

# AL-ALBAB

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Editorial Office:

**AL-ALBAB**, Gedung Saifuddin Zuhri

Pascasarjana IAIN Pontianak,

Jalan Letjend Suprpto No. 19, Pontianak Selatan  
Pontianak 78122, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia.

Phone: (62-561) 734170 Fax: (62-561) 734170 ;

Handphone/WA: +6281256738348

E-mail: redaksi.bjrs@gmail.com

Website: <http://jurnaliainpontianak.or.id/index.php/alalbab>

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## CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND SHARIA-BASED ECOLOGY IN THE FISHING COMMUNITY IN ACEH

**Zubir**

*IAIN Langsa*

Email: [zubir@iainlangsa.ac.id](mailto:zubir@iainlangsa.ac.id)

**Abdul Manaf**

*IAIN Langsa*

Email: [abdulmanaf@iainlangsa.ac.id](mailto:abdulmanaf@iainlangsa.ac.id)

**Abdul Mugni**

*IAIN Lhokseumawe*

Email: [abdulmugni@iainlhokseumawe.ac.id](mailto:abdulmugni@iainlhokseumawe.ac.id)

**Noviandy**

*IAIN Langsa*

Email: [noviandy@iainlangsa.ac.id](mailto:noviandy@iainlangsa.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the cultural resistance and sharia-based environmental management in the fishing community in Aceh Timur Raya, Indonesia. Aceh is a fascinating Indonesian region as the country's implementer of Islamic law. To date, Aceh's environment has yet to become an issue that needs to be immediately addressed. This study is classified as field-library research with a qualitative analysis. The data were collected using interviews, documentation, and observations of fishermen's environment in Aceh Timur Raya. These data were analyzed using a sociological approach, social theories, power-knowledge relations, and habitus. This study found several important reasons why there could be damage to Aceh Timur Raya's ecosystems. This article has produced several vital findings; First, the absence of the role of religion in maintaining and building an ecological culture in the fishing community. Second, the attitude of indifference among the fishing community towards the environment. Third, the politicization of environmental care. These three pieces of evidence state that cultural resistance and sharia-based environmental management in Aceh threaten the community's survival, especially fishermen who rely heavily on nature. Islamic law has not been able to base its teachings on the environment that must be preserved and developed.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Resistance; Ecological Sharia; Aceh Timur Raya

## INTRODUCTION

Culture and ecology based on sharia have not been part of Aceh's formalization of Islamic law. Since its preparation in 2000 and its declaration by Governor Abdullah Puteh in 2001, the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh—with its various instruments— has not made culture and sharia-based ecology part of Islamic law. The positivization of Islamic law in Aceh is still stuck with the implementation of *mahdhah* [pure] worship but does not or has not accommodated *ghairu mahdhah* [impure] social services, which have a more significant impact than religious ritual worship. Concerning the fishermen's ecosystem, for example, no less than 60 trawlers operate on the North-Eastern coast of Aceh today (Walidain, 2022; Randi, 2022; iNews.ID, 2021), not to mention the damage to various marine biota caused by trawling. In addition, the destruction of the mangrove forest should be the primary support for fishermen living on the east coast of Aceh. The large-scale logging of mangrove forests not only reduces the income of fishermen in the coastal areas but also diminishes the amount of land and threatens the existence of fishermen (Agency 2021; Fitri dan Iswahyudi 2010)

Politicians also disagree with the use of trawls, which has been part of the demands of the fishermen (*toke* [business owner]) who have been running the illegal fishing business (R 2021; www.monologis.id 2021). However, such demands cannot legalize the use of trawling ships in catching fish. On the one hand, the existence of *Panglima Laot* [the customary body that deals with marine affairs] is highly expected to help maintain the sustainability of the ecosystem for fishermen's needs. However, on the other hand, *Panglima Laot* must also face the demands of releasing fishermen who were arrested while working in the illegal fishing business.

Mangroves are supposed to be one of the sources of sustainable natural resources and higher income for coastal communities. For example, a mangrove park can serve as a tourist attraction and an educational site; it also serves as a place where marine life can be caught by fishermen, produce food and drinks that can be sold, and maintain the amount of inhabitable land for fishermen. Meanwhile, in a different case, logging of mangrove trees is common among the fishermen, as they use mangrove trunks to be sold as charcoal for additional income.

Studies on coastal community ecosystems in Aceh tend to focus on two aspects of discourse. First, the study of the culture of coastal communities regarding the existence of panglima laot; Keliat et al. argue that the existence of *Panglima Laot* is currently faced with various challenges and obstacles in maintaining the local community's culture in managing natural resources on the coast of

Aceh (Keliat, Amirudin, dan Luqman 2021). In the same tone, Nazaruddin and Gurning view *Panglima Laot* as a 'figure' that will guard the continuity of managing natural resources on the coast (Gurning, 2017). Meanwhile, Mahendra et al. view that the existence of *Panglima Laot* continues to change, both in terms of roles and responsibilities that have developed from a long history of 400 years (Utama et al., 2020). Second, many have also examined the roles and responsibilities of the *panglima laot* in Aceh. The role of *panglima laot* as the guardian of the ecosystem in Aceh, especially in Banda Aceh (Mustaqim dan Reni 2018; Rahmah, Salmarika, dan Miswar 2021). Similarly, the works of Fazriah et al. examine the role of *panglima laot* in Sabang (Amfar, 2015). *Panglima laot* also still plays the same role after the 2004 Tsunami and other actors who supported the recovery period in Aceh (Boyland, Nugroho, and Thomalla, 2017). Although in its journey, the *Panglima Laot* institution continues to experience role developments (Mujiburrahman dkk, 2021).

