

Islamic Ecoteology, Environmental Tafsir, and Fiqh Al-Bi'ah: Rethinking Islamic Sustainability in Indonesia's Climate Crisis

Eva Nurfitriani¹

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Syariah Haji Abdurrosyid, Lombok Tengah,
Indonesia

evanurfitriani19@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines the intersection of Islamic ecoteology, environmental Quranic interpretation (tafsir al-bi'ah), and the jurisprudence of the environment (fiqh al-bi'ah) within the context of Indonesia's accelerating climate crisis. Drawing on classical Islamic sources, contemporary ecotheological scholarship, and Indonesian Islamic legal discourse, the study argues that Islamic teaching provides a robust normative framework for ecological sustainability one rooted in the Quranic concepts of khalifah (stewardship), amanah (divine trust), and mizan (cosmic balance). The research employs a qualitative library-based methodology combining textual analysis of Quranic verses and hadith with a review of classical and contemporary fiqh literature. Findings reveal three interlocking dimensions: (1) a theological mandate for environmental stewardship embedded in Quranic ontology; (2) a jurisprudential tradition capable of generating binding environmental norms through fiqh al-bi'ah; and (3) significant, yet underexplored, potential for Indonesian Muslim institutions particularly pesantren networks and Majelis Ulama Indonesia to operationalize Islamic sustainability principles in response to climate breakdown. The article concludes that ecoteology and fiqh al-bi'ah must be integrated into mainstream Islamic education and fatwa practice in Indonesia to translate theological imperatives into meaningful environmental governance.

Keywords: Islamic ecoteology; environmental tafsir; fiqh al-bi'ah; climate crisis; Islamic sustainability; Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global climate crisis constitutes one of the most severe moral and existential challenges of the contemporary era. Rising sea levels, intensifying natural disasters, accelerating deforestation, and cascading biodiversity loss are no longer distant projections they are lived realities for millions of people worldwide. Among the most acutely affected populations are the communities of Indonesia's archipelago, a nation whose ecological vulnerability is compounded by rapid urbanization, extensive land-use change, and persistent governance deficits in environmental regulation (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2022; Rockström et al., 2009);

As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia occupies a striking position at the nexus of ecological vulnerability and Islamic normative potential. Its religious identity might serve as a powerful lever for environmental transformation, yet that potential has been largely unrealized in formal environmental governance. The inadequate integration of Islamic ethical frameworks into national climate policy represents both a scholarly gap and a practical deficit with real consequences for Indonesia's ecological future (Nasr, 1968).

Within Islamic intellectual history, questions about the human relationship to the natural world have been addressed though not always systematically through the Quran, the prophetic hadith literature, classical jurisprudence, and Sufi cosmology. The emergence of Islamic ecotheology as a distinct academic and activist field since the 1990s has renewed scholarly attention to these resources, arguing that Islam possesses a coherent environmental ethic capable of speaking meaningfully to the modern ecological crisis. Scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Richard Foltz, Mawil Izzi Dien, and Ibrahim Abdul-Matin have been instrumental in recovering and systematizing these traditions for a contemporary audience (Foltz et al., 2003; Dien, 2000; Abdul-Matin, 2010); (Foltz dkk., 2003).

Despite this growing global scholarship, the Indonesian context has received comparatively limited attention. Indonesian Islamic legal thought (*fiqh*) has not yet fully engaged with questions of environmental jurisprudence or *fiqh al-bi'ah* in a systematic manner, even as Indonesian scholars and institutions such as the Majelis

Ulama Indonesia (MUI) have issued occasional environmental fatwas. This gap between the theoretical richness of Islamic ecological resources and the practical underdevelopment of Islamic environmental jurisprudence constitutes the central problem this article addresses (Dien, 2000; Muthhar, 2014). This gap between the theoretical richness of Islamic ecological resources and the practical underdevelopment of Islamic environmental jurisprudence constitutes the central problem this article addresses (Dien, 2000).

