


Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Sufism and environmental conservation practices in Indonesia

**Author:**Bambang Irawan¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Faculty of Theology, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Bambang Irawan,
bambang.irawan@uinjkt.ac.id

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This article is concerned with the environmental conservation efforts that respond to the human race's ecological crisis. It does this by looking at Sufistic-based environmental conservation at the pesantren of ath-Taariq in West Java, Indonesia. Data were obtained through interviews, observation and documentation using qualitative methods. Two findings were yielded; firstly, environmental conservation practices taught to students include ecology teaching, producing plant seeds and recycling waste into organic fertiliser. Secondly, significant steps have been taken by the establishment for reforestation and nature conservation motivated by Sufi values and doctrines, including the concept of *zuhud* [asceticism] and gratitude, kinship and mutual assistance, love and blessing, as well as *tafakkur* [contemplation].

Contribution: This article helps develop studies of Sufism and environmental conservation. It offers a new direction for the teaching and learning of contemporary Sufism that all Islamic educational institutions could adopt.

Keywords: ecological crisis; environmental conservation; pesantren; Sufism; Islam; Indonesia.

Introduction

The environmental crisis is a global issue that threatens human survival. Hence, expert solutions are urgently needed. However, some of the strategies offered are not sufficient to overcome this increasingly severe predicament based on observations suggesting that human spirituality is the fundamental problem that should be taken into account (Bagir 2015; Bauman 2009; Vaughan-Lee 2002). The exploitative characteristics of consumerist tendencies require healing and restoration as they lead towards unpredictable and destructive weather patterns in which the relationships between human activity and the environment have created patterns and feedback mechanisms that govern the presence, distribution and abundance of species assemblages (Mpofu 2021; Puglisi & Buitendag 2020). Effective partnerships between spirituality and conservation communities represent significant untapped potential that directly supports conservation outcomes (James 2003:143; Tucker 1997).

A comprehensive and deep dimension of spirituality can be discovered in the study of Sufism, which is an esoteric dimension of Islam, focusing on ethical and aesthetic relationships between humans and God, as well as humans and other ecosystems (Van Bruinessen 1998:192–219). Generally, Sufism teaches morality or ethics towards God, humans and the universe. Consequently, the main study themes of this concept include purity of heart, character nobility, *zuhud* life, patience, love, compassion, which are part of the inherent foundation in a Sufi life. The focus of the Sufism teachings has previously been to purify the heart and feel solemnity and intimacy in worshipping God (Ahmadi 2017; Dhofier 1980; Van Bruinessen 1998).

Sufism studies, which have recently begun to expand on the issue of environmental preservation and protection, have become the most widespread and powerful revolutionary movement in the last few decades. Several great studies have resulted from this spiritual ecology movement. Of course, this is something encouraging to develop Sufism studies. The expansion of environment-based Sufism studies should be supported and encouraged considering environmental issues, such as climate change, global warming, ecological crises, which have become common enemies that are increasingly worrying and threatening the survival of humankind (Febriani 2018; Ahmad 2019; Irawan, Nasution & Coleman 2021; Rohidayah 2018; Suwito 2010).

Islamic Educational Institutions are committed to an interdisciplinary approach with the integration-interconnection jargon, and the efforts to expand the study on environment-oriented

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Sufism are worth appreciating. Although efforts to expand the study of Sufism that are oriented to environmental protection issues have been made, it seems that it has not had implications for curriculum changes and expansions in Sufism studies in all Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia.

I argue that there is a significant connection between Sufism and the environment, and this connection is essential and in flux today because of the reality of environmental degradation so that the scholarly study of Sufism must include attention to the ways Sufistic doctrines' tradition relate their beliefs and practices to environmental issues and priorities. If Sufi traditions and spiritual practices are to fulfil their role as moral guides, they need to reflect on the ethical implications of these trends and to lead people of faith to more just and sustainable lives. Sufism teachings and doctrines should respond to the real environmental crisis (Irawan 2012; Rozi 2019; Suhaimi 2021).

In the pesantren of ath-Taariq, in addition to teaching religious sciences, students are being trained on how to garden and farm, produce plant seeds, recycle waste into organic fertiliser and raise poultry as well as fish (Diva Kautsar 2020; Praja Muda 2020; Qori'ah 2018:309; Yunizar 2017). Research on exclusive Sufism characterised by an obsession with routine and ritual rigidity that prioritise individual piety triggered Martin Van Bruinessen (2013) to claim the return of Islamic conservatism's striking face in Indonesia. However, this claim does not occur in the Sufism model in this pesantren.

