

**Reading Eco-Theology Through the Mopoa Huta Ritual:
Local Wisdom, Environmental Ethics and Spiritual Ecology in Gorontalo**

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Abstract

Environmental degradation and the decline of local ecological wisdom have urged scholars to explore alternative frameworks that reconnect humans with nature. One such framework is eco-theology, which interprets human–environment relations as part of humanity’s spiritual responsibility before God. This study examines the ritual of Mopoa Huta- a traditional agrarian practice in Molamahu, Gorontalo- as a cultural expression that integrates mysticism, environmental ethics, and religious meaning. The study aims to (1) analyze how Mopoa Huta embodies ecological values within its ritual structure, (2) explore how the ritual reflects the community’s theological understanding of nature, and (3) explain its contemporary relevance for environmental ethics and eco-theological discourse. Using an ethnographic approach supported by functional and eco-theological analysis, this research draws on field observations, interviews with ritual practitioners, and textual interpretation of local narratives. The findings show that Mopoa Huta functions as a form of traditional eco-spiritual governance, in which the wombuwa serves as a cultural-ecological steward who regulates planting seasons, mediates human–spirit relations, and maintains environmental balance. Ritual elements such as offerings, taboos on cutting certain trees, and collective dances express a worldview where humans, spirits, and nature form an interconnected moral community. The study concludes

that Mopoa Huta provides an alternative eco-theological model rooted in local wisdom that emphasizes harmony, restraint, and gratitude toward the natural world. Its values remain relevant today for reframing environmental ethics, especially in responding to climate change and ecological disruption.

Keywords: Eco-theology, Mopoa Huta; environmental ethics; indigenous knowledge

Introduction

The ongoing global ecological crisis-encompassing biodiversity degradation, increasingly extreme climate change, and the rapid erosion of traditional ecological knowledge-has compelled scholars across disciplines to adopt more holistic analytical frameworks. Contemporary eco-theology literature (Mickey et al., 2020; Wasil & Muizudin, 2023; Sulistiyowati, 2024) argues that human-nature relations cannot be adequately understood through technocratic or instrumental approaches alone. Instead, they must be examined alongside the spiritual, ethical, and cosmological dimensions embedded within local cultural systems. Furthermore, global studies on religious environmentalism (Gottlieb, 2006; Bratton, 2018) demonstrate that traditional belief systems significantly influence ecological attitudes and serve as moral regulators of environmental behavior.

Studies on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) have also gained significant momentum since 2020, particularly those emphasizing that indigenous rituals are not merely cultural expressions but function as social regulatory systems for environmental sustainability. Recent works-such as Reyes-García (2023) in Latin America, Price et al., (2021) on agrarian cosmologies in Asia, and Brondízio et al., (2021) on Pacific spiritual ecologies-demonstrate that traditional rituals embed empirically tested mechanisms of environmental governance, including ecological taboos, ritual-based pest control, and the conservation of sacred sites that have been shown to preserve biodiversity.

Within this context, agrarian rituals operate as community-based ethical instruments for environmental stewardship. Rituals such as sasi in Maluku (Maatoke

et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025) are analyzed as forms of ritual ecology, a system in which ecological balance is maintained through symbolic and spiritual actions. These findings challenge modern narratives that reduce ritual practice to superstition or irrationality, showing instead that such rituals actively regulate resource distribution, maintain landscape equilibrium, and cultivate social harmony.

Nevertheless, scholarly studies on local rituals in Gorontalo-particularly the *Mopoa Huta* ritual-remain limited. Most previous research has tended to examine this ritual through a normative-theological lens, which often marginalizes its ecological dimensions and social functions. Recent ethnographic studies (Hunowu, 2025b; Hunowu, 2025a), however, demonstrate that *Mopoa Huta* contains a set of ecological ethics, including prohibitions against cutting trees inhabited by spiritual beings, the protection of water sources, and restrictions on excessive land use. From the perspective of religious anthropology, these practices align with international research on cosmological stewardship (Abe et al., 2024; Tauro & Rozzi, 2025).

