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Amanah and umma: Eco-Islam and epistemological diversity in environmental communication

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This paper is a call to research, teach, and collaborate from epistemically diverse, spiritually grounded, and cosmically connected practices. It is an offering from two scholar-friends who demonstrate that *amanah* (divine trust) and *umma* (cosmological community) offer another way of knowing and being with the Earth than neoliberal paradigms. *Amanah* and *umma*, practices grounded in Eco-Islam, represent a cosmological vision of the world that resonates across indigenous and kinship-in-place epistemologies. Utilizing a reflexive inter-eco-cultural dialogue, interspersed with evidence from Omani ecocultural ecospiritual practices, we articulate *amanah* and *umma*, as not only a moral imperative, but an epistemology—an obligation to know, relate, and act in ways that preserve the sacred integrity of Earth.

KEYWORDS

ecospirituality, epistemicide, ecological justice, *amanah*, *umma*, Eco-Islam, epistemological diversity, decolonial

Introduction

The desert must have been a connection from the start. We're both women of (a) desert. We come from geographically different places in the globe, but our stories are tied by a deep connection to the land, sky, water, and the more-than-human world. We carry these experiences into our lives and work. Our relationship is wrapped in the wind that whips around us during most seasons of New Mexico. The wind always sings its own rhythm, one that can pulse in measured time, or whip with such ferocity it makes us wonder what time even is. The wind in the high desert bounces off rocks and shrubs, lavender and juniper, prickly pear and piñon, the aroma specific and spectacular. In the desert, the wind turns you around, upside down, inside out, and topsy-turvy. How long we turn our faces to the sun and how long we embrace before heading into a coffee shop is up to the desert wind.

Throughout this paper, our stories reflexively and honestly told, will mirror the Eco-Islam concepts of *amanah* and *umma*, divine trust and cosmological community. Drawing upon Islamic theological, ethical, and cultural practices, Eco-Islam highlights core Islamic principles such as *khalifa* (stewardship), *amanah* (divine trust), *mizan* (balance), *wasatiyyah* (moderation), *adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *umma* (community).

These same principles animate the metaphor of the date palm central to Omani ecoculture. The palm's life cycle—beginning with the tender shamareekh (male blossoms), hand-pollinated by human touch—symbolizes a sacred relationship between humans and nature, one that requires attentiveness, skill, and moral responsibility. Watered by falaj systems—an ancient communal irrigation technology that embodies principles of *Umma* in its shared governance and collective maintenance—the date palm flourishes not through ownership, but through stewardship. Its many varieties reflect the biodiversity of traditional knowledge, each with unique timings and tastes. Harvested during qaidh—the hottest and most laborious

season—dates are not simply consumed but shared in rituals of hospitality and festivals of gratitude.

Through an inter-reflexive dialogue between the researchers that mirrors questions of decolonial relationship building, the authors demonstrate how *amanah* and *umma* open new possibilities for knowledge production. In this work, we articulate *amanah* (divine trust) and *umma* (cosmological community) as core Islamic ecospiritual principles that offer a decolonial epistemology grounded in relational ethics, reciprocal responsibility, and more-than-human kinship. Through inter-reflexive storytelling and embodied praxis, we demonstrate how these concepts disrupt extractive, Eurocentric knowledge paradigms and frame environmental communication as a sacred, place-based process of ethical co-existence and collective care.

Author 1: I grew up in a farming village surrounded by date palms and rocky hills. I watched life move in harmony with the land—I saw my neighbors plowing the fields with the first light of dawn, the goats being herded along winding paths under the watchful eyes of shepherds, and the women sorting dates in golden afternoons drenched in sunlight. The earth was like an open book, every detail telling a story of connectedness and resilience. The stars above our village were tireless storytellers, and I spent long nights tracing their tales across the sky. Water in the village was scarce and precious, and the sound of aflaj channels flowing softly was like a whisper of life weaving through the stillness. I watched the date palms stand tall in their resilience, as if carrying ancient secrets of endurance and grace. Everything around me was alive with the more-than-human. The cooing of pigeons in the morning, the rustling of wind through the crops, and the soft murmur of irrigation streams—all were windows into a world that taught me how to belong to the earth, how to see it, and how to feel it.

Author 2: I grew up in the high desert of the Southwestern US on the lands of the Yavapai Native Tribe. A self-described ‘dirt baby’ with hippie parents reminiscent of liberal homesteaders, I grew up outside with my siblings, marveling at the Milky Way on summer nights that smelled of horses and a garden freshly tilled by earthworms. I was swallowed whole by the cosmos, running, climbing, swirling inside the iridescent blues and yellows of our galaxy.

The sun-drenched days in the dry desert, cooled by reading in the boughs of ‘my’ globe willow. I sobbed when she died, a piece of my songs, games, and childhood forever lay to rest with her. I tended the horses, cat, bird, dog, and various other animals that came with awe and affection. I cursed at thousands of goat-heads that stuck in my calloused bare feet and yet, I choreographed countless dance routines in the stubby crabgrass, the more-than-human always part of my movements, intrinsic to the dance itself.

