

Ontology The Place In Qur'anic Dialogue When Angelika Neuwirth

Omar Ali Hussein Ali Al-Zobaidi

stud.2022.1@uodiyala.edu.iq

Iraq/ University of Diyala/ College of Islamic Sciences/ Department of Qur'anic Sciences

Prof. Dr. Munshid Falih Wadi Al-Shammari

mnshidalwadi@gmail.com

Iraq/ University of Diyala/ College of Islamic Sciences/ Department of Qur'anic Sciences

Abstract:

The concept of place is considered one of the philosophical and semantic foundations in the Qur'anic discourse. It has received intensive attention from the German orientalist Angelika Neuwirth, who attempted to approach the Qur'anic understanding from a historical and semiotic perspective with multiple dimensions. This research aims to analyze Neuwirth's views on place in the Holy Qur'an in terms of interpretive dimensions, rhetorical functions, and the influence of the Bible, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, and the eschatological vision. The study seeks to understand how Ontology place transforms from a mere geographical point into an active element in portraying divine justice, reminding of recompense, and constructing the eschatological conception of the universe. The study is based on the analytical and critical methodologies, with limited use of other approaches such as the descriptive and comparative methods, in tracing the details of Neuwirth's writings. It was conducted through her interpretive reading of the relevant Qur'anic verses, along with her repeated comparisons between the Holy Qur'an and the Bible, and her use of spatial symbols related to punishment, salvation, and collective memory. The study has shown that Neuwirth deconstructs the Qur'anic concept of place from a dual perspective: at times as a domain of eternity and finality, and at other times as an Ontology and cultural and historical symbol that transcends the material toward meaning. It also revealed her reliance on concepts influenced by Jewish and Christian theology, which led her to adopt a Western framework in her reading of Islamic texts. The research concludes that Neuwirth's vision of place involves the interpretation of philosophical constructs and ancient religious concepts. At the same time, however, it highlights the centrality of place within the structure of Qur'anic discourse, portraying it as a domain for reminder and exhortation, rather than merely a historical geography.

Keywords: Angelika Neuwirth, Qur'anic discourse, spatial ontology, sacred space, the concept of place in the Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION:

Space, alongside time, constitutes one of the major reference frameworks that shape the human experience in the universe. It has remained an ambiguous concept, rich in transformations and meanings in both human and religious thought. In recent times, space has received particular attention and care within the context of Orientalist Qur'anic studies especially by Angelika Neuwirth, who has attempted to interpret the Qur'an through its historical and cultural context. She does so through a lens that combines the semantics and ontology of space with semiotic interpretation and a historicist perspective. Neuwirth examines the concept of space in the Qur'an in terms of its ontological nature and treats it as a variable dimension that shifts between the Meccan and Medinan periods. She analyzes it through multiple layers of meaning: archaeological and geographical, symbolic and eschatological, mnemonic and cultural. In her writings, she focuses on comparing the Qur'an with the Bible in order to uncover the imaginative structures that shape the Qur'anic conception of the world as a continuation of ancient religions. This is explored through narratives of divine punishment, descriptions of the Day of Judgment, and cosmic scenes related to creation and annihilation. The aim of this study is to elucidate the central conceptions of space and its ontology in Neuwirth's thought, and to analyze the academic and methodological ethics underlying her approach. This is carried out using a critical analytical method and by examining the texts in light of the theological and rhetorical context enabled by the structure of the Qur'anic discourse itself.

First: The Concept of Ontology:

The term being or existence (ontology) emerges prominently among philosophers, as its roots lie in philosophy, with philosophers being the first to formulate it. Ontology is attributed to Aristotle⁽¹⁾, as mentioned in his work *Metaphysics*, in which he meticulously examined the nature of being. As for the term "ontology" in its technical sense, it was first coined by the German thinker Jacob Lorhard⁽²⁾, where it appeared in his work *Ogdoas Scholastica* (1606 CE). This marked one of the foundational moments in the emergence and crystallization of this field, paving the way for subsequent developments in philosophy.⁽³⁾ Ontology is the philosophical study of existence in terms of what it means to be or exist, or of entities that signify existence. In other words, it seeks to understand the origins of every reality or truth.⁽⁴⁾ The most prominent figure who focused on the concept of existence ontology in the modern era, specifically in the twentieth century CE, is Martin Heidegger⁽⁵⁾. In his writings, Heidegger examined the meaning of existence in a detailed and precise manner, centering on the question, "What does it mean to be?"⁽⁶⁾ He defines ontology as "being the most universal conception... it is the concept itself"⁽⁷⁾. In other words, ontology or "being" is the broadest and most comprehensive concept that the human mind can contemplate. Through being, we are able to perceive things not merely through their physical existence, meaning that ontology is the science or study of being itself. Ontology is also defined as "the form that is distilled within the exceptional linguistic nominalism of the Qur'anic creative command: Kun (Be)."⁽⁸⁾

¹ Aristotle: (384–322 BCE) was one of the most important philosophers and thinkers of ancient Athens and one of the most prominent figures in history. He authored a comprehensive philosophical and scientific system. Aristotle was a student of Plato for approximately twenty years and later became the teacher of Alexander the Great. He founded the school known as the "Lyceum" or the "Peripatetic" school, so named because he taught while walking. Aristotle is renowned for founding various fields including logic, biology, ethics, politics, and metaphysics. Among his most significant works are *Politics*, *Poetics*, and *Metaphysics*. Farouk Abdel-Moati, *Aristotle: The Master of Greek Philosophers* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 1413 AH/ 1992 CE), pp. 7–17.

² Jacob Lorhard: (1561–1609) was a German philosopher and educator who is considered the first to have coined the term ontology in its technical sense, in his book *Ogdoas Scholastica* published in 1606. He believed that the study of being involves the knowledge of intelligible concepts through which we comprehend the world, thereby establishing a rational metaphysical approach based on the understanding of beings and their concepts. His work represented an early bridge between rationalist philosophy and the emergence of modern scientific thought. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, entry: "**Jacob Lorhard**", retrieved: 04/05/2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Lorhard.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, entry: "**Ontology**", retrieved: 04/05/2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ontology-metaphysics>.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Martin Heidegger: (1889–1976) was a German philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. He is best known for his contributions to existential philosophy, ontology, and the critique of traditional metaphysics. In his works, he focused on the meaning of Being, considering existential anxiety as a gateway to understanding the self and authentic existence. His affiliation with the Nazi Party sparked extensive debate regarding the ethical dimensions of his thought. Among his most prominent works are *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, *Being and Time*, and *Early Writings*, among others. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "**Martin Heidegger**", retrieved 04/05/2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Heidegger-German-philosopher>.

