

Ecofeminist Discourse in Oral Literature: An Analysis of the Sumur Songo Legend in Gresik

Abdul Karim Wirawan¹, Khumaidi Abdillah²

SUBJECT

Oral Literature

¹) Universitas Bilfath Lamongan, Indonesia

²) Universitas Bilfath Lamongan, Indonesia

Email: abdulkarimwira@gmail.com

Received: July 29, 2025

Accepted: October 15, 2025

Online version: December 30, 2025

Keywords: Ecofeminist; Oral literature; Legend; *Sumur Songo*; Gresik

Abstract

The ecofeminist discourse within Indonesian oral literature presents a new dimension in literary studies, connecting ecological aspects, feminism, and local wisdom. However, a comprehensive analysis applying ecofeminist perspectives to Javanese oral traditions remains limited. This research aims to analyse the construction of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend from Gresik and examine its relevance to Javanese socio-cultural contexts. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with an ecofeminist theoretical framework, utilising systematic documentation methods for data collection and qualitative analysis through coding processes encompassing open, axial, and selective coding stages. The research reveals that ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend is constructed through a complex interplay of women's subjectivity, natural symbolism, and resistance against patriarchal domination, as demonstrated by Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari's intimate connection with wells as fertility symbols and her sophisticated resistance strategies, which utilise local knowledge of Javanese cosmology. The legend's relevance to the Javanese socio-cultural context is evident through the integration of balance (*timbang*) and harmony (*rukun*) concepts, Islamic-Javanese syncretism in coastal Gresik society, and spiritual practices that connect women's

power with natural forces. This study concludes that ecofeminist values have been deeply embedded in the Javanese cultural tradition, with oral literature functioning as an effective medium for transmitting these values across generations, while providing alternative paradigms for sustainable and gender-just development.

Introduction

Ecofeminism discourse within Indonesian oral literature presents a new dimension in literary studies that connects ecological aspects, feminism, and local wisdom. Ecofeminism theory, developed by thinkers such as Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, emphasises the interconnection between patriarchal oppression and environmental

exploitation, viewing climate change, gender equality, and social injustice as intrinsically interconnected issues rooted in masculine domination over nature. Ecofeminism is a movement and critical theory that combines critique of patriarchal domination and environmental exploitation (Dewi, 2017) and finds a unique articulation space within the oral literary tradition of the Nusantara.

This perspective views climate change, gender equality, and broader social injustice as intrinsically interconnected issues, all rooted in societal masculine domination over nature. In this context, Indonesian oral literature becomes a highly relevant medium for exploring the articulation of ecofeminist values that have long been embedded in Nusantara cultural traditions.

The contextualisation of ecofeminism within Indonesian oral literature has profound relevance to local wisdom traditions that have long been rooted in Nusantara society. Oral literature, as a medium of cultural transmission, serves not only as entertainment but also as a repository of ecological and gender values that are integrated into the traditional society's worldview. Various Javanese oral literary texts possess characteristics that explicitly and implicitly demonstrate a cosmic orientation, reflecting harmonious relationships between humans and nature across multiple dimensions of life.

Within Javanese oral literature, the legend of Sumur Songo from Sidokumpul Village, Gresik, East Java, presents a compelling case for ecofeminist analysis. This legend recounts Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari's rejection of a Majapahit prince's proposal, resulting in nine wells that became geographical markers of the region. The narrative complexity demonstrates female agency, power relations, and human-nature relationships within Javanese cosmology. The legend of Sumur Songo represents one form of oral literature that developed in Gresik society and has historical relevance to the Walisongo tradition (Akhmad, 2020). This story recounts the tale of a beautiful woman named Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari, who rejected the love of a prince from the Majapahit Empire. This unrequited love story was subsequently immortalised in the form of nine wells scattered throughout the region.

The narrative of the Sumur Songo legend presents not only romantic dimensions but also complex representations of female agency, power relations, and human-nature relationships. We can trace symbolic depth in this legend through narrative structures that depict women's resistance to masculine domination while demonstrating how natural elements (wells) become manifestations of collective memory about feminine power. This narrative complexity makes the Sumur Songo legend a text rich in ecofeminist interpretative potential.

In Javanese tradition, wells are understood not merely as water sources but also as symbols of fertility, life, and spiritual power, closely related to feminine principles in Javanese cosmology. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, the nine wells scattered throughout the Gresik region serve as both geographical and spiritual markers, connecting the personal narrative of Nyai Ageng with the local community's cultural landscape. The significance of the number nine in Javanese tradition also has cosmological connotations related to concepts of perfection and balance, which, from an ecofeminist perspective, can be interpreted as representations of harmony between masculine and feminine principles in the universe.

The relevance of ecofeminist studies in oral literature lies in their potential to reveal the value systems and worldviews of traditional societies that are often overlooked in conventional literary studies. Wiyatmi, Suryaman, and Swastikasari (2017)

assert that ecofeminist literary criticism functions as a tool to dismantle dominance structures that exploit both women and nature simultaneously. In Javanese oral literary traditions, there is a tendency to portray female characters with a special connection to nature, reflecting Javanese society's understanding of women's roles as guardians of social-ecological balance.

This understanding aligns with ecofeminist concepts that view women as having more intimate relationships with nature compared to men, not due to biological determinism, but because of social and cultural positions that place women in nurturing and caring roles. Thus, Javanese oral literature becomes an important arena for exploring how ecofeminist values are articulated within specific cultural contexts.

We can trace the ecofeminist dimension in the Sumur Songo legend through four interrelated aspects. First, the representation of female characters who have close connections with natural elements, particularly wells as sources of life and symbols of fertility. Second, the narrative of women's resistance to masculine domination is represented through Nyai Ageng's rejection of the prince, demonstrating female agency in determining their destiny. Third, the symbolism of wells as feminine spaces that simultaneously manifest collective memory about women's roles in maintaining social-ecological balance. Fourth, the transformation from individual to landscape illustrates how personal narratives can become integral to a region's ecological identity.

