



## The *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance: Interweaving *Ihsān* and Indigenous Wisdom Against Extractive Development

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### Abstract

Environmental degradation in Kalimantan is not only an ecological crisis but also a challenge to the ethical foundations of local communities. This study aims to explore how the Muslim community in *Tumbang Batu* integrates local Dayak-Malay wisdom with the Islamic ethic of *ihsān* in formulating resistance to the expansion of the palm oil industry. Using a qualitative approach and social construction theory, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of community practices. The results reveal that forest preservation in *Tumbang Batu* is understood as "Ecological Marwah"—a sacred obligation that combines collective ancestral memory with a transcendental mandate. Key findings indicate the emergence of The *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance, where the value of *ihsān* acts as a kinetic moral compass that encourages excellence and compassion for all creation. This phenomenon is also strengthened by the digital agency of youth through the concept of Sacred Environmental Cartography, which synergizes GPS mapping with sacred customary zones. This study concludes that the integration of vernacular theology and local epistemic sovereignty is key to the sustainability of a resilient ecosystem. This study makes a theoretical contribution to the global Eco-Islam discourse by offering a new paradigm in environmental policy based on hybrid identities and grassroots spirituality.

### Keywords:

Eco-Theology, *ihsān*, Local Wisdom, Environmental Resistance, Identity Hybridity, Dayak-Malay.

## INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis has triggered a paradigm shift in environmental ethics (Aksir et al., 2025; Beckford, 2018; Ócsai, 2020), where technocratic approaches are beginning to be deemed inadequate without a solid moral-spiritual foundation. In the Muslim world, discourse on eco-Islam has grown rapidly in response to massive ecosystem degradation (Abdelzaher et al., 2019; M. Ali & Agushi, 2024; Quddus, 2020). Previous research has laid the foundations of

Islamic environmental ethics through the principles of *Mizan* (balance) and *Khalifah* (guardianship) (Asshidiqi & Sholihah, 2024; Hanif, 2024; Hussain, 2024; Kurbiyanto et al., 2024). However, most of these studies are still theocentric and normative, which are often distant from the sociological realities at the grassroots level, especially in Muslim communities living in the epicenter of extractive industries such as Kalimantan.

In the Malay region, the dialectic between religion and the environment has been extensively explored through the lens of local

wisdom (Effendi et al., 2020; Erwin, 2025; Nggiku et al., 2024). Studies in Malaysia, for example, highlight the role of religious institutions and fatwas (religious edicts) in conservation (Budiono et al., 2026; Ramlan, 2019; Sobian, 2012), while research in Sumatra often emphasizes the role of Islamic customary law in maintaining forest ecosystems (Mansur & Hann, 2026; Ridwan, 2025; Rudy et al., 2021). Although Indonesia has extensive environmental regulations, their implementation on the ground often clashes with major economic interests. The phenomenon of forest destruction in Kalimantan due to the expansion of oil palm plantations is not only an environmental crisis but also a challenge to the ethical foundations that guide communities' relationships with their ancestral lands.

A significant academic research gap is evident in the lack of attention to how personal spiritual values transform into collective resistance movements. While the concept of the Caliphate is often misunderstood as a mandate to control nature, and *Mizan* is understood as maintaining technical balance, this research proposes that the concept of *Ihsan* offers a deeper "spiritual aesthetic" perspective. *Ihsan* in this context goes beyond normative obligations; it represents an inner awareness that actions toward nature are a reflection of God's presence (Hanif, 2024; Russell, 2019). In *Tumbang Batu* Village, this value of *ihsan* serves as the community's guiding principle in defending the forest ecosystem from the threat of deforestation.

Sociologically, *Tumbang Batu* presents a unique case in which local Dayak traditions and Islamic values do not exist as separate entities but rather merge in an eco-theological synergy. Unlike case studies in Java, which often highlight structural movements through institutional fatwas, the resistance in *Tumbang Batu* is organic. The community

here defines sustainability not through global sustainable development jargon, but through collective ancestral memory validated by Islamic spiritual values. The community's resistance to the entry of palm oil companies into their territory is understood as a moral position guided by the principle of *ihsan*, which encourages excellence and compassion in human actions toward all creation.

The novelty of this research lies in the conceptualization of "Ecological *Ihsan*" as a new model for community-based environmental governance. While previous studies by scholars such as (Kirin & Kariman, 2026) and (Rahayu et al., 2025), emphasized formal governance, this research demonstrates that the most effective resistance stems from a deep spirituality fused with local wisdom. This research argues that the synergy between eco-theology, local traditions, and governance in *Tumbang Batu* creates a sustainable ecosystem because it is driven by love for the Creator, not simply fear of legal sanctions or physical damage.

