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## **The Theological Imperative of Marine Ecosystem Conservation via Mangrove Forest Preservation: A Study of the Social Construction of Kyai Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the theological urgency of preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation in a study of the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah District, Gresik. Social construction theory plays an important role in shaping society's views on the need to protect the

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marine environment, which is increasingly threatened by the pace of industrialization. Using the social construction theory framework by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this research analyzes how Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai construct a theology of marine ecosystem conservation and connect it with mangrove forest conservation. Data was collected through interviews and content analysis of lectures and religious literature through a qualitative approach. The research results reveal that Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai have formed a social construction that prioritizes theological values in the context of environmental conservation, especially marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation. This construction provides a spiritual and moral foundation for society in the face of ecological change and rapid industrialization. This research provides new insight into the potential role of religion in environmental conservation and provides an in-depth view of the urgency of mangrove forest conservation from the perspective of the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai.

[Tulisan artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis urgensi teologi pelestarian ekosistem laut melalui konservasi hutan mangrove dalam studi konstruksi sosial kyai Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah di Kecamatan Ujungpangkah, Gresik. Teori konstruksi sosial memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk pandangan masyarakat tentang perlunya menjaga lingkungan laut yang semakin terancam akibat laju industrialisasi. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori konstruksi sosial oleh Peter L. Berger dan Thomas Luckmann, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana kyai Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah mengonstruksi teologi pelestarian ekosistem laut dan menghubungkannya dengan konservasi hutan mangrove. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan analisis konten terhadap ceramah dan literatur keagamaan. Hasil penelitian mengungkap bahwa kyai Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah telah membentuk konstruksi sosial yang mengedepankan nilai-nilai teologi dalam konteks pelestarian lingkungan, khususnya ekosistem laut melalui konservasi hutan mangrove. Konstruksi ini memberikan landasan spiritual dan moral bagi masyarakat dalam menghadapi perubahan ekologis dan industrialisasi yang cepat. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan baru tentang potensi peran agama dalam konservasi lingkungan dan memberikan pandangan mendalam tentang urgensi konservasi hutan mangrove dalam perspektif konstruksi sosial kyai Nahdlatul Ulama dan Muhammadiyah.]

**Keywords:** conservation theology; social construction, Kyai Muhammadiyah; Nahdlatul Ulama, Ujungpangkah Mangrove Ecosystem

## **Introduction**

The theology of preserving marine ecosystems is a concept that is increasingly gaining attention in the environmental context amidst the ever-increasing rate of ecological destruction. So far, theological concepts tend to only be interpreted superficially and have not been able to be operationalized practically as a basis for humanitarian and ecological movements. Mangrove deforestation is an example of damage to marine ecosystems that requires the operationalization of environmentally friendly theological praxis.<sup>1</sup>

In Indonesia, mangrove forests are extensive coastal ecosystems rich in biodiversity and have a very important role in maintaining the balance of marine ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> Based on the national mangrove map and mangrove ecosystem status released by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Papua Island occupies the highest position with a mangrove forest area of 1,497,724 ha, with a calculation scale of 1:25,000. Meanwhile, Java Island occupies the lowest position, with a mangrove area of 35,911 ha.<sup>3</sup>

Ujungpangkah District is a large example of a mangrove ecosystem that has potential for the surrounding community. As a representation of the mangrove forests of the North Coast of Java, the Ujungpangkah mangrove ecosystem area has quite abundant mangrove ecosystem potential with an economic value of almost 98 billion rupiah, as well as a strategic role in maintaining the sustainability of the marine ecosystem on the North Coast of Java, Gresik Regency.<sup>4</sup> Even though these mangroves have great potential and value. However, in the report by Prasetyo et al., the Ujungpangkah mangrove during the previous 10 years (2006-2016) experienced functional degradation, namely

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<sup>1</sup> Siti Rohmah, Erna Herawati, and Moh. Anas Kholish, "Hukum Islam dan Etika Pelestarian Ekologi – Bookstore UB Press," accessed November 2, 2024, <https://bookstore.ub.ac.id/shop/agama/hukum-islam-dan-etika-pelestarian-ekologi/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jamal Aprianto and Agus Romadhon, "Analisis Kesesuaian Ekowisata Mangrove di Pantai Kutang Kabupaten Lamongan," *Juvenil: Jurnal Ilmiah Kelautan dan Perikanan* 2, no. 2 (June 2021): 107–14, <https://doi.org/10.21107/juvenil.v2i2.10654>.