These four dimensions become increasingly significant in relation to the geographical and cultural context of Gresik, a northern coastal region of East Java with unique cultural characteristics, including maritime traditions and a strong Islamic influence stemming from the Walisongo history. These characteristics provide special nuances to the Sumur Songo legend. The narrative cannot be separated from the social dynamics of Javanese coastal society, which has cultural traditions different from those of inland Javanese society.

The geographical context of Gresik as a coastal region provides important ecological dimensions for understanding the Sumur Songo legend from an ecofeminist perspective. As an area directly bordering the sea, Gresik has rich cultural traditions deeply rooted in water symbolism and feminine elements associated with fertility and life. The existence of wells in this legend not only reflects the community's practical need for clean water sources but also represents the Javanese cosmological understanding of the relationships between the microcosm (humans) and the macrocosm (universe).

In Javanese tradition, wells are often understood as the axis mundi, connecting the upper world (heavens), the middle world (earth), and the lower world (underground). In an ecofeminist context, this can be interpreted as a representation of cosmic unity between masculine and feminine principles. This cosmological understanding provides a crucial foundation for understanding how traditional Javanese society articulates relationships between gender and the environment through oral literary media.

Gresik's maritime tradition, which has developed since the Majapahit era, also provides an important socio-cultural context for understanding women's positions in the social structure. In maritime societies, women often hold more independent roles due to their involvement in diverse economic activities and high social mobility. This is reflected in the character of Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari, who is portrayed as a woman with the power to reject the prince's desires, demonstrating female agency in broader social contexts.

Meanwhile, Islamic influence through the Walisongo tradition provides spiritual dimensions that enrich ecofeminist interpretations of this legend. Islam in the Javanese context is often adapted with local values that respect the balance between men and women, as well as between humans and nature. This syncretism creates unique negotiation spaces for articulating ecofeminist values within Javanese cultural contexts influenced by Islamic traditions.

Oral literature, as a medium of cultural transmission, plays a vital role in preserving and perpetuating societal values from one generation to the next. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, oral literature serves as a space for negotiating meanings about gender, power, and the environment. This aligns with the view that oral literature functions not only as entertainment but also as an instrument of education and cultural identity formation (Wirawan, 2019).

Oral literary texts have great potential to become environmental wisdom literature or ecological literature because, both implicitly and explicitly, they present environmental themes and make them the ethical orientation of texts. In these texts, humans are viewed as part of the living universe at its best because they acknowledge deep interconnections between human life and their natural environment. This perspective is highly relevant to ecofeminism principles that emphasise the importance of harmonious relationships between humans and nature.

The characteristics of Javanese oral literature with cosmic orientation are reflected in various narrative aspects, demonstrating harmonious relationships between humans and nature. In Javanese oral literary traditions, Arcadia is often depicted as influenced by nature-based mythology, idylls are portrayed as implementations of village customs as ancestral heritage, georgic is depicted as working harmoniously with physical and metaphysical nature, retreat is manifested in ritual journey narratives of wayang characters and founding figures, and return is portrayed through spiritual journey parables that restore humans to unity with nature (Sulistyorini, Siswanto, & Rochman, 2021).

These characteristics indicate that Javanese oral literature has a firm epistemological foundation in understanding human-nature relationships, which is highly relevant to ecofeminist perspectives that emphasise the importance of balance and harmony in relations between humans and the environment. This epistemological foundation becomes an important basis for understanding how ecofeminist discourse operates within specific cultural contexts of Javanese society.

Ecofeminism studies in Indonesian oral literature still face several academic limitations that need acknowledgement. First, previous research on Javanese oral literature tends to focus on structural aspects and cultural values without comprehensively integrating ecofeminist perspectives. Second, studies of the Sumur Songo legend, specifically those conducted by Raharjo (2016), remain limited to structural and historical analysis, without exploring the gender and ecological dimensions in depth. Third, ecofeminism theory in the Indonesian context has not yet developed optimally to accommodate local cultural complexities, especially in oral literary contexts with characteristics different from written literature.

This research gap becomes increasingly significant in relation to the global urgency to develop ecofeminist perspectives that are more contextual to non-Western cultural realities. In the global context, ecofeminist discourse is becoming increasingly relevant as a response to the intertwined environmental crises and gender injustices. However, most ecofeminist theories currently being developed still centre on Western

cultural experiences and perspectives, requiring adaptation and contextualisation for application in Indonesian cultural contexts with vastly different characteristics. Despite the rich potential of Indonesian oral literature for ecofeminist analysis, comprehensive studies applying ecofeminist perspectives to Javanese oral traditions remain limited. Previous research on the Sumur Songo legend (Raharjo, 2016) primarily focuses on structural and historical aspects, without exploring gender and ecological dimensions. This gap becomes increasingly significant given the global urgency to develop ecofeminist perspectives more contextual to non-Western cultural realities.

Based on the identified research gap, this study is expected to provide significant contributions in several aspects. First, this research can reveal forms of women's resistance to patriarchal domination, articulated through symbolic relationships with nature, which are often undetected in conventional literary analysis. Second, this research can contribute to the development of ecofeminism theory that is more contextualised to Indonesian cultural realities, while providing alternative perspectives for understanding Javanese local wisdom related to ecological balance and gender equality. Thus, this research formulates two main problems to be explored in depth: first, how the ecofeminist discourse is constructed in the Sumur Songo legend; and second, how the relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend relates to Javanese social and cultural contexts. Both problems will be explored through interdisciplinary approaches that integrate ecofeminist theory with oral literary studies, cultural anthropology, and local history.

