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ISLAM, GENDER, AND CIVIC ENVIRONMENTALISM: MUSLIM WOMEN'S COMMUNITY-BASED WASTE ACTIVISM IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The growing waste crisis has emerged as a pressing environmental challenge in Indonesia, driven by rapid urbanization, the growth of the food and beverage industry, and persistent improper disposal practices. Although Islamic environmental discourse has gained increasing normative recognition, much of the existing scholarship focuses on

theological formulations rather than on how religious values are enacted in everyday environmental practices. Furthermore, studies of environmental movements often pay limited attention to the role of religion and gender in shaping grassroots collective action. To address this gap, this article examines how Muslim women leverage Islamic values in community-based waste activism. Drawing on qualitative research conducted between July and September 2023—including participant observation, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with Muslim women environmental activists across several Islamic institutions—this study approaches Islam as lived religion embedded in civic practice. The findings indicate that waste management is framed not merely as a technical issue but as both a civic responsibility and a religious obligation grounded in Islamic notions of stewardship, cleanliness, and moral accountability. Waste banks emerge not only as mechanisms for waste reduction but also as social spaces for collective learning, community mobilization, leadership formation, and women's economic empowerment. By positioning waste management as a domain where religion, gender, and civic engagement intersect, this study argues that Muslim women's initiatives constitute a form of civic environmentalism in which Islamic values are mobilized as moral resources to address contemporary patterns of consumption and waste. This study contributes to the sociology of religion and gendered environmental activism in contemporary Indonesia by demonstrating how environmental responsibility is enacted through everyday religious practice and grassroots-level institutional innovation.

Keywords*: Islam, Civic Environmentalism, Muslim women, Community-Based Waste*

A. Introduction

The waste crisis in Indonesia exemplifies the fundamental contradiction between the expansion of modern consumption and the practices of waste management in everyday life. According to data from the National Waste Management Information System (SIPSN, *Sistem Informasi Pengelolaan Sampah Nasional*) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK, *Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan*), total national waste production is projected to reach 25.1 million tons per year by 2025. This figure

encompasses 249 regencies and cities across Indonesia, serving a total population of 272,229,372 (Registration, 2021). Of this waste, 65.73% is discarded, while only 34.27% is properly managed. Households are the largest contributors, generating 56.67% of the waste, followed by business centers at 7.58%, markets at 13.7%, and regional areas at 4.68%. The remainder is produced by various locations, including public facilities and offices. This indicates that the issue is deeply rooted in everyday consumption practices (SIPSN, n.d.). Moreover, Indonesia ranks third among the ten largest plastic waste-producing countries globally (Haryanto et al., 2024). Therefore, the waste crisis transcends mere governance; it is fundamentally a social and normative issue that touches on consumption culture, value orientation, and the ecological responsibilities of society.

The ecological crisis is deeply intertwined with value structures, meaning that responses cannot solely depend on regulations, religious edicts, or infrastructure improvements. The field of inquiry examining the relationship between religion and the environment emerged in the 1960s, coinciding with a growing global awareness of environmental issues. A significant contribution to this discourse came from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who delivered a series of influential speeches in 1966 highlighting the connection between environmental degradation and the spiritual and moral crisis of the modern world. These insights warrant serious consideration as a crucial aspect of the study of religion and the environment (Bagir et al., 2022; Bagir & Martiam, 2016).

In Indonesia, research exploring the relationship between religion and the environment has emerged in two

significant contexts: the growing concerns about ecological issues such as deforestation, and the influential role religion plays in public life, including its impact on environmental governance discourse and practices (Bagir, 2015). Given the critical role of religion, both religious communities and religious edicts significantly shape the daily lives of Indonesians (Wijsen, 2021). In a predominantly Muslim country like Indonesia, a fundamental question arises: to what extent do Islamic values inform everyday practices? The tension between normative religious teachings and modern social structures that influence patterns of production and consumption highlights the necessity for analyses that extend beyond normative theology, focusing instead on the lived social practices of religion.

Environmental governance issues are formally legitimized through religious authorities, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), which has issued MUI Fatwa No. 41/2014 on waste management and MUI Fatwa No. 86/2023 concerning global climate change control. However, integrating Islamic principles into environmental conservation efforts poses significant challenges (Testriono & Billahi, 2025). In addition, Wijsen (2025) notes that many studies on religion and the environment often assume that religious communities play a crucial role in addressing ecological crises. However, empirical analysis from Indonesia reveals that the connection between religious beliefs and environmentally friendly behaviors is not always strong or straightforward. Furthermore, the incorporation of religiously based environmental ethics into public policy does not happen automatically; rather,

it requires a process of normative negotiation and the development of discourse coalitions among diverse social actors. These findings highlight the need for further research on environmental governance practices—particularly in the context of waste management—that considers the religious and gender dimensions of everyday life. Consequently, there remains a gap in the literature for an analytical approach that links religion, gender, and citizenship practices within a more cohesive framework.

In the context of governance and civic engagement, the concept of civic environmentalism, as introduced by John (1994), provides a valuable analytical framework for exploring community-based environmental activism in Indonesia. John illustrates that environmental policies tend to be ineffective when they rely solely on top-down regulations; instead, they require a bottom-up approach that emphasizes collaboration, participation, and the utilization of local networks. Within this framework, addressing environmental challenges hinges on establishing "shadow communities"—informal networks of diverse actors that foster consensus and develop context-specific solutions. When applied to the waste management practices of Muslim women, this concept reveals how Islamic values function not merely as doctrinal norms but are mediated within local civic spaces through collaboration among communities, religious organizations, and local institutions. Consequently, waste bank activism can be seen as a form of civic environmentalism operating within a religious context, where Islamic ethics, gender roles, and environmental governance intersect in a tangible process of social negotiation.

