

## Ecospirituality: *Aron* as a Lived Religion and Ecological Ethic

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### ABSTRACT

Local knowledge serves as a vital resource that intertwines with religious practices, reflecting the profound relationship between humans, culture, and the environment. In Karo society, agricultural practices are not merely a means of sustaining livelihoods but also encompass a dimension of religiosity that governs both social interactions and human-environment relations. One of the most significant of these practices is *aron*, a tradition of communal labor in agriculture that embodies rich cultural and religious values. Despite its importance, previous research has rarely explored the religious dimension of *aron* and its influence on social relations and ecological ethics. This study aims to examine the religious values embedded in *aron* as part of Karo's cultural heritage. Using a literature review approach, this research analyzes relevant scholarly works to identify the religious identity of *aron* and its underlying spiritual meanings. The findings reveal that *aron* represents a relational paradigm emphasizing equality among individuals, ecological sustainability through reverence for nature as a source of life, and the practice of gratitude that integrates spiritual and environmental values. These principles manifest through *myth* (belief systems), *praxis* (agricultural management), and *corpus* (ecological consciousness). Additionally, *aron* reflects everyday religiosity in the form of social philanthropy, strengthening communal solidarity within Karo society to this day. By highlighting relationality and sustainability, this paper asserts that *aron* is not merely a cultural symbol but also a model for sustainable living that remains highly relevant in addressing contemporary ecological and social challenges.

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### 1. Introduction

The indigenous wisdom of the Karo people has been preserved and passed down through generations, becoming an integral part of daily life and cultural identity. As an agrarian society inhabiting fertile lands, agriculture plays a pivotal role in shaping the social and economic dynamics of the Karo community. Beyond its function as a means of sustenance, agricultural practices deeply influence social interactions and human-environment relationships. One of the most significant traditions in Karo agriculture is *nuan-nuan* (planting and cultivation), which has historically shaped

the relational paradigm between humans and nature (Prinst, 2008; Latifah et al., 2021; Gereja Batak et al., 2016).

Among these agricultural traditions, *aron*—derived from *sisaron* (mutual assistance)—stands as a testament to the spirit of solidarity in farming activities. *Aron* operates as a communal, reciprocal system in which individuals assist one another in completing agricultural tasks without monetary compensation. Instead, labor is exchanged, ensuring that farming responsibilities are collectively managed and sustained over time. This reciprocal mechanism is not merely a form of indigenous knowledge but also serves as a fundamental social adhesive within Karo society (Barus, 2019, Bdk. Ginting, 2023; Steedly, 1994).

According to Karmila, the *aron* system has undergone significant transformations over time, reflecting both continuity and adaptation. Historically, *aron* functioned through a labor-based exchange system (*utang gegeh*), in which tasks were performed collectively under a structured rotation. However, contemporary shifts—driven by seasonal changes, increased agricultural output, and a declining workforce—have led to the incorporation of wage-based labor within the *aron* framework. This shift signifies an evolution from a purely cooperative tradition to one that accommodates modern socio-economic realities while still retaining its communal essence (Karo, 2021; Rosramadhana et al., 2017).

Beyond its role in agriculture, *aron* extends its influence into religious and ecological domains, embodying a form of collective spirituality deeply ingrained in Karo society. As a cooperative labor system, *aron* reflects the ethos of collectivism, which transcends agrarian functions and informs religious consciousness. This is evident in the theological interpretations within the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBK), which embraces the *aron* principle as a manifestation of spirituality that unites individuals, their communities, and the natural world (Immanuel Kemenangan Ginting, 2022; Malau et al., 2016).

Moreover, *aron* fosters a deep reverence for the land and agricultural produce, exemplified in the concept of *beraspati tanah*—a sacred recognition of the Creator as the sovereign of the land—and *guro-guro aron*, a ritual of thanksgiving and prayer for bountiful harvests. These traditions position *aron* as more than a communal economic system; they establish it as an integrative mechanism that bridges religious values and ecological ethics within Karo society (Latifah et al., 2021; Sembiring, 2002).

