

## Rediscovering ‘Sacred Place’ through the Indigenous Religion Paradigm: A Case Study of Bugis-Makassar Indigenous People

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### Abstract

The Bugis-Makassar indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng perform a ritual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the top of Mount Bawakaraeng (as a sacred space). This ritual is often considered heretical and deviant. These negative assumptions are the result of the monopoly definition of “sacred place” by the world religion paradigm which is only limited to the doctrine of the holy book and is hierarchical-exclusive. Meanwhile, in the indigenous religion paradigm, “sacred place” is closely related to the surrounding environment (nature) which also gives life to indigenous peoples. The Bugis-Makassar indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng construct the sacredness of the mountain, not only as a place for religious rituals but also as a guarantor of their life. There were lacking previous researches discussing “sacred place” through the indigenous religion paradigm approach. This research contributes to that lack. This study examines how the indigenous religion paradigm interprets “*sacred place*”. The research method used in this research is qualitative. This study argues that there is no better way to understand why indigenous people perform rituals on Mount Bawakaraeng than using the indigenous religion paradigm. This study also shows that the “sacred place” associated with Mount Bawakaraeng is a way for the indigenous people who live around the mountain to preserve the nature around them which has enabled them to live and make a living such as accessing water, gathering medicines from nature, and so on. Eventually, with research that provides a better explanation of what a “sacred place” is in the indigenous religion paradigm, negative assumptions about indigenous people who regard a mountain as sacred place can be better understood.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Religion Paradigm, Mount Bawakaraeng, Sacred Place.*

### A. Introduction

To protect nature, indigenous peoples are often at the forefront.<sup>1</sup> I argue that this is rooted in the perspective of indigenous peoples who are closer to nature, more appreciative of nature as part of the reasoning of human life compared to the perspective of world religions, science, and modern technology on nature. Some indigenous religions that can

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<sup>1</sup>Samsul Maarif, “Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People,” *Studies in Philosophy* 44 (2019): 103–21, doi:<http://doi.org/10.15068/00155157>; Samsul Maarif, “Re-Establishing Human-Nature Relations: Responses of Indigenous People of Indonesia to Covid-19,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7 (2021): 447–472; Samsul Maarif, “Ammatoan Indigenous Religion and Forest Conservation,” *Worldviews* 19, no. 2 (2015): 144–60, doi:[10.1163/15685357-0190200](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-0190200); Zainal Abidin Bagir, “The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia,” *Workdviews* 19, no. 2 (2015): 99–102; Rebeka Sultana, Noor Muhammad, and A K M Zakaria, “Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Sustainable Development,” *International Journal of Development Research* 08, no. 02 (2018): 18902–6.

serve as examples include Ammatoans<sup>2</sup>, Tolotang<sup>3</sup>, and many others<sup>4</sup>. As we know, after the development of modern technology and science, environmental crises occur everywhere, such as deforestation, land diversion, clean water crisis, drought, pollution, public health problems, destruction of biodiversity, and so on<sup>5</sup>. Ecological movements that voice environmental interests are unavoidable, however, the desires and greed of modern humans force an antithesis movement, and so far, indigenous peoples have always been in line with ecological interests.

There are many factors why this exploitation of nature can occur. Some researchers find that humans exploit natural resources because their population continues to increase and, because of the increasing population, they have to fulfill their needs to survive, such as clearing forest land to build houses or settlements. This opinion was only expressed by a small number of researchers. Most agree that exploitation of nature does not only occur to ensure survival<sup>6</sup>, but also for capitalistic interests, for example, many corporations carry out deforestation in the context of clearing forest land to build oil palm plantations, mining, or their company's factory areas.

This act of exploitation carried out by humans is the effect of the modern human perspective on nature. There are two main reasons for the main pattern of the modern human perspective, namely, nature is de-sacralized, and science is secularized<sup>7</sup>. From this kind of perspective, which prioritizes nature as part of the guarantor of life, a desire to conquer nature is born. This is inseparable from the thesis that a person's treatment of the environment is very dependent on what they understand and think about themselves and their relation to something outside of them<sup>8</sup>. Modern people assume that humans have power over nature and have the power to exploit.

In addition to the modern scientific perspective, which emphasizes nature and secularizes science, the religious perspective also often contributes to a hierarchical perspective, especially in the world religions perspective. Hierarchical what I mean here is that humans are seen as creatures who have control over nature or the position of humans is higher than nature<sup>9</sup>. Thus, exploitation becomes permissible because humans are the holders of authority over nature, or in the language of religion, humans are *khalifah* or substitute for God on this earth. This perspective is commonly found in many of the world's religious traditions, and often religions, with such doctrines, are used to legitimize acts of exploitation of the natural resources around us.

