Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama
Volume 6, Number 2, September 2026, pp: 523-533
E-ISSN: 2797-6440 P-ISSN: 2797-7722
DOI: 10.22373/arj.v6i2.36819

THE POTENTIAL INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES AND LOCAL WISDOM IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN BARUS

***Nanda Sekti Prayetno[1], Ira Novita Sari[2], Khairatunnisa Sihombing[3]**
[1,2,3] Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Barus Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
Email: nandasp@staibarus.ac.id

Abstract

The current environmental crisis requires technological and policy responses as well as stronger ethical and moral awareness. This study examines the potential for integrating religious values and local wisdom to support environmental conservation in Barus. It uses descriptive and analytical library research. Books, journal articles, conference papers, and relevant historical documents were identified, classified, interpreted, and synthesized. The literature documents local knowledge concerning the camphor tree (Dryobalanops aromatica) and the Kenduri Laut tradition. These materials can be interpreted in dialogue with Islamic environmental principles, including human responsibility as khalifah fi al-ardh, balance (mizan), and the prohibition of damage (fasad). Their intersection offers a possible basis for ecological awareness grounded in religion and local culture. Because this is a literature study, however, it maps conceptual potential; it does not establish that Barus residents practice environmental conservation. Fieldwork is needed to determine how these values are understood and enacted.
Keywords: *Religious Values, Local Wisdom, Environment, Conservation, Barus*

Abstrak

Krisis lingkungan saat ini memerlukan respons teknologi dan kebijakan sekaligus penguatan kesadaran etis dan moral. Penelitian ini mengkaji potensi integrasi nilai keagamaan dan kearifan lokal untuk mendukung pelestarian lingkungan di Barus. Penelitian dilakukan melalui studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Buku, artikel jurnal, prosiding, dan dokumen sejarah yang relevan diidentifikasi, diklasifikasikan, diinterpretasikan, dan disintesiskan. Literatur yang dikaji mendokumentasikan pengetahuan lokal tentang pohon kapur barus (*Dryobalanops aromatica*) dan tradisi Kenduri Laut. Keduanya dapat ditafsirkan dalam dialog dengan prinsip etika lingkungan Islam, yaitu tanggung jawab manusia sebagai *khalifah fi al-ardh*, keseimbangan (*mizan*), dan larangan berbuat kerusakan (*fasad*). Pertemuan nilai-nilai tersebut berpotensi menjadi dasar bagi kesadaran ekologis yang berakar pada agama dan budaya lokal. Namun, karena penelitian ini berbasis kepustakaan, hasilnya terbatas pada pemetaan potensi konseptual dan tidak membuktikan bahwa masyarakat Barus telah menjalankan praktik pelestarian lingkungan. Penelitian lapangan diperlukan untuk mengetahui bagaimana nilai-nilai tersebut dipahami dan diterapkan.
Kata Kunci: *Nilai Keagamaan, Kearifan Lokal, Lingkungan, Pelestarian, Barus*.

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A. Introduction

The environmental crisis is an increasingly complex global challenge in the twenty-first century. Climate change, deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and the exploitation of natural resources point to an imbalance in the relationship between people and their environment. Climate change and environmental degradation also affect human life, ecosystem stability, and planetary sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires ethical and cultural reflection alongside scientific, technological, and policy measures. Exploitative attitudes toward nature raise ethical questions about human relationships with the environment (Ngabalin, 2020). Religion offers one source of values through which these attitudes and behaviors can be examined. Research on religion and the environment considers how religious values shape ethics and social practices. In Islam, the concepts of khalifah fi al-ardh, mizan (balance), and the prohibition of fasad fi al-ardh articulate human responsibility toward the environment (Yahya, 2025).

Several studies examine connections among religion, local wisdom, and the environment. Al Mubarok et al. (2026) identify Qur'anic terms associated with the cosmos, sky, earth, humans, and animals, and discuss ecological responsibilities such as maintaining cleanliness, ecological balance, and the protection of living beings. They suggest that Qur'anic values can provide an ethical basis for environmental awareness among Muslims. In Abrahamic Religions, Rambe et al. (2021) likewise discuss the normative relationship between Islamic teachings and environmental responsibility.

