

ACTUALIZING THE SDGS THROUGH PESANTREN PEDAGOGY: AN IQBALIAN PANENTHEISTIC FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: *The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently faces a severe motivational crisis due to its reliance on pragmatic-secular frameworks devoid of spiritual grounding. Concurrently, Islamic environmental discourse remains polarized between rigid legalism and passive mysticism. Addressing this gap, this study aims to formulate an Islamic Educational Philosophy by excavating the ecological dimension of the Indonesian pesantren tradition through an Iqbalian panentheistic lens. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, the research explores a “lived ontology” to achieve a fusion of horizons between historical pesantren pedagogy and contemporary SDG urgencies. The findings reveal a dynamic dialectic of “contextualized panentheism.” This paradigm transitions from a mystical fusion with nature into a proactive ethical stance, embodied by the awakened Iqbal’s concept of *khudi* as a responsible *khalifah*. By perceiving nature as a living divine mirror (*tajalli*), this pedagogy systematically dismantles the alienated, exploitative Cartesian ego. Empirically, this educational praxis manifests in successful community-driven conservation models—such as the eco-pesantren and customary maritime laws—which consistently outperform secular technocratic policies by internalizing ecological care as a binding moral obligation. The study concludes that pesantren pedagogy provides an authentic, internally driven motivational grammar, ultimately transforming environmental stewardship from an external regulatory duty into a sacred existential expression.*

Keywords: *Contextualized Panentheism, Islamic Educational Philosophy, Muhammad Iqbal, Pesantren Pedagogy, Sustainable Development Goals.*

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Abstrak: Pelaksanaan *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) saat ini menghadapi krisis motivasi yang parah karena bergantung pada kerangka pragmatis-sekuler yang nir-spiritual. Bersamaan dengan itu, diskursus lingkungan Islam masih terpolarisasi antara legalisme kaku dan mistisisme pasif. Mengisi kekosongan tersebut, studi ini bertujuan merumuskan filsafat pendidikan Islam dengan menggali dimensi ekologis tradisi pesantren di Indonesia melalui kacamata panenteisme Iqbalian. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berlandaskan hermeneutika filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer, penelitian ini menelusuri “ontologi yang dihidupi” untuk mencapai peleburan cakrawala antara pedagogi historis pesantren dan urgensi kontemporer SDGs. Hasil analisis mengungkap dialektika dinamis “panenteisme terkontekstualisasi.” Paradigma ini bergerak dari peleburan mistis dengan alam menuju sikap etis proaktif, yang diejawantahkan oleh konsep Iqbal tentang *khudi* sebagai khalifah yang bertanggung jawab. Dengan memandang alam sebagai cermin Ilahi (*tajalli*) yang hidup, pedagogi ini secara sistematis meruntuhkan ego Cartesian yang teralienasi dan eksploitatif. Secara empiris, praksis pendidikan ini bermanifestasi dalam model konservasi berbasis masyarakat yang sukses—seperti eko-pesantren dan hukum adat maritim—yang melampaui kebijakan teknokratis sekuler dengan menginternalisasi kepedulian ekologis sebagai kewajiban moral yang mengikat. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pedagogi pesantren menyediakan tata bahasa motivasional yang otentik dan digerakkan dari dalam, yang pada akhirnya mengubah pelestarian lingkungan dari sekadar kewajiban regulasi eksternal menjadi sebuah ekspresi eksistensial yang sakral.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam, Mubammad Iqbal, Panenteisme Kontekstual, Pedagogi Pesantren, Sustainable Development Goals.*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda has become a global consensus, a shared blueprint for the future of the planet and humanity. However, behind its technocratic optimism, the implementation of the SDGs often confronts a deeper crisis of motivation, relying on a pragmatic-secular ethical framework that sometimes feels lacking in spiritual grounding. This condition has triggered an ‘inward turn,’ a global search for a more authentic and rooted ethical foundation capable of moving humanity not merely from a sense of obligation, but from a place of profound conviction. It is within this context that the world’s religious traditions, including Islam, are once again called upon to offer their spiritual and intellectual resources. Beyond merely providing theological justifications, the challenge lies in excavating and revitalizing a living and holistic ecological worldview from the very heart of the tradition itself—one that can answer the question “why should we care?” at the most fundamental level.

The discourse on Islamic environmental ethics has evolved significantly in response to the urgency of the global ecological crisis (Khalid 2005, 80), with many scholars exploring the Qur’anic view of humans and nature as an interdependent unit requiring the fulfillment of human obligations (Ghoni et al. 2024, 85). This scholarly response has largely branched into two distinct, yet often parallel, streams of thought. The first is a philosophical and sapiential approach, pioneered by thinkers like Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1976, 35), who diagnose the environmental crisis as a spiritual malaise stemming from the desacralization of nature. This perspective, which calls for a revitalization of ecological spirituality, emphasizes a reunion with the sacred character of the cosmos (Asmanto 2015, 334). In parallel,

a second stream of scholarship has sought to construct an environmental ethic from the legal and normative traditions of Islam (Dien 2000, 130). This juridical approach includes the development of *fiqh al-bī'ah* (Amiruddin et al. 2024, 188).

