

THE AMMATOAN WOMEN'S AGENCY THROUGH EARTH-SPIRITUALITY RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous women's environmental knowledge often operates outside formal governance structures, raising questions about alternative forms of ecological stewardship. This ethnographic study examines how the Ammatoan women in Kajang, South Sulawesi, exercise environmental authority through the Andingingi ritual despite political marginalization. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing ethnographic data collected during the preparation and conduct of the Andingingi ritual. The data were collected at the research site through ethnographic fieldwork conducted between December 2024 and February 2025. This research analyzed women's spiritual practices as environmental governance mechanisms. Women assume central authority as ritual coordinators who manage environmental protection through spiritual mediation with ancestral, natural, and Tu Riek Akrakna entities. Their roles demonstrate environmental governance through "cooling the earth" practices that prevent ecological disasters while maintaining cultural continuity. These spiritual authorities operate independently from formal political exclusion, creating parallel systems of environmental management. The study reveals how indigenous women's ritual practices constitute environmental governance systems that transcend conventional formal-informal power distinctions, contributing to scholarship on indigenous feminism and environmental stewardship.

Keywords: *Indigenous feminism, Andingingi ritual, Spiritual practice, Women's agency*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change significantly affects various aspects of human life, with indigenous communities worldwide experiencing dire consequences without exception. It causes an increase in the frequency and severe extreme weather phenomena, including prolonged droughts, devastating floods, powerful storms, and dangerous excessive heat (Leal Filho et al., 2021). In the context of climate change, indigenous environmental governance, the role of

indigenous women as environmental guardians has received scholarly attention. However, the depiction of indigenous knowledge that refers to nature and women through the concept of Mother Earth has been criticized by ecofeminists (Van Wyk, 2022). Ecofeminism is a theoretical movement of resistance to the belief and dominance experienced by both nature and women (Das & Hossain, 2023). This perspective argues that environmental oppression is a universal responsibility that should not be limited by gender

considerations, due to climate change impacts everyone on the earth. Furthermore, ecofeminism argues that romanticized depictions of Mother Earth can reinforce patriarchal objectification and enable continued environmental exploitation through structural activities that cause ecological damage (Daniel, 2021).

Despite the criticisms above, many indigenous communities have been maintaining and implementing earth-center spiritual practice as well as their environmental governance. These practices demonstrate Mother Earth as embodied ideology of knowledge rooted in their lives, identity, and behavior (Van Wyk, 2022). Nevertheless, the separation of women and nature, Joyce Green shows that segregation is beyond patriarchy perspective. It is influenced by colonial power structure specially on politics which transform the knowledge (Dhillon, 2020; Green, 2007). In addition, the condition of indigenous community, women's voices are often marginalized in decision making and male domination political structure. However, indigenous women realize their position in society. They actively exercise their agency instead of silence. This is reflected in the structure within the Ammatoan community and women agency. While the concept of Mother Earth is highly respected, practiced, and represented through rituals, political structures influenced by a long history of kingdoms, colonial eras, and modern eras (DI/TII) reinforce male domination in formal structures (Takbir, 2022). Therefore, the Ammatoan political formal-structural system today has never changed and remains static (Malliongi et al., 2023).

In literature, it highlights women's roles in the Ammatoan community in the midst of static political structure that contradict each other. Several scholars have pointed the presence of Anrongta as adat advisors who accompany the Ammatoa as an indicator of gender equality and representation of women in

community (Kaltsum, 2022; Nurjayanti, 2023). In contrast Bakri (2024) critically argue that Anrongta has yet represented the complex issue of women of women in society, that related to children and women such as sexual or domestic violence, and early marriage (J. Bakri, 2025). Anrongta's presence in ritual and Ammatoa election demonstrate their presence as representative of collectivity in whole not only Ammatoan women. The role of women in the *Andingingi* ritual has also been studied by (Nurfadillah et al., 2023) who showed that this role is the result of social activity which has continuously carried out. They emphasize that women get respect from men. The challenge in this research is the emergence of objectification in viewing the role of women as supporting objects or functional objects in society, which can make it possible that women's role is second class in society. Moreover, this gap indicates the need for critical analysis that can distinguish between formal and substantive representations, and question whether the narrative of "respect for women" in the traditional context actually legitimizes gender subordination. By critically analyzing how the *Andingingi* ritual can maintain a more intricate the role while creating equality in gender, this study is focused on bridging this gap by integrating the meaning of mother earth as a religious agency with each woman's role in the ritual.