This study aims to analyze how the *aron* tradition embodies everyday religiosity and ecological sustainability, and how its values offer an ethical model for contemporary environmental and social challenges. The relational framework embedded in *aron* extends beyond human-to-human interactions, encompassing a broader ethical commitment to nature as a sacred and sustainable entity.

To analyze *aron*, this research employs the *ethnoscape* approach, which examines the interconnections between rituals, agricultural practices, and the environment as an interwoven cycle forming the foundation of Karo society's sustainability (Barrera-Bassols & Toledo, 2005). This framework is further elaborated through Nancy Ammerman's concept of *everyday religion*, which highlights how religious experience extends beyond institutional settings into daily practices. Within this context, sacred values are not confined to formal rituals but are embedded in everyday activities, including *aron*, which—although not always explicitly categorized as a religious practice—carries profound spiritual significance (N. T. Ammerman, 2014).

## 2. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach through an in-depth library-based methodology, aiming to uncover the spiritual and ecological dimensions embedded in the *aron* tradition of the Karo people. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for exploring the richness of symbolic meaning, lived experience, and value systems—elements that lie at the heart of indigenous communal practices. As Sugiyono (2008) suggests, qualitative research enables scholars to engage interpretively with cultural phenomena, particularly those grounded in local cosmologies and everyday religiosity.

Rather than viewing *aron* merely as a cooperative agricultural system, this study approaches it as a living tradition—a deeply relational practice that weaves together collective labor, spiritual consciousness, and ecological ethics. To excavate this layered reality, the research relies on a library research strategy, which is not simply a process of gathering references, but a dynamic and critical engagement with existing literature. This methodological framework allows for the integration of prior ethnographic studies, conceptual insights, and theoretical interpretations into a coherent narrative that reflects the holistic nature of *aron*.

This study focuses on the concept of *aron* as practiced by the Karo people living in the foothills of Mount Sinabung, particularly within local farming communities. These communities were selected because they perceive *aron* not merely as a system of collective agricultural labor, but as a spiritual expression that reflects their dependence on the Divine and their ecological relationship with nature—specifically the balanced interaction among soil, water, and air as essential natural elements. In this context, agricultural practices are not solely aimed at productivity but also serve as a means of preserving cosmological values and fostering sustainable ecological balance.

The literature for this study was identified through a systematic search of academic databases using keywords such as “aron,” “Karo culture,” “collective farming,” “human–nature relations,” and “indigenous local wisdom.” The selected literature was evaluated based on the authority of the authors, the methodologies employed, and its contribution to the understanding of *aron* as a relational and sustainable practice. Sources were included based on their thematic relevance to the social, ecological, and spiritual values embedded in *aron*, particularly those that highlight its religious dimensions. Accordingly, this study aims to uncover a model of everyday religiosity embodied in the agricultural life of the Karo communities in the Mount Sinabung region.

Library research, in this context, serves as a vital intellectual tool to bridge empirical knowledge and theoretical frameworks. By situating *aron* within interdisciplinary conversations—drawing from anthropology, theology, ecology, and religious studies—this method enables a robust understanding of how indigenous agricultural practices inform religious identity and environmental ethics.

The steps undertaken in this library research include:

- 1) Topic refinement and conceptual framing: The research is grounded in a focused inquiry into *aron* as an intersectional practice involving culture, religion, and sustainability.
- 2) Systematic literature collection: Key academic sources, including ethnographic reports, theoretical works, and case studies, were collected—featuring thinkers such as Nancy Ammerman (everyday religion), Gordon Lynch (functionalist approach to religion), and Barrera-Bassols & Toledo (ethnoecology). The process of selecting and screening sources was carried out systematically, considering the author’s academic credibility, the relevance to the topic of *Aron*, and the depth of analysis related to Karo culture and religious life. The criteria for source selection are based on two primary considerations: first, the academic credibility of scholars or authors with recognized authority in Karo cultural studies and indigenous religious traditions; second, the content’s relevance to the core theme of the *Aron* labor system—including its historical background, practical manifestations, and its development and transformation in contemporary Karo society. Sources discussing *Aron* were examined narratively to explore its historical roots, collaborative practices, social solidarity values, and implications for sustainable agriculture and religious life in the Karo community.(Purwono, 2008)

