

Earthcare as Ecological Sovereignty for Planetary Survival:

Feminist Political Wisdom of Nusantara
in Contemporary Indonesia

Dewi Candraningrum

E-paper



In the face of widespread destructions – ecological, economic, geopolitical, and even health crises- returning to Nature may hold the key to Earth’s survival. Deeply rooted in feminist and Indigenous knowledge, as well as myths and folklores, Earthcare challenges economic inequalities, particularly within the affected sectors of the communities – the women, Indigenous, and marginalized members of the society. Centered on care, which is innate in every human being, Earthcare critically examines the adverse impacts of development on very people who are meant to benefit from corporate initiatives and large-scale projects. Yet, without genuine care often absent in such development, both the communities and ecological systems sustaining life are left to suffer.

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Feminist Political Wisdom of Nusantara in Contemporary Indonesia

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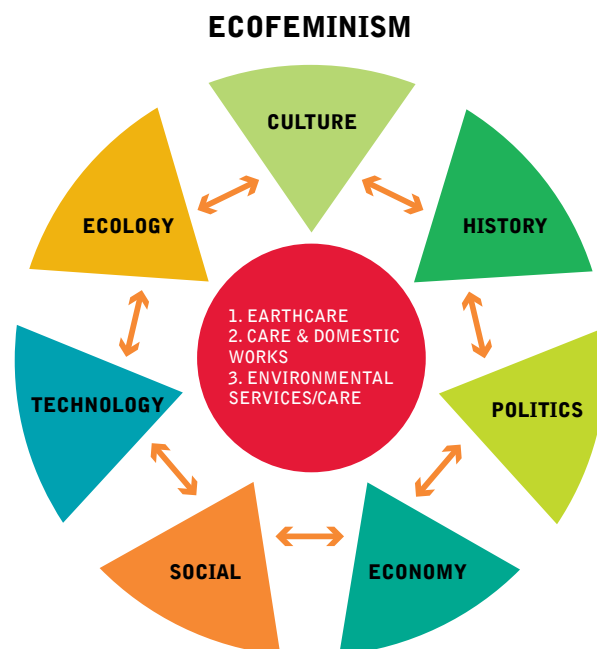
Content

Introduction	
Nusantara Earthcare Wisdoms: from Mountain, Land, River, to the Sea	6
Cupu Manik Astagina, the Story of Water	6
Mothers of Nguter, Guardian of Bengawan Solo River	8
Bengawan Solo (English Version Song Lyrics)	9
Kartini Kendeng Kupatan Temu Banyu Beras, Stories of Karst Mountain Range	12
Melarung Jakit, North Penajam Paser Indigenous Community Guarding the Sea	14
Conclusion	16
Author's Profile	17
References	18

Introduction

Feminist ecological wisdom, together with political ecology focuses on care that can help humanity analyze the current economic, environmental, and geopolitical crises to form alternative frameworks that move away from a reliance on extractive depletive economic growth, addressing inequalities, redistribution of wealth and reprioritization of ways of living together sustainably. The importance of care for humanity and ecology foregrounds multiple ways of knowing as alternatives to dominant economic development trajectories (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015; Elmhirst, 2018). Humanity needs to address today's various crises through a shift in development thinking and practice from universalizing truths to pluriversal learnings especially from the underrepresented knowledge of women and Indigenous community strategies of resilience and survival (Kaul et al., 2022). The multiplicity of knowledge helps anthropocentrism from universal understanding of growth which neglects the importance of care and the ecology to pluriversal wisdoms of how care is central to humanity and ecological resilience.

The current environmental crises and unsettled geopolitics policies must listen to voices that have been marginalized and made peripheral. The current crises are part and parcel of historical and systemic inequalities that proffer a universal story instead of recognizing the many stories that create our many worlds in one world. Ecofeminism offers ecological wisdom that has provided powerful tools to untangle how ecological crises and human-ecology relations are determined by power, gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, and specific socio-economic status, cultural and historical legacies. Ecofeminism emerges from a gendered critical analysis of environmental science, environmental rights, consumption, and distribution of resources. It also looks at how gender power relations determine access and control of resources across scales shaped by interactions with ecological, technological, and political-economic processes. It points to gender inequalities leading to reduced rights for women to own land and gain access to energy, water, and other productive social economic incentives and facilities – all of which have a negative impact on human health, ecosystem health, and the planet.



Bringing gender-environment knowledge to transformative wisdom and actions requires a critical examination of the following established mainstream knowledge. By looking at ecological relationships through the lens of gendered social relationships, and within the context of colonial histories and human economic activities, humanity might become aware of how ecological challenges are not gender-neutral and that social justice should not be considered secondary or trivial to identifying and solving environmental problems (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015; Elmhirst, 2018). Human/ecological relations are part of the ideologies and economies of domination, inequity, exploitation, and colonialism (Haraway, 1988). Humanity needs to understand how gender-ecology relations are embedded in inequitable (his)stories that continue to erase women's bodies, voices, and ecological knowledge which manifests as ecological wisdoms.

