Interrogating State Ecotheology: *Tana Sangkol* Conversion and the Limits of Ecological Piety in Sumenep

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Abstract

This article examines the ambivalence of State Ecotheology as institutionalized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through *Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor* 244 *Tahun* 2025, using the conversion of *tana sangkol* in Sumenep Regency, Madura, as a case study. The state ecotheology framework emphasizes spiritual harmony among God, humans, and nature, yet frequently stops at cultivating individual piety without engaging the power structures that actually drive environmental degradation. Employing an ethnographic approach that follows both people and issue, this study traces the conversion of *tana sangkol* into shrimp ponds across three subdistricts in Sumenep, a region where the religious authority of *kiai* and *pesantren* has historically been strong yet has not been able to halt the pace of land-use change. The analysis draws on Schlosberg's three dimensions of environmental justice (distribution, procedure, and recognition), together with Harvey's framework of accumulation by dispossession and Foucault's concept of governmentality. The findings reveal a gap between the Ministry's language of spiritual harmony and field realities marked by conflicts of interest, unequal access, and an unjust distribution of risk. The concept of eco-theological statewashing is introduced to read this gap, while also showing that grassroots ecotheology exemplified by the *Istighasah Kubro* gathering in Badur Village engages more directly with questions of power over lived space. The article concludes that State Ecotheology must connect to broader structural resource governance if it is not to remain merely a moral slogan.

Keywords: *State Ecotheology, environmental justice, tana sangkol conversion, eco-theological statewashing*

1. Introduction

State ecotheology is the term this study uses to synthesize the approaches of ecotheology (Pihkala, 2017), public ecotheology (Bedford-Strohm, 2007), the green state (Eckersley, 2004), the green constitution (Asshiddiqie, 2010), and environmental justice (Cannavò, 2008) in reading the version of ecotheology promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). This institution attempts to normatively unite faith and ecological responsibility. Yet, as is well known, a ministry established by the state is

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offering a single ecological salvation amid Indonesia's massive ecological disasters, a situation that renders the concept of ecotheology inherently ambivalent: on one hand, the state calls for ecological responsibility, while on the other, other ministries frequently become the principal agents of environmental destruction. This ambivalence is the researcher's point of departure for examining a case in Madura: the conversion of *tana sangkol* in Sumenep.

Through this Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama), the state has formally institutionalized ecotheology as a religious framework for environmental stewardship. Environmental problems are no longer read solely as the business of technical ministries, but as matters of faith, religious education, the governance of religious institutions, and public service. Even so, the ecotheology framework promoted by Kemenag remains heavily inflected by a language of spiritual harmony that emphasizes alignment among God, humans, and nature. The researcher's initial hypothesis is that, conceptually, this framework carries strong moral force but is not sufficiently incisive to grasp the realities of environmental destruction on the ground.

In Madura, environmental degradation is not always a matter of the relationship between human faith and the environment, as though destruction occurs solely because of the Madurese people's weak piety. Many factors are at work: conflicts of interest, an unequal distribution of risk, power plays, licensing matters, and unequal access to participation (Hidayati & De Vries, 2025). The pressing question, therefore, is no longer whether ecotheology has been practiced, but whether its conceptual framework is sharp enough to dissect ecological injustice. It is precisely this ambivalence that makes the spiritual-harmony framework in need of further testing when confronted with a concrete case such as the conversion of *tana sangkol* in Sumenep.

Madura, and Sumenep Regency in particular, is the focus of this study for testing this tension, because religious authorities such as *kiai* (Paisun et al., 2025; Zainuddin et al., 2026), and pesantren (Harnadi et al., 2021; Karim, 2009), wield strong influence over Sumenep society (Bukhari et al., 2026). In many respects, religious figures are the community's primary reference point when facing land disputes or investment pressure. Yet the reality in Sumenep shows that environmental destruction caused by the conversion of *tana sangkol* into shrimp ponds continues on a massive scale. This process of land-use change is not simply a matter of individual moral choice; it also involves patterns of licensing, power relations between local elites and investors, and an uneven distribution of risk among affected residents.