As an Omani researcher deeply rooted in the ecospiritual practices of my desert community, and a U.S.-based researcher committed to interrogating Western-centric epistemologies, our collaboration is not merely academic; it is lived, relational, and disruptive.

*Sitting together at sun-warmed coffee shops in New Mexico, the desert winds threading between us, we traced the constellations of *amanah* and *umma* not just across scholarly texts but through our lived encounters: the quiet reverence for shade offered by an old acacia tree against the crisp desert cold, the warmth gathering over shared cups of rich piñon coffee infused with the scent of earth, around simple meals prepared from the land’s modest offerings, and exchanging stories beneath star-laden skies that stretched endlessly overhead. These moments revealed that *amanah* and *umma* are not abstract ideals, but embodied practices grounded in mutual care between humans and the more-than-human world.*

Our shared praxis, born from these ecospiritual experiences, gestures toward a decolonial environmental communication. Our collaboration models a decolonial methodology rooted in relationality, reciprocity, and epistemic humility, advancing an epistemological transformation centered on kinship, place-based knowledge, and the sacred responsibilities of *amanah* and *umma*. In this way, we reflect a relations-in-place, or a way to understand that relationship making is always a process of the more-than-human too (Milstein et al., 2011). The context for our relationality always already involves the more-than-human in “an immersive space that provides the grounding, experiences, and material for social relations” (Milstein et al., 2011, p. 487). By grounding our research in local ecocultural relational systems of the Omani date palm, we seek to disrupt entrenched Eurocentric paradigms that dominate academic inquiry and global knowledge production (Nasr, 1999) by focusing on an eco-cultural (Milstein and Mocatta, 2022; Murphy and Castro-Sotomayor, 2021) eco-spiritual approach to environmental communication knowledge production.

Our co-authorship exemplifies epistemic decolonization and epistemic justice by bridging distinct cultural, geographical, and epistemological contexts to challenge dominant mainstream knowledge systems. In our work practicing *amanah* and *umma*, we shift from a focus on the research output—the teleos of scientific inquiry—to a focus on the research process—the spiral of epistemological delinking. Our thoughts and stories on these pages, intertwined with scholarship on Eco-Islam and eco-spirituality, told through the metaphor of the date palm, attempt to model possibilities for decolonial knowledge building in environmental communication. Beyond its theoretical intervention, this work opens possibilities for reimagining research ethics and climate engagement through spiritually grounded relational frameworks. By foregrounding *amanah* and *umma* as epistemic and ethical anchors, it offers a model of scholarship rooted in responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence—challenging extractive paradigms that dominate both academia and environmental policy. This approach invites scholars, educators, and communities to engage in knowledge production not as an act of mastery, but as a sacred, place-based responsibility toward human and more-than-human kin.

Intellectual parasitism and epistemological diversity

In the modern era, neoliberal materialistic worldviews have dominated global thought, presenting an epistemic model grounded in materialism and economic gains. Although this model has succeeded in advancing natural sciences and technology, it has led to profound environmental and ethical crises (Nasr, 1999; Sullivan, 2017). Neoliberalism refers to a system of economic, political, cultural, and environmental practices that support deregulation of markets, an increase in private property, and removal of a ‘welfare’ or ‘support’ state (Bsumek, 2018). “Within neoliberalism, the primary responsibility of the state is to create the necessary conditions under which hyper-capitalism can flourish” (Lupinacci et al., 2018, p. 655).

In academia, the neoliberal university subordinates education, students, and staff to market-driven imperatives, often invalidating and invisibilizing academic work, eroding scholarly independence, and prioritizing a narrow range of scholarship that can ‘produce’ grants (Carrasco-Campos and Saperas, 2021; Davis, 2023; Evelyn Gildersleeve, 2016).

Relatedly, the dominance of Eurocentric Judeo-Christian epistemologies has systematically marginalized Indigenous, Middle and Eastern paradigms, and local knowledge systems, perpetuating epistemological injustice and intellectual parasitism (El-Messiri, 2002; Izetbegovic, 1984; Mancinelli, 2024; Nasr, 1999; Sayem, 2021; Shariati, 1980). Intellectual parasitism, as Dhareshwar (2015) explains, occurs when dominant knowledge systems appropriate the insights of marginalized traditions without acknowledging their source or context, transforming these insights into decontextualized, commodified forms. Such practices sustain a global knowledge hierarchy that privileges Western paradigms while exploiting and silencing non-Western epistemologies. Intellectual parasitism parallels traditional neoliberal practices in its extractivism of labor and resources from the bodies and the land that produce the insights.

