



Islamic Eco-Theology and Hadith on Justice: A Theological Critique of Colonialism and Environmental-Economic Exploitation in Africa

Rahman

Study Program of Da'wah Management, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication
Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6418-2347>
Corresponding author : rahman@uin-suska.ac.id

Ilyas

Postgraduate Program, Islamic Family Law Study Program
Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6171-4299>
ilyas.husti@uin-suska.ac.id

Rika Dwi Ayu Parmitasari

Department of Management, Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2714-9123>
rparmitasari@uin-alauddin.ac.id

Tasbih

Department of Islamic Guidance and Counseling, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6131-5493>
tasbih.tasbih@uin-alauddin.ac.id

Ficha Melina

Study Program Islamic Banking, Faculty of Islamic Religion
Universitas Islam Riau, Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2619-4597>
fichamelina@fis.uir.ac.id

Abid Nurhuda

Doctoral Program in Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir
Universitas Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Quran, Jakarta Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5176-1665>
abidnurhuda123@gmail.com

Muhammad Reza Fadil

Doctoral Program in Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir
Universitas Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Quran, Jakarta Indonesia
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8065-9950>
mrezafadil@iainlangsa.ac.id



<https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.231>

Abstract

Colonialism in Africa has entrenched the exploitation of natural resources, a legacy that persists today through multinational corporations, foreign debt, and neoliberal policies. The Democratic Republic of Congo, with the world's largest cobalt and copper reserves yet over 60% of its population living in extreme poverty, exemplifies this enduring global inequality. In



this context, the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, which stress distributive justice, prohibition of monopoly, and ecological stewardship, gain critical relevance. This study explores the normative contribution of hadith to economic and environmental justice in postcolonial Africa. Using a qualitative descriptive method with historical-critical and theological-normative approaches, it integrates hadith textual analysis with the socio-economic realities of African societies. Findings reveal three main points: *first*, hadiths on water, land, and tree planting articulate principles of conservation and equitable resource distribution; *second*, Islamic ecotheology frames environmental degradation as a violation of human responsibility as God's *khalifah* (steward); *third*, development models grounded in hadith values offer alternatives to exploitative global capitalism. The study concludes that revitalizing hadith is vital not only for theological discourse but also for guiding ethical and structural systems, aiming to build a more just and sustainable global order for African societies still burdened by colonial legacies.

Keywords: Colonialism, Africa, hadith, economic justice, environment, ecotheology.

Introduction

Colonialism in Africa represents one of the darkest chapters in modern human history, in which various European imperial powers—such as Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany—competed to exploit the continent's natural resources and its people (Nunn, 2007). The process of colonization, which intensified from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, brought systemic impacts on the social, economic, and environmental structures of African societies (Boahen, 2008). One of the most destructive aspects was the large-scale exploitation of natural resources without regard for economic justice or ecological balance (Tosam, 2019).

Social realities demonstrate that the impact of colonialism on African societies remains deeply felt to this day. Countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Angola continue to struggle with economic inequality, conflicts over natural resource control, and environmental degradation inherited from exploitative colonial practices (Parashar and Schulz, 2021). According to data, more than 40% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa lives below the extreme poverty line, despite the region's abundance of mineral reserves, petroleum, and other biological resources. This irony reflects deeply entrenched structural inequalities resulting from colonial systems that diverted Africa's natural wealth beyond the continent.

Colonial exploitation by Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Britain, Germany and Belgium, has had detrimental effects on Africa's economic and environmental structures. In his seminal work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney argues that colonialism not only drained Africa's natural wealth but also dismantled local economic systems, forcing production orientations that served solely colonial interests (Rodney, 2018). A similar view is expressed by Walter Dignolo in his concept of "epistemic disobedience," arguing that colonialism also deprived local communities of their intellectual and ecological sovereignty (Dignolo, 2011). From an Islamic perspective, the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH emphasize the prohibition of injustice and highlight the importance of preserving the balance of nature (*mīzān*). One such hadith states:

.."Indeed, the world is green and beautiful, and indeed Allah has appointed you as stewards within it, so He will see how you act.(Muslim, No. 2744)

Several previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of this topic in contemporary contexts. Research by Ndlovu-Gatsheni discusses how the colonial legacy continues to shape the political-economic structures in Africa, particularly in the control of natural resources by multinational corporations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This research highlights the failure of the neoliberal system in addressing inequalities inherited from colonialism. Furthermore, a study by Colin Bundy demonstrates that economic disparities in Africa cannot be separated from the historical exploitation of colonialism and that modern legal and bureaucratic systems continue to reflect earlier colonial interests (Bundy, 2020). Meanwhile, research by Leonard emphasizes



the importance of a legal perspective grounded in environmental and social justice in addressing the ecological crises left behind by mining companies in Africa (Leonard, 2024).

This study identifies a significant gap in research on the impact of colonialism on the exploitation of natural resources in Africa, namely the lack of integration of normative Islamic perspectives, particularly the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Existing studies are generally limited to postcolonial economic-political, legal, and secular approaches. However, Islam, which is widely embraced on the continent, offers an alternative ethical and spiritual framework. Therefore, this study seeks to answer how colonialism shaped the dynamics of resource extraction, what the socio-economic-environmental consequences were, and to what extent the hadith can provide an ethical framework for interpreting this reality.

