

External Examiner’s Report on the Dissertation of Jakub Kolářek

“Islam and Ecological Crisis: Modern Islamic Environmental Discourses”

Submitted in 2024 at the Department of the Middle Eastern Studies

I. Brief summary of the dissertation

The dissertation examines the ongoing debate about Islam and the environment since the 1960s. More specifically, it covers the early and later Islamic thought on environmentalism, the application of Islamic concept on environmental policies, and certain Islamic environmentalist scholars and movements. For this purpose, the candidate utilizes an interdisciplinary methodology mainly based on historical sociology and environmental history.

II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is an exciting and welcome piece on a critical and fascinating topic, which unites the debates on Islamic and Muslim environmentalism. I found the dissertation well-researched and thoughtfully written, providing valuable insights into the intersection of environmentalism and religion in various contexts. The candidate critically examines the “primordialist” and empirical perspectives on the Islamic understanding of environmental issues, while assessing the evolution of “Islamic environmentalism” through the analysis of discourse. Therefore, the thesis offers a critical, social-scientific and historical perspective.

III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

1. Structure of the argument

The dissertation sufficiently used a logical approach to provide a considered output. Most arguments are well-developed and there is originality of thought. The dissertation clearly communicates thoughts and ideas. The flow is relatively good, and the language is academic. Moreover, the dissertation has set clear objectives in terms of defining proper and interesting research questions. Overall, the thesis is cohesive and well-organised.

2. Formal aspects of the dissertation

The candidate is coherent in the use of abbreviations, references, and transcriptions of

non-English terms. The dissertation uses the Harvard referencing system and footnotes are only used sparingly. Regarding the bibliography, the candidate should create a distinct subsection on primary sources to further indicate the originality of his work. Also, it would be appropriate to separate books from book chapters and scholarly articles in the rest of the bibliography. Overall, the thesis is visually well-presented.

3. Use of sources and/or material

The candidate possesses the intellectual agility to utilise multiple pieces of information and produce a well-structured analysis. The literature review is extensive and critical enough. All major works have been acknowledged by the candidate. He managed to incorporate a variety of secondary sources into his research, despite the wide range of topics covered. In this way, he offered a broader context to frame his research within the existing body of literature. Having said that, the dissertation did not fully explain which primary sources can offer direct data and thus provide a solid foundation for this research. Furthermore, the research questions could have been formulated better in terms of expected utility and value.

4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

The candidate utilises both primary and secondary sources. His presumed knowledge of Arabic allowed him to explore the relevant literature, which often remains out of reach for many Western scholars. There is ample evidence of originality which the candidate should be commended for and there are glimpses of important critical analysis, although some of which remain tentative or not fully developed. Overall, the work in this dissertation could play a significant role in the production of new knowledge on the nexus between ‘religion’ and environmentalism in different Muslim contexts.

IV. Questions for the author

1. You did describe the methods which you utilised to collect and analyse field data. However, you did not discuss in detail the principles you used to select

data, to collate it, code it and analyse it in such a way as to interrogate it as source of new knowledge. Why not?

2. I intend to ask a question about the candidate's interdisciplinary approach, and the extent to which he is aware of critical debates surrounding the category 'religion' and current debates of how the political relates to the religious beyond modern Western traditions.
3. Can you offer a historical contextualisation of the rise of the Islamic environmental discourse within Muslim and non-Muslim contexts?
4. Can you situate environmentalist discourse and movements (the rise of Muslim NGOs, the national perspectives etc) in the wider 20th century transformations of Muslim thought and practice?
5. And what is the reasoning underpinning the specific case studies selected for analysis in the dissertation?
6. Some might argue that a lot of environmental problems stem from inappropriate development based on Western – secular – forms of materialism, science and economics. Why do not you consider Muslim critiques of Western colonialism and forms of development which are widely current in the literature and in the Muslim world?
7. You mentioned that Islamists seek to “re-territorialize Islam” (p. 65) but there is no further analysis about this concept. Why?
8. You claimed that “Islamists have not, to a significant extent, acquired an interest in environmental matters” (p. 351) but then explained how new evidence has been discovered. The question is whether an “Islamic environmental policy” would have been possible for quasi-state actors like Hamas and Hizbullah.

V. Conclusion

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed with minor revisions*

31 August 2024

Dr Emmanuel Karagiannis