

Revitalization of religious narratives for water resource preservation: A case study of Mori indigenous community, Central Sulawesi

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> water pollution religious narratives Mori Indigenous community Indigenous religion paradigm water resource preservation</p>	<p>Water pollution, caused primarily by mining and palm oil plantation, contributed to the water crisis in North Morowali, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. It has impacted the Mori Indigenous community, which are among the largest and the oldest communities in the area. They have their own ecological knowledge that reveals a strong connection to the water, but the extractive industries, which pollute their historic Tiu Lake, threaten others water resources, and disconnect them from nature. This study examines Mori Indigenous religious narratives of water and how they perceive and cope with the water pollution. This study applies the qualitative research methodology, using in-depth interview and direct observation to collect the data. Employing Indigenous religion paradigm and the theories of sacred natural sites, this study finds that the religious narratives of water are: Tiu Lake Legend, Imbu-the water protector myth, and the sacred place of water resources. They reveal the inter-subjective relationship of the Mori Indigenous community to the water with religious principle such as: the responsible dimension, how they protected Tiu Lake and water resources as sacred place; the ethics dimension is about the rules on water resources; and the reciprocal dimension where they try to maintain a balance and harmony between human and nature. All this ecological knowledge will be used for water resource preservation in North Morowali, Central Sulawesi.</p>

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Introduction

Water pollution is a critical issue in North Morowali, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, particularly affecting the Mori Indigenous community. This study explores the religious narratives surrounding water within this community, highlighting its profound cultural and spiritual significance. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2021), around 10,683 villages across Indonesia suffered from water pollution, with 126 of those villages located in Central Sulawesi province. The extractive industries, primarily mining and palm oil plantations are significant contributors to this environmental degradation. These extractive industries often operate without proper governmental permits, exacerbating the situation. Since the beginning of the New Order of Soeharto, in 1968, suddenly the mining company started to come to Morowali, Central Sulawesi. There were two giant international mining companies, Rio Tinto and PT. Inco which had the mining contract after the 3rd generation the owner of PT. Freeport in Papua. Then it expanded when the area developed into a new region called North Morowali in Mongabay news report (2015). It can compare with the report from Watchdoc documentary film (2022) in Morowali.

Until now there are around 51 nickel mines and also 14 palm oil plantations actively operated. The exploitation has sparked societal critique, exemplified by the widespread statement: *"We are now in North Morowali Regency of Central Sulawesi feeding the people of the capital city, Jakarta."* This expression popular belong to the local society in everyday conversation and serves as a sharp satire, reflecting the local perception of exploitation by the Indonesian government and corporate interests. The escalation of forest destruction for mining and palm plantation has been rising every

year. The Alliance of WALHI Sulawesi (2024) released an official statement to the Government for temporarily stopping nickel production and evaluating all the companies. The situation in North Morowali is emblematic of broader environmental and socio-economic challenges, where natural resources are extensively mined and forests are depleted, severely impacting water quality and availability.

North Morowali regency historically known as Wita Mori (Eng. "Land of Mori"), explains and explored by Albert Christian Kruyt, an ethnographer and missionary from *Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap* (1900, 1914, 1979). Cruyt divided this area in two regions called *Beneden Mori* or Mori Bawah (Eng. Lower Mori), and *Boven Mori* or Mori Atas (Eng. Upper Mori). Polinggomang also cited that it carries a deep historical significance for the local Indigenous Mori community, once ruled by the Mori Kingdom (2008). This identity of Mori Land is reflected in the local government's emblem, which includes traditional symbols and the motto *"Tepo Asa Aroa,"* (Mori languages) meaning one word, one determination, and one goal. Before the World Religion entered this land, the Mori Indigenous community itself had the *Lamoa/Lahumuoa* as their Ancestral religion. *Ue Lahumuoa* is the God and Creator the earth and all in it. The World religion come and changed all of them and majority is Christianity, besides Muslim, Hindu, etc.

The ongoing environmental in North Morowali, degradation disrupts the connection of Mori people to their land, water, and air, as essential elements of their cultural and spiritual life. The root problem of this degradation is a lack of awareness of interconnectedness of humans and nature stated by Bauman (2011). This interconnectedness because of the anthropocentric paradigm placed human as the center and the other being the objects for human stated by White (1967). Besides,

Religion played the important role in Indonesia including in ecology stated by Zainal Abidin Bagir (2015). Further, he explains that the main players in environmental degradation have been big companies-national and Trans-nasional-and the state, religion as a source of moral and political authority has its rules both in positively and negative. There is need the academic involvement, so religious studies play a role in resolving the ecology problem. In this context, this study is a significant contribution.