This study focuses on integrating historical-colonial analysis with hadith values regarding distributive justice (*al-ʿadl*), stewardship in environmental management (*amānah*), and the prohibition of corruption (*fasād*) and injustice (*ẓulm*). This approach is important for bridging the dark history of colonialism with Islamic teachings that uphold universal justice. In the pluralistic context of Africa, especially in the Sub-Saharan region with its large Muslim population, exploring the ethical potential of hadith is a strategic effort to build a collective consciousness rooted in spirituality, in order to respond to the legacy of exploitative economic paradigms.

Furthermore, this research is expected to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarly discourse, particularly in the fields of hadith studies, African studies, and environmental ethics. The integration of classical Islamic sources into contemporary discussions on postcolonialism and ecological justice represents an epistemological innovation that combines normative Islamic knowledge with historical and structural realities. Thus, hadith are not merely read as spiritual texts but also serve as a source of values that can guide socially, economically, and ecologically just actions. In this interdisciplinary framework, the Qurʾan also occupies a central position as a primary ethical and theological foundation that articulates core principles such as *khilāfah* (stewardship), *amānah* (trust), *mīzān* (balance), and *fasād* (ecological corruption), which are crucial for reading environmental justice as part of religious responsibility. When situated within similar postcolonial and ecological debates, Qurʾanic discourse not only strengthens the normative basis of Islamic environmental ethics, but also provides a macro-vision of justice that can be dialogued with historical experiences of domination, unequal resource extraction, and structural ecological violence.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, this study aims to understand complex social and historical phenomena and how Islamic values, particularly hadith, can provide an ethical perspective on these issues. The approach used combines historical-critical and theological-normative methods. The historical-critical approach is applied to examine the dynamics of colonialism and its impact on the environment and economic structures of African societies, while the theological-normative approach is used to explore the relevance of Islamic teachings through hadith, particularly concerning social justice, wealth distribution, and environmental preservation.

This study uses two sources of data: primary data in the form of hadiths from the books Sahih al-Bukhari, Muslim, and others on economic and environmental justice; and secondary data in the form of literature on African colonialism, academic articles, and NGO reports. The analysis techniques applied are content analysis of hadith texts to identify Islamic normative values, and contextual analysis of the African colonial situation. Thus, this study aims to critique colonial exploitation practices through an Islamic ethical perspective, and to show how the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad can serve as a moral foundation for the struggle for global ecological and economic justice. Hadith are central because they translate Qurʾanic ethical



ideals into concrete prophetic practices that address power, wealth, and social harm in lived realities. Through the Prophet's responses to injustice, resource control, and public rights, hadith provide operational moral guidance for resisting exploitation. They also supply interpretive authority for applying Islamic ethics to specific postcolonial and ecological contexts.

To ensure that the reading of hadith does not stop at the literal meaning, this study uses an ethical-normative hermeneutic framework based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which is interpreting hadith by emphasising the moral objectives and public interests that the Prophet's teachings seek to realise. Operationally, the steps include: (1) its editorial structure to capture its universal message; (2) identifying core values such as justice ('adl), prohibition of *ẓulm*, trustworthiness, protection of public rights, and ecological balance; (3) testing the relevance of these values to contemporary realities through structural analysis (colonialism, extractivism, global inequality); and (4) formulating practical implications as social ethics that favour the protection of life, property, the environment, and human dignity, so that hadith can serve as a normative guide for social and ecological transformation.

Result and Discussion

Colonialism, Economic Injustice, and Natural Resource Exploitation in Africa

European colonialism in Africa has left profound marks on the continent's social, political, and economic structures. The colonial legacy is not limited to geographical borders or modern administrative systems; it also involved the establishment of an extractive economic system that systematically deprived local communities of their autonomy. This system laid the foundation for structural inequalities that persist to this day. Colonialism is not merely a historical event but a historical process that continues to shape global dynamics, particularly in the relationships between Global North and Global South countries.

Walter Rodney, in his work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, asserts that colonial exploitation destroyed Africa's endogenous development. He argues that European development and African underdevelopment are two interrelated and mutually reinforcing phenomena. The colonial system destroyed autonomous local economic structures, replacing them with a system of production designed to meet the needs of European industry. Agricultural land was converted into commercial plantations for export crops such as cotton and rubber, which deprived communities of control over their land and forced them into cheap labor. Data shows that by the early 20th century, about 60% of fertile land in East Africa was controlled by colonial governments and leased to European capitalists (Clarence-Smith, 1985; Rodney, 2018).

Mahmood Mamdani deepens this critique by showing that colonialism also shaped repressive power structures. In *Citizen and Subject*, he explains that the colonial system created a duality of government: modern authorities in urban areas and politicized traditional authorities in rural areas. Village heads became extensions of the colonial administration, controlling village life, including taxation and forced labor (Mamdani, 1996). As a result, local communities lost control over resources and political processes.

