

## The Interplay of Public/Private and Agent/Victim Dualism in Sustainable Living Practice: Indonesia's Case

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### ABSTRACT

*An examination of sustainable living practices through the lens of ecofeminism is the subject of this article. In this article, sustainable living practices refers to the actual implementation of environmentalism ideas in everyday situation. The selection of this subject is deemed significant due to the prevailing trend in environmental literature to associate it as pro-environmental behaviour that, unlike environmental activism, exclusively with the upper middle class, thereby rendering it feeble, apolitical, and inconsequential. This study aims to evaluate the correlation between pro-environmental behaviour and environmental action and activism by examining sustainable living practices through the lens of gender. Departing from Ecofeminism, it attempts to incorporate insights from relevant literature to enhance the discussion. Availing from exploratory field observations, this study uses Indonesia as a case studies. The study found that, in addition to the availability of social media and spiritual factors, there are educational orientation that, related to cultural and religious aspects, bridges private/public elements as well as agents/victims division in Ecofeminism discourse. The transformation of the movement's character from individualist to collectivist is influenced by global political dynamics, as well as showing the moral and spiritual orientation of this movement.*

**Keywords:** *sustainable living practice, ecofeminism, environmental care, pro-environmental behaviour, environmental activism*

### ABSTRAK

Diskusi mengenai praktik hidup berkelanjutan melalui lensa ekofeminisme menjadi subjek dari artikel ini. Dalam artikel ini, istilah praktik hidup berkelanjutan mengacu pada implementasi aktual dari ide-ide environmentalisme dalam situasi sehari-hari. Pemilihan subjek ini dianggap penting karena literatur lingkungan cenderung mengaitkannya sebagai perilaku ramah-lingkungan yang, tidak seperti aktivisme lingkungan, secara eksklusif hanya berlaku untuk kelas menengah ke atas, sehingga membuatnya terlihat lemah, apolitik, dan tidak berdampak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi hubungan di antara perilaku ramah-lingkungan dan aktivisme lingkungan dengan mengecek praktik hidup berkelanjutan melalui lensa gender. Berangkat dari Ecofeminisme, artikel ini mencoba mengembangkan wawasan dari literatur yang relevan untuk memperkaya diskusi. Memanfaatkan hasil observasi lapangan yang bersifat eksploratif, penelitian ini menggunakan studi kasus Indonesia. Studi ini menemukan bahwa, di samping ketersediaan media sosial dan faktor spiritual, terdapat orientasi pendidikan yang, terkait dengan aspek budaya dan agama, menjembatani pemisahan unsur privat/publik dan agen/korban dalam wacana Ecofeminisme. Transformasi sifat gerakan dari yang awalnya individualis menjadi kolektif dipengaruhi adanya dinamika politik global, sekaligus memperlihatkan adanya orientasi moral dan spiritual dari gerakan ini.

**Kata kunci:** praktik hidup berkelanjutan, Ecofeminisme, perawatan lingkungan, perilaku ramah lingkungan, aktivisme lingkungan

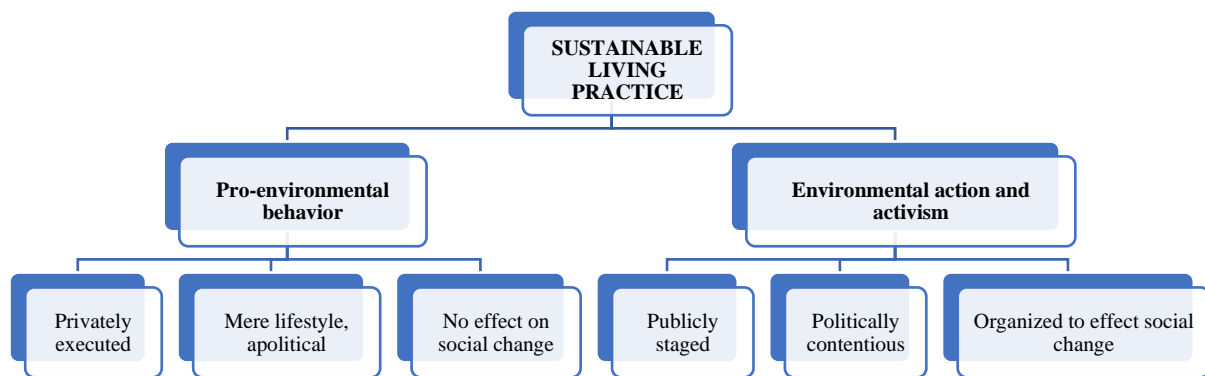
### Introduction

This essay attempts to examine sustainable living practices in the context of Indonesia. The word "sustainable living" in this article refers to the incorporation of environmentalist concepts into material