In evaluating each source, I reviewed the research objectives, methodological approaches, data analysis techniques, main findings, and conclusions. Through this process, I identified gaps in the existing literature and assessed the potential for new contributions—both conceptually and contextually—that this study might offer. Although this study is primarily a literature review, I deliberately narrow the geographical scope to the Karo community in Kuta Galuh village, Tiganderket sub-district in Karo Regency—an agrarian area located on the slopes of Mount Sinabung, historically known for preserving the practice of *Aron*. This area was chosen for its representative characteristics in reflecting the social and religious values embedded in the *Aron*

system. The central focus of this literature analysis is to understand how the *Aron* system is interpreted within the religious life of the Karo people, particularly in relation to social solidarity and sustainable agriculture. Thus, rather than merely collecting descriptive data, this study seeks to build a theoretical synthesis that enriches the discourse on community-based agricultural practices within the context of local cultural frameworks. (Sujatmiko, 2020)

- 1) Thematic classification and analysis: The collected literature was examined thematically, identifying core patterns around solidarity, reciprocity, cosmological beliefs, and human-nature relations within the *aron* practice.
- 2) Theoretical synthesis and critical reflection: Diverse theoretical lenses were woven together to interpret *aron* as a site of ecological spirituality and social resilience, offering insights into how indigenous wisdom operates as a form of lived religion.
- 3) Construction of interpretive narrative: The final step involved translating this synthesis into an analytical narrative, positioning *aron* as both a theological and ecological framework for sustainability and communal ethics.

Ultimately, this methodological approach demonstrates that *aron* is not only a cultural legacy but also a vibrant model of everyday religiosity and environmental stewardship. Through the use of library research, this study affirms the relevance of indigenous relational ethics in addressing broader ecological and interreligious challenges. The findings underscore how deeply rooted practices like *aron* can serve as compelling alternatives to dominant, anthropocentric paradigms—offering a vision of sustainable living grounded in gratitude, reciprocity, and sacred interdependence.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Interweaving Culture and Religious Dimensions

The *aron* system in Karo society is more than just an agricultural practice—it serves as a cultural identity that embodies solidarity and collective resilience, deeply rooted in local wisdom. As a cooperative work system in agriculture, *aron* emerged as a response to the need for efficient farm management, encompassing all stages from planting, processing, and maintenance to harvesting. The structure of *aron* is often formed based on kinship, friendship, or close ties within a village or community. Built on the principles of collectivism and social interconnectedness, this system enables a rotational labor structure, allowing groups to work across different plots of land in an organized and reciprocal manner (Rosramadhana et al., 2017; Ginting, 2023).

This cooperative labor system has been passed down through generations. According to Teridah Bangun, its persistence can be traced back to the colonial era. While collectivism has always been an inherent part of Karo culture, external threats during colonial rule further reinforced the necessity of mutual assistance, known as *sisaron-saron* (mutual help). Consequently, the solidarity cultivated within *aron* extends beyond agricultural activities, influencing various aspects of social life within the Karo community (Bangun, 1986).

Within the *aron* framework, the bonds between members are not only based on labor but also on social and emotional ties. Agricultural workgroups often develop deep emotional connections and adhere to customary norms, such as mutual respect (*mehamat*), assisting each other in completing tasks (*sisampaten gegeh*), and engaging in communal storytelling and humor (*nuri-nuri/jagar-jagar*). The solidarity embedded in *aron* permeates all aspects of daily life, reinforcing its role as a fundamental principle that governs social interactions within Karo society.

