



The Epistemology of Ecological Tafsir and the Transformation of The Interpretation of *Kawniyyah* Verses in Classical and Contemporary Exegesis

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 13-05-2026

Revised 14-05-2026

Accepted 20-06-2026

Keywords:

Ecological Tafsir

Transformation of Meaning

Classical Tafsir

Contemporary Tafsir

ABSTRACT (10 PT)

This study examines the development of Qur'anic exegesis from an ecological perspective, highlighting the epistemological shift from classical to contemporary interpretations. The primary focus of this study was the analysis of QS. al-Baqarah: 30 and QS. ar-Rum: 41 in the tafsirs of Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Quraish Shihab, and Hamka. This study employed a library research method using qualitative, hermeneutical, philosophical, and comparative approaches. The findings reveal that classical exegesis tends to be textual-normative, with a strong reliance on transmitted narrations (riwayat) to understand the concepts of khalifah (vicegerency) and fasad (corruption), thereby positioning nature primarily in a theological domain. In contrast, contemporary exegesis demonstrates a shift toward a contextual-ecological approach that emphasizes environmental balance and human responsibility, as in Khalifah. Quraish Shihab and Hamka, in particular, relate environmental destruction to modern ecological crises such as pollution, deforestation, and climate change. This study further demonstrates that ecological tafsir emerged from the awareness of the global environmental crisis and the need to reinterpret the Qur'an's kauniyah verses integratively. Thus, ecological exegesis functions not only as a textual interpretation but also as a foundation for environmental ethics grounded in Qur'anic values that are relevant to the challenges of the modern era. This research is expected to strengthen the integration of Qur'anic studies and environmental issues within contemporary Islamic academic discourse, while also contributing theoretically to the development of an interpretive paradigm that is responsive to global ecological problems and the sustainability of human life in the modern age.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of Qur'anic exegesis has continuously undergone dynamic development in line with the changes in the times, advances in science, technological progress, and the increasing

complexity of social problems that concern not only human relations with one another but also humanity's relationship with nature as an integral part of life (Wahyu Iskandar, 2025). In this context, tafsir is no longer merely understood as a textual activity; rather, it has evolved into a scholarly discipline with a systematic methodological framework that includes sources of interpretation, interpretive methods, and various orientations and styles of exegesis. As stated by J.J.G. Jansen, as cited by Abdul Mustaqim, modern and contemporary tafsir can be classified into several major typologies, such as scientific tafsir (tafsīr 'ilmī), linguistic-philological tafsir, and practical tafsir. This demonstrates a transformation in the orientation of Qur'anic interpretation from mere textual understanding toward contextualizing the meanings of the Qur'an in addressing human problems (Saddad, 2017, p. 50).

Environmental issues are experienced at all levels of society worldwide. Problems such as landslides and flash floods are among the consequences of environmental destruction, most of which result from human activity (Faisal & Baihaqi, 2025). These problems undoubtedly cause both material and immaterial losses for companies. International meetings have been held at the global level to address these issues. Environmental crises are not only related to ecological destruction, such as deforestation and illegal mining, which damage the environment, but also to air pollution, climate change, and other ecological concerns. Ultimately, all of these cases point to one crucial issue: environmental degradation. In recent years, the environmental crisis has become a major global issue, receiving serious attention in Qur'anic studies, giving rise to a new approach known as ecological tafsir. This approach seeks to interpret the Qur'an's kauniyah verses in relation to natural phenomena from an ecological awareness perspective. Thus, the Qur'an is understood not only as a source of spiritual guidance but also as a source of environmental ethics relevant to addressing the global ecological crisis.

Environmental problems have reached alarming levels and are widely felt by the global community, including Indonesia. Various ecological disasters, such as flash floods, landslides, forest fires, and climate change, are tangible manifestations of an environmental crisis, much of which is caused by exploitative human activities. Data released by Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI) indicate that approximately 159 million hectares of land has been allocated for extractive industries, with corporate control reaching 82.91% of the land area and 29.75% of the marine area. This reflects an imbalance in natural resource management and the potential for massive ecological destruction (Wahyun et al.f, 2024, p. 127).

This phenomenon confirms that the environmental crisis is not merely a technical or economic issue but is also closely related to a crisis of ethics and spirituality in humans' perception of nature. In this regard, religion, particularly Islam, plays a strategic role in fostering ecological awareness through the theological and moral values contained in the Qur'an. Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that the modern environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis in which humanity has lost its sacred awareness of nature as a manifestation of the signs of God (āyāt Allāh), resulting in limitless exploitation of the natural world (Anggriani, Nasution, & Harahap, 2023).

