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NATION BUILDING FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL GROWTH: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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NATION BUILDING

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ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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CHAPTER THREE

ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Today, pollution is occurring on a vast and unprecedented scale worldwide. It is pervasive, affecting in some way virtually everyone and everything. There is no doubt that the world we live today is absolutely unlike that of the primitive times when man is in total accord with nature and his environment. The worst environmental problem the world faces today is pollution arising from a combination of factors - natural and manmade. This paper attempts to highlight the fact that the concept of environmentalism originates from Islam and that the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) was an advocator of pollution-free environment 1400 years ago. It elicit the truth on how and when the idea of environmental awareness began in Europe and America despite the distorted media bombardments on environmentalism and the level of successes achieved internationally on the dangers, management and control of environmental pollution irrespective of the numerous laws enacted to protect the environment. The treatise gave a recap of Africa and specifically Nigeria as nations bedevilled with myriad of pollution related problems. The paper brings to lime-light how Islamic teachings on environmental ethics has enhanced environmental consciousness of its people and stress the need for global recognition and exploration of Islamic religious ethical and philosophical tools for an effective, result-oriented pollution abatement effort.

Introduction

It is an established theory that as population of a society increases in size, individual members of the society exert more pressure on scarce available resources such as land and other natural endowments for survival. This directly or indirectly through socio-economic activities, pollutes the environment and further cause degradation (Wilkinson and Boulding ,1973).

‘The planet is passing through a period of dramatic growth and fundamental change. Our human world of 5 billion must make room in a finite environment for another human world. The population could stabilize at between 8 billion and 14 billion sometime next century, according to U.N. projections. More than 90 percent increase will occur in the poorest countries and 90 percent of that growth in already bursting cities. Economic activity has multiplied to create a \$13 trillion world economy, and this could grow five-or tenfold in the coming half century. Industrial production has grown more than fiftyfold over the past century, four fifths of this growth since 1950. Such figures reflect and presage profound impacts upon the biosphere as the world invests in houses, transport, farms, and industries’ (W.C.E.D.1978).

Western View

Environmentalism is the most popular social movement in the United States today. Environmental movement began just about one hundred years ago (19th century), it is rooted in England philosophical movement called ‘Transcendentalism’ in which the Poet and Essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, and naturalist and author Henry David Thoreau, were leaders. When Henry David Thoreau left Concord in 1845 to write and study nature for two years at Walden Pond, Massachusetts, USA. He became the harbinger of twentieth century conservationists who would preserve the natural world for its beauty and potential for spiritual enlightenment, not merely for its practical value. In an era when vast portions of the country remained unsettled, few of Thoreau's fellow citizens embraced his vision.

Advocacy for Clean Environment and the Birth of the Movement.

The idea of a harmonious philosophy was taken up by naturalist and writer John Muir (1838-1914). The Scottish-born visionary founded the US conservation organization-the Sierra Club in 1892. Through the Club, he successfully used his literary gifts to encourage US government to protect some of the great wilderness of the country.

Pollution of rivers is not a new problem. The River Thames in London was so badly polluted that the year was called the “Year of the Great Stink,” Michael Faraday, a famous Scientist and electrochemist, led a campaign to install a proper sewage system in the city (Punch, 1858). It was then the movement was founded to advocate for a kind treatment of the environment - land, water and air. Hundreds of write-ups were written to emphasise the value of nature and its spiritual importance to humans. The first systematic analysis of the effects that humans could have on their environment, was done by George Perkins Marsh, in his book titled “Man and Nature” or physical Geography as Modified by Human Action, published in 1864. A combination of these efforts moved people to a new level of environmental awareness and activism.

Within 100 years a small number of concerned people had done much to raise awareness of environmental destruction. But it wasn't until the 1960s that concern for the environment was galvanized into an organized force. Many would agree that the milestone marking the birth of the environmental movement was Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*. Carson, a nature lover and former marine biologist, told of how chemicals like pesticides and insecticides, used on farms, forests and gardens were contaminating the environment. Wildlife was being poisoned, she said. The insect life was dying (and not just the pest species) which meant no food for the birds. No birds, no bird song means a silent spring and that people were equally in grave danger. She described in detail how the chemicals, like the insecticide DDT, enter the

food chain and accumulate in the fatty tissues of animals, humans included, resulting in higher risks cancer.

