

Rereading the Qur'an's Verses on Nature: A Gendered Critique of Anthropocentrism in Islamic Thought

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Abstract

This study aims to reread Qur'anic verses on ecology in order to critique the concept of anthropocentrism, which positions humans as the center and ruler of the universe. Such a reading is increasingly urgent, as today's ecological crisis is not only caused by natural disasters but also by human domination over nature. Using ecofeminism and Islamic eco-theology as analytical frameworks, the research raises fundamental theological questions: If nature was created before humankind, does the Qur'an—as a continuation of divine revelation—truly authorize humans to dominate nature in ways that lead to imbalance and injustice? This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical method by observing ecological realities and conducting a literature review of Islamic texts and interpretations related to anthropocentrism and nature. The findings suggest that rereading ecological verses in the Qur'an can offer a new paradigm of environmental care rooted in gender justice. An anthropocentric view not only accelerates ecological degradation but also reinforces gender inequality and marginalizes vulnerable communities. Therefore, this rereading invites a more inclusive and balanced Qur'anic interpretation—one that nurtures harmony between human beings, nature, and the divine.

Keywords: anthropocentrism; ecology feminism; eco-theology; environmental justice; gender justice

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ecological crisis has become a problem not only at the global level but also at the local level. This issue is becoming increasingly urgent to resolve. Ecological damage is a condition in which biodiversity is no longer able to function as the earth's resilience to maintain the survival of living things within it. The most common causes of ecological damage are deforestation, climate change, and global warming. For example, according to BMKG (Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency) observation stations, the average air temperature from 1991 to 2022 was 26.7°C, and this increased to an average of 27.5°C in 2024 (Wicaksono, 2024). This makes 2024 the hottest year

globally. Previously, 2022 was named the hottest year in the world, but the earth's temperature continues to rise year after year. The earth's temperature in 2024 even rose beyond the 1.5 degree C threshold in the last decade, which was also recorded as the ten hottest years in history. In 2023, according to observation stations, it almost reached that figure, but 2024 was the first year in which the entire earth exceeded that threshold (Wisnubrata, 2024). The increase in the earth's temperature causes the availability of fresh water to decrease and the ice at the North Pole to melt, resulting in the sea surface becoming wider and some land being covered.

Others, supported by land conversion activities from forests to monoculture plantations, have a significant impact on *landscape changes* on earth. Conversion to oil palm plantations, for example, has a negative impact on biodiversity, temperature and water. With the opening of land for oil palm plantations, the quantity and quality of clean water is reduced. Inadequate water availability targets those who are classified as vulnerable groups, children and women. Water is a resource for all women's activities. Women's water needs are related to their reproductive system, from menstruation, childbirth, and breastfeeding, as well as domestic activities such as washing, cooking, cleaning, and so on (Angraini et al., 2023).

The damage experienced by nature can be said to be an ecological crisis. This does not just happen as mentioned previously, ecological damage is also supported by anthropocentric religious interpretations. The development of the anthropocentric view has become a claim for humanity to control and subdue nature according to human will and desire. Rarely, then, do humans consider the consequences and impacts of radically implementing anthropocentrism. Within Christian teachings, the understanding has developed that humans are part of God's transcendence, thus placing their existence above nature (Karunia et al., 2022). Similarly, within Islamic teachings, a Qur'anic interpretation has developed that places humans in control of nature (Nasution, 2019). This view ultimately legitimizes human power over nature through conquest, occupation, and domination.

