Ecosufism as a Critical Lens on the Disconnection Between Islamic Spirituality and Ecological Responsibility

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Abstract

This study examines the persistence of ecological crises in Pekalongan, particularly recurrent flooding, by analyzing the disconnection between Islamic spirituality and socio-ecological praxis within *santri* communities. Despite the strong presence of Sufi traditions, *pesantren* culture, and religious moral discourse, environmental degradation continues, indicating an urgent gap between spiritual piety and ecological responsibility. This research aims to explore how ecosufism is understood and articulated in socio-religious life, why Sufi spirituality has not been significantly transformed into environmental awareness and conservation practices, and what theological, socio-cultural, and structural factors shape this disjunction. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically using ecosufism, Islamic environmental ethics, social practice theory, and political ecology. The findings show that ecosufism operates mainly at a normative and symbolic level, emphasizing individual moral cultivation and spiritual endurance rather than collective ecological action. Environmental crises are commonly interpreted as divine tests rather than consequences of human–nature imbalance. The study concludes that weak articulation and institutionalization of ecosufism as a public ethic hinder the transformation of spiritual piety into ecological piety in disaster-prone contexts.

Keywords: *Ecological Piety, Ecosufism, Islamic Environmental Ethics, Santri Community, Socio-Ecological Crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

Pekalongan has once again been affected by flooding due to high-intensity rainfall, inundating a number of residential areas in the city. This situation has compelled the local government to prepare evacuation sites and fulfill the basic needs of affected residents, including food, clean water, health services, and temporary shelter, particularly in West Pekalongan and East Pekalongan Districts.[1] The impact of the flooding has also extended

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[1] Pemerintah Kota Pekalongan, "Laporan Penanganan Banjir Kota Pekalongan," 2025, https://pekalongankota.go.id/berita/banjir-akibat-curah-hujan-tinggi-pemkot-siapkan-sejumlah-lokasi-pengungsian-dan-optimalkan-pemenuhan-kebutuhan-dasar-warga.html.

to the education sector, where dozens of early childhood education centers (PAUD) and schools were forced to suspend face-to-face activities or shift to online learning to ensure students' safety.[2]

In recent decades, the global ecological crisis has increasingly challenged modern development paradigms, prompting scholars to reconsider the ethical foundations of the relationship between humans and nature. Environmental degradation, climate change, and recurring disasters in many parts of the world reveal that technological and infrastructural solutions alone are insufficient to address ecological problems. Consequently, interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate ethical, cultural, and spiritual perspectives have gained greater attention in environmental discourse.[3]

Within this broader context, religion has been revisited as a potential source of environmental ethics. Various scholars argue that religious traditions contain moral frameworks that can guide environmentally responsible behavior and foster ecological awareness.[4] In Islamic thought, normative principles such as *khalīfah* (human stewardship of the earth), *mīzān* (cosmic balance), and *amānah* (trust) emphasize humanity's responsibility to preserve environmental harmony.[5] In recent scholarly discussions, Sufi traditions have been increasingly explored for their ecological implications, giving rise to the concept of ecosufism, which highlights spiritual awareness, humility before creation, and harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world.[6]

The ecological challenges experienced in the coastal city of Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia, provide a relevant empirical context for examining these ideas. In recent years, the region has experienced recurring flooding that has disrupted public life, damaged infrastructure, and affected transportation networks, including railway services. Such environmental disturbances have significant implications for social mobility and local economic activities, reflecting the broader vulnerability of coastal urban areas facing combined environmental pressures.[7]

Importantly, the flooding in Pekalongan is not solely the result of high rainfall. Structural ecological factors also play a critical role, particularly land subsidence caused by intensive groundwater extraction. As parts of the city have gradually sunk below sea

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[2] Radar Pekalongan, "Sekolah Terdampak Banjir Dialihkan ke Pembelajaran Daring," 2026, https://radarpekalongan.id/2026/01/27/banjir-kepung-kota-pekalongan-puluhan-paud-terpaksa-libur-dan-alihkan-belajar-daring-demi-keamanan/.

[3] Laudato Si', Vatican Press, 2015; Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

[4] Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, eds., *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[5] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 1997); Fazlun Khalid, "Islam and the Environment," *Social and Economic Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*, 2002.

[6] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Ibrahim Özdemir, *The Ethical Dimension of Human Attitude toward Nature: A Muslim Perspective* (Ankara: The Fountain, 2003).

[7] Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana, "Laporan Bencana Banjir Rob Pekalongan," 2023; World Bank, *Indonesia Coastal Resilience Assessment*, 2021.

level, Pekalongan has become increasingly vulnerable to tidal flooding and rainwater inundation. These conditions are further compounded by challenges in water governance and urban drainage systems that struggle to accommodate extreme rainfall volumes.[8] Since the early 2020s, large-scale inundation has repeatedly affected residential areas and displaced hundreds of residents, illustrating how ecological degradation intersects with social and economic vulnerabilities.[9]

These facts indicate that flooding in Pekalongan constitutes a structural, chronic, and multidimensional ecological problem rather than merely a seasonal disaster.[10] Although the city is culturally known as a *kota santri*, characterized by the presence of *pesantren*, religious communities, and relatively strong Sufi and *tarekat* practices, it continues to face serious ecological degradation. Within the theoretical framework of ecosufism, Sufism is understood as a spirituality fostering cosmic awareness and ecological ethics, where the human relationship with God entails moral responsibility toward nature. However, the empirical reality reveals a paradox between high levels of Sufi spiritual piety and weak environmental conservation practices at the social level.

