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# Between Allah and the Sea Spirits: Ritual Transformation and the Negotiation of Sacred Meaning in Bajo Sailing Mantras

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**Abstract**

This study examines how religious authority and changing ritual practices shape the interpretation of sacred meaning in the six-stage sailing mantra ritual of the Bajo community in Matangnga Village, Gorontalo, Indonesia. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study draws on interviews with ten purposively selected informants, ritual observations, and field notes. It

explores "desacralization" as a perceived decline in a mantra's sacred status, efficacy, or necessity, and "resacralization" as a perceived renewal or strengthening of its sacred significance. The findings reveal an uneven transformation of ritual practice. Islamic invocations coexist with inherited Bajo expressions across the six stages. At the same time, some younger and more educated fishermen reportedly use traditional mantras less frequently or rely more on modern navigation equipment, such as GPS and Garmin. Nevertheless, some fishermen continue to seek customary elders' guidance when encountering difficulties at sea, and field notes indicate that many community members still regard the mantras as sacred, partly because they interpret certain experiences as evidence of their efficacy. These patterns demonstrate that changes in ritual performance do not necessarily correspond to changes in sacred belief. Reduced use alone cannot establish "desacralization", just as continued use does not demonstrate that sacred meanings remain unchanged. The available evidence therefore does not establish "desacralization" and "resacralization" as distinct processes across the six ritual stages. Nor does it establish a direct causal relationship between ecological uncertainty and changes in ritual language. The study contributes to the analysis of religious change by distinguishing observable transformations in ritual practice from changes in perceived sacred status and by highlighting the need to examine participants' interpretations and experiences when assessing both processes.

**Keywords:** Bajo sailing ritual; religious authority; ritual transformation; desacralization; resacralization

## A. Introduction

Maritime rituals among Muslim coastal communities reveal how religious beliefs, inherited knowledge, and everyday practices intersect. Among the Bajo people of Indonesia, the sea is not merely a source of livelihood but also a space associated with spiritual meanings, ritual

practices, and relationships between humans and nonhuman beings.[1] Research on maritime spirituality in Java and religious cosmology among indigenous communities in the Mentawai Islands likewise shows that relationships between people, spiritual forces, and the environment can carry religious and cultural meanings.[2] These relationships form part of a cultural and religious landscape in which inherited practices encounter changing interpretations of Islam.[3]

Sailing mantras express these relationships through requests for protection, acknowledgments of spiritual beings, and understandings of human dependence on the sea. Previous studies have examined Islamic acculturation and the symbolic meanings of Bajo maritime rituals, including communities in Gorontalo.[4] Although these studies establish the cultural and religious significance of such practices, the continued use of a mantra does not necessarily indicate that its sacred status remains unchanged, just as

[1] Ian McNiven, "Saltwater People: Spiritscapes, Maritime Rituals and the Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Seascapes," World Archaeology 35, no. 3 (2004): 329–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/0043824042000185757; Kumiko Kato, "Describing Space Cognition from Ritual Practices among Bajo Settlements in Southeast Sulawesi: The Affective Bond between People, Spirits, and the Sea," Japanese Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 61, no. 1 (2023): 35–69, https://doi.org/10.20495/tak.61.1_35.

[2] Andreas Kristianto, Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, and Stefanus Christian Haryono, "Nyi Roro Kidul and Marine Eco-Pneumatology: Javanese Contextual Theological Studies in Maritime Society, Yogyakarta, Indonesia," International Journal of Asian Christianity 7, no. 1 (2024): 103–18, https://doi.org/10.1163/25424246-07010006; Dwi Wahyuni et al., "The Religious Cosmology of Indigenous Communities for Maintaining Ecological Balance in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia," Millah: Journal of Religious Studies 24, no. 1 (2025): 137–72, https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol24.iss1.art5.

[3] Abbas Abbas, "Mistisisme Muslim Pesisir: Studi Atas Ritual Masyarakat Muslim Bajo Sulawesi Tenggara," Al-Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian 17, no. 2 (2022): 83, https://doi.org/10.31332/ai.v0i0.3731.

[4] Andi Oktami Dewi Artha Ayu Purnama et al., "Rituals in Acculturation of Islam and Local Traditions of the Bajo Tribe in Gorontalo," ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia 8, no. 2 (2023): 302–13, https://doi.org/10.31947/etnosia.v8i2.32207; Karim Karim, Gisela Nuwa, and Abbdullah Muis Kasim, "Makna Simbolik Proses Ritual Suku Bajo Dalam Aktivitas Melaut Di Desa Parumaan Kecamatan Alok Timur Kabupaten Sikka," Protasis: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Budaya, dan Pengajarannya 3, no. 2 (2024): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.55606/protasis.v3i2.160.

reduced use does not automatically signify the abandonment of its spiritual meaning.

Rituals organize social relationships and communicate meanings within particular cultural contexts.[5] In maritime communities, they may also connect cosmological understandings with experiences of danger and uncertainty at sea.[6] Accordingly, changes in ritual language must be examined through practitioners' interpretations, the contexts of ritual performance, and the authority through which its legitimacy is defined. This study uses "desacralization" to refer to a reduction or withdrawal of a practice's perceived sacred status, and "resacralization" to refer to the acquisition, recovery, or reinforcement of sacred significance. These are analytical categories, not predetermined outcomes: their occurrence must be demonstrated through participants' accounts and practices. Ritual theory and the study of supernatural beliefs help distinguish observable ritual changes from changes in the meanings attributed to them.[7]

This distinction matters because of the relationship between inherited maritime practices and Islam. Some Muslim actors may regard invocations or offerings associated with spiritual beings as incompatible with Islamic monotheism. In contrast, others may interpret inherited expressions through distinctions between worship, seeking protection, respecting ancestral knowledge, and maintaining

[5] Catherine M. Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[6] Idris Masudi Hamdani and A. Muhtarom, "Islam Maritim dan Kultur Penjelajah Laut Masyarakat Nusantara," Islam Nusantara 4, no. 1 (2023): 29–39, https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v4i1.670.

[7] Melford E. Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism: A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967); Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions.

relationships with the sea. Research on Islam and local customs in Indonesia shows that these encounters may involve accommodation, reinterpretation, and disagreement rather than uniform religious change.[8] Such differences make the legitimacy of maritime rituals a matter of interpretation and negotiation within Muslim communities.

