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Research Paper

Qur'anic ecological ontology, poverty, and the climate crisis: Ecological and economic correctives

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Abstract: This article argues that the Qur'an's ecological ontology, anchored in mīzān (balance), amānah (trust), and khalīfah (stewardship), and operationalised through ijtihād (independent reasoning), tafsīr (exegesis), and shūrā (consultation), constitutes a normative and policy-ready framework capable of addressing the joint crises of climate breakdown and poverty. Using close textual analysis of Qur'anic āyāt (verses) alongside classical and modern scholarship, I show how Qur'anic injunctions 'for those believe' against fasād (corruption) and isrāf (wastefulness) translate into redistributive, sufficiency-based economic model aligned with planetary limits.

Keywords:
1. Ecology
2. Islamic political economy
3. Justice
4. Poverty
5. Qur'an

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1. Introduction

The climate crisis is inseparable from the crisis of poverty. Rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, and species extinction deepen existing poverty traps, displace those with the least resilience, and consolidate wealth where fossil capital is concentrated. Extractive industrialisation and debt-driven growth ideologies render the earth a ledger, enclose commons, and externalise costs. Against this, the Qur'an, unchanged and unchangeable, articulates a theocentric ontology in which creation is a trust (amānah), ordered by balance (mīzān), with humans appointed as stewards (khalīfah). By "resolve," I mean neither technocratic quick fixes nor religious sentiment, but a jurisprudential-ethical architecture that disciplines policy: an order that constrains predation, redistributes fairly, and re-embeds economies within ecology.

From within this frame arise the guiding several intertwined research questions of the paper. First, what does Qur'anic ecological ontology—anchored in mīzān, amānah, and khalīfah, and prohibiting fasād and isrāf—offer as a structural response to ecological destruction and poverty

to societies and the self? Second, how does the Qur'an's command to "give the poor their due on the day of harvest" (6:141)[1] translate into distributive justice in practice, embedding redistribution at the point of production rather than as an afterthought? Third, how should the Qur'an's recognition of animals as umam amthālukum (nations "like yourselves," 6:38)[2] reshape understandings of justice across species, making biodiversity loss and habitat destruction questions of moral community and poverty alike? Fourth, why have the leading torchbearers Sunni and Shia states—Saudi Arabia and Iran—betrayed these mandatory principles intrinsic to the faith, subordinating stewardship to fossil capital and what are the implications for poverty and justice in their societies?

2. Theocentric worldview and human stewardship

The Qur'an denies human divinisation. Even prophets, Jesus and Muhammad, are "only messengers" (Qur'an 5:75[3]; 18:110[4]). Worship is direct: "You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help" (Qur'an 1:5[5]). Humanity's dignity is epistemic and moral: created "in the best of forms" (Qur'an 95:4–6[6]), taught "the names" (Qur'an 2:31–33[7]), inaugurated by the command "Read/Recite" (iqraʾ) (Qur'an 96:1–5[8]). Knowledge is thus an obligation: it must be enacted as justice. Believers are enjoined to "be just; that is nearer to God-consciousness" (Qur'an 5:8[9]), and to witness even against themselves, "whether rich or poor" (Qur'an 4:135[10]). These verses establish human beings as stewards accountable for right-ordering the social and natural worlds. They also ground the paper's method: revelation will not recur (Muhammad as

[1] Asad, Qurʾān 6:141 "For it is He who has brought into being gardens – [both] the cultivated ones and those growing wild – and the date-palm, and fields bearing multiform produce, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] resembling one another and yet so different! Eat of their fruit when it comes to fruition, and give [unto the poor] their due on harvest day. And do not waste [God's bounties]; verily, He does not love the wasteful."

[2] Asad, Qurʾān 6:38 "Although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is not [God's] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. And once again: unto their Sustainer shall they [all] be gathered."

[3] Asad, Quran 5.75 "The Christ, son of Mary, was but an apostle: all [other] apostles had passed away before him; and his mother was one who never deviated from the truth; and they both ate food [like other mortals]. Behold how clear We make these messages unto them: and then behold how perverted are their minds!"

[4] Asad, Quran 18:110 "Say [O Prophet]: 'I am but a mortal man like all of you. It has been revealed unto me that your God is the One and Only God. Hence, whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting his Sustainer [on Judgment Day], let him do righteous deeds, and let him not ascribe unto anyone or anything a share in the worship due to his Sustainer!'"

[5] Asad, Quran 1:5 "Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid."

[6] Asad, 95:4–6; Verily, We create man in the best conformation, and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of the low; excepting only such as attain to faith and do good works: and theirs shall be a reward unending."

[7] Asad, Quran 2:31–33 "And He imparted unto Adam the names of all things; then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: 'Declare unto Me the names of these [things], if what you say is true.' "They replied: 'Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! No knowledge have we save that which Thou hast imparted unto us. Verily, Thou alone art all-knowing, truly wise.' Said He: 'O Adam, convey unto them the names of these [things].' And as soon as [Adam] had conveyed unto them their names, [God] said: 'Did I not say unto you, "Verily, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth, and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal"?'

[8] Asad, Quran 96:1–5 "READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created, created man out of a germ-cell, READ—for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, who has taught [man] the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know."

[9] Asad, Quran 5:8 "O YOU who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God: verily, God is aware of all that you do."

[10] Asad, Quran 4:135 "O YOU who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort [the truth], behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do.

Khatam an-Nabiyyīn), but reason (‘aql) and ijtihād, institutionalised through tafsīr and shūrā, carry principles into new circumstances, including contemporary environmental harms and poverty’s engineered scarcity.