Recentering the importance of gender relations and the ecology in human discourse involves directly addressing efforts to save the planet. Ecosystem collapse and climate crisis are an outcome of the unequal power relations and the loss of cultures, natures, and ways of being that impact the planet. The extractive and depletive model of economics exploits human, other species, and the nature itself. It is also profoundly racist, patriarchal, and classist based on deep historical inequities. This historical inequality is built on colonial histories. Resolving these problems requires ecofeminist wisdom that acknowledges earthcare as not involving dispossession or the devaluation of life, and that stands are anti colonial, anti-depletion, and anti-extractivism. Ecological wisdom, as part of reimagining the lifeworlds, which recentres gender and ecological relations, requires humanity to bring care to the center of equity and development. As humanity work towards repair, it must amplify solidarity rather than reproduce mastery.

Caring is an ethically and politically charged practice (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). There is substantive political work to do to overcome intersectional oppressions that are leading to gender inequality, poverty, and the destruction of the Earth. Bringing the wisdom of care to the table can unsettle gender injustices and colonial continuities that shape access to resources and discrimination. Valuing care exposes the deep gendered injustices particularly for Indigenous communities exposed and displaced by climate disasters and ecological destruction in the planet. Care is a profoundly gendered and time-consuming activities performed to support the bodily, emotional, and relational integrity of human beings. However, in a more thoughtful sense, care is an ethical, wisdom, and political concept that acknowledges human interconnectivity and interdependence with other species and the planet. In this deeper vision of care, to value care is to recognize human mutual interdependency and human need for sustainable and flourishing relations, not merely survivalist or instrumentalist ones (Dengler et al., 2021).

Ecological wisdom has long been connected to feminist ethics of care as part of reimagining a post-capitalist alternative to neoliberal forms of natural resource-based development. Maria Puig de la Bella Casa (2017) argues that a refocus on care requires us to change our views on virtually everything: ontology, epistemology, ethics and wisdom, and politics. A caring political economy that acknowledges gender/ecology relations must be grounded in the principles of cooperation, sharing, reciprocity, and intersectional environmental justice to ensure nutrition, ecological balance, clean water, secure housing, gender equality, and meaningful approaches to all forms of labour (Di Chiro, 2019). Care and the ethics of care are part of this increasingly loud and urgent call for new ways of knowing (Tronto, 2010).

Specifically, this paper explores the concept of Earthcare (Merchant 1995; Barca 2020) that could help narrate and uncover the Nusantara ecological wisdom that has long been invisible to the formation of the Indonesian nation-state history. This can contribute to the discourse on Indonesia's contemporary climate crises. Earthcare is about the everyday politics involved in securing the conditions for the regeneration and flourishing of humanity's present and future generations. In her book *Forces of Reproduction*, Stefania Barca's theorising on Earthcare comes from her observations of the *Praialta Piranheira*, an agroforestry settlement in the Brazilian Amazon. She describes how local people survive by continuing to care for the Earth and each other, even amid their struggles against attacks on their land and culture by Bolsonaro's government. She explains that they continue to thrive in their territory because of the relevance and value they afford to care work, not only in the home but also for the land and non-human environment (Harcourt et al., 2023).

Humans see the importance of Earthcare labour care for the soil, water, non-human animals and plants and learn from the Indigenous experiences of land/body/territory being fundamental to social reproduction, which includes relations with the planet. Miriam Lang (2021) researching in Ecuador, supplies to this analysis of Earthcare in her study of the Kichwa people practicing assembly-based decision-making, collective labour, and collective land titles and Indigenous gender relations. She describes how community care includes care for the local ecosystems, especially soil fertility and water sources. Putting Earthcare ethics as ecological wisdom into practice has strengthened collaboration and reciprocity between humans and nature, created more resilient ecosystems, and transformed interpersonal relations, which has led to greater intergenerational, intercultural, and inter-epistemic justice. Earthcare is caring for others and is a vital and visible act that holds communities together and requires social recognition and economic resources.

Nusantara Earthcare Wisdoms: from Mountain, Land, River, to the Sea

Does the contemporary modern Indonesian society of conformity and homogeneity of modern values risk undermining the diversity of Nusantara ecological wisdoms, including local diversity based on or centered on feminist ecocultural perspective? The influences of Indianization, colonialization, Islamization, globalization, have impact on various sociocultural, religio-cultural, histo-cultural, spatio-cultural, geo-cultural and even ecocultural spaces in Indonesia. Nusantara ecocultural spaces narrate stories of water, trees, lake, river, land, women, girls, and other species that build up the intricate ecosystem of faith and spirituality.

This situation illustrates two important things.

First, there is adaptability and resilience in various ecocultural wisdoms when faced with various modern national and/or global values. Through a range of strategies and methods whether adaptation, indigenization, acculturation, assimilation or response – these ecological wisdom maintains, even strengthen, their continuity and continued existence. For example, the ecological practices in several regions in Sumatra including Nias, Mentawai, or Bangka-Belitung negotiate, maintain or adapt ecologically or ecoculturally in relation to colonialism, nationalism, modernism, developmentalism, globalism, and anthropocentrism. We witness the existence of ecological resilience or ecological sovereignty, even though the conditions vary.