This article aims to complement previous research and, in addition, also to examine the extent to which the role of the positivization of Islamic law in Aceh works for environmental protection (*hifdzul bi'ah*). In particular, it also sheds light on whether the culture of loving the environment as a place of life and livelihood for fishermen is maintained or neglected. In addition, it also provides an overview of whether the attention of the government and politics leads to the preservation of nature, especially on the east coast of Aceh. In connection with this, two questions must be answered in this article; 1) What are the roles of Islamic law and the community's culture in maintaining the sustainability of the fishermen's ecosystem in Aceh Timur Raya? 2) Why is the sustainability of the fishermen's ecosystem in Aceh Timur Raya currently at a very concerning threshold?

This article stems from an argument that environmental protection (*hifdzul bi'ah*) has yet to become an essential part of the positivization of Islamic law in Aceh. Even environmental damage tends to be 'driven' and 'backed up' by religious leaders. This will not only deplete the natural resources on the East Coast but, even worse, will threaten the balance of nature, both biologically and socially. On the other hand, from a political and cultural perspective, it has not yet become an influential agenda for the politicians and the people in the area.

## **CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND SHARIA-BASED ECOLOGY**

Experts agree that resistance tends to be interpreted as action by certain groups to make changes. The opposition does not have to be on a large scale but rather the significance of an action. These actions can also be taken at any

time in community activities. On the one hand, Islamic law in Aceh, through its *qanuns* [legislation], does not address the important things in maintaining the fishermen's ecosystem on the coast of Aceh. This is also the space for the resistance of the fishing community to Islamic law, which tends to dwell on the *mahdhah* [pure] worship only. Various fishermen's activities currently do not favor the ecosystem, in addition to people's lack of knowledge - Aceh's Islamic law also does not regulate the importance of ecosystems. The paradigm that is built tends to be: 'nature is considered and intended to be used as widely as possible for mankind' without the obligation to care for and maintain its sustainability.

Marine natural resources on the east coast of Aceh are essential not only for Aceh but also for Indonesia (Wilson dan Linkie, 2012; Yulindawati, 2018). Nationally, one of the known natural products on the coast of Aceh is the Windu Shrimp commodity—despite its scarcity nowadays (Tjahjo dkk, 2019). This shows that the existence of nature in this area is very different from other places, so Aceh's natural products, especially tiger prawns, are highly sought after by various entrepreneurs as export commodities. It is time for these commodity products to regain their 'prima donna' status, with various policies, cultures, and fishermen's activities that have disappeared all this time. Various other commodities from the nature of the east coast of Aceh are natural products and products that various policies must support community culture and fishermen's activities, especially about preserving and caring for nature there.

In light of the above, culture and Islamic law should play an essential role in sustaining coastal natural commodities in Aceh Timur Raya. Ecology, one of the sciences about nature and natural ecosystems, should be integrated as an essential part of the culture of the coastal communities in East Aceh. People's lack of knowledge about protecting and caring for nature can be answered when an ecological culture is embedded in the coastal community. In addition, the Islamic law in Aceh should also not only deal with matters of worship that are *mahdhah* in nature but also regulate and promote cultural worship that is *ghairu mahdhah* in nature—in terms of economic needs, and the survival of this *ghairu mahdhah* worship is much more necessary.

Implementing Islamic law in Aceh has yet to get an ecotheological perspective. It also builds an understanding of Islamic law in Aceh that only focuses on forms of religious rituals. Abdullah argues that protecting the environment must be in *Maqasid ash-Shariah* [purpose of applying a law according to Sharia]. Furthermore, he stated that the environmental crisis would hinder other *Maqasid ash-Shariah's* achievements (Abdullah, 2010, 2012; Ahmad,

2015) race, religion, or group. It has been a common problem and requires global cooperation to overcome barriers regardless of religion and race. Within this framework, every religion and traditions required to contribute in joint actions to overcome the environmental crisis. This is so, because the efforts of political and secular law are considered no longer sufficient to resolve the tragedies of today's ecological problem on earth. Therefore, this paper will explore the perspective of Environmental Fikih in the context of a global movement to overcome the environmental crisis." container-title: "Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan" DOI: "10.18326/ijtihad.v10i2.157-173" ISSN: "2477-8036, 1411-9544" issue: "2" journalAbbreviation: "Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan" page: "157" source: "DOI.org (Crossref. This means that protecting the environment must exceed Islamic law's other goals. Zubir, in his research, proposes the Eco-Ushul theory in making every decision and policy of Islamic law in Aceh. As a strong foundation in making legal decisions in Islam, Usul Fiqh must first consider eco-ushul. The concept of ecotheology is the main structure before constructing other structures (Zubir, 2021).

