

## Ecofeminism Among Women Farmers in Pakel Village, Banyuwangi: An Ethnographic Study Amidst Land Conflicts

### Ekofeminisme pada Petani Perempuan di Desa Pakel, Banyuwangi: Studi Etnografi di Tengah Konflik Pertanahan

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#### Abstract

In conflicts and struggles, women are both actively involved and affected, as discussed in various studies. However, research on the lives of women farmers in land conflicts in Pakel village, Banyuwangi Regency, is still limited. This study aims to describe the lives of women farmers in land conflicts that occur in Pakel village, Banyuwangi Regency. Pakel Village was chosen as the research location because the women had been abandoned by the men to avoid police arrest during a land conflict, leaving them to survive on their own. This qualitative research approach uses ethnographic methods with ecofeminism theory from Vandana Shiva. Primary data was collected through participant observation, informal interviews, and in-depth interviews. The technique of determining informants in this study used snowball sampling with a total of five female informants to be interviewed in depth. The results showed that women farmers in Pakel village, Banyuwangi Regency, played an active role in the struggle. From their dual roles as heads of households and housewives in the pre-land reclamation period to their active participation and roles in various aspects of their daily activities after the land reclamation—such as farming, cooking, caring for children and/or grandchildren, *istighosah*, mediating conflicts, participating in night patrols, and fighting back. The violence in this land conflict also had a traumatic impact on one of the women farmers, so psychological services were provided. Further research is needed to better understand the role of women in land conflicts in Pakel village, Banyuwangi Regency, with different themes and from various disciplines.

**Keywords:** Pakel farmers; women farmers; land conflict; ethnography study; Pakel village

#### Abstrak

*Dalam konflik dan perjuangan, perempuan memiliki peran keterlibatan yang aktif sekaligus juga terdampak, sebagaimana yang telah dibahas di berbagai penelitian. Namun, penelitian mengenai kehidupan petani perempuan di desa Pakel, Kabupaten Banyuwangi, dalam konflik pertanahan masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan kehidupan petani perempuan dalam konflik lahan yang terjadi di Desa Pakel, Kabupaten Banyuwangi. Desa Pakel dipilih sebagai lokasi penelitian karena para perempuan pernah ditinggalkan oleh para laki-laki untuk menghindari penangkapan polisi saat konflik lahan, sehingga mereka harus berjuang sendiri. Pendekatan penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan metode etnografi dengan teori ekofeminisme dari Vandana Shiva. Data primer didapatkan dengan cara observasi partisipasi, wawancara informal, dan wawancara mendalam. Teknik penentuan informan dalam penelitian ini menggunakan snowball sampling dengan total lima informan perempuan untuk diwawancarai secara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa petani perempuan desa*

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*Pakel, Kabupaten Banyuwangi, berperan aktif dalam perjuangan. Dimulai dari peran ganda yang diemban sebagai kepala keluarga dan ibu rumah tangga pada masa sebelum reclaiming lahan, hingga terlibat aktif dan berperan dalam berbagai aspek kegiatan dalam keseharian mereka setelah reclaiming lahan—seperti bekerja, memasak, mengurus anak dan/atau cucu, istighosah, menengahi terjadinya konflik, mengikuti ronda malam, dan melawan. Kekerasan dalam konflik pertanahan ini juga memiliki dampak yang traumatis bagi salah satu petani perempuan, sehingga diberikan layanan psikologis. Diperlukan penelitian lanjutan untuk memahami lebih mendalam mengenai peran perempuan desa Pakel, Kabupaten Banyuwangi dalam konflik pertanahan dengan berbagai topik dan dari berbagai disiplin ilmu lainnya.*

**Kata kunci:** petani Pakel; petani perempuan; konflik tanah; studi etnografi; desa Pakel

## Introduction

Women are one of the sexes, which in the biological sense is understood as someone who has a vagina, usually experience menstruation, become pregnant, give birth to children, and breastfeed (“perempuan”, 2023). In contrast to sex, gender is associated with a hierarchical system of social and cultural relations with the sexes. Gender stereotypes can lead to discriminatory behavior because they attribute masculine traits to men and feminine traits to women (Joel & Fine, 2022). Particularly in Indonesia, the role of women is often labeled as being limited to being caretakers of households and children and having a gentle and emotional character (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2022).

However, there are also many women who are not as portrayed by the stereotypes. Feminism in the eastern world is also on the move and growing; the women's movement against social injustice is also growing, especially struggles to defend the environment (Karim, 2022). The role of women is one of the most important aspects of struggle engagement, which can strengthen solidarity and promote community welfare (Rumbekwan & Tanamal, 2022). When conflict occurs, women tend to be the most victimized because they have to carry out the dual role of head of the family and breadwinner (Palulungan et al., 2020).

