

Eco-Spirituality in Mandar Traditional Ussul: Building Environmental Awareness Through Indigenous Cultural Practices

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Abstract: This study examines the concept of eco-spirituality in the traditional ussul practices of the Mandar community in Indonesia. The ecological crisis occurring today is a result of the modern human paradigm shift that no longer views nature as having intrinsic and spiritual value. This research utilizes a qualitative approach with ethnographic and phenomenological methods to understand the ussul tradition in the context of eco-spirituality. The findings reveal that the understanding of ussul in Mandar religious traditions can be classified into several levels: literal, interpretative, critical, and creative understanding. The integration of ussul in Mandar local wisdom and eco-spirituality concepts manifests in various forms: substitution, syncretism, addition, deculturation, and origination. Additionally, the role of eco-spirituality in traditional Mandar ussul contributes to building environmental awareness by providing spiritual foundations for environmental management, bridging the emergence of cosmic relationship awareness, and becoming a vessel for value transformation. This study concludes that the traditional ussul of the Mandar community serves as a form of symbiotic mutualism relationship between humans and nature, which reflects the implementation of eco-spirituality principles and has significant implications for sustainable environmental practices.

Introduction

The ecological crisis that is occurring today is the result of a paradigm shift in modern humans who no longer view nature as an entity with intrinsic and spiritual value.¹ Philosopher Henryk Skolimowski interprets human existence as a spiritual being who should have the consciousness to foster a harmonious relationship with other creatures.² In line with this view, Aldous Huxley emphasized the expansion of human consciousness through spiritual experience to see man's unity with nature,³ while Thomas Berry affirmed man's responsibility as part of the earth's organism to maintain and preserve it.⁴ The manifestation of the spiritual relationship between humans and nature is reflected in the local wisdom of the Mandar people who have an inseparable relationship with the surrounding environment. As stated by Muhammad Ridwan Alimuddin, the Mandar people developed various

¹ Wasil Wasil and Muizudin Muizudin, "Ecotheology in Responding to the Ecological Crisis in Indonesia Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Perspective," *Reflection* 22, no. 1 (2023): 179–202, doi:10.15408/ref.v22i1.31403.

² F Fios and G Arivia, "The Concept of Homo Ecologicus Spiritual-Ethical (an Ethical Reflection on the Ecological Humanism Concept of Henryk Skolimowski)," *Cultural Dynamics in a Globalized World*, 2017, 119–24, <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315225340-17>.

³ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (hatto & Windus, 1954).

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, California: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

knowledge rooted in their relationship with nature, such as marine knowledge, boating, shipping, to occult knowledge.⁵ Abdullah Tahir also revealed that the Mandar people's dependence on the sea as their main source of livelihood has shaped their distinctive views and patterns of interaction with nature.⁶

One of the tangible manifestations of the symbiotic relationship of mutualism between humans and nature in the life of the Mandar people is *ussul*, which is a communication pattern that is loaded with symbolic messages in the form of objects, expressions, or behaviors. *Ussul* is a form of negotiation of the Mandar community for prayers, hopes, and desires to obtain welfare and safety or avoid diseases, accidents, and natural disasters.⁷ The tradition of *ussul* that has been applied for generations is interesting to study in the context of eco-spirituality, especially about how the understanding of *ussul* in the religious traditions of the Mandar community as the foundation of eco-spirituality, the combination of *ussul* in the local wisdom of the Mandar community with the concept of eco-spirituality towards environmental sustainability practices, and the role of eco-spirituality in the tradition of the *ussul* of the Mandar community in an effort to build environmental awareness.

research methods

This study uses a type of qualitative research with ethnographic and phenomenological approaches to understand in depth the *ussul* tradition in the context of the

eco-spirituality of the Mandar community.⁸ The ethnographic approach was chosen to explore and describe the cultural patterns and practices of the *ussul* tradition carried out by the Mandar people in their interaction with nature, while the phenomenological approach was used to reveal the meaning and essence of the spiritual experiences of the Mandar people related to these traditions. The data collection technique was carried out through participatory observation by being directly involved in the rituals of the *ussul* tradition, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders, and Mandar fishing communities who practice the *ussul* tradition, as well as documentation studies of local texts and relevant ritual documentation. The data obtained was then analyzed using a hermeneutic interpretation analysis method with data reduction stages to classify information according to the theme of eco-spirituality, presentation of data in the form of narrative descriptions, and drawing conclusions that were validated through source triangulation techniques and methods to ensure the credibility of research results.⁹

Results and Discussion

Understanding Ussul in the Religious Traditions of the Mandar Community as the Foundation of Eco-Spirituality

The understanding of *ussul* in the religious traditions of the Mandar people can be classified into several levels, namely literal, interpretive, critical, and creative understanding. In the context of eco-spirituality, *ussul* has played a role as a forum for strengthening

⁵ Muhammad Ridwan Alimuddin, *The Fastest Boat of the Archipelago* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2013).