Hereby, I choose Tiu Lake and several springs as case study; because it has been polluted since the extractive industries come around. The lake is located in West Petasia Region, North Morowali, Central Sulawesi. The lake area is approx. 600 ha with oil palm plantation around. There are three villages in the vicinity, namely Maralee, Tiu, and Tontowea. Tiu villages are closely related with the lake because they originate from there based on the Legend of Tiu Lake. In the past, Tiu Lake was a source of income for local residents, sending children to college. But now, it can no longer rely on local residents, the condition of the lake is polluted due to mining activities.

Further, the local government already visited the lake, but until now there is not action to address it report by Metro Sulteng (2019). According to the data, that is the PT. Mulia Pasific Resources (MPR) dan PT. Sumber Swarna Pratama (SSP) companies, which is caused pollution to the Tiu Lake, it is reported by Newsurban.id (2023). The case of Tiu Lake is particularly poignant. Once a clear and vital water source, the lake has suffered severe pollution due to nearby mining activities, turning its waters red and muddy. This pollution not only represents an environmental crisis but also a profound spiritual and cultural rupture for the Mori Indigenous community, for whom Tiu Lake holds historical and sacred significance. In this case, the exploitation by multinational

companies transforms the Mori's and their natural surroundings into mere instruments of modern development agendas. For them, water sources such as lakes, rivers, and springs are not just vital for survival; they are deeply entwined with their ancestral identity and spiritual life.

The detrimental effects of water pollution on these communities underpin this study, which seeks to highlight their identity as Indigenous people and explore the intrinsic link between their cosmology and the natural environment. This relationship starts with the understanding that there is a profound connection between water and religion, especially from the perspective of Indigenous religions, which often view environmental stewardship as a religious duty. Drawing on Western examples like Canada, stated by Shaw and Francis (2008), discuss how environmental changes can lead to shifts in behavior and deepen or alter the spiritual relationship individuals and communities have with their surroundings.

By exploring these dynamics, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the spiritual implications of environmental degradation and the potential for resilience and adaptation within Indigenous communities facing such challenges. Some scholars have begun to adopt alternative approaches to examining water pollution, particularly from the perspective of Indigenous communities. Notably, Barbara Watson Andaya, (2016) citing Peter Boomgard, emphasizes the importance of focusing on water within Southeast Asian studies. Andaya argues that water has profoundly shaped the region, often referred to as the "world of water." Despite this centrality, Southeast Asian water narratives, especially those involving water-spirit archetypes, have been largely overlooked in broader cross-cultural discussions. This oversight suggests that both historians and contemporary researchers need to delve deeper into their sources

and adopt a more comparative approach to fully understand these narratives. This study aims to contribute significantly to this discourse by exploring the concepts and practices related to water within Indigenous communities, offering insights into their unique relationship with this vital resource. This study seeks to delve into how the Mori Indigenous community interprets and responds to the degradation of their sacred waters. It examines their traditional water resource management practices and their spiritual relationships with water, which are integral to their identity and resilience. By focusing on the intersection of ecology and spirituality, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of water in Mori Indigenous community religious life and the broader implications for water preservation efforts in North Morowali.

Method

This study employs an ethnographic approach by Spradley (1979), utilizing qualitative research methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of what happened to the Tiu Lake and other water resources around it. I conducted in-depth interviews with around nine key informants, including male and female fishermen, traditional leaders, official leaders, religious leaders, and youth. All of the informants have agreed with their statements being published. In addition to these interviews, I engaged with women's groups during their daily activities in the kitchens and church settings. Direct observations were also made at Lake Tiu and surrounding areas where pollution has had significant impacts. Fieldwork was conducted from January to June 2023, complemented by preliminary online interviews with four individuals during November 2021 and March 2022. The interviews were conducted in both Indonesian and Mori languages. Fortunately, most respondents

were fluent in Indonesian, which simplified communication and reduced translation issues. All the data will be collected and categorized as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and will be analyzed as the qualitative data. The analysis will explore the cognitive processes—such as concepts, thinking, perceiving, knowing, believing, understanding, interpreting, planning, hoping, and feeling—that form part of the collective memory of the Mori Indigenous people, contributing to their role as social agents within their community, as discussed by Van Dijk (2018).

The primary data for this study were derived from both the interviews and direct observations, also including the Maps of the springs. Secondary data were sourced from journals, research reports, personal notes, online media, YouTube videos, and relevant literature. Due to difficulties in obtaining information directly from companies and local governments, much of the information about the environmental situation was gathered from national and local media reports. Tiu Lake was specifically chosen for this study due to its significant pollution levels, which also extend to several springs and rivers in the area. The selection of key persons was carefully balanced in terms of gender and age, focusing on individuals from the Mori Indigenous community who possess firsthand experience and knowledge regarding water resource management. All interviews were recorded and securely stored, with access restricted to the authors and interviewers to ensure the confidentiality and security of the sensitive data collected. This study employs the Indigenous religion paradigm and sacred natural sites as its theoretical frameworks to analyze and interpret the data collection.