Numerous studies indicate that women's participation in waste management is deeply rooted in a gender-based division of labor, which positions them as the primary managers of domestic responsibilities, including household waste production and management. In Indonesia, women not only oversee food-related tasks but also contribute to waste reduction through their involvement in community-based women's organizations, thus enhancing household and community waste management practices (Hadiningrat, 2020). Similar findings across various developing countries indicate that women often play a crucial role in collecting and sorting recyclable materials, despite their relatively marginalized status in the economic value chain, which is influenced by social constructs and limited resources (Muhammad & Manu, 2013; Nwamaka et al., 2021). Additionally, religious values can impact women's environmental practices, serving as a source of moral inspiration and legitimacy for pro-environmental behaviors in their daily lives (Fikri & Colombijn, 2021; Haq et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, this dynamic empowers Muslim women to leverage their social and religious standing by establishing waste banks and other community initiatives, thereby extending waste management practices beyond the domestic sphere and evolving into forms of civic engagement that foster leadership and social solidarity at the community level.

This article presents a three-pronged theoretical approach by integrating elements of Islam, gender, and civic environmentalism. First, it asserts that Islamic environmental ethics position waste management as a religious and moral obligation. Second, it employs gender analysis to emphasize

women's agency in transforming domestic labor into active civic practices. Lastly, civic environmentalism elucidates how these ethical commitments can be translated into collaborative governance within communities. By weaving these aspects together, the article argues that the waste management activism of Muslim women exemplifies a form of civic citizenship, in which Islamic values serve as moral resources for navigating contemporary consumption patterns. In doing so, it shifts the focus from abstract Islamic theological discussions to tangible civic practices at the community level.

In light of this context, this article addresses the central question: How do Muslim women harness religious values and discourses in their responses to the waste crisis through community-based waste management initiatives? This research employs a qualitative approach conducted from July to September 2023, utilizing methods such as participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The study engaged Muslim women involved in waste management initiatives across four types of Islamic institutions: Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), public and private Islamic universities, and community-based organizations. A total of fifteen participants contributed to the interviews. Through this research, the author contends that Muslim women's environmental activism transcends mere technical responses to waste management challenges; it embodies the integration of religious principles into everyday civic practices that weave together Islamic ethics, gender relations, and community governance. This analysis aims to enhance the fields of sociology of religion and gender-based environmental activism within contemporary Indonesia.

The subsequent section will provide a literature review and methodological framework before presenting the research findings and conclusions.

The exploration of the relationship between women and the environment has seen considerable conceptual advances over the past 30 years, particularly through the contributions of ecofeminist thinkers such as Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant. Shiva (2016) argues that the ecological crisis is inextricably linked to the expansion of global capitalism and a patriarchal culture that simultaneously marginalizes women and exploits nature as a mere object of production. In addition, Merchant (2014) illustrates that the historical trajectory of modernity has fostered a paradigm of domination over nature, which mirrors the subjugation of women. Therefore, achieving environmental conservation necessitates the restoration of ecological integrity that engages both men and women equally.

While Shiva and Merchant frame the ecological crisis as a critique of global capitalism and modern patriarchal culture, the literature on Islam and the environment enriches this discourse by providing a normative-theological foundation that emphasizes humanity's moral obligation to ensure environmental sustainability. Building upon this conceptual framework, the discussion shifts to the Islamic perspective on the environment, which offers an ethical basis for the human-nature relationship. Khalid (2002) contends that the ecological changes required today must be interpreted through the lens of Islamic teachings, which are articulated in four fundamental principles: tawhid (cosmic unity), fitrah (the inherent harmony of creation), mizan (balance), and khalifah

(human moral responsibility as custodians of the earth). In contrast to Western ecofeminist critiques that emerge from the deconstruction of modern epistemology, Islamic environmental ethics posits that the human relationship with nature has always been framed within religious values that reject excessive domination and exploitation. Consequently, while Shiva and Merchant perceive the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature as historical products of modernity, Islamic ethics presents a normative horizon that enables the transformation of these relationships through a religious ethic grounded in principles of balance and collective responsibility.

While ecofeminism offers a valuable critical lens for examining the intersection of gender and environmental degradation, this study does not utilize it as its primary analytical framework. Instead of viewing women as inherently closer to nature, this article adopts a socially constructed perspective, emphasizing how gender emerges from social, cultural, and religious negotiations. Therefore, Muslim women's participation in waste management is not conceptualized as a natural inclination linked to a supposed affinity with nature; rather, it is understood as the outcome of the interplay between social status, lived religious practices, and the dynamics of community governance.

To address the gap between the normative dimensions of religious beliefs and the activism of Muslim women, this article builds on Saniotis's (2012) argument for a multidimensional approach to understanding Muslim environmentalism. This approach should encompass not only the normative and theological aspects but also the social,

cultural, and political practices that shape Muslim responses to the environmental crisis. Consequently, the exploration of community-based Muslim women's environmental activism serves as a convergence point for religious ethical norms and everyday social practices. It illustrates how Islamic ethics are reinterpreted through gender agency within the realm of civic environmentalism. Thus, the waste management efforts undertaken by community- or institution-based Muslim women become an empirical arena for assessing the extent to which Islamic environmental ethics are enacted in collective actions. This simultaneously addresses Saniotis's paradox concerning the disjunction between normative teachings and ecological realities in Muslim societies.

From the perspective of religion as a reflection of everyday values, the author draws on the concept of lived religion as articulated by McGuire (2008a). McGuire posits that religion manifests not only in normative doctrine and official authority but also through daily practices and individual moral actions. This approach to lived religion offers a valuable framework for understanding the involvement of Muslim women in waste management initiatives. Instead of perceiving religion merely as a doctrinal system, this perspective highlights that religion is experienced through daily practices, women's unique experiences, and their social interactions within the community.

The importance of religion as a daily practice is vital, as current studies have primarily focused on normative aspects. For instance, Fadhilah and Naharin (2017) explored the role of women as pioneers in environmental conservation through the lenses of ecofeminism and environmental jurisprudence.

Similarly, Juwita (2019) analyzed community empowerment via waste bank management from the perspective of *maqasid al-sharia*. However, much of the existing literature tends to emphasize normative and discursive dimensions, with limited consideration of how these values are expressed and enacted in everyday life.

A prominent focus on environmental issues has attracted scholarly attention to the governance and dynamics of waste management. Several researchers have linked waste management challenges, environmental conservation movements, and women's empowerment to ecofeminist perspectives, while also exploring the intertwining relationship between ecology and theology. For instance, studies have examined the role of women in waste management (Rahmaningsih et al., 2019), community-based waste management practices (Asteria & Heruman, 2016), the ecofeminist movement through household waste management initiatives (Yasin et al., 2021), and waste management in Islamic boarding schools (Sadiyah & Anshori, 2021). These investigations reveal that, in specific contexts, women play a crucial role in community-based waste management efforts in Indonesia. However, while these studies primarily emphasize social participation and community empowerment, there is a relative scarcity of exploration regarding the ethical dimensions or underlying religious values associated with these issues.