Acemoglu and Robinson's research shows that colonial extractive institutions have long-term effects, hindering innovation because they do not guarantee ownership. Postcolonial elites often continue the old power structures. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a prime example: the colonial legacy continues through the exploitation of resources by foreign companies. After independence, major mines such as Tenke Fungurume remained controlled by multinational corporations, while local state-owned companies held only minority shares with no real control. The benefits to local communities remained minimal, reflecting the continuation of postcolonial exploitation (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; IMF, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2016).



Although the DRC is rich in cobalt, copper, and coltan, the majority of the population lives in extreme poverty (around 62.3% in 2022). Mineral extraction drives macroeconomic growth, but does not reduce poverty proportionally, highlighting the gap between large exports and low welfare (Bank, 2022). State revenues from the mining sector are vulnerable to price fluctuations, tax avoidance, and limited administrative capacity. The IMF notes that about one-third of domestic revenues come from mining, but this dependence allows profits to be transferred abroad without adequate social redistribution (International Monetary Fund. African Dept., 2024).

Transparency International studies show that corporate payments to governments are often opaque through “parafiscal” practices and complex agreements, hindering accountability. Investigations have uncovered massive corruption at Gécamines and a cross-border coltan smuggling network that enriches foreign middlemen and rebel groups. This evidence reinforces the “resource curse” thesis: foreign corporate control, monopolistic contracts, corruption, and weak state oversight lead to the accumulation of wealth far from local communities (Levinson et al., 2025; Toroskainen et al., 2020).

This structural inequality is reflected in global data. Of the 20 countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI), 17 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The richest 10% of Africa's population controls more than 50% of total wealth, while millions of people have no access to education, health care, or decent work (Ahmed et al., 2022). The structure of international trade also continues to follow colonial patterns: around 80% of Africa's exports in 2022 were raw materials such as crude oil and metal ores, while value-added products were imported. This dependence makes African economies highly vulnerable to global commodity price fluctuations (UNCTAD, 2023).

In the context of Islam, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW on ownership and justice is highly relevant in criticizing the injustice of this structure. The hadith, which prohibits the seizure of another person's land, even if it is only the size of a palm, emphasizes that such an act is oppression (HR. Bukhari, no. 2452; Muslim, no. 1610) Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani interprets the punishment of “being buried in seven layers of earth” as a metaphor for the heavy moral and social responsibility of rights deprivation (Al-Asqalani, 1959). In the contemporary context, land dispossession occurs not only between individuals but also through political and economic systems, including colonialism and modern-state capitalism.

Muhammad Abu Zahrah, within the framework of Islamic economics, emphasizes that ownership distribution must be equitable and should not be monopolized by a single party, as this contradicts the *maqasid al-shariah*, particularly the protection of wealth (*hifz al-mal*) (Zahrah, 2003). Colonial practices that seized local land and exploited it for the benefit of a small elite of colonizers constitute a form of structural injustice, obscuring the Islamic principles of justice and public welfare (*maslahah*). A similar view was expressed by Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in *Iqtisaduna*, emphasizing that the system of ownership must be founded on social justice and should not create economic disparities that deprive communities of their rights. Thus, Islam rejects all forms of systems that institutionalize economic oppression, including colonialism, as they contradict the principles of *tawhid* and justice, which serve as the ethical foundation of Islamic social order (Ramadan, 2009).

Environmental Exploitation in Africa: An Ecotheological Approach in Hadith

Environmental exploitation in Africa reflects a tangible legacy of colonialism, now perpetuated by multinational corporations. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the extraction of cobalt and copper by global companies has caused severe ecological damage, including river pollution from heavy metal waste and large-scale deforestation (Abulu, 2024). A study by Amnesty International revealed that children are involved in illegal mining activities, which not only harm human well-being but also degrade the surrounding ecosystems (Amnesty International, 2016). In Nigeria, pollution of the Niger Delta by oil companies such as Shell has led to the destruction of coastal habitats, a decline in water quality, and adverse impacts on public health. In Nigeria, pollution in the Niger Delta caused by oil companies such as Shell



has resulted in the destruction of coastal habitats, deterioration of water quality, and negative impacts on public health (UNEP, 2011).

Within the perspective of Islamic ecotheology, the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH offers a solid theological basis for environmental conservation. The notion of humans as *khilāfah* (guardians) on earth signifies not only a spiritual duty, but also an ecological obligation to protect and sustain God's creation. The Prophet said ;

“...Indeed, this world is green and delightful, and Allah has made you vicegerents upon it to see how you will act. So, beware of the world and beware of the trial of women, for the first trial of the Children of Israel was through women. (Muslim, No. 2742)

This hadith carries two essential messages: the ecological responsibility of humankind as *khilāfah* and the warning against worldly temptations and the trial of women. In his *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, Imam al-Nawawi explains that the phrase “green and delightful” refers to the attractiveness of worldly life, which can distract humans from their duties as servants of Allah and as stewards (*khilāfah*). The meaning of *khilāfah* here is not that of an absolute ruler, but rather a guardian and caretaker of the earth, entrusted with responsibility and accountability (al-Nawawi, 1994).