Based on the statement above, the tension between spiritual centrality and political marginalization reveals a critical gap in understanding women's environmental agency. While formal political structure may exclude women from office environmental governance, their roles in ritual, traditional healer, and community practices suggest alternative alleyway to environmental influence and empowerment. The *Andingingi*, a ritual thanksgiving to the earth and prayers of safety for one year ahead, offers an interesting performance examining how women's spiritual practice can shape

environmental forms challenge formal political boundaries. This study aims, first, to understand how women strengthen their domestic roles in rituals to demonstrate the concept of Mother Earth in the *Andingingi* ritual amidst their exclusion or male elitism from formal political structures in the environmental sustainability counter. Second, to investigate how these roles contribute to women's empowerment through the connection of earth and spirituality within the social structure.

Literature Review

Indigenous Feminism

Indigenous feminism offers a more holistic approach to understanding women's relationship through nature. Indigenous feminism focuses on strengthen women's political status within in context of their communities by evaluating their agency without leaving collective identity (Castillo, 2010b; Green, 2007). Relationality that characterizes women and nature is frequently considered as inauthentic, perpetuates, oppression, and unable to free women from patriarchy and colonialism (Snyder, 2015). Yet, Women are not silenced by this situation. They actively embody the strength and represent the complexity of women as agency facing patriarchy hegemony and exploitation. In the midst of decolonization process, indigenous women negotiate their movements to establish harmonic balance in gender relations, community, and the state (Moura-Kocoglu, 2017).

Responding the statement above, Joyce Green demonstrates that indigenous women's movement cannot be separated from their collective responsibility to their communities and the environment. She observed that political structures often marginalize women's voice in decision making. Due to this situation, indigenous women have led them to engage their right to 'self-determination' through grassroots movements, adapting to the needs of their

context and their own belief (Green, 2011). Indigenous feminism emphasizes the importance of maintaining a spiritual and traditional connection to nature as an integral part of indigenous women's identity and agency through placed-based relationships.

In a practical context indigenous feminism provides a more relevant theoretical framework for understanding the role of the Ammatoan women in safeguarding their land. Separating women and nature instead, the concept of Mother Earth is independently practices in Ammatoan daily life. Therefore, indigenous feminism understands them as manifestations of women's collective agency rooted in traditional values and communal rights. This approach does not separate women's struggles from the struggles of indigenous communities as a whole to maintain sovereignty over their territories and resources.

Religious Agency and Environmental Governance

The conceptualization of agency within religious frameworks has evolved beyond traditional binary oppositions between individual autonomy and structural constraints. Rather than viewing agency solely as resistance to dominance or hegemonic forces, (Sarkar, 2021) proposes a more nuanced understanding of "agency within structure," where meaningful action emerges through negotiation with, rather than rejection of, existing power arrangements. This perspective challenges feminist scholarship that positions agency primarily as liberation from patriarchal systems, particularly as critiqued by (Avishai, 2008) who warns against the instrumentalization of religious practices for non-spiritual agendas that may inadvertently reinforce gender hierarchies. Postcolonial feminist scholars like (Mohanty, 2002) further complicate these discussions by questioning the universality of Western feminist agency concepts, arguing for recognition of diverse forms of

empowerment that may not align with radical liberation narratives but remain meaningful within specific cultural contexts.

Indigenous women's contributions to environmental governance extend far beyond conventional domestic roles, encompassing complex responsibilities as community architects, cultural preservers, and environmental stewards. While dominant social constructions typically confine women to household management and maternal duties (Fauziah et al., 2022; Nickel, 2017) indigenous contexts reveal women functioning as creators of communal structures, caregivers in broader ecological sense, and central figures in empowerment processes. Research from Canada and Australia demonstrates that indigenous women's environmental responsibilities become pivotal in community negotiations for land protection, where their roles intersect cultural sustainability, institutional frameworks, and political advocacy (O'Faircheallaigh, 2013). However, Nickel (2017) acknowledges that these comprehensive role understandings cannot be universally applied due to distinct community-specific challenges and contexts.

Despite their crucial roles in natural resource sustainability, indigenous women face systematic exclusion from formal environmental governance structures, with state institutions frequently overlooking their contributions to community resilience (Masoga & Shokane, 2019). This marginalization manifests through government policies that prioritize private sector expansion over indigenous land rights (Zaiful et al., 2020), resulting in environmental conflicts that disproportionately impact women through gender-based violence—with Komnas Perempuan documenting 2,291 such cases between 2004-2020 (Elsa, 2023). While indigenous women demonstrate agency through educational advocacy to challenge these conditions (Shield, 2009) and

maintain traditional economic systems including collective resource harvesting, fishing, and trading (Castillo, 2010a; Kuokkanen, 2011) state-driven separation from natural environments increasingly pushes them toward the margins of both familial and social structures (Becker, 1993).