Broader changes in maritime culture and community life may also affect how inherited practices are performed and transmitted. Research on Islam and maritime culture in the Indonesian archipelago, the revitalization of traditional mantras, and the transformation of Bajo settlements demonstrates that ritual forms and social functions can change over time.[9] However, such changes do not necessarily indicate secularization or the emergence of a new sacred status. A mantra may be used less frequently yet remain spiritually meaningful, while an expression may persist after its ritual significance has diminished. Studies of Bajo ritual and Islam, the relationship between Islam and *adat* (custom), ritual symbolism, and coastal solidarity provide important foundations for examining these processes.[10] Nevertheless, social continuity does not by itself

[8] Anzar Abdullah, Muhammad Asdam, and Andi Alimbagu, "The Reciprocal Acculturation of Islamic Culture and Local Culture in the Nusantara : A Historical Review," *JAWI* 08, no. April (2025): 77–90, doi:10.24042/00202582704000; Ahmad Khoirul Fata and Moh Nor Ichwan, "Pertarungan Kuasa Dalam Wacana Islam Nusantara," *Islamica* 11, no. 2 (2017): 339–64, doi:https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2017.11.2.339-364; Etty Nurbayani and M Husin, "The Meeting of Islam and Adat: Exploring the Religiosity of Bajau Samah Community in Kotabaru," *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 13, no. 2 (2024): 300–333, doi:10.31291/czrmv993.

[9] Nuryadin Nuryadin and Ramlin Ramlin, "Model Revitalisasi Mantra Monda'u Masyarakat Tolaki," Jurnal Ilmiah Dikdaya 11, no. 2 (2021): 251–59, https://doi.org/10.33087/dikdaya.v11i2.220; M. Amir Salipu and Ahda Mulyati, "Kajian Perubahan Permukiman Suku Bajo Berdasarkan Konsep Transformasi Kebudayaan Ignas Kleden," Mintakat: Jurnal Arsitektur 23, no. 2 (2022): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.26905/jam.v23i2.7830.

[10] Karim, Nuwa, and Kasim, "Makna Simbolik Proses Ritual Suku Bajo"; Irma Juliana, Nindi Laili Safitri, and Wulan Fadillah, "Solidaritas Masyarakat Pesisir Dalam

establish the persistence of sacred meaning, and the adoption of Islamic prayers does not automatically demonstrate "resacralization".

This study addresses the gap by examining sailing-mantra practices across six ritual stages among the Bajo. Rather than assuming a linear transition from Indigenous spirituality to formal Islam or from sacred practice to secular expression, it investigates how ritual form, function, perceived sacredness, and religious legitimacy may change at different rates. It also considers how Islamic reform, generational differences, and transformations in maritime life shape the interpretation, use, and transmission of sailing mantras.

The study asks three questions: (1) How do "desacralization" and "resacralization" manifest across the six stages of Bajo sailing-mantra practice, and how are changes in ritual form and function related to perceived sacred status? (2) How do Islamic reform, generational change, and transformations in maritime life influence the interpretation, use, and transmission of these mantras? (3) How do members of the Bajo community negotiate the religious legitimacy and spiritual significance of inherited ritual expressions and Islamic prayers? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to scholarship on Islam and local religious practice by examining sacredness as a status that may be maintained, challenged, diminished, or re-established through lived religious experience and competing interpretations.

Tradisi Petik Laut," Jurnal Ilmiah Kesehatan Masyarakat dan Sosial 1, no. 2 (2023): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.59024/jikas.v1i2.121.

## B. Literature Review

### 1. Islam, Custom, and Religious Negotiation

The relationship between Islam and local customs in Indonesia involves ongoing negotiation rather than a uniform transition from indigenous beliefs to Islamic orthodoxy. Inherited practices may be defended, reinterpreted, or challenged as understandings of legitimate Islamic practice evolve. Research on the reciprocal acculturation of Islam and local culture highlights the importance of examining these relationships within their historical and social contexts.[11] Studies of the Bajau Samah community similarly show how Islamic identity and *adat* interact in everyday religious life.[12]

This perspective is relevant to Bajo sailing mantras, which community members may understand differently. Some may regard them as inherited means of seeking protection, while others may question their legitimacy when they appear to involve supernatural beings other than Allah. The coexistence of Islamic prayers and customary expressions does not necessarily constitute syncretism or indicate that one has replaced the other. Instead, the analysis must examine how practitioners interpret these elements and whether their relationship changes the ritual's perceived sacred status. Research on syncretism in Indonesia offers a comparative perspective on interactions between Islamic and local cultural practices, while

[11] Anzar Abdullah, Muhammad Asdam, and Andi Alimbagu, "The Reciprocal Acculturation of Islamic Culture and Local Culture in the Nusantara: A Historical Review," JAWI 8 (2025): 77–90, https://doi.org/10.24042/00202582704000.

[12] Etty Nurbayani and M. Husin, "The Meeting of Islam and Adat: Exploring the Religiosity of Bajau Samah Community in Kotabaru," Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage 13, no. 2 (2024): 300–333, https://doi.org/10.31291/czrmv993.

emphasizing the importance of understanding how these combinations are interpreted in specific social contexts.[13] Studies of other Indonesian Muslim communities offer further comparative insights: research on the *Piạ Susa* death ritual among the Islam Masade community in Sangihe examines the relationship between Islamic practices and local beliefs. In contrast, Hunowu's study of *Mopoa Huta* in Gorontalo provides a regional perspective on local ritual practices.[14] These studies help contextualize the negotiation of religious and cultural meanings, although they do not directly establish how Bajo fishermen interpret the sacred significance of sailing mantras.

## 2. Ritual Communication and the Transformation of Mantras

Ritual communication emphasizes how shared meanings and social relationships are sustained through practice, rather than viewing communication merely as information transmission.[15] Applied to sailing mantras, this perspective directs attention to the words spoken, the circumstances of recitation, accompanying actions, and the meanings attributed to the practice.

Bell's theory of ritualization helps explain how particular expressions and actions become distinguished

[13] Sri Lestari and Yuyun Yunita, "Sinkretisme Budaya Islam dan Budaya Lokal Nusantara dalam Memperkokoh Hubungan Masyarakat," Ri'ayah: Jurnal Sosial dan Keagamaan 10, no. 1 (2025): 93–103, https://doi.org/10.32332/riayah.v10i1.10440.

