

ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION BASED ON SACRED VALUES: AN INTERCULTURAL STUDY OF FOREST WAQF AND INDIGENOUS POPULATION

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi hubungan manusia-alam dalam etika lingkungan Islam melalui konsep wakaf hutan, membandingkannya dengan praktik pengelolaan hutan adat sebagai bentuk perlindungan ekologi berbasis sakral. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya deforestasi di Indonesia dan tren kebijakan berorientasi ekonomi yang mengabaikan nilai-nilai normatif dan spiritual. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini didasarkan pada tinjauan pustaka komprehensif terhadap sumber-sumber primer dari Al-Qur'an dan Hadits, serta sumber-sumber sekunder berupa jurnal, buku, dan laporan penelitian yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2020 dan 2025. Analisis dilakukan secara komparatif melalui identifikasi konsep kesakralan, klasifikasi tema-tema ekologi, perbandingan struktur pengelolaan, dan perumusan kerangka kesakralan sebagai mekanisme perlindungan. Validitas dipertahankan melalui triangulasi sumber hukum Islam, fikih klasik dan kontemporer, serta praktik sosial masyarakat adat. Temuan-temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa, terlepas dari perbedaan asal-usul kesakralan, kewenangan pengelolaan, dan bentuk sanksi, baik wakaf hutan maupun hutan adat mengakui nilai intrinsik hutan dan pentingnya pelestariannya. Kontribusi utama studi ini adalah merumuskan kerangka epistemologis kesakralan sebagai paradigma alternatif bagi perlindungan ekologi yang adil dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Adat; Nilai Sakral; Wakaf Hutan.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the construction of human-nature relations in Islamic environmental ethics through the concept of forest waqf, comparing it with customary forest management practices as a form of sacred-based ecological protection. The study is motivated by the increasing deforestation in Indonesia and the trend toward economically oriented policies that disregard normative and spiritual values. Using a qualitative method, the research is based on a comprehensive literature review of primary sources from the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as secondary sources in the form of journals, books, and research reports published between 2020 and 2025. The analysis was conducted comparatively through identifying the concept of sacredness, classifying ecological themes, comparing management structures, and formulating a sacredness framework as a protection mechanism. Validity was maintained through triangulating sources of Islamic law, classical and contemporary fiqh, and the social practices of indigenous peoples. The findings demonstrate that, despite their differences in the origin of sacredness, management authority, and forms of sanctions, both forest waqf and customary forests recognize the intrinsic value of forests and the necessity of their preservation. This study's main contribution is formulating an epistemological framework of sacredness as an alternative paradigm for equitable and sustainable ecological protection.

Keywords: Indigenous Forest; Sacred Values; Forest Waqf.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental damage, particularly deforestation, continues to threaten the sustainability of ecosystems and human life. In 2023, Indonesia lost approximately 1.18 million hectares of forest, the second-highest rate of tropical forest loss after Brazil and contributing to approximately 65% of total deforestation in tropical Asia. Government policies favoring investment interests are one of the main factors driving deforestation, resulting in forest management that emphasizes economic profits over ecological sustainability (Rahman et al., 2023).

This problem stems from the widespread granting of exploration permits to state-owned and private companies, particularly in the palm oil and mining sectors. These practices disregard the rights and access of local communities and involve commodity conversion, land distribution, allocation policies, and forest area conversion (Forest Watch Indonesia, 2020). These policies have often had a significant impact on deforestation, leading to ecological, social, economic, and cultural consequences. Legal-formal and economic approaches to conservation policy are often unable to foster collective awareness of the importance of protecting forests as an integral part of holistic, sacred life (Ansar et al., 2024). The reality of forest destruction and policy bias reveals a disconnect between forest management practices, which are often conflicted, and the normative values that should protect the environment and communities.

While academic studies have focused primarily on the legal and formal aspects of conservation, the dimensions of sacredness, the concept of forest waqf, and the ecological

wisdom of indigenous peoples have not received adequate attention as alternative bases for ecological protection. To date, research that systematically discusses and compares the sacred dimensions of forest waqf and customary forests remains limited.

