

THE INTERPLAY OF GENDER AND NATURE: AN ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF LANA O NARRATIVES

GISELLE ANN ESPINOSA & BEVERLY TAGA, PhD
Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City Bukidnon 8700

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ABSTRACT

This study explores ecofeminist themes within the Lanao epics, Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana, analyzing how these narratives reflect and construct relationships between gender, ecology, and cultural sustainability. Despite the rich cultural and ecological content of these narratives, a significant gap exists in scholarly ecofeminist analysis within the Lanao context. This research addresses this gap by employing a thematic analysis to examine the epics through the lens of the Harvard Analytical Framework, focusing on gender roles and relations. Findings reveal four key themes: Harmony with Nature, Connection to the Land, Gender Dynamics and Ecology, and Resilience and Adaptation. Bantugan particularly highlights a profound human-animal connection and the land's symbolic significance, demonstrating a cultural understanding of interdependence with the environment. Gender roles, as seen in Kabaian's resource gathering and Siagambal Anunan Kelam Anandinganan's authority, are shown to be intrinsically linked to ecological interactions, illustrating the 'lived' experience of the environment. Furthermore, the epics portray resilience and adaptation through characters' reliance on both inner strength and nature's power, reflecting the interconnectedness of human and ecological resilience. This research contributes to the understanding of ecofeminism within indigenous narratives, highlighting the intricate connections between gender, ecology, and culture in Lanaoan society and offering insights into the ways local narratives can inform contemporary ecofeminist discourse.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, indigenous narratives, gender roles, ecology, epics

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The intricate interplay between culture, ecology, and gender dynamics has been a subject of scholarly inquiry and societal concern, particularly within the framework of ecofeminism. Indigenous narratives serve as invaluable repositories of cultural heritage and ecological wisdom, offering insights into the complex relationships between humans and their natural environments. Within the Lanao region of the Philippines, local epics such as Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana stand as testament to this rich tapestry of storytelling tradition, providing fertile ground for the exploration of ecofeminist perspectives.

However, despite the wealth of cultural narratives and ecological themes present in Lanaoan epics, there remains a notable gap in the scholarly discourse surrounding the ecofeminist analysis of these narratives. While ecofeminism has gained traction as a theoretical framework for understanding the intersections of gender, ecology, and social justice, its application to local narratives of Lanao has been relatively underexplored. This research seeks to address this gap by delving into the ecofeminist analysis of Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana, unraveling the

intricate connections between gender roles, environmental values, and cultural sustainability within Lanaoan society.

To contextualize this study within the broader field of ecofeminism and indigenous narratives, it is essential to explore related literature that provides insights into the theoretical foundations and empirical research on these topics.

Ecofeminism explores how long-standing conceptual frameworks have constructed a link between women and nature, perpetuating a patriarchal system that normalizes both the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment. According to Karen Warren, these frameworks are built upon "a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world," and are embedded within language and all forms of social interaction.

Braidotti (2003) investigates the philosophical underpinnings of ecofeminism, elucidating its key principles and implications for understanding the interconnectedness of gender and ecology. His focus on postcolonial ecofeminism is relevant to Lanao, which has a complex history of colonialism and its impact on environmental and social structures. Examining local narratives through this lens can reveal how they challenge or reinforce colonial power dynamics related to gender and the environment. However, Braidotti's study primarily focuses on gender dynamics. This study can expand this analysis by incorporating other intersecting factors like class, ethnicity, and indigenous knowledge systems. This can provide a more nuanced understanding of how local narratives address environmental issues and power structures within the Lanao context. In addition, this study can delve deeper into how local narratives in Lanao interpret and enact care ethics within their specific cultural context. This could involve examining traditional ecological knowledge, gender roles within environmental practices, and community-based resource management strategies.

Similarly, Hassan and Akhtar (2019) offer a comprehensive examination of gender, environment, and sustainable development, shedding light on the complex dynamics shaping environmental discourse within diverse cultural contexts in the 21st century. However, their study does not delve into the specifics of local narratives. Thus, the researcher can fill this gap by examining how ecofeminist principles are reflected or challenged within the stories, traditions, and knowledge systems of the Lanao people. Local narratives might reveal unique challenges and opportunities for ecofeminist action within the Lanao context. Furthermore, this study can explore how these narratives address environmental issues specific to the region, considering factors like land use practices, resource management, and the role of women in environmental protection.

Moreover, Mies et al., (2014) provide a critical analysis of ecofeminist perspectives, emphasizing the importance of incorporating marginalized voices and perspectives in environmental activism and scholarship. Rapayla (2019) explores ecofeminism in the context of local narratives, highlighting its relevance for understanding gender dynamics and environmental concerns within specific cultural settings.