However, cultural transformations over the past two decades-including agricultural modernization, local Islamization, and the commodification of culture-have reshaped how the Molamahu community understands and performs this ritual. Studies on the transformation of traditions in Indigenous communities (Kustermans et al., 2022) and in modern societies (Cornejo Valle & Martin Andino, 2023) emphasize that local rituals which lose the authority of traditional leaders often experience shifts in both meaning and ecological function. In the case of *Mopoa Huta*, the diminishing role of the *wombuwa* and increasing socio-religious pressures have contributed to the transformation of the ritual into a simpler form of communal prayer, similar to the pattern observed in agrarian rituals across different parts of the world (Tatay & Merino, 2023; Zannini et al., 2021; Shiferaw et al., 2023).

Based on this research gap, the present study seeks to fill the limitations of previous works that tend to describe *Mopoa Huta* merely as an agrarian rite or a local tradition, without examining the ecological and spiritual transformations occurring within it. This study emphasizes that *Mopoa Huta* is not simply a mystical practice,

but an epistemological space that stores and reproduces Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) through symbolism, ecological taboos, and the spiritual relations between humans and the non-human world. Furthermore, the study highlights how the process of Islamicization of local customs contributes to the emergence of new interpretations of the ritual, particularly through the role of the *wombuwa* as a guardian of cosmic balance. From these considerations, three central research questions are formulated: (1) how the community understands the mystical dimensions and human–nature relations within *Mopoa Huta*; (2) what ecological values are embedded in the ritual structure; and (3) how *Mopoa Huta* remains relevant as a foundation for contemporary environmental ethics amid the current ecological crisis.

This article is built upon the argument that *Mopoa Huta* represents an important example of how local mysticism has been transformed into an eco-theological praxis that supports environmental conservation and the spiritual life of Muslim communities in Gorontalo.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive ethnographic design to understand the transformation of *Mopoa Huta* from a mystical ritual into an eco-theological practice. The research, carried out during 2022, was conducted in Molamahu Village, Gorontalo Regency, a customary community that continues to perform *Mopoa Huta* and represents the integration of spiritual, ecological, and Islamic values in environmental governance.

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling, consisting of ten key informants who possess knowledge of and direct involvement in the ritual: 1) Kpd (ritual leader/*wombuwa*, 71 years), 2) Kpu (customary elder, 73 years), 3) Blb (village healer, 66 years), 4) Ksd (customary elder, 61 years), 5) Kud (village imam, 67 years), 6) Phs (customary figure, 70 years), 7) Maz (senior female healer, 85 years), 8) Mrk (customary practitioner, 63 years), 9)

Kdr (young farmer, 35 years), 10) Ptg (young farmer, 29 years). This diversity of informants allows for a cross-generational and cross-authority analysis involving customary and religious actors, both men and women. In terms of the researcher's position, it is important to emphasize that, as a Gorontalo native with close ties to the Molamahu community, the researcher occupies an "insider–outsider" position. Cultural proximity facilitated access to customary leaders, while analytical distance was maintained through reflexivity and data triangulation. The researcher's prior experience studying ecological traditions in Gorontalo helped in interpreting ritual symbolism, yet the analysis remained grounded in the voices of the informants to minimize bias.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation studies involving customary archives, local records, and literature on ecotheology, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and ritual anthropology. All field data were supplemented with reflective notes to capture the socio-ecological context of the practices. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, beginning with open coding to identify units of meaning, followed by axial coding to construct categories such as ecological taboos, human–nature relationality, and spiritual values. Functional analysis was employed to interpret the social roles of the ritual, while ecotheological analysis was used to examine its ecological and spiritual dimensions. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and confirmation with key informants. Accordingly, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local wisdom, environmental ethics, and ecological spirituality are intertwined in the everyday life of the Gorontalo community.

Result

1. Community Understanding of the Mystical Dimension and Human-Nature Relations in the *Mopoa Huta* Ritual

The *Mopoa Huta* ritual in Molamahu is held once a year or when ecological disturbances occur, such as prolonged drought, pests, or plant diseases. The procession begins with the determination of an auspicious day by the *wombuwa*, followed by the preparation of offerings of produce (*hantalo*). On the day of the ritual, a series of *wumbungo* (ritual poems) are recited, accompanied by *towohu* music and *dayango* dancing. *Hantalo* is offered to the earth, and the ritual concludes with a communal prayer. This is as stated by the *wombuwa* leader:

“The ritual is held once a year and is very urgent when the dry season arrives as an effort to compromise with supernatural beings so that they do not disturb humans by withholding rain or spreading disease. On the appointed day, musical instruments (towohu) are played to accompany the dancers (dayango) as they sing poems (wumbungo), ending with the offering of sesajen (hantalo)” (Kpd, wombuwa, 71 years old).