Despite media criticism and attempts by the chemical industry to *ban the book*, many reputable scientists backed her up and her work was validated. President John F Kennedy ordered an investigation into the issues highlighted in the book. Carson was found to be correct – DDT was banned, and the effects of other chemicals were scrutinized (Reynolds, 2011).

On April 22, 1970, the first Earth day, approximately 20 million Americans gathered at various sites across the country to protest corporate and non- governmental abuse of the environment. Earth day, the event leading up to it, and its aftermath transformed American society to a new era of environmental awareness, and numerous grassroots environmental organisation were established to work for political change, including the Environmental Defence Fund in 1967, Friends of the earth in 1968 and Green Peace in 1970.

Progress in the Developing and Developed Countries: Is the Pollution battle being won?

It is not more than a decade and a half ago that the United States and many other industrial countries spotlighted “traditional ” pollutants and initiated major, expensive cleanup programs. Are these programs achieving their goals? Critical analysis of the available information shows that there are some degree of successes, some backsliding, and judging by the goals of the Federal Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, progress has been disappointingly slow (James, 1988).

In the United States, there are several Federal and State laws and regulations specifically devoted to the protection of the environment from various forms of pollution. The various government agencies involved in environmental matters are generously invested with authority to deal with any erring generator of toxic waste. No prudent industrialist would allow himself to be caught violating the laws on toxic wastes management.

History also recorded several Legislation and litigations to address environmental problems such as Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) of 1980. Despite the expressed commitment of nations of the world, the plight of the environment is not better and that obviously shows that there are still reasons why those who generate hazardous wastes do not want to take responsibility for their actions. It could be understood from the international politics backing the course of environmentalism, those who pollute are also the police, the prosecutor and the judge, what an amazing drama! The United state government despite its leading role in the effort for pollution free environment was accused of environmental racism in-house, one report says:

“Toxic waste sites are more prevalent in poorer communities, and the single most important factor in predicting the location of hazardous waste sites in the United State is the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood” (Badger, 2014, AlterNet Environment). It is not coincidental that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) passed its first resolution on the hazardous-waste issue in 1983 after the national protest demonstration in Warren County, North Carolina. Subsequent protest actions were instrumental in getting the New York-based Commission for Racial Justice to sponsor its 1987 national study of toxic waste and race. This national study, like the 1983 GAO report, found a strong association between race and the location of hazardous-waste facilities. Race was by far the most prominent factor in the location of commercial hazardous-waste landfills, more prominent than household income and home values. For example, the commission study found that toxic-waste facilities are often located in communities that have high percentages of poor, elderly, young, and minority residents. An inordinate concentration of uncontrolled toxic waste sites is found in black and Hispanic urban communities. For example, when Atlanta's ninety-four uncontrolled toxic waste sites are plotted by zip code areas, more than 82.8 percent of the city's

black population compared with 60.2 percent of its white population were found living in waste site areas. Many of these large commercial hazardous-waste landfills and disposal facilities that are located in black communities are invisible toxic time bombs waiting for a disaster to occur (Badger, 2014). This is a scenario from the United States of America

In Nigeria, the oil boom of the 1970s led to tremendous increase in industrial activities. With booming of oil, Nigerian nation had lots of resources but no development policy, unguided urbanization and industrialization took place. The result was the indiscriminate sitting of industries, deforestation and desertification with no regards for environmental concerns. Oil exploration, production, and refinement in Nigeria has resulted in various environmental and ecological problems ranging from oil spills, gas flares, habitat destruction, air and water pollution. The discharge of domestic and industrial waste materials such as petroleum, mining, iron and steel, pharmaceuticals and textiles into water bodies have increased the contents of sulphates and nitrates and denatured the colour and the odour of water bodies. The pollution level in the air, land and water and its consequential effect have been vividly described (Adelegan, 2004; Ogbonna and Ekweozor, 2002, Ajayi and Ikporokpo, 2005)