So far, research on eco-Sufism has only elaborated a small part of the Sufistic values that motivate students to care for and love the environment (Rohidayah 2018; Suwito 2011). It is undeniable that there are tens and even hundreds of other doctrines of Sufism that deserve to be researched and explored. Therefore, this research will reveal other Sufistic doctrines implemented by this pesantren community. Existing research related to eco-Sufism also has not seen a strong relationship between pesantren and the study of Sufism.

This research will gradually explore the literature review, relationship between pesantren and Sufism in Indonesia, profile of pesantren of ath-Taariq, ecology teaching in pesantren, Sufistic doctrines in farming and gardening activities, reconstructing the discourse on the relationship between Sufism and environmental conservation, and conclusion.

Literature review

Religion undeniably offers intellectual energy, symbolic power, moral appeal, commitment to simplicity and love, as well as harmony with nature, which contributes to the transformation of attitudes, values and practices for a better earth future (Bauman 2014). Several terms, such as green faith (Glaab & Fuchs 2018; Gottlieb 2006; Harper 2021), green religion (Douglas 2008), green sisters (Rakoczy 2015),

spiritual ecology (Vaughan-Lee & Hart 2017), deep ecology (Charmetant 2018), eco-Sufism (Rozi 2019), *ecomysticism* (Samantaray & Patro 2018) and others, emerged from religion.

Several Sufi figures talk a lot about cosmology and the nature of the universe, as well as their attitude in glorifying and loving nature. These Sufis include Ibn' Arabi (Alsamaani 2017), Hazrat Inayat Khan (2020), Rumi (1994), Hossein Nasr (1990), Vaughan Lee (Vaughan-Lee & Hart 2017) and others. Their views on the relationship between nature and God, as well as the obligation to respect nature, are a significant contribution to building the theoretical framework of this research. Furthermore, this concept is understood as a mystical dimension of Islam focusing on the pattern of harmonious and loving relationships between humans and God, as well as between humans and their environment. Islam is the basis of Sufism, which views Allah's creations as sacred and the universe was created by God because of His love for humans (Abdel Meguid n.d.; Almond 2004).

Research on eco-Sufism: Study on environmental conservation efforts in the Jama'at Mujahadah Ilmu Giri and Jamaat Aolia' Jogjakarta was carried out by Suwito. His research found that in eco-Sufism, there is a dynamic process within human spiritual ecology, leading to win the natural process for the safety of himself and his environment. The self-dynamism process in eco-Sufism takes the integrative style, namely theo-central humanistic. Self-dynamism moves from the egoistic zone (self-centric) to the communal zone (communalistic) that is togetherness in terms of the divine, humane and universe with which human behaviour should satisfy (approved by God) and orientated towards the safety of the universe (Suwito 2010).

Another research was carried out by Bambang Irawan entitled 'Environmental Protection From The Perspectives of Indonesian, Sufi And United Kingdom Muslim Environmentalists' (Irawan 2016). Irawan explores the perspectives of several environmental thinkers, such as Fachruddin Mangunjaya from Indonesia, Hossein Nasr as a Sufi representative and Fazlun Khalid from England. This research only focuses on theoretical studies without providing practical examples related to environmental protection.

Then, there is research entitled dynamics of Sufism and Environment Studies in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Irawan & Nasution 2020). This research attempts to examine the dynamics of Sufism and environmental studies in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions through scientific works in the form of a thesis and dissertation. This study does not discuss the practice of Sufism in Islamic boarding schools.

Research on a Sufi approach to environmental ethics was also written by Irawan et al. (2021) entitled 'Applying Ibn 'Arabī's Concept of Tajallī: A Sufi Approach to Environmental Ethics'. This research explored the Ibn 'Arabī's concept of tajallī in its spiritual and moral sense to develop a new approach to environmental ethics and did not talk about practical

examples to environmental conservation. Anies Rohidayah's research is entitled *Eco-Sufism in Ahmad Tohari's selected literary works*. At Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, 2018, he explored ecological themes in Tohari's works, such as, *At the Foothills of Cibalak Hill*, *The Dancer* (a trilogy consisting of *Notes to Momma*, *Shooting Stars at Dawn and Rainbow Arc*), *Project People* and *Karyamin's Smile* through an eco-Sufism perspective. Through the spirituality of Sufism, the harmonious life among mankind, God and nature can be restored (Rohidayah 2018). This research does not mention environmental protection in Islamic boarding schools.