Additionally, Salleh (2015) offers an in-depth exploration of ecofeminist consciousness among Filipino women, focusing on the theme of hunger as a catalyst for environmental activism and social change. These diverse sources provide a robust foundation for understanding the

theoretical frameworks and empirical research informing the ecofeminist analysis of local narratives in Lanao.

In light of these research gaps and the rich tapestry of ecofeminist thought and indigenous storytelling tradition, this research aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding gender, ecology, and cultural sustainability within Lanaoan society. By unraveling the complexities of Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana through an ecofeminist lens, this study seeks to illuminate the intricate connections between gender roles, environmental values, and cultural resilience embedded within these narratives. Through a nuanced exploration of these themes, this research endeavors to enrich our understanding of ecofeminism in the context of indigenous narratives and foster dialogue on the intersections of gender, ecology, and culture within Lanaoan society.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. How do the narratives of Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana construct and represent women's roles in relation to the environment, as analyzed through an ecofeminist lens?
2. In what ways do these narratives embody or challenge ecofeminist principles concerning the interconnectedness of gender, ecology, and cultural sustainability within the Lanao context?
3. What specific environmental values and practices, as they relate to women's roles, are embedded within these narratives, and how do they contribute to or detract from cultural sustainability?

3.0 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study employs a dual-layered analytical approach. Firstly, a conceptual framework grounded in ecofeminist theory and linguistic analysis examines how language constructs and perpetuates hierarchical dualisms between gender and nature. Specifically, it explores how linguistic structures within the epics Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana, such as metaphors and narratives, reinforce or challenge the 'othering' of women and nature.

Secondly, to provide a structured analysis of gender roles and power dynamics within these narratives, the Harvard Analytical Framework (Gender Roles Framework) is applied. This framework allows for the identification and examination of how gender roles are defined, assigned, and negotiated within the epics. By integrating the Harvard Framework with the ecofeminist linguistic analysis, this study investigates how the language used in the epics constructs and reinforces specific gender roles, and how those roles relate to the perceived relationship between humans and the natural world. For instance, the framework will be used to explore if and how the language used to describe female characters, also mirrors the language used to describe the natural world. Furthermore, this dual analysis will reveal how the linguistic construction of gender roles within the epics either supports or challenges ecofeminist principles, particularly concerning the interconnectedness of social and ecological domination. By analyzing these Lanao narratives through both lenses, one gains a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender, ecology, and culture.

4.0 METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design, prioritizing in-depth textual analysis to explore ecofeminist themes within the epics. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell & Creswell (2018), focuses on understanding phenomena through descriptive data, emphasizing words, observations, and experiences rather than numerical analysis. This approach is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for a nuanced examination of the epics' narratives, uncovering complex relationships between ecofeminist themes, characters, and settings. By focusing on textual analysis, the research aims to reveal the subtle and intricate layers of meaning embedded within the epics, providing a rich and detailed understanding of their ecofeminist dimensions.

This study analyzes the Lanao epics Bantugan and Maharadia Lawana using published transcriptions as the primary data source. These epics, central to Lanaoan cultural heritage, offer insights into traditional ecological knowledge and gender dynamics. Employing textual analysis, a systematic qualitative method, the research identified and code recurring themes (nature, gender, power) to uncover underlying ecofeminist perspectives within the texts. This approach allows for focused textual analysis and interpretation, leveraging accessible data to explore complex cultural narratives.

To systematically analyze the textual data, a code guide was developed, organized around three core themes: Nature/Ecology, Gender, and Power. The "Nature/Ecology" codes, encompassing natural elements, human-nature interaction, and traditional ecological knowledge, allow for the identification of environmental depictions and the epics' portrayal of the relationship between humans and the natural world. "Gender" codes, addressing gender roles, female agency, and representations of femininity, facilitate the examination of gender dynamics and the portrayal of women within the narratives. Finally, "Power" codes, focusing on social hierarchies, power dynamics, and the ethical implications of power, enable the analysis of social structures and control mechanisms within the epics. This structured code guide, with its hierarchical subcategories, ensures a nuanced and consistent approach to textual analysis, aligning with the research's focus on ecofeminist perspectives, traditional knowledge, and gender dynamics within the cultural context of the Lanao epics. The coded data allows the researcher to return to the original text, reinforcing the textual analysis nature of the research.

5.0 DISCUSSION

A thematic analysis of the Filipino epics, 'Maharadia Lawana' and 'Bantugan,' reveals four key themes: (1) Harmony with Nature, (2) Connection to the Land, (3) Gender Dynamics and Ecology, and (4) Resilience and Adaptation. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the available textual excerpts and the depth of thematic development skewed heavily towards 'Bantugan.' This disparity raises questions about the preservation of these narratives and potentially reflects differing cultural emphases. Future research should prioritize recovering and analyzing more comprehensive versions of 'Maharadia Lawana' to provide a more balanced perspective. Despite the imbalance, the themes identified in 'Bantugan' offer valuable insights into the Lanao context.

