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Islamic Perspectives on Environmental Ethics: Balancing Modern Progress with Sustainability

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Abstract

The concept of environmental ethics in Islam is deeply rooted in the principles of stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān). Islamic teachings emphasize the responsibility of humanity to act as stewards of the Earth, safeguarding it for future generations while maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature. The Quran and Hadith provide a framework that guides Muslims towards sustainable living, urging them to respect all forms of life and avoid excessive exploitation of natural resources. Modern progress, characterized by rapid industrialization and technological advancements, poses significant challenges to environmental sustainability. The tension between development and ecological preservation is a pressing issue in contemporary Muslim societies, where the pursuit of economic growth often leads to environmental degradation. However, Islamic environmental ethics offers a balanced approach that advocates for sustainable development, integrating modern progress with the principles of ecological stewardship.

This paper explores the Islamic perspective on environmental ethics, highlighting how the principles of khilāfah, amānah, and mīzān can be applied in the context of modern progress. It examines the Quranic injunctions and Prophetic traditions that emphasize the importance of environmental conservation and the ethical use of resources. The paper also discusses contemporary Islamic scholars' interpretations and how these teachings can be implemented in addressing current environmental challenges. Furthermore, the paper analyses case studies from various Muslim-majority countries, illustrating how Islamic principles are being utilized to promote sustainability and environmental conservation. It argues that the integration of Islamic environmental ethics with modern technological advancements can lead to a more sustainable and balanced approach to development. By embracing these ethical guidelines, Muslim societies can contribute to global environmental efforts while maintaining their religious and cultural identity.

Keywords:

Islamic environmental ethics, stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), balance (mīzān), sustainability, modern progress, Quran, Hadith, ecological stewardship, sustainable development, environmental conservation, Muslim-majority countries.

Introduction

Environmental ethics in Islam is a profound field that addresses humanity's relationship with the natural world through the lens of religious obligations and moral principles. As the global community faces environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss, the Islamic perspective offers a rich framework for understanding and addressing these issues. This framework is deeply rooted in key Islamic concepts such as stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān), which are central to Islamic

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teachings and are consistently emphasized in both the Quran and Hadith. These principles not only highlight the responsibility of Muslims to protect the environment but also provide guidance on how to harmonize modern progress with ecological sustainability.

The concept of stewardship, or *khilāfah*, is fundamental to Islamic environmental ethics. It posits that humans are not owners of the Earth but are entrusted with its care. This responsibility is explicitly mentioned in the Quran: "It is He who has made you successors (*khalīfah*) upon the earth" (Quran 35:39). This verse establishes the human role as caretakers of the environment, responsible for preserving its resources for future generations. The Quran also warns against corruption and degradation of the Earth, urging humanity to maintain the integrity of the natural world (Quran 7:31). The concept of trust (*amānah*) further reinforces this responsibility, as it is seen as a divine mandate that humans must uphold by using resources judiciously and ensuring that their actions do not lead to harm or wastefulness.

The principle of balance (*mīzān*) is another critical aspect of Islamic environmental ethics. The Quran emphasizes that all creation is in a state of balance, and it is humanity's duty to maintain this equilibrium. The verse "And He raised the heaven and established the balance (*mīzān*), that you not transgress within the balance" (Quran 55:7-8) underscores the importance of preserving the natural order and avoiding excess. This concept of balance extends to all aspects of life, including economic activities, social interactions, and environmental practices, and serves as a guiding principle for sustainable living in the modern world. Islamic teachings also emphasize the interconnectedness of all creation, highlighting that every element of the natural world has intrinsic value and purpose. This perspective is reflected in the Hadith, where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated, "The Earth has been made for me a mosque and a source of purification" (Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 335). This Hadith illustrates the sacredness of the Earth and its role in the spiritual and physical well-being of humanity. It also reinforces the idea that environmental stewardship is an act of worship, and that caring for the environment is integral to fulfilling one's religious duties.

