

THE POLICY OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGIC PROJECT FOOD ESTATE SYSTEM FROM A RELIGIOUS FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

¹Azzahra Nurraina Tazakka
zzhrraina@gmail.com

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Abstrack

The religious feminist approach to the food system is closely correlated with the reality of women who often face a double burden, namely taking care of household chores and seeking sources of livelihood for their families. This condition cannot be separated from patriarchal factors. Women in rural areas contribute significantly to farming activities as a source of income. The government's priority program for achieving food security is the Food Estate. The main issue in this article is the analysis of the National Strategic Project (PSN) Food Estate policy from a religious feminism perspective. This study uses a socio-legal approach by examining empirical data on women's involvement in the PSN Food Estate to answer this question. This is then reviewed through a religious feminism perspective. The analysis is conducted with reference to religious values, especially Islam, the majority religion in Indonesia, while also considering other religious values. Implementing the Food Estate has shifted the local food system to a centralised one, neglecting the community's fundamental rights. This condition is closely related to the oppression of women, which is also rooted in patriarchal religious interpretations. This has given rise to a mindset that reinforces the subordination of women in almost all aspects of social life. Through a qualitative approach and analysis, this study reveals how women's roles are marginalised in agriculture and offers an analysis of the steps that can be taken to create a more inclusive food system.

Keywords: Food Estate, Religious Feminism, Women's Involvement, Policy Politics

¹ Universitas Airlangga

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector is one of the most dominant sectors in the Indonesian economy (Cooperative Statistics, 2005). The increase in women's capacity in agriculture as an essential part of human resources has not been optimally utilised. Based on BPS data from March 2021, 55.79% of the total poor population in Indonesia lives in rural areas, and most of their livelihoods come from small-scale agriculture. In terms of gender, 49% of agricultural households in Indonesia are headed by women². Suppose the number of women in the farm sector continues to increase. In that case, access to resources such as fertilisers, quality seeds, agricultural technology, and funding should be relaxed, as access to these resources has been limited until now³. The increase in physical and non-physical activities for women in agriculture, especially with the significant dual role of women, has led to the emergence of "Feminisation of Agriculture." The feminisation of agriculture is clear evidence that women have begun to take control of the agricultural sector, but imbalances and risks are still felt.

The gender inequality experienced by women is linked to the emergence of the term religious feminism. However, the union between religion and feminism also has a long history. The feminist movement in the struggle for suffrage in the 19th century involved many religious women, as did black feminism in the 1970s and

² Badan Pusat Statistik, Sensus Pertanian 2018, (Jakarta: BPS, 2019).

³ Perempuan Tani: Pilar Tersembunyi di Balik Ketahanan Pangan", DataSensia, 11 Mar. 2025.

1980s⁴. Thus, conflicts over gender equality, followed by protests, are often related to religion. In the context of agriculture, especially in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is religious, religious interpretations in real life can often create limitations for women in their search for livelihoods, which then leads to inequality. In fact, the silence surrounding feminism and religion is profound, with its roots lying in the metanarrative of secularisation⁵.

Recent studies show that women involved in agricultural work are unpaid, seasonal, and part-time, and receive lower wages than men, even though they do similar work⁶. Implementing a system in Indonesia that creates a working environment that is not very favourable to women is caused by various factors, one of which may stem from something deeply rooted in every human being, namely their beliefs. The presence of religious feminists in religion began with the documentation of religious texts that contained distorted perceptions of women. Patriarchal doctrines have permeated every aspect of life, both inside and outside the home, starting with elements of patriarchy regarding the concept of male leadership in household life, which has been misinterpreted.

Limiting women in agriculture is not a wise move that will save Indonesia from the current food crisis. When exploring feminist

⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism, Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (2008): 1-24.