Second, ecological wisdoms also experience erosion, brittleness, and even weathering when faced with onslaught of challenges, demands, and even external threats that take various forms. The winds of colonialism, industrialism, anthropocentrism, instrumental rationalism have come continuously and massively affected diverse areas often with hidden agendas and conflicting interests fading and tearing at the intricate fabric of ecological wisdom and beauty that Nusantara embodies. How many times have we seen taboos/pamali, sacred things, myths, rites, ceremonies, and ecological wisdom and habits in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, Flores, and Papua being compromised by the agenda and interests of modernism, developmentalism, neoliberalism, without adequate support from the State? Ecophonic pluralism is increasingly disappearing in the landscape of the Indonesian archipelago, becoming a shadow of ecocultural genocide, to borrow the term from Short and Crook in *Genecide-Ecocide Nexus*. Contemporary Indonesian society is also witnessing vulnerability, decay, and ecocultural colonization across in various regions of the archipelago.

The following Nusantara wisdoms of Earthcare are example of how the communities resisted this ecocultural genocide in the face of modernism.

Cupu Manik Astagina, the Story of Water

Telaga Madirda lake is located on the slopes of Mount Lawu, precisely in Tlogo, Berjo Village, Ngargoyoso District, Karanganyar Regency, Central Java. This lake is known for its clarity and natural beauty Telaga Madirda is considered sacred by the Karanganyar community because as it is the site of the tragedy of goddesses Dewi Anjani, Subali, and Sugriwa, as told in "Cupu Manik Astagina Story". They are revered as deities with extraordinary powers, believed to be the source of Telaga Madirda (lake Mandirda). Many people still believe in myths about the lake, including that the water from the lake can cure illnesses through specific rituals. The lake is also believed to be the birthplace of the Anoman (sacred white monkey), and a place to pray for a child. Those whose requests are granted by God will return to the lake to hold thanksgiving (Kristya, 2022). These stories and previous Earthcare ecological wisdom in the form of legends may influence ecological conservation, encouraging people to protect the lake ecosystem. This story has long been regarded as local wisdom that cannot be separated from moral principles, instilling a belief that harming the lake ecosystem will lead to punishments by the deities. The legend of Telaga Madirda has become an integral part of people's lives, strengthening the importance of ecological protection.

Every year, before the fasting month, the communities around the lake hold a Nyadran (pilgrimage) bringing their harvests. Apart from that, hundreds of Hindus also perform Melasti at Telaga Madirda to welcome the Saka New Year's Nyepi Day, starting at 09.00 in the morning. They bring offerings of agricultural products in the form of fruit and rice as part of Earthcare rituals. The purpose of Melasti is to cleanse oneself of impurities and sins. They collect *tirto amerta* (waterspring) from the lake's springs as a cleanser before Nyepi Day. Hindus also make offerings to Telaga Madirda so that everything taken from the mortal world – such as land, water, and sunlight – are returned to nature for balance (Directorate General of Hindu Community Guidance, 2017).



Aside from being sacred, the lake is still believed to be a haunted place or as *wingit* in Javanese language. This sacredness is guarded and cared for across generations. These beliefs have been passed down from their ancestors for many years, so they can have a positive influence on nature conservation as long as the supporting community still uses the belief system as a reference for acts of kindness (Sukmawan, 2015: 3). Mystical ceremonies and offerings to Cupu Manik Astagina are efforts to protect the people from natural disasters and to ensure their safety and health.

The presence of a place of prayer in the Hindu community around the [Madirda Lake](#) illustrates the existence of ecocentrism and Earthcare attitude that recognises humans as an integral part of nature. Hence, nature must be protected and respected. This is part of customary human behaviours and traditional societies that exist anywhere in the world. People treat nature with respect because of their belief in the story of the origins of Telaga Madirda. The lake is also used to carry out the *padusan* tradition by getting people wet from head to toe when the fasting month approaches. This bathing tradition means that they are ready to fast because their bodies are clean and pure from sin (Prasetyo, 2010: 88). Madirda Lake sustains life and has been an important source of clean water for the residents of Berja. Through legends, wise attitudes towards nature have been implicitly imparted. People respect nature because it provides a circular, interdependent system of care that benefits both humans and the environment.

Good relations between visitors and local residents as community-led lake management is able to support the integrity of the ecosystem around the lake because there is mutual respect between humans and nature. According to Sukmawan (2015, p.3) local residents are the determining factor for success in maintaining environmental sustainability, as well as the supports from the functioning of local institutions, such as traditional communities, BUMDes/Badan Usaha Milik Desa/Village-Owned Enterprises, Karang Taruna/youth organization, PKK/Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga/women-led Empowerment of Family Welfare, RT/RW (Rukun Tetangga/Rukun Warga (neighborhood association/resident association) who are able to encourage their communities to act in accordance with norms, wisdom, principles, as well as sanctions. These widely rooted values and beliefs facilitate interactions between humans and their natural resources. This means that this institution spearheads the empowerment of the community in harmony with nature and the environment, promoting prosperity and equity while ensuring the protection of the environment. Harmony between humans and nature is the key to the survival of communities. By carrying out padusan (bathing to cleanse), kenduri (feast), nyadran traditions in the open at the Telaga Madirda, the surrounding communities and outside communities cultivate an ethic of respecting nature through their religious beliefs and connections with the spirits of their ancestors.

Nature lovers, and visitors to nature tourism, must learn to respect the environment and understand the functions of nature for humanity. However, not all visitors understand the value of nature, so it is important to establish formal and informal rules amongst various parties. Informal rules are often rooted in forms of traditional rules and legends or myths including the Cupu Manik Astagina story.