⁶ Abdullah Tahir, "Migration of the Mandar Community," *Curiosity: Journal of Research* Perd Edition (2008): 68–82.

⁷ Asri, "The Trust of the Mandar People in *Ussul* Builds a House in Pambusuang Village, Balanipa District, Polewali Mandar Regency" (UIN ALAUDDIN MAKASSAR, 2019).

⁸ Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka Dan Studi Lapangan," *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung* (Bandung: Digilib UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2020), 1-6.

⁹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018), 178.

dynamic environmental awareness. As a tradition that colors the socio-cultural reality of the Mandar people, *ussul* has formed the character of a society that has an awareness of eco-spirituality where the commitment to preserving the environment is seen as an integral part of the theological system they believe in.¹⁰

The *ussul* tradition cannot be separated from the life of the Mandar people as cultured creatures. As stated by Ambarwati et al., this closeness makes tradition affect the character and personality of the community, sometimes even occupying a position that is parallel to spiritual rituals or religious teachings.¹¹ The *ussul* tradition plays an important role in shaping the cultural and social identity of the Mandar people, covering various aspects of life ranging from ceremonies, customs, to language. Through this tradition, values and norms are passed down from generation to generation, as well as a means to strengthen social relations and solidarity between members of society. The existence of the *ussul* tradition strengthens the sense of togetherness and collective identity which leads to the strengthening of eco-spirituality-based environmental management.

Muhammad Rusydi said that humans who are able to absorb the values of wisdom in their lives are those who are wise in understanding themselves and the social reality around them.¹² When wisdom is used as the basis of eco-spirituality within a theosophical

framework, the paradigm of environmental management becomes not limited to theological barriers. The values of wisdom in eco-spirituality that are immanent to all religious teachings have metamorphosed into a set of universal values such as justice, humanity, love, and compassion.¹³ In this context, eco-spirituality teaches that man's relationship with nature is based not only on material needs, but also on moral and spiritual principles. Nature is seen as an integral part of human spiritual life, where preserving nature is a manifestation of wisdom and ethical values.

Human life, which is an accumulation of the sacred dimensions of the *ukhrawi* and the profane worldly, emphasizes the need for a proportional balance between the two. The existence of humans as religious and cultured creatures requires the emphasis on value aspects in life, including in eco-spirituality-based environmental management.¹⁴ The transformation from *homo sapiens* to human *sapiens* allows humans to use their mind's potential to control activities to be within the loci of values that contribute constructively to the various cosmic dimensions. The Qur'anic cues show that human beings as *kehalifatullah fi al-ardh* are actually most responsible for the damage on land and sea.¹⁵ Therefore, the spirit of environmental management in eco-spirituality demands the transformation from *homo*

¹⁰ Andi Nur Fitrah, Tuti Bahfiarti, and Muhammad Farid, "Strengthening the Local Wisdom of Paissangang Sumombal Sandeq Boat in Attitude Tawakkal of Mandar Tribe Fishermen," *IJUM Journal of Human Science* 6, no. 2 (2024): 137–49.

¹¹ Alda Putri Anindika Ambarwati and Indah Lylys Mustika, "Javanese Traditional Marriage as One of the Strengths of Indonesian Culture," *Proceedings of the National Seminar on Indonesian Language and Literature* 2, no. 2 (2018): 17–22.

¹² Muhammad Rusydi, *Wisdom-Based Education: Perennis Philosophia Perspective*

¹³ C S Ramanathan et al., "Spirituality, Social Work Practice, and Sustainable Development," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 2025, 1–21, doi:10.1080/15426432.2025.2475900.

¹⁴ Abinet Shiferaw, Mamo Hebo, and Getachew Senishaw, "The Spiritual Ecology of Sacred Landscapes: Evidence from Sacred Forests of the Sebat Bête Gurage, Central - South Ethiopia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1–22, doi:10.1080/23311886.2023.2210900.

¹⁵ Carol L Berzonsky and Susanne C. Moser, "Becoming Homo Sapiens Sapiens: Mapping the Psycho-Cultural Transformation in the Anthropocene," *Anthropocene* 20 (2017): 15–23.

humanus to human humanus with strong social empathy.

