

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: TRANSFORMING TORAJA CHURCH IN INDONESIA

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to deconstruct the transformation of Toraja Church's leadership by showing how the Church's patriarchal structure was destabilized by external forces, and how Torajan agency was developed and how it pushed for gender equality from within. The paper also expands feminist analyses of agency in women's leadership to include men's agency. The theory of structural transformation of William H. Sewell Jr. (1992; 2005), and the theory of agency from Sherry B. Ortner (2006), are both employed in analyzing the case study. The data used includes documentary research and in-depth interviews with five male leaders and seventeen female ordained pastors of first and later generations, as well as participant observation from two months of field work in Toraja in 2015. The paper argues that this transformation was the outcome of both external forces from the cultural, political and religious contexts, and the active involvement of human agents. Toraja Church's transformation represents a long process of interaction and negotiation between patriarchal missionary and local matrilineal cultures.

## Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century heralded the development of feminist scholarship around women's struggles for leadership in religious institutions (Gross 1996). Leadership here refers to the decision-making level, and includes access to theological education, ordination, and positions in the hierarchy. Feminist scholarship has generally focused on separate aspects of the issue. Thus several feminist scholars approach this struggle by exposing patriarchal structures, namely doctrines, sacred texts, culture, and institutional practices that limit leadership for women (Adams 2007; Antone 2013; Fiorenza 1994; Kang 2013; Wadud 1999). Others focus on the enabling aspects of the structure that create opportunities for women's leadership (Ecklund 2006; Tremper 2013). Still other feminist scholarship focuses on how women actively use resources and strategies to transform their religious communities or achieve extra-religious ends even within highly conservative religious systems (Adeney 2003; Mahmood 2005; Noriko 2003).

Generally there seems to be a lack of feminist scholarship that looks at this struggle as a whole process and from an outcome perspective, however. In other words, it has not asked the question, "How have women achieved such a level of advancement in leadership?" This paper attempts to contribute an empirical study into the relationship between agency and structure in this process, by

examining a successful case of the struggle for women's leadership in the church, specifically the Toraja Church in Indonesia. The approach is qualitative and sociological.

Toraja Church is an ethnic-based Protestant church located administratively in the upper reaches of the Sa'dan River in south Sulawesi, Indonesia. Protestant Christianity was first brought to Toraja by the Gereformeerde Zendingsbond (GZB) Dutch missionary, van de Loosdrecht, in 1913. The Toraja Church declared independence from the Dutch mission in 1947, but remained under the control of missionaries. In 2015, the Christian population in Toraja reached 369,730 or 71.34 percent of the total population of 518,245 (Kantor Kementerian Agama Kabupaten Tana Toraja 2015a; 2015b). Toraja Church, in particular, has a membership of 327,246 or 63.14 percent of the total population (Sinode Gereja Toraja 2015b).

This Church has been through a transformation process in terms of the role of women. In the beginning, the Dutch missionaries installed a highly patriarchal structure, with women completely excluded from theological education and leadership positions (Hutabarat-Lebang 2006, 67; Taruk 2013, 21, 58). The missionaries used the justifications of gender-biased biblical passages that silence women in the church (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1947, 3). Nevertheless, Toraja Church gradually moved from the complete exclusion of women from leadership before 1955 to a full recognition of women's participation in all Church life in 1984. Two years after the institutionalization of women's rights in Toraja Church, the first woman was ordained. From 1986 to 2015, or within thirty years, the number of ordained female pastors has reached 345 or 45.6 percent of the total ordained clergy (Sinode Gereja Toraja 2015a; 2015b). Women also gained a presence at the hierarchical level. In 2001, a woman became one of the four chairpersons of the synod. In 2011, the synod had a female chairperson and a female general treasurer. While there may remain gender issues to be tackled by Torajan Christians, the formal gender structure of Toraja Church was transformed in 1984 after a long period of persistent struggle from both men and women. This paper focuses on the period before 1984, during which time the negotiation between local matrilineal and patriarchal missionary cultures took place, a negotiation that substantially altered the formal gender structure of Toraja Church.

This paper deconstructs Toraja Church's transformation toward inclusive leadership, by showing how the gender structure was destabilized by external forces, and how Torajan agency was developed, with a push for gender equality coming from within. Among other purposes, this study attempts to explore men's agency and their contribution to the women's struggle. Feminist studies in this field have primarily focused on women's agency, while mostly leaving men's agency untouched, perhaps because men have generally been part of the dominating structure. Although there have been calls from male scholars and feminists to engage men in feminist theory and practice (Hooks 1992; Ndlazi 2004; Pease 2000; Schacht and Ewing 2004), this phenomenon has not been explored empirically in women's leadership studies. This study is also unique in terms of its locality, as there have been no previous vigorous sociological studies on Christian women's leadership in the Toraja Church.

In social studies, the relationship between agency, context, and structure has been long theorized and debated. Anthony Giddens (1979), confined the concept of agency to the reproduction of structure and so structural transformation was not adequately theorized until the work of Williams H. Sewell Jr. (1992; 2005). While Giddens focused primarily on the reproduction of structure as a single entity and in a synchronic manner, Sewell took into account the historical process of structural transformation in convergence with other structures. Sewell viewed structures as multiple, intersecting, and transposable. It is possible to explain structural change, because the conjunction of different structures helps social actors distance themselves from their own cultural structures and creatively apply new schemas, or accumulate and use resources in a new way. Sewell's theory of structural change is applied here to explain the transformation of the gender structure in Toraja Church. This is done by identifying the multiplicity of structures in the Torajan context, namely the cultural, political, and religious structures that intersect with the Church's

gender structure, resulting in the transposability of schemas and the unpredictability of resource accumulation by Torajan agents.