The ritual is understood as a process of restoring balance between humans, nature, and spirits. In general, it can be described as follows:

1.1. *Mopoa Huta* as a Mechanism for Human-Nature-Spirit Relations

The informants understand that the *mopoa huta* ritual is a mystical act and, more importantly, a practice that maintains ecological and spiritual relationships. The ritual leader explains:

“For us, Mopoa Huta is a symbol of feeding the earth by inviting spirits to communicate through wumbungo and fulfilling their wishes regarding what food they want, which is then provided in the form of offerings (hantalo) and we say to them, “This is your share, don't disturb us.” (71 years old)

The traditional leader added:

"We believe that living beings, whether humans, plants, or animals, coexist with spirits, so there is no separation between the real world and the spirit world. Everything is one. If humans disturb their dwelling places, such as banyan trees (luluo), they will surely receive retribution in the form of plant pests, drought, and mass disease." (Kpu, 73 years old)

This finding shows that the community views nature as a spiritual and material unity that influences each other, not as separate entities.

1.2.Perceptions of Supernatural Beings as “Moral Ecology”

The Molamahu people do not view spirits (lati-latiyalo) as evil entities, but rather as guardians of certain ecological spaces. Farmers/traditional elders argue:

“Spirits behave according to how humans treat them. When humans cut down banyan trees (luluo), they feel disturbed because the trees are not just trees but their homes.” (Ksd, 61 years old).

Traditionalists add:

“If someone cuts down trees indiscriminately, they will usually suddenly fall ill. It is not that cutting is not allowed, but permission must be sought by offering dry offerings in the form of rolled cigarettes and tobacco. If someone suddenly falls ill or there is a long period without rain, it means they are angry” (Blb, 66 years old).

These quotes confirm that ecological taboos function as a traditional conservation mechanism.

1.3.The Role of *Wombuwa* as Ecological “Khalifah”

Wombuwa is a central figure for followers of the *mopoa huta* ritual. He is a reference point for the relationship between humans and the supernatural, as well as the relationship between humans and nature. Informants consistently describe the role

of *wombuwa* as the guardian of the ecosystem's balance and a cosmic mediator. An interview with one of *wombuwa*'s descendants stated the following:

"People come to our father when they want to plant. They ask, 'What is a good day?' Our father will determine the right day and time and explain why that day and time are good for planting a particular type of crop. So this is not a prediction but a calculation of the seasons based on the stars in the sky. There are two adjacent gardens, but just a difference in planting time results in different yields." (Informant Kdr, 35 years old)

Another informant said:

"Wombuwa used to be like a doctor. Residents would come to him for treatment all the time. Some were given plain water that had been prayed over, while others were given herbal medicine. There was no charge. He knew which illnesses came from spirits and which came from food. When pests came, he took care of them through rituals. There was no need for pesticides." (Phs, 70 years old).

This view shows that *wombuwa* functioned like the concept of *khalifah fil-ardh* in Islam. He was a reference, not a ruler, but a steward of the earth.

1.4.Mopoa Huta as Reciprocal Ecology

The community interprets rituals as actions to foster good relations with nature. A female informant stated:

"Hantalo is not feeding demons. It is a symbol. We take from the earth, we must give back. Ritually, demons are summoned to taste the food, but after the ritual, the food is distributed among the ritual organizers." (63 years old).

A young farmer informant expressed the view:

"If we forget to hold the Mopoa Huta ritual, the land usually gets angry quickly. Either there will be minor flooding or crop failure. That is a sign that

the relationship between humans and nature has been damaged.” (Ptg, 29 years old).

This statement supports the finding that *Mopoa Huta* is seen as an environmental ethics system based on reciprocity.

1.5.The Mystical Dimension as Local Ecological Knowledge

The informants interpret mystical elements not as magic, but as a traditional way of understanding environmental dynamics. Here are their views:

“Outsiders say this is idolatry. We are accused of worshipping demons. We invite demons to compromise. This is our business, don't interfere with us. So the point is to take care of the earth. In the past, our elders used the language of spirits, but now we use the language of religion. However, the meaning is the same: do not destroy nature.” (Kud, 67 years old):

“Not long after the ritual was performed, it did not rain. This was not an empty ritual. It was a sign from nature asking us to improve our relationship with the inhabitants and rulers of nature.” (Maz, 85 years old).