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Fathi El-Meskini, reviewed by Ismail Al-Mosaddiq (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadidah, 2012), pp. 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–54.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology (Hermeneutics of Facticity)*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Muhammad Abu Hashim Mahjoub (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'minun bi-la Hudud Foundation for Studies and Research, 2019), pp. 66.

This means that the Qur'anic command Kun is the command of 'being' itself." This implies that the Qur'anic concept of being or ontology resides in the very divine command, in line with Martin Heidegger's interpretation, and as can be understood from the words of the Almighty in the Qur'an "All it takes, when He wills something 'to be', is simply to say to it: "Be!" And it is!"⁽⁹⁾ In another definition, ontology is described as "a branch of philosophy that studies being in itself, independently of its conditions and phenomena"⁽¹⁰⁾ or it is a science "that investigates things in themselves regarding what they are as essences, in the Cartesian sense"⁽¹¹⁾

Second: The Problematic of Space Among Scholars:

Time and space are considered inseparable elements in human experience. Their meanings and interpretations have varied among philosophers and exegetes, yet time and space remain fundamental essences for perceiving the universe, shaping the framework of thought in the humanities, as follows:

Space in Language:

It is that in which a thing is placed. It is said to be an attribute or a substratum, such as the ground for a bed. The plural forms are "amkina" and "amakin", which is the plural of the plural.⁽¹³⁾⁽¹²⁾ The letters م (m), ك (k), and ن (n) together form one word: makan, meaning "place" or "space."⁽¹⁴⁾ It means the position or the location.⁽¹⁵⁾ Al-Makanat is also a plural form of al-Makan, formed first as Amkina, then further pluralized as Makanat.⁽¹⁶⁾ Originally, al-makana means the whiteness of fog. It is also said that al-makanat means al-amkina, i.e., places. It is said: "An-nas 'ala makanatihim wa sukanatihim" meaning they are in their places and their dwellings⁽¹⁷⁾. Al-Makina derives from tamakkun, meaning firmness or being firmly established. It is related to talab seeking or demand and tabi'a following or pursuit, which come from tatallub and tatabu, respectively.⁽¹⁸⁾

Place in terminology:

Aristotle linked place with the body, making its existence dependent on it. He considered the body as evidence of the place's existence; since the movement of a body and its displacement of another body

⁹ The Holy Qur'an: Ya-Sin, 82.

¹⁰ Jamil Saliba, *The Philosophical Dictionary in Arabic, French, English, and Latin Terms* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Maktabat Al-Madrasa, 1982), part 2, pp. 560.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Abu Ubaid Al-Qasim ibn Sallam Al-Baghdadi (d. 224 AH), *Gharib al-Hadith*, edited by Muhammad Abd al-Mu'id Khan (Hyderabad, Deccan, India: Ottoman Encyclopedia Press, 1384 AH/ 1964 CE), part 4, p. 214, entry: Al-Tawf.

¹³ Muhammad Murtada Al-Husseini Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-Urus min Jawahir al-Qamus* (Kuwait: Ministry of Guidance and Information, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters), part 36, pp. 189-190, entry: M K N.

¹⁴ Ahmad ibn Fares ibn Zakariya al-Qazwini al-Razi, Abu al-Husayn (d. 395 AH), *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lugha*, edited by Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun (Dar al-Fikr, 1399 AH / 1979 CE), part 5, pp. 343.

¹⁵ Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Sayyidah al-Mursi (d. 458 AH), *Al-Muhkam wal-Muheet al-Azam*, edited by Abdul Hamid Hindawi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2000 CE), part 7, pp. 71, entry: M K N.

¹⁶ Abu al-Qasim Mahmoud ibn Amr ibn Ahmad al-Zamakhshari Jar Allah (d. 538 AH), *Al-Fa'iq fi Gharib al-Hadith wal Athar*, edited by Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi (d. 1399 AH) and Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim (d. 1401 AH) (Lebanon: Dar al-Ma'rifah), 2nd edition, part 3, pp. 381.

¹⁷ Mujadd al-Din Abu al-Sa'adat al-Mubarak ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Shaybani al-Jazri Ibn al-Athir (d. 606 AH), *Al-Nihaya fi Gharib al-Hadith wal Athar*, edited by Taher Ahmad al-Zawi and Mahmoud Muhammad al-Tanahi (Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Maktaba al-Ilmiyya, 1399 AH / 1979 CE), part 4, p. 350.

¹⁸ Ibid.

indicate that place has a tangible and perceptible existence.⁽¹⁹⁾ Al-Zarkashi ⁽²⁰⁾ was influenced by some views of Greek and Arab philosophers regarding the concept of place. Among the most prominent of them were Aristotle, Al-Farabi⁽²¹⁾, and Ibn Sina⁽²²⁾. He conveyed their definition of place as the surface of a body both outward and inward that is, the measured dimensions. He also pointed out that the theologians (mutakallimun) consider place to be space, whereas the philosophers view place as emptiness void.⁽²³⁾ Place is defined as "the imagined space that the body occupies and within which its dimensions extend"⁽²⁴⁾ It is also defined as "the inner surface of the containing body that is tangent to the lower surface of the contained, and it is said to be the place of the lower surface on which a heavy object rests."⁽²⁵⁾ Every physical entity in the world occupies a space in the universe and is not considered abstract; rather, it can be measured in all directions. Place is characterized by several features, the most prominent of which is possessing dimensions known as volume. Also, every substance occupies a space with clear boundaries

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Physics: Natural Hearing*, translated by Abd al-Qadir Qanini, (Beirut: Africa al-Sharq). pp. 109.

²⁰ Al-Zarkashi: (745–794 AH) was Abu Abdullah Badr al-Din Muhammad ibn Bahadur ibn Abdullah al-Zarkashi al-Masri al-Shafi'i, a venerable and serious scholar known for his expertise in Shafi'i jurisprudence, the sciences of the Prophetic Hadith, and Qur'anic exegesis, among other fields. He made significant contributions to the advancement of Islamic thought. He studied under scholars from the Levant such as al-Balqini, al-Adhri, and al-Isnawi. He was a repository of Arabic and Islamic sciences across various disciplines. He was born and died in Egypt, specifically Cairo, and some say he was of Turkish origin. Among his works are Silsilat al-Dhahab, Al-Bahr al-Muheet, and Al-Burhan fi Ulum al-Qur'an. Abu Bakr ibn Ahmad ibn Umar al-Asadi al-Shihabi al-Dimashqi, Taqi al-Din Ibn Qadi Shahba (d. 851 AH), *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyya*, edited by Al-Hafiz Abdul Alim Khan (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1407 AH), part 3, pp. 167–168.