While Giddens restored the concept of agency, his theory of agency was oversimplified, since it focused on agency as power in general, and ignored other dimensions, such as gender, asymmetrical power relations, class, status, and ethnicity. Further, it did not clarify how agency is formulated and how it leads to transformation of structures. Sherry B. Ortner (2006) utilized basic theories of agency and structure from major social practice theorists, namely Giddens, Bourdieu, Foucault, Geerts, and Sahlins, to formulate a theory of agency that takes into account the complexity of agency subjectivity and politics, and that locates agency in the nexus of dynamic social relations and power asymmetry in the historical process. Ortner views agency as “pursuing ‘projects’ within a world of domination and inequality” (Ortner 2006, 15). Projects can be understood as culturally and historically constituted goals. The actor’s project enables or constrains his or her agency. Ortner calls this the “agency of project.” To establish the project, the actor devises strategies to restructure the power relations around the decision to dominate, conform, or resist. This she calls the “agency of power.” For example, the capitalists’ project is wealth and competition. This is their agency of project. To establish their project, they have to dominate the workers, and thus they become an agency of power (Ortner 1996, 46ff).

Ortner’s agency framework is useful in analyzing agency in the Toraja Church, since agency in this Church involves both male and female leaders, who have different projects and power relations with regard to the Church’s gender structure. Their respective agencies are enacted through a historical process of context dynamics. Both genders also reflect internal diversity in terms of social status, family relations, and motivation.

Data in this paper includes documentary research and ethnographic field work collected during a two-month project from October to December 2015 in Toraja Church, located in Tanah Toraja and Toraja Utara. Documentary data consists of Church synod documents, and also writings and publications from the first witnesses of the Toraja women’s struggle for leadership. Ethnographic data includes in-depth interviews with five male leaders and seventeen female pastors of first and later generations, and also participant observations. The researchers also had conversations with several male and female lay-leaders from Toraja Church regarding the issue under study.

This paper reveals that the transformation of the Toraja Church toward gender-inclusive leadership was not only facilitated by the cultural, political, and religious context, but was also brought about by the active agency of Torajan leaders with the limited support of some Dutch missionaries. It was a long process of interaction and negotiation between missionary patriarchal and Torajan matrilineal cultures, and was embodied by the actors involved, especially in the pre-1984 period.

## **Transformation of the Torajan Church’s Gender Structure in Context**

Employing Sewell’s theory of structural transformation, this paper argues that the transformation of the Torajan Church toward gender-inclusive leadership was to a certain extent facilitated by three factors: (1) the dominant gender equality practice of Torajan culture; (2) the Torajan political context that facilitated the pursuit of education and international exchanges which increased the agents’ accumulation of resources; and (3) the encounter with progressive Christian movements and alternative gender practices from neighboring churches, which motivated and pressured the Toraja Church to change. These dynamics functioned as destabilizing forces for the patriarchal gender structure of Toraja Church as they encountered one other.

### Gender Practices in Torajan Culture

In cultural studies, scholars are increasingly aware of the dynamics of cultural structures in a given society. For instance, Geertz admits that “[c]ultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is” (Geertz 1973, 29). As for Bourdieu, the field of cultural production is always a contested field of competing discourses and values (Bourdieu [1977] 1995, 72; Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002, 159). This section of the paper therefore attempts to present how the dominant discourses of Torajan culture served as a basis for resisting and destabilizing the patriarchal gender regime of the Church. In fact, existing studies show that the dominant discourses of Torajan culture promote gender equality and give women high social status.

Concerning local custom or *adat*, Waterson states that “[s]o far as *adat* is concerned . . . I could discover no point of *adat* law which discriminates against women” (Waterson 2009, 229). In familial organization, there is no gender preference or discrimination among children. Both boys and girls are valued and share equal inheritance rights; however, women are given strong positions in several areas. For instance, in the Torajan custom of marriage, a man has to live with, and contribute his labor to, his wife’s family after the wedding. In Torajan culture, each large family is represented by an origin house or *tongkonan*. Women are the ones who represent the *tongkonan* and who manage the ricebarn of the family. In terms of death rituals, women are given more honor than men in the sense that the number of animals sacrificed for their funeral is greater than for their husbands who have passed away (Suryadarma 2006, 123; Waterson 2009, 230, 234-237). Torajan custom also prescribes that the funeral of a dead person must be celebrated in a person’s maternal *tongkonan*, regardless of how highly ranked the paternal *tongkonan* is. This means children are considered the mother’s descendants. In kinship terminology, the Torajans rarely distinguish between sexes. For example, they use the same words for both sexes, such as *sampu* (cousins), *api’*, *ulu’*, *unu’*, *siulu’* (local variants for siblings), and *nene’* (grandparent) (Nooy-Palm 1979, 26-29). Women can thus be said to have a special position in the Torajan culture of kinship. In terms of ritual, women participate in all Torajan rituals and their participation is even compulsory. According to the *Aluk To dolo* tradition, there were women who became ritual leaders. This tradition later became rare, however, and almost died out after Dutch evangelists converted the majority of Torajans to Christianity (Suryadarma 2006, 123; Waterson 2009, 232-33). Hence, at the symbolic level of Torajan custom or *adat*, women have high social status bestowed upon them.