The Qur’an itself frames its guidance as universal, not parochial. In the opening Fātiḥa, humanity is taught to declare: “Guide us onto the straight path” (Qur’an 1:5–6[11]). The invocation does not delimit the “straight path” to one religious community; rather, it situates reliance and orientation directly in the Creator, open to all who seek justice and balance. This universality is reinforced by the Qur’an’s insistence that “there shall be no coercion in matters of faith” (Qur’an 2:256[12]). Together, these verses establish that the Qur’anic ontology of trust (amānah), balance (mīzān), stewardship (khalīfah), and prohibition of corruption (fasād) is not a proprietary ethic for Muslims alone but guidance intended for the world. Indeed, the Qur’an stipulates that faith must be sought “in the creation of the heavens and the earth … are signs for those who think.” (Qur’an 3:190-191).

Muhammad Asad’s[13] rendering of the famous “Light Verse” (āyat al-nūr), the lamp of divine truth is described as being “lit from a blessed tree—an olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west” (Qur’an 24:35[14]). This imagery, as Asad notes, signifies a truth that transcends geography and sectarian ownership, is symbolic of nature itself and a source of illumination that cannot be monopolised by any one people or polity.

In this sense, Qur’anic ecological ontology is not dependent on being advanced by a “Muslim-led” nation: its validity and relevance are universal, and the divine measure of balance (mīzān), trust (amānah), and justice speaks to all communities, wherever ecological and social integrity are at stake. But for Muslims, to knowingly violate the trust and balance inscribed in both the written *ayah* (the revealed word) and the living *ayah* (the divinely created earth) is, in essence, a negation of faith.

[11] Asad, Quran 1:5-6 “Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. Guide us the straight way.”

[12] Asad, Quran 2:256 “THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing.”

[13] Saudi Arabia formally banned Asad’s Qur’an translation, originally sponsored by the Muslim World League, already in 1974, largely on grounds of “creedal divergences” from the Salafi-Wahhabi orthodoxy, particularly objections to his rationalist exegeses and footnotes that some scholars deemed heterodox. In place of Asad’s version, the state elevated and broadly disseminated a doctrinally aligned translation (such as the Hilali–Khan “Noble Qur’an”), embedding Saudi’s official interpretations within the text of the Qur’an itself to ensure conformity with the kingdom’s religious ideology which included references holy ‘wars’. We rely on Asad’s work precisely because of his exceptional linguistic scholarship, the absence of personal comments within verses, his proficiency in Hebrew and Aramaic enriched his engagement with Semitic root-structures, and his years living among nomadic Arab tribes gave him intimate access to vernacular Arabic idioms, making his translation uniquely sensitive to both classical and colloquial registers. Further, Hilali–Khan’s reads the Revelation as a static ledger, a closed record of injunctions policed by the Saudi’s-approved doctrine rather than a breathing discourse of divine signs.By contrast, Asad’s Qur’an restores the text’s pulse—each *ayah* a living sign mirrored in earth and its living. In Asad’s vision, the ocean, sky, and all creatures read as verses in motion, demanding a protection of the ecology in order to honor one’s faith.

[14] Asad, Quran 4:35 “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star: [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree - an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light! God guides unto His light him that wills [to be guided]; and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things.”

3. Justice, knowledge, and poverty

Justice in the Qur'an is distributive and procedural. It demands full measure and weight (Qur'an 6:152[15]) and refuses partiality "even if against yourselves" (Qur'an 4:135[16]). Economic justice is ecological: the poor are due their share "on the day of harvest" (Qur'an 6:141[17]); consumption is seasonal and local; waste (isrāf) is condemned for, "indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils" (Qur'an 17:27[18]). Asad's note explains the context of wasteful as including the misuse of resources. The prohibition of isrāf integrates sufficiency with dignity: a paradigm where poverty alleviation is not afterthought or charity, but structural design. Using Sen's framing of justice as the expansion of substantive freedoms does correlate in principle and practice with the Qur'anic model, insofar as both prioritize concrete capabilities—security, livelihood, health, and dignity—over abstract measures of growth (Sen, 1999).

If poverty is enforced unfreedom for the powerful, then fasād, the violation of order, is the mechanism and magnifies it: corruption on land and sea "because of what people's hands have wrought" (Qur'an 30:41[19]) signals the intersection of ecological damage and social harm. The Qur'an's stance is categorical: "Do not spread corruption in the earth after it has been set in order" (Qur'an 7:56[20]) for "Allah does not love corruption" (Qur'an 2:205[21]) – contextually described by Asad as disturbing the balance. Fasād is not merely a moral disorder; it is also ecological ruin, soil depletion, water contamination, habitat collapse, whose costs are regressive, borne first and most by the poor.

4. Qur'anic ecological ontology (mīzān, amānah, khalīfah, fasād)

Surah al-Raḥmān inscribes the blueprint of creation: "The sky, He raised it and set the balance (mīzān), so that you do not transgress in the balance; establish weight in justice, and do not make deficient the balance" (Qur'an 55:7–9[22]). Mīzān is not metaphor alone; it is law, cosmic, ecological, economic. Humanity is appointed khalīfah, "successive authority on earth" (Qur'an

[15] Asad, Qur'an 6:152 ""And do not touch the substance of an orphan—save to improve it—before he comes of age. And give full measure and weight, with equity: [however,] We do not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear. And when you voice an opinion, be just, even though it be [against] one near of kin. And [always] observe your bond with God: this has He enjoined upon you, so that you might keep it in mind."

[16] Asad, Quran 4: 135 "O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over [the claims of] either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort [the truth], behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do."

[17] Asad, Quran 6:141 |And He it is who has brought into being gardens—[both] the cultivated ones and those growing wild—and the date-palm, and fields with produce of all kinds, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] resembling one another and yet so different! Eat of their fruit when they come to fruition, but on the day of harvest render therefrom what is due [unto the poor]; and do not waste [God's bounties]: verily, He does not love the wasteful!"

[18] Asad, Quran 17:27 "Verily, the wasteful are brethren of the satans; and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Sustainer."