A relationship to environment that is predicated on neoliberal epistemologies, overshadows more holistic understandings of the environment that include cultural and spiritual dimensions (Smith, 2009; Nasr, 1999) such as TEK, ecospirituality, and Indigenous worldviews (Alhinai and Milstein, 2019; Tu'itahi et al., 2021). Hursh et al. (2015) posit that neoliberal political and economic policies not only undermine our ability to respond to current economic and environmental crises, but are, in fact, the primary cause of them. This is because they promote regulating society to privilege market transactions, reject pursuit of other collective solutions, detach humans from the more-than-human, and perpetuate colonial extractive legacies (Abdelzaher et al., 2019; López, 2024; Rife, 2024).

Moreover, the ideology underlying much of neoliberal 'progress' is what Corbett (2006) defines as unrestrained instrumentalism or, "the belief that humans are the most important and dominant entity in the natural world and resources exist entirely for humans' unlimited use" (p. 30). Indeed, "the rise of a scientific rationality, untempered by an ecospiritual dimension, has imposed the most profound impact on the world, leading directly to the development of the technologies and mindsets that have enabled massive exploitation of the world's ecosystems" (Smith, 2009, p. 659). This instrumentalism is not merely a material logic, but a spiritual rupture—a disembodiment of knowledge from its metaphysical, ethical, and cosmological roots. Neoliberal science, stripped of spiritual responsibility, severs humans from the sacred web of life, replacing reverence with control, and kinship with consumption. Thinkers such as Nasr (1999) and Shariati (2008) have long argued that the ecological crisis is inseparable from this desacralization of knowledge, where the divine order is eclipsed by technocratic mastery. The absence of spiritual accountability within dominant scientific frameworks has allowed exploitation to proceed unchallenged by ethical or cosmological constraints. This disconnection continues to shape environmental policy and practice, reinforcing anthropocentric and extractive approaches while dismissing ecospiritual alternatives as unscientific or irrational.

The long-standing knowledge of Indigenous¹ and local communities who have deep ecospiritual connections built on relations-in-place are frequently overlooked in policy decision-making. Environmental

communication as field, and particularly the vein of ecocultural communication, has critiqued neoliberal policies, practices, and results, as well as the academy's epistemic groundings in neoliberalism (c.f. Comfort and Park, 2018; Milstein and Mocatta, 2022). The critical need to ground environmental communication research, public communication, and environmental education in Indigenous and kinship-in-place cosmologies cannot be understated. There is a pressing need to avoid epistemicide, particularly of marginalized belief systems that are under socio-political attack, such as Islam and Muslims.

Epistemicide—the systematic erasure of global marginalized knowledge systems (Hall and Tandon, 2017)—threatens diversity by privileging dominant, often Western-centric, epistemologies. For example, Bhambra (2021) and Fricker (2007), discuss testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, where marginalized groups are denied credibility, deemed unscientific or unreliable when offering insights about ecological practices (testimonial) and/or when Indigenous frameworks are dismissed as irrelevant or mystical within neoliberal scientific paradigms. This exclusion, steeped in coloniality and racism, reinforces epistemic silencing, limiting the scope of environmental discourse and innovative policies. It has also created a "cognitive empire" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021) or a coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), which imposes a monocultural knowledge system based in Eurocentric paradigms of global knowledge production, mirroring intellectual parasitism.

Undoing intellectual parasitism involves not only acknowledging the contributions of marginalized knowledge systems but also transforming the structures that sustain their exploitation. As Dhareshwar (2015) argues, addressing intellectual parasitism requires rethinking the structures of knowledge production and dissemination. Berkes (2012) advocates for integrating TEK into environmental practices, not as a supplementary resource but as a foundational framework, specifically because they are grounded in a kinship-in-place (Alhinai and Milstein, 2019). Similarly, Magallanes-Blanco (2014) highlights the power of Indigenous storytelling and visual media to challenge dominant narratives and assert epistemological agency. The Resolana framework, as described by Montiel et al. (2009), fosters dialogue and reflection rooted in community knowledge, offering a model for epistemic decolonization. Spirit and sacredness—core dimensions emphasized in Indigenous frameworks—are not merely cultural features but are understood as essential to ecological sustainability (Kealiikanakaoleohaililani and Giardina, 2015). These spiritually grounded relationships between humans and the more-than-human world reflect ecocultural and ecospiritual values that are integral to planetary well-being and climate resilience, yet they are often ignored or reduced to economic metrics within dominant neoliberal frameworks (Seltenrich, 2018).

Mignolo (2007) and Quijano (2000) propose epistemic delinking as a crucial step toward decolonization. Delinking involves severing the dependency of marginalized epistemologies on dominant Western frameworks, creating space for the articulation and development of alternative ways of knowing. This process is not a rejection of modernity but a reimagining of it, rooted in local and Indigenous traditions. Epistemic delinking challenges the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano,

¹ Indigenous in this paper can be meant as in either the political, ethnic, identity sense, or the long-rooted-in-place sense. We have tried to make clear the meaning. The authors do not consider themselves, nor Muslims in Oman,

as part of the former but Omanis are part of the latter definition. At the same time, Eco-Islamic practices mirror Indigenous ecocultural belief systems.