With the legalization of anthropocentric views in society, a perspective that favors nature is needed for the sustainability of biodiversity. When progressive interpretations emerge, they not only protect and preserve nature but also provide a just and safe space for vulnerable groups, especially women. They view nature not as an object but as a subject that also plays a significant role in the sustainability and resilience of Earth's

ecosystems. Based on the description above, this research attempts to reread anthropocentric religious interpretations through religious interpretations that prioritize ecotheology using a gender perspective in order to provide a safe and comfortable space for women. In previous studies, many articles have been found discussing anthropocentric verses to ecotheological verses, including research conducted by Abdul Fatah with Epistemology of Environmental Interpretation (Hermeneutical Analysis of the Interpretation of Anthropocentric Verses in the Qur'an). In his research, Fatah explains the interpretation of anthropocentric verses, which are one of the causes of environmental destruction. Using a contextual hermeneutics approach, Fatah reduces these verses to produce an environmental interpretation of the verses of the Quran (Fatah, 2019).

There is also research conducted by Delsia Amelia Putri, Hanifah Azzahra, Muhammad Zulfin Melaban, and Edi Hermanto, entitled "Ecological Interpretation: Reading the Verses of Nature as Conservation Ethics in the Global Climate Crisis" which explains the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an using an ecological perspective that contains the values of responsibility, balance, prohibition of destruction, and carrying out the mandate towards the earth (Putri & Al, 2025).

Another research conducted by Shinta Nurani entitled "Ecofeminist Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Efforts to Realize Gender-Aware Qur'anic Ecological Ethics." Shinta Nurani explains feminist ecology as a bargaining power for the concept of environmental ethics through ecological mapping in the Qur'an and the application of ecofeminist hermeneutics in ecological verses, so as to be able to formulate gender-aware Qur'anic ecological ethics (Nurani, 2017). Next is Hidayati's research entitled "Gender Equality in Environmental Conservation from a Qur'anic Perspective." Hidayati explains narratively and descriptively about Qur'anic verses that describe the roles of men and women in environmental conservation (Hidayati, 2021).

Finally, Nur Arfiyah Febriani's research, "Multidisciplinary Thematic Methods: Application to Gender-Conscious Ecological Interpretation," is interesting compared to previous research because it negates the concerns of ecofeminists. In her research, Febriani explains the application of multidisciplinary thematic methods to gender-conscious ecological interpretation. Through this research, Febriani has a different perspective from ecofeminist advocates, who believe environmental damage is caused by male dominance over women. Febriani argues that feminine and masculine traits are

already balanced in human life, so that the potential for both destruction and nurturing is shared by all humans, both men and women (Febriani, 2019). Based on previous studies, the author has not yet discussed or provided confirmation on the impacts experienced by women due to the ecological crisis. Previous studies have only focused on the impacts experienced by nature and humans in general. The impact on women has not received special attention, even though women are the most vulnerable group affected by the ecological crisis. Women's experiences are often dismissed and assumed to be the same as men's reproductive systems. In fact, these biological differences are the source of women's vulnerability to the ecological crisis. Furthermore, this study also provides an in-depth analysis as confirmation of the claims mentioned by Nur Arfiyah Febriani in previous research.

METHODS

In this study, a qualitative-descriptive-analytical method is used to describe the verses of the Qur'an by prioritizing eco-theology and ecofeminism, so that the description of this study is not only descriptive but also analytical (Raco, 2010). The collection of sources was carried out by tracing written sources in the form of books and journal articles that discuss Islamic interpretations related to anthropocentrism and nature. The analytical tools used in this study are eco-theology and ecofeminism. Eco-theology is used to analyze Qur'anic verses that emphasize environmental ethics for the sustainability of nature, and ecofeminism is used to analyze the symptoms, impacts, and consequences arising from prioritizing and applying ecological interpretations to vulnerable groups, such as women.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Anthropocentrism: Domination of Nature and the Marginalization of Women

