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# Performing gender equality: Internalising Bugis-Makassar cultural values (3S) as a theological strategy for transforming patriarchal structures

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Gender inequality is a global problem and causes various acts of violence and suffering for women, especially in the third world, including Indonesia. This article offers a cultural strategy supported by Judith Butler's gender performativity theory to challenge patriarchal culture and build a more just and equal life. Using Judith Butler's gender performativity framework, this qualitative research in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi, involved in-depth interviews with married couples, female school principals, ordained female pastors, church officials and agricultural cooperative leaders, along with participatory observations in family, church and community settings. This strategy brings together two distinct cultural contexts: Eastern culture, namely the Bugis-Makassar 3S culture (*Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*) and performativity theory from the West. Internalising the cultural values of the 3S through performativity theory is an effective way to achieve gender equality not only in the Soppeng community where the research took place but also to empower women as a whole and present the image of humans as imago Dei in togetherness with other God's creations.

**Contribution:** This research integrates Western gender performativity theory with Indonesian local cultural values (3S Bugis-Makassar) as a decolonisation agent for the transformation of patriarchal gender structures. This study advances gender theory and theological discourse through a culturally based gender justice approach in the Indonesian Christian community.

**Keywords:** gender equality; Bugis-Makassar; cultural values; transforming patriarchal structures; *Sipakatau*; *Sipakainge*; *Sipakalebbi*.

## Introduction

Gender inequality is a global issue that impacts human rights, economic development and social cohesion worldwide. The United Nations recognises that the impact of gender inequality hinders social progress and perpetuates systemic injustice (Aminuddin & Azlan 2025; Morgan et al. 2020). This inequality manifests in various forms, including the marginalisation of women in public spaces, the double burden of domestic and professional roles, restrictive gender stereotypes and the continued rise of gender-based violence.

In the context of Indonesia, gender inequality against women has persisted for a long period and continues to this day. The Deputy for the Fulfilment of Rights to Caregiving, Family and Environment at the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection explained that equality between men and women remains an unfinished work, encompassing issues such as violence against women, child marriage and high divorce rates (Hamdy & Hudri 2022). In the Indonesian context, gender inequality is a crucial issue because it impacts violence against women and shows a growing trend. Cases of violence against women increased by 9.77% in 2024 compared to the previous year (Wolter et al. 2024). Domestic violence dominates these statistics, with violence against wives reaching 50% of total cases, indicating a substantial gender imbalance in marital relations and showing that the subordinate position of women within the institution of marriage remains a structural problem (Muthmaina 2024).

The Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), at its 17th General Assembly in Waingapu, East Sumba, in November 2019, stated that gender inequality is a major issue facing the church, along with poverty, radicalism and environmental damage (Hutabarat-Lebang 2019). The phenomenon of gender inequality, which remains massive to this day, is largely because of the persistence of a patriarchal culture that places men in a superior position and dominates inferior women. This is experienced by women in various spheres of life, from family to social, political, economic and

religious life (Wijaya 2017). The persistence of gender inequality is largely rooted in the deeply embedded patriarchal culture upheld in Indonesia and other third world nations, a culture that places men in superior and dominant positions across various dimensions of life – from the family to broader social, political, religious and economic domains.

Addressing gender imbalances in Indonesia, exacerbated by entrenched patriarchal societies, requires an effective strategy. This approach focuses not only on policy and legal interventions but also on fundamental cultural transformation (Santosa et al. 2022). This research advocates for cultural strategies to achieve gender equality through the internalisation of affirmative local cultural norms. This methodology is very important because Indonesia's rich local culture can embody the principles of equality and humanity. Although it has an important role, it is often overshadowed by the prevailing patriarchal culture rooted in Western colonialism, which is also reinforced by the social framework and specific interpretations of religious doctrine (Bustomi 2025; Heriyanto 2023; Siddiqui-Dennis 2021). This research is essential to advance the theoretical understanding of the advancement of gender performability through the integration of local cultural values and to deconstruct and reinterpret Western gender theory in the context of diverse Indonesian cultures.

