

Equal *lumbung* of Culture: Poso Women's School

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Introduction: *lumbung* and Women

Among the reading sources compiled for the Women's School managed by the Mosintuwu Institute, there is an interesting article about the position of women in agriculture tradition. The article talks about *mompadungku*, the long process of farming tradition in Poso, from land clearing to post-harvesting after the crops are stored in the granary (Hokey, 2017). The farmers' long work process, which is described in detail, reflects the relationship between the set of farming activities and the entire value system, social system, and arts and culture of the community. Each stage and ritual is carried out collectively by community members and is connected with the relationship between humans and nature that provides sustenance and is respected. The night before planting begins, the villagers will have a meal together while keeping vigil and singing to honor the seeds that they are going to plant. In like manner, at a later time before harvesting, husbands will build huts in the fields for themselves since they are in charge of waiting for the rice and must separate themselves from their wives.

Of all the previously mentioned series of processes, what is interesting and stands out is the important role of women. It is stated that "even though the husband has to wait second by second for the rice to be ready to be harvested... when the time to harvest comes, it is not the man who picks the first rice, but the oldest woman in the house." (Hokey, 2017) The other important moment is the ritual of bringing the rice into the *lumbung*:

"Putting the rice crops into the *lumbung* is not just for anyone either. It is for the old women to welcome the rice and arrange it or *ndanyumpi* in the *lumbung*." (Hokey, 2017)

Unfortunately, in the rapidly changing times, the equal *lumbung* tradition was superseded by patriarchal cultures that came from various directions. The political order is increasingly separated from the communal cultural practices of its people. Elections for heads of village and other leaders of administrative regions, which have more to do with the dynamics of the political elites, rarely engage female leaders. Similarly, the definition of the head of the family as stated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 1974, Article 31 paragraph 3 places the husband as the leader or head of the family, whereas the wife in the domestic sphere is the "housewife". Patriarchal culture is also confirmed through religious practices that promote male leadership. Traditional customs become narrower in matters of marriage and divorce. In Poso, the *sampapitu* custom applies, namely the dowry given to women in marriage. If at any time a woman asks for a divorce because of domestic violence or other cases, the woman must pay a fine to the man. Ethnic customs that have roots in women's leadership have shifted (Gogali, interview 2022). Meanwhile, agricultural culture is increasingly replaced by a capital-based economy with an urban lifestyle orientation.

lumbung Conflict and Strategy

Social construction through the various institutions as mentioned above has further marginalized women from the public sphere and placed them at the subordinate level in the domestic sphere. Under these circumstances,

conflict situations have the potential to exacerbate the gender gap that already exists in society, and as a consequence women are vulnerable to becoming victims of violence. That is what happened when a multidimensional conflict exploded in Poso in 1998 and spread on a large scale (Agustina, 2005: 4; Babutung, 2018: 76; Gogali, 2008). The religious-nuanced conflict in the pluralistic society in Poso, which resulted in the loss of lives and massive displacement, has reportedly been driven by the interests of various political-economic powers.

It is highly obvious that in a war situation, all the collective work of society and efforts to pool resources, food, and culture, will be destroyed. Especially in the case of a civil war between people in the same space or community.

“Villages were left empty, gardens uncultivated, crops left to rot, children separated from their parents, parents lost their children, husbands separated from wives, from relatives, neighbors, the air along most of the road was filled with the stench of corpses, children afflicted by diseases due to malnutrition, babies delivered in the forests, schools temporarily or even permanently closed, houses burned, looted.”(Gogali, 2008: 16)

At the same time, Gogali reminded that even in the worst conditions, people of both opposing camps, especially those who have lived side by side in the same community for a long time, developed strategies to help each other, for example, neighbors of different religions would help each other by “disguising the religious identity” on their citizen ID cards during a sweeping raid and protect each other if an attack occurred. (Gogali, 2008: 17) In the midst of such efforts to navigate a path to peace, the role of women was very prominent, such as the role of women who continued to sell in the markets for the opposing camp, which was also welcomed by their counterparts from the other camp. (Gogali, interview, 2021) Logistics and food issues are the keys to knit togetherness. Women, who are constructed to take care of children and the need for food, see the food “*lumbung*” as a priority to be built together—across political and ideological divides.

Mosintuwu and the Women’s School

However, the work of building resilient and conflict-resistant communities requires leadership, insight, and a network of actors with a shared commitment. Correspondingly, the community needs to be provided with critical education and knowledge to unravel the primordial sentiments that are aroused for the sake of power.

It is for that reason that Lian Gogali, a Poso native who had successfully completed her master’s in degree education in Yogyakarta, was compelled to return home to re-knit together what had been scattered due to the conflict. With that in mind, she established a network of friends who are committed to peace and founded the Mosintuwu Institute in Tentena in 2009. The word *mosintuwu*, which literally means working together or mutual cooperation, according to Lian Gogali contains the philosophy of supporting each other, giving and helping each other, which was taken from the Poso way of life (Lian Gogali, interview, 2021, Sari, 2016). The word institute refers to a “critical space” (Mosintuwu Institute website, accessed 21 January 2022).

