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#### RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Ecofeminist Empowerment: In Preserving the Musi River Waters of Palembang City in 2023

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Abstract: This article discusses ecofeminist empowerment in efforts to conserve the waters of the Musi River in Palembang City in 2023. This research takes an ecofeminist approach by combining environmental and gender perspectives, focusing on the understanding that human relationships with nature have complex social and cultural dimensions. This research used a qualitative approach involving interviews and observations. The data collected were thematically analyzed to explore the understanding of ecofeminist contributions to the preservation of the waters of the Musi River. The results showed that the ecofeminist approach has made an important contribution to the efforts to conserve the waters of the Musi River. However, several factors that influence ecofeminist empowerment still need to be addressed. Social and cultural factors, such as gender stereotypes and limited roles for women in environmental affairs, are obstacles in increasing women's active participation in water conservation. In addition, inadequate policies and regulations also need to be considered to create a supportive environment for ecofeminist empowerment. In this context, collaborative efforts need to be made between the government and civil society to overcome these problems. It is hoped that the results of this research can make a significant contribution to efforts to conserve the waters of the Musi River in Palembang City, while strengthening awareness of the link between the environment and gender.

#### Keywords:

Ecofeminism, Empowerment, Preservation, Women.

## **About the Author**

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## 1. Introduction

Humans are identified with the most dominating and defining component of all other living things, having a great capacity to change or influence the environment through thought and action (Torabi & Noori, 2019). The environment has only a limited ability to accept these changes. The ability of the environment to accept these changes is called the environmental carrying capacity (Rizki et al., 2021). At the end of the 21st century, various public awareness movements emerged that paid attention to environmental conditions. This refers to public awareness to keep the Earth clean, healthy, and green. Various ecological organizations have sprung up, and recycling consumer goods has become a lifestyle trend for city dwellers (Astuti, 2012). The proliferation of environmental organizations certainly includes many who tend to care about the environment, not only NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and the Government, but women also plunge into environmental organizations. Women are often associated as observers of nature and the environment (Petersson, 2020). Despite its significance, emerging nations have seen a decline in public trust in recent years. The lowest decline in relation to other organizations, including businesses, NGOs, and the media (Suriyanrattakorn & Chang, 2021).

Women's relationship with the environment is often referred to as ecofeminism. In the book Ecofeminism Women, Animals, Nature: Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature written by Greta Gaard (1993), she defines ecofeminism as a theory that developed from various fields of feminist inquiry and activism: the peace movement, the labor movement, women's health care, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements (Mentes, 2019). Based on ecological thinking, feminism, and socialism, the basic principle of ecofeminism is that ideologies that legitimize oppression, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and race, are ideologies that support the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism can be interpreted to give voice to all oppressions, arguing that no efforts to liberate women or other oppressed groups can succeed without similar efforts to liberate women (Gaard, 1993).

In addition, according to Françoise d'Eaubonne, in her book Le Féminisme ou la Mort (1974), it can be defined that ecofeminism is considered the result of oppression and domination experienced by groups in various fields, including women, people of color, children, the poor, as well as the oppression of nature such as animals, land, water, and air. According to Françoise in her book, she argues that the oppression, control, exploitation, and colonization perpetrated by Western patriarchal societies directly cause irreparable environmental damage. In her thinking, Françoise has always sought to eliminate all forms of social injustice, not just the injustices experienced by women and the environment (Adams, 1993). Ecofeminism also considers women's ideas and passion in the form of love for nature in developing policies and actions that affect many people. Ecofeminism is also analogous to a social movement about environmental ethics (Fitri & Akbar, 2017). All things considered, a number of contemporary feminist and environmental trends and gaps can be interpreted as jointly expressing a compelling case for ecofeminist research in general and intersectional ecofeminist methodologies in particular. In keeping with advancements in feminist studies outside of the field (Singer, 2020). This ecofeminist movement was born in response to the need for womenbased environmental protection (Arni & Nur, 2021). Ecofeminism builds on the various perspectives of those whose perspectives are usually omitted or trivialized in the dominant discourse (Carolyn & Merchant, 1995).