Research on local cultural values was conducted in the Bugis-Makassar community, specifically in the Soppeng area of the Soppeng Regency in South Sulawesi. The culture to be studied and internalised is the 3S culture (*Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*), which has strong values of equality. The 3S values support gender equality through the principles of recognising dignity and human rights (*Sipakatau*), reminding one another of the need to oppose injustice (*Sipakainge*) and mutual respect (*Sipakalebbi*). Internalisation of the 3S cultural values is achieved by developing a theoretical understanding of how gender performativity can be transformed through the internalisation of 3S cultural values and by applying Western gender performativity theory to reinterpret diverse Indonesian cultures.

In relation to gender equality efforts, several studies have been conducted from various perspectives. A study by Tampilang, Letunggamu & Manambe (2024) examines the position of women in Christian worship, drawing on 1 Timothy 2:8–15, which is often the basis of debate between patriarchal and feminist perspectives in Christian theology. This study confirms that the text of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 is not intended to prohibit women from serving but rather to regulate worship in accordance with the social context of the time. A study by Tampilang et al. (2024) offers practical theological reflections for churches in Indonesia, highlighting examples such as BNKP and GPIB that have affirmed women's spiritual leadership on an equal basis with men. This research has a common thread that underscores the urgency of gender equality, as it concerns the right to life and equal roles as fellow human beings.

Several scholars have also studied Bugis-Makassar culture. Pelras (1996) stated that Bugis women have long held high social status and that gender stratification is not based on sex but on social status and personal achievement. Millar (1983) added that Bugis women can be active in various areas of life and become equal partners with men, including in political discussions. Although these studies indicate that Bugis-Makassar culture holds values that support gender equality, no research has systematically examined how the 3S cultural values (*Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*) can be internalised through the theoretical framework of gender performativity to effect gender transformation in contemporary society.

This research is important for addressing significant knowledge gaps in the literature on gender equality in Indonesia and on the appropriate use of gender theory for the internalisation of cultural values in contemporary society. Knowledge gaps need to be filled to effectively change the gender structure that has been rooted for centuries in society's culture, among other factors: firstly, local cultural approaches to gender equality have not been studied in-depth using a robust contemporary gender theoretical framework. Secondly, the internalisation of cultural values as a mechanism for transforming gender performativity has not been systematically analysed. Thirdly, there has been no research that integrates Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity with local Indonesian cultural values to develop cultural strategies in addressing gender inequality. Fourthly, although the 3S culture is known in Bugis-Makassar society, its practical application to foster equal interactions between men and women in public spaces has not been studied critically and empirically. The reasons for this knowledge gap and the theoretical framework of gender performativity underpin the significance of the research in this article.

## Conceptual framework

This study uses performative gender theory developed by Judith Butler, a prominent American philosopher and gender theorist. The study develops a conceptual framework that integrates Butler's (1988, 2024) performativity theory with the internalisation of the 3S cultural values in the context of Bugis-Makassar society. This conceptual framework is based on the premise that gender, as a socially constructed reality, can be transformed through the internalisation of equal and just cultural values. In this case, performative theory is closely related to Peter L. Berger's social construction theory, which states that social reality is the result of social construction created by humans themselves through three dialectical moments: externalisation (individual adjustment to the socio-cultural world), objectivation (interaction with the institutionalised intersubjective world) and internalisation (individuals identify themselves with social institutions).

Butler's theory states that gender is not something we have but something we do (performativity). Butler rejects the view that gender is the result of biological nature but instead emphasises that gender is shaped by social and cultural

construction. According to Butler, gender is not a fixed attribute or essential identity but rather something that is performed or displayed through repeated actions. Within this framework, gender identity is the result of performativity. This means that gender is constructed through actions and behaviours that are carried out over generations, creating the illusion of stability and naturalness. Cultural norms play a significant role in shaping and influencing these actions and behaviours. Through performativity, individuals internalise norms and enact them in their daily lives.