Here, the spiritual-harmony framework offered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs begins to reveal its limits. It is precisely amid this ambivalence that suspicion arises that state ecotheology is nothing more than jargon. The language of spiritual harmony can function as a sweetener that keeps the state looking environmentally committed, while other ministries continue their destructive practices unimpeded. If ecotheology remains merely theoretical ornamentation, it will be unable to halt the pace of land conversion such as that occurring in Sumenep. Worse, it may actually perpetuate the status quo, in which the state secures a clean moral image while environmental destruction continues to go without justice.

2. Method

This research originates from the researcher's position as a member of the Sumenep community, which has harbored concerns since 2016 following the construction of the Suramadu Bridge. At that stage, however, the focus had not yet settled on the case of *tana sangkol* conversion in Sumenep; this engagement grew out of several articles documenting the increasingly massive conversion of *tana sangkol*, and only in 2024–2025 did the researcher begin to examine the problem through a sociological lens. This study adapts the ethnographic approaches of "follow the people" and "follow the issue" (Marcus, 1995), tracing Sumenep residents' attachment to *tana sangkol* and following the trail of *tana sangkol* conflicts across three subdistricts in Sumenep. As a researcher born in Sumenep, it was necessary to position this role carefully to avoid subjectivist bias, which was addressed by foregrounding rigorous reflexivity. That is, the researcher consciously recorded and examined his own positionality, biases, and emotional involvement in a field journal kept separate from the data notes.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews involved eight informants across the three subdistricts identified above, selected purposively on the basis of two criteria, ownership of *tana sangkol* and direct experience of its conversion, with two of the eight affiliated with the agrarian activist group *Barisan Ajaga Tana Ajaga Na'potoh* (*Barisan Penjaga Tanah dan Keturunan*) (BATAN), whose movement-level accounts complemented the household-level narratives of the remaining informants. Participant observation, carried out over the same 2024–2025 period, involved directly following unfolding conditions and conflicts surrounding *tana sangkol* in Sumenep, including community gatherings, disputes, and activities organized around the issue.

Read together, the interviews and observations produced two distinct streams of evidence on the same phenomenon, which were reconciled through source triangulation (Denzin, 2017): cross-checking the testimony of landowning residents against that of the BATAN activists, and weighing both against the researcher's own field-journal notes, so that divergences, for instance, between residents' more resigned accounts of dispossession and activists' more confrontational framing of the same events, were treated as sociologically informative rather than as methodological noise. As this study did not undergo formal review by an institutional ethics committee, ethical safeguards were instead secured through informed consent obtained verbally from each of the eight informants prior to the interview, following disclosure of the research's purpose and their right to decline or withdraw at any stage; no informant's name, exact residence, or other identifying detail is disclosed anywhere in this article, and all accounts are attributed to anonymized designations only.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Social Anthropology of Madurese Society

The anthropological foundation of Madurese society concerns, in particular, patterns of religiosity, adherence to ritual practice, and the position of *kiai* and *pesantren* as the principal nodes of socio-religious authority (H. Jonge, 2019; Pribadi, 2013). This social anthropology of Madurese society serves as a map for reading the ambivalence of state ecotheology, which is difficult to read contextually, since community responses to environmental issues in Madura cannot be separated from the socio-religious structures

that were already firmly established long before the state introduced a formal ecotheology framework through the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Kuntowijoyo's study of social change in Madurese agrarian society from 1850–1940 offers a starting point for understanding the basic character of Madurese society (Kuntowijoyo, P, 2017). Kuntowijoyo explains that Madura constitutes a distinct eco-historical unity shaped by a *tegal* (dry-field) ecology that differs from the wet-rice ecology dominant in Java. This dry, arid ecological pattern gave rise to dispersed, non-centralized settlements, high rates of out-migration from the island, and a personality type among the Madurese that tends toward the individual-centered while remaining strongly bound to kinship and religious networks. Equally essential, Kuntowijoyo (2017) asserts that informal political leadership in Madura has historically rested with the *kiai* rather than with the formal colonial or postcolonial bureaucratic structure. The social history of Madura is thus a history of the tug-of-war for power between local religious authority and state power, a pattern of relations that recurs down to today's context of *tana sangkol* conversion in Sumenep.