From several explanations of ecofeminism and several cases in the world, ecofeminism is no longer new in the environment, even from several studies saying that ecofeminists already need the role of women and the environment in preserving the earth (Puleo, 2017). Indonesia is often said that nature is like a woman, the earth is often called "Bumi Pertiwi". It is said that a woman and her nature are similar because when a woman conforms to her nature, she is gentle and loving. Similarly, if nature is treated well, it will provide a good source of life for life on Earth. If both are treated unfairly, they will be harmed and will have a major impact on life on Earth (Arni & Nur, 2021). Women are often compared to the earth, chicken, night, moon, and rice. Sometimes these myths are not positive, but negative. This metaphorical language for women sometimes leads to interpretations that demean women. Women are synonymous with nature, which is

controlled by humans. Based on this analogy, nature is the objects of the earth that are controlled and explored, and even exploited by humans. From the analogy between women and nature, it can be concluded that other people (people in male society) will also "dominate" (Astuti, 2012). From this argument, women's involvement is very important in the environmental movement, with the environmental empowerment movement.

This women's empowerment movement is a conscious effort of individuals and groups with the aim of helping women become more independent and productive, but in an effort to protect and care for the environment, it is clear that every woman needs to be aware. Raising awareness is the most important part of the eco-feminist movement, with changes for the better, of course, there must be a sense in every woman to improve her environment. Now, the sea and beaches should not have hunting practices. No matter how small or big, every human activity (good or bad) towards the environment will definitely affect the environment itself (Arni & Nur, 2021). The roots of a strong patriarchal culture exist in the social system of the community, which requires them to be able to divide their time fairly between activities inside and outside the family environment. Especially for wives and mothers. The need to stay at home to do housework becomes greater and more important to show their existence as "good" mothers and wives from a patriarchal perspective (Priyatna et al., 2017). One aspect of the environment that women take into consideration is environmental preservation. The community's primary source of water for organisms with vital life-sustaining roles is the river. One natural resource that is crucial to human existence is the river. In addition to serving as a source of pure water, rivers are crucial for preserving the sustainability of ecosystems, offering habitat for a variety of plants and animals, facilitating transportation and agriculture, and generating income for local residents.

South Sumatra has many rivers, one of which is the Musi River. The Musi River is one of the important rivers in the province, as it is significant for the transportation of people and goods. The Musi River, along with its tributaries, is the principal waterway in South Sumatra and can be used for large offshore vessels (Firdaus et al., 2025; Natassia & Syarifudin, 2024; Kadarsa et al., 2017). The boundary length of the not less 750 km, in South Sumatra the Musi River is an important natural resource (Syarifudin, 2017; Kadarsa et al., 2017; Arifin et al., 2022). The Musi River has enormous cultural, economic and environmental importance. Despite the Musi River's many advantages, it is often neglected in terms of purity due to human behaviour including littering (Sudarmo et al., 2025; Rozirwan et al., 2021). Because of this environmental neglect, the areas around the Musi river have become polluted, resulting in environmental damage and degradation, diminished fish populations, loss of macrobenthic organisms, and sedimentation (Syarifudin, 2017; Rozirwan et al., 2021; Sudarmo et al., 2025). Therefore, there is a need for sustainable preservation of the waters along the Musi River based on ecofeminist principles.

The concept of ecofeminist empowerment combines feminist principles with environmental issues, so as to strengthen the role of women in environmental management. In the context of preserving the waters of the Musi riverbank, women have an important role in decision-making, environmental maintenance, and sustainable economic development. Regulations governing the preservation of the Musi River include Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 17 of 2019 concerning Water Resources (Indonesia, 2019) and South Sumatra Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2013 concerning Integrated Watershed Management (South Sumatra, 2013). Balai Riset Perikanan Perairan Umum (2010) Musi River has abundant biodiversity, including various aquatic species that have economic value, such as fish, crustaceans, mollusks, reptiles, and other species. Therefore, the empowerment of ecofeminism in the musi river must be preserved, one of which is in Palembang City, South Sumatra.