Performativity is not static but dynamic and open to change. This means that individuals can challenge and reshape existing cultural norms, thereby enabling social change and fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian culture. The 3S culture does not directly oppose heterosexuality but rather recognises and values the diversity of sexual identities and orientations. In Bugis-Makassar society, there are not only two genders but five genders: male [*oroane*], female [*baine*], *calalai* [women who have a male identity], *calabai* [men who have a female identity], and *Bissu* [individuals whose gender identity is not categorised as male or female]. The integration of performativity with the internalisation process of the 3S culture in the context of Bugis-Makassar culture not only opposes patriarchy but also opposes heterosexuality and values the diversity of gender identities.

Through the process of internalisation carried out repeatedly and consistently in families, religious institutions and society, the cultural values of 3S can form a new gender performativity – a performativity that no longer places men in a superior position and women in an inferior position but builds equal relations, mutual respect and mutual support and even mutual acceptance of gender diversity in Bugis-Makassar culture and the current context (LGBT). Theologically, performativity is also consistent with the imago Dei, whereby humans reflect God's attributes through repeated actions and behaviours, thereby forming a reality and identity in accordance with the image of God, who is inclusive and egalitarian.

This conceptual framework connects three levels of analysis: the individual level (internalisation of the 3S values in personal consciousness and behaviour), the institutional level (implementation of the 3S values in families, churches and social organisations) and the structural level (legitimisation of the 3S values in broader social policies and norms). Gender transformation occurs when these three levels interact dialectically: individuals internalise the 3S values and engage in equal gender performativity; institutions support and legitimise this performativity through practices and policies and the broader social structure transforms changes in gender performativity at the individual and institutional levels, creating new social realities. Thus, this research contributes to the development of a theoretical understanding of how local culture can become an agent of gender transformation in the context of postcolonial societies that are still shackled by patriarchal gender structures inherited from colonialism.

This study examines the cultural values of 3S (*Sipakatau, Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*) as a cultural strategy for fostering equitable interactions between men and women in public spaces, using Judith Butler's gender performativity theory as a critical analytical framework.

## Research method and design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to deeply understand how the Bugis-Makassar 3S cultural values are internalised and operate in transforming gender performativity within social, institutional and religious practices (Zaluchu 2020; Zaluchu & Zaluchu 2024). The qualitative design enables the exploration of complex and contextual social dynamics within the framework of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The research was conducted in Soppeng Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, a former kingdom with a Bugis-Makassar community that still strongly preserves traditional cultural values. As a research location, Soppeng is appropriate for demonstrating three levels of analysis: individual, institutional and structural. These three levels are part of the research to obtain samples that can be used to develop cultural strategies to foster equal interactions between men and women; using gender performativity theory, Soppeng was selected as the setting because this community has maintained strong cultural roots despite experiencing significant patriarchal influence during the Dutch colonial period. This geographical and cultural context allows for an empirical examination of how the culturally relevant 3S values can function as a mechanism for contemporary gender transformation across various spheres of life: the family, religious institutions (the church) and work communities (agricultural cooperatives).

The research population includes members of the Bugis-Makassar community in Soppeng Regency who are active in family life, church and community organisations and who can communicate in Indonesian or the local language. This study uses purposive sampling with a snowball sampling approach to identify participants who meet the criteria. Three main instruments were used for data collection: in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions (FGDs).

The instruments were culturally modified to ensure that the questions correspond with the local Bugis-Makassar context and honour community values. The predominant language for the interviews was Indonesian, while some participants preferred to communicate in the native Bugis language. Interviews concerning gender dynamics in marital relationships necessitated specific sensitivity, as certain subjects are deemed private under traditional Bugis-Makassar culture. The researcher engaged community and church leaders as intermediaries to establish trust and enhance access to the community.

Data analysis was carried out in several stages. Interview data were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings into text documents. Observation notes were typed in a structured

format that included time notation, location, participants and behavioural descriptions. All transcripts and observation notes were checked again for accuracy and completeness, with cross-verification between the audio recordings and the transcriptions to ensure that no information was missing. A thematic analysis was then conducted using a deductive–inductive approach. Trust is ensured through meticulous data management, including the cross-verification of transcripts with original recordings to avert information loss. The 3S principles are intrinsically connected to Butler's theory, which conceptualises gender as a performative act redefined by repeating egalitarian conduct, hence challenging patriarchal norms at individual, institutional and structural levels.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Fakultas Teologi Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga (No.: 001/Fteo-DSA/ Kaprodi/SPEP/11/2025).