The characters in Cupu Manik Astagina story – Dewi Anjani, Subali, and Sugriwa are memorialized above the entrance door of the ritual place as a reminder to the community that the Earthcare stories are intertwined with Javanese culture, with specific values that contribute to local identity, wisdom, and values of life (Sukmawan, 2016, p. 187). Madirda Lake and its ecosystem offers clear water, cool air, vegetations, and natural sounds that foster a sense of belonging – andarbeni – the Javanese language of owning. The Berji Village community plays an important role in the sustainable management of Madirda Lake. Born and raised in Berja Village, they are committed to investing their their energy and ideas to advancing their village, which serves as a foundation for jobs and a sustainable green circular economy, especially through eco-tourism and religio-tourism.

In an ecological context, Indonesia as an archipelagic country, is vulnerable to shortages of clean water. Thus, Telaga Madirda, Jumok Waterfall, and Tawangmangu Waterfall in Karanganyar Regency, Central Java can serve as alternative sources of clean water in the future. Telaga Madirda Lake has a substantial and reliable source of clean water, supported by dense trees on the slopes of Mount Lawu. To maintain the ecology around Madirda Lake, oral traditions play a vital role – particularly the prohibition of destroying the environment through myths or stories. Myths or legends reflects the values of friendship and balance with nature cherished by our ancestors. The collaboration of the government, traditional leaders, and local communities is crucial for respecting and preserving nature by reintroducing local myths and or legends that the community still believes in.

Mothers of Nguter, Guardian of Bengawan Solo River

As observed and learned from inspiring Earthcare practices in rural Telaga Mandirda Karanganyar and other Indigenous communities in Nusantara, warm and caring relationships between people and their ecology can be found not only in rural areas but also in urban settings. This ethics of care happens in established neighbourhoods and communities, as well in abandoned buildings, factories, parks and farms – ruins of the neoliberal restructuring of both cities and rural areas. Some ecological and environmental activists often occupy and reclaim these spaces, cleaning, repairing, and making them inhabitable and caring environments (Kaul et al., 2022). For example, during the community action by the Mothers of Nguter, Sukoharjo, Central Java against the pollution caused by PT. RUM/PT. Sritex in the fast fashion industry, the act of communing care and collective power took the form of micropolitics of care in front of the Sukoharjo Courthouse. This network of mothers and commons nurseries illustrates how feminist commons of care can function in modern sub urban city of Surakarta, Central Java, where President Joko Widodo previously served as city mayor. These caring community practices are what make communities thrive, building on shared time, skills and a collective vision of wellbeing.

According to the Solopos news report, PT.RUM's waste pollution complaints date back to 2018. Multiple media records including DetikJateng, reported that residents have opposed the operation of the factory since the trial began in October 2017, because the stench continued to persist during the production of the rayon fiber. The residents' held demonstrations to oppose the operations of PT. RUM. It was initially attended by 300 residents from the three villages closest to PT.RUM, namely Plesan, Gupit and Celep Village, Nguter District. These protests spread to other sub-districts, where air, water, and soil pollution have worsened.



PT RUM direct waste pipe inside Bengawan Solo River during Dry Season, 14 May 2023. (Photo source: Dewi Candraningrum.)

At that time, the Regent of Sukoharjo, Wardoyo Wijaya, was forced to sign a letter containing the permanent closure of PT. RUM but was refused for various reasons. The peak of the residents' anger was on February 23, 2018. It the police force arrested a number of demonstrators. The pollution problem persisted until the following year. Local residents, particularly the farmers along the Gupit River, a tributary of Bengawan Solo, not only complained about the foul odour, but also about the pollution affecting their livelihoods. The waste contaminated the two freshwater rivers that are water sources for local residents, not just farmers. "The stench is not only felt by one village or sub-district, but has reached other districts such as Wonogiri. Wherever the wind blows, the smell of waste is will be carried," Detikcom reported. It was also reported that how fish, amphibians, and other river biota died due to contamination.

Bengawan Solo (English Version Song Lyrics)

Bengawan Solo/River of love, behold/Where the palms are swaying low/And lovers get so enthralled/Bengawan Solo/River of love we know/Where my heart was set aglow/When we loved not long ago//

Chorus:

Nightingales softly singing/The guitar is gently playing/Moon and stars brightly shining/Shining for you and I/In that moment divine/You whispered you were mine/And you vowed we'd never part/Down by the river of love/

/Chorus: Nightingales softly singing/The guitar is gently playing/Moon and stars brightly shining/Shining for you and I/In that moment divine/You whispered you were mine/And you vowed we'd never part/Down by the river of love//



This classic song of Bengawan is the Javanese word for a large river. The largest river in Java Island is often referred to as the Bengawan Solo. Bengawan Solo is well-known and worldwide today. Gesang Martohartono, was a famous Javanese singer and songwriter, best known for his composition "Bengawan Solo." The song gained fame in Asia, especially in Indonesia and Japan. "Bengawan Solo" was composed by Gesang in 1940, when he was 23 years old. It tells about the flow of the Bengawan Solo River. Besides being well-known in Indonesia, this song well-known throughout Asia after being introduced by the Japanese soldiers.

The song begins with its quite famous lines: "Bengawan Solo, riwayatmu kini (how is your history now) ..." Along the banks of the river, many fossils and remnants of primitive civilizations were discovered. The abundance of fossils along Bengawan River is an evidence that early humans heavily depended on nature. They lived near rivers where they could easily find food to sustain them. Pithecanthropus Erectus is the first human fossil discovered in Indonesia by Eugene Dubois in 1890. Pithecanthropus Erectus was found in Trinil, a village located along the banks of the Bengawan Solo.