<sup>3</sup> Bagus Dwi Rahmanto, "Peta Mangrove Nasional dan Status Ekosistem Mangrove di Indonesia" (Development for Mangrove Monitoring Tools in Indonesia, Jakarta, August 6, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Nyoto Santoso, Rizki Praba Nugraha, and Ricardo Andalas, "Total Economic Value of Mangrove Forest in Pangkah Kulon and Pangkah Wetan Village Areas, Ujungpangkah District, Gresik Regency, East Java Province," *Media Konservasi* 24, no. 2 (October 2019): 152–62, <https://doi.org/10.29244/medkon.24.2.152-162>.

abrasion of almost 178 hectares due to conversion into non-hydrological ponds (silvofishery) of around 733 hectares, as well as deforestation approximately 102 hectares due to illegal logging.<sup>5</sup>

Basically, the government has long prohibited mangrove deforestation through various regulations configured in laws and regulations. Like Law No. 27 of 2007, Presidential Regulation No. 121 of 2012, and Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Regulation No. 4 of 2016, as well as other regulations. However, the various efforts made by the government have apparently not been completely effective in preventing various damages to the marine ecosystem. Thus, alternative regulations are needed in the form of fatwaha and constructions by Kyai, who have socio-cultural patronage in Ujungpangkah society.<sup>6</sup>

Kyai Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are two cultural patrons who can mobilize community structures to preserve marine ecosystems. Kyai, in Horikhosi's perspective, is a generator and turbine of social change that can be used as a catalyst agency for the environmental conservation of marine ecosystems through mangrove conservation in Ujungpangkah.<sup>7</sup> In line with Horikhoshi, Clifford Geertz also interpreted that the Kyai are highly respected because of their authority and ability to exert massive influence, which constructs societal perception and action.<sup>8</sup>

In the culture of the Ujungpangkah community, Kyai are highly respected actors and have a central role as guardians of the texts of the holy books that are believed by the community. Thus, the existence of kyai for the Ujungpangkah community is a cultural strength that strengthens various government policies regarding the preservation of

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<sup>5</sup> Arif Prasetyo, Nyoto Santoso, and Lilik Budi Prasetyo, "Kerusakan Ekosistem Mangrove di Kecamatan Ujung Pangkah Kabupaten Gresik Provinsi Jawa Timur [Degradation of Mangrove Ecosystem in Ujung Pangkah Subdistrict Gresik District East Java Province]," *Journal of Tropical Silviculture* 8, no. 2 (October 2017): 130–33, <https://doi.org/10.29244/j-siltrop.8.2.130-133>.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Imron Rozuli et al., "Kyai NU's Patrons as an Agent of Social Change and Environmental Marine Conservation: A Case Study in Paciran Lamongan," *ADDIN* 16, no. 1 (June 2022): 103, <https://doi.org/10.21043/addin.v16i1.17408>.

<sup>7</sup> Hiroko Horikhoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 2 (January 1960): 228–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500000670>.

marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation. Kyai's exemplary patronage is a living norm in the system of cognition and affection of the Ujungpangkah Gresik Muslim community. So, according to Thohir Luth et al., the kyai on the North Coast has a very effective role in strengthening various government policies and regulations that are not being implemented well.<sup>9</sup>

Kyai, through his theological construction, in researchers' observations, has a quite significant role in encouraging society to preserve marine ecosystems. Kyai are not only religious leaders who only pronounce fatwa on halal and haram laws. However, Kyai must also be active as a valve for social change and ecological preservation. The theological concept, which has been identified as the "celestial concept," was actually practically grounded by the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai on the basis of their respective eras. In this context, this article's research study is very relevant in answering various ecological problems faced by the Ujungpangkah community in the form of mangrove forest deforestation. At the same time, this research also seeks to encourage Kyai with their theological concepts to continue to become turbines for environmental conservation in the sea through mangrove forest conservation.

## **Methods**

The research location was conducted in Ujungpangkah District, Gresik Regency. The participants or subjects in this research are Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah District, who are involved in efforts to preserve marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation. This research uses a qualitative approach to understand and analyze the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in the context of marine ecosystem conservation through mangrove forest conservation.<sup>10</sup> The qualitative approach allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the views, values, and actions of religious figures involved in preserving the mangrove ecosystem in Ujungpangkah District.

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<sup>9</sup> Thohir Luth et al., "Coastal Ulama Ijtihād and Destructive Fishing Prevention in Indonesia," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 2 (December 2022): 335–56.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Pendekatan Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan Mixed* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2017).

Data collection was carried out using in-depth interviews with Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Ujungpangkah Kyai as primary sources to gain their understanding of views relevant to the preservation of marine ecosystems and mangrove forest conservation. Meanwhile, secondary sources were obtained from interviews with subjects or participants who had been directly involved in preserving the mangrove environment, such as volunteers or environmental activists and sympathizers of mangrove conservation in Ujungpangkah.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers in this case observed and were actively involved in activities related to preserving marine ecosystems conducted by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Ujungpangkah Kyai, such as outreach activities and mangrove planting. Apart from that, analysis of documents such as religious literature, religious guides, and policies related to the environment was also carried out to understand the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in preserving marine ecosystems. Next, the data collected will be analyzed using a qualitative analysis approach. Such activities involve coding processes, thematic grouping, and identifying patterns and relationships between data. The analysis will focus on identifying religious views, values, beliefs and actions related to preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation as perceived by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah kyai.