The application of foundational legal maxims such as *al-dararu yuzāl* (Zamroni et al. 2025, 737) and the utilization of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) as a guiding paradigm for contemporary reinterpretation (Auda 2008, 28). While both the sapiential and juridical approaches offer invaluable resources, their separation often perpetuates a polarization between a mysticism that can appear detached from concrete action and a legalism that may lack a deep-seated ontological motivation.

This polarization reveals a significant research gap: the need for an integrated framework that connects profound spiritual experience with active ethical responsibility. The true locus for such an integration is not in abstract texts alone, but within a living tradition where this connection is actively cultivated and transmitted. While scholars like Azyumardi Azra have masterfully mapped the vast intellectual and scholarly networks of the Nusantara archipelago, the precise pedagogical methods through which the pesantren's ecological worldview is instilled—how it moves from latent principle to lived ethic—remain critically under-theorized (Azra 2004, 25). The central question, therefore, is not merely what this worldview is, but how it is systematically formed, nurtured, and passed down through the educational and spiritual lifeblood of this unique institution. To understand this transmission is to excavate the very core of an Islamic Educational Philosophy—one that functions not as a modern administrative curriculum, but as a living ontological praxis designed to shape the human soul for its ecological destiny.

A potential bridge for this gap was proposed in a prior study by the author, which identified the panentheistic ontology of Muhammad Iqbal as a robust philosophical framework that establishes the interconnectedness of all existence and promotes an environmental ethic rooted in a dynamic, creative universe. To prevent any theological conflation with static pantheism—which risks reducing the Divine entirely to the material cosmos—this study explicitly adopts Iqbal's panentheism. Ontologically, Iqbalian panentheism posits that while the universe is intimately encompassed within God, the Divine essence remains absolutely transcendent. As Iqbal establishes, nature is not a static entity identical to God, but rather a dynamic "structure of events" that is organic to the Ultimate Ego (Iqbal 2013, 45). The cosmos, therefore, is a continuous creative habit of the Divine, providing a theological framework where nature is sacred but not deified. However, the theoretical potential of Iqbal's thought has yet to be employed as a hermeneutic lens to excavate and understand the practical, lived ecotheology of the pesantren. This paper seeks to fill that gap by demonstrating how Iqbal's action-oriented philosophy can illuminate the dialectic of mystical experience and ethical practice found within this unique Nusantara tradition.

This paper, therefore, puts forth the central thesis that the ecological wisdom embedded in Indonesian pesantren traditions reveals a 'contextualized

panentheism’—understood not as a static doctrine, but as a living dialectic. This dialectic moves from a ‘pantheistic moment’ of mystical fusion with nature to a ‘panentheistic stance’ of conscious, ethical action within it. The novelty of this research lies in its synthetic and hermeneutic approach. Instead of treating mystical experience and ethical action as separate or opposing poles—a common polarization in the existing literature—this study demonstrates their dynamic interplay within a specific living tradition. By employing the action-oriented philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal as a hermeneutic lens, this paper moves beyond merely describing local wisdom, aiming instead to articulate its underlying philosophical structure and revitalize its relevance for contemporary challenges. This act of bridging Iqbal’s high philosophy with the grounded pedagogical praxis of the pesantren constitutes the primary contribution of this work, effectively redefining Islamic Educational Philosophy as an existential tool for planetary stewardship.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to excavate, articulate, and revitalize the ecological dimension of the pesantren’s intellectual and spiritual tradition. The aim is to demonstrate how this local wisdom, when philosophically illuminated, provides a holistic and spiritually grounded ethical framework that can meaningfully contribute to the global discourse on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this objective, the research is guided by the central question: How does the pesantren tradition navigate the dialectic between the mystical experience of nature and the demands of ethical action, and in what way can this synthesis, understood through an Iqbalian panentheistic lens, be formulated as the ontological foundation of an Islamic Educational Philosophy capable of actualizing a comprehensive Sustainable Development Ethic? To undertake this ontological excavation and answer this central question, a specific methodological approach is required.

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. This methodology was deliberately chosen over purely descriptive approaches because the aim is not merely to catalog ecological practices, but to excavate a “lived ontology”—the very structure of meaning that underpins ethical action (Gadamer 2003, 125). The research process is thus conceived as a dialogue between the interpreter’s present horizon, shaped by the urgency of the SDGs, and the historical horizon of the pesantren texts. The goal of this interpretive act is to achieve a ‘fusion of horizons’ (*horizontverschmelzung*), wherein the tradition’s ecological wisdom can be understood from within and, through an act of application (*anwendung*), revitalized as an authentic and robust ethic for the contemporary era.

Operationally, to ensure methodological rigor, the practical execution of this fusion of horizons is structured according to the established framework of philosophical research methodology (Bakker and Zubair 1994, 92–98). This framework systematizes the hermeneutic process into four distinct procedural stages: Historical objectification, pre-understanding articulation, hermeneutic dialogue, and application (*anwendung*). Contextually, this study operationalizes

these four stages as follows: First, the historical objectification maps the original structure of meaning within classical pesantren texts, specifically the mystical experience of unity with nature (the pantheistic moment) in *al-Hikam* and Hamzah Fansuri's poetry. Second, the pre-understanding articulation formulates the present-day crisis of environmental degradation and the ethical deadlock in SDGs implementation from the reader's standpoint. Third, the hermeneutic dialogue forces a dialectical confrontation between the historical texts and the contemporary crisis through the lens of Iqbal's panentheism, interrogating the texts' capacity to shift the alienated Cartesian ego into a responsible *khalifah*. Finally, the application produces a new conceptual synthesis— "Contextualized Panentheism"—which is practically demonstrated as the ethical foundation driving the success of eco-pesantren and customary maritime laws.

