

(Research/Review) Article

Integration of Faith and Ecosystems: Islamic Theology as a Foundation for Resistance to Environmental Exploitation in Mandailing Natal

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Abstract: This article examines the synergy between Islamic theological values and local wisdom as a basis for resistance to environmental exploitation in Mandailing Natal. The focus of the study lies on the application of faith principles, such as the concepts of *khalifah*, justice, and *ihسان*, and their implementation through the traditional practice of *lubuk larangan*. The literature study method was used to collect and analyze secondary data from scientific articles, journals, and national and local news sources. The results of the study show that these Islamic theological values have been deeply rooted in the culture of the Mandailing Natal community, encouraging a critical attitude towards illegal gold mining practices that damage the ecosystem. The *lubuk larangan* tradition also acts as a mechanism for social control and environmental conservation, by implementing periodic restrictions on extractive activities to provide space for natural regeneration. The findings indicate that the integration of Islamic theology and local wisdom results in a more integrated and ethical natural resource management paradigm. This research recommends strengthening the synergy of faith values and local traditions in the formulation of public policies and increasing community participation in environmental monitoring. This integrative approach can be used as a strategic model to overcome the challenges of environmental exploitation amid increasingly complex global dynamics.

Keywords: Environmental Exploitation; Ecosystems; Islamic Theology; Local Wisdom.

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1. Introduction

The integration of faith and ecosystems is a multidimensional concept that is increasingly relevant in the era of globalization and modernity [1], where the dynamics of economic development often clash with environmental conservation efforts. In the midst of global pressure to achieve sustainable development, there is an urgency to explore alternative paradigms that not only emphasize technocratic aspects, but also integrate spiritual and traditional values [2]. Mandailing Natal Regency, which is rich in natural resources, especially gold mining, is a concrete example where the conflict between resource exploitation and nature conservation poses a serious challenge. Communities in this area, which are predominantly Muslim, have internalized principles of faith that encourage ecological responsibility, while local wisdom, such as the customary practice of *Lubuk Larangan*, has long served as an effective conservation instrument [3]. This research aims to investigate how the integration between Islamic theology and Mandailing Natal's local wisdom can be used as a strategic foundation in resistance to all exploitation practices that can damage the environment, as well as offer a new paradigm for ethical and sustainable natural resource management.

As global concerns over environmental degradation grow, various studies have highlighted the role of religion as a driver of ecological awareness. The study by Rasyad [4]

asserts that the principle of faith in Islam, which teaches human responsibility as *khalifah* on earth, provides a strong ethical foundation to reject extractive economic practices that do not pay attention to ecological limits. This understanding is particularly relevant in Mandailing Natal, where illegal gold mining practices often ignore holistic environmental impacts. In addition, a study by T. Lubis et al. [3] revealed that Mandailing local traditions, particularly the practice of *lubuk larangan* applied after *Eid al-Fitr* celebrations, serve as a time-tested conservation mechanism. This integration of faith values and local wisdom offers an adaptive and sustainable strategy in maintaining ecosystem balance, while providing an alternative to modern regulations that are still limited.

On the other hand, research by Worlanyo and Jiangfeng [5] documents the significant impact of illegal mining practices on forests, soil and water sources, causing not only environmental but also economic damage to communities. From a cross-disciplinary perspective, Nasir Hassan Wani's [6] research shows that harmonization between Islamic ecological principles and environmental ethics can optimize responses to the challenge of nature destruction through a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates the values of justice, responsibility and harmony between humans and nature. Furthermore, the study by Pahrudin HM et al. [7] reveals the dynamics of conflict between the growth of the illegal gold mining industry and environmental conservation, highlighting the strong resistance of local communities who have emotional and cultural attachments to nature. The findings emphasize the urgency of developing a new paradigm that integrates faith values with local wisdom as a means of resistance to exploitative practices in order to achieve environmental sustainability.

Although various studies have explored the role of theology and local wisdom in the context of environmental conservation, there is still a significant research gap. Many previous studies tend to separate theological analysis from the study of local traditions, resulting in a fragmentary understanding of the potential synergy between the two elements. The existence of the practice of *lubuk larangan* in Mandailing Natal as a form of customary regulation is often studied separately from the religious aspects that underlie it. As a result, the collective contribution of faith values and environmental conservation traditions does not receive adequate attention in the formulation of natural resource management strategies. This gap is the main focus of this research, which explores how the integration of Islamic theology with local wisdom can create an effective model of resistance to exploitative actions against the environment, especially in the face of illegal gold mining practices.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the integrative approach between theological values in Islam such as the concept of justice, responsibility as a *khalifah*, and environmental conservation ethics with the local wisdom of Mandailing Natal which is realized through the practice of *Lubuk Larangan*. This approach offers a new paradigm that is not only descriptive, but also normative, by providing strategic recommendations for more sustainable and ethical environmental management. Combining two domains that have rarely been comprehensively synergized, this research aims to develop a theoretical and empirical framework that documents and analyzes the interaction between Islamic theological principles and local customary practices of Mandailing Natal in the face of natural resource exploitation.