To ensure the validity of the research, several strategies will be used, such as data triangulation (combining data from various sources), checking the clarity of the findings with research participants, and involving other researchers in the process of analyzing the research objectives. Additionally, the reliability of the research will be strengthened by documenting the methodological steps in detail and maintaining detailed records throughout the research process.<sup>12</sup>

By using a structured qualitative research method, it is hoped that this research can provide rich insight into the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation in Ujungpangkah District, Gresik. It is hoped that the research results will also contribute

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (London: SAGE Publications, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (London: SAGE Publication, 2018).

to a better understanding of the role of religion in environmental conservation and provide important input for efforts to preserve the mangrove ecosystem in the region.

## **Results**

### ***From Heavenly Theology to Humanity and Environmental Conservation Theology***

Since ancient times, theology has been the main foundation in shaping humans' views about their relationship with God and the universe. Understanding the existence of God often characterizes religious thought, but in the increasingly complex modern era, theology must also adapt to global issues, including environmental challenges.<sup>13</sup> The journey from a theology that focuses on celestial aspects towards a theology of humanity and environmental conservation marks the evolution of the meaning of religion in a changing social and ecological context.<sup>14</sup>

According to Ali Shariati, the journey from Heavenly Theology to Humanity and Environmental Conservation Theology reflects a shift in the understanding of religion and spirituality from a focus that is primarily centered on human relationships with those above (God or spiritual existence) toward a broader understanding of the role of humans in the global ecosystem and responsibility towards nature and fellow creatures.

The understanding of “celestial theology” prioritizes human relationships with the Divine or transcendental, which focuses on human relationships with God or spiritual forces. Spiritual self-development, worship, ritual, and human ultimate goals (such as heaven or redemption) take center stage. Meanwhile, “humanitarian theology,” according to Ali Shariati, emphasizes a deep understanding of human rights, dignity, and social responsibility. Such theology better explains how religious values can encourage justice, empathy, and concern for the condition of disadvantaged humans, including social issues such as poverty, inequality, and social justice.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bryn Barnard, *The Genius of Islam: How Muslims Made the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Rozuli et al., “Kyai NU’s Patrons as an Agent of Social Change and Environmental Marine Conservation.”

<sup>15</sup> ‘Alī Shari‘atī, *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures* (Jakarta: Mizan Press, 1979).

The next journey is to internalize the values of caring for the environment and nature. This understanding places humans in the context of the global ecosystem, where natural sustainability and ecosystem balance are important. Thus, responsibility towards the earth and the duty to protect nature is increasingly emphasized.<sup>16</sup> Apart from that, Leopold also stated that there are important points in the responsibility to care for nature, such as the concept of the interconnection of all creatures. According to him, the concept of the interconnectedness of all creatures is a more holistic moral understanding that recognizes that all living creatures and nature are strongly interconnected.<sup>17</sup> Syamsuddin explained that the emergence of the concept of protection, respect, and wise management of nature is part of the principles of human characteristics in the Islamic religion.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, positive human relations with nature and mutualism are an integral part of Islamic moral religiosity.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from morality, humanitarian theology and environmental conservation are also categorized as interrelated. Human prosperity cannot be achieved without paying attention to ecosystem balance and environmental protection. Therefore, a dignified human life is connected to the welfare of nature. To preserve nature, this theological understanding also invites religious communities to take concrete action in supporting social justice and environmental preservation. This can include environmental campaigns, sustainability education, and environmentally friendly practices.<sup>20</sup>

The development from Heavenly Theology towards a Theology of Humanity and Environmental Conservation reflects awareness of the need to combine spiritual dimensions with social and ecosystem

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<sup>16</sup> Rohmah, Herawati, and Kholish, "Hukum Islam dan Etika Pelestarian Ekologi – Bookstore UB Press."

<sup>17</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Moh. Samsuddin, "Krisis Ekologi Global dalam Perspektif Islam," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 11, no. 2 (November 2017): 83–106, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v11i2.1353>.

<sup>19</sup> Pratama Yudha Pradheksa et al., "Environmental Ethics in the Spiritual Perspective of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam: Aligning Roles and Finding Intersecting Paths," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 2 (July 2023): 122–35, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i2.93>.

<sup>20</sup> Laili Savitri Noor et al., "Peran Kiai dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Modern di Pondok Pesantren," *At-Ta'dib* 18, no. 1 (June 2023): 28–42, <https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v18i1.9911>.



responsibility. In this view, spirituality and religion are directed at forming caring, wise, and responsible humans for nature and each other.<sup>21</sup> Nasr strongly supports the idea that religious teachings should guide every aspect of human life, including how we relate to nature and the environment. He argued that the same view of the universe and humans must be holistic, uniting material and spiritual dimensions.<sup>22</sup> Some of the main concepts in Nasr's thinking relevant to this transformation are as follows.