The ecological message in this hadith is very clear: humans are given the authority to maintain the balance of creation, not to exploit it. From the perspective of Islamic eco-theology, the principle of *mīzān* (balance) affirms humanity's responsibility to maintain ecological harmony. This is in line with the commandment in Surah al-Raḥmān (55:7–8) which prohibits transgressing boundaries and disturbing the harmony of creation.

In a global context, uncontrolled economic expansion and a culture of greed have accelerated environmental degradation. Human activities have increased the Earth's temperature by approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, triggering more frequent natural disasters, rising sea levels, and the threat of food and water crises (IPCC, 2022). This condition contradicts *mīzān*. Human ecological footprints have even exceeded 1.6 times the Earth's regeneration capacity, which means that we consume resources faster than nature can renew itself (World Wildlife Fund, 2020). The Prophet's warning to be cautious of the world can be interpreted as a call to build ecological awareness, so as not to be trapped in economic greed that destroys the sustainability of life. This hadith is particularly relevant to the development of modern environmental ethics that balance material needs, moral values, and ecosystem preservation.

Ibrahim Özdemir asserts that this hadith must be understood within the framework of Islamic cosmic ethics, in which every action towards nature is part of spiritual and social responsibility (Özdemir, 2003). Therefore, economic activities that damage the environment are not only a violation of policy, but also a betrayal of the mandate of the caliphate.

Islamic eco-theology rejects the exploitation of nature that disregards *mīzān* and *ʿadl* (justice). When multinational corporations pursue profits by destroying the environment and ignoring the rights of local communities, they violate not only human rights but also the basic principles of *amānah* and ecological responsibility in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said, ". Do not waste water, even if you are by a flowing river (HR.Ibn Mājah, no. 425), is not only a teaching of efficiency, but also instills awareness that natural resources are an *amānah* (trust) that must be preserved, even in times of abundance (Al-Munawi, 1994). This principle demonstrates that Islam instills an ethic of conservation even in times of abundance—an ethic that, in modern reality, is highly relevant in addressing the large-scale exploitation of natural resources. Fazlun Khalid asserts that the waste of resources is a form of spiritual betrayal that contradicts *tawḥīd* (Khalid, 2010).

Oil exploitation by multinational companies in the Niger Delta has severely polluted the land and water, destroying the livelihoods of fishermen. Reports by UNEP and research by Linden & Pålsson (2013) confirm hydrocarbon and heavy metal contamination far exceeding safe limits, threatening food security and public health (Lindén & Pålsson, 2013; UNEP, 2011). The



ongoing oil spills clearly contradict Islamic principles of preserving nature (*ḥifẓ al-makhlūqāt*) and responsibility as stewards (*amānah*). The awareness to continue doing good for the environment is emphasized in the hadith: "...If the Day of Judgment is near and one of you has a date seed in his hand, then plant it (Aḥmad, No. 12902). This command emphasizes the importance of righteous deeds until the end of time, as a form of sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*) and fulfillment of the *amānah* towards the earth, where the effort itself is valued, not just the results (al-Hanbali, 1999). From an eco-theological point of view, Islam does not recognize the word "too late" in caring for the environment. Planting trees, even at the end of time, is still an act of worship. Fazlun Khalid calls this ecological spiritual optimism (Khalid, 2010).

This theological value is supported by empirical evidence. The IPCC states that reforestation and afforestation are among the most effective options for carbon sequestration if planned properly, although they must still be accompanied by reductions in fossil fuel emissions (Shukla et al., 2022). The latest mapping shows that hundreds of millions of hectares of lava fields have the potential to be sustainably reforested to absorb billions of tons of CO₂ per year (Carrington, 2025). Thus, this hadith encourages Muslims not to despair in the face of climate change. Planting based on scientific planning, social justice, and sustainability is a form of sustainable worship that reflects the care of creation (*khalq*) and the fulfillment of *amānah* for future generations (Muhammad, 2023).

Revitalizing the Spirit of Hadith as a Critique of Contemporary Exploitation

Postcolonialism did not mark the end of exploitation; rather, it signaled its transformation into more veiled forms: foreign debt, the dominance of multinational corporations, and neoliberal policies promoting privatization and market liberalization (Harvey, 2006). Countries in Africa and Asia remain structurally dependent on global economic powers. According to Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, neoliberal policies often damage local economies, undermine food sovereignty, and deepen social inequality through the pressures exerted by international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Stiglitz, 2003).

In this context, the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad PBUH offer a transformational framework of values. For instance, the principles of *al-musāwah* (equality), *al-ʿadālah* (justice), and the prohibition of *ribā* (financial exploitation) form the foundation of an Islamic economic system that rejects structural oppression. Contemporary Muslim economist Umer Chapra emphasizes the importance of integrating Islamic values into the global economic system to achieve greater justice. He asserts that development rooted in Islamic ethics must uphold fair distribution of wealth, protection of the vulnerable, and restrictions on exploitative capital accumulation (Chapra, 2008).