This study aims to analyze how the Muslim community in *Tumbang Batu* utilizes local wisdom and the Islamic ethic of *ihsan* to engage in environmentally conscious practices. Furthermore, this research seeks to examine the hybridity of identities and the dialectic between vernacular theology and indigenous knowledge in responding to pressures from the extractive industry. By mapping this unique synergy, this study not only documents local practices, but also aims to offer a new theoretical model "The *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance" which is expected to make a significant contribution to the global Eco-Islam discourse and provide a new perspective for policymakers in formulating environmental governance based on the epistemic sovereignty of indigenous peoples.

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## **METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

This study applies a qualitative design with a naturalistic inquiry approach from Miles et al. (2014) to explore the eco-theological phenomenon in the sociocultural context of the *Tumbang Batu* community in depth. This design was chosen based on the need to capture the complex and dynamic reality of how spiritual values are internalized into environmental resistance movements amidst pressures from extractive industries. Using social construction theory as an analytical framework, this study focuses on how ecological responsibility is shaped through the dialectic between religious beliefs and ancestral knowledge. This approach allows researchers to understand the "lived meaning" of the community, where the forest is viewed as a sacred trust closely linked to their moral identity.

### ***Participants***

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling to ensure rich and representative data from various stakeholders in *Tumbang Batu*. Fifteen key informants were selected based on their active involvement in environmental conservation efforts and a deep understanding of local traditions. The composition of participants includes three traditional leaders as guardians of collective memory, three religious figures with theological authority, five village youth representatives as digital mapping agents, two female leaders who play a role in transmitting domestic values, and two village government officials. This diversified sample aimed to achieve data sovereignty and information validity through a cross-generational perspective.

### ***Data Collection***

The data collection process was conducted through several comprehensive research techniques to ensure depth of information. The primary research instrument was in-depth interviews with key community figures, such as traditional elders, religious teachers, youth leaders, and village heads. These informants were selected because of their crucial role in opposing the expansion of the palm oil industry, thus providing direct insight into the influence of spiritual and cultural frameworks on the formation of collective ecological consciousness. In addition to in-depth interviews, data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, direct observation of environmental rituals, and documentation of communal practices focused on forest conservation. To strengthen the analysis, additional information was also obtained through a literature review discussing Islamic environmental ethics, the ecological philosophy of indigenous communities, and a legal review of the concept of 'urf in relation to ecosystem protection.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously, following Miles et al. (2014). qualitative analysis model. The first stage involved data reduction, where raw information was distilled into key themes such as "Ecological Ihsan" and "Indigenous-Islamic Hybridity." Next, data display was performed to map the relationships between themes into a systematic conceptual model (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). The final stage was verification and conclusion drawing, where researchers compared findings with global literature to ensure scientific rigor. This entire process aimed to generate strong theoretical propositions regarding how eco-theological synergy can create a resilient

sustainability model in the face of the global environmental crisis.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### ***The Aesthetics of Resistance: Ihsān as a Kinetic Moral Compass in the Tumbang Batu Environmental Struggle***

Fieldwork in *Tumbang Batu* reveals a deep, collective commitment to environmental conservation, particularly in the face of oil palm plantation expansion (Herlina & Wahyuni, 2022). Community resistance to ecological degradation stems not solely from political motivations or economic considerations (Subakir et al., 2024). Rather, it emerges from an ethical and spiritual imperative rooted in ancestral values and Islamic beliefs (Herzog & Beadle, 2018). Community members from various generations, including elders, youth, religious teachers, and women leaders, emphasize that protecting the forest is not only an inherited responsibility but also a divine obligation. Records of community meetings further demonstrate official decisions denying companies access to local lands, motivated by theological beliefs and cultural norms (Oniki et al., 2020).

Although initial research expected Islamic ethics to contribute to community environmental awareness, what emerged was more profound (Dendi Yuda et al., 2023). The value of *ihsān* has become so ingrained in everyday life that it is no longer considered an abstract teaching but rather an internalized and guiding ethic (Mohamad Sodikin et al., 2021). Although the term *ihsān* is rarely mentioned directly, its essence, doing good with integrity, humility, and moral excellence is clearly reflected in everyday language and behavior (Owens et al., 2019). One respondent shared:

*“The forest is more than just trees. It carries the soul of our village. Destroying it*

*is like turning your back on your ancestors and disobeying God’s will (R1).”*

This sentiment was confirmed through observations of local rituals, where communal prayers and traditional permission are sought before engaging in activities such as collecting forest products or clearing land (Pratimaratri & Prayassita SR, 2018).