The Bengawan Solo River is the largest river on the island of Java. It and drains water from a watershed (DAS) covering an area of $\pm 16,100$ km², starting from the Sewu Mountains in the west-south of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, to the Java Sea in the north of Surabaya through a channel that is ± 600 km long. The upstream section has a width of between 20-75 meters and a depth of over 1 meter; the middle section has a channel width of between 75-100 meters with a depth of above 2 meters, and in the downstream has a channel width of up to 150 meters, which ends in the Java Sea, the north coast of Java.

The Bengawan Solo Watershed features a relatively flat topography, primarily located in lowland areas, which gives rise to its meandering river flow. Today, the Bengawan Solo River is still used as a means of transportation, agricultural irrigation, a source of water for the the community, and fish ponds in the upper reaches of the river leading to the Gajah Mungkur Reservoir in Wonogiri. This river stretches 548.53 km and crosses two provinces: Central Java and East Java. This river originates on the slopes of Mount Lawu and flows through several major cities such as Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, Solo, Sragen, Ngawi, and Bojonegoro, before emptying into the Java Sea.

There are 12 regencies/cities in Central Java and East Java that are directly dependent on the river: Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, Solo, Karanganyar, Sragen, Ngawi, Blora, Bojonegoro, Tuban, Lamongan, and Gresik respectively. Currently the condition of Bengawan Solo is alarming due to the presence of pollutants being dumped into its waters. Over the past decade, several social and ecological protests have emerged especially the most notable and recent protests by the people of Sukoharjo against the activities of PT RUM, which is part of a large Southeast Asian textile company, PT. Sritex.



Protest in front of Sukoharjo Court during class action legal action against PT RUM on July 6, 2023.
(Photo source: Dewi Candraningrum.)

On 26 April 2023, Mbok Sarmi sent a message on WhatsApp stating that she would go to the Sukoharjo District Court before heading to PKU Hospital in Wonogiri near her home in Nguter. Her daughter was treated at PKU Hospital after experiencing a headache and fainting in the morning. According to Mbok Sarmi, air pollution from the rayon fiber factory in front of her house caused their illness. Mbok Sarmi also experienced severe migraines almost every day. Since 2018, both mother and daughter have been in and out of the hospital due to vertigo, nausea, dizziness, and vomiting. Why didn't Mbok Sarmi move out from her home if since 2017, she began to notice the smell hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) from the improperly treated waste of viscose factory. This waste not only contaminated the air, but was also discharged into the Gupit River, which flows into Bengawan Solo, with some pollutants also leaking into the ground. I asked her a number of questions while she was showing me some of the medications she now takes regularly – Ranitidine Hcl 150mg, Aspilets Acetylsalicylic 80mg, and Gestrucid suspension 60ml.

“ I will not move from here. This is my place. This is an inheritance from my ancestors. I will defend myself, my children, my family, and this land and ancestral home. I like living here, although now my children and I are getting sick. Actually, I am not strong and it really hurts my head and chest when I smell it. But it is my ancestral land that calls me to stay here and defend our territory. ”

Interview with Mbok Sarmi on 12 April 2023

Meanwhile, Nico Wauran and Etik, representatives residents from LBH Semarang who support affected residents, narrated that during the socialization event about Class Action process updates and resident empowerment on June 5, 2023, that PT RUM does not have the necessary permits to install pipes, let alone to dispose waste in the Bengawan Solo river and its tributaries such as the Gupit river, Tawangkrajan river, and other small rivers, and ditches surrounding the factory. While COVID-19 may be considered a “direct killer”, Mbok Sarmi, a woman whose house is right behind the factory, and who is organizing protests, calls this waste and air pollution as a “silent killer”.

“ I have experienced how the waste and air pollution from this factory has a direct impact on my child, my family, at least five to seven times each year, we have to stay in the hospital alternately because of illness. Considering that I am old and the children are at school, who of course, need clean air, all of this makes me really scared. ”

Interview with Mbok Sarmi on 1 June 2023

The idea of nature as merely a natural resource has negated its value and reduced it as an object. Whereas nature is the origin and invaluable treasure the mother and parent of the human species. Shifting this paradigm and perspective can begin by changing the vocabulary we use and how we describe the rivers of the planet. A river on the island of Java, Bengawan Solo, has absorbed hazardous waste damaging its ecosystem causing mass death of its species. While laws have governed human-to-human and state relations; they have failed to acknowledge, respect and fulfill the rights to life of nature, species, biodiversity, and the planet as a whole. A shift in legal culture and the way humans relate to their natural surroundings is essential to restoring these relationships Beyond restoration, fostering a caring relationship with the environment, may offer some other ways to live peacefully with other communities.



Kupatan Kendeng & Naga Kendeng/Dragon of Kendeng. (Photo source: Dewi Candraningrum.)

Kartini Kendeng *Kupatan Temu Banyu Beras*, Stories of Karst Mountain Range

Although it is painful to watch and observe how little has changed since 2014 across the North Kendeng Mountains in Central Java, mothers of Kendeng, known as Kartini Kendeng, continue their protest by cooking and giving in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta, and the Governor's Office in Semarang, Central Java. They are not just providing food, but also collecting water from the mountain springs to tell the story of water in the mother city of Indonesia. As with many conflicts, food has been central to this ecological struggle: the government weaponizes it by threatening to starve population of Kendeng community.