Firstly, 'Bantugan' vividly portrays a profound 'Harmony with Nature.' For instance, the monkey son of Potre Langgawi, fathered by Radia Mangandiri, commands the carabaos of the forest and the crocodiles of the river. This act goes beyond mere dominion, signifying an intrinsic human-animal connection. Consequently, this depiction reflects a cultural

understanding where humans and animals are interconnected, mirroring the people's reliance on and need for peaceful coexistence with their environment. This aligns with ecofeminist principles that reject human-nature dualisms and emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings.

Building upon this, the 'Connection to the Land' is further emphasized. Consider, for example, the line, 'Whenever Maharadia Lawana approached Potre Malaila Ganding, fire approached between them.' This suggests a mystical relationship between characters and their environment. Specifically, the fiery barrier symbolizes a spiritual discordance when actions contravene the natural order. Moreover, Balatama's observation of 'a stone set in the middle of the road. It glowed and glistened as if it were made of pure gold,' and 'a house made of pure gold,' underscores the landscape's symbolic and material significance. Thus, the land is not merely a backdrop but an active participant, reflecting the values and aspirations of the characters, and it is a source of valued materials. Indeed, these depictions of nature's influence in 'Bantugan' align with the understanding that natural environments contribute to human well-being, as supported by Ulrich and Parson (2015) and Taga (2022). This demonstrates the ecofeminist value of recognizing the spiritual and material importance of the land.

Furthermore, the interplay between social dynamics and ecological interactions is evident in the 'Gender Dynamics and Ecology' theme. This analysis adopts an ecofeminist lens, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of women and nature and challenges the patriarchal structures that contribute to both environmental degradation and gender inequality. Specifically, this study focused on the principles of valuing diverse knowledges, and challenging dualisms. To illustrate, Kabaian's discovery and assistance to shipwrecked brothers by gathering shells and ferns showcase the direct link between resource acquisition and community welfare. This demonstrates the ecofeminist principle of valuing women's traditional ecological knowledge and their role in sustainable resource management.

Similarly, the female guard, Siagambal Anunan Kelam Anandinganan, demonstrates female authority as part of the socio-environmental landscape, potentially challenging patriarchal norms. These examples, as Loftus (2012) argues, embody the 'lived' experience of the environment, where individual actions and social roles are intertwined with nature. Therefore, the women's actions are 'assemblages' of their social roles and natural surroundings, co-evolving and shaping their community's relationship with its environment. Due to the lack of examples, it is hard to compare the representation of women's roles in Maharadia Lawana to Bantugan, however, the small glimpse we have shows a need for further research.

Finally, 'Resilience and Adaptation' is powerfully illustrated through the brothers' arduous journey. As the text narrates, 'Twenty years have passed in their wanderings...they experienced all kinds of hardships.' Additionally, Balatama's invocation of 'the winds from the homeland' to overcome adversity demonstrates the characters' reliance on the environment's strength. This narrative, where individuals draw upon both inner strength and nature's power, parallels the concept of resilience in the natural world. In fact, as Katz (2024) argues, resilience is essential for both individuals and ecosystems. Consequently, both the characters and nature exhibit a remarkable capacity to adapt and recover. The narratives' emphasis on 'Harmony with Nature' not only reflects a deep respect for the environment but also provides a framework for sustainable resource management, which is crucial for the long-term cultural and ecological

well-being of the Lanao community. While the narratives celebrate the interconnectedness of humans and nature, they may also reflect power dynamics that could lead to exploitation. Further analysis is needed to explore these complexities.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Based from the results, the thematic threads woven through the epic of 'Bantugan'—harmony with nature, the profound connection to the land, the interplay of gender dynamics and ecology, and the enduring spirit of resilience and adaptation—offer a window into the cultural values and worldview of the people who preserved these narratives. While the scarcity of readily available textual excerpts from 'Maharadia Lawana' limits a fully comparative analysis, the rich tapestry of 'Bantugan' provides compelling evidence of how these themes are deeply embedded within the narrative fabric of Filipino epic tradition. These themes underscore the intricate relationship between humanity and its environment, the significance of social roles in shaping ecological interactions, and the enduring capacity of both individuals and nature to overcome adversity. Ultimately, understanding these themes not only enriches our appreciation of these epics but also offers valuable insights into the enduring relevance of these cultural narratives in navigating contemporary challenges. Future research, however, should prioritize the exploration of 'Maharadia Lawana' to achieve a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of these thematic elements across both epics, thereby providing a more complete picture of the Filipino cultural landscape as reflected in its rich oral traditions.

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