...The Muslims are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire. (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, no. 3477; Musnad Aḥmad, no. 2395)

Al-Khaṭṭābī's interpretation of the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, which prohibits the monopolization of water, fire, and pastures, affirms the concept of public ownership (*al-milkiyyah al-ʿāmmah*). This principle is not merely a moral recommendation, but a normative foundation for a just socio-economic system, as well as a fundamental critique of capitalism, which commodifies everything, including the basic elements of life (Al-Khatthabi, 1995). This idea is in line with Tariq Ramadan's call for the revitalization of Islam to be systemic, involving criticism and redesign of global structures that perpetuate inequality, such as the previtalization of natural resources (Sachs & Warner, 1995).

In the global reality, this principle is relevant for analyzing the phenomenon of the "resource curse." The classic study by Sachs and Warner shows that resource-rich countries (such as Nigeria, Angola, and Venezuela) tend to experience economic stagnation, corruption, and deep inequality, especially if natural wealth is not managed with a fair and accountable distribution system (Sachs & Warner, 1995).

Recent research reinforces the finding that weak institutions (non-independent judiciary, low accountability) exacerbate this curse. Without adequate institutional quality, resource revenues actually fuel corruption and waste, and deepen dependency. Case studies in Venezuela and analyses in Sub-Saharan Africa show that weak democracy and public participation capacity can turn the potential blessings of resources into a disaster of inequality (Acheampong et al., 2023; Narh, 2025).

In addition, recent data highlight the exacerbating effects of inequality driven by the combination of weak democracy and natural resource wealth. For example, a study on Sub-Saharan Africa found that natural resources reduced inequality in some regions, such as West and Southern Africa, but increased inequality in East Africa where democratic institutions and citizen participation capacity were weak (Acheampong et al., 2023).

“...In this context, the Prophet’s hadith stating that “*People are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire.*” (HR. Abu Dawud, No. 3477)

This hadith can serve as an ethical and normative foundation for constructing an alternative development model—one that is based on distributive justice and ecological sustainability. This approach is reinforced by contemporary Islamic economic thought, such as that of Muhammad Umer Chapra, who emphasizes that development must avoid *al-takathur* (excessive accumulation) and instead promote fair distribution as part of the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, particularly within the dimensions of *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of wealth) and *ḥifẓ al-bī‘ah* (protection of the environment) (Chapra, 2008).

Studies in Latin America show that the privatization of water and energy by transnational corporations triggers local resistance. The Cochabamba case (1999–2000) confirms this: concessions caused water rates to jump 200–300%, triggering bloody protests until the contract was canceled (Spronk, 2007). The anti-privatization movement was successful when a strong coalition was formed and there was a political opportunity (Lobina et al., 2011). From a political economy perspective, the state often acts as a facilitator of global capitalism rather than a protector of the people (Sprague-Silgado, 2017). In this context, the Prophet’s hadith prohibiting the monopoly of public resources can be read as a theological statement defending the oppressed.

In this context, the Prophet’s hadith prohibiting the monopoly of public resources can be read as a theological statement defending the oppressed. From a secular environmental ethics standpoint—especially traditions that reject religious frameworks in public policy—such a claim may be criticized as “non-neutral,” because it grounds ecological justice in revelation rather than in universal reason. Yet, the substance of the hadith converges with major secular arguments: that essential ecological goods should not be captured by private power, and that the commons must be governed to prevent exclusion, degradation, and inequality. The prophetic principle that people share collective rights over “water, pasture, and fire” can be interpreted as an early moral critique of enclosure and extractivism, aligning with contemporary debates on commons governance and distributive justice (Sya’roni et al., 2025).

Moreover, secular theorists of common-pool resources emphasize that equitable and sustainable environmental governance depends on institutions that protect communal access, accountability, and collective decision-making—rather than leaving vital resources to market monopoly alone (Ostrom, 1990). In this sense, hadith ethics strengthens—not replaces—secular ecological reasoning by providing moral motivation, a language of obligation, and a critique of oppression (*ẓulm*) that resonates with structural environmental injustice. Finally, within plural societies, such religious reasoning can still enter public debate through shared ethical goals (justice, dignity, sustainability), without demanding that all citizens adopt its theological premises.

An important academic critique questions whether a pre-modern legal-ethical text can be directly applied to modern capitalism, where exploitation is mediated by corporate structures, global supply chains, financialization, and state-backed property regimes. Classical hadith such as “Three things cannot be denied: water, pasture, and fire” (HR. Ibnu Majah, No. 2473).

emerge from a socio-economic world shaped by basic subsistence needs, not industrial extractivism. Critics argue that the gap between these contexts risks producing anachronistic moral claims that lack operational precision. Moreover, “monopoly” in modern economies is embedded not only in hoarding (*iḥtikār*) but also in legal privatization, concession contracts, and market liberalization, which cannot be reduced to individual unethical behavior.