Prior to June 1988, Nigeria responded to most environmental problems on an ad hoc basis, so there is virtually little or no official data relating to the harmful effects of toxic wastes on the environment. Oil producing areas have been identified as danger zones of pollution arising from toxic wastes. The Koko incident of 1988 was spectacularly absurd for the collective common sense of Nigerians. The attendant media and public outcry forced the government to act promptly. Through international support, Nigerian government was able to discover that the toxic wastes were brought in to the Country by some Italian business fraudsters with active connivance of a poverty stricken Nigerian villager, Sunday Nana, for meagre sum of N500.00 monthly. He allegedly died as a result of the effects of the toxic wastes dumped in his compound and the Italian government and the company were forced to lift the

wastes out of the country through diplomatic efforts (Ikhariale, 1989; Kalu, 2009; News Watch Magazine, 1988).

The importation and subsequent dumping of toxic waste in a number of African countries is not new and many governments of Africa paid scanty attention to it. Another unforgettable incident in Africa was that of a Singaporean-based oil and commodity shipping company named Tranfigura Beheer BV which chartered *Probo Koala*, a Panamanian registered Greek shipping Prime Marine Management Inc to offload its toxic waste. *Probo Koala* attempted twice to dump the deadly toxic waste in Lagos in July 2006, but failed and eventually had its way at the Port of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire on 19th August, 2006. Within few weeks, the communities near the landfill at Akouedo knew something strange was happening in their atmosphere leading to breakdown of law and order. The substance gave off toxic gas and resulted in burns to lungs and skin, as well as severe headache and vomiting. A report confirmed that seventeen people died within few days and at least 30,000 were injured leading to a civil lawsuit against Trafigura. The *Probo Koala* had its cargo rejected by Amsterdam Port Services BV, and was to be charged €500,000 in nearby Moerdijk and decided to turn to a cheap fertile ground-poor africa, where it paid around €18,500.00 for its disposal (The Guardian, 2009). In Zambia, villagers in Chongwe district, about 40km east of the Zambian capital of Lusaka, discovered a concrete slab where the army had buried contaminated beef imported from a former Eastern Bloc country. The radioactive beef had been lying on the shelves of state-run shops for many months and certainly consumed by many Zambians. The Times of Zambia, stumbled on the story and published an expose on the radioactive beef (ECZ Report, 1994).

World Environmental Day (WED).

Worldwide, 5th June of every year has been set aside as the world environmental day. This was founded in 1972, also by the United Nations Environment programme (UNEP). Heads of

Governments all over the world gathered to jointly overhaul environmental problems and proffer solutions.

In Nigeria, The then head of State, Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, late General Sani Abacha, on June 5, 1997, (May Allah be pleased with him and overlook his shortcomings) lamented in his paper reproduced below;

“Today across the length and breadth of our great nation, we are faced with the stark realities of the errors of our past developmental activities and indisciplined life style.

•devastation of our natural resources;

•ravaging gully, sheets and coastal erosion;

•rapidly expanding arid lands and deserts;

•unyieding mountains of urban solid wastes; and urban infrastructural decay.”

(The Nigerian Environment, 1997).

The address described the situation of the nation as pathetic as regard management and control and highlighted the need for us to rise to the attendant challenges associated with modernization and urbanization, and that the world must make frantic efforts to protect the environment and make it a safe place to live, not only for man, but also for all the living components of his surroundings.

The Environmental Concept in Islam

In Islam, the environment is a broad concept. It includes climate and its components, plants, animals, and, human being, and all things found on the ground or in the atmosphere. The concept of the environment in Islam is ‘a comprehensive concept that includes earth, sky, and mountains with all creatures, in addition to human and their motivations, emotions and instincts’ (Abdusslam, 2010).