This research provides several significant new contributions to ecofeminism studies in the Indonesian context. First, this research represents a pioneering effort in comprehensively applying ecofeminist perspectives to Sumur Songo legend studies, which has not been undertaken previously. Second, this research develops ecofeminist analytical frameworks tailored to Javanese cultural contexts, particularly in oral literary traditions with unique characteristics that differ from those of written literature. Third, this research contributes to the development of Indonesian ecofeminism studies by presenting perspectives from the East Java region, which has coastal cultural characteristics and a strong Islamic influence.

The novelty of this research also lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates ecofeminist theory with oral literary studies, cultural anthropology, and local history, thereby enabling a more holistic understanding of how ecofeminist discourse operates within the specific cultural contexts of Javanese society. This interdisciplinary integration is expected to produce more nuanced and contextual analytical frameworks for understanding the complexity of relationships between gender, environment, and culture in Indonesian oral literary traditions. This research also acknowledges potential limitations in interpreting oral literary texts, including variations in narrative versions across different sources and the challenge of avoiding over-interpretation without sufficient empirical grounding. The study addresses these limitations through triangulation and member checking with cultural informants.

Research method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, grounded in an ecofeminist theoretical framework, to analyse the Sumur Songo legend. The qualitative approach is chosen because it suits research characteristics attempting to understand the meanings and interpretations of oral literary texts within specific cultural contexts. Qualitative research is an appropriate approach for exploring and understanding the meanings that

individuals or groups attribute to social or humanitarian problems. Ecofeminist theory serves as the primary theoretical framework to expose the interconnections between women's oppression and natural exploitation in the legend's narrative construction. Adapting ecofeminism theory within Javanese cultural contexts requires sensitivity to local values, so this research also integrates concepts from Javanese philosophy relevant to ecofeminist principles, such as balance (*timbang*) and harmony (*rukun*) concepts that can enrich ecofeminist analysis of the Sumur Songo legend (Creswell, 2009; Shiva, 2019; Mies, 2014).

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation methods to obtain Sumur Songo legend texts from various credible sources, including published oral literary documentation, academic journals, and cultural documentation compiled by cultural institutions. Data analysis follows qualitative data analysis models consisting of six stages: data preparation and organisation, reading and general understanding, coding, description, interpretation, and validation. The coding process was conducted inductively, using ecofeminist theoretical frameworks as guides, while remaining open to the possibility of emerging new themes not covered in the initial theoretical frameworks. Coding was divided into three levels: open coding to identify basic concepts, axial coding to organise concepts into larger categories, and selective coding to identify core categories that become the primary focus of analysis. The analysis process was conducted iteratively and interactively to ensure depth and accuracy of interpretation (Creswell, 2017; Miles, M.B., & Huberman, 1994).

Data validity testing employs four primary strategies to enhance the credibility of qualitative research. First, triangulation was conducted using various data sources and theoretical perspectives, including comparing different versions of legend texts from different sources and applying relevant theoretical perspectives to confirm the findings. Second, member checking was performed by involving key informants with deep knowledge of the Sumur Songo legend and Gresik culture to validate the generated interpretations. Third, thick description was employed by presenting detailed and in-depth descriptions of the cultural, historical, and social contexts underlying the legend, and by providing extensive quotations from the legend texts to offer strong empirical evidence. Fourth, an audit trail was conducted by systematically documenting the entire research process, from data collection to final interpretation, enabling other researchers to follow the research traces and assess the quality and consistency of the analytical processes, in accordance with dependability principles (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln, Guba, & Pilisuk, 1985).

Discussion

The Construction of Ecofeminist Discourse in the Sumur Songo Legend

The ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend is constructed through the complex interplay of women's subjectivity, natural symbolism, and resistance against patriarchal domination woven within the Javanese oral literary narrative. This construction can be traced through several interconnected dimensions: the representation of female characters who possess intimate connections with nature, the manifestation of resistance against patriarchal power, the symbolic transformation from individual to collective identity, and the internalisation of ecofeminist values within the cultural landscape of Gresik society.

The Sumur Songo legend presents the figure of Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari as a representation of women's subjectivity, which maintains a profound connection with

natural elements, particularly wells, as symbols of fertility and life sources. In the narrative that developed within Gresik society, Nyai Ageng is portrayed as a woman of extraordinary beauty from a distinguished family, as the granddaughter of Sunan Giri. Nyai Tumengkang Sari was known for her strong principles, indicating that from the beginning, the female character in this legend positioned herself as a subject with agency to determine her fate. This representation aligns with Shiva's (2019) perspective, which emphasises that in the ecofeminist view, women and nature share an inseparable ontological connection, where both become victims of the same domination system.

The construction of women's subjectivity in this legend can be analysed through how Nyai Ageng positions herself in relation to nature through subtle symbolism. When a prince from Majapahit came to propose to her, Nyai Ageng gave an unusual condition: she wanted the prince to create 10 wells in one night. This condition demonstrates that Nyai Ageng possessed a profound understanding of the symbolic meaning of wells in Javanese cosmology, and she utilised this knowledge as a strategy to assess the prince's spiritual and cultural capabilities. This aligns with the concept developed by Shiva (2019) regarding ecofeminism as a critique of the patriarchal system that simultaneously dominates both women and nature.

Symbolism in Javanese tradition has rich and complex dimensions that, in an ecofeminist context, can be interpreted as representing feminine principles related to fertility, life, and spirituality. Wells are understood not merely as water sources, but also as yoni symbols or representations of the female reproductive organs, symbolising the source of life and fertility. In Javanese cosmology, wells are also understood as the axis mundi, connecting the upper world (heaven), the middle world (earth), and the lower world (underground). In an ecofeminist context, this can be interpreted as representing cosmic unity between masculine and feminine principles. This interpretation is supported by Jervis & Merchant's (1982) theory, which states that the patriarchal system has transformed nature's perception from "life-giving mother" to "controllable machine."

