



WOMEN AGAINST CEMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN THE KENDENG MOUNTAIN RANGE OF CENTRAL JAVA INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to discuss the women's environmental activism as manifested in their involvement in the contemporary anti-cement movement in the Kendeng Mountain Range of Central Java. Three major issues are dealt with here: 1) the ways in which the issues of women and the environment are linked and utilised to justify the women's involvement in the forefront of the resistance against the cement industry, 2) key female figures who have provided leadership in raising awareness among the passive, domestic-oriented women and mobilized them into a more unifying resistance force, and 3) the forms of women's resistance against the cement industry. Although women are not the only actors in the movement, but their partaking presents an interesting feature. Their involvement in the resistance has become an icon that provides a basis for labelling the contemporary anti-cement movement as the struggle of "Kartinis of Kendeng", linking it with Indonesia's national heroine of the region who has struggled for liberating women from the prison of tradition.

Key words: anti-cement movement, Central Java, environmental activism, forms of resistance, women.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The threat to the earth or environment is a threat to women. This phrase seems to be quite relevant as a starting point to explain the involvement of women in the resistance movement against the cement industry in the Kendeng Mountains of Central Java. In the context of Javanese community, women and earth are often metaphorically and alternately used. Earth is the mother who is the source of life, providing the guarantee of livelihood.[1] Among them

especially the Samin community of Kendeng region, women are also metaphorically regarded as the land that their husbands work on at night. There are two purposes of human on earth: the affairs of men to produce humans through intimate relationships and work affairs to produce food by working the land.[2]

Women are not the only actors in the contemporary anti-cement movement in the Kendeng mountain range region. In fact, it was the men who first appeared on the forefront of the resistance and only later, the women join the movement. Explanations have been offered regarding the conditions, causes, sequences of the anti-cement movement.[3] But little has been offered to understand the involvement of the women in the movement. This is an interesting phenomenon because the long lasting resistance that has occurred in the region, the so-called Saminist movement[4-6] was a peasant, non-violent, male-dominated movement [7]. A few studies have contributed to the understanding of aspects of the Samin community [8,9] but few has look at them from gender and environmental perspectives [1,10]. Despite their valuable contributions, these works miss the latest development and and fail to capture the unique details of the movement.

To fill in the existing gap, the present article seeks to discuss the involvement of the Saminist women in the contemporary anti-cement movement. There are three major issues to be dealt with here: 1) the ways in which the issues of women and the environment are linked and become reasons to justify the women's involvement in the resistance movement against the cement industry, 2) leadership and key figures in the the process of raising awareness and solidarity among the passive, domestic-oriented women and mobilized them into a more unifying force, and 3) the forms of resistance employed by the women in opposing against the cement industry.

2. METHODS

The research upon which the present article is based on employed a combination of historical and anthropological methods. It generally involves three major stages: (1) collecting source materials that are relevant to the subject; (2) examining critically the collected data to obtain credible information; (3) interpreting and synthesizing the obtained information into an argument. Data were collected from places in Rembang, Pati, Semarang and Yogyakarta by employing documentary and observation methods.

Theoretical inspirations that inform the discussion are taken from environmentalism and women's environmental activism. The term environmentalism embraces three related aspects of philosophy, ideology, and social action with a special focus on creating the welfare of the environment. The term environmentalism here refers more to a social movement aiming at protecting the environment. Environmentalism grows from a civil society with the initiatives of social groups and usually exist outside the state, even in opposition to the state.[11] Environmentalism includes all activities by non-state actors through a network of groups oriented to creating environmental justice. Women's environmentalism draws from an idea that women and environment are interconnected. The destruction of the environment and women has taken place due to the naturalization of women and the feminization of the nature. The former refers to a process of downgrading the position of women as equal to other things in the nature, while the latter refers to the conquest, control and exploitation of the nature. It is believed that the exploitation of the nature is parallel with the exploitation of women.[13]

3. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The involvement of women in the anti cement movement affirms the interconnectedness women and the environment, as clearly seen in the issue of water. The threat to water resources and the environment is identical to a threat to women.[13] Water problem to be

caused by the cement factory is women's concern. Women are the main users of water in the households. Therefore, they are the first to suffer the adverse effects of water scarcity caused the cement industry.[14] Water is a matter of life and death. Gunarti said: " Without water we can do nothing... everything on earth [needs water]" [15]. Yulianti, one of the nine "Kartini Kendeng" said: "Over there [in the Kendeng Mountain] is the source of the water springs ... when the dry season comes we have to buy water [because of the cement plant]. Is it called a prosperity? We [will] suffer from all of this".[16]