The first program that was created was the Women’s School. While conducting research for her thesis, Lian traveled to conflict-affected areas of Poso of the two opposing camps, and learned about women’s strategies for peace. At the same time, these initiatives were rarely recorded in the collective memory of the conflict—and women’s voices were not represented in the public sphere and in local governance. The first theme to explore is equality, in order to encourage women to participate in their respective villages. Women from villages with different backgrounds are the main target of the program, in addition to groups that had been involved in the conflict. In the beginning, the program only managed to bring together nine women, but in time, the number of participants increased. The curriculum consisted of nine materials covering issues of tolerance and peace, economic, socio-cultural, and political rights, and sexual health and reproductive rights. Meetings were held three to four times a month and lasted for a year. One very important material was training in speaking, reasoning, and writing skills. The women who participated in the training were, on average, elementary school graduates or at the most high school graduates. When dealing with DPRD members or officials, they would tend to have difficulty expressing ideas. Public speaking training was found to greatly increase self-confidence.

Changes and the Village Dream Map

In Gogali’s village, the alumni of the Women’s School have demonstrated the capacity to make changes. Equipped with a comprehensive understanding of Law No. 6 of 2014 concerning Villages, alumni are able to amend misguided village policies. One woman who graduated from the Women’s School managed to become the first

female head of a hamlet in her village and was protested against by the residents. She faced the protesters and managed to defend her position by referring to the rights and roles of women as citizens to participate in village welfare. Mrs. Nengah Susilowasih from Kilo Village returned to her village with new insights and enthusiasm. She built a network of women from the Christian and Islamic communities and implemented a “solidarity economy.” They process virgin coconut oil to revive the tradition of planting coconuts, which has begun to diminish, substituted by cocoa. The oil they produced is sold to the Women’s School. They also work on a garden-based household economy. In another village, the women built an organic market and preserve the forest for the ferns. The women’s hobby of caring for organic plants became the basis of the solidarity economy, and from that, the Market Bank was created. The Women’s School and its network of alumni have become a source of strength for advice and support.

In each village, alumni of the Women’s School collaborate with village officials and other villagers to create a Village Reform School, to map the villagers’ geospatial and socio-cultural aspects, and to design a “village dream map” to improve the welfare of the villagers. Village Reform Schools have been established in 24 villages in Poso, and involve not only women but all elements of society. The cultural exploration program encourages village youth to rediscover the existing and living values in their respective villages. Kokorondo Village, for example, preserves the value of “mutual trust.” There, the story of King Talasa’s past is observed, with his motto “the ocean is borderless, the land is fenceless” (Gogali, interview, 2021). The story provides the villagers with an insight into peace and builds a “bridge” for conflicting groups. From Malitu Village there is the *mompaho* system, which calls on them to cultivate the

land together—regardless of their religious background. There is a very strong value of solidarity with nature in that village. One existing oral tradition reveals that in order to clear the land, one must ask the ants for permission. If someone is stung by an ant, that person should not be there in the first place (Gogali, interview, 2021). The value of simplicity is taken from the traditional fishery technology in Lake Poso, namely the *waya masapi*, which is based on the philosophy of respecting nature. To catch eel and *masapi*, a particular type of fish endemic to Poso, bridges and bamboo-floored huts are built, the front consisting of a fence of bamboo slats extending up to 20-meters wide. The bamboo ties are in odd numbers since even numbers are only for God, (Gogali, interview, 2021, Siruyu, 2018). There is a culture of cooperation in groups (*masale*) and fair distribution of catch that is applied in this tradition. A group of fishermen “take turns to get one night’s right ... to get the catch when [doing] the shift,” (Siruyu, 2018). They can earn one million rupiahs in one night. Such economic yield has been used by the villagers to send their children to higher education.

Epilogue: Equal *lumbung*

lumbung practices are known throughout the archipelago, including in Poso. It is not only known among farming cultures but also in regions with maritime traditions. The working principle of a *lumbung* is to collect harvested crops together so that they can be enjoyed and managed together for the welfare of the people. The *lumbung* tradition is closely related to the local philosophy that is kept alive by the people. In the whole process, social relations and the meaning of collective life are intertwined.

Digging deeper into the traditional practice of the past, *lumbung* culture did include the principles of equality between men and women.

Women had been prioritized because they were considered close to nature and had an interest in preserving it. Although over time the value of equality in *lumbung* practices has been eroded by patriarchal cultures, efforts to revive equality in works involving the improvement of community welfare as demonstrated by the Mosintuwu Women's School, turn out to have an immediate impact on the people.

In many parts of the world, granaries as symbols of prosperity and togetherness have been ravaged by war, conflict, and violence. There, women and children are vulnerable to becoming victims. The Mosintuwu Women's School is a pilot model of how women gain strength through knowledge and networking to re-knit social networks that had been torn apart by conflict and revive the practices of an equal *lumbung*. In their respective villages, women who have been equipped with enthusiasm and self-confidence have proven their ability to make changes.

Changing times is an unavoidable certainty. The rural realms have been increasingly beleaguered by the urban lifestyle, the world of national and local politics, and transactionalism approach that emphasizes competition and profit. The younger generation is confronted with exposure to unfiltered information technology, while identity politics reinforces mutual suspicion. In dealing with all that, the practice of *lumbung* to rebuild togetherness is increasingly urgent. Naturally, the strategies and methods will always need to be renewed so as to adapt to the conditions of the times. The challenge is to re-examine the richness of local culture, values, and socio-economic practices that can be used as a "dream map" for a living—not in the past—but in the future. For this reason, the younger generation, with their technological sophistication, creativity, and enthusiasm, are at the forefront.

The *lumbung*, in the end, is not merely a symbol but a cultural practice that is lived and brings prosperity to its people. The harvest collected is not just plants or fish, but the entire wealth of values, knowledge, and social practices as regards the identity of the *kampung* and village. At the center of the practices of the *lumbung* is organized equality and cooperation that involves all its people, regardless of their religious background, age, and gender.

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