2000) by foregrounding place-based, relational, and ecospiritual epistemologies that may be better able to deeply interrogate the world, thereby producing knowledge and relationships that can address complex, interconnected crises such as climate change and environmental degradation. For instance, Williams (2023) demonstrates how Indigenous philosophies challenge utilitarian and extractive paradigms by emphasizing relationality, reciprocity, and planetary stewardship.

A similar ecospiritual paradigm is embodied in Omani desert communities, where the date palm is regarded not merely as a crop but as a vital member of the community—central to cultural identity, spiritual obligation, and intergenerational knowledge. Cultivated through the communal falaj irrigation system, the palm's care reflects the Islamic principles of *amanah* and *umma*, reinforcing a relational model of environmental stewardship that is rooted in reciprocity rather than commodification. This place-based knowledge, passed down through lived practice and Qur'anic cosmology, enacts a form of epistemic delinking from extractive, technocratic models of knowing and being. It also reflects similar worldviews as many Indigenous philosophies that provide a fruitful intersection for analysis of more-than-human kinship-in-place based belief systems rooted in spirituality as an antidote to neoliberal extractivism devoid of spirituality.

Take for example the Waiora Indigenous Peoples' Statement (Tu'itahi et al., 2021):

Core features of Indigenous worldviews are the interactive relationship between spiritual and material realms, intergenerational and collective orientations, that Mother Earth is a living being – a “person” with whom we have special relationships that are a foundation for identity, and the interconnectedness and interdependence between all that exists, which locates humanity as part of Mother Earth's ecosystems alongside our relations in the natural world (pp. 75–76).

Both Eco-Isam and Indigenous philosophies offer not only an epistemic alternative but also a moral framework that can guide humanity toward more just and regenerative futures. In this way, we honor the Waiora people's call to bring more spiritual-relational lenses towards our eco-relationships and knowledge production.

Eco-spirituality

Spirituality is not merely a subjective experience but a genuine source of knowledge that reshapes our relationship with the world (Plumwood, 2002; Shariati, 2008). It reflects a holistic experience aimed at understanding the deeper meaning of life and existence. Spirituality transcends the material world to encompass the metaphysical, ethical, and environmental dimensions governing the relationship between humanity and the universe (Izetbegovic, 1984; Shariati, 2008). Spirituality redefines the relationship between humanity and nature within a framework of sanctity and responsibility. While some scholars define spirituality primarily as “the personal, subjective, non-institutionalized, and unmediated experience with the sacred” (Ferguson and Tamburello, 2015, p. 297), such a view contrasts with the broader epistemological and relational framework presented here. Rather than reducing spirituality to an individual experience detached from communal, ethical, or ecological concerns, this paper

draws on thinkers like Plumwood (2002), Shariati (2008), and Izetbegovic (1984) to argue that spirituality is a valid source of transformational knowledge—one that reshapes our orientation to the world by linking metaphysical insight with ethical responsibility and environmental stewardship.

Neoliberal ideologies have been criticized as reducing knowledge to material aspects only, leading to an intellectual crisis and an absence of ethical values in modern science (Husserl, 1970). “Kant's theory about nature was not in reality a theory of knowledge, but a theory of scientific knowledge that claimed for itself the status of a theory of knowledge, thereby rejecting other ways of knowing the order of nature” (Nasr, 1999, p. 106). The modern Western model, unlike Islamic or Eastern frameworks,² marginalizes metaphysical insight and thereby impoverishes both knowledge and civilization.

Shariati (2008) addresses the impact of Western intellectual colonization on Islamic societies, arguing that Western thought is imposed as a universal standard, marginalizing Islamic identity and weakening local cultural independence. He critiques the wholesale adoption of neoliberal secular education models in postcolonial Muslim societies, particularly in Iran, arguing that these systems promoted Western philosophy, history, and social sciences as normative while marginalizing Islamic intellectual traditions. This epistemic hierarchy not only framed Western thought as universally superior but also contributed to the erosion of indigenous knowledge and the internalization of cultural inferiority among Muslim intellectuals—ultimately undermining Islamic cultural autonomy and identity. This critique finds concrete resonance in the Omani context, where contemporary transformations in agriculture exemplify how Western models of “scientific” development have similarly displaced local Islamic knowledge systems.

Traditional Omani farming practices, especially the *afraj* irrigation system, embody a sustainable, communal ethos grounded in Islamic environmental stewardship (*khalifa*). Yet, modernization initiatives—framed as progress—have introduced mechanized irrigation, chemical inputs, and monoculture farming, resulting in ecological degradation and the devaluation of long-standing communal practices. This process reflects what Spivak (1988) terms “epistemic violence,” wherein dominant paradigms displace indigenous worldviews. Oman's experience thus illustrates a broader trend across the Islamic world: the imposition of neoliberal intellectual frameworks which not only marginalize Islamic epistemologies but also weaken the cultural, ecological, and spiritual foundations of local Muslim communities—precisely the concern at the core of Shariati's argument. Ecospirituality is a way to (re)center local kinship-in-place relations that offer profound opportunities for learning.