When we look at nature and its potential in Aceh Timur Raya, we wonder why the ecological culture of the people of the east coast of Aceh is currently experiencing resistance? This can be seen from the fact that many trawls are used in fishing (Randi, 2022). Concern for mangrove growth is almost nonexistent (Agency, 2021; Fitri dan Iswahyudi, 2010). Fishery culture and sharia-based fishery are natural resources at stake for coastal communities in the future. As for the hypothesis of this research article, why is the ecological culture of fishermen met with strong resistance on the East coast of Aceh? First is the absence of religion's role in preserving and caring for ecological culture in policy and fishing communities along the coast of Aceh. Second, the community's low awareness of the environment; and third, the marine environment, especially East Aceh, which tends only to become a political area that needs to remember natural resources that should not be politicized for the benefit of certain groups. These three big problems are crucial to address immediately—perhaps future generations will never know the types of fish commodities of the Aceh coastal communities, or it is even possible that the eastern coast of Aceh will turn into the next Bagansiapiapi City of Riau Province.

### **THE ABSENCE OF THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PRESERVING THE FISHERMEN COMMUNITIES' ENVIRONMENT**

Islam has become inherent in every walk of life in society in Aceh, meaning

all people are familiar with religion. This is in line with the motto of the *hadih madja* in Aceh, *Islam ngon adat, lage zat ngon sifeut. Kiban adat menan hukom, adat ban adat, hukom ban hukum, meusahoe adat ngon hukom, nanggroe teuga hana goega* (Mujiburrahman dkk. 2021; Nurdin, 2016:8). This *hadih madja* has become a civilization of Acehnese life from generation to generation so that Islamic values will continue to live in each existing system and governance. In the current era, Islam in Acehnese society has begun to be undermined by the influence of modernism which tends to be secular. This is also the highlight of this research in viewing the position of Islam in protecting and preserving the ecosystems needed for the survival of fishermen in the future.

There are at least three crucial things that contribute to the lack of the role of Islam in protecting and preserving the ecosystem of fishing communities on the east coast of Aceh; First, the lack of values of sharia-based ecology contained in Aceh's *qanuns* [legislations]— values to be included tend to be practical, pragmatic, and punitive. Second, the ulemas [Islamic scholars] have not made ecology a religious study in coastal communities in Aceh as current conditions prove that the role of natural and human resource development has not been successful. Third, fishermen lack the knowledge and understanding of the importance of protecting and preserving the ecosystems that fishermen rely on.

### **Lack of Values of Sharia-based Ecology in Aceh Qanun**

*Qanun* is local legislation that can regulate matters in a more detailed manner, or that has yet to be regulated in the hierarchy of the law above it. The special status of the *qanun* in Aceh is a special derivative of Law No. 11 of 2015 concerning the Government of Aceh. The Aceh government can use this legislation to implement Islamic law in Aceh. *Qanuns* in Aceh have regulated many things —just like regional regulations in other regions—but in Aceh, they can be drafted based on the values of the Islamic law that apply there. This should be an essential input in formulating and enacting *qanuns* in Aceh.

The following are some of the *Qanuns* related to fisheries and maritime affairs at the provincial and district levels in Aceh, and other policies:

1. Aceh Qanun of Number 7 of 2010 concerning Fisheries
2. East Aceh District Qanun Number 10 of 2010 concerning Fishery Business License Fee
3. Aceh Qanun Number 9 of 2008 concerning the Guidance of Customary Life and Customs
4. Aceh Tamiang District Qanun No. 3 of 2016 concerning the Protection of

### Tuntong Laot Species

5. Aceh Qanun Number 11 of 2019 concerning Wildlife Management
6. Aceh Qanun Number 2 of 2011 concerning Environmental Management
7. Aceh Qanun Number 1 of 2020 concerning Zoning Plans for Coastal Areas and Small Islands of Aceh 2020-2040
8. Aceh Qanun Number 10 of 2008 concerning Customary Institutions (Panglima Laot)
9. Aceh Qanun Number 7 of 2016 concerning Aceh Forestry

In plain view, the *qanuns* formulated as political products or the fishing community's needs lack Sharia values. Some important things are required by the *qanun* or government policy; 1) Administration that fishermen, 2 must fulfill) Retribution or related to state income, 3) Protection of mangroves and certain species in Tamiang, 4. Settlement of conflict that occurs among fishermen by custom, 5. Roles and responsibilities of related parties.

The five things above are the *qanuns* formulated in Aceh and the districts/cities in the East Aceh region. So far, Islamic values have yet to be included in the points of the qanun. The values of protection and preservation contained in the *qanun* are also part of Islamic values. The nuances of Islam, divine values, and monotheism are not attached to and felt by officeholders, fishermen, or the readers of these *qanuns*. The punitive aspect of these *qanuns* is greater than the spirit of protecting and preserving the ecosystems needed by fishermen on the East coast of Aceh. The punitive spirit is different from the spirit of protecting or preserving the natural ecosystem. It is case-oriented, and the state officers take pride in the achievement; the more cases handled, the better the performance is. In fact, protecting and preserving nature should not be oriented to the officers' performance in handling cases but to the achievement of developing natural resources located on the coast, beach, or sea.

