

Reinterpretation of the Meaning of Kufr and Its Relationship with Environmental Destruction: A Semantic Perspective by Toshihiko Izutsu

Reinterpretasi Makna Kufr dan Relasinya dengan Kerusakan Alam Perspektif Semantik Toshihiko Izutsu

Nurul Qomarudin
PTIQ University Jakarta
berkahguru.bsa98@gmail.com

Ardi Kurniawan
PTIQ University Jakarta
ardyealkhadafi36@gmail.com

Abstract

This study departs from the main question: How can the meaning of Kufr be reinterpreted and how does it relate to environmental destruction from Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic perspective? The purpose of this study is to explain the dynamics of the meaning of Kufr in the Qur'an and to understand the reinterpretation of the meaning of kufr and its relation to environmental destruction (Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic perspective). Using a qualitative method based on literature study with the Qur'an as the primary source, supported by the works of Toshihiko Izutsu as well as classical and contemporary interpretations. The analysis was conducted through Izutsu's relational semantic approach, which includes basic meaning, relational meaning, semantic field, and conceptual opposites to trace the transformation of the meaning of 'kufr' towards a theocentric Qur'anic value system. The conclusion of this study is that the concept of kufr in the Qur'an cannot be reduced solely to a theological category opposed to imân, but is a comprehensive moral concept with theological, ethical, social, and ecological implications. Semantic analysis shows that kufr is closely related to closing oneself off from the verses of Allah, denial of blessings (kufr al-ni'mah), injustice (dzhulm), wastefulness (isrâf), and corruption (fasâd fî al-ardh). This relationship confirms that environmental destruction is not merely a technical-material issue, but a manifestation of a spiritual and moral crisis resulting from a loss of awareness of tawhid and neglect of humanity's stewardship. Thus, this study formulates the concept of ecological kufr as a form of denial of the divine order that governs the balance of the cosmos. The main difference between this study and previous works lies in its analytical focus, which directly links kufr to ecological issues through a relational semantic approach. Thus, this study offers a new perspective in Qur'anic studies by integrating theology, ethics, and ecology.

Keywords: *kufr, Qur'anic semantics, environmental destruction.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari pertanyaan utama: bagaimana reinterpretasi makna *Kufr* dan relasinya dengan kerusakan alam perspektif semantik Toshihiko Izutsu? adapun tujuan penelitian ini ialah menjelaskan dinamika tentang makna *Kufr* dalam al Qur'an dan memahami reinterpretasi makna *kufr* dan relasinya dengan kerusakan alam (perspektif semantik Toshihiko Izutsu). Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka

dengan Al-Qur'an sebagai sumber primer, didukung karya Toshihiko Izutsu serta tafsir klasik dan kontemporer. Analisis dilakukan melalui pendekatan semantik relasional Izutsu meliputi makna dasar, makna relasional, medan makna, dan pasangan oposisi konseptual untuk menelusuri transformasi makna *kufr* menuju sistem nilai Qur'ani yang teosentris. Adapun kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa konsep *kufr* dalam Al-Qur'an tidak dapat direduksi semata-mata sebagai kategori teologis yang berlawanan dengan *îmân*, melainkan merupakan konsep moral-komprehensif yang memiliki implikasi teologis, etis, sosial, dan ekologis. Analisis semantik menunjukkan bahwa *kufr* berelasi erat dengan penutupan diri dari ayat-ayat Allah, pengingkaran nikmat (*kufr al-ni'mah*), kezaliman (*dzhulm*), pemborosan (*isrâf*), serta kerusakan (*fasâd fi al-ardh*). Relasi ini menegaskan bahwa kerusakan alam tidak sekadar persoalan teknis-material, tetapi merupakan manifestasi krisis spiritual dan moral akibat terputusnya kesadaran tauhid dan pengabaian amanah kekhalifahan manusia. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini merumuskan konsep *kufr ekologis* sebagai bentuk pengingkaran terhadap tatanan ilahi yang mengatur keseimbangan kosmos. Perbedaan utama penelitian ini dengan karya-karya sebelumnya terletak pada fokus analisis yang mengaitkan *kufr* secara langsung dengan persoalan ekologis melalui pendekatan semantik relasional. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif baru dalam studi Al-Qur'an dengan menjembatani kajian teologi, etika, dan ekologi secara integratif.

Kata Kunci: *kufr, semantik Qur'ani, kerusakan alam.*

Introduction

Environmental degradation has become one of the most urgent global challenges confronting contemporary civilization. Climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, land degradation, water pollution, and the increasing frequency of ecological disasters demonstrate that environmental problems have evolved far beyond scientific and technological concerns. They now represent multidimensional crises involving economic, political, ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Recent international reports consistently indicate that anthropogenic activities remain the primary driving force behind global environmental deterioration, highlighting the necessity of integrating scientific approaches with ethical and religious perspectives in addressing ecological challenges.¹ Consequently, environmental conservation should no longer be perceived merely as a technical issue of natural resource management but also as a moral responsibility requiring the reconstruction of humanity's worldview toward nature.