The literal understanding of *ussul* is the initial foundation that creates space to maintain the existence of this tradition as a forum for strengthening eco-spirituality that is sacred and authentic. However, the development of understanding to the interpretive, critical, and creative levels requires a paradigmatic transformation. The transformation includes a paradigm shift from absolutism to relativity, from textual to contextual, from atomistic to systemic-comprehensive, and from theological ideals to moral ideals.¹⁶ Through this paradigmatic transformation, the understanding of *ussul* in the religious traditions of the Mandar people as the foundation of eco-spirituality can develop dynamically and adaptively, so as to be able to answer the challenges of environmental management in the contemporary era without abandoning the values of local wisdom that have been inherited from generation to generation.

The Combination of Ussul in the Local Wisdom of the Mandar Community and the Concept of Eco-Spirituality on Environmental Sustainability Practices

The combination of *ussul* in the local wisdom of the Mandar community and the concept of eco-spirituality towards environmental sustainability practices manifests itself in several forms, namely substitution, syncretism, addition, deculturation, and origination. This variation of the blended form suggests that the two entities are interrelated and continue to undergo a dialectical process of acculturation.¹⁷ The practice of *ussul* as a value

of Mandar local wisdom can be replaced or adapted with more universal eco-spirituality concepts without losing its essence. Meanwhile, syncretism occurs when the elements of *ussul* and the concept of eco-spirituality are combined into a new practice or belief that contains elements of both.¹⁸

Blending processes can also be additional, in which new elements of the concept of eco-spirituality are added to the practice of local wisdom without changing the basic structure or essence of the practice. In the case of deculturation, certain elements of local wisdom are replaced by new concepts of eco-spirituality in response to environmental or social changes. Origination emerged as a process in which new practices that were completely original were born from the interaction between the local wisdom of the Mandar people and the concept of eco-spirituality, which was driven by the need to preserve the environment. This blend reflects the dynamics of interaction between tradition and modernity, where local wisdom and eco-spirituality values enrich and shape each other, allowing the Mandar people to adapt to the challenges of the modern environment while still maintaining their cultural identity.

This phenomenon of combination illustrates that humans are creatures who always think as in Mantik Science said *al-Insan Hayawan Natiq* to respond to various phenomena he faces. This human character, as described by Harun Hadiwijono, shows that the effort to seek the truth is a never-ending process along with the dynamics of the problems that arise. This ability

¹⁶ Ahmad Zainal Abidin and Fahmi Muhammad, "Ecological Interpretation and Environmental Problems (A Comparative Study of Mujiyono Abdillah and Mudhofir Abdullah's Interpretation of Verses on the Environment)," *QOF: Journal of Studies and Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2020): 1–18, doi:10.30762/qof.v4i1.

¹⁷ Ahmad Zainal Abidin and Fahmi Muhammad, "Ecological Interpretation and

Environmental Problems (A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of Mujiyono Abdillah and Mudhofir Abdullah on Verses on the Environment).

¹⁸ I. Putu Fery Karyada and La Ode Sabaruddin, "Exploring Eco-Spirituality and Sustainability Performance: A Study of Village-Owned Enterprises in Bali, Indonesia," *Cogent Business and Management* 12, no. 1 (2025): 1–17, doi:10.1080/23311975.2025.2490603.

to think and seek truth is at the core of human nature that continues to develop and adapt. The thought process is not only limited to solving practical problems but also involves the search for a deeper meaning about man's relationship with nature and his neighbor, which is the essence of eco-spirituality in the context of the local wisdom of the Mandar people.

The Role of Eco-Spirituality in the Traditional Ussul of the Mandar Community in Building Environmental Awareness

The role of eco-spirituality in the traditional ussul of the Mandar community in building environmental awareness can be understood in several dimensions. First, eco-spirituality in the traditional ussul of the Mandar community provides a foothold for spirituality in environmental management. Second, eco-spirituality bridges the emergence of awareness of cosmic relations in environmental management. Third, eco-spirituality in the traditional ussul of the Mandar community is a forum for value transformation in environmental management.

As an inseparable part of tradition, the traditional ussul of the Mandar community has many social functions where tradition helps to shape the collective identity of the community. Through tradition, the Mandar people share the same history, values, and norms, which in turn creates a sense of togetherness and social solidarity among them to further become social capital in building a joint commitment to strengthening environmental management as part of eco-spirituality. In addition, many traditions are rooted in rituals and symbolism that are often associated with religious or spiritual beliefs. This ritual not only strengthens individual beliefs, but also strengthens social

structures by providing meaning and direction in daily life. Although traditions tend to maintain the status quo, they can also adapt and evolve over time. Flexible traditions allow people to integrate change and innovation while still maintaining their cultural identity, including in terms of being in direct contact with the concept of eco-spirituality.