This article tries to fill in the shortcomings of existing eco-Sufism studies by carefully mapping out other practical doctrines that encourage someone to protect the environment.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (Schimmel 1994). Using a phenomenological approach, researchers will find out the experience and knowledge of leaders of the pesantren and the students about environmental protection practices in Islamic boarding schools based on Sufi doctrines. Researchers investigate how knowledge about Sufism and environmental conservation is externalised, objectified and internalised in the concept of environmental preservation based on Sufistic values. The data focused on Sufism concepts and their implementation on environmental preservation.

This research reinforces the concept of the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) (Dunlap et al. 2000; Grendstad 1999; Kopnina 2011) on life science and the new physics, and as a contribution to Islamic Studies, this research proposes the theory of eco-Sufism, namely strategies for elaborating Sufistic values of environmental conservation. This study also refines the phenomenological approach of Annemarie Schimmel (Eaton 1996) by adding the subjective aspect of Sufism practitioners and Action Research in the implementation of environmental protection programs.

Data were collected through observation, documentation and in-depth interviews that were conducted in February 2020 (Ustadz & Nisa 2020) and then triangulated (Crist & Tanner 2003). The interview method was used to obtain data on the concept and implementation of Sufism in the context of environmental preservation. Then, the data are confirmed on various Sufistic values in general so that this interview process applies the snowballing model (Atkinson & Flint 2001). Researchers also observed the activities of the pesantren community, both related to religious practices, worship and patterns of interaction with the environment. Based on the data sources and collection techniques, the researcher processed and critically analysed the data using a phenomenological approach based on Heideggerian philosophy. The theory is used to prove the social construction of Berger and Luckman to produce a comprehensive

and substantive understanding of the process of externalising, objectifying and internalising Sufism teachings on environmental conservation.

Results

The relationship between pesantren and Sufism in Indonesia

Historically, the mission of establishing pesantren in Indonesia was the demand for educational development at that time. This is in line with Claire Holt's theory of change and continuity (Lyons 1968), which describes that pesantren is identical with the maintenance of traditional Islamic education and implies the authenticity of Indonesian culture. Pesantren is an institution that is closely related to Sufism (Bosra & Umiarso 2020).

As the central axis of the social, cultural and religious dynamics of traditional Islamic societies, pesantren has formed a socio-anthropological subculture. There are at least two main functions of this institution, namely an educational institution with an education system and a distinctive teaching-learning pattern. In addition, the pesantren also functions as the institution that calls and spreads goodness that always internalises Islamic values in the pesantren community itself and the general public. Martin van Bruinessen mentions the tradition of Islamic boarding schools as one of the great traditions in Indonesia in teaching Islam in Indonesia, which aims to transmit traditional Islam (Dhofier 1980; Van Bruinessen 1994).

The very close relationship between pesantren and Sufism, apart from being caused by historical factors, is also sociologically similar. Historically, the development of Sufism was influenced by the decline of Islamic intellectual activity in the 12th and 13th centuries. According to the research of several experts, Islam came to Indonesia brought by Islamic preachers or missionaries or Sufis through the Bengal region of India. Therefore, the style of early Indonesian Islam was Sufistic. Therefore, Islam could be accepted in Indonesia easily (Farhan & Hadisaputra 2020).

The *ustadz* (a term for highly respected Islamic scholars) has the most important role in maintaining Sufism and *tarekat* in the pesantren. It is often found that *ustadz* is also *murshid* of certain *tarekat*. This was done in order to maintain continuity with the initial process of Islamisation that took place in Southeast Asia. Martin van Bruinessen said that Sufism is one of the essential factors in the process of Islamisation of Southeast Asia because it is not surprising that Indonesian Islam is still thick with Sufistic values (Van Bruinessen 1998).

Some historians agree that the Sufistic approach in pesantren and the spread of Islam in Indonesia are believed to be the meeting room of Islamic values with local traditions, even leading to success in the spread of Islam, without using violence as a choice (Ricklefs 2008).

Profile of pesantren of Ath-Taariq

Pesantren of Ath-Taariq was founded in 2008 by a husband and wife named Ustadz Ibang Lukman Nurdin and Umi Nissa Saadah Wargadipura, who decided to provide ecology-based education. The pesantren land of 8500 square metres was divided into several agricultural, plantation, hatchery and livestock zones. The research was conducted at the Ath-Taariq Islamic Boarding School, better known as the 'Kebon Sawah Ecology Boarding School'. This pesantren is surrounded by green expanses of rice fields and vegetable gardens near the Garut Regency Regional Government office area in Cimurugul Hamlet, Sukagalih Village, Tarogong Kidul District, Garut Regency, West Java (Yunizar 2017).