¹ John Houghton, *Global Warming: The Complete Briefing*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 35–39.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, environmental stewardship is inseparable from the Qur'anic conception of humanity as *khalīfah fī al-ard* (vicegerent on earth). Rather than portraying human beings as absolute owners of nature, the Qur'an assigns them the responsibility of maintaining the divinely ordained balance (*mīzān*) governing the universe. The natural world is repeatedly presented as a manifestation of God's signs (*āyāt*), inviting human beings to contemplate divine wisdom while simultaneously preserving the harmony embedded within creation. Consequently, environmental destruction constitutes not merely ecological imbalance but also the violation of humanity's theological and moral responsibilities before God.²

The Qur'an explicitly establishes a close relationship between moral deviation and environmental corruption. This relationship is particularly evident in Q.S. al-Rūm [30]:41, which attributes corruption on land and sea to what human hands have earned, indicating that ecological degradation originates from human behaviour rather than from nature itself. Likewise, Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:205 portrays destructive individuals as those who spread corruption by destroying crops and livestock after turning away from divine guidance. These verses collectively demonstrate that environmental destruction should be understood not solely as a consequence of technological advancement or economic development but as an ethical manifestation of humanity's deviation from divine values.³

Such a theological perspective becomes increasingly relevant in the context of contemporary ecological crises. Modern civilization has largely been shaped by an anthropocentric worldview that regards nature primarily as an object of economic exploitation. Scientific and technological progress has undoubtedly contributed to human welfare; nevertheless, it has simultaneously accelerated excessive resource extraction and environmental degradation when detached from ethical and spiritual considerations. Seyyed Hossein Nasr argues that the modern ecological crisis fundamentally originates from the desacralization of nature, whereby the universe is no longer perceived

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), 65–70.

³ Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, vol. 11 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2017), 76–81.

as a sacred manifestation of divine reality but merely as material available for unlimited exploitation.⁴ This diagnosis resonates profoundly with the Qur'anic worldview, which consistently emphasizes that the disruption of harmony between humanity and nature ultimately reflects a deeper crisis in humanity's relationship with the Creator.

Among the numerous Qur'anic concepts associated with moral responsibility, the concept of *kufr* occupies a particularly significant position. Etymologically, the term derives from the Arabic root *kafara*, which literally means "to cover," "to conceal," or "to hide."⁵ Prior to the advent of Islam, this expression was commonly employed in ordinary Arabic usage to describe a farmer covering seeds with soil. Following the revelation of the Qur'an, however, the term underwent a profound semantic transformation. Rather than referring merely to the physical act of concealment, *kufr* became a comprehensive ethical and theological concept denoting the rejection of divine truth, the denial of God's blessings (*kufr al-ni'mah*), and the refusal to acknowledge God's signs manifested both in revelation and throughout creation. This semantic transformation illustrates how the Qur'an reconstructs pre-Islamic vocabulary into a coherent system of religious and moral values.

Classical Muslim exegetes including al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr predominantly interpreted *kufr* within the framework of Islamic theology, emphasizing its opposition to *īmān* and its association with disbelief in God's oneness and prophetic revelation.⁶ Although this interpretation remains indispensable for understanding Islamic creed, it does not fully explain the broader semantic structure through which the Qur'an employs the concept across diverse ethical, social, and moral contexts. Numerous Qur'anic passages associate *kufr* with ingratitude (*kufr al-ni'mah*), injustice (*ẓulm*), extravagance (*isrāf*), arrogance (*istikbār*), and corruption (*fasād*), suggesting that the concept extends beyond doctrinal disbelief toward a comprehensive ethical orientation shaping human behaviour.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 65-67.

⁵ Ibnu Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999), 191.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 157-158; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.).

Understanding these broader dimensions requires an analytical framework capable of examining Qur'anic concepts as interconnected components within an integrated semantic system rather than as isolated lexical units. In this regard, Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory offers one of the most influential methodological approaches in contemporary Qur'anic studies. Unlike conventional lexical analysis, Izutsu reconstructs the meanings of Qur'anic key concepts through their relational positions within a network of interconnected and opposing concepts, thereby uncovering the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* or worldview.⁷ Within this framework, *kufr* is not merely understood as the opposite of *īmān* but functions as a central ethical concept whose semantic relationships with *shukr*, *ẓulm*, *fasād*, *isrāf*, and other key terms collectively construct the Qur'an's moral vision concerning humanity, God, and the cosmos.

This semantic perspective offers an important opportunity to reinterpret the concept of *kufr* in response to contemporary environmental challenges. If environmental destruction reflects humanity's failure to recognize and preserve God's signs manifested throughout creation, then ecological degradation may also be understood as a consequence of a deeper spiritual and moral disorientation embedded within the semantic structure of *kufr*. Such an interpretation opens new possibilities for integrating Qur'anic semantics with Islamic environmental ethics, enabling the concept of *kufr* to be understood not only as a theological category but also as an ethical framework for interpreting humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Scholarly interest in Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory has grown considerably over the last decade, reflecting its increasing significance in contemporary Qur'anic studies. Nevertheless, existing research has primarily concentrated either on explaining Izutsu's semantic methodology or on examining individual Qur'anic concepts without sufficiently exploring their implications for contemporary ethical issues. Consequently, despite substantial advances in Qur'anic semantic studies, the relationship between the concept of *kufr* and environmental ethics remains largely underexplored.

⁷ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 10–17.