This study therefore pursues three specific objectives: first, to examine the Quranic and theological foundations of Islamic ecoteology, with particular attention to the concepts of khalifah, amanah, and mizan; second, to analyze the structure and potential of *fiqh al-bi'ah* as a jurisprudential framework for environmental regulation within an Indonesian Islamic context; and third, to assess the institutional capacity of Indonesian Muslim organizations particularly MUI and the pesantren network to operationalize these norms in response to the ongoing climate crisis (Rahman, 1980).

The central hypothesis is that Islamic ecoteology and *fiqh al-bi'ah* are not merely academic constructs but actionable normative systems whose institutionalization in Indonesia could produce meaningful ecological outcomes provided that theological discourse is translated into concrete jurisprudential guidance and embedded within influential Islamic institutions (Nasr, 1968).

Islamic ecoteology refers to the systematic theological reflection on the relationship between Islamic faith and the natural environment. The term gained scholarly currency following Nasr's landmark *Man and Nature* (1968), which argued that the environmental crisis of modernity is fundamentally a spiritual crisis rooted in the desacralization of nature within Western secular thought. Nasr contended that the Islamic tradition, by contrast, preserves an ontological connection between the divine, the human, and the natural order that structurally resists the exploitative instrumentalism underlying contemporary ecological destruction (Nasr, 1968).

This foundational insight was developed by a subsequent generation of scholars, culminating in the comprehensive edited

volume *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Contributors examine Quranic cosmology, Sufi understandings of nature as theophany, hadith traditions concerning care for animals and land, and the application of *maqasid al-shari'ah* to environmental problems. The central theological claim common to most of this literature is that God is the ultimate owner and sustainer of creation (*khaliq wa rabb*), and that humans are entrusted with its care as *khalifah* stewards or vicegerents a role that carries both privilege and accountability before God (Foltz dkk., 2003).

Environmental tafsir constitutes a distinct sub-field engaging the classical science of Quranic commentary in order to recover and amplify the ecological dimensions of divine revelation. The Quran contains numerous verses addressing natural phenomena water cycles, animal communities, soil systems, atmospheric processes and a growing number of scholars argue that these verses encode not merely incidental poetry but a systematic theology of creation (Abdullah, 2010).

Key Quranic concepts include: *khilafah* (Q. 2:30; 6:165), establishing humans as stewards with attendant responsibilities; *amanah* (Q. 33:72), the divine trust or covenant encompassing care for creation; *mizan* (Q. 55:7–9), the balance God has set in the cosmos that humans are prohibited from transgressing; and *fasad fi al-ard* (Q. 30:41), the concept of corruption on earth associated in contemporary interpretation with environmental destruction. Indonesian scholarship in this area, particularly the Kementerian Agama's thematic tafsir on environmental conservation, has sought to integrate these hermeneutical insights into national Islamic educational materials (Kementerian Agama RI, 2009).

Fiqh al-bi'ah is a relatively recent scholarly construction that seeks to derive binding legal norms for environmental conduct from classical Islamic legal sources. Al-Qaradawi's *Ri'ayat al-Bi'ah fi Shari'at al-Islam* represents the most influential systematic work in this tradition, applying the five classical legal categories to a range of environmental behaviors and arguing for an environmental reading of *maqasid al-shari'ah* that adds *hifz al-bi'ah* (protection of the

environment) alongside the classical five protected interests (al-Qaradawi, 2001).

Indonesian contributions to *fiqh al-bi'ah* include the work of Moh. Asy'ari Muthhar and Mudhofir Abdullah, who argue that the pesantren tradition and the MUI fatwa mechanism are uniquely positioned to generate contextually grounded environmental jurisprudence. The challenge, both scholars note, is that classical *fiqh* developed in conditions where anthropogenic ecological disruption was not foreseeable requiring contemporary jurists to exercise *ijtihad* to address new ecological realities (Muthhar, 2014).