*First*, tawhid and connectedness, Nasr emphasized the concept of tawhid, namely belief in the unity of God, as the basis of his worldview. This is also agreed by Masturin et al., who say that the universe and everything in it is a manifestation of God, which implies a connection between nature, humans, and God.<sup>23</sup> Thus, leading to a more inclusive view of biodiversity and the environment. *Second*, the concept of human leadership in the universe. Nasr believes that humans were appointed as caliphs (managers) of nature by Allah. Therefore, humans have a moral-ethical-theological responsibility to care for nature and the surrounding environment in a sustainable and continuous manner.

*Third*, regarding spiritual values in the environment, Nasr views nature as signs of God that reflect His beauty, harmony, and mercy. He encourages humans to develop a deeper relationship with nature so that they can recognize the spiritual values contained in it.<sup>24</sup> Fourth, Nasr criticizes materialism and consumerism, saying that modern materialism and consumerism have damaged the environment and ignored spiritual values. For him, a shift from a theology that sees

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<sup>21</sup> Ilham Defriono et al., "Zuhd and Minimalism in a Consumerist Society: Exploring Al-Ghazali and Fumio Sasaki's Thoughts," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 2 (August 2023): 151–63, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i2.92>.

<sup>22</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Antara Tuhan, Manusia, dan Alam* (Yogyakarta: IRCISOD, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Masturin Masturin, Mhd. Rasid Ritonga, and Siti Amaroh, "Tawhid-Based Green Learning in Islamic Higher Education: An Insan Kamil Character Building," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 1 (July 2022): 215–52, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i1.14124>.

<sup>24</sup> Md Abu Sayem, "Conceptions of Nature in Religious, Scientific and Historical Overview: A Brief Analysis," *Philosophy and Progress* 69, no. 1 (October 2022): 173–88, <https://doi.org/10.3329/pp.v69i1-2.60188>.

nature as a manifestation of God towards a theology of humanity and environmental conservation is a step to overcome this problem.<sup>25</sup>

Fifth, regarding religious education and environmental awareness, Nasr in Santosa and Heriyanto also supports the importance of religious education, which includes teachings about environmental conservation.<sup>26</sup> According to him, holistic religious education can shape human thought patterns and behavior that care more about the environment. Thanks to his thoughts, Seyyed Hossein Nasr illuminates the journey from traditional theology, which emphasizes celestial aspects, to theology that places humans in the context of the universe, encourages environmental conservation, and revives spiritual values in human relationships with the world around them.

### ***Assessing the Role of Ulama and Kyai as Catalysts for Environmental Conservation***

In environmental conservation, the role of ulama and Kyai has infinite driving force. As religious pillars and spiritual leaders of society, ulama, and Kyai have a broad influence in shaping the views and behavior of the people. However, their role is not only limited to religious aspects but also forms the foundation for sustainable nature conservation.<sup>27</sup> In this article, we will explore in more depth how ulama and Kyai play a role as catalysts in efforts to protect and care for the environment, as well as how religious views can be a driving force in protecting the earth that has been given to humanity.

The role of ulama and Kyai as catalysts for environmental conservation is very important in the context of preserving nature and the environment. In many Islamic societies, ulama and Kyai have a significant influence in shaping people's views and behavior towards the environment.<sup>28</sup> In another aspect, in Nata's study, the existence of ulama and Kyai can also play an important role in providing education

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<sup>25</sup> Nasr, *Antara Tuhan, Manusia, dan Alam*.

<sup>26</sup> Iman Santosa and Husain Heriyanto, "Pemahaman Tradisional Mengenai Alam Menurut Seyyed Hossein Nasr dalam Upaya Mengatasi Krisis Lingkungan," *Jurnal Peradaban* 2, no. 1 (January 2023): 75–93, <https://doi.org/10.51353/jpb.v2i1.659>.

<sup>27</sup> Saefullah, "Nalar Ekologi dalam Perspektif Islam," *Jurnal Penelitian* 13, no. 2 (June 28, 2016): 113, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jupe.v13i2.1196>.

<sup>28</sup> Syamsul Arifin et al., "Jihad Ekologi Melawan Eksploitasi Tambang Emas di Banyuwangi Sebagai Penguatan Green Constitution," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 1 (January 2023): 105–21, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i1.52>.

and awareness about the importance of protecting the environment,<sup>29</sup> in sermons, lectures or religious teaching.<sup>30</sup> Apart from that, they can also describe the universe and the environment, which are reflected as gifts from God that must be protected and preserved.

