



**RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
AND COOPERATION**
**РЕЛИГИСКИ ДИЈАЛОГ
И СОРАБОТКА**

Бр.8/2026 Година VIII
No.8/2026 Volume VIII

THE SPACE OF THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE: A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NARRATIVE ROLE OF THE GARDEN IN CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

Emina Rustemoska, PhD¹

Abstract: *The garden functions not merely as a site of cultivation but as a semiotic space where religious narratives inscribe boundaries between the sacred and the profane. This paper undertakes a sociological interpretation of the garden's narrative role, focusing specifically on the Christian and Islamic traditions. The paper examines the garden as a religious space and symbol that actively participates in the social construction and demarcation of both spheres. Historically and mythological, the garden serves as the primordial setting for creation and fall (Eden), the locus of revelation or profound spiritual experience (Gethsemane), and the ultimate representation of paradise (Heaven/Jannah). Sociologically, this narrative function reveals how religious communities organize, perceive, and interact with space and nature, creating a distinction between the ordered, sanctified and ideal space of the garden and the chaotic, temporal or fallen reality of the profane world. The objective of this research is to explicate the complex sociological dimensions embedded within these religious spatial metaphors. The paper will analyze how the garden, through its narrative manifestation, both separates and connects the sacred and the profane, thereby influencing the social practices, ethics, and cosmological understanding of believers in both traditions.*

Keywords: *Garden, Sacred, Profane, Christianity, Islam, Sociology of Religion, Religious Space, Narrative Role*

¹ Independent researcher, Republic of North Macedonia, emina.rustemoska@gmail.com

1. Introduction to the Theme: The Garden as a cultural symbol and space

The garden, in its myriad forms, is a universal cultural artifact a space that is intentionally designed, cultivated, and protected. It represents a fundamental human impulse: the desire to order, civilize, and find beauty within nature. Across diverse civilizations, the garden has consistently transcended its utilitarian function, evolving into a potent symbol for philosophical concepts, social ideals, and cosmological beliefs. It is a place where the human hand meets the wild world, an intermediate zone often laden with deep narrative and religious significance, representing a controlled cosmos, a retreat from the chaos, and a reflection of a higher, ideal reality. In this sense, the garden is a primary site for the cultural articulation of the relationship between humanity, nature, and the divine.

1.1. Framing the issues and objectives of the paper

The sociological dimension of religious spaces and symbols is crucial for understanding how faith is lived, organized, and reproduced within a community. Religious narratives do not simply describe a static world; they actively construct and define social reality including spatial reality by designating certain places as 'sacred' and others as 'profane' (Durkheim, Eliade). The garden, in both Christian and Islamic traditions, is a central, recurring narrative element that serves this definitional function. Its role is not merely decorative or illustrative; it is a structural component of the sacred-profane binary, influencing community formation, ethical conduct, and eschatological hope. The garden, therefore, is a key to unlocking the social and spatial logic of these major world religions.

The primary aim of this paper is to conduct a sociological analysis of the garden's narrative function, moving beyond purely theological or historical readings. The central research question guiding this inquiry is:

How does the narrative role of the garden in Christianity and Islam define and delineate or connect the spheres of the Sacred and the Profane, and what are the sociological implications of this spatial demarcation for believers in each tradition? This paper will explore how the garden's position in foundational myths (Eden, Jannah) and imagery of the afterlife shapes the collective consciousness and social organization of the faithful.

2. Research Methodology: Narrative-Comparative Analysis

The investigative design for this study is underpinned by a qualitative, comparative hermeneutic, fundamentally centering on the analysis of the garden's symbolic representation within the foundational literary corpora of the Christian and Islamic traditions. This methodological deployment is structured in two principal, sequential phases to facilitate both deep contextual exegesis and subsequent theoretical comparison.

The first phase, textual analysis, involves a systematic close reading of the garden's narrative trajectory and defining characteristics. Within the Christian Tradition, the analysis is centered on the sequential function of three key garden sites: the Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 2-3), which establishes the foundational sacred/profane rupture and the origin of The Fall; the Garden of Gethsemane (*Mat-ey* 26; *Marko* 14), which serves as a crucial transitional site defined by sacrificial transition; and the culminating New Jerusalem/Paradise imagery (*Revelation* 21-22), which articulates the eschatological restoration of the sacred realm. Concurrently, the analysis of the Islamic Tradition is devoted to the conceptualization of Jannah (Paradise) as meticulously described throughout the Qur'an (2:25, 3:133,38:51,39:73) detailing its features of order, fertility, and perpetual proximity to the divine and tracing its resulting terrestrial manifestation in the earthly garden traditions, which is consciously designed as a physical, symbolic manifestation of the heavenly ideal.