⁵ Mack, Phyllis. "Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth- Century Quakerism." *Signs* 29.1 (2003): 149-177

⁶ Fredrick Wamalwa and R. Njoroge, "Gender Relations in Farmer Groups' Performance: Voices of Women in Western Kenya," *Journal of Rural Sociology* 89, no. 1 (2024): 22-39.

approaches to religious studies, there is a concept called "ecofeminism." Ecofeminism is a concept that supports the relationship between gender inequality and the environment. This ecofeminism concept connects women's sanctity with the universe's sanctity. The main goal of ecofeminism is to redefine society's perspective on the activities and productivity of women and nature⁷. Women have always tried to resist and are more sensitive to the damage caused by modern industrial productivity, which is a result of capitalism that impacts nature, the body, health, and the environment, while highlighting issues often overlooked. The ideas about ecofeminism voiced by the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s led to a study of how women and nature are oppressed, especially under a patriarchal system.

Patriarchy is deeply rooted in life, especially in government projects where men hold the majority of government positions. It is not nonsense if women feel that they are not given roles or are not given much attention, let alone given leadership positions. There may be women, but there is no balance. Repressive coercion against local communities in the PSN food estate area has caused structural conflict, which, from an ecofeminist perspective, is seen as a form of oppression against women. This is especially true considering that historically, women have been tied to nature. This article will discuss the main issues regarding feminism and female farm workers in the National Strategic Food Estate Project. Experience imbalance and

⁷ Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, dengan Maria Mies (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publications, 1993).

injustice in their working ecosystem due to a system that may have been formed by the centre or their immediate environment, such as household affairs. The concept of religious feminism relates to the limitations experienced by women in managing nature, which has become a part of themselves to be preserved and managed productively to meet the needs of themselves and their families.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article uses a socio-legal approach to analyse issues related to government public policy, namely the national strategic food estate project. The public policy approach is used as an analytical framework to examine how the food estate policy is formulated and implemented, and its impact on female agricultural workers. This study is also linked to religious feminism initiated by the feminist movement, which is used to support public policies responsive to gender issues. Primary data was obtained through a normative approach by examining laws, regulations, and policy documents related to food estates. This article discusses female farm workers who face limitations influenced by religious aspects in farming activities, especially in the government's PSN food estate program. The analysis was conducted to see how much the policy provides protection and fair access for female farm workers.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Public Policy Analysis on the National Strategic Project Food Estate

The food estate program is an initiative to achieve food security in Indonesia. It integrates the plantation, agriculture, and livestock

sectors within a designated area. During President Joko Widodo's administration, the implementation of the food estate program was announced to the public. He also believed the food crisis needed to be anticipated immediately, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic caused a global food crisis. The food estate program was designed as an agribusiness effort rooted in rural, indigenous and local communities, forming the foundation for regional development. The resulting production is intended to meet national food security needs, and any surplus will be allocated for export.

In its implementation, several issues have arisen: a) Program planning tends not to be entirely based on evidence-based policy making principles; b) Supporting policies arising from the program have raised concerns about potential changes to the function of the area; c) There is a risk of environmental damage if a comprehensive feasibility analysis does not accompany development; d) The program has the potential to cause significant socio-economic impacts on local communities in the implementation area⁸. As a result of food estates changing the agricultural system in certain areas, there have been many changes in the activities of local communities, leading to a decline in their quality of life because they can no longer determine their own fate, especially on their farms, as the government and other interested parties have structured these.

Agriculture in areas designated as food estates, especially those outside Java, has a tradition of farming using local wisdom systems passed down from generation to generation. One example is

⁸ Tempo.co, "Food Estate Sumut: Jejak Luhut dan Polemiknya," 2024

the Dayak, where the people were once producers but are now forced to migrate in search of food. The position of women becomes much more difficult when faced with critical situations, especially in the context of their daily needs, namely food. It is impossible to imagine the physical and psychological impact felt by women. It is important to note that women are more vulnerable when they are pregnant or menstruating, not to mention those who play dual roles in their households. Since the inception of the PSN food estate, the government has raised hopes by promoting food security as a means to achieve prosperity and economic improvement. However, this program has only distanced local communities further from food security.

Agricultural development policy is a political decision made in the political marketplace. The process involves policymakers, namely the executive and legislative branches, who constantly seek to maintain their position by offering policies that garner political support from civil society, interest groups, and mass organizations⁹. On the other hand, decisions using this kind of scheme are not entirely neutral. They will always consider how much the policy can benefit their political position. Ironically, then. The selfishness of those with political intent often makes women the victims of the implementation of politics. The concern is that the government's "ambition" to establish the PSN food estate is merely a political tool

⁹ Miriam Budiardjo, *Dasar-Dasar Ilmu Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2008), 181.

to garner public sympathy and empathy for food issues, aiming to maintain its political position.