Anthropocentrism is a scientific discourse that views nature as an object that can be exploited. Exploitation of nature from an anthropocentric perspective ignores the crucial potential consequences, both ecologically, economically, and socially. Simultaneously, this indifference to nature is tantamount to marginalizing certain genders from nature itself. This means that when nature is exploited in such a way for its benefits, it intentionally marginalizes women from the relationship with nature. Economist Vandana Shiva believes that nature and women are an inseparable whole. Merchant, on the other hand,

views nature and women as one entity, emerging from a long-standing and close relationship. Anthropocentrism didn't emerge from a vacuum and suddenly emerge as a dominant ideology. It arose from the prevailing gender inequality and the power of patriarchy within society. It was this patriarchal power and capitalist dominance that gave rise to the dominant ideology of nature. Nature is merely an environment devoid of utility. However, only when it is integrated with capitalism and exploited according to the will of patriarchy and capitalism does it become valuable. Ben Mylius (Mylius, 2018) explains in his article that, in the anthropocentric paradigm, nature lacks value, language, and rationality. In this context, humans possess all of these: values, language, and rationality. Therefore, Mylius further explains that in this anthropocentric context, humans, as rational beings, must strive to dominate nature and empower it so that it becomes valuable (Mylius, 2018) .

Ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood (1993) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) critique the way anthropocentrism and patriarchy work together as a dual project of domination. Plumwood calls this the "logic of colonization," a binary way of thinking that justifies the domination of superior groups over inferior ones through constructs such as rationality vs. emotion, culture vs. nature, and men vs. women. In this logic, women are constructed as being closer to nature, their bodies, emotions, and reproduction, and are thus considered part of nature that must be controlled and subdued, just like the environment. Thus, the domination of nature and the marginalization of women are not two separate processes, but rather interconnected within the same system of knowledge and power .

This dominance is manifested in the global economic and political system, where development and industrialization often cause ecological damage that disproportionately burdens women, especially in rural and poor communities. Vandana Shiva (1989), in her work *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* , emphasizes that women are often the primary victims of environmentally damaging development projects, while also being crucial actors in maintaining sustainability through local knowledge and everyday ecological practices. However, these women's voices and experiences are often not recognized in development discourse or environmental policy.

Rereading Ecological Verses in the Qur'an in a Non-Anthropocentric Way

The current global environmental crisis affecting the world is not merely a technical or scientific issue, but also a profound moral and spiritual crisis. Forest destruction, water

and air pollution, global warming, and species extinction are not merely the result of technological development, but rather manifestations of humanity's perspective on nature (Nasr, 1996) . In this regard, religion, as a source of values and morals, plays a crucial role in responding and offering more fundamental solutions. Religious teachings, including Islam, not only regulate human relations with God and fellow humans, but also with nature and all creation (Özdemir, 2003) . Unfortunately, in the history of Islamic interpretation, the dominance of the anthropocentric paradigm has often diminished the potential of the ecological teachings in the Qur'an. Classical interpretations often place humans at the center of the universe, the most noble creature and entitled to control everything on earth (Dien & Mawil Y, 2000; Sardar, 1992) .

a. Nature as signs of God (āyāt Allah)

In the Qur'an, the universe is not seen merely as an inanimate object or material object, but as *the verses of Allah* , signs of God's greatness and existence that always speak to human consciousness (Nasr, 1996) . Nature is an integral part of God's open revelation (*kitāb al-mansyūr*), which complements the written revelation (*kitāb al-maṣṭūr*), namely the Qur'an itself (Dien & Mawil Y, 2000) . In QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 164, Allah describes various natural phenomena such as the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, ships sailing on the sea, rain that revives the dead earth, wind, and clouds that bow between the heavens and the earth, as signs for people who use their reason. This verse emphasizes that nature has an epistemological function, namely being a means for humans to recognize and contemplate the greatness of the Creator. Nature is not only for consumption, but also for contemplation (Khalid, 2009) . This interpretation challenges the anthropocentric approach that only sees nature as a resource, and leads to the awareness that the existence of nature contains a deep spiritual message. (Bagir, 2016) .