To date, academic studies have focused more on the formal legal aspects of conservation. The dimensions of sacredness, the concept of forest waqf, and the ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples have not received adequate attention as alternative bases for ecological protection. Research that systematically discusses and compares the sacred dimensions of forest waqf and customary forests remains limited.

This study aims to enrich the epistemology of ecological protection by offering an alternative approach that emphasizes religious values and local wisdom. The two main approaches are the concept of forest waqf in Islamic tradition and the management of customary forests by indigenous communities. Both approaches are grounded in the principle of sacredness, viewing forests as spiritual spaces that must be respected and preserved, not merely as physical assets.

From an Islamic perspective, humans have a moral and ethical responsibility to manage nature wisely and sustainably as Allah's caliphs on earth. Meanwhile, indigenous peoples view forests as the center of their identity, culture, and life. (Jainuddin, 2023). Their conservation practices grow from sacred values passed down from generation to generation (Humaedi, 2014).

Based on this description, the main question raised by this study is how the concept of human relations with nature is

understood in Islamic environmental ethics through the practice of forest waqf, as well as in the ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples. The study also examines how these concepts are translated into concrete forest management practices. Additionally, the study examines how the ecological protection mechanisms established through forest waqf compare to indigenous forest management practices in maintaining the sustainability and sacredness of forests.

The study aims to demonstrate that traditional and religious value systems can provide the foundation for sustainable solutions that are not only technocratic but also grounded in the ethics of ecological justice and spiritual sustainability. Thus, this study attempts to fill the gap in scientific literature that lacks systematic analyses and comparisons of the sacred dimensions of forest waqf and indigenous forest management.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, with the primary data collection technique being a comprehensive review of existing literature. The authors meticulously collected and analyzed data from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources utilized in this study are drawn from the Quran and Hadith, while secondary sources of legal material are obtained from scientific journals across various disciplines, books, research reports, and other literature pertinent to the subject. This study utilizes a comparative approach to analyze the findings of forest waqf and forest management by indigenous peoples. The objective is to identify commonalities and differentiate between these two concepts.

To ensure data accuracy, the literature selection process was based on several criteria, including: The discussion must encompass the following criteria: The discourse must address forest endowments or customary forest management practices. The discourse must incorporate normative dimensions and sacred values concerning the relationship between humans and nature. The publication date must be between 2020 and 2025 to ensure its relevance as a reference. The discourse must originate from credible academic sources, such as accredited scientific journals, books, or institutional research reports.

The data analysis was conducted in four stages. Initially, the identification of fundamental concepts such as sacredness, environmental ethics, and ecological prohibitions is imperative. Secondly, the classification of concepts is based on themes such as the epistemology of sacredness, regulatory structures, forms of sanctions, and ecological objectives. Thirdly, an analysis is conducted to identify the similarities and differences between patterns from forest waqf and customary forests on each theme. Fourthly, the findings must be compiled into a framework that elucidates the mechanisms by which sacredness functions as an ecological protection mechanism.

Triangulation of sources, namely combining Islamic law sources, classical and contemporary fiqh, the social conditions of indigenous peoples, and related environmental research, serves as a guideline for maintaining validity. This study only uses credible scientific literature, and each finding is verified across sources to avoid bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous Peoples: Actualizing Sacred Values in Forest Protection

A substantial corpus of research and empirical evidence has emerged in recent decades, indicating that indigenous peoples and local communities residing in proximity to conservation areas, encompassing forests and watersheds, play a substantial role in preserving environmental sustainability and ecosystem balance. Indeed, it has been acknowledged that indigenous populations are the optimal guardians of global biodiversity. It has been determined that approximately 80% of the world's biodiversity is located within the boundaries of indigenous territories. These territories are subject to the stewardship of the indigenous communities that traditionally occupy them, guided by their unique systems of knowledge and practices (Rahmat, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, customary practices are regarded not only as cultural heritage but also as concrete ecological mechanisms. It is evident that traditional ceremonies, which are ubiquitous across various geographical regions, function as a means of social and ecological control over resource exploitation. This is exemplified by ceremonies that include harvest thanksgiving rituals or offerings to sea and mountain guards. These ceremonies play a pivotal role in preserving the natural cycle, regulating the utilization of forests and waters, and maintaining a harmonious balance between human needs and environmental sustainability (Minang, 2024).