Pakel Village, located in Licin Sub-district, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, is one of the villages experiencing land conflicts. Land conflicts in Pakel Village have occurred since 1929, when the Regent Raden Arya Adipati Mohammad (R.A.A.M.) Notohadisuryo issued ‘Soerat Idin Memboeka Tanah’—also called ‘Akta 1929’—an area of 4000 shoulders (1 shoulder = 0.74 hectares) to Pakel residents. However, this was criticized by colonial officials because the area would later be used as an expansion area for colonial plantations (Puputan Pakel Committee, 2023).

Continuing in 1985, the Director General of Agrarian Affairs issued a Cultivation Rights Title (HGU) certificate bagged by PT Bumi Sari—a plantation company—covering an area of 11,898,100 m<sup>2</sup> with SK. 35/HGU/DA/85. The certificate was issued suddenly without involving the community, covering 9.995.500 m<sup>2</sup> of Songgon Village and 1.902.600 m<sup>2</sup> of Kluncing Village (Pancarani & Wahyuni, 2023). The certificate issuance caused conflict over land between the company and Pakel villagers. From 1992 to 2000, cases of land grabbing began to occur frequently in Pakel Village. Pakel farmers also experienced various intimidations, such as confiscation of farming tools, gunpoint while farming, house raids, and arrests of farmers carried out by Unknown People or “*Orang tidak dikenal*” (hereinafter abbreviated as OTD) (Puputan Pakel Committee, 2023).

This condition made many men choose to flee the village to save themselves rather than be detained by the police. This led Pakel Village to be nicknamed “Kampung Janda” (Widows' Village) due to the absence of men there (Ramadani & Harianto, 2022). Pakel women who were abandoned by their husbands at that time experienced many difficulties because they had to take care of their children and earn a living. Even so, these women also played an active role in joining the movement to fight against the plantation company that grabbed their land (Asmy, 2023).

This research is expected to provide new knowledge related to the lives of Pakel women farmers and their efforts to maintain their lives in the midst of land conflicts. Therefore, to avoid similarities with previous studies, this research was conducted using an anthropological approach with ethnographic methods. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the life and role of Pakel women farmers in defending their land, which is still in conflict with the plantation company to this day.

To complement the field data and enhance the research results, we conducted a literature study. From the results of the literature study, researchers found many studies that discuss the role of women in the midst of land conflicts (Astono et al., 2024; Isma et al., 2023; Istiqlali, 2022; Puspitasari, 2017). However, there is still no academic research that discusses in more depth the life and role of Pakel women farmers and their struggle to maintain their living space, only journalistic articles that discuss this matter (Asmy, 2023, 2024). This research uses the theory of

ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva, in which the women's movement also has great potential to defend their place of residence and preserve the environment (Bangun, 2020). Although women are often vulnerable to the impact of capitalism, this theory also emphasizes that the women's movement is a great potential to resist patriarchal capitalists who exploit the environment (Tong, 2009).

## **Research Methods**

This research uses a qualitative research approach with ethnographic methods. In general, ethnography means a writing that contains a description of the social organization, social activities, symbols, and material resources, as well as the characteristics of the interpretive practices of a particular human group. Ethnography is chosen as a method because we seek to understand and learn about a people's way of life by following their daily lives, seeing what happens, hearing what they say, asking them questions, and collecting whatever data is available (Kamarusdiana, 2019; Spradley, 2006).

This research was conducted in Pakel Village, Licin Sub-district, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, which was conducted on 2 - 9 July 2024. There are two types of data taken, namely: (1) primary data, which is data obtained directly in the field by means of participant observation, informal interviews, and in-depth interviews, and (2) secondary data, which is data obtained from published sources by means of literature studies.

We conducted participant observation and informal interviews with the Pakel Village community, especially those who are members of the Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel (RTSP). From our informal interviews, we received recommendations of female informants who could be further interviewed in-depth, also known as snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014). The total number of female informants we interviewed in-depth was five. All data collected from participant observation, informal interviews, and in-depth interviews were written down in fieldnotes.

**Table 1. List of Informants**

Informants	Sex	Age	Occupation
1	Female	45	Farmer and Housewife
2	Female	37	Housewife
3	Female	44	Farmer
4	Female	31	Farmer and entrepreneur
5	Female	47	Farmer

Source: Researchers' processed data, 2024

After the data was collected, we analyzed the fieldnotes by doing data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Sugiyono, 2018), to answer our research question. We conducted a literature study to complement field data and deepen the research results by searching for keywords relevant to this research on the Google search engine, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and the Publish and Perish application.