Ulama and Kyai also have the ability to interpret Islamic teachings and apply them in the context of environmental conservation. They can show how religious teachings encourage people to be good stewards of nature and not damage it.<sup>31</sup> Apart from interpreting Islamic teachings, ulama and Kyai also have the authority to issue fatwah (Islamic legal opinions) on environmental issues. By providing legal guidance regarding environmentally friendly practices, they can influence people's behavior in carrying out daily worship and other activities.<sup>32</sup>

As stated by Horikhosi, ulama and Kyai are able to have a strong influence in the community and can mobilize people to take real action in preserving the environment.<sup>33</sup> They can organize clean-up activities, tree planting, or environmental awareness campaigns.<sup>34</sup> The behavior of ulama and *Kyai* in protecting the environment can be a role model for the people. If they are actively involved in practices that support environmental conservation, people will be more inclined to follow in their footsteps.<sup>35</sup> They can also act as advocates in supporting sustainable environmental policies. By using the influence of ulama and

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<sup>29</sup> Abuddin Nata, "Kyai and Character Education," *Psychology and Education Journal* 58, no. 1 (January 20, 2021): 5365–89, <https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i1.1795>.

<sup>30</sup> Nor Hasan, "The Social Construction of Islamic Education Through the Internalization of Traditional Values and Regional Culture," *Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online* 19, no. 3 (2020): 148–59, <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2020.03.112>.

<sup>31</sup> Darlina Kartika Rini et al., "Pendidikan Islam pada Pesantren Pertanian untuk Membangun Ekosofi (Ekologi Filosofi) bagi Penyelamatan Lingkungan," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 03 (October 2022): 559, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i03.2779>.

<sup>32</sup> Rozuli et al., "Kyai NU's Patrons as an Agent of Social Change and Environmental Marine Conservation."

<sup>33</sup> Horikoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial*.

<sup>34</sup> Izzatul Mardhiah, Rihlah Nur Aulia, and Sari Narulita, "Konsep Gerakan Ekoteologi Islam Studi atas Ormas NU dan Muhammadiyah," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 10, no. 1 (2014): 83–99, <https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jsq/article/view/4420>.

<sup>35</sup> Ali Yafie, *Merintis Fiqh Lingkungan Hidup* (Ngawi: Tama Printing, 2006).

Kyai, they can encourage the government and society to take more serious action in protecting nature.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from advocacy approaches, ulama and Kyai can also use social media and other technology to convey environmental messages to the wider community. This helps in spreading information about the importance of environmental conservation and how every individual can contribute. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that ulama and kyai have an important role as catalysts in environmental conservation in the context of a Muslim society. Through education, religious interpretation, role models, and advocacy, they can help form awareness and positive actions for people in protecting and caring for the environment.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ali Noer Zaman, Ma'mun Murod, and Nurul Fitralaila Tanjung, "Muhammadiyah dan Advokasi Perlindungan Lingkungan," *KAIS Kajian Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 2 (March 11, 2022): 183–200, <https://doi.org/10.24853/kais.2.2.183-200>.

<sup>37</sup> Abdul Karim, "Integration of Religious Awareness in Environmental Education," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 2 (December 2022): 415–42, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i2.14404>.

<sup>38</sup> Rini et al., "Pendidikan Islam pada Pesantren Pertanian untuk Membangun Ekosofi (Ekologi Filosofi) bagi Penyelamatan Lingkungan."

<sup>39</sup> Rozuli et al., "Kyai NU's Patrons as an Agent of Social Change and Environmental Marine Conservation."

<sup>40</sup> Horikoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial*.

<sup>41</sup> Mardhiah, Aulia, and Narulita, "Konsep Gerakan Ekoteologi Islam Studi atas Ormas NU dan Muhammadiyah."

environmental conservation, people will be more inclined to follow in their footsteps.<sup>42</sup> They can also act as advocates in supporting sustainable environmental policies. By using the influence of ulama and Kyai, they can encourage the government and society to take more serious action in protecting nature.<sup>43</sup>

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### ***Social Construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai Regarding the Theology of Marine Ecosystem Preservation through Mangrove Forest Conservation***

The social construction theory proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman focuses on how social reality and meanings are given by individuals and society through social interaction.<sup>45</sup> This theory can be applied in the context of the theological construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai regarding mangrove conservation as an effort to stop damage to marine ecosystems. Berger and Luckmann argue that social reality is not inherent but rather is constructed through human interaction. In this case, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai, as spiritual and intellectual leaders of the Islamic community, have a role in shaping the social reality of the importance of mangrove conservation to stop damage to marine ecosystems. They can influence

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<sup>42</sup> Zaman, Murod, and Tanjung, "Muhammadiyah dan Advokasi Perlindungan Lingkungan."

<sup>43</sup> Zaman, Murod, and Tanjung.

<sup>44</sup> Karim, "Integration of Religious Awareness in Environmental Education."

<sup>45</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 1991).

people's perceptions and beliefs through lectures, religious teachings, and religious literature.<sup>46</sup>

Berger and Luckmann argued that the internalization of social meanings and norms through the socialization process, in this case, the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai, can shape the community's view of mangrove conservation as a religious obligation. Through teaching and explanations in the context of Islamic teachings, they help the community understand how mangrove conservation can be realized with religious values and human responsibility towards the environment.<sup>47</sup> Social construction theory also highlights how individual and group identities are formed through social interactions. Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai can build a community's religious identity by emphasizing the important role of religion in protecting marine ecosystems. Thus, this is able to stimulate people to feel moral and ethical responsibility towards the environment.

