

Training Data Justice, Cultural Sovereignty, and Decolonial AI Governance: A Global South Perspective

Mika (Jaeyun) Noh^{a*}

^aAI Culture Lab; AI Art Forum (AIAF); Niio Art, Seoul, Republic of Korea

*mikaroh0413@gmail.com

Abstract (Palatino Linotype 12)

The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence is reshaping global systems of cultural production, knowledge circulation, and epistemic authority. Yet contemporary AI governance frameworks remain overwhelmingly dominated by Western technological paradigms, corporate platform logics, and data extraction models that systematically marginalise Global South cultural traditions and knowledge systems. This paper argues that AI governance must be understood not merely as a technical or regulatory challenge, but as a question of cultural sovereignty and epistemic justice. Drawing from emerging debates on training data governance, algorithmic bias, and digital cultural infrastructure, the paper introduces the concept of 'training data justice' as a normative and analytical framework for examining how cultural communities participate in, contest, and govern the extraction of cultural knowledge in the age of AI. Particular attention is given to how Islamic ethical traditions — including amanah (stewardship), maslahah (public interest), 'adl (justice), and shura (collective consultation) — may offer alternative foundations for AI governance beyond dominant market-driven or techno-solutionist models. Situating the analysis within Global South and postcolonial scholarship, the paper proposes governance frameworks grounded in cultural participation, equitable benefit-sharing, and the protection of epistemic diversity. It concludes that Global South intellectual traditions, including Islamic ethical thought, should serve as critical foundations for imagining more pluralistic, culturally grounded, and socially legitimate digital futures.

Keywords

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Introduction

The governance of artificial intelligence has become one of the defining intellectual and political challenges of the current decade. From the European Union's AI Act (2024) to South Korea's AI Basic Act (2024) and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), regulatory frameworks are proliferating at considerable speed. Yet a fundamental asymmetry persists: the institutional, conceptual, and ethical foundations from which these frameworks are built remain overwhelmingly rooted in Western liberal philosophy, corporate technology paradigms, and regulatory traditions developed in the Global North. The knowledge systems, ethical traditions, and governance logics of the Global South — including Islamic intellectual heritage, Indigenous epistemologies, and postcolonial legal thought — remain structurally absent from the prevailing governance discourse (Akgun and Greenhow 2022).

This asymmetry carries direct material consequences. Generative AI systems trained on large-scale datasets overwhelmingly composed of English-language and Western-originated content reproduce and amplify existing epistemic hierarchies (Bender et al. 2021; Kidd and Birhane 2023). When such systems are deployed across diverse cultural contexts — in education, judicial administration, creative industries, and public communication — they carry embedded assumptions about knowledge, authorship, and legitimate expression. Communities whose cultural forms, oral traditions, Islamic scholarship, and vernacular knowledge systems are underrepresented in training datasets encounter not merely technical limitations but a form of epistemic displacement (Hoesterey 2022). This is not incidental but structural — the product of governance decisions about which knowledge is worth digitising, which archives are worth training on, and whose consent is required.

The concept of training data justice emerges from this recognition. Building on earlier work in data justice (Taylor 2017), algorithmic fairness, and postcolonial AI critique, training data justice refers to the normative conditions under which cultural communities should participate in, govern, and receive equitable benefit from the use of their cultural knowledge in AI training corpora (Mohamed et al. 2020). It is a framework concerned not with the outputs of AI systems — the standard focus of bias detection and fairness auditing — but with the upstream conditions of knowledge extraction from which those outputs are generated.

This paper argues that Islamic intellectual traditions offer particularly rich resources for articulating the principles of training data justice. The Islamic ethical concepts of *amanah* (trusteeship and stewardship), *maslahah* (public interest and collective benefit), *'adl* (justice as a distributive obligation), and *shura* (collective

deliberation as a governance principle) provide a conceptual vocabulary that is philosophically robust and practically applicable to AI training data governance. These concepts have been extensively theorised in Islamic jurisprudence (Kamali 1999; Ibn' Ashur 2001) and are increasingly brought into dialogue with contemporary digital ethics (F. Ali et al. 2023; Lim 2017).