Within this framework, ecological tafsir emerges as an epistemological response to the need to reconstruct humanity's perspective on nature through a more integrative and contextual

approach to Qur'anic interpretation. However, a closer examination reveals fundamental differences between classical and contemporary tafsir in their understanding of kauniyah verses. Classical tafsir tends to place these verses within a theocentric and symbolic theological framework, where nature is viewed primarily as a sign of God's power, without further exploration of its ecological implications. In contrast, contemporary tafsir shifts this paradigm toward a more ecocentric orientation by emphasizing the importance of harmonious relationships between humans and the environment, as well as humanity's responsibility as khalifah (vicegerent) in maintaining ecological balance (Abdullah, 2014). This transformation indicates a shift in the epistemology of tafsir from one based primarily on textual authority and tradition to integration with modern science, environmental ethics, and the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah approach that emphasizes universal welfare, including environmental preservation.

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. The primary sources consist of classical tafsir works such as *Tafsir al-Ṭabari* by Al-Tabari and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* by Ibn Kathir, as well as contemporary exegesis such as *Tafsir al-Mishbah* by Quraish Shihab. Secondary sources include academic journals relevant to ecology and Quranic interpretations. The analysis was conducted using philosophical and hermeneutical approaches to uncover the epistemological structures underlying the interpretation and transformation of meaning. A comparative approach was also employed to compare the characteristics of classical and contemporary tafsir in understanding kauniyah verses, particularly Qur'anic verses associated with environmental preservation, such as QS. al-Baqarah: 30 and QS. ar-Rum: 41.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to fill the gap in studies connecting the epistemology of tafsir to ecological issues. Existing studies on ecological tafsir have largely focused on normative and ethical dimensions, whereas the epistemological foundations underlying interpretive constructions have received less attention. Understanding the epistemology of tafsir is crucial for identifying how meaning is constructed, developed, and transformed within particular social and historical contexts. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Qur'anic exegesis studies, particularly by strengthening the paradigm of ecological tafsir as a relevant approach to address the global environmental crisis. It is also expected to contribute to fostering ecological awareness based on Quranic values.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research to examine the epistemological construction of ecological tafsir and the transformation in the interpretation of the Qur'an's kauniyah verses within the traditions of classical and contemporary exegeses. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focused on the analysis of meaning, understanding, and interpretation of exegetical texts rather than quantitative measurements. The research data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include classical tafsir works such as *Tafsir al-Tabari* by Al-Tabari and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* by Ibn Kathir, as well as contemporary exegeses such as *Tafsir al-Mishbah* by Quraish Shihab and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka. Secondary sources include scholarly journal articles, books, and other academic

works relevant to ecological technology, Quranic interpretation epistemology, and environmental issues.

Data collection was conducted through documentation studies by examining exegetical texts related to kauniyah verses, particularly QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 and QS. ar-Rum [30]: 41, which are considered highly relevant to the concept of environmental sustainability. The collected data were analyzed using philosophical and hermeneutical approaches. A philosophical approach was employed to uncover the epistemological structures underlying the perspectives of mufassirs (Qur'anic exegetes) in interpreting these verses, including their sources of knowledge, reasoning methods, and intellectual frameworks. Meanwhile, the hermeneutical approach was used to interpret the textual meanings contextually by considering the historical, social, and intellectual backgrounds underlying the interpretations, thereby identifying the transformation of meaning from the classical to the contemporary period.

In addition, this study employed a comparative approach to examine the differences in interpretation between classical and contemporary tafsir in understanding kauniyah verses. This comparison focuses on the differences in paradigms, interpretive orientations, and their relevance to ecological issues. Using this approach, this study seeks to identify an epistemological shift from the theocentric paradigm of classical tafsir to a more contextual and ecocentric paradigm in contemporary exegeses. Thus, this method enables researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the development of ecological technology and its contribution to the response to environmental crises in the contemporary era.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study on the epistemology of ecological tafsir in the interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 and QS. ar-Rum [30]: 41 reveal a significant paradigm shift from classical to contemporary Qur'anic exegesis. In classical tafsir, the interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30, which emphasizes the concept of *khalīfah fī al-ard* (vicegerency on earth), tends to be understood within a theological-anthropological framework, in which humans are regarded as God's representatives on earth, with emphasis on authority, trust, and moral-spiritual responsibility. Meanwhile, QS. ar-Rum [30]: 41, which speaks about corruption and destruction on land and sea, is generally interpreted as the consequence of human sin and moral deviation, without a systematic exploration of its ecological dimensions. The epistemology employed in classical tafsir is primarily textual, normative, and grounded in the authority of transmitted narration (*riwāyah*) and linguistic approaches.