Firstly, Local wisdom of *Sasi* in Maluku. Since time immemorial, there have been endeavors to safeguard the environment for

the inhabitants of Maluku. This is evidenced by one of the cultures of the Maluku people, which prohibits the taking of certain potential results or damaging the environment. The activity in question prohibits the taking of these potential results by the people of Maluku known as *Sasi*. *Sasi* is a tradition of the Maluku people that involves the maintenance of specific potential outcomes. In the event that *sasi* has been executed, the community is forbidden from harvesting certain fruits on land and procuring certain products from the sea for a designated period, as stipulated by the village authority. The role of *sasi* facilitates the continuous growth and development of natural resources. (Alvayedo & Erliyana, 2022).

The *tutup sasi* process ends with a prayer which is offered to the ancestors with the intention of safeguarding the area from theft and requesting blessings for the location of the *sasi*. The *sasi* is to be closed at the predetermined time. In the event that a community engages in a violation of the *sasi*, they must be prepared to receive the prescribed punishment (Maatoke et al., 2024). In the event of customs violations by individuals, the ruler of the country and the spirits of the ancestors are responsible for the enforcement of the customary laws. The most severe sanctions that are feared are those that are believed to be given by the spirits of ancestors. Therefore, people are very afraid of violating *sasi*. In the event that an individual violates *sasi* by taking crops or seafood during the designated closing period, the state government, under the authority of the king and the state apparatus, imposes severe penalties. These penalties include arrest, public display of the violator,

and physical punishment such as whipping, fines, forced labor, and social ostracization by the community. The punishment meted out by the spirits or ghosts of the ancestors is more severe (Judge & Nurizka, 2008).

In addition to the prohibition on taking at certain times, *sasi* is also carried out as a form of prohibition for forest exploitation carried out by national companies. This *sasi* is usually called "*sasi pohon*", the purpose is to protect the tree from the threat of exploitation and no more indiscriminate logging by the company. In addition, the purpose of *sasi pohon* is to protect the forest which is seen by the people of Maluku as *ina* (mother) who have given life to the people of Maluku. Therefore, forests are very protected from human surrender. The people of Maluku practice *sasi* as an effort to stop drilling activities from gas and oil companies. (Maatoke et al., 2024).

Secondly, Ammatoa Kajang Indigenous People (South Sulawesi). The Kajang tribe that inhabits the interior of Bulukumba Regency is known for its commitment to maintaining harmony with nature. They uphold ancestral teachings through a philosophy of life that is passed down from generation to generation. The essence of this principle is reflected in *Pasang ri Kajang*, which is a collection of teachings in the form of messages, advice, norms, and directions that guide people to live in harmony with the universe, fellow humans, and God. For them, forests are not just green spaces, but a source of life that determines ecological balance. Destroying forests means destroying the future for up to seven generations (Dassir, 2008). The Kajang tribe manages customary forests through the division of zones that each have different

functions and rules: *Borong Karamaka* (Sacred Forest), *Borong Batasayya* (Border Forest), and *Borong Luara* (People's Forest).

This division reflects a management system based on conservation and communal justice. The Kajang people's belief system, in particular, is characterized by an intricate relationship with the forest. According to their beliefs, the forest's foliage serves as a medium for requesting precipitation, while its roots are believed to act as springs. Ammatoa, a spiritual leader who is believed to be the first human created by Tu'rie A'rana (the Creator), also known as Boheta, has emphasized the importance of the forest as the lungs of the world. The forest is likened to a sheath for the earth, suggesting that if humans wear cloth as clothing, then the earth is "clothed" with the forest. Forests are regarded as sacred and must be preserved in their natural state due to their cultural and spiritual significance (Arumningtyas et al., 2023).

One of the main traditions that is routinely carried out is *the Andingingi ritual*, which is carried out one day and a night in the sacred forest. This ritual serves to "cool" the earth, maintain ecological balance, and ask for safety for all living things. As part of a spiritual and symbolic process, this ritual conveys sacred messages from Ammatoa to indigenous peoples to adhere to the four main prohibitions in safeguarding customary forests. The prohibitions are: *Tunu Bani* (Burning Bees), *Tabbang Kaju* (Cutting Down Trees), *Natta Uhe* (Cutting Rattan), and *Rao Doang* (Catching Shrimp).