This condition points to a gap between the theoretical ideals of ecosufism and their implementation in the everyday lives of *santri* communities. Most studies on Sufism and ecosufism remain largely normative and philosophical, with limited empirical research examining how Sufi values are translated or fail to be translated into concrete ecological practices, particularly in disaster-prone social contexts. This lack of empirical engagement leaves important questions unanswered regarding how spiritual teachings interact with environmental realities in Muslim communities.

Therefore, this study critically examines the disconnection between spiritual piety and ecological piety in the lived practices of *santri* communities in Pekalongan. Rather than portraying Sufism as a source of failure, this research positions it as a spiritual tradition that encounters challenges of implementation within complex social, ecological, and structural conditions. To explore this issue empirically, the study employs a qualitative approach based on ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews with religious leaders, *santri*, and local residents. Through this approach, the research seeks to understand how spiritual values are interpreted, practiced, and negotiated in relation to ecological responsibility in everyday religious life.

Several scholars conceptualize ecosufism as a theological framework integrating the relationship between God, humans, and nature into a unified ethical vision. Jaelani emphasizes the ecological implications of *tawhid* as divine trust (*amanah*), though remaining at a conceptual-normative level.[11] Syihabuddin and Kirwan, engaging the thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, frame the ecological crisis as a consequence of the loss of a sacred worldview, yet do not explore its operationalization in local Muslim

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[8] United Nations Development Programme, *Addressing Coastal Flooding in Indonesia*, 2020.

[9] Pemerintah Kota Pekalongan, "Laporan Penanganan Banjir Kota Pekalongan," 2023.

[10] Channel News Asia, "Indonesia's Sinking Cities and Climate Threat," 2021; Antara News, "Korban Banjir Masih Bertahan di Pengungsian," 2023.

[11] Jaelani Jaelani, "*Teologi Islam: Ekosufisme Dalam Harmonisasi Ketuhanan, Kemanusiaan, Dan Alam*," *Lentera: Multidisciplinary Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): https://doi.org/10.57096/lentera.v3i2.143.

communities.[12]

Overall, ecosufism research remains dominated by normative, philosophical, and textual approaches, leaving a significant gap for empirical investigation into how Sufi values are understood, negotiated, and at times fail to manifest in concrete ecological practices within structurally vulnerable contexts such as the annual flooding in Pekalongan.

A significant portion of the ecosufism literature draws on classical Sufi thought to articulate Islamic environmental ethics. These studies typically emphasize spiritual concepts such as *zuhd* (ascetic restraint), *tawāzun* (cosmic balance), and *amānah* (moral responsibility), particularly as interpreted in the works of scholars such as Al-Ghazali.[13] Within this strand, ecosufism is primarily discussed at the level of theological and textual analysis, highlighting the ethical relevance of Sufi teachings for contemporary environmental discourse while offering limited engagement with empirical social contexts.[14]

Another group of studies attempts to bridge spirituality and environmental praxis by examining community-based ecological initiatives inspired by Sufi values. These works demonstrate how spiritual teachings can motivate environmental awareness, conservation activities, and grassroots ecological movements within Muslim societies.[15] Nevertheless, such studies are generally conducted in relatively stable ecological environments and tend to analyze organized environmental programs rather than communities facing persistent environmental crises.

A related body of literature highlights the broader eco-theological potential of Sufism by revisiting the ideas of influential Sufi thinkers such as Abdul Karim al-Jili and exploring the role of religious preaching in promoting ecological awareness.[16] Other studies examine the perspectives of contemporary *ulama* regarding the ethical implications of natural resource exploitation. While these works expand the conceptual and theological dimensions of ecosufism, they often remain detached from specific environmental crises and do not fully address how spiritual teachings are negotiated

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[12]Muhammad Syihabuddin and Kirwan, "Reconception of Environmental Ethics in Islam: A Review of the Philosophy and Applications of Husein Nasr's Thought," *Refleksi: Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 23, no. 2 (2023): 238–60, https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v23i2.5228.

[13] Gufron, Uup, and Radea Yuli A. Hambali. "Manusia, Alam dan Tuhan dalam Ekosufisme Al-Ghazali." *JAQFI: Jurnal Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam* 7, no. 1 (2022): 86–103. https://doi.org/10.15575/jaqfi.v7i1.16275.

[14] Mita Uswatun Hasanah and Mulia Ardi, "Eko-Sufisme dalam Upaya Pelestarian Lingkungan di Alam Kandung Rejotangan Tulungagung," *Syifa al-Qulub: Jurnal Studi Psikoterapi Sufistik* 6, no. 2 (January 11, 2022): 170–179, https://doi.org/10.15575/saq.v6i2.12937.

[15] Dwi Pra Fitri, "Ekosufisme sebagai Upaya Menjaga Kelestarian Lingkungan melalui Program Kampung Iklim (ProKlim)," *Spiritualita: Journal of Ethics and Spirituality* 9, no. 1 (2025): 55–76, https://doi.org/10.31943/spiritualita.v9i1.2795.

