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Women as Ecological Leaders: Ecofeminism in the Context of Karampuang Indigenous Community

[1,3]Muammar, [2*]Muallim, [3]Kurnia, [4]Ismail Suardi Wekke
[1]Kantor Urusan Agama Bontocani Kementerian Agama Kab. Bone, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
[3]Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
[4]Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
*e-mail: muallim@unm.ac.id

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Abstract

Women are often the victims of the destruction of nature caused by the exploitation of nature. The similarity of oppression between women and nature brings the same spirit to the ecological struggle. This study looks at the relationship between the values of local wisdom of the Karampuang indigenous people and ecofeminism principles. This article is a literature study using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were obtained by reviewing relevant literature such as journals, books, and scientific works. This study's results show a connection between the values of Karampuang's local wisdom and the concept of cultural ecofeminism. First, three principles illustrate the similarity between Karampuang's local wisdom values and ecofeminism, namely, the principle of living simply and in harmony with nature (tuo kamase mase), the principle of humanizing the forest (mappatau ale'), and the principle of appreciating and respecting nature (mappakalebbi ale'). Secondly, conceptually, the symbols of ecofeminism are shown through the belief in Tomanurung and traditional houses with feminist characteristics. Third, the practice of women's struggle is found in the role of Sanro as a ritual leader. The struggle against government programs and official religious pressure eliminates their role as Karampuang women through traditional ceremonies that are maintained.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, Karampuang Indigenous People, Ecology, Indigenous Women.*

Abstrak

Perempuan seringkali menjadi korban dari penghancuran alam yang disebabkan oleh eksploitasi alam. Kesamaan penindasan antara perempuan dan alam membawa semangat yang sama dalam perjuangan ekologi. Penelitian ini melihat hubungan antara nilai-nilai kearifan lokal masyarakat adat Karampuang dan prinsip-prinsip ekofeminisme. Artikel ini merupakan studi literatur dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data diperoleh dengan meninjau literatur yang relevan seperti jurnal, buku, dan karya ilmiah. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya keterkaitan antara nilai-nilai kearifan lokal Karampuang dan konsep ekofeminisme budaya. Pertama, terdapat tiga prinsip yang menggambarkan kesamaan antara nilai-nilai kearifan lokal Karampuang dan ekofeminisme, yaitu prinsip hidup sederhana dan harmonis dengan alam (tuo kamase mase), prinsip memanusiakan hutan (mappatau ale'), dan prinsip menghargai serta menghormati alam (mappakalebbi ale'). Kedua, secara konseptual, simbol-simbol ekofeminisme terlihat melalui keyakinan terhadap Tomanurung dan rumah adat dengan ciri khas feminis. Ketiga, praktik perjuangan perempuan ditemukan dalam peran Sanro sebagai pemimpin ritual. Perjuangan melawan program pemerintah dan tekanan agama resmi

menghilangkan peran mereka sebagai perempuan Karampuang melalui upacara tradisional yang tetap dipertahankan.

***Kata Kunci**: Ekofeminisme, Masyarakat Adat Karampuang, Ekologi, Perempuan Adat.*

Introduction

Environmental degradation is not only a problem of resource depletion; it also raises questions about whose knowledge, labor, and authority count in decisions affecting land and forests. Ecofeminist scholarship examines connections between gendered hierarchies and the treatment of nature as an object of domination (Astuti, 2012; Shiva & Mies, 2005; Tong, 2010). However, describing women solely as victims or as inherently closer to nature risks obscuring their varied political and institutional roles. MacGregor (2010) calls for analyses that move beyond women's vulnerability to examine gendered discourses and agency. In this article, women's ecological leadership refers to their capacity to shape environmental values, participate meaningfully in collective decisions, transmit ecological knowledge, and influence rules governing access to and use of natural resources. This working definition distinguishes symbolic recognition from demonstrable decision making authority and practical effects on environmental governance.