Several studies have indicated that, particularly at the community level, women play a vital role in environmental management initiatives, especially in addressing waste issues (Noviyanti et al., 2022) and in empowerment programs

focused on recycling (Rokis & Silaturrahmi, 2018). Research has documented women's participation in practices such as waste bank management and reforestation efforts within local communities in Indonesia, highlighting their significant contribution to these collective dynamics. Furthermore, additional studies have observed women's proactive responses to environmental degradation and ecological injustice in specific social contexts (Tho'atillah et al., 2022). It is essential to interpret these findings as outcomes of contextual studies rather than universal claims or quantitative comparisons with other social actors.

To enhance the community and citizenship dimensions, this article employs Dewitt John's (1994) concept of civic environmentalism. This framework underscores that ecological challenges, especially those linked to consumption behaviors, cannot be effectively addressed solely through top-down state regulation. Active citizen participation, robust local social networks, and a strong moral commitment to the community are essential. Civic environmentalism complements the emphasis on community-based collaborative governance.

Current studies reveal that while research on women's participation in waste management, Islamic environmental ethics, and community governance has made significant strides, it is often examined in isolation. Women's involvement is often described empirically, lacking a clear gender framework; religious legitimacy is frequently analyzed within a normative-theological framework, without considering everyday practices. Additionally, research on community-based environmental governance rarely integrates religious

dimensions with gender relations simultaneously in a cohesive manner.

To address this gap, this article examines the interconnectedness of Islam, gender constructivism, and civic environmentalism in understanding Muslim women's waste management practices. Currently, empirical studies that simultaneously integrate these three dimensions among Indonesian Muslims are relatively scarce. Through this lens, the article aims to illustrate that Muslim women's environmental activism cannot be attributed solely to religious morality or to a natural affinity for nature, but rather emerges from the interplay of gender roles, lived religious experiences, and the dynamics of community governance. To investigate these themes, the research employs a qualitative, case-study-based approach, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the experiences, narratives, and social practices of individuals at the community level.

B. Research Method

This research employed a qualitative approach conducted from July to September 2023. This methodology was selected to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the experiences, meanings, and social practices of Muslim women addressing waste issues within Islamic institutional environments. A comparative case study design (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) was employed, focusing on four locations with similar Islamic affiliations but distinct institutional formats—community-based organizations, Islamic universities, campus women's groups, and Islamic boarding schools. This framework enabled a horizontal comparative analysis

to uncover patterns and variations in waste management activism, institutionalization strategies, and the construction of religious meanings across contexts. Additionally, the research engaged in vertical analysis that linked macro-dynamics (Islamic discourse and environmental policy), meso-level dynamics (organizational structure and culture), and the micro-practices of Muslim women's daily lives. Through this cross-case and scale exploration, the study aimed to understand waste management issues as manifestations of religious morality, as a negotiation of gender roles, and as a form of community-based ecological citizenship.

The selected locations were chosen purposefully based on several criteria in Table 1: (1) the presence of an active community-based waste management program, (2) significant involvement or initiation by Muslim women, (3) affiliation with Islamic institutions, and (4) potential for sustainability through the institutionalization of practices. Geographically, the research sites were distributed across Java, Sumatra, and West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), providing a diverse range of social and institutional contexts. The four locations included the Women and Environment Studies (WES) Payungi community in Metro City, Lampung; the Nahdlatul Ulama University (UNU) Waste Bank in Lombok, NTB; the Dharma Wanita Persatuan (DWP)—state-sanctioned organization in Indonesia, comprised of the wives of civil servants—Pijar Semesta Waste Bank at the State Islamic University (UIN, *Universitas Islam Negeri*) Raden Mas Said Surakarta in Central Java; and the *Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) Al-Manshur Popongan Waste Bank in Klaten, Central Java. While these cases share similarities in Islamic affiliation and the leadership of Muslim women, each exhibits distinct

organizational forms and institutional strategies, facilitating a comparative cross-contextual analysis.

The primary data source for this study consisted of Muslim women actively engaged in waste management within their neighborhoods. A total of 15 participants were interviewed, including three individuals from the Pijar Semesta Waste Bank, three from the Pondok Pesantren Al-Manshur Popongan, four from the WES Payungi community, and five from the UNU Waste Bank in NTB. The participants comprised waste bank managers, community activists, lecturers, students, leaders of Islamic boarding schools (nyai), and administrators of campus women's organizations. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to identify key individuals directly involved in waste management practices, with subsequent snowball sampling to expand perspectives and enrich the gathered information.

Data collection was carried out through a combination of observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews with all informants averaged 60 minutes in length and were recorded with their consent. Additionally, four FGDs were conducted—one at each location—with approximately five to seven participants per session. These FGDs aimed to capture collective dynamics, meaning negotiation, and the collaborative construction of waste management practices within the framework of Islamic institutions. Observations were made during field visits to document social interactions, waste management activities, and various forms of community participation.

In addition, it continued until saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of new substantive information

from additional interviews. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study employed a triangulation of sources and methods, comparing information across informants and corroborating interview results through field observations and focus group discussions. Limited clarifications were also provided to several informants to ensure data accuracy. Ethically, all participants voluntarily engaged in the study after receiving a comprehensive explanation of the research objectives and context.

Subsequently, data analysis began concurrently with data collection, utilizing a thematic analysis approach. This phase involved reading interview and FGD transcripts, data reduction, open coding, and categorizing themes. Key themes were developed based on the research focus: religious practices in addressing the waste crisis, negotiating gender relations in community leadership and management, and strategies for institutionalizing participatory environmental movements. This method facilitates the identification of patterns of similarity and difference both within and across locations, while also illuminating how the institutional context shapes the articulation of Islamic values in Muslim women's ecological citizenship practices.