Ecospirituality combines spiritual dimensions and epistemic dimensions, offering a new conceptualization of knowledge that transcends mainstream Western biases. Ecospirituality is also consistent with, and embedded in, the philosophy and ethics of many Indigenous people. Capra (1988) noted the profound connection between ecology and spirituality: “Ecological awareness at the deepest level is the intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations and its cycle of change and transformation”

² Such as Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Sufism.

(p. 109). According to Greene (1997), “Ecological spirituality is grounded in the sense that, from the beginning, the universe has had a psychic/spiritual dimension and that this dimension is manifest in every element of the universe and in the universe as a whole” (p. 13).

Endres (2012) and Magallanes-Blanco (2014) highlight how eco-spirituality informs our connection to nature, offering valuable insights into ecocultural meaning systems. Ecospirituality can be understood as a framework that creates an ecological paradigm shift by recognizing the interdependence of humans, the Earth, and other species. An ecospiritual worldview recognizes the agency of humanature, as a living being with the capacity to nurture and sustain. It brings together spiritual and epistemic dimensions to offer a renewed conceptualization of knowledge that transcends the dualistic and anthropocentric biases inherent in mainstream thought. Rather than opposing scientific inquiry, ecospirituality represents a synergy between science and spirituality, intellect and intuition, objectivity and subjectivity, and the human and the planetary. Izetbegovic (1984) and El-Messiri (2002) agree that spirituality is the solution to contemporary intellectual and climate crises, reshaping the relationship between the human and more-than-human world on ethical and spiritual foundations.

Nasr’s (1999) conception of sacred science offers a profound pathway for expanding epistemological diversity by challenging the modern neoliberal epistemic monopoly that privileges empirical rationalism to the exclusion of metaphysical knowledge. Nasr (1999) emphasizes that many religious and philosophical traditions—such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism—uphold cosmologies in which nature is imbued with intrinsic sacredness. The rejection of these sacred cosmologies by modern science, according to Nasr, has not only led to the desacralization of the natural world but has also narrowed the horizons of valid knowledge. By affirming that revelation, spiritual intuition, and metaphysical insight are legitimate sources of understanding alongside empirical observation, Nasr calls for a re-centering of the sacred within human knowledge systems. Spirituality is not a substitute for science but a complement to it, enabling humans to understand the universe from a holistic perspective (Izetbegovic, 1984; El-Messiri, 2002; Ali and Agushi, 2024). Indeed, as Nasr (1999) states, “Earth is man’s teacher and man can learn from the order of nature not only quantitatively but also morally, intellectually, and spiritually” (p. 65). One spiritual approach to learning from/with/through Earth is represented in Eco-Islam.

Eco-Islam

According to Shariati (2008) Islam is not merely a set of rituals but a holistic way of life addressing all dimensions of human existence: spiritual, intellectual, and social. He presents Islam as an alternative that harmonizes spirituality with material progress, in contrast to neoliberal systems that prioritize materialism over spirituality. As Ali Shariati states, “[Islam] is believed to be a constitution for Muslims’ daily life, and it is, therefore, expected to have a significant influence on behaviours of Muslims in their interaction with all components of the environment” (as quoted in Abdelzaher et al., 2019, p. 629). The convergence of Islamic teachings with environmental ethics has cultivated what scholars term “Eco-Islam,” offering a distinct form of ecospirituality rooted in religious values.

Eco-Islam draws from traditional Islamic principles and adapts them to contemporary ecological concerns, presenting a culturally embedded, faith-driven response to global environmental crises (Mancinelli, 2024). Rooted in Quranic teachings on humanity’s role as khalifah (steward) of the Earth, Eco-Islam emphasizes stewardship, moderation, justice, and the intrinsic value of all creation (Ali and Agushi, 2024).

Spirituality in the Quran reflects the integrative relationship between God, humans, and nature. This relationship is rooted in understanding humans as a responsible being, constantly interacting with the Creator through worship and reflection on nature (Izutsu, 1964). Nature in Islamic thought is not a separate material entity but a means of understanding the divine, making spirituality a foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the universe.

The Quran defines nature as “signs” of God, thus enhancing awareness of the sanctity of the natural world. The Quran, also, positions humans as ‘responsible custodians’ (Nasr, 1999) on Earth, in contrast to the Western perspective, which often limits humans to material roles (Shariati, 2008). Moreover, Al-Dughshi (2002) highlights that Quranic knowledge relies on multiple sources, including sensory perception, reason, revelation, and inspiration, reflecting a holistic vision that unites the spiritual and the material. This also resists ocularcentrism (Milstein and Dickinson, 2012) and sense-less (Abram, 1996) science. As Nasr (1999) puts it, “Even if destined for the invisible world of the Spirit, human beings need to learn from the order of nature, or as certain Sufis have said, the cosmos itself can assist man to transcend the cosmos” (p. 158).