The connection between Nyai Ageng and wells as natural elements shows that in the Javanese oral literary tradition, women are often represented as guardians of social ecological balance. This aligns with the ecofeminist concept that views women as having more intimate relationships with nature compared to men, not due to biological determinism, but because of social and cultural positions that place women in nurturing and caring roles. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, Nyai Ageng not only serves as a character connected to nature but also as a guardian of spiritual values related to cosmic balance.

The dimension of resistance in the Sumur Songo legend is visible in how Nyai Ageng constructs her rejection of the Majapahit prince's proposal. This resistance is not carried out directly, but rather through sophisticated strategies that create conditions that connect masculine power with the ability to interact with natural elements. Nyai Tumengkang Sari refused to marry due to differing beliefs, demonstrating that the rejection was not only based on personal preference but also on deep ideological and spiritual considerations.

The resistance strategy through well-construction conditions can be interpreted as a manifestation of alternative knowledge that women possess about human-nature relationships. Nyai Ageng utilised local knowledge about well symbolism to assess whether the prince could comprehend and appreciate the feminine principle inherent in nature. This aligns with Mies's (2014) view that women's knowledge about nature is

often holistic and sustainable, differing from men's knowledge, which tends to be atomistic and exploitative.

When the prince succeeded in creating nine wells but failed to complete the tenth because a rooster crowed, signalling dawn, this failure can be interpreted as the masculine power's inability to master the feminine essence contained in well symbolism fully. This narrative reveals that although masculine power possesses the technocratic ability to create wells, it lacks a profound spiritual understanding of the wells' significance in Javanese cosmology. This interpretation is supported by Plumwood's (2019) theory, which posits that ecofeminism must be understood as a critique of Cartesian dualism that separates mind-body, culture-nature, and male-female.

Nyai Ageng's resistance is also reflected in how she positions herself during the evaluation of the prince's work results. Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari eventually met the prince and saw the wells he had created; then she sat on one of them. After that, she counted the existing wells, excluding the one she was sitting on. The act of sitting on one well and not counting it shows that Nyai Ageng had the power to construct reality according to her interests. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of women's agency, capable of influencing men's perceptions of success and failure.

This resistance dimension can also be viewed from the perspective of the relationship between the sacred and the profane in Javanese tradition. In Javanese tradition, wells are understood not only as sources of water but also as places with spiritual significance. In this context, Nyai Ageng, who oversees well construction, can be interpreted as a guardian of cosmic balance, possessing the power to test someone's spiritual ability. The resistance carried out by Nyai Ageng is not only resistance against personal domination but also resistance against value systems that do not respect feminine principles in Javanese spirituality.

One of the most interesting aspects of ecofeminist discourse construction in the Sumur Songo legend is the transformation of personal narrative into regional geographical identity. The nine remaining wells after the prince's failure then became the geographical identity of Sumur Songo Village, symbolically showing that the memory of women's resistance against patriarchal domination has been internalised in the community's cultural landscape. This transformation shows that ecofeminist discourse in this legend operates not only at the individual level but also at the collective community level.

This transformation process aligns with the concept developed by Gaard (2011) about "embodied materialism" in ecofeminism, which emphasises that women's and nature's experiences cannot be separated from specific material and social contexts. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, the female body (Nyai Ageng) and nature's body (represented by wells) form a symbolic unity, representing resistance against patriarchal domination. The existence of nine wells that can still be found in Sumur Songo Village functions as a material reminder of the importance of respecting women's and nature's power.

The transformation from individual to collective can also be seen in how the Gresik society integrates the Sumur Songo legend into its spiritual and social practices. The tomb of Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari is believed to possess *karomah* (blessing), which provides ease and smoothness during childbirth processes. Water from Sumur Songo is believed to have healing properties for various diseases. This belief shows that the Gresik society has internalised ecofeminist values contained in the legend through spiritual practices that connect women's power with nature's healing power.

This transformation dimension is also reflected in the oral traditions developing in society, where the Sumur Songo legend is told not only as a failed romantic story but also as a narrative that contains moral and spiritual values. "The girls in this village should not reject men's proposals anymore, lest there be those who reject men's proposals, like what I experienced, becoming old maids forever." This quote demonstrates that the Sumur Songo legend has become an integral part of the community's value system, regulating gender relations within the community.

This symbolic transformation illustrates that ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend serves a crucial pedagogical function in conveying cultural values. This aligns with Warren & Cheney's (1991) view that ecofeminism is not only a critical theory but also a praxis aimed at transforming human-nature relationships. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, the transformation from individual narrative to collective identity demonstrates that ecofeminist values operate not only at the discursive level but also at concrete, material, and social levels.

The construction of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend cannot be separated from the Javanese cultural context, which has unique value systems regarding human-nature relationships. In Javanese tradition, concepts such as balance (*timbang*) and harmony (*rukun*) are highly relevant to ecofeminist principles. The balance concept in Javanese philosophy emphasises the importance of maintaining harmony between different elements, including between men and women, and between humans and nature.

The Sumur Songo legend operationalises this balance concept through a narrative showing that excessive masculine dominance will result in cosmic imbalance. The prince's failure to complete the construction of ten wells can be interpreted as a manifestation of imbalance occurring when masculine power tries to dominate feminine principles without understanding their essence. This aligns with Wiyatmi et al.'s (2017) view that ecofeminism seeks to highlight connections between all forms of human oppression, particularly those affecting women, and the natural world.