The Mori Indigenous community is the center and active subjects of this study. According to Rand (2011), their voices, experiences, knowledge, and narratives as

an Indigenous community form the main sources for this study. Indigenous Religion Paradigm is introduced by scholars such as Kenneth Morrison (2000), Bird-David (1999) and develops in Indonesia by Samsul Maarif (2019). The Indigenous religion paradigm is predicated on the concept of an inter-subjective or interpersonal cosmology. Besides, the sacred natural sites encapsulate the profound and unique relationships between people and nature. As defined by Bas Verschuuren, Robert Wild, Jeffrey McNeeley (2010), these areas are considered holy, venerated, or consecrated, connecting them with religious or belief systems, or designated for spiritual purposes. While the term 'spiritual' relates to the human spirit rather than to material or physical entities and does not necessarily imply an affiliation with a religious institution, many individuals, including secular scientists, experience spiritual emotions about nature without belonging to any formal religion. In cultures with living traditions, sacred sites usually have associated institutions and rules that are inherently religious or spiritual.

Results and Discussion

“Morini” means cold and “Memooru’ or Mooru”, meaning fallen to the ground. It is literally where the Mori coming from.

(Ten Marunduh, Mori Indigenous Leader)

This study begins with look about water in the Indigenous Mori worldview. Robert Redfield (1952) defines 'worldview' as a perspective that shapes how individuals or communities perceive themselves in relation to the wider world. In exploring the Mori Indigenous community's relationship with water, it becomes evident that water is not merely a resource but an integral part of their identity and life. For the Mori's, *water, or Uwoi Tuwua (Indonesian: Air sumber kehidupan)*, translates as "the source of life."

Historically as an agrarian society, their settlement patterns have always prioritized proximity to water sources. This essential element supports not only their daily needs such as drinking, cooking, bathing, and agriculture but is also central to their spiritual practices. Water is used ceremonially by the Sando-Shaman during key agricultural rituals—to initiate planting and harvesting by sprinkling water in the four cardinal directions and making offerings under auspicious trees to seek blessings from the *Lamoa* for a prosperous yield.

Thus on 10th, May 2023, I interviewed Ten Marunduh, a Mori Indigenous Traditional Leader, who provided insights into the cultural significance of water for the Mori's. He recounted two historical narratives that explain the origins of the name 'Wita Mori.' The first narrative attributes the name to the cold water, “Morini” (*‘Morini’ meaning cold*) experienced by ancestors when they first settled in the mountainous regions. The second narrative relates to the abundance of fallen fruit “Memooru’ or Mooru”, (*‘Memooru’ or ‘Mooru’ meaning fallen to the ground*) encountered by the ancestors in the forests, symbolizing fertile land. The settlement decisions of the Mori's are deeply influenced by the availability of water; they establish villages only where water is accessible. Water is cold and determines fertility, so according to the meaning of Mori, its means that water is identity of Mori itself. Further he explains that until the 1990s, Mori's traditionally collected water using segments of bamboo, conscientiously maintaining the natural environment that supports their water sources. This conservation mindset extends to their agricultural practices; they engage in shifting cultivation, allowing land to revert to forest, thus ensuring the sustainability of their water resources. They also utilize natural materials, such as forest rope and young bamboo, which contain water, for their needs without

permanently altering the environment. This deep-seated respect for and spiritual connection with water highlights the Mori's intrinsic understanding that their survival and well-being are inextricably linked to the preservation of their natural surroundings. Their practices demonstrate a sophisticated ecological wisdom that emphasizes sustainability and reverence for water as a life-giving and sacred element.

The religious narratives of water in the Mori Indigenous community

The Mori Indigenous community's worldview integrates deeply held beliefs about water, stemming from their cosmology and religious narratives. This section delves into three significant narratives that exemplify their spiritual relationship with water: the Legend of Tiu Lake, the mythology of *Imbu* as a water guardian, and the concept of water as integral to sacred lands. They are spiritual guidance and practice in their daily live religion. In applying place-based narratives in environmental crises, the voice of local communities should be recognized to challenge the global and dominant discourse Werner (2010). Further Werner and Bremer (2020) argue that the main function of place-based narratives which-give meaning to abstract scientific information are key to understanding, making sense, of what it means to live in and with a changing environment. It is how they perceive and cope with the water pollution.

The Legend of Tiu Lake

"Tiu Lake is our home before, our history begins there."