In contrast, contemporary tafsir presents an epistemological transformation by integrating interdisciplinary approaches, including environmental studies, ethics, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 is no longer understood merely as a legitimization of human vicegerency, but also as a foundation for ecological ethics that obliges humans to maintain ecological balance and sustainability. Likewise, QS. ar-Rum [30]: 41 is interpreted as a Qur'anic critique of the excessive exploitation of nature, which in the modern context can be associated with global

environmental crises such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution. Therefore, the epistemology of ecological tafsir in the contemporary context demonstrates a shift from an anthropocentric approach to a more holistic ecocentric perspective, in which humans are positioned as an integral part of the ecosystem rather than its absolute rulers. This transformation confirms that the kauniyah verses of the Qur'an possess dynamic and contextual relevance in responding to the ecological challenges of the modern age.

DISCUSSION

Understanding the Construction of Ecological Tafsir

To understand the construction of ecological tafsir, it is best to begin from both linguistic and terminological perspectives. Ecological tafsir in Arabic is known as *al-tafsīr al-bī'ī*. Etymologically, the word *tafsir* derives from the Arabic root *fassara – yufassiru – tafsīran*, which in Indonesian means “explanation.” In another sense, tafsir also means uncovering and revealing abstract or hidden meanings in the Quran. Imam Ibn Manzur interprets the meaning of the word *al-fasr* as revealing a concealed meaning, while the term *al-tafsir* refers to clarifying difficult expressions. Based on these expressions, the use of the word tafsir appears to be more dominant (Yusron, 2022, p. 63). Terminologically, according to Shaykh Al-Jazairi, tafsir is an explanation of words that are difficult for listeners to understand while clarifying the intended meaning contained within them. Al-Dhahabi defines tafsir as an explanation of the meanings or intentions of Qur'anic verses based on human capabilities. (Sudianto, 2022, p. 252). Al-Zarkasyi explains that tafsir is a science applied to understand and explain the meanings of the Book of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad to derive its legal rulings and wisdoms. (Saddad, 2017, p. 55)

According to Eugene P. Odum, ecology is a science whose object of study concerns the processes of interrelation and interdependence among living beings within a particular environmental area. Ecology is a branch of science that focuses on the biological aspects of the Earth's system. (Alviansyah & Dahliana, 2023, p. 72). When these two concepts are connected, ecological tafsir can be understood as the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses related to environmental issues. The purpose of applying this interpretive approach is to demonstrate that environmental issues require serious attention. This approach emerged from the concerns of Muslim intellectuals regarding deteriorating environmental conditions, often resulting in natural disasters that cause significant loss of life.

The Concept of Ecological Tafsir: Understanding the Relationship Between Humans and Nature

The study of ecological tafsir represents a new approach to understanding the Qur'an, focusing primarily on the relationship between humans and nature. In this context, Qur'anic verses are understood not only as spiritual guidance but also as directives for maintaining ecological balance and preserving the environment. This concept is based on the principle that Islam guides humanity not only in ritual worship but also in ethics and social responsibility, including nature protection.

The Qur'an provides numerous references to environmental preservation as an obligation entrusted to humanity for managing the Earth. Environmental issues have been addressed in many Qur'anic verses. Mohammad Shomali states that environmental terms are mentioned in at least 750 verses of the Qur'an, including 14 surahs named after animals or natural phenomena, such as *al-Baqarah* (The Cow), *al-Ra'd* (Thunder), *al-Nahl* (The Bee), *al-Naml* (The Ant), *al-Nur* (Light), *al-An'am* (Livestock), *al-Fil* (The Elephant), *al-Fajr* (Dawn), *al-Layl* (Night), *al-Shams* (The Sun), and *al-Qamar* (The Moon). These names are considered environmental components that form ecosystems, although the naming of these surahs does not directly discuss environmental issues in detail. Nevertheless, the existence of these names supports environmental awareness. In addition to these surah names, the Qur'an also describes natural environmental phenomena related to the sea (*bahr*), water (*ma'*), clouds and wind (*rih/riyah*), plants (*al-habb*, *al-'adas*, *basal*, *fum*, *khardal*, *yaqtin*, *tin*, *zaitun*, *nakhl*, *rumman*), rivers (*nahr*), and animals (*dabbah*). (Rodin, 2017, p. 396).

Islam strongly encourages humans to cultivate respect and love for their natural environments. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reprimanded a companion who had taken chicks from a bird's nest during a journey. Feeling the loss of its young, the mother bird followed the prophet (peace be upon him). At that moment, he said, 'Who has distressed this bird by taking its chicks?' Return the chicks to their mother immediately.' This prophetic saying demonstrates that Islam is deeply concerned with the rights of animals. In another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "There is no Muslim who plants a tree except that whatever is eaten from it will be counted as charity for him, whatever is stolen from it will be counted as charity for him, whatever is eaten by wild animals from it will be counted as charity for him, and whatever is eaten by birds from it will also be counted as charity for him'. Nothing diminishes from it except that it becomes charity for him." (Nafisah, 2019, p. 98).