# Results

## The cultural values embedded in the 3S culture (*Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi*) and their relevance for gender equality

### Domestic sphere

The 3S culture, particularly *Sipakainge* and *Sipakalebbi*, promotes gender equality within the family by cultivating a reciprocal, courteous and supportive dynamic between spouses throughout decision-making processes. *Sipakainge* promotes the respect of individuals, facilitating reminders of inequitable actions such as discrimination, whereas *Sipakalebbi* underscores mutual regard, collaboration and acknowledgement of good contributions, thereby averting the diminishment of women's responsibilities. This aligns with interviews, including one with Andi Sulaiman, which emphasise collaboration and reciprocal assistance among spouses (Fadhilah & Rahman 2023; Mustadjar & Dirawan 2017).

### Public leadership

Historical evidence from the Bugis-Makassar culture indicates that women possess a significant social standing and engage actively in public life. Raffles (1830) observed that in 1817, ladies in South Sulawesi commanded greater respect than in other societies. Women engage publicly, interact across various domains, discuss politics with men and even ascend to the throne without enduring poverty or forced labour. Scholars such as Pelras (1996) and Millar (1983) assert that status and achievement, rather than gender, determine stratification, positioning women as equal political players.

### Church integration

The values of the 3S are in harmony with the Christian theological teachings on equality, as seen in the principle of imago Dei Genesis 1. This affirms the existence of ontological equality for both sexes as God's honourable creation. Sipakor reflects human dignity; *Sipakainge* reflects Jesus' praxis that transcends gender barriers (e.g. Mk 7:24–30; Mt 15:21–28; Jn 4:1–42; Mk 14:1–9); and *Sipakalebbi* embodies the Pauline ethic of humility, respect and solidarity in a diverse community (Gal 3:28; Rm 16:3–5; 1 Cor 16:19).

### Workplace dynamics

The Bugis-Makassar bidirectional kinship acknowledges both maternal and paternal lines. This structure facilitates women's participation in all aspects of life, including public and economic domains, rather than colonial patriarchy. *Sipakatau* contests the hierarchy by acknowledging that each individual is a whole person deserving of respect. *Sipakalebbi* fosters social solidarity via mutual assistance, promoting cooperation within the community and workplace, historically enabling women's active participation without gender-based constraints (Mustadjar & Dirawan 2017).

### Gender performativity and internalisation

The primary values of *Sipakatau* emphasise the intrinsic dignity of all individuals, irrespective of gender, as creations of God, embodied via 3S activities that confront patriarchal dominance. *Sipakainge* internalises justice by advocating for injustice; subsequently, *Sipakalebbi* cultivates an ethos of humility and gratitude, so enhancing women's agency and contributions. This cultural mechanism, closely aligned with Christian egalitarianism, fosters performative equality in social cohesion and ethical orientation (Fadhilah & Rahman 2023).

## Realisation of 3S cultural values in Bugis-Makassar society in Soppeng

Findings from the FGDs with cocoa and rice farmers in Lamogo village, Soppeng, along with church officials (pastors and elders) at Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Selatan (GKSS) Immanuel Soppeng on 18 November 2023, indicate that the 3S values are tangibly reflected in modern gender relations within the spheres of family, church and community. Soppeng is a historical kingdom located in South Sulawesi. Notwithstanding the considerable impact of patriarchy throughout the colonial era, the Soppeng community has persistently upheld and enacted the egalitarian tenets inherent in the 3S culture.