²¹ Al-Farabi: (260–339 AH), Abu Nasr, whose full name is Muhammad ibn Tarkhan al-Farabi, is named after the city of Farab in Kazakhstan and is of Turkic origin. He was a Muslim philosopher and scholar, honored with the titles "The Second Teacher" after Aristotle and "The Master of the Philosophers" He believed that reason is the path to understanding religion. Al-Farabi was prominent for his writings in philosophy, law, logic, and politics. He endeavored to reconcile Greek philosophy with Islam. Much of his work focused on the concept of "utopia" aimed at achieving justice. Among his notable works are *Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City and its Opponents and Detached Chapters*, among others. Mustafa Abdul-Razzaq, *Philosopher of the Arabs and the Second Teacher* (United Kingdom: Hindawi Foundation, 2014), pp. 41–58.

²² Ibn Sina: (370–428 AH), though some say he died in 427 AH, Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abdullah al-Balkhi al-Bukhari, was a renowned Islamic philosopher and scholar. He was a memorizer of the Holy Qur'an and well-versed in medicine, politics, logic, astronomy, psychology, and more. Ibn Sina served as a minister in the government of Adud al-Dawla ibn Buyah. Like Al-Farabi, he believed that reason is the path to understanding and a means to comprehend existence. His efforts to reconcile Greek philosophy with Islamic philosophy were similar to those of Al-Farabi. He left behind a vast scientific legacy in both Arabic and Persian, covering various scientific fields. His most important works include *The Book of Healing (Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat)* and *The Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb)*, among others. Amer Al-Najjar, *History of Medicine in the Islamic State* (Cairo: Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1994), pp. 120–126.

²³ Badr al-Din Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH), *Tashnif al-Masamie bi Jam' al-Jawami'* by Taj al-Din al-Subki, studied and edited by Sayyid Abd al-Aziz and Abd Allah Rabi' (Cairo: Maktabat Qurtubah for Scientific Research and Heritage Revival and Library, 1418 AH/ 1998 CE; Mecca: Al-Makkiyah Library, 1418 AH/ 1998 CE), part 4, pp. 899–900.

²⁴ Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sharif al-Jurjani (d. 816 AH), *Al-Ta'rifat* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1403 AH / 1983 CE), pp. 227.

²⁵ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH), *Mu'jam Maqalid al-'Ulum fi al-Hudud wa al-Rusum*, edited by Muhammad Ibrahim 'Ibada (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Adab, 1324 AH/ 2004 CE), pp. 134.

that do not overlap with another substance.⁽²⁶⁾

Thirdly: The Concept of Place According to Neuwirth:

Neuwirth focuses on the crystallization and development of place from the Meccan (otherworldly) significance to the new Medinan (earthly) significance. In the Holy Qur'an, place is not merely a tangible reality; rather, it is a complex blend that highlights divine will, the testing of humanity, and the struggle between good and evil. The Qur'an presents this to people with an eloquent and miraculous style.⁽²⁷⁾ We can clarify the concept of place according to Neuwirth as follows:

1_ Impact:

A_ Neuwirth adopted the Orientalist Joseph Horovitz's⁽²⁸⁾ approach regarding the development of the concept of place throughout history according to the Qur'anic stories, specifically the "punishment stories" Horovitz interprets these punishment stories and what befell the peoples of the "extinct nations" as a consequence of their disobedience to divine commands. The Qur'an differs from other sacred scriptures in presenting these stories of peoples by naming them with specific place names such as "Thamudyun" "Nabataeans" "Aribiyun" and "Adiyun" as well as names of other tribes. However, Neuwirth denies the Qur'an's originality in these toponyms, referring in her book to Ptolemy's map⁽²⁹⁾, from which it is understood that these names had already appeared in his work and thus the Qur'an lacks originality in this regard according to Neuwirth's perspective.⁽³⁰⁾

B_ Neuwirth's writings are predominantly influenced by the Holy Scripture, which is evident in her works, as she extracts from it certain signs and punishment stories mentioned in the Qur'an, such as "Sodom and Gomorrah"⁽³²⁾⁽³¹⁾

C_ The influence of the Qur'an is no less than the influence of history or the Holy Scripture, which in

²⁶ Abdul Rahman Badawi, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Beirut, Lebanon: The Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1984), part 2, pp. 461.

²⁷ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, translated by Sobhi Shuayb, reviewed by Mazen Akasha, (Cairo, Egypt: Red Sea Library, 2022), pp. 182-184.

²⁸ Josef Horovitz: (1874-1931) was a German Orientalist of Jewish faith. His father was a rabbi. He graduated from the University of Berlin in Germany and served as a professor of the Arabic language at the Aligarh Muslim University in India. Among his colleagues at the university was the Indian scholar Abdul Hamid al-Farahidi, from whom he learned Hebrew. Horovitz benefited from his deep knowledge of Arabic sciences and interpreted the Qur'an in a book titled Qur'anic Studies, which he did not complete. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, article "Josef Horovitz" retrieved May 8, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Horovitz

²⁹ Claudius Ptolemaeus: He was a philosopher, astronomer, mathematician, geographer, astrologer, and musician of the second century AD. He was born in Egypt and lived in Alexandria, which at that time was part of the Roman Empire. He authored the book Al-Majisti (The Almagest), which remained the most important reference in astronomy for more than a thousand years. His astronomical theory was based on the geocentric model, with the Earth at the center and celestial bodies revolving around it. Encyclopaedia Britannica, entry "Ptolemy" retrieval: 08/05/2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ptolemy>.

³⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 157-160.

³¹ Sodom and Gomorrah: Two cities famous for their sinfulness, destroyed because of their evils. Along with the cities of Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar, they formed the "Five Cities of the Plain" They are mentioned in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Their names are associated with divine punishment and place. Ahmed bin Suleiman Ayyoub and a selection of researchers, *Encyclopedia of the Beauties of Islam and Refutation of the Wicked's Objections* (Kuwait: Dar Elaf International Publishing and Distribution, 1436 AH/ 2015 AD), part 12 .pp. 372.

³² Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp.173.

turn provides a key to deciphering the complexities and ambiguities of historical symbols, with an Islamic religious perspective aimed at addressing past issues and confronting present conflicts.