All these creatures were created by God and created for the service of man. Therefore, man is responsible for maintaining and conserving the environment. Islam forbids wasting of resources and destroying the environment. The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered the Muslims not to cut trees during the war. He emphasised the conservation of the environment and the prevention of its destruction. Therefore, conserving the environment is a religious duty of every Muslim. The importance of environment in Islam extends to every environmental aspect. Maintaining the environment has a specific place in the Islamic thought (Salem, et al., 2012).

The Islamic view of nature is neither from an anthropocentric (human-centered) point of view based on ecocentrism nor anthropocentrism, but is essentially theocentric (God-centered) wherein it is believed that everything in the universe is created by God. The Qur'anic portrayal of nature, as found in numerous verses, is multifaceted (Gada, 2014). The Qur'an emphatically declares that nature is created by one, the Allah:

“There is no God but He, the Creator of all things” (Qur'an 6:102).

The Qur'anic view holds that everything on the earth was created for humankind. It was God's gift (*ni'mah*) to him, but a gift with conditions nevertheless and be responsible for its exploration. The earth then is a testing ground for the human species and the tests are a measure of our acts of worship (*ihsan*) in its broadest sense. Here, Islam provides a comprehensive model of environmental ethics where man is a consumer and beneficiary and at the same time, a guardian and trustee and enjoined to maintain harmony of our inner and outer environments (Gada, 2014).

As our interaction with the environment evolved, it manifested itself in a range of rules and institutions. As the Muslim community expanded out of its sparse desert environment, it was confronted by many challenges, one of which was relative abundance. This brought about other problems like over exploitation and waste. Muslims applied themselves to these problems assiduously and it would be salutary to look at this legacy (Bagader *et al.*, 1994; Llewellyn, 1992 and Dien, 2000). The following are the summary of principles Shari'ah developed in this area over the past 1400 years (Khalid, 2002):

- i. *Allah is the sole owner of the earth and everything in it. People hold land on usufruct- that is, for its utility value only. There is a restricted right to public property;*
- ii. *Abuse of rights is prohibited and penalized;*
- iii. *There are rights to the benefits derived from natural resources held in common;*
- iv. *Scarce resource utilization is controlled;*
- v. *The common welfare is protected;*
- vi. *Benefits are protected and detriments are either reduced or eliminated;*

Muslims learn from the Qur'an that God created the universe and every single atom and molecule it contains and that the laws of creation include the elements of order, balance and proportion:

"He created everything and determined it most exactly" (Quran, 25:2) and

"It is He Who appointed the sun to give radiance and the moon to give light, assigning it in phases. Allah did not create these things except with truth. We make the signs clear for people who know" (Quran, 10:5).

The Quran also asserts that God's creation is meaningful and orderly, has purpose, value, wisdom and function. The Qur'anic verses say:

And the Earth we have spread out; set therein mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance (Qur'an 15:19);

"And look for his Creation for any discrepancy! And look again! Do you find any gap in its system? Look again! Your sight, having found none, will return to you humbled (Qur'an 67:3-4).

The Qur'an again uses an environmental theme in exhorting humankind to be moderate; (Quran 6:142) says:

"it is He who produces gardens, both cultivated and wild, and palm trees and crops of diverse kinds and olives and pomegranates both similar and dissimilar. He does not love the profligate".

The Shariah also evolved within the guidelines set by three principles agreed upon by scholar jurists over the centuries. The guideline stipulates that:

- i. *the interest of the community takes precedence over the interests of the individual;*
- ii. *relieving hardship takes precedence over promoting benefit;*
- iii. *a bigger loss cannot be prescribed to alleviate a smaller loss and a bigger benefit takes precedence over a smaller one. Conversely a smaller harm can be prescribed to avoid a bigger harm and a smaller benefit can be dispensed with in preference to a bigger one.*