Beyond its function as a cooperative farming system, *aron* also holds significant spiritual and environmental dimensions. This is reflected in the ritual of *guro-guro aron*, an artistic expression of gratitude for the harvest. Typically held at the village level, this ritual involves traditional dance, *gendang* (drumming) performances—or modern adaptations using keyboards—and prayer ceremonies as an offering of thanks to the Divine. The purpose of *guro-guro aron* is to express gratitude and hope for future abundance, symbolized by the phrase "*mbuah page nisuan, merih manuk niasuh*" (harvesting rice and raising chickens). More than just a ritual, this event embodies

the collective spirit of Karo society, as it involves the active participation of the entire community (Karo, 2021; Prinst, 2008).

The values embedded in *aron* are closely tied to environmental reverence and relational ethics. Within the indigenous Karo belief system, *pemena*, rice is regarded as the embodiment of *Beru Dayang*, a spirit sent by the Divine to teach humans the art of farming. Thus, rice seeds are seen as a manifestation of *Dibata's* (God's) provision for humanity. This belief system gives rise to various pre-planting rituals, performed both individually (*ertoto* or personal prayers on farmland) and communally through *guro-guro aron* at the village level (Steedly, 1994; Swarintha, 2023; Ginting, 1999).

According to Karmila, the cultural values embedded in the *aron* system reflect various moral and social aspects, including reciprocity, responsibility, loyalty, tolerance, justice, and respect for life. These values were further emphasized in a study conducted by Emia Ariska Br Purba and Adri Febrianto in Batu Karang Village, which found that ethical awareness in *aron* manifests in the form of humility and gratitude towards the land and seeds as divine blessings. Their research highlights that *aron* functions not only as a cooperative labor system but also as an expression of the deep religiosity of Karo society (Karo, 2021; Purba & Febrianto, 2020).

From the exploration of *aron*, it becomes evident that several interconnected identity elements shape the cyclical nature of life in Karo society. The relationship between agriculture and religion illustrates a knowledge system (*corpus*) that simultaneously informs and shapes communal beliefs (*belief*). The solidarity inherent in *aron* influences not only social structures but also deeply correlates with religious values. This is because agriculture, within the Karo worldview, is inseparable from daily practice—encompassing interpersonal relationships, community formation, and the transmission of cultural and spiritual knowledge (Barrera-Bassols & Toledo, 2005; Pauli et al., 2016).

Before engaging in farming activities, the Karo people always conduct rituals and prayers as an offering to nature. The integration of cultural and religious practices is profound, as land, agricultural yields, and climate are perceived as blessings from *Dibata*. Through collective prayers and expressions of gratitude, the community believes that fertile land and abundant harvests are manifestations of divine generosity. Therefore, *aron* is not merely a cultural system but a socio-cultural pillar that intertwines spiritual, ecological, and social dimensions within Karo society.

### 3.2. Aron as Lived Religiosity

Religious identity is often reduced to a substantive framework that limits its interpretation to doctrinal aspects, religious literature, and institutional representations. Gordon Lynch argues that this approach is inherently restrictive, as it fails to account for other dimensions of religion that can be understood through phenomenological and functionalist perspectives. Therefore, the study of religion must adopt a broader and more critical approach to analyze religion within the context of complex social phenomena. From this perspective, religion is not merely a normative institution but also a reflective force capable of providing critique and insight into social and cultural realities. Lynch thus emphasizes the importance of a functionalist understanding of religion to prevent its reduction to a narrow and rigid role (Lynch, 2007).

In his argument, Lynch highlights how a functionalist approach to religion seeks to transcend the dichotomy between the sacred (transcendent) and the profane. The concept of the sacred, which is traditionally associated with divine entities or revelations, is expanded to recognize that various aspects of the secular world can also possess sacred significance. In this context, sacredness is understood as a social construct that provides meaning, value, and legitimacy to particular beliefs and practices within society. Consequently, religious understanding cannot be detached from the social and cultural systems that shape and sustain its sacred substance in everyday life (Lynch, 2007).