The data demonstrate a significant trend: the internalization of ecotheological principles into a lived ethical framework (Mansur Hidayat, 2023). Nature, in the eyes of the villagers of *Tumbang Batu*, is not a resource to be managed from afar, but a sacred trust closely tied to their moral identity (Martel et al., 2021). In this context, *ihsān* serves as a moral compass that guides behavior toward compassion, stewardship, and integrity (Krettenauer et al., 2022). It functions not as an external legal requirement, but as a deeply felt responsibility, giving spiritual depth to their environmental commitments (Jufrizen et al., 2019). This shapes decisions about land, community governance, and moral responsibility with a sense of sacred obligation and ethical clarity (Elsayed, K., Lestari, A., Brougham, 2023).

The *Tumbang Batu* community demonstrates that environmental conservation is not simply a response to a biophysical crisis, but rather a manifestation of deep theological convictions. The primary strength of this resistance lies in the hybrid identity between Islamic values and local Dayak-Malay traditions. Sociologically, this identity creates a meeting point between the concept of *Ihsan* (awareness of God's presence) and local wisdom such as *Belom Bahadat* (customary living). This dialectic ensures that preserving nature is not merely seen as an ecological obligation, but as a hybrid form of transcendental piety. From an etymological-sociological perspective, this unification forms what is known as

"Ecological Marwah." In *Tumbang Batu*, Islam provides religious legitimacy for the protection of customary land without erasing Dayak/Malay identity. Local terms such as Huma Betang (large communal house) are reinterpreted through an Islamic lens as an inclusive space where all of God's creation should receive protection and compassion (*Rahmah*). This is what fortifies the community against the temptations of the economic pragmatism of the extractive industry.

These findings align with recent scholarly work, such as (Mohamad Sodikin et al., 2021), which links the value of *ihsan* to achievement-oriented leadership in Central Java, and (Solihin et al., 2020), which documents similar ethical patterns in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). However, the context of *Tumbang Batu* offers a different novelty; the values of *ihsan* here emerge organically from the community's own cultural and religious traditions, rather than within a formal institutional environment (Tahara, 2023). This reinforces social construction theory Berger & Luckmann (1966), which describes how religious understanding is shaped through social interaction and living memory (Wibisono & Darmalaksana, 2022). This study illustrates that environmental resistance in *Tumbang Batu* is not a reactive attitude but a proactive expression of faith and ethical awareness that integrates theology and cultural memory.

The broader implications of this research are significant for the future of customary lands in Kalimantan (Satyawan et al., 2022). The model offered by *Tumbang Batu* demonstrates that environmental management can be rooted in local spiritual and cultural frameworks (McMillen et al., 2020), rather than relying solely on external legal mechanisms (Morozova, 2022). The integration of *ihsan* and customary law offers a promising model for faith-based

environmental education and community policy (Rwa Jayantiari et al., 2024). This example also demonstrates the potential for the emergence of a spiritually driven ecological movement in Muslim-majority regions, raising a crucial question: How will formal religious authorities recognize indigenous approaches as legitimate interpretations of Islamic environmental ethics in the future?.

Theoretically, these findings confirm that *ihsan* no longer operates as a passive theological doctrine, but rather has transformed into a "kinetic moral compass" that drives the resistance of the *Tumbang Batu* community. Thus, this syncretism between Islamic ethics and local wisdom creates a new paradigm in environmental sociology, where the sustainability of nature depends not only on state regulation but also on the depth of hybrid spiritual internalization.

### ***The "Marwah" of the Land: Epistemic Hybridity between Dayak-Malay Adat and Islamic Eco-Theology***

Empirical findings from *Tumbang Batu* illustrate that environmental management in the village is embedded in a deeply rooted sociocultural system, where customary practices and Islamic moral teachings harmoniously intersect. This integration is evident in local rituals; community members routinely perform traditional ceremonies and Islamic prayers before entering the forest or collecting natural resources (Kartika et al., 2024). During sacred land-clearing rituals, participants have been observed seeking permission from the ancestral presence while simultaneously invoking the name of God (Prakash Kala, 2017). These actions reflect a dual epistemology, where indigenous and Islamic worldviews are not isolated but rather inform cohesive moral practices (T. Ali et al., 2022).

