

ROLE OF ECO-PESANTREN ATH-THAARIQ FACING ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION TODAY

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues are our problem today. Therefore this article will present the function of religion as represented Pesantren, Islamic educational institution, especially in Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq in West Java. This article will trace the religious idea and its ecological practices implemented in agricultural practices in reducing our environmental degradations beside as a place for education, by exploring some literatures, including in its website and interview with its leader. The result shows that Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq has implemented the Islamic principle in their agricultural activities by promoting agro-ecology as a response of the crisis. In fact there is no explicit explanation of agriculture in the Qur'an or Hadith as the Islamic foundation. Yet, the Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq by giving another view of concept "no harm" in the earth that the concept does not only discusses about the moral degradation that should be repaired, but also environmental degradation that should be repaired, so that agroecology there teaches people how they should interact with the earth as the source of life.

INTRODUCTION

United Nations reported that extreme tornadoes in the United States over Christmas, abnormal snowfalls in Mexico, and heavy flooding in South America and the United Kingdom have just happened in the last December 2015 (UN News Centre, 2015). "The repetitive floods in the UK and unusual snowstorms in Mexico are alerting the world about how difficult it is to predict global warming impacts and climate change," Ms. Wahlström, head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)) said (UN News Centre, 2015). This shows that our earth is unbalanced more.

Indeed, our earth has experienced environmental degradations in this century. Those are for examples: climate change which is considered by many to be the most urgent and negative impact of human industrial activity and agriculture, the destruction of biodiversity because of industrial development, and pollution of water, air and land because of toxic chemicals and substances (Bauman et al., 2011:3). Those are so complex.

Because of the complexities of the degradations, tuning to religion can be one of answers to respond those. Bauman et al. discerns that if religion is to be relevant to respond to reality of the environmental degradations to lead people of faith to more just and sustainable lives, religion must respond to the problems (Bauman et al., 2015:3-4). For me, the religion is needed because of less awareness of people to tackle the problems. They know what our earth is today, but they still continue their activities that lead to the degradations. Therefore, shaping moral through religion must be concerned.

One of examples of the religion can be traced through activities in Pesantren, Islamic educational institution, especially in Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq in West Java. Based on its name, it is clear that the institution relates religion, especially Islam and ecology. Therefore, discussing the religious idea and its ecological practices implemented in agricultural practices in the institution is significant because it can be example for everyone in participating to reduce our environmental degradations beside as a place for education, by exploring some literatures, including in its website and interview with its leader.

General Description of Ath-Thariq

In its website, it is told that the complete name of the instiution is *Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thariq* (Ecological-Pesantren Ath-Thariq) (Pesantren Ath-Thaariq, 2015). It was established in the end of year 2009. It is located in Sukagalih, Tarogong Kidul, Garut, West Java. It is leaded by a couple, Ibang Lukmanurdin and Nissa Wargadipura. Its motto is care for the earth, care for the human and care for the future. Its vision and mission are to share knowledge and form agro-ecological cadre promoting of saving and caring for the earth, the human and the future. It is important to note that this institution keeps ecology and holds on religion, Islam as its foundation.

The educational concept in the institution is ecological-*pesantren*. In the institution, while its students learn Islamic teaching, they also learn how to engage in farming using ecological agriculture. So, the institution is also called Sekolah Kebon Sawah Pesantren Ath-Thaariq (School of Garden and Wet Field Pesantren Ath-Thaariq). It means to keep habitat and interconnected ecosystem there. The institution teaches that Islam does not only speak about the need of food, but there is also responsibility to keep the environment. There is right for animal beside human. There is right for environment also (Pesantren Ath-Thaariq, 2015). In addition, Wargadipura mentions that the institution also uses family concept (Wargaipura, 2015). There is no different social structure, so that the people there have same responsibility.

Even, the intuition teaches gender that think men and women have same responsibility (Wargadipura, 2016). If the women cook, so the men also cook. If the men plant, the women also plant. Those all the daily activities are like. Then, she also notes that the institution gives big rooms for women because women usually keep the house and educate the children. So, the institution wants to develop the women to be productive in their home by developing some lands surrounding them.