activities in everyday contexts. The discussion of this topic is significant because the environmental movement's literature tends to view sustainable living practices as an alternative lifestyle only accessible to the upper middle class, resulting in a movement that is individual, sporadic, weak, apolitical, and ultimately ineffective. Some sustainable living practices, such as minimalism, sustainable consumption, and permaculture, are perceived to represent only the educated class's taste markers and cultural capital markers, reinforcing class tastes and identities while failing to bring criticism or meaningful social change. In this light, the hypocrisy often associated with sustainable living practices is thought to stem from the blurring of the lines between being a citizen and a consumer, which not only aligns with the framing of sustainability in the interests of capital owners and Neoliberal political culture, but also derail participatory political ideas into consumer-driven politics.

This assumption is still closely tied to the classification of pro-environmental behaviour, or environmentally friendly behaviour, and environmental activism, which is extensively used to evaluate environmental activities in both private and public settings. Environmental activism is carried out by professionals<sup>1</sup> through political movements that openly criticize the exploitative capitalist system of production and the political structures that support it;<sup>2</sup> whereas pro-environmental behaviour is associated with the actualization of environmentally friendly attitudes in private spaces that are influenced by a person's or group's habitus.<sup>3</sup> If environmental activism is thought to be based on critical ideology and environmental justice,<sup>4</sup> then pro-environmental behaviour is thought to be based on media-constructed audience trends so that it is thought to be lacking in awareness and continuity, let alone being politically interventionist or socially transformative. With this insight, it is assumed that environmental activism has a greater impact on driving social change than green behaviour (see Graph 1).

**Grafik 1.** Sustainable living: a pro-environmental behavior or environmental action and activism?



In addition, the significance of environmental activism can be seen in the issues it tackles, such as the problem of deforestation and *land grabbing*—due to illegal logging, industrial mining operations, and the development of large-scale monoculture plantations—as well as the development of industrial,

<sup>1</sup> David B. Tindall, Scott Davies, and Céline Mauboulès, “Activism and conservation behavior in an environmental movement: The contradictory effects of gender,” *Society and Natural Resources* 16, no 10 (November 2003), 909–932.

<sup>2</sup> Lori M. Hunter, Alison Hatch, and Aaron Johnson, “Cross-national gender variation in environmental behaviors,” *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no 3 (July 2004), 677–694.

<sup>3</sup> Paul C. Stern and Thomas Dietz, “The value basis of environmental concern,” *Journal of Social Issues* 50, no 3 (1994), 65–8

<sup>4</sup> Chantal Séguin, Luc G. Pelletier, and John Hunsley, “Toward a model of environmental activism,” *Environment and Behavior* 30, no 5 (1998), 628–652.

service and trade areas in urban areas, all of which intersect on two things. First, the long-term ecological impacts as well as the socio-cultural and political-economic impacts on indigenous communities, the urban poor, and other marginalized groups. Second, the involvement of large capital and the abuse of power in the granting of lease permits and the decision-making process. In contrast, eco-friendly behaviour is considered 'only' capable of addressing minor issues that are not critical, such as household waste management, home gardens, or do-it-yourself craft activities.

In essence, the hierarchical arrangement of environmental activism in relation to pro-environmental behaviour reflects gender and class bias. Gender bias, as environmental activities that lead to social change only appears to be confined to organizations or individuals with professional backgrounds, disregarding the daily participation of women in various practices of sustainable living. Class bias, as sustainable living practice itself is seen to be feasible only among the upper middle class, who act with certain value and taste preferences, but without considerable criticism toward the existing order of social and economic hierarchy that supports their position.

By paying attention to the distinguishing features, this paper intends to assess the relationship between pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism through sustainable living practice by using a gender lens, especially Ecofeminism, then enrich it with discussions from various relevant literature. The discussion in this paper is divided into several parts, namely literature review on sustainable living practice, Ecofeminism framework related to the idea of environmental care and/as work, followed by analysis developed through reading the results of relevant previous research, and ending with conclusion.