Similarly, the spirit is built on the punitive aspect such as imposing a fine for violation according to the applicable provisions. Very few potentials of natural resources and human resources can be adequately empowered—especially in protecting nature. Compensation for paying a fine is not included as a spirit in protecting nature and the environment where the perpetrator commits a violation. Fines will only be burdensome and feared by the lower-middle-class fishing community—while to the upper-middle class, fines concerns making amends, especially with bribery that is quite common there.

These two aspects: punishment and fines, certainly have the desired impact on preserving natural resources throughout the years. Policymakers should consider some things, considering that Aceh is an agricultural area where

people have powerful Islamic beliefs from generation to generation. These Islamic values, which are not stated in the *qanuns* concerning fisheries and marine affairs, let alone the ecological values in natural ecosystems in coastal communities, are not part of the *mahdah* worship that scholars frequently communicate.

On the other hand, the *qanun* also tends to refrain from involving fishermen in preserving natural ecosystems as their life necessities. It can be seen in the existence of Panglima Laot that it is nothing more than resolving conflicts that occur among fishermen (Iwan, 2022; Saifuddin, 2022; Walidain, 2022). There is no *qanun* mandate to involve Panglima Laot in various program activities to protect and preserve the fishermen's ecosystem. When Panglima Laot is involved in various program activities, it will be seen that the fishing community's understanding and responsibility will grow through Panglima Laot. Moreover, if the *qanun* contains Islamic values, it will always be observed and guarded by Panglima Laot and the fishing community.

### **Ulemas Have Not Made Ecology a Religious Study**

Ecology, in general, is the study of the relationship between organisms, as well as between organisms and their environment. This science is not part of religious studies—even in certain studies other than religion, but it is *fardhu kifayah* [obligation] to study it in depth. The existence of ecology is a non-negotiable necessity for human life—especially for fishermen's lives. Protecting the environment is not part of a worship ritual that must be carried out at any time following established guidelines. Protecting the environment, dealing with the government, carrying out education, and various other social and cultural works are not included in the *mahdah* worship, but the *ghairu mahdah* worship.

Protecting and preserving natural ecosystems for the future needs of the nation's generation is *ghairu mahdah* worship. Even though this is not a regular *mahdah* worship where the management of natural resources will continue to be ignored, it is possible that *mahdah* worship can no longer be carried out (Ahmad, 2015; Mudhoffir, 2011). The *ghairu mahdah* worship, in this case, studying ecology and protecting and preserving natural ecosystems in the eastern region of Aceh, is now mandatory for all parties. The *mahdah* and *ghairu mahdah* worship also cannot be separated from each other. All people, especially coastal communities, are obliged to carry it out.

The *mahdah* worship, especially protecting ecosystems among coastal communities, should be driven by the ulemas, especially those who constantly

interact with the fishing communities. In addition, the government considers that the role of the ulemas is to pursue and spread the message of the importance of performing *mahdhah* worship, not *ghairu mahdhah*. This can be seen from government programs, which have never facilitated the ulemas in socializing the importance of preserving the ecosystem in studying Islamic law. For example, the Head of the Office of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DKP) of East Aceh District admitted that he had never involved the ulemas in socialization and raising awareness about protecting and preserving natural resources (Intan, 2022). The same is also the case in Langsa City and Aceh Tamiang district; in addition to not involving the ulemas, these two heads of office also complained about the behavior of the people who did not protect the natural resources for future generations (Banta, 2022).

The government does not involve the ulemas in socializing the importance of protecting and preserving the fishermen's ecosystem because they need to gain scientific knowledge of ecology based on Islamic law. Aceh's ulemas constantly interact with the community, at least in every recitation, Friday sermon, *wirid yasin* recitation, Friday night recitation, etc. In addition, the ulemas also interact with various social rituals in coastal communities; *keunduri laot*, *peusujuk bot*, *peutron bot*, *peu ubat bot*, *takziah*, etc.<sup>1</sup> These various rituals have yet to be used by ulemas as a medium to propagate the importance of the natural resource ecosystem in life. Basyaruddin, an environmental NGO activist in Aceh Timur Raya, reported as follows;

*“Since I was a child until I have my own family, I have never heard of any study of Islamic ecology. Teungkus from the past until now, from various types of fish, there are rivers and mangrove until now we have experienced difficulties and lost various types of fish. Teungkus still continue and only teach prayer, fasting, zakat, and teaching the Qur’an. Teungkus come and go, but the themes they raise in religious studies are always the same. Protecting natural resources does not seem part of Islamic studies”* (Basyaruddin 2022).