The mission of this school is to spread knowledge and produce agroecological cadres to save and care for the Earth, people and the future. Also, the Institute aims to be a centre for the spread of a sustainable agricultural knowledge system and a role model in Indonesia, where various agricultural products can generate without destroying existing ecosystems. This school also protects habitats, maintains biodiversity, harvests and markets produce at fair prices as part of the social, economic and ecological justice movement.

Ecology teaching in pesantren

Pesantren of Ath-Taariq applies the concept of ecology in its education system. Moreover, the residents together maintain the ecosystem with the study of religious knowledge as a foothold and farm using ancient and traditional methods to maintain the environment, ecology and human relations with nature. In an interview with Ustadz Ibang and Umi Nissa at the pesantren, Umi Nissa stated that 'Ecology is our home, many come and go from home; hence someone has to keep it from getting damaged. If not us, then who?' (Ustadz & Nisa 2020).

The pesantren is open to anyone who desires to learn. Ustadz Ibang stated that three things should not be traded, including water, forests and mines. In addition, 'Nature is like a mother; hence, the agrarian disaster is a mother's disaster'. Religion recommends that the students have high morals and minds to protect the Earth. Also, in an interview, Umi Nissa stated that 'this pesantren is a small effort to protect the earth through gardening, farming, and seed production'.

These individuals share the task of reviving an ecological pesantren, where Ustadz Ibang focuses on teaching ecological theology to the students and Umi Nissa on managing biodiversity. However, both agreed that the pesantren should produce several youths who want to become farmers and aid reforestation to save the remaining and arid agricultural lands. Although monoculture farmers at the lowest level cannot benefit from their harvests, according to the founder of this pesantren, gardening and farming ideologically will gradually restore the Earth's increasingly damaged condition in the long term. The pesantren continues to grow and develop, with more than 500 plant species in

Kebon Sawah, where the founder stated, 'Thank God our products have entered the international market'. However, around the increasingly widespread residential Islamic boarding schools, the growth of environmentally unfriendly industries is one of the challenges that must be faced.

Furthermore, the pesantren plants rice, ready for harvest after a month or two. In this way, the founder wanted to give an example to the community that it does not always require a large area to prepare food for daily needs. Furthermore, Ustadz Ibang concluded that the blessings of the abundant harvest could continue to be felt by residents in the pesantren, as the school has never had a shortage of food. The system in this ecological pesantren can be imitated by the state and implemented to realise a sovereign, independent and blessed Institute.

Umi Nissa stated, 'Anyone who works as a farmer is part of the family and the struggle with me'. The pesantren results from an extended reflection on what was fought for before. Umi Nissa saw that many farmers were trapped in poverty, and many of them sold their land after bloody efforts amid a long period of conflict with investors who ensnare farmers with long and difficult debt so that they continue to live in poverty. This fact made these individuals think hard, reflect, evaluate themselves and discover an answer where advocacy for farmers does not necessarily create prosperous farmers without developing their skills. Therefore, several farmers remain poor because of the impact of the green revolution; hence the learning model applied by Ath-Taariq is designed differently from pesantren in general. In addition to implementing an academic curriculum and deepening Islamic religion, the pesantren has the motto 'Care for the Earth, Others, and the Future'.

Ecology learning in pesantren is conducted theoretically and practically through activities, such as seeding, planting, plant care, harvesting, to post-harvest processing. Nissa stated, 'We also process crop production to enhance its economic value'. The initial learning was in planting local Garut vegetables, including *kenikir* (*cosmos caudatus*), several types of *bean* and watercress. Also, the ustadz asked students to plant these crops and harvest at the appropriate time although other communities visited and studied together in pesantren. Nissa also stated, 'Every week, children living in the surrounding area were invited to farm around and interact directly with fellow students and nature'. These children can study for a week, a month or three months and are subsequently considered alumni of Pesantren Ath-Taariq. Hence, thousands of students have become graduates since 2008. Also, Ibang stated that 'They come from various regions, a few from abroad, and similar to regular students'. These individuals are not charged fees to study at the pesantren and accept those with strong intentions as part of the family. Moreover, they unite their determination to help farmers become self-sufficient in food production.