There are counter-trends to these gender practices, however. In Torajan society, it is not gender, but class status, that divides the society. Women from upper classes are not allowed to marry men of lower class; whereas this is not applied to men (Nooy-Palm 1979, 31; Tangdilintin 2006, 115-6). In addition, the coming of Christianity to Toraja and the New Order Policy restricted women’s roles to wifehood and motherhood (Waterson 2009, 241). Similarly, and notably since 1974, the New Order Government established women’s organizations composed of wives of civil servants and army officers, in order to promote the domestic orientation of Indonesian women. In Toraja, this organization was headed by the Bupati’s wife (Waterson 2009, 241).

Despite these counter-gender practices, the dominant gender discourses of Torajan culture promote gender equality and respect for women. Research data shows that the conflicting gender regimes of the Toraja Church and Torajan culture became tense and provided grounds for resistance on both small and larger scales. Toraja Church documents and writings show that Torajan men struggled for gender equality very early, even before the Church was established, and before the birth of Western feminist theology or any encounter with it. While Western feminist theologies emerged during the 1960s (Gross 1996), the struggle for gender equality in Toraja Church began much earlier.

For example, in a discussion on women’s right to vote for Church offices at a missionary conference in Rantepao in 1937, four out of seven people agreed to give women the right to vote, while only three members disagreed. However, this decision was not realized, because the missionary leaders did not approve (Anggui 2006, 42).

Since Toraja Church was established in 1947, this struggle of male leaders became more obvious and heated through several synod general assemblies, such as the fifth assembly in Rantepao in 1955, the seventh assembly in Makale in 1959, the twelfth assembly in Makale in 1970, the thirteenth assembly in Palopo in 1972, and the fifteenth assembly in Rantepao in 1978.

There were also strategic gender equality practices that were carried out within the patriarchal gender regime of the Church. For example, in 1960, seven students were sent from Toraja Church to study at Jakarta Theological School. They all requested financial aid from the Church, but the Church gave financial support to only six. The other student did not receive support because she was a woman. Instead of conforming to this gender discriminatory practice, the six male students agreed to divide their scholarships into seven so that the female student received the same amount (Anggui 2011, 30-31). This female student later became the first ordained female pastor of Toraja Church.

The above evidence shows that in the early period, Toraja Church gender egalitarianism was drawn from nowhere but their own culture. Toraja Church leader, Rev. A.J. Anggui, and sociologist Suryadarma, agree that the gender egalitarian values of Toraja culture were one of the sources of resistance and transformation of this Church's gender regime (Anggui 2011, 32-33; Suryadarma 2006, 124). In other words, these conflicting gender structures, existing in parallel in the Toraja Church context, shaped the Torajan agency for resistance. They also functioned as a destabilizing force for change.

#### Torajan Political Context

Beside the cultural context, the political context also played a role in the transformation of the Toraja Church's gender structure. In particular, the Torajan political context offered opportunities for personal empowerment through higher education and international exchange, which in turn led to unpredictable accumulation of resources by the agents.

From the colonial period to the present, the Torajan political context in general has facilitated opportunities for education and international exchange. During the colonial period (1900-1942), the Dutch colonial government invested in education for female children and protected women. The Dutch government opened two public schools using the Torajan and Melayuan languages in 1908. They also opened another school that used the Dutch language in 1929, and one more with the name "Christelijke Torajase School" in Rantepao in 1938. From the beginning, female children were admitted to these schools (Hutabarat-Lebang 2006c, 65-66). In 1967, women were allowed to take Christian education in STT Rantepao, and several women became teachers of Christian education during this period. Even though women were not allowed to take theological education in Toraja Church's theological institutions, such as STT Rantepao, before 1984, other theological seminaries or structures such as STT Jakarta opened this opportunity for women. Indeed, women pioneers, such as Damaris M. Anggui-Pakan and Henriette Hutabarat Lebang, were able to receive theological education in STT Jakarta in 1959 and 1972 respectively (Anggui 2011, 31-32; Hutabarat-Lebang 2006c, 69-70). This reveals that the simultaneous operation of multiple incompatible structures can result in the accumulation of resources by agents.

After Independence in 1945, Indonesia opened the country to the outside world in order to boost industrialization and international relations (Vickers 2005, 126-133). This integration of Indonesia in the global context facilitated, among other things, international travel, personal empowerment through higher education, and international interaction with women's rights movements. As an administrative unit in Indonesia, Toraja also benefited from this policy. For example, Rev. A.J. Anggui, who later became chairman of Toraja Church synod and a key figure in Toraja Church reform, including gender reform, earned his Master of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1965. His education from the United States, and his worldwide knowledge and experiences, qualified him for a leading position in the Toraja Church. Perhaps his worldwide experience also broadened his vision of gender-inclusive church leadership. Upon his return to Toraja Church, he assumed a leading position at the Theological School in

Rantepao and on the Church synod. Under his leadership, women's rights in theological education and leadership participation improved step-by-step.