In the geographical and cultural context of Gresik, a coastal area in northern East Java, the Sumur Songo legend also encompasses specific ecological dimensions. As a region directly bordering the sea, Gresik has a cultural tradition rich in water symbolism and feminine elements related to fertility and life. The existence of wells in this legend not only reflects the practical needs of society for clean water sources but also represents the cosmological understanding of Javanese society regarding the relationship between the microcosm (humans) and the macrocosm (universe).

Gresik's maritime tradition, which has developed since the Majapahit era, provides an important socio-cultural context for understanding women's position in the coastal society structure. In maritime societies, women often hold more independent roles due to their involvement in diverse economic activities and high social mobility. This is reflected in Nyai Ageng's character, portrayed as a woman with the power to reject the prince's wishes, thereby demonstrating women's agency within a broader social context.

Islamic influence through the Walisongo tradition also provides spiritual dimensions that enrich the ecofeminist interpretation of this legend. Islam in the Javanese context is often adapted to incorporate local values that respect the balance between men and women, as well as between humans and the natural world. This syncretism creates unique negotiation spaces for articulating ecofeminist values within Javanese culture, which is influenced by Islamic tradition. This is evident in how the Gresik society

integrates the Sumur Songo legend into their religious practices, where Nyai Ageng's tomb becomes a pilgrimage site considered to possess spiritual power.

Oral literature, as a medium for cultural transmission, plays a vital role in preserving and perpetuating society's values from one generation to the next. In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, oral literature serves as a space for negotiating meanings related to gender, power, and the environment. This aligns with the view that oral literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a means of education and the formation of cultural identity.

The characteristics of Javanese oral literature with cosmic orientation are reflected in various narrative aspects, showing harmonious relationships between humans and nature. In the Javanese oral literary tradition, there is a tendency to portray female characters with a special connection to nature, reflecting Javanese society's understanding of women's roles as guardians of social and ecological balance. The Sumur Songo legend is a concrete example of this characteristic, where female characters not only serve as romantic objects but also as subjects with spiritual and cultural power.

In a global context, ecofeminist discourse in Indonesian oral literature, as represented in the Sumur Songo legend, holds significant relevance for developing an ecofeminist theory that is more contextually relevant to non-Western cultural realities. Most ecofeminist theory developed today remains centred on Western cultural experiences and perspectives; therefore, the study of the Sumur Songo legend can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and multicultural corpus of ecofeminist theory.

The construction of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend has significant theoretical implications for the development of ecofeminist studies in the Indonesian context. First, this legend demonstrates that ecofeminist values have been deeply rooted in Javanese cultural tradition, indicating that ecofeminism is not only a concept imported from the West but also has a strong epistemological basis in Indonesian local wisdom. Second, this legend demonstrates that oral literature has significant potential to serve as a medium for articulating ecofeminist values that are often overlooked in conventional literary analysis.

From a practical perspective, the study of the Sumur Songo legend can offer inspiration for developing environmental conservation strategies that incorporate local cultural values. The existence of wells still maintained by Gresik society shows that cultural narratives can be effective instruments for environmental conservation. This aligns with the ecofeminist view that emphasises the importance of integrating local knowledge and women's experiences in sustainable environmental management efforts.

The construction of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend also demonstrates that women in the Javanese tradition are not only victims of patriarchal systems but also agents with the power to resist and transform. This provides a more complex and nuanced perspective on women's position in Javanese society, which can enrich feminist discourse in the Indonesian context, where it is often still trapped in stereotypes about Javanese women's passivity.

The study of the Sumur Songo legend demonstrates that interdisciplinary approaches, integrating literary studies, anthropology, and ecology, can yield a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationships between gender, environment, and culture. This approach can serve as a model for future studies of Indonesian oral literature, which have the potential to reveal ecofeminist values that have not received adequate attention in Indonesian academia.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo Legend to the Javanese Socio-Cultural Context

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend to the Javanese socio-cultural context highlights the complexity of relationships between traditional Javanese values, women's position in society, and environmental understanding, which are integrated into the worldview of Nusantara society (Fenn & Geertz, 1974). The Sumur Songo legend serves not only as a folkloric narrative providing entertainment but also as a repository of ecofeminist values that have long been rooted in Javanese cultural tradition and possess profound relevance to the socio-cultural context of Gresik society, a coastal region with unique cultural characteristics (Ricklefs, 2012). This relevance can be traced through several interconnected dimensions: the integration of ecofeminist values in Javanese philosophical systems, the position of women in the social structure of coastal society, the relationship between spirituality and ecology in Javanese tradition, and the function of oral literature as a medium for transmitting ecofeminist values across generations.

The Javanese philosophical system exhibits characteristics highly compatible with ecofeminist principles, particularly in its understanding of cosmic balance and harmony between different elements in the universe (Suseno, 2001). In Javanese tradition, the concept of balance (*timbang*) emphasises the importance of maintaining harmony between masculine (*lanang*) and feminine (*wadon*) principles in various aspects of life, including human-nature relationships (Fox, 2024). This concept aligns with ecofeminist views developed by Molyneux & Steinberg (1995), emphasising that "feminism should see linkages between patriarchal oppression and the destruction of Nature in the name of profit and progress." The Sumur Songo legend operationalises this balance concept through a narrative showing that excessive masculine dominance will result in cosmic imbalance, as reflected in the prince's failure to complete the construction of ten wells, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of imbalance occurring when masculine power tries to dominate feminine principles without understanding their essence.