This quote confirms that *Mopoa Huta* mysticism is a form of ecological knowledge preservation conveyed through symbols and rituals. For more details, the results of this study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Aspects of Public Understanding

Understanding Aspects	Informant Verification
<i>Mopoa Huta</i> as a relational mechanism	Rituals as communication with nature
Spiritual beings as moral ecology	Spiritual beings that guard ecological spaces

<i>Wombuwa</i> as an ecological caliph	Ecological authority, healer, pest controller
The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature	<i>Hantalo</i> (offering) as a symbol of reciprocity
The mystical dimension as TEK	Mysticism = language for caring for the earth

2. Ecological Values in the *Mopoa Huta* Ritual System

Ethnographic analysis shows that *Mopoa Huta* contains a set of ecological values that support environmental sustainability through symbolic, normative, and ritual practices that have been passed down across generations. These values are a form of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that serves as community-based ecological guidelines. In the context of local Islam, these values resonate with the concept of *khalifah* as guardians of the earth. The role of *wombuwa* is central to the management of these ecological values.

2.1. Ecological Taboos

The prohibition on cutting down large trees (*luluo*), polluting rivers, or clearing land before it has been “cleansed” by *wombuwa* serves as an ecological protection mechanism and a regulator of community behavior. The following are statements from informants:

"If large trees are cut down indiscriminately, the soil beneath them becomes angry. Water can disappear. We have always been taught that luluo are the homes of spirits, so we should not cut them down indiscriminately, but the real purpose is to keep the soil from losing water." (Kpd, 71 years old).

"There is no prohibition against polluting the river, but women are prohibited from bathing during their menstruation in the river. If this is violated, they

will immediately be disturbed by spirits and could die suddenly. Even bathing monthly guests is not allowed, let alone throwing trash into the river." (Mrk, 53 years old).

The results of this study show that customary prohibitions have regulatory power that maintains ecological stability while strengthening the authority of *wombuwa* in community life.

2.2. Ritual-Based Pest Control

Mopoa Huta functions as a non-chemical ecological mechanism in preventing pest attacks and maintaining soil health. This is evident from the following statement by an informant:

"If the wombuwa says not to plant this week, we will definitely postpone it. He says that the position of the stars indicates that the wind is still chaotic and the pests have not yet gone to sleep. If we follow this rule, the harvest is rarely attacked by pests." (Kdr, 35 years old).

"I observe the wind movement and the sound of insects at night. If there are signs of pests coming, I hold a personal ritual, burning incense at the four corners of the garden and sticking white bamboo in the middle of the garden while rubbing it so that the caterpillars don't dare to bite the plants because their teeth feel sore." (Kud, 67 years old).

Both pieces of information show that the *Mopoa Huta* ritual is a spiritual practice that holds ecological knowledge based on long experience.

2.3. Ritual Ecological Calendar

Wombuwa can determine auspicious days for planting and indicate natural signs for planting or prohibitions on planting as a system for reading seasonal changes, weather, and other ecological threats. This was conveyed by the following informants:

“In addition to observing the stars in the sky, there are other natural signs that can be read to determine the seasonal calendar, such as the sound of certain birds that indicate imminent rain or prolonged drought.” (Kud, 67 years old).

“If the castor oil plant sprouts a lot, it is a sign that rain will fall soon, so farmers are asked to quickly prepare seeds for planting so that the planting season is not delayed.” (Blb, 66 years old).

Thus, the ritual ecological calendar becomes a tool for regulating the rhythm of the environment that is integrated into the authority of *wombuwa*.

2.4. Reciprocal Ethics in *Hantalo* (Take and Give Ethics)

The presentation of *hantalo* in the form of agricultural produce affirms the ethics of reciprocity with nature as a moral principle. This was obtained from the following informant:

“All creatures have rights to agricultural produce and livestock. There are parts that must be shared. If we take from the earth, we must give back a little so that nature remains good to us.” (Maz, 85 years old).

“Hantalo is a sign that we must share and not be greedy. It is a way to keep the earth in balance.” (Ptg, 29 years old).