There, each student is taught to farm each Sunday in a 7500 m² land by various plants of food. The land is divided to wet-field area, garden of food plants, animal husbandry and seeding area. So, the family there consumes food from their farms, until they do not only depend on one type of food. They have been accustomed to consume tubers and vegetables beside rice. Their crops are used to fulfill their need. Also, the institution thinks that they must fulfill their need first before they are selling their crops.

The various plants in their farm benefit to quality of the environment there. They can make the soil healthy. The water becomes clean. Their plants are not easy to get pest without chemical substance. If the environment is healthy, so all creatures that live there can live and perform their own role well. That's why, the institution is called Ecological *pesantren* because all creature

are respected there; if one stops performing, it will impact negatively to the whole creatures there.

Furthermore, they cultivate their farms using open pollinated organic seed system. The system is based on ecology that keeps this ecosystem as a form of submission to the World. Specifically, it stresses on education based on agroecology that teaches the importance of planting without destroying ecosystem for students or people surrounding there that will be discussed later in the next passages. Also, it teaches the importance of selling by fair price. Moreover, it also stresses on research activities and/until the student can be an inventor, so that the students grow up becoming individual that stand on the saving the earth, the human and the future.

Today, the institution has cultivated and produced crops from various plants. They also distribute dried medical plant and various local seed. In addition, they also build a seed library as knowledge zone. The institution does these activities together in opened relationship without social border.

In short, the institution formulates its purposes explicitly as below (Pesantren Ekologi Ath-Thaariq, 2015):

1. It aims to make this institution become the sharing knowledge center of sustainable agricultural system promoting to save and care to the earth, the human and the future.
2. It aims to be example for Indonesia that produces various without destroying ecosystem and keeps the habitat and the biodiversity.
3. Also it aims to harvest and sell in fair trade, as a part of social, economic and ecological movement actualizing justice.

Dreams and Challenges of Ath-Thaariq

The dreams of Ath-Thaariq have been briefly written in its visions and missions that are to share knowledge and form agro-ecological cadre promoting of saving and caring for the earth, the human and the future as the way to solve environmental degradation today. Also, sovereignty of food is its main dream of family in the institution, so that optimizing agriculture is the best way to achieve the dreams. Actually, it is not easy because according to the leader there are many problems in agriculture today, especially in Indonesia (Wargadipura, 2015). His wife sees that today farmers is very poor because the imbalance of agricultural structure until they cannot sovereign their food.

Based on her view, economically the agricultural problems are serious enough because of functional conversion of land from agriculture to non-agriculture (Wargadipura, 2015). Also the agricultural area becomes narrower. Moreover, the conversion is too strong. She sees that more than 100 ha agricultural land in a year has converted to other function. She is afraid if this continues until agriculture was left, it can make this country becomes starving.

Besides, ecologically the weather is not good so that it also will negatively impact to their crops. This is true, the season today seems strange. The weather is not usual as the UN's report. These phenomena will become additional obstacle for the farmers to harvest their crops.

This is also supported by the system of economic policy. She argues that Indonesia has experienced multi sustainable crisis: social, ecological and economic problems (Wargadipura, 2015). For example, socially, many farmers have left agriculture to be a seller, a laborer, a worker. Ecologically, some agricultural lands have changed to be mining lands. Economically, the farmer

becomes poorer and cannot fulfill their food well. They become depended on market.

She strongly accuses that the causes of those crisis are globalization and Free-Market leaded by WTO (Wargadipura, 2015). Globalization has destroyed the biodiversity and natural production. WTO has increased number of food-import in Indonesia until it harms the center of civil production and consumption. Also, it has increased foreign investments in agriculture, plantation and mining that have narrowed lands functioning as the source of life.

Even, she clearly criticizes the agricultural policy of Indonesia that clearly does not support for ecology (Wargadipura, 2016). She thinks if the policy support ecology, the policy will supports the farmers. Indeed, she tells that the green movement there has not ever been supported by the government. She is aware that it is because the dreams of Ath-Thaariq will be contrast to governmental policies. For example, government promotes hybrid or genetic-modified seed, but Ath-Thaariq promotes inherited seed. Government promotes pesticide, but Ath-Thaariq promotes no pesticide in the farming. Moreover, the farmers of Indonesia have been constructed by the government to apply the policies because of economic interest.