The Ammatoa indigenous people in Tana Toa Kajang adhere to the belief that transgressions of these regulations will incur the wrath of their ancestors' spirits. The

curse manifests in two distinct ways. Firstly, it can take the form of a disease that afflicts the perpetrator. Secondly, it can result in a cessation of the flow of water around the customary territory. This conviction is exemplified by the following pair of lines: "*Naparanakkang juku Napaloliko raung kaju Nahambangiko allo Nabatuiko Ere Bosi Napalolorang Ere Tua Nakajariang*"

This teaching contains a profound message that forest conservation is not just a customary rule, but a form of respect for nature and ancestors. The article of the other Pasang which is an recommendation for forest maintenance and the prohibition of destroying it reads:

"Anjo boronga anre nakkulle nipanraki. Punna nipanraki boronga, nupanraki kalennu"

Meaning: The forest must not be destroyed, if you destroy it, then you are also destroying yourself (Ichwan et al., 2021).

The Kajang people's interpretation of forests as living entities is rooted in the belief that their maintenance is essential for ensuring blessings, while the destruction of these forests is believed to result in adverse consequences that will impact future generations. According to the regulations observed among the Ammatoa indigenous people, the consequences of the suspension are set forth in the form of a material fine for a serious violation of Rp12,000,000 (12 reals) and a less substantial fine of Rp6,000,000. In addition to the material fine, the indigenous people of Ammatoa Kajang also implement other forms of sanctions in the form of customary punishment. This form of punishment exerts a profound influence on the preservation of forests, as it is characterized by social sanctions. In the Ammatoa community, social sanctions such

as exclusion are considered more severe than monetary fines because they impact aspects of social relations and honor in society. Of particular concern is the social stigma associated with this phenomenon, which not only affects immediate perpetrators but also extends to their extended family members and subsequent generations. This long-term effect engenders a profound sense of caution among indigenous communities in their interactions with nature. These sanctions are part of a customary value system called Poko' Ba' Bala', which is a customary law that symbolizes spiritual and social consequences for violators of environmental governance (Hildayanti & Machrizzandi, 2022).

Indigenous communities, such as those practicing the sasi tradition in Maluku and the Ammatoa Kajang community, regard forests not solely in ecological terms but also in spiritual terms. The community's belief system, which encompasses the existence of ancestors, guardian spirits, and the principle of cosmic solidarity, establishes the forest as a region of paramount importance, requiring protection from any actions that might result in the destruction of natural ecosystems. The concept of sacredness serves as a normative foundation, binding the behavior of the local community.

Both communities impose a variety of sanctions for violations of existing regulations related to customary forests. The application of conventional sanctions, manifesting in the form of financial penalties, is often accompanied by the implementation of social sanctions, such as ostracism. This phenomenon has the

capacity to exert a profound influence on social relationships, extending its repercussions to extended family units and subsequent generations. However, the most significant deterrent appears to be the belief in spiritual sanctions, which entails the conviction that transgressing against a spiritual norm will result in prolonged illness, a curse that will befall the family and even the community. This conviction has been found to exceed the fear of legal consequences.

Transforming Sacred Values into the Legal Realm: The Potential of Waqf as Forest Protection

In the Qur'an, it is recorded that Allah affirms that humans were created in the most perfect form ('ahsāna taqwīma'), as stated in Surah At-Tīn, verse 4. This perfection is primarily manifested through the faculty of reason, which is unique to humans and sets them apart from other creatures. Reason is the primary instrument that guides humans towards benefit, but it can also lead them to harm. Therefore, it plays a definitive role in determining the quality of human actions. The human race has been endowed with the capacity for reason, and thus bestowed with the responsibility of khalīfah, or stewardship, over Earth. This entails the ability to discern between good and evil, benefit and harm, and to uphold the order established by Allah's creation. It is evident that the purpose of Sharia in bestowing reason upon humans is not merely to establish them as the most superior of Allah's creations; it is also to emphasise their significant responsibility as stewards and guardians of the Earth.