The Ammatoan Woman's Agency in Environmental Protection

An Ammatoan community conceptualizes earth through the lens of "Mother Earth". This concept as a living philosophy frames the relationship between human and land as analogous a child and a mother — one defined by care, respect, and reciprocal obligation (Z. Bakri, 2024). It extends into everyday lives of Ammatoan women, whose commit to their own survival, their families' well-being, ritual practice, and traditional healing system. Therefore, this paradigm grounding positions of women does not merely as passive recipients of nature's resources like shown in political structure that women excluded, but as active guardians of the earth whose daily practices embody to the environmental protection rooted in indigenous knowledge.

In context of the agency, Ammatoan women's roles are closely tied to domestic responsibilities, yet these roles extend far beyond household management into environmental stewardship. Several studies have documented various dimensions of women's agency within the community, including their role in providing ritual offerings in ceremonial practices (Nurfadillah et al., 2023), their engagement in weaving *tope lekleng* using natural materials sourced from the land (Juniati et al., 2022), dan and their function as keepers of local knowledge practiced in everyday life as traditional healers (Sukarsih et al., 2023). These practices collectively demonstrate that Ammatoan women's agency is inseparable from their relationship with the natural environment

— the land provides the materials, the knowledge, and the spiritual foundation that sustain their roles within the community.

Based on the statement above, the studies tend to examine the roles without examining the relational intersections between these practices, their roles, and their substantive contributions to ecological sustainability. This study therefore argues that Ammatoan women's agency—expressed through ritual authority, traditional healing, and land-based knowledge—constitutes an indigenous system of environmental protection.

Conceptual Framework

This research uses indigenous feminism as the primary framework for understanding Ammatoa women's position in environmental governance through spiritual practices. Indigenous feminism positions women as the agents of inseparable from their collective identity, traditions, and spiritual connection to nature—not simply as individuals resisting patriarchy (Castillo, 2010b; Green, 2007). Within this framework, the concept of Mother Earth is not merely a metaphor, but an ideology embedded in Ammatoa women's daily practices, including the *Andingingi* ritual, a concrete manifestation of spiritually-based environmental management. Therefore, understanding women's agency cannot be measured solely through participation in formal political structures, but rather through their active roles in interconnected ritual, domestic, and ecological spaces.

This framework is also reinforced by the concept of religious agency developed in a postcolonial context, where agency is understood as "meaningful action within structure," not merely resistance to domination (Mahmood, 2005; Sarkar, 2021). In the context of Ammatoa society, women negotiate with patriarchal customary structures, not by rejecting them, but by negotiating their sphere of

influence through ritual authority as spiritual mediators between the community, ancestors, nature, and Tu Riek Akrakna. This approach allows research to see how Ammatoa women construct parallel environmental governance systems that operate outside—but not independently of—formal political structures, thereby broadening the understanding of indigenous environmental governance beyond the formal-informal dichotomy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative description, utilizing ethnographic data collected during the preparation and conduct of the *Andingingi* ritual. We stayed with the Ammatoan Community for three months, from December 2024 to February in 2025. To get the holistic data and deep experiences, we actively participated in all preparatory activities for the *Andingingi* ritual while engaging in domestic tasks alongside community members. We systematically observed the behaviors and interactions of Ammatoa community members throughout the entire ritual process. Our data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews within semi-structured interviews while participating in these activities, speaking with individuals such as Ramlah and several other women who were present during the ceremony. Meanwhile, we conducted structured interviews with the Ammatoa (Adat leader) and other *adat* authorities. This paper offered a focus on the relationality of spirituality and women's relationship with nature in only one ritual that became a limitation of this paper then my thesis. The data was analyzed using an Indigenous feminist framework that observed the unique intersection of gender, culture, and environmental consciousness in indigenous communities.