The concept of Islamic sustainability a religiously grounded vision of development that does not compromise the ecological systems on which future generations depend has gained traction in Indonesian Islamic discourse, particularly following high-profile natural disasters linked to deforestation and land conversion. Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama's Lembaga Penanggulangan Bencana dan Perubahan Iklim (LPBI-NU) and several pesantren-based environmental programs represent practical expressions of this concept (Abdul-Matin, 2010).

However, the translation of ecotheological principles into sustainable development practice remains uneven across Indonesia. Institutional religious authority has not consistently prioritized environmental issues, and the intersection of Islamic normativity with government environmental regulation remains theoretically underdeveloped. This article seeks to contribute to closing this gap by examining how ecoteological resources and *fiqh al-bi'ah* principles can be more systematically institutionalized within Indonesian Islamic governance.

2. METHOD

This research is situated within the tradition of Islamic legal and theological scholarship, with a particular focus on the nexus between classical textual resources and contemporary environmental jurisprudence in Indonesia. The choice of library-based qualitative research reflects the nature of the inquiry: the primary data is textual Quranic verses, hadith collections, classical *fiqh* texts, contemporary

ecothological monographs, and Indonesian Islamic institutional documents. The unit of analysis is the normative argument: the claims made within Islamic texts about what believers are required to do with respect to the natural environment (Muthhar, 2014).

The research is qualitative and descriptive-analytical in orientation. It does not seek to generate quantitative findings or test empirical hypotheses about observable behavior. Rather, it seeks to map, analyze, and evaluate the normative resources available within the Islamic tradition for constructing an ecologically responsive jurisprudence, and to assess their relevance to the Indonesian institutional context (Abdullah, 2010).

Primary sources consulted include the Quran and its classical tafsir (Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari), as well as thematic environmental tafsir produced by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Hadith collections particularly those preserved in the canonical six (*al-Kutub al-Sitta*) are engaged where they bear directly on environmental conduct. Classical fiqh texts from the four Sunni schools are examined for their treatment of land use, water rights, and natural resources (al-Qaradawi, 2001).

Secondary sources include major works of Islamic ecoteological scholarship noted in the literature review, as well as Indonesian Islamic institutional documents including selected MUI fatwas and pesantren environmental curricula. Analysis proceeds through close reading and thematic synthesis. The analytical framework draws on three interpretive lenses: (1) textual-hermeneutical analysis of Quranic and hadith environmental norms; (2) jurisprudential analysis of how classical legal categories apply to contemporary environmental questions; and (3) institutional analysis of how Indonesian Islamic organizations are positioned to operationalize these principles.

3. RESULTS

a. The Theological Mandate for Environmental Stewardship

Analysis of the Quranic corpus reveals a coherent and internally consistent theology of creation that generates a strong normative mandate for environmental stewardship. Three

concepts are foundational. First, *khalifah* (Q. 2:30): classical tafsir consistently emphasizes that the designation of humanity as vicegerents of the earth establishes not a license for domination but a fiduciary relationship with the natural order. God alone is the owner of creation; humans are answerable for how they have exercised their stewardship (Kementerian Agama RI, 2009).

Second, *amanah* (Q. 33:72): the divine trust accepted by humanity encompasses the entire created order, not merely human social relations. Contemporary environmental tafsir scholars, including Mudhofir Abdullah and the Kementerian Agama's thematic commentary, interpret this trust as establishing an obligation of care that includes the preservation of biodiversity, clean water systems, and atmospheric stability. Acceptance of *amanah* implies accountability (*mas'uliyah*) before God for one's treatment of the natural environment (Abdullah, 2010).