[16] Miftahul Mustofah and Nurul Agustin, "Abdul Karim al-Jili dan Etika Ekologis Kontemporer: Relevansi Pemikiran Sufi untuk Gerakan Ekoteologi di Indonesia," *Spiritualita: Journal of Ethics and Spirituality* 9, no. 2 (2025): 87–104, https://doi.org/10.31943/spiritualita.v9i2.2893.

within communities experiencing ecological vulnerability.[17]

      Overall, current ecosufism scholarship remains largely dominated by normative, philosophical, and textual approaches, resulting in limited empirical attention to how Sufi values are understood, negotiated, and sometimes fail to manifest in concrete ecological practices within structurally vulnerable contexts. This gap is particularly relevant in regions facing chronic environmental pressures, such as the recurring flooding affecting coastal communities in Pekalongan. In response, this research aims to analyze how the concepts and values of eco-Sufism are interpreted and articulated within the socio-religious life of the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) community in Pekalongan, while examining why these spiritual values have not significantly transformed into environmental awareness or ecological action among flood-affected residents. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify and analyze the specific theological, social, cultural, and structural factors that contribute to the disconnect between Sufi piety and ecological responsibility, providing a deeper understanding of the barriers to environmental devotion in this specific local context.

METHOD

      This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze how ecosufism values are understood and articulated within the socio-religious life of *santri* communities in Pekalongan, as well as the factors influencing the disconnection between Sufi piety and ecological piety in a flood-prone area.[18] The selection of informants was based on the socio-religious landscape of Pekalongan, which is culturally dominated by the Nahdliyyin tradition, the strong influence of the Habaib network (Rabithah Alawiyah), and the dynamic movement of Sufi orders and Salafi *pesantren* affiliations (such as Lirboyo), alongside the Muhammadiyah community, which also has a structured mass base. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants, including figures from Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, Rabithah Alawiyah, muballigh/da'i, the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah order, the Shadhiliyyah order, and alumni of Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo.[19]

      The interviews were complemented by observations of socio-religious practices and analysis of religious documents as well as media reports related to flooding in Pekalongan.[20] To ensure that the analysis is grounded in empirical reality, the field observations focused on several socio-religious practices within *santri* and community religious settings in Pekalongan. First, the research observed the content of religious

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[17] Abubakar Abubakar, "Tasawuf dan Dakwah Lingkungan dalam Perspektif Spiritualitas Islam," *Insania: Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Keislaman* 27, no. 1 (2025): 45–62, https://doi.org/10.31538/insania.v27i1.1092.

[18] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018).

[19] Interview I1 (2026); Interview I2 (2026); Interview I4 (2026); Interview I5 (2026); Interview I7 (2026).

[20] Pemerintah Kota Pekalongan, "Laporan Penanganan Banjir Kota Pekalongan," 2025; Radar Pekalongan, "Sekolah Terdampak Banjir Dialihkan ke Pembelajaran Daring," 2026; Antara News, "Banjir Rendam Rel Kereta di Pekalongan," 2024.

sermons, study circles (*pengajian*), and teaching materials delivered in *pesantren* and mosque-based gatherings to identify how ecological issues such as environmental responsibility, water management, and flooding were framed within religious discourse. Second, direct observations were conducted on everyday environmental practices within religious institutions, including waste management, water usage, and environmental conservation initiatives implemented in *pesantren* and surrounding mosque communities.

In addition, the study documented how local religious communities responded to recurring flooding events, particularly the role of religious leaders, *santri*, and mosque networks in organizing social assistance, evacuation support, and collective coping strategies. These observations were complemented by in-depth interviews with religious leaders, *santri*, and local residents to explore how Sufi-inspired spiritual values are interpreted and negotiated in relation to ecological responsibility in everyday life.

Data were analyzed using critical thematic analysis through stages of open, axial, and selective coding, guided by a layered theoretical framework comprising spiritual ecology and Islamic environmental ethics as the macro foundation, ecosufism as the middle-range theory, and ecosufistic practices as the micro-analytical framework.[21] Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, as well as researcher reflexivity in interpreting the relationship between spirituality and ecological praxis.[22]

Table 1. Informant Socio-Religious Background

Informant Code	Socio-Religious Background
I1	Muhammadiyah figure
I2	Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) figure
I3	Rabithah Alawiyah representative
I4	Islamic preacher (da'i)
I5	Practitioner of the Qadiriyyah–Naqshbandiyyah order
I6	Practitioner of the Shadhiliyyah order
I7	Alumni of Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Ecosufism in the Socio-Religious Life of *Santri* Communities in Pekalongan

In this study, ecosufism is used as an analytical framework to interpret the relationship between spiritual values and ecological practices observed within *santri* communities in Pekalongan. Ecosufism integrates Sufi spirituality with ecological ethics by emphasizing that environmental crises are not only technological or economic problems but are also rooted in a deeper spiritual disconnection between humans and nature. From this perspective, nature is understood as a manifestation of divine *signs (āyāt kauniyyah)*, and the human–environment relationship is ideally guided by ethical

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[21]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[22]Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989). https://archive.org/details/researchacttheo00denz.

principles such as *amānah* (trusteeship), *mīzān* (balance), and *maḥabbah* (cosmic love). These principles provide a normative basis for examining whether and how spiritual teachings within *pesantren* communities translate into ecological responsibility in everyday practice. [23]

However, the field findings indicate that while religious teachings emphasizing spiritual purification *(tazkiyat al-nafs)* and moral discipline remain central in *santri* education, ecological responsibility rarely appears as an explicit component of religious discourse or practice. This condition illustrates a gap between spiritual piety and ecological praxis. In this sense, ecosufism is not treated merely as a theological concept but as a lens to analyze how spiritual values are interpreted and enacted within specific socio-religious contexts.

