota, Murakami's fiction, along with Japanese animation or anime, and Japanese-made computer games, give Japan the international cultural power that it lacked until the 1980s (Yomota 2008, 33).

Written materials that form the foundation of this article are primarily Murakami's novel *1Q84*, public interviews given by Murakami himself, his speeches, some book reviews, and academic journal articles. Unfortunately, this researcher has limited knowledge of the Japanese language, which means that data for the article are limited to those materials available in English. If there is any silver lining in this, it is that the richness of the English-language materials solidifies Murakami's impact in the English-speaking world, which in turn points to his privileged position in global literature today, where English remains the strongest *lingua franca*. Moreover, examining Murakami from the vantage point of English language sources might be more effective, because as Masaki Mori states, he "seems to be more inclined to speak publicly while abroad and to grant interviews to Western publications" (Mori 2012, 220).

Notes on the Publication and Reception of *1Q84*

Murakami was already a professional fiction writer at the top of the global literary game when he embarked on the three-volume, 925-page (in English translation) behemoth of a novel, *1Q84* (ichi-kew-hachi-yon), published in Japan in May 2009 (Books 1 and 2), and in April 2010 (Book 3). That he was already in a position of dominance in the global literary field cannot be emphasized enough. It must be borne in mind that no new writer in the literary field should ideally start with a project of such ambitious length, for no new writer will find it easy to enter the field of literature and receive support from the literary establishment, most importantly, from a publisher, to release a multi-volume work such as this. Yet in this age of digital connectivity and plunging book sales,

and due to the literary/cultural capital that Murakami had amassed over his years of writing, New York-based publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, gave a nod of approval to this work, and in a further illustration of faith in its author, allowed the translation in English to be unabridged.

It should also be emphasized that translation of the volumes that comprise *1Q84* began from their native Japanese to English as soon as they were released by local publisher, Shinchosha. The demand by foreign readers for the novel's translation was so high that Murakami's translators worked non-stop to meet publishers' deadlines coast to coast. Eventually the first translation by the Korean, Yun Ok Yang, was released by the publisher Munhakdongne on August 1, 2009. It was the first piece to transform Book 1 of Murakami's *1Q84* into a different language and it did so less than three months after the novel's release.

Murakami's novel was written and developed over three years. According to multiple sources, the title is a play on the Japanese pronunciation of the year 1984, and a reference to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The letter Q and the Japanese number 9 (typically romanized as "kyū", but as "kew" on the book's Japanese cover) are homophones, and are often used in Japanese wordplay.

The Burden of Reading Murakami

> "Even without knowing anything about the book, I decided tobuy and read [1Q84] anyway because I trust Mr. Murakami. Any book of his would be fun."
> Kanae Miyazu, Tokyo photographer, and long-time reader of Murakami (quoted in Thangham 2009)

By the time Murakami wrote *1Q84*, he had already carved out a literary space for himself in two fields, the local/national and the global. His work at this point was able to combine his concerns in both areas through his fantastic style of the 1980s, which developed into what is referred to as "Murakamiesque," and which became his ticket to global fame. Later with his novels, especially *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1995-1997) and *1Q84* there is a more conscious political slant to his writing.

Murakami's salient consciousness as a political agent was emphasized in his speech when he received the Jerusalem prize in 2009 ("The Novelist in Wartime"). Here he labels himself as a fiction writer who is a "professional spinner of lies." He explained in his speech that the role of the fictionist-liar is be to someone who:

> by telling skillful lies—which is to say, by making up fictions that appear to be true—can bring a truth out to a new location and shine a new light on it. In most cases, it is virtually impossible to grasp a truth in its original form and depict it accurately. This is why [the novelist tries] to grab its tail by luring the truth from its hiding place, transferring it to a fictional location, and replacing it with a fictional form.

In his more vocal political stance Murakami states what his readers already know from his fiction—that he is a writer championing the individual, a rare breed in modern societies, and especially in his native Japan where a combination of conservatism and the drive to modernize have made the rise of the individual difficult, almost impossible. In the same speech, Murakami states:

> I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and shine a light upon it. The purpose of a story is to sound an alarm, to keep a light trained on The System in order to prevent it from tangling our souls in its web and demeaning them. I fully believe it is the novelist's job to keep trying to clarify the uniqueness of each individual soul by writing stories—stories of life and death, stories of love, stories that make people cry and quake with fear and shake with

laughter. This is why we [fiction writers] go on, day after day, concocting fictions with utter seriousness. (Murakami 2009b)

Murakami's readers, especially his East Asian readers, are very supportive of his consistent advocacy of the individual. Murakami has become a symbol for the region in providing a voice for the generation of post-World War II disenfranchised youth. This is the generation of those who experienced firsthand the need for student protest in the 1960s, an experience that was something closely shared by Japan and other Asian countries during that time in the Cold War. This 1960s generation of Japan also experienced a strong feeling of alienation in the face of the rapid and soulless modernization that continued into the 1970s and 1980s.

Murakami's works provide an inspiration to writers, especially in East Asia, to reach out across generations to try to bring back a human face to modernity.

1Q84 as Counter Memory

At the very heart of the novel 1Q84 is a love story. If in earlier Murakami works the mystery of the plot is tied up to something amorphous—The System—in this, more than any other Murakami novel, the mystery is connected with the power of love. It is a love that defies The System, defies time, and defies reality (to paraphrase the description on the novel's dust jacket). The main plot of the novel revolves around the seemingly impossible reunion of thirty-year-old Aomame with her twenty-nine-year-old childhood sweetheart, Tengo. Although they have not seen each other for twenty years, the affection they felt for each other grows as they mature into adults. Although both lead highly individualistic, independent lives, it is that childhood connection they want to return to. It is the impossibility of crossing paths again, after decades of not seeing each other and of seemingly having little in common as adults, that creates an air of mystery in the novel. Will fate allow them to meet and carry on the love they felt for each other as children? It is quite unlikely, given the situations they find themselves in. And yet a longing inside of them cannot be silenced.

As children, they are not even friends. The girl, Aomame, is too different from her classmates. Her parents are active members of a religious group, the Society of Witnesses (which is described quite like a mixture of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, although Murakami never confirms this in any interview). Her religion makes her stand out from her classmates, which is not an easy situation for young people in Japan. The Japanese educational system even today maintains a uniform way of doing things. Japanese society still reveres tradition; in Japan, communal identity is favored over that of the individual. As a member of the Society, Aomame has to pray in a loud voice before she takes her meals. This, coupled with her introversion, later makes her a target for bullying. Further, Aomame has to accompany her parents on Sundays to proselytize. It is during some of those Sundays that she and Tengo cross paths.

Tengo loses his mother at an early age and is raised by an indifferent father who insists that he join him on Sundays to collect subscribers' fees for the government-run television channel, NHK. His father uses Tengo's presence as a strategy to collect the fees; for adults usually do not refuse to pay in the presence of a child. Tengo detests those Sundays. He would rather study his lessons than be with his indifferent father. Tengo is both a math and a martial arts (Judo) prodigy. His future as a student has promise and yet his father insists that he do this Sunday chore, which embarrasses Tengo tremendously. Similarly, during that period, Aomame feels a yearning to break free from the shackles of her religion. It is with this loneliness and helplessness that they look at each other during those instances that their paths cross as children.

Then, one time at school when Aomame is being bullied, Tengo steps in and prevents the other students from attacking her. It is the first time that someone from school stands up to protect Aomame. It is soon after this incident that Aomame musters the courage to come up to Tengo, not to say something, but just to hold his hand. Aomame holding Tengo's hand as a girl is significant,

for in that moment two lonely children, two lonely individuals, find a human connection; they find a love that is pure and not yet corrupted by life in an indifferent world. It is this connection, this pure love, that motivates the two, even as adults who have lost contact with each other over the years, to find each other. Intuitively they knew that meeting again is something that they must make happen.

So it is around this impossible love story between Aomame and Tengo that *1Q84*'s revolves. They are bound to meet and do so after a long period of hoping and trying. They meet in an alternate reality that they enter, the reality of *1Q84* that is the alternate 1984 that they find themselves caught in. The entire novel runs for nine months. The separate titles of each book in the trilogy show this: Book 1 April-June, Book 2 July-September and Book 3 October–December.

In Chapter 1 of Book 1, the character of Aomame is introduced while she is in a taxi on her way to meet a client in the Shibuya district of Tokyo. The taxi driver, quite unusually, plays classical music in his vehicle. Aomame, being fond of history, identifies the piece as Janacek's "Sinfonietta." The music is composed in 1926, which incidentally is a significant year in Japanese history as it is the year when the era of the Taishō emperor ends and the era of Shōwa starts. The latter is the age that yields rapid modernization and economic growth in Japan. The insertion of the Sinfonietta here in a Japanese setting in 1984 is clearly an allusion by Murakami to the historical context of the novel. 1984 is still within the era of Showa and it is a year that still enjoys the rewards of Japan's bubble economy.

As the heavy traffic forces the vehicles to move at crawling pace, the taxi driver (an enigmatic character who never resurfaces in the novel) suggests to Aomame she use an emergency stairway off the elevated highway. This stairway will help her access the subway and get her to her meeting on time. Interestingly the driver, who does not listen to the news on his radio, is confident about the flow of the traffic. He even tells Aomame that the news reports cannot be trusted: "If you really want to know what's happening here and now, you've got to use your own eyes and your own judgment" (Murakami 2011, 6). Before leaving the vehicle, the driver gives her a warning that: "things are not always what they seem" (9), and the warning from the driver is the key to unlocking the worldview of 1Q84. Through the driver's advice to Aomame to use her intuition and look beneath the surface of what is there in reality, readers are also prepared to sharpen their interpretive abilities. Holding on to this advice will carry one through the entirety of the rabbit hole of the novel. When she asks the taxi driver what he means, he says: "after you do something like that [using the emergency stairway], the everyday look of things might seem to change a little. Things may look different to you than they did before…But don't let appearances fool you. There's always only one reality" (9).

As noted, the warning given by the taxi driver is the motif in this novel. Interestingly, Aomame herself at this early point in the book is not what she seems. Dressed as an office lady on her way to a meeting with a client, Aomame is not in the least connected with any professional registered business. The meeting is with a highly secretive leader of a religious cult. There she is welcomed as a masseuse. Although Aomame does have background in massage therapy, her real business with the leader is to carry out a directive to kill him, vigilante style.

When Aomame follows the driver's advice to take the emergency staircase, she does indeed enter a time which is not quite the 1984 (the year in which the novel is set) she knows. In Book 1, Chapter 3, for instance, Aomame notices that a policeman's uniform and service firearm are different. For someone who pays close attention to police uniforms, she finds it odd that there appears a seemingly abrupt change. In Chapter 7, Aomame then asks Tamaru, the bodyguard who works for her own employer, when the police got new uniforms and guns, to which he replies:

> That big shootout near Lake Motosu between the Yamanashi Prefectural/Police and the radical group took place in mid-October of 1981, and the police had their major reorganization the following year. Two years ago….It was really bloody. Old-fashioned six shooters against five Kalashnikov AK-47s. They look as if they'd been

stitched on a sewing machine. The Self-Defense force got involved right away, sending in their paratroopers. The cops totally lost face. Prime Minister Nakasone immediately got serious about strengthening police power. There was an overall restructuring, a special weapon force was instituted, and ordinary patrolmen were given ordinary high-powered automatic pistols to carry—Beretta Model 92s. (85-86)

Historically there was no actual shoot-out as described in the novel. What is worth noting is that such an incident is quite believable if one looks at the political context of Japan in 1984. The Japan of 1984 is a Japan of economic prosperity, but this economic prosperity occurs in the era of the Cold War where Japan has become a staunch U.S. ally and views all opposition groups as infiltrators coming from the communist bloc. Thus there is urgency in Japan (as well as in most U.S. allied nations in Asia) to annihilate dissident groups out of fear that the democratic states will be victimized by communist scheming. Aomame, upon hearing about the shooting from Tamaru, already feels that something strange is occurring. To understand these surprising social changes, she heads to a ward library close to her home to read newspapers from September to November 1981. While reading the old papers she realizes that there are many events she does not know about. She concludes that this is quite impossible since she always keeps up to date with current events. She then reasons that:

It's not me but the world that's deranged. Yes, that settles it. At some point in time, the world I knew either vanished or withdrew, and another world came to take its place. Like the switching of a track. In other words, my mind here and now, belongs to the world that was, but the world itself has already changed into something else……Parallel worlds. (106-107)

Upon accepting that indeed she has "switched to a different track" or reality Aomame decides: "1Q84—that's what I'll call this new world…Q is for 'question mark.' A world that bears a question…Like it or not, I'm here now, in the year 1Q84. The 1984 that I knew no longer exists. It's 1Q84 now" (110).

Exit "Big Brother," Enter "Little People"

1Q84's title, as mentioned, is a clear reference to George Orwell's novel of dystopia, *1984*, but Murakami does this with a twist. If Orwell wrote about a grim future under the watchful eye of a Big Brother, Murakami writes a near-past novel in *1Q84* where the System is carried out by "Little People." One of the characters, Professor Ebisuno, explains to Tengo the shift from Big Brother to the Little People:

George Orwell introduced the dictator Big Brother in his novel *1984,* as I'm sure you know. The book was an allegorical treatment of Stalinism, of course. And ever since then, the term "Big Brother" has functioned as a social icon. That was Orwell's great accomplishment. But now, in the real year 1984, Big Brother is all too famous, and all too obvious. If Big Brother were to appear before us now, we'd point to him and say, "Watch out! He's Big Brother!" There's no longer any place for a Big Brother in this real world of ours. Instead, these so-called Little People have come on the scene….The Little People are an invisible presence. We can't tell whether they are good or evil, or whether they have any substance or not. But they seem to be steadily undermining us. (236)

1Q84 then, is a near-past novel set in Cold War Japan, where the system is run silently by a powerful group that has the power to undermine individuals who go against them. The question of whether the Little People are good or evil depends on an individual's stance. In short, one's

perspective determines whether to view the Little People as friend or foe. This brings to mind what the taxi driver told Aomame: "things are not what they seem" and that one must use one's own judgment to know what is true.

Why does Murakami use the form of a near-past novel in this work instead of following Orwell's lead in writing about the future? Murakami has undergone a change in his worldview after tragedies of personal, national and international nature. The first tragedy is that his friends and parents have died. Murakami is in his sixties, after all. Second, his native Japan suffered natural catastrophes in the form of the Kobe earthquake or the Great Hanshin Earthquake on January 17, 1995. And third, Japan was attacked through the bioterrorist act of the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo on March 20, 1995. In 2001, the 9/11 attack happened in the United States and was viewed as a global act of terror.[4] During this almost decade of unrest, Murakami underwent a serious form of reflection and change. He had to position himself politically; his days of being apolitically "cool" were over.

The two disasters in Japan struck a chord in Murakami, who in the past was unable to identify his connection to his country. Murakami was in the U.S. when these disasters struck, but he soon found himself back in his home country. Moreover, he started his work on his non-fiction essay/interview collection on the Aum Shinrikyo survivors and even interviewed some of the perpetrators. He made two works from these: *Underground* and *The Place that was Promised*. In the *Yomiuri Shimbun* interview with Mariko Ozaki, he states:

> The series of incidents involving Aum followers made us seriously question just what the definition of "ethical" should be in contemporary society. I started following Aum matters so I could reassess the current situation from the viewpoints of both good and evil. We live in an era in which it is extremely difficult to have a one-sided socio-ethical judgment on what is an absolutely right opinion or action. The wall separating people who would commit crime from those who wouldn't is flimsier than you might think. Reality exists in the hypothetical and vice versa.
> There is anti-establishment within establishment and vice versa. I wanted to write a novel encompassing this contemporary social system in its entirety. That's why I gave names to almost every person in the novel and fleshed out their characters in detail, so that it couldn't be unnatural for any of us to be one of them.[5] (Ozaki, 2009)

Murakami wanted to use his novel *1Q84*, a novel of the distant past set in Japan, to enable himself and people of this age to come to terms with what is called "the present" and with all the socio-ethical changes that people of today need to confront. Clearly the point of the novel is to come to grips with this world, which has become scarred by big and small acts of terror and questioning. The novel functions as a beacon of hope to the demoralized to continue to live as individuals, despite the restrictions and acts of terror.

Thus it comes as no surprise that one of the sub-plots of this novel focuses on a religious cult. Murakami uses the novel to show why such religious groups are unstoppable institutions, no matter how modern a country is. Academician, government official and former president of the Tokyo Foundation, Hideki Kato, states that "most people expect religion to fill the gap that [he refers] to existing between man and other forms." He explains further: "It is my conviction that the Japanese people inherently have very strong religious feelings but that this is being rapidly lost in modern society, especially in urban areas."

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[4] Murakami considered the 9/11 attack surreal, and it appears that his recent fiction had focused on making sense of the upsurge of global terrorist attacks. In an interview, he states: "To me 9/11 does not feel like an incident that took place in the real world. Somewhere, there must be a world in which this didn't happen (Kubota 2009)."

[5] The novel Murakami refers to would become his *1Q84*.

It is the link that holds together the Little People, the religious groups, the modern world, and the love story of two highly individualistic characters, all set in modern Japan, that Murakami presents us in *1Q84*.

Trying to make sense of his political position in the contemporary age and seeking to use the novel as a form for addressing socio-political issues, Murakami wrote *1Q84* as a means of re-examining our perspective about what is deemed history, and of re-examining our notion of what is real. *1Q84* is a novel that challenges individual, national (Japanese), and global representations of reality or history. This is clear when Murakami uses the character Tengo as his mouthpiece. When Tengo comments about the Orwell novel in his conversation with Fuka-Eri, he states:

> In his novel, George Orwell depicted the future as a dark society dominated by totalitarianism. People are rigidly controlled by a dictator named Big Brother. Information is restricted, and *history is constantly being rewritten.* The protagonist works in a government office, and I'm pretty sure his job is to rewrite words. *Whenever a new history is written, the old histories all have to be thrown out. In the process words are remade, and the meanings of current words are changed. What with history being rewritten so often, nobody knows what is true anymore. They lose track of who is an enemy and who is an ally. It's that kind of story...Robbing people of their actual history is the same as robbing them of part of themselves. It's a crime.* (257, italics mine)

Tengo's discussion with Fuka-Eri clearly shows what the novel attempts to do as it creates a worldview—that is, it re-assesses what is passed on as history, examines what factors challenge this history, and accepts the necessity to re-write history for the people of today. The novel tells us what to suspect in old and new histories, what they contain, and what they dismiss or marginalize.

Literature and History

At this point, one may do well to reflect on the relationship between literature and history. Earlier I quoted from Murakami's Jerusalem speech, where he describes his job as a fiction writer as being that of "a professional spinner of lies." Fiction writers, unlike other members of society (i.e. politicians, blue collar workers, etc.) are *encouraged* by the public to tell "bigger" lies in their work. From Murakami's Jerusalem speech, we can clearly see that literature functions as an extension of writing history, especially the history that has been omitted from a people's official history. In Japan for instance, the history of the Ainu, and Japan's war atrocities, are not widely known. Literature serves to balance views of what is deemed as reality, which is very problematic for truth "is virtually impossible to grasp…in its original form," and the telling of historical truth cannot be done "accurately" (Murakami 2009b). Yet the fiction writer's job is always to draw attention to the malaise in what Murakami refers to as "the System"—which encompasses the government or any ruling institution. The lies of fiction do attempt to contain the elusive truth that is dismissed in popular or mainstream history. Murakami then is calling for a historical "revisionism" and he is using his fiction as his tool. What does it mean to be a historical revisionist? Giovanni C. Cattini discusses this:

> Today we take to be revisionist all the interpretations that, whether coming from university chairs or cultural pundits, try to dismantle the "truths," at times mythologized, of traditional historiography. Even so, it should be said that in the universities all the historical views that try to question some of the crucial developments in modern and contemporary history are also understood as revisionism—from the French Revolution (1789-1799) to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), from communism to fascism and Nazism, and even the Holocaust—with

the idea of reinterpreting certain historical events in the light of new facts, elements, and from a scientifically neutral perspective. (Cattini 2011, 31)

To further understand the importance of literature in re-shaping history, let us now turn to a recent development in the study of literature and history. Today the study of history has become the study of memory. Astrid Erll, in her introduction to the book *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008), argues that people have

> *different modes of remembering in culture*. This approach proceeds from the basic insight that the past is not given, but instead is continually reconstructed and re-presented. Thus, our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. This holds true not only for what is remembered (facts, data), but also for how it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes. *As a result there are different modes of remembering identical past events*. (7, italics mine)

Literature is one of the most utilized receptacles containing the history/memory of the individual and collective society. Japan, with its long history from a classical civilization, to a closed nation, to an imperial nation, then a capitalist leader, and now its current state of recession and aging population, needs to re-connect and perhaps re-imagine its past, in order to understand the meaning of Japan for itself and the world.[6]

It must be understood though, that a literary work, much like the reader who consumes it, cannot stand on its own. It is the paradox of human being (and text!) that we value our individuality, but we need our community to provide purpose to that individuality. Both human and text need other human beings and texts to have meaning. As Renate Lachmann writes:

> Literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions. Literature inscribes itself in a memory space into which earlier texts have inscribed themselves. It does not leave these earlier texts as it finds them but transforms them in absorbing them. The memory of a text is its intertextuality. Intertextuality, as the term is conceived in literary scholarship, is the semantic interchange, the contact between texts—literary and non-literary. (Lachmann 2004, 172-173)

A text is intertextual with other texts. Knowledge can then be perceived as a product of all these interconnections formed by human beings and their cultural products, texts. Murakami's fiction, as represented here by the comprehensive novel *1Q84*, is a work that aims to make the suppressed histories of modern Japan apparent.

Issues surrounding the imperialist practice of the Japanese forces in Asia during the second world war, the internal colonization that modern Japan experienced, the breakdown of Japan's economy and the psychological effects that the Japanese suffered because of it, as well as the changing role of Japanese women in their society, are but some of the suppressed issues in Japan that Murakami depicts in his works, particularly in *1Q84*. Moreover, *1Q84* is a work that envisions a healing of past wounds for those who created those wounds in the first place—the Japanese, and everyone else. We, regardless of our national affinity, are connected to Japan's history; it is our history as global citizens also.

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[6] Grimes and Schaede describe Japan's economy in the twenty-first century as changed. "In contrast to most of the postwar era, which had been a period of growing opportunities, the 1990s and early twenty-first century were characterized by growing constraints. Legal, political, and economic changes both within and outside Japan had narrowed the possibilities for policy makers and corporations seeking to protect firms and sectors from the challenges of an ever more competitive marketplace" (2003, 17).

1Q84's   General Themes

I now move into a close reading of the novel. I have identified six general issues or themes that emerge from a close-reading of *1Q84*. First, is the use of Tengo Kawana's character to discuss the issue of history as a form of counter-memory. Second, is the politics of the publishing world in relation to authorship and book publication as seen in the publication of Fuka-Eri's *Air Chrysalis*. Third is the use of the three characters, Fuka-Eri, Aomame and the Dowager as the three faces of women in the novel (the maiden, the mother-warrior and the crone), which is important when considering the changing role of Japanese women today. Fourth is the issue of gender and the issue of citizenship as exemplified by the character of Tamaru, a homosexual character whose citizenship is caught in an unresolved historical issue. Fifth is the rise of religious groups in the face of modernity, as represented by Sakigake and its splinter group, Akebono. The sixth and last theme is the representation of a social outcast in a group-think society like Japan, personified by the spy, Ushikawa. For this paper I focus on the fifth theme, which intersects society, religion and the individual.

The History of *1Q84's* Sakigake and Akebono Groups

When things are becoming very dangerous for the life of the then ten-year-old Fukuda Eriko (nicknamed, Fuka-Eri), she is given instructions by her father, who is also the leader of the religious group, to sneak out of the commune and find her way to the home of his trusted friend, Professor Ebisuno. The professor, as he is referred to, is a cultural-anthropologist of some repute before he leaves the university. The surname Ebisuno is quite fitting since it translates as "field of savages." The professor lives "in a rural area some distance from Tokyo in a place called Futamatao [trans. *Forked Tail*]. He is a thinly built man, probably no taller than five foot three, probably in his mid-sixties" (119).

The professor meets Fuka-Eri's father in the university where they work for the same department. It is said that "although they had different worldviews and personalities they got on well. They both married late, had daughters soon after the marriage and lived in the same faculty apartment building." When the riots over the United States-Japan Security Treaty escalate in 1970, resulting in deaths, the professor decides to leave the university. He does not want to be caught up in what he refers to as the "clash of organizations." He is not a believer in any form of social organization. Two years after the Professor quits the university, Fuka-Eri's father leaves it too, but he takes a different path from the professor.

During the 1960s, Fuka-Eri's father, Tamotsu Fukada, is a very idealistic young professor who is influenced by the pervasive communist ideology of the time. The professor says that Fukada organizes a group of students on campus into something like a Red Guard and this incident causes him to be dismissed from the university. After his dismissal, Fukada forms a commune he calls the Takashima Academy with the ten core students from his Red Guard unit. The professor says that what Fukada aims to create is a utopia. However, his utopian world ends up like the utopia in Orwell's novel (121).

The commune supposedly supports itself by farming. In 1974, the group purchases fields and houses in the mountains of the depopulated Yamanashi Prefecture. The professor knows that Fukada contributes some of his own money to the purchase of the land, but is unsure where the group's other sources of income originate, which leads to speculations that the group has rich benefactors with an ulterior motive. The newly established commune is renamed "Sakigake" (meaning "Forerunner"). It is the first ecological farming group of its time (123). The group begins attracting the attention of other idealistic young people, mostly professionals who turn away from city-life to live with them. The membership in the group increases. Yet there are also those who leave after not finding the satisfaction they are looking for in the communal lifestyle of the group.

For some years the commune enjoys a peaceful co-existence with the original dwellers of Yamanashi Prefecture. Their vegetable produce is sold or traded and becomes staples of households there. Sakigake, like all human organizations, also has political problems internally. The professor shares:

> [E]ventually the commune split into two distinct factions….On one side was a militant faction, a revolutionary group based on the Red guard unit that Fukada had originally organized. For them, the farming commune was strictly preparatory for the revolution….On the other side was the moderate faction. As the majority, they shared the militant faction's opposition to capitalism, but they kept some distance from politics, instead preferring the creation of a self-sufficient communal life in nature…the two factions of the Sakigake commune parted ways [in 1976]…The moderate faction continued to call itself "Sakigake" and remained in the original village, while the militant faction [Akebono] moved to a different, abandoned village a few miles away and made it the base of their revolutionary movement. (125)

In 1979, the Sakigake faction is granted official recognition as a religion (146), which immunizes it from any criminal investigation by the police (147). Since they part ways at the university, Professor Ebisuno and Fukada lose contact with each other, so it comes as a surprise to the professor that Fuka-Eri ends up being sent to him. He understands the desperation of Fukada's action. He knows Fukada, who is now known as the leader, is in a difficult situation even in the group that he himself has created. For this reason, the professor thinks it a good move to have the story dictated by Fuka-Eri published and circulated. This story reaches Tengo in the form of a manuscript for revision. As the professor tells Tengo: "What I am hoping is that I can spread bait to guide the attention of the media toward Eri's parents. *Where are they now, and what are they doing?* In other words, I want the media to do for me what the police can't or won't do" (233).

The last time that the professor hears about Sakigake and Akebono is when the two stage a gun battle with the police in the mountains near Lake Motosu (126). This is the same incident that Aomame researches, and that later, according to her conversation with Tamaru, becomes the reason why the police are given new uniforms and guns. Akebono is a group that has no future in the Japan of the 1980s, which is already reaping the rewards of capitalism. The communist backbone of Akebono will not be enough to support itself in the coming age (269).

Consequently, due to the controversy surrounding Akebono and its link to Sakigake, the once very private communal group/religion begins attracting the curiosity of society. For this reason, a press conference is held to clear the group of further speculation. According to Sakigake's spokesperson:

> We do not have any set, clear-cut doctrine….We perform theoretical research on early Buddhism and put into actual practice the ascetic disciplines that were engaged in back then, aiming for a more fluid religious awakening but rather than the individual awakenings come first….One after another, people who have sensed the emptiness of competitive society's materialism have entered our gates in search of a different and deeper spiritual axis. Many of them are highly educated professionals with social standing. (268)

When Aomame begins her own research into the group and asks for the aid of Ayumi, a policewoman-friend, Ayumi tell her that Sakigake is not a quasi-religion, it is a cult:

> Sakigake calls itself a religion, and it even has official certification, but it's totally lacking any religious *substance*. Doctrine-wise, it's kind of deconstructionist or something, just a jumble of *images* of religion thrown together. They've added some new-age spiritualism, fashionable academism, a return to nature, anti-capitalism,

occultism, and stuff, but that's all: it has a bunch of flavors, but no substantial core. Or maybe that's what it's all about: this religion's substance is its lack of substance. In McLuhanesque terms, the medium is the message. Some people might find that cool. (289)

What the public does not know is that within the confines of Sakigake a new form of leadership has emerged where Fukada/Leader only functions as something symbolic, and the real power is emanating from the mysterious entities called Little People. Aomame learns about this the night she is tasked with killing the Leader.