A deeper reflection on these two hadiths implicitly portrays the balance of life among all creatures in Islam as follows: humans live among other living beings; therefore, respect should be directed not only toward fellow humans but also toward animals, plants, and even inanimate entities such as soil, water, and stones. The first hadith emphasizes that humans should not act arbitrarily toward animals, including harmless ones. The Prophet's reprimand illustrates Islam's high regard for environmental compassion and sustainability in this regard. The second explanation is that vegetation is an essential source of nourishment for living beings, indicating that creatures exist in a state of mutual dependence and symbiotic relationships. Humans must preserve nature, which in turn provides immense benefits to humans.

Principles of Ecological Tafsir in the Qur'an

The fundamental principle of ecological existence originates from creation itself, as explained in the Qur'an, Surah al-An'ab, Verse 38.

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَيْرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَّمٌ أَمْثَالُكُمْ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ

Fazlun M. Khalid argues that every living being forms part of a community (*ummah*). These creatures are organized and move in ways that enable them to survive in a balance with their respective environments. Giant whales in the ocean, herds of elephants in tropical forests, and ants and bees are examples of organisms that form efficient and complex multigenerational societies. Similarly, the annual migration of birds from one climate to another demonstrates how animals work together to survive.

Muslim scholars focusing on environmental issues appear to have sought to uncover the meaning of this verse and relate it to natural phenomena. He also added, based on Allah's statement regarding the origin of human creation in Surah Ar-Rum, verse 30:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَائِمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ.

Allah created humans as perfect beings to participate in the cycle of life among his creations. Humans are expected to submit to the divine order established by Allah, an order that cannot be altered, similar to the natural laws governing other creatures. Biologically, humans stand alongside other creatures as partners. Various elements of the universe cooperate to maintain a balanced environment. Humans may attempt to modify their environment according to their desires, but they cannot change their fundamental principles or laws. Thus, the current environmental crises can be understood as adjustments within the mechanisms that maintain the Earth's balance.

In these verses, Fazlun emphasizes that environmental issues are rooted in Qur'anic teachings, highlighting humanity's interconnectedness with all creatures in preserving ecological equilibrium.

Human beings are entrusted with the responsibility of preserving the environment; therefore, they are referred to in the Qur'an as *khalifahs* (vicegerents). This implies that humans bear great responsibility for the life cycles of all living beings. However, the reality today is that humans seem to have abandoned their position as *khalifahs* by destroying Allah's creation. Human efforts to develop their potential are considered attempts to achieve prosperity in life. The human potential to explore and utilize natural resources found on Earth is natural; however, these resources are limited and can be depleted, which often causes environmental destruction when exploited excessively. Conversely, air pollution in the form of emissions, whether caused by motor vehicles or small and large industries, also contributes to environmental damage. Scientists have likewise acknowledged that such actions have resulted in global warming and climate change, and that these forms of destruction have disrupted the pattern of Allah's creation. Allah, the Almighty, created the earth with a climate suitable for the sustainability of all living beings. The term "destruction" here is based on the word *fasād* mentioned in Surah Ar-Rum, verse 41.. (Khalid, 2015, p. 25).

Environmental preservation is therefore not merely a minor ethical act but carries theological consequences, as implied in Surah Al-Zumar, verse 38:

وَأَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَاتُ ضُرِّيهِ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَتُ رَحْمَتِي قُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ.

The message conveyed in this verse concerning theology lies in the phrase who is the Creator of the environment (the universe)? The answer is Allah. The application of rhetorical messages in this verse implies that the message delivered by the communicator cannot be denied by the recipient. This indicates that the recipient fundamentally already knows and cannot refute the message sent to them. Therefore, the application of this rhetorical style aims to establish the belief that Allah the Almighty is the only God who has created the environment—an environment characterized by unparalleled order and harmony. The orderly and harmonious nature of the environment provides a strong signal for humans to protect and preserve it from destruction and pollution.

The environment has become a key element in establishing religious societies. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, behavior that destroys nature and causes the extinction of plants and animals is equivalent to killing the worshippers of God and silencing the prayers of all creatures before God. Such actions deny the original purpose for which the world was created, namely, so that God may be known and that all living beings among His creations may offer prayers to Him. (Nafisah, 2019, p. 100).

The Significance of Ecological Tafsir in the Modern Context

The relationship and importance of ecological interpretation (*tafsir ekologis*) in the present era have become highly relevant because one of the major problems currently faced by humanity living on earth is the issue of the environment. Environmental problems, such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, and the loss of various forms of biodiversity resulting from deliberate forest burning and mining land expansion that do not meet proper standards, thereby causing the destruction of environmental ecosystems, are clear indicators of real environmental crises. Ecological interpretation, a newer approach to Qur'anic exegesis, seeks to re-examine the verses of the Qur'an to discover ethical guidance focused on environmental sustainability and human responsibility toward nature. This interpretive approach strongly emphasizes that humans, as *khalifah* (guardians or stewards) of Earth, bear the full responsibility for protecting the balance of the ecosystem.