Pesantren of Ath-Taariq is permaculture based, a branch of ecological science that designs a sustainable and integrated

agricultural system to meet human food needs and pays attention to the existing flora and fauna ecosystem cycles. Also, permaculture ethics that include caring for the Earth, universe and the future are a series of actions protecting the ecosystem from damage made by humans (Diva Kautsar 2020).

Umi Nissa used the pesantren land founded by the couple in 2008 as a learning facility for the students of Ath-Taariq. An interesting point about the planting method at pesantren is re-raising local and village plants, which are of many benefits and are increasingly rare. In addition, local plants and those consumed by the villagers are preferred to popular plants and increase knowledge. The ustadz teaches students about farming skills from seeding, cultivation to harvesting, 'They do it themselves'. Various habitats are preserved to maintain an interrelated ecosystem.

In addition to reciting and farm learning, students also undergo formal education, including junior high school and senior high school, and students residing at the boarding school. Although the school is small, students still focus on absorbing the knowledge of the Qur'an and applied science as well as learning how to do organic farming by maintaining various habitats to protect the ecosystem. However, on Saturdays, Sundays and national holidays, the pesantren is packed with students gardening and raising livestock. Specifically, insects, such as butterflies, fireflies or dragonflies rarely seen in big cities like Jakarta, are still easily found in this Islamic boarding school. The presence of these creatures is significant because it shows the proper agriculture management and the area's health (Qori'ah 2018).

Also, the couple shared tasks in nurturing their students, where Ustadz Ibang, who originates from a pesantren environment, teaches religious knowledge, such as morals, Sufism, fiqh, theology and material for ecological studies with the perspective of the Koran. Meanwhile, Nissa focuses on providing agroecology learning. The lecture is delivered in stages, starting at dawn with the material for the recitation of the Koran, and then students study at a formal school which is not far from the pesantren environment in the afternoon. Local plants are chosen because they grow in various weathers to reduce routine maintenance, making it easier for students. Subsequently, students are required to process the plants for self-consumption after harvesting to create food security and conversion (Iqbal 2015).

The students were taught techniques for growing herbal plants, such as roselle, crystal sugar and Curcuma, and in the post-harvest process were asked to manage these vegetables until they had an economic value. According to Umi Nissa, 'Before being marketed out, the needs of the pesantren must be first be fulfilled, and then we market the rest out'. The pesantren is in great demand by parents, with 30 students living in this pesantren from Bandung, Jakarta, Palu, Padang, Bekasi and other areas. Moreover, the school's promotion is performed through blogs and social media by showing off student activities, such as making tea or drinks from various leaves, salt, palm sugar and many others. In addition, most of

the pesantren community consume plants grown personally on their land, covering approximately 1 hectare (Qori'ah 2018).

Producing plant seeds/hatchery and making organic fertiliser

The students are taught how to cultivate agriculture or plantations using pollinated organic seeds, specifically developing local seeds. The seeds produced are planted that thrive on the agricultural land, where the rice quality produced is remarkable. Nissa stated, 'We combine various seeds, and then spread them to strengthen each other'. Agricultural products are the food source for the pesantren families as they are never worried about rising chilli prices or afraid of rice shortage, 'Hence, we are free from food difficulties'. Also, she reported that 'Among the things that we prioritise from our movement are having, developing and consuming seeds by residents at the pesantren'.

The ustadz equipped the students with knowledge on making their compost from organic materials and livestock waste and eliminating chemical mixtures. Also, the fertiliser used to manage the garden must be organic and produced from livestock manure. Therefore, the residents of the pesantren never buy fertiliser. Here, planting activities do not require chemical fertilisers and pesticides that damage the soil and kill microorganisms that are good for plants. The students chose to produce their organic fertiliser from kitchen waste and catfish pond water, where the rice field snakes are left alive to avoid rat pests. Consequently, the fields and gardens of the pesantren have been spared from pest attacks or crop failure for nine years (Ningtyas 2017).

Sufism doctrines in farming and gardening activities

Holding unto the motto 'Care for the Earth, Others, and the Future', pesantren is known to apply Sufistic values to stimulate the love and interest of the students towards gardening and farming activities. The Sufistic doctrines are the driving factors for the birth of the environmentalism movement in this pesantren, where the developed teaching model integrates these messages for environmental preservation. Likewise, the ecological movement in Islamic boarding schools with these doctrines had transformed the character of pesantren residents in performing environmentalism or environmental preservation movements. The following are the Sufistic doctrines taught by the pesantren, which foster the students' spirit to cultivate crops and protect the environment.