[14] Ahmad Khoirul Fata, Sunandar Macpal, Sintia Hamani, and Awaludin Hubu, "Piạ Susa: Death Rituals in the Islam Masade Community in Sangihe, North Sulawesi," Dinika: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies 10, no. 2 (2025): 291–312, https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v10i2.11285; Momy Hunowu, Ritual Mopoa Huta di Gorontalo: Kajian Fungsional (Jakarta: BRIN, 2025).

[15] Rosalina P. Costa, "Ritual View," in The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Mass Media and Society, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2020), 1490–91, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483375519.n572.

from ordinary activities, while Turner's approach to ritual process situates ritual change within broader social relationships.[16] [17] Geertz's anthropological study of Javanese religion also illustrates the value of examining religious meanings in relation to cultural and social life. However, its categories should not be transferred directly to the Bajo community.[18] These perspectives allow the study to examine changes in ritual performance without presuming that they necessarily involve a loss of sacred meaning. A mantra may be recited less frequently or accompanied by Islamic prayers while retaining spiritual significance. Conversely, an expression may continue to be used after its ritual authority has diminished. Ritual form, social function, and perceived sacred status must therefore be examined as related but distinct dimensions.

## 3. Maritime Cosmology and Spirituality among the Bajo

For maritime communities, the sea may represent not only an economic environment but also a domain of spiritual relationships and cultural meaning. Research on Indigenous seascapes and Bajo settlements demonstrates how relationships among people, spirits, and the sea may be expressed through ritual practices.[19] In this study, Bajo sailing mantras are examined within this maritime context, with attention to how practitioners understand their purposes and spiritual significance.

[16] Catherine M. Bell, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[17] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).

[18] Clifford Geertz, The Religion of Java (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

[19] Ian McNiven, "Saltwater People: Spiritscapes, Maritime Rituals and the Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Seascapes," World Archaeology 35, no. 3 (2004): 329–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/0043824042000185757.

Expressions such as *karang tapotong*, which participants describe as seeking permission from the inhabitants of the sea, require interpretation through their accounts and the situations in which they are used. Their meanings should not be generalized to all Bajo communities, since understandings may vary among individuals and generations. Nor does the coexistence of inherited expressions and Islamic prayers establish a single, shared theology. Some practitioners may regard these practices as compatible with divine protection, while others may question their religious legitimacy.

Studies of maritime culture in Indonesia and Bajo ritual acculturation in Gorontalo provide a broader context for examining these relationships.[20] However, cultural continuity and practical usefulness do not necessarily demonstrate the persistence of sacred meaning. This study therefore treats maritime cosmology as a context in which ritual meanings are interpreted and contested, rather than as an unchanging system of belief.

Maritime rituals are embedded in broader relationships among human communities, the sea, and locally understood spiritual forces. Research on the Bajo has examined ritual practices across the life cycle and the role of local beliefs in marine conservation.[21] At the same time, comparative studies of maritime spirituality and indigenous

[20] Andi Oktami Dewi Artha Ayu Purnama et al., "Rituals in Acculturation of Islam and Local Traditions of the Bajo Tribe in Gorontalo," ETNOSIA: Jurnal Etnografi Indonesia 8, no. 2 (2023): 302–13, https://doi.org/10.31947/etnosia.v8i2.32207.

[21] Kamaruddin Mustamin and Sunandar Macpal, "Ritual dalam Siklus Hidup Masyarakat Bajo di Torosiaje," Al-Qalam 26, no. 1 (2020): 203–220, https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v26i1.799; Aninda Maulidyna, Bhefira Syafitri Hartawan, Herlina Noor Agustin, and A. N. Irfan, "Review: The Role of Local Belief and Wisdom of the Bajo Community in Marine Conservation Efforts," International Journal of Bonorowo Wetlands 11 (2021): 48–63, https://doi.org/10.13057/bonorowo/w110105.

cosmology demonstrate that relationships between spiritual beliefs and the environment vary across cultural settings.[22] This literature provides a contextual basis for investigating sailing mantras in Matangnga Village, while leaving the specific meanings and transformations of these practices to be established through the present ethnographic evidence.

## 4. Analytical Framework: "Desacralization", "Resacralization", and Ritual Transformation

This study combines complementary perspectives to analyze changes in Bajo sailing mantras. Geertz's interpretive approach helps examine the meanings attributed to ritual expressions; Bell's concept of ritualization focuses on how practices acquire distinctive ritual significance; Turner situates changes within social processes; and Spiro provides a comparative perspective on supernatural beliefs.[23] [24] Together, these perspectives inform the analysis without predetermining its findings.

"Desacralization" refers to a reduction or withdrawal of the sacred status attributed to a mantra or ritual practice. Relevant evidence includes participants' accounts that a mantra has lost its spiritual efficacy, is no longer necessary, or is no longer regarded as religiously legitimate. Reduced frequency alone is insufficient, since it may reflect practical

[22] Andreas Kristianto, Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, and Stefanus Christian Haryono, "Nyi Roro Kidul and Marine Eco-Pneumatology: Javanese Contextual Theological Studies in Maritime Society, Yogyakarta, Indonesia," International Journal of Asian Christianity 7, no. 1 (2024): 103–118, https://doi.org/10.1163/25424246-07010006; Dwi Wahyuni, Indah Andika Octavia, Karen Karista, Anjali Sabna, and Martalia, "The Religious Cosmology of Indigenous Communities for Maintaining Ecological Balance in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia," Millah: Journal of Religious Studies 24, no. 1 (2025): 137–172, https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol24.iss1.art5.

[23] Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[24] Melford E. Spiro, Burmese Supernaturalism: A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

constraints rather than diminished belief. “Resacralization” refers to acquiring, recovering, or reinforcing sacred significance through reinterpretation or renewed religious authorization. Adding Islamic prayers may be relevant, but it does not by itself establish “resacralization”; evidence must show that participants attribute renewed or altered sacred meaning to the practice.

The analysis distinguishes three dimensions: ritual form**,** including wording, sequence, gestures, and frequency; ritual function**,** including protection, preparation for sailing, and the transmission of inherited knowledge; and perceived sacred status**,** concerning spiritual efficacy, necessity, and religious legitimacy. These dimensions may change independently. A mantra may change in form while retaining sacred significance, or continue to serve a social function after its ritual authority declines. Changes may also differ across ritual stages, generations, and practitioner groups.