The PSN food estate is classified as an agricultural policy based on political-economic decisions. The "political-economic paradigm" assumes that public policy is made by governments that tend to prioritise their own interests and those of their groups (self-interest orientation)¹⁰. Based on this scheme, it is essential for affected local communities to be more critical when faced with agricultural programs resulting from farm policies. Basically, economic and political needs are still needed to maintain the momentum of development. In the case of the PSN food estate, if it is not implemented correctly and on target, this project will only become a means of mobilisation for the government to give the impression of being democratic and seemingly "caring" about the people's food, but unable to realise it.

There is a process called a process of massive indoctrination, which refers to Ralph Miliband's thinking, stating that there is a specific strategy to obtain the regime's dominant position in the country's political management. Louis Althusser then distinguishes the institutions involved in political regime domination. First, the repressive state apparatus maintains domination through physical force (potential force), such as the military. Second, the ideological state apparatus functions to support political regime domination through the dissemination of ideology, namely religion, law,

¹⁰ Pantjar Simatupang, *Analisis Kebijakan: Konsep Dasar dan Prosedur Pelaksanaan* (Bogor: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Sosial Ekonomi Pertanian, 2003).

education, mass media, and labour unions. Through ideology, the state can influence society to obey the system created by the government to meet the needs of the political regime. If religion has been used by a handful of groups that have the power to control society, then the government must be more careful in using ideology for political interests.

Women are often victims of male-biased interpretations of religious teachings, perpetuating the most obvious injustices felt by women from lower classes, such as female farmers. Changes to the farming system resulting from government policies in the context of the PSN food estate do not particularly favour local communities. Increasing the role of women in agriculture needs to be addressed, one way being to include the interests of women farmers in the political policies that produce food-related programs. A feminist perspective must become an essential foundation for those in authority who make policies. Structural injustice, patriarchal bias, and power inequality that often affect female farmers are usually ignored in the policy development process. The feminist perspective emphasises that many government policies appear to be "gender neutral," when in fact they perpetuate inequality without considering the different social and biological roles of men and women.

It has been argued that, especially after the wave of protests in 2011, feminist movements, even religious feminists, have become increasingly influential in line with the strengthening of bottom-up

grassroots politics or direct community participation¹¹. As an example that has already occurred, in Tunisia, feminists organised protests and demanded gender equality alongside democratic change, including from a religiously inspired perspective. Since the uprising, they have finally mobilised mass support to ensure that the term "equality" is not replaced with "complementarity" in the constitution¹².

B. The Concept of Religious Feminism in the Religious Perspective on Women

Islamic feminism seeks to promote what Riffat Hassan calls post-patriarchal Islam, or in her own words, Qur'anic Islam. This Islam pays excellent attention to the liberation of humans from the shackles of traditionalism, authoritarianism (in the religious, political, and economic spheres), tribalism, racism, sexism, slavery, and all forms of obstacles that prevent humans from realising the vision of the Qur'an, namely returning to Allah as the purpose of life. According to the Qur'an, Islam's primary goal is to create peace (salam), which is the basic meaning of Islam itself (Mahzar, 1994).

¹¹ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013); Meriem El Haitami, "Islamist Feminism: Constructing Gender Identities in Post-Revolution Morocco," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 2 (2016): 166–182.

¹² Mounira M. Charrad and Amina Zarrugh, "Equal or Complementary? Women in the New Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 2 (2014): 230–243; Safwan M. Salem, "Tunisia's Constitutional Process and Gender Equality: Progress and Challenges," *Middle East Law and Governance* 7, no. 2 (2015): 255–266.

In this context, religious authority can be understood as a theory explaining religious leaders' influence, power, and charisma over their followers. For centuries, this authority has tended to be dominated by men and marginalised women (Fuad, 2021). Therefore, the intersection between feminism and religious authority, as well as between gender and religion, continues to evolve dynamically (Badran, 2009). The theory of religious authority emphasises how the influence, power, and charisma of religious leaders are often dominated by men, thereby excluding women from formal and symbolic structures. This condition then leads to the intersection between feminism and religious authority, particularly in the discourse on gender and religion. In the American Jewish context, religious feminism not only demands women's access to positions that men have defined but also seeks to reshape religious leadership and ritual structures.