Lynch's concept of spirituality emphasizes the importance of lived religious experience that transcends formal rituals and doctrinal boundaries. He highlights how sacredness is often expressed through the ordinary and embedded in the fabric of daily life—through habits, spaces, relationships, and collective memory. This view reframes spirituality as something dynamic, immanent, and

contextually grounded, rather than confined to institutional settings. Within this framework, everyday practices become spaces where spiritual meaning is negotiated, embodied, and sustained. Such a perspective closely aligns with the indigenous Karo philosophy of *aron*, a communal agricultural system that is deeply rooted in relational ethics and collective responsibility. While often perceived as a customary cultural practice, *aron* also carries embedded spiritual values that reflect a holistic worldview. These values are not rigidly codified but are instead fluid and responsive to the relational dynamics among humans, nature, and the divine. The integration of religious meaning within everyday social cooperation illustrates that the Karo people's understanding of *aron* is not merely functional or economic—it is also a form of spiritual engagement with the world. Thus, both Lynch's theory and the *aron* tradition affirm that spirituality can be enacted in ordinary communal life, fostering social cohesion and ecological consciousness (Karo, 2021; Purba & Febrianto, 2020; Latifah et al., 2021).

Nancy Ammerman further reinforces this perspective, asserting that daily practices constitute an authentic expression of religiosity. According to her, lived religion is not solely confined to institutions and formal doctrines but is also shaped by how individuals and communities find religious meaning in their everyday lives. This is evident in the *aron* practice within Karo society, where reciprocity is not merely a cultural value but also represents a spiritual relationship manifested in social interactions—whether in agriculture or communal life. Thus, the collectivist culture of Karo society is strengthened through *aron*, which essentially embodies a form of religiosity that permeates various aspects of daily life (N. Ammerman, 2007; Prinst, 2008).

Reciprocity within the *aron* system is a fundamental element of Karo identity, emphasizing mutual respect and communal assistance. This principle is rooted in collective awareness that individuals hold equal value (*aku kam kap, kam kap aku*). Such an understanding reinforces social solidarity within the community. In practice, the *aron* system functions not only as a cooperative mechanism in agriculture but also as an expression of religiosity that fosters a spirit of social and religious philanthropy, transcending differences in religious identity.(Karo, 2021; Ginting, 2023; Prinst, 2008; Rosramadhana et al., 2017; Ginting, 2021)

The element of trust within the *aron* system can be analyzed as a form of spirituality oriented toward equality and social justice. In Karo society, every individual plays an essential role that is interwoven with others, reinforcing a sense of collective responsibility in both agricultural activities and broader social life. This principle of equality is upheld without hierarchical authority, which could otherwise hinder harmonious social relations. As a result, religiosity in Karo society is not only reflected in formal religious practices but also deeply embedded in everyday life, grounded in values of justice, solidarity, and communal well-being (Steedly, 1994).

Beyond human relationships, the *aron* system also embodies a profound connection with nature. Expressions of gratitude for the environment are closely linked to Karo cosmology, which views agricultural abundance as a divine blessing (*pemere Dibata*). The reverence for land reflects a relational paradigm in Karo society, wherein fertile soil and abundant harvests are regarded as sacred gifts from *Dibata* (Prinst, 2008; Ginting, 2014; Ginting, 2021).