**Table 1 summarizes the analytical framework**

| Analytical dimension | Empirical indicators | Guiding question |
|---|---|---|
| Ritual form | Changes in wording, sequence, gestures, and frequency | What changes in ritual performance? |
| Ritual function | Protection, preparation for sailing, social relationships, and inherited knowledge | What do practitioners believe the mantra accomplishes? |
| Sacred status | Perceived efficacy, necessity, and religious legitimacy | Is the mantra still regarded as sacred or spiritually effective? |
| “Desacralization” | Explicit accounts of diminished sacred | Do participants describe a decline in |

| Analytical dimension | Empirical indicators | Guiding question |
|---|---|---|
| | significance or efficacy | sacred status? |
| "Resacralization" | Renewed sacred meaning or religious authorization | Do participants attribute renewed sacred significance to the practice? |
| Religious negotiation | Competing interpretations of ritual legitimacy | How do community members justify or challenge the practice? |
| Uneven transformation | Differences across stages, generations, and practitioners | Do changes in ritual form correspond to changes in sacred status? |

*Source: Analytical framework developed for this study, drawing on Geertz, Bell, Turner, Spiro, and scholarship on Bajo maritime ritual.*

The framework guides the analysis of the six stages of sailing-mantra practice by examining ritual performance, attributed function, and perceived sacred status at each stage. It also considers how Islamic interpretations, generational differences, and changing maritime practices shape these dimensions. The central proposition is that ritual transformation should not be assumed to represent either the disappearance of local spirituality or the straightforward incorporation of Islam. Ethnographic evidence must establish whether a change constitutes "desacralization", "resacralization", or selective continuity.

## C. Research Method

### 1. Research Approach and Setting

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how members of the Bajo community

experience and interpret sailing mantras. Fieldwork was conducted from March to April 2025 in Matangnga Village, Gorontalo, Indonesia. The study focused on the perceived functions of sailing mantras, their relationship to Islamic religious practices, the transmission of inherited ritual knowledge, and changes linked to generational differences and modern fishing technologies.

The analysis distinguished changes in ritual performance from changes in perceived sacred status. "Desacralization" refers to a perceived decline in a mantra's sacred significance, efficacy, or necessity, whereas "resacralization" refers to the reaffirmation or strengthening of its sacred significance. Neither process was inferred solely from reduced ritual use, the adoption of modern technology, or continued mantra performance.

## 2. Informant Selection

Ten informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of sailing mantras, social roles, and involvement in the community's maritime and religious life. They comprised one customary leader, two religious leaders, three senior fishermen, and four younger fishermen, aged 27–67 years. According to the available informant list, all ten participants were male.

**Table 2. Profile of Research Informants**

| No. | Informant code | Category | Age |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I01 | Customary leader | 67 |
| 2 | I02 | Religious leader | 55 |
| 3 | I03 | Religious leader | 61 |
| 4 | I04 | Senior fisherman | 63 |
| 5 | I05 | Senior fisherman | 58 |

| No. | Informant code | Category | Age |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | I06 | Senior fisherman | 60 |
| 7 | I07 | Younger fisherman | 41 |
| 8 | I08 | Younger fisherman | 37 |
| 9 | I09 | Younger fisherman | 30 |
| 10 | I10 | Younger fisherman | 27 |

*Note: Informant codes follow the order of the available informant list. All attributions in the findings must be verified against the original research records.*

Including these groups enabled the study to consider different perspectives on ritual knowledge, religious interpretation, established maritime practices, and technological change. Detailed educational histories were not available for all informants; therefore, claims concerning education are limited to instances supported by the field materials.

## 3. Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, Gorontalo, and Bajo, depending on participants' preferred language. Recordings and written interview notes were retained, and relevant statements were checked against the available source materials. English translations of quotations were prepared after verification against the original records. Secondary data were drawn from relevant scholarly literature on maritime life, ritual practices, religious interpretation, and the transformation of local traditions.

The data were organized thematically around three analytical dimensions: ritual form, ritual function, and

perceived sacred status. Ritual form concerned the expressions, gestures, and variations in mantra wording. Ritual function concerned the purposes attributed to the mantras, including protection, guidance, and assistance in dealing with uncertainty at sea. Perceived sacred status concerned whether participants' accounts indicated continued recognition of the practice's sacred significance or a perceived change in its efficacy, legitimacy, or necessity.

The analysis compared the available interview and observation materials across the four informant categories. Recurring issues included continued belief in mantra efficacy, variation in ritual transmission, the use of modern navigation equipment, and consultation with customary elders. These themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions concerning ritual transformation, sacred meaning, and religious authority. The available documentation does not establish the use of a formal coding protocol or coding software; accordingly, no specific coding procedure is claimed.

## 4. Research Credibility and Ethics

The analysis compared accounts across informant categories and considered reported ritual practices alongside accounts of technological use and consultation with customary elders. This comparison helped identify similarities and differences in the available materials but should not be understood as evidence that a formal triangulation protocol was implemented. The documentation also does not establish that member checking was conducted or that a formal data-saturation criterion was applied. The adequacy of the material is therefore considered in relation to the ten purposively

selected informants and the range of perspectives represented in the available records.

Participants provided oral consent to take part in the study. The available documentation does not specify whether formal ethics review or institutional approval was obtained; therefore, no such approval is claimed. Informants are identified by codes I01–I10 in the manuscript. Codes from earlier drafts should be reassigned only when the original speakers can be verified from the research records. The findings are interpreted within the context of this single community and the March–April 2025 fieldwork period, rather than as representative of all Bajo communities or as evidence of long-term change.

## D. Results

### 1. Sacred Language, Ritual Continuity, and the Negotiation of Spiritual Relationships

The six-stage structure of the Bajo sailing mantra ritual provides a basis for understanding how inherited ritual expressions are incorporated into fishing activities and how their significance is maintained or reconsidered in everyday maritime life. The available interview records and field notes document the use of Islamic invocations, inherited Bajo expressions, bodily gestures, and references to sea-associated beings. These elements appear at different moments of a fishing journey, from preparation at home to the return from the sea. The findings indicate that Islamic expressions and inherited ritual practices coexist, although their forms and uses differ at each stage.