One of the most relevant studies is conducted by Arifdo Putra, Syofyan Hadi, and Arina, who examine the semantic diversity of the term *kufṛ* through a contextual semantic approach. Their study demonstrates that *kufṛ* possesses multiple meanings depending on its Qur'anic context, including disbelief, denial of God's blessings, rejection of truth, dissociation, and concealment. By emphasizing contextual interpretation, the authors successfully challenge the reduction of *kufṛ* to a single theological category and reveal the richness of its semantic variations within the Qur'an. Nevertheless, their analysis remains primarily descriptive and linguistic, without reconstructing the broader ethical relationships among *kufṛ* and other Qur'anic concepts associated with environmental responsibility.⁸

Another significant contribution is provided by Mahmud Muhsinin, whose study discusses Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic methodology from the perspective of non-Muslim scholarship on Islam. Muhsinin argues that Izutsu's semantic approach successfully reconstructs the Qur'anic worldview by demonstrating how pre-Islamic vocabulary was transformed into a coherent theocentric system of values centred upon *tawḥīd*. His study contributes substantially to understanding the methodological significance of Qur'anic semantics. However, the discussion is largely confined to explaining Izutsu's theoretical framework and does not extend its application to contemporary social or ecological issues.⁹

Likewise, Laili Nur Qomariyah provides a comprehensive examination of Izutsu's semantic theory by explaining the concepts of basic meaning, relational meaning, synchronic and diachronic analysis, as well as syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. Her research successfully illustrates how Izutsu reconstructs the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* through semantic analysis of key concepts. Nevertheless, the study primarily focuses on the philosophical and methodological dimensions of Qur'anic semantics rather than

⁸ Arifdo Putra et al., "Pemahaman Kata 'Kufṛ' dalam Al-Qur'an: Pendekatan Analisis Semantik Kontekstual," *Al-Fawa'id* 14, no. 2 (2024): 170–181.

⁹ Mahmud Muhsinin, "Non-Muslim Scholarly Perspectives on Islam: Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantic Analysis of the Qur'an," *Al-Hikmah* 10, no. 2 (2023): 153–166.

investigating how semantic networks may illuminate contemporary ethical challenges, including environmental degradation.¹⁰

These studies collectively demonstrate the growing importance of semantic analysis within contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. At the same time, they reveal several important limitations. First, previous studies predominantly examine *kufr* from theological, linguistic, or methodological perspectives without systematically reconstructing its semantic relationships with ethical concepts governing human interaction with nature. Second, although Izutsu's semantic theory has become an influential analytical framework, its application to environmental ethics remains remarkably limited. Third, previous scholarship rarely analyses the interconnected semantic network linking *kufr* with *fasād*, *ẓulm*, *isrāf*, *shukr*, and *īmān* as an integrated conceptual structure capable of explaining environmental destruction from the perspective of the Qur'anic worldview. Consequently, the ecological implications of *kufr* have not yet received comprehensive scholarly attention.

This study seeks to address these limitations by employing Toshihiko Izutsu's relational semantic approach to reconstruct the concept of *kufr* within its broader Qur'anic semantic field. Rather than interpreting *kufr* exclusively as disbelief or theological rejection, this research analyses its semantic relationships with *shukr*, *fasād*, *ẓulm*, *isrāf*, and *īmān* in order to demonstrate that environmental destruction represents not merely an ecological phenomenon but also a manifestation of moral and spiritual disorientation. Through this analytical framework, the study proposes the concept of ecological *kufr*, referring to the denial of divine signs through exploitative attitudes toward nature and the neglect of humanity's responsibility as *khalīfah*. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this conceptual reconstruction has not been systematically developed in previous studies employing Izutsu's semantic approach.

Accordingly, the novelty of this research lies in three principal aspects. First, it expands the application of Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory beyond its conventional theological and linguistic orientation by integrating it with contemporary environmental ethics. Second, it reconstructs the semantic relationships among *kufr*, *fasād*, *ẓulm*, *isrāf*,

¹⁰ Laili Nur Qomariyah, "Pemikiran Toshihiko Izutsu dalam Semantik Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ilmu Qur'an dan Tafsir* 4, no. 3 (2023): 1–15.

and *shukr* as an integrated ethical framework for understanding ecological degradation within the Qur'anic worldview. Third, it introduces the concept of ecological kufr as a new analytical perspective for interpreting environmental destruction from the standpoint of Qur'anic semantics.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses two principal research questions. **First**, how has the meaning of *kufr* developed within the semantic system of the Qur'an? **Second**, how can the concept of *kufr* be reinterpreted through Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach to explain its relationship with environmental destruction? Answering these questions is expected to enrich contemporary Qur'anic semantic studies while simultaneously contributing to the development of Islamic environmental ethics through a more comprehensive understanding of humanity's theological, moral, and ecological responsibilities.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Qur'anic semantics by demonstrating that the meaning of *kufr* cannot be adequately understood through theological opposition to *īmān* alone but must be situated within the broader semantic network constituting the Qur'anic worldview. Practically, the findings provide an alternative ethical framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges by emphasizing that ecological responsibility constitutes an integral dimension of Islamic spirituality. Consequently, this study seeks to bridge Qur'anic semantic studies and environmental ethics, offering a new perspective through which the ecological crisis may be understood as a manifestation of humanity's moral and spiritual relationship with God and the natural world.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research (*al-baḥṭh al-maktabī*) to examine the semantic structure of the Qur'ānic concept of *kufr* and its relationship with environmental degradation through Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory. A qualitative library approach is appropriate because this research focuses on interpreting meanings, reconstructing conceptual relationships, and

explaining the ethical worldview embedded within the Qur'ān rather than examining empirical phenomena quantitatively.¹¹

The primary sources of this study are the Qur'ān and Toshihiko Izutsu's *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, which serves as the principal theoretical framework.¹² These are complemented by classical and contemporary Qur'ānic commentaries, including *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr, and *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* by Muhammad Quraish Shihab, as well as relevant scholarly books and journal articles on Qur'ānic semantics and Islamic environmental ethics.¹³

Data were collected through documentary research by identifying Qur'ānic verses containing the concept of *kufr* and related ethical concepts such as *īmān*, *shukr*, *fasād*, *ẓulm*, and *isrāf*. The collected data were then classified and analysed using Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach, which includes the examination of basic meaning, relational meaning, semantic field, and the reconstruction of the Qur'ānic *weltanschauung*.¹⁴ Through these analytical stages, this study reconstructs the semantic network of *kufr* and explains its relationship with environmental destruction within the ethical framework of the Qur'ān.