In the local community, women and the natural environment culturally have a respectable place. This is reflected in their strong beliefs about 'mother earth' or 'motherland'. A mother is a manifestation of the earth, which acts as the giver, caregiver, and protector of life.[17] Like the role of a mother in the household, for the community the earth is the mother who nurtures life. Mbah Tarno, a Saminist community elder once told: "The earth is your mother, mother who gives life, feeds you, to whom you ask for to drink, who breastfeed you".[18] There is a strong belief that the Kendeng Mountains has secured their livelihoods for years.[19]

With the views, they believe that the Kendeng Mountains must be respected and preserved and they have to struggle for its sustainability. The presence of the cement industry in the region illustrates what is called by Vandana Shiva 'desacralization of the earth', initiated by colonialism and continued by developmentalism. This process places the earth with all its potentials solely as the object of exploitation so as to negate its sanctity and the respect for it. [20]. The exploitation of minerals is a threat to the sanctity of the earth that has provided livelihoods and therefore, women as her children are called to protect mother earth from the destruction to be inflicted by the cement industr. [21]

In addition, the action of women in the frontline of the anti-cement movement is linked to the moral consideration as well. It is believed that they have responsibility to preserve the environment for the generations to come. This is evident from the statement of Ambarwati, one of the nine "Kartinis of Kendeng" shortly before casting her feet with cement in front of the State Palace in Jakarta on April 2016, saying: "I am crying not because my feet hurt. I feel sorry for my descendants, how they will live with the cement factory". [21] Another protester, Deni Yulianti, revealed: "We are only able to fight for our rights, that we have the rights to live, our descendants have the rights to live".[16]

Gunarti in her speech during a rally in front of the Central Java Governor's Office on December 18, 2014 stated: "We want to save Kendeng Mountains so that our children's lives will be more sustainable".[22] An elderly woman named Rasmi, who took part actively in the activities of the environmental woman group, Simbar Wareh, stated: "I have to fight for my grandchildren". The women of Kendeng, who run anti cement movement by living in a tent and witnessing a number of babies born during their stay there, asserted that the loss of water sources from mining that destroy karstz hill caves with underground river flows is "a threat to the livelihoods of their babies".[21] This reflects the recognition of the equal rights of future generations with contemporary generations to access the environment and all its resources, showing a similarity with colonial conservationists in the Indies in the early 20th century promoting moralistic value in the nature protection [23,24].

Starting from the belief in the responsibility they bear, the women actively transfer environmental values to their children. They also teach them how to respect for the earth and water, planted trees, and not to destroy nature. Mothers cultivate an awareness that destroying nature means destroying life, and preserving nature means taking care of life [17]. With the conversion of the Kendeng Mountains into an area of cement industry, the women will be uprooted from their important role in the inheritance of values related to the utilization and management of the natural environment [1].

The commitment to save the environment for the sustainability of life is continuously held in the community. Gunarti during a rally in front of the Central Java Governor's Office on December 18, 2014 stated: "Earth and nature sincerely sustain human life ... Cement factory can not make prosperous citizens up to three generations, but agriculture since ancient times could suffice people's food and prosperity".[22] Yulianti revealed: "We need to eat [with farming]. [With the loss of water source] do we eat cement?".[16] In their view, only agriculture can guarantee their welfare. Agriculture is the answer to the question of how to maintain a balance between the utilization and preservation of the environment. The benefits from cement industry are believed to be only temporary and not proportional to the environmental costs to be paid in the form of loss of natural resources. Instead of welfare, it is believed that the cement industry will only bring havoc and misery.[15]

4. LEADERSHIP

The presence of leaders becomes a key factor in the making of resistance ideas and the maturation of necessary conditions for actions. The role of leadership in mobilizing the mass of women is interesting to discuss due to the fact that in the context of the past social movements, rural women's participation has been relatively small. The present active involvement of women in the forefront of the struggle against the cement industry reflects the great success of leadership in building the movement.