To further interpret these findings, insights from social practice perspectives are used to understand how religious norms become routinized in everyday life within *pesantren* environments. The persistence of ritual devotion alongside limited ecological engagement suggests that environmental ethics have not yet been institutionalized as part of the habitual religious practices of the community. At the same time, broader structural conditions, including recurrent flooding, economic pressures, and limited environmental governance, shape how communities prioritize immediate survival concerns over long-term ecological initiatives.

Viewed through this combined analytical perspective, the ecological situation in Pekalongan does not necessarily indicate the failure of Sufi spirituality. Rather, it reflects a structural disconnection between spiritual teachings and socio-ecological praxis within communities experiencing chronic environmental vulnerability. Ecosufism therefore functions in this study as a critical interpretive framework for examining how religious values are negotiated, adapted, or marginalized in disaster-prone contexts where ecological crises intersect with complex social realities.

Despite its rich normative foundations, ecosufism encounters a practical dilemma when spiritual values remain confined to individual consciousness and ritual observance without being articulated into concrete socio-ecological action. Ibrahim Özdemir emphasizes that Islamic spirituality including Sufism attains transformative power only when it functions as a public ethic shaping lifestyles, social policies, and structural relations between humans and nature.[24] From this perspective, Sufism cannot be reduced to *tazkiyat al-nafs* (inner purification) alone; rather, it must be reinterpreted as a source of ecological ethics with direct implications for spatial governance, collective responsibility, and environmental sustainability.

Contemporary environmental philosophy supports this emphasis on transformative ethical frameworks. Holmes Rolston III argues that ethical ecology must expand moral considerability beyond anthropocentric frameworks toward more holistic

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[23]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[24]Ibrahim Özdemir, "Toward an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective," in *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, ed. Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

worldviews.[25] J. Baird Callicott extends this by emphasizing the need for culturally embedded environmental ethics that integrate values, beliefs, and practices into environmental decision-making.[26] Stephanie A. Malin's work on environmental justice shows how spiritual and cultural logics shape community responses to ecological harm.[27] Similarly, Matthew Hesselink highlights the role of religion in motivating ecological stewardship and collective action.[28] These perspectives align with ecosufism's claim that spirituality must translate into socio-ecological praxis to address structural environmental problems.

This ecosufistic framework is particularly relevant for examining the paradox of *santri* communities in Pekalongan, where Sufi practices, *tarekat* affiliations, and religious rituals remain robust, yet ecological crises most notably recurrent flooding and environmental degradation persist with limited ecological response. Critically, this condition does not necessarily indicate the failure of Sufism as a doctrine, but instead reveals a structural disconnection between Sufi spirituality and socio-ecological praxis. As Catherine Keller notes, religious narratives often emphasize inner transformation while underemphasizing socio-political engagement with ecological systems.[29] Similarly, Willis Jenkins contends that religion's ecological contributions depend on its capacity to mobilize collective ethics beyond personal spirituality.[30]

Accordingly, ecosufism in this study is not positioned as an idealized normative concept, but rather as a critical analytical tool for interrogating the gap between spiritual piety and ecological piety. This approach enables a reflective examination of how Sufi values are interpreted, negotiated, or even depoliticized within the socio-religious life of *santri* communities in disaster-prone contexts such as Pekalongan. In this sense, ecosufism functions not only as an environmental theology but also as an analytical lens for assessing the extent to which spirituality can be transformed into a collective, contextualized ecological ethic.

Theological Foundations of Islamic Environmental Ethics

Islamic environmental ethics provides a conceptual framework for understanding human–nature relations within the theological principle of *tawḥīd*. Within this paradigm, nature is not perceived as a neutral entity or merely an economic resource, but as a divine

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[25]Holmes Rolston III, "Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World," *Environmental Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1979): 59–68.

[26] Michael Horace Barnes, ed., *An Ecology of the Spirit: Religious Reflection and Environmental Consciousness* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 201.

[27]Stephanie A. Malin and Stacia S. Ryder, *"Developing Deeply Intersectional Environmental Justice Scholarship,"* Environmental Sociology 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1446711

[28]Khamrang Varah, Sophayo, Eknee Khongrei, Mirinchonme Mahongnao, and Franky Varah. 2021. "The Influence of Religion on Beliefs of Stewardship, Dominionship and Controlling God towards pro-Environmental Support." *Culture and Religion* 22 (1): 84–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2023.2177317.

[29] Catherine Keller, *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

[30]Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

creation endowed with purpose (*ghāyah*) and moral order. The principle of *tawḥīd* implies an integrated relationship between God, humanity, and the natural world; environmental degradation is therefore interpreted as a form of cosmic disharmony with theological implications. In this framework, the concepts of *khalīfah* (stewardship) and *amānah* (trust) emphasize that humans are not absolute owners of the earth but moral and spiritual custodians entrusted with its care.[31]

In socio-religious practice, however, Islamic environmental ethics often remains confined to a normative-textual level. Existing studies indicate that Qur'anic injunctions against environmental destruction (*fasād fī al-arḍ*) and commands to maintain balance (*mīzān*) are frequently framed as general moral teachings rather than as concrete ethical principles guiding social action or public policy.[32] Consequently, ecological awareness among Muslim communities rarely develops in a systematic or institutionalized manner, despite its strong theological foundations.