D_ The stylistic analysis of Qur'anic contexts indicates a clear spatial semiotics⁽³³⁾, manifested in making place an active and influential element in shaping the rhetorical semantic image, ultimately enhancing understanding and constructing insights for contemplation.⁽³⁵⁾⁽³⁴⁾

E_ We observe that Neuwirth adopted Christoph Domling's⁽³⁶⁾ commentary on the cities of "Sodom and Gomorrah" and was influenced by it, accepting his view regarding the negativity associated with them and the perception and imagination accompanying their mention. Christoph Domling points out that the negativity linked to the story of the people of Lot (peace be upon him) carries deeply significant negative connotations. It is inconceivable that a prophetic message would come without referencing the enormity of the crime they committed, recalling the prophet associated with them, hinting at the connection to divine retribution, and highlighting these nations' civilizational development but with their behavior's decline and the eternal curse upon them. This serves as a history of these societies. Furthermore, the mind, by mentioning these places, links the memory to the cause of that punishment and the manner of its treatment something that is much needed today amid prevailing global conditions such as gender change and widespread ignorance clouding minds.⁽³⁷⁾

F_ It must be noted that Neuwirth included in her study the commentary of Ersent Axel Knauf⁽³⁸⁾, which reflects a form of acceptance, agreement, and influence. Axel Knauf expanded his discussion regarding the beginnings of the punishment stories, which he studies from theological sources of the Old Testament, most notably the Book of Isaiah. In his study, he emphasizes the issue of the curse of nations, their exile, and the demographic⁽³⁹⁾ changes that occurred. With reference to the negativity of the ancient

³³ Semiotics: It is a relatively modern discipline that specializes in signs, symbols, features, and their meanings in communication whether in language, images, or signs, and whether natural or artificial. The first to introduce this term were the American Charles Sanders Peirce and the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotics focuses on analyzing the way meanings are created and conveyed through symbols such as words, signs, images, gestures, and so on. It is divided into two main branches: 1_ Linguistic Semiotics: Studies concerning the relationship between words and their meanings. 2_ Visual Semiotics: Studies concerning meaning in culture, literature, art, and film. Faysal El-Ahmar, *Dictionary of Semiotics* (Algeria: Ikhtilef Publications, 1431 AH/ 2010 CE; Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers), pp. 11-18.

³⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 158.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 173.

³⁶ Christoph Dohmen: is a German Catholic theologian and scholar of the Old Testament (the Torah). He holds a doctorate in theology and was born in 1957. Dohmen is a member of the Catholic Theological Faculty at the University of Regensburg and the University of Osnabrück. His writings focus on elucidating the texts of the Torah and emphasizing the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Lux, Yale University platform, "Christoph Dohmen" retrieved 06/08/2024, <https://lux.collections.yale.edu/view/person/ea58f300-549b-41d6-a100-3b320ee2711a>.

³⁷ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 159.

³⁸ Ernst Axel Knauf: Born in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1953, he is a scholar of the Old Testament specializing in the history of ancient "Israel" and the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. He has taught at several universities, including the University of Geneva and the University of Bern. His research focuses on religious literature during the Persian period and the connection between Palestine and the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. Among his notable works are Ishmael: Studies on the History of Palestine and Northern Arabia and Environment of the Old Testament. Wikipedia: "Ernst Axel Knauf" retrieved 25/12/2024, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Axel_Knauf.

³⁹ Demography or Population Science: It is a key interdisciplinary field that bridges sociology and geography. It focuses on studying population characteristics and movements, including aspects such as population size, density, urban planning, age and gender composition, and more. Demography aims to understand the dynamics of a society in a given area, its desires, and the causes of population change,

Arab history according to Neuwirth, his commentary alludes to meanings based on classical orientalist conceptions, linking Arab tribes with loss or destruction that befell those regions according to the Qur'an, specifically the "verses of punishment" The classical orientalist perspective lacks neutrality, as it requires comparison with Arab religious and historical sources to exonerate and clear the Arabs of such claims, and to balance the discourse between Western and Eastern narratives.⁽⁴⁰⁾

G_ Neuwirth adopted the perspective of Christian Lange⁽⁴¹⁾ regarding the interrelation between time and space, emphasizing the impossibility of separating the "now" from the "after." Time extends linearly and continuously from beginning to end, connected intrinsically to space, which is subject to the same principle as time. Space undergoes dissolution at the end of time, resulting in the formation of beginnings and endings⁽⁴²⁾ :

Two beginnings		Two endings	
Beginning of time	Beginning of existence	End of time	Dissolution of the universe

H_ Neuwirth was influenced by the view presented by Gottfried Muller⁽⁴³⁾ concerning the verses of commendation or praise that is, the verses that discuss scenarios of the Hereafter which are considered by Neuwirth as an affirmation by the Qur'an of the meaning of the "realm of nature" Gottfried Müller compared pre-Islamic poetry with the Qur'an and observed the extent of the difference in the conception and imagination of nature, emphasizing the wide disparity between the Qur'anic conception of nature and that of the ancient Arab tribes. Neuwirth regards this as an echo of the Psalms and an intertextual reference from the Old Testament of the Holy Bible.⁽⁴⁴⁾

I_ Neuwirth was influenced by the view of Ernst Robert Curtius⁽⁴⁵⁾ regarding the comparison between nature scenes in the Holy Bible, specifically the Book of Psalms, and the Qur'an, particularly in Surah An-Naba'. Curtius concludes that the ideal or exemplary place is associated with nature according to the conceptions established by religions in the late classical era. He notes that the Qur'an employed a

analyzing them in detail. This analysis forms a foundation for planning and sustainable development. Ahmad Ali Ismail, *Foundations of Population Science and Its Geographic Applications* (Cairo: Dar Al-Thaqafa for Publishing and Distribution, 1997), 8th ed., pp. 11-16.

⁴⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 168-169.

⁴¹ Christian Lange: Born in 1975, he is a professor and head of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. He studied comparative religion and Islamic studies at the University of Tübingen, Cairo, Harvard, and Muscat, and earned his PhD from Harvard University. His research focuses on Islamic intellectual and cultural history in the pre-modern period. Among his notable works are Islamic Sensory History, Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions, and The Secret Name of God. Christian Lange, *Justice and Punishment in the Islamic Imagination During the Middle Ages*, trans. Riad El Miladi (Beirut: Al-Madaar Al-Islami, 2016), pp. 2.

⁴² Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, p. 174.

⁴³ Gottfried Muller: (born 1934) is a German theologian and former politician in East Germany as well as a pastor. He served as Minister of Information and later became president of the parliament. He studied Protestant theology at Karl Marx University and Friedrich Schiller University, earning a doctorate in theology. Muller held many political positions within the German government .Wikipedia, "**Gottfried Muller**" retrieved 08/06/2024, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gottfried_M%C3%BCller_\(Politiker\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gottfried_M%C3%BCller_(Politiker)).

⁴⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 178-179.

⁴⁵ Ernst Robert: (1886-1956) was a literary scholar from northern Germany, a linguist and philosopher, and a literary critic specializing in Romance languages. He was proficient in French and English and is renowned for his study of European literature and the Latin Middle Ages, which was translated into English under the title European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages. Wikipedia, "**Ernst Robert Curtius**" retrieved 07/08/2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Robert_Curtius.