## Results and Discussion

The majority of Pakel residents work as farmers. Of the total 2.760 residents, more than half work as farmers. In 2020, Pakel farmers formed an organization called Rukun Tani Sumberrejo Pakel (hereafter RTSP). Based on interviews conducted with Informant 1, this organization was formed on the initiative of the community to defend the rights of Pakel farmers who often experience oppression by PT Bumi Sari, there are at least 800 family cards (KK) who are members of this organization. Not only male farmers are members of the RTSP, but also female farmers and young people. If we take the middle figure, it can be assumed that around 1,000 residents work as farmers. With a manageable land area of 321,6 hectares, it can be assumed that the land area received by each person is around 0,3 hectares (WALHI Jawa Timur, 2021).

Pakel residents only received land distribution after they succeeded in reclaiming the land that had been occupied by PT Bumi Sari. The protest was carried out on September 24, 2020, to reaffirm the right to land and be able to manage it, which has long been the right of Pakel residents. The process of reclaiming was started by the farmers by breaking through the plantation's guard posts and then setting up several huts there. Women farmers also played a part in this, which will be explained in the subsections below.

In this study, researchers divided the lives of Pakel women farmers into two periods, namely before and after reclaiming land in 2020. Period I (before reclaiming) describes the lives of

women farmers from the 1990s to September 2020. Period II (after reclaiming) describes the lives of women farmers from October 2020 until the writing of this research. The reason researchers did not write about the lives of women farmers from the emergence of the conflict in 1929 to 1990 was due to a lack of data, both primary and secondary data. The discussion in these subsections comes from interviews with informants complemented by literature studies.

#### **Period I: Life of Pakel Women Farmers Before Reclaiming Land**

This period (1990s - October 2020) was characterized by a lot of oppression experienced by Pakel farmers. Prior to their conflict with PT Bumi Sari, Pakel residents first had a conflict with Perhutani KPH Banyuwangi Barat in the 1990s. At that time, Perhutani grabbed land up to the Pakel village area and caused losses to farmers there. In the 1999-2000s, house raids and abductions of farmers by OTD began to occur frequently. Based on an interview with Informant 1, at that time abductions of male farmers were common, even though they had done nothing wrong. Meanwhile, based on an interview with Informant 3, men who are not yet adults are also often victims of violence, such as beatings and being held at gunpoint.

*"There was once an incident where a resident's house was raided at 12 o'clock. Farmers who were just farming were arrested. Men who were just walking were arrested. All men are taken until there are no more men here."* (Interview with Informant 1, [6 July 2024]).

Male residents who felt unsafe ended up fleeing outside the city or even outside the island—such as Bali, for months to save themselves. Informant 1 also mentioned that the absence of men in the village caused Pakel to be nicknamed as "Kampung Janda" (Widows' Village), confirming previous research conducted by Ramadani & Harianto (2022). Informant 1 was one of the victims whose house was broken into by the OTD at night, causing her husband to flee the city for four months to avoid arrest. This incident had traumatized her, she often felt uneasy when going to sleep at night for fear that her house would be broken into by OTD at any time. The situation became difficult, as she was forced to fulfill the roles of head of the family and housewife simultaneously. This situation, as Informant 1 said, causes women and children to live in poverty, and it even causes children to drop out of school.

Although she was traumatized, she said she needed to recover quickly so she could focus on working and providing for her children. Based on the interview with informant 1, she does not

mind if she is hungry; the most important thing is that she feels calm and happy if her child can eat.

*"I'm fine (hungry). The important thing for me is to see my children eat. That makes me happy."* (Interview with Informant 1, [6 July 2024]).

To meet their economic needs, women who can farm choose to work as daily farm laborers in plantation company. They use their wages for food. Informant 1 herself chose to work as a farm laborer on the plantation temporarily to earn an income. From this job, she only earns Rp40,000/day to fulfill her household needs. Meanwhile, farmers who have their own fields usually choose to sell their produce and use the money to buy rice for their meals. Women who cannot farm or do not have fields usually prefer to work outside the island or abroad. The reason they choose to work abroad is because there are more job opportunities, a variety of jobs, and they are looking for a higher income.

However, this did not last long because—three to four months later—the male farmers began to return to their villages one by one. Conditions slowly recovered as the division of roles in the household was re-balanced, with women no longer bearing the double burden of being the head of the family and housewife. Some of them were able to send their children back to school until they graduated.