DISCUSSION

Andingingi, an annual harvest thanksgiving ritual, reflects the community's deep relationality to the land. The term of *Andingingi* derives from Konjo “*dinging*” meaning cold which refers to the ritual's purpose of cooling the earth (Agus & Mustafa, 2020; Arumningtyas et al., 2023). This cooling concept represents both the restoration of land and a spiritual. Through *Andingingi*, the community not only expresses thanksgiving for the harvest but also seeks to restore the balance and fertility of the earth for the coming year. The farmers, represented by women, brought their agricultural produce and sea or river produce in the form of side dishes prepared at home. They brought included *songkolo* (a dish made from black or white sticky rice), rice, shrimp, fish, and palm wine (*ballok*). These agricultural and marine products constitute their daily sustenance. In their understanding, this food serves as a concrete manifestation of gratitude to Tu *Riek Akrakna* for the abundance of earth's gift.

In addition, this ritual serves as a prayer for safety and protection from disaster. The Ammatoa, *adat* chief, described that the earth is currently in a “heat” condition. This condition causes droughts, natural disasters, declining sea catches, and crop failures. Ramlah, an Ammatoa's daughter, added “heat” specifies what we know as climate change which has become a global issue. This phenomenon certainly involves human activity. In consequence of this, the Ammatoan community performs *Andingingi* ritual as an earth cooling ceremony to avoid the harmful “heat” of the earth that can damage both human, non-human beings, and nature. This represents a reciprocal relationship—actions that show how connections are maintained through rituals and practices that care for the earth in relations.

While the *Andingingi* ritual ultimately took place in Borong Karassa (sacred forest), the ceremonial process

begins days earlier within domestic spaces where extensive preparations unfold. Through participant observation, we documented the household preparations that preceded the ritual in Ammatoa's house, revealing how domestic spaces function as gendered sites of ritual organization. The two-day preparation phase demonstrates women's central authority in ritual logistics. Beginning in the early morning, women coordinated all organizational aspects by dividing up the tasks, including going to the market and preparing the kitchen for cooking. Men's contribution operated in a different sphere. They gathered wood, carried water by horse from outside the *adat* territory, collected fruit in the forest or their own garden, and caught fish or shrimp in the sea as well as in the river. This gendered division reveals that women controlled the strategic coordination within domestic spaces, while men provided essential resources through external procurement.

The ceremonial activities were geographically distributed across sacred and domestic territories. Indigenous women performed water collection rituals using *Nila* shells from the sacred wells of Bonto Pao and Tambara within the sacred Borong Karrasa forest, while concurrently preparing ritual sustenance and crafting ceremonial implements including powdered *Tambara* plant materials and cotton-candlenut illumination devices. Meanwhile, male participants engaged in forest-based activities including temporary structure construction, preparation of 40 specified plant varieties, and execution of additional ritual obligations, illustrating the sophisticated spatial and social coordination underlying this traditional ceremony. The contrast between domestic preparation and sacred forest execution reveals that gender roles in the *Andingingi* ritual are not fixed cultural categories but spatially contingent performances. Women's authority shifts from logistical coordination in domestic spaces to sacred ritual performance in forest settings, while

men transition from peripheral resource provision to central structural and botanical ritual functions.

The transformation of gender roles in *Andingingi* ritual, from women's domestic coordinating authority to their sacred forest performance, exemplifies how gender relations are continuously reproduced through contextual practices rather than fixed cultural prescriptions (Connell, 2009). This dynamic reveals that structure and change operate as complementary forces within Ammatoa social life, where women's complex positioning enables them to command different spheres of influence across ritual and everyday contexts, complicating conventional interpretations of indigenous gender systems.

After all the preparations in the domestic space and in the sacred forest, the Ammatoan community conducted the evening ritual termed *Appalenteng ere* (water movement). They wore traditional dress codes—women donning black *pokko* attire paired with black sarongs (*tope lekleng*), while men wore black sarong and cloth, as well as *passapu* on their head. Several Ammatoan people and I walked through the sacred forest, carrying the morning's prepared food and natural utensils, such as coconut shells, banana leaves, and palm leaf cutlery. The women prepared the food for the ritual, along with two jars of water. Anrongta recited mantras and prayers, followed by Ammatoa, who led the *Appalenteng Ere* ritual.

During *Appalenteng Ere* ritual within the sacred forest, Ammatoa assumed the central ritual leadership while others formed a circle around him. He emphasized that ritual in sacred forest served to request permission from ancestral spirits and entities inhabiting the earth. The ceremony generated intersubjectivity through relational dynamics where participants mutually influenced one another's spiritual engagement. The Ammatoan community believes that all earthly entities (visible and invisible)

possess personification and agency. For that reason, society puts high respect and protects certain land or a place that are believed to unseen inhabitants through action such as not carrying out prohibited acts as well as anything reprehensible. This concept of understanding aligns with concepts of personhood that extend beyond human boundaries to encompass non-human beings who are different from human, transcend human limitations and process their own form of agency (Bird-david, 1999; Maarif, 2019).