"*Protecting the Earth only stops at the mouth*," shouted of hundreds of people in the "Kupatan Kendeng 2024" parade. Kupatan Kendeng, celebrated as Earthcare, is a Sacred Eid tradition for the people of Gunem District, Rembang, Central Java. They paraded around Tegaldowo Village, carrying four mountains of diamond-shaped rice cakes called *ketupat/tupat/kupat*. A number of banners with political messages urged the protection of the Kendeng karst mountains as an Earthcare act.

Ketupat in Bahasa Indonesian/Melayu or kupat in Javanese and Sundanese, or tipat, in Balinese, is a Javanese rice cake packed inside a diamond-shaped container of woven palm leaf pouch. Originating in Indonesia, it is also found in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, and southern Thailand. It is commonly described as packed rice, although there are other types of similar packed rice such as *lontong* and *bakchang*. Ketupat is cut open until its skin, the woven palm leaf, is totally removed. The inner rice cake is then cut into pieces and served as a staple food, replacing plain steamed rice. The earliest mention of ketupat appears in the *Kakawin Ramayana*, written in the 9th century during the reign of King Balitung of the Mataram kingdom. In this manuscript, ketupat is called *kupatay* and listed alongside the names of other foods. The term *kupat* was found in several later manuscripts from different kingdoms, including the *Kakawin Kresnayana* during the Kediri Kingdom in the 12th century, and the *Kakawin Subadra Wiwaha* and *Kidung Sri Tanjung* during the Majapahit Kingdom in the 14th to 15th centuries CE.

Despite its current association with Muslim festival of Holy Iedul Fitri, ketupat is also known in non-Muslim communities, such as Hindu Balinese, Javanese Kejawen beliefs, and people of the Philippines, which suggested that the weaving of coconut fronds has pre-Islamic origin. In Bali and Java, ketupat has also been used as *sajen*, an offering for deceased ancestors, for centuries. People that adhere to ancestral beliefs like Kejawen and Sunda Wiwitan would hang a bunch of ketupat, usually in banten style, at the door, as an offering to treat the ancestral spirits, which are believed to sometimes return to mortal world to visit their descendants. This Javanese beliefs on providing offerings for visiting ancestral spirits is somewhat akin to Hindu Balinese Galungan-Kuningan festival. According to Central Javanese tradition, ketupat was first introduced by Sunan Kalijaga, a Javanese theologian and an important figure for the spread of Islam in the island of Java. The earliest connection of ketupat with Islamic *Lebaran* tradition is believed to have begun in the 15th-century Sultanate of Demak (Akbar, 2010).



Solidarity during a protest in front of cement mining with indigenous women of Sedulur Sikep Kendeng on August 28, 2016. (Photo source: Dewi Candraningrum.)

According to Javanese traditions, the Indonesian Lebaran tradition began with Sunan Bonang, one of Wali Songo of Tuban in 15th-century Java. He urged the Muslims to elevate the spiritual completion of their Ramadhan fasting by seeking forgiveness and offering forgiveness for others' wrongdoings.

The tradition of preparing and consuming ketupat during Lebaran was introduced by Raden Mas Sahid or Sunan Kalijaga, one of Wali Songo, one of the nine Muslim saints, who spread Islam in Java. Sunan Kalijaga introduced the Lebaran Ketupat ritual on 8 Shawwal, a week after Eid ul-Fitr, following the completion of a six-day Shawwal fast. The ritual carries deep symbolism: *kupat* means *ngaku lepat* or "admitting one's mistakes" in Javanese language, in accordance to asking for forgiveness during Lebaran. The crossed weaving of palm leaves symbolise mistakes and sins while the inner whitish rice cake symbolises purity and deliverance from sins after observing Ramadhan fast, prayer and rituals. Other than Java, the tradition on consuming ketupat during Iedul Fitri also can be found throughout Indonesia, from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, and also neighboring countries, including Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (Rianti, 2018).

Local stories from Rembang, a city at the slope of Kendeng Mountain, have attributed the creation of this style of rice preparation to the seafarers' need to keep cooked rice from spoiling during long sea voyages. The coconut leaves used in wrapping the rice are always shaped into a triangular or diamond form and stored

hanging in bunches in the open air. The shape of the package allows moisture to drain from the cooked rice while the coconut leaves provide aeration and protect the rice from flies and insects.

Gunretno, the event coordinator of Kupatan Kendeng, said that Kupatan is a tradition of the Rembang Indigenous people, handed down from generation to generation as a form of Earthcare wisdom. It is a Syawalan tradition in villages in Gunem District, Rembang Regency during Holy Eid. The highlight of the event is usually five days after the Eid al-Fitr celebration. In this ritual, there are three mandatory processions, namely *temon banyu rice* (the meeting of water and rice), *dono weweh kupat lan pepet*, and *lamporan*. After the ripe ketupat are arranged into mountains, they are tied one by one in a bamboo frame, creating a mountain-like form. At least three ketupat mountains are made and paraded around the village, in what is known as *dono weweh kupat lan pepet* procession. "This ritual, apart from being a Syawalan tradition, also attracts the interest of tourists," Gunretno said. At present Kartini Kendeng, known as the Mother Guardian of Kendeng Mountains, used this Earthcare tradition to politically defend their ecology against cement mining.