Aomame as an assassin is under the employ of the rich, mysterious Mrs. Ogata (the Crone representation in the text) (255-59). During the night that Aomame poses as a masseuse in order to carry out the Dowager's orders, she is surprised to find that the Leader, now a blind, weak man, is not what she expected from the description given him, that of a cult-leader who is also a child-rapist. What she sees is a calm, gentle man who inspires trust. He is also world-weary, and even before Aomame gets to ask him anything, he is already aware of what she is set to do and welcomes his own death. This amazes Aomame and makes her recognize that this Leader is no ordinary man. They have a conversation that illuminates many uncertain areas about Sakigake. According to the Leader, the Little People find their group through the aid of the child Fuka-Eri, his daughter. Little People is a name that Fuka-Eri gives them: "*They* have been called by many different names, but in most cases, have not been called anything at all. *They were simply there*" (445). These entities give the Leader special powers that allow him the gift of prophecy and healing. In return "they have impressed certain demands upon [him]. Their desires have become [his] desires—implacable desires that [he is] unable to defy" (445).

A controversial aspect of what the Little People demand from him is that he has to perform a taboo: "physical relations with girls who still had not reached maturity" (446). This is something that the Leader does not want to do, but the Little People overpower his body. The plot at this point turns philosophical. For the Leader, the act of copulation in this state is not a physical act, but something that is a spiritual or even philosophical. He mentions the division of the Self into *dohta* and *maza*. The *dohta* is also the Perceiver, the shadow of one's heart and mind. The *maza* is the physical body, the receiver. The discussion in the novel about this suggests that the principle behind the union between *dohta* and *maza*—the perceiver and receiver—is to restore balance in nature; the participants in the act have no emotion about it at all (see 462-83). Fuka-Eri, who becomes instrumental in bringing the Little People to the world is given the title of Perceiver and her father is the Receiver. The conceptual and impersonal or abstract union of the two creates the balance that the Little People want to maintain.

Therefore, at least in Aomame's mind, as difficult as it is to believe, she becomes sympathetic to the Leader. Further, she learns that the complexity of what transpires in Sakigake mirrors the complexity and mystery of the so-called Little People, who are neither good nor evil. As the Leader explains to her:

Where there is light, there must be shadow, where there is shadow, there must be light. There is no shadow without light and no light without shadow….We do not know if the so-called Little People are good or evil. This is, in a sense, something that surpasses our understanding and our definitions. We have lived with them since long, long ago—from a time before good and evil even existed, when people's minds were still benighted. But the important thing is that, whether they are good or evil, light or shadow, whenever they begin to exert their power, a compensatory force comes into being. In my case, when I became an "agent" of the so-called Little People, my daughter became something like an agent for those forces opposed to the Little People. In this way, the balance was maintained. (465)

What the Leader points out here is that, within every group, even a religious one, factions necessarily emerge and these factions also create a sense of balance for the group. Aomame further asks, "Are God and the Little people opposites? Or two sides of the same thing?" To which the Leader answers, "Good and evil are not fixed, stable entities but are continually trading places. A good may be transformed into an evil in the next second. And vice versa….The most important thing is to maintain the balance between the constantly moving good and evil. If you lean too much in either direction, it becomes difficult to maintain actual morals. Indeed, *balance itself is the good…*" (447, italics mine).

Before the Leader succumbs to death by poisoning, he shares with Aomame the reality of 1984 and 1Q84. He tells her these are actually the same places, the same worlds, where the difference between the two is dependent on one's interpretation: "1984 and 1Q84 are fundamentally the same in terms of how they work. If you don't believe in the world, and if there is no love in it, then everything is phony. No matter which world we are talking about, no matter what *kind* of world we are talking about, the line separating fact from hypothesis is practically invisible to the eye. It can only be seen with the inner eye, the eye of the mind" (463). The key to solving the mystery of 1Q84 then, is love, the same type of selfless love that Aomame and Tengo believe they have for each other.

Conclusion

While Murakami was writing his Western-influenced fiction overseas and accumulating literary capital through awards and book-sales, Japan as a nation had its own issues to contend with. On a national-level, the 1990s brought about Japan's biggest economic recession; it also was a time of social unrest heightened by the religious cult, Aum Shinrikyo's gas attack, which proved that Japan's prosperity was not able to address issues pertaining to the psyche of the Japanese people. Postwar Japanese are perceived to lack a deeper purpose in their lives after reaching economic prosperity. The old community spirit has been abandoned in impersonal big cities such as Tokyo. Murakami was quick to sense this and used his fiction to unveil often hidden aspects of Japanese society and history. His recent fictional works, such as *1Q84*, signal a strengthening of social commitment in his writing. In this novel Murakami put forward his thoughts about historical revisionism with which he sought to inspire his Japanese readers into introspection about their society. Interestingly, the writing formula of his novels, including *1Q84,* work even when translated. Murakami's global readers also take a deep interest in the themes of his more recent works. As proof, these latter novels have been given literary awards, while at the same time figuring in bestseller lists worldwide.

Guevarra, Alona Ureta (PhD)
Assistant Professor
Department of English,
Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

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GRASSROOTS THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES AS A THIRD WAY BEYOND PENTECOSTAL AND LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

Sadje, Hadje Cresencio

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to conduct a critical evaluation of the theological claims made in Simon Chan's book entitled *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (2014). Chan argues Asian liberation theologians became elitist because they failed to take seriously the ethnographic concerns (personal healing, freedom from debt, and deliverance from evil spirits) of Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. In *Grassroots Asian Theology* Chan addresses the subject intensively and, in contrast to the Asian liberationists, proposes the notion of "ecclesial experience" as a concrete expression of grassroots Asian theology. Ecclesial experience, as Chan further argues, reflects and is derived from the lived experiences of the people of God. In other words, an authentic formulation of grassroots Asian theology requires cooperation between the lay person and the theologian. Firstly, this researcher attempts an exposition of several concepts that Chan repeatedly uses: grassroots Asian theology, ecclesial experience, and cultural experience. However, the difference between grassroots Asian theologies (Pentecostalism/Charismatic movements) and elite theologies (Asian liberation theologies) appears to be the central motif of Chan's book. In the end, the researcher critically evaluates the accuracy and relevance of Chan's concept of grassroots Asian theology.

Introduction

Most Filipinos consider religion a central part of their lives. For instance, the 2017 Social Weather Survey (first quarter) reports that 48 percent of Filipino adults attend religious services weekly and 85 percent say religion is important (Santos and Marchadesch 2017). Filipino theologians observe that religious Filipinos are incarnational in the way they express and practice their Christian faith, particularly in the public space. The Feast of the Black Nazarene, for example, shows how Filipinos are demonstratively religious, as the theologians attest (Mercado 1982, 3-17). The Black Nazarene statue of Quiapo Manila symbolizes the suffering and persistence of Jesus Christ under the persecution of the Roman Empire. Devotees of the Filipino Black Nazarene find ways to identify with the suffering and resilience of Christ in the hardship of their own lives. Although there have been disagreements among Filipino Roman Catholic priests and theologians, this religious feast still draws millions of Filipino devotees each year, including young Filipinos. According to the Catholic organizers, between 2011 and 2015 about 6 to 12 million people attended the January event, reflecting an annual growth rate of 20 percent (Umbao 2017). During the procession, millions of Filipinos pack the streets of Manila, trying to get close to and touch the black statue of Christ for h ealing, forgiveness, and blessing. For Filipino devotees, this is a unique

way of displaying their Christian faith in the public sphere. However, a young Filipino Christian writer and activist, Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, makes the following point: "We have to wake ourselves to the reality that we do not have doctrinal articulations for the most practical concerns of life and not even for the most fundamental aspects of our being a Filipino living in this corner of the world (Crizaldo 2016)." For Crizaldo, Filipino contextual theologies need to be informed by reality on the ground, specifically public issues in the context of this multi-religious-ethnic-linguistic society.

If we acknowledge this, the need for a grassroots theology becomes more crucial as religious Filipinos search for a truly Filipino faith-based understanding of Philippine political, psychological, and cultural/religious problems. Following the 2016 national election, the newly elected Philippine government made various promises of political and economic reforms. With high hopes for the new government, most Filipinos expect that Duterte's administration will bring a new period of great change. Nevertheless, there will always be challenges. Certainly, political-economic changes will affect Filipino's lives, particularly the poor and marginalized populations. It is thus imperative that the Philippine church interacts with the concrete life issues of poor and marginalized Filipinos.

Inculturation is an effective way of communicating the gospel to the culture that is addressed. However, inculturating or contextualizing the gospel is a slow and ongoing process in the Philippine context. Virginia Fabella, a Filipino feminist scholar and religious activist, reiterates that inculturation is slow among Filipino theologians, local faithful communities, and marginalized groups (Fabella 1999, 118-128). She nevertheless sees the move towards contextual Filipino theologies as an essential part of communicating the liberating gospel of Christ to the Filipino people, especially to marginalized youth and women. Simply put, Filipino professional theologians and lay people need to understand and interpret God's acts, and help suffering Filipinos in their daily struggles to transform their dire situation in accordance with God's vision for his kingdom.

Today, poverty is one of the most malign social problems in the Philippines. According to a National Statistics Office 2015 report, "More than 26 million Filipino remain poor with almost half, or a little more than 12 million, living in extreme poverty and lacking the means to feed themselves" (Yap 2016). In December 2, 2017, the Social Weather Station survey showed that the number of Filipino families who consider themselves poor has risen to 10.9M (Cepada 2017). In consequence, conditions of poverty and inequitable distribution of wealth in Philippine society remains a major concern of contemporary Filipino theologians. In response, liberation theology has become a popular theological approach for dealing with poverty and wealth distribution. Dominador Bombongan Jr., a Catholic Filipino theologian, argues, for example: "Responding to poverty related issues is usually the bread and butter of liberation theologians if not their raison d'être. Liberation theologians take the cause of the poor not because it is a fashionable thing to do but because it is what they are called to do as a source of engagement" (Bombongan 2008, 9-34).

For Bombongan, "the preferential option for the poor" is one of the central tenets ensuring liberation theology remains relevant today, particularly in the Philippine context. Furthermore, Filipino liberationists see their role as prophetic, denounce all forms of social injustice, and proclaim a vision of shalom (Tangunan 2007, 13-55). Yet it seems that this theological enterprise does not appeal to marginalized Filipinos. For some informed Filipinos, the politicization of Christian faith is disagreeable and raises too many questions. For instance, Filipino liberation theology appears to be a disguised ideology. Others express the suspicion and paranoia that the gospel of Christ (salvation history) will be reduced to political-economic liberation (Tangunan 2007, 23).

Alongside Filipino liberationist movements, the emergence of Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in the Philippines has had a marked effect on the Philippine theological landscape and established religious institutions (Pew Research Center 2006). From 1920 to 1929, Pentecostal/Charismatic movements transformed many Filipino local Christian communities, especially the mainline Protestant churches (Lumahan 2005, 331-344). According to Conrado Lumahan, "with the growth of Pentecostalism in the United States and Hawaii, baptized Filipino

Pentecostal returnees started their pioneering works in the Philippines" (Ibid.). Lumahan further states:

> Although the Philippines AG (Assembly of God) was basically a religion started by the balikbayan (returnees from oversees), missionaries through the years have significantly contributed to the growth and expansion of the AG. They have been instrumental in organizing the PGCAG, establishing Bible schools, training and equipping nationals, supporting Bible school students, financing the planting of churches, church building, buying Bible colleges' vehicles through the Speed the Light funds, the digging of wells, fishponds, piggery, poultry projects and others. Now from many countries, missionaries have also conducted indoor and outdoor crusades that have resulted in the establishment of many congregations. (Lumahan 2005, 344)

Lumahan suggests the proliferation of various Bible schools, and indoor and outdoor crusades become the major drivers behind the rapid expansion of Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in the Philippines. Likewise, Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, Korean Pentecostal missionaries in the Philippines for twelve years, contend, "The church has a dream of reaching people not only nationwide, but worldwide and establishing a global outreach…the first [step] is extensive Bible studies at home, offices, and communities" (Ma and Ma 2010, 135-137).

Putting the brief overview of Filipino liberation and Pentecostal movements side-by-side, it seems that Filipino liberationists have been preoccupied only with social and political change, while Pentecostal churches have been focused only on ethnographic concerns (personal healing, personal debt, and deliverance from evils spirit), numerical growth, and church planting in the Philippines. However, one of the most challenging recent theological discourses is the attempt to integrate these two theological systems. Simon Chan, for example, criticizes Asian liberationists for tending to ignore the reality on the ground. Chan argues that Asian liberationists should appreciate Asian Pentecostals for taking the ethnographic concerns of poor people seriously. Below I consider how Chan applies various descriptions, contrasts, and comparisons between these two most influential religious movements in his book, *Grassroots Asian Theology* (2014). However, I also evaluate and critique Chan's sharp distinction between Asian liberationist and Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in light of relevant articles from Filipino theologians, namely, Edicio De La Torre, Karl Gaspar, Eleazar Fernandez, Doreen A. Benavidez, Joseph Suico, and Wonsuk Ma.

Simon Chan: Brief Biography and Works

Simon Chan is former Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. He has recently gained widespread popularity among Southeast Asian scholars for his strong criticism of Asian liberation theologies. In 1986, he earned a doctoral degree with a specialisation in Historical Theology at the University of Cambridge, UK. Chan is an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God and has written several books: *Man and Sin* (1994), *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (1998). *Liturgy Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (2006), *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (2011), and *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (2011). These works locate the emergence of Pentecostal spirituality as the focus of all the issues of liturgy and ecclesiology that preoccupy him. Many of the ideas about Pentecostal theology are advanced by Chan in *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (2014), in which he puts forward his main criticisms of Asian liberation theologies.

Chapter one of that work, entitled "Methodological Questions," calls for a specific theological method. To begin, Chan outlines how a grassroots Asian theology can be undertaken, by examining, firstly, the preoccupation or angst of contemporary Asian theologians about the major differences between Eastern and Western ways of thinking (Chan 2014, 9-10); secondly, the dynamic interplay

between Church and tradition in the development of local theologies (11-15); thirdly, the nature of ecclesial experience (18-27); fourthly, ecclesial experience versus cultural experience (ibid.); and lastly, the organizing principles of theology in Asia (41-46).

In the first part, Chan's methodological quest raises some interesting concerns. Take for example Chan's strongly-worded proposal: "Perhaps it is time to get rid of the habit of describing different patterns of thought in terms of Eastern and Western ways of thinking." For Chan, contemporary Asian theologians should able to move beyond the East-West debate. Nevertheless, Chan tries to overcome contrasting issues between the Eastern and Western approaches to contemporary Asian theology. He considers these two ways of thinking equally important and further suggests that "a more pertinent question we need to ask in order to develop a contextual or local theology in an Asian context is: what spiritual and intellectual resources of the Cartesian faith can we bring to bear on the Asian context such that an authentic Christian faith can effectively communicated and received?" Following Paul Hiebert, a proponent of the "common spiritual heritage" concept, Chan argues that contemporary Asian theologians should recognize the common spiritual heritage that binds them together, which includes Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism.

Ecclesial Experience as a Way of Doing Grassroots Asian Theology

In chapter one, Chan introduces one of his most important concepts, namely, "ecclesial experience" (Chan 2014, 15-41), suggesting that ecclesial experience is an alternative to elitist forms of Asian liberation theologies. In the process, Chan demonstrates ecclesial experience derives from the lived experience of both lay-persons and theologians (17). Ecclesial experience, he contends, is a form of grassroots theology that requires cooperation between laity and theologians. According to Chan, elitist Asian theologians (Western-trained), carry the legacy of Enlightenment ways of thinking, impose their categories on locals (grassroots) and read their context selectively (27-28). For Chan, Christian theology appears to use presuppositions that ignore the lived experience of God's people. For example, he holds that most Asian liberation theologians discourage faith communities from participating in the process of constructing local theologies (17-18). Consequently, Christian theological discourse becomes a highly contentious elitist agenda or a specialized field, rather than a corporate endeavor between Christian theologians and lay people (26-27). Asian liberation theologies, in short, are constructed by elite theologians on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. As a result, these theologies become largely irrelevant outside of a tiny cloister of academic parthenogenesis, or they become objectivized by Western-trained Asian liberation theologians. Chan contends: "Theologians therefore must endeavor with utmost seriousness to listen to what God by his Spirit is saying through the laity. If they speak, they must speak from within the church, as fellow worshippers with the whole people of God, before being able to speak to the church and for the church to the world" (Chan 2014, 18).

Because of what he sees as the betrayal of God's people by Asian liberation theologians, Chan stresses it is important to listen to what God by his Spirit is saying through God's people. In other words, theologians must take account of the importance of the participation of God's people or grassroots faith communities in the process of constructing local theologies.

Having set himself this vast task, Chan advances his notion of "ecclesial experience." He considers "ecclesial experience" a clear and concrete form of grassroots Asian theologies. First, Chan indicates the difference between ecclesial experience and cultural experience. Afterward, he seeks to elaborate the constituent elements of ecclesial and cultural experience. Ecclesial experience, he says, helps us avoid two major pitfalls that the present researcher mentions above: first, Christian theology should not be treated simply as propositional statements or objective facts (Chan 2014, 18). Second, individual or subjective experience is not the primary agent for doing

theology (13). To conceptualize the nature of "ecclesial experience," Chan contends it is an ecclesial endeavour derived from God's people and the theologians.

Ecclesial Experience Versus Cultural Experience

Chan advances his notion of grassroots Asian theology by expanding and elaborating upon the nature of ecclesial experience. He starts with the central argument that we must distinguish ecclesial experience from subjective or cultural experience. In his view cultural experience is problematic compared with his notion of ecclesial experience. The danger is if we base our theology solely on cultural experience it raises a lot of questions about our Christian teaching and practice. For instance, according to Chan, there are four problems with an approach based in cultural experience, namely: the fallenness of humanity, cultural bondage, a selective approach to culture, and lastly, elitist tendencies (Chan 2014, 26). At the same time, cultural experience does inform our theology. The problem is that cultural experience has ended up as the sole determining factor in constructing local theologies (Chan 2014, 18). He writes: "Cultural experience may provide an important context for theology by posing questions that theology must address. But cultural experiences cannot be the source of theology since they belong to the realm of fallen humanity rather the humanity renewed by the Spirit in the church" (18).

While Chan sees cultural experience as useful in providing an important context when constructing local theologies, it cannot be the sole source for doing Asian theology. The problem with cultural experience, as Chan suggests, rests in several factors. According to Chan, "cultural experiences may provide an important context for theology by posing questions that theology must address." He then points out, as mentioned above, that such experiences reflect fallen humanity rather than renewed humanity. He adds, "A theology constructed from such sources usually serves to reinforce what is culturally acceptable rather than challenges it" (2014, 18). As an example, he points to the way Asian feminist theologians reduce the relational nature of sin to a psychological condition (18).

Secondly, when it comes to cultural bondage, Chan argues that an emphasis on culture tends to privilege one aspect of culture and make it determinative for theology, which he sees as very problematic. This selection can produce a string of disastrous compromises with cultural bondage, culminating in an uncritical stand toward local cultures. Cultural bondage reduces everything to subjective experience and considers individuals the primary agents for doing theology. It also undermines the genuinely universal salvation history of Christianity (Chan 2014, 19). Chan believes Asian theologians need to be faithful to the core message of the Scriptures in spite of their cultural context, while at the same time they need to accept the mission to contextualize the gospel to a particular cultural experience in order that people will understand and embrace it. Contextual theologians must nevertheless be aware of the cultural accoutrements that they attach in the process of inculturating the gospel message.

Thirdly, in relation to the selective approach to cultural experience, Chan argues Asian contextual and liberation theologians move in opposite directions. He writes:

> The third problem is that a theology of cultural experience is actually quite limited in scope and reductionistic. Often a multidimensional theological theme is reduced to a single referent. For instance, one gets the distinct impression from an Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) publication like Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions that spirituality is nothing but the spirituality of social and political liberation .... This highly selective understanding of what constitutes Asian theology must be challenged, not only for its uncritical assimilation of Enlightenment epistemology and the resultant lack of theological discernment, but also for the way it totally ignores vast swathes of Christian movements in Asia: the

evangelical and Pentecostal movements in much of Asia and more specifically, the indigenous Christian movements in India, Japan and China. (Chan 2014, 23-24)

Chan believes Asian liberationist theologians have produced several highly academic concepts inspired by Enlightenment thinking. Christian spirituality, for example, is no longer directly related to individual sin. As a result, Christian spirituality has been reduced to socio-political liberation.

Lastly, concerning the elitist tendencies of a focus on cultural experience, Chan writes, "While its subject matter may be poor and marginalized—the Dalits and Minjung—seldom do we find views of the grassroots themselves being taken seriously; rather what we see is how the theologian views the grassroots and how they might fit in to the theologian's grand scheme of things" (Chan 2014, 26). Asian liberation theology, he continues, "promotes the views of the intelligentsia and largely ignores the view of the ordinary people themselves, especially the ordinary members of the church" (27). Chan suggests that most Asian liberation and feminist theologians have attempted to articulate Christian theology from the perspective of highly academic enterprises, without the participation of ordinary church members. The result, according to Chan, is that "[e]lite theologians (Asian liberation and feminist theologians) may theologize about the poor and oppressed, but such a theology is not likely to find much traction among the poor themselves" (ibid.). He concludes, "The failure of such theologies is well summed up by one Latin American theologian who noted, 'Liberation theology opted for the poor and the poor opted for Pentecostalism'" (ibid.).

Ecclesial Experience

After establishing problems with the cultural experience approach, Chan puts forward his own notion of "ecclesial experience" as an alternative method for grassroots Asian theology. As with the cultural experience approach, Chan also outlines two important aspects of ecclesial experience: ecclesial experience as ecumenical theology and ecclesial experience as social engagement (Chan 2014, 27-41).

Ecclesial Experience as Ecumenical Theology

According to Chan, "If ecclesial experience must be distinguished from cultural experience, it must also be distinguished from individual experience" (ibid.). He adds, "It is hazardous to base theology on the private experience of individuals no matter how important these experiences may be to the individuals themselves" (ibid.). For Chan, doing theology should not be defined solely by private individuals or by subjective experiences. Since we belong to a faith community (the body of Christ), doing Asian theology is not simply putting forward our own views, opinions, and feelings. Rather, ecclesial experience is the experience of the church, the whole people of God (28). Contemporary Asian theologians, Chan contends, ought always to apply principles and be willing to allow themselves to be challenged by the lived experience of God's people.

Inspired by the "Report of the Moderator" of a WCC document, Chan contends that real ecumenical theology "should not be based merely on what elitist theologians are saying about the grassroots" (28). He further argues, "If real ecumenism is validated at the grassroots, then it is also at the grassroots level that our reflection on an ecumenical theology must begin…. In other words, the experience of ecumenism among the people of God constitutes primary ecumenical theology and should become the starting points for further theological reflection" (27-28). Chan concludes,

> The task of the professional theologian is not to tell the church what is good for it but to listen carefully what the Spirit of truth who indwells the church is saying through the people of God. Elitist theologians who fail to recognize what God is doing among his people by his Spirit are no better (and are perhaps worse) at recognizing what God is doing in the world. (30)

Folk Christianity

In this short section, Chan emphasizes the significance of Pentecostal/Charismatic movements. For Chan, Pentecostalism is a new form of a contemporary Christian mass movement, and he sees the rapid growth of Pentecostalism as the most successful contextualization of the gospel the world has ever seen (Chan 2014, 30-31). Also, he believes that "Pentecostalism is one of the most visible forms of folk Christianity" (31). He leads in to his criticism of elitist theologians by noting their premature judgment of folk Christianity: "Among elitist theologians, however, folk Christianity is often prematurely judged as syncretistic and so much superstition" (Chan 2014, 32). For example, in the Philippines, Jaime Bulatao, a Filipino Jesuit priest and theologian, has popularized a concept of "split-level Christianity" (Areulio 2018). Split-level Christianity, according to Bulatao, means that for Filipinos "faith is in one level and the other level is daily life, they do not jibe" (ibid.). In short, Bulatao observes that how Filipino Catholics live is inconsistent with what they believe. Thus many Filipino Catholics retain various superstitious beliefs even though they celebrate Catholic holidays. In response, Chan contends, "This is the problem with the theologically loaded phrase 'split-level Christianity.' It assumes that Christianity and primal religions are inherently incompatible, whereas, as we have noted in the studies of Harold Turner, they are in fact much closer to each other theologically" (Chan 2014, 49). For Chan, Bulatao's notion of "split-level Christianity" is thus a concrete example of elitist Asian theology that ignores the real concerns of Asian folk Christianity.

Ecclesial Experience and Social Engagement

According to Chan, "The one-sided understanding of social engagement that dominates mainline Asian theology needs to be supplemented by more comprehensive understanding recognizing other theologies of social engagement" (Chan 2014, 36). Broadly speaking, for Chan, there are two dominant proponents of the theology of social engagement: Paul Tillich and Karl Barth. Tillich's basic method of relating Christianity to the world at large is the "method of correlation" (36). For Tillich "the primary task of theology is to translate particular Christian symbols into philosophical terms of the larger culture" (36). Karl Barth's methodological concern, on the other hand, is to bring both God's revelation and the Scripture to the center of doing theology. Chan comments, "the global Pentecostal phenomenon and Asian Christianity in particular exemplify a more Barthian-Hauerwasian than Tillichian-Moltmannian approach to social engagement" (Chan 2014, 40). He concludes:

> Thus the way grassroots Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, has impacted the larger society as noted by Miller and Yamamori and its creative adaptation in primal religious contexts as noted by Turner, Mullins and others makes it a significant point of reference for developing an Asian theology that takes seriously both sociopolitical and ethnographic contexts, integrates these two poles, and offers an alternative approach to social engagement. (Chan 2014, 61)

Chan argues that the challenge facing Asian theologians is not new, but requires an integration of Barthian-Hauerwasian and Tillichian-Moltmannian approaches when constructing local/contextual Asian theologies. Obviously, in proposing an integrated model, he takes this debate seriously. As a final note, Chan suggests: "This is the approach that we will take. We believe that such an approach will allow theology to go beyond the impasse currently seen in mainline Protestant and liberal Catholic theologies in Asia" (61).

For Chan, an integrated model holds both extremes together and, as mentioned above, helps negotiate in a more appropriate way the complex dynamic between the universality and particularity of Jesus Christ in the Asian context.

In his subsequent chapters and inspired by Saphir Athyal's proposal for an Asian contextual theological method (Chan 2014, 47-202), Chan suggests and elaborates upon the five organizing principles of theology in Asia. These are, God in Asian contexts (chapter 2); humanity and sin (chapter 3); Christ and salvation (chapter 4); the Holy Spirit and spirituality (chapter 5); and the church (chapter 6). In every chapter Chan demonstrates how Asian Catholic and Protestant liberation theologies became an elitist enterprise that deflects from their true purpose. However, it is worth noting that this work does not claim to be a systematic theology. Chan writes: "This is not a systematic theology. My main focus is on how theology ought to be done. This book is as much concerned with the processes as the content of theology. Only the content that has particular bearing on the Asian context is highlighted in each theological locus" (18).

Critical Evaluation of Simon Chan's Proposal

To begin a critical evaluation of Chan's proposal, this author believes it is necessary to ask the following questions: (a) What does Chan mean by "elitist Asian theologies?" (b) What does he mean by "grassroots Asian theology"? (c) Lastly, does Chan's notion of "grassroots Asian theology" provide a means to go beyond both Pentecostal and liberation theologies?

<u>What Does Chan Mean by "Elitist Asian Theologies"?</u>

Through his thorough and careful theological research, Chan tries to demonstrate how liberation theologians were deflected from their main task or went drastically wrong in Asia. For instance, he claims that Asian liberation theologians became "elitist" in the following ways: First of all, Chan contends elitist theologians seldom take the ethnographic concerns of grassroots Christianity seriously (such as healing bodies, freedom from the fear of evil spirits, and fatalism) (Chan 2014, 7). Subsequently, in chapter 2, Chan mentions the following Asian theologies and theologians: Dalit theologies, Minjung theologies, liberation theologies in the Philippines (including Jesuit priest and father of Philippine psychology, Jaime C. Bulatao), plus the individual theologians, Kazoh Kitamori, C. S. Song, Kosuke Koyama, M. M. Thomas, and Stanley Samartha (Chan 2014, 22-27).