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<sup>1</sup>*Keunduri laot* is a religious thanksgiving ritual performed by fishermen every year in each sub-district, which is supervised or coordinated by Panglima Laot Lhok. *Rabu Abeh* is also a religious ritual that aims to ward off evil carried out by coastal communities on the beach on Wednesday at the end of the month of Safar. *Peusujuk bot - Peutron bot* is a ritual of plain flour or thanksgiving and prayer upon completion of the boat/fishing boat construction or when the boat is launched to catch fish in the sea. *Peu ubat bot* is a religious ritual performed on boats or ships that have been considered “unhealthy” or unable to provide enough catch for fishermen.

The Panglima Laot<sup>2</sup> of Aceh Tamiang District had a similar view, depicted here:

*“The ulemas do not have the knowledge, let alone attention to natural resource ecosystems. These ulemas receive alms from the prayers they recite. That’s what they do all the time. They don’t know that these natural resources must protected, if it is not cared for then we will sin. If people cut mangroves in Aceh Tamiang, it is purely to meet their daily needs. But the ulemas have never played a role in conveying the message that the use of trawls is a big sin, why do they not convey it. Because first they don’t know the laws and regulations; second, they receive a lot of alms from the toke [business owners] who use trawls” (Muhammad 2022).*

The ulemas play a crucial role in the life of the Acehnese. Obedience to the ulemas is a characteristic of the life of the Acehnese, especially given that Aceh has been designated as a special region for implementing Islamic law (Indonesia, 1999). The community’s life should always be close to the ulemas in various aspects. The ulemas must also continue to improve their knowledge, not only of science and classical books that examine *mahdhah* worship. Otherwise, people will believe that ulemas cannot solve the problems people face—they even consider that protecting the environment is not the responsibility of Islam and Muslims. Of course, such a view is detrimental to natural resources and the Muslims in Aceh.

### **Lack of Understanding of Sharia-based Ecology among Fishermen**

Sharia-based ecology is not part of other sciences but the equivalent of the words that the author summarizes to understand that ecology is a part of the study of Sharia that should be considered and remembered. If we refer to the provisions of Islamic law, both the Qur’an and Hadith, these two sources are sufficient to explain that Islam has a high concern for natural resources. Even in war, the Messenger of Allah forbade his troops to destroy plants (Abdullah, 2010; Basyar, 2020). This shows that Islam has a strong message to protect the environment. Without a healthy and comfortable environment, human life will be far from the blessings and grace of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Panglima Laot is a traditional structure that lives in the midst of a fishing community in Aceh Province. Its existence has been known for more than four centuries, since the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda to be precise. Structurally, Panglima Laot is the leader of *pawang-pawang* (boat owner/captain) in his area of authority, who is responsible to the sultan through the *uleebalang* intermediary. Panglima Laot then became part of a customary government structure called a *mukim*, a combination of several *gampongs* (equivalent to villages or *kelurahans* [urban villages]). The structure of Panglima Laot in Aceh is institutional formed from the provincial, district/city to sub-district levels.

The question is, why do fishermen who rely heavily on renewable natural resources not understand the sharia-based ecology? Understanding and awareness of protecting natural ecosystems should be the root of fishermen's understanding and "doctrine" in their daily activities. Religious understanding is rarely the subject of discussion in any religious activities. Understanding the natural resource ecosystem for fishermen is a secular science that tends to be considered separate from Islam as a religion and theology in their activities. When this science is considered secular, knowledge and understanding of ecology are not important for religious people who live on the coast.

Furthermore, understanding ecology considered secular will only relate to state law and the violations committed. Using trawls, mangrove logging, etc., is only considered a violation of state law, not Islamic theological doctrine (Asykari, 2022; Zubir, 2021:233). With such understanding, the fishermen do not feel guilty. They have become more savage in exploiting natural products as it does not violate religious law and will not be punished in the future. This impacts the boat owners' fear of losing the crew. Likewise, charcoal business owners will continue to have people stealing mangroves—after all, they are not stealing on the community's land but state-owned land (Walidain, 2022).

The fishing communities do not understand sharia-based ecology well. As far as this research is concerned, Eco-theology (Ahmad, 2015; Aman, 2016; Sadding, 2017) is one of the perspectives that should be discussed in the broader scope. The Eko-Ushul idea, proposed in Zubir's 2021 Dissertation, should also be considered.

### **LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AMONG THE FISHING COMMUNITY**

The environment is all external elements that affect organisms. These elements can be living organisms (biotic factors) or non-living (abiotic factors). This means that the environment as a unitary space with all objects, power, and conditions of living things, including humans and their behavior, affects nature itself. In ecology, nature is seen as a network of living systems that are interrelated with one another. This shows that every living thing is in the process of adjustment in the living system, which is affected by the principles of the sustainability of ecological life.

Fishermen are professional figures that depend on the environment they live in. Living side by side with the environment is a must to protect and preserve the environment. However, if one visits this fishing village, one will see the opposite. Fishermen's villages tend to be seen as slums—not because of poverty, but because of the fishermen's lifestyle that is not environmentally

friendly. There is an attitude of ‘ignorance’ toward the environment among fishing communities, especially in the Aceh Timur Raya region. This condition is a manifestation of the attitudes and behavior of the community towards the environment. The environment should be able to continue to provide for their lives; at least it does not harm them and their families.