"hermeneutical correction" of many scenes found in the Bible, including scenes of nature. ⁽⁴⁶⁾

2 _The Significations of Place According to Neuwirth:

It is essential to emphasize that Neuwirth alludes to the concept of place in the Qur'an through several ideas and conceptions, most notably: Place as an archaeological and geographical feature; Place as a domain of memory and history; Additionally, place is considered a symbol of eternity and transience (annihilation). She then links it to the afterlife and frames it as a scene from the eschatological landscape. Neuwirth points to the relationship between culture and place particularly through punishment narratives and draws attention to the deep connection between place, the complexity of spatial history, the destiny of the universe, and the belief in salvation (al-mufazah) and its opposite. The exalted Qur'an, in her view, connects time and space: time represents human life in a linear form, beginning with creation and ending with disintegration on the appointed day, while space represents Paradise and Hell as eternal abodes. The signification of place can thus be analyzed, according to Neuwirth's conceptual framework, as follows:

A_ Place as an Archaeological and Geographical Marker:

The Qur'an uses place as a geographical signifier indicative of a former nation or prophets mentioned in the sacred text. Most of these places are associated with torment and punishment and point to the commission of sins and transgressions such as "Sodom" "Gomorra" "Makkah al-Mukarramah" among others. The Qur'an also alludes to specific sites such as al-Hijr, in His saying: "Indeed, the residents of the Stone Valley also denied the messengers" ⁽⁴⁷⁾ where the reference is to the people of Thamud, to whom the prophet Ṣāliḥ (peace be upon him) was sent. It also references 'Aynunah, a valley associated with the people of the prophet Shu'ayb (peace be upon him), and the sunken city Sodom, which is linked to the people of the prophet Luṭ (peace be upon him). ⁽⁴⁸⁾

B_ Place as a Field of Memory and History:

Neuwirth considers that the places mentioned in the Qur'an are not merely geographical or archaeological points, but rather narrate ancient stories laden with messages directed at the Arab environment of the pre-Islamic era. The ruins or remains ⁽⁴⁹⁾ serve as evidence of the existence of these former nations and as a sign of divine power and immense forgiveness.

Neuwirth suggests that Qur'anic places contribute to a deeper understanding of the jahili period and aid in the construction of a unified Arab civilization that encompasses both past and present. Through the punishment of former nations, these places highlight that Muslims possess a historical truth regarding those peoples. ⁽⁵⁰⁾

C_ Place as a Sign of Eternity and Destruction:

Neuwirth explains that place in the Qur'an is simultaneously a domain of continuity, permanence, and eventual demise. The Qur'anic narratives depict the eternity and sustainability of the universe, the form of the natural world, and spatial existence. However, from another perspective, these same narratives also suggest the dissolution and destruction of the universe for those who disobey the commands of the Creator and fail to respond to His teachings and laws. ⁽⁵¹⁾

⁴⁶ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 179-181.

⁴⁷ The Holy Qur'an: Al-Hijr, 80.

⁴⁸ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 158.

⁴⁹ Ruins: This term refers to the remains of heritage created by humans that have become destroyed due to various reasons, including wars, natural disasters, migration, etc. Gradually and slowly, people begin to neglect them and then forget them. Many cities have turned into ruins, some of which still exist today, while others have been erased by time. Examples of ruins include Babylon, the Egyptian pyramids, and others.

Wikipedia,

"Ruins,"

Retrieval

date:05/08/2024, <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84>

⁵⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 159-161.

⁵¹ Angelika Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 182-183.

D_ Place as an Image of the Great Day:

Neuwirth hints that the concept of place in the Noble Qur'an is not fixed or stable, but rather an image of the afterlife and the evolution of space. She gradually employs symbols, scenarios, and scenes from the sacred books of monotheistic religions to contribute to the formation of a new understanding of place and the afterlife. This is the Qur'anic conception of the Day of Resurrection as an event involving the destruction of the old universe and its reconstruction, thus making place a sign and image of the annihilation of the cosmos and its replacement by another within the divine will. As stated in His saying: "Have We not smoothed out the earth 'like a bed' and 'made' the mountains as 'its' pegs"⁽⁵²⁾, the mountains are used to represent God's power, ability, and will to control and govern the world. And in His saying: "and the mountains will be blown away, becoming 'like' a mirage"⁽⁵³⁾, the mountains become perished, like an illusion, in the afterlife. It becomes evident that the Qur'anic text does not use place as an absolute sign of the Resurrection, but rather as a mixture of metaphor, signs, and ambiguity to represent divine authority and the effect of the afterlife on the world.⁽⁵⁴⁾

E_ Place and Culture:

Neuwirth refers to the relationship between place and culture, and she encourages understanding place and culture through the interpretation of Qur'anic narratives. These are not merely historical accounts, but rather narratives of Arab culture. She emphasizes that the Qur'anic text reflects the reality surrounding it and is not detached from life. Moreover, she hints at the form and nature of the pre-Islamic Arab environment.⁽⁵⁵⁾

F_ The Ideal Place:

According to Neuwirth, the Qur'an depicts Paradise using miraculous rhetorical and poetic harmonious rhythmic imagery. It is considered a model of the ideal place according to Qur'anic and biblical scenarios, which associate it with nature to convey the idea that Paradise is like a garden. She draws a comparison with the Psalm: "and you made the darkness, so the animals in the forest could come out at night. Lions roar as they hunt for the food you provide."⁽⁵⁶⁾, to liken the forest and nature to the ideal model of place in the ancient imagination.⁽⁵⁷⁾

G_ Ontological Place:

In a unique and entirely different step from her previous approaches, Neuwirth studies the concept of place in the Qur'an ontologically, between its existence as a tangible geographical point (existent), and the disintegration of the features of place as it deteriorates into ruins remnants of those who came before us, romanticized by poets, and then completely vanishes to become immaterial mirage-like memories retrieved by humans as part of their past. Place, according to Qur'anic prophecies, becomes a paradox of matter, transforming from an earthly utilitarian space into an otherworldly place (Paradise), which is mentioned as a reward for the righteous and represents the immaterial opposite. Neuwirth links the development of place through history to the development of time as its inseparable companion, accompanying it from being to disappearance and the end, according to the Qur'anic conception. She uses examples from Surahs such as al-naba' and al-Shu'ara' and others. She provides examples of these Qur'anic places such as the well-known cities of "Sodom" and "Gomorrah" and many others, where the transformation or evolution of place is tied to the transformation of peoples, progressing through time

⁵² The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba' 6-7.

⁵³ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba' 20.

⁵⁴ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 181.

⁵⁵ Ibid, pp. 171.

⁵⁶ The Holy Bible: Old Testament, Psalm 104/20-22.