Indigenous communities frequently connect environmental governance to customary obligations, cosmology, and social institutions. The Karampuang Indigenous Community of Sinjai, South Sulawesi, provides a relevant setting for examining these connections. Accounts of Karampuang describe a female Tomanurung in its foundational narratives (Muhannis, 2022; Yunus, 2020), architectural symbolism associated with the female body (Wasilah et al., 2019; Widiastuti & Nurhijrah, 2021), and the position of Sanro in the customary leadership structure (Umar, 2017). These representations are significant but are not, by themselves, evidence of ecological leadership. Stronger evidence requires attention to the authority exercised by women in deliberation and ritual and to the rules through which the community manages its forests. Awaliyah et al. (2020), for example, document customary forest zones, restrictions on harvesting, permissions for timber extraction, and obligations to plant replacement trees. Such findings make it possible to connect cultural values to identifiable governance mechanisms without presuming that every ritual has a demonstrable conservation effect.

Based on this flow, the facts of natural destruction victimize women and are also part of the ecological struggle. So, this study aims to analyze the relationship between ecofeminism and the local wisdom of the Karampuang indigenous people, both in terms of local knowledge and practice. The author will examine whether there are similarities between the local wisdom of the Karampuang Indigenous People and the ideas of ecofeminism. Also, what are

the concepts and practices of ecofeminism in the Karampuang indigenous community?

Method

This study employs a qualitative, document-based literature review focused on the Karampuang Indigenous Community in Sinjai, South Sulawesi. Its evidentiary corpus consists of the published books, peer-reviewed articles, theses, organizational materials, and publicly available historical accounts cited in this manuscript. Sources directly discussing Karampuang customary leadership, women's roles, rituals, forest management, and local knowledge form the primary analytical corpus; broader scholarship on ecofeminism, environmental ethics, and the Indigenous Religion Paradigm supplies conceptual context. The review is selective and interpretive rather than systematic: it does not claim exhaustive database coverage or a reproducible count of screened records.

For the revised analysis, source selection follows three substantive criteria: direct relevance to Karampuang or to the theoretical framework; identifiable authorship, publication context, or issuing institution; and sufficient descriptive detail to assess claims about gendered authority, customary rules, or environmental conduct. Materials about other communities are used only as comparisons, not as evidence of Karampuang practices. The cited works span earlier accounts and more recent publications, with relevant Karampuang focused studies primarily appearing between 2008 and 2023. Because no original interviews, field observations, or ecological measurements were conducted for this article, statements about customary practices are attributed to the authors of the underlying sources.

The analytical procedure comprises four stages. First, the selected documents are inventoried by publication type, setting, and subject. Second, passages relevant to the research questions are extracted into a thematic matrix with the fields: source, reported practice or representation, institution or actor involved, environmental relevance, and evidentiary limitation. Third, these passages are coded into five categories: (a) human nature ethics; (b) female cultural representation; (c) customary authority and deliberation; (d) rules and sanctions governing forest use; and (e) ritual and environmental practice. Finally, the categories are compared using ecofeminist arguments about domination and relational ethics (Merchant, 2012; Shiva & Mies, 2005) alongside the intersubjective approach of the Indigenous Religion Paradigm (Maarif, 2019).

The synthesis explicitly distinguishes a source's documented observations from the present article's conceptual interpretation. For example, an account of a female associated house is treated as evidence of

cultural symbolism, whereas a documented permission requirement for cutting trees is evidence of an environmental governance rule. Neither kind of evidence, on its own, establishes women's causal impact on forest conditions. This distinction is necessary because a literature review cannot independently verify customary enforcement, contemporary decision-making, or measured ecological outcomes.