A similar point is emphasized in QS An-Nahl [16]:10–11, where Allah explains that He is the One who sends down water from the sky as a source of life for various plants: grapes, olives, dates, and various kinds of fruit. In this perspective, nature becomes a medium of God's love for all creatures. The presence of water and the earth's produce not only serves to fulfill human physical needs, but also is a manifestation of God's grace that is spread throughout all corners of life (Özdemir, 2003) . These verses teach that nature is a sacred gift, not just a commodity that can be freely exploited. Consequently, humans are required to be respectful, grateful, and responsible in treating nature, not with greed

and destructive attitudes (Esack, 1997) . Meanwhile, QS Al-Jatsiyah [45]:3–5 explicitly states that “Indeed, in the heavens and the earth there are signs for a people who believe.” This verse even mentions that in the creation of humans, the distribution of animals, and the alternation of night and day there are signs for people who believe. In other words , the presence of creatures other than humans is also a verse worthy of reflection. This broadens the scope of ecological spirituality in the Qur'an—that all creation is a manifestation of God's will and greatness, and therefore must be respected, protected, and treated with manners (Foltz, 2003) . This reading leads to a non-anthropocentric understanding, where nature has inherent value because it is a reflection of the Divine presence. Therefore, destroying nature does not only mean destroying the environment, but also a form of denial of God's signs that are evident in His creation (Nasr, 2003) .

b. Balance and mīzān

The concept of balance (mīzān) is one of the main principles in Al-Qur'an cosmology which has very strong ethical implications, especially in the context of environmental ethics. In QS Ar-Rahman [55]:7–9 , Allah says: *"And He has raised the heavens, and He has placed mīzān (scales), so that you do not exceed the limit in mīzān. And uphold the scales fairly and do not reduce mīzān."* This verse illustrates that balance is a cosmic law that Allah has established in the structure of the universe. Mīzān not only refers to a measure or justice in human affairs, but also reflects the overall harmony and order in creation. Everything in nature—the movement of the stars, the water cycle, ecosystems, and even the functions of living things—operates in a precise and mutually supportive order. In other words, mizan reflects the principle of ecological balance that underlies all life (Khalid, 2009) . Destruction or damage to this system not only has physical consequences but also represents a violation of the divine laws inherent in creation.

In the context of Islamic ecological ethics, this verse emphasizes that humans must not transgress (*lā tughaw fī al-mīzān*), that is, they must not disrupt the balance that God has established on earth and in the heavens. Excessive exploitation of nature, forest destruction, water and air pollution, and species extinction are forms of exceeding *mīzān* and, thus, are forms of ecological injustice (Nasr, 2003) . When humans disrupt this harmony, the impact is not only on other creatures, but also destroys human existence itself. Therefore, this verse is not just a cosmological statement, but also a moral and spiritual command: that maintaining the balance of nature is part of obedience to God (Dien & Mawil Y, 2000) .

Non - anthropocentric approach to this verse invites us to see *mīzān* as a value system that is not human-centered, but applies universally to all creation. Balance is not only important for humans to live comfortably, but also because all creation has its own value and role in maintaining the harmony of the universe. Thus, the task of humans as *caliphs* is not to dominate, but to be the guardians of that harmony (Sardar, 1992) . The upholding of justice (‘*adl*) in the Qur'an cannot be separated from the effort to maintain *mīzān*, because ecological damage is a form of injustice towards other creatures and towards God's order (Baharuddin, 2003) . Therefore, this ecological reading of QS Ar-Rahman strengthens the spiritual call in Islam to live a life that is environmentally conscious, full of manners towards creation, and faithfully maintains the cosmic balance that God has established as a form of worship and trust.

c. Universal Prayer Beads

The concept of universal prayer is an important dimension in the ecological understanding of the Qur'an, which emphasizes that all creation, both visible and hidden, continuously glorifies and praises the greatness of Allah. In QS Al-Isra' [17]:44 , Allah says: *"The seven heavens and the earth and all creatures in them continually glorify Him, and there is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise, but you do not understand their prayer. Indeed, He is Forbearing, Forgiving."* This verse explicitly states that prayer is not an exclusive human activity, but all living creatures and even inanimate objects also carry out this spiritual function (Khalid, 2009; Nasr, 1996) . From a non-anthropocentric perspective, this is an acknowledgment that nature is not a collection of passive mechanical objects, but spiritual subjects participating in cosmic worship to the Creator (Foltz, 2003) .