## Literature Review

Sustainable living is frequently associated in both academic literature and popular usage with *way of life* or *lifestyle* that restricts consumption in the effort to attain physical and spiritual wellbeing. In general, proponents of sustainable living define it as the pursuit of coexistence and simplicity in daily life, with the hope that their presence on earth does not contribute to the worsening of environmental issues through concrete environmentally friendly practices.<sup>5</sup>

In common parlance, the term sustainable living is also used to refer to minimalism, frugality, and voluntary simplicity, which are frequently used interchangeably. Minimalism endeavours to live a more modest life through conscientious consumption and environmentally friendly behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Frugality attempts to employ environmental principles as a life framework with a strive for a more equitable existence through sufficiency.<sup>7</sup> Voluntary simplicity refers to all the aforementioned element while also emphasizing the significance of personal development with some sense of inner growth, be it related or unrelated to religious affiliation.<sup>8</sup>

According to Elgin, spirituality is one aspect that is often mentioned in the sustainable living literature, and is considered to have compatibility with inner growth. Although there are many variations in the sources of spirituality in question (from religion to indigenous and quasi-spiritual tradition),

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<sup>5</sup> Gemma Romano, "Sustainable Happiness in an Ecovillage: Exploring the Impacts of Sustainable Living on Individual Happiness," (Master's Thesis, Lakehead University, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Bronwyn Hayward and Joyashree Roy, "Sustainable Living: Bridging the North-South Divide in Lifestyles and Consumption Debates," *The Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 44 (2019), 157-175. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-101718033119>

<sup>7</sup> Liliana L. Bove, Anish Nagpal, and Adlai D.S. Dorsett, "Exploring the determinants of the frugal shopper," *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 16, no 4, (2009), 291-297. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2009.02.004

<sup>8</sup> Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Harper, 2010).

traditional and religious values have always been considered as the legitimate sources.<sup>9</sup> While the expression of spiritual values is often influenced by socio-cultural and geographical factors,<sup>10</sup> technological factors and political economic structures are no less influential in determining the extent to which spirituality finds its form.

Spirituality is apparent among Ecoliteracy educators, as evidenced by their adoption of a systems approach to comprehending sustainable living-based life. In this context, sustainable living serves as both a guiding principle and an educational framework for all practices that incorporate ecological learning components, including managing organic waste, conserving energy and water, growing food, and extending the service life of goods.<sup>11</sup> The system approach of Ecoliteracy intersects with the view of the Circular Society, where both believe that biodiversity and material resources can only be maintained if consumed within safe planetary limits through balanced exchanges of energy and materials. Here, it is important to differentiate the Circular Society and Circular Economy. In contrast to Circular Society and Ecoliteracy, which prioritize the development of alternative economic systems, which is rooted in communal cultures, and the impact of spirituality, the Circular Economy emphasizes anthropocentric approaches in environmental management through technological engineering with an orientation to optimize resource extraction within the capitalist system.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the sustainable living literature, however, points to what Capra calls piracy, co-optation, and trivialization of sustainability concepts.<sup>13</sup> Strategically engineered by corporations, this so-called “corporate environmentalism” created a mass of consumers that uncritically submitted to the green campaigns of the corporations. In their research, Doyle, Farrell, and Goodman, for instance, revealed how the term sustainable living was hijacked by corporations to increase profit achievement alone, namely building the Company's reputation as a climate defender and the Company's image through care work, but instead of taking an active role to assume environmental responsibility, the company has depoliticized and delegated its environmental responsibility to the consumers.<sup>14</sup>

From a gender perspective, research utilizing feminist analysis demonstrates that women are more susceptible to being targeted as subjects to biopolitically driven environmental movements, such as the zero-waste lifestyle<sup>15</sup> and household-based sustainability.<sup>16</sup> These women perform symbolic actions, such as changing bulbs, buying organic food or environmentally friendly green products, which are criticized for weakening the focus on building meaningful strategies in addressing real environmental problems while, at the same time, depoliticizing it. But, while much of these papers depart from the context of North America and Europe, the present paper tries to focus on the phenomenon of sustainable living practices in Indonesia. This study acknowledges the uniqueness of context, recognizing that findings from prior studies may not be equally applicable to different locations. The variation in context is deemed crucial and cannot be used as a foundation for making universal judgments. In what follows,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Holloway and Oliver Valins, “Editorial: Placing religion and spirituality in geography,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 3, no 1 (November 2010), 5-9 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649360120114107>

<sup>11</sup> Fritjof Capra, “Sustainable Living, Ecological Literacy, and the Breath of Life,” *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 12 (2007), 9-19.