In the context of modern progress, Islamic environmental ethics provides a framework for addressing the environmental impacts of industrialization, technological advancement, and economic growth. The rapid development witnessed in many parts of the Muslim world has brought about significant environmental challenges, including pollution, deforestation, and water scarcity. These issues are often exacerbated by the pursuit of economic growth without adequate consideration for environmental sustainability. However, the Islamic ethical framework advocates for a balanced approach that harmonizes development with environmental preservation. The Quranic principle of avoiding wastefulness, as highlighted in the verse "Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils" (Quran 17:27), serves as a reminder that unsustainable practices are not only harmful but also contrary to Islamic teachings. Contemporary Islamic scholars have expanded on these traditional teachings to address modern environmental issues. For instance, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a prominent Islamic philosopher, has argued that the environmental crisis is a result of humanity's disconnection from the divine and the natural order. He advocates for a return to traditional

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Islamic values and the recognition of nature's sacredness as a solution to ecological degradation (Nasr, 1996). Similarly, Fazlun Khalid, a leading Islamic environmentalist, emphasizes the role of Islamic teachings in promoting environmental sustainability and calls for the revival of Islamic environmental ethics to address contemporary challenges (Khalid, 2002).

The practical application of Islamic environmental ethics can be observed in various initiatives across the Muslim world. In Indonesia, for example, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) has been instrumental in promoting sustainable practices rooted in Islamic teachings. These initiatives include tree-planting campaigns, conservation projects, and educational programs aimed at raising awareness about environmental issues from an Islamic perspective (Osman, 2014). Similarly, in the Middle East, the "Green Mosque" initiative in the United Arab Emirates seeks to reduce the environmental impact of mosques through energy efficiency measures, water conservation, and the use of sustainable materials (Ahmed, 2017).

Islamic finance is also playing a significant role in promoting environmental sustainability. The concept of "Green Sukuk," or Islamic bonds issued to finance environmentally sustainable projects, is gaining traction in several Muslim-majority countries. These financial instruments align with the ethical principles of Islam by promoting investments that contribute to environmental sustainability and social well-being (Elasrag, 2015). Such initiatives demonstrate the potential for Islamic environmental ethics to guide not only individual behavior but also institutional practices and policy-making. Moreover, the integration of Islamic environmental ethics into educational curricula is becoming increasingly important. Islamic schools and universities are incorporating environmental studies into their programs, emphasizing the importance of environmental stewardship as part of Islamic education. This approach aims to instill a sense of responsibility towards the environment in the younger generation, encouraging them to adopt sustainable practices in their personal and professional lives (Hussain, 2013).

The global Islamic community is also contributing to international environmental efforts. Organizations such as the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Muslim World League have been active in promoting environmental awareness and sustainability through conferences, publications, and collaborative projects with international organizations (Saniotis, 2012). These efforts highlight the potential of Islamic environmental ethics to contribute to global sustainability initiatives and to offer a unique perspective on the relationship between faith and environmental stewardship. The Islamic perspective on environmental ethics offers a comprehensive and holistic framework for addressing the environmental challenges of the modern world. The principles of stewardship (*khilāfah*), trust (*amānah*), and balance (*mīzān*) provide a moral and ethical foundation for sustainable living, emphasizing the responsibility of humanity to protect and preserve the environment. By drawing on these teachings, Muslim societies can navigate the complexities of modern progress while upholding their religious obligations to care for the Earth. As the world continues to face unprecedented environmental challenges, the

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integration of Islamic environmental ethics into global efforts for sustainability can contribute to a more just and equitable future for all.

Literature Review

The discourse on Islamic environmental ethics has expanded significantly in recent years, drawing attention to the rich ethical framework that Islam provides for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Nasr (1996) argues that the environmental crisis is rooted in a fundamental disconnection from the sacredness of nature, advocating for a spiritual and metaphysical approach to environmental ethics within the Islamic tradition. Khalid (2002) similarly emphasizes the role of Islamic teachings in promoting environmental stewardship, suggesting that a revival of these principles could address the ecological crises facing Muslim societies today. In this context, the principle of stewardship (*khilāfah*) has been a focal point of discussion, with scholars like Khan and Siddiqui (2017) highlighting its relevance in promoting sustainable practices in the modern world. They argue that *khilāfah*, as outlined in the Quran, places humanity in a position of responsibility over the Earth, urging Muslims to act as guardians of the environment.

Furthermore, the concept of trust (*amānah*) has been explored by scholars such as Osman (2014), who asserts that it encompasses a divine mandate to use natural resources judiciously and avoid exploitation. Bakar (2013) adds that this trust is not only a religious duty but also a moral obligation that extends to all aspects of life, including economic and social practices. The principle of balance (*mīzān*) has also received considerable attention, with Saniotis (2012) noting its critical role in maintaining ecological harmony and preventing environmental degradation. This concept is echoed by Ziauddin (2011), who contends that maintaining balance in the natural world is essential for ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems.