The religious mandate of the Khalifah, as ordained by Allah, encompasses three relational dimensions: The following is the correct usage of the phrase in question: 'ḥablun min Allāh', 'ḥablun min an-nās', and 'ḥablun min al-'ālam'. These three dimensions are essentially combined into two major roles. Firstly, the human is defined as a servant who worships and submits completely to Allah. Secondly, it is the responsibility of humankind to fulfil the mandate of caliphate on earth y means of endeavours to prosper, provide welfare and maintain the sustainability of social and ecological life. Consequently, the natural environment is regarded as a facility and a trust that must be managed wisely. The relationship between humans and nature is not exploitative, but rather a form of actualising the ethical responsibility of a caliph. In Surah al-Baqarah verse 30, the concept of Khalifah is discussed, emphasising its status as a divine mandate transmitted across generations. The verse states that the responsibility of the Khalifah is to uphold justice and truth, including the protection and preservation of nature as part of God's creation (Saputra & Maharani, 2023).

The sacred and spiritual values that are recognised as being inherent in nature should, it is argued, form the basis of human responsibility in carrying out the mandate of stewardship. However, the current ecological reality suggests otherwise: humans are the primary agents of environmental destruction. The issue of massive deforestation is not purely a result of human economic needs; rather, it is primarily a consequence of institutionalised greed, as evidenced by government policies that prioritise investment over ecological

sustainability. The present study explores the implications of a forest management approach that prioritises short-term economic gains, a practice which has been shown to disregard the fundamental principle of sustainability in natural resource management (Agung et al., 2023). Indeed, Article 28H Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia formally acknowledges the right of all individuals to a good and healthy environment. Consequently, the state is constitutionally obligated to ensure the realisation of this right through the implementation of sustainable natural resource management and the enforcement of environmental legislation. Consequently, the state, as the highest authority, should formulate policies and programs that favour ecological protection, rather than accelerating the rate of destruction.

From an Islamic perspective, deforestation and various forms of environmental degradation caused by human activities are considered clear evidence of violations of the environmental mandate entrusted by Allah to humankind. The previously mentioned damage is indicative of actions that are not in accordance with Divine will. The responsibility of khalifah obliges humans to protect, preserve, and manage the earth in accordance with the principles established by Allah. The fundamental premise that humans wield absolute authority over the universe is demonstrably false. It is an established fact that all authority originates from Almighty God, and humans are entrusted with the management of that authority. Consequently, when human beings act in a destructive manner towards their

environment, they are effectively exercising their authority in an arbitrary manner and exceeding the limits of authority established by God (Amin, 2018).

The verse in Surah Al-Anam: 165 clearly demonstrates that humans not only have the right to utilise nature, but also bear ethical responsibility for all of Allah's creations. At this point, reason becomes the principal instrument that Allah has entrusted to humanity for the purpose of decision-making: whether humans will pursue their desires, leading to destructive actions, or whether they will subdue these desires in order to foster the prosperity of the earth in accordance with the mandate of khalifah. The guidance provided by Allah in the Qur'an is very clear; on the one hand, humans are reminded that all of Allah's creation was created in balance and order (QS. Al-A'raf: 31), and on the other hand, they are prohibited from overexploiting natural resources (QS. Al-Muddatsir: 31). Accordingly, the Islamic perspective establishes humankind as environmental stewards, entrusted with the moral responsibility to implement the principles of sustainability, preserve resources, and manage waste in a manner that is both wise and responsible (Jainuddin, 2023).

In the context of the utilisation of natural resources without ecological destruction, the concept of waqf manifests as a concrete expression of human responsibility as caliphs on earth. The WAQF, therefore, aims to encourage humans to manage wealth in a prudent manner, whilst also promoting the sustainable utilisation of the assets in question and ensuring the equitable allocation of resources.

Etymologically, the term is التسييل، synonymous with the expression 'to hold back (Zuhaili, 2007). The majority of fuqaha interpret the word 'waqf' as used in the hadith with the following meaning (Azzam, 1998). An alternative interpretation of the term 'waqf' is provided by the fuqaha, who define it as follows (Hammad, 1995):

تحبيس الأصل وبسبيل المنفعة

The process of maintaining the origin and distributing the benefits is of the utmost importance. According to the above definition, the fundamental nature of waqf is not limited to the legal act of holding assets; rather, it also serves as a mechanism for the sustainable distribution of benefits, in accordance with Islamic ecological ethics. This ethical framework prioritizes the preservation of God's creation without causing harm, while ensuring the continuity and prosperity of life.