If those unecological policies still continue, so environmental degradation will continue. The soil will be infertile. The biodiversity will be reduced. Moreover, because of the pesticide, she sees unusual diseases have been well developed after Green Revolution in 1970 in the developing countries, especially in Indonesia. Yet, although to repair our crisis today is hard, she never loses his hope to start the good change in the small institution.

Positively, the revolution has increased the need of food, but its negative impacts have become real today in Indonesia (Atmojo, 2006). The revolution that is signified by chemical substantives in aspects of farming has leaded some destruction. For example, the soil and the water becomes polluted, the biodiversity has decreased, the emergence of new diseases, and he dependence of farmer to hybrid seeds and pesticide.

In addition, another challenge to get the dreams is that there less students who are interested to become student in the institution. She told that the students there are more than fifteen to twenty. The cause is less supports of their parents because they do not want their children become a farmer. Yet, she is not desperate because she can tackle this by curriculum of leadership in which the students is shaped to build a new community after graduation. It means that the students must practice and share what they get there when they have graduated.

In short, the challenges to achieve all the dreams are complex and hard. The farmers tend to leave their farming. The weather is unbalanced. The policies of government do not support the idea of ecology and the farmer. There is less awareness of the importance of safe and health agriculture. Yet, Ath-Thaariq convincingly struggle to make the ideas comes true although it is only in the small institution.

Islam and Ecology in Ath-Thaariq

The institution offers a solution, and religion is its foundation. Bauman et al. (2011: 13) states that religion is deeply and personally important to billions of people in this life. Thus, in this sense religion can be as the way of

life for people, including our environmental problems today. He then argues that religion has shaped this entire planet on which we live. Its roles can change the bodies and minds of human being through the people and the institutions of which they are a part (Bauman et al., 2011: 13). However, defining religion is not simple one because the term has broad meanings.

In this sense, relating to Islam, it is appropriate to borrow the definition of Paul Tillich about religion. According to him, “religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, in which cultural particularities, sacred text, rituals, and day-to-day choices and practices take a back seat to the singular experience of ultimate reality” (Bauman et al., 2011:15). Thus, this definition is close to Islam that the ultimate thing is very concerned as for instance the Qur’an, a sacred text from God is always referred by Muslims.

Therefore, Islam is hoped to be a guide in shaping how humans interact with the environment. The question is “what is the guide of Islam that can be used to respond to this environment?” Indeed, those were established in the Qur’an. The leader of the institution, Ibang Lukmanurdin recalls some verses and supporting explanation of Hadith as religious foundation to tackle the degradations. Here are some texts that he refers (Lukmanurdin, 2015):

1. Qur’an, Verse Ar-Ruum, Article 41-42
(41) Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that ((Allah)) may give them a taste of some of their deed In order that They may turn back (from evil). (42) say: "Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before (you): Most of them worshipped others besides Allah.
2. Qur’an, Verse Al-A’raaf, Article 56-58
(56) Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set In order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good. (57) It is He who sendeth the winds like heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy: when They have carried the heavy-laden clouds, we drive them to a land that is dead, make rain to descend thereon, and produce every kind of harvest therewith: Thus shall we raise up the dead: Perchance ye may remember. (58) From the land that is clean and good, by the will of its Cherisher, springs up produce, (rich) after its kind: but from the land that is bad, springs up nothing but that which is niggardly: Thus do we explain the Signs by various (symbols) to those who are grateful.
3. Qur’an, Verses Shaad, Article 27
(27) Not without purpose did we create heaven and earth and all between! that were the thought of Unbelievers! but woe to the unbelievers because of the Fire (of Hell)!
4. Qur’an, Verses Huud, Article 6
(6) There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance dependeth on Allah. He knoweth the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit: all is In a Clear record.
5. Qur’an Al-Qashash 77
(77) "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the home of the Hereafter, nor forget Thy portion In This world: but do Thou good, As Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief In the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief."
6. Qur’an, Verses Al-A;raf, Article 56

(56) *Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good.*

Lukmanurdin thinks that the environmental degradations have been described in the Qur'an in Part 1 to 3. The Part 1 and Part 2 mentioned that humans incline to create environmental degradation. Then human has to keep all of the things in this earth because God has created those without no purposes. Furthermore, In part 4 to 6, those verses emphasize that human not only must care to human, but also must care to all His creatures including because in the part 4 is clear that God also care for those. Even, not destroying environment is considered as faithful implementation of God.