This ecological character deserves emphasis because it explains why religious institutions in Madura grew into a force far more robust than state institutions at the grassroots level. When the agrarian economic structure failed to provide stable livelihood guarantees, and when colonial and postcolonial power remained distant from villagers' everyday lives, *kiai* and *pesantren* filled that vacuum, providing not only spiritual guidance but also social, economic, and even political mediation (Ala et al., 2018; H. D. Jonge, 1989).

One of the most salient features of Madurese society is the intensity of religiosity visible in everyday life, functioning not merely as personal belief but as a marker of collective identity. Studies of the *pesantren* socio-religious network in Madura describe how almost the entire life cycle of residents, from birth, through marriage, to death, is framed by strictly maintained religious rituals such as *tahlilan*, grave pilgrimage, *rokat tase*' (sea thanksgiving), and the commemoration of a *kiai*'s *haul* (Pribadi, 2013). Communal rituals of this kind not only affirm adherence to religious teaching but also sustain social solidarity and a sense of togetherness across groups, so participation extends well beyond the boundaries of any particular religious organization.

This adherence is also evident in the density of religious educational institutions. As recorded in recent studies on religious moderation among Madurese *kiai*, Madura is home to more than 1,300 *pesantren* (Radar Madura) spread across the island a density that has made it widely known for its strong religious culture and the central authority of *kiai* in social and educational life (Syarif et al., 2024). This density of *pesantren* is not merely a quantitative fact but an indicator that religious institutions have become the primary social infrastructure sustaining public life, far surpassing the role of formal state educational institutions in many rural areas of Madura.

Religious adherence among the Madurese is also frequently explained through an honor (*harga diri*) approach intertwined with religious values. (Wiyata, 2002), in his anthropological study of *carok*, argues that violations of honor in Madura are not solely about interpersonal relations but also encompass matters that intersect with religion for instance, insults to religious symbols or disputes over rights to land and natural resources such as water and grass. In other words, the dimensions of religion, honor,

and control over natural resources in Madura are interwoven and difficult to separate, a finding relevant for re-reading the case of *tana sangkol* conversion, in which land disputes potentially touch on a domain of social honor far broader than a mere economic dispute (Zahid et al., 2025).

The central position of the *kiai* in Madurese society can be explained through a popular expression still alive in the community, *bhuppa' bhabhu' ghuru rato*, which literally places father, mother, teacher (*kiai*), and government (*rato*) as a graded hierarchy of authority figures in residents' social life (Nur et al., 2024). This hierarchical structure places the *kiai* in a position of moral authority that ranks above government on the scale of residents' trust, so that the *kiai* is not merely a religious teacher but also a moral leader, a mediator in social conflict, and the primary reference point on a wide range of public issues, including matters formally within the state's jurisdiction.

The relationship between *kiai* and *santri*, as affirmed in studies of *pesantren* sociology, is a distinctive patron–client relationship: *santri* are trained from an early age not to contradict the *kiai*, and this pattern of value socialization persists even after *santri* return to wider society, well beyond the completion of their *pesantren* education (Nasith et al., 2025). This obedience is sustained through continuing religious rituals, such as collective *dhikr* and the commemoration of a *pesantren* founder's *haul* organized by alumni networks. It is this leadership pattern grounded in charisma and kinship networks that makes the *kiai-santri* relationship exceed a mere transfer of knowledge, evolving instead into a patron-client institution deeply rooted in the social structure of both the *pesantren* and the surrounding community. Other research affirms that the *kiai'*s social influence rests on two main factors: first, a genealogy or lineage preserved through an exclusive kinship system; and second, religious scholarly legitimacy reflected in the *kiai's* morality and exemplary conduct within the community (Kosim, 2012).