The main purpose of writing this article is to fill the gap in the literature on the synergy between faith values and conservation traditions and to provide an empirical basis for the formulation of public policies that are responsive to environmental challenges, especially illegal gold mining practices. Academically, this research is expected to enrich the study of environmental theology and local wisdom, and offer a new, adaptive perspective for natural resource management. On the practical side, the results of this research can be used as a basis for stakeholders, including local governments, local communities, and non-governmental organizations to develop environmental conservation programs that combine formal regulations with cultural and spiritual values, while increasing community participation and empowerment at the local and global levels.

2. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach through a comprehensive literature study [8]. Data were obtained by reviewing various written sources, including articles obtained from scientific journals and articles from national and local news, as well as other supporting literature materials related to theological values in Islam, local wisdom of Mandailing Natal, and the dynamics of environmental exploitation. The selection of sources was done selectively based on relevance to the research topic and the reliability of the information, thus enabling researchers to develop an in-depth conceptual framework without direct field involvement.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively with thematic synthesis where the collected information was organized based on key themes [9], such as faith principles, local conservation practices, and the impact of environmental exploitation activities. This approach enabled the identification of patterns and comparisons between various perspectives found in the literature, resulting in a comprehensive picture of the synergy between theology and local wisdom in Mandailing Natal. The validity of the findings is strengthened through a data triangulation process, which ensures consistency and accuracy of analysis and supports the development of strategic recommendations for ethical and sustainable environmental management.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Islamic Theological Foundations of Environmental Conservation

Islam as a teaching that is sourced primarily from the Qur'an and hadith [10], has several concepts of faith that become an important basic foundation and reference for the lives of its people on earth, such as the concept of man as a caliph on earth, the principle of justice, the concept of *ihsan*, and the concept of trust. The concept of *khalifah* requires each individual to see himself as the manager and protector of the earth, thus making the management of nature a moral responsibility that must be carried out with full awareness [4]. The principle of justice directs Muslims to uphold balance in all aspects of life, ensuring that the rights of every creature of God are respected and there is no form of oppression in the distribution of resources [11]. Meanwhile, the concept of *ihsan* encourages the implementation of the best actions with full sincerity, so that it is reflected in actions that support the common good and welfare, both towards fellow humans and the surrounding environment [12]. In addition, the concept of trust reminds that each individual must maintain and be accountable for the entrustment of nature that has been given by God [13]. By integrating these four concepts, Islamic teachings not only provide a spiritual foundation, but also offer practical guidance to face contemporary challenges, including in environmental conservation and sustainable development efforts, all of which become concrete manifestations of the implementation of the value of faith in everyday life.

In the context of Islamic theology, the concept of humans as caliphs/*khalifah* on earth is the main foundation for environmental conservation efforts. Islamic teachings emphasize that each individual is tasked with managing and maintaining the earth as a mandate from God. This *khalifah* duty is not only administrative, but also includes a moral obligation to maintain the balance of the ecosystem, avoid damage, and ensure the sustainability of His creation [4]. This value of faith encourages people to optimize the use of natural resources wisely, so that any act of excessive or destructive exploitation is considered a violation of divine responsibility. The predominantly Muslim Mandailing Natal community internalizes the concept in their daily lives, especially by rejecting illegal gold mining practices that often result in forest destruction [14], river pollution [15], and land degradation [16]. Awareness of their duty as *khalifah* leads them to maintain the integrity of the environment, while encouraging the application of justice values, where the rights of nature and other living things to protection must be respected and maintained.

The principle of justice in Islam emphasizes the need for fair distribution of resources and balanced environmental management. The justice in question includes not only social aspects, but also ecological justice that recognizes the rights of every creature created by God. Muslims are taught that any form of environmental damage is an injustice that must be avoided for the welfare of humanity and other living things [11]. In Mandailing Natal, this value of justice is reflected in community efforts to criticize and reject exploitation practices that not only benefit a handful of parties, but also sacrifice the balance of the ecosystem. The value of justice leads the community to support conservation policies that do not only focus on economic growth, but also accommodate environmental interests as an integral part of shared prosperity.