**Table 3. Ritual Practices and the Types of Change Supported by the Available Evidence**

| Ritual stage | Documented practice or expression | Attributed meaning and significance | Type of change supported by the available evidence | Interpretive limits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recitation at home | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, followed by a request concerning the household while the fisherman is at sea | Preparation for fishing, concern for family well-being, and hope for a safe journey and livelihood | Continuity of Islamic invocation | The available records document the practice but do not establish when it emerged or whether its meaning has changed over time. |
| Leaving home | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, accompanied by a request for family members, particularly children, to pray for the fisherman | Family support, divine blessing, and reassurance before departure | Continuity of Islamic invocation and family-oriented ritual practice | The evidence does not establish whether these elements have replaced earlier expressions or have long coexisted with them. |
| Boarding the boat | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, followed by a Bajo-language expression entrusting life, safety, and livelihood to the Almighty | Dependence on divine power during a journey involving uncertainty and risk | Coexistence of Islamic and inherited expressions | Coexistence does not, by itself, demonstrate syncretism, "desacralization", or "resacralization". |
| At the fishing spot | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, followed by a Bajo-language expression | Protection and recognition of the spiritual | Coexistence of Islamic invocation and inherited | The records do not establish a uniform interpretation of sea spirits among |

| Ritual stage | Documented practice or expression | Attributed meaning and significance | Type of change supported by the available evidence | Interpretive limits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | interpreted by some participants as addressing or acknowledging beings associated with the sea | significance attributed to maritime spaces | spiritual references | all participants or demonstrate a change in the sacred status of these expressions. |
| Setting hooks and inserting bait | *Kau ridu aku ridu, ridu kau ridu aku*, accompanied by a hand gesture touching the sea; offerings are reportedly made in some difficult circumstances | An inherited verbal and bodily practice associated with relationships between humans and the sea | Continuity of an embodied ritual expression, with reported situational variation | The evidence does not establish whether offerings have become more or less frequent, whether they have been substituted by other practices, or whether participants' evaluations of their sacred significance have changed. |
| Returning home | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, followed by an expression of gratitude for livelihood and protection during the journey | Gratitude for the outcome of fishing and protection during the journey | Continuity of Islamic invocation and gratitude-oriented expression | The available records do not establish historical changes in wording, frequency of use, or perceived sacred status. |

*Source: Interview records and field notes, 2025. The table summarizes documented practices and reported meanings. It does not imply that every participant performs or interprets each practice in the same way.*

Table 3 distinguishes the ritual practices documented at each stage from the types of change that can be established from the available evidence. Islamic invocations appear at five stages of the sailing sequence. In contrast, the stage of setting hooks and inserting bait involves the inherited expression *Kau ridu aku ridu, ridu kau ridu aku* and a bodily gesture involving contact with the sea. The sequence therefore demonstrates the coexistence of different forms of ritual expression rather than a uniform linguistic pattern across all stages.

This coexistence should not automatically be interpreted as the replacement of inherited practices by Islamic expressions. The available records do not show that the Islamic invocations were newly introduced, nor that their presence has reduced the perceived sacredness of the inherited mantras. Similarly, the continued performance of an inherited expression does not demonstrate that its meaning has remained unchanged. The evidence supports a distinction between the presence of a ritual practice and the meanings participants attribute to it.

This distinction matters especially when considering the expression used while setting hooks and inserting bait. Its accompanying gesture and the reported use of offerings in some difficult circumstances indicate that ritual practice may involve verbal and bodily forms of communication. However, the available materials do not establish whether these practices have become more or less frequent over time or whether participants have changed their evaluations of their sacred significance. The reported variation in offerings should therefore be treated as situational variation rather than evidence of substitution or “desacralization”.

The broader field records provide additional evidence of uneven continuity. Many residents continue to regard the mantras as sacred, and some interpret experiences at sea as confirming their efficacy. At the same time, some younger and more educated fishermen reportedly rely less on mantras during routine fishing activities and use equipment such as GPS and Garmin devices. Yet some fishermen who use modern equipment still seek customary elders' guidance when they encounter storms, become lost, or experience other difficulties at sea. These accounts indicate that technological adoption and inherited spiritual understandings can coexist.

Taken together, the six-stage sequence establishes continuity and coexistence more clearly than it establishes changes in sacred status. The broader accounts suggest variation in ritual reliance and transmission, but reduced use, differences in wording, and the presence of Islamic invocations cannot independently demonstrate “desacralization”. Nor does continued use alone establish “resacralization”. Determining either process would require more direct evidence that participants have changed their assessments of the mantras' sacredness, efficacy, legitimacy, or necessity.

## 2. Factors Shaping Ritual Practice and the Limits of Sacred Change

The transformation of Bajo sailing mantras in Matangnga Village needs to be understood in relation to changing religious interpretations, the adoption of modern fishing technologies, generational differences, and the uncertainties of maritime life. The available field materials suggest that these factors are associated with different

patterns of ritual use and transmission. However, they do not show that any single factor directly causes a decline or renewal in the perceived sacred status of the mantras. The analysis therefore distinguishes changes in ritual practice from changes in participants' evaluations of sacredness, efficacy, and necessity.

**Table 4. Factors Associated with Ritual Change and Their Implications for Sacred Meaning**

| Factor | Evidence documented in the field materials | Type of change supported by the evidence | Interpretive limits |
|---|---|---|---|
| Religious interpretation and Islamic invocations | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* is reported at five stages of the sailing ritual, while inherited Bajo expressions also remain present. Participants do not necessarily interpret references to God and sea spirits in the same way. | Coexistence of Islamic invocations and inherited ritual expressions; possible differences in religious interpretation | The evidence does not establish that Islamic invocations have replaced inherited mantras or that their presence has reduced the mantras' sacred status. |
| Modernization and fishing technology | Some younger and more educated fishermen reportedly rely on GPS and Garmin devices and use inherited mantras less frequently during routine fishing activities. Some nevertheless seek customary elders' guidance when encountering serious difficulties at sea. | Reduced routine reliance on mantras among some fishermen and selective adaptation to modern technology | The evidence does not establish that technology has eliminated belief in the mantras or caused a general decline in their sacred status. |

| Factor | Evidence documented in the field materials | Type of change supported by the evidence | Interpretive limits |
|---|---|---|---|
| Generational differences and ritual transmission | Older fishermen and younger people with less formal education reportedly continue to practice and believe in the mantras. Differences in wording are associated with different teachers or sources of learning and variations in the terms used for sea spirits. | Uneven continuity and variation in the transmission of ritual knowledge | The evidence does not establish that age or formal education alone determines ritual participation or causes "desacralization". |
| Maritime and ecological uncertainty | Field materials refer to storms, becoming lost at sea, and concerns about fishing and livelihood. In difficult situations, some fishermen reportedly seek guidance from customary elders. | Continued situational relevance of customary knowledge in dealing with maritime uncertainty | The available evidence does not establish that ecological change, declining catches, or overfishing directly causes changes in mantra use, wording, or sacred status. |

*Source: Interview records and field notes, 2025.*

Table 4 shows that the factors associated with ritual change have different implications for how sailing mantras are used and interpreted. The presence of Islamic invocations within the ritual sequence demonstrates that Islamic expressions form part of contemporary ritual practice. However, the simultaneous presence of inherited

Bajo expressions means that the relationship cannot be described simply as a replacement of traditional mantras by Islamic prayers. The available materials document coexistence more clearly than they document the historical sequence through which these expressions may have been introduced, modified, or reinterpreted.