Interviews with married couples suggest that the absorption of the 3S values significantly enhances equitable and egalitarian decision-making processes within the household. A case study of the Muhiddin family demonstrates a practice of collaborative sharing of domestic duties and joint participation in strategic decision-making about their children's education. This family model describes the existence of a distribution of educational possibilities according to individual abilities and personal choices, rather than gender determinism. A similar tendency is noted in the example of a priestess, where the depiction of professional responsibility is between her and her partner. The pastor served as a government official. Her professional responsibilities do not preclude the development of respectful and supportive relationships. Both families embraced a

collaborative decision-making strategy through deliberative conversation and replaced the conventional patriarchal authoritarian style. The importance of these findings is highlighted by the *Sipakatau* principle, which serves as a way of understanding that recognises the individuality and humanity of each family member. The *Sipakatau* principle results in equal educational opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender.

The involvement of women in the public sphere illustrates the practical implementation of gender equality concepts grounded in local cultural traditions. A case study of Mrs. Joice, who concurrently occupies various roles as a school principal, an officially ordained congregational pastor, a church functionary and the director of an agricultural cooperative, demonstrates the tangible potential for women's leadership across diverse institutional sectors. Ethnographic studies indicate that the spouses of women in such professional roles actively distribute and share home duties typically regarded as feminine obligations. The examples of Mrs. Joice and Mr. Sainal Abidin illustrate the partnership paradigm in which the husband's structural support includes managerial-educational and collaborative roles in church ministry. An important finding in this study is that when the wife's income far exceeds that of the husband, it does not result in a reduction in symbolic patriarchal authority within the family domain. This means that household leadership is changing from being based on who makes the most money to being based on cooperation and mutual respect. This suggests a deeper shift in the way gender roles are viewed (Mustadjar & Dirawan 2017).

Workplace dynamics further demonstrate the practical application of the 3S values. Female school principals reported positive collaborative relationships with male subordinates, characterised by mutual support and respect. All research participants affirmed that their ability to maintain fair and mutually understanding relationships directly stems from the internalisation and everyday practice of the 3S values (Mustadjar & Dirawan 2017).

## Integration with Christian theological values

Interview participants consistently emphasised the alignment between the 3S cultural values and Christian teachings. They identified theological resonance between *Sipakatau* and the biblical concept of human dignity and between *Sipakalebbi* and the Christian command to love one's neighbour. This compatibility has enabled the integration of the 3S values into church life and has been acknowledged by both religious and educational authorities.

The research findings indicate a strong correspondence between the 3S cultural values and Christian teachings through the foundation of Christian anthropology. The resonance between the 3S values and Christian theological principles finds its strongest grounding in the concept of the *imago Dei* [image of God]. Genesis 1:26–27 establishes that men and women are created equally in the divine image, providing the theological basis on which the cultural principle of *Sipakatau* rests (Harmadi & Diana 2020). The term *imago Dei* – which includes *tselem* (image) and *demuth* (likeness) in Hebrew – conveys that human beings possess distinguishing marks of God's character, including rational capacity, moral agency and relational ability – attributes that transcend gender categorisation.

The theological significance of this equality is articulated through contemporary Christian scholarship. Mwandayi (2022), McIntosh (2023) and McCarthy (2020) contend that the doctrine of the imago Dei intrinsically suggests gender equality and contests patriarchal interpretations that have traditionally excluded women from roles of authority and respect. This theological position directly affirms the principle of *Sipakatau*, which underscores the recognition of every individual as a whole person, irrespective of social status or gender. The *Sipakatau* principle receives explicit theological support from the biblical record that describes Jesus' profound support for human dignity that transcends social, gender and ethnic divisions. Contemporary theological scholarship recovers the significance of these narratives. Halawa, Purwonugroho and Adi (2025), for example, analyse the figure of Esther as a paradigm of women's political participation and resistance against injustice, arguing that women throughout Scripture exemplify faithful moral agency in the face of unjust power structures. This theological recovery further validates the principle of *Sipakatau* by demonstrating that Scripture affirms women as active agents of God's justice.