Chan then identifies some problematic issues with elitist Asian theologies. He believes that elitist Asian theologies reduce the Christian faith to cultural experience, which then becomes the main source for doing Asian theology. Chan remarks that if our Christian theology is based solely on cultural or human experience, problems arise as follows: (a) while at first sight, cultural experience seems to offer a more comprehensive vision of reality compared to propositional theology; cultural experience is nevertheless the product of the fallenness of humanity; (b) privileging one aspect of culture results in cultural bondage; and (c) a selective approach is applied to culture (Chan 2014, 19-22). According to Chan, cultural bondage produces a string of disastrous compromises, culminating in an uncritical stand toward local cultures. Cultural bondage is the reduction of everything to subjective experience and incorporates a view of individuals as the primary agents of doing theology (ibid.). As Chan sees it, this bondage to culture also undermines and jeopardizes the genuine universal salvific history of Christianity. For Chan, Asians need to be faithful to the core message of the Scriptures in spite of their particular cultural context. At the same time, we have a mission to contextualize the gospel to our own particular cultural experience in order that people will understand and embrace it. Contextual theologians need to be aware of the cultural accoutrements that they attach in the process of inculturating the gospel message, however. Otherwise, as Chan observes, Asian liberationist theologians tend to reduce Christian theology into cultural forms and expressions, and fail to critically challenge these forms and expressions.

Chan's general description of Asian Christian theology cannot be validly applied to Filipino Pentecostal and liberation theologies, however. At the very least, we should avoid making hasty generalizations about the contemporary religious landscape in the Philippines. To talk about the

liberation theology movement in the Philippines, we need to be aware that liberation theologies are not uni-directional flows of ideas, motifs, and identities. Filipino liberation theology is not a monolithic discourse, but is divided on the basis of different realities, historical contexts, and local customs. Although Chan mentions several Asian liberationist scholars, theological models, and countries, to an extreme degree he tends to perceive all Asian liberation theologies as products of cultural or personal experience. For instance, Chan uses the singular term "Asian," implying a serious charge against all Asian liberation theologians, including Filipino liberation theologians (Chan 2014, 23). Filipino liberation theologies cannot simply be dismissed on the basis of Chan's limited encounters with Filipino theologians. It is misguided to describe Filipino liberation theologies as merely cultural and selective, privileging some aspects of Filipino culture over others. Filipino liberation theologies are in fact reactions against the social, economic, and political deprivation of the Filipino masses, as well as against colonisation (Harris 2006, 83-107). Both Catholic and Protestant Filipino theologians claim that it is the growing gap between poor and rich that has led to the rise of contemporary Filipino political theologies, particularly Filipino liberation theologies (Chan 2014, 23).

What Does Chan Mean by Grassroots Asian Theology"?

Chan seeks to critique and redefine contemporary Asian theologies, particularly Catholic and Protestant liberation theologies. In so doing, he uses the term "grassroots" for Asian Pentecostals, to indicate that Pentecostals are more "grassroots" than Asian liberation theology movements. For Chan, "grassroots" refers to popular Christologies that reflect the spiritual dimension of salvation and personal needs. This broad term receives no full consensus among Filipino scholars, however. For Chan, nonetheless, the term grassroots is very simple to define. In chapter 4 of his book, he argues strongly that grassroots Christianity or Asian Pentecostals tend to highlight the ethnographic dimensions of faith, such as healings, deliverance from demonic spirits, answered prayers, and special providence—i.e., lived experience. In addition, Chan argues that Asian Pentecostal/Charismatic movements are more fluid, i.e., against rigid religious structures. They appear better equipped to address the concerns of nonbaptized believers in Christ, more concerned with building vibrant-worshipping communities, and better able to adapt to the primal religious worldview or popular religiosity that elitist approaches have largely ignored (Chan 2014, 201). By contrast, Asian elitist theologies focus strongly on the socio-political context, while largely ignoring the ethnographic concerns of their followers—i.e., their lived experience. Thus Chan simply uses the term "grassroots" to mean the ethnic concerns of believers, such as healing of their bodies, freedom from the fear of evil spirits, and fatalism (Chan 2014, 127).

In the Philippine context, however, the term "grassroots" is often used as a rough synonym for non-government organizations working with poor, marginalized and oppressed communities (Özerdem and Podder 2012, 521-545). In addition, "grassroots" denotes a decentralization of power, social justice advocacy, community transformation, community-orientation rather than individualism, and the overcoming of an exclusivist culture among Filipinos. From a religious perspective, Emo Yango, a Filipino theologian and missionary, argues for example that Filipino theology, in order to be grassroots, should be informed and shaped by the everyday struggles of Filipinos. These everyday struggles connote the experience of political-economic and socio-cultural marginalization, not merely the physical and psychospiritual aspects (Yango 2005, 24-36). For Filipino theologians like Yango, the connotations of "grassroots" are not simply bodily healing, freedom from evil spirits, and fatalism as Chan understands the term.

Today, the term "grassroots" is used and defined in the context of various fields of academic study, for example, anthropology, political philosophy, community development, theology, etc., as well as diverse other Filipino contexts. Chan, however, uses a narrow meaning of the term "grassroots" for the Asian Pentecostal movement. In fact, Chan claims strongly that global or Asian Pentecostalism is more of a more grassroots movement than the liberation theology movement. Yet, in the Philippine context in particular, his statement sounds uninformed. For example, Allan

Anderson, a British Pentecostal historian and a scholar, argues that there is no uniform or monolithic Filipino Pentecostal movement (Anderson 2013, 10). Likewise, Giovanni Maltese and Sarah Eßel, both professors of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at Heidelberg University, Germany, conducted intensive research among Filipino Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, particularly in relation to how Filipino Pentecostals perceive themselves. As a result of their study, the term "Pentecostal" is seen as an ongoing construction of political identity among Filipino Pentecostals (Maltese and Eßel 2015, 225-279). Similarly, as with the Asian liberation theology movement, Pentecostalism is variegated on the bases of historical context and local customs. In short, both Filipino Pentecostal and liberation movements are complex, dynamic, and diverse religious movement in the Philippines.

<u>Does Chan's "Grassroots Theology" go Beyond Pentecostal and Liberation Theologies?</u>

In Chan's historical-critical analysis of contemporary Asian liberation and Pentecostal theologies, "ecclesial experience" as a concrete form of grassroots Asian theology takes centre stage. Firstly, Chan's notion of ecclesial experience unmasks the weaknesses of some contemporary liberation theologies in Asia, specifically the left-wing Filipino liberation movement. This critical analysis is congruent with current critical evaluations by Filipino theologians (Mabalay, Pilario, De Mesa, and Tangunan). Chan clearly points out the tendency of some Filipino liberation theologies to be elitist, revealing an inability to incorporate grassroots logic or the ethnographic dimension (psycho-spiritual needs). However, Chan's sharp distinction between grassroots (Pentecostal) and elitist Asian theology (liberation theology) is an inaccurate description of the Philippine theological landscape. Hence, Chan fails to recognize the diversity of Filipino liberation theology. Historically speaking, Filipino liberation theology arose from the grassroots and from socio-political conditions. As a matter of fact, in Chan's own words, "the Pentecostal phenomenon in Asia cannot be properly understood without considering the larger religious context and in more recent years, the socio-economic context of Asia" (Chan 1994, 32).

Filipino liberation theology emerged from a self-interpreting and self-defining moment of a local community working together to surmount social and political challenges. This raises the question: why does liberation theology remain relevant today in the Philippines? The answer is simple. As Sobrino states, "The origin, thrust, and direction of theology of liberation is not in socialism, but in the experience of God in the poor, an experience of grace and exigency." Equally, Filipino liberation theology arose from poor and marginalized Filipino communities. By contrast, Joseph Rommel Suico, a Filipino Pentecostal scholar, observes Pentecostals' lack of engagement in socio-economic and political issues confronting the Philippines, especially poverty (Suico 2003, 192-208). Doreen Benavidez, a Pentecostal New Testament scholar, also clearly notes that most Filipino Pentecostals "are only concerned with saving souls," rather than with social responsibility or social action. Simply put, Filipino Pentecostals have a tendency to withdraw from political-social activities (Benavidez 2016, 171-178).

Furthermore, ecclesial experience, as Chan argues, is always an endeavor that requires cooperation between laity and theologians. Thus Chan believes that true Christian theology comes from both lay people and theologians, and that without this cooperation theology is merely the imposition of the theologian's own ideas as propositional truths. However, Chan fails to recognize that liberation theology also puts great emphasis on the dialectical connection between the subject and the object of Christian theology. Simply put, both liberation and Pentecostal theologies acknowledge the key role of the individual lived experience of the poor and destitute in doing theology. Combining the subject and object of Christian theology as theological sources will give us a more holistic approach to doing grassroots Asian theology. Therefore, Chan's description of Asian liberation theology as elitist is inaccurate, especially in relation to the Philippine theological landscape.

Concluding Thoughts

It should be clear from Chan's descriptions that "Asian liberation theologies" and "Asian Pentecostalism" cannot be regarded as static, bounded and fixed categories. As has been noted by several Filipino and foreign scholars, both Asian liberation and Asian Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, particularly in the Philippines, have undergone significant transformation during recent decades. For instance, Edicio de la Torre, a former Filipino Catholic priest and activist during the Martial Law period, popularised the local version of Latin liberation theology in the Philippines, as a "theology of struggle" (de la Torre 1986, 1-9). Stirred by Luis Hechanova's challenging statement, "We shall call our theology a theology of struggle rather than a theology of liberation," de la Torre started by reflecting on Philippine conditions while searching for a Filipino theology (ibid.). During the period of Martial Law, de la Torre was the head of a Maoist-inspired and underground Christian movement known as Christians for National Liberation (CNL).

For de la Torre, liberation is still in the distant future. The focus of the theology of struggle is the present struggle, with liberation considered in the future tense. In the second section of his book, *Touching Ground, Taking Root: Theological and Political Reflections on the Philippine Struggle*, de la Torre starts to provide a political or ideological line to guide and inform Christians how to ground their political theology. This way of doing theology in the Philippine experience hence becomes more grassroots, pro-people, and anti-imperialist. De la Torre then introduces a Maoist analysis. He argues that the Maoist model is the appropriate form of analysis for the Philippine context. By using Maoist analysis, Filipino liberation theology will be able to start the struggle in large dominant sectors in Philippine society, he argues. Here he emphasizes topics such as farming, fishing, working conditions and illegal settlers as appropriate subjects for Filipino liberation theology. The Philippine Maoist movement makes a correct analysis of many of the problems in the Philippines in his view. De la Torre comments that "Maoism, or more concretely, the national democratic movement, presents itself as the most vocal, concrete programme (Maoist model, rural guerrilla strategists or moving from rural to urban insurrections, in contrast with Lenin), and ideology (Mao, Anti-Imperialism and US)" (Ibid.).

The theology of liberation or the theology of struggle is an unfinished and ongoing project among Filipino liberation theologians, however, and over the years, has developed into different forms and expressions, such that there is now no single definitive theology of struggle. The theologies vary in their goals, methodologies, strategies, affiliations, and contexts. Often they overlap, and some Filipino liberation theologians identify themselves with several branches of post-colonial theologies simultaneously (Whelchel 1995, 77). For instance, Danny Franklin Pilario and Catalino Arevalo, two leading contemporary Catholic theologians, classify contemporary theological efforts in the Philippines into three areas of interest (Pilario 2004, 5-39). The first is what Pilario calls mainstream theology, "which uses the discourse of the magisterium as its base for reflection" (Pilario 2004, 5-6). The second is culture: "Part of the conscious attempt to construct a distinctly 'Filipino' theology, this theological trend delves into the complexity of the Filipino traditional culture, its popular religions, its language and cultural structures, in order to discern the Good News already embedded in it" (ibid.). The third trend is an engagement with Marxist analysis and praxis in pursuit of the "the economic, political, social and cultural transformation of society" (ibid.).

"Being part of the Two-Third World," Pilario contends, "one of the most appealing fields for theological reflection is that of the liberationist thematic" (Pilario 2004, 7). Pilario also points out that this third—Marxist oriented —group is divided into several further groups. First, "Filipino theologian-members of the EATWOT and the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) whose social analyses are parallel to those of the left-wing political parties" (ibid.). Examples here would be Edicio de la Torre and Karl Gaspar. The second is a centrist group which "consciously and explicitly relies on the official ecclesial magisterium in the discernment of an appropriate Christian

praxis in our times" (ibid.). Lastly, in the third group, there is reflection "going on among grassroots communities (BECs) whose political position ranges from 'far left' to 'left of center'" (ibid.). However, Pilario and Arevalo only enumerate Filipino Catholic liberation theologians. They fail to recognize the contribution of non-Catholic or Filipino Protestant liberation theologians, such as Eleazar Fernandez, Levi Oracion, Everett Mendoza, Melanio Aoanan, Oscar Suarez, and the Evangelical theologian David Lim, to name but a few. Furthermore, one thing is certain: Latin American liberation theology is an open door for the development of local theologies, such as womanist theologies, grassroots theologies, minjung theologies, queer theologies, and dalit theologies, including the Filipino theology of struggle (see e.g., Vigil 2007). Like the Filipino liberation theology movements, for their part Filipino Pentecostals have hardly remained static either. The complex Pentecostal theology, Pentecostal ministries, and the dialectic of Pentecostalism with colonial experience have shaped facets of the wider society, such as identity, class, gender roles, ministry, and public discourse (see e.g., Anderson 2013). Ignoring the inherent diversity of Filipino Pentecostalism fails to do justice to the complexity of the Pentecostal worldviews, theologies, and practices in the Philippines (Chong 2015, 1-9). In short, it would be naïve to think that either Philippine Pentecostalism or Philippine liberationist are uniform or monolithic movements.

Sadje, Hadje Cresencio (MA)
Lecturer,
School of Global Studies,
Foundation Academy of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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DIVORCING THE WEST: A REINTERPRETATION OF JAPANESE CHRISTIAN ANTI-WESTERN THINKING IN THE CASE OF THE JAPANESE YMCA (1880-1945)

Zhou, Yun

Published online: 12 November 2018

ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has noted that the anti-Japanese position of the Western powers in WWII contributed to a reduction of foreign influence in the Japanese Christian community. In this paper, I propose that focusing solely on political factors overlooks the underlying conflict between foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians. I examine this suggestion through a case study of the Japanese YMCA from 1880 to 1945. While rising militarism exerted pressure on Japanese society during WWII, the anti-Western mindset within the Japanese YMCA was not without historical causes, such as the demand for local autonomy and theological differences. By looking at the relationship between foreign missionaries and local agents in the Japanese YMCA during WWII, I argue that the anti-Western attitude of the latter was part of a process of continuous development of decades-long cooperation with and struggle for independence from foreign missionaries.

Introduction

Ever since the establishment of the first Protestant Church in Japan in 1872 (Hara 2005, 19), Japanese Protestants have been questioned about their nationalistic stance, particularly in relation to the rise of the militarist and authoritarian government. A great many studies have examined the relationship between Japanese Christianity and the Emperor system.[1] Recent scholarship has examined the conduct of Japanese Christians in a militarist empire, and their relationship with the Japanese Christian community. While some Japanese Christians resisted the militarist government policy and advocated pacifism,[2] most Japanese Christian institutions aligned themselves with the imperial government by publically embracing the Emperor system.

The nationalistic conduct of Japanese Christians has been examined primarily through a political lens that concentrates on the impact of government policies on religious groups. In his article, "The Cross Under an Imperial Sun," A. Hamish Ion paints a panoramic picture of Japanese Christianity under an imperial government from 1895 to 1945 (Ion 2003, 69-100). He notes that the involvement of Western missionaries in the development of Christianity in Japan was one of many concerns facing Japanese Christians between 1894 and 1931. Ion further notes that Japan's militarist invasion of China prompted criticisms from the Western powers and Protestant

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[1] See Ion (2003, 69-100); Tomizaka Kirisutokyō Center (1996); Kudō (1993, 25-55).

[2] See Hayashi (1989, 635-650); DDJKK (1969).

denominations in Britain and America. Influenced by the international crisis and the domestic centralization of control over religious groups, Japanese Christians decided to sever connections with Western Christianity, politicians, and cultural values (Ion 2003, 88). Japanese Christianity or *Nipponteki Kirisutokyō* 日本的基督教, a concept coined in the late 1930s, encapsulated this nationalistic and anti-Western attitude that aimed to "join Christianity with Japan's traditional spirit, thought, and religion" (Ion 2003, 88)[3].

In agreement with Ion, I propose that the Japanese YMCA's hostile attitude towards Western powers needs to be seen within a larger framework. An exclusive focus on political factors (rather than acknowledging their background importance) can lead to the inherent conflict between foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians being overlooked. This paper thus explores the relationship between Japanese YMCA agents and their American mentors, from 1880 to 1945. While rising militarism exerted pressure on Japanese Christians, the anti-Western mindset within the Japanese YMCA was not without its historical causes, such as the demand for local autonomy and theological differences. From its establishment in 1880 to the end of WWII, the Japanese YMCA was involved in activities that demonstrated loyalty to the imperial state and that reflected a struggle for independence from their American colleagues. An examination of the relationship between foreign missionaries and local agents in the Japanese YMCA suggests that the anti-Western attitude began long before the outbreak of WWII. The finding of this paper adds to knowledge that suggests a nationalistic Christianity, characterized by Western antagonism, only occurred during wartime.

The first section of this paper outlines the broader religio-political milieu in which Japanese Christianity was nurtured, molded, and developed. The focus is on major political events that underpinned the development of Christianity from the Meiji period in Japan to the end of WWII. The second section examines the relationship between the Japanese YMCA and American missionaries from 1880 until the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This section elaborates how local agents accepted, transformed, and then rejected the evangelical vision introduced by their Western mentors.[4] In the third section, I explore the wartime attitudes of the Japanese YMCA toward foreign missionaries, using articles from the periodical *Kaitakusha* 開拓者, which encouraged anti-Western religio-political thinking. Finally, I conclude with an argument that moves beyond the traditional interpretation of Japanese Christianity, primarily from a political perspective. Much of the conduct of Japanese Christians living in an authoritarian state can be best understood in terms of a paradigm that incorporates both internal and external forces. Furthermore, I point out that the missionaries' failure to identify the nationalistic discourse of Christianity occurred not only in the Japanese context, but also in Republican China. Our understanding of Christianity in the East Asian context would be enriched by further comparative analysis.

The Historical Setting of Christianity in the Rising Empire

There was a revival of foreign Christian missions in Japan during the 1880s. Prior to the issuing of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (*Dai Nippon Teikoku Kenpō* 大日本帝国憲法) in 1889, when the whole nation embraced westernization, missionary activities were conducted in a relatively friendly environment. A number of Euro-American Protestant denominations constructed their institutional frameworks during this period. The five major denominations that expanded all over Japan were the Congregationalists, the Presbyterian-Reformed Church, the Methodists, the Holy Catholic Church (Anglican Episcopal), and the Baptists (Iglehart 1959, 80-83). By the end of the 1880s, the missionary force had increased from 145 in 1883 to 363, and their places of residence from thirty-seven to eighty-nine (Iglehart 1959, 71). In this initial stage of

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[3] Original source see Kiyohiko (1937).

[4] While attitudes towards the American leadership divided among the Japanese YMCA by 1900, this study focused on the group that characterized a nationalistic interpretation of Christianity. See Davidann (1995, 107-125).

church development, Japanese Protestants assisted missionaries, rather than taking a leading role in the evangelical work. This trend can be seen in records of the Second Missionary Conference in Osaka in 1883, where the discussions were led and the conclusions reached by missionaries. Although the Conference brought up the issue of devolving responsibility from missionaries to local evangelical agents, the Japanese converts were not assigned responsibilities on the grounds of their immature status.[5] However, as Charles W. Iglehart (1959, 70) notes, no tension existed between missionaries and Japanese leaders at the time.

From 1889 to 1945, Japan became a Shinto State regime and embarked on an expansion of its territory in East Asia. The Emperor, legitimized by the Constitution in 1889, became the supreme ruler of the country. In October 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku ni kansuru chokugo* 教育に関する勅語) was issued, designed to build a spirit of loyalty towards the Shinto State through the education system. Japan's defeat of China in 1895, and of Russia in 1905, strengthened national confidence in its polity and led to further imperialistic expeditions. Noting the pursuit of self-interest by Western powers in Asia, Japan revitalized its old slogan "*Fukoku kyōhei*" (富国強兵 Enrich the country, enhance the army). Thus, the nation retreated from over-westernization and adopted a militarist approach in its nation-building.

Disagreement emerged between foreign missionaries and local converts in the midst of the surrounding wave of nationalism. The missionaries maintained that local believers were of inferior status and should be excluded, as witnessed at the Missionary Conference in Tokyo in 1900, where 435 delegates and forty-two missions and agencies were represented, but no provision was made for the participation of Japan (Iglehart 1959, 112-113). While the whole nation was immersed in the building of a modern imperial state, Japanese churches and their leaders displayed "sensitive reactions to all the trends that were sweeping the nation" and "followed the general mood in a new attitude of criticism toward the missionaries whose training and competency … were scarcely adequate to the new demands." Iglehart (1959, 93) suggests missionaries lacked sufficient training by their mission societies in the 1880s and 1890s, including in language and theology. This shortfall distanced missionaries from Japanese life. As Mark R. Mullins (2003, 145) also notes, most missionaries came to Japan with fervent evangelical zeal, but their theological training gave them limited resources for understanding local cultures and religious traditions. At the time, evangelical work followed a pattern where missionaries drew the blueprint, and Japanese pastors maintained local Christian communities (Mullins 2003, 95-96). Missionary ignorance of nationalistic trends generated a desire among Japanese Christians to sketch the future of the churches. In contrast to the Western missionaries, Japanese Christians responded to the imperialistic trend by following the first Sino-Japanese War through concrete actions such as, "providing comfort for bereaved families" and "disseminating information that justified the war." (Ion 2003, 72)

In addition, a series of indigenous movements led by charismatic Japanese Christian leaders occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. Mullins argues that proponents of these indigenous movements adopted a dichotomous view of Christianity and Western cultures. While accepting Christianity, they rejected the Western style Christianity that bonded them unnecessarily to Western organizational forms. They also rejected denominational politics, and missionary control (Mullins 2003, 143). One well-known case was the establishment in 1901 of the Nonchurch Movement (*Mu kyōkai* 無教会) by Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861-1930). After being criticized by missionaries for "upholding Japanese Christianity," Uchimura defended his rights by pointing to the "sectional or denominational forms of Christianity" existing within the missionary enterprise that were similar to national Christianity (Mullins 2003, 147-8). In opposition to the Western framework of establishing the church as an institution, Uchimura advocated an ideal church as one that "fit the natural simplicity of Japanese culture," and where converts gathered in love (Ballhatchet 2003, 49).

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[5] The legal acknowledgement of Christianity after its aborted prohibition came in 1873.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the Forward Evangelistic Campaign of 1901-1904 under the motto of "Our Country for Christ," indicating a sense of responsibility on the part of Japanese Christians for evangelizing the whole nation. The following years, which encompassed the famine in northeastern Japan, witnessed collaboration between Christian social movements and the government (Iglehart 1959, 119-120, 128-129). There were no signs of confrontation, at least on a large scale, between the Japanese Christian community and the Shinto State at the beginning of the Showa period (1926-1989) (DDJKK 1972, 12). The Japanese churches reasoned, however, that they had to make a statement of their stance towards a fascist regime in the early 1930s (Tomura 1974, 68). The Special Higher Police (*Tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu* 特別高等警察) then started an investigation into Japanese Christian organizations in 1936 and paid special attention to pacifism among Christians after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese war in July 1937 (Tomura 1974, 12-14). The situation became more compelling for Japanese Christians when the government initiated a National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (*Kokumin seishin sōdōin undō* 国民精神総動員運動) in October 1937, which emphasized loyalty to the country. In order to advance a totalitarian nation-state, the Spiritual Mobilization Movement was replaced by the Imperial Aid Assistance Association in 1940 (1940-1945, *Taisei yokusankai* 大政翼賛会). All organizations, including the Christian community in Japan, were compelled to fall in line with this Association (Hara 2005, 111-113).

The political position of the church in Japan was further questioned when their foreign counterparts denounced Japan's military actions in the Manchurian Incident in 1931. Initially, the National Christian Council of Japan (hereinafter referred to as the NCCJ) was opposed to the Incident and attempted to seek help from "Christians overseas to implore governments to help in bringing about a peaceful settlement between China and Japan." The condemnation of Japanese actions by "Western missionaries in Japan and Western Christians in general" not only put Japanese Christians in an awkward situation, but also disappointed their Japanese counterparts (Ion 2003, 75-76).[6]

The Second World War became a catalyst for the Japanese churches to show their loyalty to the Emperor, not necessarily in the form of religious worship, but in being compelled to at least show their support for the ruling power. From November 1937, a Christian patriotic movement emerged out of some churches in Tokyo. At the same time, the NCCJ made a statement on the Manchurian Incident and decided to draft a letter expressing gratitude to the overseas Imperial Army (DDJKK 1972, 46-48). Furthermore, in December 1937, several Christian institutions, including Tokyo YMCA and YWCA, joined in a prayer ceremony for the wellbeing of the Empire. In February and May 1938, lectures on the meaning of holy war and the consistency between the Japanese spirit and the Christian spirit were held in Osaka under the surveillance of the police department (DDJKK 1972, 106). Several factors prompted this independent and nationalist reform among Japanese churches. These factors included an anti-Japanese statement by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury; a call for aid for China from the British Salvation Army; and a call for anti-communist and pro-Japanese support by the Roman Pope (DDJKK 1972, 44-45).

The Religious Organizations Law, passed in 1940, centralized religious groups through the imposition of political restrictions. Many scholars consider the establishment in June 1941 of the United Church of Christ in Japan (hereinafter, the UCCJ)—the only legal Protestant organization in wartime Japan—to have been based on this new law (Kubota 2002, 52). The launch of the Imperial Aid Association in 1940 functioned as a further force in promoting a "New Order" movement with the aim of creating a totalitarian one-party state by removing political and economic dissidents. A result of this movement was the abolition of a number of political parties and unions. The arrest of the commander of the Salvation Army, Uemura Masuzō 植村益蔵, in July 1940, serves as one example. Arrested by the Tokyo *Kempeitai* (東京憲兵隊 military police) on suspicion

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[6] Original work see Shigeru (1976, 54).

of spying, Uemura was eventually released because of insufficient evidence. Uemura's antiwar and anti-militarist attitudes attracted political attention, however. In response, the Salvation Army in Japan passed the reform proposal and made a public announcement of its stance supporting the imperial state in newspapers in August 1940 (Sasaki 1965, 35-36).

Struggling with American Missionaries: The Japanese YMCA from 1880 to 1937

The first YMCA in Japan was founded in Tokyo in 1880. Early founders of the organization, some of whom were from the samurai social class, favoured a nationalistic identity. In fact, thirty percent of all Meiji converts were ex-samurai, and they organized themselves into bands. Some YMCA leaders belonged to influential bands, such as the Yokohama band and Kumamoto band. Uemura Masahisa 植村正久, a YMCA founder, was a member of the Yokohama band. While the Yokohama band was well known for its evangelical approach to Christianity, Uemura was a strong advocate of cultural independence from the missionaries. Another member of the Yokohama band was Honda Yōichi 本多庸一, who joined the YMCA's executive committee in 1903. Honda was "a strong nationalist," supporting the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. Another YMCA founder, Kozaki Hiromichi 小崎弘道, belonged to the Kumamoto band, which was known as the most nationalistic group of converts in Japanese Christianity (Davidann 1998, 55-56).

Most Japanese Christians embraced liberal theology on the grounds that it matched their desire "for a more public, socially active Christianity." This was in agreement with the ideology of Confucianism, which advocated public service in society. The arrival of American YMCA missionaries in Japan in the 1890s, however, had infused a different theological thinking emphasizing evangelicalism (Davidann 1998, 56-57). When missionaries were sent to Japan at the start of the global YMCA movement, their vision was to introduce an American-style YMCA to Japan (Davidann 1998, 40). Mission work by foreign workers was often combined with a sense of cultural superiority over their Japanese colleagues. In the Osaka Missionary Conference of 1883, Japanese colleagues were frequently referred to as "the heathen," and respected members of the Japanese Christian community involved in Bible translation were addressed as "assistants" (Davidann 1998, 37-38, 94).[7]

However, unlike the foreign missionaries, Japanese Christians interested in the YMCA emphasized their cultural roots, and after the Meiji Restoration were more concerned with filling the moral void. One notable speech was made by Yokoi Tokio 横井時雄 at the Second Summer School of the Japanese YMCA in 1890, expressing a hostile attitude toward Western missionaries and emphasizing Japanese identity. Yokoi, a prominent Christian who lost control of Dōshisha University to the American board in the 1890s, stated:

> As for European and American forms of Church government and customs, we [Japanese Christians] will accept only critically or reject without hesitation their approach. Instead we will rely on our own history, customs, and ideas in promoting growth and progress for Christianity in Japan. (Davidann 1998, 80)[8]

The Japanese YMCA founders wished to transform the moral outlook of Japanese society through Christian ethics. This goal is clearly illustrated in the first issue of *Rikugō Zasshi* 六合雑

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[7] Davidann points out a similar cultural assumption of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race among the American missionaries within the Japanese YMCA, by referring to the American YMCA missionary writers, Robert E. Speer and Sherwood Eddy.