Alatas's reading also shows that religious figures in Indonesia as actors in (religious) institutions are believed to have authority in constructing social reality, such as the strength of influence of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah.<sup>48</sup> When they support and promote mangrove conservation, these actions lend legitimacy to environmental conservation efforts and change the way society views religious obligations to the environment. By applying this social construction theory, we can see how Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah kyai not only convey religious teachings, but also help shape people's views about the importance of mangrove conservation as part of religious responsibility in stopping damage to marine ecosystems.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Luth et al., "Coastal Ulama Ijtihād and Destructive Fishing Prevention in Indonesia."

<sup>47</sup> Ferry Adhi Dharma, "Konstruksi Realitas Sosial: Pemikiran Peter L. Berger Tentang Kenyataan Sosial," *Kanal: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (September 1, 2018): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.21070/kanal.v6i2.101>.

<sup>48</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Moh Mufid, "Fikih Mangrove: Formulasi Fikih Lingkungan Pesisir Perspektif Eko-Syariah," *Al-Daulah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Perundangan Islam* 7, no. 1 (September 2017): 107–27, <https://doi.org/10.15642/ad.2017.7.1.107-127>.

In the perspective of Robert W. Hefner<sup>50</sup> and Mitsuo Nakamura,<sup>51</sup> Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are the most influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia, so this condition also influences the strengthening of patronism of the teachings of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in society. It is this structural and cultural capital that Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai should utilize to promote the importance of preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove conservation. These two Islamic organizations use theology as the basis of their struggle. Nahdlatul Ulama uses Aswaja theology as fuel for its movement, while Muhammadiyah uses Al-Ma'un theology to develop business charities and social change. Nahdlatul Ulama's Aswaja theology departs from the doctrines of Sufism which have been put into practice in the form of movements and social change. According to Said Agil Siraj, only Sufilah are able to establish mutual peace between humans and nature in harmony. At this point, it becomes important for Nahdlatul Ulama Aswaja theology to be mainstreamed by Nahdlatul Ulama Kyai. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah's al-Maun theology departs from the spirit contained in the Al-Maun letter which places more emphasis on the values of liberation from the shackles of exploitation of people who claim to be religious, but are fond of carrying out destructive behavior.

According to Ali Shariati, theology must be able to be grounded from soaring narratives towards a theology of humanity and environmental preservation, such as the practical implementation of the Aswaja theology of the Nahdhiyyin and the Al-Ma'un theology of Muhammadiyah.<sup>52</sup> Because, if theology is only interpreted transcendently, only talking about heaven and hell, as well as eschatological areas, then theological studies will be considered incompatible with answering the various problems faced by modern humans who continue to be dynamic and developing. At this point, the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah tried to put into practice a theological narrative that went up towards a theology of mangrove conservation. Ujungpangkah, which is the central point for

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<sup>50</sup> Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7szvv>.

<sup>51</sup> Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises Over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town c. 1910-2010* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983).

<sup>52</sup> Mufid, "Fikih Mangrove."

the development of the marine oil industry, is faced with various ecological problems which must be balanced with the preservation of marine ecosystems in the form of mangrove forest conservation.<sup>53</sup>

Because, according to the construction of K. H. Hakim Nasikh, Chair of the Ujungpangkah MUI in his interview, said that the earth needs balance. If there are groups that destroy, then there must be groups that preserve. That is where the role of ulama is as Warasatul Ambiya. If the prophets were sent to be agents and actors balancing various crimes against humanity and ecology, then the role of ulama as their heirs must also be able to become a catalyst for social and ecological improvement.

Efforts to plant and conserve mangrove forests are a form of praxis from soaring theology. The good names of Allah that are configured in "Asmaul Husna" must be grounded and operationalized in everyday life. In K.H. Construction. Hanafi, as a cleric with a Muhammadiyah background in Ujungpangkah, said that every servant of Allah must be able to become an agent of the universal loving nature of His mercy and womb for the entire universe and its contents. As a theological consequence, Allah appointed the Prophet Muhammad to be none other than an actor and agent of universal love in the universe (*rahmatan lil alamin*). This prophetic spirit underlies the construction of the kyai and ulama, which are its authoritative heirs. When humans have declared themselves to be agents of God's universal love, then human existence on earth will not be an agency for the destruction of the universe.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time K.H. Mahmudi Ambar also interprets the nature of Allah "al-Hayyu al-Qayyum" as the Most Animating and Responsible substance. That means every human being must be able to play a role in grounding and operationalizing God's nature in the form of reviving dead marine ecosystems. One of them is through planting mangrove forests. On the other hand, the meaning of al-Qayyum must also be interpreted practically as an agent responsible for various

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<sup>53</sup> Prasetyo, Santoso, and Prasetyo, "Kerusakan Ekosistem Mangrove di Kecamatan Ujung Pangkah Kabupaten Gresik Provinsi Jawa Timur [Degradation of Mangrove Ecosystem in Ujung Pangkah Subdistrict Gresik District East Java Province]."