The cultural principle of *Sipakainge* is theologically aligned with the prophetic tradition in Christianity. The moral imperative of justice requires believers to advocate for the vulnerable and confront structural inequality, resonating with *Sipakainge's* emphasis on collective accountability for gender-based discrimination. Paul's letters provide a theological basis for understanding *Sipakainge* within a Christian framework. Tampilang et al. (2024) examine 1 Timothy 2:8–15 and show that texts traditionally used to restrict women's roles are contextually responsive to specific crises, rather than universal prohibitions against female pastoral leadership. Likewise, Panuntun and Oddeng (2024) employ a vulnerability framework to demonstrate that Paul's restrictive language in 1 Timothy 2:12–15 addresses the marginalisation of women in the Ephesian context, supporting contemporary efforts to affirm women's equality. Thus, the principle of *Sipakainge* finds theological validation in the Christian prophetic tradition as a call to witness injustice and advocate for gender justice.

The cultural principle of *Sipakalebbi* directly reflects Jesus' identification of the 'greatest commandment': 'Love the Lord your God … and love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek term agape – covenantal, selfless love – finds its cultural expression in *Sipakalebbi's* emphasis on honouring one another and recognising the intrinsic worth of others. A theological anthropology grounded in relational ontology affirms that human beings are fundamentally shaped by their capacity for mutual recognition and reciprocal relationships.

Baloyi (2012) argues that the imago Dei necessarily implies that women are entitled to relationships defined by mutual respect and free from domination, because they embody the divine image no less fully than men. This transforms *Sipakalebbi* from a cultural virtue into a theological imperative rooted in Christian anthropology. Apostolic writings repeatedly emphasise the practical implications of covenantal love within Christian communities, with women serving as house-church leaders and recognised spiritual authorities – demonstrating that early Christianity did not acknowledge gender-based barriers to spiritual authority (Musili 2024).

### Gender performativity and the internalisation process

The application of Butler's theoretical framework of gender performativity to the socio-cultural context of Soppeng reveals that the realisation of gender equality is actualised through the repetition and perpetuation of egalitarian behavioural practices grounded in the values of 3S. This reflects Butler's notion that gender identity is constituted through repeated acts. Here, these acts are culturally re-scripted through 3S values, destabilising patriarchal norms.

Qualitative data indicate that the construction of gender identity is a product of repetitive cultural performance and normative institutionalisation. This perspective is articulated through the narratives of research participants, particularly Mrs. Murhania (church minister), who identifies the 3S values as a cultural heritage reproduced transgenerationally and functioning as an enabling mechanism for women to actualise themselves professionally while maintaining their commitment to family responsibility – a dynamic that demonstrates a repositioning of women's roles without restricting them exclusively to the domestic domain. A complementary perspective is delivered by Rev. Jusuf Ladja (Emeritus Pastor of GKSS), who constructs the 3S values as the architectural foundation that forms the personality of the Bugis-Makassar people in harmony with principles of religious ethics. Theoretically, the internalisation of 3S values follows the dialectical dynamics formulated by Berger: externalisation (adaptation to specific socio-cultural realities), objectification (crystallisation through family institutions, church communities and social structures) and internalisation (subjective incorporation into belief systems and personal identity that actualises egalitarian norms) (Navetia 2025).

The transformation of gender performativity in Soppeng illustrates that when individuals consistently enact the 3S values, they create a new gender performance that rejects the patriarchal binary. Women taking on leadership roles in public spaces while men share domestic responsibilities represents a fundamental shift in gender performance, demonstrating Butler's concept of gender fluidity. This repeated performance, when legitimised by social institutions and supported by cultural values, gradually transforms the social construction of gender at the structural level (Kamila & Maulidya 2025).

## Discussion

This research establishes that indigenous cultural values – particularly the Bugis-Makassar 3S culture – can function as an effective strategic mechanism for achieving gender equality through processes of internalisation. This central finding confirms that *Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, and *Sipakalebbi* provide a culturally based alternative to Western patriarchal constructions of gender that have dominated Indonesian society since colonialism. These values create a framework in which gender equality is not perceived as a foreign imposition but as the restoration of indigenous cultural practices (Ismoyo 2020).