The Pantheistic Moment: Mystical Fusion with Nature in Pesantren's Spiritual Texts

The experiential foundation for an ecological ethic within the pesantren tradition is not typically found in systematic treatises on environmental law, but rather in the contemplative prose of Sufi masters. A primary example is the celebrated *al-Hikam* of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī. This collection of aphorisms has served not merely as an inspirational text but as a core curricular pillar shaping the mystical consciousness of students for centuries. Through established pedagogical methods such as *sorogan* (one-on-one tutorial) and *bandongan* (classical lecture), its dense metaphysical principles are systematically unpacked and internalized. Here, these traditional methods operate as the practical mechanics of an Islamic Educational Philosophy, becoming the very grammar through which a *santri* learns to perceive the world not as a collection of objects, but as a theatre for divine manifestation (Muttaqin 2016, 51–53). These texts do not speak of ecology in modern terms but instead articulate a profound vision of the cosmos as a direct manifestation of the Divine, inviting an experience of mystical fusion that resonates with the raw, immersive encounters with nature found in the literary archetype of Knut Hamsun's *Pan* (Hamsun 2007, 63). This "pantheistic moment" is a recurring theme, articulated through a sophisticated metaphysical grammar.

A central aphorism from *al-Hikam* captures the dual perception of the mystic, which forms the basis for this experience of fusion: "*Al-kā'īnu thābitun bi ithbātīhi wa mamḥuwun bi aḥadiyyati dhātīhi*" (All of creation is made existent by His affirmation, yet it is effaced by the Oneness of His Essence). This statement presents a paradox: the cosmos is undeniably real and affirmed by God (*thābitun*), yet in the overwhelming presence of the absolute Divine Oneness, its independent reality is completely effaced (*mamḥuwun*) (Akyawī 2020, 150). This is the intellectual articulation of the experience of *fanā'* (annihilation), where the boundaries between the observer and the observed landscape dissolve. Nature is not seen as a separate object to be analyzed, but as a theatre for the manifestation of the One, a reality whose very existence is simultaneously affirmed and negated

by the Divine presence that underpins it (Arifka 2025, 61–62).

This theme of God’s simultaneous hiddenness and manifestation is further explored in a series of subsequent aphorisms. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī questions the very possibility of God being veiled by the cosmos, arguing that the cosmos itself is the veil. He states, “*Mimmā yadulluka ‘alā wujūdi qabrihi subḥānahu an ḥajabaka ‘anhu bimā laysa bi mawjūdin ma‘abu*” (Among the signs of His overpowering majesty is that He is veiled from you by that which has no existence alongside Him). This paradox is immediately sharpened: “*Kayfa yutaṣawwaru an yahjubahu shay’un wa huwa alladhī aḥbara kulla shay*” (How can it be imagined that something veils Him, when He is the One who manifests everything?). The argument culminates in an affirmation of radical immanence: “*Kayfa yutaṣawwaru an yahjubahu shay’un wa huwa aqrabu ilayka min kulli shay*” (How can it be imagined that something veils Him, when He is closer to you than anything?) (Muttaqin 2016, 55–60).

This mystical perception is further radicalized in another of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī’s aphorisms, which states: “*Al-kawnu kulluhu ḡulmatun, wa innamā anārabu ḡubūruḥ ḥaqqi fīhi*” (The cosmos is entirely darkness, and it is only illuminated by the manifestation of the Real God within it). This is not a physical statement but an ontological declaration (Ghazali 2013, 146–47). The “darkness” of the cosmos is its inherent nothingness, its lack of self-subsistence. The universe possesses no light of its own; its reality, its beauty, its very intelligibility is nothing but the borrowed light of God’s continuous self-manifestation (*ḡubūr* or *tajallī*) (Akkach 1997, 98). For the seeker on the Sufi path, therefore, the goal is an act of perception that is akin to a form of spiritual seeing; to look at a tree and see not “a tree” but to witness “the Real manifesting as a tree.” Cultivating this radical shift in perception is precisely where Islamic Educational Philosophy ceases to be a theoretical discipline and operates as an active, soul-shaping mechanism. The distinction collapses in an ecstatic vision where the phenomenal world is understood not as a collection of objects, but as a series of divine gestures (Zebiri 2011, 301).

This ecstatic viewpoint ultimately dissolves the subject-object duality that structures normal perception (Heidegger 2010, 35). The final barrier to this unitive vision, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī suggests, is not in the world itself but in the mind’s own illusory constructions. He asserts: “*Mā istatara al-ḥaqqu ‘anka bi wujūdi mawjūdin dūnahu, wa innamā ḥajabaka ‘anhu tawabḥumu mawjūdin ma‘abu*” (The Real is not veiled from you by the existence of a being alongside Him; rather, what veils you from Him is the *illusion* of a being alongside Him) (Sakandari 2019, 102–4).