Result and Discussion

Karampuang Local Wisdom and Ecofeminism

Karampuang is an old village in Sinjai Regency and has been incorporated as a Customary Law Community (Badan Registrasi Wilayah Adat, 2023). Karampuang comes from the Bugis or Konjo language Karampulue (standing hair), later known as Karampuang (Muhannis, 2022; Yunus, 2020). Karampuang is an indigenous community that also plays an essential role in environmental management, especially forests, with their local wisdom. According to Asmarani and Keraf, local wisdom includes all forms of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, insights, customs, or ethics that direct human behavior in their lives within the ecological community environment (Asmarani, 2014; Keraf, 2010). However, it is also essential to be careful in terming local wisdom, as it appears from some cases that the local wisdom of local communities often harms the environment. This includes mindsets, attitudinal habits, and actions based on traditions and values that have been culturized in the community. For example, the habit of rural Kalimantan communities in collecting leaves or branches for firewood or household use is to knock down or cut down the whole tree. They believe that their nature, the forest, is still vast and will never be used up by the next generation (Astuti, 2012). However, continuing this mindset will contradict nature conservation and environmental preservation efforts. Therefore, in addressing forms of "local wisdom," it is essential to adjust and adapt them to align with conservation and environmental preservation efforts. However, this must also respect and appreciate the methods applied by the local community.

Local wisdom as a concept has generally also become part of the practice of ecofeminism. Using the Indigenous Religion Paradigm approach with the concept of inter subjective (Maarif, 2019), in the view of ecofeminism, nature, and non-human beings are seen as subjects that have value and not as objects that can be exploited. Ecofeminism emphasizes the direct relationship between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women, so the liberation of both must be done simultaneously and should not ignore each other. Ecofeminism, also called ecological feminism, is a branch of feminism that examines the relationship between women and nature (Fuadah et al.,

2021). In this case, ecofeminism can be used as a struggle to restore respect for nature and women whose dominance has been deprived of patriarchal culture. Therefore, indigenous peoples' local wisdom and ecofeminism ideas show mutually supportive views on maintaining ecosystem balance, promoting sustainability, and respecting human relationships with nature. Some concepts of ecofeminism in the local wisdom of the Karampuang community are seen through several principles such as:

a. Principles of Simple Living and Harmony with Nature (*Tuo Kamase Mase*)

In maintaining and preserving forests, the Karampuang indigenous people also adhere to the principle of tuo kamase mase, which is interpreted as living simply and in harmony with nature (Awaliah et al., 2020; Buhari, 2015). Living in harmony with nature shows the principle of human equality with non-humans. The egalitarian understanding emphasized by the ecofeminism movement does not mean that humans and non human beings are precisely equal. The struggle is not "equal treatment" but "equality of consideration" (Suliantoro et al., 2011). In ecofeminism, the principle of harmony in the relationship between humans and nature implies that moral-based decision making does not only consider human interests but also the interests of non human parties. This concept of harmony is called partnership ethics(Merchant, 2012), which involves the equal treatment of humans, including male and female partners, in personal, domestic, and political relationships. In this ethic, humans are regarded as equal partners with non-human nature, not as entities that are controlled or dominant over.

b. Principle of Humanizing the Forest (*Mappatau ale'*)

Humans are biological, sociological, ecological, and theological beings. As ecological creatures, humans are aware that humanizing the forest comes from the awareness that they are an integral part of the forest itself (Syahriyah & Zahid, 2022). Meanwhile, as theological beings, humans depend on something beyond them, such as God or ancestors. In this context, the Karampuang Indigenous people make nature (its contents) a human (person) itself. Using the Indigenous Religion paradigm, this principle shows an equal position between humans and nature (forest) and all the creatures in it. Ecofeminism develops an interdependent relationship between humans and all elements of the cosmos without involving oppression as part of the relationship

c. The Principle of Respecting and Honoring Nature (*Mappakalebbi ale'*)

The relationship that unites humans with nature can be likened to an intimate emotional bond between a mother and her child (Shiva & Mies, 2005; Suliantoro et al., 2011). In the principles of the Karampuang indigenous community, respecting nature is an obligation because they are the creations of Puang Dewata Seuwae (God), who have the same thing to live and develop (Awaliah et al., 2020; Buhari, 2015). In other words, forests have the right to

be treated with respect, not only because human life depends on them but especially because humans are an integral part of the forest and a member of the ecological community.

