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## **Rooted Resistance: Gendered Narratives of Land Dispossession and Planetary Health in Central Java**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the intersections between land system changes and planetary health through a decolonial feminist lens, foregrounding women's voices from Central Java, Indonesia. Drawing on testimonies from five women environmental defenders—traditional midwives, interfaith activists, Catholic leaders, peasant mothers, and grassroots educators—the research situates reproductive health, ecological integrity, and spiritual resistance within community-led responses to ecological injustice. It highlights how large-scale development projects such as dams, mining, hotel construction, and corporate agriculture intersect with socio-religious hierarchies to degrade women's sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and the planetary life systems they steward. Central to this study is the use of decolonising methodologies that position women as co-creators of knowledge, not merely subjects of research. Through narrative inquiry and contextualised analysis, this paper challenges dominant technocratic and Eurocentric discourses in planetary health, which often marginalise indigenous knowledge systems and gendered labor. The testimonies reveal how women's care work—such as planting, cooking, healing, and educating—becomes a radical act of environmental stewardship and resistance to both environmental degradation and colonial-capitalist modes of development. Theoretically, this study bridges decolonial feminist thought with environmental humanities, offering a model of planetary health rooted in relational ontologies, cultural memory, and intersectional justice. It contends that reclaiming local epistemologies—embedded in Muslim, Catholic, indigenous Samin, and peasant cosmologies—can reconcile land system transformations with ecological and reproductive justice. By centering the voices of Javanese women who resist land dispossession, the research advances inclusive pathways for reimagining planetary health, where land, body, water, and belief are inseparable domains of identity.

**Keywords:** Decolonial Feminism, Planetary Health, Land System Change, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), Ecological Justice, Indigenous Knowledge, Women Environmental Defenders.

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## Introduction

Indonesia's agricultural and land systems, particularly in Java—the country's most densely populated and agriculturally intensive island—are at a critical juncture. Faced with the accelerating impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, and extractive land-use policies, the region's food security and planetary health are increasingly under threat (IPBES, 2019; Folke et al., 2021). Once fertile landscapes are now fragmented by infrastructure expansion, mining, and commercial monocultures that prioritize profit over ecological balance and community well-being (Lambin & Meyfroidt, 2011; Resosudarmo et al., 2012). In this context, women in Java have emerged as key stewards of land, seed, and water. Despite systemic marginalization in land tenure, policy-making, and agricultural decision-making, Javanese women continue to uphold intergenerational knowledge systems that center sustainability, care, and resilience (Elmhirst, 2011). From cultivating biodiverse home gardens and managing community water sources to resisting cement mining in Kendeng and filtering polluted wells in Banyumas, their practices reveal the deep interdependence between land justice and reproductive, environmental, and food-related health (FAO, 2021; IPBES, 2019). This paper situates these lived experiences within the broader discourse of planetary health—a framework that recognizes the reciprocal relationship between human systems and the Earth's natural systems (Folke et al., 2021). By examining testimonies of women farmers, midwives, and eco-activists in Central Java, the paper foregrounds the urgent need to transform current land and food systems through inclusive, ecological, and gender-just frameworks. Java's environmental degradation is not only a climate crisis; it is a crisis of governance, of eroded indigenous and feminine values of stewardship, and of systemic neglect toward rural women's knowledge. Reclaiming land and restoring agroecological practices is not only vital for food security—it is essential for regenerating the health of both people and planet. This study affirms that safeguarding planetary health in Indonesia begins with centering women's voices in the struggle for land, food, and ecological justice.

## Methods

This study adopts a decolonial feminist ethnographic approach, centering lived experiences and oral testimonies of women in Central Java affected by ecological injustice. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and storytelling sessions with women farmers, midwives, and community leaders. The analysis foregrounds intersectional lenses of gender, religion, class, and ecological displacement. By privileging local knowledge systems and resisting extractive research practices, this methodology seeks to co-produce knowledge with participants rather than about them—aligning with calls in feminist political ecology for participatory, justice-oriented methods. The aim is to challenge dominant narratives on land, food systems, and planetary health by highlighting community-rooted responses to climate and food insecurity in Indonesia.

## Results and Discussions

### ***Dispossession and the Gendered Costs of Land System Change***

This section investigates how state-led infrastructural projects—such as the Kedung Ombo Dam and cement mining in Kendeng—reconfigure land tenure systems and displace long-standing agrarian communities. It foregrounds the gendered nature of land dispossession, showing how women, particularly traditional midwives and subsistence farmers, lose not only access to land but also authority over ecological knowledge and food production. Land is not merely a physical resource but an epistemic and cultural archive, and its seizure under development projects severs matrilineal relationships to place, health, and community sustainability.

### ***From Extraction to Extinction: Feminist Resistance to Ecological Degradation and Planetary Ill-Health***

This section explores how extractive economies—cement mining, industrial expansion, and hotel development—have induced ecological degradation with measurable impacts on planetary health, including biodiversity collapse, water scarcity, and food system disruption. The narratives of women like Sukinah and Neni Yuliawati illustrate grassroots resistance to these planetary harms. Their activism embodies a localized feminist critique of extractivism, linking land degradation to the erosion of reproductive rights, crop failures, and rising disease burdens. These women contest the “development” paradigm by asserting alternative, care-based economies grounded in land regeneration, clean water, and community health.



### ***Spiritual Ecologies and Decolonial Land Ethics: Reimagining Environmental Governance from Below***

This section analyzes how religious and indigenous cosmologies—Islamic, Catholic, and Saminist—are being mobilized by women to articulate ethical frameworks for land stewardship and planetary care. Figures like Alissa Wahid and Nunung Purwanti challenge the moral vacuity of neoliberal development by reinterpreting spiritual teachings as imperatives for social and ecological justice. Their work signals a shift from top-down technocratic governance to grassroots planetary ethics that prioritize reciprocity, interdependence, and ecological humility. These decolonial visions of land and health offer a pathway toward post-extractive futures that re-center relationality over profit.

### **Conclusion and Outlook**

This research has illuminated the powerful intersection of gender, land systems, and planetary health through the voices of Central Javanese women. Their lived experiences demonstrate how environmental injustice directly threatens food security, biodiversity, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. These women resist ecological harm not only as farmers, mothers, and caregivers, but as cultural leaders and spiritual stewards of the land. Their efforts offer alternative, locally rooted models of sustainability and justice. Looking forward, it is imperative to expand feminist, decolonial frameworks that prioritize indigenous ecological knowledge and amplify women's agency in climate discourse and policy. Future research and land system governance must co-create solutions with affected communities, embracing intersectionality, decoloniality, and relationality. The resilience of these women offers hope—and a blueprint—for achieving gender-just and ecologically sustainable futures in Indonesia and beyond.

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