In the context of environmental concerns, forest waqf emerges as the most salient manifestation of productive waqf. The program's objective is the conservation of forest areas situated on Waqf land, with a primary emphasis on ensuring long-term ecological sustainability. The permanent protection of the forest's ecological function is ensured by the prohibition of the transfer, sale, or inheritance of WAQF land, as stipulated by Sharia provisions. This mechanism underscores the multifaceted benefits of waqf forests, which encompass both sustainable economic value for local communities and substantial ecological contributions. These ecological contributions include water conservation, biodiversity protection, and the prevention of

environmental damage and disasters (Saifuddin & Aghsari, 2022).

Legally, the development of waqf forests is firmly embedded within the framework of national waqf regulations. This practice aligns with the fundamental tenets of waqf in Islam, which underscore the principles of sustainability (istimrariyyah) and public benefit (maslahah 'ammah). The Indonesian Waqf Board (BWI) asserts that waqf forests fall under the category of public welfare waqf, as stipulated in Article 22 of Law Number 41 of 2004 concerning Waqf, because their orientation is environmental and ecosystem preservation. Furthermore, Article 16 of the aforementioned legislation stipulates that immovable assets eligible for donation as waqf encompass land, along with associated flora and all elements directly related to it. Consequently, waqf forests legally encompass land areas and all vegetation on these lands, thereby ensuring that ecological protection is not only ethical but also receives structural support within the Indonesian legal system (Sup, 2021).

The forest wakf movement in Indonesia emerged as a response to the escalating environmental degradation that was a matter of profound concern. Aceh has been a pioneering region since 2012, when environmental activists purchased critical land in Jantho to be used as a protected forest in response to repeated flooding and landslides. In Bogor, a similar concept emerged in 2018 following the publication of an article on Waqf Forests, which prompted a waqf to donate land in Cibunian Village. The Bogor Waqf Forest Community was established in 2019 under the Yassiru Foundation, with the same orientation: to

prevent ecological disasters while restoring damaged areas (Syamila et al., 2021).

Despite its initial focus on nature conservation, the practice of forest waqf has actually yielded widespread benefits. In Aceh, the implementation of crowdfunding has transformed the waqf into a charitable institution that provides benefits to the inhabitants of Jantho and users of environmental services within the Krueng Aceh watershed. In the city of Bogor, the management of waqf properties has undergone significant development, characterized by the expansion of land holdings, the utilization of superior seedlings for reforestation initiatives, and the establishment of designated ecotourism areas. These activities have been shown to generate economic opportunities for local communities, ranging from vegetable and fish farming to Waqf Forest Coffee products. The Al- Qur'an education and environmental conservation programs—including the Sekolah Rimbawan Kecil, in collaboration with the Faculty of Forestry at IPB—strengthen the social and educational dimensions of this initiative (Bogor, 2022).

The aforementioned benefits illustrate that forest waqf fulfills its fundamental purpose, which is to preserve its origin and distribute its benefits. The primary objective of conservation remains paramount; however, it is achieved without compromising ecological functionality, thereby ensuring the provision of socio-economic benefits. The implementation of sustainable reforestation programs has been demonstrated to contribute to the maintenance of environmental quality. Concurrently, the utilization of the area for tourism and educational purposes has been

shown to enhance community welfare, thereby avoiding the detrimental consequences of destructive exploitation. Therefore, forest waqf has the capacity to address the often-competing imperatives of development and conservation, a feat that is frequently challenging to attain through a solely regulatory framework (Septiadi, 2025).