<sup>12</sup> Martin C. Friant, Walter J. Vermeulen, and Roberta Salomone, “A typology of circular economy discourses: Navigating the diverse visions of a contested paradigm,” *Resources, Conservation & Recycling* 161 (October 2020), 104917, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.104917>.

<sup>13</sup> Fritjof Capra, op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Doyle, Nathan Farrell, and Michael K. Goodman, “The cultural politics of climate branding: Project Sunlight, the biopolitics of climate care and the socialisation of the everyday sustainable consumption practices of citizens-consumers,” *Climatic Change* 163, no 4 (November 2020), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02487-6>

<sup>15</sup> Mandy de Wilde and Sarah Parry, “Feminised concern or feminist care? Reclaiming gender normativities in zero waste living,” *The Sociological Review* 70, no 3 (March 2022) 526–546. DOI: 10.1177/00380261221080110

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Murphy and Sarah Parry, “Gender, households and sustainability: Disentangling and re-entangling with the help of ‘work’ and ‘care’,” *EPE: Nature and Space* 4, no 3 (January 2021) 1099–1120. DOI: 10.1177/2514848620948432

using the case study, this paper attempts to contextualize the phenomenon outside what has already been discussed. Furthermore, by looking at the breadth of coverage contained in the term sustainable living with all its good and bad potentials, this paper tries to position sustainable living practice and to see it within the debate of environmental care and/as work in Ecofeminism. The selection of the Ecofeminism framework is intended to usher in the discussion of environmental care as work and its relationship with the public/private and agent/victim dichotomy.

## Methodology

Ecofeminism believes that systemic injustices, such as colonialism, racism, sexism, to the destruction of nature, are interconnected and crossed with patriarchal logic,<sup>17</sup> which pairs hierarchical dualisms in the form of culture/nature, reason/emotion, mind/body, or masculine/feminine, all of which are interrelated and support masculine constructions. Attached in the capitalist system, this masculinist construction has placed humans as autonomous individuals, i.e. able to think logically and rationally, to make decisions by optimizing profits and minimizing losses, and to orient themselves towards achieving self-interest. In practice, this construction places human beings in terms of productivity and effectiveness of economic work, with the aim of meeting the standards of individual physical welfare, but ignoring the fundamental fact that in order to achieve it all, there is the support of environmental factors—both in terms of socio-cultural and ecological—that accompany it.

With respect to care, ecofeminism believes that it is social goods and, as an idea, it should be able to reverse the idea of autonomous and independent individuals, which are celebrated in the capitalist system. It also posits that all individuals are interconnected in a web of attachment with fellow humans and non-human entities, relying on one another and forming relationships. The discourse of care in Ecofeminism itself is influenced by the same discourse that has developed earlier in Feminism. For instance, Noddings differentiates between care as an attitude (caring about) and care as a practice (caring for);<sup>18</sup> Gilligan distinguishes the idea of moral development between men and women, which is built upon justice and responsibility.<sup>19</sup> Both share the idea that, whereas the attitude of care as an attitude is expected to be embraced by everyone, its practice is only evolved through experiential learning. Their explanation affirms the presence of socio-cultural and political-economic aspects that are intrinsic to the concept of women's care. Many Feminists and Ecofeminist alike argued that linking care with a feminine ethic is commonly seen as harmful to women since it reinforces unequal gender dynamics.<sup>20</sup>

Whereas in the socio-cultural setting, care practice involves engaging in maintenance activities and fulfilling the needs of family members or communities; in the ecological context, care practice involves carrying out environmental activities that contribute to enhancing the quality of human existence. The issue arises from the belief that women are solely responsible for fulfilling these activities.<sup>21</sup> Within the realms of socio-cultural and environmental care activities, formal papers and documents grounded in the Neoliberal thinking framework often refer it with the concept of unpaid care

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<sup>17</sup> Val Plumwood. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Nel Noddings. *Caring, A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (California: University of California Press, 1984)

<sup>19</sup> Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Nel Noddings. *Caring. A relational approach to ethics and moral education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed updated (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Carol Gilligan, "Hearing the difference: Theorizing connection," *Hypatia* 10, no 2 (1995), 120–127; Sherilyn MacGregor. *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Folbre, "Measuring care: Gender, employment, and the Care Economy," *Journal of Human Development* 7, no 2 (2006), 183-199.

work, non-market transfer, or social reproduction. As a result, care activities are frequently undervalued, and women who perform these tasks are generally regarded as inferior within the capitalist system.<sup>22</sup>

The disparity over who should be responsible for providing care has led to the campaign to acknowledge its merit by introducing the concept of care as work and to formulate the 3R (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute), the 4R (3R + Reward), and the 5R (4R + Represent) Framework for decent care work under the auspices of the ILO and UNWomen. MacGregor, Arora-Jonsson, and Cohen (2022) contend that conceptualizing environmental care activities as work can simultaneously achieve the objectives of environmental care and rectify gender disparities. This can be accomplished by advocating for a fairer recognition of gender roles, a more equitable allocation of social responsibilities, and granting political rights to foster equal representation in the public domain.