Researchers have also studied the conservation status of the Musi River. The Balai Riset Perikanan Perairan Umum (2010), for example, found that the Musi River has abundant biodiversity, with many different species of flora and fauna; similarly, one additional study on the Musi River by Mindasari (2022) found that the river's biodiversity had been lost through human action and activities. This is in contrast to a study on

water quality information by Putri & Melki (2020), the authors also found using several chemical estimating measures, that nitrate, phosphate and total suspended solids (TSS) up to nearly unacceptable levels. Rizki (2021) again drew attention to human impediments to action, which her study identified as legal impediments in infrastructure, law enforcement, law enforcement agencies, and legal understanding. Trisnaini (2018) indicated low water quality overall for the Musi River by assessing physical habitats. Windusari (2015) achieved similar results for water quality, he concluded it was not suitable for consumption. Previous research suggests that these research studies have mainly focused on the conservation and water quality evaluations of the Musi River. There is a lack of previous research as no further research studies on the conservation of the Musi River have been conducted from an ecofeminist perspective. This study addresses the deficiency of previous research by looking at the opportunity for ecofeminism to improve conservation of the Musi River banks, specifically in Palembang City, South Sumatra. This article discusses the connection of women and the environment to organize the conservation of the Musi River banks by the agency of women.

#### 2. Methods

This study presents more details about women's empowerment and the environment of the Musi River waterside using a qualitative approach involving interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data collected is thematically analyzed to explore the understanding of the ecofeminist contribution to the preservation of the waters of the Musi River. The qualitative method means that it can record the words of the people studied in their language. Human experiences are described in detail through qualitative research by considering the life goals, experiences, and social interactions of the subjects studied. This approach allows researchers to understand society through subjective perspectives and understandings. This is different from quantitative research, which tends to categorize respondents' experiences with standard categories set by researchers (Agusta, 2003). This qualitative method aims to develop the concept of sensitivity to the problem at hand, clarify the reality related to the search for Grounded Theory, and develop an understanding of one or more phenomena at hand.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Ecofeminism recognizes the double subsumption of women and the environment (Molyneux & Steinberg, 2019). Women who manage watersheds have an opportunity to influence the continued integrity of the ecosystems they are responsible for. By enabling women to have more power, it will allow them to, and inspire them to, be more innovative and acquire new knowledge which is actively engaged in collaborative conservation programs (Asteria & Herdiansyah, 2020; 2021). Women tend to be the predominant leaders of community-based conservation programs. For example, women in India play a significant role in the management of community forests and sustainable energy usage, which are critical to environmental protection (Tiwari, 2020). The engagement of indigenous women in small-scale fishing in Fiji highlights their importance to family food security and the case for the need for their inclusion in the planning and management of fisheries (Thomas et al., 2021). However, when exploring the relationship of women with river water, it is clear this does violate the above-described concepts. Rojas et al. (2025) study supports this by demonstrating that women's contributions to land use planning is often overlooked.

The Case Study of Settlement Characteristics on the Riverbanks is an example of a case study that discusses the waters of the Musi River. The settlements that are along the Musi River stem from the social structure of people living in the area, the community way of life, and spatial design. Initially, all of historic communities were situated along the river, and economic activities were based on livelihoods linked to the rivers source. Now the communities have moved further away from the river, with this have changing the shape of the Palembang region from front to back of the Musi River (Sastika & Yasir, 2017). Another study employs the Ekist framework to demonstrate the significance of communities along the Musi River in

Palembang city to culture. This study concerns Kelurahan 7 Ulu, a location historically inhabited by the Chinese ethnic group, which possesses historical and cultural significance to Chinese, Dutch, and Palembang civilizations, as evidenced by the various architectural styles among the buildings surveyed in the area. The Palembang city government is currently attempting to develop the riverbank area into a cultural tourist destination, a historical tourism destination, and a city on the waterfront. The people along riverfront are still interacting and using the Musi River within their everyday life. However, as the area develops there are shifts in how people who live and inhabit the river are starting to change and this impacts and shifts that ethnocultural communities identity as people who live along the riverbank (Mindasari et al., 2022).