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<sup>2</sup> Samsul Maarif, "Dimensions of Religious Practice The Ammatoans of Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Oriens* (Arizona State University, 2012), doi:10.2307/1578909; Maarif, "Ammatoan Indigenous Religion and Forest Conservation."

<sup>3</sup> Hasse Jubba et al., "The Future Relations between the Majority and Minority Religious Groups, Viewed from Indonesian Contemporary Perspective: A Case Study of the Coexistence of Muslims and the Towani Tolotang in Amparita, South Sulawesi," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 16 (2019): 13–23, doi:10.24035/ijit.16.2019.002.

<sup>4</sup> Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People."

<sup>5</sup> Bagir, "The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia."

<sup>6</sup> Andi Alfian, "Symbolic Violence in Religious Discourse in Indonesia," in *International Conference on Social and Islamic Studies* (Proceedings of the International Conference on Social and Islamic Studies 2021, 2021), 205–14.

<sup>7</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature. The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, Die Welt Des Islams*, vol. 12 (George Allen & Unwin, 1968), doi:10.2307/1569702.

<sup>8</sup> Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *American Association for the Advancement of Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–7.

<sup>9</sup> Andi Alfian, "Evaluating World Religion Paradigm through the Idea of Ultimate Reality," *Jurnal Islam Transformatif: Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 62–73, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/it.v6i1.5537.

With a perspective that is not in favor of environmental interests, modern science and religion have been criticized a lot, especially the world religions paradigm which tends to fail to understand the way indigenous peoples view nature. With the emergence of various criticisms from various circles of this perspective, some scholars have begun to provide alternatives to view ecological problems from the perspective of indigenous peoples. In Indonesia, we can see many cases showing the success of indigenous peoples in managing the natural environment which in world religions are often ignored. For example, Maarif (2019) has investigated how indigenous peoples carry out religious practices with their local traditions, managing nature as something important in the ecosystem of life<sup>10</sup>. Indigenous peoples such as the Ammatoans, Kendengs, and Mollos can be good examples of this kind of case.

In the perspective of indigenous peoples, nature is seen as something sacred even though each indigenous community has its own, sometimes different, way of defining the sacred. Keller (2014) in her article examines the specific meaning of what is sacred for indigenous peoples. She uses the term “indigenous studies” as a special concept to analyze the phenomenon of sacred places in indigenous peoples in America. She researched the Apsáalooke people by interviewing older people and comparing his views with those of Anglo-Christianity as the dominant religion there. The study shows that there are three characteristics of the definition of sacred place held by the indigenous Apsáalooke: first, for them, sacred space is a ritual space, “a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances”; second, sacred space is “is significant space, a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world”; and third, sacred space is “inevitably contested space”.<sup>11</sup>

The problem is that most of the people who use the world religions paradigm and modern scientific perspective consider that the sacred place of indigenous peoples is not sacred at all. As a consequence, many indigenous peoples are discriminated against because they are considered not following the teachings or doctrines of the world’s religions which are the majority, in the context of Indonesia: Islam. This kind of thing is not only experienced by indigenous communities in Indonesia, many cases in the world also describe the same thing. For example, Bakht and Collins (2017), in their article entitled *The Earth is Our Mother: Freedom of Religion and the Preservation of Indigenous Sacred Sites in Canada*, examine the issue of discrimination against indigenous peoples in Canada who seek to maintain the sacredness of their place. They argue that the state should be responsible for ensuring religious freedom is maintained and protecting religious minority groups including indigenous peoples. From their study, it can be understood that historically, Canada has a long record of violating the rights of indigenous religions by prohibiting religious ceremonies, destroying holy places, and other tragic treatments in the name of European religions.<sup>12</sup>

European religions, or in this paper I use the term world religion paradigm, are often used by the state, the ruling group, as an instrument to isolate religions or beliefs that differ from those of the major religions. This can be seen from state policies that often marginalize indigenous peoples under the pretext that they are not following the perspective of the major

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<sup>10</sup> Maarif, “Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People.”

<sup>11</sup> Mary L Keller, “Indigenous Studies and ‘the Sacred,’” *American Indian Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2014): 91, doi:10.5250/amerindiquar.38.1.0082.

<sup>12</sup> Natasha Bakht and Lynda Collins, “The Earth Is Our Mother’: Freedom of Religion and the Preservation of Indigenous Sacred Sites in Canada,” *McGill Law Journal - Revue de Droit de McGill*, 2017, 777–812.

religions in the majority<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, it is not only the state or people in power who often do the ostracism, scholars also often do the same thing.<sup>14</sup> For example, scholars who research indigenous peoples with a biased approach, especially when they use the world religions paradigms to see what is sacred in the religious practices of indigenous peoples.