[8] Original work see Tokio (1891).

誌 (*Cosmos*, launched in 1880), the mouthpiece of the organization, as well as in its succeeding journal *Kaitakusha* 開拓者 (launched in 1906).

> Central to the old moral system of Japan was loyalty and filial piety. A new Japan requires new ethics. The old moral ethics must be transformed based on the notion of equality and mutual love. Christianity is a necessity that supports the new ethics from an internal perspective. (YMCA Shi Gakkai Henshū Iinkai 2003, 5)

> Japan had been at most a legal system, which was referred to as *Rechtsstaat* by German people. It has a framework but not a moral flesh. It is only Christianity that can fulfil the task of building a moral flesh. (Nihon Kirisutokyō Seinenkai Dōmei 1906)

Contrary to the evangelical expectations of their Western colleagues, Japanese converts were deeply rooted in local cultural, political, and social settings, upon which their concerns were based. At this time, Japanese Christians were accused of disloyalty to the Emperor and father, loss of patriotism, and of being a danger to national authority. In response, the Japanese YMCA pointed to the close link between strong nationalism and Christianity in Euro-American countries.[9] In his monograph titled, *A World of Crisis and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan, 1890-1930*, Jon Thares Davidann argues that this moral approach was part of the nationalist discourse among Japanese Christians. He declares it to be "an independent and unique Japanese style of Christianity." According to Davidann (1998, 78-80), this independent movement, "was a way for Japanese Christians to reconcile Christianity with their own national identity." In 1903, an article in the journal, *Nihon no Seinei* (*The Japanese Youth*), argued that local autonomy of the Japanese YMCA was a prerequisite for evangelical work, and that receiving financial support from the American YMCA was necessary for achieving ultimate independence. In order to avoid a repetition of the Dōshisha Incident, where the Japanese trustees lost control of the school to the American board in 1890s, recipients would "freely use the fund" and work together with overseas Christian contributors to establish the Kingdom of God among the youth.[10]

Although the YMCA International Committee passed a resolution in 1899 that set native control as the goal for all foreign YMCAs, Davidann (1998, 44) points out that tension existed in terms of indigenous leadership being controlled by foreign colleagues who insisted on conformity to American standards. According to Davidann, disagreement over the membership rule of the YMCA, reflects the different theological grounds which turned into a battleground for local autonomy. When Luther Wishard, International College Secretary of the YMCA, visited Japan in 1889, his insistence on strict adherence to the American standards of the YMCA, requiring, for example, a candidate's association with "an evangelical church professing the trinity of God and the divinity of Christ," caused tension among Japanese Christians whose theological thinking was liberal and Unitarian (Davidann 1998, 89). The conflict became visible when the college association at Tokyo Imperial University abandoned the evangelical test for YMCA membership in 1892.[11]

Davidann observes that by the 1920s, Japanese YMCA leaders had a greater share of control, which was clearly reflected in the complaints of YMCA missionaries. In 1930, G. S. Phelps, the senior American secretary in Japan, also expressed his displeasure with the situation, and the policy of the Japanese administration that obviously ignored the foreign secretary (Davidann 1998, 97).[12] Davidann also remarks on tensions caused when the Japanese and American YMCA leaders expanded the missionary cause in Korea and Manchuria after the Russo-Japanese War. As the

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[9] *Rikugō Zasshi* 六合雑誌 [The Cosmos] on 11 October 1880, see *Rikugō Zasshi* ([1880] 1983, 1: 92).

[10] See Beikoku seinenkai ([1903] 1984).

[11] Ibid. Original resource see Swift to Morse (1892, 2).

[12] Original resource see Confidential Notes on Japan (1922); Reports of Annual Meeting (1930, 14-15).

Japanese YMCA missionaries took on the unique role of transmitting Christianity into Oriental contexts, they simultaneously undermined the authority of evangelical work by their American counterparts. Different evangelical visions and national polity shaped a less harmonious but more competitive relationship between these two groups. When Japan launched a larger-scale war in China and other countries in East Asia in the second half of the 1930s, the relationship fell into a trough.

A Divorce with the West: The Japanese YMCA from 1937 to 1945

After the outbreak of WWII, the Japanese YMCA responded to the national call with support and cooperation. The 273rd committee conference in July 1937 passed the following motions:

1. The need for providing comfort services to the Imperial Army carried out by the NCCJ, working through the affiliated YMCA to raise funds and goods.
2. Contribute necessary service in terms of the comfort and welfare of the soldier in active service.
3. When a comfort messenger is sent, they should cooperate with the NCCJ and the YMCA. (Nara 1959, 331)

From 1937, the Japanese YMCA launched the Manchuria Project (*Tairiku jigyō* 大陸事業) sending Japanese Christians to China for comfort work.[13] In Shanghai, welfare services included haircutting, writing letters for wounded soldiers, and opening recreational places in old YMCA buildings. In addition to Shanghai, the comfort team of the Japanese YMCA went to Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Beijing, Zhangjiakou, Tianjin, Baoding, Guangdong, etc. (Nara 1959, 332-334). In August 1938, the National Council of the Japanese YMCA[14] pressured the Korean YMCA for an alliance through the political slogan "*Naisen itai*" (Japan and Korea as one, 内鮮一体). According to the first clause of the resolution, the Korean YMCA was required to seclude itself from the world alliance of the YMCA and transfer all rights of dealing with foreign countries to the National Council of the Japanese YMCA. This resolution was in essence a facilitator of the Japanizing of the Korean YMCA. As a result, twenty-one Korean YMCA branches joined in the alliance (Nara 1959, 329-330). In addition, in 1939 the Japanese YMCA sought cooperation with YMCAs in East Asia, with the aim of protecting local YMCA activities from suppression by the Japanese military government. In the case of China, a major aim of the Japanese YMCA was the need to protect Chinese refugees. Assistance from the Japanese YMCA also involved fundraising and cooperation with local YMCAs (Nara 1959, 335-336).

In late August 1940, the Japanese YMCA held urgent conferences in response to the growth of anti-Christian sentiment in Japan. The principles guiding young Christians from a moral perspective were changed and replaced with a new ideology emphasizing "the cultivation of loyal and outstanding Imperial subjects" (Sasaki 1965, 36). A collective declaration by the Japanese Christian community was made at the national congregation in October 1940, which demonstrated support for the nation's overseas expansion at that time.

During wartime, *Kaitakusha* served as one primary source for tracing theological thinking and attitudes that were adored by and circulated among its membership. Articles by Japanese Christians who went to China during wartime shed light on their interpretations of Japanese colonial policy, as well as their attitudes towards foreign missionaries. In the China mission, some articulated a core

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[13] A project launched by the Japanese YMCA from 1937. Causes included the Imperial Army's comfort, refugee rescue, contacting Chinese YMCAs, protecting local YMCAs and churches from the Japanese military, etc. See YMCA Shi Gakkai Henshū Iinkai (2013, 255).

[14] The Council was established in 1904 when City YMCAs (9) and Student YMCAs (59) in Japan merged into one organization. See *Nihon YMCA Dōmei Kessei 100 shūnen kinen shashin nenpyōshū* (2003).

concern about the dominance of Western ideology, the activities of Western missionaries, and the role of Western powers in East Asia. Among those who joined the YMCA's Manchuria Project was Suekane Toshio 末包敏夫 (1897-1991), who lived in China from 1938 to 1946.[15] Prior to his arrival in China, Suekane worked in the Kobe YMCA in 1921 and then moved to the Kyoto branch in 1931, influenced by the concept of the social gospel. To support Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese YMCA launched a special project in cooperation with the NCCJ, providing comfort to the Imperial Army. The Kyoto YMCA took an active part in this project (Kyōto YMCA shi hensan iinkai 2005, 234-235). In 1938, Suekane led the third unit for comfort cause to the northern part of China.[16]

An article on the construction of East Asia and missions for young Christians in the 1939 edition of *Kaitakusha* provides a detailed picture of Suekane's religio-political thinking (Suekane 1939, 22-26). In Suekane's view, the world was being encroached upon by the Euro-American powers. Japan's imperial expansion was perceived as a counterweight to Western ideology. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident was not considered Chinese resistance toward the Japanese. Rather, it reaffirmed the urgency and necessity of constructing a collaborative community in East Asia. It was thought that otherwise the political and economic sphere of Asia would continue as a semi-colonial state, dominated by Western powers. Suekane's one-sided interpretation was that Japan's action in China was not an imperialist intrusion but a bid to emancipate China from the hands of Euro-American colonialism. Although acknowledging the existence of Japan's capitalist intrusion in China, Suekane asserted the majority of Japanese people believed in the construction of a new order in East Asia, inspired by the idea of liberation. This new order was fundamentally different from capitalist imperialism. Suekane believed that the new order was based on the notion of oriental authenticity.

Suekane's experience in China made him well aware of Chinese nationalist sentiment towards Japanese action. Slogans about fighting the Japanese to save the country expressed an explicit logic that China's liberation was closely tied up with winning the war against Japan. However, Suekane criticized this short-sighted ideology and argued that China's independence from Japan would strengthen colonization by Euro-American countries. Among various reasons contributing to a misunderstanding of Japan's action in China, Suekane singled out democracy and communism as the two main ideologies among the Chinese leading class. Furthermore, the rise of the doctrine of "ethnic independence" (*Minzoku jiketsu shugi* 民族自決主義) aimed at liberating the Chinese from a semi-feudal and semi-colonial status, enhanced anti-imperialist patriotic fervour among young Chinese intellectuals. Many of these individuals had been educated in mission schools. Suekane thought Western missionaries exported their cultural and political ideology through their evangelical education, generating a pragmatic, realistic, and political-oriented religious attitude among Chinese students. Suekane attributed anti-Japanese feeling to this Western education system and to Chinese dependence on the West. In contrast, young Japanese students were attracted by the mystical religious aura of Christianity, which gave them a historically transcendent worldview and an idea of eternity. Suekane thought Christianity in modern China had been distorted by Western humanist ideology. The responsibility for saving Chinese Christianity from this Western impact fell on Japanese Christians, because they held the correct religious attitude. This task was conceived as an obligation for Japanese believers, to be performed in the name of love. As a Japanese citizen, as a Christian believer, and also as an East Asian, Suekane urged Christians in China and Japan to overcome the shadow of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and collaborate in the reconstruction of East Asia in the firm belief that this process would engender a new experience of faith based on Nipponism. Such a faith was different from that of the Occident, as it was grounded in the soil of familism and emphasized the love of redemption. Suekane believed that under the influence of such

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[15] See YMCA Shi Gakkai Henshū Iinkai (2013, 120); Endō (2014, 101-109).

[16] See Endō (2014, 101).

a faith, the deadlock of Western civilization would be broken and Japan would contribute to world Christianity.

Suekane's anti-Western religio-political thinking was shared by other Japanese Protestants. Like Suekane, Bessho Kenjirō 別所健二郎 (?-?) held a similar viewpoint. A colleague of Suekane, Bessho was a director of the Kyoto YMCA when he was dispatched to China's northern area to provide military comfort in 1938 (Nara 1959, 334). An article in 1940 articulated Bessho's vision of the China mission as concern about Western influence in the mission field (Bessho 1940, 41-46). Based on his experience and understanding, Bessho observed that mission work in China had been led by foreign missionaries along with Chinese converts who were dependent on their Western mentors both financially and spiritually. The question of achieving autonomy and establishing an indigenous church independently of their foreign counterparts, therefore became an important question for Chinese Christians.

Bessho believed the 1930s were a crucial transition period for China and referred to the church union movement in Chinese society as outstanding. Bessho estimated that 61 percent of Chinese Protestants were involved in this alliance movement nationwide. This campaign touched on issues such as the rationality of a preaching strategy and the independence of the churches, and led to the emergence of institutions such as the Church of Christ and the Holy Catholic Church in China. Bessho believed that members from the association of Christian education, the medical evangelical organization, the YMCA, and the YWCA could play a crucial role in reconstructing the nation, and that a religious movement featuring a Chinese element would arise when foreign missionaries withdrew their leadership. In this transitional period, joint efforts by the domestic Japanese churches, and the YMCA and its branches in China, were viewed by Bessho as appropriate sources of spiritual guidance for Christians in both countries to promote the shared mission of constructing the East Asian community. Japanese Christians were encouraged to join in shaping the religious landscape in China in collaboration with Chinese believers. Bessho excluded Western missionaries from the future vision of the Christian community in China and the construction of East Asia. In this way, Western influences were expelled from the religious sphere in China. This was in accordance with the concept of an East Asian community fundamentally opposed to the potential threat from the Euro-American countries.

Nara Tsunegorō (1909-1986), another leader in the Japanese YMCA, was also active in constructing a concept of a New East Asia. [17] In 1942, Nara was assigned to the southern part of China where he encountered Chinese Christians in Hong Kong and Guangdong (Nara 1943, 2). In 1943 he was dispatched by the Japanese YMCA to assist the Hong Kong YMCA with financial support. In August 1944 Nara was drafted to the Imperial Army in Dong'an (currently the city of Mishan in Heilongjiang Province) (Nara 1959, 335, 342). His activities were informed by a strong sense of obligation felt by the Japanese people at the time, which aimed not only to safeguard Japan, but also to undertake the great cause of constructing a prosperous East Asia. In Nara's words, it was a shift in the historical trajectory from "Japan in the world" to "a world in [the hands of] Japan" (Nara 1944, 3). The idea that the rise and fall of Japan controlled the fate of East Asia revealed a Japan-centered nationalist attitude.

In his article titled "The Development of Japanese Christianity in the Greater East Asia" in 1944, Nara advocated two tasks for Japanese Christians, which in essence would serve the nation. As Japan's power was expanding with the acquisition of overseas territories at the time, Japanese Christianity should center on Japanese spiritual traditions and serve as a spiritual force in tandem with Japan's expansion. In this sense, the export of Christianity from Japan became a medium for spreading Japanese ideals. Nara stressed this expanding mission could not be categorized under the term "international," for that term had been adopted by British and American missionaries in the old world order. The mission for Japanese Christians in a new order was to correct the "chaotic

[17] See YMCA Shi Gakkai Henshū Iinkai (2013, 167).

cultures" caused by the cultural superiority of British and American missionaries. Nara argued that Japanese Christianity had correctly grasped the essence of Christian ideals because the Christian community in Japan was isolated from those of the Euro-American countries. Japanese Christianity, therefore, had a leading role in the spiritual landscape of East Asia. These two tasks, taken together, were based on the premise of the existence of Japan as a nation. Nara praised the Emperor for allowing Christianity in Japan and called for an individual reflection on the royal grace of the Emperor. Japanese Christians, according to Nara, would show their patriotism by engaging in the construction of a "New East Asia."

Nara's nationalistic evangelical vision is reflected in his proposed task of cooperating with Chinese Christians to create the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and to propagate "the awakened self-consciousness of a new East Asia" (Nara 1943, 2). In his article titled "The Gospel and Culture in China" printed in *Kaitakusha* in 1943, Nara said he thought one prominent task was to eliminate the "evil deeds" of British and American missionaries who oppressed the "inferior" Chinese people with notions of their "superior" civilization. The spread of the Western mission, from Nara's viewpoint, displayed cultural arrogance in demanding a civilizing process from the local people, and also represented a conglomeration of individualism and political ideologies. China had failed to defend itself from the penetration of Western values in national life. In contrast, Japan had distinguished Christian teachings from Western ideals and solidified the Japanese essence in its encounter with Christianity. Nara interpreted the Manchurian Incident in 1931[18] as triggering self-awakening among Chinese intelligentsia from "total westernization" to the "cultural construction of a new China," and embodied in the indigenous movement among Chinese churches. Although the Incident aroused anti-Japanese sentiment, in essence it was neither anti-Japanese nor dependent on British and American missionaries. Nara believed there was an obligation for Japanese Christians to address their fellows in China and advocate a return to Oriental self-consciousness and a true understanding of the gospel. In his concluding words, Nara prayed for the formation of an alliance with Chinese Christians in order to fight against Britain and America.

Further Discussion

This paper has explored the anti-Western mindset of members of the Japanese YMCA during WWII, and their conflicts with American missionaries from 1880 onwards. The opposition towards missionaries can be seen not only in Japan's indigenous movement and nationalist sentiment prior to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, but also in the writings of Japanese YMCA Christians who went to China during wartime. These conflicts were fuelled by the rising militarist power and centralization of political control over religious groups; by the cultural superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race; different theological thinking; and a desire for local autonomy. The consensus in the Japanese YMCA about independence and cultural roots before and during WWII suggests the need for a broader analytical framework to address the detachment of foreign influence from the Japanese Christian community during the wartime period. Instead of solely interpreting the hostility towards Western missionaries through a political lens, this paper offers a balanced view that focuses on the internal conflicts between Japanese Christians and their Western colleagues.

The antagonism towards Western powers was closely associated with the nationalistic discourse of the Japanese YMCA. The missionaries' failure to recognize this hindered their mission work in a local context. Similar conflict occurred between Western missionaries and Chinese Christians in Republican China. When the National Christian Council of China (hereinafter referred to as the NCCC) drafted an official letter to the Shanghai Municipal Council, urging a thorough investigation of the Incident on 30 May 1925, the political activities of the NCCC stirred up a heated discussion within the missionary community (Correspondence 1925). As the NCCC facilitated its

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[18] The Japanese invasion of the northeastern part of China in 1931.

indigenous movement and advocated the abolition of "Unequal Treaties," the China Inland Mission withdrew from the Council in March 1926 (Macrae 1926, 818; The National Christian Council 1926). In response to a series of ensuing political activities by the NCCC, a large group of prominent missionaries issued a statement on April 7, 1927, criticizing the NCCC and asserting that the Council had lost the confidence of a large part of the missionary body due to its political activities (Missionary Group 1927).

While Western missionaries were driven by evangelical zeal, local converts perceived and reshaped Christianity based on their concerns in a local context. A further examination of Christians, in both Japan and China, would capture features of the discourse of nationalistic Christianity during the wartime period. Other questions in need of examination are: How did Chinese Christians deal with the role of missionaries in churches? and What were the similarities and differences in this process between China and Japan? In particular, as some Japanese Protestants in the Japanese YMCA were involved in the Manchurian Project, what was their relationship with Chinese Protestants? How did they collaborate with their Chinese colleagues? While Japanese Christians joined in the national cause to show their loyalty to the Emperor, Chinese Christians expressed their patriotism in the form of anti-Japanese militarism. Further research needs to be undertaken on the manner in which Chinese Christians perceived and responded to Japanese evangelical work under Japanese occupation. These are questions crucial to understanding the entanglement of political activities and nationalism in the complicated discourse of Christianity in a most dynamic East Asia.

Zhou, Yun
PhD Candidate
Australian Centre on China in the World,
The Australian National University, Australia

Abbreviations used in the Paper

KSMK *Kirisutokyō Shakai Mondai Kenjyū* 基督教社会問題研究.

DDJKK dōshisha Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo 同志社大学人文科学研究所

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ISLAMIC TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY

Sayem, Md. Abu

ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to present Islamic environmental teachings as a guiding source for environmental ethics. After briefly discussing current Muslim practices in relation to the environment, the paper focuses on the way Bangladeshi Muslims deal with the environment. It also correlates Islamic environmental teachings with current Bangladeshi practices and attitudes towards environmental sustainability. The study thus makes a new contribution to the debate about environmental problems in Bangladesh.

Introduction

The environment presents a burning issue that cannot be solved by any one nation, by any single governmental initiative, or by any single international organization. It is a global problem, although some local areas are more intensely affected. Because of uncontrolled human greed and all-pervasive economic activities, the natural world and its ecological systems are going to collapse.[1] To deal with this issue there is thus an urgent need for a combined effort from both governmental and non-governmental bodies, from both national and international initiatives, and from both secular and religious organizations. Thus, a collective approach and combined action plan is needed. In this present situation, secular people commonly think about the issue in conjunction with various activities. They are engaged in appreciable activity for the sake of the environment, although their criticism that religion is responsible for the ecological crisis creates some problems for religious people to work with them. For Lynn White (1967) and Arnold Toynbee (1972), religions invariably focus on human beings as the agents of God on earth, set upon proving their excellency and victory over the rest of creation. This gives humans open license to dominate the natural world, or so the argument from this view on religion goes. In this context, critics refer frequently to the Bible passage where Adam is commanded by God to "fill the earth," "subdue it" and "rule over" it (Gen 1:27-28). For such critics, religious views on environmental ethics are

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[1] Even the World Bank has expressed its frustration when assessing the situation in terms of the environmental damage wrought in the name of economic development: "[M]any environmental problems continue to intensify, and, in many countries, there are few grounds for optimism" (WB 1996, 4; quoted in Dragun and Tisdell 1999, 1).

anthropocentric,[2] rather than bio-centric[3] or eco-centric.[4] These critics further argue that people must abandon such anthropocentric views in the interests of environmental preservation, and accept either a bio-centric or eco-centric approach to environmental ethics.

Unfortunately, religious people rarely talk about this matter, though religions do have the potential to mitigate the problem. Some scholars and theologians, such as John B. Cobb (1925-present),[5] and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933-present),[6] have sought to disprove the arguments of these secular environmental ethicists, arguing instead that the religious approach to environmental ethics is not only anthropocentric, it is also bio-centric and eco-centric. While human beings do have special status over others, they are commanded by the same God (Gen. 2: 15) to protect the natural world and to take care of other animals and plants. Thus religions should not be misunderstood by secular environmental scholars as responsible for the present environmental crisis; instead religious teachings should be considered an alternative to secular environmental ethics or world-wide green technology movements.

As a religion of peace, Islam inspires Muslims to maintain a peaceful life with both humans and non-humans (Mohamed 2014, 325). In the light of Islam, all creatures are included in the family of God, with the human being just one member.[7] The human being is only a microcosmic part of the macrocosmic universe. In Islam, as in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, humans are given a dignified position as a crown of creation (Qur'an 2:30),[8] not only for ruling over others, but also for taking care of them on behalf of the Creator. Thus Muslims are not allowed to destroy any component of the natural world solely for economic benefits. The core teaching of Islam in terms of environmental ethics is to improve the environment, not to destroy it. There are repeated exhortations in Islamic religious texts to keep a balance with the natural world and to take care of what God has created. Unfortunately Muslims are not fully aware of these teachings of Islam, with current Muslim practices revealing a negligible understanding of the Islamic view of the environment.[9] This is seemingly true across all Muslim countries. Following modern world-views, Muslims are today concentrating on physical development to reap the economic benefits of the

[2] The term "anthropocentrism" comes from the Greek word *anthropos* for "human," and *kentron* for "center." It means an ideology that places human beings in the central position in the world, indicating their supremacy over all other creatures.

[3] The term originally comes from the Greek *bios*, "life" and *kentron*, "center" and so refers to all living things small and big, visible and invisible, human and non-human. The term is mostly used in an ecological sense of morality and responsibility, and implies there is inherent value in all living things in nature.

[4] The term "eco-centrism" (derived from the Greek *oikos*, "house," and *kentron*, "center") denotes a nature-cantered worldview that places intrinsic value on all living organisms and their natural environment, regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings.

[5] Since 1969, Cobb has been writing extensively on environmental issues from a Christian theological point of view (Cobb 1972, 1; 1994, vii). His first book *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* was published in 1972. His other works (Birch and Cobb 1981; Daly and Cobb [1989]1994; Cobb 2007) also deal with the same issue.

[6] Nasr has been working actively on environmental problems since 1968, with his first publication *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. He attempts to deal with the ecological crisis from an Islamic perspective. His other works (Nasr 1993, 1996) focus on the same issue from different angles.

[7] Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, "[A]ll creatures are Allāh's family; and Allāh loves most those who treat His family well and kindly." (*Bayhaqi; Shamā'il Kubra*, quoted in Green Muslims, n.d.).

[8] According to the Qur'an (2:30) all human beings are the vicegerents (*khalīfah*) of Allāh on the earth. Allāh states, "[A]nd when your Lord said to the angels: I am making a *khalīfah* on the Earth..." Thus, in this verse Allāh talks about His will for sending His deputy on the earth. In another place (Qur'an 6:165) Allāh speaks about the responsibility of the vicegerent and how human beings are accountable to Him: "(A)nd it is He Who has made you *khalīfah* (successor) upon the earth...that He may try you through what He has given you." Thus it is a very special duty that Allāh be obeyed by human beings; otherwise, it is like rebellion or unbelief, as Allāh says, "(I)t is He Who has made you *khalīfah* (successor) upon the earth. And whoever disbelieves (in not performing his duty as a successive authority of Allāh on the earth) – upon him will be the consequence of this act..." (Qur'an 35:39).

[9] Perhaps this is due to lack of real Islamic education or perhaps it is because of the pressure of modern world-views, which are followed all over the world for material development. Like other nations, Muslim countries are influenced by materialistic and mechanistic world-views.

natural world (Izzi Dien 1997, 47, 50-54). By so doing they are not actually developing their countries in terms of quality of life; instead they are making their livable places unfit for dwelling peacefully with the natural world.

Bangladesh, where 90.39 percent of inhabitants belong to Islam (BBS 2011, xiii), is selected here as a case study in order to demonstrate some of the current practices of Muslims in response to environmental degradation. Bangladesh is a country of natural beauty and environmental diversity,[10] yet day-by-day it is becoming a worse place to live. The core objective of this paper is thus to examine why Muslims in Bangladesh are not responding to the environmental issue seriously, given Islam has clear guidelines on how to treat nature and the environment properly. Unfortunately, little value is placed in religious ethical principles in secular Bangladesh, although the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) could still appreciate Islamic environmental ethics as a supplement to the country's secular environmental policies and activities.[11] This paper thus seeks to present a brief survey of the initiatives taken by government in terms of environmental sustainability, as well as other activities undertaken by NGOs, civil society organizations and environmental activists, before assessing how seriously these programs are taken so far and some of their shortcomings. Having discussed these matters, the paper will present some suggestions for improving what Bangladeshi people are facing now in terms of environmental degradation.

Islamic Teaching for Environmental Ethics

According to core Islamic beliefs, everything in the natural world is created by God; so in this sense there is a oneness of creation (*tawḥīd al-khalq*).[12] In the prophetic tradition, the world is called the family of God (*ʿayyāl Allāh*).[13] Thus Lubis (1998) considers human beings equal partners with other creatures. Shomali (2008, 2, 6) calls the earth "mother earth," arguing that the earth nurtures what is on it like a mother. He refers to a prophetic tradition where Prophet Muhammad said, "(P)reserve the earth because it is (metaphorically) your mother" (Nahj al-fasaḥah, ḥadīth no. 1130, quoted in Shomali 2008, 2). When considering how humans should treat the natural world, we should first think how human nature works with nature. In the view of Mohamed (2014, 317) the essential nature of the human being (*fiṭrah*) lives in harmony with nature, because human beings are always commanded by God to keep the middle position by virtue of moderation, balance and preservation (*al-wasaṭ / al- mīzān*).[14]

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[10] There are six seasons in a year. At the alteration of the seasons, people experience variation in natural charms. Bangladesh is considered the largest delta in the world. It is a riverine country, neither cold nor hot in terms of temperature. It is a mild tropical country where people enjoy both seasons in a middle way.

[11] Bangladesh is constitutionally a secular country, though Islam is declared to be its state religion. Some Islamic values are also considered at state level, but secular policy is highly favored in every layer of state affairs.

[12] Usually *tawḥīd* means oneness. When it relates to Allāh it is called *tawḥīdu (A)llāh,* meaning the oneness of Allāh. Here it relates to the creation of Allāh (Qur'an 30:25), i.e., *tawḥīd al-khalq*, meaning the oneness of Allāh's creation. In this sense, Lubis (1998) states *tawḥīd* is "the fundamental statement of the oneness of the Creator, from which everything else follows." For him, "it is the primordial testimony to the unity of all creation and to the interdependence of the natural order of which humanity is an intrinsic part." Lubis' argument and interpretation are followed and reinterpreted by Gada (2014, 134) with many other Qur'anic verses.

[13] See the foot-note no.1. Lubis (1998) refers this to *Kashf al-khafa'*.

[14] Allāh states in the Qur'an, "[A]nd thus We have made you [Muslims] as a median/just [balanced and moderated] nation…" (2:143). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says, "[T]he best of affairs is the medium one" (*Nahj al-fasaḥah,* ḥadīth no. 1481, quoted in Shomali 2008, 5). Muslims are therefore commanded to take a middle position between two extremes, be it between extravagance and niggardliness, or spirituality and secularity, or between finite and infinite, or between expenditure and earning, or between offering and receiving, and so on.