Lamporan is an Earthcare tradition of walking with a torch at night during Kupatan tradition, as a symbol of light and prayer to keep away from danger and repel evil. The Lamporan tradition in Rembang is enlivened by *barongan* groups in the village or district. "Apart from that, Lamporan is believed to be able to ward off spirits that disturb village security," said Sukinah Kartini Kendeng. This tradition is held every Kliwon Friday night in the month of Suro, in Punden Gunem Village. "This tradition requires the involvement of barongan art "because barong is considered to be a *balak* repellent," explained Sukinah. Because this tradition can provide lessons about simplicity, mutual cooperation and cultural preservation, Gunretno hopes that the cement factories will leave their mountains. Meanwhile, Joko Prianto, one of the village residents, admitted that there were special conditions imposed in Lamporan ritual, starting from the route taken and stopping points. The starting and ending point of departure is the village punden, "After that, go around the villages, interspersed with temporary stops at each major intersection or T-junction to offer prayers at each break," explained Joko. In this year's celebration, there were differences in the route taken in previous years.

Melarung Jakit, North Penajam Paser Indigenous Community Guarding the Sea

The *melarung/mendiwa jakit* tradition is an Earthcare tradition that has been going on for a long time and has been carried out for generations by the Paser traditional community in East Kalimantan. The origin of *larung jakit* or *nulak jakit* is based on the ecological wisdom and respect for nature, especially the sea, which has long been a source of livelihood. They believe that the sea is home to various forms of life, including the ruler of the water known as Tondoi Tendalum Juata Minta Juata Telok Lontop Juata Tajau Rancang, as well as mythical creatures such as loden, a type of dragon; bayo, crocodile; and punjut, called the wire-haired Raden Batu Pulau Negara, and Tungkot Tuo Kuning Lolang, as part of the story behind larung jakit. Therefore, the Larung Jakit ritual is performed to honor and respect the sea and its ecosystem, so that humans will not disturb or damage their homes.

This wisdom cannot be separated from nature and the beliefs of the Paser traditional community, which originally adhered to Iden religion, which has four deities that are being respected, such as the four sacred colors namely Sengiang (white), Tondoi (yellow), Longai (black), and Nayu (red). Although the majority of the present Paser traditional community is Muslim, the belief in ritual wisdom passed down through generations continues to this day. It is performed on both large or small scale depending on the ritual's purpose or intention like the birth of a child as a salvation, and death, as a source of evil. The Larung Jakit Earthcare tradition plays a role in conserving water resources in the traditional territory of the Paser Indigenous community. Apart from that, this tradition, which is part of the Nondo Cultural Festival has then been supported as an annual festival organized by the Culture and Tourism Office of North Penajam Paser Regency. It is expected to become a cornerstone of the Indonesian Capital City (IKN) in the future.

The Paser traditional community is the original community of North Penajam Paser Regency (Regional Regulation (PERDA) of North Penajam Paser Regency Number 2 of 2017 concerning the Preservation and Protection of Paser Customs, 2017). This community cannot be separated from Paser Regency because it was previously in the Paser area before being expanded to North Penajam Paser in 2002. The origins of the name Paser have various versions. There are sources from informants who quote the opinion of Mr. M Yusuf, in the History of Kampung Daya Taka, published in 1991, said claiming that the name Paser comes from the word

pa' which means 'light or radiance like the appearance of the sun, blazing, or spirit', while the word ser means 'the voice of the heart/feelings, deep from the heart'. Paser can mean 'a person's deep desire to be better' or 'a burning light of enthusiasm'. Meanwhile, another version, quoted from Aji Jamil Bin Aji Suman, states that Paser comes from the name of the person who first inhabited Paser land.

Paser community prided itself with Earthcare cultural richness as a local identity that is still developing to this day, in the form of manuscripts, oral traditions, customs, rites, traditional knowledge, traditional technology, art, language, traditional games, traditional sports, and cultural heritage (Cultural Principles Regional (Pokok Pikiran Kebudayaan Daerah) North Penajam Paser Regency, 2018). The preservation and protection of the Earthcare local culture of the Paser traditional community is carried out in the midst of the development of the Indonesian Capital City in their territory as stated in (Regional Regulation (PERDA) of North Penajam Paser Regency Number 2 of 2017 concerning the Preservation and Protection of Paser Customs, 2017). With the arrival of IKN workers and migrant communities—previously dominated by trans-migrants from Java, particularly in Bumi Harapan Village, IKN Ring 1 Area – who have brought their respective cultural identities, the local culture of the Paser traditional community has not been changed, it has survived and continues to coexist harmoniously with new cultures entering in their territory.

It is undeniable that changes in the natural landscape are due to the entry of logging, mining, and palm oil companies, as well as ongoing development, but it was also a result in changes in the behavioural patterns of traditional communities. While in the past farming, gardening, and hunting were central to livelihood, these activities are no longer widely practiced. In fact one of the informants, a Paser traditional leader, stated that only 1% are engaged in farming activities. This shift is attributed to changes in the natural landscape, as well as the policy prohibiting land clearing by burning in 2009.