One of the most significant expressions of gratitude toward nature in Karo tradition is the *kerja tahun* ritual, which includes the *guro-guro aron* performance. This traditional art form is often featured in communal celebrations and post-harvest thanksgiving ceremonies. According to Sarjani Tarigan, *guro-guro aron* is not merely a form of entertainment but a representation of village-wide solidarity in celebrating agricultural abundance and offering prayers for future harvests. Beyond that, *kerja tahun* also embodies the values of kinship (*raron*), where the community collectively expresses gratitude. In *pemena* belief, *kerja tahun* involves offerings to nature as a symbolic gesture of reverence for *Dibata*.(Latifah et al., 2021; Suharyanto et al., 2018)

A study by Em Swarintha on expressions of gratitude in Karo tradition and Christian theology reveals a shared collective awareness that agricultural prosperity is inseparable from ecological balance. This awareness is accompanied by concerns over potential environmental disasters such as wildfires, droughts, and floods that threaten agricultural sustainability. Thus, before commencing the

planting process, *sangkep nggeluh* (extended family members) traditionally hold prayer gatherings and offer symbolic gifts as acts of gratitude and petitions for protection from natural calamities during the farming season. (Swarintha, 2023; Steedly, 1994)

The gratitude embedded in Karo cultural practices reflects a relational paradigm that can be revitalized amid anthropocentric religious discourses. Functionally, the *aron* system exemplifies an ecological spirituality that emphasizes human-nature interdependence, fostering a sense of respect, care, and responsibility toward the environment. This tradition is not only practiced individually but is also expressed communally through celebratory rituals such as *kerja tahun* and *guro-guro aron*. Through these practices, religious values and ecological awareness continue to be passed down from generation to generation, making them an integral part of Karo identity (Maarif, 2016).

Institutionally, *pemena* beliefs have often been positioned in opposition to officially recognized religions such as Christianity and Islam. However, in this discussion, *pemena* is not perceived as nature worship but as a belief that the universe contains sacred elements reflecting divine reality. This perspective informs a moral framework that encourages Karo society to maintain ecological balance as a fundamental aspect of their identity as an agrarian community. This approach aligns with the concept of everyday religiosity, which highlights how daily practices imbue spirituality with profound meaning in people's lives (N. Ammerman, 2007; Peterson, 2016).

In various villages within Karo communities, interfaith prayer rituals are often held as expressions of gratitude. This practice reflects not merely religious affiliation, but a ritual imbued with spiritual meaning that transcends institutional religion. Such as those in Limang, Tigabinanga District. These communal prayers serve not only as acts of thanksgiving for agricultural abundance but also as collective supplications for rainfall, which is crucial for agricultural sustainability. These practices illustrate how Karo society, through the *aron* system—a cooperative agrarian structure—positions nature as an integral part of life. Consequently, interfaith prayers function not merely as religious rites but as reflections of the deep interconnectedness between humans and ecosystems, underscoring the dependency of agrarian life on environmental balance. In this context, prayer serves as an expression of ecological awareness and a form of social solidarity that strengthens *aron* communities in navigating environmental uncertainties (Redaksi SIB, 2024).

The *aron* system in Karo society is not merely a social structure designed to regulate cooperation in agricultural activities; it also embodies religious values that transcend cultural boundaries. More than just a platform for social interaction, *aron* reflects the intricate relationship between spirituality and ecology in everyday life. According to Ammerman, every cultural community holds an *ultimate truth* that is collectively recognized, allowing religious experience to foster social integration and harmony despite institutional differences (N. Ammerman, 2007; Hurd, 2015). In Karo society, social rituals and religious practices are inseparable, as both contribute to shaping the understanding of the Divine while also structuring interpersonal relationships. (Tambun, 1952)

The religious dimension embedded in the *aron* system cultivates spirituality on both personal and communal levels. Thus, Karo culture cannot be understood solely as a cultural expression; it also serves as a religious asset that plays a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and ecological balance. The practice of gratitude, deeply embedded in Karo traditions, exemplifies a relational paradigm that offers a model for addressing contemporary religious challenges, particularly those rooted in anthropocentric perspectives. In essence, the concept of *aron* is not limited to social interaction within an agrarian community—it also embodies an ecological spirituality that underscores the essential interdependence between humans and nature.

### 3.3. Reviving Aron Towards Ethic of Interdependence

The *aron* tradition is not merely a social system rooted in communal labor; it also holds profound relevance as a global ethical model for ecological resilience. As part of local cultural heritage, *aron* embodies fundamental values that emphasize everyday religiosity, reflecting a relational ethic between humans and nature. This ethic serves as the foundation for sustainability practices across various dimensions of life.