Spiritual Mediation as Environmental Governance in Religious Agency

The ritual activities on the second day deepened my understanding of *Andingingi*'s spiritual motivation as well as the environmental significance. When I asked a female participant about the purpose of the ritual, she explained that *Andingingi* serves as both an ancestral tradition and an ecological prayer—a sacred practice aimed at maintaining the balance of the earth, preventing prolonged drought, and preventing natural disasters while ensuring agricultural fertility and prosperity. Three activities we captured: first, cold powder made from *Tambara* plants is placed on the forehead and neck as a prayer to ward off disaster and bring health to the human body. Second, water from the jars was sprinkled in the four wind directions with the same intent. Next, offerings are placed in seven locations in the forest, where the community believes these seven locations are sacred places where their ancestors reside. Ramlah emphasized that those activities demonstrate that the land is ancestral, as it is the ancestors who inherit the land. Therefore, thanksgiving is also offered to the ancestors.

The ritual's symbolic framework centers on specific plant that carry profound meaning for the community. Yellow coconut leaves represent plant fertility and are subsequently placed in rice fields and gardens as protective talismans,

while a collection of 40 medicinal plants positioned at the tent's center embodies healing power and disease prevention. These plant symbols hold such significance that community members actively compete to obtain them during the ritual, later utilizing the coconut leaves for agricultural protection and processing the medicinal plants into therapeutic preparations, thus extending the ritual's beneficial effects into daily life and demonstrating the practical integration of spiritual practice with ecological stewardship.

Female farmers representing their households bring agricultural produce as offerings to the fertility ritual, then compete for the sacred botanical materials distributed during the ceremony. Sinyong, participant of *Andingingi* ritual, explained, the yellow coconut leaves (*janur kuning*) obtained by these women are placed in rice fields the next day with prayers for abundant harvests. The medicinal plants are boiled and consumed upon returning home to ensure health throughout the coming year, while other ritual plants are positioned in homes as protective talismans against calamity and disaster.

Negotiating Collective and Individual Agency

On the ritual's second day in the sacred forest, photography was categorically forbidden for documentation. The direct presence of Ammatoa in this ritual reinforced spiritual authority, as any violation of the photography prohibition would result in reprimand and *adat* sanctions. This contrasts fundamentally with the *Andingingi* performances presented for ecotourism purposes during the Bulukumba festival and anniversary celebrations, which permitted visual documentation, took place in a different location, and were led by other traditional leaders without the presence of Ammato. The most touching aspect of the second day's observations was the religious diversity among the ritual participants. The *Ilalang Embayya* and *Ipantarang Embayya*

communities attended in large numbers, sharing the same purpose and prayer, dressed entirely in black, including those residing in *Ipantarang Embayya*, who wore robes, hijabs, and black skirts. This phenomenon provided a profound realization that religious identity and belief in the *Andingingi* ritual are not subject to debate within the Ammatoan community. This observation reinforces Maarif's (2012) emphasis, which states that Islam and *adat* integrated as "indigenous", creating a monotheistic Islamic cosmology that embodies Tu Riek Akrakna while still respecting human relationships with non-human entities such as ancestors and nature in ritual practices. This integration demonstrates the community's spiritual flexibility in uniting various dimensions of belief without ideological conflict.

This religious identity above extends to how Ammatoan women navigate gender relations within their traditional society. Ramlah and Nani, Ammatoa daughters, acknowledge that patriarchal systems still exist within the Ammatoa indigenous community in various aspects of life. However, this does not make them passive and resigned to their position. Regarding political structures, they believe that what is most important is not the formal structure, but rather the freedom of women to express their opinions and express themselves within the community. Through the *Andingingi* ritual, they see that in addition to the balanced roles between men and women, women have a fundamental function in carrying out rituals and other activities such as farming and traditional healing systems. Based on this description, Ammatoa indigenous women have a unique perspective on gender inequality in their environment. Culturally, their status and rights are viewed as equal to those of men. However, imbalances persist in their relationships, driven by the need for understanding based on personal experience of specific subjects. This view aligns with Saba Mahmood's concept of subject freedom, which

emphasizes women's autonomy, manifested through active involvement and specific norms (Mahmood, 2005).