Modern fishing technology provides a different indication of change. Some younger, more educated fishermen reportedly rely on GPS and Garmin devices and use inherited mantras less often in routine fishing activities. This pattern suggests a shift in the practical role of ritual knowledge amid technological adaptation. Nevertheless, reduced reliance during ordinary fishing does not necessarily mean that the mantras have lost their sacred significance. The reported practice of seeking customary elders' guidance during storms, disorientation, or other serious difficulties at sea indicates that modern equipment and inherited spiritual knowledge may continue to serve different purposes in fishermen's understandings of maritime life.

Generational differences also require careful interpretation. The field materials indicate that older fishermen and younger people with less formal education continue to practice the mantras. In contrast, some younger, more educated fishermen rely on them less routinely. This contrast suggests that ritual continuity is uneven within the community. It does not, however, support a general conclusion that younger people have abandoned the mantras or that formal education necessarily produces "desacralization". Such a conclusion would require more direct evidence about how individual fishermen understand the mantras' sacredness, efficacy, and relevance, rather than

relying on age or patterns of technology use as proxies for belief.

Variation in mantra wording provides further evidence of change in ritual transmission. The available records identify differences in teachers or sources of learning and in the terms used for beings associated with the sea. These differences indicate that practitioners do not transmit ritual expressions in the same form. Yet variation in wording should not be confused with a loss of sacred meaning. Without evidence that participants associate particular variations with diminished efficacy, reduced legitimacy, or a changed understanding of sacredness, the most defensible interpretation is variation in transmission rather than established "desacralization".

Maritime and ecological uncertainty forms part of the wider context in which these practices are maintained and interpreted. Storms and incidents in which fishermen become lost at sea are reported as circumstances in which some turn to customary elders for assistance. Such accounts help explain why inherited knowledge may remain relevant even among fishermen who use modern equipment. However, the available materials do not demonstrate a direct causal relationship between declining catches, overfishing, or environmental change and the transformation of mantra language or sacred meaning. Ecological uncertainty should therefore be treated as a contextual condition rather than an established cause of ritual transformation.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the transformation of Bajo sailing mantras is uneven and context-dependent. Religious interpretation, technological adaptation, generational differences, and maritime

uncertainty are associated with changes in how ritual knowledge is used and transmitted, but their implications for sacred meaning are not uniform. The evidence supports continuity, coexistence, variation, and reduced routine reliance among some fishermen. It does not establish a general process of "desacralization" or "resacralization". These processes can be demonstrated only when changes in practice are accompanied by evidence that participants themselves perceive the mantras as less or more sacred, efficacious, legitimate, or necessary.

## 3. Adoption, Selective Continuity, and the Reorientation of Ritual Language

The findings indicate that changes in Bajo sailing mantras in Matangnga Village are better understood as selective continuity and ritual reorientation than as a uniform decline in sacred belief. The use of inherited mantras continues among many fishermen, while some practices have been adjusted alongside the adoption of modern fishing technology and the continued use of Islamic invocations. These patterns suggest that ritual transformation does not necessarily involve the abandonment of inherited practices or a complete change in their perceived sacred status.

*Table 5. Forms of Ritual Continuity and Reorientation and Their Implications for Sacred Meaning*

| Observed pattern | Evidence from the field | Analytical interpretation | Evidentiary limit |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Continued use of inherited mantras** | Older fishermen and some younger fishermen continue to use mantras and associate them with experiences they regard as evidence of their efficacy. | Inherited ritual knowledge retains practical and sacred significance for these practitioners. | These accounts do not establish that all fishermen share the same beliefs or interpret the mantras identically. |
| **Reduced routine reliance on mantras** | Some younger fishermen, particularly those with more formal education, reportedly rely less on mantras in routine fishing activities and use GPS or Garmin devices. | Fishing practices are being reoriented through the adoption of technological tools. | Reduced routine use does not, by itself, demonstrate that belief in the sacredness or efficacy of mantras has disappeared. |
| **Coexistence of technology and inherited knowledge** | Some fishermen use modern equipment but still consult customary elders when they encounter difficulties at sea, including storms or becoming lost. | Technological adoption can coexist with continued recourse to inherited spiritual knowledge. | The available evidence does not establish whether technology strengthens, weakens, or otherwise changes the fishermen's underlying beliefs. |
| **Variation in mantra wording** | Fishermen reportedly learn mantras from different teachers and use different terms or names for sea spirits. | Ritual transmission allows variation in verbal expression while inherited | Variation in wording does not establish a decline in sacredness or a change in the perceived |

| Observed pattern | Evidence from the field | Analytical interpretation | Evidentiary limit |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | practices continue. | legitimacy of the ritual. |
| **Coexistence of Islamic invocations and inherited expressions** | *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* is recited at several stages of the sailing ritual, while other inherited expressions and gestures remain part of the practice. | The ritual incorporates different forms of religious expression without necessarily replacing one with another. | The evidence does not establish whether practitioners understand these expressions as complementary, conflicting, or hierarchically ordered. |

*Source: Field observations and interviews conducted in Matangnga Village, March–April 2025.*

The first pattern concerns the continued significance of inherited mantras. Several fishermen, particularly older practitioners, continue to regard these expressions as meaningful in preparing for a journey, fishing at sea, and responding to uncertainty. Their accounts connect the practice with experiences that they interpret as evidence of its efficacy. From their perspective, continuing the mantra is not merely preserving an old verbal formula; it remains connected to practical experience and understandings of the relationship between human beings and the sea. These accounts suggest that the mantra's sacred significance persists for at least some practitioners.