Women and nature have an inseparable natural relationship. In the Quran, it is stated that the earth is synonymous with feminine characteristics. In relation to ecology, verses with ecological nuances are not solely intended for women. The metaphor that connects the world with feminine traits emphasises the importance of reviving feminine values in society, such as compassion, unity, preservation, and love (Megawangi, 191). These values should be internalised by every human being, both men and women, to face crises, eliminate injustice and marginalisation against women, and preserve ecology. Muslim ecofeminist Amina Wadud Muhsin views that the Quran does not define a single role or a single definition of a role for each gender

within a culture, nor are there detailed rules emphasizing how both function culturally, so it is necessary to revive the role of protecting and preserving ecology through feminine qualities in both men - male or female qualities to help bring about a harmonious and ecological revolution between humans and their relationship with God, themselves, their fellow human beings, and their environment.

The concept of ecofeminism views nature and women as often being placed in a lower position, exploited, controlled, and even sacrificed for the sake of power and development. However, the Qur'an offers a different perspective. Surah Ar-Rahman states: "And He raised the sky and created balance, so that you may not destroy that balance" (QS. Ar-Rahman: 7-8). This verse emphasises that destroying nature is tantamount to ignoring the principles of justice and balance established by Allah. Several Quranic exegetes have begun interpreting verses about nature and women through an ethical and ecological approach. With this view, the position of women is not only a domestic role, but is understood as agents of life and social change.

Women are not only housewives, but also "mothers of the earth" who play a role in caring for the environment and rejecting exploitation through the perspective of ecofeminism, verses about creation, the mandate of humans as caliphs, and the prohibition of causing damage to the earth (QS. Al-A'raf: 56) become relevant. This interpretation does not support double domination, namely, male domination over women and human domination over nature.

Instead, what should be upheld is a vision of harmonious coexistence with nature and gender equality as part of the balance of creation.

Since the 1980s, Jewish feminists have sought to incorporate women's perspectives into liturgy and interpret classical texts by creating feminist siddurs, Passover Haggadahs, and feminist midrashim. Figures such as Judith Plaskow, Rachel Adler, and Ellen Umansky challenged the masculine bias in Jewish theology, while Marcia Falk introduced new prayers with feminist-tinged Hebrew. These changes gained institutional recognition in the 1990s when the Reconstructionist and Reform movements integrated feminist liturgy into the siddur, and the Conservative movement began to make room for the mention of female ancestors (matriarchs) alongside male ancestors (patriarchs) in prayer.

In Europe, the struggle for women's rights also spilt into North America, where the authority of the North had been established (Ross, 2001). The church was then pressured to recognise women's involvement in religious activities and to abolish practices that were exclusive to men. This pressure led the church to undertake internal reforms, relax its patriarchal policies, and open up wider involvement in activities (Leschi, 1996).

The complexity becomes even more apparent when comparing female leadership with the ongoing contest between feminism and religious authority (Ilyas, 2002). Both sides often interpret the same verse but produce contradictory arguments, justifications, and conclusions. For example, there is a debate surrounding the question of whether there is *Qa Awwamun* in QS. An-Nisa [4]:34. From the

perspective of established religious authorities, qawwam is understood as a "leader" who is tasked with protecting and guiding women according to God's commands (Masri, 2021). In the view of conservative communities, this interpretation is accepted as a form of authentic leadership: men provide for their families, and women follow and obey (M. Jaya, 2020; Kholis, 2015).

The final dimension that reinforces gender inequality is institutional structure. From the outset, major religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism were formed within a patriarchal framework, both in their texts and teachings. The holy books were written at a time when only wealthy men had access to literacy education, while women were already placed in a subordinate position. Even after centuries of rewriting, the masculine perspective remains dominant. In the Bible, for example, some verses state that women must submit to their husbands (1 Timothy 2:11-12). In the Torah tradition, women are even prohibited from studying the word of God.