Result and Discussion

Kufr as the Moral Root of Environmental Destruction

To understand how the Qur'an places *kufr* as the moral root of various forms of destruction, including ecological destruction, the first step that must be taken is to trace the semantic structure of the concept from the most basic level. In Izutsu's approach, a Qur'anic concept does not stand alone, but derives its meaning through the network of historical, lexical, and value relations that surround it.¹⁵ Therefore,

¹¹ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 41-45.

¹² Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 10-17.

¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 157-158; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.); Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999); Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2017).

¹⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 10-17.

¹⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 11.

before analysing the relationship between *kufr* and concepts such as *îmân*, *syukr*, *fasâd*, and *zhulm*, it is necessary to first understand the original meaning of the word *kufr*, its semantic shift, and how the Qur'an shapes the concept into an ethical term that influences human actions. The following section will outline the evolution of the meaning of *kufr* as a foundation for reading its relationship with the phenomenon of environmental destruction from a Qur'anic perspective.

As has been explained, the root of the word *kufr* etymologically contains the basic meaning of 'covering' or 'concealing,' as confirmed by lexicographers such as Ibn Fâris and Ibn Mandzhur. In pre-Islamic times, this word was used in a material context, for example, farmers covering seeds, so its meaning was neutral and unrelated to theological issues. It was only after the Qur'an was revealed that the meaning expanded and shifted to the moral-spiritual realm, namely the act of covering up Allah's blessings or rejecting the truth that should be accepted. This transformation of meaning was later emphasised by al-Râghib al-Ashfahânî and contextualised by Izutsu as part of the opposition between *îmân* and *kufr* in the Qur'anic value system.

By understanding this change in meaning, we can see that the use of the word *kufr* in the Qur'an does not only refer to the explicit rejection of faith, but also reflects an inner attitude of closing oneself off from divine guidance. This understanding is the basis for exploring how the concept of *kufr* developed further in the network of Qur'anic meanings and how its position relates to destructive human behaviour. Therefore, the following discussion will elaborate on the semantic position of *kufr* in relation to concepts such as *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm*, as a step towards understanding its connection with the phenomenon of environmental destruction.

When the Qur'an was revealed, this basic meaning underwent semantic expansion and theological deepening.¹⁶ The Qur'an did not sever this pre-Islamic meaning, but reinterpreted it within a moral-spiritual framework: covering up the truth, denying Allah's blessings, rejecting guidance, or hiding evidence of the truth that should be

¹⁶ This is in accordance with Fazlur Rahman's explanation that the text of revelation is fixed, but its meaning is always open to contextual expansion according to social dynamics. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: The Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2–3.

revealed.¹⁷ In this context, *kafir* is not merely a theological label, but an ethical category that refers to people who consciously reject or conceal divine truth.

This development in meaning is easier to map when viewed through the chronological framework of revelation. A reading based on the order of revelation shows that during the Meccan period, the term *kufr* did not only function as a label for those who rejected the Prophet's teachings, but was a theological concept used by the Qur'an to expose the ideological structure of the polytheistic society's rejection of the three main pillars of Islamic faith: monotheism, prophethood, and belief in the Day of Resurrection.¹⁸ This emphasis is clearly seen in a number of verses, such as QS. As Sajdah [32]:10 and QS. An Nahl [16]:83, which describe the stubbornness, unwillingness to accept evidence of the truth, and intellectual defiance of the polytheists towards the divine message.¹⁹

Thus, in the Makkiyah stage, the meaning of *kufr* underwent a strengthening of its theological function: it no longer simply described the act of 'covering up,' but developed into a normative category used by the Qur'an to refer to the epistemic and moral position of a person who consciously turned away from the truth. This early development became the basis for further semantic transformation in the Madaniyah period.

In the Madaniyyah period,²⁰ the meaning of *kufr* underwent an expansion of function that far exceeded the theological limitations that dominated the Makkiyah phase. In the context of Madinah society, which already had social, political, and legal structures, the Qur'an used the term *kufr* not only to refer to the rejection of *tawhid*, but also

¹⁷ al-Râghib al-Ashfahânî, *Mufradât Alfâdz al-Qur'ân*, (Beirut: Dâr al-Qalam, 2009), 420-421.

¹⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung...*, 223-225.

¹⁹ In Surah As-Sajdah, Ibn Kathir interprets that the disbelievers of Mecca deny the resurrection after death because they consider it unreasonable, which in essence means they deny meeting God. Meanwhile, in Surah An-Nahl, Ibn Kathir explains the disbelievers' denial of the blessings that God has given them, even though they know that the one who gives them blessings is the Lord of Muhammad. See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsîr al Qur'an al 'Adzhim*, Juz 6, (Cairo: Dâr Thaubah, 1999), 360.