The concept of *ihsan* in Islamic theology, which invites people to do good with full awareness and sincerity, also strengthens environmental conservation efforts. *Ihsan* encourages the implementation of the best actions in every aspect of life, including nature management [12]. This value motivates the Mandailing Natal community to not only follow formal regulations, but also implement traditional practices that support nature conservation. One example is the implementation of the *Lubuk Larangan* tradition, where the community periodically limits the exploitation of natural resources after the *Eid al-Fitr* celebration, as a form of respect and gratitude to God for His creation [3]. This practice is not only symbolic,

but also effective in giving nature pause to recover, reflecting the real application of the value of *ihsan* in daily life.

Furthermore, the concept of *amanah* in Islam emphasizes that each individual is fully responsible for the management and maintenance of the earth. This mandate requires collective awareness to reject all forms of activities that can disrupt the balance of nature and damage the integrity of the ecosystem [13]. In Mandailing Natal, the values of the concept of trust have become a foothold for local communities in an effort to reject illegal mining practices that often ignore long-term impacts on the environment. Bringing together the values of *khalifah*, justice, *ihsan*, and *amanah* in Islamic theology provides a strong normative framework for environmental conservation. Efforts to resist environmental exploitation in the context of Mandailing Natal are not only based on formal regulations, but also on deep moral and spiritual commitment, so as to create a new paradigm in ethical and sustainable natural resource management.

3.2. Manifestation of Local Wisdom as an Implementation of Faith Values

The manifestation of local wisdom in the context of environmental and natural resource conservation in Mandailing Natal is a clear reflection of the implementation of faith values in daily life. The tradition of *lubuk larangan*, which has been passed down for generations, is a prime example of how local communities integrate Islamic theological principles into natural resource management practices. This tradition is carried out periodically, especially after the *Eid al-Fitr* celebration as a form of respect for nature and as an effort to regulate the use of resources in a sustainable manner. In practice, *lubuk larangan* stipulates a certain period during which extractive activities, such as river fishing, must be put on hold to allow time for nature to regenerate [3]. This temporal policy aligns with the Islamic concept of responsibility as a *khalifah* and the value in the concept of *amanah*, where every individual has a moral obligation to maintain the balance of Allah SWT's creation.

The practice of *lubuk larangan* is not only ritualistic, but also an effective control mechanism in maintaining the ecosystem of waters and land on the river coast. The Mandailing Natal community believes that by respecting the silent period set out in the tradition, they are also actualizing faith values such as *ihsan* and justice. *Ihsan*, which encourages the best actions in all aspects of life [12], is reflected through the community's disciplined attitude in limiting activities that can damage the environment. Meanwhile, the value of justice requires a fair distribution of natural resources [11], in which every creature, including nature, deserves protection. Restrictions on extractive activities imposed through *lubuk larangan* not only maintain ecosystem stability, but also realize ecological justice as taught in Islamic theology.



Figure 1. *Lubuk Larangan* Opening Tradition in Mandailing Natal [17].



Figure 2. *Lubuk Larangan* River Ecosystem in Mandailing Natal [17].

At the implementation level, local wisdom through *Lubuk Larangan* has become an effective resistance tool against illegal mining practices that often ignore ecological aspects. *Lubuk larangan* prohibits all exploitative activities in rivers designated as *lubuk larangan* [3]. The Mandailing Natal community, which is very thick with its Islamic identity, uses this tradition as a foundation that is both passive and active in rejecting and criticizing all forms of unethical environmental exploitation. This collective effort is evident in the community's proactive stance that consistently advocates for the implementation and enforcement of the *lubuk larangan* tradition, despite being faced with economic pressure from an uncontrolled mining industry [17]. Thus, the integration between the values of faith as Islamic theology, and the values of local wisdom not only strengthens the moral position of the community, but also provides cultural legitimacy in the face of practices that can potentially damage the environment.

In line with Islamic theological principles, the *lubuk larangan* tradition also functions as a form of social control that involves the active participation of the community. Through rituals and community meetings in deliberation, faith values such as shared responsibility and solidarity are interpreted as collective efforts in maintaining the sustainability of nature. The community not only sees this tradition as a religious obligation but also as an integral part of their cultural identity that is closely related to nature. This awareness encourages the adoption of preventive conservation practices, in which human intervention in the ecosystem is regulated in such a way as to avoid long-term negative impacts. This is in line with research by Siyuan He et al. [18] which states that community participation itself is key to maintaining a solid relationship for the mutual benefit of environmental conservation. Thus, the spiritual values internalized through Islamic teachings are manifested in the form of concrete actions that protect natural resources holistically.

The manifestation of local wisdom through the *lubuk larangan* tradition is a practical implementation of Islamic theological values that encourage environmental conservation. This approach combines normative aspects of Islamic teachings, such as the concepts of *khalifah*, *ihsan*, and justice with time-tested traditional management mechanisms. Through this synergy, the Mandailing Natal community not only maintains the balance of the ecosystem, but also rejects the practice of illegal exploitation of nature that threatens the sustainability of nature. An integrative approach that combines Islamic theological values and local wisdom can offer a new paradigm that can be used as a model for other regions in efforts to resist all practices that have the potential to cause environmental damage, and can make a significant contribution to the development of ethical and sustainable environmental conservation strategies.