Amanah and umma

The principles of *amanah* (divine trust) and *umma* (cosmological community) form the core of an Omani ecospiritual epistemology (Alhinai and Milstein, 2019). These concepts provide a framework for understanding the moral and spiritual obligations that humanature relations by emphasizing human responsibility towards the environment. In Islamic teachings, humans are seen as divine trustees, obligated to protect the natural world (Islam, 2016; Islam and Samsudin, 2018).

Amanah is a fundamental concept in Islam that emphasizes the responsibility humans have towards the environment as stewards of God’s creation. There is a moral obligation to protect and preserve the natural world (Gada, 2014). The Quran highlights that humans are entrusted with the care of the earth, which includes maintaining biodiversity and ensuring sustainable use of resources. In the Quran, biodiversity is a divine *amanah*, or trust, that must be respected and preserved. By understanding *amanah* in the context of ecological Islam, Muslims are encouraged to adopt practices that reflect their commitment to environmental stewardship, such as responsible consumption and conservation efforts (Ali and Agushi, 2024).

Rural farming communities in Oman demonstrate a profound spiritual connection to humanature, integrating their faith into their daily practices and ecological interactions. This ecospiritual worldview is reflected in their farming practices, which are imbued with a sense of devotion and purpose. Farming, for the villagers, is more than a material activity—it is a spiritual exercise that nurtures their bond with Allah and with humanature. The date palm serves as a compelling example of how the Islamic concept of *amanah* underscores human

responsibility towards more-than-human world. In Islamic tradition, the Prophetic teachings emphasized the importance of planting and preserving trees, noting, “If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him/her” (Al-Bukhari, 1997, Hadith 2320). This teaching highlights that the act of caring for trees like the date palm constitutes a fulfillment of the divine trust assigned to humanity. The date palm thus reflects the broader Eco-Islamic ethic of nurturing, sustaining, and caring for more-than-humans as living trusts.

The concept of *amanah* also extends to the ethical treatment of all living beings, reinforcing the idea that humans should not exploit or harm humans or more-than-human species, as all are part of the divine creation. Ultimately, situating *amanah* within Eco-Islam fosters a holistic approach to environmental issues, integrating spiritual beliefs with practical actions aimed at achieving sustainability and harmony with nature (Islam and Samsudin, 2018).

Amanah emphasizes societal welfare and empowers individuals to combat social issues like ignorance, injustice, and treason, fostering a peaceful relationship between all beings on Earth (Herijanto, 2022). The essence of *Amanah* as a divine mandate underscores the pivotal role it plays in human conduct, ethics, and the universal order as prescribed in Islamic teachings. *Amanah* signifies fulfilling responsibilities with a sense of devotion, fear of God (*taqwa*), and discipline (Herijanto, 2022).

In traditional Omani villages, the care of animals is not only a matter of economic necessity but also a reflection of an enduring ecocultural ethic that emphasizes balance, responsibility, and compassion towards all humanature. Animals, particularly goats, are viewed as integral members of the community, as kins deserving of daily care and attention. This relationship is evident in the routines of many villagers, who make a point of checking on their goats each night to ensure they are fed and secure before sleep; revealing the intimate human-animal bonds in rural Omani life. This nightly practice of personally checking on the goats ensures that their basic needs—particularly nourishment and safety—are consistently met. Such practices align with Islamic principles of *rahmah* (mercy) and *amanah* highlighting that stewardship extends to all of God’s creation, including the animals who share human spaces and livelihoods.

Our co-authorship also exemplifies *amanah* not as a metaphor but a cosmological principle—our mutual practices of kinship care undertaken with justice, humility, and care. We met through academic networks shaped by shared interests in ecospirituality and decolonization, but our connection grew through conversations that extended far beyond academic formalities—into voice notes, Quranic verses that required no translation, field memories, and dreams of transformation. We regard our collaboration as a form of *amanah*—a trust we hold not only toward knowledge, but toward each other: to listen, to represent faithfully, to critique without harm, and to co-create responsibly.

Author 2: I can feel the corners of my brain closing in, trying to pin Islam into my Christian upbringing and my atheist framework. Attempting to paint it as a hierarchy, an exploitation, and inherently un-ecocentric as I read experts, scholars, practitioners of Eco-Islam telling me it’s not that. I type and retype, deleting stuttering attempts at inter-eco-cultural (un)learning. I sift through the things I was told, the ways religion has laid waste to the world, and the deep need for it in people’s lives. My process at decolonization begins with decolonizing my

own frames, dissecting them and discarding with love and appreciation at what’s rotten, what’s overused.

Author 1 in response: My eyes are full with tears as I read your notes.