However, a maqāṣid-based hermeneutic can respond by treating such hadith as articulating public rights (ḥuqūq ‘ammah) and an anti-domination principle rather than a narrow rule about specific commodities. The prohibition of restricting shared necessities can therefore be extended—by ethical analogy—to contemporary “commons” such as water systems, forests, and mineral wealth, especially when their privatization intensifies harm. This approach aligns with modern theoretical debates on Islamic normativity and modern power, including critiques that the modern state and capitalist governance reorder moral life through impersonal bureaucratic control (Hussin, 2014). Thus, the hadith functions less as a technical economic policy manual, and more as a prophetic moral grammar for resisting ecological dispossession and structural injustice.

Thus, juxtaposing the hadith with empirical studies demonstrates that Islam provides a normative framework that can serve as a foundation for constructing a just and sustainable alternative economic system. The spirit of the hadith is not only relevant in a religious context but can also serve as an ethical and political blueprint for social movements and public policies that prioritize ecological justice and equitable resource distribution. This guidance can be utilized by Muslim activists, environmental NGOs, policymakers, Islamic philanthropic institutions, educators, and community leaders seeking faith-based frameworks for sustainability. It also benefits interdisciplinary scholars and global justice advocates who **require normative ethical resources to strengthen collective action.**

Integrating Hadith Ethics and Ecotheology in Critiquing Colonial-Ecological Injustice

1) Critical Analysis: How Hadith Perspectives Evaluate Colonial Exploitation

In Islamic ethics, the principles of justice (*al-‘adl*) and the prohibition of corruption (*fasād*) form a moral foundation that directly contradicts colonial systems of domination and resource extraction. Hadith literature provides a comprehensive ethical framework for evaluating the historical and ongoing exploitation of Africa’s natural resources, people, and environment. When assessed through Prophetic teachings, colonialism emerges not only as a political and economic crime but also as a profound ecological violation.

First, The hadith affirms that the earth is a trust (amānah). The Prophet said: “This world is sweet and green, and Allah has placed you as guardians over it, to see how you will act” (Muslim, Kitāb al-Dhikr, no. 2742). This concept of stewardship (khilāfah) obliges humans to maintain ecological balance. The practice of European colonialism extracting gold, oil, timber, and fertile soil from Africa for the benefit of the empire is a betrayal of this sacred trust.

Second, the Prophet condemned all forms of oppression. He said: “*Oppression will be darkness on the Day of Resurrection*” (Bukhari, *al-Zūlm*, no. 2447). Colonialism in Africa—with its forced labor, resource extraction, racial domination, and economic impoverishment—fits this definition of *ẓūlm*, creating structural ecological injustice that continues to have an impact (Rodney, 2018).

Third, The Prophet forbade indiscriminate destruction of the environment, rebuked those who cut down trees unnecessarily, and prohibited the killing of animals without reason (Abu Dawud, *al-Jihād*, no. 2614). In contrast, the colonial extractive industry cut down forests, polluted rivers, and depleted minerals, representing *fasād fī al-ard* (destruction on earth). Critically, this *fasād* is not accidental but structurally produced through political-economic regimes that normalize environmental sacrifice zones for imperial profit. It reflects an epistemic violence that reduces nature to commodities, negating ethical stewardship and intergenerational justice.



Therefore, from the standpoint of hadith ethics, colonialism is deeply incompatible with Islamic moral teachings. It violates stewardship, justice, and ecological balance, and thus represents a form of ecological sin. This aligns with African theologians such as Wangari Maathai, who describe colonial exploitation as a system of intertwined social and ecological injustices (Maathai, 2009).

2) Islamic Ecotheology as a Foundation for Ecological Liberation Ethics in Africa

Islamic ecotheology provides a rich theological framework for reinterpreting Africa's historical experience and contemporary challenges through the lens of environmental justice. Its core concepts—*tawhīd* (divine unity), *khilāfah* (stewardship), and *mīzān* (balance)—offer a liberatory ethical vision capable of critiquing both colonial and post-colonial ecological injustices.

First, the principle of *tawhīd* asserts the interconnectedness of all creation under the sovereignty of God. In this view, ecological destruction and human oppression are not separate phenomena but interconnected violations of the unity of creation. As Nasr argues, the ecological crisis is rooted in a spiritual crisis caused by the severing of the human–divine relationship (Nasr, 1996). Restoring African environments therefore requires a theological renewal that reaffirms this holistic interconnectedness.

Second, *khilāfah* underscores that the management of natural resources must occur responsibly and ethically. Colonial regimes imposed extractive economic models focused on exploitation rather than stewardship. Hadith emphasize that humans will be held accountable for any misuse of authority, including environmental mismanagement (Muslim, no. 2742). Ecotheology thus challenges African governments and global corporations to adopt policies that promote ecological sustainability and equitable access to resources.

Third, the concept of *mīzān* reinforces the necessity of maintaining ecological equilibrium. Colonial extraction disrupted ecosystems and contributed to long-term environmental degradation. Contemporary challenges—such as the “resource curse,” deforestation, and mineral exploitation by multinational corporations—continue this legacy (UNEP, 2020). Islamic ecotheology identifies these practices as violations of divine balance and intergenerational justice.