In a comparative thesis on Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Umam (2023) argues that both thinkers understand humans as part of nature. Nasr connects the environmental crisis to modern spiritual alienation and criticizes a fragmented view of the cosmos, whereas Nursi grounds his account in the divine names and what he calls the law of nature. Aprilia (2025) discusses how the Huma Betang values of belom bahadat and handep can inform ecological reflection among Catholic youth. In Manggarai, Sandri et al. (2025) consider the revitalization of local values through collaboration among communities, churches, and government. Gule and Surbakti (2021) connect Batak Toba religious and local values with responsibility, harmony with nature, just resource use, and restraint in environmental exploitation. Sarimata (2026) discusses the Mulung tradition in Baranusa as a distinct example of ecological spirituality in a coastal community; its practices cannot be generalized to Barus.

These studies indicate that religion and local wisdom can shape how communities understand their environments. Ruswanda (2026), in a comparative literature study published in Abrahamic Religions, describes the Baduy tradition as an example in which ecological norms are embedded in customary practice. That comparison concerns a different community and does not establish similar practices in Barus. The geographical and social settings of these studies differ from Barus. Studies of Barus have more often addressed trade, religious history, archaeology, and cultural heritage. There is therefore room to consider how documented religious values and local knowledge in Barus relate to environmental conservation.

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This article identifies and interprets religious values and local wisdom documented in writings about Barus, then examines their potential relationship to environmental conservation. Its purpose is to map possible ecological meanings in documented traditions, knowledge, and religious social life, rather than to establish empirically that Barus communities already undertake conservation. Existing Barus scholarship addresses trade, Islam, archaeology, material heritage, and community traditions. Research elsewhere also suggests that religion and local wisdom can inform environmental ethics. Yet the intersection of documented religious values and local wisdom in Barus with environmental conservation has received limited attention. This article therefore identifies, interprets, and synthesizes relevant values in the available literature, without treating them as empirical evidence of conservation practice.

B. Method

This study uses a descriptive and analytical library research design to identify, interpret, and synthesize written material on religious values, local wisdom, Barus society, and the environment. It includes no field observations or interviews. Accordingly, its findings are limited to information and interpretations supported by the literature. Library research draws on reference works and earlier studies to establish relevant conceptual and contextual foundations (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). Sources included books, scholarly journal articles, conference papers, official documents, research reports, and other relevant written materials. Searches were conducted through Google, Google Scholar, and Google Books using terms including "Barus," "ecotheology," "Barus local wisdom," "religion and environment," "Islam and environment," and "environmental conservation," together with relevant combinations. Sources were considered when they directly addressed Barus history and society, local wisdom, religious values, or human relationships with the environment. Material unrelated to the research focus or lacking usable analytical information was excluded.

The analysis had four stages. First, sources were identified according to their relevance. Second, pertinent information was classified under four themes: (1) the historical and social context of Barus; (2) documented forms of local wisdom; (3) religious values concerning human relationships with the environment; and (4) possible connections between those values and conservation. Third, the grouped material was interpreted in its social, cultural, and religious contexts. Fourth, the interpretations were synthesized to explain the potential integration of religious values and local wisdom in environmental conservation. To maintain interpretive accuracy, the study distinguishes statements made directly in the sources from the authors' interpretations. Barus-specific sources provide the principal basis for describing local circumstances; literature on religion, the environment, and local wisdom elsewhere serves as conceptual and comparative material. These limits mean that the study identifies documented values and analyzes their potential relevance, rather than demonstrating conservation practices in Barus.

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C. Results and Discussion

1. Religious Values and Environmental Ethics

Religion provides guidance not only on relationships with God and other people but also on relationships with the environment. Religious values can offer ethical limits on the use of nature and frame environmental care as a moral responsibility. Human relationships with nature can therefore be understood in terms of responsibility, balance, and respect for the continuity of life, alongside economic needs and resource use.

For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, environmental problems are linked to how people perceive nature. He criticizes modern approaches that separate nature from its spiritual dimension and primarily regard it as an object of use. Because the natural order has meaning in relation to divine reality, human engagement with it should not rest solely on domination and exploitation. This perspective places environmental concern within a framework of moral and spiritual responsibility (Nasr, 1996).