There are several important points regarding the significance of Ecological Tafsir in the contemporary context, including the following:

1. Building spiritual awareness of environmental problems. Ecological tafsir attempts to connect environmental issues with religious teachings, establishing the belief that nature protection is part of worship. Such an understanding can encourage religious communities to care more deeply about the environment as a religious obligation.

2. Connecting religious values to environmental ethics. Ecological technology integrates ethical values derived from religion with modern understandings of sustainability and environmental issues.
3. Encouraging practical environmental sustainability efforts is also important in this regard. Through ecological tafsir, religious teachings can inspire concrete actions such as resource conservation, sustainable living, and environmental protection. This is especially important in the modern era, which is characterized by highly consumptive behavior.

Ecological Tafsir in Classical and Contemporary Exegesis

Studies on ecological tafsir are difficult to identify within the context of Qur'anic interpretation, especially in classical exegesis. The phenomenon of ecological tafsir has emerged from Muslim scholars' concerns regarding the widespread environmental destruction caused by humans. Nevertheless, the embryonic form of this approach can already be seen in several tafsir works, particularly contemporary ones. Considering the large number of tafsir books produced in the contemporary era, the author only discusses a few tafsir works that interpret Surah Al-Baqarah 30 and Surah Ar-Rum 41. These verses serve as foundational references for Muslim scholars concerned with environmental issues, as they consider them to reflect contemporary environmental problems.

Surah al-Baqarah verse 30

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةًۭۙ قَالُوْۤا اَنْتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَۗ قَالَ اِنِّيْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَۙ

Al-Tabari criticized the view of some Basran linguists who considered certain letters in Qur'anic verses to be additional elements that could be omitted without changing the meaning. He rejected this opinion by emphasizing that every letter in the Qur'an has an important function and meaning. To strengthen his argument, he referred to classical Arabic poetry and demonstrated that the omission of letters could damage the intended meaning. In the context of the verse concerning the creation of the *khalifah* (vicegerent), Al-Tabari placed it within a sequence of divine dialogues affirming Allah's blessings upon humanity, beginning with the creation and ending with the subjugation of the universe. Thus, the verse became part of the affirmation of Allah's power and his mercy. (At-thabari, 2007).

Al-Tabari explains that angels are divine messengers executing Allah's commands and interprets *khalifah* primarily as "successor," meaning humans succeeding one another generation after generation in managing the earth. He also narrates traditions of previous beings, such as jinns, who caused corruption before the creation of humanity. Thus, humanity emerges either as a new vicegerent or as successive generations responsible for managing the Earth (At-thabari, 2007). Al-Tabari explains that the angels' question regarding human corruption reflects limited angelic knowledge, while Allah knows the greater wisdom behind human creation, including the emergence of prophets and righteous people. Hence, corruption is not humanity's absolute nature, but part of the freedom and responsibility entrusted to them (At-Tabarii, 2007).

According to Ibn Kathir, Allah SWT informs humanity about His favor upon the descendants of Prophet Adam, namely, the honor He bestows upon them: This honor is evident when Allah mentions His plan to create humankind before the angels, even before humans were created: Allah says (meaning): “And remember when your Lord said to the angels...,” that is, Allah commanded the Prophet Muhammad SAW to remember and convey this event to his community (ad-Damasyqi, 2004).

In that verse, Allah states: “Indeed, I will place a *khalifah* on the earth.” The meaning of *khalifah* is a being that succeeds one another from generation to generation to prosper the Earth and establish justice within it. This is in accordance with Allah’s words in QS. Al-An’am: 165 dan QS. Az-Zukhruf: 60.

The appointment of the *khalifah* was not limited to Prophet Adam but also included his descendants. This is understood from the question of the angels: “Why would You place upon the earth a being who will cause corruption and shed blood?” This question indicates that they understood the potential for human beings to be inclined to cause corruption (ad-Damasyqi, 2004).

The angels’ knowledge may have originated from

1. Their understanding of the meaning of *khalifah*, namely, a being that would judge and face conflicts.
2. Specific information was provided by Allah.
3. Comparisons with previous creatures that had once inhabited the earth

The angels’ question regarding the creation of humanity was not a form of objection or jealousy but rather a request for an explanation of the wisdom behind such creation. Angels are beings who are constantly obedient to Allah and never disobey Him. Therefore, their question is understood as part of their obedience and desire to understand Allah’s wisdom in creating human beings who possess the potential to cause corruption on Earth.

Allah then replied that he knew what the angels did not know. This indicates that behind humanity’s potential for corruption, there exists greater wisdom, namely, the emergence of prophets, messengers, truthful people (*shiddiqin*), martyrs, righteous individuals, scholars, and servants who believe in and love Him. In one narration, it is also mentioned that angels take turns watching over human beings, especially during the times of Fajr and Asr prayers, and report that humans are engaged in worship, demonstrating the virtuous side of humanity as part of the wisdom behind their creation.