Zuhud and gratitude

Zuhud is the attitude of feeling complete towards worldly pleasures. The concept of *zuhud* applied at the pesantren is believed to be effective enough to be used as a moral and spiritual basis through a frugal and simple lifestyle to save the environment. The *ustadz* educated and trained the students to live modestly and frugally and prohibited them from consuming anything in excess even though their crops were abundant. These individuals have been accustomed to consuming food from the tubers and vegetables they grow.

Also, the attitude of *zuhud* and modesty is shown by not consuming plant products in excess. Pesantren families consume food crops according to the available harvest. Hence, they do not depend on one food type. The students are accustomed to eating tubers, bananas and other foods aside from rice to meet their carbohydrate needs. In addition, they eat vegetables grown in their gardens, and all the agricultural products on the pesantren's land are used to meet the family's food needs.

It appears from the students' consumption patterns of their crops that although modest, their food shows variety, consisting of more than rice. The form of gratitude taught to the students does not involve eradicating plant pests with chemicals because it will damage the soil and plants and tarnish the sanctity of the Earth given by God. According to a simple statement by Ustadz Ibang 'Just let the snake existing around the garden to eat the rats'. Consequently, the ecosystem on the agricultural land will remain clean, safe and healthy. The attitude of *zuhud* and gratitude can be ammunition for the students to study hard and earnestly. It proves almost all the students who managed to get good grades in their respective schools. According to Ustadz Ibang, seven students obtained cum laude scores.

Kinship and mutual assistance

The concept of kinship and mutual assistance in the teaching and learning process is an essential strategy taught to students at the pesantren. These individuals are committed to feeling the same fate, sharing responsibility and are ready to face life's challenges together in farming, protecting and preserving the environment. With the spirit of kinship and equality, they are taught to place themselves as aware of their position and have a high sense of shared responsibility. Consequently, the students are not selfish because they are inseparable from other people, with the same rights and responsibilities in maintaining and consuming the crops obtained.

Fulfilling the life necessities in the pesantren environment uses principles from students to students. It implies that no production is intentionally sold or traded but offered to friends and relatives who want to buy excess food or new herbs. The students are trained to produce and reproduce their own lives, stand on their own feet and consume personal products. Furthermore, all agricultural products on the pesantren land are used to meet the family's food requirements and then sold to grow the economic life of the institution in the case of an abundant harvest. Umi Nissa considered that the concept of good agriculture should prioritise its own food needs first before thinking about selling the products. Therefore, the pesantren first meets nutrients, vitamins, carbohydrates and vegetables. The proceeds from the sale of agricultural products in the pesantren are used for their infrastructural and students' education requirements, where Umi Nissa ensured that all her students in the school received free education.

The commitment to the concept of kinship as fellow creatures given the mandate by God to inhabit this Earth is the answer

to the fate of the environment in the future. In the pesantren, there is no distance between the kyai and the students, where the teachers and administrators unite with students as a harmonious, peaceful and happy family. Consequently, Umi Nissa shows a merging of farming and education systems in a family called an agrarian.

Another example of the success of this pesantren alumnus is the formation of organisation and ecological communities. These organisations include Saung Rangkai Tegal Lega Bungbulang, Buruang Bumi Agroecology Tangoli Cibalong, Hanum Cilacap Creative House and Halimun Bogor Agrarian. Umi Nissa stated, 'We hope students think and act to save the ecology, social and economy'.

This pesantren has produced 1400 alumni in almost a decade. For those who want to study in this pesantren, they should share to their parents and the next generation all the knowledge they got after graduating from this pesantren, transmitting this farming movement as a habit wherever they live.

Love and blessing

Based on the vision of the initial establishment, all students in this ecological pesantren are taught to love the environment with actual actions as they feel happiness in mingling with nature. They learn about the harmonious and close relationship among God, humans and nature and are prohibited from environmental destruction. The students feel happy planting whatever they want, where their love for these plants compels them to linger in the garden.

The founder of this pesantren claims that the activities conducted by the entire community here are based on blessings. According to Ustadz Ibang (2020):

[C]reating plants using seeds and organic fertilisers, for example, is an effort expected to provide greater, healthier benefits and blessings. In addition to human rights, there are also animal and natural rights that must be understood broadly and correctly so that the mission of establishing this ecological Islamic boarding school becomes meaningful by the grace of God.