Third, *mizan* (Q. 55:7–9): God has set a precise balance in the cosmos and explicitly commands that this balance not be transgressed (*la tukhsiru al-mizan*). The IPCC's scientific finding that current trajectories of greenhouse gas emission are disrupting fundamental Earth system balances offers a striking empirical parallel to this Quranic concept. Within an Islamic ecoteological frame, such disruption constitutes a form of *fasad fi al-ard* corruption on earth explicitly condemned in Q. 30:41 and repeatedly throughout the Quran (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2022).

b. Fiqh al-Bi'ah: Structure and Potential in the Indonesian Context

Analysis of the *fiqh al-bi'ah* literature reveals a jurisprudential tradition that, while recently systematized, draws on deep roots in classical Islamic law. Al-Qaradawi's framework, as applied and developed by Indonesian scholars, generates concrete legal norms across several domains relevant to Indonesia's environmental crisis (al-Qaradawi, 2001).

With respect to deforestation: classical *fiqh*'s treatment of *ihya' al-mawat* (the revivification of dead land) and the *hima* institution

(protected natural reserves) provides direct jurisprudential resources for regulating land clearing. The *hima* institution in which areas of land are designated as protected from exploitation for communal benefit has been identified by al-Qaradawi and Abdullah as a proto-conservationist legal mechanism directly applicable to contemporary environmental protection zones (Abdullah, 2010).

With respect to water: classical *fiqh*'s treatment of water rights (*ahkam al-miyah*) establishes principles of community ownership of water resources and prohibitions on monopolization and pollution, directly applicable to the regulation of industrial water use and the protection of Indonesian rivers and coastal ecosystems (Foltz dkk., 2003).

With respect to climate-damaging emissions: here the jurisprudential tradition requires more extensive *ijtihad*. The prophetic principle *la darar wa la dirar* (no harm shall be inflicted or reciprocated) provides the most direct classical resource. Contemporary *fiqh* scholars have applied it to argue that activities generating demonstrable environmental harm including large-scale fossil fuel extraction and combustion are jurisprudentially impermissible when their harm to others, including future generations, can be established (Abdul-Matin, 2010; al-Qaradawi, 2001).

c. Institutional Capacity: MUI, Pesantren, and Islamic Environmental Governance

Analysis of Indonesian Islamic institutional documents reveals both significant capacity and significant unrealized potential for operationalizing Islamic sustainability principles. The MUI has issued several environmental fatwas, including a 2014 fatwa on illegal mining and statements on environmental protection in the context of natural disasters. However, these fatwas have not been integrated into a systematic *fiqh al-bi'ah* framework, nor consistently accompanied by implementation mechanisms (Foltz dkk., 2003).

The pesantren network presents a particularly significant institutional resource. With approximately 28,000 pesantren serving an estimated four million students, the pesantren system

represents an unparalleled network for disseminating Islamic environmental norms at the grassroots level. Several pesantren most notably Pesantren Nurul Haramain in West Lombok have become internationally recognized for community-based environmental programs, demonstrating that pesantren can be practical sites of ecological sustainability as well as Islamic education (Muthhar, 2014).

Nahdlatul Ulama's LPBI-NU has been particularly active in developing an Islamic climate change narrative and connecting it to community-based disaster risk reduction. The organization has produced educational materials connecting Islamic theological concepts particularly khalifah and amanah to practical environmental behaviors, and has worked to integrate environmental considerations into the religious practices of NU-affiliated communities across Indonesia.

4. DISCUSSION

a. Theological Mandate and Motivational Power

The finding that Islamic theology generates a coherent and robust mandate for environmental stewardship is significant precisely because it grounds ecological obligation not in secular utility or international legal norm frameworks with limited purchase among devoutly religious Indonesian Muslims but in the relationship between the believer and God (Baharuddin, 2003; Esack, 1997). The concept of accountability (*mas'uliyah*) before God for one's environmental conduct is potentially a more motivationally effective norm than carbon pricing or regulatory compliance, because it is embedded in the existing moral formation of Muslim communities (Nasr, 1968).