A comprehensive review of extant research findings reveals a striking similarity between the concept of forest waqf in Islamic tradition and the perspectives held by indigenous peoples concerning customary forests. This similarity is particularly evident in the shared conception of ecological protection as a sacred undertaking. The management approach of both systems is predicated on the aforementioned sacred values, with an emphasis on economic aspects as well as the principles of sustainability and environmental preservation. The principle of waqf, a form of Islamic worship, has evolved into a productive and socially oriented management mechanism. Its implementation supports multidimensional sustainable development. In this context, forest waqf can be regarded as a pioneering initiative in environmental conservation with a long-term ecological orientation (Purnama, 2020). Concurrently, the indigenous knowledge system provides a framework for the sustainable utilization of customary forests, guided by a legal framework that incorporates customary practices and sets stringent boundaries and regulations for natural resource management (Purba, 2023).

Although rooted in different foundations-waqf is based on Islamic law principles, while adat is based on local wisdom-both converge in socio-economic

dimensions and sustainability orientation. Forest waqf practices have developed as productive instruments that serve to support education, strengthen community economies, and promote long-term environmental conservation. On the other hand, the customary system upholds sustainability through collective regulation and respect for the living space inherited from ancestors. Thus, both waqf and adat give rise to patterns of resource utilization that are oriented towards economic efficiency while maintaining ecological integrity.

It is at this point that the relationship between humans and nature in Islam becomes clear. The practice of forest waqf reflects the understanding that humans are caliphs tasked with caring for God's creation. The parallelism between humans and nature as creatures of God demands harmony, not domination. This principle is in line with the idea of deep ecology, which emphasizes ecosystem balance. Thus, forest waqf becomes a concrete manifestation of religious teachings in safeguarding the ecological mandate, while also affirming that commitment to nature conservation is part of human servitude and moral responsibility (Firas et al., 2024).

Comparative Analysis of Customary Forests and Forest Waqf

The Waqf and forest management systems in indigenous communities are two approaches that originate from different foundational beliefs. The Waqf is an institution with its foundation in Islamic teachings, which are derived from revelation. This principle establishes the responsibility for property entrusted for the public good. In

this instance, the legitimacy of waqf is of a normative theological nature, with a formal legal basis in Islam (Hadi, 2023). Conversely, forest management by indigenous communities is predicated on local beliefs that are transmitted intergenerationally, often articulated through mythological narratives and spiritual relationships with ancestral spirits or guardians of nature (Manuaba et al., 2012).

Despite their epistemological distinctions, both sources offer ethical guidance that emphasizes the importance of environmental respect and responsibility. This is an offer in the mechanism of environmental preservation that contains a worldview that affects how humans position themselves towards nature. A close examination of these diverse sources reveals a growing consensus regarding the concept of sacred ethics towards nature. In accordance with the principles of waqf and customary practices, nature is not regarded exclusively as an economic entity; rather, it is perceived as an entity that possesses intrinsic and sacred value. According to Islamic belief, humanity is regarded as a caliph, entrusted with the responsibility of preserving the equilibrium of God's creation. This perception engenders an obligation to manage land in accordance with the mandate of the giver, thereby prohibiting the transfer, sale, or inheritance of land (Saifuddin & Aghsari, 2022). In the traditional view, humankind coexists with nature in an inviolable cosmic order. This perception engenders norms of prohibition (pamali) and rituals that serve to reinforce ecological boundaries (Maridi, 2015). Consequently, the relationship between humanity and nature in these two traditions is similarly

constrained by transcendental consciousness, despite the divergent origins of belief. This sacredness constitutes the ethical foundation for rejecting excessive exploitation and cultivating a harmonious relationship with the environment.

The sacred values and ethics inherent in the waqf system have the potential to encourage the formation of a sustainable forest management model, not only from an ecological perspective, but also from a social and economic perspective. In numerous instances of productive waqf practices, waqf forests are utilized as a medium for Islamic ecology-based education targeting the younger generation and Islamic boarding school students, as part of the responsibility to nurture the community. Furthermore, this management model has the potential to generate local employment opportunities through activities such as planting, conservation, and sharia-based ecotourism initiatives that engage the surrounding community. The concept of usefulness (*manfa'ah*) attributed to waqf property is intrinsically linked to the objective of collective and long-term empowerment of the ummah, in accordance with the established principles (Darojat & Harrieti, 2025). This suggests that sacred values function not only as constraints on exploitation, but also as a source of revitalization, able to transform barren land into a space that fosters social benefit.