However, Christian women have their own way of interpreting religion according to their life experiences (Beaman-Hall and Nason-Clark 1997; Harrison 2007; van de Brandt 2015). Beaman-Hall (1997) shows how Evangelical women reinterpret the Bible to help victims of domestic violence. They use the Holy Scriptures as a basis for their calling to protect other women, even though there are verses that seem to support absolute obedience to husbands. Another example comes from the Mormon community, where some women interpret the figure of Heavenly Mother as a counterpoint to

the dominance of the male concept of God. The presence of this female divine figure provides comfort and a sense of inclusivity in their spirituality (Petrey, 2016).

A similar phenomenon can be seen among Muslim women. They have begun to interpret the Qur'an from their own perspective, arguing that interpretation has been dominated by men, resulting in a patriarchal system, rather than a patriarchal religion itself. Salem (2013) emphasises the need to "return" to the Qur'an so that men and women can interpret the text together in an egalitarian manner. Vanzan (2012) even asserts that women's rights have actually been guaranteed by Islamic egalitarian ethics from the beginning, but have been obstructed by patriarchal fiqh throughout history. Therefore, the re-establishment of Qur'anic justice is a necessity in the context of modern life.

Thus, in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish traditions, women's efforts at reinterpretation show that the main problem lies not in religion itself, but in the patriarchal interpretations inherited from previous generations. Today, various religious feminist movements are attempting to develop new articulations so that spiritual teachings are in line with the values of gender equality and justice.

C. Exploitation and Marginalisation of Women in the National Strategic Food Estate Project

Women, who by nature are close to nature, cannot easily allow the land to be damaged. Based on data from the 2018 Indonesian agricultural census, there are 8,051,328 female farmers, or around

24.04% of Indonesia's total number of farmers. Therefore, agriculture in Indonesia must be able to accommodate gender equality to achieve food security. A study in developing countries shows that agricultural policies are still not sufficiently responsive to women's needs. Women also have a dual role; in addition to working in the farm sector, they still have to take care of the household and family. The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) project, during the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2008, had a significant impact on environmental and social aspects. During the implementation of the MIFEE project, the conflicts that significantly impacted vulnerable groups were those affecting children and women. The conversion of forests for the MIFEE project has led to the loss of the primary food source for local communities. This situation has forced women and children to work selling gambier wood to intermediaries to meet their families' needs.

In 2020, female farmers in the PSN Food Estate in Humbang Hasundutan (Humbahas) Regency, North Sumatra, were already accustomed to farming even before the food estate program was introduced, helping their husbands to provide for their families. In the past, the land in Humbahas was idle, but the food estate has re-energised villagers who work as farmers to participate. The activities of women farmers on the food estate land are pretty productive. From dawn until noon, they work on the farm, then continue until six in the evening. Women farmers have a dual role as housewives who must also farm and care for their children. In fact,

they say they are willing to do farming even if it means sacrificing a lot of time, because they do this for their children's future, so that they can be more independent, keep up with the times, and achieve their dreams¹³.

The government chose potatoes, shallots, and garlic as the primary commodities in the Food Estate program in the Ria-ria region of Humbang Hasundutan to improve the community's economy. However, according to female farmers, their primary need is actually rice, because potatoes are not a staple food for the local community in North Sumatra. As a result, there have been many crop failures because local farmers have traditionally managed these commodities¹⁴. This situation increases the vulnerability of women, because they are the ones who are responsible for providing food for their families daily and have to bear a double burden: on the one hand, they lose their primary source of food (rice), and on the other hand, they are forced to adapt to new commodities that are unfamiliar to them.

Furthermore, the development of the Food Estate in the Ria-ria region has triggered land conflicts. In fact, the village community has been fighting to defend their customary land since the 1970s. In 1979, women were at the forefront of the struggle for recognition of these lands, which were eventually recognised by the state as customary lands. This confirms that women are not only vulnerable

¹³ Kementerian Pertanian Republik Indonesia. Wawancara Petani Food Estate Humbang Hasundutan. TV Tani, 2020.