Although this perspective seemingly aligns with Glenn's (2000) argument that care is a practice and a public social responsibility that involves equal access, shared responsibility, and fair efforts towards its fulfilment,<sup>23</sup> MacGregor (2004, 2006) has warned that the incorporation of the concepts of practice and responsibility in the delivery of care may run the risk of concealing the longstanding care issues that have disproportionately affected women.<sup>24</sup> Instead of the "practice and responsibility", she prefers the "work and rights" approach. She proposed the concept of ecological citizenship, namely the integration of environmental care work into the framework of citizen rights, both at the communal, national, and global levels. Yet, she acknowledges that the recognition of citizenship rights is not sufficient on its own, as it must be supported by the establishment of infrastructure and policies that promote gender equality. In short, based on the exposition, the provision of care in Ecofeminism is intricately linked to the debates surrounding the public/private and agent/victim divisions, as demonstrated above.

One political thinker that has thoroughly elaborated the public/private with respect to agency is perhaps Arendt. In an effort to rehabilitate *viva activa* (activities) ahead of *viva contemplativa* (contemplation), she defined the word 'public' as a visibility in a space of encounters and asserted that to live one's life is to be with others in public. In light of this definition is an insinuation that to leave from the domain of togetherness equals with one's existential cessation. The freedom of human from the cyclical naturalness and consumption of life is what intrigued Arendt. She attempted to traverse bondage that tied human with labor and work through political action in the public because its performance means an actualization of human existence. (cf. Passerin d'Entrèves, 1994; Hayden, 2014).

However, the subtlety of the public/private context in its actuality has never been as firm as it is heuristically devised, especially with regards to sustainable living practice. The employment of case study method is, therefore, in line with the reason behind this study, which is to cover the contextual condition deemed relevant to the phenomenon of under study, through empirical exploration.<sup>25</sup> Case study is selected, based on the aim of this study to answer the "how" and "why" question pertaining to sustainable living in Indonesia, especially how to situate it within the Public/private and Agent/victim division, and to assess whether it may fitly fall with the grouping of pro-environmental behaviour or environmental activism, or even a combination of the two, and why is it so. This study is a continuation of my research on sustainable living practice among household women in urban Java, that has been conducted since October 2018 by the application of phenomenological-based ethnography as its methodology. Yet, considering International Relations' macro level analysis, this paper, only covers the

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<sup>22</sup> Rosemarie P. Tong. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn N. Glenn, "Creating a caring society," *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 29, no 1 (January 2000), 84-94. DOI: 10.2307/2654934

<sup>24</sup> Sherilyn MacGregor, "From care to citizenship: Calling Ecofeminism back to politics," *Ethics & Environment* 9, no 1 (2004), 56-84; See also Sherilyn MacGregor. *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006)

<sup>25</sup> Robert K. Yin. *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (London: Sage, 2003).

contextual element of the issue of sustainable living practice conducted by mothers. Hence, instead of displaying direct quotes, the discussion in this paper will be elaborated by brushing the case of sustainable living practice in Indonesia, in ways that it able to compare with and contrast to the proposed framework and other relevant literatures.

## Discussion

### A. Case Study: Exploring Sustainable Living Practice in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the practice of sustainable living gained momentum in early 2000 and is primarily achieved through two means, namely the adoption of organic food as an alternative and the promotion of zero-waste lifestyle. Initially, organic food alternatives gained more popularity among specific demographics, such as upper middle class and educated individuals, through community channels,<sup>26</sup> which consists of two distinct groups: buyers and producers. This demographic of organic food consumers frequently faces intense scrutiny as it serves as a common evaluator of the sustainability practice. Referred to as "green consumerism," the buyers embraces the concepts of both environmental sustainability and consumerism, which are inherently conflicting.<sup>27</sup> They warmly embrace the concept of circular economy and believe that its adoption in society is not only feasible, but can also bring environmental justice to all.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the buyers, the organic food producers are more ideological and critical, as demonstrated by their familiarity with readings such as *The One-straw Revolution* (Masanobu Fukuoka) or *Small is Beautiful* (Ernst F. Schumacher), which critique the exploitative character of the capitalist economic structures. Their passion to bring the idea of circular society to life often leads them to adopt permaculture or agroecology method.<sup>29</sup> Both methods advocate for agroecosystems that replicate the richness and the functionality of the local ecosystem. However, unlike agroecology that expands alongside the global farmers' movement led by La Via Campesina (i.e. one that promotes farmers' well-being, sustainable agriculture, local heirloom preservation, and environmental justice); the dissemination of political education regarding permaculture has exhibited a tendency toward segmentation (i.e. especially due to its historically unacknowledged appropriation of Aboriginal cultural practices, from where permaculture flourishes).<sup>30</sup>