(Tete Bate and Tanis A. Bansoe, Mori Traditional Leader)

The Tiu Lake legend encapsulates a vital narrative that is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical identity of the Mori people, illustrating the significance of myth in shaping communal beliefs and behaviors. There is a lot of Tiu Legend as an oral story in Tiu village and surroundings. I choose The Tiu Legend story rewritten by Tete Bate & Tanis A. Bansoe (2018). I also interviewed both. The story begins in a valley flanked by geographical landmarks such as Bayu Mandou hill and Pejoe Ule hill in the East, Mount Kawibola to the West, Masamasara in the North, and Mount Ligisa in the South. This valley inhabited by the Pamona Tribe—evidenced by the local nomenclature derived from the Pamona language—was where the village of Tiu was established. Under the leadership of Ue Liendi, the community thrived, expanding to include nearby areas such as Pesombaa and Kompono Langkai. Over time, the governance of the village transitioned through various rulers, including the notable King Patimbang, famed for his unusual four-eyed visage. The core of the legend revolves around a tragic miscarriage of justice that led to divine retribution, mirroring the narrative structure of the Banyuwangi Legend from East Java. In the Tiu tale, two men and a woman were wrongfully accused of adultery—a crime considered unforgivable by the community—and were sentenced to death by the local king and his subjects. The woman, maintaining her innocence, prophesied a disaster as proof of her unjust treatment. This prophecy materialized when an innocuous event involving a goat whose horn became entangled in a "boru," a traditional farmer's head covering, escalated into a sequence of laughter and cruelty towards the animal. This seemingly trivial act was admonished by a bystander, warning that such cruelty could precipitate their own downfall.

Subsequently, a catastrophic storm ensued, featuring relentless rain and thunder,

which ultimately submerged the village, sparing only a few who then became the progenitors of the new Tiu community. This element of the legend underscores a moral lesson about justice and the consequences of moral transgressions, serving as a cautionary tale. The story concludes with the mention of Tiu Lake, where, during clear conditions, the submerged village can purportedly be seen, and where crocodiles with unusual five-fingered appendages are believed to be the reincarnations of the villagers' ancestors. From an academic perspective, the Tiu Lake legend is not merely folklore but serves as a foundational religious narrative for the Mori Indigenous community. It embodies the principles of their indigenous religion and offers insight into the ways such stories function as both cultural heritage and moral compass. Thus, the Tiu Lake legend is crucial for understanding the identity, beliefs, and historical consciousness of the Mori people, affirming the broader significance of indigenous narratives in maintaining cultural continuity and integrity.

Mythology of Imbu, the water protector

"Imbu is the Landlord of this Tiu Lake. I meet and saw It twice time and I respect It as water protector." (Nene Angel, fisherwomen)

One element from *Lamoa* beliefs system related to the water is the mythology of *Imbu*. Another name is *Umbu Koloro*. This myth revered as the Water Protector, is a compelling element of the cultural fabric of the Mori indigenous community. Almost all the Mori people know about *Imbu*, but the young generation today did not know it. This belief in *Imbu* as a formidable snake inhabiting rivers, lakes, and springs is part of a broader narrative common across various cultures worldwide, from Peru to Siberia, where water bodies are seen as conduits to the ancestral realm stated by Andaya (2016).

In the Southeast Asian context, similar traditions are observed on the island of Timor, where each descent group maintains a specific spring linked to ancestral veneration through ritualistic water drawing. These springs, often protected by sacred creatures like eels, crocodiles, and pythons, are central to rituals that ensure health and fertility, demonstrating a universal reverence for water sources adorned with mythological protectors.

The Mori's designation of the water protector as *Imbu* or *Umbu Koloro*—interpreted as the Landlord of their waters—underscores a deeply rooted ethos of respect and humility towards nature. This ethos is vividly illustrated in local narratives, such as the encounter by Nene Angel (Eng. Grandma Angel, pass away several months after the interviewed), who experienced a vision of *Imbu* while fishing. She called the *Imbu as Tuan Tanah, the Landlord* and respects it. She had met It around twice after she did wrong in the Tiu Lake. At the time, Nene Angel threw the chicken carcass into the middle of the lake. She violated the rules of throwing animal carcasses and feces into the lake, as stated below:

"I wake up in the morning and go into the middle of the lake. Suddenly the water is foaming and the Imbu appeared slowly.... from behind the grass in the middle of the lake, something like a log came out. It is straight up, perhaps about 10 meters. It has a big eye.... then I said apologize to Him.... "Maybe there's a mistake in my language. Oh Friends, I am so sorry, if I did wrong, if any something wrong came out of my mouth. Let me keep fishing here, I promise never did again!!!" After that around 10 minutes, he go down slowly went back into the water and disappeared.