One of the informants made a quite distressing statement: “*In the past, for daily meals, it was very easy to catch fish or shrimp around the house or in the river. Now it is very difficult, even if you want to get a little fish or shrimp in a fishing environment*” (Basyaruddin, 2022). Another informant reported: “*Nothing can be expected anymore from the sea in Langsa; the middle-lower class fishermen never get sufficient catch from their work*” (Asykari, 2022). This shows that serious problems occur between fishermen and their ecosystems. Although in various expressions, the fishing community does not really believe in bad attitudes and behavior so far, which has caused a decrease in the catch. The fishermen believe that this is the destiny of Allah Almighty that determines their daily sustenance. This could be one of the causes of the indifferent attitude commonly adopted by the fishing village community in Aceh Timur Raya.

### **The Fishermen’s Ecosystem: between the Demand and Responsibilities of Fishermen**

Marine ecosystems can be maintained sustainably if fishermen use environmentally friendly ways of working. This means that fishermen are not only concerned with the catch, but also prioritize the sustainability of the ecosystem and its resources. According to Yulia A. Hasan in her book, *Law of the Marine Conservation of Fish Resources in Indonesia* (2020), preserving marine or aquatic ecosystems is the responsibility of users of marine resources. It is the right of fishermen to capture and utilize natural resources in the sea, in the form of fish or other marine catches (Hasan, 2020). As a form of responsibility, fishermen must preserve the ecosystem and its natural resources.

Fishermen are not only a profession that catches fish or collects other marine natural resources, but also serves as guardians of nature from various damages. Fishermen often report the presence of foreign trawler ships entering Indonesian sea areas to the Marine Police, but on the other hand many fishermen also work for *toke* or boat owners where they work using trawling ships to catch fish in the sea. This means dispelling or reporting trawling vessels that plunder fish in Indonesian seas to perpetuate their livelihood, so that they can catch more fish with their *toke*’s trawling ships (Asykari 2022; Rusyidi 2022; Zulkifli 2022).

Fishermen have many needs, including families to support. Being a fisherman and working with a trawler boat owned by a *toke* is hard to resist. On the one hand, fishermen feel obliged to protect nature to ensure its sustainability. On the other hand, they must meet their needs. If they refuse to work for the *toke*, other fishermen will take the job. Even one of the fishermen, let's call him Iwan, was bullied by fellow fishermen. In addition, the crew will not be detained even though the *toke's* boat is caught by the security forces while catching fish at sea (Saifuddin, 2022; Walidain, 2022).

The fishermen also have good relationship with the *toke*, as some of *toke* do not consider these crew members only as workers, but as part of their big family. The *toke* is like a parent to them. He gives loans, makes donations when there is a disaster or when there is a family celebration. It is difficult for fishermen to avoid working for the *tokes* who have trawlers. The *toke* and the fishermen are like a coin with two faces that cannot be separated from each other, because both will lose value if separated. But if such circumstances continue, the nature will lose its resources. Obviously, we all do not want Aceh Timur Raya to become the next Bagan Siapiapi due to the collaboration between the *toke* and the fishermen.

### **Fishermen have no responsibility to the ecosystem**

The fishermen do not seem to understand the importance of protecting the ecosystem where they get a livelihood. Many fishermen use explosives or fish poison. These fishermen used to work on the *toke's* trawler to catch fish. They have needs to fulfill despite the destruction of natural ecosystems. In the end, it will make their own lives difficult. Understandably, they prioritize their needs. Such 'construction of needs' is not the only contributor to the environmental damage, the government, ulemas, also gives equal contribution especially the point of view that is adopted by fishermen today (Ahmad 2017; Muhammad 2022).

The role of religion, in this case the ulemas in Aceh Timur Raya; East Aceh, Langsa City, and Aceh Tamiang, has yet to improve the situation. The ulemas do not yet have a strong and clear view of the destruction of natural ecosystems both at sea and on land. They never talk about prohibition of destroying natural ecosystems in their religious gatherings. On the other hand, there is also a complicated problem, namely the government that do not have many programs at the grass root level of fishermen. The existence of the *panglima laot* institution tends to be used as a scapegoat in resolving conflicts between fishermen. The *panglima laot* reported the following in Aceh Timur Raya:

Customary institutions, such as the Panglima Laot, are not institutions designed to involve the community in protecting and preserving natural ecosystems. The existence of the Panglima Laot Institution tends to be politically motivated; various parties carry out many programs without informing the Panglima Laot institution. At the same time, the existence of Panglima Laot will have very different roles and responsibilities if it is involved in various roles and programs in society. At least panglima laot can be asked or controlled regarding how the economic development of fishermen, the fisherman's ecosystem to the success of government programs.