[19] Asad, Qur'an 30:41 "Corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]."

[20] Asad, Qur'an 7:56 "And do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered: and call unto Him with fear and hope—for, verily, God's mercy is ever near unto the doers of good!"

[21] Asad, Qur'an 2:205 "And when he turns away [from you], he hastens through the land to spread corruption therein and to destroy crops and progeny: but God does not love corruption.

[22] Asad, Qur'an 55:7–9 "And the sky has He raised high, and has established the balance (mīzān),[SEP]so that you might not transgress the balance:[SEP]weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and do not upset the balance!"

2:30[23]; see also 6:165[24]; 38:26[25]), and entrusted with an amānah that even mountains declined to bear (Qur'an 33:72[26]). Asad reads the trust as moral agency and responsibility, not dominion: the earth is not property but a deposit, its integrity owed to the Giver. Stewardship thus binds agriculture, trade, and governance to balance; to disturb the order is to oppose the wisdom inscribed in creation. The Qur'an's eschatological warnings make this political: past nations, 'Ād, Thamūd, Pharaoh, violated the balance and met ruin (Qur'an 7:85–86[27]). The text calls for cultivation without ruin (imārat al-arḍ) (Qur'an 11:61[28]) and for judging in truth (Qur'an 38:26[29]). Where power and wealth are unequal, responsibility is heavier (Qur'an 6:165[30]). The ecological injunctions reach into the granularity of rural life such as, "Eat of their fruit in season and give the poor their due on the day of harvest, and do not waste" (Qur'an 6:141[31]), binding livelihoods to justice, sufficiency, and care. Asad's Qur'an — banned by Saudi Arabia — restores God's sovereignty to its absolute plane, where no monarch, cleric, or ideology can mediate divine authority. The mīzān is law, not metaphor; imbalance—whether political or economic—is a breach of creation's order.

Saudi Arabia's monarchy rule and Iran's priest-like rule – called Ayatollah or Supreme Leader – are both human inventions that claim what belongs only to God. "To transgress the balance" (Qur'an 55:8[32]) is to make religion serve domination rather than justice. Asad reads revelation as emancipation from all earthly absolutisms royal or revolutionary. The Qur'an's equity is not delegated power but direct accountability to the Creator alone. Every hierarchy that sanctifies itself becomes a form of shirk—the association of partners with God in command. In Asad's rendering, the Qur'an dismantles both throne and pulpit when they pretend to guard the balance they have already broken.

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[23] Asad Qur'an 2:30 "And lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it (a khalīfah).' They said: 'Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood—whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?' [God] answered: 'Verily, I know that which you do not know.'"

[24] Asad Qur'an 6:165 "For, He it is who has made you inherit the earth, and has raised some of you by degrees above others, so that He might try you by means of what He has bestowed upon you. Behold, thy Sustainer is swift in retribution—yet, behold, He is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace."

[25] Asad Qur'an 38:26 "O David! Behold, We have made thee a [khalīfah] on earth: judge, then, between men in justice, and do not follow [thy own] desires, lest they lead thee astray from the path of God."

[26] Asad Qur'an 33:72 "Verily, We did offer the trust (amānah) to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains; but they refused to bear it, and were afraid of it. Yet man took it upon himself—for, verily, he has always been prone to be most unjust [to himself], most ignorant [of its meaning]."

[27] Asad, Qur'an 7:85–86 "And unto [the people of] Madyan [We sent] their brother Shuʿayb. He said: 'O my people! Worship God [alone]: you have no deity other than Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come unto you from your Sustainer: give, therefore, full measure and weight, and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs; and do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered: this will be for your own good, if you would but believe!"

[28] Asad, Qur'an 11:61 –"And unto [the tribe of] Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said: 'O my people! Worship God [alone]: you have no deity other than Him. He it is who brought you into being out of the earth, and made you thrive thereon. Ask, then, His forgiveness, and turn towards Him in repentance: for, verily, my Sustainer is ever-near, responding [to all who call unto Him]!'"

[29] Asad, Qur'an Qur'an 38:26 "O David! Behold, We have made thee a [khalīfah] on earth: judge, then, between men in justice, and do not follow [thy own] desires, lest they lead thee astray from the path of God."

[30] Asad, Qur'an 6:165 "For, He it is who has made you inherit the earth, and has raised some of you by degrees above others, so that He might try you by means of what He has bestowed upon you. Behold, thy Sustainer is swift in retribution—yet, behold, He is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace."

[31] Asad, Qur'an 6:141 "And He it is who has brought into being gardens—[both] the cultivated ones and those growing wild—and the date-palm, and fields with produce of all kinds, and the olive tree, and the pomegranate: [all] resembling one another and yet so different! Eat of their fruit when they come to fruition, but on the day of harvest render therefrom what is due [unto the poor]; and do not waste [God's bounties]: verily, He does not love the wasteful!"

[32] Asad, Qur'an 55:7–9 "And the sky has He raised high, and has established the balance (mīzān), so that you might not transgress the balance: weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and do not upset the balance!"

5. Animals as nations (umam amthālukum)

The Qur'an extends the moral community beyond the human: "There is no creature on the earth nor bird that flies with its two wings but they are nations like you (umam amthālukum). We have neglected nothing in this Book; then, unto their Sustainer they shall be gathered" (Qur'an 6:38[33]). Animals glorify God in forms we may not perceive (Qur'an 24:41[34]). Even the least visible are honoured: the ant warns its community (Qur'an 27:18[35]), the bee receives inspiration and yields healing (Qur'an 16:68–69[36]), and cattle are named for warmth, sustenance, and beauty (Qur'an 16:5–6[37]).