Compared to organic food alternatives that was favoured only among particular sections in the society, the zero-waste movement in Indonesia is relatively easier to develop into a popular movement because its promotion was galvanized by the exposure of the digital media that has greater accessibility.<sup>31</sup> Thus, despite its initial prevalence among the middle class, the latter movement has successfully expanded its support base and, since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, has even managed to incorporate the alternative food movement into its fold.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the worldwide popularity of zero-waste movement is not without its critics. Müller and Schönbauer, for instance, argue that zero-waste movement was firstly developed among middle-class white women in North America and Europe and their advises to individuals around the

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<sup>26</sup> Field visit and observation. David Wahyudi and Ardy Ardiansyah, "Perceptions of young consumers toward organic food in Indonesia," *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology* 13, no 4 (December 2017). DOI: 10.1504/IJARGE.2017.10009400

<sup>27</sup> Field visit and observation. See also Estu P. Wilujeng, "Facing paradoxical identities: How Indonesian organic food community unify consumers and environmentalist identities," *Simulacra* 4, no 1 (June 2021), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v4i1.10002>

<sup>28</sup> Field visit and observation

<sup>29</sup> Field visit and observation

<sup>30</sup> Field visit and observation. See also Terry Leahy. *The Politics of Permaculture* (London: Fireworks/Pluto Press, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> Field visit and observation

<sup>32</sup> Wilujeng, loc cit.

world to adopt environmentally friendly personal lifestyle changes was basically devious. These changes include purchasing local and organic products at farmer's markets or bulk stores, engaging in do-it-yourself practices such as making cleaning products and cosmetics, and altering consumption habits to prioritize second-hand goods. But rather than perceiving this transition narrative in a positive light, the authors view it as problematic. To the authors, the argument of the narrative is not only selfish in nature, but also full of prejudice, as it fails to acknowledge that the ability to adopt new consumption habits requires certain resources such as leisure time, stable finances, and socio-cultural qualifications that cannot be shared equally among different races, ethnics, and classes in society. Therefore, in their assessment, this movement is not connected to the struggle for environmental justice, nor it contributes to creating a more equitable and inclusive society. In fact, they claimed, it further exacerbates social differences and alienation.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, despite a similar tendency, the zero-waste movement in Indonesia has in fact evolved into a highly active movement at the grassroots level. Participants of this movement includes individuals and organizations or communities, from variety of backgrounds, diverse age group<sup>34</sup> and religious affiliation.<sup>35</sup> Besides the presence of religious or spiritual factors,<sup>36</sup> access to the internet and communities of practice are also significant elements that influence its proliferation. Either online or offline, communities of practice provide access to learning as well as social engagement that helps sustain personal motivation. As we will further see in the analysis, other than technological affordance, timing was also another important aspect to the proliferated acceptance of sustainable living practice.

## B. Analysis

The place of mothers in everyday sustainability practice in Indonesia is noteworthy. Not only did it imply an emphasis on the value of the family in Indonesian society, with the mothers playing a significant role, but it also implies religious and cultural beliefs that highlight the woman's important position as an educator within the home.

Centred on the household, sustainable living practice ranges from reducing food waste, minimizing plastic waste, to gardening edibles at home. In terms of food waste reduction, their main method was composting, extending food's life use, and repurposing food scraps and leftovers. In minimizing plastic waste, their main method was to avoid the single use plastic packaging and, if at all, to make ecobrick or to send plastic waste to the Waste Bank. Apart from the latter, the earlier activities were mostly initiated, executed, and revamped by the mothers. It is to this point that, following MacGregor and other critics, environmental care work was believed to negatively affect the mothers in ways that it becomes an additional household burden that is socially charged upon women in the family.