Another typical example of the power of global integration comes from Rev. Damaris M. Anggui-Pakan, who later became the first ordained female pastor of Toraja Church and a key figure in the struggle for women's rights. She was present at the Asia Church Women's Conference (ACWC) in Japan in 1966 (Hutabarat-Lebang 2006b, 55-58). She was also sent by Toraja Church to other countries, such as the United States, India, Philippines, and Taiwan, to join ecumenical women's conferences. She said that her participation in these ecumenical events built strength, confidence and maturity in her struggle for women's rights.<sup>1</sup> By empowering agency, the political context of Toraja Church in particular, and Indonesia in general, therefore played an indirect role in destabilizing the Toraja Church's gender structure.

### Pressure from Religious Context

Beside the cultural and political settings, the religious context of the Toraja Church also had a role in transforming the Church's gender structure. The religious context here means the encounter of the Church with the outside Christian world, both nationally and internationally.

Toraja Church became a member of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (former name "DGI" and present name "PGI") in 1950. It joined the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), which later became the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in 1964. In 1967, Toraja Church became a member of the World Council of Churches and a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1973 (Hutabarat-Lebang 2006b, 55). Since these Christian ecumenical movements promote, among other things, human rights, contextual theology, and gender equality, Toraja Church, as a member, could not escape their influence. At the level of practice, churches in Indonesia started to ordain women as early as the 1950s and a majority of churches had ordained women by the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> The participation of Toraja Church in progressive Christian movements and its encounter with gender equality practices in neighboring churches thus possibly increased the Church's own awareness of alternative gender practices. Such awareness became both a motivation and a pressure for Toraja Church to change its patriarchal gender structure.

In fact, evidence from research data shows that this encounter did become the ground for change. For instance, one of the reasons raised in favor of women's right to vote in the Church at the fifth general synod assembly of Toraja Church in Rantepao in 1955, reveals awareness by the Toraja Church of gender structure reform in other Indonesian churches. This awareness was articulated by Musa: "I agree with Rev. Sumbung that in the Indonesian Protestant Church, women also vote" (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1955, 38). Change did take place at this synod assembly, which agreed to give women the right to vote for the first time. In the next synod assembly in Rantepao in 1957, a feeling of being under pressure from women's emancipation movements in other churches was again expressed. The assembly was divided into two groups: those for and against women's rights to be elected to Church offices. Here the assembly leaders refused to change the Church's gender structure. The same pressure was expressed in later synod assemblies in 1959, 1965, and 1972. The next four synod assemblies in 1975, 1978 and 1981 saw the reformation of the Torajan Church's structure to accommodate women's rights, culminating in complete change of the Church's gender structure in 1984.

To sum up, this section of the paper has demonstrated that the gender equality practices of Torajan culture; the political context that facilitates educational pursuit and international

<sup>1</sup> Anggui-Pakan, Damaris M., Rev. Interview with the author.

<sup>2</sup> We have not found an official report about the overall situation of women's ordination in Indonesia. This assumption is drawn from several conversations with Indonesian church leaders and feminist scholars and from Toraja synod assembly records.

experiences that empower agency; and the encounter with progressive Christian communities and gender equality practices in neighboring churches, proved strong external destabilizing forces to Toraja Church's gender structure. The conjunction of these local and translocal structures shaped agency and served as the basis for resistance and transformation of the Toraja Church's gender structure over time. One factor might be stronger than the others, but no single factor can completely explain the transformation of Toraja Church's gender structure.

### **Torajan Agency: Negotiation between Missionary Patriarchal and Local Matrilineal Cultures**

Beside the external destabilizing forces, the internal push of Torajan agency was equally important for the transformation of the gender structure of Toraja Church. This was a long process of interaction and negotiation between the missionary patriarchal culture and the Torajan matrilineal culture and embodied by the actors involved. In this transformation process, and during the pre-1984 period, the local Torajan male leaders, with the limited support of few open-minded Dutch missionaries, played a more prominent role than the women. The Torajan female agents emerged later when they played a no less important role than the men.

#### Male Leaders Negotiating the Patriarchal Structure

The earliest record of men negotiating the patriarchal structure of Toraja Church comes from a 1937 missionary conference, where four out of seven people agreed to give women the right to vote for Church offices. This decision was not realized, however, because the Dutch missionary board did not approve (Anggui 2006, 42). This record does show that there were supporters of women's rights among the missionaries, however. At this time, it was a right to vote in the Church. Would these open-minded missionaries go far enough to support gender equality in the religious order and Church hierarchy?

The battle between the missionary patriarchal perspective and advocates of gender equality in Toraja Church emerged again in the first Church synod assembly of 1947, when the Toraja Church was established. There was a debate between a local gospel teacher, F. Bura, and two Dutch missionaries: Dr. D. J. Van Dijk as chairman of the assembly and Dr. van der Linde, regarding women's participation in church governance. Gender-biased biblical passages were quoted to silence Mr. Bura's questions.

- Mr. Bura:
- (1) Why can't women hold church offices?
  - (2) Why aren't women allowed to vote in the church?
  - (3) What does church governance mean?

Chairman: For the first question, let's look at Corinthians 14:34-35. The second question is related to the first question, meaning women should be quiet. The meaning of church governance is that church offices are not the same as what is outside the church.

Mr. Bura: Please read Romans 16:1.

Chairman: This is not about the office of elder but deacon.

Dr. Van der Linde: We should not think that women are inferior to men, but Paul said that women should not rule over men but men are head of the households. Only this can be used in the Reformed Church's rule. (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1947, 3)

In this debate, the Dutch missionaries imposed a gender-biased interpretation of misogynistic biblical passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which denies women the right to speak in church as follows: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." The missionaries

successfully silenced appeals for women's rights from this first synod to the fifth synod in 1955. At this later synod, women's rights to vote in the church were raised again. The assembly was divided into two groups: those for and those against women's rights to vote.