For example, in the article *Empty Space or Sacred Place? Place and Belief in Social Work Training*, indigenous peoples' conceptions of sacred places are considered to interfere with social work programs because indigenous peoples maintain what they call "empty space". These scholars, the authors of this article, argue that the sacred place was man-made. They argue that land is treated as a resource for people to meet their sacred and mundane needs; and most importantly, it is people who make the place sacred through sanctification and a belief system to separate the sacred from the profane<sup>15</sup>.

The way these scholars, Galloway, and his colleagues, in identifying what is sacred seems very rigid and narrow. They fail to understand the sacred through the ecological approach contained in the paradigm of indigenous religions<sup>16</sup>. By observing that Aboriginal people create ideas about the sacredness of the land through myths and distinctive narratives about creation, about the concept of *The Dreaming* and the presence of ancestral spirits<sup>17</sup>, they think that their ideas about the sacred are just a way to give legitimacy to the tribe or certain clans over land. In fact, the claim to a sacred place for indigenous peoples is not a matter of ownership of it, but the efforts of indigenous peoples to fight for their land rights are in the interest of environmental and natural preservation.

Several scholars have researched to prove that local communities, or indigenous peoples, manage forests well through their local wisdom values. By interviewing tribal chiefs, they found that indigenous peoples do have strong ties to the forest or their natural surroundings which are reflected in their noble values which have been passed down from generation to generation<sup>18</sup>. In addition, these customary values are also institutionalized or at least imprinted in the social systems within the customary community<sup>19</sup>, preserved in the form of rituals.<sup>20</sup>

This research intends to explain how the indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng see the mountain as a sacred place, and examine the religious values they hold as a way to preserve nature. This study uses the terms sacred, sacred places, and traditional religious paradigms as the main concepts for analyzing nature as sacred. This study contributes to providing a better picture of the practices of indigenous peoples who regard

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<sup>13</sup> Zainal Abidin Bagir et al., "Limitations to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Indonesia: Norms and Practices," *Religion and Human Rights* 15, no. 1–2 (2020): 39–56, doi:10.1163/18710328-BJA10003; Alfian, "Symbolic Violence in Religious Discourse in Indonesia."

<sup>14</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 20 (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Greta Galloway, Pat Wilkinson, and Gavin Bissell, "Empty Space or Sacred Place? Place and Belief in Social Work Training," *The Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning* 8, no. 3 (2012): 28–47, doi:10.1921/jpts.v8i3.380.

<sup>16</sup> Fany Nur Rahmadiana Hakim, "Redefining 'Sacred' through the Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Case Study of Sunda Wiwitan Community in Kuningan," *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* Vol. 12, no. No. 1 (2022): 42–63, doi:https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v12i1.1859.

<sup>17</sup> Galloway, Wilkinson, and Bissell, "Empty Space or Sacred Place? Place and Belief in Social Work Training."

<sup>18</sup> Sepus M Fatem et al., "Camouflaging Economic Development Agendas with Forest Conservation Narratives: A Strategy of Lower Governments for Gaining Authority in the Re-Centralising Indonesia," *Land Use Policy* 78, no. July (2018): 699–710, doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.07.018.

<sup>19</sup> Micah R Fisher et al., "Striving for PAR Excellence in Land Use Planning: Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration on Customary Forest Recognition in Bulukumba, South Sulawesi," *Land Use Policy* 99 (2020), doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2017.09.057.

<sup>20</sup> Maarif, "Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People."

nature, such as mountains, as sacred places. With a better understanding, negative assumptions about the religious practices of indigenous peoples can be reduced, and at the same time we can understand and appreciate the religious practices of indigenous peoples. The main questions of this research are (1) what does “sacred place” mean in the indigenous religion paradigm as opposed to the world religion paradigm? and (2) how do you understand the indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng who view the mountain as a “sacred place”?

The Bugis-Makassar community living around Mount Bawakaraeng was chosen as the object of research because this community has a ritual of making a pilgrimage to the top of Mount Bawakaraeng. Even though they are Muslims, they still adhere to ancestral beliefs about mountains as sacred. The unification between Muslim identity and the rituals of their ancestors is important to be seen further, especially about the sacred concept of their motivation to carry out the Hajj rituals and preserve the mountains as part of their lives. The Bugis-Makassar people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng have interacted a lot with modernism and dominant religions, especially Islam. However, this interaction does not eliminate their traditions and rituals related to sacred places according to the teachings of their ancestors. The Bugis-Makassar people around Mount Bawakaraeng not only believe that Mount Bawakaraeng is a sacred place, but also that the mountain has given them water to survive.

This study is a literature study. The data presented here are collected through data collection methods and strategies commonly used in qualitative research which usually aim to find new ideas<sup>21</sup>. In addition, this study also uses a case study approach. Usually, a case study can show the whole method of data collection<sup>22</sup>, and a case study looks at one thing from several social phenomena, for example, a village, family, or group of youths, and the case study researcher can only look for one idiographic understanding of the particular case being studied<sup>23</sup>. This study focuses on one indigenous community, namely the Bugis-Makassar Community, which lives around Mount Bawakaraeng, as a representation of the traditional religion paradigm because it has rituals on the mountain as a sacred place and this is ecologically relevant in preserving nature. Furthermore, in analyzing the problems studied, the original religious paradigm is used in defining what is meant by sacred.