<sup>54</sup> Hanafi Husni Mubaroq, "Interaksi antara Gerakan Sosial Modernisme Muhammadiyah dengan Kegiatan Tradisional Yaqowiyyu di Jatinom," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 3, no. 1 (July 2019): 42–49, <https://doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v3i1.4076>.



ecological damage resulting from the actions of irresponsible corporations.<sup>55</sup>

The theological construction in environmental conservation is in line with the theological concept offered by Seyyed Hossein Nasr; according to him, the relationship between humans and nature is not a destructive and exploitative subject-and-object relationship. Humans as caliphs on earth are not positioned as subjects who can subdue the universe or even exploit it. Because there is a tendency for the meaning of the caliphate to be hijacked by religionists as a theological justification for exploiting nature blindly, at this point, Seyyed Hosein Nasr condemned the behavior of modern humans who often prostitute the universe for momentary and pragmatic interests.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's anxiety, which is also felt by the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Ujungpangkah Kyai who see the flow of industrialization in the Gresik area, is part of the modern human perspective which positions nature as an object of prostitution. According to K. H. Abdul Muis (2023) various natural resources in the form of oil in Ujungpangkah are exploited and monopolized by the oligarchic elite. However, these corporations only take advantage, but are not responsible. Various damages to marine ecosystems have become a reality in the Ujungpangkah sea. Many industrial wastes in Gresik Regency are not managed well.<sup>56</sup> So, according to the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah, mangrove forest conservation is an urgent need, a theological necessity, and an anthropological and ecological necessity.

## **Discussions**

From the various theological perspectives of the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai above, at least their perspectives have undermined White's thesis, which states that Abrahamic religions have the potential to be influential variables as well as generators of ecological damage in this world.<sup>57</sup> Christian theology, with its colonialist practices, has proven to be an inseparable part of capitalism

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<sup>55</sup> Samsuddin, "Krisis Ekologi Global dalam Perspektif Islam."

<sup>56</sup> Prasetyo, Santoso, and Prasetyo, "Kerusakan Ekosistem Mangrove di Kecamatan Ujung Pangkah Kabupaten Gresik Provinsi Jawa Timur [Degradation of Mangrove Ecosystem in Ujung Pangkah Subdistrict Gresik District East Java Province]."

<sup>57</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>.

and industrialism. Likewise, Islam and Judaism, which are also Abrahamic religions, are also considered to be contributors to ecological damage in Muslim and Jewish countries. The various perspectives put forward by Lyn White above seem to be a generalization of the portrait of religion and the flow of industrialization in developed and developing countries. In fact, in William Cavanaugh's perspective, religion is only used as a sacrifice, as well as a "scapegoat" for destructive oligarchic behavior.<sup>58</sup>

Lyn White, in her perspective, has been absent from photographing the actors and agencies of religious leaders such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai who have an ecological theory perspective. The theo-ecological perspective is a servant's way of seeing the relationship between humans and God and the relationship between humans and the nature He created. This perspective has at least become a driving force for ecological conservation in industrialized countries and countries that are developing industries.<sup>59</sup> However, the actors and agencies of clergy who have a theo-ecological perspective are quite few compared to those of clergy who choose to pawn off their theological independence for the interests of oligarchic and corporate elites.

At this point, the social construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai regarding the theology of preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove conservation become relevant to serve as role models. The Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah agreed that God had prohibited various destructive practices of exploiting nature after Allah had repaired them (*wa laa Tufsidu fil al-Ardhi ba'da Ishlahihah*). In the construction of the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai, the prohibitions above have the consequence of *Tahrim* or prohibition so that anyone who becomes an actor of ecological damage on this earth is a group that Allah will anger because they ignore the prohibitions that have been strictly outlined.

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<sup>58</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Yohanis Rantelangan, "Ekologi: Pandangan Iman Kristen tentang Permasalahan Alam," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 2 (July 2023): 136–50, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i2.51>.

However, ironically, according to Kholish et al., the modern actors and humans who carry out ecological damage declare themselves to be agents of improving the world with various kinds of indiscriminate industrialization and technological sophistication.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, in the short term, oligarchic modern humans have also established themselves as contributors to economic growth in developed and developing countries. In the long term, the ecological damage resulting from this centric economy has a destructive domino impact on sustainability. What worries Kholish et al. is the extraction of their thoughts on the verse of the Qur'an Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 11, which says, “and when it is said to them do not destroy the earth, they say: verily we are agents of goodness, know that in fact, they are agents of destruction, but they never feel it.”