The strength of the *kiai'*s authority also carries a broader cultural function. The *kiai* functions as a cultural broker who shapes and simultaneously reproduces the moral and epistemic framework that Madurese society uses to make sense of its social reality (Rozaki, 2021). This authority does not operate solely through the *pesantren*'s formal institutional structure but also through everyday interaction, manifested in informal social relations between the *kiai* and residents beyond the *pesantren*'s walls. The historical trace of the *kiai*'s role in Madura's socio-political movements is likewise long-standing. Kuntowijoyo documents how the local Sarekat Islam movement in Madura during the 1910s was driven by *kiai*-based religious networks, demonstrating that the *kiai*'s capacity to mobilize the masses on issues intersecting with power is not a new phenomenon but a deeply rooted pattern in the island's social history (Kuntowijoyo, 1985). Horikoshi further affirms that *kiai* in Java and Madura have often served as engines of social change rather than mere guardians of religious status quo, so that the *kiai*'s capacity for a critical stance toward policies detrimental to their communities in fact has a strong cultural precedent (Horikoshi, 1976).

From the discussion above, the principal strength of Madurese social anthropology rests on three mutually reinforcing elements. First, a density of social capital formed through *pesantren* and alumni networks produces robust communal solidarity and

mechanisms of moral support operating across generations. Social capital of this kind borrowing Putnam's framework as invoked in studies of *kiai-santri* relations in Madura enables the *pesantren* to function as a network node connecting individuals, families, and communities on a scale far exceeding the state's institutional capacity at the village level (Putnam, 1993).

Second, the *kiai*'s charismatic and genealogically inherited moral legitimacy renders religious authority in Madura relatively stable and difficult to displace by formal state authority, including the authority carried by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' ecotheology framework. When a *kiai* speaks of the responsibility to protect nature, that message carries a far greater reach and binding force than an administrative appeal from a ministry because it is delivered through a channel of authority that residents have trusted for generations.

Third, the capacity of *kiai* and *pesantren* to mediate social conflict positions them as potential strategic partners in resolving natural-resource disputes, including land-conversion cases such as *tana sangkol* in Sumenep. As Wiyata (2002) shows, the resolution of honor and resource conflicts in Madura in practice often involves the role of elders, *kiai*, and local elites through informal channels that run alongside and sometimes prove more effective than the state's formal legal channels. This mediating capacity is precisely what should ground state ecotheology if it is to genuinely side with ecological justice, rather than merely turning the language of "spiritual harmony" into normative packaging with no grip on the realities of power and interest on the ground.

3.2. Downstream Flow of Environmental Degradation: From Indonesia to Sumenep

The ambivalence of state ecotheology cannot be separated from a tiered pattern of environmental destruction that moves downward from the national scale to the local scale, ultimately landing at one concrete point: the conversion of *tana sangkol* in Sumenep. This study terms this pattern the downstreaming of environmental degradation a term that borrows the logic of "downstreaming" (*hilirisasi*) from economic development discourse but inverts its meaning to show how an ecological crisis originating in extractive policies and practices at the national level ultimately "flows downstream" and accumulates its burden in the living spaces of coastal communities with the least bargaining power, such as Sumenep. Environmental destruction, in other words, does not stop as a national statistic; it is passed down and changes from deforestation spanning millions of hectares in Sumatra and Kalimantan (Margono et al., 2012; Santoro et al., 2023; Singh & Yan, 2021), to river pollution crossing provinces, and finally into shrimp ponds that erode the coastline and ancestral land in rural Sumenep (Ferdiansyah et al., 2022; Hidayatillah, 2017; Murtadho, 2021; Salsabila & Ruhaeni, 2025).

At the national level, Indonesia's rate of environmental destruction over the past two years shows an alarming trend. The Ministry of Forestry recorded net deforestation in 2024 reaching 175,400 hectares, a significant increase from 121,100 hectares the previous year, with gross deforestation of 216,200 hectares only partially offset by 40,800 hectares of reforestation (Kehutanan.go.id). The independent monitoring body Auriga Nusantara recorded an even higher figure of 261,575 hectares throughout 2024, up from 257,380 hectares in 2023, with the island of Kalimantan consistently remaining

the epicenter of deforestation for eleven consecutive years (siej.or.id). This discrepancy between government and independent data is a problem itself, since official government data are frequently not accompanied by maps that the public can independently verify (simontini.id).