Notably, the dog of the Companions of the Cave is explicitly remembered across multiple verses as the righteous' companion—"their dog stretching forth its forelegs" (Qur'an 18:18[38]) and again in the verse recounting differing reports of their number (Qur'an 18:22[39]) marking the creature's companionship as honored, important and dignified in verses. Read together, these passages treat non-human beings as organised communities bearing moral and legal significance; Asad's take on *umam* underscores "collectivities" with order and divine purpose, not mere aggregates. Despite this reverence, in many Muslim cultures, dogs are traditionally viewed as ritually impure (*najis*), leading to their avoidance in domestic and religious spaces.

The tribe of Thamūd "cruelly slaughtered the she-camel which God had sent as a token of His grace" (Qur'an 91:13), an act Asad reads as a violation of divine trust in creation, thus breaching the Qur'anic ontology that binds ethical order to ecological stewardship. In Asad's rendering, God sent Ṣāliḥ to Thamūd with a clear signl: "let her graze on God's earth and do not harm her," with water to be shared by turns (Qur'an 7:73, 26:155–156, 54:28). Thamūd hamstrung the camel in defiance (Qur'an 7:77; 54:29; 91:14), whereupon they were overtaken by the violent earth-tremor (*al-ṣayḥah*, *al-rajfah*), left lifeless in their dwellings (Qur'an 7:78–79). In his notes, Asad reads the camel as a moral-ecological test, a curb on monopolizing a scarce commons (water) and a token of divine trust—so the tribe's fate signifies that violating the sanctity of creation and the justice of shared resources invites collective ruin

[33] Asad, Qur'an 6:38 "although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is not [God's] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. And once again: Unto their Sustainer shall they [all] be gathered.

[34] Asad, Qur'an 24:41 "ART THOU NOT aware that it is God whose limit-less glory all [creatures] that are in the heavens and on earth extol, even the birds as they spread out their wings? Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him; and God has full knowledge of all that they do:"

[35] Asad, Qur'an 27:18 "till, when they came upon a valley [full] of ants, an ant exclaimed: 'O you ants! Get into your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you without [even] being aware [of you]!'"

[36] Asad, Qur'an 16:68–69 "And [consider how] thy Sustainer has inspired the bee: 'Prepare for thyself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and in what [men] may build [for thee by way of hives];'
and then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow humbly the paths ordained for thee by thy Sustainer.' [And lo!] there issues from within these [bees] a fluid of many hues, wherein there is health for man. In all this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who think!"

[37] Asad, Qur'an 16:5–6 "And He creates cattle: you derive warmth from them, and [various other] uses; and from them you obtain food; and you find beauty in them when you drive them home in the evenings and when you take them out to pasture in the mornings."

[38] Asad, Qur'an 18:18 "And thou wouldst have thought that they were awake, whereas they lay asleep. And We caused them to turn over repeatedly, now to the right, now to the left; and their dog [lay] on the threshold, its forepaws outstretched. Hadst thou come upon them [unprepared], thou wouldst surely have turned away from them in flight, and wouldst surely have been filled with awe of them."

[39] Asad Qur'an 18:22 "[And in times to come] some will say, '[They were] three, the fourth of them being their dog,' while others will say, 'Five, with their dog as the sixth of them'—idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge—and [so on, until] some will say, '[They were] seven, the eighth of them being their dog.' Say: 'My Sustainer knows best how many they were. None but a few have any [real] knowledge of them

Scholarly treatments converge: Foltz shows that classical and contemporary Muslim sources preserve robust resources for animal ethics grounded in revelation and practice (Foltz, 2006), while Tlili's close study of the Qur'an demonstrates that animals are addressed, portrayed as worshippers, and granted narrative agency, all of which push against anthropocentric readings (Tlili, 2012). In this light, biodiversity loss is not a statistic but the annihilation of nations. Wildlife poaching, breeding for parts or zoos — even the use of animals in biomedical experiments — represents a theological, legal-ethical, and ecological wrong with direct justice implications for human and non-human communities alike.

6. Discussion: Qur'anic ecological ontology as a poverty corrective

Qur'anic ecological ontology corrects poverty at the level of structure. First, it subordinates the economy to ecology: wealth is trust, not absolute title; natural systems possess prior claims. Second, it embeds redistribution into productivist cycles: "give the poor their due on the day of harvest" (Qur'an 6:141). Third, it limits consumption through legal-ethical constraints on isrāf and through obligations of just measure (Qur'an 6:152; 17:27). Fourth, it recognises multi-species justice (Qur'an 6:38; 24:41), widening the horizon of harm and benefit. Finally, it demands procedural accountability: witnesses speak truth "whether rich or poor" (Qur'an 4:135), rulers judge "in truth" (Qur'an 38:26), and cultivation avoids ruin (Qur'an 11:61).

Operationally, this means theory becomes policy via ijtihād and shūrā. Scholars derive rulings from principles: heavy oil dependence that damages climate and health contravenes the prohibition on fasād; single-use plastics and planned obsolescence violate bans on isrāf; debt-driven growth that extracts from the poor while exhausting ecosystems conflicts with amānah and mīzān. Through shūrā, communities translate rulings into law: renewable energy incentives, bans on destructive mining, restoration mandates, ethical finance, enforceable animal-welfare protections, fair-trade arrangements. This is not an import of secular environmentalism into Islam; it is Islam's own ontology operationalised.

Empirically, each pillar of this ontology tracks high-confidence evidence on poverty. Pollution is a first-order poverty amplifier: the Lancet Commission's update attributes 9 million deaths annually, one in six worldwide to pollution, with the heaviest burdens falling on low- and middle-income populations (Fuller et al., 2022). This locks households into medical impoverishment and lost earnings. Climate impacts already erode physical security, sustenance and livelihoods of the poorest across regions (heat, drought, floods), with IPCC finding observed and projected losses concentrated among vulnerable groups without adaptation support (IPCC 2022, ch. 8, Executive Summary).