This study found that the indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng define the mountain as a sacred place. Indigenous people practice various rituals as a form of expression of the sacredness of Mount Bawakaraeng. The concept of the mountain as a sacred place is the biggest reason and motivation for indigenous peoples to protect Mount Bawakaraeng from all forms of exploitation, land clearing, and so on. In this way, the indigenous peoples around Mount Bawakaraeng have succeeded in preserving nature and the environment around where they live. Since most of these indigenous people are Muslims, at least they profess Islam, but in practice, they synthesize the teachings of Islam and the teachings of their ancestors. The main argument from the results of this study is that the indigenous religious paradigms have different interpretations of what is sacred in the way they preserve their sacred places. They do not merely imply sacred as something that has to do with spirituality and supernatural things<sup>24</sup>. More than that, they also have a deeper connection with nature, where they make a living, perform rituals, and also communicate with what they consider sacred.

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<sup>21</sup> W Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 7th Edition (Pearson Education Limited, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford university press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 14th ed., vol. 22 (Belmont: Cengage Learning, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Alfian, “Evaluating World Religion Paradigm through the Idea of Ultimate Reality.”

Before discussing further case analysis, I will introduce the main concepts that are quite relevant for analyzing this case. I will start by explaining the meaning of “sacred place” by referring to various theories. Then, I will move on to the definition of “sacred” in the world religion paradigm. Related to that too, I try to show how “nature and sacred place” in the indigenous religion paradigm. These explanations will help us understand the concept of “a mountain as a sacred place” in the perspective of the Bugis-Makassar indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng.

## **B. What is the “Sacred Place”?**

A place does not become sacred by itself, although people say that the place is a sacred place and has existed for thousands of years and is part of a tradition passed down from generation to generation from the ancestors, it does not mean that the place is sacred not because it is sacred. by humans, people who embrace the sacredness of the place. That is, a place becomes a sacred place because it is formed or constructed by humans themselves based on their interactions and attachments to that place. Michael Northcott in his book *Place, Ecology, and the Sacred* explains that:

“As we have seen, places of dwelling become places, and sacred places, as they are shaped by human experiences and events in interaction with local and specific ecological qualities”.<sup>25</sup>

This means that a place becomes sacred by a certain community because of a certain background, for example, the background of an indigenous community considers nature as a sacred place because indigenous peoples have attached certain meanings to the place. For example, the sacred place is part of the place where they find meaning and fulfillment of needs, therefore the place also gives them life. The meaning that humans live in nature (a certain place) and from that nature they live and are protected is sufficient reason for indigenous peoples to claim that nature and humans are closely related. Even though the facts are not that simple, indigenous peoples always have a relationship with sacred places or certain places in various and unique ways.

One of the things that are often misunderstood about the claim to the sacredness of a place by indigenous peoples is that the sacredness of a place is constructed to claim ownership of the place and exploit the resources within it. In fact, indigenous peoples construct nature as a sacred place to protect and preserve nature while they make a living in it, and it is not exploitative. As explained by Tuck-Po who has researched in Malaysia with the Batek community:

“To look after the forest, then, is to keep the trees in their place and maintain forest cover. For in their very existence trees also symbolise the close relationship between the Batek and the entities of the other-world”.<sup>26</sup>

In short, making nature (forests, mountains, etc.) a sacred place is very important not only for the practice of religious rituals but also for preserving and maintaining the balance of natural vegetation and biodiversity. Interestingly, certain indigenous peoples or indigenous communities that are widely spread in Indonesia, including the Bugis-Makassar community living around Mount Bawakaraeng, have a better understanding of nature (forests, mountains, and so on) than modern societies. For example, the indigenous community living around Mount Bawakaraeng believe that the mountain is sacred not only

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<sup>25</sup> Michael S Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred: The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Lye Tuck-Po, “The Meanings of Trees: Forest and Identity for the Batek of Pahang, Malaysia,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 6, no. 3 (2005): 249–61.

because of their belief that it is a place where they can meet and communicate with their ancestors but also as a source of water, plants, and so on that have guaranteed them life<sup>27</sup>. Oviedo and Jeanrenaud explain the definition and characteristics of nature as a sacred place like this:

“Sacred natural sites are natural areas of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. They include natural areas recognized as sacred by indigenous and traditional peoples, as well as natural areas recognized by institutionalized religions or faiths as places for worship and remembrance”<sup>28</sup>.