Then, he also refers to two hadiths that describe how we should interact with all creatures. The first, we must feed them as the Prophet Muhammad says that we must feed animals in which we drive and take their milks. The second, we must help them as he illustrated a person who help a thirsty dog by giving it water that he took from a well. Moreover, he says that who gives benefit for all living beings will get reward from God.

So, it is clear that Islam has urged us to keep everything in this earth. Moreover, the text is pointed to Humans. We are prohibited to make them harmed. Therefore, making harm in this earth means colliding God. So, the institution proves that religion is the answer for our environmental degradation today.

Considering the relation between religion and ecology seeing the degradation, in fact Bauman et al. (2011:59) states that:

If religious people seek to do something about this problem, are they best served by recovering wisdom in the traditions they have inherited, by reforming those traditions in light new situations, or by replacing traditional religion in favor of something new and more suited to the current crisis?

Indeed, Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq has recovered the religion, Islam. It has re-emphasized norms of Islam, even it also has implemented the norms in the real practice.

Also, noting that there are many verses in the Qur'an that talk about destruction or degradation, his wife told that the intuition has other significant purposes different with other *pesantren* (Wargadipura, 2016). If other *pesantrens* generally stress on moral education, this intuition not only stresses on religious or social ethics but also ecological education. So, there is different interpretation of the Qur'an. The intuition sees that not only moral degradation, but also environmental degradation that has happened in this earth. In other words, there is reforming of religion in response to our crisis today by understanding that the mischief (*fasad*) is also about environmental degradation that human should concern.

Furthermore, she stressed that as the Qur'an pointing that human should not make destruction in the earth, so human is not the superior one on this earth until he wants to exploit anything. According to her, human is in the part of earth's circle. Clearly, she states that what is on the earth, in the earth and in the sky is a unity. Human should not only respect only for the God and human but also for the earth. It means that in line with the Qur'an, the institution rejects "anthropocentrism (human-centeredness), which values nature exclusively in term of its usefulness to humans" (Taylor and Zimmerman,

2005: 2). The Qur'an criticizes that human should not be the destructor. In addition, the idea is also rejected by deep ecologist, a green spiritual movement promoting ecocentrism.

Agriculture, Sustainability and Islam in Ath-Thaariq

According to Jenkins (2011: 104-107) in "Grounding Religion", we can understand sustainability by consider three models of sustainability. The first is economic model which proposes to sustain welfare. The second is ecological model that proposes to sustain biological diversity and ecological integrity. This model directly focuses on the health of living world. The third is political model that proposes to sustain social system realizing of human dignity.

Applying the Islamic norms and concerning the multi crisis, the institution proposes a solution. It is a sustainable agriculture that has practiced in the institution. It is a system of farm that integrates aspects of environment, social and economy (Wargadipura, 2015). Therefore, the system must fulfill these criteria: (1) economic benefit, (2) social benefit for family of farmer and society, (3) sustainable conservation of environment. Then, referring to three model of sustainability, the Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq covers those models.

Particularly, the institution practices "agroecology" and "open pollinated organic seed" in the agricultural activities. "The ultimate goal of agroecological design is to integrate components so that overall biological efficiency is improved, biodiversity is preserved, and the agroecosystem productivity and its self-sustaining capacity is maintained (Altieri, 2005)." Agroecosystems are communities of plants and animals interacting with their physical and chemical environments modified by human to produce their food (Altieri, 2005).

Concisely, Wargadipura explains that agroecology is a design of farming that gives a priority to safety in the soil or on the soil based on ecosystem (Wargadipura, 2016). There are many definitions of ecosystem. Yet, Based on the phrase, "ecology" is parallelized with "ecosystem" as Alfred George Tansley (1935), quoted by Nganro and Suantika (2009: 1), thinks that both terms are same as in his statement that "ecosystem or ecological system is a biotic assemblage and its associated physical environment in a specific space". Simply, ecology or ecosystem can be defined as "interconnectedness" of all things (Bauman et al., 2011: 51).