Domestic Roles, Spiritual Authority, and Environmental Stewardship

Ammatoan women claim that they are already equal, considering the division of labor between men and women. Both men and women recognize this position and carry out their respective tasks without debate. Green called this condition an unchangeable category (Green, 2007). The division of labor in the domestic space in preparation for the *Andingingi* ritual shows that both genders can cooperate with each other to ensure the ritual runs well. On the other hand, in the domestic space, women play a greater role because they control the domestic space while men provide the domestic space's amenities. Therefore, women's roles within this formal and informal concept depend heavily on how Ammatoan indigenous women articulate their positions. This perspective aligns with the freedom of the subject in Saba Mahmood's view of women's independence articulated through active participation and certain norms (Mahmood, 2005). Following this active participation, Green emphasizes the importance of self-determination as a form of independence and freedom for indigenous communities, rejecting standard definitions such as those in the top-down concept of the national council (Green, 2011).

The depiction of gender roles transforming from the political sphere to the domestic sphere in everyday life creates social rituals with the potential to inspire grassroots activism. This transformation serves as both a critique and an affirmation of masculine dominance (male dominance) within social structures that foster the perpetuation of deeply entrenched patriarchal systems through a statist division of labor. Rather than viewing the domestic sphere as an entity separate from the public sphere, the concept of "everyday

life" can be understood as a manifestation of collective labor among individuals within the household unit (Vandeventer, Lloveras, and Warnaby 2024). This perspective allows for a reinterpretation of the domestic role as a crucial arena for negotiation and resistance against dominant patriarchal power structures. For James Scott, these roles are a form of resistance that breaks down the dominance of power or formal organizations in everyday life by focusing on the infrapolitical system (O'Brien, 2013).

The conditions above then become very crucial to break down the structures that strengthen the marginalized position of women. In looking at the religious roles of women in the context of the Ammatoan community is an effort to see more deeply how the roles as a form of resistance, obedience, empowerment, and instrumentalism (Burke, 2012). They are linked to their role in maintaining their community, land, and teachings as their identity. With the result of that, all forms of agency are interconnected with each other in the movement of indigenous women.

Responding to the statement above, I point out that dividing Muslim women and indigenous women into separate identity categories reinforces unclear self-concepts and results in discriminatory treatment. This pattern also applies to how formal and informal institutions are separated when allocating work roles. When individuals are reduced to a single, unified identity, it eliminates the diversity of group variations, religious distinctions, and ethical differences (Mohanty, 1984).

The concept of Mother Earth related to the *Andingingi* ritual is an identity that shows the spirituality and way in which the Ammatoan people maintain the preservation of nature. The gendered division of labor in public and private domains sustains discrimination against indigenous women, yet indigenous feminism reveals the heteropatriarchal and racist elements embedded in daily life that must be dismantled (Dhillon, 2020; Green,

2007)). Women's labor permeates societal structures—visible or invisible—performed for communal benefit, necessitating examination of grassroots movements. Indigenous women's agency represents their active resistance to patriarchal oppression and hegemony, establishing gender balance amid complex decolonization processes (Moura-Kocoglu, 2017), often linked to their forest knowledge (Gabriel et al., 2020). This agency positions women as community creators, nurturers, and empowerment centers (Nickel, 2017) though their bargaining power in fulfilling these roles for cultural, social, and political sustainability remains context-dependent (O'Faircheallaigh, 2013). Among the Ammatoan indigenous people, women actively engage in agentive rituals, politics, social practices, culture, and *adat* forest preservation, demonstrating their existence and strengthened position for individual and collective benefit through *adat* ecology interpretation in everyday life, which becomes the foundation for community sustainability and development.

CLOSING

This research advocates for a paradigm shift toward "equality" that refers to the perspective of indigenous women's freedom to define themselves and their actions. The reason is that power relations within the structures shaping indigenous communities enable the assimilation of identity into a culture that universalizes identity based on structural authority. Moreover, rigid structural compartmentalization causes prolonged discrimination against grassroots agency and complex individual experiences (Green, 2007, 2009). The Ammatoan women's agency transforms rigid formal structures—such as political restrictions in the public sphere and gender-based division of labor rooted in *Pasang ri Kajang* norms—into flexible informal spaces where they express their voices and

navigate cultural practices. Through their active engagement with local knowledge systems such as *adat* ecology, these women assert their presence through ritual practices and their role in environmental sustainability. By centering on women's agency, this research reveals a more nuanced understanding of how indigenous women navigate, influence, and subvert existing power structures, ultimately demonstrating a more dynamic and empowered position.

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