Furthermore, the findings of this research align with and expand existing scholarship on gender equality in Indonesia and on indigenous cultural approaches to social transformation. The study by Tampilang et al. (2024) examines the position of women in Christian worship based on 1 Timothy 2:8–15, concluding that biblical texts should not be interpreted as prohibiting women from ministry. In addition, the research of Halawa et al. (2025), which focuses on women's political participation in Indonesia based on Queen Esther's struggle for justice, contributes to this discourse. This research complements other theological works in the Indonesian context by showing that local cultural values can provide additional legitimacy for gender equality in religious settings. This is evidenced by the Soppeng churches that accept women as ordained pastors.

Butler's concept of gender performativity has primarily been employed in Western contexts to challenge binary gender notions from a sociological perspective. This study augments Butler's theory by demonstrating its applicability in a non-Western cultural framework and its consonance with indigenous value systems. These findings support Butler's central argument that gender is not innate or biological but is instead constructed by habitual actions (Choi 2019). This research enriches theoretical debate by illustrating that transformational gender performativity may be grounded in pre-colonial indigenous values rather than solely in contemporary feminist endeavours.

This research improves the understanding of the operation of Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory about gender transformation. The dialectical processes of externalisation, objectification and internalisation occur not within an abstract societal framework but through specific cultural mechanisms – the 3S values. These findings address a gap in social construction theory by identifying particular cultural components that facilitate the rebuilding of gender reality (Awaru 2020).

A comparative analysis of several indigenous cultures reveals both similarities and differences. Studies on indigenous feminism in Africa assert that pre-colonial African societies structured social roles based on age and seniority rather than gender, hence fostering equality (Ajiboro & Etieyibo 2023). The Bugis case substantiates these findings and offers unique

insights into the cohabitation of traditional gender identification systems alongside bilateral family structures that promote gender flexibility.

Research on gender equality within the Indonesian Islamic framework reveals a growing recognition of the need for culturally sensitive approaches (Pratama et al. 2024). This study's findings about the correlation between the 3S values and Christian beliefs indicate that indigenous cultural values may serve as a medium for religious communities to advance gender equality. This is crucial, as Indonesia encompasses multiple religions, making the application of universal gender equality frameworks challenging across various religious groups (Halawa et al. 2025; Sinurat et al. 2024; Suardana, Darmawan & Runtukahu 2023).

Sociological studies about patriarchal systems in Indonesia ascribe the development of rigid gender hierarchies to colonialism (Triadnyani 2018). This research provides empirical evidence supporting decolonisation theory by demonstrating that the restoration and revitalisation of indigenous values can actively dismantle colonial patriarchal constructions. The Soppeng case illustrates that communities maintaining strong cultural roots are better positioned to resist patriarchal gender norms than communities in which indigenous values have eroded.

Studies on gender equality in the workplace have documented persistent barriers, including the glass ceiling, gender-based discrimination and work–family conflict (Darmayanti, Manda & Sadriani 2024). The Soppeng findings present a contrasting model in which cultural values enable women's leadership in male-dominated sectors without triggering resistance. This suggests that gender equality interventions may be more successful when grounded in culturally resonant values rather than imposed frameworks.

## Strengths and limitations of the research methods

The research aims to demonstrate how cultural values positively impact people's lives, namely the 3S culture, so that local culture is not marginalised but rather influences societal change towards greater inclusivity and equity.

The qualitative research approach used in this study offers several methodological strengths. In-depth interviews and participant observation in Soppeng enabled a rich and contextual understanding of how the 3S values operate within everyday gender relations. The focus on a specific cultural community allowed for a detailed examination of the mechanisms through which cultural values are translated into gender equality practices. The integration of Butler's theoretical framework with Berger's social construction theory provided a strong analytical tool for interpreting the internalisation process (Morgenroth & Ryan 2018).

Although there are several limitations in this study, the author's efforts to understand the 3S culture that has the power to realise gender equality and find the relationship between Butler's performativity theory and the internalisation of 3S cultural values that are manifested in behaviour in the family, church and Soppeng society according to research data can be the first step to continue research in the future. Further research can connect the influence of patriarchal structures that give rise to gender inequality with capitalism, the context of today's society, thereby providing evidence and legitimacy for the power of 3S culture and performativity theory across different contexts. This also proves that the problem of gender inequality is related to many areas of life. Thus, research can be developed and adapted to the context of societal struggles (Nur, Komariah & Wilodati2024).