Although communities still have the freedom to open fields based on local wisdom, with a maximum of two hectares per family, this policy still has an impact on sustainability. In Paser community, in farming involves activities, there are a series of activities, such as clearing fields, preparing seeds, and harvesting rice. Each stage includes an Earthcare farming ritual where *soyong* mantras are recited to show respect for nature as a source of livelihood and to honor ancestral spirits which they call *sengiang*, seeking their blessings for a smooth the farming process. As farming activities become less common, this once-thriving culture is also disappearing. This is one of the challenges for Paser culture to continue to exist amidst changing times.

The Earthcare local wisdom of the Paser traditional community regarding nature as a source of livelihood is found in the customary laws, customs, and rituals. Until now, this community still believes in and upholds customary law. Customary law is an unwritten rule that is binding the community, used as guideline in living community life. This is passed down orally through generations. In the customary law upheld by the Paser traditional figures, detailed provisions are outlined, including applications of law and customary fines for violations called *mayar sala*. Customary law is closely related to nature conservation. For example, if there is an activity that destroys the forest, whether carried out from within the traditional community or from outside (companies entering the community area), a customary fine/*mayar sala* will be imposed based on the severity of the violation. Based on the narrative of the *mulung* figure or the leader of the *Belian* ritual, there is a customary fine to be paid for being re-dieted by *molu* for killing several types of trees, roots and animals. This customary fine is used as responsibility for killing trees and animals. Fines were paid to traditional heads who were believed to have authority over forests, rivers, rice fields, mountains and seas in the form of caps *toli bobok kasai tipong* bargain with two reals (now around Rp. 200,000.00). Ecological prohibitions/taboo/*mamali* are believed by the Paser traditional community to this day (Macshury, Ajeng Irma, Arifin, M. Bahri & Rijal, 2020); (Aisyah, 2020). If this prohibition is violated, one will be reprimanded/punished in the form of illness or even death.

Various ecological norms have been developed, such as prohibitions on eating certain types of animals, such as *telogak*/deer, eel/*malung* fish, and crocodiles for some Paser communities who are believed to be the descendants/*tutus*. Apart from that, there is also prohibition on felling various types of trees, such as *kariwaya*, ironwood, *puti*, *lumo*, *tamiyang*, and *sopang* trees, which are believed to be inhabited by spirits and are beneficial to the community. According to informants who are Paser traditional leaders, the Paser traditional community believes that every tree has a *sengiang* (tree goddess) in the forest. There is a *sengiang* called Layas Karangayu (wood goddess); Sende Barontaris (*sengiang* at the boundary of the land to be opened); Seniang Sondo (wood stump); Seniang Sanda (cut tree trunk); and many other *sengiang* names. Therefore, if one wants to cut down or kill trees for farming, they need to perform a ritual in the form of chanting the *soyong* spell, *tipong* bargain, etc. as a tribute to the *sengiang* that inhabits the trees for farming. There is also a prohibition on cutting down trees around the lake

(the Paser community calls it *gentung*) so that the water does not dry up during the dry season. The prohibition applies to all types of trees, except for soft trees, such as kecombrang, banana and other vines. If someone violates it without the permission of local traditional leaders, they can be given a customary fine, usually depending on the agreement in the village. These prohibitions are a form of conservation of water resources in traditional territories. Efforts to conserve water resources by the Paser traditional community are also visible in the *Melarung/Mendiwa Jakit* tradition, which still continues today. The implementation of these customary laws and cultural meaning of larung jakit in the Paser traditional community are crucial for sustainability and circular economy.

Conclusion

Collective care, as seen in traditional Nusantara Earthcare practices is a multi-faceted approach involving engagement with other bodies, planetary life, and modern worlds. It is visceral, material and emotional, linking selves, communities, natural and social worlds (Dengler et al., 2021). Learning from feminist theory and practice, collective care is based on understanding connections that recognise the work of social reproduction and the intersectionality of gender, race, class, able-bodiedness, and age (Harcourt and Bauhardt, 2018). It is about collective survival within a world where many lives are more precarious than others. It is about solidarity and collaboration, where caring becomes an ethically and politically charged practice crucial for the planetary survival. Therefore, sharing these small stories is important. These stories produce tangible evidence of why care matters, and highlight the importance of valuing care as both ethical and political practice (Tronto, 2010).

Institutionalizing an ethics of care involves challenging priorities of economic productivism, high levels of consumerism, and market competition, which have commoditized care in modern societies. These communities reproduce themselves and non-human beings, engaging in Earthcare to protect and maintain the varied ecologies that they inhabit (Harcourt et al., 2023). Valuing care exposes the deep gendered injustices particularly for communities exposed and displaced by climate crisis and ecological destruction in the Global South. Care could be seen as core aspect of safeguarding planetary well-being and socioecological reproduction (Barca, 2020). Humanity can learn and draw inspiration from caring communities, where critical kin relations foster social and ecological interdependence, and respectful, and sustainable relationships are nurtured between humans and non-humans. Feminist perspective on Earthcare are important for transitioning to a just society. By placing Earthcare at the centre of human-ecology relations, we can move toward mutually reciprocal ways to achieve planetary survival.

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In her leisure time, she paints and exhibits her work, including pieces such as North Kendeng Mt Women Ecological Defenders at Onca Gallery Brighton. She often collaborates with her son Ivan Ufuq Isfahan, who has a disability, in some of her artistic projects.

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