A similar dynamic is observable within *santri* communities in Pekalongan. Religious teachings continue to emphasize ritual observance and personal piety, while environmental issues such as flooding, land subsidence, and hydrological degradation are often interpreted as divine trials or natural destiny. From the perspective of Islamic environmental thought, such interpretations risk weakening the sense of human responsibility for ecological management and obscuring the structural and socio-economic factors that contribute to environmental crises.[33]

This condition underscores the need to approach Islamic environmental ethics in a more critical and contextual manner. Contemporary Muslim thinkers argue that religious reasoning must move beyond the dichotomy between the "sacred" and the "worldly" in order to address modern social and ecological challenges.[34] When environmental issues are excluded from the domain of religious obligation, religion risks losing its transformative capacity to critique exploitative development practices. Islamic environmental ethics, therefore, should not remain confined to individual moral instruction but must be reconceptualized as a social ethic that encourages collective engagement in environmental governance, public policy, and the regulation of destructive political–economic structures.[35]

Religious Habitus and the Limited Ecological Engagement

To interpret the relationship between spiritual values and ecological practices observed in Pekalongan, this study draws on the theory of social practice developed by

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[31]Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 25.

[32]Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2019), 33.

[33]Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity, and the Climate Crisis* (Leicestershire: Kube Publishing, 2019).

[34]Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans. Robert D. Lee (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

[35] Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

Pierre Bourdieu. In this framework, social practices are shaped not only by knowledge or normative beliefs but also by *habitus*, a system of durable dispositions formed through processes of socialization and everyday experience.[36] Habitus structures how individuals perceive problems, prioritize actions, and respond to social realities, often operating beneath the level of conscious reflection. Consequently, values that are normatively endorsed do not necessarily translate into concrete social practices.

Within *santri* communities in Pekalongan, the religious habitus is largely formed through *pesantren* education, religious study circles, *tarekat* affiliations, and ritual observance. Field observations indicate that this habitus strongly emphasizes indicators of personal piety, such as ritual devotion, moral discipline, and obedience to religious authority as the primary markers of religiosity. However, ecological concerns rarely appear as an integral component of these religious dispositions. As a result, environmental issues tend to remain peripheral within everyday religious practices despite the strong theological foundations for environmental ethics in Islamic teachings.[37]

Bourdieu's perspective also highlights that social practices operate within specific social fields structured by power relations and the distribution of symbolic and cultural capital.[38] In the religious field of Pekalongan, moral authority is primarily attributed to actors who possess classical scholarly capital, such as mastery of *kitab kuning*, recognized chains of religious knowledge transmission, and institutional legitimacy within *pesantren* networks. Environmental discourse, however, has not yet acquired comparable symbolic capital within this field. Consequently, ecological concerns rarely emerge as authoritative religious issues capable of mobilizing collective action within *santri* communities.

This dynamic is reflected in interview data collected from religious leaders affiliated with Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and several local *tarekat* groups. Many respondents interpret the recurrent flooding in Pekalongan primarily through religious narratives of divine testing, destiny, or natural cycles rather than as structural consequences of groundwater extraction, urban development policies, and environmental mismanagement. Such interpretations shape a religious response that prioritizes prayer gatherings, *istighāthah*, and post-disaster solidarity rather than preventive environmental action or advocacy for structural ecological reform.

Viewed through the lens of social practice theory, these findings suggest that the limited ecological engagement of *santri* communities does not necessarily reflect a lack of theological awareness. Instead, it indicates the absence of an ecological habitus within the prevailing structure of religious practice. Without the integration of environmental values into *pesantren* curricula, religious preaching, and the symbolic authority of religious leaders, ecosufistic teachings remain largely confined to the level of normative discourse. In this sense, Bourdieu's framework helps explain why strong spiritual piety

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[36]Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[37]Richard C. Foltz, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[38]Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

within Pekalongan's religious communities does not automatically translate into ecological responsibility in everyday social practice.[39]

Structural and Political Dimensions of the Ecological Crisis in Pekalongan

Political ecology offers a critical approach that conceptualizes environmental problems not as purely natural phenomena, but as outcomes of power relations among the state, market forces, and local communities.[40] From this perspective, environmental degradation emerges from development policies, political–economic logics, and unequal resource distribution. Flooding, land subsidence, and ecosystem damage are therefore socially produced and politically mediated, reflecting patterns of benefit and risk allocation.[41]

Forsyth cautions that moralistic approaches to environmental crises frequently fail because they neglect structural dimensions.[42] In Pekalongan, an excessive emphasis on personal piety, whether through Sufi spirituality or general religious ethics risks obscuring systemic issues such as urban governance, state–industry relations, and ecological injustice. As a result, communities are encouraged to cultivate patience and *tawakkul*, while the structural drivers of environmental degradation remain largely unchallenged. Critical disaster scholarship similarly demonstrates that so-called "natural disasters" are socially constructed through vulnerability and political–economic processes rather than being merely acts of nature.[43]

To interpret the broader structural conditions shaping ecological practices in Pekalongan, this study also draws on perspectives from Political Ecology. This approach views environmental problems not merely as natural phenomena but as outcomes of political–economic processes and unequal power relations between the state, market actors, and local communities.[44] From this perspective, environmental degradation including flooding, land subsidence, and coastal ecosystem damage must be understood as socially produced and politically mediated rather than purely environmental events.

Field findings from Pekalongan indicate that recurrent flooding cannot be separated from structural factors such as intensive groundwater extraction, coastal industrial expansion, fragile spatial planning, and weak environmental regulation. Communities in flood-prone areas including many *santri* households often occupy the position of ecological victims rather than primary agents of environmental degradation. This structural context complicates the implementation of ecosufistic values, since individual ecological responsibility frequently confronts political–economic forces

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[39] Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Stephanie A. Malin, *The Price of Nuclear Power: Uranium Communities and Environmental Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

[40] Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society* (London: Methuen, 1987).