Concept and Practice of Ecofeminism in Karampuang Indigenous Community

Tomanurung and Karampuang Traditional House

Most indigenous people in South Sulawesi are generally familiar with the concept of Tomanurung. Tomanurung is the name given to a person who suddenly appears from the sky or heaven. The arrival of Tomanurung is usually unknown, but his presence is highly anticipated because he is considered capable of improving a chaotic situation. Tomanurung is generally regarded as the kingdom's savior, unifier, and successor (Muhannis, 2022; Yunus, 2020). In contrast to Tomanurung, who is embodied as a man in Barambang Kingdom (Chandra, 2013; Nurlinda et al., 2019) and Banteang Kingdom (Sakka, 2016), Tomanurung is believed by Karampuang Indigenous People to be a woman. The Karampuang Indigenous People believe that once the earth was still filled with oceans except for a small hill similar to a coconut shell, Tomanurung then descended on a rock called "Batu Leppa," which became the place for ceremonies of the Karampuang indigenous people (Lismawati & Mustafa, 2021; Widiastuti & Nurhijrah, 2021).

The above concept can be seen as cultural ecofeminism, where in the pre-historic era, nature was symbolized by the figure of a pregnant woman; butterflies and women were glorified as carriers of life (Merchant, 2012). However, the emergence of patriarchal culture resulted in the overthrow of the role of female goddesses and their replacement with male deities considered to have dominance. In contrast, female deities had to submit to them. Likewise, in the Karampuang community, male dominance eventually overthrew the role of women in various places. However, there is also a position in the customary structure, namely Sanro, which women must hold.

Women's symbols are evident in the culture and civilization of Karampuang. In contrast to Bugis traditional houses in general, which emphasize masculinity, Karampuang traditional houses instead depict the beauty and elegance of women (Oktawati & Azizah, 2023). The appearance of this traditional house has a shape philosophy that symbolizes a woman's body. Some of them, such as the position of the door, which is located in the middle of the bottom of the house (not the side, front, or back) and has a door that looks like a stone, the position of this door symbolizes the intimate organs of a woman (Maharika, 2018). In addition, the placement of the two kitchens is parallel to the position of the door, which is symbolized a woman's breasts as a source of human life and its inhabitants as the kitchen is the source of life in

the house. Other symbols, such as the Ornament located at the peak of the roof of the house, with crossed wood and its ends facing upwards, symbolize the skewer that symbolizes the female Goddess in Karampuang (Maharika, 2018; Suherman, 2018).

The female associated symbols embedded in the Karampuang traditional house reflect the significant position of women within the community's cultural identity and customary traditions. The preservation of these architectural symbols, along with the continued recognition of the traditional house as a sacred cultural heritage, demonstrates the enduring importance of women in Karampuang's cultural representations and collective memory (Maharika, 2018; Nurdin, 2020; Wasilah et al., 2019; Widiastuti & Nurhijrah, 2021). However, the persistence of these symbols should not be interpreted as direct evidence of women's resistance to patriarchal domination. Rather, such resistance can be more meaningfully understood through women's active involvement in maintaining, negotiating, and defending their customary roles and authority. In this context, the recognized position of Sanro as a female ritual leader, alongside the changing distribution of religious and customary responsibilities, provides a stronger basis for understanding how Karampuang women negotiate and maintain their roles within evolving social and religious structures (Muhannis, 2022; Umar, 2017). From an ecofeminist perspective, these dynamics demonstrate the importance of examining the relationship between women's symbolic recognition, customary authority, and participation in community life, particularly in understanding how cultural traditions may contribute to challenging patriarchal forms of domination.

Women's Struggle in Environmental Conservation

Sanro and Her Position

Women are privileged in the Karampuang indigenous community (Muhannis, 2022; Yunus, 2020). This position of women continues to be honored, as seen in their customary structure. Their customary structure is known as Ade Eppa (four customary leaders), namely: Arung or To Matoa (supreme leader), Gella (executor of tasks in the community), Sanro (tasks: ritual, social, health, and community welfare) and GuruGuru (tasks: culture, education, and religion). The four are nicknamed Eppa alliri teteppo'na wanuae (four pillars supporting the integrity of the village) (Umar, 2017). Sanro and GuruGuru, one of which must be a woman. In various traditional events, the Sanro plays a central role as a spiritual liaison. In the release of the People's Child Advocacy and Education Institute (LAPAR) South Sulawesi, Sanro Karampuang, Puang Jenne revealed that "Tencaji Gaue ko de gaga seddanna Makkurai nasaba niga elo annasu ko de'gaga Makkunrai" meaning: It will not be an event if there is no female voice, because who will cook if it is not a woman. The meaning of Puang Jenne's expression, cooking, is not only in

the sense of serving food. Instead, all traditional rituals, such as experienced foodstuffs, are for women.