3.3. The Synergy of Islamic Theology and Policy in Resistance to Environmental Exploitation

Synergy between the values contained in Islamic theology and environmental policy in Mandailing Natal provides a strategic basis for resistance to all exploitative actions against the environment, especially in the context of illegal mining practices. In addition to public awareness influenced by Islamic theological values, resistance to environmental exploitation

must also be accompanied by responsive and adequate policies [19], including customary policies inherent in the community. This approach integrates Islamic ethical principles, such as individual responsibility as a *khalifah* on earth, justice, and *ihsan* with local policy initiatives to create an ethical and sustainable natural resource management framework. Mandailing Natal people who have a strong Islamic identity will view environmental conservation as an integral part of their devotion to God. The concept of *khalifah* requires each individual to protect and maintain the earth as a divine mandate [4], so practices that damage the ecosystem are considered not only as violations of the law but also as a form of moral deviation. The value of justice teaches that every creature created by Allah SWT, including nature, also has the right to be protected, while *ihsan* encourages the best actions in environmental management [11]. This approach underpins a firm rejection of illegal mining activities that threaten the balance of nature, while at the same time motivating and sensitizing communities to actively engage and participate in monitoring, and advocating for environmental policies.

The policy implications of the synergy between Islamic theology and local wisdom values are reflected in collective efforts by the Mandailing Natal community through community forums and customary oversight mechanisms. Besides relying on formal regulations, the community proactively voices demands for stricter law enforcement against illegal exploitation practices and encourages the establishment of ecosystem rehabilitation programs [14]. Through regular meetings and dialogue among stakeholders, faith values rooted in local culture are integrated into decision-making processes regarding natural resource management. This participatory process combines community aspirations with government and NGO initiatives, resulting in policies that are not only technocratic, but also have strong moral legitimacy [18], [19]. By prioritizing the values of religious Islamic theology, the policy is expected to create a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation, and also provide more effective protection of natural resource management.

The synergy between Islamic theology and environmental policy inspired an innovative conservation strategy that is adaptive to the social-ecological dynamics in Mandailing Natal. This strategy includes efforts to reorganize environmental use, rehabilitate damaged ecosystems, and restore water sources polluted by illegal mining activities. This integrative approach not only emphasizes preventive aspects, but can also facilitate active participation from the community in the process of planning and implementing environmental conservation programs. By combining faith principles as a normative foundation and responsive policy mechanisms, the people of Mandailing Natal can create a comprehensive model of resistance to exploitative practices. This multidimensional strategy offers an alternative paradigm for sustainable natural resource management that can be replicated in other regions, especially those facing similar conflicts between economic interests and environmental conservation. Through this synergy, the values of faith not only act as a moral foundation, but also as a driver for integrated environmental policy innovation, strengthening collective community resistance to ecosystem damage, and realizing more ethical and sustainable environmental management.

4. Conclusions

The conclusion of this study confirms that the integration of Islamic theological values and Mandailing Natal's local wisdom is an effective strategy in fighting environmental exploitation practices, especially illegal gold mining. Through a deep understanding of responsibility as *khalifah*, justice, and *ihsan*, the people of Mandailing Natal have succeeded in translating the principles of faith into concrete actions that support nature conservation. The *Lubuk Larangan* tradition, as a form of local wisdom, has proven to be an adaptive control mechanism, which is able to maintain ecosystem balance through periodic restrictions on extractive activities. This synergy not only strengthens the community's moral commitment to environmental conservation, but also creates strong social legitimacy in rejecting destructive practices. The results of this study provide a clear picture that an integrative approach between theology and local traditions has a significant impact in creating a more ethical and sustainable natural resource management paradigm.

This research makes a meaningful contribution to the development of a holistic conservation strategy, where faith values and local wisdom form the basis of environmental policy formulation. The findings indicate that active community involvement and the strengthening of local traditions can improve the effectiveness of monitoring and enforcement of regulations against illegal mining practices. The benefits of this approach are not only academic, but also have practical implications that can be applied in policy-making

and environmental restoration programmes at the local and national levels. Recommendations include the need to integrate religious values in environmental policies, increase community participation in decision-making, and adopt a tradition-based conservation model that can be replicated in other areas. Thus, this research confirms that the synergy between Islamic theology and local wisdom is a solid foundation for creating positive changes in ecosystem management, and opens opportunities for the development of conservation strategies that are more responsive to global challenges in a wounded world.

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