Islam and Environmentalism

Industrial revolution of 19th century in its attempt to make life more convenient and comfortable for mankind, has introduced more problems not only that it has terminated lives of many untimely, but enough environmentally rooted crisis for the generations yet unborn. 1400 years ago, the prophet-Muhammad (Pbuh) built an egalitarian society, which is environmentally friendly, where even the animals have rights under an Islamic state. Prophet Muhammad's (Pbuh) stance on environmentalism as well as inter-relationship between man to man, and man to other creatures was un-diabolical. He successfully groomed the companions and left the 'Ummah' on an eco-friendly platform. In order to underscore the main focus of this write-up, there is the need to examine few of the teachings of Islam which moulds and tame the muslim world to be environmental conscious and friendly;

- i. *Allah (the exalted) says; "Mischief has appeared on the land and sea because of (the deed) that the hands of men have earned, that Allah may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil)" Qur'an 30:40.*
- ii. *"Those who that harm /hurt believing men and women undeservedly, they bear guilt of slander and manifest sin" (Q 33:58).*

In the first verse, Allah established that indeed mischief would appear on the land and the sea, foreign and hazardous materials would be generated and dumped in to land and water bodies resulting in harmful effect both on man and other creatures in his ecosystem.

Prophet Muhammad (Pbhu), the world acknowledged greatest leader in history laid the precedence of sincere and genuine approach to the issues of environmental protection. Writing under the caption, who were history's Great Leaders, Jules Masserman, a famous US psychologist, says:

‘A true leader must fulfil three functions namely:

- i. Provide for the well being of the led;
- ii. Provide a social organisation in which people feel relatively secure;
- iii. And provide them with one set of beliefs.

“People like Pasteur and Salk are leaders in the first senses; people like Gandhi and Confucius, on the one hand, Alexander, Caesar and Hitler, on the other hand, are leaders in the second or perhaps the third senses, Jesus and Buddha belong to the third category alone. Perhaps the greatest leader of all times was Muhammad who combined all the three functions. To a lesser degree Moses did the same; (Time Magazine, July, 1974).”

One thousand four hundred years ago, Islam founded the course of environmentalism in all its ramifications and championed the protection of lives and property. **Prophet Muhammad** was the first and the **original environmentalist**, for his environmental awareness campaign was divinely informed. His advocacy was freed from any form of ulterior motives and was not politically or materially motivated. Allah says:

“In the law of equality there is (saving of) life to you, O ye men of understanding; that ye may restrain yourself” (Q2:178-79).

In another verse, Allah (SWT) says:

“We ordained therein for them: life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal” But if any one remits retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. Anyone who failed to judge by what Allah revealed, they are the wrong –doers” (Q5:45).

He added:

“....And do not kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily Allah hath being to you most merciful. If any do that in rancour and injustice, soon shall we cast him in to the fire: and that is easy for Allah.” (Q 4 29-30).

These injunctions of Allah are underscoring the sanctity of human life and that men of faith must eschew acts that could endanger, terminate or threatens the lives of fellow mankind no matter their societal status. The likes of deliberate dumping or creating hazardous waste landfill would not have ever been contemplated. Today world-wide, many people have died and many others are suffering as a result of the effects of exposure to environmental disease causing chemical agents, radiations and physical hazards.

These problems are more pronounced in the third world country like ours, “a carefree society” where the operations of many desperados have sent thousands of poor Nigerians to their graves untimely and hundreds are still struggling between life and death. Industrial society has introduced thousands of chemicals capable of causing diseases in to the environment, notable are inorganic materials such as lead, mercury, arsenic, cadmium, and asbestos, and organic substances such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBS), vinyl chloride and the pesticide DDT. Many of these substances are potentially dangerous: causing lung cancer, mesothelioma, liver cancer and leukaemia. Toxic potentials of many of these substances are stated by the manufacturers and in most cases instruction are given on safe handling of these

chemicals from loading, off-loading up to production handling. Unfortunately, these ‘industrious criminals’ often disregarded these; thereby endangering the lives of the workers. Many pathetic stories of Nigerian workers have appeared on pages of the dailies, revealing the unsafe environment in which they are working and how many of them have toiled to death (Insider Weekly, 2001).