¹⁴ BBC News Indonesia. "Food Estate Humbang Hasundutan: Antara Ketahanan Pangan dan Konflik Lahan." 2021.

to changes in agricultural policy but also play an essential role in defending their rights to land and their families' livelihoods. On the other hand, a study of the Food Estate in Central Kalimantan, particularly in the subdistricts of Bataguh (Kapuas) and Pandih Batu (Pulang Pisau), shows gender inequality in agricultural activities¹⁵. Almost all of the main activities, such as spraying, irrigation, fertilisation, weeding, soil cultivation, and sowing, are carried out by men.

This work is considered more suitable for men because it involves physical labour and the use of agricultural machinery, so women are rarely involved. In fact, women also have the capacity and should be given their fair share, for example, in seed selection, post-harvest management, or farm management. That way, women's roles remain present without eliminating fairness in the division of labour. Problems related to the wages received by women farmers are also still frequently encountered, such as not being paid, seasonal work, or only part-time work. Even if they get paid, the amount is still lower than that of men, even though the type of work is the same. This injustice arises due to the system implemented by the authorities, including the government, in the PSN food estate program. The question that needs to be asked is whether it is true that men and women have different needs in terms of daily expenses, considering that women also bear a double burden of taking care of the household and working.

¹⁵ Yuwono, S. & Prasodjo, A. (2013). Analisis Gender dalam Pertanian. Jakarta: Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak.

A study in developing countries has shown that agricultural policies are still not sufficiently responsive to women's needs¹⁶. Repressive enforcement has led to forced evictions, criminalisation of farmers, environmental damage, and land grabbing, followed by the loss of livelihoods and productivity of women in villages. This project is suspected of causing the loss of productive agricultural land, so rural women, the backbone of food production, face enormous challenges due to the food estate.

D. Religious Bias and Gender Inequality Behind the National Strategic Food Estate Project

Women and rural areas have a complex relationship because they exist in the midst of a strong patriarchal culture. Rural areas are different from urban areas because in villages, the influence of beliefs, customs, and culture is still robust, causing patriarchy to become even more dominant and continue to this day. Women play an essential role in all stages of cultivation, from land preparation, planting, maintenance, to harvesting¹⁷. Female labour in agriculture is still very much needed but under-validated, and it has been proven that the length of time women work in cultivation activities is equal to that of men. Still, in practice, women often receive lower wages due to gender bias¹⁸.

¹⁶ Acosta, Maria, et al. *Gender and Agricultural Policy in Developing Countries*. London: Routledge, 2025

¹⁷ Yuwono, Budi. *Peran Perempuan dalam Pertanian dan Pembangunan Pedesaan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2013

¹⁸ Hujatulu, Andi. *Gender dan Keadilan dalam Sektor Pertanian*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2015

The phenomenon of exploitation of women in food estate agriculture in Humbang Hasundutan Regency is linked to Batak customary history. Female farmers in the Humbahas food estate PSN have experienced a dual role, namely as farmers from morning to evening, while also taking care of family matters. Meanwhile, their husbands, who work as farmers, do not have as heavy a workload as their wives. The position of women in Batak customs is trapped in a patriarchal system that views them as objects subject to male authority. One of the Batak customs that has long shaped women's way of thinking, making it difficult for them to escape their predicament, is that women do not have inheritance rights to land or family property, which is considered the husband's responsibility after marriage. However, in reality, in the Humbahas food estate, wives still bear the same responsibilities as their husbands, and in fact, even heavier ones. In addition, various studies have also proven that women are the first to be most affected by environmental damage. Therefore, it is unsurprising that women are willing to take on such heavy responsibilities when managing food estate agriculture.

When exploring the Dalihan Na Tolu tradition in Batak society, it can be seen how customary constructs have become the basis for social relations that place men at the centre of authority. At the same time, women (*boru*) are more often positioned as the implementing or serving group in traditional ceremonies. This philosophy emphasises three principles, namely *somba marhula-hula* (respecting the female provider/wife's family), *manat mardongan*

tubu (being careful with fellow clans), and elek marboru (being gentle with women). Although understood as a value of social balance, this structure reflects the history of patriarchy in Batak, where control over land, marriage, and clan continuity is mainly in the hands of men. At the same time, women are attached to domestic roles and symbols of affection that must be maintained. The powerlessness of women due to Batak customs is reflected in how they must submit to family matters. Male control over women in rural areas can be even stronger, mainly because education in villages is not yet advanced, and the mindset of the community is not yet open-minded. It can be said that they are still “old-fashioned” and there is still a lot of conflict if someone expresses an opinion that rebels against a ‘tradition’ or “culture.”