The concept of the universal prayer beads invites humans to reconsider their relationship with nature, shifting from a paradigm of domination to a relationship of respect and recognition of the intrinsic value of other creatures. The idea that all creation chants the prayer beads means that nature possesses a spiritual "voice" that, although incomprehensible to human senses, still contains profound messages and meanings about God's presence (Saniotis, 2012) . This understanding affirms humanity's position as part of a vast network of life, not as a sole ruler free to exploit nature. Humans are reminded to open their spiritual awareness and sensitivity so they can "listen" to the prayer beads of nature through contemplative and ethical methods that strengthen harmonious relationships with the environment.

Within a non-anthropocentric hermeneutical framework, this verse encourages a holistic and transformative reading of the Qur'an, in which spirituality is not disconnected from ecology (Dien & Mawil Y, 2000) . The universal prayer beads become the theological foundation for building an environmental ethic that respects all creation as meaningful and dignified entities. By understanding that nature continually glorifies God, humans are required to participate in protecting, nurturing, and not destroying creation, which serves as a field for these prayer beads. In the context of the current global environmental crisis, awareness of the universal prayer beads provides a strong spiritual foundation for transforming an exploitative paradigm into a more ecologically and religiously conscious lifestyle.

Furthermore, the universal prayer beads open up space for dialogue between science and spirituality, where natural phenomena studied by science can also be understood as manifestations of God's greatness (Nasr, 1996) . This invites humanity to be not only observers, but also active actors in maintaining the balance of creation, so that this world remains a sacred space filled with dhikr and praise to Allah. Thus, QS Al-Isra' [17]:44 not only strengthens awareness of human dependence on nature, but also expands the meaning of worship into a transcendent ecological act.

d. Harmonious relationships between creatures

One of the strongest verses in support of a non-anthropocentric ecological view in the Qur'an is QS Al-An'am [6]:38 , which states: *"And no creature that moves on the earth, nor any bird that flies with its two wings, is but a community like yourselves. We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord they will be gathered."* This verse contains a profound message about the existential equality between humans and other creatures. In this context, the term *umamun amtsālukum* ("peoples like you") indicates that every species, whether land animals or birds, has its own community, social system, and even existential rights just like humans (Foltz, 2003) . This is a direct affirmation from the Qur'an that other creatures are not passive objects created solely for the benefit of humans, but rather part of the community of creation that also has a relationship with God and a special place in the cosmic order.

This verse clearly challenges the anthropocentric paradigm that has dominated classical interpretations, in which humans are considered the sole moral and spiritual subjects (Dien & Mawil Y, 2000) . Instead, this verse shows that all creatures are part of the "ummah"—a term that in the Qur'an has religious and social connotations, not just

biological ones. In a non-anthropocentric approach, this means that animals and other living creatures also have a theological and spiritual role in God's scheme of creation. Their existence is not only legitimate but also morally and metaphysically meaningful. Therefore, treating other creatures unjustly—such as destroying their habitat, hunting them to extinction, or torturing them without reason—is a violation of the harmony of creation and the mandate as God's vicegerents on earth.

In addition, QS Al-An'am:38 also implies the importance of building relationships. harmonious and relational relationship between humans and other creatures. This harmony is not simply a matter of "not harming," but includes recognition of the right to life of other creatures and the obligation of humans to live side by side ethically. In Islam, this relationship is framed in the concept of mercy (*rahmah*) that extends to all creatures (*rahmatan lil 'ālamīn*) (Khalid, 2009). Thus, harmonious relationships between creatures are not only ecological but also an expression of Islamic spiritual values. In other words, loving and protecting other creatures is a form of devotion to God. A non-anthropocentric approach to this verse leads humans to be humbler and more reflective, realizing that they are not the only honored people, but one among many communities of God's creation that must be maintained within the fabric of universal harmony.