⁵⁷ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 179-183.

and in accordance with divine will.⁽⁵⁸⁾

3_ Applied Examples:

After all this exposition, and as we previously mentioned, Neuwirth has provided only two applied examples or case studies, as follows:

A_ Punishment Narratives:

Neuwirth presents an in-depth study of the punishment narratives that appear in Surah Ash-Shu'ara', such as the story of Prophet Noah, Prophet Hud, in addition to Prophet Salih, then Prophet Lot, and not forgetting Prophet Shu'ayb. Neuwirth does not address the entire Surah Ash-Shu'ara', but rather a small portion specifically limited to the verses in which these prophets are mentioned, in order to connect the context and the derived conclusions to the concept of place in the Qur'anic text. She also conducts a comparative study through these narratives with the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Jeremiah, the Book of Deuteronomy, and the Book of Leviticus, alongside the Psalms of Prophet David. All of these falls within the Holy Bible, and these scenes are examined from a semiotic, symbolic, and doctrinal Islamic religious perspective.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Those peoples transgressed divine rights for themselves to the extent that they deserved punishment from God. The punishment was not merely for their disobedience, but also for violating divine rights such as arrogance. The people of those nations were arrogant and aspired to build an "eternal glory" through architectural achievements, according to Neuwirth's perspective. However, the purpose of Surah Ash-Shu'ara' is not only to present these stories but to contextualize those nations within their historical framework. The Qur'an does not view these events as continuous in the same way as the Bible does; rather, it regards them as past events that exist solely as lessons. Had these events continued, the Arabs would have borne part of the negativity and curse that accompanied those peoples.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Neuwirth's approach regarding place in the context of the verses of punishment appears to implicitly assign responsibility to God and direct blame toward Him. The way God punished those peoples through natural disasters had lasting impacts on the people afterward, such as the destruction of irrigation systems, demographic changes, and other consequences. This is illustrated in the verse: "When the earth is shaken 'in' its ultimate quaking, and when the earth throws out 'all' its contents"⁽⁶¹⁾ which refers to the destruction of the people of Thamud by an earthquake that was not fate but rather a divine punishment.⁽⁶²⁾ In an unprecedented move, Neuwirth links place with divine justice, mercy, punishment for disobedience and rebellion, making it evidence of these attributes. She proposes a new perspective suggesting that reason works by logically connecting scenarios or causes of punishment to deduce the justice and mercy of the Lord. This is reflected in the verse: "The people of Noah rejected the messengers...And your Lord is certainly the Almighty, Most Merciful."⁽⁶⁴⁾⁽⁶³⁾ The scenes of punishment in Surah Ash-Shu'ara' are not merely historical narratives, but rather they are charged with divine messages from Allah and serve as warnings to humanity against repeating the mistakes and sins of past nations—such as arrogance, disobedience to the messengers, and lack of faith in them and in Allah. Through this message, we are called to raise awareness in the world about prevalent misconceptions in this era, foremost among them being the alteration of gender identity, disobedience to Allah, denial of Him and His blessings, drifting toward idolatry, and the necessity of repentance from sins and wrongdoings.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Neuwirth views the punishment stories as a sign or symbol of God's retribution against all who deny His praise, associating them with the negative and rejected aspects. She considers these stories as a

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 175–184.

⁵⁹ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 166.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Holy Qur'an: Al-Zalzalah, 1–2.

⁶² Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 170.

⁶³ The Holy Qur'an: Ash-Shu'ara', 105–191.

⁶⁴ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 161.

⁶⁵ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 166.

powerful emblem of sinfulness in Surah Ash-Shu'ara'. What appears clearly evident in the surah is the authority and message of the Prophet Muhammad, who employs the punishment narratives as a means and example to demonstrate God's will and His archaeological imprint on place and time.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Finally, Neuwirth analyzed the central idea of Surah Ash-Shu'ara' regarding these punishments, which is that place in the Qur'anic conception is not fixed or stable, but rather a field for punishment and the manifestation of divine justice.

B_ Verses of Divine Power:

Neuwirth analyzes the series of verses concerning divine power in Surat al-naba', which begin with expressions formed to praise God, extol His creation, and glorify the greatness of the Lord therein. The verses then conclude with the annihilation and disappearance of the material universe in an ending she describes as tragic this coming after the mention of God's blessings and perfection. In the same context of the "two revisions" Neuwirth once again criticizes and attacks the Qur'an regarded as untouchable specifically in Surat al-naba', considering it an extension of pre-Islamic poetry and of the Psalms within the Holy Scripture.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Neuwirth shows that the beginning of Surat al-naba', which opens with a question about "the Great Announcement" al-naba', is in fact an anticipation of the Promised Day—a warning and threat to the disobedient and the opposers, regarding what will befall them if they persist in their current state, and a reward for the moderate believers. After establishing that the world is inevitably perishable and that the Hereafter is everlasting, Neuwirth emphasizes the contemplation of the Qur'an through the unseen matters presented to us in the form of signs that foreshadow the end such as the signs of the Hour which she considers a major transformation in the course of the material universe. This, in turn, leads to an expansion in the cognitive awareness and understanding of the meanings, implications, scenes, and messages of the Qur'an, as in His saying, the Exalted: "What are they asking one another about?...what their hands have done, and the disbelievers will cry, "I wish I were dust." "⁽⁶⁹⁾⁽⁶⁸⁾ Neuwirth connects the context of Surat al-naba' with time and space, in order to deduce from it the progression of time and its movement forward in conjunction with space. This is evident in the verses of Surat al-naba', beginning with His saying, the Exalted: "Have We not smoothed out the earth 'like a bed',... and dense orchards?"⁽⁷⁰⁾ They are verses that speak about the perfection of creation from a standpoint of wondrous, miraculous eloquence. Then, the verses address the Final Judgment and those who deserve reward and recompense after the dissolution and disappearance of the universe, as in the words of the Exalted: "Indeed, the Day of 'Final' Decision is an appointed time...a 'fitting' reward as a generous gift from your Lord"⁽⁷²⁾⁽⁷¹⁾ Neuwirth discusses in Surah An-naba' the influence of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and the Holy Scripture on the Qur'an. As previously mentioned, she claims there is extensive intertextuality with the Psalms of Prophet David (peace be upon him). She further demonstrates, after examining various perspectives on this matter, the extent of the difference between the pre-Islamic mindset and the Qur'anic thought, and the degree of development present in these conceptions and intertextual scenarios according to Neuwirth. For example, the verse: "Have We not smoothed out the earth 'like a bed' and 'made' the mountains as 'its' pegs"⁽⁷³⁾ "and surrounded by light. You spread out the sky like a tent" ⁽⁷⁴⁾"You built foundations for the earth, and it will never be shaken"⁽⁷⁵⁾ In her final narrative, she favors the Psalms over

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 172–174.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 174.

⁶⁸ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba', 1–40.

⁶⁹ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 178.

⁷⁰ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba', 6–16.

⁷¹ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba', 17–36.

⁷² Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 182.

⁷³ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba', 6–7.