Table 1. Comparison of Research Locations

No	Institutions & Locations	Institutional Forms	Core Programs	Gender	Forms of Civic Environmentalism
1	WES Payungi Community, Metro City, Lampung	People's Market-Based Community	Women's Empowerment School, Liqo' Environmental Literacy Program, "Mubadalah" Waste Bank	Leadership rooted in women's literacy and empowerment	Participatory and Educational Community Initiatives
2	Nahdlatul Ulama University Waste Bank, West Nusa Tenggara	Private Islamic Universities	Universities Waste Bank, Tuition Fee Payment with Waste, MaSmash Application	Women as Drivers of Campus Policy Innovation	Institutionalization of Technology-Based Waste Management
3	DWP's Pijar Semesta Waste Bank, UIN Raden Mas Said, Surakarta, Central Java	Women's Organizations at State Islamic Universities	Universities Waste Management, Collaboration with BMT Mazaya	Women as Managers and Mediators of Economic Networks	Integration of Waste Bank with Islamic Microfinance Institutions
4	Pondok Pesantren Al-Manshur Waste Bank, Popongan, Klaten, Central Java	Pondok Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School)	Santri or Student-Run Waste Bank and Waste-Sorting Education	The Leadership of Nyai (Pesantren's Female Leader) in Promoting Ecological Awareness	Institutionalization of Ecological Practices in Pesantren Culture

An analysis of the four locations presented in Table 1 reveals three principal patterns. First, Muslim women perceive the waste crisis as a moral-religious issue that necessitates a collective response, allowing Islamic values to serve as ethical resources in their daily practices. Second, their involvement illustrates the negotiation of gender dynamics within community leadership, where both religious

and social authority are established through tangible waste management practices. Third, this activism is institutionalized in various forms of civic environmentalism—ranging from literacy education and institutional innovation to economic integration—transforming waste from mere consumption residue into a source of social and economic value.

C. Results

1. Environmental Crisis, Meaning Construction, and Muslim Women's Agency

In recent years, waste management has become a significant environmental issue in Indonesia. According to the National Waste Management Information System, projections indicate that by 2025, the volume of unmanaged waste will exceed the managed waste (SIPSN, n.d.). On a local level, the Muslim women who participated as informants in this study have also faced a waste management crisis. Their concern over the inadequate handling of waste served as a catalyst for raising awareness and fostering a collective movement to mobilize their communities towards more effective waste management practices.

The analysis of the four case study locations reveals that poor waste management stems from a disconnect between religious teachings on cleanliness and community behavior regarding waste disposal. Muslim women participants in this study characterized the accumulation of waste as a form of "disorder," which contradicts the values of cleanliness, responsibility, and trustworthiness integral to their religious life.

At one Islamic university, an informant, a Lecturer and Secretary of the Pijar Semesta Waste Bank at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, discovered over 100 large plastic bags filled with waste that had been left to accumulate for months. The noxious odor and the practice of mixing organic and inorganic waste underscore the perception that this issue is not merely a systemic deficiency but also indicative of a lack of collective awareness within the campus community (Ika Fenni, Personal communication, August 1, 2023). This situation is particularly striking given that Islamic campuses are typically viewed as centers of learning and religious enlightenment. The dissonance between their symbolic identity as Islamic educational institutions and daily practices that disregard waste management raises significant moral concerns among the Muslim women engaged in environmental management initiatives.

This anxiety served as the catalyst for articulating both voice and action. Umi Marwandari, a member of the DWP at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, does not view herself as a "campus housewife" but rather as an active institutional agent mobilizing her social network. Through the structure of Dharma Wanita, she spearheaded the establishment of a waste bank and forged a partnership with the Sukoharjo Regency Environmental Agency (Umi Marwandari, Personal communication, August 4, 2023). In this context, gender roles do not merely function as inherent rights but are instead viewed as social resources that can be negotiated to create opportunities for public participation. Work traditionally associated with women, such as maintaining household cleanliness (Windiani et al., 2025), is reimagined as an institutionalized practice of ecological citizenship.

Echoing this perspective, Wardatul Janah, a lecturer in Environmental Engineering at UNU NTB, believes that waste management poses a significant challenge that demands immediate attention. While waste management has been recognized as a government initiative—such as the "zero waste" program—its implementation at the community level remains limited. Much waste continues to be disposed of directly in landfills without prior sorting, highlighting that waste management is often reduced to programs while actual community practices fall short (Wardatul Janah, Personal communication, September 7, 2023).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in pesantren. Nyai Ummi, the caretaker of the Pondok Pesantren Al Mashur Popongan in Klaten, confronted the reality of waste accumulation and burning, both within the school and in the surrounding community. The waste crisis was perceived as undermining ethical values and reflecting a lack of awareness of religious principles. Drawing on her symbolic authority as the leader of the boarding school, she initiated waste-sorting practices, integrating them into her teachings, and serving as a role model for her students. These efforts were not merely technical; they were also pedagogical—emphasizing cleanliness and ecological responsibility as integral components of character development for the students (Nyai Ummi, Personal communication, September 1, 2023).

At the community market level, Hifni Carolina, Manager of the WES Payungi, chose to intervene directly to address the waste crisis rather than wait for government action. Hifni viewed this proactive approach as a practical application of Islamic teachings. She recognized that, in addition to fostering

a strong relationship with God, humans must also maintain harmonious relations with one another and with the natural environment. This illustrates that Islamic teachings are not merely understood on a normative level but also serve as a motivating force within the community (Hifni Carolina, Personal communication, September 8, 2023).

The four cases illustrate a consistent trend: cleaning work, traditionally associated with women's domestic roles, has undergone a process of institutionalization and broadened its scope of influence. Through initiatives like waste banks, sorting, and partnerships with local governments, tasks once viewed as routine and private have evolved into community-driven collective movements. This transformation highlights three key aspects. First, the waste crisis provides a platform for constructing meaning, allowing Muslim women to negotiate their social standing within Islamic institutional frameworks. Second, religious legitimacy—whether derived from the authority of Nyai, the DWP network, or underlying religious values—serves as a valuable resource for expanding participation. Third, waste management practices have developed into a form of civic environmentalism, characterized by citizen involvement in community-based environmental governance and collaboration with state entities. Consequently, the waste crisis in this context not only prompts practical responses but also creates a space for Muslim women to negotiate their religious identity, gender roles, and civic responsibilities simultaneously.