Information related to the Musi River indicates poor water quality, with levels of ammonia, sulphide, iron, manganese, and chloride exceeding permitted limits for rivers. These data can conclude that specifically the water quality at the sample site, especially, is not potably safe since findings attributes pollution from industrial waste and sewage (Windusari & Sari, 2015). Based on the above research, the study is mainly about women empowerment, an intersection with studies of rivers, forests, sustainable energy practices, settlements of Chinese ethnic groups, the water quality of the Musi River, and the way of life of the people who inhabit the Musi River. However, the stated research does not consider the significance of ecofeminism in the protection of the Musi River located in Palembang City. In this sense, this study will explore the role of women to protect the Musi River.

#### **Women and the River**

Digitalization of Indonesia's digital village is now part of the national agenda through the Smart Village program, according to the Minister of Villages, Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration Regulation Number 7 of 2021 on Priority Use of Village Funds, and supported by the 2020–2024 RPJMN, which mandates the digitalization of public services at the village level. This initiative is also based on the principle of modernizing village governance based on e-government to encourage efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness (Kementerian Desa Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal dan Transmigrasi, 2020). Responding to this agenda, the Jatirenggo Village Government, Glagah District, Lamongan Regency, initiated the launch of the JALANTOL Application (Jatirengo Integrated Online Service) on September 4, 2022, as the first digital public service innovation in its area. This application was developed locally and based on the local social context. According to the Lamongan PMD Service report (Saputra, 2022), the penetration of Android devices among Jatirenggo residents has reached around 97%, although the methodological details of the survey are not yet available. This reflects community readiness as an important foundation in implementing village service technology. Therefore, citizen involvement and technological device readiness are important requirements for the success of contextually relevant community-driven digital transformation.

When discussing environmental issues in Indonesia, it can be observed that environmental conditions are increasingly complex, and damage is increasingly difficult to control. One of the environmental problems that often occurs in most parts of Indonesia is related to rivers and the problem of microplastic waste (Ma'Ruf et al., 2024; Ali et al., 2021; Rachman et al., 2021; Andarani et al., 2024; Manalu et al., 2017). Environmental damage due to mass exploitation makes women fear excessive (male) domination (Wijayanti et al., 2019). Various community activities depend on the Musi River, such as agriculture, the fishing industry, plantations, transportation, and so on. These activities are feared to harm the river ecosystem. However, community activities certainly have an impact on the sustainability of the Musi River, one of which is the existence of women. So, the theory of women's protection of nature, called ecofeminism theory, breaks the ethics of anthropocentrism, which places humans above nature.

Yoshiko Isshiki (2000) in (Astuti, 2012) explains that the word 'eco' in the context of ecology comes from the Greek word 'oikos', which refers to 'household life'. This concept includes shelter for all living things, including humans, animals, plants, water, earth, air, and the sun. Ecology as a scientific discipline studies the relationship between humans and the environment, incorporating aspects of the humanities and natural

sciences in a multidisciplinary approach. Ecological consciousness views the world holistically, recognizing the existence of diversity within a unified world. The ideology of modern feminism, which views women as beings who are themselves and have all the opportunities that must be realized to arouse the desire to take on masculine traits while denying the value of femininity, actually makes women trapped in a patriarchal system. This situation changed the opinions of some contemporary feminists and became more realistic. The understanding is that building a new egalitarian society can be done by maintaining feminine qualities and the role of women as mothers (Fahimah, 2017). Women are considered the central figure in many households fighting for justice by creating ecological space through the practice of ecofeminism (Romero-Perez et al., 2020; Bangun, 2020; Peeples & DeLuca, 2006). Although it is a simple action, ecofeminist values have become an inseparable part of everyday life and have even developed into a support in the family economy (Wijayanti et al., 2019).