²⁰ Abdul Fattah al Awary menjelaskan bahwa salah satu karakteristik ayat-ayat madaniyah yaitu menjelaskan kekufuran kaum kafir yang disebabkan oleh sifat munafiq yang melekat pada diri mereka. Lihat pada Abdul Fattah Abdul Ghani al Awary, *Dirasat fî Ulumil Qur'an*, (Kairo: Wizarul Auqaf, 2024), 42.

to criticise behaviour that disrupted the social and moral order. Therefore, in this phase, *kufr* developed into a category of values that included betrayal of agreements (*khiyânah*), acts of injustice (*dzhulm*), social rebellion that exceeded limits (*baghy*), and various forms of destruction that disrupted social stability (*fasâd*).²¹

From Izutsu's semantic perspective, this change indicates that *kufr* is no longer understood merely as an inner orientation that closes itself off from the truth, but has become the normative root of destructive actions that arise in the social sphere. Thus, the Madaniyyah verses present *kufr* as a source of negative values that give rise to exploitative practices such as *isrâf* and ecological destruction, so that this concept serves as a moral basis for understanding how spiritual deviation can lead to social collapse and disruption of the balance of nature.

This shift from lexical meaning to Qur'anic meaning is in line with Toshihiko Izutsu's analysis that the main concepts of the Qur'an do not stand as isolated terms, but form a semantic field that determines the *weltanschauung* (worldview) of the Qur'an. According to him, *kufr* developed from the meaning of 'covering' to 'rejecting the truth,' and from this arose a series of ethical values of ingratitude, injustice, and moral decline that led to destructive actions against the cosmic order.

Therefore, understanding the semantic development of *kufr* is important before exploring its relationship with environmental destruction; because in the Qur'anic worldview, *kufr* is the moral source of actions that destroy the balance of the earth and disrupt cosmic harmony (*mîzân*).

Meaning Structure of Ecological Kufr in Izutsu's Perspective

Within the semantic framework offered by Toshihiko Izutsu, each key concept in the Qur'an is not a stand-alone entity, but part of a semantic field that interacts with each other and forms a coherent network of meaning. Central concepts (key concepts) such as *kufr* have the ability to radiate value to other concepts within their thematic domain. Thus, an understanding of *ecological kufr* can only be achieved by tracing how the meaning of *kufr* resonates with and constructs other

²¹ al-Thabari, *Jâmi' al-Bayân 'an Ta'wîl ay al-Qur'ân*, Juz 4, Kairo: Dâr Hajar, 2001, hal. 157–158.

ethical concepts such as *fasād*, *isrāf*, and *ẓulm*, which have ecological implications.

a. *Kufr* as an Inner Value Structure in the Semantic Field of the Qur'an

Within the semantic framework formulated by Toshihiko Izutsu, eackey concept in the Qur'an not only has a basic lexical meaning, but also carries a relational meaning that is formed through the conceptual network that surrounds it. It is this relational meaning that gives birth to the Qur'anic value-world, namely the ethical and cosmological structure that guides human orientation in understanding their existence before God and nature.²² When the root word *kafara*, which etymologically means 'to cover', is placed within this network of values, it appears that the concept undergoes a process of *semantic deepening*, expanding from a mere physical act of covering to an inner attitude of concealing or rejecting divine truth. In a philosophical sense, *kufr* describes an existential disorientation: an inner condition that severs the connection between humans and the source of transcendent values.

This self-closure is not only towards doctrinal truth, but also towards the value structure that governs the connection between humans and nature as an integral part of God's creation. In an ecological context, this closure takes the form of neglecting the rights of the earth, an inability to respond to the blessings of nature with gratitude, and a denial of *mîẓân* (cosmic balance), which functions as a moral and ontological principle for all creation. At this point, *kufr* becomes more than just a theological rejection; it transforms into a deformation of values that damages the relationship between humans and nature.

Furthermore, the inner tendency born of *kufr* also leads to a denial of the *istikhlâf* mandate of khalifah, which requires humans to protect, care for, and prosper the earth. When this mandate is rejected or set aside, human values shift in orientation: from beings who should submit to divine rules to subjects who position themselves as the centre and autonomous owners of natural resources. From an Islamic philosophical perspective, this shift in orientation is the core of spiritual

²² Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung...*, 12–17.

illness, namely *hubris* or existential arrogance, which in the Qur'an is often described as the highest form of moral deviation.

Therefore, *kufr* as a central concept in the Qur'anic semantic field functions as a 'root value' that radiates ethical consequences into various spheres of life. When applied to the relationship between humans and nature, *kufr* gives rise to a series of destructive behaviours: unlimited exploitation, ecological injustice, greed for resources, and actions that deny cosmic order.²³ In other words, *kufr* is a structure of meaning that unites inner disorientation with ecological destruction. It is not merely a spiritual deviation in the private sphere of humans, but an ontological error that affects the physical world and all beings that depend on it.

From this, it is apparent that the concept of *kufr* in Izutsu's semantic perspective cannot be reduced to dogmatic rejection, but must be understood as a crisis of values that has cosmic implications. When this value is drawn into the ecological dimension, an awareness emerges that the destruction of nature is not merely the result of human material actions, but a manifestation of a much deeper spiritual disorientation. Thus, *kufr* stands as the starting point of a series of meanings that connect the inner condition of humans with ecological reality; it is the moral foundation that determines whether humans become guardians of the earth or the cause of its destruction.

b. Transformation of Inner Values into Behaviour: *Fasâd*, *Isrâf*, and *Dzhulm* as External Expressions

In Izutsu's view, the inner moral attitude of human beings is always manifested in concrete actions (outer manifestations). Therefore, *kufr*, as an inner orientation that rejects and ignores divine truth, does not stop at the spiritual level, but produces patterns of behaviour that reflect this moral corruption. In an ecological context, this disorientation manifests itself primarily in three forms of expression: *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm*. All three are direct consequences of the inner value of *kufr* and explain how ecological destruction on earth is a reflection of human

1. *Fasâd* (damage)

²³ *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), Edisi V, entri "destruktif," Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI.