Based on data from the Humbang Hasundutan District Statistics Agency, the majority of the Protestant population reached the highest number, 146,689. The representation of patriarchal culture in Protestantism has been seen in Protestant Christian churches. The religious feminist movement criticises Protestant churches for still being confined to the idea that women were created only as “helpers” to men, or as implied by the word “ezer” or equivalent helper. In fact, this Hebrew word means “helper” of the Israelites (Psalm 121). However, this verse has been interpreted negatively to imply the inferiority and subordination of women, when in fact, if interpreted literally, the verse elevates the superiority of women and upholds equality. Verses with room for different interpretations end up being used by certain parties to their

advantage. The Protestant feminist movement has understood that physical and non-physical violence, both macro and micro, are not only violations of human rights but also violations of faith.

The continuing gender gap, caused by long-standing customs, makes it difficult for women to recognise and change their suffering. In developing the agricultural sector through the PSN food estate, women's role in farming should not be limited but adjusted so that their potential can be fully realised. However, deeply held values, namely patriarchal perspectives, need to be eliminated, not only in traditions embedded in village life but also in groups that have the authority to formulate policies. Religious teachings that are conveyed incorrectly have also been proven to have the potential to produce a generation of men who do not care about women's issues. Religious ideology plays a vital role in creating order in the state. Still, in practice, it is often used to legitimise rules designed according to the interests of men who dominate the formation of the state system¹⁹.

Regions in Indonesia that are far from urban areas and minimally affected by globalisation show that many residents are still afraid to criticise the oppression of women, which is often justified by religious arguments. Although Indonesia has progressive laws regarding land ownership, practices in the field still show inequality. For example, in India, land ownership by women remains low due to inheritance rules based on religious law. Similar

¹⁹ Alimatul Qibtiyah, *Islam, Feminisme dan Gerakan Perempuan di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009).

conditions also have the potential to occur in Indonesia's Food Estate policy. Although the regulations are designed to protect community access to land, their implementation often ignores the gender dimension. As a result, women, who are heavily involved in agricultural activities, remain marginalised from access to and control over land.

Studies have shown that gender, religion, and the state are closely intertwined²⁰. For example, based on studies in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, it shows that in this region, the formation of gender relations, sexuality, and religion has been embedded since the early construction of the nation-state²¹. This is not much different from Indonesia, where religion, especially Islam, has been used as an ideology, making religious principles easier to enter various aspects of life. The existence of religious feminists has helped develop the mindset of many oppressed women who are surrounded by a patriarchal system. Religious principles related to “patriarchy” have long been used as a tool to create the order desired by the state.

The issue of gender inequality against women, which includes limited access to education, societal values, gender values and roles that are commonly known to the public, are often found in textbooks,

²⁰ Kandiyoti, Deniz. *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

²¹ Moghadam, Valentine M. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013.

and values that teachers and gender policies internalize²². In Indonesia, one prominent Muslim feminist figure is Alimatul Qibtiyah. In her inaugural lecture as a professor, she emphasised that the tendency to belittle the role of women is rooted in a conservative and textual understanding of religion. This mindset consistently places women in a subordinate position, as if they were a “second sex”²³. Furthermore, conservative constructs often label women's bodies with symbols of purity, fertility, or satisfaction, so that they are considered a source of disaster²⁴. This way of thinking has strong indicators in the oppression of women that has been going on for a long time, even when women have become part of the division of labour. For example, women seem morally responsible for following their husbands' rules, so they play dual roles.

Based on a case study in Tapian Nauli, one of the largest rice farming areas in North Labuhan Batu Regency, several factors cause women to dominate agricultural activities²⁵. First, environmental factors: the Tapian Nauli community depends entirely on the farm sector as a source of livelihood, so women are required to participate in working in the fields, even though the work is considered heavy. Second, economic factors: urgent livelihood needs mean that women

²² Ridwan Khairandy, *Pokok-Pokok Hukum Dagang* (2003), dikutip dalam Fitrianti & Habibullah, *Kajian Hukum Ekonomi di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2012), hlm. 45.