[41] Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

[42] Tim Forsyth, *Critical Political Ecology: The Politics of Environmental Science* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[43] Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[44] Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Disasters and Political Ecology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, ed. Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy (London: Routledge, 2015).

beyond the immediate control of local religious communities. Such dynamics resemble patterns of environmental injustice frequently observed in developing regions, where vulnerable populations disproportionately bear ecological risks generated by development regimes.[45]

Interview data with religious leaders and community figures further reveal that environmental preaching within religious forums often encounters institutional and political limitations. Several respondents acknowledged that while environmental awareness is occasionally discussed in sermons or religious gatherings, efforts to promote ecological responsibility rarely develop into sustained collective initiatives. Within local religious discourse, flooding is frequently interpreted through theological narratives of divine testing, patience (*ṣabr*), and trust in God (*tawakkul*), rather than being framed as the outcome of structural environmental mismanagement.

From a political ecology perspective, such interpretations illustrate how moral and spiritual responses can coexist with structural constraints that limit ecological activism. Scholars of environmental governance caution that approaches focusing solely on moral awareness often fail to address the deeper political–economic drivers of ecological crises.[46] In Pekalongan, an excessive emphasis on personal piety risks obscuring systemic issues such as urban development policies, industrial expansion, and environmental governance failures that contribute to recurring flooding.

Viewed alongside ecosufism and social practice theory, political ecology helps situate Pekalongan's environmental crisis within a broader framework of power relations. The limited translation of Sufi spiritual values into ecological praxis is therefore not only a matter of religious awareness or habitus formation but also a consequence of restricted socio-political space for collective environmental action. Consequently, meaningful ecological transformation requires not only the cultivation of spiritual consciousness but also institutional reforms that enable religious values to influence environmental governance and development policies.[47]

Normative Spirituality without Ecological Praxis

The interview findings indicate that eco-Sufism among religious leaders and *santri* communities in Pekalongan is generally understood as part of Sufi teachings oriented toward moral cultivation and individual piety. A Muhammadiyah leader emphasized that Sufism is primarily perceived as a path of spiritual purification and self-discipline rather than as a structured framework of social ethics. He stated,

> *"Sufism is essentially about purifying the heart and refining character. If a person's heart is good, their relationship with nature should also be good. However, it has rarely been discussed in concrete environmental terms."[48]*

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[45]Tim Forsyth, *Critical Political Ecology: The Politics of Environmental Science* (London: Routledge, 2003); Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

[46]Joan Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002).

[47]Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society* (London: Routledge, 1987).

[48]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

This statement demonstrates that the relationship between spirituality and the environment is understood implicitly and normatively, without clear practical guidance.

A similar perspective emerged from Nahdlatul Ulama circles and *pesantren* communities. A young NU leader explained that Sufi values such as trust (amanah) and ascetic restraint (zuhud) are frequently conveyed in religious gatherings but remain at the level of moral exhortation. He noted,

> *"In religious study sessions, caring for nature is often described as part of God's trust. Yet, honestly, it has not evolved into a serious movement. It remains more a moral reminder than a social agenda."[49]*

An alumnus of Lirboyo Islamic boarding school further stressed that Sufism has largely been positioned as an inward spiritual matter rather than a social system*: "In pesantren, Sufism is strong in individual formation. Environmental issues are often regarded as worldly matters not directly linked to acts of worship."[50]* These accounts collectively suggest that eco-Sufism operates primarily as a symbolic personal ethic rather than as a framework for collective ecological action.

These findings reinforce Seyyed Hossein Nasr's critique that the ecological crisis cannot be adequately addressed through normative spirituality alone without reconstructing cosmic consciousness and practical ethical commitments.[51] However, this study reveals a more specific layer of the problem: even within religious communities with strong Sufi traditions, spiritual awareness does not automatically translate into ecological consciousness. Eco-Sufism functions as a moral discourse that cultivates patience and resignation *(tawakkal)*, yet it has not developed into an ethical paradigm capable of mobilizing organized ecological action. Therefore, the gap between Sufi piety and ecological praxis lies not in the absence of values, but in the failure to articulate and institutionalize those values within social and structural domains.[52]

The Articulation Gap between Spiritual Piety and Socio-Ecological Practice

The findings reveal a clear gap between Sufi spiritual piety and socio-ecological practice among *santri* communities in Pekalongan. Core Sufi values such as *zuhud* (ascetic restraint), *tawazun* (balance), *amanah* (trust), and *mahabbah* (love) consistently appear in religious discourse, study circles, and *pesantren* education. However, these values are predominantly framed as individual moral guidelines rather than as foundations for collective action in addressing environmental challenges. A young preacher who is also affiliated with a Sufi order stated,

> *"Values such as zuhud and amanah are frequently taught. Yet in practice, they remain limited to living modestly and patiently. They have not developed into an*

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[49]Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec, eds., *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

[50]Interview I2, Tokoh muda Nahdlatul Ulama dan GP Ansor, Pekalongan, 2026.

[51]Interview I4, Muballigh muda, ASN, alumni *pesantren*, Pekalongan, 2026.

[52]Interview I5, Pengamal Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah, Pekalongan, 2026.

organized environmental movement.”