Barrera-Bassols & Toledo argue that the interconnectedness of agricultural practices and spiritual awareness highlights that farming is not just a daily activity but a deeply ingrained cultural and religious expression (Barrera-Bassols & Toledo, 2005; Pauli et al., 2016). This aligns with Ammerman's perspective, which emphasizes that religious identity should not be confined to formal theological definitions (scriptures, rituals, and institutionalized religious structures) but must also be understood through everyday practices and social interactions (N. T. Ammerman, 2014). In this sense, the everyday religiosity embedded in *aron* represents a functional model of lived religion—one that transcends doctrinal and institutional boundaries.

Within the context of sustainability, the ethical foundation of *aron* necessitates the decolonization of knowledge production. This process is essential to challenge dominant paradigms that often prioritize the exploitation of natural resources without consideration for ecological balance. Gaudry highlights that mainstream religions must integrate indigenous wisdom to develop a more relational understanding of human-nature interactions. By adopting this approach, indigenous agricultural and ecological sustainability systems can serve as alternative models that counteract exploitative industrial practices that lead to environmental degradation (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Samsul Maarif emphasizes that local communities that incorporate religious values into their daily lives exhibit a strong eco-centric ethos, where responsibility toward nature is not merely a moral obligation but an essential part of relational ethics. The concept of *relational dignity for human and non-human entities* within indigenous communities reinforces the idea that nature is not an object of exploitation but an entity with its own intrinsic dignity (Maarif, 2023). In this context, the everyday religiosity reflected in *aron* enriches religious consciousness by fostering deep ecological awareness. (Maarif, 2016)

The *aron* tradition illustrates a collective responsibility that extends beyond human interactions to embrace a universal ethical commitment to nature. The principle of *gotong royong* in *aron* is not merely a social mechanism but also a strong spiritual foundation. The collective consciousness within the *aron* community fosters a system of social resilience that is not based on religious identity but on inter-member relationships and a shared sense of belonging. The phrase *aku kap kam, kam kap aku* (I am you, and you are me) signifies that responsibilities within the community are not defined by rigid identity boundaries but by a profound interconnectedness among members (E. Ginting, 2023).

Anne Paterson explores the link between religious practices and sustainable agriculture, emphasizing that ethical farming prioritizes harmony over the mere pursuit of production efficiency. Sustainable agricultural principles reject excessive exploitation of land and crops while advocating for ecological balance through community-based farming systems (Peterson, 2016). Within the *aron* system, this ethos is evident in collective practices such as composting and coordinated harvesting schedules to prevent pest infestations. Through such practices, *aron* serves as a model of agricultural management rooted in ecological spirituality, reinforcing the resilience of agrarian communities. (Liao & Chan, 2016)

Barrera-Bassols & Toledo further assert that indigenous agricultural management is often shaped by deep religious consciousness. In the *aron* context, the sacred dimension of agriculture extends beyond reverence for land, water, and crops—it also represents an integrated ethical system (Pauli et al., 2016). Rituals such as *kerja tahun, ndilo wari udah, ertoto bas juma*, and the concept of *beru dayang* illustrate how spirituality and agricultural practices are intertwined in fostering ecological harmony (Prinst, 2008; Ginting, 2014).

The everyday religiosity embedded in *aron* demonstrates that sustainability ethics are not merely theoretical concepts but tangible practices embedded in daily life. Ammerman emphasizes that religious experiences are not confined to formal rituals but are also present in routine activities that carry spiritual significance. As an expression of everyday religiosity, *aron* upholds the ethics of reciprocity, where humans do not merely extract from nature but also take on the responsibility to protect it. This is reflected in practices such as preserving water sources, blessing seeds before planting, and allowing land to rest before the next cultivation cycle—concrete examples of ecological

awareness grounded in spirituality (N. Ammerman, 2007; Sebayang et al., 2022; E. K. Ginting, 2024).