Fasâd is an important concept in the Qur'an, derived from the root word فسد, which has the basic meaning of 'corrupt', 'not functioning as it should', or 'deviating from nature'. In Qur'anic semantic construction, this term not only describes moral and social corruption, but also encompasses ecological dimensions, as seen in verses such as QS 2:205 and QS 30:41, which link corruption on earth with human behaviour. Thus, *fasâd* is understood as the outward expression of the inner disorientation of *kufur*, namely when humans reject divine values and exceed the established limits, the natural consequence is the emergence of various forms of destruction that disrupt the order of life and ecological balance.

2. *Isrâf* (excess and transgression)

Isrâf in the Qur'an refers to excessive behaviour or exceeding the limits set by Allah. Lexically, this term indicates behaviour that deviates from the principles of moderation and balance. In a relational dimension, the Qur'an often associates *isrâf* with *kufur al-ni'mah*, which is a form of denial of Allah's blessings, as stated in QS 17:26–27 and QS 7:31. Through this association, *isrâf* is not only understood as wasteful economic behaviour, but as a moral expression born of an inner attitude that disregards the principles of gratitude and balance. In an ecological context, *isrâf* is the root of consumptive behaviour and exploitative lifestyles, including the excessive and unmeasured use of natural resources without regard for the limits of sustainability set by the cosmic order. Thus, *isrâf* is one of the mechanisms that bridges the gap between inner moral corruption and ecological destruction in the real world.

3. *Dzhulm* (injustice and transgression)

Lexically, *Dzhulm* means 'to place something out of its proper place', an act of transgression that destroys the harmony and order that *should be* maintained. In the Qur'an, this concept is often paired with *kufur*, as seen in QS 31:13, thus indicating that spiritual injustice rooted in the rejection of divine truth can extend to social and ecological injustice. From this perspective, *dzhulm* is not only related to oppression between humans, but also includes the deprivation of the rights of other creatures, excessive exploitation of the environment, and violation of the principle of cosmic balance (*mîzân*) which is the basis of natural order. Thus, *dzhulm* serves as an indicator of how inner corruption originating from *kufur* manifests itself in forms of injustice

and destruction that permeate all aspects of life, including the relationship between humans and the earth.

These three concepts together reveal the mechanism by which a destructive orientation rooted in *kufr* transforms into concrete practices that result in ecological destruction. Within the Qur'anic semantic framework, *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm* are not stand-alone phenomena, but are the outward articulation of moral and spiritual disorientation triggered by human rejection of the divine order of values. Thus, the three form a conceptual intertwining that shows that ecological damage cannot be understood solely as a technical or material problem, but rather as an empirical manifestation of an inner value fracture that originates from *kufr* itself.

c. Semantic Relations of Four Main Ethical Concepts

Within Izutsu's semantic framework, Qur'anic concepts do not stand alone, but are interconnected in a network of meanings that forms a coherent and dynamic field of meaning. At the centre of this network is the concept of *kufr*, which functions as a negative inner orientation and is the source of human moral disorientation. Rejection of these divine values gives rise to *fasâd*, namely actions that destroy the social and ecological order, as indicated in QS 2:205 and QS 30:41. Ibn Kathîr understands *fasâd* in these verses as a direct consequence of human moral and political deviance. From *kufr* also arises *isrâf*, which is excessive and consumptive behaviour that in the tradition of interpretation is viewed as *kufr al-ni'mah*. Al-Rāghib al-Ashfahânî in *Mufradât* emphasises that *isrâf* does not arise except from an inner orientation that denies Allah's blessings.

The relationship between *kufr* and *dzhulm* is also very strong; QS 31:13 places *shirk* as 'the greatest *dzhulm*', and al-Qurthubî interprets *dzhulm* as any form of transgression, including ecological injustice that harms other creatures. These derivative concepts are not only related to *kufr*, but are also interconnected: *israf* triggers *fasâd*, *israf* is intertwined with *dzhulm* in producing intergenerational ecological injustice, and *fasâd* is often a manifestation of the structure of *dzhulm*. Thus, *kufr*, *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm* form a structure of meaning that explains the aetiology of the ecological crisis, affirming that the destruction of nature is not merely a material phenomenon, but a direct reflection of humanity's spiritual disorientation in the Qur'anic worldview.