Particularly, this is a form of inter-eco-cultural dialogue that mirrors Nasr’s (1999) views on the power of sacred science and (re) integrating spirituality into our academic studies in a way that foregrounds intercivilizational dialogue by valuing diverse epistemologies, fostering a pluralistic framework where the spiritual, moral, and intellectual dimensions of the cosmos are fully recognized.

In Eco-Islam, the concept of *umma* (cosmological community) extends beyond the traditional understanding of the human-Muslim community to encompass a broader ecological community that includes all living beings and the environment. This reflects an ecocentric ethic that recognizes the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and nature, a specific antidote to anthropocentric ideologies (Mancinelli, 2024). *Umma* is seen as a cosmic collective that shares a responsibility for environmental stewardship, emphasizing that all members must work together to protect and sustain the earth. This collective responsibility is rooted in Islamic teachings that highlight the importance of justice and equity in addressing environmental issues.

Eco-Islam encourages the *umma* to engage in sustainable practices and to advocate for policies that reflect Islamic ecological ethics, thereby fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose in addressing global ecological challenges (Ali and Agushi, 2024). The teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad) serve as guiding principles for the *umma*, reinforcing the idea that caring for the environment is a communal obligation that reflects the moral and ethical dimensions of Islam. By defining *umma* in this way, Eco-Islam promotes a holistic approach to environmentalism that integrates spiritual beliefs with practical actions, encouraging a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world (Mancinelli, 2024; Mardila, 2024).

The date palm, revered across Omani ecocultures, offers a profound metaphor for understanding *umma* as an expanded, ecospiritual community. Within this worldview, the date palm is not merely a resource but living kin—a member in a sacred ecology that binds humans, animals, plants, and land into a moral and spiritual community. In Oman, date palms hold a central place in the ecospiritual imaginary. Revered as a family member, the date palm embodies the commitment to ecological and spiritual reciprocity. For centuries, it has been more than a source of food; it has been a symbol of care and intergenerational connection. This kinship is captured by the framing of the date palm as “a life partner to an Omani” (Alhinai and Milstein, 2019, p. 1087), a metaphor that redefines the tree as a subject of relationships rather than an object of utility. The date palm provides sustenance and shelter not only for humans, but also for birds, animals, and insects, illustrating the interconnectedness and mutual reliance that defines *umma*. Through metaphors such as “our mother” and “our aunt,” the date palm signifies the interconnectedness of all forms of life. It nurtures humans, animals, and the land itself, exemplifying a model of ecocultural sustainability that stands in contrast to neoliberal ideologies of commodification.

Just as members of the *umma* are responsible for one another’s wellbeing, human relations with the date palm emphasize reciprocity, stewardship, and intergenerational care. Tending to the date palm, protecting it from harm, and sharing its fruits reflect the ethical

obligations embedded in *umma*, extending communal responsibility beyond the human to encompass the more-than-human world. Planting and caring for date palms is both a spiritual duty and an act of resistance against the devaluation of humanness. This is encapsulated in the Hadith: “إذا قامت الساعة وفي يد أحدكم فسيلة، فليغرسها” —a teaching that prioritizes ecological regeneration even in the face of existential uncertainty. In its resilience, generosity, and rootedness, the date palm models the virtues that sustain *umma* across time, reminding us that true community flourishes only when all its members, humans and more-than-humans, are honored and nurtured.

Both authors: I used to burn the frankincense you gave me after you moved. An olfactory and sensory mimetic for feeling your calming presence and our bond. Set in a south facing window in my 1930's casita in the desert, the blue pottery lit from below with a tea light candle, the frankincense settled into my senses. 'Eat it' you told me – 'we eat it, breathe it in, rub it on our necks and wrists.' So I did. The gold flecked sap, tapped by Omani methods that incorporate amanah and umma, transported through mechanisms of globalization, represented our own caretaking practices with each other.

Operating together, *amanah* and *umma* form the bedrock of an environmental ethic in Islam. Followers are entrusted by God with a communal responsibility to take care of the cosmological whole, to honor the specific role and place that each being was created for, and to engage deeply with the natural world as a spiritual practice. Taken through this lens, exploitative, colonial, and extractive policies are deep betrayals of this divine trust and a negation of divine responsibility to community. Therefore, Eco-Islam offers an ecocultural framework rooted in the affective for environmental education, policy, and disrupting climate change.

Limitations of Eco-Islam

Eco-Islam faces barriers such as economic pressures and fragmented interpretations (Mancinelli, 2024). The prosperity of majority-Islam countries is reliant on fossil fuels. Global political tensions, the genocide of Palestinians, and a commodity-based market, makes implementing Eco-Islam difficult in the current hyper-capitalistic system. Moreover, fragmented interpretations can make implementing Eco-Islam difficult (Mancinelli, 2024). Aside from the known differences between Shia and Sunni Islam, there are ecocultural differences as well. For example, practicing Islam in Oman also means practicing a relationship to date palms, frankincense, and roses, whereas among the people of the Dukhu village in Indonesia it is expressed in the *Mauja* or *Perayaan Moros* ceremonies (Effendi et al., 2020).