⁷⁴ The Holy Bible: Old Testament, Psalm 104/2.

⁷⁵ The Holy Bible: Old Testament, Psalm 104/5.

the Qur'an by stating that the Psalms depict the world as an artistic painting subject to the will of the incarnate God, and that it is dynamic in order to provide sustenance to humans and creatures because it is connected to the Lord. This, according to Neuwirth, represents the model of place⁽⁷⁶⁾ According to Neuwirth's perspective, the verses of Power include a discourse about place, which, like time, is entirely subject to an end that requires its disintegration and cessation, similar to matter in the universe. However, this disintegration is followed by abandonment of the earthly place toward an ideal and more perfect place (Paradise), which humans aspire to, as stated in the verse: "Indeed, the righteous will have salvation...a 'fitting' reward as a generous gift from your Lord" ⁽⁷⁷⁾ Based on Surat An-naba', a stereotypical image is completed of the new world that transcends the meaning of physical place and linear time. This is a place firmly established in the Qur'an, transforming from transcendent realms into worldly realms—namely divine visions or promises that God revealed in advance to be fulfilled later within a purposeful and predestined course.⁽⁷⁸⁾ As a result, from Neuwirth's analysis emerges a complex vision of place linked to Qur'anic symbols and conceptions of place, where the earthly place is material, and the otherworldly place is immaterial whose existence Surat An-naba' can affirm according to divine visions.⁽⁷⁹⁾

4_ Critique:

1_ History has become a primary reference in Neuwirth's approach to the narratives of punishment from its inception until now, considering religion as an integral part of history.⁽⁸⁰⁾

2_ Neuwirth reaches a historical discontinuity after relying on the theory of the existence of "other classics," meaning the presence of more than one time period simultaneously, where with the emergence of Mecca and Medina, there was also the emergence of al-Hirah and other cities, resulting in an overlap within memory.⁽⁸¹⁾

3_ Neuwirth through her analysis of the concept of place in the Qur'an, seeks to impose biblical backgrounds upon it. She strives hard to create or find a correlation and rapprochement between the Qur'an and the Psalms or the Bible, all within the framework of a comparative methodology that leads her to assume later that the Qur'an was influenced by the Bible and even by pre-Islamic poetry. This contradicts Islamic thought and neglects the Qur'an's unique perspective on the cosmic and divine vision.⁽⁸²⁾

4_ Neuwirth focuses more on the symbolic scenes of place in a collection of verses within the Qur'an rather than on its material and geographical reality. This leads to a diminution of the doctrinal and legislative dimension of these places, which may drive her to rely on a cultural context when contemplating the Qur'anic concepts. This approach completely diverges from the intended meaning of the text, since it is not possible to make the poetic imagery absolute over the interpretation of the Qur'an. This is what we observe in Neuwirth's interpretation of the meaning of place or ruins.⁽⁸³⁾

5_ The optimistic perspective observed in Surat An-naba' regarding place is a reflection of the Psalms from the Bible, but it differs from what was present in the pre-Islamic poetry, where pessimism was reflected.⁽⁸⁴⁾

6_ Neuwirth prefers, in her deconstruction of the Qur'anic concept of place, to distance herself from the doctrinal and linguistic contexts of the text; thus, she offers a new and innovative reading that differs

⁷⁶ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 178-181.

⁷⁷ The Holy Qur'an: An-Naba', 31-36.

⁷⁸ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 179-184.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 170.

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 171.

⁸² Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 180.

⁸³ Ibid, pp. 178-180.

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 179.

from previous approaches, thereby neglecting the interpretations of Muslim scholars or the classical readings of the verses.

7_ Neuwirth assumes that the Qur'anic verses related to the concept of place have been reinterpreted or revised later in light of the political developments that occurred during the time of the Hijra and beyond. This is attributed to the "historicization of the text" a notion that the Islamic perspective rejects⁽⁸⁵⁾.

8_ Neuwirth infers from the use of the plural pronoun "We" in the verses that the Qur'an was the product of a historical process, which, according to her, diminished God's presence as an active agent.⁽⁸⁶⁾

9_ The concept of place in the Qur'an relies in its discourse on exhortation, reminder, and argumentation.⁽⁸⁷⁾

10_ Place, according to Surah An-naba', undergoes annihilation following the destruction of the earth.

11_ Neuwirth tends to analyze the concept of place in the Qur'an as an element within a "dramatic" or "narrative" structure, which distances her from the precise hermeneutics of the text and allows emotions to dominate her judgment of concepts and issues.

12_ According to Neuwirth, the ending of Surat An-naba' is a justification for divine retribution.⁽⁸⁸⁾

13_ The new Qur'anic cosmos, distanced from paganism, transcends earthly space and time.⁽⁸⁹⁾

14_ The issues of (Creation – Resurrection) are presented progressively and in a rhetorical style as evidence to prove the existence of real space, and this can only be achieved through the Qur'an.⁽⁹⁰⁾

15_ It is understood from Neuwirth's writings that the ideal space was prevalent in previous heavenly religions, and it is a hypothetical idea that the Qur'an came to render as real, so that space, in turn, transforms from being hypothetical to becoming actual.

16_ Space is an ambiguous epistemological field, whether in religion or in other sciences.

17_ The concept of space is interpreted based on the flow of the text in which it appears, as the text itself determines the nature and characteristics of the space—whether it is earthly or celestial, real or hypothetical, etc.

18_ Neuwirth employed ontology in her writings within a Western philosophical framework, without adapting it to the Qur'anic context. One observes the absence of Islamic grounding for ontology, as she relies on concepts derived from postmodern Western thought such as "existential space" and "religious space" without accounting for the differing epistemological structure of the Qur'an, which is not framed through abstract mythological notions, but rather through the relationships of revelation and contextual meaning.

19_ Neuwirth focuses on the hermeneutical dimension of space for example, the Kaaba as a symbolic center of pilgrimage while overlooking its ontological and devotional dimension. That is, in the Qur'an, space plays a role in shaping the identity of the Muslim. Space in the Qur'an is not merely a symbol but part of the formation of the believing self in its relationship with God, through the stories of past peoples, sacred places, and the promised lands.

20_ Ontology in the Qur'an is not static; rather, it is connected to the dynamic movement of revelation through time. Neuwirth, however, does not highlight this living relationship between space and time within the narrative of revelation. Instead, she re-reads the text in a manner influenced by literary narrative structures, which may strip the Qur'anic text of its ontological and divinely ordained character.

21_ Transforming space in the Qur'an into an interpretive realm open to multiple meanings comes at the expense of semantic centrality. Neuwirth excessively leans into symbolic interpretation of space, and in doing so, she alters the Qur'anic spatial ontology into pluralistic visions that contradict the essence of space itself. This weakens the ontological stability and existential significance of space in the Qur'anic

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 183-184.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 182.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 182.