From the quote above, we can understand that a place has a sacred value for indigenous peoples because the place is not only seen as a natural place but more than that. This answers the question of why world religions often misunderstand the sacred place of indigenous peoples because these world religions only see nature in its natural aspect and assume that nature does not have a spiritual aspect in it. This happens because the paradigm of world religion and the paradigm of indigenous religion is very different. Nature in the paradigm of world religion is seen as a mere object while in the paradigm of indigenous religion, nature is also seen as a subject like humans. Thus, for indigenous peoples, nature is like living humans so it needs to be treated equally and the relationship to it is inter-relational<sup>29</sup>. The same thing is also emphasized by Berkes in his book *Sacred Ecology* that between humans and nature there is a social relationship:

“Traditional worldviews of nature are diverse, but many share the belief in a sacred, personal relationship between humans and other living beings”<sup>30</sup>.

This perspective makes the Bugis-Makassar indigenous community living around Mount Bawakaraeng closer to their nature. Noble values that are epistemologically close to nature. Seeing nature as a living subject that needs to be protected and treated equally as with humans. With such a perspective, sacred places can be well understood without blaming or disowning the rituals performed by indigenous peoples against their sacred places. In the next section, I will present the world’s religious views on sacred that often make religious rituals and practices of these indigenous communities seen as deviant and wrong rituals and practices. Then, in the next section again, I will show how the indigenous religion paradigm views “sacred”.

### C. Definition of “Sacred” in World Religion Paradigm

To gain an in-depth understanding of what is sacred, we must trace the development of the term “religion” chronologically. This is because often the sacred is only discussed in its category as one aspect of religion. Many scholars from the Victorian era to the recent era are still looking for the meaning of the sacred as a part or aspect of religion (religious aspect). According to Smith (1964), religious aspects contained in human life as well as other aspects, are historical, developed, and undergo a process<sup>31</sup>. Previously, Tylor (1871) had

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<sup>27</sup> Gonzalo Oviedo and Sally Jeanrenaud, “Protecting Sacred Natural Sites of Indigenous and Traditional Peoples,” ed. Josep-Maria Mallarach and Thymio Papayannis, *Protected Areas and Spirituality. Proceedings of the First Workshop of The Delos Initiative* (The World Conservation Union (IUCN), Gland, Switzerland and Publications de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> James L. Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007); Maarif, “Indigenous Religion Paradigm: Re-Interpreting Religious Practices of Indigenous People”; Maarif, “Ammatoan Indigenous Religion and Forest Conservation”; Bagir, “The Importance of Religion and Ecology in Indonesia.”

<sup>30</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1964), 8.

hypothesized that religion underwent an evolution, starting from the concept of animism as a philosophy of human life and then developing into a more complex and larger natural philosophy<sup>32</sup>. Tylor explained that the theory of the human soul recognizes animal souls through their natural expansion, then the human soul also finds other souls from other objects such as plants, trees, and so on in a partial way, and in the end, the category becomes wider beyond the souls they find in inanimate objects<sup>33</sup>. Tylor also argued: for as the human body was held to leave and act by virtue of its inhabiting spirit-soul, so the operation of the world seemed to be carried on by the influence of other spirits<sup>34</sup>.

Later on, Geertz defined religion as:

“A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”<sup>35</sup>

In explaining his ideas about religion, Geertz mapped the definition of religion into five important points, but for Geertz, the most important, the most substantial point, is religion as a system of symbols. With the symbol system, humans are considered to be able to embody the meaning of life. The same thing that happens in indigenous peoples, sacralizing a place or an object is a form of their symbolization, and according to Geertz, it should also be referred to as part of religious practice (religious symbols). Several scholars are best known for their theories about the sacred, among them Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade. Durkheim introduced the definition of religion as two characteristics, the sacred and the profane. Durkheim states:

“Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden”<sup>36</sup>

The sacred is made a major feature in religion and religious practice<sup>37</sup>. The sacred and the profane in Durkheim's theory are not about good and bad, but about the representation of individual or group concerns in sacred religion, especially those that represent unity as the interests of the group and are embodied in sacred symbols within the group. While the profane is the opposite, representing human concern for personal worldly things<sup>38</sup>. The sacred can contain good and/or evil as well as the profane, the difference lies only in the sacred social setting. In short, according to Durkheim, the sacred is society, and people can freely categorize anything as something they regard as sacred, as something that unites them as a group of people<sup>39</sup>.