The waste crisis within Islamic universities, pesantren, and Muslim communities acts not only as a catalyst for action but also as a forum where religious meanings are both

negotiated and actualized. The responses of Muslim women to the accumulation of waste illustrate that their ecological efforts do not exist in isolation; rather, they are deeply intertwined with their interpretation of Islamic teachings on environmental stewardship. It is essential to recognize that these teachings are not merely theoretical constructs but are actively practiced in everyday life. The following subsection will delve into this aspect through a lived religion approach, emphasizing how the Islamic principles of cleanliness and ecological responsibility are manifested in tangible daily actions and community governance (McGuire, 2008a).

The efforts of Muslim women in waste management showcase their agency in addressing the issue, viewing it not only as a challenge to be tackled but also as an opportunity to elevate their ideas to a broader, more impactful platform. Agency is characterized by a deliberate, conscious pursuit of desired goals, encompassing how individuals and collectives navigate challenges and obstacles to influence society (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016).

Muslim women exercise their agency by mobilizing movements with the explicit aim of confronting the environmental crisis. They choose to elevate issues that are often relegated to the category of "domestic work" into the public domain, thus expanding the reach and impact of their efforts and encouraging broader community involvement. This, in turn, underscores the power and authority of Muslim women, challenging the stereotype that their roles are limited to domestic work.

2. Living Islam and the Essence of Cleanliness in Waste Management Practices

In addressing the waste crisis, the Muslim women in this study do not operate in a social vacuum; rather, they function within a context where religion wields strong normative power and moral authority. However, rather than treating religion solely as a normative doctrine, the informants see it as a source of meaning that shapes their concrete actions. Within the framework of living Islam, teachings on monotheism, the concept of humans as caliphs, and the principle of cleanliness as a tenet of faith transcend mere normative texts and evolve into everyday practices such as waste sorting, community education, and the establishment of waste banks. This illustrates how religious doctrine is not only lived but also harnessed to foster social compliance in the face of ecological crisis (Bagir, 2025; Billahi et al., 2025).

Ika Fenni underscored her concern for waste management through a theological lens, viewing humans as stewards of God's creation. For her, the call to maintain cleanliness transcends mere religious ritual; it embodies an ecological imperative that should be actively reflected in the university's environmental practices. She believes that cleanliness is not only a component of faith but also a social responsibility to prevent the accumulation of waste that can disrupt community life. From this standpoint, the establishment of a campus waste bank represents more than a technical initiative; it is a tangible expression of a deeply rooted religious awareness (Ika Fenni, Personal communication, August 1, 2023).

A similar view was expressed by Hafidhah, a lecturer and Director of the Pijar Semesta Waste Bank at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, who emphasized that without a foundation of monotheism, waste management activities may merely become socio-economic undertakings rather than meaningful initiatives.

> If it is not grounded in the teachings of monotheism or theology, then the only motivation is economic gain. "In theory, the campus community understands the religious command to maintain cleanliness. However, in practice, many individuals still do not follow this principle, so ongoing education to raise awareness is still necessary. (Hafidhah, Personal communication, August 4, 2023)

This statement illustrates how theology serves as a moral compass, preventing the movement from becoming ensnared in mere instrumental rationality. Although campus residents may have a theoretical understanding of religious teachings regarding cleanliness, the act of littering persists. This is where the waste bank functions as a social medium, bridging the divide between normative knowledge and actual practice.

A similar reflection can be seen in the narrative of Nurma Ningsih, a Lecturer in Environmental Engineering at UNU NTB. She perceives the teachings on purification not only as essential for valid worship but also as an ethical principle that encompasses broader environmental cleanliness. For her, a polluted environment is not just an aesthetic concern; it fundamentally disrupts the comfort and solemnity of worship. This awareness has transformed into a personal "mission," which has been

institutionalized through the establishment of a waste bank, effectively shifting religious values from the private sphere to community action.

> Islam emphasizes the importance of cleanliness. There are many teachings about purification before performing acts of worship and maintaining overall cleanliness. A dirty and littered environment can hinder our comfort during worship. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that everything is clean. I have made it my personal mission to get involved with the Waste Bank initiative. (Nurma Ningsih, Personal communication, September 5, 2023)

Through the above statement, Nurma recognizes that the religious teaching on purification extends beyond the act of worship to encompass all facets of life, including the importance of maintaining a clean environment. As a Muslim, she is inherently aware of the obligation to uphold cleanliness and purity, which are integral to the practice of worship. Nurma has transformed her personal mission into a broader initiative by establishing a waste bank, enabling her efforts to have a wider impact. The waste bank serves as a practical means for Nurma to fulfill her commitment to cleanliness in her daily life.

> In public spaces, Muslim women can play a significant role in addressing the environmental crisis by embodying the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad, which emphasize the importance of nature conservation and foster a positive attitude toward the environment. This perspective serves as a valuable alternative to conventional technical and scientific approaches. Theological awareness can influence changes in

> consumer behavior, leading to reduced plastic consumption, increased use of renewable energy, and a greater emphasis on preserving biodiversity among plants and animals. Given the profound impact of religious beliefs and Islamic teachings on the moral attitudes and behaviors of the Muslim community, it is essential for Muslim women to adopt an environmentally conscious approach. By doing so, they can inspire fellow Muslims to embrace environmentally friendly practices (Islam et al., 2024; Shavarani, 2024).

From the perspective of lived religion, these practices illustrate how religion manifests through concrete actions shaped by social and institutional contexts. The concept of cleanliness is not simply a normative slogan; instead, it serves as an inspiration for everyday life. Education extends beyond traditional lectures to include practical implementations such as waste sorting, managing waste banks, and forming partnerships with local institutions. In this way, religion is expressed through tangible, daily actions.

These findings also suggest that theological awareness has the potential to enhance pro-environmental behavior, aligning with research by Liobikiene and Poškus (2019), which emphasizes the role of awareness in fostering ecological action. For these Muslim women, however, technical environmental knowledge does not exist in isolation; it is enriched by meaningful insights derived from Islamic teachings. This supports Wijsen's (2025) conclusion that religion can bolster environmental consciousness. In this context, theology serves as a normative foundation, while the institution of waste banks serves as a means of realizing it.