The second phase, comparative sociology, contrasts the findings to delineate the convergence and divergence in how these garden narratives structure the sacred-profane relationship. Convergence is readily identified in the shared conceptual usage of the garden as the primary locus of an ideal state (whether pre-lapsarian² or post-Judgment), defining the Sacred universally through common imagery of order, fertility, and divine presence. Conversely, the analysis targets a fundamental divergence in the garden's operational role: the Christian narrative utilizes the garden as the primary site of a loss of innocence, resulting in rupture and profound sociological distance, whereas the Islamic paradigm interprets the physical garden on earth as an active anticipation and conscious imitation of eternal Jannah, emphasizing continuity and the integration of divine order into the profane sphere. This comprehensive methodology ensures a deep, contextualized examination of the garden's symbolic power and its measurable sociological impact on the religious worldview and spatial orientation of the faithful.

3. The Christian Garden: Fall, Sacrifice, and Lost Sacred Space

In the Christian narrative, the garden plays a crucial, though ambivalent, role primarily characterized by loss and anticipation. It functions sociologically to define the current, profane human condition by referencing a perfect, sacred past and a promised eschatological future.

3.1. Eden: The Original sacred-profane divide

The Garden of Eden (*Genesis* 2-3) stands as the archetypal Christian sacred space. It is the original *axis mundi*, the site of perfect harmony and unmediated communion with God. The Sacred is defined here by absolute order, perpetual sustenance, and immortality a sanctuary where God walks, representing the Sacred in its purest, most immediate form. Its perfection establishes the measure against which all subsequent human-built and natural environments are judged. However, the moment of disobedience (The Fall) instantly transforms the garden into the boundary where the Sacred is violently lost. The expulsion from Eden is thus understood as the sociological moment that creates the sphere of the Profane. The world outside the garden is characterized by toil, pain, and death the challenging conditions of profane existence that necessitates human civilization and social organization. Consequently, the narrative establishes a fundamental religious and cultural drive: the profound nostalgia for the lost sacred space. This longing structures Christian ethics, pushing believers toward seeking redemption and a return to the lost harmony.

3.2. Gethsemane: The Garden of transition and sacrifice

The second pivotal garden in the Christian narrative is Gethsemane³, the place of Jesus passion and arrest. Sociologically, it serves as the ultimate site of transition between the sacred mission and its profane execution. Gethsemane is the location where the divine (Jesus) fully confronts human weakness, betrayal, and mortal fear. It is a garden where the profane forces of the world political

² condition of the world in Edenic bliss phase

³ Gethsemane (<https://islamhouse.com/mk/books/501/>) is a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, where, according to the Four Gospels of the New Testament, Jesus Christ underwent the Agony in the Garden and was arrested before his crucifixion. Gethsemane appears in the Greek original of The Gospel According to Matey and The Gospel According to Marco as Γεθησημανή (Gethsēmané). The name is derived from the Aramaic ܓܬܫܡܢܐ (Gaṭ-Smān) or Hebrew גַּת שֶׁמְאֲנִים (Gath shəmānim) meaning 'oil press'. Matey 26:36 and Marko 14:32 call it χωρίον (*chōrion*), meaning a place or estate. The Gospel according to Jovan says Jesus entered a garden (κῆπος, *kēpos*) with his disciples.

authority, treachery, and human frailty violently intrude upon a space of sacred solitude and prayer. Crucially, Gethsemane establishes a New Sacred Center. Unlike Eden, which was lost through human action, Gethsemane is a resanctified garden through sacrifice. It is here that the path to restoring the sacred relationship (redemption) is sealed, fundamentally linking the garden not just to creation, but to the recreation of humanity.

3.3. *Paradise Anticipated: The New Jerusalem*

The narrative concludes with the grand scriptural narrative, initiated by the primal trauma of exile in Genesis, finds its ultimate resolution the vision of the New Jerusalem (*Revelation 21-22*), which is essentially a restored, eternal garden situated at the core of a celestial city. This vision represents the Ultimate Sacred Space and the eschatological goal a place where the Tree of Life is fully restored and the curse of the fall are lifted. It signifies the ultimate abolition of the profane condition, providing a final, definitive answer to the structural crisis established by the Fall in Eden. The sociological function of this final garden vision is profound: it provides the ultimate social blueprint and collective hope. This transcendental referent provides essential validation for the rigors of earthly moral and ethical life. The struggle against the chaos and corruption of the profane world is granted ultimate meaning, as the faithful are perpetually pulled toward the reality of this final, perfect, and orderly existence. The promise of a return to the perfect garden validates earthly moral struggle and provides a transcendental reference point for Christian social and ethical life, constantly pulling the faithful away from the chaos of the profane.