⁸⁸ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 183.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 183-184.

worldview.

22_ Neuwirth's academic background is shaped by Western intellectual foundations, and her interpretation of space in the Qur'an is based on Western philosophical perspectives. As a result, her ontology tends to appear more like a philosophical projection imposed on the Qur'anic text rather than a derivation from within it. This approach contradicts the principles of authentic foundational critique rooted in the internal logic and epistemology of the Qur'anic discourse.

23_ Neuwirth arrives at the conclusion of an epistemological rupture between the Arabs and their pre-Islamic past, including the memory of perished cities. This rupture, she argues, stems from the obscurity of ancient civilizations due to the linguistic differences between pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Arabs. The languages of earlier peoples Nabatean, Aramaic, and Greek differed from Arabic, thus creating a cognitive gap between the two eras. Neuwirth attempts to strip the Arabs of any positive legacy and instead attributes to them only the negativity associated with these prior civilizations. She does this by linking the Arabs to those earlier peoples while also portraying them as dismissive of knowledge, accusing them of ignorance toward the languages and sciences of past nations.⁽⁹¹⁾

24_ Neuwirth thus attempts to construct a body of knowledge through the Qur'anic concept of space in which the ambiguity and confusion in Arab history are confronted by means of interpreting Qur'anic texts. She asserts that religious knowledge can only be attained through revelation, which, according to her view, transfers divine knowledge from the Preserved Tablet (al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz) considered the archive of divine knowledge to the prophets exclusively.⁽⁹²⁾

25_ Neuwirth criticizes the Arabs using bold expressions such as "failure" and similar terms, due to what she claims is their inability to construct a coherent body of knowledge or historical continuity linking them to their pre-Islamic past based on her analysis of Qur'anic verses related to earlier peoples. However, this language is inappropriate for scholarly discourse and lacks the objectivity and rigor expected in academic research.⁽⁹³⁾

26_ The Qur'an was able to correct the intellectual trajectory of the Arabs by addressing and overcoming their epistemic, symbolic, and even religious shortcomings in their conceptualization of space, perished nations, and collective memory, among other themes.⁽⁹⁴⁾

CONCLUSION:

Engaging with the study of the concept of space in the Qur'anic text from the perspective of Angelika Neuwirth opens up a rich epistemological horizon for understanding the ambiguous interplay between geography, semantics, and symbolism in the scriptures. This study has revealed that Neuwirth's perspectives are inseparable from the Western context in which they were formed, with its underlying Jewish and Christian theological backgrounds. Nevertheless, she has offered insightful and unique readings of the Qur'anic discourse, not bound by traditional orientalist frameworks. Neuwirth's focus centers on space as a semantic and symbolic structure operating within the Qur'anic text through which the connection between God and humanity, and between society and prophethood, as well as history and revelation, is constructed. From this standpoint, she views the Qur'an not merely as a descriptive account of places, but as a discourse that reconstructs them symbolically, intertwining the theological with the ontological, the real with the mythical, the historical with the metaphysical, and the rational with the emotional. Through her analysis of Qur'anic texts, Neuwirth has persistently sought to link spatial semantics with the concepts of divine promise and warning. She considers the destroyed cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah not merely as geographical locations, but as symbolic signs indicating moral corruption and serving as warnings of divine punishment that transcend the boundaries of time and space. Neuwirth further elucidated how space in the Qur'anic discourse evolves into a rhetorical device

⁹¹ Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 173.

⁹² Angelica Neuwirth, *How the Qur'an Bewitched the World*, pp. 173-174.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 173-174.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

that lays the foundation for eschatological prophecies, grounded in the evocation of humanity's ultimate fate. This interpretive deconstruction has enabled Neuwirth to present a non-traditional, non-stereotypical reading of the Qur'an one that integrates literary, historical, and symbolic interpretation. However, her intellectual framework remains influenced by the Western background from which she derives her concepts, methodologies, and analytical tools. Therefore, this intersection between Western and Islamic thought in her studies necessitates a critical Arab-Islamic discourse, one that aims to rebalance the approach and preserve the Qur'an's unique semantic integrity without retreating into isolation from Western readings, and without rejecting them in their entirety.

First: Results:

- 1_ It becomes clear from analyzing Neuwirth's study on the concept of space in the Qur'an that it is not a secondary element, but rather constitutes a symbolic core within the structure of the Qur'anic text transcending the geographical and material dimensions to encompass ontological and religious meanings.
- 2_ Neuwirth based her study on semiotic and interpretive approaches influenced by Western literary criticism, yet she diligently sought to apply them to the Qur'anic text within a novel framework that blends Pre-Islamic poetry, the Bible, and Arab history.
- 3_ Neuwirth's perspective is distinctly influenced by Jewish and Christian backgrounds, particularly in her interpretation of the Qur'anic "stories of punishment" which at times led her to reinterpret certain concepts through a religious lens that differs from the spirit of the Qur'anic text, thereby subjecting the notion of place to this reinterpretation.
- 4_ Neuwirth focused on the destroyed cities mentioned in the Qur'an as spatial markers reminding of divine punishment, linking this to a Qur'anic conception of place as a didactic and admonitory tool that transcends the historical moment.
- 5_ The study revealed the possibility of expanding the concept of place in Qur'anic studies to include symbolic, historical, interpretive, and ontological dimensions, instead of limiting it to classical geographical analysis.
- 6_ Neuwirth's reading of the Qur'anic text reveals the presence of an ontological dimension in the representation of place, where place is not presented merely as a backdrop for events, but as an influential element in shaping human identity and their relationship with revelation and existence. According to her view, place in the Qur'anic text expresses the stage of human existence and destiny, crystallizing into an existential sign that foretells deeper issues beyond the apparent text, such as creation, destruction, destiny, and the stance towards God Almighty. This reflects a concern for interpreting the text within a comprehensive ontological semantic system.

Second: Recommendations:

- 1_ It is essential to continue studying the concept of place in the Qur'an from an interpretative perspective that highlights its interrelation with time, symbolism, eschatological resurrection, and other dimensions especially in light of the rich rhetorical and historical accumulations embedded within the Qur'anic text.
- 2_ The importance of maintaining a critical openness toward Western readings of the Qur'an, while carefully distinguishing between what is beneficial in their methodologies and what conflicts with the unique nature of the Qur'anic text and its epistemological structure.
- 3_ Encouragement to conduct more comparative studies between the concept of place in the Qur'an and the Bible, in order to identify areas of agreement and difference, and to highlight the Qur'an's unique perspective on spatial conception.
- 4_ Paying attention to modern orientalist studies and their scientific methodologies, and providing alternative interpretive approaches either to respond to them or to highlight the distinctiveness of the Qur'anic perspective in contrast to their propositions.

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