Further, Nene Angel said that she knows him, the story of *Imbu*, from his parents and all the elderly before as hereditary. If we did something wrong, then he will arise. If he appears it means that there are humans

doing evil things. It was an honor to me that could record her testimony as one of the persons who's lived long around 40 years on the lake, before her pass away.

This encounter, marked by the sudden appearance of a creature with dragon-like features, was perceived as a corrective warning, prompting an immediate acknowledgment of a transgression and a plea for forgiveness. Such personal testimonies enrich the communal lore, reinforcing the normative behaviors expected in these sacred spaces. Besides, contrastingly, J. Pombalawo, (a local fisherman leader), that I already mention before, despite his skepticism towards the literal aspects of the *Imbu* myth, acknowledges the cultural and spiritual significance of the lake.

"We are forbidden to talk carelessly and must watch our mouths while on the lake. If you fisherman, you have to have good intentions and a clean heart. I believe that God will bless us if we have a good aim in this lake."

His practice of fishing with reverence and a clear conscience, inspired by a belief in divine blessings for those who respect the lake, illustrates a secular but respectful approach to the traditional beliefs. His stance represents a pragmatic adaptation of mythological reverence, ensuring the safeguarding of this natural heritage. This divergence in belief and interpretation within the community reflects a broader challenge of cultural transmission and adaptation. While older generations hold the myth of *Imbu* as a cornerstone of ecological and spiritual stewardship, younger Mori's may not share the same connection to these traditional narratives. The gradual erosion of such myths among the youth underscores the pressing need to reinterpret and reinvigorate these stories in contemporary contexts. Reinforcing the myth of *Imbu* could serve as a powerful tool for environmental

preservation, making it relevant to modern conservation efforts and bridging the gap between ancestral wisdom and present-day ecological challenges. To effectively leverage this mythology for water preservation, it is crucial to engage both the community and the younger generation in dialogue that aligns traditional respect for nature with contemporary environmental practices. Such efforts would not only preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Mori people but also promote a sustainable relationship with their natural environment, demonstrating the enduring relevance of myth in fostering a responsible stewardship of natural resources. This approach, which combines respect for tradition with modern ecological awareness, could prove pivotal in ensuring the sustainability of these cherished water sources for future generations.

Water resources as the sacred place

"Tiu Lake is our Ancestral heritage. We give it for the young generation to keep maintain and preserve it." (Alen Lareso, Mori Indigenous Leader)

It was an honor to me as researcher; guidance by Alen Lareso, The Leader of Mori Petasia Traditional Council, for entered the sacred area of Tiu Lake. He did the ritual for me as new visitors before entering the area, because there is a sacred boundary that must be respected between ordinary territory and sacred territory. He speaks in Mori Languages to the Ancestors for asking for permission, so that I can enter their sacred territory. He also could speak directly with the Ancestors. They believed that the Ancestor still alive in the Tiu lake and several jungles in the mountain surrounding the lake.

The concept of customary land as sacred is deeply embedded in the traditions of the Mori Indigenous community, reflecting a profound reverence for nature and its guardians, which are believed to be the spirits of their ancestors. This sanctity is particularly emphasized in the management and preservation of water resources, where ancestral dictates prohibit disrespectful behaviors and the pollution of these vital environments. J. Pombalawo and Alwun Lasiwua (activist and the Secretary of Mori Traditional Council), emphasize the necessity of maintaining the purity of springs and rivers, a practice which involves not only cleanliness but also a respectful conduct that honors the guardianship believed to be held by spiritual entities. They keep saying the spring and the area around it must be kept maintained.

"The orders of the ancestors are that the river and spring be purified. Humans are not allowed to shower carelessly; not allowed to throw dirty things such as blood, garbage and other objects. It must keep clean. Ancestor order was that the rivers and springs had guards. We do not allow speaking carelessly and being arrogant around that place."

One poignant example of this belief in action is the spring located in Bunta village. According to Lasiwua, this spring exhibits a direct responsiveness to the actions of the villagers; improper uses, such as washing pork or other disrespectful actions, are believed to invoke immediate natural repercussions, such as flooding. This phenomenon is interpreted as a manifestation of the spring's guardian, further emphasizing the cultural norm that the natural world is sentient and reactive.

Such beliefs foster a cautious interaction with water bodies, underlined by tragic incidents like drowning, which reinforce the community's respect for these sites as powerful and sometimes dangerous.