Often in the world religious paradigm, the position of women is considered to only occupy the domestic space (kitchen), even though the Karampuang women themselves feel very elevated by their vital role in the domestic space. Moreover, in the customary rules, this domestic space is further confirmed as decisive by the existence of a separate event called "Mabbali Sumange," which is an event for making cakes and food but is a series of traditional rituals (Desantara Foundation, 2008). These findings show that indigenous peoples have customary knowledge that they are entitled to preserve. The Western feminist stigma that third-world women are powerless has been debunked. Karampuang women still occupy domestic space, which feminists consider a form of oppression. However, domestic space for Karampuang women is a dedicated space. Women's voices determine all traditional rituals because they are the source of Karampuang's life. The symbol of Karampuang women's greatness can be seen in the traditional rituals led by Sanro, who represents the position of women.

In the Karampuang indigenous community, women are highly respected and considered valuable, as seen in Karampuang traditional events led by a woman (Maharika, 2018). Women's voices are decisive when conducting traditional deliberations because they are traditional rituals' central holders or determinants. Women are the highest decision-makers in the customary deliberation, called Mabbahang (Muhannis, 2022). In forest management, for example, women have the right to speak and be heard, and the division of customary land according to matrilineal, a community custom that regulates the flow of descent from the mother's side. Therefore, the role of women in the life of indigenous peoples cannot be underestimated. Women have a strategic role as agents in preserving the natural forest as a source of life for indigenous peoples. Sanro is a person who plays a very dominant role in the Karampuang traditional ritual.

The struggle of the Karampuang community is no longer related to corporations that want to exploit the land, as in some indigenous women's resistance such as in Papua (Astuti, 2012; Dasopang & Lubis, 2021), and Rembang (Raharjo, 2022), but rather a struggle to defend their culture from government empowerment programs and pressure from official religion. On the one hand, empowerment projects carried out by the government can provide benefits to local communities in the area. However, excessive intervention can eliminate the distinctiveness and local knowledge the local community has owned. In an interview with Nasrullah, Sanro Puang Jenne stated that women in Karampuang have a unique understanding of their roles. According to him, the role women play in Karampuang is precious, even

though it is mainly related to kitchen matters because it is related to the spiritual dimension and customary rituals (Nasrullah, 2016).

The position of Karampuang Indigenous Peoples is also under pressure from the official religion. In the past, spiritual responsibilities were handled by Sanro in the Karampuang tradition (Ridwan et al., 2022). However, with the arrival of Islam, the Sanro's spiritual role was divided, with some of his responsibilities handed over to a man, the Guru (Muhannis, 2022; Suherman, 2018). The Guru, as one of the customary leaders, has the additional task of being a religious leader. Guru's duties are limited to those related to Islamic rituals and also involve Sanro. Meanwhile, ancestral rituals prior to Islam were the responsibility of the Sanro, and the Guru was his follower. So Karampuang women remain the key to Karampuang life by resisting domination over them. The struggle faced by Karampuang women is to maintain their position in order to remain equal to men.

Indigenous Peoples' Ecofeminism Practices in Safeguarding the Environment

Indigenous Ecofeminism in Protecting the Environment is seen through their relationship with nature through inter subjective (ethics, responsibility, and reciprocity) (Maarif, 2019). The ethics of the Karampuang indigenous people in environmental management can be seen in their attitudes, behavior, and morals. The ethics of the Karampuang indigenous people are expressed through a taboo or prohibition in environmental management. The Karampuang indigenous people believe every corner of the environment has a waitperson. Therefore, it needs to be preserved. The Karampuang indigenous people apply sustainable environmental management to ensure their lives always align with nature. Mutual respect is not only for fellow humans, but the environment must also be preserved.