Forest integrity functions as a poverty buffer and income base CIFOR syntheses show forests provide safety-nets and cash pathways; conversely, enclosure/clearance removes those protections and deepens deprivation (Angelsen & Wunder, 2003). In fossil-frontier contexts, oil contamination externalises costs onto the poorest: UNEP's Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland documents persistent soil and water pollution, impaired fisheries, and long-horizon health risks that depress incomes and demand costly remediation (UNEP, 2011). Even the World Bank's Shock Waves report demonstrates that, without ecologically disciplined policy, climate change becomes a structural obstacle to poverty eradication, while ecologically aligned measures (clean energy, resilient infrastructure, targeted transfers) deliver joint climate–poverty gains (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2016).

7. Islam's ecological ontology beyond capitalism and communism

Islam's ecological ontology diverges fundamentally from the dominant secular ideologies of modernity, capitalism and communism. Both traditions, though opposed in their rhetoric, rest upon anthropocentric and materialist premises that instrumentalise nature as passive 'dead' resource for production and accumulation. Capitalism treats the earth as an infinite ledger for profit; communism, while redistributive in intention, remains premised on industrial mastery over the natural world. As Nasr observes, both are "products of the desacralisation of nature," stripping creation of divine presence and transforming it into an object of conquest (Nasr, 1968).

In contrast, the Qur'an frames the earth as amānah, a trust, not subject to commodification or absolute ownership. Qur'anic injunctions against fasād (Qur'ān 30:41, 7:56) criminalise environmental destruction irrespective of private or collective ownership structures. Hallaq has argued that Islamic ontology resists modern sovereignty itself, for in Islam "law is not a human artefact but a divine measure," placing limits on economic and political authority (Hallaq, 2013). Where capitalism maximises growth and communism maximises production, Qur'anic ontology enshrines mīzān (balance) (Qur'ān 55:7–9), compelling sufficiency and restraint.

Özdemir stresses that the Qur'anic vision "is not anthropocentric but theocentric," where humans are khalīfah, stewards among other nations of creation, accountable for their disruption (Özdemir, 2003). This renders both capitalist exploitation and communist extractivism violations of divine trust. Foltz reinforces this by showing how animals and ecosystems are recognised as moral communities (Qur'ān 6:38), rendering their annihilation a form of injustice beyond human class relations (Foltz, 2006). The Qur'an, unlike secular ideologies, universalises justice across species and generations.

Moreover, as Rahman notes, Islam insists on the use of ʿaql (reason) to apply principles to contemporary conditions, meaning its ontology is dynamic, not nostalgic (Rahman, 1982). The result is a paradigm where poverty alleviation is inseparable from ecological justice, and where economic systems are embedded within, rather than above, living creation. Sardar calls this a "radical epistemological break," challenging both neoliberal capitalism and statist communism by restoring nature as subject, not object (Sardar, 1985). Islam's ecological ontology is thus not a third path between capitalism and communism; it is a categorical rupture. It demands a dramatic revaluation of the earth as a living amānah, whose balance must be maintained, whose nations must be protected, and whose resources must be distributed justly. This ontology displaces the growth imperative and reframes prosperity as sufficiency within divine limits.

8. Fossil fuels and the misinterpretation of Islam's ecological ontology by Sunni and Shia leaders

The Qur'an's ecological ontology, anchored in mīzān, amānah, and khalīfah, has been persistently eclipsed in Muslim-majority polities by the logics of fossil capital. Whether Sunni or Shīʿa, states have bent theology to hydrocarbons, reinterpreting stewardship as dominion and balance as bounty to be exploited. Despite explicit Qur'anic directives to uphold mīzān (Qur'an 55:7–9[40]), avoid fasād (Qur'an 30:41[41]), and treat the earth as amānah (Qur'an 33:72[42]) many

[40] Asad, Qur'an 55:7–9 "And the sky has He raised high, and has established the balance (mīzān),␣so that you might not transgress the balance:␣weigh, therefore, [your deeds] with equity, and do not upset the balance!"

[41] Asad, Qur'an 30:41 "Corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return [to the right path]."

[42] Asad, Qur'an 33:72 "Verily, We did offer the trust (amānah) to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains; but they refused to bear it, and were afraid of it. Yet man took it upon himself—for, verily, he has always been prone to be most unjust [to himself], most ignorant [of its meaning]."

Muslim-majority economies operate on extractive hydrocarbon models. Oil wealth finances authoritarian consolidation while externalising social-ecological costs onto marginalised communities.

As Jones shows in his study of Saudi Arabia, modern sovereignty was built by welding oil to water, producing an "infrastructure state" where resources became instruments of control (Jones, 2010). Hydrocarbon wealth enabled regimes to finance authoritarian consolidation, projecting religious legitimacy while systemically violating Qur'anic injunctions against fasād (Qur'ān 30:41) and isrāf (Qur'ān 17:27). Possession of the Two Holy Mosques grants not only spiritual prestige but geopolitical immunity, turning Mecca itself into an instrument of legitimacy. By banning Asad's version of the Qur'an, mass printing and global distribution of the Hilali-Khan Qur'an which enables monarchy, faith is recast as an apparatus of state ideology.

The Qur'an is reduced and reauthored to align faith with a nationalized theology under kingship. *Āyat al-Kursī* dismantles the very premise of monarchy in Islam: no human may embody, inherit, or monopolize divine authority. Where monarchs claim permanent, personal sovereignty, in Qur'anic theology sovereignty (*mulk*) is God's alone — repeatedly affirmed in verses like 3:26 "Say: O God, Lord of all dominion! Thou givest power unto whom Thou wilt and takest it away from whom Thou wilt…"

The legitimacy of the monarch is immediately voided as there is no one who can stand between a person and God, let alone "intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave?" (Qur'an 2:255)[43]. Without the continuous flow of oil revenue, the Saudi monarchy would not exist in its current form—a petro-state sustained by rent, reliant on arms imports to secure its rule and project power.