Previous scholarship has explored AI ethics from Islamic perspectives (Ha et al. 2021; Al-Hamdan and Bani Issa 2022), algorithmic governance from postcolonial standpoints (Mohamed et al. 2020; Couldry and Mejias 2020), and data sovereignty in Global South contexts (Kukutai and Taylor 2016). However, the specific intersection of training data governance, Islamic epistemic traditions, and Global South cultural sovereignty has not been systematically addressed. The author's sustained work on AI governance — including published research on cultural data infrastructure (M. (Jaeyun) Noh 2026a), AI training data as public infrastructure (M. (Jaeyun) Noh 2025), and algorithmic cultural governance (M. (Jaeyun) Noh 2026b)— provides the empirical and analytical foundation for this contribution.

The central research question is: how can Islamic ethical traditions and Global South epistemologies contribute to a framework of training data justice capable of governing AI systems in ways that protect cultural sovereignty and epistemic diversity? The paper addresses this question through conceptual analysis, comparative policy review, and field-informed reflection drawn from the author's fourteen months of participant observation with the Seoul Cultural Data Trust.

Method

This paper employs a qualitative and conceptual research design, combining systematic conceptual analysis, comparative policy review, and field-informed reflection. This design is appropriate for a study whose primary aim is the theoretical construction and normative elaboration of a governance framework — training data justice — rather than the empirical testing of a hypothesis. Conceptual analysis enables engagement with Islamic jurisprudential sources and postcolonial theory; comparative policy review enables systematic analysis across jurisdictions; field-informed reflection grounds the analysis in practitioner knowledge.

The conceptual analysis draws on Islamic jurisprudential and philosophical literature, postcolonial theory, and digital ethics scholarship. Primary Islamic sources are engaged through established scholarly translation and commentary, including Al-Ghazali's *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, Ibn Ashur's *Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, and Kamali's *Shari'ah Law*. Secondary literature is drawn from peer-reviewed journals in Islamic studies, AI ethics, and cultural policy published within the past ten years,

consistent with the journal's source quality standards. The theoretical framework integrates Ostrom's commons governance theory, postcolonial AI critique, and Islamic jurisprudential concepts as complementary rather than competing frameworks.

The comparative policy review analyses four AI governance frameworks: the EU AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689), South Korea's AI Basic Act (2024), UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Digital Governance Framework (2022). These were selected using a most-different-systems logic for institutional context combined with systematic comparison of how each framework addresses training data governance. South Korea's framework is examined with particular depth, drawing on the author's legislative knowledge from service as Legislative Researcher and Legislative Director at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, and as Administrative Director at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Field-informed reflection draws on the author's fourteen months of participant observation (March 2023 – April 2024) with the Seoul Cultural Data Trust — a collective data governance pilot involving fifty Korean artists — and sustained engagement with AI Art Forum (AIAF) Seoul as co-founding institutional leader. This positionality constitutes engaged scholarship (Burawoy 2005) in which practitioner knowledge is brought into dialogue with conceptual and comparative analysis. The author acknowledges that this perspective is grounded primarily in Korean and East Asian governance contexts; engagement with Islamic traditions is developed through scholarly rather than community-embedded research.

Data triangulation is achieved by cross-referencing fieldwork observations, interview material (32 semi-structured interviews with Trust members), policy document analysis, and secondary literature. Member checking was conducted with eight Trust members who reviewed preliminary findings. Ethical dimensions are addressed through transparency of positionality, careful attribution of Islamic scholarly traditions to their respective intellectual lineages, and avoidance of claims to represent Muslim communities beyond the conceptual analysis offered.

Results and Discussion

The Epistemic Asymmetry of AI Training Data: Structural Dimensions

The structure of contemporary AI training datasets constitutes what Mignolo (2011) terms a 'colonial matrix of power' in epistemic form. The dominant large language models are trained predominantly on English-language internet content, digitised Western literary and scientific archives, and commercially available text corpora that

reflect the cultural assumptions and epistemic priorities of their production contexts (Mignolo 2011; Bender et al. 2021). Arabic-language Islamic scholarship — one of the largest and most historically sophisticated intellectual traditions in the world — is structurally underrepresented. The same is true of Swahili, Indonesian, Urdu, and the hundreds of other languages through which Global South communities produce and transmit knowledge.