In these instances, Muslim women not only uphold

religious doctrine but also reinterpret it to address local challenges. The ideas of trust, the integral role of cleanliness in faith, and the prohibition against harming the earth are translated into practices such as waste sorting, establishing waste banks, and community education. Consequently, the awareness and actions of the Muslim women in this study represent not merely protests against inadequate waste management; rather, they embody concrete efforts that link structural crises with Islamic moral cosmology.

It is essential to highlight that the spirit of cleanliness and theological awareness embodied by Muslim women extends beyond the formation of individual piety. In practice, the values of monotheism, trustworthiness, and cleanliness—integral to their faith—serve as a foundation for cultivating organized collective action through institutions or communities. When practices such as waste sorting, environmental education, and waste bank management are implemented consistently, they begin to transcend the personal sphere and enter the domain of citizenship. This phenomenon, referred to as civic environmentalism (borrowing a term from John, 1994), emerges from a shared understanding of local issues and is expressed through collective efforts to achieve common objectives.

In the context of the Muslim women's movement, religion acts as both a source of ethical inspiration and a basis for fostering collaboration, creating cross-institutional networks, developing economic incentive mechanisms, and strengthening the movement's institutional framework. Therefore, understanding the transformation from private morality to civic environmentalism strategies is crucial

for grasping how Muslim women's activism evolves from everyday religious consciousness to sustainable public citizenship practices.

3. From Private Morality to Public Citizenship: Strategies of Civic Environmentalism

As outlined in the initial section, the participation of Muslim women in waste management within this study is driven by three interconnected factors: (1) an awareness of the waste crisis as a significant public concern, (2) a vision for organized environmental governance, and (3) the internalization of religious teachings regarding cleanliness and the responsibility to safeguard the environment. This sub-chapter illustrates how these three factors are translated into civic environmentalism strategies through collaboration, social networks, institutional frameworks, and economic incentives, while also addressing potential tensions among them.

a. Collaboration and Institutionalization: Transitioning from Care to Governance

At UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Ika Fenni began her initiative out of personal concern for the waste crisis and transformed it into a systematic vision for environmental governance by founding the Pijar Semesta Waste Bank. Her strong sense of religious duty, combined with her academic background in environmental studies, provided both a moral and intellectual foundation for this endeavor. However, the long-term success of this

movement relies not only on individual motivation but also on a strategy for institutionalization that incorporates integrated waste management practices into the university's framework. To achieve this, she fostered collaborations with various student organizations and championed integrating waste management into the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, particularly in community service. In this way, the waste bank functions not just as a mechanism for waste management but also as a center for ecological citizenship, bridging the campus and the surrounding community.

A comparable approach can be observed at the Yosomulyo Metro Market in Lampung, where the WES Payungi community operates. Notably, approximately 90% of the 65 vendors at this market are women.

> If men can contribute to society, why can't women? According to available data, 90% of the 65 vendors are women, indicating that their roles significantly impact the community and the environment. Although it was initially challenging, any idea put forward by women, including those related to waste management, can now be implemented. (Hifni Carolina, Personal communication, August 20, 2023)

Their involvement is characterized as the "driving force" behind market waste management. However, a crucial question arises: does this prominent female participation signify a transformation in gender relations, or does it merely perpetuate the expectation that cleanliness falls within a woman's realm?

On one hand, women's leadership in market waste

management extends their roles from the domestic sphere into the public economic domain. They do more than just "clean"; they design rules, organize vendors, and influence market governance. In this regard, a measure of agency and a broadened public participation are evident. On the other hand, because cleanliness is often culturally associated with women, such participation may also reinforce the moral obligation that women bear for daily environmental matters. Therefore, civic environmentalism in this context presents an ambivalence, navigating between open leadership opportunities and the prevailing gender inequalities in society.

This study highlights the significant role of religiosity in shaping individual motivation to protect the environment (Karimi et al., 2022). For Muslims, environmental stewardship is often motivated by religious beliefs grounded in their understanding of Islamic principles related to the environment and their commitment to their faith (Rahmanto, 2023). Religiosity influences one's interpretation of religious teachings, which, in turn, shapes their actions. In this context, Muslim women's activism is driven by their understanding of Islamic concepts of environmental stewardship and cleanliness. Moreover, this understanding has evolved from individual efforts to a collective movement in the public sphere.

The approach adopted by these Muslim women promotes the development of an environmentally focused public space in which women play a central role.

They emphasize the importance of maintaining a clean environment free of waste, in line with Islamic teachings that view cleanliness as a vital component of faith. This commitment is foundational to the community, as these women actively engage and contribute to a movement aimed at tackling the waste crisis in their respective neighborhoods.

b. Social Networks and Religious Symbolic Capital

At the Pondok Pesantren Al Manshur Popongan Klaten for Girls, Nyai Ummi has established waste management practices. Leveraging her religious authority and symbolic power as a teacher of Islamic law, she has successfully integrated the principles of cleanliness into a structured system that includes routine waste sorting, weekly weighing, and the distribution of economic benefits. In an interview, Nyai Ummi shared that the school's management actively involves students in collecting and sorting waste on the premises. The boarding school provides plastic bags for separating organic and inorganic waste, and all students are expected to sort their waste into the appropriate bags (Nyai Ummi, Personal communication, September 1, 2023).

Each week, the collected waste is weighed and sold to a collector, with the proceeds utilized to purchase essential items for the students, such as brooms, mops, and other cleaning supplies. The guiding principle behind this initiative is "from the students, for the students," ensuring that the waste managed by the students ultimately

benefits them directly. This practice not only helps clean the boarding school environment and addresses waste management concerns but also enhances the students' economic value (Nyai Ummi, Personal communication, September 1, 2023). Nyai Ummi's approach illustrates how private morality, embodied in religious teachings on cleanliness as a facet of faith, can be effectively translated into institutional norms.

Nyai Ummi's efforts extend beyond the confines of the Islamic boarding school; she effectively leveraged the Family Welfare Empowerment (PKK, *Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*) association, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Muslimat network, and various religious study forums to amplify her advocacy for waste management. This illustrates that civic environmentalism hinges not only on individual awareness but also on the ability to cultivate social networks that sustain the movement. Religious capital provides moral legitimacy, while these social networks offer essential practical infrastructure.