These sacred sites and their associated taboos highlight the complex relationship between the Mori community and their natural environment, one that is mediated through rituals and the guidance of traditional figures like the Sando or Shaman. For instance, D's (pseudonym) experience at the Tadiola spring in Tiu villages, illustrates the ongoing relevance of these cultural practices. After suffering physical ailments from what he perceived as a disrespectful visit to the spring, D was healed not by modern medicine but by traditional shamanic practices that involved direct communication with the guardian spirit of the spring. This healing ritual, which countered the advice of his Protestant mentor, underscores the tension between indigenous religious practices and introduced Western religious ideologies such as stated by Aragon (2003). This tension reflects broader cultural and theological conflicts within the community, particularly between the Indigenous Lamo religion and the GKST (a local Protestant church), which views the universe through a lens of dominion and control, in contrast to the Mori's view of living in harmony with it. The church's stance that indigenous practices are heretical has led to a decline in traditional rituals, demonstrating a significant cultural shift influenced by external religious doctrines. This shift not only affects religious practices but also impacts the community's interaction with their environment, as traditional ecological knowledge and reverence for nature are integral to indigenous Mori beliefs.

Further, the explanation in the section below shows how I interpretation the religious narratives of the Mori Indigenous community about water into framing of the Indigenous Religion paradigm such as responsible, ethical and reciprocal stated by Bird-David (1999), Morison (2000), Maarif (2019) and sacred place by Veschuuren (2010).

Thus, in the end I proposed revitalization the Mori Indigenous ecology knowledges for water preservation in North Morowali. Martinez-Alier's (2016) stated that ecology of the poor also underlined the communities' contribution to conservation as they protest over (state) generalized market and capitalism exploitation over nature.

Water is/as our stories as responsible dimension

"If Tiu Lake and all water resources just left extinct, so we worried about future of our family and society". (Women in Tiu village)

I visited Tiu Lake twice. The first just in the edge of the lake and the second was going along it with small boat. During my direct observation at the second time when rainy season, the lake being brown and cloudy because of polluted. Based on information from J. Pombalawo, the Local Fisherman Leader stated that this lake is threatened with destruction and extinction because of the mining. The fish have run out and the water cloudy. Besides, one of the rare fish will be extinct. The new *Oryzias soerotoi* from the research: A New Ricefish of the Genus *Oryzias* (Beloniformes, Adrianichthyidae) by Daniel. F. Mokodongan, Rieko Tanaka and Kazunori Yamahira. They are from Tropical Biosphere Center, University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, Japan and Worlds Medaka Aquarium, Nagoya Higashiyama Zoological Park, Nagoya, Japan (2014). Mokodongan and friends also already warning that palm-tree plantation will be another serious threat to the lake and fishes. Their research was the first one scientific research for the Tiu Lake, and my research as case study, is the second specifically for the religious dimension and ecology.

The Legend of the Tiu Lake encapsulates the *Lamo* belief system (ancient Mori

Indigenous belief system), which espouses the unity between nature, humans and non-humans in line with Hallowell theory (1960). This unity engenders a relationship that is not only complete but also mutually dependent. They believe that their Ancestors, who once inhabited the surrounding lake and forest, continue to look after them and therefore deserve respect. The concept of Tiu Lake and all the water resources also the jungles, as a sacred place is in line with the concept of sacred places by Oviedo and Jeanrenaud (2007). They posit that sacred places for indigenous peoples are natural sites where they can worship their Ancestors or Gods. They include natural areas recognized by institutionalized religious or faiths as places for worship and remembrance. They have inherited the order and responsibility to protect the universe from their Ancestors.

However, the problem is there are no written customary regulations or village regulations to protect Tiu Lake and customary forests throughout the Tiu village area. Consequently, mining can easily enter the area despite demonstrations being carried out by community members. Furthermore, the majority of Mori Indigenous communities have been forced to become modern industrial societies with their connection to Ancestors and the Universe having been lost. It is in line with what Seyyed Hossein Nasr stated: "The world view of modern science, especially as propagated through its vulgarization, itself contributed to this secularization of nature and of natural substances' (1967/1990).

It is time for the local government to designate Tiu Lake as a Mori historical site that needs to be protected. The designation of a site as sacred underscores its significant religious value to a specific community, which also implies its importance to government, culture, and religion. This perspective aligns with Michael S. Northcott's interpretation of Martin Heidegger's concept of "being in a

place" – a safe place is a dwelling where divinities, mortals, and non-human entities like rock, water, plant, and animal 'belong together in one.' Northcott (2015) argues that human experiences and interactions with local ecological qualities shape places of dwelling into sacred places. The terms 'holy' and 'sacred' are often used interchangeably, as noted by Mircea Eliade (1961). So the Mori Indigenous community brings deep understanding about how managing the preservation of Tiu Lake to the modern people today.