The destruction does not stop at forest cover. Approximately 60% of Indonesia's major rivers fall into the moderately-to-heavily polluted category, with strategic rivers such as the Citarum and the Musi classified as polluted due to industrial and household waste (environment-indonesia.com). In the agrarian domain, the Consortium for Agrarian Reform (KPA) recorded that throughout 2025, agrarian conflicts affected 107,099 farming families across 398,646.45 hectares of land and 1,123 fishing families across 12,960.26 hectares of fishing and aquaculture grounds, while triggering the criminalization of 399 residents in 2024 (magdalene.co). This data shows that ecological destruction in Indonesia runs in tandem with structural violence against residents defending their land and fishing grounds.

The picture above shows that Indonesia's ecological crisis is not merely an environmental problem in a technocratic sense, but is closely intertwined with patterns of land control, business licensing, and power relations among the state, investors, and residents a pattern that recurs, on a smaller yet no less intense scale, in Madura. Where deforestation is the principal marker of environmental destruction in Sumatra and Kalimantan, in Madura that marker shifts to coastal and dry-field ecosystems eroded by the expansion of shrimp ponds. Data from the Sumenep Regional Forestry Service Branch (CDK) show that the Madura Island's total mangrove area on Madura Island reaches 15,118.2 hectares, with a highly uneven distribution across regencies (Muhsoni et al., 2014).

Sumenep holds nearly four-fifths of all of Madura's mangroves, making it the most vulnerable region when land-conversion pressure arrives. Endang Handayani, Head of the Sumenep Regional CDK, stated that shrimp-pond waste discharged directly into the sea is the principal cause of mangrove destruction, even at sites that have already been rehabilitated, such that replanting efforts are frequently rendered futile so long as the surrounding ponds continue operating (Madurapost.net). This phenomenon confirms that the downstreaming of environmental degradation is not only a matter of the destruction's location shifting, but also of its form shifting from large-scale deforestation at the national level to organic pollution and the loss of mangrove ecological function at the Madurese coastal level.

At the furthest downstream level, an investigative report by Mongabay Indonesia records that exploitation of Sumenep's coastal land began intensifying in 2016, marked by the construction of large-scale shrimp ponds along the coast that systematically pushed coastal residents off their own land; residents who refused to sell their land were frequently persuaded, pressured, and even had their road access to their land cut off (mongabay.co.id, mongabay.co.id). One documented case involved two women in Andulang Village, Dungkek Subdistrict, who held out against selling their land to a businessman amid a wave of land sales by surrounding residents.

A similar pattern recurs in Ambunten Subdistrict. In July 2024, environmental activists questioned the legitimacy of shrimp-pond operating permits in Campor Temor and Belluk Ares villages, suspecting that the operators had not obtained a Location

Permit consistent with the Regional Spatial Plan (newssatu.com). This licensing problem is not an isolated case; the Sumenep Regional Legislative Council (DPRD) itself has openly pressed for a crackdown on illegal shrimp ponds "flourishing" along the northern coast up to Pasongsongan Subdistrict, with the Gapura-to-Batu Putih area cited as one of the most intense sites of resident protest (dprd.sumenepkab.go.id).

Land conversion in Sumenep does not stand alone as merely a shrimp-pond case either; it is also intertwined with the expansion of phosphate mining. A draft revision of Sumenep's Regional Spatial Plan bylaw even increased the number of designated phosphate-mining sites from eight to eighteen, triggering resident resistance in karst areas that ecologically serve as habitat for bat species that function as natural pest controllers and plant pollinators (nu.or.id). This resistance took a form heavily charged with religious meaning: in October 2019, around a thousand Nahdliyin residents affiliated with four Nahdlatul Ulama branch representative councils (MWC-NU) held an "*Istighasah Kubro*" gathering in Badur Village, Batu Putih Subdistrict, praying together at the site of a shrimp pond under construction while simultaneously declaring their rejection of land exploitation (nu.or.id). This action is notable because it shows that religious authority in Sumenep, as discussed in the social-anthropology section above, in fact possesses a critical capacity to mobilize ecological resistance, even though that capacity did not originate from the Ministry of Religious Affairs' official ecotheology framework but from grassroots religious initiative operating independently of the state.