According to Gus Muhammad Al-Fayyadl, the verse above is a hard slap to the oligarchic elite of capitalism with their greed but serves as a catalyst for goodness. As an activist with the East Java Nahdliyin Front for Natural Resources Sovereignty (FNKSDA), Gus Fayadl considers that mainstreaming environmental preservation amidst the pace of industrialization is a theological necessity that must be encouraged and promoted at the grassroots.<sup>61</sup>

In line with the theological construction put forward by Gus Fayadl, the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah also agree that the various ecological damages carried out by modern humans are a form of greed and covetousness. Various forms of excessive greed in the theological construction of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai are satanic behavior that must be avoided. This construction of the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai was also confirmed by Baqir Sadr in his work “Iqtisaduna.” According to him, the greed and avarice of the oligarchic elite who exploit nature, which then results in ecological damage, is the result of modern humans' perspective in positioning nature.

Limited natural resources are forced to meet unlimited human needs and greed. Thus, ecological damage in various countries

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<sup>60</sup> Moh. Anas Kholish, Gugus Irianto, and Andi Muhammad Galib, *Fikih Ekonomi Kontemporer: Konfigurasi Pemikiran Ekonomi Islam di Era Global* (Malang: Empar Dua Media, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> Muhammad Al-Fayyadl. “Mistifikasi Kesadaran Rakyat yang Menderita oleh Cak Nun.” Medium. Last modified June 22, 2018, accessed April 3, 2020.

continues to increase exponentially. This perspective is also in line with what Mahatma Gandhi once expressed. According to him, the abundance of natural resources that God has given to humanity is never enough to satisfy the greed of the oligarchic elite.<sup>62</sup> In this context, Ernest Ferdy Schumacher and McKibben, in their work "Small is Beautiful," said that technological development must be reoriented from destructive and exploitative technology that is mass in nature towards technology that is effective and efficient.<sup>63</sup> If not, Stephen Hawking's concerns about global chaos in 2045 will become a reality if modern humans' perspective on nature is not improved.<sup>64</sup>

Relevant to these various perspectives, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah see the damage to the mangrove ecosystem in Ujungpangkah as a form of human greed that never ends in exploiting nature. So, most of the people of Ujungpangkah are from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah organizations must continue to be encouraged to increase their theological awareness of caring for mangrove forests. The Ujungpangkah community should not mortgage mangrove forests just for individual interests by expanding their ponds in Ujungpangkah, which causes deforestation and mangrove degradation as has occurred significantly from 2006 to 2016.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, the Ujungpangkah community must also be encouraged to become mangrove guardians amidst the increasingly complex pace of industrial waste in the city and district of Gresik. The role of the Ujungpangkah community in making Kyai both patrons and navigators in their lives must continue to be strengthened through the kyai's green fatwa formulations. The study in this research article only captures and qualitatively describes the construction of Nahdlatul

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<sup>62</sup> T. N. Khoshoo and M. S. John, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environment: Analysing Gandhian Environmental Thought* (Mithapur: The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), 2009).

<sup>63</sup> E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as If People Mattered*, Reprint edition (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Hawking, "This is the Most Dangerous Time for Our Planet," *The Guardian*, December 1, 2016, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/01/stephen-hawking-dangerous-time-planet-inequality>.

<sup>65</sup> Prasetyo, Santoso, and Prasetyo, "Kerusakan Ekosistem Mangrove di Kecamatan Ujung Pangkah Kabupaten Gresik Provinsi Jawa Timur [Degradation of Mangrove Ecosystem in Ujung Pangkah Subdistrict Gresik District East Java Province]."

Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai regarding the theology of mangrove conservation. However, in the future, as a recommendation, the government must collaborate with kyai, who are patronized by the community, to strengthen government policies in mangrove conservation, both at the micro level in Ujungpangkah and at the macro level in the national context.

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## **Conclusion**

In concluding this in-depth study, it becomes increasingly clear that the theology of preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation is not just an initiative but an obligation that flows from the social construction formed by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai. This concept opens the door wide to the role of religion as a transformational force in maintaining natural balance. In the context of the pace of industrialization in Ujungpangkah District, Gresik, the formation of perceptions and beliefs by religious leaders has opened people's insight into the importance of marine ecosystems in all aspects of life.

When we observe carefully how social construction is practiced by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai, new hope for the future appears. Mangrove forest conservation is not only a material consideration but is also increasingly developing as a spiritual value that is reflected in the wisdom of the universe given by the Creator. This initiative also provides an important example of how religion and the environment can collaborate in harmony, creating a moral foundation for facing ecological challenges.

Therefore, the theological urgency of preserving marine ecosystems through mangrove forest conservation initiated by Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Kyai in Ujungpangkah District, Gresik, not only embraces the material dimension, but also the spiritual dimension in human relations with nature. These two organizations have formed a strong foundation for future generations to continue efforts to protect and care for marine ecosystems for the sake of sustainability and justice for all living creatures on the earth we love.

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