The series of interviews shows that *hantalo* has a symbolic nature and regulates the consumption and distribution of natural resources. For more details, see Table 2.

Table 2: Ecological Aspects and Core Values

Ecological Aspects	Core Values	The Role of <i>Wombuwa</i>
Ecological prohibition	Protecting forests, rivers, and land through customary taboos	Establishing and monitoring ecological taboos

Traditional pest control	Managing crops and pests without pesticides	Reading nature's signs & guiding rituals
Ecological calendar	Signs of nature as determinants of seasons and weather	Interpreting the rhythms of nature for the community
The ethics of taking and giving	Offerings as a symbol of balance between humans and nature	Maintaining the moral and symbolic discipline of the community

3. The Relevance of *Mopoa Huta* as the Basis for Contemporary Environmental Ethics

The results of the study show that the *Mopoa Huta* ritual has strong ecological relevance in the context of contemporary Molamahu society. The literal meaning of “feeding the earth” is interpreted as a basic principle of caring for the earth and maintaining the sustainability of the local ecosystem. This meaning is not only symbolic, but also forms an ecological ethical framework that binds the entire ritual series. The following are the results of research related to the main aspects of *mopoa huta* that are relevant to contemporary environmental ethics.

3.1. *Mopoa Huta* as a Paradigm of Human-Nature Relations

The informant emphasized that the soil is viewed as a living entity that requires human attention.

“The soil is alive. It will speak through the representatives of spirits. Feeding the spirits is the same as feeding the soil so that the soil continues to live and give life. If the soil is hungry, it will retaliate with drought or pest attacks.” (71 years old).

This statement shows that the community understands ecological balance through the concept of reciprocity between humans and natural elements. Another

informant reinforced this view by explaining that clearing land or cultivating soil requires certain procedures.

“If we clear new land, we cannot do so carelessly, without permission, without rules, because there will definitely be consequences. The land has guardians. There are creatures called pulo huta, which are spirits that guard haunted places, and pulo huta, which are spirits in the form of tiny creatures in the ground that turn into plant pests.” (Phs, 70 years old)

The informant also emphasized that Mopoa Huta serves to maintain the ecological rhythm of the village:

“Mopoa Huta is there to maintain good relations. We respect the land, water, and wind. If the relationship is damaged, the harvest will also be damaged. As the traditional saying goes, ‘the land is yours, the water is yours, the air is yours, the fire is yours, but do not be arbitrary, my lord.’” (Ksd, 61 years old).

These interview excerpts show that *Mopoa Huta* functions as a cultural device that upholds ethical relationships between humans and the environment.

3.2. Mopoa Huta as a Traditional Conservation Mechanism

The *Mopoa Huta* ritual contains a set of ecological values that serve to maintain environmental integrity. A traditional elder explained that various ecological prohibitions in the ritual, such as not cutting down large trees (*luluo*) and maintaining the clarity of rivers, are understood as mechanisms for protecting the ecosystem that have been passed down for a long time. Here is what he said:

“Luluo must not be cut down because it protects the springs. Rivers must not be polluted either, because if the water is damaged, the harvest will also be damaged and the plants will easily become diseased. All of these are rules for protecting nature, not just traditional rules.” (Kpu, 73 years old).

Meanwhile, an elder woman who also performs rituals emphasized that the act of offering produce (*hantalo*) and the procedures for treating the land serve as a reciprocal ethic that prevents humans from acting exploitatively. She stated:

“Hantalo is a sign that we are not greedy. We take from the land, so we give back so that it remains alive. If the land is treated badly, it can become angry, so Mopoa Huta calms the land.” (Mhz, 85 years old).

These two opinions show that *Mopoa Huta* functions as a traditional conservation system that relies on taboos, symbols, and rhythmic mechanisms to maintain environmental sustainability.

3.3. *Mopoa Huta* as Ecological Ethics within the Islamic Framework

This study also found that the ecological values of *Mopoa Huta* are in line with Islamic religious concepts, especially the idea of humans as caliphs on earth. A local religious leader stated:

“In Islam, humans are caliphs. Wombuwa here is an example. He protects nature, protects planting times, protects water, protects residents so they remain healthy, all without expecting anything in return.” (70 years old).