Here, the hermeneutic deepens to a radical degree: the problem is not the existence of the world, but our delusion that it exists independently of God. It is this “ontological schizophrenia” of seeing two realities—God and world—that constitutes the ultimate veil. This is precisely the tragic, unarticulated agony of Hamsun’s Glahn. He is trapped in the raw power of the “pantheistic moment” (Hamsun 2007, 58), feeling the unitive presence in nature so intensely that it

drives him to pantheism, yet he lacks the spiritual grammar to understand that the true illusion is not his ecstatic vision, but the “sane” world of separation and objects to which he cannot return. The pesantren texts, through the wisdom of *al-Ḥikam*, provide this grammar: they teach that the gaze of mystic rapture—the act of seeing only the Beloved everywhere—is, in fact, the highest form of knowing. This absolute redefinition of ‘knowledge’—from the mere empirical accumulation of facts to the existential witnessing of the Divine—is exactly what establishes this mystical grammar as the epistemological core of a true Islamic Educational Philosophy.

The presence of this mystical grammar in *al-Ḥikam*, which has shaped spiritual consciousness in the pesantren for centuries, is not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, its deepest and perhaps most poetic resonance can be found in the works of a sheikh from the Nusantara itself, Hamzah Fansuri. While Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī employs dense, aphoristic Arabic prose to deconstruct the illusion of duality, Fansuri utilizes the power of Malay *shī‘r* (poetry) to dissolve the boundaries of the ego in the ocean of Divine Being. Fansuri’s central doctrine, often simplified as *wujūdiyyah*, is not a naive pantheism that equates God with the cosmos. Rather, it is a sophisticated ontological articulation that there is only one ultimate Reality, *al-Wujūd* (the Real Being, or God), and the entire cosmos (*al-‘ālam*) is nothing but the manifestation (*maḥṣar*) of His Attributes and Names. In Fansuri’s most famous metaphor, the universe is akin to a wave upon the ocean. A wave possesses a recognizable form and a name by which it can be called, yet the essence of its being is nothing other than the water of the ocean itself. It has no existence independent of the ocean. This serves as a Nusantara echo of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī’s aphorism: “*Al-kā’īnu thābitun bi ithbātīhi wa mamḥuwun bi aḥadiyyati dhātīhi*” (All of creation is made existent by His affirmation, yet it is effaced by the Oneness of His Essence). For Fansuri, this ‘pantheistic moment’ is the pinnacle of *ma‘rifah* (gnosis): an act of perception wherein the seeker (*sālik*) no longer sees the wave as a wave but witnesses the Infinite Ocean in its every ripple (Ni’am 2017, 266–70).

This intellectual maneuver by Fansuri has a transformative impact, not only for this argument but also for the understanding of ‘local wisdom’. It definitively demonstrates that the mystical experience of unitive being is not an imported commodity borrowed from Arab or Persian traditions, but rather a spiritual heartbeat that found its authentic expression in the Malay-Nusantara language and imagination (Faslah and Yanti 2022, 49).

Fansuri provides the linguistic and spiritual framework for what is experienced in a raw and tragic manner by archetypal characters such as Glahn in the novel *Pan* (Hamsun 2007, 63). Whereas Glahn is trapped in an unarticulated wilderness ecstasy that drives him to madness, Fansuri offers a ‘boat’ (*syair*)—a method and a map—to navigate this ocean of experience without drowning. His poems serve a dual function: as a record of his personal experience of annihilation and simultaneously as a pedagogical manual to guide his disciples toward the same experience. This strategic use of poetry as a tool for spiritual transformation exemplifies the deeply

rooted Islamic Educational Philosophy at work within the archipelago. Thus, the presence of such a rich *wujūdi* tradition at the heart of Nusantara's intellectuality provides irrefutable evidence. It affirms that the dialectic between mystical fusion with nature and the ethical consciousness that emerges thereafter—the core of the 'contextualized panentheism' proposed herein—is indeed a wisdom that has grown, breathed, and been inherited from within the womb of the pesantren tradition itself, making it an authentic and deeply rooted foundation upon which to build an environmental ethic for the modern era.

The Panentheistic Stance: Ethical Consciousness and the Role of the *Khalīfab*

The "gaze of mystic rapture," while foundational, cannot remain in a state of passive, ecstatic dissolution. The journey of the self, as charted in the esoteric traditions of the pesantren, necessitates a return—a moment of sobriety (*baqā'*) that follows the annihilation (*fana'*) (Iqbal 2013, 13). This return is not a regression to the old, separated world but an awakening into a new stance: the emergence of a conscious, active, and ethically responsible Self (Iqbal 2022, 129). This is the panentheistic stance, where the self, having experienced its unity with the cosmos, now recognizes its unique role within it. This transition from contemplative mystic to active vicegerent (*khalīfab*) is the very objective of the pesantren's spiritual cultivation (*tarbiyah*)—a process that serves as the operational core of an Islamic Educational Philosophy, perfectly articulated through the philosophical lens of Muhammad Iqbal's concept of *khudi*, or the self (Ahmad et al. 2023, 33–34).