Even so, land conflicts and oppression continue to occur. Starting in 2002, Pakel farmers faced Perhutani and PT Bumi Sari at the same time, who often invaded their land. The oppression that occurred included the cutting down of farmers' crops and sharp weapons being pointed at farmers by OTD. Informant 5 explained that the destruction of farmers' crops often occurs and is carried out by OTD without a cause, which aims to scare residents.

*"It is not clear that they damaged it; it could be done by them (OTD) at any time. Usually they wear black masks while shouting. There is no purpose other than to scare people."* (Interview with Informant 5, [7 July 2024]).

Women farmers did not remain silent; they participated in social movements during the land-reclaiming process with the aim of rejecting and resisting the land grabbing by PT Bumi Sari into their area. They planted various plants such as bananas, cassava, durian, eggplant, coffee, coconut, and others as a form of affirmation that the area belongs to Pakel residents. Social



movements by women farmers have also been carried out elsewhere—namely in Kendeng, Rembang Regency. Kendeng women farmers staged a demonstration aimed at cement companies by painting their feet in front of the State Palace (Puspitasari, 2017). Meanwhile, women farmers in Pakel have been protesting—by continuing to plant crops to mark the Pakel area and also by praying to God for help. As Informant 5 said, they always pray to God for protection in the midst of conflict.

*"For us, our weapon is a prayer to make money. For them (plantation company), money is used as a weapon."* (Interview with Informant 5, [6 July 2024]).

#### **Period II: Life of Pakel Women Farmers After Reclaiming Land**

After going through a land-reclaiming process in 2020, Pakel residents regained the land that was rightfully theirs. Pakel residents immediately divided the land for farming, with each person receiving 0,3 hectares. This situation makes women who work outside the island—such as Bali and abroad, such as Malaysia—prefer to return home and become farmers. Based on an interview with Informant 3, who had previously worked outside the island, she explained why she preferred to return home as a farmer, namely that she felt her life was more secure and she would not go hungry because she had her own farmland.

*"In the past, we didn't have land. I had to work to eat, so I worked outside. Because there are also more varied jobs outside (the island). After the reclaiming, I already have land, so I prefer to be a farmer. Besides earning money, I also don't worry anymore; if I want to eat, I can just take it from the field."* (Interview with Informant 3, [7 July 2024]).

These farming products include bananas, cassava, durian, coconut, coffee, corn, eggplant, chili, *petai* (stink bean), and many more. Pakel farmers use their farm produce for daily consumption, while side dishes such as fish or chicken are bought from people who sell them around the village. Especially for bananas, RTSP will conduct a special auction among its members every week. The person who submits the highest price will get the banana, and the money will be put into the RTSP treasury. This method is considered more effective than charging dues to each member.



Pakel farmers also often hold *tasyakuran* during the harvest season, which they do to thank God for giving them the harvest they expect. During our research, Pakel farmers also held a *tasyakuran* to celebrate the release of three Pakel farmers (Mulyadi, Suwarno, and Untung) who had previously been detained. The *tasyakuran* was attended by Pakel farmers and opened with a joint prayer, where they hoped to always be protected, given safety, and given blessings by God. After the prayer, the event continued with a meal together. Many types of food are served during *tasyakuran*, such as *balado* chicken, fried noodles, vegetable curry, *apem* cake, and a particular type of *jenang*. To prepare for the *tasyakuran*, the women (who are also farmers) gather to cook the dishes together. After the *tasyakuran*, they will resume their daily activities, which is farming.



**Figure 1. Farmers in Pakel gathered for a *tasyakuran* as a form of gratitude for the release of the Pakel trio (Muwardi, Suwarno, and Untung) who were arrested**

Source: Researchers' documentation, 2024

Despite the success of reclaiming their land, the oppression of Pakel farmers did not stop. Various cases of terror, such as the burning of *musholla* (Muslim community prayer building), cutting down of agricultural crops, demolition of farmers' huts, and violence against farmers, still occur frequently. Female farmers are also victims of violence, one of which was experienced by Informant 3. Based on our interview with Informant 3, she said that her farmland's crops had been cut down by the OTD. Not only her own crops, but also those of other farmers in the surrounding area. Informant 3 was at home when she heard the news that her crops were being cut down and went straight to her farm to protect it from being cleared. By the time she got there, she had met many other farmers whose land had also been cut down. Informant 3 explained that she also received physical violence, such as being shoved by the OTD. As she held on to her

durian plant in the hope that it would not be cut down, she was almost hit in the stomach by a sharp weapon as the OTD continued to swing it at the female farmer. This incident has left her traumatized to this day, and she now chooses to take a break from farming and leave the farming to her husband. Due to this incident, Informant 3 was provided with psychological services by LBH Surabaya to heal the trauma.