Concept	Basic Meaning	Functions in Semantic Fields	Primary Relationship	Ecological Impact
<i>Kufr</i>	Covering up, denying	Negative inner value centre (disorientasi spiritual)	→extravagance, →wastefulness, → injustice	The roots of ecological destruction
fasâd	Damage, malfunction	Manifestations of destructive behaviour	← <i>kufr</i> , ↔ <i>isrâf</i> , ↔ <i>dzhulm</i>	Environmental and social damage
<i>Isrâf</i>	Excessive	Mechanisms of excessive behaviour	← <i>kufr</i> , ↔ <i>fasâd</i> , ↔ <i>dzhulm</i>	Exploitation of nature, consumptive
<i>Dzhulm</i>	Out of place	Boundary violations & injustice	← <i>kufr</i> , ↔ <i>fasâd</i> , ↔ <i>isrâf</i>	Ecological injustice (interspecies & intergenerational)

Relational Network Table Concept

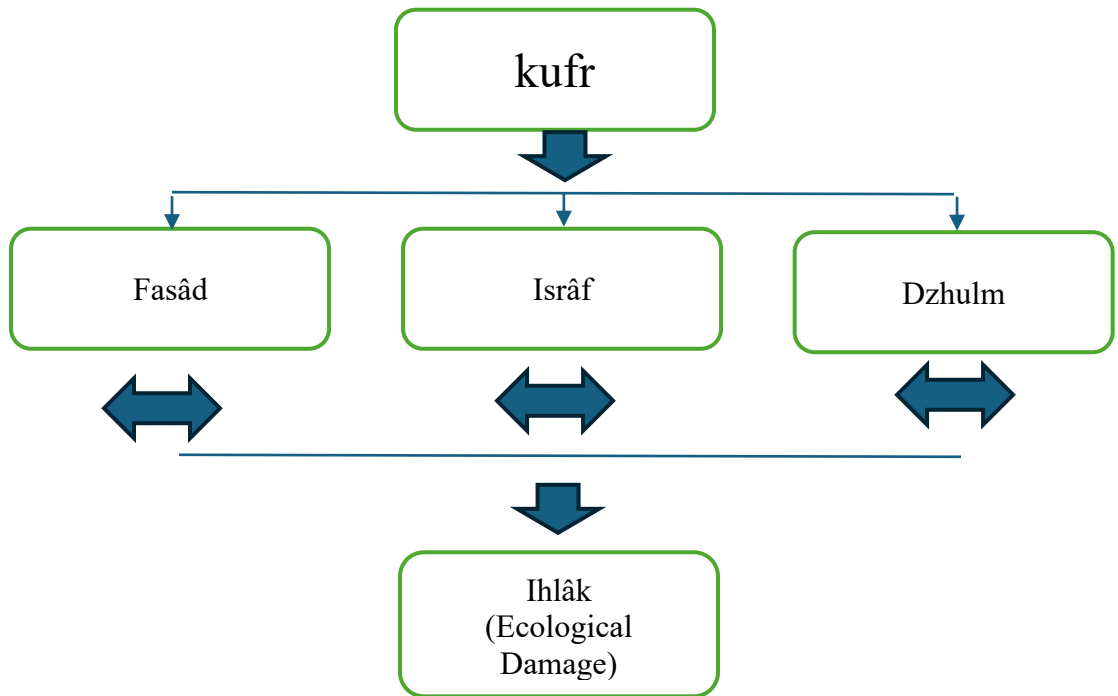
Explanation:

1. Basic Meaning: indicates the lexical meaning of each concept before undergoing semantic expansion.
2. Function in the Semantic Field: describes the semantic role of the concept in the Qur'anic network of meanings
3. Main Relationship: indicates the direction of the semantic relationship between concepts:
The → sign indicates that *kufr* causes or gives rise to another concept.
The ← sign indicates that the concept originates from *kufr*.
The sign ↔ indicates a reciprocal relationship that mutually reinforces each other.
4. Ecological Impact: explains the real ecological implications of the concept.

To clarify how *ecological kufr* is formed as a semantic construction, the following table was compiled to map the relationship between the four key concepts of *kufr*, *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm* in the Qur'anic network of meaning. Through Izutsu's approach, the meaning of each concept is not understood separately, but in its reciprocal relationship. This table helps to display the semantic function of each concept, its interrelationships, and its

ecological implications, so that the reading of environmental damage can be placed in a coherent moral-spiritual framework.

Diagram Relasional 4.1



The diagram illustrates the causal and relational structure of ethical concepts in the Qur'an that lead to ecological destruction. Kufr is placed at the top as the *root of inner orientation* that deviates from the Qur'anic field of meaning. From kufr flow three forms of moral expression-behaviour: fasâd (destructive actions), isrâf (excessive behaviour), and dzhulm (injustice or transgression). These three concepts do not work separately, but interact with each other, as indicated by the reciprocal lines which show that excessive behaviour can trigger injustice, or injustice can result in fasâd, and so on. The accumulation of interactions between fasâd, isrâf, and dzhulm then culminates in one final outcome, namely ecological damage, as a tangible manifestation of spiritual disorientation rooted in kufr. Thus, this diagram emphasises that the environmental crisis is not merely a technical issue, but rather the result of a network of values and behaviours that have a theological foundation in the Qur'anic worldview.

d. Meaning Structure as the Conceptual Foundation of “Ecological Kufr”

This relational structure indicates that *kufr* functions as a spiritual foundation that is the main source of various forms of ethical and ecological damage. As an inner orientation that rejects divine values, *kufr* gives rise to behavioural mechanisms such as *isrâf* and *dzhulm*, which act as mediators between spiritual disorientation and destructive human actions. *Isrâf* expresses excessive tendencies and transgressions in consumption and resource utilisation, while *dzhulm* reflects structural injustice and misplacement that inherently violate the principle of *mîzân* (cosmic balance). When accumulated in the social and ecological spheres, these two mechanisms produce *fasâd* as empirical outcomes in the form of ecological damage, environmental degradation, and disruption of natural order.