The integration of traditional values and Islamic values is evident in the recitation of opening and closing prayers in rituals, as well as in the understanding of the younger generation. A young informant revealed:

“I used to think this was just a custom, but now I see that it teaches us responsibility as caliphs. We must not damage the environment.” (Ptg, 29 years old).

Wombuwa, as a key figure in *Mopoa Huta*, is seen not only as a ritual leader, but also as the guardian of the village's ecological rhythm. The *wombuwa* figure emphasized this:

“We pray first so that what we do is pleasing to God. Caring for the land is also a form of worship.” (Kpd, 71 years old).

Thus, *Mopoa Huta* provides a foundation of ecological ethics that is compatible with the contemporary religious framework and relevant in facing modern environmental challenges. For more details, the results of this study can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Contemporary Environmental Ethics in the *Mopoa Huta* Ritual

The Concept of Environmental Ethics	<i>Mopoa Huta</i> Practice	Ecological Meaning
The Human-Nature Relational Paradigm	“Feeding the soil” is understood as caring for the earth and maintaining harmony with the soil, water, and forests	Nature as a partner in life; balanced relationships prevent drought, crop failure, and epidemics
Traditional Conservation	Prohibition of cutting down large trees, protecting rivers, following planting seasons, and pest control without pesticides	Protect forests and water; keep soil fertile; prevent ecological degradation
Integration of Islamic Ethics	<i>Mopoa Huta</i> is combined with prayer, pilgrimage, and salawat. <i>Wombuwa</i> is positioned as an ecological guardian and selfless healer	In line with the concept of “khalifah”; caring for the earth as worship; environmental ethics based on spirituality

Discussion

The results of the study show that *Mopoa Huta* functions not only as a traditional agrarian ritual, but also as an integrated ecological, spiritual, and social space. These findings lead to an analysis of five main focuses, which will be discussed further, namely: first, how *Mopoa Huta* reinforces the relationship between humans and nature in line with global ecotheology theory; second, how this ritual preserves and reproduces Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) through the language of mysticism; third, how the role of *wombuwa* is interpreted as an ecological caliph figure who maintains the balance of the cosmos; fourth, how conservation values persist even though the ritual has undergone transformations in form and authority; and fifth, how *Mopoa Huta* offers a model of contemporary environmental ethics rooted in cultural wisdom while being in harmony with Islamic spirituality.

The analytical framework of this study integrates three complementary theoretical approaches: functionalism, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and eco-theology. Functionalism is used to explain how *Mopoa Huta* maintains social order through taboos, ritual rhythms, and *wombuwa* authority. TEK provides a framework for understanding that the mystical dimension is not merely a religious symbol, but a repository of intergenerational ecological knowledge. Ecotheology then serves as an interpretive lens to see how all of these practices are understood by the community as a spiritual mandate to maintain human-nature relations. The integration of these three theories allows for a more comprehensive analysis; not only assessing the social function of rituals, but also interpreting their ecological and spiritual meanings in the context of local Islam.

1. Human-Nature Relationality as the Foundation of Local Ecotheology

Research findings reinforce the view in contemporary eco-theology (Mickey et al., 2020) that the relationship between humans and nature is more than just an ecological interaction; it contains spiritual and cosmological aspects that shape patterns of community action. From the perspective of the Molamahu community,

Mopoa Huta is not merely a magical ritual, but a relational practice that restores balance between humans, land, water, forests, and non-human beings. The community's understanding that the physical and supernatural realms form “a mutually determining cosmos” is in line with the concept of interdependent spiritual ecology, namely the idea that material and non-material elements are inseparable parts of a broader ecological system. In global agrarian traditions, this ecological reading is also found in the studies of Patwardhan et al. (2021) on agrarian rituals in Southeast Asia, which place guardian spirits of nature as part of the ecological ethics of the community. Thus, the Molamahu community's belief structure provides an ontological framework that strengthens their ecological practices, rather than weakening them.