Indeed, incidents where the Pakel area was entered by OTD and then terrorized Pakel residents often occurred, resulting in a deep sense of trauma for Pakel residents as evidenced by a high sense of suspicion towards strangers (including us at first). When we were conducting this research, there was also an incident where the OTD entered the residents' land, shouting and yelling at some of our friends. In this situation, female farmers always come to the forefront to mediate between the OTD and the male farmers, they will ask the OTD questions such as "Who are you?" and "What is your business here?". If they don't get the answer they want, the women farmers will tell the OTD to go home and emphasize that 'this is our land, we just want to farm here, to eat.'. This—as Informant 3 said—was also done to mediate between the OTD and the male farmers to prevent the occurrence of *gulungan* (fights in Madurese term) and prolonged conflict. In addition to helping prevent conflicts, women farmers also participate in night patrols to protect the community's farmland.

Although the majority of women in Pakel work as farmers after reclaiming the land, some of them now have side jobs. Women farmers who are relatively young usually have side jobs such as being entrepreneurs, opening shops at home, and daily farm laborers (helping work on the farms of fellow RTSP members). Meanwhile, female farmers over the age of 40 are usually more focused on helping their husbands with farming. In addition, they also perform their duties as housewives, taking care of children and grandchildren. Women farmers also play a role in assisting their husbands in deciding what crops to plant in the next harvest period. From this it can be understood that women also have a position to make decisions within their households.

The daily life of women farmers before going to the fields in the morning usually starts with cooking and preparing food for their family's needs. They do this while chatting with neighbors to share farming results and the latest news related to the plantation. After cooking, they will usually take care of their children and grandchildren (for those who already have grandchildren).

Once the housework is done, they will go to the fields to help their husbands farm. When it's one o'clock in the afternoon, farmers usually go home and rest. In the afternoon, the women farmers would visit each other's houses and chat; they would talk about the latest news happening in the plantation or simply chat with their families. In the evening after the Isha' prayer, Pakel farmers have a routine activity that has always been carried out since 2020 without stopping, namely *istighosah* (prayer together). Based on the interview with Informant 1, the activity is routinely carried out at the farm post by Pakel farmers to ask God they believe in—Allah SWT—for help so that they are provided with ease when they encounter difficulties. Female farmers also participate in *istighosah*; after praying, they usually continue to stand guard at night according to a predetermined schedule.

*“We have been doing istighosah (praying) non-stop, every day, since 2020. (After that) we will do night patrols in turns, whether it's women or men, everyone joins the night patrols to protect our area. Previously, our crops were always vandalized and our mosque was burned down by thugs. So we always do istighosah since then.”* (Interview with Informant 1, [6 July 2024]).



**Figure 2. *Istighosah* is performed by Pakel farmers every night to ask for help from God**  
Source: Researchers' documentation (2024)

These findings show that women in Pakel Village actively contribute to protecting their territory. Although they live in a stressful situation that has affected them economically, socially, and culturally, they still carry out various forms of resistance. These include *istighosah*, night patrols, farming, and protecting crops from being destroyed by thugs. This resistance is part of the practice of the ecofeminism movement, where women not only fight for territory and control over land, but also the sustainability of Pakel residents' lives over the exploitation of natural

resources. In this conflict, women in Pakel have a vital role to fight capitalistic exploitation and maintain the sustainability of food sources for their lives.

## Conclusion

Research on the role of women farmers in defending their living space in land conflicts in Pakel Village, Licin Sub-district, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, is important to conduct due to the limited literature that specifically discusses the topic. By going directly to the field, we found that women farmers also play a role in the struggle to defend their living space. This awareness is formed because they have experienced difficult experiences, which cause women to have a dual role as head of the household and housewife. Farming and working outside the island and abroad are ways to sustain life. Women also take care of their plantations even if it threatens their lives. When conflicts occur, women are also the ones who break up so that the fight does not get worse. By conducting this research, it is hoped that it can contribute new insights that specifically highlight the role of women farmers in Pakel Village, which has been absent in the discussion of land conflicts in that location. Due to the limited period of research conducted, it is hoped that this research can trigger further studies that discuss in depth with a longer period of time, regarding the role of women farmers in Pakel Village with various topics and from various other disciplines.

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