Learning from Imbu as water protector as ethical dimension

"This earth and nature are damaged and destroyed because of the greedy of human. Imbu no longer believed by human recently". (Nene Angel, fisherwomen)

The prohibition on the disposal of blood and dirt into the water, as well as the use of careless language and the pursuit of malevolent intentions, represents a form of ethics towards water areas. This ethical code is not written and is regarded as a taboo for the entire community. It will be introduced and informed especially for those who are coming to the area for the first time. This regulates the ethics towards nature and all the water sources. The *Imbu* as Supernatural Being and water protector only exist as a myth in majority society especially for the youth. It's crucial to rewrite in the popular media like The Legend of Ang as the lessons in public school for water preservation. Nene Angel respects the *Imbu*, not only as the Landlord but also called it Friends because of the deep relationship every day in the lake. Thus, the concept of *Imbu* as "person" that is the concept of personhood which is not limited only for human or living being, stated by Hallowell (1960) and Bird-David (1999).

On the other hand, it is very interesting how seeing the myth of *Imbu* and other Supernatural Beings is not very functional for J. Pombalawo, who catches fish every day in Tiu Lake. He didn't believe it because he had never had a supernatural experience at the lake as people believed. However, he still believes that he must have ethics when fishing in the lake. He still respects Tiu Lake as the place of origin of the Ancestors and a place to find life. The holy place that he understands is a place that he must protect, from evil intentions, dirty thoughts and words. His perspective can be developed for those who no longer believe in the *Imbu* mythology, but still hold an attitude of high respect for the universe. Even he stated that but in fact what his act is actually the essential of the ethics from the Mori Indigenous ethics of nature itself.

Water is Uwoi Tuwua or the source of life as reciprocal dimension

"Our Ancestral teaching to us is not to take what is in nature carelessly because not everything is intended for humans". (Alen Lareso, Leader of Mori Indigenous)

Historically the Tiu Lake is the origin identity of the Mori Indigenous community. They keep up by using it for a source of life which they need every day. Taking only what is needed is a characteristic of indigenous communities in Indonesia as reciprocity relationship, stated by Maarif (2019). They are not allowed to take more than they need, let alone act beyond their limits of damaging nature. This spiritual belief and practice enables them to maintain ecological balance and preserve nature. Since ancient times, they have lived in harmony with the benevolence of the universe. They recognize that they have been blessed with abundant natural wealth, a reflection of the name "Mori" itself, which means abundance. So they have the right and obligation to maintain harmonious

relations between God, Ancestors, humans, and nature. The relational is not hierarchy but equal and inter-subjective each other.

As explained previously, for the Mori's, water is Uwoi Tuwua (Indonesian: *Air sumber kehidupan*), translates as "the source of life. Tanis A. Bansoe as elderly and part of Mori Traditional Council expressed his concern that the presence of the extractive industry had damaged relations between human and nature. We should behave well towards nature because nature gives us life. That's what our ancestors taught us. In line with that, Alen Lareso, as the Chief of Mori Petasia Council stated that the Ancestral teaching is not to take what is in nature carelessly because not everything is intended for humans. This reciprocal relationship contrasts sharply with the policies and actions of the extractive mining industry, which has extensively and actively caused water pollution. For the Mori Indigenous community, if Tiu Lake and all the springs are damaged, their way of life will become extinct. Their identity as Mori people will be lost and extinct.

Revitalization the Mori Indigenous religious narratives as spiritual practices and ecology knowledge

"North Morowali government please set immediately our Tiu Lake, all water resources and jungles around as the heritage of Mori Indigenous community for water preservation and future of Wita Mori." (Indigenous Mori community in Tiu village and surrounding)

This section explains about my proposed how the Mori Indigenous religious narratives as spiritual practices and ecology knowledges could be revitalization for the water preservation in North Morowali, Central Sulawesi. Water and waterscapes are crucial for Indigenous spiritual, wellbeing, live hoods, and identities. As such, Indigenous rights of self-determination span the cultural,

political, and socioeconomic dimension of Water like Robinson stated (2018). The Mori Indigenous community itself is victimized by government development policies, and absence to protect nature. Thus, the Mori's religious narratives about water are not recognized and excluded by the government for massive mining operations. Since 2019, people around Tiu Lake have been demonstrating demanding the revocation of mining permits report by Sulteng news (2019). Criticism of this demonstration was also mostly based on economic motives and only a few of them brought up the history of Lake Tiu. Automatically, the religious narrative of Tiu Lake was not the main issue here. By integrating the main issue of spiritual and historical of Tiu Lake for Mori indigenous community, it will be concerning acknowledgment of their status as the "*tuan tanah*", whose rights in their ancestral lands should be acknowledged in redress for their dispossession, including the acknowledgment of their status as *primus inter pares* like what Kathryn Robinson proposed for Orang Asli Sorowako community, in South of Sulawesi (2019).