When it comes to different interpretations of the Qur'an, Abdelzاهر et al. (2019) state:

There is no singular official interpretation for the Qur'an. Given the richness of the Qur'anic text, its language often tends to be symbolic, carrying various social and cultural meanings that can result in a difference across various schools of thoughts and socio-cultural backgrounds (Islamic Research Foundation International, <http://www.irfi.org>). Thus, interpretations of the Qur'an can arguably be seen as synonyms, rather than antonyms, of the same text (Helfaya et al., 2016, p. 630).

To these limitations, we add one that operates within/without academia: Islamophobia. Scholars across disciplines have pointed out Islamophobia silences critiques of anti-Muslim rhetoric (Bridge Initiative Team, 2025); perpetuates Orientalism when engaging with students, colleagues, or sociopolitical texts (Anderson et al., 2021; Chaudry, 2020); and operates to bar opportunities for funding and research in Islamic countries and/or about Islamic texts (Črnič, 2020). While scholars in environmental communication do study, teach, and publish at the nexus of 'eco' and Islam, there is a pressing need for more scholarship in order to shift colonial belief systems that render Islam and Muslims as incompatible with neoliberal Christian values and a thriving future.

In fact, “the role of Islam could be one of the decisive factors tipping the planet towards a sustainable future” (Assistant GS of the UNDP, Kjørven and Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2009). This can come from policy engagement with religious leaders (Mardila, 2024), cross-sector collaboration with secular groups (Sayem, 2021), or environmental education (Ali and Agushi, 2024). Practically, Eco-Islam is already compatible with sustainable technologies like regenerative farming and renewable energy (Mohamad et al., 2023); able to raise the collective conscious on environmental concerns (Moneim, 2023); guide management principles in business (Abu-Znaid, 2006); and function as a type of constitution for daily living (Ali, 2010; Abdelzاهر et al., 2019). “Islam embraces green values and thoughts that, if embodied and incorporated into mainstream national legislations, will raise individual and collective awareness. It presents a universal environmental approach composed of Islamic values, ethics, and principles that improve human well-being and sustainable development” (Moneim, 2023, p. 44). Moreover, Ali and Agushi (2024) assert, “When these principles [Eco-Islam] are applied correctly, they can significantly contribute to environmental protection, conservation, and the sustainable use of natural resources” (p. 949).

Conclusion

This paper has proposed a decolonial methodology rooted in Islamic ecospiritual principles of *amanah* (divine trust) and *umma* (cosmological community), employing inter-reflexive storytelling and embodied relational praxis to challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and orient environmental communication toward place-based, more-than-human kinship. Drawing from Omani ecocultures, sacred texts, and lived desert experiences, we have offered *amanah* not as metaphor, but as an epistemological imperative—an obligation to know and act in ways that preserve the sacred integrity of life. Through the lifeworld of the date palm and the communal ethics of the *falaj* irrigation system, *umma* becomes visible not only as a human social body, but as an expanded, more-than-human community of ethical interdependence and shared responsibility.

This paper is also the fruit of a transnational, intercultural friendship between two scholars—one Omani, one American—brought together by shared commitments to epistemic justice, decolonial thought, and environmental care. Our collaboration emerged from academic networks, but it deepened through reciprocal learning, personal vulnerability, and a refusal of the extractive logics that shape dominant research frameworks. We regard our

co-authorship as a form of *amanah*—a sacred trust we hold toward each other, our communities, and the ideas we seek to represent with care. In this way, we enact *umma* as an epistemic, ethical, and relational horizon: not a unity of sameness, but a fellowship of difference held together by reverence, humility, and mutual accountability.

Writing amidst a world marked by climate catastrophe and genocidal violence in Palestine, we do not view these realities as incidental to our work. Rather, they form the ethical ground from which we write. The destruction of land and life is not only ecological but epistemic—a silencing of ways of knowing and being that honor the sacredness of creation (Qumsayeh, 2023). Sacred science, as Nasr (1999) reminds us, does not reject empirical inquiry but embeds it within a cosmology that restores balance between reason and revelation, the material and the spiritual, humanity and the more-than-human. It is this sacred science, exemplified in *amanah* and *umma*, that offers new possibilities—not only for decolonizing knowledge, but for regenerating our relationships with each other and the Earth.

Ultimately, this work calls for a shift in global knowledge production: away from commodification and abstraction, and toward ecospiritual responsibility, trans-civilizational solidarity, and practices of care. The possibilities it offers lie not only in theoretical intervention, but in lived methodology—one that invites wonder, pause, prayer, and rage. Like the roots of the date palm—tangled, unseen, but sustaining—our commitment to epistemological plurality, spiritual depth, and collective healing grounds every line of this paper. We offer this work not as a conclusion, but as a beginning—an invitation to reimagine knowledge as a sacred trust and community as an ecology of interdependence.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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