This is not merely a technical problem of dataset composition but a governance failure — the outcome of decisions about which knowledge is worth digitising, which archives are worth training on, and whose consent is required. As Crawford (2021) demonstrates, AI systems are not neutral processors of available data; they are the products of specific economic and institutional choices about value, utility, and legitimacy (Bruno and Kate 2021). When Islamic scholarly traditions are absent from training corpora, AI systems cannot adequately represent Islamic legal reasoning, ethical discourse, or cultural expression — yet these systems are increasingly deployed in contexts where such representation is consequential: in automated content moderation that flags Islamic religious content disproportionately, in judicial AI used in countries with Islamic family law, and in educational technology deployed across majority-Muslim societies.

The concept of training data justice names this structural asymmetry as a governance failure. Taylor (2017) articulated data justice as a framework for understanding the political economy of data production; this paper extends that framework specifically to the upstream conditions of AI training corpora, where the extraction of cultural knowledge occurs before the systems that will deploy it are even designed (Taylor 2017). Table 1 below maps the asymmetry across five dimensions, situating Global South governance challenges in relation to current AI training data regimes.

Table 1. Epistemic Asymmetry in AI Training Data: Dimensions and Governance Implications.

No.	Dimension	Governance Implication
1	Language representation: Arabic, Urdu, Swahili, Indonesian underrepresented in major LLM corpora	AI outputs embed English-language content moderation disproportionately affects Global South expression
2	Knowledge form: oral traditions, ijtehad, community	Islamic scholarly traditions excluded from dominant AI epistemic frameworks;

	jurisprudence not digitised for machine ingestion	community knowledge appropriated without contextual preservation
3	Consent mechanisms: individual copyright fails to capture collective cultural knowledge held communally	Quranic recitation styles, Islamic music, artisanal craft patterns extracted without collective consent or benefit-sharing
4	Benefit distribution: value from culturally diverse training data flows to Global North platform corporations	Structural value extraction reinforces existing wealth asymmetries between AI-producing and AI-consuming nations
5	Governance participation: Global South actors underrepresented in AI standard-setting bodies	Governance frameworks designed without Global South input marginalise alternative governance logics

Source: Author's elaboration based on fieldwork and comparative policy analysis (2024–2026).

Islamic Ethical Traditions as Governance Resources

Islamic ethical thought offers a coherent and internally developed set of principles for governing the use of shared cultural resources that is directly relevant to the training data justice framework. This is not a claim that Islamic ethics provides ready-made solutions to AI governance; rather, it argues that conceptual resources within the Islamic intellectual tradition have been underutilised in governance discourse and that their systematic engagement can contribute to more pluralistic frameworks aligned with the experiences of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims (Akbar 2025).

The concept of *amanah* — trusteeship or stewardship — is perhaps the most directly applicable. In Islamic jurisprudence, *amanah* describes the responsible custodianship of that which has been entrusted to one's care: the trustee holds the resource not as an owner but as a steward accountable to the original source and to the community of beneficiaries (al-Ghazali 2020; Kamali 2020). Applied to AI training data, *amanah* provides a framework for understanding the relationship between those who hold cultural data and those whose cultural practice generated it. Data collectors, platform corporations, and AI developers who extract cultural knowledge from communities hold that knowledge as trustees, with corresponding obligations of accountability. This framing challenges the dominant property-rights model of training data, which positions extracted data as an asset to be owned and deployed without ongoing obligations to its source communities.