Concurrently, in the context of forest management by indigenous communities, the preservation of sacred values is found to exert a tangible influence on the sustainability of community life. Although not yet as formalized as waqf in the institutional system, indigenous peoples

have long practiced a value-based form of empowerment. In this system, forest products are managed collectively to support the needs of food, medicine, and cultural activities that strengthen local identity (Gunawan et al., 1998). These practices show that sacred values are not only a tool of preservation, but also a social resource to survive amid modern economic pressures.

Regarding the matter of actors, indigenous peoples rely on leadership through traditional elders. As indicated by Sahrizal, traditional institutions are vested with the authority to manage and resolve issues that arise within the scope of customary forests (Pajeri et al., 2025). In contrast, waqf grants authority to the nazir with the legitimacy of state law. The nazir is entrusted with the management and development of waqf property. The nazir is obligated to uphold the values of trust, accountability, transparency, and creativity (Nur & Irfany, 2024). Despite the distinct natures of authority in these two cases, both instances involve the exercise of moral leadership.

With respect to the administration of customary forests and forest waqf, there is a divergence in the legal systems to which they are subject. The customary system is transmitted from one generation to the next and is firmly entrenched in society due to its profound social and spiritual ramifications. In contrast, forest waqf is governed by a distinct set of legal frameworks, including Law No. 41 of 2004 on Waqf (Syawal & Handayani, 2021). Despite the divergent regulatory frameworks that govern their management, both impose obligations and restrictions on their management.

The variety of legal systems in existence gives rise to a corresponding array of sanctions. In the event of a transgression against customary provisions, the sanctions imposed may take the form of social and spiritual sanctions. These sanctions may include curses from ancestors, ostracism, and loss of honor. It is important to note that these sanctions affect not only the individual

but also their extended family. This phenomenon has been demonstrated to possess a more pronounced deterrent effect in comparison to that of state-imposed sanctions. Conversely, individuals who misuse waqf may face criminal sanctions and administrative sanctions, including criminal penalties and fines (Amriah, 2023).

The subsequent comparative table delineates the salient differences between customary forests and waqf forests:

Aspect	Customary Forest	Waqf Forest
Source of sacredness	Sacredness based on spiritual relationships with ancestors	Sacredness based on wahyu, upholding the principle of caliphate
Manager	Managed by the community led by the head of the customary institution	Managed by the nazir, the waqf institution
Law structure	Based on customary laws that have been passed down from generation to generation and are not always documented	Based on positive law such as Law No. 41 of 2004 concerning Waqf, the written regulations of the Indonesian Waqf Board
Sanction	Customary, social, and spiritual sanctions that have a deterrent effect, in the form of ancestral curses, fines, and exclusion from society	Criminal and administrative sanctions
Ecological orientation	Maintaining natural regeneration	The welfare of the people (kemaslahatan umat), socio-economic sustainability

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that, despite their different sources of sacredness—Islamic revelation and Sharia law versus ancestral beliefs—both forest waqf in Islamic tradition and customary forest management, such as Sasi in Maluku and Ammatoa Kajang, have similar objectives. Both view forests as entities with intrinsic value that must be protected. The differences lie in the origin of sacredness, the managing parties, the legal system, forms of sanctions, and ecological orientation. However, the fundamental

similarity is the view that forests are sacred spaces whose preservation must be ensured, not merely economic commodities.

These findings theoretically confirm that sacredness can serve as an epistemological basis in environmental ethics and offer an alternative to the dominant legalistic-economic approach. Sacredness fosters a transcendental awareness that curbs excessive exploitation and recognizes humans as part of the ecosystem, not its sole rulers.

In practice, forest waqf and customary forest management demonstrate that

spiritual values can encourage sustainable ecological conservation while strengthening community economies, ecological education, and social stability through moral leadership and the effective application of sanctions.

REKOMENDATION

Based on these results, this study makes three recommendations: First, sacred values should be incorporated into national forestry policy to complement the technocratic approach. Second, the institutions of Nazir and customary institutions should be strengthened to improve accountability and conservation effectiveness. Finally, empirical research based on field case studies should be expanded to test the application of sacredness-based ecological protection models in other regions.

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