For Iqbal, the universe does not simply exist as a static, external fact to be observed; rather, its very form is an effect of the Self's creative affirmation. In the soaring verses of *Asrār-i-Khudī*, he proclaims: "The form of existence is an effect of the self, whatsoever thou sees is a secret of the self. When the self-awakens to consciousness, it reveals the universe of thought." This active, world-shaping Self is the true agent of history and knowledge. It is the *khalīfab* not merely as a passive guardian, but as an active co-creator, a participant in what Iqbal, in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, calls God's continuous creative activity (Iqbal 2013, 26). The ethical consciousness of the *khalīfab* is therefore not a matter of following a static set of rules, but of engaging with the world, wrestling with its secrets, and in doing so, strengthening and realizing its own latent potentialities (Tarigan et al. 2024, 16977).

A profound example of this active, interpretive stance is found in the modern Muslim engagement with both revelation and scientific discovery, such as the scientific exegesis (*tafsīr 'ilmi*) of Q.S. Aṭ-Ṭalāq [65]: 12. This verse, which speaks of the seven heavens and "of the earth, a similar number," has been a subject of deep contemplation (Helli 2025, 13). Classical exegetes like al-Qurṭubī explored possibilities of seven distinct, inhabited earths or seven connected layers separated by great seas (Ahmad 2013, 6).

In the modern era, this contemplation has transformed into an active scientific inquiry, a testament to the *khudi* seeking to understand its cosmic environment.

Recent studies, such as that by Firmansyah (Firmansyah 2025, 117), highlight the remarkable correspondence between this verse and geophysical findings that the Earth is composed of seven distinct layers: the crust, lithosphere, asthenosphere, transition zone, inner mantle, outer core, and inner core.

From an Iqbalian perspective, however, the significance of this correspondence is not merely one of scriptural “proof” or prediction—a reading that would remain trapped in a positivistic mindset. The deeper, more essential truth lies in viewing the Qur’anic verse not as a static statement of fact, but as a divine invitation that awakens the *khudi*’s quest for knowledge. The scientific discovery is not a passive confirmation of an old truth, but the active fulfillment of the Self’s destiny to master and comprehend its world (Azad 2014, 32). It is the *khudi* in action, striving to unravel the “secret of the Self” that is hidden in the very structure of the Earth. As Iqbal writes, “*The pencil of the Self limned a hundred to-days/to achieve the dawn of a single morrow*” (Iqbal 2022, 11).

The centuries of geological and geophysical struggle are the “hundred to-days” of the collective human Self, striving to realize the “single morrow” of integrated knowledge where revelation and observation find their harmony. This act of scientific interpretation is the ultimate fulfillment of the *khalifah*’s role: to engage with the signs of God not as a passive observer, but as a dynamic, knowing, and world-shaping ego, thereby participating in the endless unfolding of cosmic life (Firmansyah 2025, 118).

To fully grasp the revolutionary power of this Iqbalian perspective, it is essential to contrast it with the dominant conception of the Self in modern Western thought: the Cartesian ego. Emerging from René Descartes’ foundational declaration, “*cogito, ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am), the modern Self was conceived as an isolated, disembodied, thinking substance. Its primary mode of being in the world is one of radical doubt, and its relationship with nature is that of a detached subject observing a lifeless object (*res extensa*) to be analyzed, mastered, and manipulated. This establishes the profound subject-object dualism that underpins the entire modern scientific and technological project, and by extension, is a root cause of the contemporary ecological crisis (Altuner 2022, 40–42). It is, in fact, the philosophical genealogy of the “ontological schizophrenia” diagnosed in the mystical tradition—a profound violation of *tawhīd* (Divine Unity) that violently severs the modern ego from the sacred, interconnected web of God, humanity, and nature.

Iqbal’s concept of *khudi* emerges as a radical counterproposal to this alienated Self, and it is precisely the task of a genuine Islamic Educational Philosophy to dismantle this Cartesian illusion. The *khudi* is not a static, thinking-thing but a dynamic, striving, and perpetually developing center of energy and consciousness (Sass 1992, 112–13). Its reality is affirmed not by the isolation of pure thought, but through creative action, desire, and above all, love (*‘ishq*). Unlike the cold Cartesian intellect that dissects the world for exploitation, *‘ishq* serves as a profound epistemological and ontological force. It unites the *khalifah* with the cosmos by perceiving nature not as dead matter, but as a living mirror (*tajalli*) of the Divine.

The most critical distinction lies in its ultimate purpose: the *khudi*'s goal is not to dominate the world as a separate entity, but to become a "co-worker with God" by progressively assimilating His divine attributes. It is fundamentally theomorphic (God-like in form). The strengthening of the *khudi* is a process of becoming more God-like, which, in the Iqbalian framework, means becoming more creative, more life-giving, and more merciful. Within this paradigm, ecological preservation transcends secular resource management; it becomes an intimate spiritual practice, a vital manifestation of God's *Rahmān* (Compassion) and *Rahīm* (Mercy) to protect His living signs (*āyat*). This theomorphic telos provides the intrinsic ethical impulse that the isolated Cartesian ego critically lacks (Malook 2023, 40–42).