The reliance on self-reported data presents another limitation (Safari & Gekara 2025). Research participants may have provided socially desirable responses that emphasised gender equality, especially when discussing practices in a church context. Direct observation of decision-making processes and power dynamics over a longer period would yield more reliable data. This study also did not adequately examine power asymmetries that may persist even within relationships that appear egalitarian, such as which career is prioritised when conflicts arise.

From the perspective of Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity, the study offers valuable insights. However, several scholars have criticised its potential to reduce attention to embodiment and the material conditions that shape gendered experiences (Glick et al. 2018). This study did not explore in-depth how biological reproduction, differences in physical strength or health vulnerabilities intersect with cultural values to shape gender practices.

## Implications for future research

Furthermore, the results of this study enhance Butler's notion of performativity, facilitating the advancement of future gender comprehension from a cultural standpoint. Subsequent study may investigate the values of indigenous populations in South Sulawesi and other Indonesian regions engaged in performance across various contexts of conflict.

Longitudinal studies are required to assess the sustainability of gender equality practices rooted in 3S values over generations or their potential decline because of modernisation influences. Research should examine the ways via which 3S values are conveyed to children and whether the younger generation upholds a commitment to these ideals.

Future research should investigate intersectionality in a more thorough manner. This can be achieved by analysing the functioning of 3S values across various socioeconomic strata, educational attainment and religious affiliations within the Bugis-Makassar community. Furthermore, the quantitative study assessing markers of gender equality in communities with robust versus deficient 3S value systems will yield empirical data regarding the efficacy of these values.

### Recommendations

Recommendations for the National Commission on Violence Against Women [*Komnas Perempuan*] to integrate local cultural values into gender transformation programmes and training for women in their respective regions in Indonesia, so that they can understand their culture and harness its power to advance justice for all. Furthermore, through the National Commission on Violence Against Women, Indonesia can work towards establishing an advocacy body for minorities so that justice and equality can be achieved at all levels of society (Santosa et al. 2022). This includes recognising that gender equality does not require abandoning all traditional roles but rather ensuring flexibility and mutual support in the distribution of roles.

Recommendations for religious institutions, particularly churches in the Bugis-Makassar region, should explicitly integrate 3S values into theological education, preaching and pastoral practice. Training programmes for religious leaders should address how indigenous values and biblical teachings reinforce one another in upholding principles of gender equality (Panuntun & Oddeng 2024).

Recommendations for diversity and inclusion initiatives in the workplace within the Bugis-Makassar context should refer to the 3S values in developing an organisational culture that supports the advancement of women. Human resource policies that promote work–family balance and gender equality should be framed using language and concepts that resonate culturally (Arquisola & Rentschler 2023).

## Conclusion

The Bugis-Makassar 3S cultural values (*Sipakatau, Sipakainge,* and *Sipakalebbi*) represent a decolonial theological strategy that integrates human dignity as imago Dei with transformative gender performativity. This study demonstrates that *Sipakatau* (recognition of universal dignity) reflects the theological principle of ontological equality in Genesis 1:26–27, *Sipakainge* (collective accountability towards injustice) resonates with the Christian prophetic tradition and the pastoral epistemology of Jesus that transcends social–gender hierarchies. At the same time, *Sipakalebbi* (mutual respect) embodies the command of agape and relational ontology within the church community. Through the systematic internalisation of the 3S values, the Soppeng community has actualised an egalitarian gender performativity that rejects Western patriarchal binarity, demonstrating that gender equality is not an ideological imposition but a restoration of theological praxis rooted in local tradition. These findings contribute to contemporary intersectional theological discourse by validating a decolonising gender approach that integrates pre-colonial cultural heritage with liberative biblical hermeneutics.

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### CRediT authorship contribution

Resty D.J. Tehupeiory: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft. Yusak B. Setyawan: Formal analysis, Resources, Supervision, Validation. I Putu A. Darmawan: Data curation, Methodology, Visualisation, Writing – review and editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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### Data availability

The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

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