Recent studies have also focused on the practical applications of Islamic environmental ethics. Hussain (2013) and Elasrag (2015) have explored the integration of these principles into educational curricula and financial practices, respectively. The emergence of initiatives such as the "Green Mosque" (Ahmed, 2017) and the development of Green Sukuk (Usmani, 2019) demonstrate the growing recognition of Islamic environmental ethics in addressing contemporary ecological challenges. These works collectively highlight the potential of Islamic teachings to contribute to global sustainability efforts and provide a robust ethical framework for environmental stewardship.

Research Questions

- How do the concepts of stewardship (*khilāfah*), trust (*amānah*), and balance (*mīzān*) in Islamic teachings influence environmental ethics in Muslim-majority societies?
- What role does Islamic environmental ethics play in shaping sustainable development practices in the context of rapid industrialization and technological advancement?
- How are contemporary Islamic scholars interpreting traditional Islamic teachings to address modern environmental challenges such as climate change and resource depletion?

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Research Problem

The integration of Islamic environmental ethics into modern sustainability practices presents a significant challenge and opportunity for Muslim-majority societies. As these societies experience rapid industrialization and technological advancement, the traditional Islamic principles of stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān) must be examined in the context of contemporary environmental challenges. Despite the rich ethical framework provided by Islamic teachings, there is often a gap between these principles and their practical application in addressing issues such as climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation. This research problem centers on understanding how Islamic environmental ethics can be effectively applied to modern development practices, ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of environmental sustainability. Additionally, there is a need to explore how contemporary Islamic scholars are interpreting and adapting these traditional teachings to provide solutions for current environmental crises. The research aims to address the following questions: How do Islamic principles influence environmental ethics in practice? What role do these ethics play in shaping sustainable development amidst modern challenges? And how are these principles being adapted to address contemporary environmental issues? By addressing these questions, the research seeks to bridge the gap between Islamic ethical teachings and their practical application, contributing to a more sustainable and balanced approach to development in the Muslim world.

Significance of Research

This research is significant as it bridges traditional Islamic environmental ethics with contemporary sustainability practices, offering a framework for integrating religious principles into modern development. By examining how stewardship, trust, and balance can be applied to current environmental challenges, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners in Muslim-majority societies. It also contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable development by highlighting the relevance of religious ethics in addressing global ecological issues. Ultimately, the research aims to promote a more harmonious approach to development that aligns with both ethical values and environmental sustainability.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to explore and analyze how Islamic environmental ethics can be effectively integrated into modern sustainability practices within Muslim-majority societies. This study aims to investigate the influence of core Islamic principles—stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān)—on contemporary environmental ethics and practices, particularly in the context of rapid industrialization and technological advancement. By examining how these principles shape attitudes towards resource management and environmental conservation, the research seeks to assess their role in guiding sustainable development efforts. Additionally, the study aims to evaluate how contemporary Islamic scholars are adapting traditional teachings to address modern environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation. This includes analyzing

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successful examples of integrating Islamic environmental ethics into policy, education, and finance, such as the implementation of Green Sukuk and eco-friendly initiatives. Ultimately, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations for leveraging Islamic principles to promote sustainability, thereby contributing to a more balanced approach to development that aligns with Islamic values while addressing global environmental concerns.

Research Methodology

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore Islamic environmental ethics and its integration into modern sustainability practices. The study will combine qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyze data from diverse sources. Qualitative methods will include a review of primary Islamic texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, to identify and interpret core ethical principles related to environmental stewardship. This will be supplemented by a literature review of contemporary scholarly interpretations and case studies on the application of Islamic environmental ethics in practice. Interviews with Islamic scholars, environmental activists, and policymakers will provide deeper insights into how these principles are being adapted and applied in modern contexts. Quantitative methods will involve surveys distributed to practitioners and stakeholders in Muslim-majority countries to assess the current impact of Islamic environmental ethics on sustainable development practices. Data will be analysed to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities in the application of these principles. Case studies of successful initiatives, such as Green Sukuk and eco-friendly projects, will be examined to highlight practical examples of integrating Islamic ethics into environmental policies and practices. This mixed-methods approach will provide a robust understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic environmental ethics, offering actionable recommendations for enhancing sustainability in line with Islamic values.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis

The integration of Islamic environmental ethics into modern sustainability practices reflects a nuanced and evolving understanding of how religious principles can address contemporary ecological challenges. This analysis synthesizes data from various sources, including scholarly literature, case studies, and practical initiatives, to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of these ethical frameworks in promoting environmental sustainability.