The alienation engendered by the Cartesian ego is threefold: a separation from God, from nature, and ultimately, from one's own embodied existence. In stark contrast, Iqbal's concept of *khudi* is inherently participatory. It does not and cannot exist in a vacuum; it discovers, strengthens, and realizes itself precisely *through* a dynamic and often confrontational engagement with the "other"—be it society, the material world, or the Ultimate Ego (God). For the *khudi*, nature is not a dead object to be dissected but a living field of signs (*āyāt*) that both challenge and nourish it, providing the very resistance needed for it to grow and fortify itself. This reframes the entire meaning of vicegerency (*khalīfah*).

A Cartesian *khalīfah* would be a technocratic manager, an engineer of resources standing outside the system he controls. The Iqbalian concept of *khalīfah*, however, is a creative participant within a universe that Iqbal, in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, describes as an unfinished, ever-evolving reality. Humanity is not a passive guardian of a static museum but an active invitee in God's continuous cosmic creation. Consequently, ethical action is not a burdensome duty imposed by an external law, but the very process of the *khudi*'s self-realization. By acting ethically upon the environment—transforming a barren landscape into a flourishing garden, for instance—the *khudi* actualizes its own latent creative potentialities. In doing so, it strengthens its own being and becomes a more perfect mirror of the Divine Creator. This provides a powerful, internally-generated motivation for environmental stewardship that is absent in the detached, objectifying gaze of the modern secular worldview (Azad 2014, 5–7).

The ethical dynamism of the Iqbal concept of *khudi* as *khalīfah* is not a mere philosophical abstraction; it finds its most profound anchor in the Qur'anic concept of the *amānah*, or the Divine Trust. The Qur'an narrates a moment of cosmic significance when this Trust was offered to the Heavens, the Earth, and the Mountains, but they shrank from bearing it, and humanity (*al-insān*) accepted it, being described as "unjust and ignorant" (Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 72). Classical and modern exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*) have understood this *amānah* not simply as a set of rules, but as the far weightier burden and gift of self-consciousness, free will, and the capacity for moral responsibility—the very attributes that constitute the active, choosing Self (Hidayah and Kurniawan 2021, 55–56).

The heavens and the earth, in their perfect, unthinking submission (*tasbīh*), lack this capacity for free, creative ethical choice. Humanity's acceptance of the

amānah, therefore, is what defines its unique, precarious, and dignified position in the cosmos. The role of *khalīfah* is thus understood as the direct operational consequence of accepting this *amānah*. One cannot claim the station of vicegerency without simultaneously bearing the immense weight of this Trust. Consequently, the authority of the *khalīfah* is not one of absolute dominion but of profound fiduciary responsibility. To betray the *amānah* through negligence, waste, or the willful destruction of the environment is not merely a policy failure or an ethical lapse; it is an act of cosmic treason, a fundamental violation of the very covenant that underpins and defines human existence in the world (Öztürk 2024, 26–27).

If the *amānah* defines the substance of the *khalīfah*'s responsibility, the Qur'anic concept of the *mīzān*, or Balance, defines the universal standard by which that responsibility is measured (Öztürk 2024, 27). The duty of the *khalīfah* is not simply to act, but to act in such a way that maintains and nurtures the divinely established equilibrium of the cosmos. The Qur'an states this with remarkable clarity in Q.S. Ar-Raḥmān [55]: 7–9: "And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance (*al-mīzān*). That you do not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance." Commentators have long interpreted *al-mīzān* here as referring to more than just a physical scale; it signifies the intricate, interconnected, and perfectly calibrated order of the entire created world—from the gravitational paths of celestial bodies to the delicate interdependencies of terrestrial ecosystems. It is the principle of both physical and moral justice woven into the very fabric of reality. The divine command, "*allā taṭṭibhaw fī al-mīzān*" (that you do not transgress within the balance), thus stands as one of the most direct and explicit environmental injunctions in the Qur'an. This concept provides concrete ethical guidance for the awakened *khudi*. Every action, from the individual choice of consumption to the formulation of national policy, must be weighed against its impact on the *mīzān*. Deforestation, biodiversity loss, and pollution are not merely suboptimal outcomes; they are acts of "making deficient the balance" (*tukhsirū al-mīzān*), a direct contravention of a divine imperative. The ethical act of the *khalīfah*, therefore, is to consciously utilize the freedom granted by the *amānah* to creatively and justly uphold the cosmic harmony of the *mīzān* (Archer et al. 2022, 41–44).

Thus, the journey from the pantheistic moment to the panentheistic stance is not a departure from the world, but a deeper plunge into its reality. The world, first encountered in the gaze of mystic rapture, is re-engaged by the awakened *khudi* as a divine question posed in the language of existence. This re-engagement, however, is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is cultivated through a concrete pedagogical framework. The ethical consciousness of the *khalīfah* is forged through the embodied example (*'uswab*) of the *kiai*, whose stewardship of the environment serves as a living text. It is sharpened through spiritual disciplines (*riyāḍah*) that teach restraint and gratitude, and it is actualized through communal service (*khidmah*), where caring for the pesantren's ecosystem becomes a practical application of divine trust (*amānah*). The digging of a well, the planting of a tree, the meticulous separation of waste, these cease to be mundane tasks. Within

this educational matrix, they are transformed into the actualized curriculum of an Islamic Educational Philosophy. It is the Self's answer to the world's question, the *khudi's* poetic reply to the divine prose of creation, turning every deed into a continuation of the cosmic revelation.