This chain of data, from 175,000 hectares of national deforestation to the shrinking of 15,000 hectares of Madurese mangrove to the land disputes in Andulang and Ambunten, is not merely a collection of cases that happen to occur close together in time. These cases form a single causal chain: lax licensing policy, weak cross-ministerial oversight, and investment governance that prioritizes short-term economic growth over ecological sustainability. When the state's ecotheology framework, channeled through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, emphasizes a language of spiritual harmony among God, humans, and nature, it confronts a reality in which other ministries and regional governments are precisely the parties issuing permits, revising spatial plans, and allowing illegal ponds to operate for years without firm enforcement. National quantitative data affirm the scale of the problem, while qualitative data from Sumenep reveal its concrete face: *tana sangkol* changing hands, coastlines disappearing, and Sumenep residents left to confront heavy machinery and investors alone, with only *kiai* and *pesantren* networks remaining as their moral support. The downstreaming of environmental degradation is thus the most honest mirror of the ambivalence of state ecotheology outlined at the start of this article.

3.3. Reconsidering State Ecotheology: Ecological Piety or Eco-theological Statewashing?

The ecotheology institutionalized through Ministerial Decree No. 244 of 2025 on the Minister of Religious Affairs' Priority Program for 2025–2029 positions religion as one avenue for building environmental responsibility. This idea is then reflected through several programs, such as tree planting on the grounds of religious educational institutions, forest *waqf*, the strengthening of environmental education, and the involvement of houses of worship and Religious Affairs Offices (KUA). Within this

framework, caring for nature is positioned not only as an administrative responsibility but also as part of religious duty (Kementerian Agama RI, 2025).

Problems begin to surface when this normative idea is read alongside the ecological conditions outlined in the preceding sections. Deforestation, agrarian conflict, mangrove destruction, coastal pollution, and the conversion of *tana sangkol* in Sumenep all reflect the fact that environmental destruction does not occur in a space separate from state policy. These cases are in fact bound up with spatial planning, investment, licensing, oversight, and development choices far removed from any notion of "environmental salvation". The ecotheology developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs therefore needs to be read in a broader relation to how the state manages natural resources not merely at the theoretical level, but at the stage where monitoring and evaluation are actually carried out.

This is because the state does not always operate with a unified orientation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs can promote ecological awareness through religious language, while other ministries hold responsibilities tied to investment, spatial planning, development, natural-resource utilization, or regional economic revenue. This divergence is not automatically a problem, but difficulties arise when there is no sufficiently robust mechanism to bring the environmental-protection agenda together with decisions that directly determine changes to communities' living space. It is in this context that the term State Ecotheology is used in this article. The term does not refer to the Ministry of Religious Affairs alone, but to the relationship between the ecological discourse the state produces and the development practices carried out through the state's other institutions.

A further limitation becomes visible when ecological problems are viewed solely through individual awareness and behavior, or through institutions that grant legality behind closed doors under the pretext of change and progress. Narratives of environmental education, tree planting, sermons, and the strengthening of religious awareness thus become narrative nodes for a state whose environmental destruction is, in reality, visible across various media outlets. As the Sumenep data show, the conversion of *tana sangkol* cannot be adequately explained by the low environmental concern of Sumenep's residents (Zahid et al., 2025). In a number of cases, changes in land use unfold through relations involving capital owners, local elites, licensing mechanisms, government, and residents who hold differing degrees of bargaining power (Abidin et al., 2025; Amalia et al., 2024). Under such conditions, the ecological problem is no longer solely about how humans treat nature. It also concerns who has the capacity to determine change over a given space, who reaps the economic benefit, and who subsequently bears the ecological risk. Harvey uses the term accumulation by dispossession to explain the process of expanding accumulation through the seizure of resources and space previously held or used by other groups (Harvey, 2003). This framework helps read *tana sangkol* conversion not merely as an economic transaction but as part of a shifting relation of control over space.