Meanwhile, Eliade provides an analysis of the sacred and the profane using the term *Axis Mundi* which he defines as the “Center of the World” which aims to provide a significant distinction between sacred reality and profane reality. Furthermore, Eliade explained that the sacred embodies all values, therefore to get the purpose and meaning of life must go through

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<sup>32</sup> Daniel L Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (The Free Press, 1995), p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).



a process of *hierophany*.<sup>40</sup> What is meant by *hierophany* here is “fixed point, center” which is the orientation of all goals. Regarding nature as something sacred, Eliade wrote:

“For a religious man, nature is never only natural; it is always fraught with a religious value. This is easy to understand, for the cosmos is a divine creation, coming from the hands of the God, the world is impregnated with sacredness”.<sup>41</sup>

For Eliade, certain places cannot easily be called sacred, certain religions also cannot categorize a sacred place, because according to him, the whole world is “impregnated with sacredness”. Therefore, by looking at the historical-genealogically sacred term, we can conclude that there is hegemony and domination in defining the sacred. This hegemony and domination can be seen from how the definition of the sacred is constructed by world religions only.

#### **D. Nature and “Sacred Place” in Indigenous Religion Paradigm**

In his book, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religion*, James L. Cox explains that the main characteristic of indigenous religion is the existence of a significant attachment or closeness between humans and nature as a place for humans to live, the relationship between the two is reciprocal and mutual protection and care one another<sup>42</sup>. In the book, Cox wrote:

“The primary characteristic of Indigenous Religions refers to its being bound to a location; participants in the religion are native to a place, they belong to it. The single and overriding belief shared amongst Indigenous Religions derives from a kinship-based world-view in which attention is directed towards ancestor spirits as the central figures in religious life and practice”<sup>43</sup>.

In indigenous peoples, there is always a place they call a sacred place and the sacredness of that place always comes from their ancestors and has been around for a long time. Even though they do not have a written text about tradition and belief in that sacredness, they are still able to carry out rituals in the name of that sacredness. Due to the absence of a written text, sometimes they face legal difficulties to assert themselves as a religious community, even more so because the characteristics of a recognized religion in Indonesia always mean having a holy book, even though it is very political. However, indigenous peoples always have a way of protecting nature as part of their religious perspective. Nature in the indigenous religion paradigm means the sacred. Even if nature is not always considered sacred, there will be certain places that are part of nature that become sacred.

In the indigenous religion adopted by indigenous peoples, apart from often placing nature as something sacred or as a “subject” equal to humans, nature is also managed with good management. For example, Maarif researched this in Ammatoans, Kendengs, and Mollos. In his paper he wrote:

“Indigenous religion paradigm is an alternative to world religion paradigm, or at least should be incorporated in examining religious practices of indigenous peoples.... If compared in world religion paradigm, cosmological domains in indigenous religion paradigm are dwelled by beings, consisting of human and non-human beings (subject-subject), and the kind of relationship between the self and other-selves is “inter-subjective”<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, First (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69)

<sup>44</sup> Maarif, “Ammatoan Indigenous Religion and Forest Conservation.”, p. 114-115

From the quote above, more or less, Maarif wants to say that in traditional religions, nature is seen as much more central than in world religions. Furthermore, in customary religion, nature is seen as a subject, so that human relations with nature are subjects. It is different in the world religion which views nature as an object. So that human relations with nature are subject-object, and because of such relations exploitation can occur easily. In addition, Maarif also found that the way the Ammatoans, Kendengs, and Mollos treat nature is like they treat other humans. In that relationship, there is reciprocity, without hierarchy and domination as is seen in the world religion.

#### **E. The Mountain as a 'Sacred Place' for the Bugis-Makassar Indigenous People**

The pre-Islamic Bugis-Makassar indigenous people religiosity system is called customary belief<sup>45</sup>. Although it has similarities with the Indian concept of religiosity, both Hindu and Buddhist, in general, it can be said that the beliefs of the Bugis-Makassar people are an indigenous belief system both conceptually (theologically and cosmologically) and practically (rituals and religious ceremonies). Their belief in their ancestors is reflected in their worship or rituals carried out in sacred places that have existed for a long time and are passed down from generation to generation<sup>46</sup>. The Bugis-Makassar indigenous people who live around Mount Bawakaraeng, claim to be Muslims (as a way of surviving the pressure of the majority religion recognized by the state) but still hold on to the beliefs or heritage of their ancestors whose teachings are similar to local religions such as Tolotang<sup>47</sup>, located in Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi.

One of the rituals that are often performed in a sacred place, Mount Bawakaraeng is the Haji Bawakaraeng ritual. The ritual was carried out at the top of Mount Bawakaraeng. From my research, there are at least some of the main reasons why Mount Bawakaraeng is considered a sacred place, and the reasons why indigenous people perform rituals on this mountain. Among them, first, because the indigenous people in the Mount Bawakaraeng area believe that Mount Bawakaraeng is a sacred, holy place, the abode of *Tu Rie Arana* or *To Kammayya Kananna* (the Supreme Will) who maintains life on earth, is believed to be a giver of both good and evil<sup>48</sup>. Second, the indigenous people believe that Sheikh Yusuf (a great scholar and also raised by the royal family) had met the guardians at the top of Mount Bawakaraeng, and after that, Sheikh Yusuf was ordered to perform Hajj and the *adat* people believed that Sheikh Yusuf performed the pilgrimage. through the peak of Mount Bawakaraeng<sup>49</sup>. Third, indigenous people believe that the top of the mountain is the most sacred place, the most efficacious place to carry out the ritual of communication with the

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<sup>45</sup> Christian Pelras, *The Bugis* (Wiley-Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997); Mustaqim Pabbajah, "From the Indigenous to the Religious Practices: Islamic Construction of the Local Tradition in South Sulawesi, Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 1 (2021): 91, doi:10.14421/esensia.v22i1.2800.