Harsojo, in the thought quoted by Mokhammad Fadhil Musyafa and Ahmad Arif Kurniawan, put forward the basic assumptions of Bronislaw Malinowski's theory of functionalism. According to him, the existence of a social and cultural unity is a separate system consisting of its component elements, indicating that each element is built on the systemic relationship of the parts or elements internally. Each element or part is not independent, but interdependent, which implies a relationship that connects each element or part externally. Each of these elements or parts exists because they are needed, hinting that each has its own functional framework. The state of interdependence or interdependence does not occur by chance, but the overall presence is oriented towards the survival of the system in totality, which implies that the systemic interconnectedness that binds each element seeks to maintain the relationship to continue to work optimally and sustainably. Changes in one element or part can result in changes or affect the existence of other parts, indicating that the systemic relations that connect each element have a mutually affecting effect including changes in the social system.¹⁹

The role of eco-spirituality in the traditional ussul of the Mandar community in building environmental awareness must be built on a strong ethical framework so that these various roles can bind all existing social elements proportionally. Therefore, a foothold of eco-

¹⁹ Mokhammad Fadhil Musyafa and Ahmad Arif Kurniawan, "Jembaran Tradition: Analysis of Malinowski's Functional Theory in the Tradition of Santri

Al-Falah Kebumen in the Month of Muharram," *Al-Isnad: Journal of Islamic Civilization History and Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2023): 38.

spirituality with a philosophical dimension is needed in its understanding. Abdullah H. Abd. Talib describes the form of ethics in the loci of the various philosophical schools through the ethical framework that builds on these schools. The ethics of naturalism bases moral values on natural facts about man and the world, where good or bad is determined by how they relate to human nature. Hedonism ethics sees that happiness is a virtuous act that causes the effect of pleasure or delicacy. Utilitarianism ethics views the good or bad of human actions from the perspective of whether or not they are beneficial, with the basic principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Idealistic ethics emphasizes that moral action should refer to the highest principles or ideas that are considered absolute and universal. Vitalistic ethics sees that the good or bad of human actions comes from its vital element as the main barometer. While theological ethics measures the good or bad of human actions based on obedience to God's commands or will in accordance with the theological beliefs adhered to.²⁰

Amsal Bakhtiar, quoting Paul Edwards, states that value can be described in several meanings that are synthesized with the terms value and valuation. Value can be interpreted as a form of a noun that is understood in the abstract, as something good, attractive, or good, which in a broader sense includes obligation, truth, or purity. Value can also be understood as a form of concrete noun, as a manifestation of various ethical and aesthetic frameworks. In addition, value can be understood as a form of verb, as an expression of assessing, giving value, and being assessed, which is generally a synonym

of the word evaluate when value is used as a tool in assessing actions.²¹

In line with this opinion, Muhammad Baqir ash-Shadr stated that value can be recognized by several characteristics. First, values related to the subject are understood from the presence of human beings who provide value related to something that manifests in their social environment. Second, practical values are understood as the ability of humans to describe what is still in the conceptual dimension to the practical level. Third, the added value of an object is understood as an immanent added value to an object because of the elements it has compared to other similar objects.²²

Environmental awareness is an individual's or group's awareness of environmental issues and the impact of their actions on nature. This awareness is the first step in developing strong environmental ethics. Without this awareness, it is difficult for individuals or communities to take responsible action against the environment. In the context of the Mandar community, this environmental awareness is realized through traditional ussul practices based on eco-spiritual values.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that the traditional ussul practices of the Mandar community embody a profound eco-spiritual perspective essential for environmental sustainability, with findings revealing three key dimensions: the understanding of ussul in religious traditions occurs at multiple levels (literal, interpretative, critical, and creative); the integration of ussul with eco-spirituality concepts manifests in various forms (substitution, syncretism, addition,

²⁰ Abdullah H. Abd. Talib, *Philosophy of Science* (Samata: CV. Gunadarma Ilmu, 2017) 53.

²¹ Proverbs Bakhtiar, *Philosophy of Science* (Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, 2014), 164-165.

²² Muhammad Baqir Ash-Shadr, *Philosophy of the Various Philosophical Schools of the World* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), 66-67.

deculturation, and origination); and *ussul* plays a vital role in building environmental awareness by providing spiritual foundations, bridging cosmic relationship awareness, and facilitating value transformation in environmental management. The symbiotic relationship between humans and nature embedded in Mandar *ussul* traditions offers a valuable model for addressing contemporary environmental challenges by integrating spiritual, ethical, and practical dimensions. For future research, we recommend exploring the potential adaptation of these eco-spiritual principles in urban contexts, investigating the intergenerational transmission of *ussul* knowledge in modernizing communities, examining the compatibility of traditional *ussul* practices with contemporary environmental policies, and conducting comparative studies with other indigenous eco-spiritual traditions to develop more comprehensive frameworks for sustainable environmental stewardship that honor cultural diversity while addressing global ecological crises.

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