Industrious criminals have little or no reverence for the lives of their fellow human beings, and as long as they make more money it doesn’t matter whose life is in jeopardy. Inordinate ambition and extreme selfishness has blind-folded them to the sacredness of human life as prescribed by Allah in the Quran. The chain of these ugly incidences will not cease growing unless and until Allah’s law of equality is applied to deter these industrious criminals.

Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) has enjoined mankind to live in harmony with one another, with all creatures of Allah and with their environment. If we X-ray some of the authentic hadiths of the prophet, one would realise the level of harmony the religion of Islam advocated and expected on the surface of the earth:

- i. *“By Allah (I swear), he is not a true believer! By Allah he is not a true believer! They asked: who is he, the Prophet of Allah? He said: he who’s neighbour is not **secured** from his **evils**. ” (Bukhari and Muslim.)*
- ii. *“No paradise for him he whose neighbours are not secured from his evil deeds.”(Muslim).*

Also on the authority of Abu Huraira in Bukhari and Muslim collections;

- iii. *“Whoever has faith in Allah and in the day of judgement let him not hurt/harm (ill-acted towards) his neighbours.*

- iv. *“He who causes harm to a Muslim will be harmed by Allah, and he who acts in a hostile manner against a Muslim, will be treated in a hostile manner by Allah. (Abu Sirma in Abu Daud and At-Tirmidhi.)*
- v. *“The worse categories of people in ranks in the sight of Allah on the day of judgement are those deserted or avoided by people for the fear of his evil potentials” (Muslim And Trimidih).*

These were some of the teachings from divine pronouncements made by the prophet, which produced the harmonious society of the early Muslims, a hitch-free society with better interdependence of lives.

But today, the story is different man becomes mindless and carefree of harms and damages he causes to people and to the environment where he operates.

- vi. *“Beware of two cursed practices, the companions asked; what are the two cursed practices? He (Pbuh) answered: answering the call of the nature in a public thoroughfare (path taken by the people) or in a shady place” (where people relax) (Muslim).*

In the in-depth of the message of these hadiths, lays principle of land and water pollution. It requires no expertise clarification before one could sincerely understand what is pleasing to Allah who created us all. Water is necessary to live on the surface of the earth. All organisms contained it; some drink it. Plants and animals require water that is moderately pure, and they cannot survive if their water is loaded with toxic chemicals or harmful micro-organisms.

Today water bodies are contaminated with many kinds of pollutants such as petroleum products, pesticides and herbicides, heavy metals, hazardous wastes and sewage. The world is now endangered with all kinds of problems associated with land, air and water pollution. The most astonishing fact is that, despite the volume of public outcry on the dangers of pollutions,

several bills and countless national and international agreements on environmental protection signed, the result is still elusive.

Conclusion.

The relationship between human beings and the earth is increasingly complicated and urgent. Everyday there are stories about pollution, global warming and animal species facing extinction. Modern theories emphasised environmental protection as a response to external forces and the achievement of special interests while islam considers environmental protection as the only way of maintaining the balance of life.

It can be asserted from the above that true environmental evangelism began with the advent of Islam and the Prophet (pbuh) 1400 years ago, and that the panacea to the world problem of pollution lies in the use of religious ethics and philosophical approach. Islam has done it before the industrial revolution of 19th century. History also has it that only Islam succeeded in the prohibition of alcohol consumption world-wide; many nations of the world attempted it but failed including the United States (Jeffrey, 2001).

Therefore, the world is hereby implored to recognise the potentials of Islamic principles in reformation and reorientation of mankind; by combining its strategic approach with the existing measures in checking the ceaseless problems of pollution that threatens the existence of man and animals on the surface of the earth. Religious institutions and scholars also have the obligation to collaborate with government agencies such as Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment to design an enlightenment programme that would enlighten communities on the religious and health implications of our actions and inactions as far as environment is concerned.

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