The establishment of waste banks has emerged as a notable phenomenon, serving as a platform for the actualization of Muslim women's ideas on waste management. The rise of diverse waste bank initiatives within various Islamic institutions, led by Muslim women, underscores that they not only express concern for environmental issues but also actively engage in developing and implementing community-based waste management practices. These waste banks have successfully galvanized community participation in environmental protection efforts. Furthermore, this

waste management approach offers economic benefits through waste monetization, thereby enhancing community welfare.

c. Economic Incentives: Strengthening or Straining?

In community-based waste management practices, a key strategy to encourage public participation is to convert waste into an economic asset. This approach was successfully implemented by Ika Fenni to engage campus janitors in the waste management system. Beyond their routine cleaning responsibilities, janitors are motivated to sort and collect waste, which is then deposited into a waste bank. Through this system, janitors, who serve as customers of the waste bank, receive financial incentives from the monetization of the waste they gather (Ika Fenni, Personal communication, August 1, 2023).

The role of janitors on campus is pivotal within the university environment, as their primary duty involves cleaning and collecting waste from various locations. This income scheme provides a savings model, allowing the money earned from waste collection to be deposited into a savings account rather than being distributed directly (Ika Fenni, Personal communication, August 1, 2023).

An effective strategy to motivate public participation in environmental initiatives is to inform individuals about the economic benefits associated with waste collection. By purchasing waste from waste banks, collectors can earn money, demonstrating the potential financial advantages of waste management. Intan Soraya,

a waste bank administrator at UNU in NTB, shares similar concerns regarding the economic opportunities that waste management can provide.

> We all agree that waste must be managed and processed properly. We hope that in the future, the university will allocate more funds for the procurement of waste management equipment. This waste bank has tremendous potential, both economically and environmentally (Intan Soraya, Personal communication, September 6, 2023)

The involvement of campus institutions in managing waste banks illustrates their commitment to supporting environmental governance initiatives. The university recognizes waste not merely as an ecological challenge but also as a resource with economic potential, serving as a tool for effective environmental management. A notable example is the UNU Waste Bank in NTB, which has introduced a program that allows students to pay tuition fees by saving waste. This initiative encourages students to collect and recycle waste, converting it into economic value that contributes to their tuition payments. While the savings may not fully cover educational costs, the program provides financial support and fosters student engagement in waste management practices on campus.

Similar initiatives have been observed at various other locations. At Raden Mas Said State Islamic University in Surakarta, campus cleaning staff are encouraged to participate as customers of the waste bank, enabling them to save through waste collection and sorting. Additionally, in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), proceeds from waste sales are typically used to support the collective

needs of students. These various schemes highlight a dual rationality in waste management practices. On one hand, economic incentives have proven effective in enhancing community participation and ensuring the financial sustainability of the waste management system. In a resource-constrained society, this pragmatic approach allows the environmental movement to thrive without relying solely on voluntary participation.

The use of economic incentives raises important conceptual questions regarding a potential shift in motivation from a moral framework to market-based calculations. If environmental concern is predominantly influenced by financial rewards, one must consider whether religious commitment continues to serve as the foundational pillar of the movement. The findings of this study suggest that these two logics are not mutually exclusive; rather, they operate in tandem. For Muslim women environmental activists, theological underpinnings provide a normative framework that imbues waste management efforts with ethical significance. Simultaneously, economic incentives function as a pedagogical and practical strategy to increase public participation.

However, the potential tension between these two logics is significant. If the economic aspect becomes overly dominant, there is a risk that the environmental movement might devolve into mere market-driven recycling initiatives, thereby failing to foster deeper ethical transformations. Thus, maintaining a balance between moral commitment and economic rationality

is a critical component of the civic environmentalism practices undertaken by Muslim women in community-based waste management.

d. Synthesis: Civic Environmentalism as a Negotiation Process

The empirical cases presented illustrate that civic environmentalism led by Muslim women cannot be interpreted solely as an expression of religious devotion or merely as an adaptation to market forces. Instead, this practice emerges from a complex interplay among individual morality, gender dynamics, social networks, and economic rationality. Awareness of the waste crisis serves as the initial catalyst for action, while a vision of governance provides an institutional framework for the movement, and religious teachings offer a source of moral legitimacy. Throughout this process, collaboration among various actors, the institutionalization of community initiatives, and the implementation of economic incentives serve as strategic tools that facilitate the translation of religious values into practices of ecological citizenship in the public sphere.

Therefore, the active involvement of Muslim women in this movement must be understood within a dialectical context. On one hand, their participation creates opportunities for agency and empowers them within environmental governance. On the other hand, this engagement exists within a framework of gender norms that have historically linked women to roles involving

cleaning and domestic work, thereby simultaneously perpetuating certain long-standing social expectations. Moreover, the introduction of financial incentives should not be seen merely as a dilution of religious motivations; rather, it can be viewed as a pragmatic approach to broaden participation and ensure the sustainability of community-based environmental initiatives.

These findings indicate that waste management practices led by Muslim women are not merely technical efforts to reduce waste; they also embody the transformation of religious values into broader social practices. In this regard, waste banks function not only as tools for environmental management but also as social spaces where concepts of ecological responsibility, community solidarity, and public citizenship are negotiated and enacted. Through various strategies—including institutional collaboration, institutionalization of community initiatives, and economic incentives—Muslim women express their religious commitment to environmental stewardship through sustainable collective action.

Consequently, the civic environmentalism emerging from these cases reveals a more intricate dynamic than merely a direct connection between religious teachings and environmental behavior. It encompasses the interplay of religious values, social structures, women's leadership, and pragmatic considerations that enable environmental movements to thrive across diverse social contexts. This complexity invites further contemplation on how religion, gender, and practices of citizenship converge

to create new forms of environmental governance at the community level.