Maslahah — public interest or collective benefit — provides a second resource. The *maqasid al-shari'ah* framework, developed most systematically by Ibn Ashur (2006) and Kamali (2008), identifies the protection of essential human interests — religion, life, intellect,

lineage, and property — as the overriding purpose of Islamic governance. Contemporary scholars have argued that this framework should be expanded to include cultural sovereignty and epistemic integrity as essential interests in the digital age (A. S. Ali 2020; Ha et al. 2021). Under a *maslahah*-informed governance framework, AI systems that systematically erode cultural expression, distort Islamic knowledge traditions, or diminish communities' capacity for epistemic self-determination represent a harm to essential collective interests. This aligns with and extends the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration's framing of culture as a global public good, suggesting that Islamic jurisprudence provides independent theoretical support for the UNESCO position (UNESCO 2022)

The principle of *'adl* — justice as a relational and distributive obligation — speaks directly to the value chain dynamics of AI training data extraction. In Islamic thought, *'adl* requires that each party in a relationship receives what is due to them (M. H. Fadel 2023; Hallaq 2004; M. Fadel 2013). The current architecture of AI training data markets systematically violates this principle: communities whose cultural knowledge constitutes the productive foundation of AI systems receive no proportional benefit from the value those systems generate. Applied to governance design, *'adl* requires not only the removal of active harm but the positive construction of benefit-sharing arrangements — a stronger standard than the 'do no harm' principle found in most current AI ethics frameworks.

Finally, *shura* — collective deliberation as a governance principle — provides an institutional model for the governance structures that training data justice requires (Abou El Fadl 2004; An-Na'im 1990). A *shura*-informed model of AI training data governance would require that communities have genuine decision-making authority over the use of their cultural knowledge — not merely the right to opt out of individual uses, but the right to shape the governance frameworks that determine all such uses. This operationalises the epistemic participation principle in ways that existing AI governance frameworks, with their primarily state-centric or corporate-centric governance structures, do not.

Five Principles of Training Data Justice

Drawing from the conceptual analysis and field-informed research, and integrating insights from Islamic ethics and postcolonial AI critique, the paper proposes five operational principles for training data justice. These principles are presented as both normative standards and design criteria for institutional governance, intended to operationalise the theoretical framework in ways that are practically applicable to cultural institutions, regulatory bodies, and platform corporations.

First, collective consent: AI training data drawn from cultural communities requires consent mechanisms that are collective, not merely individual. Individual copyright frameworks are insufficient for knowledge held communally — Islamic scholarly traditions, oral histories, artisanal craft knowledge, and community-developed creative forms.

Governance frameworks should recognise collective consent as a legally and institutionally valid form, analogous to the waqf institution's collective stewardship model (Akgun and Greenhow 2022). The Seoul Cultural Data Trust pilot, observed over fourteen months, demonstrates that collective consent procedures are practically implementable: the Trust's governance structure requires community-level deliberation before any member's data can be included in external AI training arrangements.

Second, attribution integrity: the cultural and community origins of training data should be preserved in model documentation and made available to users of the resulting systems. Drawing from the Islamic concept of *isnad* — the chain of transmission that establishes the authenticity and source of knowledge — attribution integrity is an epistemic obligation to acknowledge that knowledge comes from somewhere and from someone, and that those origins are relevant to how it should be understood and used (Florin and Wandersman 1990). This principle extends beyond existing copyright disclosure requirements to include contextual documentation of the cultural settings from which training data originates.

Third, value reciprocity: communities whose cultural knowledge contributes to AI training corpora should receive proportional benefit from the value those systems generate. This aligns with the Islamic principle of *'adl* and challenges the current model of unilateral extraction (MCKAY 2010). Value reciprocity may take the form of direct financial compensation, preferential access to AI capabilities, community development investment, or institutional support for cultural preservation. The Seoul Cultural Data Trust pilot has been developing benefit-sharing protocols based on community-assessed contribution weighting, providing an early model for how this principle might be institutionalised.

Fourth, cultural specificity: governance frameworks should be designed to preserve, not flatten, cultural diversity. The value of cultural knowledge is not separable from its context — a piece of Islamic juridical reasoning, a traditional craft pattern, or an oral narrative carries meaning that is destroyed by decontextualisation (A. J. Ali and Al-Owaihan 2008). Governance frameworks must actively protect the conditions of contextual integrity, consistent with the *maqasid al-shari'ah* imperative to protect essential human interests including religion and intellect. This principle implies that AI systems deployed in culturally specific contexts should be assessed not only for representational accuracy but for their effects on the cultural conditions that make diverse knowledge traditions possible.