Besides, most of the rituals related to nature are no longer there. Like giving "*sesajen*" or offerings to the Ancestor and nature, worship to the Ancestor, etc. One of the factors is because Christianity as the majority rejected and abolished the ritual. The *Lamoa* as the origin of Mori beliefs was forbidden and exterminated. Facing this water pollution problem, I proposed for GKST, Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah, (Central Sulawesi Christian Church) as the local church towards "ecological conversion" by acknowledge and embracing the Mori indigenous water spirituality and create it becomes "*Gereja Air*" by Andalus (2021). Besides, the Mori community itself is the "guided society", meaning that the majority of them always depend on the leader's voices.

This could become a big challenge and an inhibiting factor in efforts to save the water resources. If the leaders of the government, local society and religious leaders don't care and don't want to take responsibility for all the damage that has occurred, then throughout that time efforts will be hindered.

The other significant challenge in this context is the size and perceived insignificance of Tiu Lake, which spans only 600 hectares. Its small size may lead to its marginalization in governmental and corporate agendas, with local governmental actions often being superficial and lacking substantive follow-up. This underscores a critical need for advocacy and policy intervention to ensure that even smaller ecosystems like Tiu Lake are recognized and valued within national and international environmental management frameworks.

Thus, the challenge facing the Mori Indigenous community is not only environmental but also deeply cultural and spiritual. The specific ritual for water preservation is no longer anymore. The need to reconcile these differing worldviews and reinvigorate traditional practices is crucial for both cultural preservation and environmental stewardship. It is highlighting the essential role of Indigenous ecological knowledge in sustainable environmental management and the need for a dialogue that respects and integrates these ancient wisdoms into contemporary life such as Leonard and friends' studies (2023). They research of Indigenous knowledge around the Lands, Waters, and colonies of Canada, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the United States (CANZUS). According to the CANZUS research, this study gives space for the voices and experiences of the Mori Indigenous community as water protectors. This integration could help in addressing both the ecological knowledge and the spiritual needs of the community,

ensuring that sacred spaces are respected and protected for future generations.

These narratives highlight the complex layer of religious and cultural significance that water holds for the Mori Indigenous community. Water is not merely a physical substance but is laden with spiritual, ethical, and ancestral importance. These Mori Indigenous religious narratives and practices not only define the community's daily interactions with water but also frame their ecological practices and their broader environmental ethics. The challenge remains in how these deeply rooted beliefs can be harmonized with modern conservation needs and how they can be imparted to younger generations to maintain their relevance and protective influence over natural water sources. Besides, it is could be part of the IWRM-Indonesian Water Resource Management such as study by Fulazakky (2014).

Thus, facing the dynamic and complexity, I proposed the revitalization of the Mori Indigenous religious narratives of water. First, recognize and reclaim Tiu Lake and all water resources as the Mori Indigenous heritage and sacred place in North Morowali. Second, embrace the religious narratives of water as Mori Indigenous ecological knowledge, both in the philosophy spiritual concept and practice. By reclaiming and reinvigorating their traditional ecological knowledge and practices will save not only the water-sources but also the identity of the Mori Indigenous community. They not only protect the environmental heritage but also assert their identity and authority as stewards of their land. This approach not only aligns with global sustainable development goals but also ensures the preservation of unique cultural and ecological landscapes for future generations.

Conclusion

The findings of this study deeply rooted in the Indigenous experiences and perspectives of the Mori Indigenous community in North Morowali, Central Sulawesi, to underscore the potential of religious narratives and ecological knowledge in addressing environmental challenges such as water pollution. Their relationship with water and nature, shaped by their unique spiritual beliefs and practices, offers valuable insights for sustainable water resource management. Indigenous Religion paradigm revealed about the inter-subjective relationship of Mori Indigenous community with their water resources. Their religious narratives about water contain the elements of responsible, ethical and reciprocal as the basic religiosity in Indigenous religion paradigm. The sacred natural sites revealed that Tiu Lake and several water resources are sacred places for the Mori Indigenous community.

The revitalization of the Mori Indigenous religious narratives is needed for water preservation. Thus, the effectiveness of leveraging this Indigenous knowledge is contingent upon the engagement and commitment of various stakeholders—including local society, governmental bodies, and religious leaders—who must actively participate in acknowledging and integrating these indigenous perspectives into broader environmental strategies. To foster a truly inclusive approach to combating water pollution, it is essential that the Mori community be given a platform to articulate their views and share their ecological wisdom. Promoting the Mori Indigenous religious narratives about water in an academic way and popular media to the public is one way to water preservation. Allowing them to speak for themselves not only validates their experiences and knowledge but also ensures that their voice is central in the dialogue around environmental conservation.

This involves not just listening to their concerns but also actively incorporating their insights into the creation and implementation of policies aimed at water resource preservation.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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