One of the most striking revelations from this fieldwork was the profound ontological fusion between these knowledge systems (Thoha et al., 2025). Rather than treating adat and shari'a as parallel but separate domains, villagers viewed them as mutually reinforcing guides for ethical living (Nisa & Surtikanti, 2024). Respondent 2 (R2) stated:

*“Before Islam came, our ancestors taught that the forest was home to ancestral spirits. When we learned about Islam, we realized the message was the same—Islam commands us not to harm the earth. That is why we now protect the forest as both a tradition and a divine responsibility.”*

This view is reinforced by Respondent 3 (R3):

*“Tradition teaches us to respect sacred trees, while Islam teaches compassion for all creation. Both guide our way of life.”*

Sociologically, the dialectic between Muslim identity and local Dayak/Malay identity in *Tumbang Batu* creates a powerful hybridity in resisting land exploitation. This fusion creates a concept of “Ecological Dignity” (or Ecological *Marwah*), wherein Islam does not diminish local identities but instead provides religious legitimacy for the protection of customary lands. An etymological analysis of local terms such as *Huma Betang* (large communal house) reveals a reinterpretation through an Islamic perspective as an inclusive space of *Rahmah* (compassion) for all of God's creation. This synergy ensures that resistance to oil palm is not simply a political statement, but rather a deeply rooted spiritual and cultural belief that fortifies the community against the temptations of extractive companies' economic pragmatism.

The *Tumbang Batu* model of resistance makes a significant contribution to the global discourse of “Eco-Islam.” This contrasts with

Muslim communities in the Middle East, which often rely on state policies or reforestation movements in West Africa driven by charismatic figures, *Tumbang Batu* offers the *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance. This model is organic and grassroots, where environmental ethics are not mediated by institutional doctrine but are nurtured through daily practices in communal forests. This hybrid model has the potential to be replicated in various Muslim communities in Africa or the Middle East facing similar climate crises, by integrating local collective memory with the ethics of *Ihsan* as a key pillar of conservation.

This framework aligns with the theory of epistemic intersectionality, which posits that diverse knowledge traditions can converge to form a coherent shared moral landscape (Settles et al., 2020). These findings resonate with recent scholarship, such as that of (Mohamad Saleh et al., 2021), but the *Tumbang Batu* experience remains unique due to its grassroots orientation. This case also reflects a broader trend among marginalized communities in Kalimantan who are responding to the pressures of industrial expansion by reclaiming their spiritual and ancestral agency (Rochwulaningsih et al., 2021). Their collective refusal to allow corporate development is elevated from mere protest to a sacred act, legitimized by cultural heritage and scriptural mandates (Worley, 2019).

In the long term, this integrated model offers a viable direction for environmental governance in indigenous Muslim contexts (Williamson et al., 2023). It underscores the potential of what has been termed “sacred ecological pluralism,” where diverse moral systems are not assimilated but respected and empowered to respond to ecological crises (Roquebert & Gond, 2025). Practically, this research suggests that environmental policy must expand beyond technical solutions and

engage with the cultural and religious frameworks that communities already believe in. Governments and civil society actors would benefit from supporting conservation strategies that affirm the synergy between adat and sharia. Community-driven ecological education and policies should be developed in collaboration with, rather than imposed on, these local ethics. By establishing this integrated sociocultural ethic, The *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance offers an alternative paradigm for global environmental governance. This model proves that the synergy between custom and sharia is able to create a 'sacred ecological pluralism' that is more effective in mobilizing grassroots awareness than formal state policies, while also being a bridge for future conservation policies that are more inclusive and based on local epistemic sovereignty.

### ***Batu Sacred Environmental Cartography: Digital Agency and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer in Tumbang Batu***

Field observations and interviews in *Tumbang Batu* reveal a robust intergenerational transmission system in which eco-theological values are preserved and adapted. Elders play a vital role in instilling this ethic of care by anchoring ecological engagement in indigenous cosmology and Islamic teachings, particularly the principle of *ihsān*. They use storytelling as a pedagogical tool, integrating historical experiences of environmental disturbance, myths of sacred forest creatures, and Quranic advice on the sanctity of the earth. As one elderly woman explained (R4):

*"We tell our grandchildren that the spirits in the forest remember both good and bad. If you cut down trees without permission, not only will the trees cry, but Allah will question your heart."*

This narrative serves as a mechanism for

transmitting values that transcend legal or technical ecological frameworks.