<sup>46</sup> Nurman Said, "Islam Dan Integrasi Sosial: Pergumulan Antara Islam Dan Tradisi Masyarakat Bugis," *Tafsire* 3 (2015): 1–20; Sabara Nuruddin, "Islam Dalam Tradisi Masyarakat Lokal Di Sulawesi Selatan," *Mimikri* 4, no. 1 (2018): 50–67.

<sup>47</sup> Jubba et al., "The Future Relations between the Majority and Minority Religious Groups, Viewed from Indonesian Contemporary Perspective: A Case Study of the Coexistence of Muslims and the Towani Tolotang in Amparita, South Sulawesi."

<sup>48</sup> Mustaqim Pabbajah, "Haji Bawakaraeng: The Resistance of Local Society in South Sulawesi," *JICZA Journal of Islamic Civilization in Southeast Asia* 1 (2012): 119–40, doi:https://doi.org/10.24252/jicsa.v1i1.718; Maarif, "Dimensions of Religious Practice The Ammatoans of Sulawesi, Indonesia."

<sup>49</sup> Andi Mattulada, "Elite Di Sulawesi Selatan," *Antropologi Indonesia* 0, no. 48 (2014): 86–101, doi:10.7454/ai.v0i48.3281; Syamsurijal Adhan et al., "Aji Ugi: Pergumulan Islam Dengan Tradisi Lokal Dan Gaya Hidup Dalam Masyarakat Bugis," *Al-Qalam* 26, no. 1 (2020): 19–38, doi:10.31969/alq.v26i1.846.

almighty will. This belief is inseparable from the belief of the indigenous people in the sacredness of the mountain<sup>50</sup>. The mountain is the center and the most sacred place on earth.

Another reason why Mount Bawakaraeng is very meaningful to the Bugis-Makassar community, as noted by WALHI South Sulawesi, Mount Bawakaraeng is the main source of raw water availability in seven regencies and cities in South Sulawesi, namely Makassar, Gowa, Takalar, Jeneponto, Bantaeng, Bulukumba, and Sinjai. Several times, indigenous peoples together with communities of nature lovers and environmental activists in South Sulawesi have advocated against burning forest land around Mount Bawakaraeng. The role of indigenous peoples in protecting Mount Bawakaraeng is considered by environmental activists to be very important and they are ready to be beside indigenous peoples when land clearing occurs around the mountain.

Apart from performing for ritual purposes such as pilgrimage, known as *Haji Bawakaraeng*<sup>51</sup>, there are many motivations for the indigenous people around Mount Bawakaraeng to make pilgrimages or visit Mount Bawakaraeng as a sacred place. There are at least four main types of reasons why indigenous people visit this sacred place: *Jappa Biasa* (usually done by young children to enjoy its natural beauty), *Jappa Sanro* (performed by traditional elders who walk as shamans), *Pakkio' Akkusiang* (performed by traditional people to perform their rituals), and *Jappa Pinati* (indigenous people who become guides for people outside the Mount Bawakaraeng area to enjoy the surrounding nature as well as camping and so on).<sup>52</sup>

In short, in both ordinary interactions and interactions for ritual purposes, Mount Bawakaraeng is considered a sacred place, the abode of a deity known as *Tu Rie Arana* or *To Kammayya Kananna* (The Supreme Will) who is believed to maintain life on this earth and give life to indigenous people. In addition, this mountain is also very meaningful to them because this mountain is a guarantor of water for them and according to indigenous peoples, the giver of life must be rewarded by protecting and preserving them like interacting with the giver of life. The belief in the mountain as a “subject” makes indigenous people believe that the mountain is not only a guarantor of life, it is also a sacred place where communication with God can be carried out. For this reason, various rituals are carried out on this sacred mountain.