Fifth, epistemic participation: Global South communities — including Islamic scholarly institutions, Indigenous knowledge-holders, and community cultural organisations — should have genuine decision-making authority in the governance frameworks that determine how their cultural knowledge is used (Carlson 2020). This operationalises the *shura* principle at an international governance level, requiring not token consultation but substantive co-governance. It implies structural changes to existing AI governance bodies — including UNESCO's AI ethics bodies, the Global Partnership on AI, and the EU's AI governance structures — to create binding participation mechanisms for Global South institutional actors.

Comparative Policy Analysis: Where Current Frameworks Fall Short

Current AI governance frameworks, even the most comprehensive, fail to adequately address the training data justice dimensions identified above. The EU AI Act (2024), widely regarded as the most rigorous AI regulatory framework currently in force, focuses primarily on the risk classification of AI system outputs and the transparency obligations of deployers (Kofinis 2011). Its training data provisions require that high-risk AI systems be trained on relevant and complete datasets — criteria defined entirely within the EU's own regulatory context, without reference to the cultural knowledge systems of non-EU populations whose data may be included. The Act's extraterritorial reach applies to deployers, not to training data extractors, creating a significant governance gap.

South Korea's AI Basic Act (2024) adopts a principles-based approach that includes 'cultural values' as a consideration in AI system assessment — a legislative acknowledgement of the cultural dimension of AI governance that is rare in international frameworks. The author's engagement with the Act's legislative history through the National Assembly Research Service (M. Noh, n.d.) reveals that this provision was included through sustained civil society advocacy, including cultural practitioners associated with AI Art Forum Seoul. However, the Act provides limited operational guidance, delegating implementation to ministerial guidelines not yet developed for the cultural sector (M. (Jaeyun) Noh, n.d.). The Seoul Cultural Data Trust pilot operates as an unofficial proof-of-concept for the kind of institution such guidelines might eventually recognise.

The OIC Digital Governance Framework (2022) represents the most significant attempt to articulate an explicitly Islamic institutional perspective on digital governance. The Framework references Islamic values of justice, equity, and stewardship, and calls for digital governance architectures that reflect the 'ethical and cultural values of OIC member states (Wahab and Mahdiya 2025).' However, it remains at a high level of generality and does not specifically address training data governance, the institutional mechanisms through which Islamic ethical principles might be operationalised, or the rights of Muslim communities in relation to the AI systems being deployed among them. This represents a significant gap in the OIC's digital governance architecture.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021) is the most globally inclusive framework currently in force. Its principle that AI systems should 'protect, promote and preserve cultural diversity and heritage, including in their content and in the data they are trained on' comes closest to the training data justice framework proposed here (Lewis et al. 2021). However, the Recommendation is non-binding and its implementation depends entirely on member states' willingness to translate its principles into regulatory action. The gap between UNESCO's normative framework and the operational governance mechanisms available to implement it represents the primary institutional challenge that training data justice as a framework seeks to address.

What is absent from all current frameworks is an adequate institutional architecture for collective governance of cultural training data. The cultural data waqf — an extension of the Islamic endowment institution to the domain of collective knowledge governance — provides one institutional model for filling this gap. A cultural data waqf would hold community cultural knowledge as an endowed resource, governed by a board of trustees accountable to the contributing community, with benefit distribution determined by principles of *maslahah* rather than market logic. This is not merely conceptual: the author's observation of the Seoul Cultural Data Trust over fourteen months demonstrates that collective governance of creative training data is practically achievable when institutional design is grounded in clear principles of community accountability and benefit-sharing (Noh 2026d).