Synthesis: "Contextualized Panentheism" as an Authentic Ethic for the SDGs

The framework of 'contextualized panentheism' that emerges from the pesantren tradition is not a static metaphysical doctrine, but a dynamic, lived ontology revealed in the dialectic between the world-dissolving ecstasy of the 'pantheistic moment' and the world-engaging responsibility of the 'pantheistic stance'. Its practical relevance becomes powerfully evident when this lived ontology is positioned as an ethical foundation for the environmental pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is particularly crucial in contexts where purely regulatory or technocratic approaches prove insufficient because they fail to address the underlying worldview that permits the environment to be seen as a mere object for exploitation (Yudawisastra 2025, 4). The dialectic traced in this paper offers a potent alternative to this modern failure. By effectively operationalizing this lived ontology into a comprehensive Islamic Educational Philosophy, it provides a deep-seated motivational grammar where conservation becomes not merely a policy, but a form of worship.

Practical Application I: SDG 15 (Life on Land) and the Eco-Pesantren Model

This framework offers a potent, grounded response to the challenges of SDG 15: Life on Land, particularly the critical issue of deforestation in Indonesia. Sociological analyses consistently reveal that top-down, technocratic conservation policies in Indonesia are fraught with limitations. They often simplify complex socio-political drivers, suffer from governance misalignments and corruption, exclude local communities, and neglect ecological nuances, leading to persistent policy failure (Maxton-Lee 2018, 420; Seymour et al. 2020, 503326; Tacconi et al. 2019, 101943). Market-based instruments and purely economic incentives are frequently insufficient to compete with the powerful profits of illegal logging and agribusiness, and their effectiveness is severely hampered by weak institutions and law enforcement (Bösch 2021, 1050; Watts et al. 2019, 101956; Wilcove et al. 2013, 533–34).

Furthermore, the failure of these technocratic models is often rooted in their inability to meaningfully engage local populations. Many top-down programs in regions like Kalimantan fail due to a lack of genuine community participation, which is hindered by poor communication, unclear objectives, and procedural inequities that prevent true empowerment (Friedman et al. 2020, 16; Miller et al. 2024, 110605). Even government-led "community-based" initiatives frequently fall into the trap of "responsibilities," where management duties are transferred to local groups without adequate resources or authority, perpetuating exclusion rather than resolving it (Erbaugh 2019, 102019; Santika et al. 2019, 205–6). This demonstrates a fundamental disconnect between policy ideals and local realities.

In contrast to these failing administrative models, ‘contextualized pantheism’ reframes the issue ontologically by operating as the active praxis of an Islamic Educational Philosophy. From the purely pragmatic viewpoint ingrained by modern secular paradigms, a forest is inevitably reduced to its economic value as mere timber (Zulkarnain 2025, 17). However, when a community’s consciousness is cultivated through the pedagogical matrix of this pesantren framework, the forest is perceived first through a unitive vision—as a living, breathing ecosystem that glorifies God (*tasbīh*), a direct manifestation (*tajallī*) of the Divine. This ontologically educated perception makes the act of indiscriminate logging not merely a regulatory offense, but a profound spiritual violation, a desecration. The subsequent ethical consciousness of the *khalīfah*, forged within the educational philosophy, translates this reverence into definitive action, guided by the divine trust (*amānah*).

This is not a theoretical abstraction; its power is empirically observable. Studies confirm that local wisdom across Southeast Asia, which is often rooted in similar spiritual worldviews, plays a crucial role in sustainable forest management through customary laws, sacred zones, and community stewardship (Novianti et al. 2022, 261; Setiawan and Triyanto 2021, 83). This intrinsic motivation is precisely what is cultivated and actualized through the Islamic Educational Philosophy of pesantren in Indonesia. Religious authorities like the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) have issued fatwas against forest burning, grounding policy in Qur’anic principles (Gade 2015, 174–75; Iskandar and Sofuoğlu 2025, 183–85).

More directly, pesantren have emerged as vital actors in community-based forest management, pioneering models like “eco-pesantren” and “*waqf* forestry” that integrate religious values, education, and participatory approaches to promote sustainable land use (Subaidi et al. 2023, 544–45; Muhtadi et al. 2022, 191–92). Initiatives in East Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi demonstrate how pesantren leverage their leadership and community solidarity for reforestation, disaster mitigation, and developing sustainable agribusiness (Aulia et al. 2019, 35, 2021, 012052). These faith-led models succeed where technocratic ones fail because, as applied manifestations of an Islamic Educational Philosophy, they provide the powerful, internally-driven “why” that complements and strengthens state-led efforts to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems (Hasan et al. 2022, 281; Jannah 2024, 399–400).