Furthermore, the statement of the angels, “we glorify You with praise and sanctify You,” is explained as an expression of exalting and purifying Allah from all imperfections. Scholars such as Qatadah ibn Di’amah interpreted *tasbih* as remembrance (*dhikr*), whereas *taqdis* was interpreted as prayer. Al-Qurtubi also explained that this verse serves as an important foundation for leadership in human life to uphold justice and social order. Therefore, leadership must fulfill certain conditions, and there should not be two leaders within one territory to avoid division. Overall, this verse emphasizes the wisdom behind the creation of humanity as *khalifah*, which carries great responsibility, as well as the importance of leadership in preserving human life (ad-Damasyqi, 2004).

The word *khalifah* in this verse can linguistically be interpreted as the “representative of Allah” or the “vicegerent of Allah.” However, the expression appears to be more appropriately understood as referring to a creature entrusted and assigned by Allah to manage everything on Earth and utilize it in accordance with His guidance.

M. Quraish Shihab argues that the term *khalifah* mentioned in the Qur’an, including in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 30, should not be understood as “the replacement of Allah.” Although the word *khalifah* may literally mean “successor” or “substitute,” it cannot imply replacing Allah because there is no substitute for Allah. Therefore, the meaning of “successor” in this context refers to a person commanded by Allah to act as His executor on earth (Aini, 2020, p. 34). Quraish Shihab further explains that although this verse indicates that the concept of *khilafah* includes authority granted by Allah, the entrusted beings—namely, Prophet Adam and his descendants—as well as the domain in which they carry out their duties, namely the earth, the concept of *khilafah* still requires those entrusted with the task to carry it out in accordance with Allah’s guidance as the giver of the mandate and authority. Any policy or action that is not in harmony with Allah’s will violates the meaning and responsibility of *khilafah*. (Shihab, 2012, p. 142)

HAMKA, in his *Tafsir al-Azhar*, argues that Allah has established his laws and regulations for humankind and entrusted them with the mandate as *khalifah* to manage the earth and uncover the secrets hidden within it. Humans are endowed with intellect, a wondrous gift whose form is unseen but whose existence is evident through the results it produces. Humans, who are initially born weak, are gradually equipped with extraordinary abilities and strengths and an unlimited desire to learn. Although human beings are weak as individuals, through cooperation and the accumulated efforts passed down from generation to generation, they have been able to leave remarkable traces across the Earth.

Humans have mastered the seas, dived into their depths, flowed through the skies, and created long-distance communication between the North and South Poles. They have pierced mountains to construct railway tunnels beneath them and continue to develop countless other potentials, including the mastery of atomic energy that transformed civilization in the twentieth century. These potentials will continue to grow, with limitless possibilities in the future. (HAMKA, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, 2007, p. 162)

Based on the explanations of the three mufassirs above, it can be understood that the pattern of ecological tafsir is not explicitly visible in terms of its ecological value. However, upon closer examination, M. Quraish Shihab and HAMKA clearly state that *the Khalifa* holds a very high position in this world. Human beings have become the highest link in the chain of living creatures. Unlike other creatures, humans are endowed with perfect intellect, which enables them to distinguish between right and wrong. In this context, a common thread can be drawn between the position of humanity as *a Khalifa* and its relationship with the natural world. Therefore, to prevent the earth from falling into destruction, humans must think about living in harmony and balance with their surrounding environment. Human beings play an important role in maintaining the balance of the world’s ecosystem.

Qs. Ar-Rum verses: 41

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمَلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

“Corruption and destruction have appeared on land and at sea as a result of human actions. Through these events, Allah causes them to experience some of the consequences of their deeds, in the hope that they may return to the right path.”

“The meaning of this verse indicates that various forms of immorality and corruption have become clearly manifest on land and at sea as a consequence of human actions that violate Allah’s prohibitions. Qur’anic exegetes explain that the phrase “corruption on land and sea” can be understood in various ways, either as referring to geographical regions of land and water or as forms of social corruption encompassing different spheres of human life. Some scholars, such as Mujahid, interpreted it to mean that when people turn away from the truth, they commit ظلم (injustice and wrongdoing) that leads to the loss of blessings, such as the withholding of rain and the destruction of agricultural produce. (At-thabari, 2007)

Other scholars, such as Ibn Zayd and Al-Hasan al-Basri, emphasized that such corruption is a direct consequence of human sins that bring about Allah’s punishment on earth, both on land and at sea. Meanwhile, some mufasssirs understood “land” to mean the entire surface of the earth and “sea” to refer to all bodies of water, while others interpreted it as social injustice, such as murder, the usurpation of rights, and unjust actions by rulers. Qatadah also explained that before the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the earth was filled with misguidance, but humanity returned to guidance after his prophethood. (At-thabari, 2007)”