Ecofeminism is one of the theories put forward by several women about the real-life conditions they feel. The term ecofeminism was first introduced in 1974 by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book Le Feminism ou La Mort, who tried to free herself from the conditions actually experienced. dualistic logic centered on the desire to save the planet (Fahimah, 2017). In the mission to save and preserve the Musi River, there is certainly a role for men and women, but so far, the concept of "environmental savior" has become a boomerang that has given birth to patriarchal seeds. This statement was obtained from the results of on-site observations that people who dominate men say that women are also involved in environmental damage in the musi river. Then, women are often positioned as individuals who have love for the environment, but at the same time, the social construction of women is still influenced by patriarchal views. For example, there is anthropocentric behavior associated with women. The importance of both men and women struggling to achieve balance in environmental activities is beginning to be discovered, even starting from the kitchen environment (Nikodemus Niko & Rupita, 2018).

# Musi River Pollution due to Microplastics

Galgani (2015) in (Victoria, 2017) explains that Microplastics are plastic fragments that have a size smaller than 5 mm. Although the exact size limit to be categorized as microplastics has not been clearly defined, most studies assume that particles with a minimum size of 300 µm can be considered as microplastics. The effects of plastic waste pollution on marine or riverine organisms are influenced by the size of the debris. Large fragments of plastic debris, such as fishing line and nets, often cause animals to become trapped in them. On the other hand, smaller plastic fragments such as bottle caps, matches and plastic granules can be ingested by aquatic life, causing intestinal blockages and potential chemical poisoning for marine and riverine animals. The local community utilizes the musi river to meet their needs and besides that, the musi river also has enormous potential in terms of fish resources and biodiversity. In a 2020 report (Kompasiana.com, 2020), the musi river estuarine ecosystem plays a very large role in supporting human life in South Sumatra. Every year, more than 3,000 tons of fish are produced in this estuary which is a source of food for the wider community.

Moving on from the large number of fish produced in the musi river estuary, the problem is about microplastic waste or kitchen waste that is not managed and thrown away. Through the results of research (ecoton.or.id, 2022a) shows that many fish have been contaminated by microplastic waste particles in the form of fibers, filaments, fragments and granules (ecoton.or.id, 2022b).

Table 1. Type Fiber Filament Fragment Granule

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NO	FISH NAME			TOTAL						
		Fiber	Filamen	Fragment	Granule	_				
1.	Rasbora daniconius	6	3	1	0	10				

2.	Helostoma temminkii	5	8	7	2	22
3.	Barbonymus schwanenfeldii	3	5	10	3	21
	Total:	14	16	18	5	53

Source: Analysis Result from Musi Care Alliance 2022.

The presence of microplastics in the bodies of fish shows that the level of microplastic pollution in the waters of the Musi River is already in a state of concern. Based on the data above, it states that the use of microplastics in Palembang City has a significant impact on the sustainability of the Musi River and the living things that live in it. Based on observations made by researchers in the sub-district of 14 Ulu Palembang City, it is very significant to prove that there is garbage scattered on the banks of the Musi River. In fact, field observers can say that people who live on the banks of the Musi River in 14 only 10% dispose of microplastic waste, but it is still a risk of pollution of the Musi River.

Tigure 1: Garbage on the banks of the Putsi River, 14 ou

Figure 1. Garbage on the banks of the Musi River, 14 Ulu

Source: Authors.

This pollution degrades water quality and increases water treatment production costs. This pollution also contributes to the economic decline of the Musi River area, as many residents depend on the use of water in the Musi River, for example through tourism, transportation, fisheries and the many restaurants and hotels along the riverbanks (Setianto & Fahritsani, 2019).

## Women as "environmental destroyers"

In the findings of the researchers at the Musi Care Alliance Coordinator, it can be said that women are seen as saviors but also as environmental destroyers. As for the reason, the researchers mentioned that household kitchen waste produced by women can also cause pollution of the Musi River in Palembang city, known of microorganisms. Based on Shiva (1998) and Tong (2009) in (Nikodemus Niko & Rupita, 2018), environmental problems are problems for women, where women themselves are symbols of nature. Therefore, liberation is needed both for women and to solve ecological problems in society. This signifies the need for cultural reform through changes in social relationships and values that govern life. Women activists write a lot about "environment and development", often portraying women as victims of environmental degradation and emphasizing the adverse effects of pollution on women (Susilo & Kodir, 2016). The presence of ecofeminism in the preservation of the Musi River is indeed very much needed not only to save the environment but also to save humans and living things around it. Through an approach that integrates ecological and feminist perspectives in efforts to conserve nature and achieve social justice.