²³ Alimatul Qibtiyah, *Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*, 2012.

²⁴ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Rita Shepia, Sulian Ekomila, *Paradoks Patriarki: Dominasi Perempuan Dalam Aktivitas Pertanian Pada Komunitas Batak Toba Di Desa Tapian Nauli*, Program Studi Pendidikan Sosiologi, Universitas Negeri Medan.

not only take care of the household, but also have to work in the fields to support their families, especially when men no longer play the role of primary breadwinners. Third, family factors: women's dominance in farming occurs because husbands are reluctant to participate, so the responsibility for providing for the family falls on the wives. In addition, agriculture is passed down from generation to generation, so women are accustomed to and skilled in agricultural activities from an early age. Fourth, cultural factors: the perception that working in the fields is not a man's job forces women to take over agricultural work.

This pattern then influenced male migrants who followed local customs and were reluctant to work in the fields. Patriarchal religious interpretations have justified this reluctance. For example, through a literal understanding of the verse "Men are the leaders of women" (QS. An-Nisa: 34), which is often understood narrowly, it is interpreted as men's absolute power over women. This understanding contributes to men's apathy towards housework and productivity outside the home. Because men feel they have full authority, they avoid responsibility, resulting in a double burden on women.

According to Alimatul Qibtiyah, the presence of Muslim feminists is intended to challenge these conservative traditions. This is because interpretations that marginalise women are not in line with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who actually placed women in a position of equality with men. One example is the hadith narrated by Muslim in the Book of Faith (no. 79) from Abu Sa'id al-

Khudri, in which the Prophet said, “O women, give charity and ask for forgiveness, for I see that most of the inhabitants of Hell are women.” This hadith is often used as a reference by patriarchal scholars to maintain male dominance over women. It is this patriarchal interpretation of religious texts that reinforces men's unwillingness to share domestic and economic responsibilities, resulting in a double burden falling on women, as is also seen in the context of the Food Estate, where women are more dominant in the agricultural sector.

In Islam, the term feminism was coined by Riffat Hassan, who referred to it as “post-patriarchal Islam,” or in her own words, “Qur'anic Islam.” This concept emphasises the importance of human emancipation from various forms of oppression. Such oppression stems from traditionalism, authoritarianism (religious, political, or economic), tribalism, racism, sexism, slavery, and anything else that prevents humans from realising the Qur'an's vision of returning to Allah as the ultimate goal of life. The true purpose of Islam, as emphasised in the Qur'an, is to build peace, a concept that is the fundamental meaning of Islam itself.

Every religion actually conveys teachings that aim to honour women. However, there are still many people who use religious hadiths or arguments to justify male behaviour that is actually based on their lust or desires, which in turn sacrifices women. Misinterpretation of hadiths is often used to give men more freedom to act, indirectly giving them more choices than women. The loopholes exploited by men in manipulating religious teachings have

created an unsupportive climate for women. Women suffer many disadvantages as a result of the patriarchal system, which is validated by men using the religious guidelines they believe in.

CONCLUSION

Women's agricultural dominance cannot be separated from environmental, economic, family, and cultural factors. Women often bear a double burden, namely taking care of the household and being the main agricultural sector workforce due to the lack of male involvement. This condition is exacerbated by policies such as food estate projects that are oriented solely towards productivity, without considering women's specific roles and needs. Patriarchal interpretations of religion, whether in Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism, are often used to legitimise the exclusion of women and perpetuate gender inequality. For example, in Islamic tradition, the hadith about women being the majority of hell's inhabitants is often used to restrict women's movements. In Christian tradition, interpretations of Paul's epistles are also often used to emphasise women's obedience to men.

Similarly, in Hindu tradition, the patriarchal social system contributes to placing women in a subordinate position. In this context, religious feminism exists across religions as an effort to challenge conservative interpretations that place women only as complements, by restoring the principles of justice and equality as the core of religious teachings. In this way, women can be considered essential food security subjects, not merely marginalised workers.

This perspective is relevant for realising an inclusive, sustainable food system that can optimise the agricultural sector's potential.

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