Explicitly, she gives an example how she designs her farming. She makes bushes to welcome snakes in order to keep her farms from rats. She plants various plants. She develops caterpillars. She provides a life for all creature of God. She wants how the life is natural without chemical substantives there. She happily illustrates that if I were there, I will see many fire flies in the night. It is right, when I was a child, I always see the animal, but now I never see those.

The concept of the agriculture stressing on functioning of all creatures in the farms evidently has saved the environment there. To some extent, the concept is close to hypothesis of Gaia¹:

- ¹ Excerpts from James Lovelock's *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford, 1979) and *The Ages of Gaia* (W.W. Norton, 1988)

The Gaia hypothesis said that the temperature, oxidation state, acidity, and certain aspects of the rocks and waters are at any time kept constant, and that this homeostasis is maintained by active feedback processes operated automatically and unconsciously by the biota. The conditions are only constant in the short term and evolve in synchrony with the changing needs of the biota as it evolves.

The hypothesis emphasizes on the cooperation of all creature and environment working by their own functions. So, if there is good cooperation of all creatures in the farm, the life will be good also. Moreover, she believes that there is living beings in the soil, until she think give pesticide or chemical fertilizer same with killing creatures in the soils (Wargadipura, 2016). Therefore, it is not only humans who have right, but all everything in the earth and the earth itself also has right because they are interconnected each other.

To support the concept and to repair the ecology, the institution promotes inherited seed and open pollinated organic seed (Wargadipura, 2016). Then strongly she insists hybrid seed and genetic modified seed (GMO). Inherited or heirloom seed is variety of seed that comes from history within a family or community, and the open pollination is variety of seed that come from pollination naturally by supports of insect, bird, wind, human, or other natural mechanism (Christy, 2012). On the other the remains, the two seeds is unnatural. There is human intervention aiming for economic interest. Moreover, both of them according to her are dangerous because it can decrease our biodiversity. Even economically it will make the farmers dependent on the both seed, because they cannot be renewable. The farmers should buy every time when they are going to plant. Also, another negative impact is the both seeds require chemical fertilizer and/or pesticide harming the soils and biodiversity.

Seeing the soil or the earth as source of human's life, she invites to actualize some ethics to be a farmer (Wargadipura, 2016):

1. We should not kill some creatures in the soil using pesticide.
2. We should use natural and good seed.
3. We should not exploit the soils continually. We must make the soil rested for a moment.
4. We should use polyculture to create good ecosystem instead of monoculture system. It is because the monoculture will reduce the biodiversity and can build safety system for the biodiversity in the land.

By the agricultural concept, the institution becomes example how people should to be a farmer in Islam. Therefore, the principle of Islam about "no harm" evidently is manifested in the agricultural activities. It teaches how people interact with all creatures of God in the earth. It teaches how people should keep the life's circle in the earth. Moreover, it has shown that by the activities based Islamic principle, the institution can build sustainable life.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, now, it becomes clear that turning to religion, particularly turn to principle of Islam has guided people to live in this earth, specifically to solve environmental degradation today. Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq has implemented the Islamic principle in their agricultural activities by promoting agroecology as a response of the crisis. In fact there is no explicit explanation of agriculture in the Qur'an or Hadith as the Islamic foundation. Yet, the Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq by giving another view of concept "no harm" in the

earth that the concept does not only discusses about the moral degradation that should be repaired, but also environmental degradation that should be repaired, so that agroecology there teaches people how they should interact with the earth as the source of life.

Indeed, agroecology, a principle of agriculture that prominently saves the earth, the human and the future, can be applied by all people in this earth because it is only health and safe concept of agriculture that can sustain all everything in the earth today and the future. The institution applies it because it is the most appropriate concept that is in line with the principle of Islam that human should keep this earth. Meanwhile, particularly I think the idea of concept can be applied in our daily life. We should participate to include solving crisis in our earth although it is only a simple thing.

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