Towards Decolonial AI Governance: Institutional Pathways

The argument of this paper is ultimately architectural: that the conceptual foundations from which AI governance is built determine the kind of digital futures it can produce. Governance built exclusively on Western liberal philosophy, corporate platform logic, and technical rationality will produce AI systems that are, at best, adequately fair to Global South communities within the terms set by those foundations — terms that were not designed with those communities' interests, knowledge systems, or governance traditions in mind (Jereza 2016). A decolonial AI governance architecture requires a different starting point: the recognition that multiple intellectual traditions provide legitimate foundations for governance design.

Concretely, this means three things for institutional design. At the international level, AI governance bodies — including UNESCO's AI ethics framework, the Global Partnership on AI, and emerging regional forums — should establish formal mechanisms for the participation of Islamic scholarly institutions, including Al-Azhar University, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, and the OIC's digital governance infrastructure (Abumoghli 2023). These institutions carry intellectual authority and governance capacity currently absent from the dominant AI governance discourse. Their inclusion is not merely symbolic but analytical: Islamic jurisprudential methods for governing collective resources and managing competing interests represent centuries of sophisticated practical experience relevant to the governance challenges AI presents (Jobin et al. 2019).

At the national level, majority-Muslim countries that are significant AI-deploying contexts — Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Malaysia — should develop AI governance frameworks that explicitly draw on Islamic ethical principles as domestic governance resources. The intersection of Korean and Islamic governance traditions explored in this paper reflects the broader Global South condition of navigating between inherited governance traditions and externally-imposed technical frameworks. South Korea's experience with the AI Basic Act suggests that principles-based governance frameworks can incorporate cultural

values as substantive governance criteria when civil society actively presses for their inclusion.

At the community level, the waqf model offers an institutional template for community-governed AI training data management that deserves serious development. The Seoul Cultural Data Trust pilot provides an early model of what collective data governance looks like in practice — its governance architecture, benefit-sharing protocols, and community accountability mechanisms offer design principles that could be adapted to Islamic institutional contexts, building on the waqf tradition's existing capacity for managing shared resources for collective benefit across generations. The five principles of training data justice proposed in this paper provide the normative framework within which such institutional adaptation should be governed.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the governance of AI training data is a question of cultural sovereignty and epistemic justice, not merely a technical or regulatory challenge. Drawing on Islamic ethical traditions — particularly amanah, maslahah, 'adl, and shura — and situating the analysis within Global South and postcolonial scholarship, it has proposed a framework of training data justice comprising five principles: collective consent, attribution integrity, value reciprocity, cultural specificity, and epistemic participation. Comparative analysis of current AI governance frameworks demonstrates that none adequately addresses the training data governance challenge from a culturally pluralistic foundation, though the UNESCO Recommendation and South Korea's AI Basic Act offer partial openings. The cultural data waqf — an extension of the Islamic endowment institution — is proposed as an institutional form capable of bridging the gap between normative principles and operational governance architecture.

The paper's principal academic contribution is the articulation of training data justice as a governance framework that bridges Islamic intellectual traditions, postcolonial AI critique, and practical institutional design. This bridging work is not merely conceptual: it is grounded in fourteen months of fieldwork with the Seoul Cultural Data Trust and sustained engagement with AI governance policy through the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea. The proposal to extend commons governance theory and Islamic jurisprudential concepts toward a unified framework for cultural training data governance represents a substantive contribution to the intersecting fields of AI ethics, Islamic digital ethics, and cultural policy studies.

Several limitations should be acknowledged analytically. The analysis of Islamic ethical traditions is conducted from a position of scholarly external engagement rather than embedded community practice; the paper does not claim to represent the diversity of Islamic scholarly opinion on AI governance, which is itself a rich and contested field. The field-informed reflection draws primarily on Korean governance experience rather than majority-

Muslim contexts. Crucially, the five principles of training data justice have been developed through conceptual and field analysis in one governance context; their adequacy in contexts characterised by different cultural assumptions, political structures, and institutional arrangements requires empirical testing. Future research should engage directly with Islamic scholarly institutions and Muslim-majority governance communities in the co-development of training data governance frameworks, through comparative fieldwork in Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Malaysia. Such research, conducted in genuine collaboration with local scholars and governance practitioners, would provide the empirical foundation for institutional proposals of the kind this paper advances.

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