In Iran, oil dependence produced a parallel dynamic. Keshavarzian documents how resource rents entrenched networks of patronage and securitised dissent (Keshavarzian, 2007). Here too, Qur'anic concepts were recast as slogans of resistance while extractivism proceeded unimpeded.

The division between Sunni and Shīʿa regimes masks a structural convergence: both subordinated Islam's ecological ontology to the demands of fossil modernity. Iran's theocratic state replicates the same structural logic it denounces in monarchic regimes: the fusion of divine authority with hydrocarbon rent. The office of the Supreme Leader institutionalizes a theology of control, financed by fossil revenue and legitimated through clerical hierarchy. Oil and gas rents sustain a vast patronage economy in which religious authority becomes an instrument of state consolidation rather than moral guidance. Ritual and ideology are mobilized as political technologies, translating devotion into national cohesion and compliance. As in rentier monarchies, the state's stability depends less on consent than on resource distribution and securitized religiosity. In both monarchical and clerical variants, the Qur'anic *amānah* of stewardship is subordinated to the material imperatives of fossil capital.

Hallaq argues that the modern state's centralized sovereignty and legislative will are structurally at odds with a Sharīʿa ethic grounded in divine sovereignty and dispersed juristic authority, any "Islamic state" is conceptually incoherent; fossil-fuel rentierism further entrenches this incoherence by financing coercive administration and transmuting trusteeship into ownership. They transmute amānah into absolute ownership, de-link zakāt from ecological justice, and empty shūrā of participatory force.

[43] Asad, Qur'an 2:255 "God! There is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save what He wills [them to attain]. His eternal power overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And He alone is truly exalted, tremendous."

Özdemir observes that creation is a trust from God and "the Qur'an's insistence on the order, beauty and harmony of nature implies that there is no demarcation between what the Qur'an reveals and what nature manifests" (Özdemir, 2019) He argues the modern worldview treats "nature as a machine" with merely "instrumental value," justifying exploitative resource use without acknowledging biophysical limits (Özdemir, 2019).

The misinterpretation is not doctrinal but political-economic. As Foltz shows, Islam recognizes animals as communities, yet in many Muslim settings the modern state's development priorities have left Islamic environmental ethics with minimal practical impact, subordinated to political-economic imperatives (Foltz, 2014).

Nasr **l**ocates the ecological crisis in the modern world's desacralisation of nature (Nasr, 1968), whereby the more-than-human world is reduced to a merely usable resource; his remedy is the re-sacralization of nature within a religious cosmology (Nasr, 1996). Building on this, contemporary analyses show that fossil-fuel rentierism hard-wires that desacralising logic into the modern state's political economy, financing coercive administration and converting trusteeship (*amānah*) into proprietary control.

Fossil capital, in short, re-authored theology: it turned Islam's ontology of limits into a rhetoric of resource nationalism.

The result is ecological devastation and entrenched poverty. Hydrocarbon wealth concentrated rents in elite circles while externalising costs, air pollution, water scarcity, dispossession, onto the poor. Qur'anic mandates for just measure and harvest rights for the vulnerable are voided by political economies calibrated to Brent crude. The betrayal is not sectarian but systemic: an ontological misreading imposed by fossil fuels.

9. Accumulation by dispossession and Qur'anic ontology

Harvey's argument that neoliberalization's "main substantive achievement" has been redistribution rather than generation of wealth, achieved through accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005) is an analytic mirror to the Qur'anic denunciation of fasād and isrāf.

The continuing process of privatization, financialization and state-led redistribution encloses commons and displaces vulnerable communities. Harvey shows that neoliberal globalisation intensifies primitive accumulation which includes privatising water, commodifying seeds, enclosing forests, and displacing communities (Harvey, 2004).

Poverty is not residual but designed: a deliberate outcome of systemic theft. Pogge argues an institutional order knowingly engineered to foreseeably not only fails to help but reproduces severe poverty (Pogge, 2008). This maps onto the Qur'an's insistence, expressed through *mīzān*, *amānah*, and bans on wrongful gain, that rules and exchanges be designed so none are systematically wronged (Pogge, 2010).

The Qur'an anticipates this analysis in its insistence on justice as structural.

Take financialisation: In the Qur'anic worldview, financialisation, defined as the pursuit of "money-for-money" or profit divorced from real economic activity, is sharply opposed to ethical trade. "God has permitted trade and forbidden usury" (Qur'an 2:275–279), a passage that contrasts legitimate exchange with exploitative gain and equates those who "devour usury" to people "confounded by Satan." Indeed, waste, greed and even evil is attributed in the Qur'an as qualities of Satan[44] who is primarily understood as "one of the ungrateful" (*min al-kāfirīn*),

[44] Asad, Qur'an 2:34 "he refused and gloried in his arrogance—and thus became one of those who deny the truth [i.e., the ungrateful]."

not merely as metaphysical disbelief, but as a moral and existential act of ingratitude – that is, a refusal to acknowledge creation as a divinely-created trust and a responsibility. The kafirin comes from kufr, a term literally *"to cover up"* or *"to be ungrateful"* toward God's bounty and creative order.

In modern form, financialisation extends this Qur'anic warning into the ecological sphere: capital's abstraction from real value has rendered nature a passive collateral asset, subject to extraction and speculation. By treating ecologies as boundless and costless, without biophysical limits, it reproduces the same usurious logic the Qur'an condemns: gain without reciprocity, profit without stewardship.

Repentance requires relinquishing unjust gain: "you shall have your principal—you will neither wrong nor be wronged." Asad underscores the moral vector of capital, noting that "God deprives usury of all blessing (Qur'an 2:276), and that what is lent for mere increase "does not increase with God."