Within Islamic thought, the concepts of khalifah, amanah, and mizan, together with the prohibition of fasad, can frame human relationships with the environment. Khalifah assigns humans responsibilities on earth; amanah emphasizes the obligation to discharge entrusted responsibilities; mizan concerns balance in the order of life; and the prohibition of fasad sets a moral limit on destructive acts (Amelia et al., 2025).

2. Local Wisdom as Environmental Ethics in Traditional Communities

Local wisdom encompasses knowledge, values, norms, beliefs, and practices developed through a community's historical experience and interactions with its social and natural surroundings. Sartini (2004) describes it as locally rooted ideas regarded as wise and valuable within community life. It may take the form of norms, customs, beliefs, and knowledge passed between generations. It is thus both a cultural inheritance and a possible source of knowledge about local social and environmental conditions.

In Barus, local wisdom must be considered in the context of a coastal area and historic trading center connected to resources from both land and sea. Barus has longstanding ties to the trade in forest products, particularly camphor and benzoin. Historical research describes networks linking producers in inland forests to traders from other regions. Community relationships with the environment must therefore be situated within this history of resource use, trade networks, and local environmental knowledge (Drakard, 1989).

Camphor offers one example. Ethnobotanical research on the camphor tree (Dryobalanops aromatica) in Barus District documents its historical and cultural importance to local identity and describes knowledge about the tree as part of the community's heritage. Such knowledge does not itself show that Barus communities historically practiced conservation in the modern sense. Here, it is treated as local knowledge that could inform more responsible resource use (Tanjung et al., 2025). Documented traditions and religious social life offer another way to consider Barus residents' relationships with the environment. Traditions need not have explicit

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ecological aims to contain values relevant to those relationships. Expressions of gratitude, solidarity, social responsibility, and respect for a shared living space may be interpreted as potential foundations for environmental concern.

Collective responsibility is particularly relevant. Local wisdom develops through shared experience and can guide social life. Mutual assistance, solidarity, deliberation, and common responsibility may serve as social resources for addressing environmental problems if directed toward shared interests. The possible ecological relevance of local wisdom thus extends beyond explicit rules for resource use to values that frame the environment as a shared living space. Connections between local wisdom and the environment in Barus should also be understood through interactions among coastal communities, inland producers, and trading networks. The history of camphor and benzoin trade ties forest products from inland areas to Barus's development as a trading center. Drakard (1989) describes Barus's links with inland production zones as well as maritime trade. This history connects inland forests, rivers, and coastal areas within the region's social and economic life.

3. Local Wisdom in Barus and Environmental Conservation

Barus, on the west coast of Sumatra, has a long history of commercial, cultural, and religious exchange. Its place in Indian Ocean trade was closely related to forest commodities, especially camphor and benzoin. Drakard (1989) describes Barus's external trading ties and its links to inland areas that supplied forest products. The coastal zone, interior, forest resources, and regional trade were thus historically connected. This history alone, however, cannot establish that past residents maintained an environmental conservation system.

The camphor tree (Dryobalanops aromatica) was one of the resources central to this history. A recent ethnobotanical study in Barus District documents botanical, ethnopharmacological, ethnoeconomic, ethnolinguistic, and ethnoecological dimensions of the tree's local significance. Using a qualitative approach and semistructured interviews with eight community respondents, it reports that knowledge of camphor persists and has economic, medicinal, and cultural significance. The authors also emphasize the preservation of this ethnobotanical knowledge and its possible sustainable development (Tanjung et al., 2025).

Susilowati et al. (2018) report threats to Dryobalanops aromatica, including illegal harvesting and land-use change, and propose vegetative propagation as one approach to conserving this North Sumatran species. Their findings provide ecological context for discussing a biological resource historically associated with Barus, although their study does not by itself establish conservation conditions in Barus. The coastal Kenduri Laut tradition provides another documented example. Ahmatnijar et al. (2025) describe it as rooted in coastal community life and practiced as an expression of gratitude to Allah for marine resources and a prayer for fishers' safety. They also examine the interaction of Sufi Islamic values, local culture, and modernity. From an environmental perspective,

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gratitude, regard for a source of livelihood, solidarity, and social responsibility may be read as values with possible ecological relevance.