Rambu: That right of women belongs to her husband.

Sumbung: After the Second World War, women demanded their rights. This means that Jesus has given women permission. If women are given the right in social matters, they also need to be given the right to vote but not the right to be elected.

Palesang: I agree with the proposal but that right must be limited. Women's labor and thoughts are needed, but their voices are not.

Z.v.d. Hooff: Agree with the proposal from Makassar.

Kadang: I disagree with this proposal with the reason that the household will have two kings if women are given this right.

M. Lebang: It is needed to give them the right to vote, but not the right to be elected.

J. Linting: Give this right to women by seeing the community development. In the beginning, Jesus lifted up women's status. Why are we now viewing women as lower than we are? I agree to give women the right to vote with our guidance.

Siahaya: The Bible does not allow in I Corinthians 14:34-35 (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1955, 38–39).

The above record clearly shows how the male leaders of Toraja Church and a Dutch missionary negotiated women's rights in the Church bit-by-bit. The pro-women's rights advocates approached the issue by appealing to Jesus as the source for uplifting women; however, they were careful not to make a big move in face of resistance from the conservative group. Finally, the assembly voted and agreed (23 votes) to give women the right to vote, although not the right to be elected for Church offices such as pastor, elder and deacon.

Right after this general synod assembly, the issue of women's rights to be elected for Toraja Church offices was raised by both Dutch missionaries and Toraja Church leaders, during the sixth synod assembly in Rantepao in 1957. Objections were also raised from both parties, however. During this synod assembly, a proposal from Makale requested women be given the right to hold Church offices. Immediately there was a heated debate, as follows:

Chairman: Church regulation allows only men to hold these offices.

Ds. C. Balke: In Romans 16:1, what does it mean regarding this issue? The Greek word (dialognal) in Romans 16:1, in church history generally, there was no deacon's office. In practice, usually women were deacon's assistants to help in things only women could do; however, they should not hold church offices...

Kesu: We need to hold firm to church regulation. As what was said by the proposer that it is easier for women to earn money, women can help but they should not hold the deacon's office.

Zuster vd. Hooff: The congregation needs to lift up the deacon office because there are things men cannot do but only women can.

M. Lebang: Agree with Zuster vd. Hooff. (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1957, 60–61).

Despite the support of the missionary, Zuster vd. Hooff, and some local leaders concerning women holding diaconate positions, the leadership of the assembly decided to reject the proposal from Makale and held firm to the regulation which had been agreed at the previous assembly. The issue of women holding Church offices was raised again in a proposal from Rombon/Ulusalu at the seventh synod general assembly in Makale in 1959. Similar to what had happened at the previous synod assembly, this immediately ignited a heated debate in which gender-biased biblical texts and



patriarchal interpretations were articulated in order to turn down the proposal (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1959, 76).

Another stepping-stone was reached during the fifteenth general synod assembly in Tagari, Rantepao in 1978. This was perhaps the most heated debate of all, and took up several pages in the record of that assembly. Interestingly, this synod obtained consensus from local leaders to support women's full rights based on gender equality theology, while opponents came only from the Dutch missionaries, and were based on gender-discriminatory theology. According to the record, when the synod leaders brought the issue of women holding Church offices to the fore for discussion, it was quickly objected to by missionary representative, Rev. van Roest:

As a church partner, we need to suggest that church issues need to be based on the Bible. It is not clear that Debora was promoted to be a judge. It was because of Barak's laziness (a man) that Debora was forced to rise up and act as a judge. In Israelite society, there was no female priest. In the New Testament, there was no woman who was lifted up to be a disciple, even though many followers of Jesus were women. In Romans 16, Paul mentioned Febe as a deaconess. This service did not include serving the Word, but only serving food. Paul insisted that women be silent. If we give women opportunities in church offices, it means we intend to build a church which is obsolete (in primitive society, women were lifted up to be priestesses). Only what was said above is based on the Scripture. For us, do we want to be loyal to the Bible or do we want to change the foundation of the church which is the Bible? (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1978, 125).

Despite the harsh and accusing objection of this Dutch missionary toward the acceptance of women for Church offices, the Torajan leaders of the assembly declared, "We have already been aware that the roles of God's people both men and women are not different" (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1978, 130). This declaration marked a victory for the belief of local men in equality for men and women in all aspects of religious life. This conviction was institutionalized in 1984. It was clear to this synod assembly that the support for women's rights from some open-minded Dutch missionaries was limited to diaconate positions. Hence at the 1978 and 1984 synod assemblies, there was a polarization between the local perspective and the missionary perspective regarding women's full rights in the Church.