In the Javanese philosophical context, wells are understood not only as water sources but also as *yoni* symbols or female reproductive organs representing life source and fertility, as well as *axis mundi* connecting the upper world (heaven), middle world (earth), and lower world (underground) (M. R. Woodward, 1989). This symbolic understanding reveals that Javanese society possesses a sophisticated epistemology regarding the relationship between feminine principles and natural forces, which can be interpreted through an ecofeminist perspective as representing a cosmic unity between women and nature (Plumwood, 2019). When Nyai Ageng stated that "Nyai Tumengkang Sari wanted 10 wells made in one night by the prince," this request was not merely a technical ability test, but also a spiritual examination of the prince's understanding of the feminine principles embodied in well symbolism. This aligns with Warren & Cheney's (1991) argument that ecofeminism is not only a critical theory but also a praxis aimed at transforming human-nature relationships through a more holistic understanding.

The concept of harmony (*rukun*) in Javanese philosophy also has profound relevance to ecofeminist principles in emphasising the importance of maintaining harmony in social and ecological relations (Mulder, 1992). In Javanese tradition, *rukun* is understood not only as harmonisation in human relationships but also as harmony between humans and nature that must be maintained through appropriate spiritual and

social practices. The Sumur Songo legend illustrates that when this harmony is disrupted by excessive masculine dominance, the consequences not only affect the individuals involved but also the broader ecological landscape, as reflected in the transformation from a personal narrative to a regional geographical identity. The nine remaining wells after the prince's failure then became the geographical identity of Sumur Songo Village, symbolically showing that the memory of women's resistance against patriarchal domination has been internalised in the community's cultural landscape.

The socio-cultural context of Gresik, as a coastal area in northern East Java, provides unique dimensions for understanding the relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend. As a region directly bordering the sea with strong maritime traditions dating back to the Majapahit era, Gresik has cultural characteristics that differ from those of inland Javanese society, particularly in terms of women's position and role in the social structure (Posey, 1999). In maritime societies, women often have more independent and active roles in economic activities due to men's high mobility from sailing and trading activities (Hall, 2019). This characteristic is reflected in Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari's representation as "a woman with strong principles" capable of setting conditions for the Majapahit prince, showing women's agency in a broader social context.

Gresik's maritime tradition, rich in water symbolism and feminine elements related to fertility and life, provides an important ecological context for understanding the relevance of ecofeminist discourse in this legend (Lombard, 2005). The existence of wells in the legend not only reflects coastal society's practical need for quality freshwater sources but also represents Javanese society's cosmological understanding of the relationship between the microcosm (humans) and the macrocosm (universe). In a coastal society context, water has more complex symbolic dimensions because it relates to the daily lives of people who depend on the sea as a source of life, as well as to spirituality, which connects humans to greater natural forces. This aligns with Jervis & Merchant's (1982) view that patriarchal systems have transformed nature's perception from a "life-giving mother" to a "controllable machine." In contrast, in the Sumur Songo legend, nature is still understood as a life source with spiritual power.

Islamic influence through the Walisongo tradition in Gresik provides spiritual dimensions, enriching the relevance of ecofeminist discourse in this legend (Drewes, 2020). Islam in the Javanese context is often adapted to incorporate local values, respecting the balance between men and women, as well as between humans and nature, thereby creating a unique syncretism (M. Woodward, 2011). In the Sumur Songo legend, Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari is portrayed as "Sunan Giri's granddaughter," showing she has spiritual legitimacy in the Islamic-Javanese tradition, while "refusing to marry due to different beliefs" shows that the rejection of the Majapahit prince was not only based on personal preference but also deep ideological and spiritual considerations. This Islamic-Javanese syncretism creates unique negotiation spaces for articulating ecofeminist values in a culture influenced by Islamic tradition, where women are understood not only as subjects with rights to determine their fate but also as guardians of spiritual and ecological values in society.

Spiritual practices developing in Gresik society, related to the Sumur Songo legend, show that ecofeminist discourse operates not only at the narrative level but also at concrete, practical levels (Beatty, 2001). "The tomb of Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari has *karomah* (blessing), providing ease or smoothness in childbirth processes. Water from Sumur Songo is believed to provide healing for diseases." This belief demonstrates

that the Gresik society has internalised ecofeminist values contained in the legend through spiritual practices that connect women's power with nature's healing power. This aligns with Gaard's (1993) view of "embodied materialism" in ecofeminism, emphasising that women's and nature's experiences cannot be separated from specific material and social contexts.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend can also be seen from the perspective of oral literature as a medium for transmitting cultural values with pedagogical functions in Javanese society (Evans & Finnegan, 1980). Oral literature serves not only as entertainment but also as an instrument for education and the formation of cultural identity, enabling the transmission of ecofeminist values from one generation to the next (Sullivan & Vansina, 1986). In the context of the Sumur Songo legend, oral literature serves as a space for negotiating meanings about gender, power, and the environment, which are integrated into society's worldview. This aligns with Teeuw's (1984) view that "The literary tradition was more oral than written, everything from the spoken word epics of the Kalimantan Dayaks in Borneo to Javanese court songs," showing that the Indonesian oral literary tradition has distinctive characteristics in conveying cultural values.

The characteristics of Javanese oral literature with cosmic orientation are reflected in various narrative aspects of the Sumur Songo legend, showing harmonious relationships between humans and nature (Weatherbee, 1976). In the Javanese oral literary tradition, there is a tendency to portray female characters with a special connection to nature, reflecting Javanese society's understanding of women's roles as guardians of social and ecological balance. The Sumur Songo legend is a concrete example of this characteristic, where female characters not only serve as romantic objects in failed love narratives but also as subjects with spiritual and cultural power to influence the ecological and social landscapes of society.