In response to global ecological challenges, the values inherent in *aron*—social solidarity and relational ethics toward nature—offer a compelling model for religiously grounded environmental ethics. While traditional *aron* practices have evolved over time, their philosophical essence remains relevant and should be revitalized. By integrating indigenous values into sustainability discourse, religious communities can draw inspiration from traditional wisdom to develop more holistic and inclusive ecological solutions. Thus, *aron* is not merely an agricultural tradition but a model of religiosity with far-reaching implications for sustainability and ethical environmental stewardship. (M. A. Ginting et al., 2020)

In the context of contemporary society, the *aron* system faces serious challenges amid the pressures of globalization and shifting social values. Modern life, which increasingly emphasizes individualism and the separation between humans and nature, stands in contrast to the relational and collective principles at the heart of *aron*. The dominance of an anthropocentric paradigm encourages a worldview that neglects holistic cultural values, including the spirituality embedded in communal agricultural practices. Critically, one of the greatest threats comes from the changing orientation of the younger generation, who are more drawn to urban lifestyles and formal employment, leading to their declining engagement with *aron* traditions. Although *aron* has adapted to modern realities through the incorporation of transactional labor systems, the commodification of agricultural work presents its own challenge, potentially eroding the foundational values of solidarity and mutual cooperation. Furthermore, the lack of integration of *aron* values within formal education systems has left younger generations without essential access to understanding its cultural significance. This situation makes the revitalization of *aron* an urgent task—not only as a means of preserving cultural heritage, but also as an effort to foster ecological and spiritual awareness that is relevant for today's generation. (Mark Woodward, 2014; Zeinudin & Novita, 2016; Mueller, 2013)

#### 4. Conclusion

*Aron* tradition in Karo society is not merely a cooperative agricultural management system; it also embodies a deeply rooted religious identity shaped by local wisdom. As a long-standing social practice passed down through generations, *aron* goes beyond collective labor mechanisms in agrarian resource management—it serves as a medium for cultivating relational consciousness, both among individuals and with nature. It is founded upon principles of solidarity, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, reinforcing the social fabric of Karo society while ensuring a holistic and sustainable relationship with the environment.

From the perspective of everyday religiosity, *aron* illustrates that spirituality is not confined to formal religious rituals but is also embedded in daily activities rich in moral and ecological ethics. In *aron*, agricultural labor is not solely viewed as an economic endeavor for survival but as an expression of reverence for nature, which is understood as a divine gift. The belief in the sacredness of land and agricultural yields, as reflected in the concept of *beru dayang* and the *guro-guro aron* ritual, underscores that human-nature relations in Karo society are not exploitative but instead rest upon a profound awareness of interconnectedness between humans, nature, and spiritual entities.

The values embedded in *aron* can be universally interpreted as an ethical framework for sustainability. The *aron* system offers a highly relevant perspective for developing more inclusive and community-based development strategies. Its sustainability model does not focus solely on productivity but also prioritizes ecological balance and the well-being of future generations. The principles of reciprocity, equity, and reverence for land and agricultural produce align with sustainability ethics that advocate for the responsible use of natural resources. In practice, *aron* ensures fair labor distribution within the community while instilling the understanding that individual well-being is inherently linked to collective welfare and environmental equilibrium.

Thus, *aron* is not just a cultural heritage that represents the identity of Karo society; it is also a sustainable way of life that provides solutions to contemporary ecological and social challenges.

Amidst the escalating environmental crisis driven by excessive exploitation and ecosystem degradation, the values of *aron* offer inspiration for more just and sustainable environmental policies. Therefore, revitalizing *aron* concepts and practices within development policies, ecological education, and community-based agricultural systems is a crucial step in maintaining harmony between humans and nature. By adopting *aron* principles, societies can foster a more inclusive, just, and ecologically sustainable social order, ultimately contributing to collective well-being on a broader scale.

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