Ustadz Ibang recounted that a student initially addicted to drugs could recover and be healthy by immersing himself in farming activities. This process occurs because of the beautiful nature, clean air and interactions in gardening, such as preparing seeds, caring for seedlings, planting and caring for the growing plant. Therefore, Ustadz Ibang stated that gardening is a blessing for food independence and healing for the sick and addicted to drugs.

The students grow several plants around the pesantren, where the blessing of fertile soil is seen from the ease of harvesting. Also, they quickly cook with a pesticide-free menu from the crops. Moreover, Ustadz Ibang and Umi Nissa opposed the monoculture farming system, where Nissa explained that 'Indonesia is an agrarian country, but because the policy system is impartial and not agrarian-oriented, the

conditions are abysmal. Our land is very fertile; logs are thrown and grow! The founder of this institution admitted that it was challenging to establish a pesantren by integrating religion with ecology (see below). Consequently, he prayed at night for months asking for Allah's guidance and finally came to the belief that this intention would bring blessing.

Tafakkur (contemplation)

In this pesantren, the students are guided to always *tafakkur*, to think about the potentials of nature and contemplate the variety of plants that can be produced by the soil, respectively. The students are directed to do both frequently before farming activities, and through these concepts, they are free to explore their farming skills from seeding and planting to harvesting. These students were led to take care of the plants, cultivate the soil and make organic fertiliser, in addition to studying religion. Occasionally, they are invited to climb the mountain or take a trip to the beach.

Ustadz Ibang said that *tafakkur* in nature is an opportunity for students to understand nature, where farming is the most pleasant choice to remember the power and greatness of Allah. The students can enjoy, harmonise, blend and be friendly with the plants without having to be ensnared by the routine of looking at social media as there is no Wi-Fi in the pesantren environment, and the signal is difficult to receive. Moreover, the students automatically become more mature human beings and can conquer difficulties with their hearts after contemplation, as well as take many lessons from the farming experience. In addition, the students also have a new spirit, have humility, personal warmth and increased faith in God.

Farming teaches students to understand how God is creative in inventing countless plants. Consequently, the students are never tired of observing the behaviour of nature because they were taught to cultivate seeds that could be turned into a variety of vitamins and medicines, as well as daily necessities. Furthermore, Ustadz Ibang stated that Islam does contain stories about food needs and the obligation to protect the environment, where there are animal and environmental rights, as well as humans (Qori'ah 2018).

Tafakkur is the concept of self-approach and deep contemplation of the existence of nature. Therefore, the students increasingly feel that nature is a form of beauty and a symbol of God's love through this concept. The generosity of nature to humans in the world according to Ustadz Ibang is identical to the love and generosity of a mother to her children. Tadabbur is a crucial activity taught by pesantren to students. This activity is expected to increase the spiritual intelligence of the students. According to Ustadz Ibang, the concept is not merely an activity of contemplating nature but includes active farming activities and reflecting on the greatness of Allah's creation and its benefits.

However, based on the observation, some problems, and challenges that pesantren community is facing are:

Human resources

The teaching staff at pesantren is minimal and only relies on Ustadz Ibang and his wife Umi Nisa. All teaching staff in this pesantren need to expand towards broader environmental conservation and ecological issues. Of course, this is not ideal for improving the quality that integrates religion or Sufism and the environment. Pesantren should recruit several more qualified teachers so that teaching and learning activities run effectively and maximally.

Limitations of Sufism and environment curriculum

Several mediums of environmental communication, active and passive, should be utilised to aid environmental communication in the learning and teaching process; these incorporate written materials such as lesson plans, fact sheets and games; audio-visual material and practical environmental activities.

Limitations of learning media

Science and technology are progressing rapidly. These advances have brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, both in the social, economic, cultural and educational fields. Pesantren needs a more massive use of information and communication technology.

Lack of support from the local government

Sufistic doctrines implemented to environment conservation by the pesantren are a very prospective thing and become a spiritual force in the present and the future. Unfortunately, the efforts and good intentions of the pesantren founders to socialise Sufi-based environment conservation and love with farming activities to students have so far not received maximum support from the local government, which tends to be less attentive and seems indifferent to pesantren greening programs even though the pesantren is next to local government location.

Reconstructing the discourse on the relationship between Sufism and environmental conservation

Pesantren of Ath-Taariq gave hope for the birth of pious and intelligent young Indonesian farmers to revive their nation as an agrarian country from its alumni. The pesantren graduates are expected to become the driving cadres to develop this movement when they return to their respective villages and later become academics, activists, leaders and state officials.