The Qur'an concludes with a comprehensive injunction toward justice in contracts (Qur'an 2:282), mandating documentation, transparency, and equity in credit dealings, safeguards against asymmetry and exploitation. The ethical boundary between commerce and financial predation is repeatedly stated — "Give full measure and weight in justice" (Qur'ān 6:152) marking distributive justice as command, not charity or welfare. Fasād,"corruption on land and sea because of what people's hands have earned" (Qur'ān 30:41), denotes the systemic harms of enclosure and ecological degradation.

Wasteful overconsumption ie: "Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils" (Qur'ān 17:27), maps precisely onto Harvey's description of capital's dependence on engineered scarcity and overproduction. Both frameworks indict growth built upon theft: Harvey in secular political economy, the Qur'an in sacred law. Pogge (2008) argues that affluent states and corporations sustain poverty through rules of trade, debt, and finance that extract from the poor.

The Qur'an's ontology name these as betrayals of amānah, the trust. Wealth is not absolute title but deposit; expropriation is sin as well as crime. In Qur'anic terms, accumulation by dispossession is fasād institutionalised: degradation of soils, waters, and livelihoods for elite gain. The poor and the vulnerable, those most entitled to protection, bear the first and deepest costs.

Where Harvey and Pogge diagnose, the Qur'an prescribes: the discipline of mīzān (Qur'ān 55:7–9), the stewardship of khalīfah (Qur'ān 2:30), and the justice of shūrā-based accountability (Qur'ān 42:38). Harvey calls for resistance to dispossession through collective struggle; the Qur'an commands it through obligatory redistribution, bans on waste, and stewardship that recognises animals and ecosystems as nations (Qur'ān 6:38). In both frames, dispossession is not marginal but central; justice requires structural inversion. Thus Qur'anic ecological ontology and Harvey's critique illuminate one another: one speaks in the grammar of fasād and amānah, the other in the idiom of accumulation and expropriation. Together they disclose poverty and ecological devastation as systemic, not accidental, demanding transformation, not amelioration.

10. Defining the interpretative framework

A central vulnerability in ecological readings of the Qur'an is the charge of methodological vagueness. To address this, it is necessary to state clearly the interpretive traditions prioritised in this work, and the rationale for their selection. Three broad strands of tafsīr dominate the exegetical field: classical, modernist, and reformist. Modernist tafsīr, exemplified by Muhammad Asad's Message of the Qur'an and Abduh's Tafsīr al-Manār, enables a hermeneutic

bridge between revelation and contemporary crises. Asad, in particular, offers a philological reading attentive to modern scientific and ethical challenges.

His rendering of amānah as moral agency and responsibility rather than dominion aligns directly with ecological ontology. Modernist approaches, therefore, are prioritised for their capacity to connect Qur'anic principles with systemic issues such as climate change and poverty. Reformist hermeneutics, as articulated by Rahman, provide the methodological hinge. Rahman's "double movement" theory insists that exegesis must first understand Qur'anic injunctions in their historical context and then derive general principles for application to new circumstances (Rahman, 1982). This approach is indispensable for applying verses on balance (mīzān, Qur'ān 55:7–9) or stewardship (khalīfah, Qur'ān 2:30) to modern ecological destruction. The selection of verses in this study follows a thematic analysis: ecological concepts (mīzān, amānah, khalīfah, fasād, isrāf) were identified and relevant āyāt across the Qur'an were gathered. This avoids chronological atomism or purely legal categorisation. The hermeneutic approach is therefore comparative and jurisprudential: comparative in aligning Qur'anic ontology with contemporary theories (Harvey, Pogge, Sen), and jurisprudential in that derived principles are intended for policy application via ijtihād and shūrā.

While classical tafsīr, as represented by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī, provides historical grounding and legal nuance, this was done in an era where commentaries, anchored in isnād (chains of transmission) and linguistic analysis, establish the normative boundaries of key terms such as fasād (corruption) and isrāf (waste). This work relies on them to situate verses within the broader jurisprudential canon, but did not take place in eras where ecological ontology was crucial for human and planetary survival and which is corroborated by scientific evidence.

By articulating this multi-layered framework, modernist relevance, reformist methodology, the paper resists charges of arbitrariness. Instead, it positions itself within a robust hermeneutical tradition that honours the text's history, engages its present, and projects its principles into actionable futures.

11. Context not cherry-picking

A critique that may be leveled at the Qur'anic ontology by Muslim-dominant governments dependent on fossil fuel revenue is the claim of "cherry-picking" verses or engaging in moralising without hermeneutics. First, this work adopts the maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah (objectives of law) framework, which identifies preservation of life, intellect, lineage, property, and religion as overarching aims. Ecological ontology is not imported into the text; it arises organically, since the preservation of life and property necessarily entails the protection of air, water, soil, and intergenerational resources. Verses such as "Do not spread corruption on earth after it has been set in order" (Qur'ān 7:56) are therefore not isolated, but part of the maqāṣid structure.

Second, verses were not selected randomly but clustered around five Qur'anic ecological categories: mīzān (balance, 55:7–9), amānah (trust, 33:72), khalīfah (stewardship, 2:30), fasād (corruption, 30:41), and isrāf (waste, 17:27). These categories are confirmed by both classical commentators and modern scholars as central to Islamic ethical discourse. This systematic clustering prevents the charge of selective citation. Third, hermeneutical depth is ensured by drawing on both philological and jurisprudential tools. Asad's philological precision anchors translation; Rahman's reformist hermeneutics contextualise; and Hallaq's legal analysis ensures continuity with the tradition. This triangulation shows that interpretation is not moralising improvisation but a disciplined application of recognised methods. Finally, comparison with external critical theories (Harvey's accumulation by dispossession, Pogge's global poverty, Sen's

capabilities) underscores the universality of the Qur'anic ecological critique. By showing convergences and distinctions, the analysis avoids the insularity often associated with cherry-picking. The Qur'an is thus read not as a quarry of moral slogans but as a coherent ontology, resonant with and distinct from secular critical traditions. Critics may still argue that thematic analysis fragments the Qur'an's unity. Yet, as Sardar observes, thematic readings are essential for contemporary relevance, provided they are transparent about scope and method. In this light, the essay's hermeneutic approach is neither arbitrary nor moralising; it is systematic, anchored in maqāṣid, clustered around ecological categories, and applied through recognised interpretive traditions.