Practical Application II: SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and Customary Maritime Laws

Similarly, this ethic addresses the core threats to SDG 14: Life Below Water, which the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas identifies as stemming from pollution and destructive fishing practices. The drivers of these problems are deeply socio-economic, rooted in rising consumption patterns, inadequate waste management infrastructure, and low public awareness (Phelan et al. 2020, 149; Lestari and Trihadiningrum 2019, 110505). Consequently, marine conservation policies in Indonesia face immense challenges, including

weak enforcement, regulatory gaps, and a failure to engage communities effectively (Hartanto 2024, 310–11; Sidik et al. 2023, 105388; Suryawan et al. 2025, 10692).

Efforts to address these issues through secular awareness campaigns often fall short. Research shows that simply increasing knowledge about environmental problems rarely translates into sustained behavioral change, as such campaigns often fail to address the underlying social norms, cognitive biases, or economic incentives that drive unsustainable practices (Cinner 2018, 890–91; Green et al. 2019, 74–75). In some cases, information-heavy campaigns can even trigger resistance or a “boomerang effect,” in which awareness increases while the intention to act sustainably decreases (Skallerud et al. 2021, 946). This highlights the limitations of approaches that do not resonate with deeper cultural and value systems.

Once again, ‘contextualized panentheism’ provides the missing ontological depth. Where a secular framework might appeal to long-term economic self-interest, this framework—functioning as a lived Islamic Educational Philosophy—reframes the issue internally. In the ‘pantheistic moment’, the ocean is experienced not as a vast dumping ground, but as a profound sign (āyat) of God’s limitless power. A coral reef is not a source of limestone, but a vibrant tapestry of divine artistry (Zulkarnain 2025, 39). Consequently, the *khalīfah*’s ethical stance, guided by the imperative to uphold the cosmic balance (*mīzān*), demands action that respects this sacredness. Avoiding plastic waste becomes an act of purification, and choosing sustainable fishing methods becomes an expression of gratitude (*shukūr*) and justice (*‘adl*).

This spiritual grammar is not hypothetical; it is the operational principle behind some of Indonesia’s most successful traditional marine management systems. Local cosmologies across the archipelago perceive the sea as a living, spiritual entity, fostering a deep sense of stewardship (Suryantini et al. 2022, 23). This worldview is the foundation for customary laws like *sasi laut*, a practice in Eastern Indonesia where communities enforce periodic closures of marine areas to allow resources to replenish (Prasetyo et al. 2020, 50–51; McLeod et al. 2009, 658–59).

The effectiveness of these systems, enforced by customary guardians (*Kewang Laut*) and rooted in local beliefs, is well-documented in case studies from Misool, Raja Ampat, and Maluku, where they demonstrably conserve marine resources and support community well-being (Muin and Rakuasa 2023, 281–82; Uktolseja and Balik 2022, 18–19).

The success of these faith- and culture-based approaches is further validated by studies showing that religious leadership can be a powerful driver of sustainable fishing practices by shaping community norms and increasing compliance with regulations (Lowe et al. 2019, 1028; Koehrsen and Ives 2025, 1320–21). These traditional systems are a real-world manifestation of the ethic proposed in this paper. They succeed because they do what top-down, secular policies often cannot: by embodying the praxis of an Islamic Educational Philosophy, they transform environmental management from an external regulation imposed from above into an internal, moral obligation that is understood and enforced by the community

from within.

These evidence-backed case studies demonstrate the profound practical utility of “contextualized panentheism.” By providing a robust, internally driven motivational framework, this lived ontology, cultivated within the pesantren tradition as a definitive Islamic Educational Philosophy, offers an authentic and effective ethical foundation to address the complex environmental challenges of the SDGs era. It is precisely this educational praxis that provides the deep-seated “why” capable of transforming human behavior from being the primary threat to Indonesia’s ecosystems into their most dedicated and effective guardian.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that in the search for a robust spiritual ethic to animate the Sustainable Development Goals, a profound resource lies within the Indonesian pesantren tradition. It has excavated a lived ontology, cultivated as the core praxis of an Islamic Educational Philosophy, termed ‘contextualized panentheism’. This is not a static doctrine but a dynamic dialectic: a journey that begins in the ‘pantheistic moment’—a gaze of mystic rapture (*wajd*) rooted in both classical Sufism and the authentic intellectual heritage of Nusantara—and culminates in the ‘panentheistic stance’. In this second moment, the awakened Iqbal concept of *khudi*, philosophically distinct from the alienated Cartesian ego and theologically grounded in the Qur’anic concepts of *amānah* and *mīzān*, returns as a responsible *khalīfah* within a sacred world.

The primary contribution of this research has been to articulate this synthesis and, crucially, to demonstrate its profound practical utility. By moving beyond a purely theoretical excavation, this paper has put its central thesis to the test against the concrete environmental crises addressed by the SDGs. The analysis has shown how the motivational grammar of ‘contextualized panentheism’ offers a potent, internally driven alternative to the demonstrably limited technocratic and top-down conservation models currently employed in Indonesia. Through evidence-backed case studies on deforestation and marine degradation, this paper has revealed how this conceptual framework is actualized as an effective Islamic Educational Philosophy, finding its real-world manifestation in the successful, community-driven stewardship models of local wisdom and the eco-pesantren. Ultimately, ‘contextualized panentheism’ offers an authentic and effective foundation for a sustainable future, proposing an ethic in which care for the earth is not merely an obligation but the necessary and sacred expression of a self that has witnessed the Divine in all things.

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