The male agents of change in Toraja Church form a special category of agency in this study, because they represent the enlightened part of the dominating structure. They were men seeking change against the conservative and patriarchal elements of the structure—here the missionary patriarchal gender structure. Some Dutch missionaries did support women's rights; however, their support was limited to diaconate or lay-leadership positions. When it came to the religious authority level of leadership, the Dutch missionaries had a unified perspective on women: they rejected women for these positions. Other sources of my data confirm this finding. For example, in 1967, after joining an ecumenical women's conference in the United States, Mrs. D.M. Anggui-Pakan had the chance to visit Holland, where she met missionaries who had worked in Toraja. When she shared with them that Toraja Church needed both men and women to serve in the future, she did not receive a positive response (Mangoting 2011, 330). According to my interview with Rev. A.J. Anggui, it was not until the 1980s that for the first time GZB included women on their Missionary Managing Board.<sup>3</sup>

The question raised is, what enabled the Torajan leaders go further than the GZB missionaries in supporting women's rights in the Church? Why did they not adopt and maintain the missionary patriarchal theology, rather than choose instead to develop a gender-equality theology right from

<sup>3</sup> Anggui, A. J., Rev. Interview with the author. 2015.

the beginning? They were struggling for women's rights from within the establishment of the Church and before women had a voice themselves. Many of these men were top leaders of the structure, such as Rev. J. Sumbung, Rev. J. Linting, and Rev. A.J. Anggui, who held the highest positions (general chairman) in the Toraja Church synod for several periods. These men were situated in powerful positions and had superior status which had been sanctioned by the religious structure. What made them willing to share power and status with women? The author assumes that these men were not merely driven by women's interests, but also had their own interests or projects which gave them the power and the commitment to pursue gender equality. It is not easy to grasp the male agents' subjectivity which led to their agency exhaustively. The data reveals to a certain extent a sense of gender justice and empathy deriving from Torajan matrilineal culture in these men's agency project. These motives are sometimes mixed together when men strategize to transform the gender structure.

### Gender Justice Agency

A sense of gender justice is treated here as the moral value that men and women must be treated with equal dignity and given equal opportunities. According to Torajan culture, a good person or a good man must treat women with respect and children equally, as the previous section on Torajan culture has shown. As the example of the seven Torajan students who requested financial aid from Toraja Church to study at Jakarta Theological School in 1960 reveals, while the Church gave financial help only to six male students, those six male students decided to divide their scholarships into seven, so that the female student would receive the same amount of financial aid (Anggui 2011, 31). This is a sense of gender justice as part of being a good human being that the male students' culture had cultivated in them. This quality enabled them to resist the discriminatory treatment of the Church. The fact that the Torajan male leaders struggled for women's rights very early, even before Western feminist theology was born, and that their voices for women's rights were persistently raised through several synod assemblies, as presented in the cultural section of this paper, shows that their sense of gender justice must have come from their culture.

### Empathy Agency

Beside the element of gender justice, a sense of empathy was also built into the male agents' project. I find Douglas W. Hollan's work "Vicissitudes of "Empathy" in a Rural Toraja Village" published in *The Anthropology of Empathy: Experiencing the Lives of Others in Pacific Societies* (2011) very helpful in explaining the agency of empathy in Toraja's male leaders. Hollan defines "empathy" as "a truly intersubjective process involving someone attempting to understand as well as someone needing or allowing him- or herself to be understood" (Hollan 2011, 195). He finds that Torajan society is built on a system of dependency and reciprocal exchange. He states: "Exchange is so central to sociality in Toraja, so basic to what is considered human, that there are moral and emotional aspects to it as well" (Hollan 2011, 199). Torajan people feel obliged to help if they feel the needs and concerns of the other are legitimate. People can feel deep shame if their needs are neglected or if they fail to help others or let others down. In Toraja, the concept of "love" involves concern and compassion for the other's needs and plight, and one takes action to help as if one has no other choice. If the appeal for help is from a kinsman, this can stimulate a "powerful feeling of love/compassion/pity for that person" (Hollan 2011, 199).

Hollan also finds that the Torajan sense of empathy is restricted when people perceive the appeal for help is not genuine or is beyond their capacity. Nor do they extend empathy toward lowlander Muslims and animals (Hollan 2011, 196, 204-205). In practice, the capacity to empathize presumably varies within this same culture. This study of Hollan concerning the Torajan culture of empathy is significant, because it can serve as a cultural framework for the agency of empathy of male Toraja Church leaders. With a sense of empathy, the male agents' project has one more solid ground. Being empathetic to the needs and concerns of others, especially women, is part of a moral obligation to be a good human being. This sense of empathy is built into subjectivity and forms

men's agency to act. The male leaders' sense of empathy can be clearly seen in their discourses in a few records of the Toraja Church synod assemblies, both in terms of sharing concerns with women, and in terms of feeling ashamed about leaving the women behind.

For instance, at the fifth Toraja Church synod assembly in Rantepao in 1955, a Church leader from Makassar presented a proposal appealing for women's right to vote. He said: "We are from Makassar. We often received insistence from the women who requested that they also be given the right to run the congregation. What we mean is that: 'Until now only men have the right to speak.' We expect that women will also be given the right to vote" (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1955, 38). His discourse reveals that the men from Makassar felt obliged to help the women, because they felt and understood their needs and concerns. When they presented the proposal, it was not only the women's problem. They made it their own problem by using the first-person expressions "we mean" and "we expect." Their agency was embedded in their word choice and also their courage to speak out for women against the patriarchal structure.