When combined, these principles form what can be described as an Islamic ecological liberation ethic. This ethic, (a) rejects extractive economic systems inherited from colonialism, (b) demands ecological justice for marginalized African communities, (c) promotes restoration of ecosystems and sustainable practices, and, (d) revives Prophetic environmental ethics as a transformative paradigm.

This approach resonates with African environmental movements such as the Green Belt Movement, which emphasize social justice, ecological restoration, and community empowerment (Maathai, 2009). Islamic ecotheology can enrich such movements by grounding ecological activism in spiritual and moral commitments.

Conclusion

Colonialism and natural resource exploitation in Africa represent forms of structural injustice that are clearly contrary to the principles of economic justice and ecological responsibility outlined in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Hadiths such as the prohibition against wasting water, the exhortation to plant even as the Hour approaches, and the prohibition of monopolizing public resources emphasize that Islam views human relations with nature and fellow beings as an integrated ethical and structural unity. These values are not merely moral-spiritual teachings but also provide a normative framework for organizing a just, ecological, and sustainable social system. In the context of today's global crises, revitalizing the understanding of hadith as a guide for social transformation is a necessity rather than a choice.



However, this study is not without limitations. Its conceptual framework still needs to be deepened through interdisciplinary approaches, particularly political economy and decolonial theory. The data sources used are predominantly secondary literature, with limited empirical field studies from Africa that could enrich contextual analysis. Moreover, the results presented are more normative than operational. Nevertheless, the main contribution of this study is the integration of hadith into the discourse of global justice and political ecology, opening space for the reinterpretation of religious texts within a liberation framework. Future research could combine field studies in countries affected by exploitation with thematic tafsir and social justice theory, thereby providing more concrete practical impact for activism and public policy grounded in Islamic values.

This research contributes theoretically by proposing Islamic ecological liberation ethics, a framework that uses prophetic teachings as a moral lens to confront structural domination over humans and nature. In this view, hadith are not limited to personal piety but function as transformative ethical texts promoting liberation from oppression (*zulm*), restoring balance (*mīzān*), and protecting shared life systems (*maṣlahah*). The novelty lies in linking hadith ethics with political ecology, showing that environmental destruction is inseparable from unequal power relations, extractive capitalism, and colonial legacies. Thus, ecological crises are understood as moral-political issues requiring justice-oriented responses. Practically, the study highlights policy implications such as adopting anti-extractive ethics, ensuring transparency in mineral governance, enforcing environmental protection, and guaranteeing community consent. It also emphasizes equitable management of public resources, faith-based ecological restoration programs, legal advocacy against pollution, and the integration of eco-justice literacy in education and religious institutions to support sustainable and just development.

Acknowledgment: The authors, Abid Nurhuda and Muhammad Reza Fadil, would like to express their gratitude to LPDP for the scholarship support and to Universitas Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Qur'an (UPTIQ), Jakarta, Indonesia, for the academic support that made the completion of this research possible.

References

- Abulu, L. (2024, May 14). Impunity and pollution abound in DRC mining along the road to the energy transition. *Conservation News*. <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/05/impunity-and-pollution-abound-in-drc-mining-along-the-road-to-energy-transition/>
- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. Crown Currency.
- Acheampong, A. O., Dzator, J., Abunyewah, M., Erdiaw-Kwasie, M. O., & Opoku, E. E. O. (2023). Sub-Saharan Africa's Tragedy: Resource Curse, Democracy and Income Inequality. *Social Indicators Research*, 168(1), 471–509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-023-03137-2>
- Ahmed, N., Marriott, A., Dabi, N., Lowthers, M., Lawson, M., & Mugehera, L. (2022). *Inequality Kills: The unparalleled action needed to combat unprecedented inequality in the wake of COVID-19*. Oxfam. <https://doi.org/10.21201/2022.8465>
- al-Hanbali, I. R. (1999). *Fath al-Bari Sharh Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal* (Vol. 3). Dar Ibn Kathir.
- al-Nawawi, A. Z. Y. bin S. (1994). *Syarah Shahih Muslim* (Vol. 1). Dar Al-Hadith.
- Al-'Asqalani, I. H. (1959). *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari* (Vol. 4). Dar Al-Ma'rifat.
- Al-Khaththabi. (1995). *Ma'ālim al-Sunan*. Dar Al-Fikr.
- Al-Munawi, A. (1994). *Fayd al-Qadir Sharh al-Jami' al-Saghir* (Vol. 4). Dar Al-Ma'rifat.
- Amnesty International. (2016). *Democratic Republic of Congo: "This is what we die for": Human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo power the global trade in cobalt*.



Amnesty International Publications.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr62/3183/2016/en/>

Bank, W. (2022). *Macro Poverty Outlook for Democratic Republic of Congo* [Text/HTML]. World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099956404262236450>

Boahen, A. A. (2008). *African Perspectives on Colonialism*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bundy, C. (2020). Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: A History. In C. Bundy, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.659>

Carrington, D. (2025, June 11). 'Win-win': New maps reveal best opportunities for global reforestation. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/11/maps-forests-study-environment-wildlife-climate-crisis>

Chapra, M. U. (2008). *The Islamic Vision of Development in the Light of Maqasid Al-Shariah (Occasional Paper)*. International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT).