God has given humans a very prestigious status over all of His creatures (Qur'an, 17:70),[15] because God has appointed them as His vicegerents (*khalīfah*) on the earth.[16] Many people have misunderstood this very dignified status as permission from God to dominate the rest of the creation of God. For Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Religious Nature 2015, 15), it is a very special kind of responsibility imposed by God upon human beings to take care of His creatures on His behalf.[17] This special status does not necessarily give open license to human beings for monopoly of domination. Instead it creates an acute balance between power and humility. Thus the role of humans in the world is the role of guardianship as custodians. In other word, it is stewardship as Mohamed (2014, 317) notes in her work.

All the creatures of God are kept before them as a trust (*amanah*),[18] so humans are expected to play a significant role in the environment as trustees. Humans are asked to improve the environment around them, not to destroy it in the name of so-called economic development, defense or power games, which are very common phenomena on the surface of earth. Sometimes this kind of development may seem necessary, but in most cases it is artificially created by uncontrolled human greed and desire.

Islam urges people to control all kinds of greed and desire. Thus, according to Islamic teaching, a Muslim cannot be greedy about the sort of economic development that causes problems for the non-human world. Everything is created by God and is also nurtured and taken care of by God's angels. This kind of religious belief gives an idea of the sacredness of the others; so, without a proper justification (that lies within the permission of God), none are allowed to harm them. God encompasses everything in the universe, nothing is beyond His sight.[19] Therefore, according to Islamic teachings about the environment, the natural world is sacred (Nasr [1968] 1976, 1993). None are allowed to blame any creation of God. Each part of creation, even if it is very tiny, is worthy and sacred. Thus human beings should have a sense of this sacredness of the rest of the creation.

As rational and responsible animals, human being ought to be thankful for what God has created in the universe, and from which they benefit. Humans are completely dependent on the rest of the creation for their own survival, and so are commanded by God not to misuse and abuse the natural resources (Qur'an 7:31; 17:26-27). They must stay away from any form of extravagance (*isrāf*), which Shomali (2008, 5) mentions as one of the potential causes of environmental degradation. Basically, this comes from uncontrolled human greed and negligence towards the resources of the environment. It is wasteful consumption which must be controlled by human

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[15] Allāh says, "[A]nd We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with (definite) preference" (Qur'an 17:70).

[16] See footnote 2. In addition, the Arabic term "*khalīfah*" comes from the root word "*khalfun,*" which means "followed," "succeeded" etc. So the word "*khalīfah*" refers to the one who comes after and obeys the sender. *Khalīfa* is provided by the sender with a very special power and responsibility concurrently. In the Qur'an, the term *khalīfah* is mentioned nine times, and seven times it is found with prefix *fī al-arḍ*, which means successive authority on earth (Lubis 1998). The common English translations of the term *khalīfah* are successor, deputy, viceroy, vicegerent, and trustee. According to Lubis (1998), its new translation is stewardship. In consideration of the preservation of the natural environment and the ecological system, Lubis' translation sounds very appropriate. Through such a new translation, Lubis attempts to see human beings as guardians of the earth, friends of the earth, custodians of the earth, with humans seen as the ones responsible for taking care of the environment.

[17] Sayyed Hossein Nasr uses the term *khalīfah* as the responsibility of humans in taking care of Allah's creation (Religious Nature 2015, 15). Nasr is not interested in its popular meaning, which is tied up with political authority and power. More importantly, Nasr wants to ensure the sense of responsibility in its political meaning.

[18] The Arabic term *amanah* refers to both trust and responsibility. It also means obligations (Saheeh International 2011, 416, footnote no.1156). It is a very unique characteristic of human beings that they accepted this kind of agreement from Allāh, when the rest of the creation refused to receive it, as Almighty Allāh states, "[I]ndeed, We offered *amanah* (the trust, responsibility, obligation) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and fear it; but human being accepted this offer…" (Qur'an 33:72). So, as *khalīfah* of Allāh, humans must be honest and sincere in this unique trust and responsibility; otherwise, they will have to show their accountability to Allāh in the life after death.

[19] In the Qur'an it is stated, "[S]o wherever you [might] turn, there is the face of Allāh" (2:115).

accountability and responsibility to the environment, otherwise disaster/corruption (*fasād/zulm*) will appear in the whole world (Mohamed 2014, 317) in the form of uncontrolled destruction.[20]

The well-established Islamic maxim is *"Lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirara fi al-Islam"* ("harm not and don't be harmed"),[21] and Shomali (2008, 5) indicates clearly that "there is no place in Islam for inflicting any harm on one's self or on others." This general rule of Islam is commonly applied to all things. Any sorts of harm, be it to any human or to any non-human being, is prohibited (*ḥaram*) and subject to punishment. Any act of corruption (*zulm*) and mischief (*fasād*) is always condemned in Islam (Qur'an 2:205; 7:56).

Shomaili (2008, 2) notes tree plantation is a work of worship to God (ʿ*ibadah*). Prophet Muhammad always encourages the planting of trees and discourages cutting them down. In the words of Prophet Muhammad, planting a tree is a charitable act: "[T]here is none among the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds in a field, and then a bird, a man or an animal eats from it, but is regarded a charitable gift (*ṣadaqah*) for him" (*Bukhārī*, ḥadīth no. 1071). Watering or feeding a tree is like the act of feeding or watering a believing man, as the Prophet of Islam states: "[W]hoever waters a date or lot tree it is as if he has given a drink to a thirty believer" *(Wassa'il al-Shi'a*, ḥadīth no. 17). Without justification, no tree should be cut down and even its leaves as well, as Prophet Muhammad says: "[U]nless you are compelled, do not cut down a tree" (*Wassa'il al-Shiʿa*, ḥadīth no. 11). If a tree is cut down without a reasonable cause it is a punishable act. In the words of Prophet Muhammad: "[H]e who cuts a lot tree (without justification of a real cause behind it), Allah will send him to hellfire" (*Sunan Abū Dawūd*, ḥadīth no. 5228). Destroying farm lands (gardens and crops), even if these belong to the enemy with whom Muslims are fighting, is not allowed by the Prophet.[22] Prophet Muhammad never allows his companions to cut trees; instead he inspires them to plant trees till the last hour: "[I]f the doomsday (*qiyamah*) comes while you have a sapling in your hand, plant it before the Hour comes" (Musnad Ahmad, ḥadīth no. 12491).

In Islam, harming animals is a punishable act, while taking care of animals is considered a way to salvation. Killing animals without justification is forbidden (*ḥarām*) as the Prophet says: [W]hoever kills a sparrow or a bigger animal without respecting its rights to exist will be accountable to Allah for it on the Day of Judgement" (*Sunan al-Nasa'i*, quoted in Bilal 2017). A man is forgiven just because of watering a dog (*Bukhārī*, ḥadīth no. 2466). In the words of Prophet Muhammad, "[T]here is reward for serving any living being" (ibid.). On the other hand, a woman is punished in hell fire because she imprisoned a cat until death (ibid., ḥadīth no. 712).

Cleanliness and hygiene are part and parcel of Islam, without which Islamic faith and practice cannot be fulfilled. In consideration of its practical applications, cleanliness is half of faith (*al-ṭuhuru saṭr al-iman*) (*Muslim,* ḥadīth no. 223). Islam not only talks about personal cleanliness (*ṭuhur*) and purification (both of the physical and the spiritual), in Islamic teachings public places (e.g., roads, parks, hospitals, educational institutions, offices, rivers, lakes, markets, etc.) are to be kept clean and hygienic. Prophet Muhammad commands his followers to clean their courtyards (*Jami al-Tirmidhī*, ḥadīth no. 2799). In the same hadith, Allah is introduced as Clean (*Nazif*) and He loves cleanliness (ibid.). Removing harmful things from footpaths or roads, for the purpose of keeping the street safe and clean, is considered as an act of (*ṣadaqa*) charity (*Muslim*, ḥadīth no. 1009). Muslims are advised not to relieve themselves in watering places, roads, and places of shade (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, ḥadīth no. 328), because these acts disturb others in keeping the adjacent environment hygienic.

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[20] That is why the Qur'an states: [D]disasters/corruptions [mischief/evil] have appeared on land and sea because of what humans have done [wrongly]…" (30:41).

[21] This ḥadīth is recorded by Ibn Majah (ḥadiīth no. 2331, 2332), Aḥmad (ḥadīth no. 2719, 2714) and Imām Malik (ḥadīth no. 1234).

[22] *Al-Kāfī*, ḥadīth no. 5.

God has created each and everything in the universe with a very perfect measurement and due proportion (Qur'an 67:3-4). God's creation is a life-supporting element for human existence. It is very unfair and unjust to do anything that can disturb the characteristics of anything existing in the creation. Izzi Dien (1997, 48) notes that all living creatures of the environment (biotic organisms of nature), even non-living things, glorify Allāh in their ways, as it is stated in the Qur'an: "[W]hatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth exalts Allāh" (61:1). Izzi Dien argues that human beings must be very sensitive about keeping in mind that to destroy anything in the creation means to stop giving voice to the glorification of Allāh. On the other hand, to protect Allāh's creatures is to keep praising Allāh. He raises a question: how is it possible for a Muslim to destroy a thing which is praying to Allāh? The whole creation is a sign of Allāh's wisdom, mercy, power and other attributes through which humans can grow their awareness and understanding about Almighty Creator (Izzi Dien 1997, 48). Thus, nature works for the spiritual understanding of the human mind in order to enhance the relationship with Allāh (Qur'an 13:2-4; 21:79).

For Shomali (2008, 6), everything in the environment has its own intrinsic value and is sacred. It has also instrumental value in consideration of others. Nothing belongs to absolutism. Values are relational, interdependent and hierarchical. Even human beings have both intrinsic and instrumental values, depending on the circumstances. Human beings must be respectful of the values of other creatures as they have not been given a monopoly in terms of values and rights. Humans are not lords or rulers of other beings; they are caretakers and trustees. As the crown of creation, humans have a very special responsibility to the rest of Allāh's creation, a responsibility that cannot be denied by human beings in the name of superiority. No other creature is assigned to perform this responsible duty (*amanah*). In this regard, Izzi Dien (1997, 49) emphasizes the Islamic term *amanah,* which denotes a very special kind of duty and responsibility, i.e., the responsibility for looking after Allāh's creation (ibid.). He suggests that this reciprocal relationship between humans and other creatures (animals and plants, including all abiotic organisms of the natural world) should be based on the concept of justice (ʿ*adl*) and kindness/compassion (*iḥsān*), and not on material and economic interest (ibid.). He cannot say how these Islamic concepts, ʿ*adl* and *iḥsān*, can articulate such relationships, however. Is it possible to implement relationships without a guiding regulation? Mohamed tries to cover this gap, since for her all these eco-ethical principles of Islam are kept into motion through a system of legal methods, laws and institutions that is called *shariʿa* (2014, 317). The goal (*maqasid*) of *shariʿa* is to seek the common universal welfare for all the creation of Allāh (ibid.). Islam aims to connect the whole of creation with its creator, Allāh, through maintaining good relationships within all of His creation. Mohamed (2014, 325) calls Islamic teachings on environmental ethics "theo-centric eco-ethics." She argues that in Islam "just, respectful and responsible interaction between humans and the natural world" is always supported and promoted" (ibid.).

Basic Islamic Environmental Principles in Positive Sense	Basic Islamic Environmental Principles in Negative Sense	Basic Islamic Environmental Principles in Due Management (*Fiqh al-bi'ah* / Natural Resource Management)
Tawḥīd al-khalq (oneness of Allāh's creation) as a principle of divine unity	*Isrāf* (wastefulness) as a principle of frugality while utilizing natural resources	ʿ*Adl* (justice) as a principle of keeping nature in its right place
Khalīfah (vicegerent and trustee of God on earth) as a principle of guardianship of planet / taking care of nature	*Tabdhīr* (squandering) as a principle of frugality while utilizing natural resources	*Qisṭ* (fairness, equality and equity) as a principle of treating nature with fairness

'Ubudiyyah (being a true slave of God) as a principle of servanthood	*Fasād* (corruption on earth) as a principle of not degrading the balanced relationship with nature	*Iḥsān* (perfection / excellence) as a principle of inspiring humans to be kind towards nature
Amanah (stewardship/trust) as a principle of responsibility	*Ẓulm* (unjust act / corruption / exploitation) as a principle of forbidding exploitation or depletion of natural resources	*Mīzān* (order of things) as the principle of balance / equilibrium in nature
ʾĀkhirah (belief in life after death) as a principle of accountability	*Takāthur* (greed) as a principle of not collaborating or bad competition in price of natural resources	*Qadar* (due proportion) as the principle of due measurement in nature
Fitrah (primordial human nature) as a principle of restoring reality of life	*"Lā ḍarara wa lā ḍirara fi al-Islam"* ("harm not and don't be harmed") as a principle of not harming anything in nature without proper justification	*Ḥarām* (forbidden / inviolable zones) as a principle of protection of lands
Ayah (both word of God and sign of God) as a principle of treating nature as a sign of God	---	*Ḥima* (protected areas) as a principle of conservation management
Ayyal (family of God) as a principle of relating creatures with God)	---	*Wasaṭiyyah* (balanced way of life) as a principle of moderation
Tasbīḥ (glorifying God) as a principle of glorification of God by saving nature	---	*Nazāfah* (clean / neat) as a principle of environmental hygiene
Ummah (community) as a principle of treating non-human animals as communities like humans	---	*Ṣadaqa* (charity) as a principle for inspiring humans to give space and opportunities for non-human animals to eat
Al-muḥīṭ (one of God's names / the Encompassing) as a principle of utmost care for nature	---	*Maqasid al-shariʿa* (goal of Islamic laws) as a principle of seeking the common universal welfare of all creatures

Figure 1. Islamic principles of the environment and its management

Modern Islamic scholars thus try to relay Islamic guidelines on environmental ethics and thus revitalize human consciousness about preservation of the environment, though they do not make give concrete suggestions for articulating these guidelines within the legalizing bodies of modern states. Until such a connection is ensured, these guidelines may not work effectively.

Current Muslim Environmental Practices

Unfortunately, all these basic principles of Islam in relation to environmental ethics are not voiced sufficiently by Islamic scholars, Islamic institutes (*madrasah*, schools, colleges and universities), and Islamic religious leaders (*Imāms*). Thus Muslims in general are not fully aware of these teachings, although the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the prophetic traditions of Islam) do provide the core foundation for such guidelines. In fact, current Muslim practices do not reflect basic Islamic principles of environmental ethics. Concerning environmental degradation, Muslim countries are not seen as different from the rest of the world (Izzi Dien 1997, 47). Religious scholars or eco-theologians, for instance Cobb (1972) and Nasr ([1968] 1976), blame the modern scientific world-view of nature, which is highly attached to materialism and secularism, for these world-wide environmental problems. The modern world-view, which was later connected with religious views, was triggered by the scientific revolution, humanism and the industrial world, thereby superseding the traditional view of nature. According to a secular worldview, nature is like a machine and has nothing to do with sacredness. From this conception, modern humans have been torturing nature and violating the ecological system in many ways since the fourteenth century C.E. Through the power of science and technology, European people colonized Muslim countries and introduced Muslims to modern education and a scientific way of understanding. A result of this was that the mainstream Muslim population moved away from Islamic education. Almost everything in the Western world, from philosophical understanding to scientific application, is now followed by Muslim countries (Izzi Dien 1997, 50). The Muslim world is just imitating what the Western world does in terms of economic development. Muslim countries are causing the degradation of the environment in the name of economic development in the same way the Western world has already done, and in this matter there is no basic difference between the Muslim world and the rest of the world.

After the discovery of oil in the middle east (in countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait), multi-development works, for instance the building of modern cities with high-rise buildings and road networks, are funded by petro-dollars. The extraction of fossil oil from deep within the earth is itself polluting the environment, for it is then processed by chemicals for export to other areas, and this also at the price of nature. Finally, this fossil oil is used by modern vehicles as fuel which immediately hits the environment and pollutes air. As people of middle east have much more money, they are rapidly increasing use of various branded motor vehicles that emit vast amounts of carbon dioxide into the fresh air, and this luxurious life-style is based on wasteful use of natural resources. At the same time, the traditional characteristics of desert lands are being fatally damaged by the unprecedented construction of roads and cities. Other Muslim countries of Africa and Asia are also causing environmental problems through deforestation, unprecedented levels of construction, ruinous agricultural practices, landfills, chemical effluents, fossil-fuelled vehicles, unplanned land use, over-population, and industrialization. The Muslim world is not free from the charge of damaging the environment, and it is thus very unfortunate that we do not hear any strong voices from within Muslim countries seeking to mitigate or at least control the situation. There are very few individuals talking about the issues, and the voices of those that do mostly go unheard by Muslim governments and the mass of people.[23]

Despite that fact, we have recently seen Islamic scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b.1933), Fazlun Khalid (b.1932), and İbrahim Özdemir (b.1960), among others, trying to contribute something to environmental ethics from an Islamic point of view. Their common focus

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[23] In the case of Bangladesh, we see Professor Anu Muhammad (Economics Department of Jahangir Nagar University) being vocal and outspoken on environmental issues (like Sundorban rakhkha andolon / "Save the Sundarbans" movement) and proper utilization of natural resources. As a member of civil society, he raised his voice against the government's policies for so-called development at the price of environmental sustainability and natural resources. But his voice is not being heard; instead his campaign is always under threat (Independent Online Desk 2016).

points are that nature is sacred, and the human role must be one of stewardship. Muslims must modify their behavior in relation to the non-human world, and the value of non-human entities must be recognized (Saniotis 2012, 167). There are some organizations, such as the UK-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science (IFEES) founded in 1994 (unofficially in 1980), the African Muslim Environment Network (AMEN) founded in 2006, and the Islamic Relief World Wide founded in 1984. Besides these, there are online organizations, such as Green Muslims, Global Muslim Climate Network, Muslim Environmental Watch, The World Muslim League, etc. All these organizations are working within their limitations for the preservation of the natural environment through increasing awareness. Very recently we discovered an Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change (17-18 August 2015 in Istanbul), in which Islamic leaders called for Muslims to take necessary steps in responding to the issue, and where they urged governments to work with all member-states of the UN for global initiatives to mitigate the problem. At its sixth Islamic conference meeting with ministers of member-states in Rabat (8-9 October 2015), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) discussed climate change, environmental protection and sustainable development. In the declaration, member countries were urged to immediately take a few steps, such as hosting green economic functions, creating environmentally-friendly energy systems and raising awareness for a sustainable environment. The OIC's secretary general, Dr. Iyad Ameen Madani, considers climate change a serious issue and also confesses that without collective (global) action it is not possible to mitigate the problem. Muslim countries are cooperating with international forums and agencies on many issues to do with the environment and climate change, and in particular are responding to the declaration of Rio-1992, the Rio+ 20, the Agenda 21, the Kyoto Protocol 1997, Cop 21, and so on. These are a few of the initiatives and activities of Muslim people and the Muslim world in relation to environmental issues, which are of course insufficient compared with the gravity of the problems. In the following pages, I focus on Bangladesh as a case study.

Environmental Problems in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a south Asian country bordered by India in the west, north and east, by Myanmar in the southeast, and by the Bay of Bengal in the south. Bangladesh is a country of natural beauty and environmental diversity. It has six seasons which vary from time to time. In the course of the year people experience many variations from summer to winter. There are many rivers, for which reason the country is called a land of rivers. Bangladesh is the meeting place of three mighty Himalayan rivers—the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna (Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2004, 2) —which flow into the Bay of Bengal. It is a low-lying tropical country of fertile lands. That is why this small country of only 147,570 sq. km (Department of Environment 2011, 1; Chowdhury 2016) can feed a huge number of its population (149,772,364 as at the population census of 2011 of BBS and 161 million according to the World Bank (WB) Report [2015]). However, this beautiful country is now facing environmental problems, and as a result of which, has already turned into a vulnerable country in terms of environmental disasters (Salequzzaman and Stocker 2001, 104). The main environmental problems and their causes are as follows:

Degradation of Land and Loss of Soil Quality:

Farmers are using chemical fertilizers, pesticides and agrochemicals on farming lands to produce more crops. These ruinous agricultural practices are the main causes of land degradation. Converting forest lands to farming lands, and the dumping of industrial effluents and hazardous waste into the soil have added to the damage to soil quality. In the hilly areas land degradation occurs due to soil erosion, and riverbank erosion is a common problem in areas beside rivers. Wetlands are drying rapidly due to drought. Bangladesh is heading towards economic development,

so urbanization and industrialization are capturing farming lands for non-agricultural purposes (DoE 2012, xviii; ADB 2004, 9-13).

Water Pollution and Contamination:

Surface water bodies are being polluted by industrial effluents, agrochemicals, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc. People dump waste indiscriminately into water bodies, which pollutes the water and contaminates its quality. Due to excessive extraction of ground water for drinking, irrigation or industrial purposes, the ground water resources are declining gradually and becoming contaminated with arsenic. According to the Bulletin of the World Health Organization (WHO)-2012, between 35 and 77 million people have already been affected by arsenic. Arsenic is causing the largest mass poisoning in the country's history (Flanagan, Johnston, and Yan 2012). People in arsenic-affected areas die each day because of arsenic poisoning (Islam 1999, 4). As an effect of worldwide climate change, the sea levels of the coastal area of Bangladesh are rising and increasing salinity in those areas, with people not having access to drinkable water.

Air Pollution:

Air pollution has reached alarming levels. Dhaka City has turned into a poisonous gas chamber (Islam 1999, 4): According to the Department of the Environment (DoE), the density of airborne particulate matter reaches 463 micrograms per cubic meter in Dhaka, which is the highest level in the world. Air pollution seriously affects the respiratory tract and causes irritation, headache, asthma, even cancer. Fossil-fuelled vehicles, industrial emissions, effluents from power generation, and brick kilns are the main causes of air pollution (DoE 2012, xx).

Unprecedented Construction:

Because of urbanization and industrialization, Bangladesh is experiencing unprecedented construction in the form of roads and houses for common people and industries. Mostly these constructions are carried out in unplanned ways. As a result, farming lands are reduced daily and the ecological systems of those areas are under threat.

Industrial (Chemical) Effluents:

Some industries (for instance pharmaceutical industries, tanneries, fertilizer factories, paper mills, textile mills, still industries, ship breaking industries in Chittagong, and brick kilns, etc.) are emitting industrial effluents into the soil and water across the country. Most of these industries do not have their own adequate disposal systems. Ultimately all these chemical and toxic effluents contaminate the air, water and soil by seriously damaging the environment and the ecological system.

Loss of Wetlands:

Wetlands carry additional water from heavy rains and serve the ecological systems. Due to population pressure and unplanned construction, wetlands are decreasing rapidly. With the decline of wetlands, the country's biodiversity is shrinking (Islam 1999, 4) and waterlogging is becoming a common problem for urban areas. Thus, the whole country is "severely affected by wetland loss" (Ghos et al. 1997, 83).

Exhaust Gases:

Bangladesh has no natural oil, but it does have some natural gas and coal mines. This gas is used in domestic cooking (especially in urban residential areas), in many industries, and in vehicles. Natural oil is used as fuel, especially in cars and diesel engines. It is also used for producing electricity. Coal is used in some brick kilns and in some power plant industries. When all these fossil-based natural resources are burnt for energy creation, their exhausted portions go directly

into the open air, which increases carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, thus causing global warming and depletion of the ozone layer.

Deforestation:

People are digging into mountains for housing and cutting forests in order to cultivate land. Besides this, hydro-electric power plants are being settled in some forest areas. Thus forest land is rapidly decreasing day-by-day. The forest area of Bangladesh has already declined from 15 to 5 percent over the last twenty years (Ghos et al. 1997, 83). Now the country's forest area is below the minimum requirement for a healthy environment. At least 25 percent of total land should belong to the country's forest, but in Bangladesh only 17 percent of the land is forest area.[24]

Desertification:

Bangladesh is likely to face desertification soon. Vast parts of the country, especially in south-western and north-western areas, are under serious threat. Desertification happens through deforestation, soil erosion, salination, waterlogging, overgrazing of pastures, inappropriate irrigation practices, mining, use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, intensive cropping, absence of proper organic management, poor drainage and inadequate soil conservation (Ghos et al. 1997, 83). In a word, unsustainable land use patterns are causing the desertification (ibid).

Household, Medical and Industrial Solid Waste:

The country lacks proper waste management handling systems. In city areas, solid household waste is indiscriminately kept in open places, which causes environmental hazards and health risks. Uncontrolled and open dumping of waste with garbage sometimes blocks the drainage system, threating contamination of the drinking water supply. Across the country, there are many public and private hospitals and clinics, but these health servicing centers have no adequate waste management. According to the ADB report (2004, 8), more than 98 percent of medical waste, such as disposable syringes, needles, blood-soaked pads, used blood bags, etc. are normally thrown in open dustbins. Such indiscriminate disposal of hazardous solid waste by hospitals poses a serious threat to health and the environment. As the country's priority is to set up various kinds of industries, huge amount of industrial waste are produced every day, but all these chemical, toxic and hazardous wastes are not properly disposed of. As a result, they are rapidly polluting the air, water and soil (ADB 2004, 7-8).

Noise Pollution:

Urbanization, industrialization and motorization create noise pollution. Indiscriminate use of hydraulic horns of vehicles, microphones and cassette players cause sound pollution in Bangladesh. According to the World Health Organization, noise should be below 60BD for a healthy environment, but according to DoE's survey, Dhaka City has already crossed this level. The DoE reveals that sound pollution is a cause of mental and physical illness, such as headaches, indigestion, high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, etc. Now millions of people are at serious health risk, ranging from deafness to heart attack (Tuhin 2008).

Inadequate and Improper Waste Management System:

According to DoE (2012, xxi) "approximately 13,332 tons of waste is produced every day in the urban areas of Bangladesh…" This number is increasing daily because of rapid growth in urbanization and industrialization (ibid.). The country's poor waste management systems cannot cope with the huge amount of waste generated by domestic, commercial and clinical activities.

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[24] *National Forest and Tree Resources Assessment 2005-2007, Bangladesh*, quoted in DoE (2012, 3).

Some waste is recycled through inadequate recycling facilities for reuse, but most is dumped in either soil or water. The unmanaged waste pollutes the air, water and land resources (Ibid.).

Chemical Runoff to Wetlands:

The traditional agricultural system, which was environmentally friendly, is being completely replaced by modern cultivation methods. As mentioned before, to increase production of crops and to guard against insects, farmers are indiscriminately using agrichemicals—chemical fertilizers and pesticides—on farm lands. This utilization of chemicals on the land results in chemical runoff to the surface water bodies (Islam 1999, 4), such as ponds, canals, lakes and rivers, and other wetlands. As a result, the country's aquaculture is now seriously at risk.

Depletion of biodiversity:

Due to shifting cultivation, urbanization, changing agricultural systems, commercial shrimp cultivation in coastal mangrove areas, deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, degradation of wetlands, hazardous environment etc., the country's biodiversity is seriously damaged. The flora and fauna are facing serious challenges to their survival. According to DoE (2012, 55), the country has lost 10 percent of its mammalian species, 3 percent of its avifauna and 4 percent of its reptiles within the last one hundred years. More than fifty species are critically endangered according to the report of IUCN (Islam 2005, 675).

Natural Calamities:

Due to its physiology and morphology, Bangladesh faces natural calamities every year. Floods, cyclones, tornadoes, earthquakes, storm surges, droughts, abnormal rainfall, hailstorm lighting, etc. destroy lives and property. Each year the country experiences many losses due to such natural disasters. Bangladesh is also called a country of natural calamities and disasters.

Unsanitary Conditions and Unhygienic Environment:

According to a WHO report, 50 percent of the country's people are deprived of hygienic sanitation facilities. The conditions in villages and in urban slums are the worst. In village schools, there is only one latrine for about one hundred students and these toilets are not cleaned regularly (Islam 2005, 676). Diseases like diarrhea are common due to these unsanitary and unhygienic conditions.

Overpopulation:

Overpopulation indicates over-exploitation of natural resources. It is a huge burden for a small country like Bangladesh. Such overpopulation always creates strong pressure on the environment and its natural resources. In order to meet their basic necessities, people are chopping trees, cutting mountains, extracting more ground water, producing more foods, setting up industries, building houses, and converting agricultural lands to non-farming lands. All these human activities undoubtedly damage the environment.

Climate Change and Vulnerability:

Greenhouse gas emissions are the main cause of global warming, through which the climate is changing all over the world. Bangladesh has contributed less than others to this cause, but nevertheless has to face a massive and dangerous situation due to climate change (ADB 2004, 15). Climate change results in sea level rises, high atmospheric temperatures, heavy rain, drought, intrusion of salt in river water and farming lands, floods, storms and lighting, cyclones, tornado, etc. (ibid.). The coastal areas are going to be the most affected by climate change. It is projected that by 2050 one third of the country's area (mainly coastal areas) will be under sea water. This will reduce drinkable water and arable lands in the southern part of the country. As a result, Bangladesh

will face problems of climate refugees. In the meantime, Bangladesh is "listed among the ten most vulnerable countries in the world".[25]

No.	Causes	Contributing Factors	Responsibility
1	Degradation of land and loss of soil quality	Agrochemicals, converting forest lands to farming lands, dumping industrial effluents into soil, urbanization, and industrialization	Country people and GoB's inadequate environmental policy
2	Water pollution and contamination	Industrial effluents, agrochemicals, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides	---Do---
3	Air pollution	Fossil-fueled vehicles, industrial emissions, effluents of power generation, and brick kilns	GoB's inadequate environmental policy and regional industrialization
4	Unprecedented construction	Unplanned ways of construction	GoB's inadequate environmental policy
5	Industrial (chemical) effluents	Inadequate disposal system	---Do---
6	Loss of wetlands	Unplanned ways of construction	---Do---
7	Exhausted gases	Natural oil, natural gas and coal used by industries and vehicles	---Do---
8	Deforestation	Converting forest lands for farms and industries	Country people and GoB's inadequate environmental policy
9	Desertification	Soil erosion, salination, waterlogging, agrochemicals, and intensive cropping	---Do---
10	Household, medical and industrial solid waste	Lacking a proper waste management handling	GoB's inadequate environmental policy
11	Noise pollution	Motorized vehicles	---Do---
12	Improper waste management system	Unmanaged waste	Country people and GoB's inadequate environmental policy
13	Chemical runoff to wetlands	Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and industrial effluents	GoB's inadequate environmental policy
14	Depletion of biodiversity	Urbanization, changing agricultural system, commercial shrimp cultivation in coastal mangrove areas, air pollution, water pollution, and degradation of wetlands	Country people, GoB's inadequate environmental policy and regional industrialization
15	Natural calamities	Floods, cyclones, tornadoes, earthquakes, storm surges, droughts, abnormal rainfall, hailstorm lighting and landslide	Natural cause

[25] *Regional Study on the Causes and Consequences of Natural Disasters and the Protection and Preservation of the Environment* (Kathmandu: SAARC Secretariat), quoted in Ghos et al. (1997, 86).

16	Unsanitary condition and unhygienic environment	Lack of awareness and proper management system	Country people and GoB's inadequate environmental policy
17	Overpopulation	Unplanned family life	Country people
18	Climate change and vulnerability	Greenhouse gas emission across the globe	Industrial and developed world

Figure 2. Causes of environmental problems in Bangladesh

From the abovementioned visible causes, the country's environment and ecology are facing serious problems. This has had a negative impact on the economy, because the country's economy is based on agricultural products which are in turn dependent on living organisms and ecosystems. Environmental degradation directly affects human health (for instance, due to air pollution in Dhaka City, respiratory problems are very common). Environmental degradation leads to atmospheric change, extinction of flora and fauna, scarcity of natural resources, ozone layer depletion, and loss of tourism. It also aggravates poverty for marginalized people because their livelihoods (fishing, cultivation, etc.) are at serious risk. Nowadays, environmental scholars and environmental activists are concerned about these destructive effects, but perhaps they fail to grasp the root cause of the problems. The root cause seems to be ignorance about the intimate and deep spiritual relationship of human beings with the natural world. This gap can be closed by religious eco-ethics and eco-spirituality. This unexplored field will be discussed later in the recommendations. First, in a nutshell, how Bangladesh currently addresses these problems:

Response of Bangladesh to Environmental Issues

Government Steps:

According to the documents of DoE (2012), the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is seen to be actively responding to international conventions with its follow-up activities. After the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment in 1972, the country issued the Water Pollution Control Ordinance in 1973 in order to take care of the water bodies of the country. The Environmental Pollution Control Board was founded in 1977 to work on improving the environment. The Department of Environment (DoE) was established in 1989 under the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF). The Bangladesh government adopted an Environmental Policy in 1992 for maintenance of the ecological balance, environmentally friendly development and sustainable use of natural resources. The Environmental Conservation Act and Environmental Conservation Rules were enacted in 1995 and in 1997 respectively to set environmental standards in relation to the quality of air, water, noise, odour, emissions and discharge. The Environment Court Act (ECA) has been in force since 2010 dealing with environmental offences. In response to Agenda 21, in 1995 the country established a National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) with the full participation of ordinary people, interest groups, resource users, environment stockholders, NGOs, and lobbyists. As the environment is a broad issue, it needs the increased participation of many bodies within the structures of government. In keeping with this spirit, other ministries, such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Land, Water Resources, Fisheries and Livestock, Industries, Health and Family Welfare, etc., plus many other institutions, are working for a healthy environment. With the recent adoption of a "polluter pays principle," DoE has attempted to make industries more responsible about the environment, even penalizing some for non-compliance with the policy (DoE 2012, 10-11).

The Bangladesh government also gives importance to environmental education, awareness and public participation. As per suggestions from the Department of the Environment, the

Bangladesh government has included environmental education in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools in science, social science, geography and the environment, and is also being taught with other general subjects. In many public and private universities, environmental science and management is taught as an independent subject, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The Department of the Environment is attempting to increase people's awareness of the essential nature of the environment through knowledge dissemination. Some Green Clubs have been established by DoE at several schools in city areas in order to enhance knowledge of the environment among school students. The National Environmental Award is offered every year by GoB for the best performance in terms of environmental sustainability. The fifth of June is celebrated across the country as World Environment Day in order to make people more conscious of the environment (DoE 2012, 11).

Initiatives of Non-Governmental Organizations:

Apart from all these governmental initiatives, some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are working for environmental sustainability also. The Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) is a research-based organization. [26] Its primary concentration is sustainable development through a healthy environment. It was founded in 1986 and since then has been working for environmental justice through better management of natural resources, such as land, water, fisheries, forestry, agriculture and biodiversity. It advocates enhancing flexibility between natural and artificial means of economic growth. Over a thirty year period as an NGO it has become a leading research institute in sustainable development and environmental justice for the whole of South Asia. As part of its monitoring activities, BCAS produces an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and a Social Impact Assessment (SIA). Clean technology, renewable energy, pollution management, and environment related health risks are considered part of BCAS's activities.

The Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) was founded in 2003. Since its inception as a non-profit NGO it has been working to conserve the country's biodiversity. Its motto is "Protect the National Heritage" (Hussain 2011). The Trust collects data on wild animals and plants and then monitors these populations through observation. It works for institutional and policy development aimed at preserving Bangladesh's diversified flora and fauna, and persists in taking legal steps for the protection of wildlife. The WTB tries to save critically-endangered species by increasing public awareness of the value of conservation, and mitigates wildlife-human conflict by promoting positive reciprocal relationships (Masud 2011).

The Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) was founded in 1993 to promote environmental justice through sound environmental jurisprudence. [27] As a non-governmental organization of lawyers, from the very outset BELA has been raising its voice against poor governance and non-implementation of environmental laws. Because of its persistence, special courts are now empowered to deal with environmental offences. The Association wants to see existing environmental laws implemented through judicial and administrative steps. It cooperates in resolving environmental disputes through court cases as well as other conflict resolution methods. BELA attempts to increase awareness about environmental laws through its campaigns; provides legal assistance and support for the protection of the environment; and collaborates with international organizations such as the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (E-LAW), Friends of the Earth International, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and South Asian Watch on Trade and Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) in pursuit of environmental justice.

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[26] For details, see https://www.bcas.net/index.php

[27] For its detailed activities see http://www.belabangla.org/who-we-do/

Proshika is focused on an environmentally-sound Bangladesh. [28] One of its goals is environmental protection and under the Social Forestry Program (SFP), this organization works to plant new trees and protect existing ones. It accords importance to the regeneration of forest resources and promotes access for the poor to forest resources through a participatory approach. For this purpose, it attempts to facilitate grassroots organizations through motivation and awareness. Under this particular program, 90.52 million seedlings have already been produced and planted. Proshika also works in crop diversification projects, collaborating with the Department of Agricultural Extension and RAKAB. Under its Organic Agriculture Program (OAP) it attempts to convince farmers to practice organic methods in croplands and vegetable production. Proshika is also vocal against the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) organization has various initiatives related to the sustainability of the environment. [29] Under its Disaster Management and Climate Change (DMCC) initiative, it attempts to increase awareness about possible impacts of climate change and to reduce environmental risks. Its Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program seeks to increase people's awareness about safe water, healthy sanitation and a hygienic environment. BRAC supplies rural people with deep tube wells and provides loans for the purpose of securing access to safe water (Masud 2011). Across the country BRAC advocates for the development of a water safety plan (ibid.). In saline and arsenic affected areas, BRAC installs hand pumping deep tube well, digs ponds, and filters water to remove the arsenic. In some rural areas BRAC provides sanitary latrine facilities for poor people (ibid).

Simple Action For the Environment (SAFE) launched from 2008. [30] Its aim is to reduce vulnerability to the environment caused by floods and strong winds. For this purpose, it advises people to build houses using traditional methods and to plant as many trees as possible.

Voluntary Civic Organizations:

Poribesh Rokkha Shopoth (POROSH) was launched in 1997 as a community-based environmental movement. The primary concern of POROSH was Dhaka City, especially the city's lakes and parks. Because of its persistent activities, the city corporation took some necessary steps to save Gulshan Lake (Islam 1999, 15). The movement also advocates clean air, clean water, and clean streets for city dwellers, and through distribution of leaflets and organizing rallies has tried to increase awareness among common people (Islam 1999, 14).

In 2000, POROSH was transformed into Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA),[31] which is now considered a very common forum for citizens of Bangladesh to save the environment. The main objective of BAPA is to protect the environment from further degradation and to work for a strong civic movement for environmental justice. It campaigns and holds rallies to highlight how essential the environment is to human life and to increase awareness. It works as a pressure group against any sort of environmental damage. Because of its persistence, two-stroke engine vehicles (TSEV) have been prohibited and the GoB imposed a ban of polyenes. The organization pioneered a river saving movement in Dhaka, which is now transformed into a country-wide river saving movement. At local level, BAPA supports and motivates pro-environmental organizations, while at international level it collaborates with many other regional and international organizations.

Some social service organizations, such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Apex Clubs, etc., provide informal environmental education to generate environmental awareness (Salequzzaman and Stocker 2001, 115). Similarly, Bangladesh Poribesh Unnayan Sangstha (Bangladesh POUSH) also plays a vital role in increasing awareness through non-formal education (Ibid., 116). Across

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[28] For details see http://www.proshika.org/what-proshika-does.html

[29] http://www.brac.net/#what_we_do can be seen for details.

[30] See https://safebangladesh.wordpress.com

[31] See http://www.bapa.org.bd/Default.aspx

the country it has established fifty informal primary schools to serve this purpose.[32] Because it realizes that textual learning will not ensure environmental sustainability, students are required to go on field trips to develop a better perception of the environment. POUSH organizes tours for students for this purpose.

Doctors for Health and Environment (DHE) seek to make people conscious of the importance of a healthy environment for public health (Islam 1999, 14). The organization also provides some health-care facilities for people affected by hazardous environments and sometimes sends medical teams to affected areas .

Issue-based Movements:

Temporary issue-based movements are also seen in Bangladesh. These basically originate from a specific local area and its people. Because of such movements, trees of the Osmany Uddyan in Dhaka City and farming lands in Tangail, Jessore and Munshiganj were protected from construction in the name of so-called development (ibid.).

Media and Press:

In Bangladesh, both the electronic and print media play a role in increasing awareness about environmental issues among common people (ibid.). The satellite channels and radios treat environment-related issues on the news as important. The daily newspapers also focus on treating such news as important. Some environmental activists use social media, e.g., Facebook, to let people know about the environment. The author operates a Facebook page called Global Voice for Sustainable Development-Bangladesh Chapter (https://www.facebook.com/GVSDBD/) for informing online users about fact and fiction in relation to economic development and the environment. Online movements like "Riverine People" and "River of Words" are other Facebook pages making people conscious of the need for healthy rivers.

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[32] S. Saeed, W. Goldstein, and R. Shrestha, eds., *Planning Environmental Communication and Education: Lessons from Asia* (IUCN-Commission on Education and Communication, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 1998), quoted in Salequzzaman and Stocker (2001, 116).

Acting agents	Modes of activity
Government of Bangladesh MoEF ➡ DoE	policy making, disaster management, including environmental issues in educational curriculum, and awareness campaign
NOGs BCAS WTB BELA Proshika BRAC	study and research on environmental issues data collection & research on ecological areas dealing with environmental jurisprudence plantation for social forestation increasing awareness of hygienic environment, and dealing with disaster management
Voluntary Civic Organizations BAPA	working for a civic movement for environmental sustainability
Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Apex Clubs, & POUSH DHE	conducting informal environmental education and increasing awareness of healthy environment providing free health-care facilities to some people affected by hazardous environment
Issue-based movements	focusing on important issues related to livelihood and recreation
Media Electronic media, Print media, & Social Media	making people conscious that ecological equilibrium and environmental sustainability are essential

Figure 3. Four agents involved in dealing with the country's degraded environment

The roles of the Bangladesh government, NGOs, voluntary civic organizations, issue-based movements, and the media, offer appreciable and encouraging signs. Because of their policies and activities, and because they are working jointly for the same purpose, there is a slight improvement and people's awareness of the environment is increasing day by day. Nevertheless, the achievements are limited and unstable in relation to the vastness of the problem (Islam 1999, 15). Despite all these on-going steps and activities, environmental pollution is still increasing, land is degrading, soil quality is decreasing, water is becoming contaminated with chemicals and arsenic, salinity in water and soil is increasing, the air is becoming poisonous, rivers are dying, greenery is declining, wetlands are vanishing, waste is being dumped in open places and in water bodies, sea levels are rising, the ecological system is collapsing, biodiversity is at risk, and many species of

flora and fauna are on the way of extinction. As a result, healthy human life, and even viable economic development, the reason the environment is being degraded in the first place, are now at serious risk in the country. Our concern is thus: what are the real deficiencies in the policies and initiatives taken by the GoB and NGOs? Is the work done to date enough to deal with this vast problem? What more needs to be done?

Findings and Recommendations

It is evident from the preceding passages that Bangladesh faces a severe environmental situation despite its response to the issue through governmental and non-governmental initiatives. It is true that Bangladesh is a developing country and its huge population is struggling with poverty, and that government policy and the demands of the people demands prioritize economic development at the price of the environment. The way the country is pushing for economic development has triggered the present environmental degradation (Jahan and Alauddin 1999, 306; Alauddin and Hossain 2001, 236). Traditionally the environment is not placed high on the agenda in GoB (Islam 1999, 8). Environmental sustainability is still seen as a secondary issue, indicating that because of a focus on short-term benefits, long-term benefits are being jeopardized. Such a perception may be influenced by the so-called Environmental Kuznets' Curve (EKC), which suggests that developing countries should achieve economic growth first, because it is economic development that can take care of environmental degradation later on (Islam 1999, 7). According to recent research findings this is a myth (Ibid.). Nobel Laureate economist Kenneth Arrow and some other scientists have disproved this notion (ibid.).

The environment in Nigeria is suffering fatally because decision-makers have followed this theory (Islam 1999, 2). By contrast, a country like Costa Rica has achieved remarkable economic development without degrading the environment (Ibid.). Bangladesh should learn from Costa Rica's experience that economic affluence and environmental sustainability can go hand in hand. This experience is also in accordance with the basic Islamic principle of moderation and balance. Islam (1999, 8) shows how poor people become victims of environmental problems. In Bangladesh, poor people are suffering serious health problems because of arsenic-contaminated water and poisonous air. If drinkable water and clean air are considered matters of social justice, considerable priority needs to be given to keeping the environment healthy (Islam 1999, 2), for it is not possible to have clean air and drinkable water without a healthy environment. According to Islamic principles, these are very special gifts from Allah for common utilization by all creatures, including human beings; so no-one has the right to pollute them.

For Islam, "environmental deterioration is not an inevitability of economic growth" (1999, 8). He sees it as lack of proper implementation of the policies adopted by the GoB so far (ibid.). He is optimistic that if Bangladesh can take the steps Costa Rica took, it will be possible for Bangladesh to also achieve economic development without degrading the environment (ibid.). In this regard, if economic development and growth is slow or constant, we should all be satisfied. This is called sustainable development, through which peoples of all walks of life, even the coming generation, can benefit in the same way, without creating heavy pressure on the environment and ecology. Bangladesh is now in a lose-lose situation, as Islam puts it (ibid.), because the country allows economic growth at the price of the environment. Yet it has been proven in many cases, especially in the case of Nigeria, that ultimately such development at the price of the environment makes economies vulnerable also. Bangladesh should adopt a win-win policy position by preserving the environment in tandem with economic development (ibid.). Keeping a balance between economic development and environmental stewardship is not only important work, it is also a significant duty and responsibility from an Islamic point of view. With a proper management system, financial affluence and environmental sustainability do work together. This should be a priority for a Muslim majority country. Bangladesh is a democratic country despite its vulnerable democratic institutes.

Considering the majority interest, the GoB should immediately take the necessary steps in this regard.

Because of the inefficiency of the relevant bodies, many projects related to environmental sustainability are not working properly. According to several assessments from the World Bank,[33] some foreign funds are not being used in right ways for improving the environment. Donor agencies, including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and United Nations frequently become frustrated with GoB officials about the progress and implementation of jointly-taken projects. There is also bureaucratic complexity, which makes it difficult to complete any project in a timely manner. The GoB should concentrate on such inefficiency and bureaucratic complexity and take the necessary steps to quickly implement projects that are designed for the improvement of the environment.

The issue of the environment is not only an issue for DoE, but involves many other ministries and departments of the GoB. All bodies of the GoB should respond simultaneously for the greater cause of the environment. It is very unfortunate there is huge lack of response to the issue from all sides, and there is thus an urgent need for moderation and integration within the GoB's functions.

It is frequently said that officials of GoB are unable to negotiate properly with international communities to effect the country's interest. As mentioned before, without making any significant contribution to the greenhouse effect itself, Bangladesh is nevertheless one of the worst sufferers of global warming and climate change. Unfortunately Bangladesh still cannot attract due attention from the international community to this serious problem, and neither can it form any alliances with other countries that have already been affected in order to solve the problem through global initiatives. Bangladesh cannot even extract compensation from developed countries and industrial worlds, although many international forums have decreed that carbon emission countries should compensate affected countries. The country's main rivers come from the Himalayas through India, and the flow of all these rivers is now reduced by various dams being constructed by the Indian government for electrical production and irrigation purposes. In dry seasons, the rivers cannot supply minimum water as before. As a result, major parts of the country are going to become desert and the country's biodiversity has already been seriously affected. Bangladesh could persistently negotiate with the Indian government, arguing that the water flow of international rivers cannot be stopped by any one country as per international river laws. For this purpose, it could also seek cooperation from SAARC countries and the international community in order to put pressure on India to compromise and ensure adequate water flow of Bangladesh's rivers in the dry seasons. While such strategic steps are yet to be considered by Bangladesh, the GoB should in fact take these steps immediately in the greater interest of the country.

The GoB has recently issued some rules and regulations relating to the environment. For example, the environmental court has been established to handle disputes over environment-related procedures and management. Yet none of these initiatives are equipped with proper and adequate resources. Yet if these proposed changes were immediately put into practice, there would undoubtedly be positive results. Lack of trained and committed manpower, along with other logistical support, means these laws and regulations are not implemented in a timely manner. In line with these adapted rules, GoB should force industries to follow the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for less pollution or for controlling pollution (Salequzzaman and Stocker 2001, 121). After duly making a cost-benefit analysis, GoB should allow foreign companies or other corporate industries to conduct their businesses in Bangladesh; otherwise the country should be satisfied with low economic development adjusted to the natural environment.

Bangladesh is a highly densely populated country. People's everyday livelihoods are met by the country's limited natural resources. These resources are now under threat because of unplanned land use and pollution of the environment. On this point, the GoB should take immediate steps to

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[33] *The Daily Star*, October 1998, quoted in Islam (1999, 10).

ensure sustainable use of the soil, water, forest and wetlands. A proper environmental planning and management system is urgently needed in this regard.

Environmental education is included in the country's educational curriculum from primary to university levels, but with limited options and not up to the required standard. Presently this education is limited within the spheres of the social sciences, biological sciences and technology, or at best, is given the name of environmental science/environmental studies and an independent department. Such education lacks proper guidelines and research facilities, both within the courses themselves and the departments. Environmental problems vary; so too environmental education should be diversified also, articulating all the varied religious, humanitarian, social science, life science, physical science, engineering and technology, and commercial benefits (Chowdhury 2014, 58). Programmes should be aimed to train up graduates in such a way that they can work effectively in environmental planning and management with their diversified knowledge. Environmental problems need more work from a variety of perspectives, only the country has not created significant opportunities for graduates. The GoB should concentrate on properly utilizing such potential human resources for mitigating the problems. If these graduates were provided with adequate resources, they could contribute their acquired knowledge and understanding to the creation of an environmentally-friendly society that allows also for sustainable development.

Bangladesh lacks a strong social movement for environmental protection (Islam 1999, 12). In countries like Germany, Sweden, and New Zealand, members of civil society and various organizations are always putting strong pressure on government in the cause of the environment (Salequzzaman and Stocker 2001, 119). Some political parties, for instance the Green Party in Germany, are vocal on the issue (ibid.). The role of civil society is critical for conducting a popular and strong social movement in Bangladesh. Admittedly, the country's civil society is divided into many groups based on political affiliations and ideologies, so they are not united on any burning issue. Since members of civil society are well educated and intelligent, they should quickly understand the necessity for working together to grow a strong social movement across the country, thereby creating huge pressure on the GoB to prioritize the environment. Such a social movement may also be advanced by a collaboration of student organizations, professional associations, literary and cultural organizations, rights organizations, trade unions and labor organizations, faith-based organizations, and also political parties. If a strong social or civil movement were to be organized and conducted with all these human resources, the political parties of the country would be obliged to pay attention to the environment (ibid.). Perhaps this could be a potential means of preventing Bangladesh from experiencing an environmental disaster.

Bangladesh is connected with the rest of the world, which is blindly following the modern scientific worldview on the environment. According to this modern worldview, and as noted before, the environment is like a machine without any sacred identity. Such a scientific and philosophical understanding of the environment has worked for the degradation of the environment over the centuries, from the thirteenth century onwards. Bangladesh, though a predominantly Muslim country, cannot take such a secular approach to the natural world. Because of their modern Western education, most educated people take this secular view of the environment. That is why people do not really feel a deeply-rooted attachment to the environment, such as is found in Islamic teachings. While the GoB and NGOs are trying to spread awareness among people about the importance of the natural environment, this is basically from a secular perspective. That is why people are conscious about the environment, yet without feeling love and respect for it. Islamic teaching on environmental ethics, along with its philosophical and spiritual approach, should be given priority in order to increase people's inner feelings of love and respect for non-human animals, plants, and even non-living things like soil, air, and water, given that all things are created by the same Creator who created human beings. They are not alien to humans, but are instead relatives of human beings in the sense of the oneness of creation (*tawḥīd al-khalq*). The environment can thus easily be related and relevant to many other Islamic teachings, as mentioned before. This is yet to done, having been tackled by neither the GoB nor the NGOs, nor any members of civil society, environmental

movements or environmental activists. Not even Islamic religious leaders, for instance the *Imāms* who deliver sermons (*khuṭbah*) at Friday congregational prayer and the Islamic scholars (who teach Islam at educational institutes) are active in making people conscious of the environment through Islamic teachings. In Bangladesh, there are more than two lacs mosques (*masjid*) and mosque-based preliminary Quran teaching schools (*maktab*) mainly served by *Imāms*. If all these Imams took the initiative to make people conscious of the environment, they could do so easily through their *khuṭbah* (Friday sermons). Thousands of students graduate from Islamic education through different categories of (*madrasah*), namely Islamic educational institutes like ʿĀlīya, Qawmī, and *Ḥafiẓia madrasah*. Mohamed (2014, 321-325, 326) shows how Islamic institutions (*masjid*, *maktab*, and *madrasah*), with the cooperation of other educational institutes, could play a vital role in increasing people's awareness about the importance of the natural environment. Thus the GoB should concentrate on properly utilizing these vast resources as a potential supplement to environment related policies and programs. Some courses related to Islam and moral studies are taught from Grade Three to Grade Twelve in the country's general educational system. Furthermore, in many public and private universities, and in government and non-government colleges, Islamic studies are being taught as a course or as an independent subject at graduate and undergraduate levels. Yet teachers and students of Islamic educational institutes and the Islamic studies departments of general educational institutes are not discussing environmental problems from an Islamic perspective. How then is it possible to disseminate basic Islamic principles of environmental ethics among those Muslims who follow religious guidance in their everyday life? If the GoB takes the initiative in including Islamic teachings on environmental ethics in Islamic studies and in the curricula of all Islamic educational institutes, it would be possible to make an enormous number of students aware that the environment is essential for life. For this purpose, teachers and *Imāms* must be properly trained with logistical support and updated information. The same could be done by other religious teachers and scholars in their institutional capacities. The GoB and NGOs should work together in this way to utilize the vast human resources and institutional opportunities embedded in the faith traditions of the country, in order to deepen awareness about the environment. In addition, the Islamic educational sector can support a strong social environmental movement, as Mohamed points out (2014, 326), thereby putting huge pressure on government to accord priority to environmental issues. Thus if the country's civil society, NGOs, and secular environmental scholars and activists come together and cooperate with Islamic scholars, religious leaders and institutes, the environmental movement would gather considerable momentum.
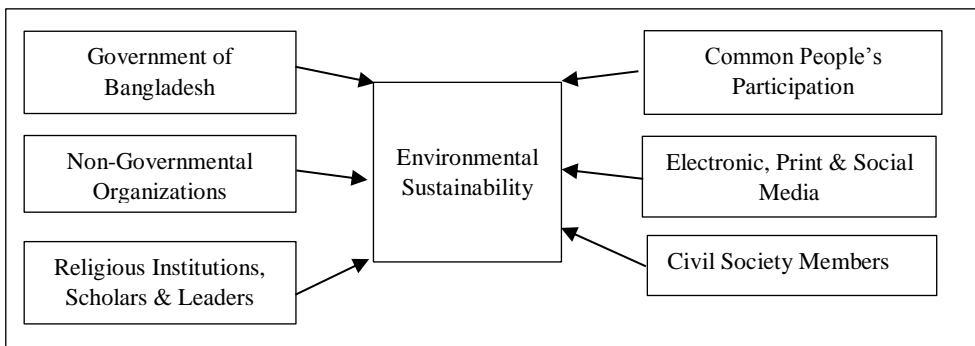
Concluding Remarks

Islam provides the idea of the environment articulating human life in the form of the unity of creation (*tawḥīd al-khalq*). Thus Islamic teachings on the sustainability of the environment provide some basic suggestions on how human beings should behave towards nature and the environment. It is a shortcoming of Muslims all over the world that they are not following Islam properly in their real lives. Current Muslim practices in terms of environmental ethics are not fully in compliance with Islamic teachings as prescribed in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Muslim world is not isolated from the Western world; instead it imitates other parts of the globe. Education, administration and state affairs do not draw upon Islamic teaching as the main source of instruction. Muslims have transformed Islamic religiosity into a cultural identity. Islam is thus unable to create strong pressure on state policies and on the present social structures of the Muslim world in order to ensure the issue of environmental sustainability is highest on the agenda.

Like other Muslim countries, Bangladesh does not respond to Islamic guidance in prioritizing the environment. At the same time, religious scholars, teachers and educational institutes have not taken the initiative to talk about and work for the sustainability of the environment through increasing public awareness. There are some policies and activities by the GoB, NGOs, voluntary civic organizations, and the media that are related to environmental justice, but these are inadequate against the unfathomable depth of the problem. Besides, all these activities lack moderation and clear integration with policies and decisions. While there are also issue-based movements that have achieved some success, these movements cannot stop further damage to the environment. Because of these various inadequacies, Bangladesh cannot protect its environment from degradation; instead it has already become vulnerable to pollution by its people and by the global climate change over which it has no control.

Having articulated these concrete problems and deficiencies in the present situation, let us ponder what can be done to mitigate them. As noted in the preceding passages, there is an urgent need to change our attitude to the environment into one of deep love and respect. As responsible human beings, every one of us is morally bound to improve our own treatment of the natural world as co-creators, and then to collectively work for a significant change in life-style from family to state. We have to remember that we are not lords of the natural world; instead, as the crown of the creation we are friends and caretakers. If we feel deeply in our hearts the oneness of creation, how is it possible to be silent when our fellow-creatures are suffering greatly or fighting for their survival? How is it possible to harm them or kill them without a proper justification? We can receive benefits from them after ensuring their ongoing existence or growth is maintained at least at current levels. As responsible creatures of Almighty Allah, we are commanded to improve the whole environment through our knowledge and activities, not to degrade it with our uncontrolled greed or show off our "superiority" over other animals, plants, or abiotic organisms of the environment. If such deep philosophical and spiritual teachings of Islam (and other religions which have more or less the same teachings about nature and the environment) were to be included in the educational curriculum and taught by well-trained teachers with deep feelings for the environment, our younger generations may soon develop a deep inner awareness of the environment. We thus recommend the GoB consider implementing this policy. By providing logistical support to faith communities, the GoB will inspire them to make people conscious of the environment. In Bangladesh, a huge number of mosques and madrasah could function as assets in working for environmental sustainability. The Ministry of Religious Affairs could take the initiative through the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh and issue a circular to all *Imāms* advocating inclusion in their Friday sermons (*khuṭbah*) the Islamic teachings on the environmental sustainability. After due consultation with Islamic scholars and people who have expertise on the environment, the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh could provide the *Imāms* with some guidelines for these sermons (*khuṭbah*) for. In Bangladesh, faith-based institutes, communities and organizations are seen as isolated from policy making processes, and the activities of the GoB and other NGOs. Yet for a greater purpose, all these potential resources should be brought together in the mainstream arena to work together to mitigate current environmental problems. Though the environmental problem is basically a global rather

than a local issue, the solution may come from collective action plans and activities that result from incorporating the micro level efforts of the society into the macro level attempts at international level. In sum, a holistic approach to environmental ethics, with the cooperation of religious and faith-based institutes should be implemented through combined efforts and with participation from people at all levels of society.

Acknowledgement

Md. Abu Sayem
PhD Research Fellow (with HKPFS Award) in Religious Studies (from 2016-2017),
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR,
And
Faculty Member,,
Department of World Religions and Culture,
University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Abbreviations used in the Paper

ADB: Asian Development Bank
AMEN: African Muslim Environmental Network
BAPA: Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon
BCAS: Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies
BELA: Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
BRAC: Building Resources Across Communities
CANSA: Climate Action Network South Asia
CEE: Centre for Environmental Education
C.E.: Common Era
DMCC: Disaster Management and Climate Change
DHE: Doctors for Health and Environment
DoE: Department of Environment
ECA: Environmental Court Act
EIA: Environment Impact Assessment
EKC: Environmental Kuznets' Curve
E-LAW: Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide
GoB: Government of Bangladesh
IFEES: Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature
MoEF: Ministry of Environment and Forest
NCS: National Conservation Strategy
NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations
NEMAP: National Environmental Management Action Plan
NSD: North South Dialogue
OAP: Organic Agricultural Program
OIC: Organization of Islamic Cooperation
POROSH: Poribesh Rokkha Shopoth
PBUH: Peace Be Upon Him
RAKAB: Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank
RING: Regional and International Networking Group
UN: United Nations
UK: United Kingdom
UNCED: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAFE: Simple Action for the Environment
SAWTEE: South Asian Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment
SEMP: Sustainable Environmental Management Program
SFP: Social Forestry Program
SIA: Social Impact Assessment
TSEV: Two-Stroke Engine Vehicle
WB: World Bank
WHO: World Health Organization
WTB: Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh
WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WSSD: World Summit on Sustainable Development

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RELIGION, RAINFALL AND RICE: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF FESTIVALS IN KATHMANDU VALLEY, NEPAL

Pandey, Rishikesh

ABSTRACT

The Newa: (or Newar in Nepali dialect) culture of Kathmandu Valley is home to a number of mythical stories associated with gods and demons. Such stories embody the spirituality of the people on the one hand, and symbolize the socio-ecological systems of the Valley on the other. This paper presents narratives of the cultural festivals of Newar communities in relation to the agricultural-ecological system, particularly rice farming, they have traditionally adopted for their livelihood. The meanings of the festivals celebrated by the Newar communities are presented with reference to the process of celebration, the items included in the offerings for gods, and the varieties of foods eaten during family festivities. The festivals chosen for this study range from those of the pre-monsoon (preparation for paddy seedling) to those of the post-monsoon (the rice harvest). The lives and livelihoods of the multi-cultural communities of the Kathmandu Valley have traditionally been linked to the spirituality, socio-cultural practices and ecosystem of the Valley. However, these practices are facing constant pressure because of modernization, changed livelihood systems, contradictions in the government's religious/cultural policies and practices, and changes in global systems.[1] The Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley are struggling to maintain sustainable celebration of their festivals because of changes in the Valley's agro-ecological landscape. At the same time, Kathmandu Valley is establishing its identity as a multicultural area, which, to some degree, affords hope for continuing the religious legacy. The Valley is being preserved as a "sacred place," because people from other castes/ethnicities are now also supporting these festivals.

Introduction

The Asian continent has many rich religious-cultural traditions. The androcentric interpretations of Asian cultural norms are that these are emotional, hard-working, receptive, and stratified. Although such notions cannot be rejected, the richness of Asian cultural traditions cannot be understood through just these few lenses. Asian cultures extend across a wide range of geographic or environmental areas. This means that Asian cultures are as diverse as the geography of Asia itself. This diverse geography has proven a fertile ground for the development and flourishing of rich cultural traditions. Nepal, a country located in the Himalayas, itself represents

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[1] On the one hand, there is a tradition by the Head of State (the President), of formally observing many of these festivals. On the other hand, the Constitution of Nepal (*Constitution of Nepal* 2015) is secular, and does not wish to emphasize only Hindu festivals. The Government's local development plans are also not geared towards protecting cultural heritage, since many ancient monuments have either been demolished or transformed into modern buildings.

rich geographical diversity in a small spatial unit, and the country is correspondingly rich in cultural practices.

The tiny Himalayan kingdom of Nepal covers only 0.03 percent of the global land surface, but houses about 40 percent of all two hundred global ecological regions, thus representing around a quarter of the world's biodiversity (in terms of species variety) (Sharma and Tsering 2009). Such natural richness is possible here because of a varied climate that ranges from near-equatorial to polar. The socio-cultural heritage of Nepal is also distinctive, since the country has more than 125 caste/ethnic groups, each with their own language and cultural traditions, and following one of ten different religious faiths (CBS 2012).[2] These factors mean Nepal is a country where spirituality and nature interact very closely.

Research Problem and Research Gap

Overlapping religious and cultural practices have made Nepal a syncretistic country. The people of Nepal consider God a companion in times of both sadness and joy. From early childhood they are taught about God, and they learn to pray for a better future. In different studies, Pandey (2016; 2008; 2004) has noted that when people's adaptive strategies fail and they suffer from misfortune, they tend to surrender to God and pray for "no further bad days." The observations of this author during his academic journey indicate that most Nepali people have a strong attachment to God and that their concept of "God" is directly or indirectly linked to nature and the environmental systems where they live. The study of the socio-ecological narratives of spirituality thus becomes an interesting theme here.

Food is an important part of life's systems and it comes primarily from ecosystem services. The types of food people use in everyday life are often determined by religious and socio-cultural practices, as well as by the environmental circumstances where they live. Rice is a staple food for the majority of the population of Nepal and therefore production of rice is at the centre of the agricultural system. Praying for rainfall to make the rice harvest abundant and ensure food security, (which is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs), therefore becomes an obvious thing to do.

As a multi-religious and multi-cultural country, Nepal gives a variety of social understandings and ecological meanings to food. Yet Nepali culture is sometimes also referred to as a "rice culture" that emphasizes the production and consumption of rice. In this context, this paper investigates the interaction between religion, rain and rice in Nepal, with reference to the festivals celebrated and the food offered to the gods in Kathmandu Valley.

Interactions to form networks and establish and strengthen relationships are a fundamental part of religious-cultural celebrations. Consistent to Orsi (2003), the people of Kathmandu have adopted religions as local strategies to craft their lives through the use of religious idioms, values, symbols, and practices. However, there is insufficient documented, rigorous research into the connections between the religious-cultural traditions and their ecological background. A literature search for a systematic review of these connections reveals formal publications are extremely rare. A rich scholarly work on religion and culture in Asia also fails to document references to the ecological dimensions of spirituality (NCSRCA 2014). Even more surprising is that Knott (2010), a scholar who has designed a complex framework to conceptualize religion, has also missed the connection with ecological traditions.

While the scarcity of literature in the field initially increased the reluctance of this researcher to conduct this present study, at the same time, such a lack also fueled the desire to contribute to

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[2] Hinduism is followed by 81.3 percent of the population, Buddhism 9.0 percent, Islam 4.4 percent, Kirat 3.1 percent, Christianity 1.4 percent, and Prakriti 0.5 percent, together with a few thousand who follow Bon, Jainist, Bahai and Sikh religions.

the field. This paper is therefore an outcome of determination, despite the work having many limitations.

Among the few available studies, Löwdin (1986) has attempted to explore the relationship between food, ritual and social organization of the Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley. This work does not attempt to explore the spiritual and ecological aspects of food served at various feasts or for particular deities, however. Khatry (1996) studied the process of celebrating *Matsyandranath Jatra* (a festival/carnival of praying to *Matsyandranath God)* in Kathmandu. That paper also talks only a little about the socio-ecological attributes of the festival, such as describing people's emphasis on praying for rain during the pre-monsoon period. Yet the author does not answer questions about why the people of Kathmandu might ask for rain.

Religion has been seen as a part of daily negotiations of power and identity, highlighting ambiguities and creativity in the production of sacred worlds (Primiano 2012). Socio-ecological perspectives on spiritual beliefs and faiths in relation to the celebration of religious festivals, or to the practice of seeking to please a "god" to ensure a better weather pattern and hence an abundant harvest of rice, say, creates an interesting research issue here. This paper therefore aims to explain the social-ecological connections between the religious and cultural practices of Kathmandu, Nepal, and the rice culture of the Valley.

Rationale of the Research

Sustainable development has been the main motto of development for the last half a century. It is debatable whether sustainable development is just a *mantra* (a sacred text to recite) (Escobar 1995) or whether it requires important policy interventions, such as Agenda 21, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Some scholars, such as Vandana Shiva (1992), accuse economists of hijacking and misusing the term. According to Shiva, the term sustainability refers to "harmony with nature," yet it has been used to mean "sustain-able" or to refer to fulfilling present needs without compromising the needs of future generations (WCED 1987). This "long-lasting" definition focuses on the economic dimensions of development and rejects the meaning of harmony. In fact, sustainable development requires development that follows the "rhythm" of nature. Yet since modernization has already reached its climax, and has created an at-risk society (Beck 1992), there is a real threat to sustainability and the modern materialistic lifestyle of human beings. Sustainability is therefore possible only through practicing a simple lifestyle.

Hindu and Buddhist spirituality emphasize a simple lifestyle, and living in harmony with nature. In this context, it is important to search for the linkage between environmental sustainability and the religious and cultural practices of a people as they follow their faith. The findings could produce indicators from a spiritual perspective that can then be incorporated into the measures of development. This spiritual/religious perspective on the environment could also provide valuable feedback for policy reforms aimed at environmental sustainability. Understanding religion in relation to the social-ecological system, and incorporating those insights into political ecology, might thus be an important task. This study therefore explores the social-ecological linkage between religion-culture and nature through the study of interactions between religion, rainfall and rice cultivation in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.

The Structure of the Paper

This paper is structured into six sections. Firstly, I will introduce the research theme, formulates the research problem, and designs the objectives of the research. Secondly, a conceptual foundation will be constructed for a theological study of a social-ecological system. Thirdly, the methodology adopted in this research will be presented. The fourth analyses the data in detail, and

finally I will discuss the results in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical foundation developed in the second part.

The Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings

In this section I create a fusion between the spiritual and physical landscapes of Kathmandu, with reference to the celebration of religious festivals. I define the concepts of spirituality and of a social-ecosystem, and outline the geographic (spatial) methodology for understanding such human-environmental interaction.

Spirituality, Religion, Place and Space

Spirituality can be defined as the beliefs and faith of a person in behaving or practicing as a social organism. Human beings are instructed by social processes and institutions, and religion has strong role in framing social behaviors. A religion is a community, an extended form of spirituality, where people hold a similar faith in a super-power that is beyond the human and who controls the social and natural world. A religious community can be organized formally or informally, and interacts for the common good (Durkheim [1915] 1964; Frazer 1922; Koenig, King, & Carson 2012).There are many definitions of religion. Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices about sacred things that unites its members into a single moral community (Adler n.d.). Such a community validates the different norms, values and actions found in traditional mythical and ritual practices. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) stipulated that the "essence of religion consists in the feeling of absolute dependence" (as cited in Harrison 2006) while Frazer's (1922) understanding of religion is that it is propitiation or conciliation of powers that are superior to humanity.

Beliefs and faiths have spatial characteristics and are associated with theories of environmental determinism. Some geographers have worked in the area of the spatial perspective on religion: e.g., Tuan (1977), Foucault (1986), Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), Harvey (1993), Knot (2005, 2010). However, the discipline of theology has not incorporated the values of space, place or bio-environmental elements in its construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of spirituality, faith and religion. Poor communication between the discipline of theology and society over the theoretical progress made over time has contributed to this negligence, which has in turn detached theology from its interdisciplinary nature.

Religion produces and reproduces social space and so has an inherently socio-spatial attribute (Knott 2005). The concept of "socio-spatial" refers to more than geometric space, and represents also physical, mental and social dimensions, including the materials or resources of the socio-political arena of a place (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 410-411). A mental or conceptual notion of space is a social construction that is produced and reproduced by human action and interaction (Fitzsimmons 1989; Greider and Garkovich 1994; Jasanoff 2010; Sauer 1925). Geography, therefore, plays an important role in constructing religion in a space, and hence spatial theory and method are, and should be, important components of theological research (Knot 2005).

A Social-ecological System from a Theological Standpoint

A social-ecological system is an integrated system of interactions between human society and the biophysical world (Berkes and Folke 1998). Human society comprises spiritual beliefs and faiths, religious and cultural norms, and social values and practices. The interactions between these elements form a broader social system. The biophysical system, on the other hand, includes the life system of the earth and its interactions with both living and non-living things. The concept of a socio-ecological system thus denotes a system that is integrated into a complex web of interaction between social and ecological systems. Proponents of a socio-ecological system advocate the transformation of mainstream anti-ecological economic development and consumption practices,

socio-political and economic institutions, and technologies, into reconstructive, ecological, communitarian and ethical societies (Adger 2006; Beck 2009; Bookchin 1995). The nature-earth has the ability to sustain life through self-regulating and self-organizing systems. However, societal actions against the harmony of nature lead to a society at risk (Beck 1992). Many religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, advocate simple living. As spirituality and religion play an influential role in founding a culture, human-environmental interaction provides an ample foundation for studying social ecosystems from a spiritual perspective.

Societies are interlocked human ecosystems, which operate on the basis of individual initiatives and actions, embodied in aggregate institutional structures and community behaviour (Butzer 1990, 685). The cybernetics between humans as a society (religion, culture, economy, politics) and environment (the natural/physical world), are holistically understood as a social-ecological system, which is produced through the interaction between nature and society (Adger 2006). Although Thrift (2002) emphasizes the idea of "nature" having its own powers, a social-ecosystem is a product of different forms of human-ecological interactions across places, peoples and time (Pandey 2016).

The discipline of theology has separated society from nature by ignoring the interactions among the fundamental parameters of the bio-geographic environment, such as body, location, space and place (Knott 2005). A social-ecological model can thus constitute an important approach to theological study since it can incorporate those elements. However, there is an immense challenge because space and the bio-physical environment are symbolic entities. In the context of the present study, an interesting research question could be: How are the Newar people of Kathmandu producing sacred space within the environment (nature) so as to acquire material prosperity (higher farm-output)? The answer to this question is developed through an analysis of the ritual process of the place (Kathmandu) where festivals are celebrated to worship the divine power and to discard the devils and demons. This is just one possible method among others, because there is no single universally accepted way of formulating the linkages between human beings, their religious/cultural practices, and their natural systems. The spatial or "location specific" method (Pandey and Bardsley 2015) or the "locality based approach" (Knott 2009) also provides ample ground for integrating theological research with the social-ecological model, which is why it is adopted here.

Linkage of Nepali Spirituality and Ecology

Nepal is a multi-religious and multi-cultural country where the majority of people follow a form of Hinduism closely interlinked with Buddhism. The *Gayatri Mantra* – the prime or powerful sacred text of the Hindus (Box 1) is recited several times a day, while adherents honor the *bhu* (the earth)*, bhuvah* (the atmosphere)*,* and the *sva* (the sky). There are different gods in Hinduism, representing different environmental elements: *Ap* (water), *Agni* (fire and heat), and the *Vayu* (wind). The *Pancha mahabhuta* (five great elements) in Hinduism are: *prithvi* (earth), *jal* (water), *tejas* (fire), *vayu* (air), and *akas* (space/sky). Since these five natural powers are worshipped daily by Hindu communities, the existing social-ecological systems of Nepal inherently incorporate spirituality.

There are various social and religious meanings given to the biodiversity of both flora and fauna in Hinduism. Trees are powerful symbols of abundance; rivers are the goddess; the mountains are the places of Lord Shiva; while the seas and oceans are the place of Lord Vishnu. Therefore, contaminating forests, rivers, mountains and oceans is considered sinful. Different animals are also worshipped by recognizing their draft power. For example, Lord Shiva travels on a Bull, a Lion carries Goddess Durga, a Peacock carries Kumar Kartikeya, while Ganesh (the god who is

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः ।
तत् सवितुर्वरेण्यं ।
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात

Figure 1 Box 1: Gayatri Mantra and Gayatri Devi (Goddess Gayatri)

worshipped first in Hinduism, and who is a son of Lord Shiva), travels on a mouse. Lord Vishnu sleeps on snakes (serpents) and goddess Saraswati sails on a swan. All of these animals are worshipped in Hinduism. In addition to these, cows are considered to be the Mother Laxmi. There are different animals, consistent with the evolution of the biological system, that are referred to as the God's *Avatar* (evolution) during different epochs of evolution in Hinduism. These include: *Matsya* (Fish), *Kurmo* (Crab), *Barah* (Boar), *Nara-singha* (Human-lion), *Baman* (dwarf, Early-Human/Neanderthal?), *Parashuram* (Human/Cro-Magnon?), *Ram* (Human), *Krishna* (Human), *Buddha* (Human), and *Kalki* (Super-Human). Furthermore, the concept of *ahimsa* (do not kill) indicates a way of valuing lives in the biosphere. In the same manner, Buddhism, which is not clearly separable from Hinduism in Nepal, is also a form of environmentalism. White hemispherical mounds are common in *Stupas* (Buddhist Shrines), with a shiny *Gajur* above the four-sided cubicle, and eyes painted thereon. The hemispherical mound of the *Stupa* represents the four elements: earth, fire, air, and water. Therefore, practicing Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal can be regarded as an approach to social-ecological sustainability. Nevertheless, only a few writings promote spirituality as part of nature-culture harmony (Dwivedi 1993; Dhiman 2016; Kumar 2017; Ulluwishewa and Kumarsinghe 2014) and there is chronic scarcity of literature investigating connections between spirituality and social-ecological sustainability. This is not only true in the case of Nepal, but also globally. This paper is therefore an effort to fill this research gap.

Conceptual Framework

Human-environmental interaction is the central theme of any geographic research. Yet the geography of religious studies is limited to spaces and sacred places and their spheres of influence and spatial distribution. This study attempts to assess human-environmental interactions from a theological perspective, one that considers religion a community practice for obtaining better rainfall for prosperity through an abundant harvest in the Kathmandu Valley. In devising a range of conceptual tools and models for this study, a "spatial" methodology of interaction with the "social-ecosystem" is adopted. Knott (2005) notes a serious lack of research dealing with religion in relation to space, particularly by scholars from outside the discipline of geography. Yet incorporation of a social-ecological model even in such geographical studies is rare. The importance and value of studying religion from a local perspective cannot be underestimated, as a locality-based approach seeks to reconnect religion with other social and cultural fields (Knott 2009). This

study therefore applies a social-ecosystem model on a local scale (Figure 2), or adopts the "locality-based" approach of Knott.

The term "locality" is a condition of a place that is near-at-hand, and its "local particularity" is defined by its physical character and social relations (Jenkins 1999, 17).

The study of religious festivals using a "locality" approach is a method of analyzing religion with reference to a local social, economic, political and ecological context. This research therefore develops an understanding of celebrations of religious festivals in the social-ecological context of Kathmandu and assesses the relevance of such celebrations in a dynamic world. As shown in Figure 2, spirituality (such as desire for better rainfall, respect for biodiversity, defining the power of the divine and demons/devils etc.) maintains social-cultural interactions, that in turn sustain festivals and

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the Spiritual, Social and Ecological Model of Sustainability

celebrations, while respect for nature contributes to promoting biodiversity and improving ecosystem services. A better ecosystem funds food security, and the ultimate outcome of these interactions is a contribution to social-ecological sustainability.
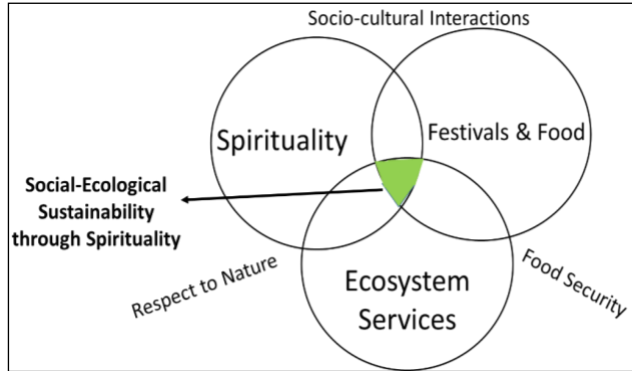
Research Methodology

In the theological study of spirituality, a methodology is more than a set of practical methods. A methodology here refers to a system of principles, practices, and procedures applied to collecting, analyzing and interpreting data (Knott 2005). This study is based on a spatial methodology that incorporates a sum of the components, relations, interpretations and representations of a place and space. It integrates the dynamism of an object or place (the way festivals are celebrated in Kathmandu), the means and the processes of production and reproduction of space (the sacred spaces of Kathmandu), and the properties of these sacred spaces in relation to their dynamic interconnections with the social-ecosystem over time dynamism (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 38-40; Knott 2005, 35-58). Fitzgerald (2007), for example, re-engages theological research in a locality using a context-specific method. This present research binds together various threads of human–environmental interactions to inspire further research into spirituality and social-ecological sustainability. Therefore this research applies a qualitative (narrative) method and is based on both secondary and primary data. Data collection methods in qualitative research are primarily made up of an ethnographic review of documents and participant observations, as well as interviews and group discussions. This work uses a document review (published and grey literature) and interviews.

Nature and Source of Data

The texts of the published and unpublished works related to the celebration of festivals, rainfall patterns, and rice cultivation in Kathmandu were first sorted and reviewed to create social-ecological narratives. The bibliographical search was performed using key phrases, such as social/ecological attributes/meanings of festivals in Kathmandu/food for the gods of

Kathmandu/offerings for the gods of Kathmandu/the process of worshiping gods in Kathmandu, and so on. Both the Google search engine and the library search engine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong were applied in locating literature. Since very limited formal literature is available, grey works were also reviewed to identify the ecological connections of festivals and to construct ecological meanings through viewing the processes of festivals, the food items and offerings made to gods, and the seasons of celebration, as well as assumptions about the role of the god being worshipped as per the religious-cultural beliefs.

There are limitations to obtaining authentic information from grey literature. Therefore, senior citizens and *Guthi* members (the religious/cultural committees of specific festivals) were also consulted to verify the information obtained from the grey literature, and also for the purpose of obtaining additional data. The collected data were then supplemented with secondary data. Many of the festivals celebrated in Kathmandu have mythical stories which vary with the story-teller. To sort out such limitations, data were also verified through a discussion with a small group of the members of specific *Guthis* (festival committees). The author used professional and social networks to identify the key informants consulted. Therefore the snow-ball method of identifying informants was adopted. The author is a Nepali national and has been living in Kathmandu for the last three decades. As he has observed many such celebrations and has interacted with people participating in these celebrations, information from the fragmented memories of the author are also incorporated in the interpretation. Altogether fifty informants were targeted initially for the collection of information. However, only twenty-seven individuals provided information, and for different festivals. While only eight *Guthi* members from different *Guthis* could be communicated with over a short period of time (mid-June to mid-July, 2018), the majority of the data and stories discussed here are the opinions of those eight informants.

Selection of Festivals

Hindu and Newar religious and cultural festivals are innumerable. There is some sort of festival available each day, and people to celebrate them. However, not all the festivals are directly related to rainfall and rice cultivation. It is therefore appropriate to focus only on a few festivals. Considering the theme of this research: "religion for rain and rice," the festivals sampled for study range from the pre-monsoon to the post-monsoon season, the typical season for rice cultivation in Kathmandu. The selected festivals are: *Matsyendranath Jatra* (carnival for the god of rain and requests for more rain after prolonged drought); *Siti Nakha* (local environment day/cleaning of water spouts, birthday of Lord Kumar/festival on sixth-day); *Gathan-Muga* (discarding the devils and demons symbolically by burning effigies); *Gunhu Punhi* (feeding frogs/Holy-thread full moon to Lord Krishna's Birthday); and *Yanya Punhi* (*Indra Jatra* (carnival of the king of heaven and request for less rain in winter). The detailed narratives of these festivals are richer than a single paper can provide. For the present purpose, only those sections of stories directly associated with worship of gods in order to obtain better rainfall for the abundance of rice production, are selected and interpreted.

Method of Interpretation

Some of the ways of extracting the social-ecological attributes of festivals are by looking at the calendar and knowing the season or month of celebration; the role the god/goddess being worshipped is meant to play according to Hindu religious texts or local beliefs; and the food and offering items presented to the gods and served at the feasts. Particular emphasis is thus given to finding the answers to the following questions, while reviewing the literature and consulting key informants:

- What is the name of the Festival? In which *Tithi* (lunar month and day) is it celebrated?

- Who is the god/goddess worshipped? What is the process of worshipping? What role are they meant to play?
- What are the food and offering items presented to the god/goddess or to those served in the feast?
- Are the food and offering items available locally during the period/season of celebration? If not, how are they arranged?
- Are there activities performed during the celebration that are directly related to nature/the ecological system?
- What sort of social and ecological meanings have people developed in relation to celebrating that particular festival?

Limitations of The Work

The author expected to use a systematic review for this research, i.e., an appraisal synthesizing primary research papers, following a rigorous and clearly documented methodology in both the search strategy and the selection of studies, in order to minimize bias in the results. However, the lack of formally documented literature affected the use of this method. Consequently, a multi-method of exploration and documentation was used, including literature review, interviews, group discussion and personal observation. The research therefore followed a quasi-systematic approach. In addition, the research was conducted and the paper prepared over a short period of time (part-time for five months with intensive work only for a month, between May and September 2018), and thus there are a number of limitations associated with the research process, analysis and discussion.

Presentation of Data and Narratives

This section presents data on the celebration of religious festivals for rainfall and a better rice harvest in Kathmandu. The Newar are the dominant inhabitants of the Valley and have been multicultural since prehistoric time. A brief introduction to the Newar communities follows, in order to contextualize their religion for rainfall and rice harvest. Afterwards, narratives are developed for each of the selected festivals.

Nepali Multiculturalism and the Newar of Kathmandu Valley

The Newar culture is unique, with its own specific customs, rituals and practices, having existed for more than 2000 years in the Kathmandu Valley. The Newar proudly preserve their traditions, despite a range of pressures for change. Many studies highlight the richness of the Newar cultural heritage (Löwdin 1986; Khatry 1996; Shrestha 2006), although none investigate the linkage between the religious-cultural assets of the Newar and the social-ecological systems of the Kathmandu Valley. Newar practice both Hinduism and Buddhism and enjoy the cultural assimilation of being located in the capital city. Therefore Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley are the best example of Nepali multiculturalism.

Newari Food Culture of Kathmandu

Nepali people greet each other before communication and interaction by asking if the other has had their meal, particularly the rice. In Newar culture, communication with a neighbor thus starts with the phrase *Ja naye dwuno la?* (Have you had your rice?) As the community has rich religious and cultural traditions, the processions of gods and goddesses, feasts and fasts, and religious pilgrimages are important components of Newar culture (Shrestha 2006). Newar spend a remarkable share of their income on feasting, which helps them preserve their rituals and traditions. However, this spending is often connoted negatively by the saying– *Newa: bigryo bhojle* (Newar are ruined because of extravagant feasting). Equally important is the fact the religious festivals are

often named after food. A few examples are: *Ghyöcaku sanlu* (first-day of the month of Magh, which falls in mid-January, is celebrated by eating ghee, sweets made of molasses and sesame seeds); *Yomari punhi* (the full moon in December when steamed cake of rice-floor is eaten); and *Bya ja nakégu* (the day to feed frogs boiled rice). Each of these festivals has specified worship procedures and celebrations, which are documented in a book, *Nepalvarsa Kriya Nakhahcakhah Pustakam* (a manual). These festivals named after food represent the seasonality of particular food availability in the Valley. After the daily/regular meals, there are specific meals for the festivals called *bhoye,* which contain many items, although they are specific to the feast and the god/goddess being worshipped. Nevertheless, the primary cereal served is the bitten rice (rice flake) known as *baji*. In most of the feasts, *samaybaji* (which includes up to eighty-four types of food items on a pile of rice flake) is served. The feast meal involves separating and offering *dyo chaye* (God's share) before eating one's own. This practice is intended to "feed" and "please" the god.