Second, Foucault's concept of governmentality holds that policy does not always operate through prohibition or coercion; power can also work by shaping how individuals understand their own responsibility (Nilsson, 2013). In the context of ecotheology, residents can be encouraged to become environmentally conscious

subjects who plant, conserve, and protect nature, as Sumenep's communities do as an effort at environmental salvation. Yet attention to the formation of individual behavior becomes insufficient unless accompanied by attention to the institutions that hold the authority to determine permits, spatial plans, or changes in land use (Hodkinson & Essen, 2015).

The problem, then, does not lie in the teaching on human responsibility toward nature as championed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Rather, it lies in the limits of that teaching's reach. Ecological awareness can drive behavioral change, but it does not by itself resolve problems of access to *tana sangkol*, conflicts of interest, or weak oversight of ventures that risk damaging the environment when carried out by segments of the state elite. This condition can be read as a moral-ecological fragmentation of the state. On one hand, the state produces norms regarding responsibility toward nature; on the other, development decisions can operate through entirely different considerations. Eckersley (2004), through her notion of the green state, reminds us that an ecological orientation cannot be confined to a single policy sector, but must be built into the way the state makes decisions more broadly (Eckersley, 2004).

The Sumenep case demonstrates the significance of this issue: the polemic over pond legality, demands for the crackdown on ponds deemed problematic, mangrove destruction, and conflicts over control of *tana sangkol* together represent an ecological problem unfolding through a process far more complex than mere community behavior, still less one reducible to the strength or weakness of faith and ecological awareness. At this point, it remains unclear how the ecotheology agenda developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs can connect directly to decision-making on spatial planning, licensing, and environmental oversight at the regional level. This finding does not mean the Ministry's ecotheology is meaningless; rather, it shows a gap between the moral-religious agenda and the policy space where ecological destruction is produced or prevented.

This gap becomes even more apparent when the *tana sangkol* case is read through an environmental-justice approach. Schlosberg distinguishes environmental justice into the dimensions of distribution, procedure, and recognition (Schlosberg, 2007). These three dimensions help show that environmental destruction is always bound up with questions of benefit, participation, and recognition for affected groups. From the distributive dimension, the change in *tana sangkol*'s function needs to be examined through the resulting division of benefit and risk. Pond enterprises may generate economic value, but the transformation of coastal space also carries consequences for land, mangroves, environmental quality, and the lives of surrounding residents. The question, therefore, is not only whether the investment yields profit, but how that profit and its impacts are shared among the parties involved.

The procedural dimension directs attention to the decision-making process itself. The case activists raised at Campor Temor and Belluk Ares, for instance, illustrate the importance of transparency regarding licensing status, conformity with spatial plans, and residents' opportunity to know about and contest changes occurring around their living space. Participation becomes meaningful only when it is available before a decision produces its impact, not merely after conflict has already emerged.

The recognition dimension, meanwhile, is foundational because *tana sangkol* is not always understood by residents as a mere economic commodity. This land is also bound up with family inheritance, intergenerational ties, identity, and social standing; losing *tana sangkol* means losing the ancestral DNA of the Sumenep people. Wiyata's (2002) study of honor and social relations among the Madurese helps map this analysis, showing that land and resources can carry meanings that exceed their market value. Ecological policy that treats land solely as an object of spatial planning therefore risks disregarding the social and cultural relations embedded within it.

At this point the limitations of an approach that overemphasizes harmony among God, humans, and nature as conceptualized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs become visible. The language of harmony carries moral force, but the reality found in the field also contains conflicts of interest and imbalances of power. Ecotheology needs to be able to account for both sides. It is not enough merely to explain humanity's obligation to preserve God's creation; it must also interrogate the social and political conditions that grant certain groups a far greater capacity to alter nature than others.

Interestingly, the religious response to ecological problems in Sumenep did not arise entirely from official state programs. The *Istighasah Kubro* action carried out by around a thousand *Nahdliyin* residents in Badur Village, Batu Putih Subdistrict, in October 2019, shows that religion is also used as a language for rejecting the exploitation of living space (nu.or.id). The collective prayer held at the pond-construction site at that time carried not only ritual significance; it was simultaneously a means by which the community voiced its objection to changes it regarded as threatening the environment. At this point, one may well ask whether the piety of Sumenep's residents can still be called into question.