There are several female figures who play a key role in the leadership of the Saminist movement in the reform era. The most prominent woman figure in this movement is Gunarti. Genealogically Gunarti is a younger sister of Gunretno, the coordinator of the Concerned Community Network for Kendeng Mountains (JMPPK) and a daughter of Wargono, a Saminist community's elder of Sukolilo. Gunarti's interest to engage in the anti cement movement was preceded by her involvement in the JMPPK's meetings that responded to the coming of the cement industry to the Kendeng Mountains. Realizing the enormous threats of the cement industry to the environment and local economy, Gunarti began to mobilize women's involvement. It is realized that the struggle will not succeed if it only involves men. Gunarti traveled from village to village in Sukolilo District to meet with mothers with the aim of explaining the importance of maintaining the Kendeng mountains and the threat of cement industry for the sustainability of agriculture. Gunarti decided to undertake this task with the consideration that men would have difficulties in conveying information to women. The delivery of information by women is believed to be more effective. There are 16 villages in Sukolilo and about 12 villages she has visited.[18]

Gunarti proved able to raise awareness among women who were previously passive and apathetic to become more insightful and militant. Gunarti organized women in a group called Simbar Wareh. The formation of this group began with a meeting in a front yard of Kedu village's mushola, which was planned to be a lime mining site and attended by about two hundred women. This meeting by the pro-mining group was rumored as a dishonorable act of Samin against a place of worship. This rumor raised concerns among women, but did not dampen Gunarti's move. The second meeting was held at Gunretno's house, Gunarti's brother in Kaliyoso on May 2, 2009. In this meeting a forum called Women Group on Environmental Care of Simbar Wareh or KPPL Simbar Wareh was established.[18]

Simbar Wareh's name is a combination of the name of the spring of Simbarjoyo and Goa Wareh in the Kendeng Mountains threatened to disappear from lime mining for the cement industry. The use of the Simbar Wareh name also has a tactical meaning to connect two sub-districts because Goa Wareh is located in Kedumulyo, Sukolilo District, while Simbarjoyo is located in Jimbaran, Kayen District. This name also contains symbolic meanings, as stated by Sriwati: Simbar Wareh itself has a meaning, simbar means watering and wareh means water.

So we hope, the existence of the Simbar Wareh can cooldown the heated atmosphere, also get a bright path for the struggle.[15] The name is considered suitable with the growing tense situation in the community that initially lived in harmony.

Simbar Wareh is expected to quell the flames of disputes caused by the cement industry. Simbar Wareh's name was officially registered and its members were confirmed by Henry Bastaman, Deputy Minister of Environment for Environmental Communication and Community Empowerment on June 16, 2009. The figure appointed as head of Simbar Wareh group is Sriwati, a young mother from Sukolilo although the backbone and motor of the group remain Gunarti.[18] The purposes of the KPPL Simbar Wareh are to build awareness of the environment and to seek the sustainability of agriculture in the area of Kendeng Mountains. The center of their activities is Omah Kendeng, a large *joglo* house used to hold cultural activities of the Samin community in Pati Regency.[17]

Another key player is Sukinah, a woman from Tegaldowo, Rembang regency.[19] Sukinah is entrusted to play the role of a commander (*senopati*). Her appointment as a *senopati* was decided after considering her prominence in speech.[25] The character of Sukinah as a commander might be illustrated with an episode of the women's protest by occupying the entrance to the mining site by setting up tents. This action lasted more than three months. Seeing how important the role of Sukinah is, the protests launched by the women have been painted poetically as the passion of Sukinah. [26] The figure of Sukinah is also emotionally integrated with the fate of Kendeng Mountains. Watching the mining of limestone hills blown up with dynamite every day, metaphorically Sukinah narrates in her tent with tears in her eyes: "It feels like my body is being tampered with. It feels like having a breech pregnancy. Fertility that extends in this [Watutulis] basin until when is there?". [26]

Sukinah is a woman who is very persistent in the struggle to reject the cement industry. Though often faced with the threat of violence when performing a demonstration, she is not afraid and gives up. The persistence of Sukinah is clear from her statement: "Sukinah will never withdraw from this struggle ... Our resistance to the last drop of blood...The Indonesian Cement Factory must lift its foot from Rembang" [19]. This persistence is shared by other fellows. Murtini, a woman from Timbrangan revealed: "till forever we refuse cement factory". There is only one desire of Murtini and her fellow women: "the right to have a better environment, agricultural lands with undisturbed irrigation". [19]