We find a strong example of empathetic agency in the struggle of Rev. A.J. Anggui for gender equality in Toraja Church. He can be considered a key figure in this process. His empathy for women can be elicited from his relationship with his wife and his radical reforms of the gender structure. He and his wife, Rev. D. M. Anggui-Pakan, the first ordained female pastor of Toraja Church, met at Jakarta Theological School in 1959. He was her senior and helped her in her study. Later they were married. For twenty years, she worked faithfully as a professor at Rantepao Theological School and Makassar Theological School while patiently longing for women to be accepted into church leadership. During this period, Rev. Anggui was continuously promoted to important positions in Toraja Church. He became Head of Rantepao Theological School and also General Secretary of the church synod in 1965. He then became Chairman of the church synod in 1981 and kept this position for successive synods of 1984 and 1988. It is not difficult to draw from Rev. Anggui a sense of love, compassion, and empathy for his wife's concerns and wishes from those twenty years of sharing life together. Under his leadership, radical changes were made. He employed various strategies, ranging from utilizing his personal position to empower women, to raising gender equality and creating room for women to serve and prove themselves.

Rev. Anggui utilized his position as Head of the Rantepao Theological School and General Secretary of the church synod to empower women through education. Since the missionaries did not want women to become pastors, and in order to avoid direct confrontation, he maneuvered his power to help the women step-by-step. First, he devised the Christian Education Program to train teachers of religion for public schools so that women could become religious education teachers. In 1967, women were admitted to this program. He made a further move in 1970 by revising the Christian Education and Theological Programs. He wisely designed the curricula for both programs to have the same subjects, except for final year subjects. The advantage was that students from the Christian Education Program could then take extra subjects from the Theological Program if they wanted to be pastors.<sup>4</sup>

Rev. Ribka Sinda, the second ordained female pastor, also revealed that in this early period, Rev. A.J. Anggui played a significant role in placing and assisting female pastors to serve at local churches. The placement of female pastors in local churches faced much difficulty, since the churches were not used to women as leaders. However, Rev. Anggui had confidence in women's ability to serve. He was patient in connecting and negotiating with leaders of churches so that female pastor candidates were given a chance to serve and prove themselves. Thanks to his care and help, several female pastors, including Rev. Ribka and her supervisees, were accepted and succeeded in transforming the Toraja Church's view toward women. These pieces of evidence demonstrate that Rev. A.J. Anggui's subjective agency cannot be explained without reference to the complexity of his situatedness: his encounters with local and translocal cultural schemas; his individual position

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<sup>4</sup> Anggui A. J., Rev., and Rev. D.M. Anggui-Pakan. Interview with the author.

in the church structure; and his relations with other actors, such as his relation with his wife, Rev. Anggui-Pakan.

To sum up, male leaders played a significant, if not decisive, role in the transformation of Toraja Church's gender structure. This section has to a certain extent pointed out that their agency arose from their cultural framework of gender justice and empathy, which formed the ground for their project to be good human beings. To struggle for women's rights also meant establishing their own projects. These powerful cultural sources motivated them to negotiate with the missionary patriarchal culture. Their struggle is seen through various strategies, ranging from persistently raising their voices for women's rights, to skillfully utilizing their powerful positions to empower women and reform the structure, thereby creating room for women to serve and prove themselves. They did the job of clearing structural constraints and creating opportunities for the women agents. Their agency did not happen all of a sudden, however, but was founded on the existing needs, concerns, and also pressure from the women agents. Many of the men were also transformed in the process, moving from holding a gender exclusive to a gender inclusive position, as seen in their increasing support of women in the church synod records.

### **Torajan Women Negotiating the Patriarchal Structure**

While the local men played the major role in negotiating the formal gender structure of the Church in the public arena, which was exclusive to men, local women skillfully and gently made use of the limited space that had opened in the structure to press forward the issue. Women's agency in Toraja Church is a complex matter for analysis, even more complex than the male leaders' agency. Women comprise the subordinate group and are themselves diverse in terms of their social status, education and aspirations. What united them was their belief in gender equality. During the pre-1984 period, the target of women's resistance was Toraja Church's patriarchal regulations and leadership established by the missionaries; however, their strategies were generally directed toward gaining support from the male agents or male sympathizers. There were basically three groups of women.

The majority group included lay women who demanded the right to manage the congregation. This project might have been inspired by a sense of gender injustice and a lack of empathy from their culture. Torajan culture prescribes that men and women be treated equally. Torajan women are very active in their household management, in local religious traditions and society beside the men, but now suddenly they were deprived of this role in the Church. That their needs and concerns were neglected produced shame, both in themselves and in the Church's leaders, in light of their cultural framework. This shame enabled their agency to transform the situation. There is not enough evidence from the available data to give a religious or theological ground for their agency. To establish their project, these women relied on both male sympathizers and women's collective power and voice to gradually achieve their rights.

The earliest voice for Torajan women is found in the record of the synod general assembly of Toraja Church in Rantepao in 1955, through a proposal from Makassar. It reads, "We are from Makassar. We often receive insistence from women who request that they be given the right to manage the congregation. What we mean is that only men have the right to speak, so we expect women will also be given the right to vote" (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1955, 38). The discourse here reveals that women felt excluded from participation in Church life. Since they were not allowed to have a voice, they appealed to the men for help. The women demanded the right to vote as the first step. They successfully achieved this during the synod assembly. The women also formed a women's fellowship called *Persekutuan Wanita Gereja Toraja* or PWGT in 1966, and had their representative voice heard for the first time at the synod assembly in Makale in 1970, where they demanded women's rights to lead worship and preach at the Church (Komisi Usaha Gereja Toraja 1970, 53).