Interestingly, my study found that, despite the feeling of being overwhelmed by the weight of the chores, the mothers were able to navigate the challenge. There are a number of factors that positively contribute to their ability to navigate, including encounters with likeminded people and the motivation they received from them, access to community of practices, public acceptance and recognition to their works, as well as capability to improve the competence and their feeling of accomplishment. Many of which factors are partially enabled by social media and another partially by experience. Social media

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth Müller and Sarah Schönbauer, "Zero waste-zero justice?" *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 6 (2020), 416-420. DOI:10.17351/ests2020.649

<sup>34</sup> Field work and observation. See also Genoveva and Jhanghiz Syahrivar, "Green Lifestyle among Indonesian Millennials: A Comparative Study between Asia and Europe," *Journal of Environmental Accounting and Management* 8, no 4 (May 2020), 397-413. DOI:10.5890/JEAM.2020.012.007

<sup>35</sup> Field work and observation. For comparison, see Maxime C. van der Laarse, "Environmentalism in Indonesia Today: Environmental Organisations, Green Communities, and Individual Sustainable Lifestyles," (Master's Thesis, Leiden University, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Field work and observation. See also David Efendi, Nanang Indra Kurniawan, and Purwo Santoso, "From Fiqh to Political Advocacy: Muhammadiyah's Ecological Movement in the Post New Order Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 28, no 2 (2021) 349-384 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v28i2.14444



help these mothers to go beyond the distinction between public and private sphere by actively engaging in daily practices of learning, actualizing, and advocating environmental issues.

The capitalist system disregards the fact that the quality of life for the current and future generations of society is determined by care practices and not by economic transactions. Indeed, care is the sole mechanism by which living things can sustain, progress, and enhance their lives via regeneration and intergenerational mechanisms.<sup>37</sup> Ecofeminism holds that no change is possible so long as the trajectory and orientation of the current system remain unchanged. The proposition to reinstate the political significance of care through the conceptualization of care as work is, therefore, valuable, especially because it addresses the need to reform infrastructure and policy that encourage the promotion of care as a social goods, but it is not devoid of peril as well, specifically when market approach, or economic incentives, become a measure of the value of work itself.

Rather than sporadic, sustainable living practices in Indonesia also have the potential to transform into collective moral and spiritual movement with environmental political significance that emerge from everyday learning. The idea echoed by Merchant regarding the importance of developing ethical partnerships between humans and non-humans, for example, can be fostered through the practice of composting, which have been widely implemented at the family and community levels.<sup>38</sup> Also, seeing the environment as something inherent in one's personal body can be conveyed by being conscious of one's health and consuming nutritious and unprocessed food from local resources, that are widely echoed by the organic food movement. Having said this, mothers who practice sustainable living demonstrate their concern for the environment by investing in sustainable environmental education.

Environmental education is the heart of environmental care work in household based sustainable living practice. Seeing care activities as “work” in Arendtian sense of meaning is seeing it as a form of long-term investment. Arendt believed that human performs three types of activities in their life: labor, work, and action. Humans engage in *labor* when they engage in consumption activities to satiate their biological requirements, in *work* when they make efforts to create something that can be enjoyed for a long time, and in *action* when they engage in activities with one another. She positioned *work* as a process of fabrication or production of things, be it material or immaterial. In light of this interpretation, regulations, laws, and norms are parts of the immaterial things produced, while technological devices (including social media), cash money, transportation vehicles, or built infrastructures are the material ones. Here, what characterizes a *product of work* is the durability, the long-lasting and possible creation of in-between space, where *action* may be facilitated. It is to this interpretation that the article sees the value of household environmental care work that these mothers perform as a real manifestation of home-based environmental education, one that has lasting impression in the course of one's life and that may even continue to a series of environmental thinking, judging, works, or actions.

Many Feminists envision household care work as unequal labor relations, an attitude that has split many Ecofeminists into two dividing group, one that agrees and one that disagrees. But, the interpretation of unequal labor relations within the concept of care work may be seen in an intergenerational form of education, that may confound the heuristically devised private/public and victim/agent distinction. Deeper than merely transferring knowledge, intergenerational form of education instils a landscape of political perspective, ecological values, ethical principles, and embodied experiences, that creates possibilities of one's environmental actions in the future.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Joan C. Tronto, Berenice Fisher, “Toward A Feminist Theory of Caring,” in *Circles of Care*, eds. E. Abel and M. Nelson (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 36-54