The Islamic principles of stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān) form the cornerstone of Islamic environmental ethics. These principles are deeply embedded in Islamic teachings and offer a robust framework for addressing environmental issues. Stewardship (khilāfah) posits that humans are caretakers rather than owners of the Earth, a concept explicitly mentioned in the Quran (Quran 35:39). Trust (amānah) emphasizes the divine mandate to use natural resources responsibly (Osman, 2014), while balance (mīzān) stresses the importance of maintaining ecological harmony (Quran 55:7-8) and avoiding excess (Sanjotis, 2012). Recent studies and practical initiatives highlight how Islamic environmental ethics are being applied in various contexts. For instance, the "Green Mosque"

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initiative in the United Arab Emirates represents a significant effort to align Islamic practices with environmental sustainability. This initiative focuses on implementing energy efficiency measures, water conservation, and sustainable materials in mosque construction (Ahmed, 2017). Such projects demonstrate the potential of Islamic principles to guide practical environmental actions, contributing to reduced ecological footprints.

In Indonesia, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) has been instrumental in promoting sustainable practices rooted in Islamic teachings. IFEES's initiatives include tree-planting campaigns, conservation projects, and educational programs designed to raise awareness about environmental issues from an Islamic perspective (Osman, 2014). These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the role of Islamic ethics in addressing local environmental challenges. The development of Green Sukuk, or Islamic bonds issued to finance environmentally sustainable projects, illustrates how Islamic financial instruments are being adapted to promote sustainability. Green Sukuk align with Islamic ethical principles by supporting investments that contribute to environmental and social well-being (Elasrag, 2015). This financial innovation demonstrates the integration of Islamic environmental ethics into broader economic practices, offering a model for aligning financial growth with ecological sustainability. The integration of Islamic environmental ethics into educational curricula is another significant development. Islamic schools and universities are incorporating environmental studies into their programs, emphasizing the importance of stewardship and sustainability as part of Islamic education (Hussain, 2013). This approach aims to instill a sense of responsibility towards the environment in the younger generation, encouraging sustainable practices in their personal and professional lives. Theoretical contributions from scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fazlun Khalid provide valuable insights into the application of Islamic environmental ethics. Nasr (1996) argues that the environmental crisis is a result of humanity's disconnection from the divine and the natural order, advocating for a return to traditional Islamic values as a solution. Khalid (2002) emphasizes the role of Islamic teachings in promoting environmental stewardship and calls for a revival of these principles to address contemporary challenges. These perspectives highlight the relevance of Islamic ethics in providing solutions to modern ecological issues. Comparing Islamic environmental ethics with other major religious frameworks reveals both commonalities and differences. While many religions emphasize the sacredness of nature and the responsibility of humans to protect it, Islamic teachings offer a unique perspective rooted in specific principles such as *khilāfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān*. This comparative analysis underscores the distinctive contributions of Islamic ethics to global sustainability efforts and highlights the potential for interfaith collaboration in addressing environmental challenges.

One of the key challenges in applying Islamic environmental ethics is the integration of these principles into policy and practice. Despite the theoretical framework provided by Islamic teachings, there is often a gap between these principles and their practical application in addressing environmental issues. Bridging this gap requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and practitioners to translate ethical principles into actionable policies and practices. The rapid industrialization and technological advancement in many

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Muslim-majority countries pose significant challenges for balancing development with environmental sustainability. The pursuit of economic growth without adequate consideration for ecological impacts can lead to environmental degradation. Islamic environmental ethics advocate for a balanced approach, but implementing this balance in practice requires addressing the complexities of modern development and economic pressures. The potential of Islamic finance to promote environmental sustainability through instruments like Green Sukuk is significant. However, expanding the role of Islamic finance in supporting sustainable projects requires further development and regulatory support. Ensuring that financial practices align with ethical principles while contributing to environmental goals is a key area for future research and policy development. The integration of environmental ethics into educational curricula is a promising development, but its impact depends on the extent to which these teachings influence students' attitudes and behaviors. Ongoing evaluation of educational programs and their effectiveness in promoting sustainable practices is essential for maximizing their impact. The data analysis reveals that Islamic environmental ethics offer a comprehensive and actionable framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. The principles of stewardship, trust, and balance provide valuable guidance for promoting sustainability and harmonizing modern progress with ecological preservation. However, challenges remain in integrating these principles into policy and practice, balancing development with sustainability, and expanding the role of Islamic finance. Addressing these challenges requires continued research, policy innovation, and practical initiatives to fully realize the potential of Islamic environmental ethics in contributing to global sustainability efforts.