D. Discussion

This discussion illustrates that the environmental activism of Muslim women cannot be fully understood through a normative framework that views Islamic ethics as the exclusive driver of ecological change. Much of the literature on Islamic environmental ethics begins with the premise that the concepts of tawhid, khalifah, and amanah inherently embody ecological awareness, which, when internalized, should lead to pro-environmental behaviors. This viewpoint is prevalent in studies focusing on the theological aspects of the relationship between humanity and nature (Foltz et al., 2003; Nasr, 2021). However, the findings of this study reveal that theological awareness regarding cleanliness and ecological responsibility has long existed within religious settings, such as Islamic universities and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), yet this knowledge has not necessarily addressed waste management. Thus, the challenge does not stem from a lack of doctrine or normative teachings, but rather from how these doctrines are mediated, institutionalized, and applied in everyday social practices.

From a lived religion perspective, religion manifests through everyday practices, social interactions, and organizational frameworks, rather than merely through normative texts and discourses. This approach underscores that religion should be understood as a practice experienced by individuals within specific social contexts (Ammerman,

2007; McGuire, 2008b). The case study presented in this research both confirms and expands upon this perspective. The teachings concerning cleanliness prove effective not only due to their normative significance but also because of the social actors involved, specifically Muslim women, who translate these teachings into practical governance strategies such as waste banks, waste savings systems, routine sorting, and the establishment of community networks. In this setting, religion serves as a moral justification that imbues the waste crisis with ethical meaning, while the sustainability of the movement is bolstered by organizational infrastructure and communal practices. Consequently, this finding calls into question the tendency in some literature to romanticize the belief that the mere revitalization of theological discourse is adequate to inspire ecological transformation.

Within the framework of civic environmentalism, this study's findings propose significant modifications. The literature on ecological citizenship often highlights the importance of citizen participation in environmental management through public awareness and community collaboration, framed by modern civic rationality (Dobson, 2007; John, 1994). However, among Indonesian Muslim women, their involvement is not articulated through the language of civil rights and obligations but rather through religious legitimacy, which imbues their collective actions with moral significance. Awareness of the waste crisis is perceived as a religious mandate, while waste management practices are viewed as expressions of social piety. Nonetheless, the idealization of participation rooted solely in moral commitment is not entirely validated. Almost all cases

reveal the use of economic incentives—such as waste savings or the distribution of collective benefits—as tools to enhance community participation. These findings underscore that the ecological citizenship that emerges is hybrid, merging religious ethics with instrumental rationality. In practice, morality and economic logic are not in complete opposition; rather, they are pragmatically reconciled in everyday life.

The gender dimension of these findings adds complexity to the overall picture. From a gender constructivist perspective, the social roles attributed to men and women are not inherent but rather shaped by historical and cultural processes that are continuously reproduced in social life (Scott et al., 1986; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women's prominent roles in driving waste management can be interpreted as an expansion of public space and a manifestation of leadership grounded in community values. These women serve not only as technical implementers but also as system designers, social network managers, and intermediaries between communities and institutions. Consequently, civic environmentalism in this context provides a platform for women's agency, although it does not inherently dismantle broader gender structures. Women's participation is thus ambivalent: it is transformative to some extent, yet it continues to operate within the limits of existing social norms.

Conceptually, his research illustrates that the ecological citizenship of Muslim women in Indonesia represents a hybrid practice emerging from complex negotiations among theology, gender dynamics, and economic reasoning. It cannot be merely characterized as an expression of normative piety,

nor can it be fully understood as a straightforward pathway to emancipation, nor simply as an adaptation to market forces. Instead, it unfolds as a gradual, contextual social process in which religion lends moral legitimacy, women serve as social mediators, and economic mechanisms function as instruments of sustainability. Therefore, the study's theoretical contribution lies in the assertion that ecological transformation in contemporary Muslim societies is achieved not solely through doctrine but rather through institutional mediation, gender negotiation, and the selective integration of market rationality into daily citizenship practices.

E. Conclusion

This article explores how Muslim women mobilize religious values and discourses in response to the waste crisis, highlighting that this mobilization occurs through the translation of theological morality into institutionalized community governance. Islamic teachings on cleanliness, regarded as an integral part of faith, and the concept of ecological responsibility evolve from normative exhortations into collective obligations that necessitate concrete operational mechanisms. In this process, Muslim women serve as social mediators, bridging the gap between religious language and institutional design by establishing and managing waste banks, building community networks, organizing sorting and savings systems, and integrating economic incentives to enhance participation.

The primary analytical contribution of this study is its assertion that religion acts as both religious and symbolic

capital, providing legitimacy and normative energy for collective action. However, the effectiveness of these efforts relies on mediation by actors and social institutionalization. By operating across varied settings—such as universities, markets, and Islamic boarding schools—Muslim women's activism illustrates that ecological citizenship emerges not solely from doctrine but from processes of organization, negotiation, and contextual adaptation. They advocate for Islamic ethics of cleanliness while simultaneously transforming these principles into a structured and sustainable governance framework.

Additionally, this study reveals that the emerging model is hybrid. Economic incentives, such as waste reduction, educational funding support, and collective benefit distribution, do not supplant religious moral frameworks; rather, they complement them. This integration illustrates that ecological citizenship within the Indonesian Muslim context is not entirely grounded in moral altruism or market rationality but arises from a negotiation between the two. Material incentives serve as pragmatic strategies to expand participation, while religious legitimacy preserves the movement's ethical orientation. Consequently, the relationship between morality and the market is not a binary opposition but a dynamic configuration subject to continuous negotiation.

While these initiatives hold promise, they operate within significant structural constraints. The production of industrial waste and inadequate institutional policy support hinder their systemic impact. Within this framework, the activism of Muslim women can be viewed as a form of grassroots

governance that addresses gaps in structural responsibility, though it does not entirely replace it. They do not serve as substitutes for the state or corporations; rather, they act as community agents that demonstrate civil society's ability to respond to the ecological crisis despite limited institutional backing. Theoretically, this article posits that Muslim women's ecological citizenship emerges from a negotiation of three key factors: religion, which provides moral legitimacy; women's agency as social mediators; and economic mechanisms that serve as avenues for sustainability. In this context, ecological transformation is not simply the outcome of internalizing doctrine; it is a social process that becomes institutionalized, expanded through networks, and implemented within the constraints of existing economic and policy frameworks.

Ultimately, this research focuses on community-based initiatives and does not thoroughly investigate the dynamics between state policy and corporate regulation on a broader scale. Further research is essential to explore how the interplay between grassroots movements led by Muslim women and formal policy reforms can foster more systemic changes in environmental governance.

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