The role of women, in this case, is Sanro, who regulates the welfare of the people. In various traditional events, it is she who is the spiritual link. Even in the Manre Ase Baru event (a formal event after the rice harvest, the term is "eating new rice"), the first to come down from the traditional house and set foot on the ground is this Sanro. While preparing the food, the saner and his assistants perform the Mattuli ritual to give blessings and welcome the presence of the rice harvested by the farmers. Three bundles of rice representing the types of rice planted, such as white, red, and black rice, are placed on the kappara makkiaje (this ceremony is accompanied by genrang sanro), jong-jong (jojo), and other sounds. In this section, the mappadekko, or mortar-pounding event, also enlivens the event. The tradition of the mappogau hanua ceremony is to worship the ancestors because they have been given fertile land so that the rice crop is fertile. The preservation of traditional rituals

in Karampuang may contribute to environmental protection by reinforcing ecological values, collective responsibilities, and customary obligations. However, the continuity of these cultural practices does not necessarily demonstrate measurable success in environmental conservation.

The maintenance and sustainability of nature for the next life can be found in the Malling tradition or abstinence, which starts three days after the mabbali sumange event, where the abstinence for Karampuang people is 1) temmappacera (prohibited from cutting livestock), 2) temmaraungkaju (prohibited from making vegetables), 3) mapparumpu or prohibited from burning leaves around the house (Muhannis, 2022; Suherman, 2018; Umar, 2017). These taboos are intended to ensure sustainability for the next life. Nature preservation is one of the values of ecofeminism (Asmarani, 2014). To carry out the tradition of the mappogau manual ceremony, the Karampuang indigenous people remain friendly with the surrounding nature; if the entire customary area still needs to be cleared of dirt, the series of events cannot be carried out. The materials used come from the forest, and before using them, they are first asked to the Dewata ri toil, or the ruler of the forest.

The relationship between ritual preservation and environmental protection can be further understood through the customary rules governing natural resource management in the Karampuang indigenous community. Previous studies have documented the community's local wisdom in regulating forest utilization and maintaining ecological balance through customary norms and restrictions (Awaliah et al., 2020; Buhari, 2015). These customary arrangements provide a more concrete basis for understanding environmental protection than ritual continuity alone. In this context, traditional practices such as Mappogau Hanua and Malling may contribute to environmental stewardship by reinforcing collective responsibility, respect for nature, and compliance with customary regulations. Nevertheless, the preservation of cultural traditions should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of ecological conservation success, since the available literature does not provide sufficient empirical measurements of environmental outcomes. Therefore, the relationship between ritual practices and environmental protection is better understood through their potential contribution to maintaining ecological values, regulating resource utilization, and supporting community-based environmental management. The involvement of Karampuang women in maintaining traditional rituals, upholding customary values, and supporting environmental responsibilities reflects elements of cultural ecofeminism. These practices illustrate how women's cultural and spiritual roles may contribute to community-based environmental stewardship, although their direct ecological outcomes require further empirical investigation.

Conclusion

On the one hand, empowerment projects implemented by the government can benefit local communities in Karampuang. However, more intervention can be needed to ensure local knowledge and distinctiveness that the local community has had. Indigenous communities have customary knowledge that they have the right to preserve. The Western feminist stigma that third-world women are powerless can be disproved. Karampuang women still occupy the domestic space, which feminists consider a form of oppression. However, domestic space for Karampuang women is a dedicated space. Karampuang women understand their role, especially their involvement in traditional rituals. Women are central in carrying out traditional rituals because they are considered the source of life in the Karampuang community. The areas for improvement of this research are in the data collection, where field observations should be made to find more accurate and original data rather than just analyzing previous research literature. Further research is expected to examine other specific issues in the Karampuang community regarding forest management, agriculture, and official religious pressure that researchers have yet to study explicitly.

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