Based on the results of researchers with the Palembang City Women's Solidarity Group, they said that women's involvement can be seen from their role in the family or household. Household tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the house are often given to women. Of course, all of these needs require water, which is also a natural resource. If seen from the results of the researcher's interview, Echa from the Palembang City Women's Solidarity Community said that: "Why are women so close to natural resources? Because until now there are roles that are attached to women, and indirectly women have the knowledge to manage natural resources," Echa, interview May 20, 2023.

It can be shown that women's involvement in decision-making processes and natural resource management can result in more inclusive and sustainable policies. Women have a different understanding of the environment and can bring diverse perspectives in formulating strategies for water conservation. However, women are not fully considered to have an understanding and knowledge of the environment. The nickname "environmental destroyer" has also become a new nickname for women with all their activities. (interview result). It is not easy to blame the river conservation crisis, on the other hand, the anthropocentric behavior that is still rooted in our society is a form of patriarchal thinking. Destructive behavior certainly has a direct impact on the environment and the lives of people or women (Nikodemus Niko & Rupita, 2018).

# Women's empowerment in preserving the Musi River

Women's empowerment in preserving the Musi River plays an important role in preserving the environment and improving the condition of the river, which is the source of life for the surrounding community. In this context, to increase women's influence, women must actively participate in river management, increase ecological awareness, strengthen the economy, and strengthen capacity and access to resources. In accordance with the results of interviews with Solidaritas Perempuan Palembang City, women play an important role in overall environmental management, including protecting the Musi River. Women often have extensive local knowledge of the river ecosystem, such as fish species, water conditions, and sustainable practices, which are passed down from generation to generation. Women's participation in decision-making processes related to river conservation enriches the understanding and knowledge needed to ensure that actions are sustainable and focused on social justice (Echa, Interview May 20, 2023).

Ecofeminist empowerment also involves increasing women's capacity in terms of knowledge, skills, and access to resources. To increase women's influence in protecting the Musi River, efforts must also be made to correct gender differences in resource availability and decision-making. In an interview with the Coordinator of Peduli Sungai Musi, they have conducted campaigns in various areas in Palembang City related to the pollution preservation of the Musi Riverbanks.



Figure 2. Documentation of Musi Care Alliance

Source: Authors.

The presence of the South Sumatra Provincial Government is also necessary in protecting the Musi River. Through strong partnerships, resources and knowledge can be pooled to improve women's access to education, funding and infrastructure that support river conservation efforts. Collaboration can also improve the coordination and effectiveness of programs aimed at women's empowerment. Not only for women but access for the entire community in Palembang City such as more provision of landfills near the banks of the Musi River and conducting routine checks every month to preserve the Musi River

#### 4. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the empowerment of conservation ecofeminism through its function for the preservation of the banks of the Musi River, and in particular the case of the City of Palembang, South Sumatra. We analyze the connecting relationship to increase impactful changes by focusing on women's empowerment engagement, increasing ecological awareness, strengthening the economy, increasing capacity and increasing access. Our research shows that women are very crucial in comprehensive environmental management. They will start campaigns in several areas across Palembang City that relate to the protection of the environment around the Musi River. It is also clear to see women's environmental involvement and participation inside of families or households because of their experience in managing natural resources. There are still issues however, such as women are not fully received as a knowledgeable and conscious being to the environment. This has lead some people to label women as "destroyers of the environment." These discoveries improve understanding of environmental preservation within an understanding of ecofeminism in the Musi River which will be important for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working in environmental efforts and ecofeminism. Further research is warranted to examine the transition to ecosentric ethics, productive partnerships among disciplines, and meaningful engagement with the public. Utilizing diverse perspectives and new approaches will offer choices for researchers to address difficult situations regarding sustainability and environmental protection.

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