This statement indicates that Sufi values largely remain within the realm of personal ethics. This gap is further underscored by a young Nahdlatul Ulama activist engaged in religious social movements. He explained that Sufi teachings tend to emphasize inner tranquility and acceptance of reality, while the dimension of social transformation receives less attention.

> *“Sufism is often understood as caring for the heart and cultivating inner discipline. When it comes to environmental issues, many perceive them as technical matters, not part of Sufism.”*

A similar view emerged from a practitioner of the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah order, who highlighted the centrality of *dhikr* and spiritual discipline but acknowledged that ecological awareness has not become a collective agenda within the order: *“Tariqa practices focus on tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the self). Environmental concerns are usually left to individual awareness.”*

These findings point to a translation failure from spiritual values to socio-ecological practice. Within the framework of middle-range theory, eco-Sufism should function as a bridge between spiritual experience and social ethics. However, in the Pekalongan context, this bridge remains underdeveloped. Sufi values continue to operate primarily within the domain of private piety, while environmental problems such as flooding and ecological degradation are treated as external issues beyond the sphere of spirituality. This condition reinforces the argument that Sufi piety does not automatically generate ecological responsibility without normative articulation accompanied by practical mechanisms and structural awareness.

Religious Interpretation of Flooding

The findings indicate that recurrent flooding in Pekalongan is generally interpreted by the *santri* community through a theological framework emphasizing divine decree (*takdir*) and spiritual trial. This interpretation cultivates a relatively calm, patient, and resigned spiritual attitude in responding to disaster. An alumnus of Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo explained,

> *“When floods come, what is most often conveyed is patience and acceptance as a test. It is rarely discussed openly that this may also result from human mismanagement of nature.”*[53]

This narrative suggests that the spiritual dimension is more dominant than ecological causal analysis. A similar understanding was expressed by a young *muballigh* actively engaged in preaching within the community. He stated that in many sermons floods are frequently associated with God’s will, while the relationship between human behavior and environmental degradation has not become a mainstream theme in religious

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[53]Interview I7, 2026, Alumni Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo, Pekalongan.

discourse.[54] A young leader of Nahdlatul Ulama added that the attitude of *nrimo* (acceptance) strengthens social solidarity, yet potentially weakens the impulse for structural critique.[55]

These findings reveal a tendency toward religious fatalism in interpreting ecological disasters. Although the concepts of divine decree and trial possess strong theological legitimacy, interpretations that lack ecological causal awareness risk obscuring human responsibility as *khalifah* (stewards) on earth. From an eco-Sufi perspective, disasters should be understood not only as spiritual events but also as reflections of disharmonious human–nature relations.[56] Moreover, disaster studies emphasize that disasters are not merely natural events but the result of the interaction between natural hazards and social vulnerability.[57] Thus, when flooding is reduced solely to a matter of destiny, Sufi values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *tawazun* (balance) lose their transformative capacity, contributing to the weak articulation of ecological piety within the *santri* community of Pekalongan.

Theological, Socio-Cultural, and Structural Factors in the Limitations of Eco-Sufism Practice

The findings indicate that the limited practice of eco-Sufism in Pekalongan cannot be separated from theological factors that shape how religious obligations are understood. Several informants highlighted a dichotomy between *ibadah mahdhah* (ritual worship) and worldly affairs, including environmental issues. A Muhammadiyah figure explained,

> *"Environmental issues are often considered technical or policy matters, not directly part of religious obligation. As a result, piety is measured through ritual practice rather than social responsibility."[58]*

Such an understanding weakens the theological legitimacy of ecological concerns as an integral dimension of religious devotion.

Beyond theological aspects, socio-cultural dynamics also play a significant role in shaping the *santri* community's environmental attitudes. The culture of *nrimo* (acceptance), resignation, and the preservation of social harmony strengthens communal cohesion, yet at the same time may constrain critical engagement with environmentally harmful practices. A young Nahdlatul Ulama activist involved in social movements observed,

> *"The santri community is strong in ethics and manners. But when it comes to criticizing policies or industrial practices that harm the environment, there is*

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[54]Interview I4, 2026, Muballigh muda, ASN, alumni *pesantren*, Pekalongan.

[55]Interview I2, 2026, Tokoh muda Nahdlatul Ulama dan GP Ansor, Pekalongan.

[56]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[57] Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[58]Interview I1, Muhammadiyah figure, alumnus of Al-Azhar, Pekalongan, 2026.

often reluctance because it is perceived as disrupting the established order."[59]

This suggests that values of politeness and social conformity, although positive in many respects, may hinder the transformation of eco-Sufism into ecological advocacy.

In addition to internal religious and cultural factors, structural and economic conditions significantly influence the limited implementation of eco-Sufism. An informant affiliated with the Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah emphasized that economically vulnerable communities often lack the capacity to implement ecological values consistently.

> *"When the economy is difficult, people focus on survival. Environmental concerns become secondary, especially when policies and urban planning are themselves not environmentally friendly."*[60]

These findings underscore that flooding and environmental degradation in Pekalongan are not merely the result of individual moral shortcomings but rather the outcome of complex interactions between economic structures, public policy, and social vulnerability.[61] In this context, eco-Sufism requires an approach that transcends personal ethics and engages structural dimensions if it is to function as a transformative socio-ecological ethic.