2. Mysticism as a space for Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

The results of the study show that the mystical dimension in *Mopoa Huta* is a medium for expressing traditional ecological knowledge. This is consistent with TEK literature (Reyes-García, 2023; Brondízio et al., 2021), which explains that traditional communities often preserve ecological knowledge through symbols, taboos, and rituals, rather than in the form of scientific texts. The prohibition on cutting down large trees, the prohibition on polluting rivers, and the mechanism for determining planting times based on natural signs, all of which are present in *Mopoa Huta*, are concrete manifestations of ecological taboos, which, according to global research, serve to maintain the balance of resources. Maatoke et al.'s (2024) study of sasi in Maluku shows a similar pattern: spiritual taboos serve as instruments of collective conservation. Thus, *Mopoa Huta* can be understood as an ecological system encoded through mystical language. Mysticism here is not a sign of irrationality, but a way for communities to ensure ecological compliance through spiritual legitimacy.

3. *Wombuwa* as Ecological *Khalifah*: Integration of Custom and Islam

One important finding is the central role of *wombuwa*, which performs both ecological and spiritual functions. In the research results, *wombuwa* appears as the determinant of planting rhythms, the guardian of ecological taboos, the mediator between humans and nature, and even a selfless healer. This function shows a strong parallel with the concept of *khalifah* in Islam-humans as guardians of the earth. These results confirm previous literature (Hunowu et al., 2023; Pakuna et al., 2024) which states that the Islamization of customs in Gorontalo does not negate the ecological functions of tradition, but rather expands its ecological legitimacy by framing it within Islamic spiritual ethics. The opening prayer, pilgrimage, and salawat in *Mopoa Huta* show that traditions can transform without losing their ecological core. In other words, *Mopoa Huta* becomes a meeting place between Islamic eco-theology and indigenous ecology, forming a new framework of eco-spiritual stewardship.

4. *Mopoa Huta* as a Traditional Conservation System Amidst Modernization

The findings of this study indicate that several forms of ritual simplification have occurred; however, the core ecological values remain intact. This phenomenon aligns with the literature on agrarian ritual transformation (Kustermans et al., 2022; Zannini et al., 2021), which explains that modernization often alters the outward form of rituals, yet their ecological functions can persist when they continue to be upheld through norms, taboos, and the authority of local figures.

In the case of Molamahu, ecological taboos, the take-and-give principle embodied in *hantalo*, and an ecological calendar based on natural signs continue to be practiced, even as younger generations gradually reduce their participation in the ritual aspects. The persistence of *Mopoa Huta*'s ecological values demonstrates that agrarian rituals possess a high degree of adaptive capacity. This reinforces the argument that *Mopoa Huta* is not a static religious system but a cultural mechanism that actively negotiates its meaning and relevance within modern contexts.

5. The Contemporary Relevance of *Mopoa Huta* for Environmental Ethics

In light of the global ecological crisis, the findings of this study carry important implications. The practice of *Mopoa Huta*-“feeding the soil”-which includes reading natural signs, applying non-chemical pest control, and protecting forests and rivers, offers an alternative model to modern agricultural systems that are often exploitative. The values embedded in this ritual align with key principles of ecotheology, including holistic awareness, reverence for the land, reciprocal human–nature relations, and community-based resource management. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values with customary principles positions *Mopoa Huta* as a relevant source of contemporary environmental ethics for Muslim communities in Gorontalo. Accordingly, *Mopoa Huta* can be understood as an epistemological source for developing a local wisdom–based environmental ethic that strengthens community conservation systems in the modern era.

Conclusion

This study affirms that *Mopoa Huta* is an ecological-spiritual system that functions beyond an agrarian rite, supporting the thesis that this tradition preserves ecological knowledge and environmental ethics that remain relevant in the modern context. The findings show that human-nature relationality in *Mopoa Huta* is consistent with global ecotheological theories, while its mystical dimension serves as a vessel for Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). The role of the *wombuwa* as a figure who regulates ecological balance also illustrates the integration of customary values with the Islamic ethic of stewardship (khalīfah). Although certain ritual components have been simplified, the core conservation values endure and continue to underpin sustainable agricultural practices.

The theoretical implications of this research lie in its contribution to studies on Indigenous ecology and Islamic ecotheology by demonstrating that local traditions can function as frameworks for environmental ethics. Practically, *Mopoa Huta* offers a community-based conservation model that can support environmentally friendly

agriculture and contextual ecological education. The findings also open opportunities for further research, particularly comparative studies across communities and strengthening the role of younger generations in sustaining the tradition. The limitations of this study include its restricted geographical scope and reliance on oral narratives; nevertheless, the results provide meaningful contributions to the development of cultural ecology approaches and local conservation strategies.

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