Gender Critique of Anthropocentrism

Gender critiques of anthropocentrism stem not only from concerns over the exploitation of nature, but also from the realization that a perspective that places humans—especially modern men—at the center of power has perpetuated gender inequality in various aspects of life. In the anthropocentric paradigm, nature is constructed as a passive entity that can be controlled and exploited, a view that aligns with patriarchal structures that have long placed women in a subordinate position to men (Plumwood, 1993). Ecofeminism emerged as an effort to dismantle the dual relationship between domination over nature and oppression of women.

Ecofeminist figures such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Ariel Salleh have made important contributions in dismantling the anthropocentric ideological structures that have long been hidden behind narratives of progress, rationality, and development. Plumwood (1993), for example, highlights the existence of a "logic of dualism" in Western philosophy that positions men as representatives of reason, culture, and superiority, while women are associated with

nature, the body, and inferiority. This dualism, according to her, is not neutral, but rather forms the basis of a social hierarchy that justifies the domination of men over women and humans over nature.

Carolyn Merchant, in her book, *The Death of Nature*, reveals how the shift in Western cosmology from an organic to a mechanistic worldview during the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution had a profound impact on the status of women and nature. She shows that before the modern era, nature was viewed as a living, spiritually valuable, and revered "mother earth." However, with the advent of mechanistic and masculine modern science, nature was reduced to an inanimate machine that could be broken down, understood, and controlled—paralleling the increasing exclusion of women from the sphere of knowledge production.

Vandana Shiva (1989) offers a critique from a global south perspective. She critiques how modern development projects, rooted in colonialism and global capitalism, have disrupted the ecological landscape and marginalized women, particularly in rural India. According to Shiva, women possess unique ecological knowledge and play a significant role in maintaining the sustainability of nature, yet this knowledge is invalidated by the logic of modern science and development institutions. Therefore, she proposes a paradigm shift based on *diversity* and *care*, rather than domination and profit.

Ariel Salleh (1997) developed the concept of *meta-industrial labor*, namely ecological work carried out by women—such as managing water, food, small-scale agriculture—which has not been recognized by the capitalist economic system. She stated that women are in a unique epistemological position because they directly experience ecological impacts and are closely connected to nature through reproductive and communitarian labor. Therefore, Salleh calls for an ecological economy that favors women and their livelihoods, rather than markets and resource extraction.

In the context of contemporary Islam, Amina Wadud (1999) and Asma Barlas (2002) also offer similar critiques of anthropocentrism disguised in masculine religious interpretations. Wadud emphasizes that reading Islamic texts must consider the principles of *tawhid* (unity), *rahmah* (compassion), and *'adl* (justice), including in the relationship between humans and nature. She urged that ecological relations in Islam be read not through the lens of domination, but rather through the lens of spiritual responsibility as caliphs on earth. This opens up space for a gender-just eco-theological understanding—recognizing that women also have a crucial role in safeguarding

ecological trusts. A gender critique of anthropocentrism is ultimately not just about highlighting women as victims, but also about dismantling the structures of knowledge, economics, and spirituality that have silenced women's voices. It calls for a shift from a control paradigm to a relational one—one in which nature and women are no longer positioned as objects, but as subjects with legitimate value, voice, and knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

The ecological crisis is not only an environmental issue, but also concerns social and gender justice. The impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are felt most by vulnerable groups, especially women, whose existence is often forgotten in the grand ecological narrative. The dominance of anthropocentric interpretations in religion has legitimized the exploitation of nature, even though the Qur'an itself contains verses that open up space for inclusive and just ecological interpretations. Therefore, a gender-perspective ecotheological approach is important to develop, not only for environmental sustainability, but also for justice for women. Progressive interpretations that free nature from its position as an object and place women as subjects of ecological experience must continue to be developed as a form of spiritual and ethical responsibility in building a more sustainable and humane world.

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