## F. Conclusion

The Bugis-Makassar community who live and live around Mount Bawakaraeng is a Muslim community that still strictly maintains traditions and ancestral beliefs about the sacredness of Mount Bawakaraeng. Various rituals are carried out based on belief in the

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<sup>50</sup> Irfan Palippui, “Syekh Yusuf Dan (Hasrat) Perjalanan Ke Puncak Bawa Karaeng,” *Masyarakat & Budaya* 18, no. 2 (2016): 173–86, doi:10.14203/jmb.v18i2.409; Muh. Fajar Islamy and Abd. Rahman R, “Ritualisme Ibadah Haji Bawakaraeng Persepsi Masyarakat Lembanna; Studi Kasus Lembanna,” *Shautuna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Perbandingan Mazhab* 2 (2021): 571–81; I Hak, “Prosesi Ritual Dan Komunitas ‘Haji Bawakaraeng’ Studi: Atas Kepercayaan Lokal Dalam Tinjauan Antropologi Agama,” *Jurnal Al Adyaan; Jurnal Sosial Dan Agama* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1–16.

<sup>51</sup> Mustaqim Pabbajah et al., “Pilgrimage to Bawakaraeng Mountain among the Bugis-Makassar in Indonesia: A Contestation between Islamic Identity and Local Tradition,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 9, no. 1 (2021): 178–90, doi:10.21427/S3P3-YA23.

<sup>52</sup> Syarifuddin Idris, “Konstruksi Ritual Ibadah Haji Pada Masyarakat Sekitar Gunung Bawakaraeng Kab. Gowa,” *Al-Qalam* 23, no. 2 (2017): 237–48, doi:10.31969/alq.v23i2.427; Mustaqim Pabbajah, “Religious Consistency and Commitment to Local Tradition Within the Bawakaraeng Community in Indonesia’S South Sulawesi” 9, no. 2 (2020): 179–98; Jubba et al., “The Future Relations between the Majority and Minority Religious Groups, Viewed from Indonesian Contemporary Perspective: A Case Study of the Coexistence of Muslims and the Towani Tolotang in Amparita, South Sulawesi”; Pabbajah et al., “Pilgrimage to Bawakaraeng Mountain among the Bugis-Makassar in Indonesia: A Contestation between Islamic Identity and Local Tradition”; Pabbajah, “Haji Bawakaraeng: The Resistance of Local Society in South Sulawesi.”

sacred place, including the Hajj Bawakaraeng ritual, and other rituals. The Bugis-Makassar indigenous community living around Mount Bawakaraeng not only treats the mountain as a sacred place, as a place of ritual but also treats the mountain as a living “subject” that needs to be protected and preserved. This can be seen from their actions to protect the forest and the environment around Mount Bawakaraeng from burning and clearing land. There are many reasons and motivations for indigenous people to regard Mount Bawakaraeng as a sacred place and need to be protected. Among other things, because the indigenous people in the Mount Bawakaraeng area believe that Mount Bawakaraeng is the abode of *Tu Rie Arana* or *To Kammayya Kananna* (The Supreme Will) who maintains life on earth. In addition, indigenous people believe that Mount Bawakaraeng is the most efficacious place to carry out the ritual of communication with the almighty will, *Tu Rie Arana* or *To Kammayya Kananna*.

From my analysis, the main goal of indigenous peoples to make the mountains and forests around the mountains sacred places is to preserve nature so that they can perform rituals in it, utilizing resources while maintaining the balance of biodiversity. After observing the Bugis-Makassar community which represents the paradigm of the original religions towards the sacred, where the Bugis-Makassar community does not limit the sacred meaning to metaphysical-spiritual things, but also real physical things such as mountains, plants, and forests. For indigenous people, mountains are living things (as subjects like humans), so they must be cared for and treated well. In other words, the Bugis-Makassar indigenous people treat nature as they treat humans, namely as “subjects”. Nature can get angry just like humans can get angry. Floods, landslides, and so on are nature’s way of getting angry. Therefore, nature must be treated as well as possible as well as treating humans. It is this perspective that underlies the attitude of the Bugis-Makassar indigenous people towards nature. Treating mountains as sacred places is part of religiosity, as a form of intersubjective relationship.

Finally, I must admit that this research still has limitations that this research was not carried out using ethnographic methods, so it has not been able to answer research questions in more depth, especially the meaning of the Bugis-Makassar indigenous people towards the sacred. Nonetheless, this research still contributes to how to explain the Bugis-Makassar indigenous people who consider mountains as sacred places or indigenous peoples in general who have a view that nature is sacred. As has been explained throughout this paper, indigenous peoples who regard nature as a sacred place are part of their religion and we cannot consider them “heretical”, “erroneous”, or “unreasonable”. They have rational and religious reasons, and it is important to appreciate them. From the results of this study, I recommend several things: First, to understand the religious practices of indigenous peoples, a proper approach is needed, namely the indigenous religion paradigm so that the religious practices of indigenous peoples can be well understood. Second, the government should understand how the religious principles of indigenous peoples are so that they are not trapped in narratives that discriminate against the perspectives of indigenous peoples. Third, it is time for all of us to pay attention to indigenous peoples, especially their religious practices, which have contributed to solving the environmental crisis using a religious approach.

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