Such circumstances show that internal factors do not only cause the fishermen who seem irresponsible toward natural ecosystems. External factors are also very influential in shaping the attitude of fishermen toward protecting and preserving the natural ecosystem as a place for them to live. Currently, the state of nature in Aceh Timur Raya is still relatively good in certain places. However, the fishermen's lack of ecological awareness will inevitably turn the ecosystem into the next Bagan Siapiapi in Indonesia.

### **POLITIZING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION**

Fishermen are one of the sources of authority in creating a culture of protecting the environment, especially in coastal areas where they and their families live. Fishermen's concern for their environment is a non-negotiable necessity, and fishermen have a major interest there. Even though the coastal area is a tourist attraction, it should aim to improve the economy of the fishing community. The improvement of the fishermen's economy should always pay attention to the environment despite the presence of tourists. The coastal area that is clean of various plastic wastes before the arrival of tourists should be more well-organized because tourists will return to an environment and places that are well-organized and well-maintained. Tourists should not be scapegoats for the dirty and unmaintained coastal areas where fishermen live. The local government sometimes fails to notice this, as in Sungailiat Belitung (Putri, 2022). Also, identity politics or electability is rejected en masse due to halal tourism framing (Makhasi dan Rahimadhi, 2020:373–74).

The government should develop the potential of the community in protecting and preserving to the environment. If the community has the potential to protect the environment, the government must play the role in supporting and assisting the community. Head of the Office of Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Marine Affairs of Langsa City, Banta Ahmad, reported that he had done this in empowering coastal communities. However, he has difficulty because he needs a budget for supervision, so that many programs given to the

community are not successful (Banta 2022). The Secretary of Panglima Laot, Langsa City, denied what Banta had stated, that the program activities carried out by the Office of Fishery and Marine Affairs were not on target. The Office of Fishery and Marine Affairs has never coordinated with us, so the program rotates without monitoring (Saifuddin, 2022). This condition should not have happened, given the existence of coastal communities as guardians of natural resources and ecosystems on the coast and the sea.

On the one hand, the existence of coastal communities needs serious attention from many parties. A culture of environmental care must thrive in the community there. Coastal communities sometimes need to get attention. Politicians then politicize this. As we can see in the two offices of marine affairs and fisheries in Langsa City and East Aceh Regency, there is no budget for activity programs from the City and District other than for the salaries of employees and administration. The programs of these two offices come entirely from the State Budget. This shows that the district/city's budgeting is not allocated for coastal communities.

### **Who Should Care about the Environment?**

An environment is a place where all creatures can live. Fishermen are one of the professions that highly depend on the nature in which they live. The question is, today, who has concern for the environment? Do fishermen have concerns for the environment? Then, who should care about the environment?

Most people are aware or will be aware if they understand how important the environment is for their lives. Zubir argues that *hifdzul bi'ah* is more important than other elements of *maqasid al sharia*. How is it possible that *Hifdzul Mall*, *Hifdzul Aql*, *Hifdzul Nafs*, *Hifdzul Nasb*, and *Hifdzul Din* can take place and be prioritized if *Hifdzul Bi'ah* is not prioritized earlier (Abdullah, 2010, 2012; Zubir, 2021). This means that a safe and comfortable environment must be the basis for constructing life in maintaining religion, guarding reason, protecting offspring, protecting souls, and protecting religion.

Several searches about Aceh Timur Raya showed that environmental concern does not arise organically in fishing communities. Concern for the environment tends to grow and develop and is brought in by people from outside the fishing community; even the existence of fishermen at first was more of a figure who only exploited the nature where they are located. Exploitation here tends to use the potential of nature without caring for the development of the natural environment in the future. Recently, fishermen have begun to understand the importance of the environment in their lives. It is difficult for fishermen to

escape the trap between needs and environmental destruction.

The existence of fishing communities is in dire need of a sustainable program that is monitored at all times. Concern for the environment tends to come from outside the fishing community, not even from the government. Local governments tend to need programs to empower fishermen or maintain and care for the fishermen's environment. The government of Langsa City, Aceh Tamiang, and East Aceh Regency have yet to allocate budgets for programs for the fishing community. The programs under the marine affairs or fisheries office are based on the State budget. This indicates that the district/city government has no responsibility for the fishing communities.

Work programs for fishing communities tend to come from non-governmental organizations whose donors are foreign nationals (Wijayanto, 2018). These foreigners that provide donations are interested in preserving nature and maintaining the world's sustainability, where their country is starting to be threatened by the destruction of the world's ecology. For the government, such programs have not been deemed necessary—they have not directly impacted the community's survival in general, except for the fishing community. Therefore, the fishermen are more responsive to the work programs of the NGOs. It can be seen that the development of mangrove forests, the largest donor, is still dominated by NGOs from abroad compared to state funds, as is the case with the empowerment of coastal communities in Aceh Timur Raya.

### **Who is being empowered, and who is being used?**

These are political questions that this research raises in this article. Considering these questions concern the existence of the fishing community. In fact, who empowers the fishing community in Aceh Timur Raya? Or, on the contrary, is the fishing community in Aceh Timur Raya more likely to be deceived by empowerment programs? Why are these questions raised? It is because government programs cannot empower the existence of this fishing community in Aceh Timur Raya. This means that there are issues that should be taken seriously by all parties as to why various programs have failed to address issues in the fishing community, which are related to poverty, health, religion, and ignorance.