Finding / Conclusion

The findings of this research underscore the profound influence of Islamic environmental ethics on addressing contemporary ecological challenges. The core principles of stewardship (khilāfah), trust (amānah), and balance (mīzān) offer a comprehensive ethical framework for understanding and responding to environmental issues within the context of modern development.

The concept of stewardship, which emphasizes humanity's role as caretakers rather than owners of the Earth, plays a pivotal role in shaping environmental ethics in Islam. This principle, as outlined in the Quran (35:39), establishes a moral obligation for Muslims to protect and preserve natural resources for future generations. This responsibility is reinforced by the Quranic directive against corruption and wastefulness (Quran 7:31), which serves as a foundational guideline for sustainable practices. The practical application of khilāfah is evident in initiatives such as the Green Mosque project in the UAE and tree-planting campaigns by the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) in Indonesia. These examples illustrate how Islamic teachings are being translated into actionable environmental practices that align with the ethical framework provided by Islamic principles. Trust (amānah), as a divine mandate, further emphasizes the need for responsible resource management. This concept extends beyond mere conservation to encompass a

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broader ethical obligation to avoid exploitation and harm. The principle of balance (*mīzān*), which stresses the importance of maintaining ecological harmony and preventing excess, is equally significant. The Quranic emphasis on balance (Quran 55:7-8) highlights the interconnectedness of all creation and the need to maintain this equilibrium in all aspects of life. This principle guides sustainable living practices, influencing both economic activities and social interactions to ensure environmental sustainability.

Contemporary interpretations by Islamic scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of how these principles can address modern environmental challenges. Scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Fazlun Khalid argue that the environmental crisis stems from a disconnection from the divine and natural order. They advocate for a return to traditional Islamic values to remedy ecological degradation. This perspective aligns with the broader goal of integrating Islamic ethics into contemporary environmental discourse, offering solutions rooted in religious teachings.

The role of Islamic finance, particularly through instruments like Green Sukuk, demonstrates how Islamic principles can influence economic practices to support environmental sustainability. Green Sukuk, by financing eco-friendly projects, align with Islamic ethical principles and contribute to broader sustainability goals. This financial innovation reflects the growing recognition of the need to harmonize economic growth with environmental stewardship. Educational initiatives further illustrate the practical application of Islamic environmental ethics. The incorporation of environmental studies into Islamic curricula aims to instill a sense of responsibility toward the environment in younger generations. This educational approach is crucial for fostering long-term sustainability and ensuring that future leaders are equipped with the ethical and practical knowledge needed to address environmental challenges. Despite these positive developments, challenges remain in fully integrating Islamic environmental ethics into policy and practice. The rapid pace of industrialization and technological advancement in many Muslim-majority countries often leads to environmental degradation that contradicts Islamic teachings on balance and stewardship. Bridging the gap between ethical principles and practical implementation requires ongoing efforts from policymakers, educators, and practitioners to translate these principles into effective environmental policies and practices.

In conclusion, the integration of Islamic environmental ethics into modern sustainability practices offers a valuable framework for addressing global ecological issues. The principles of *khilāfah*, *amānah*, and *mīzān* provide a moral foundation for promoting environmental stewardship and balancing development with sustainability. Practical examples and scholarly interpretations highlight the relevance of these principles in contemporary contexts. However, addressing the challenges of integrating these ethics into policy and practice is essential for maximizing their impact. By continuing to explore and apply Islamic environmental ethics, Muslim-majority societies can contribute to global sustainability efforts and foster a more balanced approach to development that aligns with religious values.

Futuristic approach

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A futuristic approach to integrating Islamic environmental ethics into sustainability practices involves leveraging technological innovations and policy frameworks to enhance ecological stewardship while respecting Islamic principles. This includes harnessing advancements in green technology, such as renewable energy and waste management systems, to align with the Islamic concept of balance (mīzān) and stewardship (khilāfah). Policies and financial instruments like Green Sukuk can be expanded to support large-scale eco-friendly projects, integrating Islamic finance with sustainable development goals. Additionally, incorporating environmental ethics into digital education platforms and global environmental initiatives can foster a deeper commitment to sustainability among future generations, ensuring that Islamic principles continue to guide effective and ethical responses to emerging environmental challenges.

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