12. Avoiding essentialist binaries

A persistent vulnerability in postcolonial and theological discourse is the reproduction of essentialist binaries: Islam versus the West, ontology versus ideology, sacred authenticity versus secular corruption. Critics may argue that in framing Islam's ecological ontology as a "rupture," this essay risks idealising Islam while flattening secular modernity into a caricature. The danger is twofold: first, romanticising Islam as a homogenous ecological ethic; second, erasing the plural genealogies of critique within secular traditions. To avoid this, it is necessary to situate Islam not as monolithic alternative but as one among multiple critical ontologies that challenge capitalist and communist paradigms. Nasr himself warned against reducing Islam to an "Oriental corrective" for Western ills, emphasising instead that Islamic cosmology must be understood on its own terms, with its own tensions. Likewise, Sardar cautions that contemporary Qur'anic readings risk being mobilised as cultural weaponry in a civilisational binary rather than as genuine epistemic resources. The essay resists this trap in three ways. First, by acknowledging the plurality within Islam: classical, modernist, and reformist tafsīr traditions are not collapsed into a single voice but recognised as layered, contested, and dynamic. This diversity undercuts any notion of a pure, unchanging ecological essence. Second, by critically engaging secular theorists such as Harvey, Pogge, and Sen, the essay shows that resonances exist across traditions, and that the Qur'an's ecological ontology does not stand in splendid isolation but converses with, and sometimes critiques, secular critical theory. Third, by foregrounding historical misuses of Qur'anic ontology by Muslim-majority states, Sunni and Shīʿa alike, it rejects triumphalism. Islam is not romanticised; its principles have been betrayed as much as they have been realised. Hallaq observes that the real problem is not Islam versus the West but the modern state-form itself, whose logic of sovereignty undermines all moral ontologies. Thus, the rupture posited here is not between Islam and the West, but between ecological ontology and extractive modernity. By reframing the dichotomy, the essay sidesteps cultural essentialism and instead critiques structural logics that cut across geographies. The Qur'an's ontology is therefore not romanticised as flawless antidote, but positioned as one rigorous, theocentric critique within a wider constellation of resistance to ecological and economic predation. This placement avoids the seduction of binaries and underscores Islam's contribution as part of a plural, global struggle for ecological justice.

13. Policy recommendations in Muslim-dominant governments (Derived via Ijtihād and Shūrā)

- Legislate mīzān: Enact constitutional-statutory duties to maintain ecological balance within which the economy must perform; criminalise large-scale fasād (pollution, habitat destruction, illegal deforestation); mandate environmental impact assessments aligned with precaution and intergenerational equity.

- Amānah finance: Shift public finance toward equity and/trade-based instruments that price ecological risk; prohibit harm to endemic or endangered species; phase out subsidies from public monies for fossil fuels; create green waqf (endowments) for restoration and community energy.
- Sufficiency economy: Regulate isrāf through extended producer responsibility, circular design standards within planetary capacity and sustainability, and bans on planned obsolescence; promote seasonal and local food systems and pay the poor their due at harvest (Qur'an 6:141).
- Multi-species justice: Recognise animals as umam with legal protections; prohibit cruel intensive confinement; protect pollinators and keystone species; require habitat corridors.
- Water ethics: Treat water as trust; prioritise human and ecosystem needs over extractive projects; align allocation with mīzān.
- Poverty first: Target benefits to the most vulnerable; use progressive tariffs and dividends to avoid regressive impacts; guarantee access to energy, clean water, and livelihoods as rights tied to amānah.
- Governance: Institutionalise shūrā with binding participatory mechanisms; empower independent oversight to enforce anti-fasād provisions; protect environmental defenders.

14. Conclusion

The Qur'an's ecological and economic ontology is not ornamentation: it is architecture. It is a system written in the grammar of mīzān (balance), amānah (trust), and khalīfah (stewardship), a jurisprudential framework that disciplines power, constrains predation, and redistributes life-supporting goods to the poor. Applied through ijtihād and shūrā, it transforms moral injunctions into enforceable structures: economies nested within ecologies; humans recognised as one nation among many; justice revealed not as abstraction but as the practical form of belief. The novelty here lies not in assembling verses, which anyone may recite, but in excavating a coherent political economy from within the text, one that resonates with critical secular analyses of dispossession yet remains distinct in its theocentric grounding. Where capitalism and communism alike desacralise the earth, the Qur'an insists on its sanctity as amānah; where modern states engineer extraction, the Qur'an criminalises fasād and prohibits isrāf; where global systems entrench inequality, the Qur'an mandates redistribution at the point of production. That Muslim societies have not systemically incorporated these principles into political, economic, and social life is not an inevitability inscribed by revelation. It is a historical and political betrayal: the eclipse of ontology by fossil capital, the reduction of stewardship to slogan, the silencing of shūrā. The Qur'an provides the corrective, anchored in balance, trust, and stewardship, but it must be claimed. The urgency is not rhetorical. Ecological collapse and deepening poverty expose the bankruptcy of extractive paradigms. The Qur'an's ontology, rigorously applied, offers not piety but policy: sufficiency in place of waste, accountability in place of impunity, and justice across species and generations. The choice remains with us. To neglect this system is to sanction fasād; to embrace it is to restore mīzān. The corrective is available. The question is whether we will act before the trust itself is lost.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, Qur'anic translations and verse numbering follow Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur'an (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

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