4. Religious Values in Barus Local Wisdom

Religious values can provide an ethical framework for interpreting human relationships with nature. For Nasr (1996), ecological problems concern not only material damage but also ways of seeing nature. A religious view recognizes a sacred dimension of the natural order rather than reducing nature to an object of unlimited exploitation. Islamic ecotheology can frame environmental responsibilities through khalifah and mizan. The former concerns human responsibility for life on earth; the latter emphasizes balance in human relationships with the environment. Together, these ideas can inform ecological awareness and discourage environmental damage (Rahmat et al., 2025). Nasr's perspective thus offers a philosophical basis for treating respect for nature as part of spirituality and human responsibility toward creation (Nasr, 1996). It also provides an interpretive lens for examining relationships among people, nature, and culture without assuming that every cultural practice is a conservation measure.

In Barus, this framework can be brought into dialogue with documented local knowledge. Ethnobotanical research on Dryobalanops aromatica addresses botanical, ethnopharmacological, ethnoeconomic, ethnolinguistic, and ethnoecological knowledge. This evidence documents relationships with a plant resource but does not establish a community conservation system. It may instead serve as a resource for thinking about more sustainable management (Tanjung et al., 2025). The Kenduri Laut tradition offers a second point of dialogue. Ahmatnijar et al. (2025) associate it with gratitude to Allah for marine resources and prayers for fishers' safety. These practices bring together religion, coastal livelihoods, and the marine setting, but their religious meanings do not establish the existence of marine conservation practices. In this study, the tradition is understood as a possible source of religious and social values for ecological awareness; its practical conservation implications require field research.

These potential connections can be interpreted through Islamic principles of ecological responsibility. Local resource knowledge may be considered in relation to amanah, concern for balance in relation to mizan, and limits on damaging resource use in relation to the prohibition of fasad. These connections are the authors' interpretations of the available sources. The integration of religious values and Barus local wisdom is therefore best understood as a potential basis for environmental ethics. Amanah, responsibility, balance, and the prohibition of harm supply a normative framework; local resource knowledge and community traditions provide a social and cultural context in which these ideas might be expressed. Amin et al. (2025) discuss local wisdom, religious moderation, and sustainable development in a separate Indonesian setting; their reported relationships are mixed, reinforcing the need to test such connections rather than assume them. The move from values to conservation practice cannot be assumed. Field research

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is needed to establish how these ideas are understood, transmitted, negotiated, and enacted in behavior and local institutions.

5. The Relevance of Barus Local Wisdom to Environmental Conservation

Local wisdom may be relevant to environmental conservation because community knowledge and values develop through long relationships with local environments. IPBES recognizes the contributions that Indigenous and local knowledge can make to understanding, conserving, and sustainably using biodiversity and ecosystems. Such knowledge is neither static nor automatically a conservation practice; it changes with ecological, social, economic, and cultural conditions (IPBES Secretariat, 2019). In Barus, ethnobotanical research documents knowledge of Dryobalanops aromatica across botanical, medicinal, economic, linguistic, and ecological dimensions (Tanjung et al., 2025). This indicates that the plant has several roles in community life. It does not establish that Barus communities employ a particular conservation system. Its relevance here is its potential to inform approaches to more sustainable resource management. Ahmatnijar et al. (2025) describe Kenduri Laut as a coastal tradition of gratitude to Allah for marine resources and prayer for fishers' safety. It connects religious and social life to the coastal setting. The cited study, however, does not provide sufficient evidence that Kenduri Laut functions as a marine conservation mechanism. Its ecological relevance here lies in possible values and awareness, rather than demonstrated conservation outcomes.

Barus local wisdom is therefore treated as a source of values, knowledge, and cultural identity with potential relevance to environmental conservation, rather than proof of effective conservation practice. This potential could be explored through environmental education, documentation of local knowledge, dialogue between community and scientific knowledge, and policies attentive to local social and cultural conditions. IPBES (2019) similarly addresses the relationship between local and scientific knowledge in biodiversity and ecosystem management. These local values can also be considered alongside Islamic ethical principles of environmental responsibility. Any connection between religious values, local wisdom, and actual conservation nevertheless requires empirical investigation of how these ideas are understood and transmitted, and whether they appear in rules, behavior, institutions, or environmental management. The main relevance of Barus local wisdom to conservation lies in its potential to enrich environmental approaches with locally grounded knowledge and values. It could contribute to a conservation framework where institutions, policy, concrete actions, and observable ecological outcomes connect those values to practice.