Clarence-Smith, G. (1985). *The Third Portuguese Empire, 1825-1975: A Study in Economic Imperialism*. Manchester Univ Press.

Harvey, D. (2006). Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 88(2), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00211.x>

Hussin, I. (2014). A Discussion of Wael Hallaq's Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament. *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(2), 461–463. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592714000966>

IMF. (2007). Democratic Republic of the Congo. *International Monetary Fund*. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2007/330/article-A001-en.xml>

International Crisis Group. (2016, August 3). *Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/katanga-tensions-drcs-mineral-heartland>

International Monetary Fund. African Dept. (2024). Democratic Republic of the Congo. *IMF Staff Country Reports*, 2024(227), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400283451.002>

IPCC. (2022). *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.

Khalid, F. (2010). Islam and the Environment – Ethics and Practice an Assessment. *Religion Compass*, 4(11), 707–716. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00249.x>

Leonard, L. (2024). Socio-environmental impacts of mineral mining and conflicts in Southern and West Africa: Navigating reflexive governance for environmental justice. *Environmental Research Letters*, 19(10), 104013. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/ad7047>

Levinson, R., Lewis, D., Rolley, S., & Levinson, R. (2025, July 3). Major Rwandan coltan exporter bought smuggled minerals, a UN report says. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/major-rwandan-coltan-exporter-bought-smuggled-congolese-minerals-un-report-says-2025-07-03/>

Lindén, O., & Pålsson, J. (2013). Oil contamination in Ogoniland, Niger Delta. *Ambio*, 42(6), 685–701. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-013-0412-8>

Lobina, E., Terhorst, P., & Popov, V. (2011). Policy networks and social resistance to water privatization in Latin America. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 10, 19–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.01.004>

Maathai, W. (2009). *The Challenge for Africa*. Pantheon.



- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press Books.
- Muhammad, B. (2023). Planting a Tree in the End Times: An Analysis of an Islamic and Jewish Saying. *Berkeley Institute for Islamic Studies*. <https://bliis.org/essay/planting-a-tree-in-the-end-times-an-analysis-of-an-islamic-and-jewish-saying/>
- Narh, J. (2025). The resource curse and the role of institutions revisited. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 27(4), 8187–8207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-023-04279-6>
- Nasr, S. H. (1996). *Religion and the Order of Nature* (1st edition). Oxford University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2015). Decoloniality as the Future of Africa. *History Compass*, 13(10), 485–496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12264>
- Nunn, N. (2007). Historical legacies: A model linking Africa's past to its current underdevelopment. *Journal of Development Economics*, 83(1), 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2005.12.003>
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Özdemir, I. (2003). Towards An Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective. In *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*. Harvard University Press.
- Parashar, S., & Schulz, M. (2021). Colonial legacies, postcolonial 'selfhood' and the (un)doing of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(5), 867–881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1903313>
- Ramadan, T. (2009). *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. Oxford University Press.
- Rodney, W. (2018). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Verso.
- Sachs, J. D., & Warner, A. M. (1995). *Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth* (Working Paper No. 5398). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w5398>
- Shukla, P. R., Skea, J., Reisinger, A. R., & IPCC (Eds.). (2022). *Climate change 2022: Mitigation of climate change*. IPCC.
- Sprague-Silgado, J. (2017). Toward an Understanding of Transnational Capitalism in the Caribbean. *Latin American Perspectives*, 44(4), 209–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X16683372>
- Spronk, S. (2007). Roots of Resistance to Urban Water Privatization in Bolivia: The “New Working Class,” the Crisis of Neoliberalism, and Public Services. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 71, 8–28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27673068>
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2003). *Globalization and Its Discontents*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Sugiyono. (2008). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: (Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R & D)*. Alfabeta.
- Sya'roni, Mokh., Nor Ichwan, Moh., Pratama, M. Y., & Ming, D. (2025). Ecotheological Insights from Prophetic Hadiths: Reframing Islamic Environmental Ethics Based on SDGs. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 106.5. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.51>
- Toroskainen, K., Malden, A., & Okenda, J. P. (2020). *DRC's Mining Revenues: Increasing Accountability by Analyzing Payments to Governments Reports*. Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI).
- Tosam, M. J. (2019). African Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 09(02), Article 02. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2019.92012>



UNCTAD. (2023). *Economic Development in Africa Report 2023*. UN Publication.

UNEP. (2011). *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland*. UNEP.
<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7947>

UNEP. (2020). *Mineral Resource Governance in the 21st Century: Gearing Extractive Industries Towards Sustainable Development*. United Nations.
<https://doi.org/10.18356/d4ca45f2-en>

World Wildlife Fund. (2020). *Bending the curve of biodiversity loss*. WWF.

Zahrah, M. A. (2003). *Usul al-fiqh*. Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi.

Conflict of Interest Statement: *The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*



This article is open-access and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence CC BY: credit must be given to the creator, the title and the license the work is under. This license enables re-users to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator.