

Durability Capacity of Women Cultivators Under Pressure of Forest and Land Fire Control Regulation in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the conditions of pressure and durability capacity of women cultivators facing the pressures of regulation on forest and land fire control in Indonesia. The results of this study highlight that the scientific knowledge and patriarchal capitalism perspective contribute to product regulation in Indonesia, and then creating women cultivators as a non-class subjects. Thus, the woman cultivators are victims of that regulation. Women cultivators have various complex strategies and adaptations in dealing with multiple pressures under regulations on one site, corporations and food estate programs on other sites. The act of burning fields is not intended to fight the rules, but an act with no alternatives for survival from the lowest view. The act of burning is an act of utilizing the capacity to produce and reproduce the capacity of remaining food sources and the capacity for subsistence independence. Understanding the act of burning fields by Oloh Ngaju women cultivators is an effort to understand the farming activities as rationalized by individual actions within the limits of their interests and limit power (setting the limits to domination). So it is very possible to propose the concept of subsistence feminism to see the type of the grassroots women's movement.

Keynotes: Women Cultivators, Durability Capacity, Strategies and Adaptation, Oloh Ngaju People

Introduction

Forest and land fire control regulations implemented by the Indonesian government since 2003, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2016 and 2019 aims to reduce deforestation and the impacts of climate change. However, its implementation has had a significant impact on the women cultivators, who rely on the tradition of burning fields for farming (Rizky et al., 2022). The implementation of this regulation has been implicated in cases of arrests of cultivators in several places in Central Kalimantan since 2015. And the criminal cases against these cultivators have caused trauma to the cultivation activities since 2016.

The tradition of burning fields is a common practice in farming communities in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia. The practice of burning fields is an efficient method to prepare land, increase soil fertility and reduce pest growth (Kleinman et al., 1995). According to data at Statistics Indonesia (BPS) 2022, around 60% of cultivators in Indonesia still use the burning method to manage their land (BPS Indonesia, 2023) and BPS data 2021 (BPS Indonesia, 2022) around 30% of cultivators in Indonesia are women. However, the tightening of regulations has a direct impact on the traditions, customs and culture of cultivators communities. Therefore, it is important to understand that the implementation of regulations

causes women cultivators to become victims.

Oloh Ngaju women cultivators are trapped in an unfavorable socio-political and economic situation. The regulatory perspective views the act of burning fields as resistance, but the subsistence perspective views it as durability. The development perspective calls the tradition of cultivators as deforestation, but for the sake of development, deforestation by plantation and agricultural projects is permitted (Nugraha, 2021). This ambiguity shows that the state's interests in forests are in the capitalist political-economic interests. Thus, women cultivators become the other in political-economic interests in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to describe how the pressure conditions of women cultivators on political-economic interest? How is the durability capacity to preserve the tradition of burning fields under the regulation?

Methods

This study uses ecofeminist studies in a subsistence perspective. In this perspective, the term decolonization is introduced as a method of liberation from colonial violence or an anti-colonial perspective (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2016). In line with decolonization, this study utilizes storytelling through daily conversations as a primary data collection tool, that of the women cultivator Oloh Ngaju as keys informan. Research focuses on 2 subtribes of Oloh Ngaju on Central of Borneo, namely Oloh Marikoi and Oloh Mantangai Hulu. Marikoi Village is located in the Damang Batu sub-district, Gunung Mas district is a representation of mineral and cultivators (semi-settled). Mantangai Hulu Village, in Mantangai sub-district, Kapuas district, is a representation of peatland cultivators (non-active); the location of the former PLG and the current Food Estate program. The research was conducted from April 2023 to June 2024.

This study calls Oloh Ngaju to refer to the Dayak community, avoiding the name "given" by outsiders which has insulting connotations for the indigenous people of Borneo or cultivators. Local people call themselves Oloh (people) Ngaju (living in the headwater areas) as a daily term in the sense of the people who live in the headwater of the Kapuas and Kahayan rivers. Most of the Oloh Ngaju are cultivators, and a small number are traders and forest product collectors. The Ngaju tribe has been independent politically and economically in trade with the Malay tribe in Singapore since 1846 (Schärer, 1963).

Oloh Ngaju calls their farming system as malan manana (farming in the fields) and calls themselves as oloh pamalan (cultivators). Malan manana is a system of intercropping farms and the gradual plantation expansion. Oloh pamalan is a term for people who work in the fields by slash and burn technique. So, the pamalan Oloh ngaju is a cultural subject of oloh (people) who inhabit ngaju (river headwaters) because they are malan manana (farming in the fields) (Nopembereni et al., 2019).

Subsistence Perspective: The Concept of Durability Capacity

The subsistence perspective originates from the materialist ecofeminist approaches by Maria Mies, Claudia von Werlhof and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen in the middle 1970s through research in the field of development policy and peasant studies in Southern countries such as India, Costa Rica, San Salvador, Venezuela and Mexico. The approach was formalized in 1999 in the book "The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy"; it could be called the Bielefeld approach, it came from the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany. The subsistence perspective emerged in connection with anti-capitalist feminist and transnational globalization movements (Kölzer, 2019).

The basis of the subsistence perspective is Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism which analyzes the exploitation of colonies, women and peasants for capital accumulation. Mies, et al. continuing that not

only subsistence cultivators but also society in generally on devalued, appropriated and destroyed for capital accumulation (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999), including unpaid household labor in the industrialized countries of the North and South is devalued in this regard (Mies, 2005b). This perspective was first developed to analyze the work of housewives, subsistence cultivators and informal producers who struggle to survive in various ways. They do everything to survive, including preserving food and even stealing.

The subsistence perspective is described outlined below. First, the subsistence perspective is a new perspective at the subsistence work that produces what they consume without the capital investing from the producer. Second, subsistence production aims to sustain human basic needs, achieved through food production such as rice and vegetables. Third, cultivators work is related to household work and both is related to community work (Mies, 2005a). The concept of subsistence is "life production" which is required as a prerequisite for all types of paid work, where subsistence production aims to produce life sovereignty. Subsistence production contrasts with capitalist production, where the food, housing and survival problems are done for pay or not. When people survive with everything they do, they find their own sovereignty.

Capitalists exploited the workers as nature is exploited, and maintained exploitative relationships through labor contracts and violences. Subsistence exploits the workers to secure the material means of life for their family food independence, and maintained relationships through the harmony with traditional, nature and social relations. Subsistence activities are also maintained by the working class in the large industrial cities in a reciprocal tradition, such as minor repairs where neighbors/friends help without pay. Subsistence activities in the rural areas become a resistance, whereas in the cities it becomes a politics of survival (Mies, 2005b).

Subsistence perspective is a perspective from "below" to describe the model of rural women's durability in the face of the double pressures from global capitalism and patriarchy. The perspective from below is related to the concept of survival, where poverty and welfare cannot be generalized. This perspective views the capacity of rural women's durability as being seen through the capacity to produce and reproduce their own needs, independence and voicing in their own voices, through their daily "political" activities to survive.

On the subsistence perspective the capacity of women's durability can be seen on: first, women's strategies to keep life going without sacrificing nature and other people, especially women and children; second, control of subsistence means independently without the power of external agents such as cows, land and money; third, self awareness of one's own capacity to live independently with pride, dignity, courage and equality; not beggars and not submissive; fourth, self mindset that believes in subsistence capacity is better than identifying with the elite; fifth, adaptation to the dichotomy of the "first" and "third" worldview that subsistence security is same needs in both worlds (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2000).

The Articulation of Subjek of Women Cultivators

Based on data in the Statistics Indonesia and Agricultural Census of Central Kalimantan Province (BPS Kalteng, 2024), Kapuas Regency (BPS Kapuas, 2024) and Gunung Mas Regency (BPS Gunung Mas, 2023), the number of women cultivators existing form on the estimates. Cultivators are grouped into the type of Individual Agricultural Business (UPL) Subsector Land User Farmers (UPT) or the subsector Gurem farmers as many as 46,201 people (Kapuas Regency 8,217 people and Gunung Mas 3,779 people). The subject of women cultivators is not recognized in statistics related to the FOA indicator-WCA 2020

(BPS Central Kalimantan, 2023). So that the subject of cultivators is lost in state recognition. As a result, the contribution of cultivating rice as one of the food contributions of rice in the district cannot be calculated because the variable only provides data on wet field rice production. The impositions of science had disrupted the real conditions of cultivators and ignored their factual contribution. Through observation techniques, it was found that in the population and civil registration, the woman cultivators were assumed as housewives who do not work, not as the farmers too. The production of implicit scientific knowledge perspectives such that have caused the women cultivators to become non-class subjects. The state class structure of farmers is drawn in the picture behind.

Furthermore, the regulations for forest and land fire control are related to the global discourse which labels shifting cultivation as the “main cause” of deforestation in Indonesia. This discourse is produced by the scientific knowledge and development perspectives; that are oriented towards capitalist interests. And the labels used in the drafting of policy brief, and also ignoring all local knowledge and subsistence perspectives. So, in the implementation of regulations which contain a prohibition on burning fields, gradually stopping the cultivation tradition since 2003. In this case, the women cultivators become the victims of regulation. Now, the women cultivators struggle harder to maintain the remaining food sources, work harder to fertilize the soil, walk deeper into the forest, act more carefully, save more money and speak less to avoid confrontation with the authorities. Women cultivators face legal risks from burning fields so they carry out strategies and adaptations through culturally survival actions.

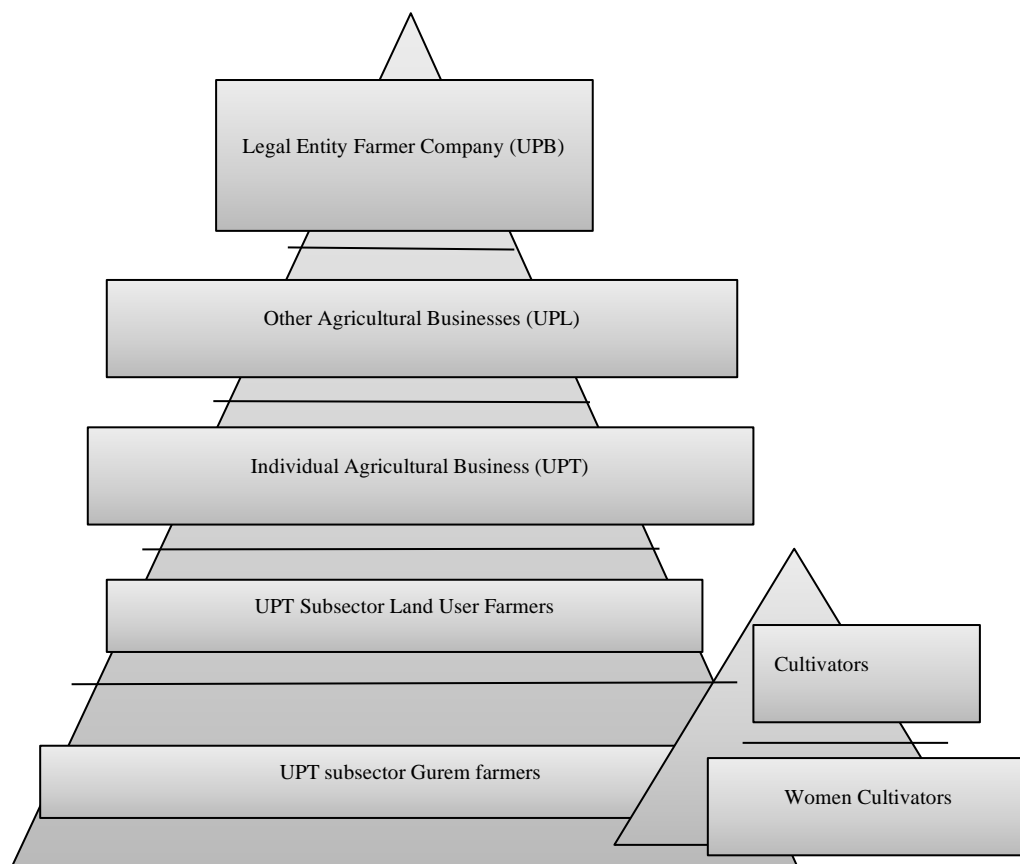


Figure 1.1. The state class structure of farmers in Indonesia

Following is the articulation of Oloh Ngaju women cultivators regarding the global discourse labels above. They rejected accusations as the “shifting cultivators”; because in fact they apply a cultivation model for the development of environmentally friendly and sustainable agribusiness. The forest damage they cause manually can still be measured by the ecological restoration of the fields with a plantation expansion model. Cultivation is a sustainable planting system, and does not totally change the construction of the land and the naturalness of the forest ecosystem is maintained in the concept of “kaleka” land (reforestation land) and “pukung pahewan” forest (customary forest).

They rejected accusations of as “the most causing forest fires”; because first, when the ex PLG land burned; the hotspots were indeed in the plantation areas but were burned by “pamburingan” (charcoal seekers) not cultivators; second, during El Nino 2015; fires formed naturally from the constant friction of dry wood not cultivators; third, during the opening of oil palm plantations; the hotspots were in former fields that had been claimed by the corporation; fourth, when cultivator burning fields the cultivators applied the layered safety techniques.

Multiple Pressure Model

Farm produce was sufficient for family food security was an old story, nowadays it is no longer reliable. Rice and local vegetables from the fields disappeared, replaced by market vegetables from the city. Because in the last 5 to 10 years many cultivators have not been actively farming again, causing fear of being arrested by the authorities. Then, the banners of prohibiting burning forests and land that are placed everywhere has been a terror for cultivators. So now opening fields with burn tradition currently requires extra courage. Now the number of cultivators who still survive is only one or two families in the headwater villages.

Currently the women cultivators are facing multiple pressures, under regulations of forest and land fire control regulations on one site, under protection of corporations and food estate programs on other sites. The implementation of regulation and company activities and food estate projects have a direct impact on cultivation activities. Then, daily activities of slash-and-burn farming become stressful and risky work, because they are against the rules. This causes women cultivators to deal directly with the apparatus. While socio-culturally, daily farming activities are related to the role of women in preparing food security (vegetables and rice). As a result of the multi pressure, many women cultivators do not farm and depend on their husbands' income; that is a new situation that is not expected in a subsistence society.

The perception of cultivators as the cause of forest fires becomes normative and powerful in the production of scientific knowledge and capitalist patriarchal perceptions. Those perceptions cannot see the reality of women cultivators as victims of epistemic violence; those who are deprived of their food sources and whose knowledge is silenced by those interests. Now, women cultivators are under multiple pressures from inside and outside parties, both implicitly and explicitly form. If Internal subjects read regulations and programs as national strategies, on the contrary non-class subjects read them as national disasters.

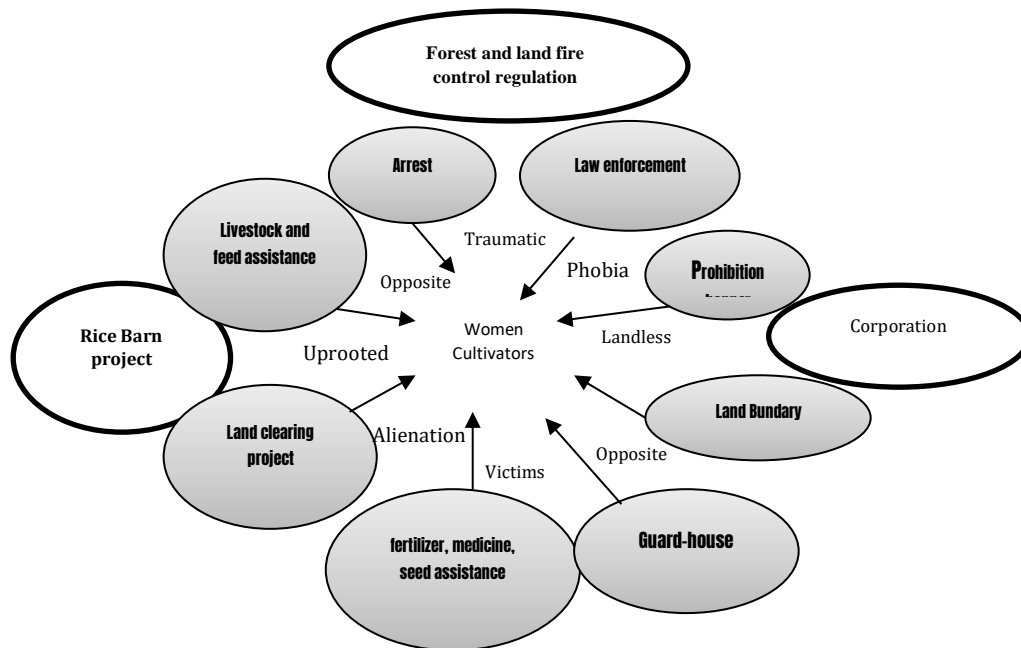


Figure 1.2. Multiple Pressure Model of Women Cultivators

The model of multiple pressures as shown in the picture is explained as follows: first, regulations resulting from global discourse and scientific studies are a major force that shapes the subject of women cultivators as legal objects. And in daily cultivation activities, women cultivators are opposed to regulations, on traumatized and phobic. Second, the national rice barn project is a job pursuing the myth of welfare that makes women cultivators objects. In the implementation of the program, women cultivators are alienated and uprooted from the fields. Third, the company activities are activities to protect capital and repress non-class subjects in the name of plantation protection areas. In the activity of protecting the women cultivators are in resitent, victims and landless.

For women cultivators, the fields are not only a food barns but also the center of maintaining customary rituals, customary laws, customary land and substance on principles of plantation expansion. In reality all of the cyclus of cultivation are always accompanied by rituals and are respectful to nature. Many customary rituals have disappeared along with the disappearance of the fields. Regulations have caused the reality of farming now to be a dream. In reality; after the last 5 years of carrying out various strategies and adaptations to regulations, failed harvests have caused the struggle to fall. While the company's expansion is getting stronger each day and hopes for food estate land are still too long.

Durability Capacity Model

Under multiple pressures, women cultivators develop strategies and adaptations to build internal capacity and use their awareness and mindset to enhance external capacity. Enhancement of survival capacity is done through the following awareness and mindset: first, women cultivators realize that regulation is a force that cannot be openly resisted, so they make adjustments to the method of burning their fields as a survival strategy. Second, women cultivators realize that expansion of their land by third parties is an attempt to “steal” their fields from their hands. Thus, women cultivators continue to farm as a final defense strategy in maintaining farming traditions. Third, women cultivators realize that farm produce can no longer be their main source, so they change their mindset by encouraging their husbands to make money

as an alternative strategy to survive while waiting for certainty about their fields from the government. Fourth, women cultivators understand that regulatory and corporate power cannot be fought alone, so that internal and external support systems can encourage women's defense capacity in the fields. Fifth, women cultivators understand that the tradition of burning fields is an important stage, so burning must be maintained without alternatives as a cultural strategy to defend rituals, customary laws and customary land. Sixth, women cultivators understand that the rituals in the cultivation tradition are related to ethics, respect and politeness values towards nature, so that maintaining the fields is a double strategy for food security as well as maintaining the Oloh Ngaju culture. Seventh, women cultivators understand their fields as a tool for learning cultural knowledge that has economic value (food barns, assets and investments), sacred value (rituals and traditions), educational value (natural mystery and trial-error experiences) and cultural value (self-identity and cultural identity).

The durability capacity model for women cultivators (in comparison of Kapuas and Gunung Mas women) as in the picture is explained below: First, regulation pressure and the women cultivators capacity are the same, but the strategies and negotiations used are different. The activities against women cultivators in Kapuas are political, namely against building support systems and advocacy with NGOs. However, regulatory negotiations cannot be accommodated due to the geographical conditions of the land in Kapuas is peatland, so they are the victims of regulation. Meanwhile, the activities against women cultivators in Gunung Mas are cultural, namely opposing regulations independently. However, regulatory negotiations are geographically advantageous because Gunung Mas is mineral land, so cultivation can be risky again.

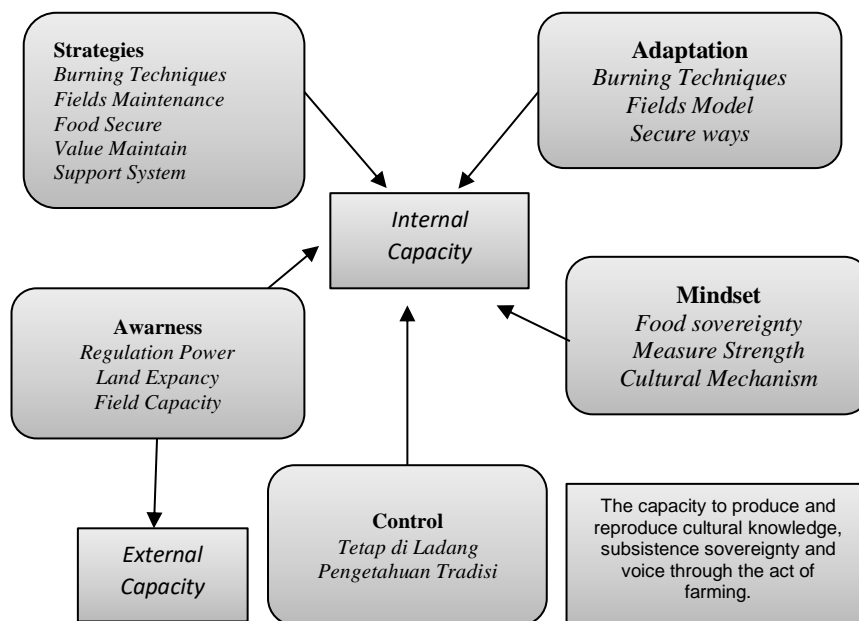


Figure 1.3. Durability Capacity Model on Multiple Pressures

Second, the negotiation and adaptation of women cultivators are different because the individual capacity and natural environment are different. The experience of reading the rules and social status of women cultivators in Gunung Mas provides advantages to survive, develop and recover. Meanwhile, the experience of going against the rules and social status of women cultivators in Kapuas causes the position to survive, develop and “in between”.

Third, the internal capacity of the women cultivators community produces the same reaction to pressure. The pressure of burning methods produces the same strategies and adaptations related to the method of burning fields, namely “hidden fires”. The individual's capacity for adaptation to pressure is the same, namely maintaining awareness and a mindset that maintains the tradition of cultivation and burning fields as a solution without alternatives for today. Understanding that the tradition of burning and the tradition of cultivation are safety and environmentally friendly farming techniques.

In the concept of women cultivators, the act of burning fields is not intended to resist the rules, but an act without alternatives to survive at the local lowest class. The act of burning is an act of utilizing the capacity to produce and reproduce the capacity of remaining natural resources and their capacity of subsistence independence. However, there is a gap between cultivators and the government where the government is concentrating on 'smoke rising upwards', while women cultivators concentrate on 'no smoke means no food'.

Durability is A Silence Resistance

The subsistence perspective as a new perspektif to voicing the original voice of non-class subjects. Voicing as an emancipatory act as a way to listen to the voices of victims who are silenced under pressure. The silenced condition is the condition of the subject being in a negotiation of choices between not fully obeying, but also not resisting. Negotiating political choices when to resist on lacking supporting resources means prison, but to fully obey means suicide. Negotiating in between forms is a political choice to survive. When they continue to carry out the activity of burning fields using the “manyimpuk” and “memehun” techniques (burning with many-small fires).

The women cultivators survival is seen by stepping back to resolve food issues first; also stepping back to maintain the remaining basic food sources. Articulation of women cultivators voices: “we step back from the fight and choose the stance we want to. We do not advance but choose to secure sufficient food for today. We need food today, don't ask us to wait for the rice field from the project that needs time. If they want to stop the fields, finish the rice fields project first. Then we will believe in their project.

In this case, stepping back is a political position of not trusting the government's ability to resolve healthy and sufficient food issues for subsistence communities. Replacing food from the fields with market food is not a solution for cultivators because modern agriculture uses chemical fertilizers and poisons to produce which are harmful to humans.

The silent position is in between policy by not opposing the repressive power head-on but also not submitting to the struggle for survival. In this case, the subsistence community finds a rationalization of the action of not resisting but also not obeying, because the interests of the elite subjects are to carry out the interests of the project or program from the center only. Women cultivators rationalize silent and vacuum actions as interests of survival in food scarcity; taking funds and not resisting because the government needs the targets and report data program. The attitude in between is a tactic of people who live under repressive power.

In a patriarchal society, the silent position of women cultivators is a rationalization of the experience of masculine cultural power. Women choose to sacrifice themselves because they are limited in energy to fight and are not even heard. In the victim's position, being seen working every day in silence is a way to survive under pressure because it is impossible to carry out openly resistance. The position of negotiating power when openly resistance is easily broken by the authorities and the choice to survive in one's own

strength can be measured is lost. When it is difficult to measure the strength to win against power, then silence is a “weapon” of resistance.

Borrowing Spivack's term, burning fields could be the voice of the interests of cultivators that cannot be represented by "others" outside their own consciousness and knowledge. As a consciousness, subaltern knowledge and way of acting of the people that is different ~not opposite~ from the elite group (Spivak, 2019). The act of hidden burning fields in the framework of subsistence feminism could be an act of women cultivators to "entertain themselves" while avoiding open resistance. Burning on the small fire is an actor's act to refuse to create antagonism (Sharma, 2000).

The author found that the practice of burning fields is still carried out by women cultivators, with the reason that if they want to plant, they must have to burn. In their experiences voices are articulated: "we have failed to harvest many times because we did not burn, so the manta plots (raw land) are not fertile. If the fields fail, the government does not provide food, so they find a way to "manusul taka-takau" (hidden burning ways). Understanding the act of burning fields for women cultivators of Oloh Ngaju is an effort to understand cultivation activities as rational individual actions within the limits of their interests and on limit power. In the subsistence perspective, the subject of women cultivators is understood as those who choose to maintain the tradition of farming, burning fields, living traditionally, surviving in basic needs and being independent from the results of their own fields.

In general, the author found that there are two characteristics of women cultivators' responses to double pressure, namely in maintaining endurance capacity and durability. It is understood that culturally, Oloh Ngaju women have an “in between” personality. Thus, the actions of Oloh Ngaju women cultivators in this case are understood in the dualistic concept. Oloh Ngaju women are socialized with dualistic values, between not being obedient and not fighting, between not being rebellious but also not obeying, choosing to be silent for a while and choosing to act according to the time needed (Riwut).

Conclusion

Women cultivators have internal and external durability capacities in the face of multiple regulatory, corporate and food estate project pressures. Despite challenges such as lack of access to resources and support, many have managed to adapt and survive. This study highlights the importance of social support, access to voice interests, and recognition of local knowledge in designing more inclusive and sustainable policies. With the correct approach, women cultivators can continue to contribute to food security and environmental sustainability in Indonesia.

Regulations marginalize and ignore the full cultural knowledge of indigenous communities and women cultivators about their local ecosystems, which could lead to sustainable land management practices. In addition, women cultivators' voices are often excluded from policy discussions, further reinforcing their marginalization and ignoring the potential contributions they can make to finding innovative solutions that blend tradition with modernization. By fostering inclusive dialogue that respects indigenous knowledge systems, there is an opportunity to create more equitable and effective environmental policies that support the conservation goals of marginalized communities.

Oloh Ngaju women cultivators also highlight the broader issue of epistemic injustice, where their traditional ecological knowledge is systematically devalued by capitalist-patriarchal paradigms and hegemonic scientific perspectives. The durability demonstrated by Oloh Ngaju women cultivators underscores the need for policy formulation to integrate cultural knowledge systems. By recognizing women cultivators as important stakeholders in sustainable development, policymakers can create

frameworks that value local cultural practices and traditions. Furthermore, amplifying the voices of women cultivators in national and international dialogues can challenge the capitalist-patriarchal narratives and scientific knowledge that currently dominate policymaking.

Furthermore, this study utilizes the concept of women's and environmental movements that have their own complexities and variants. In the contemporary era, intersectional analysis is very useful to illuminate the layers of oppression and systems of power that exist everywhere. Therefore, ecofeminist studies are also important to link the analysis of the intersection between scientific mechanisms and cultural mechanisms, capitalist-patriarchal perspectives with subsistence perspectives, climate change with justice for nature and human rights holistically. So it is very possible to propose the concept of subsistence feminism as the distinctive grassroots women's movement.

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