6. Intergenerational Transmission of Local Knowledge and Traditions

The persistence of local knowledge across generations is a distinct question from its possible ecological meaning. The Barus ethnobotanical study documents knowledge of camphor across several domains while identifying declining interest among younger

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people in traditional plant knowledge as a concern for its preservation (Tanjung et al., 2025). This supports the importance of documenting how knowledge is remembered and communicated. It does not establish whether young Barus residents currently use that knowledge to protect camphor trees. A similar distinction applies to Kenduri Laut. Ahmatnijar et al. (2025) describe changes in how younger generations regard the tradition in the context of modernity. Continuation of a ceremony, changes in its religious interpretation, and the transfer of knowledge about the coastal environment are separate processes. The available source describes the tradition's religious and social meanings, but does not measure whether it transmits environmental rules or changes fishing practices.

Taken together, these studies suggest an educational question for subsequent research: who passes on knowledge about camphor and coastal livelihoods, through which settings, and with what meanings for younger residents? The answer may differ between knowledge of an inland forest resource and participation in a coastal ritual. Treating transmission as a subject for investigation avoids assuming that an inherited value automatically becomes ecological knowledge or a conservation practice. IPBES Secretariat (2019) likewise treats local knowledge as dynamic and situated in changing social and environmental contexts.

D. Analysis

The evidence in this article operates at three levels. Historical research documents Barus's connections to inland forest products and maritime trade (Drakard, 1989). Barus-specific studies document knowledge concerning Dryobalanops aromatica and the religious and social meanings of Kenduri Laut (Tanjung et al., 2025; Ahmatnijar et al., 2025). Islamic environmental scholarship supplies concepts of responsibility, entrusted care, and balance through which those materials can be interpreted (Rambe et al., 2021; Rahmat et al., 2025). These are different kinds of evidence: historical ties establish a context, contemporary studies document particular forms of knowledge and tradition, and theological literature offers a normative lens.

The interpretive connection is strongest where the meaning attributed to a source is kept within its scope. Knowledge of camphor can be discussed alongside amanah because both concern responsible engagement with a resource; gratitude expressed in Kenduri Laut can be discussed alongside responsibility for a marine livelihood. Neither association demonstrates that participants limit harvesting, protect habitats, or follow collectively enforced conservation rules. In particular, the Kenduri Laut study does not report ecological outcomes, while the camphor study documents ethnobotanical knowledge rather than the effects of a local conservation program (Ahmatnijar et al., 2025; Tanjung et al., 2025).

The comparison with other settings clarifies what remains untested in Barus. Ruswanda (2026) discusses a Baduy setting in which ecological norms are related to customary rules, and Amin et al. (2025) report mixed relationships among local wisdom,

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religious moderation, and sustainable development. Neither study can establish how Barus residents act. To examine whether the conceptual potential identified here becomes conservation practice, a future study would need to document the meanings residents give to relevant teachings and traditions, the rules or institutions connecting them to resource use, and observable practices or ecological conditions. This is a proposed line of inquiry, not an empirical finding of the present article. The present contribution is therefore an evidence-bounded framework linking three domains: Islamic ethical principles, Barus-specific knowledge and tradition, and possible routes toward collective environmental action. The first two domains are documented in the cited literature; the third remains a question for field investigation. This distinction allows the article to identify a defensible research agenda without equating cultural continuity with successful conservation.

E. Conclusion

This literature study identifies Islamic principles of khalifah, amanah, mizan, and the prohibition of fasad as an ethical framework for considering human responsibilities toward nature. Literature on Barus documents social values and local knowledge relevant to this discussion, especially knowledge of the camphor tree (Dryobalanops aromatica) and the coastal Kenduri Laut tradition. These sources also describe gratitude, solidarity, and shared responsibility, but do not establish their environmental effects.The documented values offer a possible point of connection between Islamic environmental ethics and Barus local wisdom. Their integration may support efforts to develop ecological awareness within local cultural contexts. Because the analysis relies entirely on written sources, it does not demonstrate that present-day Barus communities practice conservation. Field research is needed to examine how these values are understood, transmitted, and enacted, and whether they are associated with identifiable conservation activities or outcomes.

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