A different pattern appears among some younger fishermen who use modern navigation equipment, including GPS and Garmin devices, and reportedly rely less on mantras in routine fishing activities. This development indicates a change in the practical organization of fishing. Navigation

and other technological functions can now be addressed through equipment that was not previously available or widely used in the same way. However, the reduced use of a mantra in a particular activity should not automatically be interpreted as the loss of religious belief. The available findings do not establish that these fishermen have rejected the sacred status of inherited practices or consider them entirely ineffective.

The continued consultation of customary elders by some fishermen who use modern equipment further complicates a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. When difficulties such as storms or getting lost occur at sea, some fishermen reportedly seek guidance about sea spirits from elders with inherited ritual knowledge. This pattern suggests that technological competence and customary knowledge may serve different perceived purposes within the same fishing community. Modern equipment can assist with navigation, while consultation with elders remains meaningful in situations interpreted through spiritual understandings of the sea. The evidence therefore points to coexistence rather than the straightforward replacement of one system of knowledge by another.

Variation in mantra wording also needs to be distinguished from changes in sacred meaning. Fishermen may learn their expressions from different teachers, and the terms used to refer to sea spirits can differ. Such variation suggests that ritual knowledge is not necessarily transmitted uniformly. Nevertheless, verbal differences alone do not demonstrate that the ritual has become less sacred, nor do they establish that its meaning has been transformed in a particular direction. Determining such changes would require evidence about how practitioners interpret the

expressions, whether they consider them legitimate, and whether their attitudes toward the ritual have changed over time.

The relationship between Islamic invocations and inherited expressions also indicates selective continuity. The use of *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* at several stages of the sailing ritual occurs alongside inherited expressions, bodily gestures, and, in some reported circumstances, offerings. Their coexistence is an observable feature of the ritual practice. However, it would be premature to classify this coexistence automatically as syncretism or to assume that Islamic invocations have replaced the meanings associated with inherited mantras. The findings presented here do not sufficiently establish how all participants understand the relationship between these different ritual elements.

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that ritual transformation in Matangnga Village is uneven and takes different forms. Some fishermen adjust their routine practices by adopting technology, while others continue to rely on inherited mantras and customary guidance. Ritual expressions may also vary across practitioners without necessarily losing their perceived sacred significance. The findings therefore support an interpretation of selective continuity and practical reorientation. They do not establish a uniform process of "desacralization", understood as a decline in the perceived sacredness, legitimacy, or efficacy of the mantras, or of "resacralization", understood as a renewed or strengthened attribution of sacred significance. Both concepts remain relevant to the analysis, but their application must depend on evidence of changes in how practitioners themselves understand and evaluate the ritual.

## E. Discussion

The findings show that Bajo sailing mantras in Matangnga Village combine Islamic invocations, inherited expressions, and ritual gestures across six stages of the fishing journey. These practices are embedded in fishermen's concerns about safety, livelihood, and their relationships with the sea. Geertz's view of religion as a cultural system offers a useful perspective for examining how ritual practices acquire meaning within specific social and cultural settings.[25] In this case, many fishermen continue to regard inherited mantras as sacred because they interpret certain experiences as evidence of their efficacy. The significance of these practices therefore extends beyond reciting particular words; it is also connected to how fishermen understand uncertainty and engage with the maritime environment. Nevertheless, these meanings should not be assumed to be uniform across the community. Some younger fishermen, particularly those with more formal education, reportedly rely more on modern navigation equipment, including GPS and Garmin devices. In contrast, some fishermen continue to seek guidance from customary elders when they encounter difficulties at sea. These patterns suggest that changes in practical fishing methods do not necessarily correspond to the disappearance of inherited spiritual beliefs.

The coexistence of Islamic invocations and inherited expressions also requires caution when interpreting the ritual as religious syncretism. The recitation of *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* at several stages of the sailing

[25] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 19.

journey occurs alongside inherited expressions and gestures, particularly when fishermen set hooks or insert bait. This coexistence demonstrates that different religious and cultural vocabularies remain present within the same ritual sequence. However, it does not establish that all participants understand these elements as harmonious, compatible, or equivalent. Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition directs attention to how religious practices are interpreted and evaluated in relation to particular understandings of Islamic teaching.[26] From this perspective, the presence of Islamic prayers alongside inherited expressions raises questions about religious legitimacy: who is recognized as having the authority to determine whether these practices are acceptable within Islam, and how are such judgments formed?

The available findings provide only a partial answer to these questions. Customary elders remain sources of ritual knowledge and guidance for some fishermen, particularly when difficulties arise at sea. Their continuing role indicates the significance of customary expertise in the community, but it does not, by itself, establish that they possess the authority to determine the ritual's Islamic legitimacy. Similarly, the presence of Islamic invocations does not demonstrate that religious leaders have displaced customary authority or that fishermen have adopted a single interpretation of the ritual. The available interview summaries do not document sufficiently specific exchanges in which customary leaders, religious leaders, senior fishermen, and younger fishermen articulate competing positions on the legitimacy of particular mantra expressions.

[26] Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 1986), 101.

Consequently, the findings cannot establish whose interpretation prevails or how competing claims are negotiated in specific situations. Asad's framework is therefore useful for identifying religious legitimacy as a central analytical problem. Still, the empirical evidence does not yet permit a detailed account of how authority over the ritual is distributed or contested among particular actors.

The relationship between modernization and ritual practice further complicates explanations that assume a linear movement from inherited practices toward their abandonment. Some younger fishermen reportedly rely less on mantras during routine fishing activities while using modern navigation equipment. Yet some fishermen who use such equipment still consult customary elders when they become lost or encounter storms at sea. These practices suggest that technological adoption and reliance on inherited knowledge can coexist, although their functions and perceived importance may differ among practitioners. Bell's theory of ritualization helps illuminate how ritual performance and significance can be examined in relation to changing circumstances.[27] Applied to the present findings, this perspective directs attention to the contexts in which mantras are recited, the stages at which particular expressions occur, and the circumstances in which fishermen continue to seek customary guidance. However, the continued performance of a ritual does not necessarily mean that its sacred meaning remains unchanged. Likewise, a reduction in the frequency of recitation does not, by itself, demonstrate that a practice has lost its sacred status.

[27] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54.

Establishing such changes requires evidence of how practitioners themselves understand and evaluate the ritual.