Basyaruddin, an NGO activist in East Aceh and Langsa City, stated: "*There is no serious program from the government other than wasting money. We know that the institutions already have all the rules and responsibilities—but they are not implemented as they should be.*" (Basyaruddin, 2022) A member of the Panglima Laot, Birrul Walidain, reported as follows: "*We, as panglima*

*laot, do not know anything about government programs in developing fishing communities. We often find out that the assistance provided by the government is not intended for fishermen.”* (Walidain 2022)

Perhaps it is common knowledge that the Panglima Laot institution is nothing more than a gathering place for fishermen and, at the same time resolving disputes (Amfar, 2015; Wilson dan Linkie, 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that it is not an empowerment narrative constructed in the fishing community. Conceptually, the narrative aims to develop fishing communities—but in practice, it is nothing more than deceiving them. The narration reflects that the fishing community is difficult to communicate with; typically violent and unruly; uneducated community; untrustworthy; does not understand rules; challenging to accept new things; (Banta, 2022; Intan, 2022) and various negative narratives, all of which concern the profile of the fishing community. These narratives do not empower fishermen but rather deceive them, despite programs to empower coastal communities continuing to be created.

## CONCLUSION

The fisherman's ecosystem should be a concern for all stakeholders. In addition to these stakeholders, culture also contributes to the root of the problem regarding the sustainability of natural ecosystems, especially in fishing communities. This research examines how the existence of a fisherman's ecosystem should be a predictor of community life on the mainland. Among the discussions in this study is the role Panglima Laot and various government agencies and other institutions play in protecting and preserving the fishermen's ecosystem. Furthermore, it also examines how culture and sharia-based ecology play a role in the management and development of fishermen's ecosystems in Aceh Timur Raya.

This research generated several significant findings, such as why the fishermen's ecosystem on the east coast of Aceh is going through a high resistance caused by culture or Islamic law currently in effect. First, protecting and preserving the fisherman's ecosystem has yet to become part of Islamic law - Aceh's law still focuses on matters of *mahdhah* worship. In addition, scholars have yet to make sharia-based ecology part of scientific studies in fishing communities so that the culture built in society is that this universe belongs to Allah and humans are free to use it without any law to protect and preserve it. Second, the growth of a culture of indifference among fishermen towards their environment. On the one hand, fishermen are responsible for maintaining the ecosystem's sustainability. However, on the other hand, they must also meet their needs and demands of working on the trawl belonging to the *toke*. Over time, that sense

of responsibility diminishes, and they prioritize life's demands over nature's survival. This also makes the fishing environment unfriendly to fishermen in terms of economy, health, social affairs, to the continuity of education for the next generation. Third, resistance to a culture of caring for the environment is also caused by the politicization of environmental issues. Who really cares for the environment and the sustainability of the fisherman's ecosystem? It should be the fishermen themselves who care. However, those who seem to care are the politicians who allow trawlers to continue exploiting Aceh's marine resources under the pretense of welfare for the fishing community. Who is *actually* empowered? Alternatively, maybe the fishing community is more likely to be deceived by politicians who only take a pragmatic advantage.

The existence of panglima laot should be central to maintaining the fisherman's ecosystem. It turns out that what happened is still far from reality. The government, politicians, and security forces have yet to make panglima laot a suitable stakeholder. The existence of panglima laot is merely used for the needs and interests of certain groups rather than for the benefit of the ecosystem and the fishermen. The east coast of Aceh will suffer heavy damage, in addition to the absence of the role of the government and related parties, cultural resistance, and the lack of understanding of the sharia-based ecology in the community about the protection and preservation of the fishermen's ecosystem. The power relations in coastal communities with the *toke* and the rulers tend to construct a discourse on 'reaping' marine products. The discourse was not only justified by the attitude of the *toke* and the fishermen regarding the fishermen's catch but is also supported by the ulemas and politicians. Thus, it is widespread for trawlers to be found on the east coast of Aceh.

Such a situation should not be allowed to continue any longer, especially on the east coast of Aceh. Aceh Timur Raya should not be the next Bagan Siapi-api that no longer has marine products. The government must conduct an in-depth evaluation of the various programs implemented so far. In addition, the existence of sharia in Aceh must make the environment an essential basis for implementing Islamic law, and the paradigm of Islamic law must change, not merely focusing on mahdhah worship and religious rituals. Aceh's Islamic Sharia must move forward in responding to various future needs in the form of *ghairu mahdhah* worship, social worship, and the cultural and political needs of the people.

The research still has many shortcomings and will be very useful if future research includes several other dimensions. What is essential is to continue this research by examining in depth using the ecotheological study appropriate to be applied in the culture of Aceh. Considering several previous studies that

examined the environment in the Book of Bustanussalatin, Aceh in the past had a socio-cultural construct based on eco-theology. It would be great for future researchers to examine this theme in depth to protect environmental ecosystems in Aceh for years to come.

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