Reformulating Eco-Sufism: Toward a Contextual and Applied Islamic Environmental Ethics

The findings demonstrate that the limitations of eco-Sufism practice in Pekalongan do not stem from the absence of spiritual values, but rather from the lack of a contextualized and applied formulation of eco-Sufism. Several informants emphasized the need to reinterpret Sufism so that it does not remain confined to inner spiritual cultivation but also promotes socio-ecological responsibility. A young leader of Nahdlatul Ulama stated, *"Sufism actually has critical social power. If interpreted contextually, it can serve as the foundation of environmental ethics. But this requires interpretive courage and alignment with the lived realities of the community."*[62] This statement reflects an urgent need to shift eco-Sufism from a normative discourse to a framework of practical ethics.

Efforts toward reformulation were also voiced within *pesantren* circles and among young preachers. An alumnus of Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo emphasized that *pesantren* possess substantial symbolic and moral capital to lead such a transformation. *"Pesantren have strong legitimacy. If Sufism begins to be linked with environmental jurisprudence*

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[59]Interview I2, young leader of Nahdlatul Ulama and GP Ansor, Pekalongan, 2026.

[60]Interview I5, practitioner of the Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah, Pekalongan, 2026.

[61]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

[62]Interview I2, young leader of Nahdlatul Ulama and GP Ansor, Pekalongan, 2026.

and disaster realities, I believe the santri community can become more proactive.”[63] Meanwhile, a young *muballigh* active in public preaching added, *“Sufi sermons must begin addressing social impacts. Dhikr and litanies are important, but they must result in a more responsible way of living toward nature.”*[64] These accounts underscore the potential of religious institutions as key agents in transforming eco-Sufism.

This section proposes a conceptual contribution through the reconstruction of eco-Sufism as an integrated Islamic environmental ethic. Eco-Sufism should no longer be understood solely as an individual spiritual path, but as a socio-ethical framework connecting Sufism, environmental jurisprudence, and structural awareness.[65] In disaster-prone regions such as Pekalongan, applied eco-Sufism requires the active engagement of *pesantren*, Sufi orders, and religious organizations in ecological education, policy advocacy, and the strengthening of collective ecological piety. Accordingly, this study affirms that the future of eco-Sufism depends on its capacity to bridge Sufi piety and ecological responsibility in a contextual and sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ecosufism within the socio-religious life of *santri* communities in Pekalongan is predominantly understood as a Sufi moral framework centered on inner purification, individual piety, and spiritual tranquility, rather than as an articulated socio-ecological ethic. Although harmonious relations with nature are normatively assumed to arise from personal moral refinement, ecosufism has not yet been systematically institutionalized within *pesantren* practices, religious authority structures, or collective community agendas. As a result, Sufi values remain largely symbolic and inward-oriented, with limited translation into environmental awareness or organized conservation practices.

The findings further demonstrate that recurrent ecological crises, particularly flooding, are predominantly interpreted through theological lenses of divine decree and spiritual trial. The strong emphasis on patience, *tawakkal*, and acceptance cultivates psychological resilience but simultaneously reinforces a form of religious orientation that prioritizes endurance over preventive ecological responsibility. Consequently, environmental degradation is more frequently framed as destiny than as a socially produced condition requiring collective corrective action. This interpretive pattern reveals a significant gap between Sufistic piety and ecological piety.

Moreover, the study identifies that this gap is shaped by interconnected theological, socio-cultural, and structural factors. A persistent dichotomy between ritual worship and worldly affairs weakens the theological legitimacy of environmental

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[63]Interview I7, alumnus of Pondok *Pesantren* Lirboyo, Pekalongan, 2026.

[64]Interview I4, young *muballigh*, civil servant, *pesantren* alumnus, Pekalongan, 2026.

[65]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

responsibility as an integral dimension of faith. At the socio-cultural level, the *santri* religious habitus emphasizing adab, obedience, and social harmony—tends to limit critical engagement with environmentally harmful development practices. Structurally, economic vulnerability and unequal governance arrangements further constrain the capacity of religious communities to operationalize ecosufistic values in transformative ways.

In synthesizing these findings, this research contributes to expand the area of psychological study on eco-Sufism by examining the relationship between spiritual values and ecological practices.the development of psychology as a science by offering a socio-spiritual analysis of religious meaning-making, ecological perception, and collective behavior in disaster-prone contexts. It demonstrates that spiritual cognition and religious habitus significantly shape environmental attitudes, resilience patterns, and collective action orientations. By reconstructing ecosufism as a contextual, collective, and applied Islamic environmental ethic, this study expands the psychological understanding of how religious values can function not only as coping mechanisms but also as potential drivers of socio-ecological transformation.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is geographically limited to the coastal communities of Pekalongan, which means that the findings may not fully represent the diversity of socio-religious and ecological dynamics in other Muslim communities facing different environmental conditions. Second, the study relies primarily on qualitative data derived from observations and in-depth interviews within *pesantren* and local religious networks. While this approach provides rich contextual insights into the relationship between spiritual values and ecological practices, it does not allow for broader generalization across wider populations.

Future research could expand this line of inquiry by conducting comparative studies across different regions experiencing varied ecological challenges, such as drought-prone or forest-based communities. Further studies may also incorporate mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative ethnographic insights with quantitative surveys to examine patterns of ecological awareness and religious environmental ethics among larger Muslim populations. Such research would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic spiritual traditions, including ecosufism, can be translated into practical ecological responsibility in diverse socio-environmental contexts.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the preparation of this manuscript, the author utilized SciSpace to assist with language refinement, translation into academic English, structural organization, and clarity of expression. All generated outputs were carefully reviewed, critically evaluated, and substantively revised by the author. The author assumes full responsibility for the final content, interpretation, and academic integrity of this publication.

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