Figure 3 Samay Baji, a traditional dish prepared with a mixture of 84 different foods offered to gods of Kathmandu

It is believed that the different foods in *Samay Baji* represents good luck, prosperity, fortune, health, and longevity. *Samay Baji* is one of the main attractions of Nepali/Newari cuisine at special festivals.

Religious Festivals for Abundant Rice Harvest in Kathmandu Valley

Kathmandu is located at an elevation of 1450 m.a.s.l. The Valley floor is immensely fertile as it was once a lake, which was drained after a fluvial deposit of fertile soil from surrounding hills. A mythical story behind the origin of the valley depicts Manjushree, the god of knowledge in Buddhism, draining the lake-water out of the valley by cutting a hill at Chobhar (a narrow gorge at the Bagmati River, which is only the outlet for the watershed of the Valley). The Valley is located in the monsoon climate regime, and thus experiences a long dry season of over eight months and two heavily wet months (July and August) with annual rainfall exceeding 250 cm. Therefore, rainfall for winter and for the pre-monsoon crops, and management of water sources, particularly during the pre-monsoon, are important components of the social-ecosystem of the valley. Additionally, the culture of producing wet rice in the rain-fed farms of Kathmandu Valley increases the importance of rainfall, and so people make every effort to please the gods and thus receive sufficient rainfall and a prosperous rice harvest in turn.

The festivals related to pleasing the god of rain start with the celebration of *Matsyendranath Jatra* (the onset of the pre-monsoon rain in May), followed by those maintaining the ecosystem during the rainy season (*Sithi Nakha:, Gatha: Muga:* and *Gunhu Punhi*), and end with *Indra Jatra* (retreat of the summer monsoon) in September. The spiritual and social-ecological attributes of each of these festivals are narrated below in brief.

Machhendra Nath Jatra (May-June):

Matsyendranath Jatra (carnival for the god of rain) is a month-long worship of the "god of rain." There are two *Matsyendranaths*: Rato (*Bunga dyah* - the god living at Bungmati, a small village in southern corner of the valley – in Lalitpur district) and Seto (*Jana Baha: dyah* - the god living at Jana Baha: in Kathmandu). The former is observed in Lalitpur, while the latter is observed in Kathmandu. There are certain deities that need to be connected *en-route* to the carnival.

Box 2: Myth about Rato *Matsyendranath* Jatra

Kathmandu Valley had experienced severe drought and famine for twelve years, but the then king and people were unaware of its cause. With the help of a saint, the king learned that Lord Gorakhnath had held back the rains because he had been angered by the Nags (*Karkotak*) when he visited Kathmandu. Lord Gorakhnath had capturedd the Nags through his *tantras*. There was no-one who could free the Nags from Gorakhnath, so on the advice of a saint, they brought Machhendranath (father of Goraknath) to Kathmandu (Patan) from Eastern India in a cart. The Nags were freed from Gorakhnath's captivity after he was appeased by people pulling the chariot of *Matsyendranath*. When the *Karkotak* were freed, it started to rain. Since then the people of Kathmandu Valley have been pleasing the god (Gorakhnath) by pulling Rato *Matsyendranath*'s chariot, to ensure rain in the pre-monsoon season.

Rato Matsyendranath (*Bunga dyah*) Jatra: *Rato Matsyendranath Jatra* (Box 2) starts after the red-faced idol from the temple at Kumaripati is paraded in a sixty-five foot-high chariot. As the god lives at Bungamati village for the rest of time, so is also known as *Bunga Dhya:*. The social-ecological attribute of the celebration concerns the fact that a black velvet jeweled *bhoto* (vest), which is displayed in the ceremony, was given to a farmer by *Karkotak Nag* (a holy snake) as a reward for curing the eye disease of the wife of the serpent. However, the vest was then stolen from the farmer by a demon. When the farmer was attending the *Matsyendranath* festival at Jawalakhel, he saw someone (the demon in human form) wearing the vest. A fight between the farmer and the demon occurred, but *Karkotak Nag* settled the fight by taking the vest back. He then submitted the *bhoto* to *Matsyendranath* for safekeeping until its original owner was identified. From that time, every year the *bhoto* is shown to the general public, and they are asked if anyone owns it. As no one claims the *bhoto*, it is kept safe for another year to display again in case the owner comes and claims it (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Rato Matsyendranath Jatra Kathmandu (Lalitpur), Officials displaying the vest or "Bhoto"
(Photo: onlinekhabar.com)

> **Box 3: The Myth behind the Seto *Matsyendranath* Jatra**
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> Historically, Kantipuri (Kathmandu) was a divine place. Every morning people would bathe in the holy river Bagmati and visit Swayambhunath. Such holy works secured the people's place in heaven after their death. Once the god of death, Yamaraj, realized that none of the dead from Kantipuri went to hell, he investigated the reason. His finding was that the divine power of Swayambhunath made this possible, so he set himself to visit Kantipuri and paid homage to the sacred god Swayambhunath. However, King Yakshya Malla, along with his *tantric* guru, then captured Yamaraj and asked him to grant the King immortality. However, as Yamaraj himself was mortal, he could not give such a blessing. Despite that fact, the King did not let him go back, so Yamaraj prayed to Arya Awalokiteshwor (the incarnation of Lord Shiva) and requested he free him. The Lord appeared with a white colored body and eyes half closed and said that a temple needed to be built at the confluence of the Kalmati and Bagmati (Rivers), and that those who paid Lord Shiva a visit would always be prosperous and would live long. Lord Shiva told the King to organize a Ratha Yatra (chariot possession) every year for three days, starting from "Chaitra Sukla Astami," so that he could travel to the houses of those people who could not move or who were disabled, so they might also be blessed with happiness and long life.

Seto Matsyendranath (*Jana Baha: dhya:*) *Jatra: Jana Baha: Dhya:* (Figure 5), celebration of the *Bodhisattva* or compassion for Buddhists and god of rain for Hindus begins on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of *Chaulā* (Chaitra Sukla Astami (April) and lasts for three days as the idol of the god is taken on a fifty foot tall chariot and paraded in the city of Kathmandu. The god is stationed at *Jana Baha*: so it is also known as *Jana Baha: Dhya:*.

Figure 5: Seto Matsyendranath Jatra, Kathmandu

The *Matsyendranath* is the god of rain for the dry period. The pre-monsoon period in Kathmandu Valley is very dry, but the time for rice seedling is approaching, so people pray for rain. The treatment of an injured snake by a farmer symbolizes the ecological concerns of the farmer, while the confluence of rivers is symbolic of the importance of water resources. The god's visit (chariots parading around the city) to peoples' homes to ensure the prosperity of those who are physically, mentally or economically challenged, encourages social justice and the economic equity of people. This practice indicates that the spirituality of Kathmandu Valley is attached to the livelihood of the inhabitants.

Sithi Nakha:

Jestha Shukla Shasthi (the sixth day of the bright lunar fortnight in June) is the day when Lord Kumar is born. Kartikeya Kumar (known as *Sithi Dhya:* or the god born on the sixth day) is a son of Lord Shiva, although his mother is not Parwati. Instead, six women, the wives of six Rishis (reverends) are said to be his mothers. Being born from six mothers, Kumar had six mouths, each representing one mother. Kumar is also worshipped with six types of foods (pan cakes) made from six types of lentils and beans. These lentils contain high amounts of protein, which might be needed for the farming community to get ready for hard farm-labour, since the rainy season is approaching and farmers will engage in rice transplantation. The farmland is worshipped to secure better rice paddies. It is believed that the rulers of water i.e., the *Nags* (Serpents) leave the wells and water spouts for other destinations because of reduced water levels caused by the prolonged dry period. It is also the time for the mating of snakes, so they wander around in search of a mate. It is therefore less risky to clean water spouts at this time, so people do this on *Sithi nakha:*. Spiritually, the water sources are recognized as the symbol of the Holy River Ganga, the mother of Kumar, so they are cleaned and worshipped (Box 4).

Ecologically, it is important to clean-up water spouts before the start of the monsoon to prevent water-borne diseases on the one hand, and to increase the outflow of water to irrigate the rice paddies on the other. This festival is also celebrated as "local water day," and so has ecological significance. The day is also said to be daughters' day. This might be because daughters are the primary members of households to fetch water for domestic use. Hence cleaning water sources can be seen as a way of helping daughters to fetch water. In particular, married daughters and the sons-in-law

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Box 4: The myth behind the birth of Kumar

Lord Shiva was making love, but *Agnidev*, following the request of all the gods who suffered from the attacks of demons, could not wait, and so, seeking help, disturbed the Lord Shiva. Immediately Lord Shiva handed *Agnidev* his powerful sperm as a solution to the problem. When *Agnidev* could not handle it, he passed it to the earth. Again the earth could not handle it, so the earth passed it to the river Ganga. Ganga too, could not handle it, and lay it on the bank. The brightness of the sperm was so strong that the wives of six Rishis who came upon the flame while returning from the Ganga after a morning bath fell pregnant immediately. Since they were the wives of Rishis, they afraid of being labeled as "unfaithful women," so they discarded the fetus. However, the fetus became a baby, Lord Kumar, with six mouths.

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are sent an invitation to the rice transplantation. Such an invitation indicates the arrival of the transplantation season and the requirement for more farm laborers. The festival is also the day when farmers apply fertilizer in their fields. The activities of this festival are clearly attached to rainfall for rice farming as part of the application of religious beliefs.

Figure 6: Sithi Nakha: Cleaning of Water Sources in Nepal
(Photo by Abhishek Bajracharya)

In the *Sithi Nakha*:, houses are decorated with sculptures, or the feather of a peacock. It is an honor to have a peacock since it is the mode of travel (vehicle) of Lord Kumar. People offer *Samaybaji,* including the eighty-four food items to Kumar, and the same is also served at the family feast. *Samaybaji* indicates the rich agro-biodiversity and abundance of food in Kathmandu Valley. The major ingredient of *Samaybaji* is rice flakes, followed by cooked beans, legumes, and varieties of meats. Many of the beans are cultivated on the edge of rice-paddies through inter-cropping. The difference between Newar and Brahmins both worshipping the same god/goddess, is that the Newar include garlic, meat, eggs, and liquor in their offering, which Brahmins do not, because these warm foods are not meant to be eaten by Brahmins. This variation indicates the acculturalization of the gods.

Gathan Muga: (Ghanta Karna)

The *Gathan Muga:* festival is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight in Srawan (*Srawan Krishan Chaturdasi*), generally in August. God Bhairav (an incarnation of Lord Shiva) is worshipped in this festival, while an effigy of a devil, *Ghanta Karna* (a devil with a bell in his ear) is dragged away from the settlements and burnt. This is the day for expelling the ghost, a mythical demon "*Ghanta Karna*" (Shrestha 2006). According to the myth, the demon wore bell earrings to drown out the name of the Lord Shiva (Bhairav) with their jingling. However, as the demon carried out robberies, murders, and kidnapping of children, people knew that such acts were not committed by the Lord Shiva (Bhairav), but by *Gathan Muga*:. The people then captured him, dragged him away from the settlement and burnt him. This festival is celebrated after completion of the rice transplantation.

Figure 7: Gathan Muga: (Ghanta Karna), A Devil of Farms in Kathmandu

The celebration of *Gathan Muga:* has several social and ecological meanings. Since the farmers of the Valley are busy with farm-work until rice transplantation is complete, they may not have enough time to clean their houses, and take care of their children. At the same time, the task of rice transplantation is over, but time for weeding has not yet arrived. In this period relatively free from farm work, people clean houses, chop bushes and unwanted plants that have grown around the homestead, and collect all rodents and garbage. As every corner of a house is cleaned (which is symbolic of searching for demons), the collection of rodents and garbage together (disease vectors), are dragged in the form of the *Ghanta Karna* effigy. The effigy is burnt to kill the symbolic demons (insects and vectors). Most important is that as farmers have transplanted the rice, they now wish for a better harvest. Demons like *Ghanta Karna* are supposed to harm rice paddies and farm output. Therefore, the burning of the effigy of a demon is symbolic. The worship of Bhairav, the angriest form of Lord Shiva, indicates that a "god-like character" cannot fight against a demon's power.

Gunhu Punhi (August-September)

Gunhu Punhi (Rakshya Bandhan) is one of the most significant festivals of Hindus, and is celebrated on the day of full moon in August (*Srawan Shukla Purnima*). High caste Hindus wear *Janai* or *Yajnyopabit* (holy thread), as a cross-garland, and *Rakshya Bandhan* (tied on one's wrist). These holy threads protect the wearer from devils and misfortunes. These threads are treated with special *mantras* (by reciting sacred texts). A single rope of sacred thread contains nine threads and represents *Omkar*, *Agni* (deity of fire), *Nag* (serpent), *Som* (moon), *Pitar* (ancestors), *Prajapati* (deity of procreation), *Vayu* (air), *Yama* (deity of death) and *Vishvadevata* (deity of the universe). Wearing such a holy thread unifies the elements of the universe and one's own self.

Gunhu Punhi continues for the next nine days, from the full moon to the birthday of Lord Krishna. On the first day, farmers offer food for frogs on the farms known as *Byanja Nakegu*. It is believed that when frogs sing or croak, fireflies dance in the night. These exciting and appealing nights make *Indra*, the god of rain, happy so he sends rain that the rice field might flourish.

The food served during this festival is mostly the soup of several types of germinated beans and other cereals (broth). It is believed that having this warm and nutritious meal cures health problems such as the colds caused by working in wet-paddies for many days on rice transplantation.

The Saparu (*Gai Jatra* – Cow-like festival) is celebrated in memory of departed family members. Family members, particularly the son of the departed one, dress- up as a cow and parade in the town, while other family members and *Guthiyar* (members of the same community), as well as other people, provide alms. The cow is an important domestic animal in farming households since it utilizes agricultural residues and provides dung for farm-manure and dairy products for consumption. It is the mother of calves, and the draft power of the farm, and is thus important.

Figure 8: Gai Jatra, People offering food and drink to those who marches in the cow costume

The third day is the *Ropain Jatra*, literally meaning "the day for rice transplantation." Between the third and the eighth day, relatives and members of the extended family are invited for a family feast. The last day of *Gunhu Punhi* is *Krishnastami*, the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Krishna's association with rainfall is that he can save his followers from rain-induced disasters when torrential rain and cloudbursts occur in the monsoon season. This association reflects people's concern about water/rainfall-induced disasters in the summer.

Yanya Punhi - Indra Jatra (September)

Ye means "Kathmandu" and *Ya* means "celebration," and so together mean celebration in Kathmandu, or the *Indra Jatra*. The festival consists of two events, the *Indra Jatra* and *Kumari Jatra,* with worship of Lord Ganesh as a side event. The main feature of this festival in Kathmandu is a week-long display of a gigantic mask of *Aakash Bhairav,* one of Lord Shiva's twelve

manifestations as Bhairav. The chariot procession of Kumari, the living goddess,[3] and of the Lord Ganesh also takes place. A week-long festival begins after the erection of Yosin, (a ceremonial pole or *Lingo* from which a banner of Indra is unfurled) in Kathmandu Durbar Square. The *Jatra* starts on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight and lasts till the fourth day of the dark fortnight of *Yanlā* (Bhadra Shukla Dwadashi). The pole, a tree shorn of its branches and stripped of its bark, is obtained from a forest near Nālā, a small town some 30km to the east of Kathmandu, and is dragged by men pulling ropes.

The festival is celebrated in honor of Lord Indra, the Hindu king of heaven, who is also responsible for the wellbeing and prosperity of the people in regulating rainfall and facilitating abundant harvests. This festival is generally celebrated at the time of the retreat of the summer monsoon, a time when the rice-paddies are blooming. Heavy rain during this period is considered harmful for blooming rice. Therefore, through the celebration of *Indra Jatra*, people ask for a regulated weather pattern, with neither heavy rain nor dry spells.

There is an exotic myth behind the celebration of *Indra Jatra.* It is believed that the Lord Indra himself, disguised as a farmer, descended to earth (Kathmandu) in search of *parijat,* a white flower (Night Jasmine) for his mother Basundhara. As he was plucking the flowers at Maruhiti, a sunken water spout at Maru in Kathmandu, people caught him, suspecting he was a thief. It is a common Nepali tradition that the flowers of Night Jasmine are not to be plucked, and that doing so is sin. This act of Indra was against the common social norms, something only an outsider or a thief will do. Indra was thus put on display in the town square of Maru so that the urbanites could see the thief (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Indra, the King of Heaven, on display in Kathmandu

The mother of Indra was worried about his extended absence, so she also came to Kathmandu and wandered around looking for him. This event is commemorated by the procession of *Dagin* through the city. *Pulu Kisi* (alternate name *Tānā Kisi*), a wicker representation of an elephant, also runs around town reenacting Indra's elephant, who is searching frantically for Lord Indra (Hoek 2004). After seeing such happenings in the city, people realize that they have captured Indra

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[3] The Kumari, young girls, are worshipped as the goddess Kumari in various contexts by followers of several religious paths (*marga*) – Buddha *marga*, Shiva *marga*, and Shakti *marga* are the identity of multi-religious faiths, particularly the co-existence of Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepal.

himself, so they appeal and immediately release him. Out of appreciation for his release, the mother of Indra promises to provide enough dew throughout the winter to ensure a better harvest. This mythical story represents the environmental condition of Kathmandu Valley when it is covered by a thick, cotton-like fog on winter mornings.

Discussion

The mythical stories presented above have many meanings, spiritually, socially and ecologically. However, modernization has had consequences for these valuable cultural traditions of Kathmandu Valley. Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley have maintained traditional ecological practices for millennia despite various ups and downs. Kathmandu Valley is the capital city of Nepal, and has experienced rapid urbanization of over 6 percent population growth per year. This sort of increase is pressuring for change. The urban concentration of the Valley has grown by 412 percent in the last three decades (1989–2009-2016) causing the loss of 31 percent of agricultural land (Ishtiaque, Shrestha, and Chhetri 2017). Global climate change has also seriously impacted the weather pattern of Kathmandu Valley, so farmers are facing problems adjusting the crop calendar. The changing weather pattern casts in doubt the relevance of celebrating festivals as the outcomes of these celebrations may not be noticeably positive. The representative festivals presented above uncover the underlying connections between spirituality and sustainability in Kathmandu. Jonathan Z. Smith, in his work *To Take Place* (1987), refers to "place" as both a noun and verb, as well as indicating something that is both physical and social (quoted in Knott 2009, 156). It is interesting to explore how religion is situated in Kathmandu and how it has related to social, cultural, economic and political forces, and to the ecological conditions of the Valley and formed relationships among them.

The spiritual beliefs of both Buddhists and Hindus concerning *Matsyendranath* are a unique combination of the place and people. *Matsyendranath Jatra* is celebrated to end the dry period and start the summer monsoon. By its name, the festival integrates *Matsya* (fish) *Indra* (god of rain), and the *Nath* (incarnation of Lord Shiva). Nepal, in general, now experiences a reduced number of annual rainy days without notable changes in total annual rainfall amount (Pandey 2016). This indicates increased extreme rainfall events. In the same way, despite the expectation of moderate rainfall after *Indra Jatra*, Kathmandu often experiences either prolonged dry winters or heavy rain. Thick, bright cotton-like fog, together with accompanying cool mornings, have already become rare in Kathmandu Valley due to pollution and changing weather patterns. Socio-economic and environmental dynamics in the valley are challenging the rationale for celebrating festivals, including *Indra Jatra,* since the outcomes are different from those expected.

The socio-ecological narratives of *Gunu Punhi*—the worship of frogs in lush-green rice fields with flowers, sandal wood-pest, dry rice and offering of cooked rice, and nine varieties of legume seeds—indicate the ecological importance of frogs and other biodiversity for an abundant farm harvest. Another meaning is that many small arthropods, fish and Amphibia, the food of frogs of paddy-farms, may have died as a result of the farm-work. The frogs themselves might have been injured and rendered unable to hunt their food. It is thus symbolic to repair the farm-ecosystem, particularly the paddy fields, after completing the rice transplantation. This event is important for the rice culture of Nepal.

There are many social and ecological meanings to the celebration of *Indra Jatra* as well. This festival is particularly focused on regulating the weather of Kathmandu Valley. The need for dew, but not heavy rain, is important to ensure an abundant rice harvest and timely sowing of winter crops. Similarly, bringing the *Yosin* from the distant forest, and pulling it all the way to Kathmandu, indicates the importance of a forest in a distant location and the way people work together for religious-cultural celebration. Another event on the first day of *Indra Jatra* is *Upāku Wanegu* when participants visit shrines holding lighted incense to honor deceased family members. They also

place small butter lamps on the way. It is obviously important to keep livestock, such as cows, in order to obtain butter for *Upāku Wanegu.* There is a specified route for parading Indra's *Yosin* that connects the major deities of the historic settlements of Kathmandu, thereby indicating the harmonization of different powers.

A new issue that the Kathmandu Valley is facing is the search for a rationale for asking the god for rain. Why urbanities would require rain when rain causes the sewers to flood, when they do not have a plot of land upon which to cultivate rice, and where they have no need to clean their traditional water spouts or *hitis*, since these have already been demolished by the municipal authorities in the name of urban management and planning, are the pertinent questions. These questions are not easy to answer. Yet the rich spiritual, social and ecological heritage of Kathmandu is facing challenges to its existence. The Newar communities are continuing their traditions though there are questions that are not easily answered, such as, what is the meaning of celebrating such festivals when there is no environment remaining for which such celebrations are meant? In addition, the rice flakes used in Kathmandu are made with a special variety of rice named *taichin*, which is an oval-shaped rice flake. This rice flake has a special flavor and is considered the best of all the kinds of rice in Nepal. Although it is possible to produce such rice outside of Kathmandu Valley, it would definitely lose its original flavor, and also increase the dependency of Kathmandu Valley. In such a context, it is possible to conclude that although the ecological meaning of spirituality and celebration in Kathmandu Valley is surviving, it is on the verge of collapse. Therefore, it must be noted that the "sustain-able" (economically speaking) celebration of festivals is possible, yet since the term "sustainable" (meaning in harmony with nature) has already been hijacked, the sustainability of such celebrations is questionable.

The sustainability of festivals in Kathmandu Valley, in terms of both the participation of people and funding for essentials is thus going to become challenging shortly. The Kathmandu Valley used to be an agro-ecological city; inhabitants had time to celebrate festival during the off-farm season. However, as farmland has already become built-up and the agricultural dependency of the majority of people has already shifted towards entrepreneurship or formal employment, the devotees of *Jatras* may become fewer. Pulling the chariots and parading around the city for as much as a month at a time requires the engagement of a huge number of people. The lunar calendar, which does not coincide with official holidays, could be another problem in the course of time. Nevertheless, multiculturalism has already become the new identity of Kathmandu Valley, which may be of some benefit. Now volunteers from other caste groups and religions now engage in pulling the chariots around the city. One specific day is assigned for women-only volunteer pullers. The multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of festivals in Kathmandu demonstrate a sense of place for everyone (Massey 1993, 65), and scope for the sustainability of celebrations.

The festivals and celebrations in Kathmandu are also facing constraints due to contradictory policies of the Government of Nepal. There are traditions where the presence of the Head of State (the President) is compulsory at some festivals, particularly *Indra Jatra, Matsyendranath Jatra* (*Bhoto Jatra*), and *Kumari Jatra*. Retaining the rich tradition of the Kathmandu Valley would be extremely helpful for both heritage conservation and tourism. However, the government's policies and the inappropriate plans of local councils are emphasizing modernization of this heritage city. Such policies are challenging the sustainability of these festivals. In addition, the Constitution of Nepal (2015) is secular, so people following different faiths are questioning the government's support of and engagement in Hindu festivals. This raises the question of whether the festivals of Kathmandu Valley have taken on a multicultural shape.

Kathmandu is the most heterogeneous place in Nepal from a social and economic perspective. Of the total population of Kathmandu, Newar make up 30 percent of the population, Janajati 25 percent, the Brahmins 20 percent, and Chettris 18.5 percent (World Population Review 2018). In such a context, people who are critical of these celebrations might be looking for a "space of representation" themselves, one which is distinct from those conducted directly through lived and associated images and symbols of festivals (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 39). The festivals and

celebrations in Kathmandu are not limited only to Hindus, so are understood as a cultural rather than a religious practice. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that the Kathmandu Valley needs a reconfiguration of its religious identity, and it needs to extend its boundaries, in line with the changing social and economic roles of urbanities in the modern context and the contemporary ecological crises and disorder (DeNapoli 2017).

Social and cultural theorists have reconceived "space" as dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history and time (Knott 2005). In such a context, the new generation of Kathmandu may seek for shorter ways of celebrating festivals without losing working days. Similarly, the government body i.e. *Guthi Sansthan*, provides some support for the continuation of various traditional festivals. *Guthis* also own some land and by leasing that land, they collect rent and cover the cost of the celebrations. However, corruption in government mechanisms is serious and executive members and officials are frequently blamed for misuse of the major part of *Guthi* property. Media reports say 90 percent of *Guthi* land has been encroached upon in collusion with *mahantas* (prayers of particular *Guthi*), local political leaders, police chiefs and government officials (The Kathmandu Post 2011). At the same time, there is an ownership crisis over *Guthi* land, since most of the land has been entitled to local people for cultivation (Aryal 2010). The Land Reform Act allows transfer of ownership of parts of the land after it has been cultivated for a certain number of years. The other funding source for religious *Guthi* is crowd funding (devotees' offerings), which is also reported as misused by the various priests in many temples. All these circumstances are causing financial problems for *Guthis*.

The Kathmandu Valley contains its history within itself as an ever-present "etymology of location" (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 37). In particular, places such as the routes for parading different *Jatras*, and the places where the gods, goddesses, and even the demons are kept and worshipped, all contain the social, spiritual, physical and ecological attributes. This containing facilitates the elements instrumentally engaging with one another along the way, and creates ideologies of multi-culturalism between Hinduism and Buddhism. Both of these religions are conventional and are influenced by tantrism. The culture of Kathmandu Valley also incorporates animism and shamanism. However, the narratives discussed above indicate that the spiritual and social heritage that has promoted social-ecological sustainability for centuries in Kathmandu Valley is increasingly vulnerable.

Conclusions

Although religious and cultural traditions have gone through imaginative experimentation and reconstruction globally, Hindu and Buddhist *dharmas* (religion) have been underrepresented in Asian theological scholarship (DeNapoli 2017). This study has contributed in this area by exploring some of the mysterious connections between rice, rainfall and religion in Kathmandu Valley. It is not the intention of this paper, nor would it be ethical, to impose upon the people an opinion about whether they should continue, leave, or modify the ways the festivals are celebrated in Kathmandu Valley. However, the people—at least the new generation—are confronting the baffling phenomenon of cultural and religious beliefs facing rapid changes in the physical environment and ecosystem of Kathmandu. Globalization and modernization have affected the lives of the people in every respect and bring with them their own worldview on religion. The spiritual and religious communities of Kathmandu Valley, whose cultural practices are particularly associated with invoking rain for rice production, are confronted by challenges of sustainability. Nevertheless, the Kathmandu Valley is continuing its religious traditions of earlier periods. Neither can government policies persuade people to defy the material world and reverse their way of living in harmony with nature.

It is interesting to understand the geography of a sacred place through the study of its social ecological narratives of spirituality. In Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place* (1987), he argues that

human beings are not "placed," they bring place into being through ritual and a meaningful world of inhabitants (quoted in Knott 2005, 171). The cultural and religious practices of the Kathmandu Valley have made this natural bowl a sacred space that honors the mother goddess for its ecological sustainability, despite experiencing various challenges. This "sacredness" in conventional places of worship, according to Sophie Gilliat-Ray's article on "Sacralising Sacred Space in Public Institutions: A Case Study of the Prayer Space at the Millennium Dome"(2005), is a consequence of shared rituals and acts of prayer (quoted in Knott 2005, 173-174). However, that "cannot so easily occur" anymore, because of a lack of progressive consensus about the long-term significance of the practices. Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) speaks of a "spatial practice," referring to the way in which space is generated, used and perceived by people in everyday life. The people of Kathmandu Valley apply their perceptions of space with different meanings, and continue in their rituals, such as curing dryness-induced eye-problems of snakes, placing demons at cross-roads (dangerous places) and assigning temples for deities such as Kumari. The people also maintain the tradition of not plucking flowers in the night. They clean water spouts and allocate them for reptiles. Maintaining rice fields for arthropods, fish and amphibians, and growing trees in distant forests, are all actions with ecological importance. Places such as the confluence of rivers are also given religious meaning. All of these examples indicate that the spiritual, social and ecological perceptions and conceptions of the people in the Kathmandu valley are connected in the creation of a sacred place.

Pandey, Rishikesh
Assistant Professor,
School of Development and Social Engineering
Pokhara University, Nepal

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