Ritual practices, such as the traditional rite of asking permission from the forest before harvesting and the recitation of Surah al-Rahman during the collective planting season, demonstrate how spiritual ecology is lived communally (Subakir et al., 2024). These practices establish a structured rhythm of life in which respect for the environment is naturalized from an early age (Autio et al., 2016). Children who accompany their parents gradually internalize the ethical significance of every movement and prayer (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This process aligns with social construction theory, which states that reality is shaped through shared meaning. In *Tumbang Batu*, environmental reality is constructed as a sacred domain through lived theology and relational pedagogy (Sachdeva, 2017). The presence of Islamic motifs ensures that these local practices are not viewed as superstition, but rather as being in harmony with religious doctrine (Tarman, 2022).

It is important to note that the youth in *Tumbang Batu* are not passive recipients, but rather active agents creating a powerful hybrid identity. They translate ancestral heritage into contemporary advocacy, combining indigenous memory with digital literacy. This phenomenon creates what has been termed a new generation's "Ecological Marwah" where they use smartphones to document biodiversity while still consulting with elders regarding historical forest boundaries. This epistemic synthesis demonstrates that the Dayak/Malay Muslim identity is capable of adapting to modernity without losing its spiritual roots, while simultaneously strengthening resistance to land exploitation through innovative means.

One concrete manifestation of this model is a youth initiative to create a community forest map that overlays customary zones (prohibited forests) with GPS data. This

project gave rise to a new theoretical concept called "Sacred Environmental Cartography," where land is mapped not simply for economic use but for spiritual significance. The *Tumbang Batu* model demonstrates that *Ihsan* is understood as a communal mandate to protect and innovate amidst ecological vulnerability. These findings offer an important contribution to global "Eco-Islam," suggesting that this model of organic resistance can be replicated in Muslim communities in Africa or the Middle East struggling with land grabbing and the climate crisis.

Historically, indigenous knowledge was often viewed as merely folklore, but is now recognized as a vital element of global environmental knowledge (Bocking, 2023). A manifestation of this paradigm shift is seen in *Tumbang Batu*, which presents a model of 'active tradition' in which sacred knowledge is dynamically reinterpreted to address modern crises. This transformation of local practices ultimately requires researchers and policymakers to move beyond the formal inclusion of local wisdom to a deeper engagement with its underlying epistemological framework.

The implications for policy and education are substantial. Initiatives that support community-based curricula and validate sacred ecology within formal education systems can improve environmental outcomes and cultural resilience. Religious institutions and Islamic scholars can play a crucial role in strengthening these efforts by recognizing the legitimacy of this vernacular theology. In conclusion, the *Tumbang Batu* case presents a blueprint for how eco-theological ethics can be transmitted across generations through an integrated system of ritual, narrative, and lived experience. This case affirms that sustainability is not merely a scientific or economic issue, but rather a moral and spiritual calling sustained through

community, memory, and faith.

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## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ecosystem preservation in *Tumbang Batu* is not simply a reactive measure to the threat of deforestation, but rather a manifestation of the crystallization of a profound eco-theological ethic. Key findings indicate that the value of *ihsān* has transformed from a mere individual spiritual doctrine into a "kinetic moral compass" that drives collective resistance to the expansion of the palm oil industry. The integration of Islamic principles and local Dayak-Malay wisdom creates a resilient hybrid identity, where nature is positioned as a sacred trust and a non-negotiable ancestral dignity. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the formulation of The *Tumbang Batu* Model of Islamic Eco-Resistance. This model demonstrates that the synergy between transcendental consciousness, customary territorial legitimacy, and youth digital agency through the Sacred Environmental Cartography initiative can create a more sustainable ecological defense system than formal technocratic-legalistic approaches. This confirms that in the context of Muslim societies in Southeast Asia, the success of environmental conservation depends crucially on the extent to which policies affirm vernacular theology and local collective memory.

The policy implications of this study urge global decision-makers and environmental activists to shift from top-down models of environmental governance to strategies based on community epistemic sovereignty. Supporting faith-based environmental education curricula and validating customary law within the state framework are strategic steps to enhance cultural and ecological resilience. While this study provides an in-

depth portrait of Kalimantan, its limitations lie in the specific location of the study. Therefore, future research should explore the replication of this model in other Muslim regions with different land conflict contexts to test the generalizability of the *ihsān* ethic in addressing the global climate crisis more broadly.

### **Author's Declaration Regarding the Use of LLM**

The author used the Large Language Model (LLM/Gemini) as an aid in drafting certain texts, while retaining full control over the development of ideas and arguments. A thorough curation and editing process was undertaken to ensure scientific integrity. Therefore, final responsibility for the validity and content of this article rests solely with the author.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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