Planting activities at the pesantren have created a new form of environmental responsibility. The students' awareness of God's presence is proven through real actions with fellow humans and the natural surroundings. It is a turning point and a transformation in Sufism teaching, which ended at the level of formal rituals without raising the religious

awareness of students towards the environment and natural reality.

Indonesia has thousands of Islamic boarding schools. Its existence as a centre for religious studies and the oldest Islamic religious education institution is undoubtedly something that is both exciting and challenging. Eco-Sufism, which has begun to be widely studied by Islamic scholars (Ahmad 2019; Irawan & Nasution 2020; Sofyan 2019; Suhaimi 2021; Suwito 2010), should not stop just as a practical idea but must have a solid and sustainable ethical foundation and spiritual values. The eco-Sufism approach to environmental preservation in many Islamic boarding schools emphasises Sufistic doctrines, such as love and gratitude, blessing, *zuhud*, *tafakkur*, kinship and mutual assistance and others, expected to be the driving factor for the environmentalism movement that should be explored in-depth and sustainably.

Furthermore, the dimension of spirituality in human behaviour towards nature and the environment positively influences the survival of humans and their natural environment. The sustainability of nature increases with the number of people putting forward the spiritual dimension for the environment, which would impact human attitudes and personality in the end. Hence, other pesantren should implement Sufistic doctrines in the pesantren. In environmental conservation, Sufism's perspective is required for humans to have good ethics towards nature and not exploit it; morals are the core of this teaching.

As a country with the largest Muslim population globally, Indonesia is a barometer for developing thought and civilisation in the Islamic world. Therefore, increased research on environmental conservation based on the Sufistic values is one of the pressing options. This is in line with the neo-Sufism concept echoed by Fazlurrahman (Rahman 2020) and John O. Voll, who seek to dialogue with contemporary Sufis on the latest social theory (Van Bruinessen 1994). These individuals want Muslims not to be hegemonised by the mystical-escapist ritual aspect only. The role played by the pesantren of Ath-Taariq involves the implementation of neo-Sufism and contemporary forms of Sufism that inspire awareness on protecting the Earth and overcoming the environmental crisis. Therefore, the reviewers, observers and practitioners of Sufism need to open up space to multiply research related to the horizon or treasures of wealth in Islamic Sufism and compare it with global issues, such as the environmental crisis. Activists, religious leaders and enthusiasts of Sufism and environmental studies can think critically about how Sufism can be formed and reconstructed because of the environmental crisis and consider how Sufism can positively impact a better future for the Earth.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation of the research stages above, there is a significant relationship among pesantren, Sufism and the environment. The efforts of the pesantren community in

implementing Sufi doctrines to protect the environment have strengthened and confirmed the interconnectedness among them. Sufistic doctrines developed and implemented have become a worldview that has implications for always encouraging to protect and love the environment. The doctrine of Sufism has enabled the pesantren community to understand that there is a synthetic relationship between faith and action, thought and action and ideas and practices that cannot be separated. Sufi doctrine is not something abstract and separate from the realities of the world and environmental issues. Pesantren, Sufism and environmental studies are not only aimed at developing theories and ideas but actually make a real contribution to a better and sustainable environment. The founders of the pesantren successfully instil Sufistic doctrines into the students to develop the spirit of gardening and farming. These doctrines include the concept of *zuhud* and gratitude, kinship and mutual assistance, love and blessing, as well as *tafakkur*. Sufism and environmental studies are considered a new paradigm that could be validated as environmental ethics because Sufism contains the principles of living in harmony with nature, as well as protecting and caring for the Earth. Also, compared to conventional Sufistic doctrines, which reveal more truth claims and are prone to exclusivity or conflicts between religious adherents, this concept unites and draws humanity into a large family living in the same planet of the Earth.

The doctrines have significantly influenced and motivated the environmentalism movement. The application of Sufistic doctrines in this pesantren is flexible and conditional, where it is not merely focusing on fulfilling individual ritual piety. Sufistic doctrines implemented by pesantren are important to protect nature and become a spiritual strength in the present and future. Consequently, the researchers suggest establishing and applying the eco-Sufism teaching and learning syllabus in all Islamic educational institutions.

Limitations of this study

This research was limited merely to some Sufistic doctrines' practices that have significantly influenced environmental conservation. Other researchers can carry out the study from different perspectives in this pesantren, such as food security and self-sufficiency, environmental conservation and biodiversity, and environmental protection through entrepreneurship and innovation.

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Competing interests

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Author's contributions

B.I. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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