The second group of women consists of a couple of well-educated women who went against the current and followed a different path for their lives. They left their hometowns to seek theological education outside Toraja Church, which had blocked the door to women's religious careers at that time. They had a clear sense of religious calling and wanted to make it their career. This was their project. They were also fully aware of their subordinate position in the Church, but believed that this was not the final scenerio. Their agency was enabled by conflicting subjectivities: being subordinated in the Church by religious schema, but being equal with men in terms of their cultural schema. Their project was enabled by their hopes and choices. Their strategies were directed toward showing their longing for recognition of their presence, aspirations, and contributions.

For example, Ms. Damaris M. Pakan had a clear calling to become a female pastor when she finished high school. She decided to enter Jakarta Theological Seminary in 1959, at a time when the Toraja Church had not accepted women to become pastors. She wrote in her book *Berbuah dalam Kristus* [Bearing Fruit in Christ] that "I had a strong belief and hope that this situation will surely change one day, so I firmly went on with my study at STT Jakarta." (Pdt. Ny. D.M. Anggui, S.Th, nd., 5). After graduation in 1965, she came back to Toraja Church and was accepted as a teacher at Rantepao Theological School. Her acceptance at this seminary was thanks to the support of some individual male leaders, and especially her status as the wife of Rev. A.J. Anggui, who was Rector. Though the acceptance of Ms. Pakan's leadership at Rantepao Theological School did not mean women's leadership was accepted generally, her position in the structure gave her the opportunity to prove women's capacity to lead and also gave her room to advocate for women's rights in the Church.

Nowhere in her writings, or her conversation with me, did she make any verbal demands or reveal confrontation with the Church. Instead, she showed it through her emotion and her work. She wrote in the aforementioned book, "Beginning from the period of study in STT Jakarta to the period of intense struggle, it was to show the longing so that a woman can also be accepted." (Pdt. Ny. D.M. Anggui, S.Th, nd., 4). She patiently and faithfully carried out her duties as a theological professor, training several male pastors for Toraja Church over a period of twenty years. She said this reality—a non-ordained woman training male pastors—became an issue for the Church. Her students later became sympathizers and supporters of her ordination.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, her personal relationship with Rev. A.J. Anggui as wife was a channel for her to make her wishes and concerns heard. She found solidarity and strength from the Toraja women and also other women internationally through her active participation in PWGT and the international ecumenical women's bodies.

The third group of women includes a few women who did not have a clear calling, but eventually found it in a later period. During this earlier period, their project was simply to have a decent life. When Christian education was opened for women, it became an opportunity for them to accomplish their project, since this program could offer them teaching positions at public schools. For example, in an interview, a female pastor confessed:

In the beginning, I actually did not desire to be a pastor because I knew that there were no female pastors but only male pastors. Second, I saw that pastors suffered a lot and got very little financial support. So I was not interested to become a pastor. Therefore, I entered the Theological School to become a teacher of religion.

In this sense, their agency was not to resist, but to flow with the new opportunity. In brief, this early period of women's struggle for leadership in Toraja Church sees the diversity of women's

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<sup>5</sup> Anggui-Pakan, Damaris M. Rev. Interview with the author.

motivations, goals, and strategies. They used soft power to approach their struggle and appealed to powerful men to act for them. The common thread that wove these groups of women's agency together was their participation in the new current that brought transformation to the Torajan gender structure in 1984, when women were given equal rights with men in all aspects of Church life.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to provide a comprehensive explanation of the transformation of Toraja Church toward women-inclusive leadership, by deconstructing the transformation process and focusing on the relationship between context, gender structure, and agency. The study has found that the convergence of the Toraja Church's patriarchal gender structure with the gender egalitarian values of Toraja culture; the Toraja political context that facilitates personal empowerment and international exchange that empowers the agency; and the Church's encounter with progressive Christian movements and gender equality practices in neighboring churches, became strong destabilizing forces for the patriarchal gender regime of Toraja Church. For these reasons, this paper has benefited from Sewell's proposed approach to analyzing structural transformation.

Beside these external forces, Torajan agency played a significant role in the process. Here the paper argued for an extension of feminist analysis of women's movements for leadership in religious organizations to include male agency. The case of Toraja Church shows that male agency played a decisive role in the early period of the struggle. The male agents' subjectivity was informed by the symbolic expressions of gender justice and empathy as the ethical core of being a good human being, which was derived from their local cultural framework, and also from social relations with female agents. This enabled them to negotiate strategically with the missionary patriarchal structure to transform the gender structure of the Church. While there were open-minded Dutch missionaries who supported women's rights, their support was limited when it came to the level of religious order. This shows that positive Asian values can be strong forces for transforming patriarchal religions.

Beside male agency, the study found that women's agency also played an important role in pushing for structural change in achieving women's leadership in the Church. In the analysis of women's agency in Toraja Church, Ortner's framework seems inadequate, because in the struggle for women's leadership, female agents benefited from the structural change that in the early period was brought about mostly by male agents. The focus on analyzing cultural schemas might not sufficiently capture the complexity of the women's subjectivity. Agency in this sense is pragmatic.

One of the implications of this study is that women are not alone in their struggle when men also start to make it their own. However, narrowing the gap between male patriarchy to gender equality is an art and a puzzle for gender activists in each context. The case of Toraja Church might be unique because it is from a matrilineal culture; however, this study assumes that there are patriarchal churches within other matrilineal cultures. Further studies should investigate why men respond or do not respond to women's struggles in both patriarchal and matrilineal cultures, in order to form a more accurate assessment of the issue.

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