The pedagogical function of oral literature in transmitting ecofeminist values is also reflected in the moral messages contained in the Sumur Songo legend. "The girls in this village should not reject men's proposals anymore, lest there be those who reject men's proposals, like what I experienced, becoming old maids forever." This quote demonstrates that the Sumur Songo legend has become an integral part of the community's value system, regulating gender relations within the community while issuing warnings about the consequences of excessive resistance to masculine power. However, from an ecofeminist perspective, this message can be interpreted more complexly as a reflection of tension between traditional values emphasising balance and challenges faced by women in patriarchal society.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend to the Javanese socio-cultural context can also be seen from the perspective of the relationship between locality and globality in the development of ecofeminist theory (Mies, 2014). In a global context, most ecofeminist theories developed today remain centred on Western cultural experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the study of the Sumur Songo legend can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and multicultural corpus of ecofeminist theory (Shiva, 2019). This legend demonstrates that ecofeminist values are not only concepts imported from the West, but also have a strong epistemological basis in Indonesian local wisdom that has developed organically within society over centuries.

The contextualisation of ecofeminist theory in Javanese culture, as seen in the Sumur Songo legend, also highlights the importance of understanding the diversity of women's experiences across various cultural contexts (Mohanty, 2021). In Javanese

society, particularly in coastal areas like Gresik, women hold different positions and roles compared to those in Western societies, which are the primary focus of mainstream ecofeminist theory development. Nyai Ageng Tumenggang Sari, in this legend, is portrayed not only as a victim of patriarchal systems but also as an agent with the power to resist and transform through the local knowledge and wisdom she possesses. This provides a more nuanced perspective on the complexity of women's position in traditional Indonesian society, which is often not adequately addressed in Western-centred ecofeminist theory.

From an environmental conservation perspective, the Sumur Songo legend illustrates that cultural narratives can serve as practical tools for maintaining the sustainability of natural resources (Robbins & Berkes, 2000). The existence of wells still maintained by the Gresik society demonstrates that the ecofeminist values contained in the legend have successfully led to the creation of sustainable conservation practices. This aligns with views on the importance of maintaining environmental sustainability integrated with local knowledge systems (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993). In this context, the Sumur Songo legend serves not only as a cultural narrative but also as a practical tool for environmental conservation, grounded in local cultural values.

The practical dimension of ecofeminist discourse relevance in the Sumur Songo legend is also reflected in how Gresik society integrates ecofeminist values into their daily lives (Posey, 1999). Pilgrimage practices to Nyai Ageng's tomb and the use of healthy water for both spiritual and medical purposes demonstrate that society has developed local knowledge systems that integrate women's power with natural forces in practical and concrete contexts. This aligns with Shiva's (2019) view, emphasising that in the ecofeminist perspective, women and nature have inseparable ontological connections, where both become sources of life and healing for society.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend can also be seen from the perspective of critique toward modernisation and development that often ignores traditional values and local wisdom. In the contemporary Indonesian context, modernisation processes are often accompanied by the exploitation of natural resources and the marginalisation of local knowledge, particularly the knowledge possessed by women regarding environmental management. The Sumur Songo legend provides an alternative development paradigm that is more sustainable and gender-just, where development is measured not only from economic perspectives but also from ecological and social balance perspectives.

In an academic context, the study of the Sumur Songo legend makes important contributions to the development of ecofeminist studies in the Indonesian context, which has been limited so far (Wiyatmi et al., 2017). Most research on ecofeminism in Indonesia continues to focus on modern and contemporary literary works. At the same time, the potential of oral literature as a repository of ecofeminist values has not been optimally explored. The Sumur Songo legend demonstrates that oral literature has great potential to serve as a medium for articulating ecofeminist values that are often overlooked in conventional literary analysis, while providing more contextual perspectives on how ecofeminist values operate within specific cultural contexts.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend to the Javanese socio-cultural context highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in ecofeminist studies, which integrate various theoretical and methodological perspectives (Gaard, 2011). The study of this legend requires not only literary analysis but also a deep understanding of cultural anthropology, local history,

and ecology to understand the complexity of relationships between gender, environment, and culture in specific contexts. This interdisciplinary approach can serve as a model for future studies of Indonesian oral literature, which have the potential to reveal ecofeminist values that have not received adequate attention in Indonesian academia.

Overall, the relevance of ecofeminist discourse in the Sumur Songo legend to the Javanese socio-cultural context demonstrates that ecofeminist values are not only abstract theoretical concepts but also have a strong empirical basis in the Indonesian cultural tradition, which has developed over centuries. This legend provides evidence that Javanese society has developed sophisticated knowledge systems and practices regarding the relationships between gender and the environment, which can inspire the development of more sustainable and gender-just development paradigms in the contemporary Indonesian context. This relevance also shows that oral literature has great potential to become a source of local wisdom that can be integrated into environmental conservation efforts and women's empowerment in Indonesian society.

Conclusion

The analytical examination of ecofeminist discourse construction within the Sumur Songo legend reveals that ecofeminist values have been deeply embedded in the Javanese cultural tradition through sophisticated representations of female subjectivity, natural symbolism, and resistance to patriarchal domination. This legend successfully integrates the figure of Nyai Ageng Tumengkang Sari as a representation of women who possess intimate connections with natural elements, particularly wells as symbols of fertility and life sources, while simultaneously demonstrating sophisticated resistance strategies through local knowledge concerning well symbolism within Javanese cosmology. The narrative transformation from individual to collective identity – wherein the nine remaining wells became the geographical identity of Sumur Songo Village – demonstrates how the memory of women's resistance against patriarchal domination has been internalised within the community's cultural landscape, functioning as a material reminder of the importance of honouring women's and nature's power within Javanese cultural value systems.