In conclusion, most Muslim scholars affirm that this verse describes the widespread corruption and destruction occurring across the earth as a consequence of human sin and disobedience. Allah’s statement, “so that He may let them taste part of the consequence of what they have done,” indicates that various calamities are forms of warning and punishment for human wrongdoing, while the phrase “so that they may return” signifies an invitation to repent and return to obedience. Thus, this verse emphasizes that the purpose of these trials is to guide humanity back to the right path and away from sin. (At-thabari, 2007)

This verse shows that various forms of immorality and corruption have become clearly manifested on land and at sea as a result of human actions that violate Allah’s commands. Qur’anic exegetes explain that the phrase “corruption on land and sea” can be understood in different ways, either as referring to geographical regions of land and water or as social corruption encompassing various spheres of human life. Some scholars, such as Mujahid, have interpreted that when people turn away from the truth, they commit ظلم (injustice and wrongdoing), which leads to the loss of blessings, such as the withholding of rain and the destruction of agricultural produce. (ad-Damasyqi, 2004)

Another opinion, such as that of Ibn Zayd and Al-Hasan al-Basri, emphasizes that such corruption is a direct consequence of human sins, which bring about Allah’s punishment on earth, both on land and at sea. Meanwhile, some mufasssirs interpret “land” as the entire surface of the earth and “sea” as all aquatic regions, while others understand it as referring to forms of social injustice, such as murder, the usurpation of rights, and unjust actions by rulers. Qatadah also explained that before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent, the earth was filled

with misguidance, but humanity later returned to guidance after his prophethood (ad-Damasyqi, 2004)

In conclusion, most scholars affirm that this verse describes widespread corruption throughout the earth as a result of human sin and acts of disobedience. Allah's statement, 'so that Allah may let them taste part of the consequence of what they have done,' indicates that various calamities are forms of warning and punishment for human wrongdoing, while the phrase 'so that they may return' signifies an invitation to repent and return to obedience. Thus, this verse emphasizes that the purpose of such trials is to guide humanity back to the right path and away from disobedience (ad-Damasyqi, 2004).

In the context of ecological interpretation, Surah Ar-Rum is regarded as a chapter that serves as a benchmark for the emergence of this approach. The word *al-fasād* in Surah Ar-Rum, within an ecological context, is key to understanding the fundamental issue underlying ecological problems, namely, environmental destruction. Therefore, it is important to examine how Qur'anic exegetes (*mufassirūn*) explain the meaning of *al-fasād* and to what extent it relates to environmental issues.

M. Quraish Shihab, by quoting Al-Ashfahani's view, argues that the word *al-fasād* means the departure of something from balance, whether in a minor or major form. This term applies to anything, whether physical, spiritual, or other aspects of life. On the other hand, Quraish Shihab adds that some scholars limit the meaning of *al-fasād* mentioned in this verse to specific interpretations, such as polytheism (*shirk*), the murder of Abel by Cain, and other similar events. However, according to him, these interpretations do not have a strong basis. Some contemporary scholars understand it as environmental destruction because the term *al-fasād* is associated with the words "land" and "sea."

The verse mentions the land and sea as places where destruction occurs. This may indicate that these two regions have become locations for destructive acts, such as murder and robbery, or that the land and sea themselves have suffered damage, imbalance, and a decline in their benefits. The sea becomes polluted, causing fish to die and catch to decrease, while the land becomes increasingly hotter, resulting in prolonged droughts. Consequently, the environmental balance is disrupted. This perspective has led some contemporary scholars to interpret the verse as a warning of environmental destruction. The omission of air may be because the verse focuses on things that are directly visible, in accordance with the meaning of the word *zhahara* ("appeared" or "became manifest"). Furthermore, when this verse was revealed, human knowledge had not yet reached an understanding of the atmosphere or air pollution. (Shihab, 2012, p. 77)

In his tafsir, Hamka explains that we should not be dazzled by the grandeur of development, such as massive buildings, long bridges, skyscrapers, the Eiffel Tower, or even humanity's achievement of reaching the moon. None of these can truly be called progress if the human soul grows farther from Allah. Hamka also emphasizes that although science and knowledge continue to advance, many people feel that their lives are becoming increasingly miserable. Technological progress does not necessarily bring happiness; instead, it creates the constant threat of war, which continually haunts humanity. Humanitarian values are often spoken only as empty words, while

evil intentions to destroy one another continue to flourish. (Muzakkir, Simamora, & Adawiyah, 2020, p. 144). He further adds that the text of this verse can be contextualized within modern developments, where the destruction of land is caused by human actions, such as pollution, namely air contamination resulting from smoke produced by combustion substances, kerosene, gasoline, diesel fuel, and others. The harmful effects of factory smoke, combined with emissions from motor vehicles, are inhaled by humans and consequently lead to damage and contamination of the human lungs.