Variation in mantra wording provides another example of why changes in ritual performance must be distinguished from changes in sacred meaning. The field material indicates that fishermen may learn mantras from different teachers and use different terms or names for sea spirits. This variation suggests that ritual knowledge is transmitted through multiple sources rather than through a completely standardized formulation. Nevertheless, differences in wording do not, on their own, demonstrate that the ritual has become less sacred, nor do they establish that its meaning has changed in a particular direction. To determine whether these variations reflect a transformation in sacred meaning, it would be necessary to examine how practitioners explain the expressions, whether they regard particular formulations as legitimate, and whether their interpretations have changed over time. Without such evidence, variation is better understood as a feature of ritual transmission than as direct proof of "desacralization" or "resacralization".

The relationship between ecological uncertainty and ritual transformation also requires a qualified interpretation. The field material identifies storms and becoming lost at sea as circumstances in which some fishermen may seek guidance from customary elders. These experiences provide an important context for understanding the continuing relevance of inherited ritual knowledge. They indicate that customary guidance may remain meaningful when fishermen encounter situations that they perceive as difficult or uncertain. However, the available evidence does not sufficiently demonstrate that declining catches or overfishing directly caused changes in mantra wording,

ritual participation, or perceptions of sacredness. Ecological uncertainty should therefore be treated as part of the context in which the ritual is practiced rather than as an established direct cause of its transformation.

Taken together, the findings indicate that ritual transformation in Matangnga Village is characterized by selective continuity and practical reorientation. Inherited mantras continue to be used and regarded as sacred by many community members, while some fishermen adjust their routine practices by using modern navigation equipment. Islamic invocations coexist with inherited expressions, and variations in wording occur through different forms of ritual transmission. These patterns do not support a straightforward interpretation in which modernization or "Islamization" necessarily leads to the disappearance of inherited spiritual practices. At the same time, the persistence of ritual performance does not prove that its sacred meanings have remained unchanged.

This distinction matters when assessing "desacralization" and "resacralization". In this study, "desacralization" refers to a demonstrable reduction in the sacred significance attributed to a mantra, such as when practitioners increasingly regard it as ineffective, illegitimate, or unnecessary. "Resacralization" refers to a renewed or strengthened attribution of sacred significance. These processes cannot be established solely by observing whether a mantra continues to be performed, whether its wording changes, or whether modern technology is adopted. The available findings demonstrate the continued significance of inherited mantras for many practitioners and identify changes in some aspects of ritual practice. They do not, however, establish a uniform process of "desacralization" or "resacralization" across the community.

This study contributes in distinguishing observable changes in ritual practice from changes in perceived sacred status. Geertz's perspective helps explain the cultural significance of the mantras; Bell's approach highlights their performance and reconfiguration; and Asad's framework raises questions about interpreting religious legitimacy. Together, these perspectives show why ritual transformation must be examined through both the practices that fishermen perform and the meanings they attribute to those practices. However, the distribution and negotiation of religious authority remain incompletely documented in the present field material. Further research involving more detailed accounts of disagreements and interpretations among customary leaders, religious leaders, and fishermen would be necessary to establish how competing claims to religious legitimacy are articulated and negotiated in practice.

## F. Conclusion

This study examined the functions of ritual language in Bajo sailing practices, the forms of ritual transformation supported by field evidence, and whether these changes indicate "desacralization" or "resacralization". The findings show that ritual language accompanies the fishing journey through six stages: recitation at home, leaving home, boarding the boat, arriving at the fishing spot, setting hooks or inserting bait, and returning home. Islamic invocations, particularly *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, appear at several stages, while inherited Bajo expressions and ritual gestures remain part of specific activities. Together, these practices allow fishermen to request safety and livelihood, acknowledge spiritual relationships associated with the sea, and express gratitude. However, the meanings attributed to

particular expressions are not necessarily uniform among practitioners.

The changes supported by the interviews and field observations are selective rather than uniform. Some younger fishermen, particularly those with more formal education, reportedly rely less on mantras during routine fishing activities and use modern navigation equipment such as GPS and Garmin devices. Nevertheless, some fishermen who use modern equipment still seek guidance from customary elders when they encounter difficulties at sea. The findings also indicate variation in mantra wording, reflecting differences in transmission and the terms used to refer to sea spirits. Meanwhile, many residents continue to regard the mantras as sacred. These patterns demonstrate changes in ritual performance, transmission, and practical reliance. Still, they do not establish that inherited practices have been abandoned or that their meanings have changed in a single direction.

The evidence does not establish "desacralization" or "resacralization" as systematic processes across the six stages of the sailing ritual. Reduced reliance on mantras does not, by itself, demonstrate that fishermen regard them as less sacred, ineffective, or illegitimate. Similarly, continued recitation does not prove that their sacred meanings have remained unchanged, while the coexistence of Islamic invocations and inherited expressions does not automatically establish religious syncretism. The findings are therefore best characterized as evidence of uneven ritual transformation, with continued sacred significance for many practitioners and changes in some aspects of ritual practice. Establishing "desacralization" or "resacralization" would require more direct evidence of how participants evaluate the legitimacy, efficacy, and sacred status of particular

expressions over time. The study also identifies the continuing relevance of customary elders. Still, the available evidence is insufficient to determine systematically how religious authority over the ritual is negotiated among customary leaders, religious leaders, and different generations of fishermen.

This study contributes to the analysis of religious change by distinguishing observable transformations in ritual practice from changes in perceived sacred status. Its interpretation draws on Geertz's cultural approach to religion, Bell's analysis of ritualization, and Asad's understanding of Islam as a discursive tradition. Together, these perspectives help explain why the persistence, modification, or reduced use of a ritual cannot be treated as conclusive evidence of either the preservation or the loss of sacred meaning. However, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The research focuses on one Bajo community in Matangnga Village, Gorontalo, and uses a small purposive sample of ten informants. Its findings cannot therefore be generalized to all Bajo communities. Interpreting interviews conducted in Indonesian, Gorontalo, and Bajo also risks of translation-related ambiguity. In addition, the cross-sectional design captures practices and interpretations at a particular point in time rather than documenting their development over time. Further comparative and longitudinal research could investigate how ritual knowledge is transmitted across generations, how competing interpretations of religious legitimacy are articulated, and whether changes in maritime conditions are associated with demonstrable changes in ritual performance and sacred meaning.

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