5. FORMS OF RESISTANCE

As a community with close relationship with nature, they like using the elements of nature to symbolically express intentions. In a protest launched to the Regent Office of Pati, representatives of women gave the regent *srikaya* and *sirsat* plants. *Srikaya* plant was symbolically used to remind him that during his tenure he was judged to be only pursuing personal wealth (*sing disir mung koyo*). *Sirsat* plant is linked to *sat* (Javanese) means dry. Meanwhile, when protesting in front of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in Jakarta, women handed a water-filled jar and jackfruit plants. Soil jar filled with water was used to express soil and water as a source of life. Jackfruit plant was used to reveal the fertility of Kendeng soils for crops production.[1] The presence of cement industry is believed to destroy the water sources and underground water streams raises a concern that the loss of agriculture is real and comes closer.[26]

A unique form of protest was run on April 12, 2015. Nine women were reported to have beaten the dimple as a sign of danger in front of the State Palace in Jakarta. The action was intended to call attention to President Jokowi to overturn the local government decision allowing the construction of cement industry. [27]. A more unique form of non-violent protest

was the action of casting feet with cement. The action was first done on April 12, 2016. It was about one year after they sounded a dimple in front of the State Palace. A similar action resumed on April 13, 2016. Nine women of Kendeng reportedly casted their feet with cement at the National Monument (Monas) in their effort to draw the attention of President Jokowi to accommodate their aspirations.[28]

Yulianti, one of the actors of casting feet with cement put forward the reason: "I hope Mr. President can give justice to us all as fair as possible and take into account the situation of all the people there ... should consider what the consequences. We are here doing this kind of action, we fight against the cement with cement.. We can not speak as smartly as they are." [16]. Sandra Moniaga, a Commissioner of the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM), believed that their action was a symbol of frustration over the long struggle that has been done through various channels, but receiving no satisfactory response from the state. Abandoning children, homes and fields in search of justice is "a symbol of a society that has been so upset, disappointed with the response delay". Even this action of self-torture indicates that there is something very serious going on.[16]

After running their theatrical action for two days, Chief of the Presidency Staff Teten Masduki and State Secretary Pratikno met with the protesters and promised to arrange a dialogue with President Joko Widodo [29]. A meeting was held on August 2, 2016. A number of 17 farmers of Kendeng accompanied by Soerya Adiwibowo of the Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB) were received by President Joko Widodo in the Presidency Office. One main point reached in this meeting was a plan to run a strategic environmental assessment (KLHS) to determine whether or not the cement industry in the Kendeng Mountainous area can be established. It was also agreed that while waiting for the result, the operation of the cement factory was put into a halt.[30]

The second action of casting feet with cement was performed again in front of the State Palace in Jakarta on March 13, 2017. The action was triggered by the issuance of new environmental permit for the Semen Indonesia by Governor Ganjar Pranowo. This was seen as a support for the operation of the cement industry. It was reported as many as 10 people casting their feet with cement each in box. At the front of the box is written their demands, "Reject Cement Factory" and on the other side written a sentence in ancient Javanese letter saying "Mother earth has given, mother earth is hurt, mother earth will judge". A poem entitled "Mother Earth" was often sung by Sukinah during the action. According to Gunretno, this poem is a prayer created to remind people to preserve nature. They believe that the earth is a mother who must be treated, guarded and should not be hurt. If not, it will rise her anger and disasters.[31]

The death of Patmi (48), one of the protesters aroused solidarity. News of her death quickly spread. A wave of sympathy and support sprang up over their struggles. As many as 20 people with backgrounds of human rights activists, environmentalists and students reportedly expressed their support by participating in casting feet with cement in front of the State Palace on Friday on March 24, 2017. [32] Dozens of people on behalf of Teluk Sepang Community and Civil Society Care of Bengkulu participated in solidarity action by casting feet with cement in front of the KPK building on March 24, 2017.[33] Similar action was held near the National Monument by Papuan students wearing their traditional dress. Not only in the capital city, actions of solidarity occurred in other places in Indonesia. Within a week after the death of Patmi, a series of solidarity actions have been taking place in 35 cities and districts in Indonesia. [34] Foreign support came from Germany where about 40 environmentalists and human rights activists held a solidarity action for Kendeng farmers in front of the City Hall of Heidelberg on May 10, 2017. Screenings of documentary films and discussions about the Kendeng people were held in 10 cities of Germany.[35]