This finding is essential because it reveals a form of ecotheology developing from below. *Kiai* and local religious networks not only speak of the moral obligation to preserve nature; under certain conditions, they also enter directly into conflicts over the use of space. Ecotheology in this context comes into direct contact with power, interest, and the protection of living space. Herein lies the distinction between ecotheology as moral education and ecotheology as a practice of environmental justice. This gap between official discourse and field experience opens space for questioning the possible occurrence of what this article terms eco-theological statewashing, or the state's ecological moral laundering. The term is developed by borrowing from the critique of greenwashing, which describes the gap between environmentally friendly claims and the practices that actually take place (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

Eco-theological statewashing refers to a condition in which the state obtains moral legitimacy through religious discourse on environmental protection, yet that discourse is not followed by adequate change in the policies that govern exploitation, spatial conversion, or the distribution of ecological risk. This concept is not deployed as a verdict that the Ministry of Religious Affairs' ecotheology program is mere image-building; this study's data are not sufficient to support so far-reaching a conclusion. Rather, the condition is used as a critical hypothesis for testing whether religious language about the environment genuinely influences the broader policy structure, as the environmental problems in Sumenep illustrate.

The Sumenep case shows that this question deserves to be asked: mangrove destruction, pond disputes, the transformation of *tana sangkol*, and conflicts over access to and control of space cannot be addressed by individual behavioral change alone. These problems also demand transparency, oversight, community involvement, and the state's capacity to prevent destructive practices. Without connection to this policy domain, ecotheology may continue as a well-intentioned moral program but with limited corrective power. Strengthening State Ecotheology, therefore, need not begin by abandoning the language of "faith." Rather, the strength of that language needs to be linked to more structural matters. Ecological education can continue, but it must be accompanied by attention to justice in resource governance. Tree-planting movements remain necessary, but their success also depends on the protection of existing conserved areas. Moral appeals to the public need to proceed together with the accountability of institutions holding the authority to determine spatial change; only then will the concept of ecotheology have real impact on environmental salvation.

In this sense, the measure of State Ecotheology is not the sheer number of religious campaigns on the environment, but the extent to which ecological values can influence how the state makes decisions. The *tana sangkol* case shows that the ecological crisis is not only about the relationship between humans and God and nature; it also encompasses relations among the state, capital, society, and groups possessing differing capacities to determine a space's future. Ecotheology will lose its critical force if it stops at cultivating individual piety without touching the structures that generate injustice. The challenge of State Ecotheology is therefore not simply to make society more environmentally aware, but to ensure that ecological awareness is also present within state governance. Without such a step, ecological piety may grow without ever truly producing ecological justice.

4. Conclusion

The case of *tana sangkol* conversion in Sumenep demonstrates that State Ecotheology, as institutionalized through KMA Nomor 244 Tahun 2025, remains insufficient to address ecological injustice that is in fact rooted in power relations rather than merely in residents' insufficient piety toward the environment. Read through Schlosberg's three dimensions of environmental justice distribution, procedure, and recognition the conversion of *tana sangkol* reveals how the profits from shrimp ponds are disproportionate to the risks borne by coastal residents, how spatial-planning decisions proceed without adequate community involvement, and how land that the Ministry of Religious Affairs treats as an object of conservation is, for the people of Sumenep, ancestral heritage inseparable from social honor. Harvey's framework of accumulation by dispossession and Foucault's governmentality help explain how the cultivation of individual piety planting trees, preaching about nature proceeds in parallel with the accumulation of space by capital and local elites, the two never truly meeting. The *Istighasah Kubro* action in Badur Village, by contrast, reveals another form of ecotheology born from below, one that confronts power directly rather than merely teaching obedience toward nature. It is from this that the concept of eco-theological statewashing is proposed not as a verdict, but as a critical question: does religious language about the environment genuinely change how the state makes decisions, or does it instead run on its own as a form of moral legitimacy detached from destructive

development practices? State Ecotheology will therefore only have corrective power if the ecological piety it calls for succeeds in penetrating the policy space that has, until now, determined who may transform living space and who must bear the consequences.

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