4. The Islamic Garden (Jannah): Anticipation, order, and imitation

In the Islamic tradition, the garden termed Jannah (جَنَّةٌ often translated as Paradise or Heaven) is a central and enduring symbol that mediates the relationship between the Sacred and the Profane. Rather than emphasizing a historical rupture between divine and earthly realms, Islamic cosmology presents Jannah as a continuously present ideal, a sacred prototype for earthly life. Gardens constructed in the profane realm are not merely aesthetic spaces; they are deliberate acts of sacred imitation. Through elements such as flowing water, shade, fruit bearing trees, and geometric harmony, these earthly gardens echo the Qur'anic descriptions of Jannah and serve as tangible manifestations of divine mercy and order. In this way, the garden becomes a spatial and symbolic bridge an anticipatory reflection of the eternal sacred space infusing the mortal world with the peace, balance, and unity (tawhid) promised in the hereafter.

4.1. *Jannah in the Qur'an: The ultimate sacred space*

„Jannah“ is the most frequently described reward for the faithful in the Qur'an, functioning as the definitive description of the Sacred, which contrasts starkly with the harsh, profane realities of desert life and mortal existence. Qur'anic descriptions of Jannah are characterized by water, flowing rivers, shade, and abundant fruit (e.g., Qur'an 47:15). These elements are not merely aesthetic; they are profound physical manifestations of God's mercy and bounty, defining the sacred as a place of perpetual peace and order. The garden is thus the physical guarantee of eternal divine presence. The narrative's strength lies in its immediacy and detail: Jannah serves as a constant, powerful reminder of the ultimate reward, which sociologically promotes pious behavior, Taqwa⁴ („يُوقَفُت“, God-consciousness), and ethical conduct in the profane world.

⁴Taqwa is the theological and ethical concept in Islam signifying God-consciousness, which is the active, inner

4.2. *The earthly garden: A Profane space mirroring the Sacred*

A unique sociological feature in the Islamic world is the cultivation of garden spaces that consciously mirror the Qur'anic vision of Jannah, these gardens are not merely aesthetic retreats, but sacred enactments of divine mercy and order. Characterized by flowing water, shade, fruit-bearing trees, and enclosed tranquility, the Islamic garden becomes a spatial embodiment of the sacred ideal. Its design often symmetrical, enclosed, and centered around water reflects the theological emphasis on balance, harmony, and divine generosity. The act of constructing such a garden is inherently sacred: it is a form of, *taqlid*, (imitation) of divine creation, an effort to bring, *tawhid*, (unity of God) into the profane realm. These gardens serve as sanctuaries for contemplation, reflection, and spiritual retreat, offering the faithful a foretaste of the eternal peace promised in Jannah, by embedding sacred cosmology into the physical landscape, the Islamic garden reintroduces divine order into everyday life, making the metaphysical principles of Islam tangible and experiential.

4.3. *The bridge between the worlds*

The Islamic narrative utilizes the garden to establish a direct, visible link between the earthly struggle and the heavenly reward. Unlike the Christian narrative, which emphasizes the rupture of the garden (Eden's loss), the Islamic tradition emphasizes the continuity of the garden concept. The earthly garden is, in effect, a "prayer in architecture," allowing a brief, ordered encounter with the ideals of the Sacred, thereby profoundly infusing the profane sphere with a piece of Jannah, peace and demonstrating the possibility of integrating divine order into mortal life. Within the Islamic tradition, the garden functions as a spatial articulation of sacred immanence. Rather than serving as a site of lamentation for a paradisiacal loss, it operates as a symbolic and material affirmation of the possibility to instantiate divine order within the profane realm. Through its aesthetic, ethical, and cosmological dimensions, the garden reflects the theological imperative of *tawhid*, offering a tangible framework through which sacred ideals are continuously reified in social and environmental practice. It transforms the profane into a site of divine resonance, allowing the faithful to inhabit a world that is both temporal and transcendent. Through its presence, the garden affirms that paradise is not merely awaited it is cultivated.

5. The Sociological Implications of the garden narrative

The comparative analysis of the garden's narrative role in Christian and Islamic traditions reveals its profound sociological significance in shaping the boundaries and interactions between the Sacred and the Profane. Far from being a passive backdrop, the garden emerges as a dynamic theological and spatial metaphor that actively structures collective consciousness, ethical imperatives, and the physical orientation of social life. At the heart of this analysis lies a key distinction: the Christian tradition frames the garden as a locus of rupture and redemption, while the Islamic tradition presents it as a site of continuity and imitation. In Christianity, Eden represents a lost sacred space whose absence defines the Profane. Redemption is eschatological, and the Sacred is deferred to a future New Jerusalem. This narrative creates a spiritual distance and a collective orientation toward transcendence and salvation. In contrast, Islam envisions Jannah as a divine ideal to be anticipated and emulated. The Profane is not marked by historical loss, but by the absence of divine order, which believers are called to replicate through cultural and aesthetic practice. This fosters a continuous, embodied

state of being constantly aware of God's presence and voluntarily shielding oneself from His displeasure by adhering to His commands and prohibitions.