Apart of the cultural and theatrical actions, women also got involved in lobbying activities. This has been done to institutions, decision makers, and influential people at local and national levels. On January 30, 2009, for example, five Kartinis of Kendeng went to the Kontras office to report violent actions committed by the security forces on January 22, 2009 against the protesters. On May 4, 2009 the women of Kendeng took the initiative to play a heated political contestation in Central Java between Bibit Waluyo and Rustriningsih. Governor Bibit Waluyo was considered to have no loyalty to the Struggle-Indonesian Democratic Party (PDIP). Meanwhile, Rustriningsih as a PDIP cadre actively campaigned for Megawati's candidacy for the presidency. In this rivalry, they approached Rustriningsih, serving as deputy governor to gain her support [18, 36].

On 18-20 November 2014 women from Rembang lobbied to various institutions in Jakarta, among them the Corruption Eradication Commission, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, National Commission for human Rights (Komnas HAM), National Commission for Woman (Komnas Perempuan), Police Headquarters and Supreme Court. Through their lobbying and audience activities, they conveyed complaints and sought support for dispute settlement with the cement industry.[30] The Komnas Perempuan highly appreciated their struggle in saving the environment and encourages the government, especially the Governor of Central Java, to take firm decision in accordance with the legal decision to stop the presence of the cement industry that potentially would endanger the environment, local economy and social harmony.[38]

Lobbying has also been done to important figures to win support for their struggle. One of them was a meeting with the former president, Abdurrachman Wahid (Gus Dur). The meeting had a special meaning. Gunarti recalled Gus Dur saying that the cement factory would inevitably quit, even Gus Dur gave an approximate time when they would retreat.[15] Visits were also made to other clerical figures. Nine Kartinis of Kendeng were reported to have visited Mbah Maemun, a charismatic cleric of Rembang on June 25, 2016. They were Sukinah, Sutini, Karsupi, Ambarwati, Surani, Deni, Murtini, Ngadinah and Giyem, who earned the nickname nine Kartinis of Kendeng since they took desperate action casting feet with cement in front of the State Palace of Jakarta.[37] In voicing their concerns against the cement industry, the women of Kendeng have even met President Joko Widodo.[15]

6. CONCLUSIONS

With a focus on protecting the Kendeng Mountains and the growing role of women, the contemporary anti-cement resistance has obtained a new feature as women's environmental movement. This environmentalism has a double ground. On the one hand, it has historical roots in the Saminist resistance movement during the Dutch colonial era as its source of inspirations, and on the other side, the movement is built by incorporating newly developed arguments showing the close relationship between women and the environment as manifested in the personification the environment [earth] as a mother. The daily experiences with the use of water in domestic affairs, the big risks of losing water sources caused by the cement industry, and the moral commitment to do justice to the next generations are key reasons for the women to move out of the domestic affairs and to enter the forefront of the resistance. The threat posed by the cement industry is identified as a serious threat to women. The growing environmental awareness among the women of Kendeng region has been credited by Gunarti. The formation of the Women Group for the Environment Concern (Simbar Wareh), initiated by Gunarti and her fellows, marked an important stage of the making of the women's environmental activism. This group has provided a place for preparing the women of Kendeng to become environmental fighters for the sake of the Kendeng Mountains environment and local agriculture.

In resisting against the cement industry, the women have acted both as field players and lobbyists. Their actions were directed not only to government institutions and figures at regional and provincial levels but to institutions and figures at national level as well. By bringing their protests to the center of power in Jakarta, it is believed that they would get national media coverage so that the echoes of their actions can reach broader audience and result in wider public sympathy and support. Another consideration is the bigger opportunity to draw the attention of the central government to intervene. The use of theatrical actions, especially through what is called self-tortured by casting the feet with cement, seems to be quite effective in pressing the central government to intervene in search of satisfying solution for the cement problem which has caused uncertainty and chaotic situation. The role of the women in the forefront of the anti-cement movement has been so prominent that the movement is later labelled as the struggle of Kartinis of Kendeng, like the struggle of a woman named Kartini for the women's emancipation from the prison of tradition. The involvement of women in the movement represents a creative way of the marginalized community to make their voices be heard by the power holders. This findings also indicate that serving as a life-giving force, women are the true guardians of the environment.

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