The relevance of ecofeminist discourse within the Sumur Songo legend to the Javanese socio-cultural context highlights the complexity of relationships between traditional Javanese values, women's position in society, and environmental understanding, as integrated within the worldview of Nusantara society. This legend operationalises the concepts of balance (*timbang*) and harmony (*rukun*) within Javanese philosophy through a narrative that demonstrates how excessive masculine dominance results in cosmic imbalance. At the same time, Islamic-Javanese syncretism within the coastal Gresik society context creates unique negotiation spaces for articulating ecofeminist values within a culture influenced by Islamic tradition. The spiritual practices that have developed within Gresik society – such as pilgrimage to Nyai Ageng's tomb and the utilisation of healthy water for spiritual and medicinal purposes – demonstrate that the community has internalised ecofeminist values through local knowledge systems that integrate women's power with natural forces within practical and concrete contexts, while simultaneously proving that oral literature functions as an effective medium for cultural value transmission in preserving and reproducing ecofeminist understanding across generations.

Bibliography

- Akhmad, F. (2020). Walisongo Sebagai Fakta Sejarah Islam Nusantara. *Al-Munqidz : Jurnal Kajian Keislaman*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.52802/amk.v8i2.253>
- Beatty, A. (2001). Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account. *American Ethnologist*, 28(4).
- Creswell, J. W. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design : choosing among five approaches - 3rd edition. In *Экономика Региона*.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches (3rd Edition). In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1523157>
- Dewi, N. (2017). Ekokritik dalam Sastra Indonesia: Kajian Sastra yang Memihak. *Adabiyāt: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajbs.2016.15102>
- Drewes, G. W. J. (2020). New light on the coming of Islam to Indonesia? *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, 124(4). <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90002862>
- Evans, D., & Finnegan, R. (1980). Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 93(368). <https://doi.org/10.2307/541021>
- Fenn, R., & Geertz, C. (1974). The Interpretation of Cultures. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.2307/1384392>
- Fox, J. J. (2024). Koentjaraningrat Memorial Lecture: Koentjaraningrat's Legacy and Contemporary Anthropology in Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2023.2284275>
- Gaard, G. (1993). Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature. In *Ecofeminism*.
- Gaard, G. (2011). Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism. *Feminist Formations*, 23(2). <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2011.0017>
- Gadgil, M., Berkes, F., & Folke, C. (1993). Indigenous knowledge for biodiversity conservation. *Ambio*, 22(2-3).
- Hall, K. R. (2019). Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia. In *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9zckps>
- Jervis, J. L., & Merchant, C. (1982). The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution. *Technology and Culture*, 23(4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3104822>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G., & Pilotta, J. J. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4). [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Lombard, D. (2005). Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya Kajian Sejarah Terpadu Bagian III: Warisan Kerajaan-kerajaan Konsentris. Penerbit PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama. Jakarta.
- Mies, M. (2014). Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale. In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350221703>
- Miles, M.B & Huberman, A. . (1994). An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis (2nd Edition). In *Sage Publications*.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2021). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003135593-13>
- Molyneux, M., & Steinberg, D. L. (1995). Mies and Shiva's ecofeminism: A new testament? *Feminist Review*, 49(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1995.8>
- Mulder, N. (1992). Individual and society in Java: A cultural analysis. (*No Title*).
- Plumwood, V. (2019). Feminism and the Mastery of Nature. In *Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader, Eleventh Edition*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429286827-77>
- Posey, D. (1999). Back Matter - Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity. In *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity*. <https://doi.org/10.3362/9781780445434.014>
- Raharjo, R. P. (2016). Konflik Batin Dalam Mite Perempuan Ingkar Janji Dalam Masyarakat Jawa. *Discovery: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan*, 1(2), 37-42. Retrieved from <https://scholar.archive.org/work/cawmbgrrrvd6vcpeglv277yy2m/access/wayback/http://ejournal.unhasy.ac.id/index.php/discovery/article/download/107/107>

- Ricklefs, M. C. (2012). Islamisation and its opponents in java: A political, social, cultural and religious history, c. 1930 to the present. In *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*.
- Robbins, P., & Berkes, F. (2000). Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management. *Economic Geography*, 76(4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/144393>
- Shiva, V. (2019). Staying alive : women, ecology, and development. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(7).
- Sulistiyorini, D., Siswanto, W., & Rochman, M. A. (2021). Pembelajaran Sastra melalui Cerita Bergambar Cerita Rakyat sebagai Upaya Penanaman Etika Siswa SD. *Jurnal Pembelajaran Sastra*, 2(02), 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.51543/hiskimalang.v2i02.36>
- Sullivan, P. R., & Vansina, J. (1986). Oral Tradition as History. *Ethnohistory*, 33(4). <https://doi.org/10.2307/482043>
- Suseno, F. M. (2001). Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa [The Ethics of Java: A Philosophical Analysis on the Wisdom of Java's Life]. In *PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama* (Vol. 3).
- Teeuw, A. (1984). *Sastra dan ilmu sastra ; pengantar teori sastra*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=CadkAAAAMAAJ>
- Warren, K. J., & Cheney, J. (1991). Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology1. *Hypatia*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1991.tb00216.x>
- Weatherbee, D. E. (1976). *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature*. By P. J. Zoetmulder. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974. Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Translation Series, No. 16. xvii, 588 pp. Illustrations, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. Dutch G. 125.00. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 35(03). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911800083479>
- Wirawan, A. K. (2019). Oral Literature Existence In Millennial Era : Between The Environment And Religion. *ISLLAC : Journal of Intensive Studies on Language, Literature, Art, and Culture*, 3(2), 139–145.
- Wiyatmi, Suryaman, M., & Swastikasari, E. (2017). *Ekofeminisme: Kritik Sastra Berwawasan Ekologis dan Feminis*. Yogyakarta: Cantrik.
- Woodward, M. (2011). Java, Indonesia and Islam. In *Java, Indonesia and Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0056-7>
- Woodward, M. R. (1989). Islam in Java: normative piety and mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta. *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2803920>