The destruction of the oceans has become a serious concern, such as seawater pollution caused by the rupture of large oil tanker ships or chemical factory waste flowing through rivers into the sea. Over time, this pollution has become increasingly severe, filling the seawater with toxins and causing fish death. Such an incident occurred in the Seine River in Europe, where all the fish in the river died and their carcasses were washed ashore, rotting, and becoming unfit for consumption. A similar event also occurred in the Tebrau Strait, between Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore Island, where hundreds of thousands to millions of fish died and were stranded along the coast, most likely due to poisoning. (HAMKA, Tafsir Al-Azhar, 2007, p. 5534)

If observed within the context of this verse, HAMKA firmly relates it to contemporary development. The term *al-fasād* in this verse is associated with human actions that damage the environment. HAMKA provides concrete examples of environmental destruction caused by human beings.

Philosophically and hermeneutically, the epistemological structure of QS interpretation. Al-Baqarah: 30 and QS. Ar-Rum: 41 from the perspectives of Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Quraish Shihab, and Hamka demonstrates a shift from a textual-normative epistemology toward a contextual-existential epistemology. Within Al-Tabari's framework, knowledge is constructed through the strict authority of transmitted reports (*naqli*), in which the meanings of *khalifah* and *fasād* are derived from classical Arabic linguistic traditions, poetry, as well as the narrations of the Companions and the *Tābi'īn*. Its epistemological structure is hierarchical: revealed text → Arabic language → transmitted narration → theological meaning.

Ibn Kathir continues this model through a more systematic narrational approach while still allowing limited space for rationality (*ta'lil al-hikmah*), particularly in explaining the dialogue of the angels as an epistemic introduction to understanding the divine will. In both of these classical interpretations, nature (the earth and sea) is not yet positioned as an ecological object; rather, it is viewed as a moral and theological arena in which human beings actualize either obedience or disobedience.

In Quraish Shihab's interpretation, a significant epistemological shift occurs toward a more reflective semantic-philosophical approach. He no longer limits the meaning of "*khalifah*" to a merely literal successor but understands it as a divine mandate that is ethical and cosmic in nature, namely humanity's responsibility as a steward of the earth based on God's guidance. Here, the epistemological structure moves from text to context and from literal to relational meaning between humans, God, and nature. Likewise, in interpreting "*fasad*," Shihab broadens its meaning from merely moral sin to ecological imbalance, so that nature is understood as a system possessing

order (mizan) that can be damaged by human actions. This demonstrates a dialogical hermeneutic between text, reality, and contemporary science, rendering the epistemology of tafsir open and dynamic.

Meanwhile, Hamka in Tafsir al-Azhar presents a humanistic-contextual epistemological structure that emphasizes the historical relationship between text and modern reality. He interprets “khalifah” as humanity’s creative potential that develops through knowledge, technology, and civilization, yet simultaneously contains destructive risks when detached from the divine values. In discussing “fasad,” Hamka explicitly connects the text with modern ecological realities, such as air pollution, marine destruction, and the global environmental crisis. His hermeneutics are applicative-empirical, in which the Qur’anic text is understood not only as a source of meaning but also as a critique of modernity itself. Thus, while Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir constructed an epistemology based on the authority of transmitted traditions (riwayat), Quraish Shihab and Hamka shifted toward a reflective-contextual epistemology that opens space for ecological interpretation as a new form of awareness of the relationship between humanity and nature from the perspective of tawhid.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Qur’anic exegesis has undergone dynamic epistemological development in line with changing times, evolving from the classical approach, predominantly textual-normative and based on transmitted narrations, toward a more contextual, interdisciplinary, and responsive contemporary approach to current issues, particularly the environmental crisis. In classical exegesis, such as that of Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, verses concerning the caliphate (khalifah) and corruption or destruction (fasad) were generally understood within theological-moral and historical frameworks, in which human beings were positioned as creatures entrusted with spiritual responsibility without extensive exploration of ecological dimensions. Contemporary exegetes such as Quraish Shihab and Hamka have broadened the meaning of these verses by relating them to ecological responsibility, environmental balance, and the realities of modern environmental degradation. Consequently, there has been a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric paradigm.

This development confirms that ecological exegesis constitutes an epistemological response to the global environmental crisis that is not merely technical in nature but also rooted in ethical and spiritual issues regarding humanity’s perception of nature. Through kauniyah verses, such as QS. al-Baqarah: 30 and QS. ar-Rum: 41, the Qur’an provides both normative and ethical foundations for humanity to preserve ecological balance as part of its role as khalifah (stewardship). Thus, ecological exegesis not only enriches the intellectual tradition of Qur’anic interpretation but also functions as a new paradigm that integrates religious values, scientific awareness, and moral responsibility to address contemporary environmental crises in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner.

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