The parallel between the Quranic concept of *mizan* and the scientific concept of planetary boundaries is particularly instructive for Islamic environmental communication. If Indonesian Muslim scholars and educators could effectively convey that current trajectories of deforestation, carbon emission, and ecological disruption constitute a transgression of the *mizan* established by God in creation a form of *fasad fi al-ard* this theological framing

could mobilize environmental concern in ways that secular scientific communication alone has not achieved (al-Qaradawi, 2001).

b. Fiqh al-Bi'ah and the Imperative of Contemporary Ijtihad

The finding that classical fiqh provides substantial resources for environmental jurisprudence confirms the hypothesis that fiqh al-bi'ah can function as a meaningful normative framework for Islamic environmental governance. However, the gap between classical jurisprudential resources and the novel dimensions of anthropogenic climate change particularly the temporal and spatial distance between emission and harm requires extensive ijtihad that the Indonesian scholarly community has not yet fully engaged (Baharuddin, 2003).

The principle of *la darar wa la dirar* is promising but requires operationalization: Who has standing to establish harm? What quantum of harm triggers legal prohibition? How does the transgenerational and transnational distribution of climate impacts affect the jurisprudential analysis of individual and collective Muslim responsibility? These questions require the sustained attention of Islamic legal scholars with both classical jurisprudential training and scientific literacy in environmental systems. The development of a specifically Indonesian school of fiqh al-bi'ah, responsive to the country's ecological specificities, is both a scholarly and an institutional imperative.

c. Toward Islamic Environmental Governance: Institutional Recommendations

Three specific recommendations emerge from the institutional analysis. First, MUI should develop a comprehensive fiqh al-bi'ah framework not a series of ad hoc responses to specific environmental events, but a systematic elaboration of Islamic environmental jurisprudence that can guide Muslim conduct across a range of ecologically significant decisions, from individual consumption behavior to advocacy for national environmental policy (Muthhar, 2014).

Second, environmental ecoteology should be systematically integrated into the pesantren curriculum as a core component of Islamic education, not merely an extracurricular initiative. This requires coordination between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, national Islamic educational bodies such as the Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah, and the pesantren community itself (al-Jaziri, 1990).

Third, LPBI-NU and comparable organizations should develop pilot programs demonstrating the practical connection between Islamic religious observance and measurable environmental outcomes programs generating evidence of impact that can be scaled across Indonesia's diverse regional and ecological contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that Islamic ecoteology, environmental tafsir, and fiqh al-bi'ah together constitute a coherent and actionable normative framework for addressing Indonesia's climate crisis. The theological foundations of this framework centered on the Quranic concepts of khalifah, amanah, and mizan are robustly attested in the Quranic corpus and the classical tradition of Islamic scholarship. The jurisprudential resources of fiqh al-bi'ah, while requiring significant contemporary *ijtihad* to be fully applicable to the novel dimensions of climate change, provide genuine legal tools for environmental governance grounded in Islamic normativity.

The combination of textual analysis, jurisprudential review, and institutional assessment employed in this study has demonstrated both the theoretical richness of Islamic environmental resources and the gap between those resources and their practical institutionalization in Indonesia. This gap is not insurmountable: the institutional infrastructure MUI, the pesantren network, LPBI-NU exists; what is needed is the sustained scholarly will to develop fiqh al-bi'ah as a living jurisprudential tradition responsive to contemporary ecological realities.

The principal limitation of this study is its reliance on published texts and institutional documents rather than ethnographic

fieldwork, which limits the ability to assess how Islamic ecoteological principles are actually received and practiced at the grassroots level. Future research should combine the normative analysis developed here with empirical investigation of Islamic environmental practice in specific Indonesian communities particularly pesantren-based environmental programs and patterns of MUI fatwa reception in order to develop a more complete picture of Islamic sustainability in practice and to evaluate the conditions under which ecoteological norms are most effectively translated into environmental behavior.

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