In Izutsu's semantic perspective, this connection is not mechanical or artificial, but rather the result of an organic Qur'anic field of meaning, in which value concepts interact through consistent relational connections. *Kufr*, as a key value-term, radiates meaning to subordinate concepts within its semantic orbit, so that *fasâd*, *isrâf*, and *dzhulm* acquire increasingly strong moral-ecological weight. Thus, the formulation of ‘ecological kufr’ is not only hermeneutically valid, but also has solid academic legitimacy as an analytical category capable of explaining how human spiritual deviance is transformed into observable ecological damage in the empirical world.

Conclusion

This study aims to re-analyse the meaning of *kufr* in the Qur'an using Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach, as well as to explore how this concept is directly relevant to the phenomenon of environmental destruction in the modern context. This effort is carried out by tracing the etymological roots of the term ‘*kufr*,’ its development in meaning in the pre-Islamic to Qur'anic contexts, its relationship with other key concepts, and its normative implications for Islamic environmental ethics. Based on all stages of analysis in this study, the following important points can be concluded.

First, this study shows that *kufr* is a concept that underwent a fundamental semantic transformation when it entered the Qur'anic value system. In pre-Islamic Arab tradition, *kufr* had the concrete

meaning of 'to cover,' like the action of a farmer covering seeds in the ground. However, when the Qur'an was revealed, this meaning was reoriented into a moral-spiritual meaning, namely the attitude of rejecting, covering, or turning away from divine truth. This transformation proves that revelation functions as an agent of meaning renewal that not only changes the lexical meaning of a word, but also forms a new value framework that underlies the Qur'anic worldview. Thus, *kufr* is no longer understood as a physical action, but as a state of consciousness that is closed to divine guidance and the values of monotheism.

Second, based on an analysis of semantic fields and polar pairs, this study finds that *kufr* is a concept that cannot be understood independently, but exists within a network of semantic relations involving a number of key concepts such as *îmân*, *syukr*, *nûr*, *fasâd*, and *dzhulm*. Among these relationships, the oppositional relationship between *kufr* and *iman* forms the basic structure that explains human moral orientation in the Qur'anic system. In this context, *kufr* is understood as a total rejection of the values upheld by faith, such as submission, truth, and gratitude. Furthermore, the semantic connection between *kufr*, *fasâd*, and *dzhulm* shows that spiritual denial has broad moral and social consequences. These relationships indicate that *kufr* is not only a matter of internal belief, but also has implications for human behaviour and actions in social and ecological life.

Third, this study shows that the Qur'an explicitly links *kufr* with destructive actions and damage to the earth. Verses such as QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 205 show how human behaviour that turns away from the truth gives rise to damage that includes the destruction of plants, livestock, and the natural order in general. Similarly, QS. ar-Rûm [30]: 41 emphasises that ecological destruction is the result of human actions that do not maintain the cosmic balance established by Allah. These findings reinforce the conclusion that ecological destruction in the Qur'anic perspective is not only the result of technical factors, but is a manifestation of a moral and spiritual crisis. In other words, destructive behaviour towards the environment is a reflection of the condition of *kufr* internalised in humans.

Fourth, this study introduces the concept of *ecological kufr*, which is a form of denial manifested in the neglect of the mandate of khalifah, excessive exploitation of natural resources, and a lack of awareness to

maintain *mîzân* (balance), which is the basic principle of the cosmos. *Ecological kufr* reflects the severing of humanity's connection to the divine signs present in His creation, so that humans no longer view nature as a verse of God, but only as a utilitarian object that can be exploited without limits. This concept emphasises that the contemporary ecological crisis is a structural spiritual crisis: because it is rooted in an anthropocentric paradigm that disregards the sacredness of nature.

Thus, healing the environmental crisis requires the restoration of spiritual values rooted in faith, gratitude, and awareness of God's presence in every aspect of creation. Fifth, Izutsu's semantic approach has proven capable of providing a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the structure of values in the Qur'an.

By tracing the basic meaning, relational meaning, and development of meaning of a phrase in the context of revelation, this study finds that the Qur'anic interpretation of *kufr* forms a theological structure that places humans in direct relationship with God, fellow humans, and nature. This approach allows for a holistic reading of the Qur'an, so that Qur'anic concepts are not understood fragmentarily, but as part of a network of mutually reinforcing meanings. In the context of contemporary Islamic studies, Izutsu's semantic approach offers a methodological path for interpreting the Qur'an in a relevant way, without losing its authentic roots of meaning.

Sixth, this research contributes theoretically to the development of Qur'anic semantic studies and modern thematic interpretation. The reinterpretation of the meaning of *kufr* through semantic analysis not only enriches the understanding of this theological concept but also opens up space for the construction of an Islamic environmental ethic that is more based on revelatory values. The findings of this study confirm that the Qur'an has provided a strong theological and moral foundation for building sustainable ecological awareness. On a practical level, the results of this study can be used to formulate educational, da'wah, and social policy approaches that emphasise the integration of faith values and ecological responsibility.

Ultimately, this study concludes that *kufr* is a key concept that plays a central role in shaping human relations with God and nature. The ecological damage that is currently a global challenge cannot be separated from the spiritual crisis of humanity. Therefore, every effort

to restore the environment requires a transformation of values, a reconstruction of consciousness, and a restoration of human relations with Allah through faith and gratitude. Thus, the results of this study not only contribute to the development of science, but also to the Islamic ecological movement based on spirituality, ethics, and Qur'anic values.

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