connection to the Sacred, emphasizing tawhid and stewardship. These divergent narrative functions yield distinct sociological consequences. Spatially, the garden serves as an axis mundus: for Christians, it marks exile and longing; for Muslims, it offers a replicable model for earthly organization. Psychologically, both traditions use the garden as a collective representation Eden and Jannah/New Jerusalem to validate suffering and sustain hope. Ethically, the garden narrative embeds a primordial relationship of stewardship over creation, reinforcing environmental responsibility and sacred order. Ultimately, the garden operates as a structural mediator between the Sacred and the Profane. Whether remembered, sacrificed, or replicated, it provides a tangible locus for navigating the human condition. It reinforces the necessary boundary that preserves the Sacred's power while offering a bridge for transcendence. Through its enduring presence in religious imagination, the garden enables the faithful to endure the Profane and aspire toward the Sacred, making it a central sociological device in the architecture of belief and community.

Conclusion

This study has explored the narrative function of the garden within Christian and Islamic traditions, revealing its central role in the sociological construction and maintenance of the Sacred and Profane spheres. Far from serving as a passive backdrop, the garden emerges as a dynamic structural mediator an organizing principle that shapes humanity's spatial, ethical, and temporal orientation toward the divine ideal. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the garden narrative operates through two distinct mechanisms: rupture and continuity. In the Christian tradition, the garden of Eden is framed as a site of rupture and redemption. The fall and subsequent expulsion from Eden define the Profane world as a space of historical loss, with the Sacred deferred to a future eschatological restoration in the New Jerusalem. This theological view is positioning the world as a temporary stage of exile and orienting the faithful toward transcendence and redemption.

In the Islamic tradition conceptualizes the garden (Jannah) as a site of anticipation and imitation, emphasizing continuity. The Profane is not marked by a historical rupture, but by the absence of perfect divine order an absence that can be actively addressed through aesthetic and ethical creation. The Sacred ideal is modeled on earth through deliberate cultural practice, transforming the garden into a repeatable and achievable template for organizing the world according to the principles of tawhid. This theological orientation fosters a sociological imperative to integrate divine order into the profane realm, making the garden a living prototype of paradise.

These divergent narrative functions yield distinct sociological consequences for the faithful. First, they shape spatial orientation and worldview: the Christian narrative positions the world as distant from the ideal, while the Islamic narrative treats it as a canvas for divine organization. Second, they inform collective identity and hope, with both traditions deploying the garden as a collective representation in the Durkheimian sense validating present suffering by promising a perfect, ordered communal reward. Third, they embed a primordial ethic of stewardship over creation, with the garden symbolizing humanity's sacred responsibility to cultivate and protect the natural world.

Building on these foundational insights, future research should pursue several directions. Empirical sociological studies particularly ethnographic and qualitative approaches are needed to assess how these garden narratives manifest in contemporary urban planning, architectural design, and environmental movements within Christian and Muslim communities.

Additionally, the comparative framework should be extended to include secular garden narratives, such as those found in utopian communities or Enlightenment era parks. These cases may retain the structural function of mediating between a desired "perfect order" and a perceived "chaotic reality," even in the absence of explicit theological grounding. Investigating how the Sacred and Pro-

fane are reencoded in secular contexts could yield valuable insights into the persistence of religious spatial logic in modernity.

Finally, research into the historical and sociological dynamics of cross-cultural garden exchange such as the influence of Islamic Garden aesthetics on European formal gardens would illuminate how theological and sociological meanings are translated, resisted, or transformed across religious boundaries. As a result of the process of acculturation, these garden forms often undergo reinterpretation, where symbolic elements are selectively adopted, recontextualized, or stripped of their original theological significance. Such inquiry would deepen our understanding of the garden, not only as a theological symbol, but as a transhistorical sociological device for negotiating the human condition, revealing how sacred spatial logic persists, adapts and evolves within diverse cultural matrices.

References

- Clark, E. (2004). *The art of the Islamic garden*. Cordwood Press (UK).
- Durkheim, É. (2001). *The elementary forms of religious life*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Ip, K.-T. (2009). *Environmental ethics: intercultural perspectives*. Rodopi.
- Matevski, Z. (2021). *The role of religion in peace and conflict*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Religion, A. A. of, & Meeting, A. A. of Religion. N. (2001). *Deep ecology and world religions: new essays on sacred ground*. SUNY Press.
- Ruggles, D. F. (2011). *Islamic gardens and landscapes*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- КУР'АН со ПРЕВОД. (n.d.-b). <https://islamhouse.com/mk/books/501/>
- Свето Писмо Библија. <https://www.sveto-pismo.mk/>
- Traces Berbères. Retrieved November 16, 2025, from <https://traces-berberes.com/trip/marrakech-gardens-private-tour/>



ISSN-2671-3594