<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The death of nature: Women, ecology and the scientific revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); *Radical ecology: The search for a livable world* (New York: Routledge, 1992); *Autonomous nature: Problems of prediction and control from ancient times to the scientific revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Bronislaw Szerszynski, “Technology, performance, and life itself: Hannah Arendt and the fate of nature,” *The Sociological Review* 51, no 2 (2003), 203-218, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2004.00459.x>

Similarly, seeing social media as a product of work means to see it in its immense possibilities. Arendt explained how people's work shapes the world of human artifacts, where social media is a part of. In the phenomenon of sustainable living practice, social media has helped facilitate communication, understanding, and cooperation among individuals. To be a part of the world means to share in the culture's relics, to live in an environment conducive to dialogue and action in the long run.

Unlike the more conservative form of public or private space, social media enables a conflated form of public/private as well as victim/agent instrument. For these mothers, social media not only serves as a medium of learning and an effective tool for engaging the public with environmental issues and causes, but also an instrument that helps them coping with the daily struggles of dealing with environmental work load in their private life. Through social media, these women are able to appear in front of the people, to be seen and to be heard. In social media, these mothers deliver the environmental message that is profoundly personal, based on their own experience of practicing sustainable living. Far from being sterile, the social media attracts attentions of those who have similar propensity like them and aspire the same.

In order to transcend the public/private and agent/victim dichotomies surrounding the practice of sustainable living, this paper proposes viewing environmental care through the lens of its inherent political worth: politics as performance, which is not predicated on outcomes, but rather on the ongoing and continuous implementation of political actions in everyday life. In the context of sustainable living, this action is implemented as activism that is actualized in daily life, serves not only to preserve the environment or to foster meaningful connections with the people around them through care, but also to project a foreseeable future that through present action.

Indeed, it is this prefigurative form of activism that these mothers are actually signing in. In prefigurative politics, people express their political dissatisfaction to the established system by employing the political ends of their actions (i.e. sustainable living) through their means, such that it provides an alternative and a protest at the same time.<sup>40</sup> Whereas social media help distribute the campaigns on sustainable living, it is not until the Covid pandemic struck the world that these practices evolved into a massive movement. During the pandemic, many communities arose and thrived as individuals sought to relieve boredom and uncertainty by embracing new habits like waste reduction, gardening, and other sustainable living activities. Many turns to sustainable living practice as an alternative lifestyle and livelihood. The Covid pandemic contributed to the growth of the zero-waste movement and strengthened the shifts from largely individual-based initiatives to an expansion of multiple communities of practice.

Aside from the pandemic, the Palestinian resistance revolt on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, has helped to shape the movement's trajectory. The Palestinian's uprising, followed by the global exposure of the genocide of Palestinians by US- and EU-backed Zionist settler colonials, has transformed green consumerism and zero waste movements into a political form of globally collectivized individual action linked to the larger BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction) movement. Many mothers who have already practiced sustainable living under my observation join this worldwide movement to resist the occupation and the Empire, thereby solidifying their political base. Their goal is reached not only by boycotting any mass-produced commodities and services associated with Israel or the practice of occupation in Palestine, but also by developing an alternative mode of consumption that does not rely on mass-produced items on the market. As a result, rather than simply promoting local products as an alternative to mass-produced ones with Israeli ties, they advocate for a more sustainable consumption and a change in people's daily consumption, many of which practices have already been implemented in their daily lives long before the news of Israel's genocide in Palestine gained global attention.

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<sup>40</sup> See Luke Yates, "Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no 1 (2015), 1-21, DOI: 10.1080/14742837.2013.870883

## Conclusion

This paper attempts to assess the relative importance of sustainable living practice within the spectrum of pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism. This effort is carried out in two steps. First, it examines the progression of the environmental care discourse within Ecofeminism as it grapples with the depoliticization of the value of care in capitalist society and embraces the notion of work. Second, it tries to overcome the public/private and agent/victim dualism inherent with the attachment of the concept of care as pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism.

Availing from the case of Indonesia, this paper contends that the prevailing dichotomy between pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism is not as rigid as it has historically been presented in conjunction with the concept of the work. Sustainable living practice manoeuvres dynamically between preexisting dichotomies when work is regarded as an investment in education that connects the present and the future. When sustainable living practices in the private sphere are transmitted, mothers have already assumed the role of agents for the public. However, this transmission is only feasible because mothers have instigated modifications in their everyday practices. Consequentially, it is erroneous to consider pro-environmental behaviour as being in opposition to environmental activism: it is the present pro-environmental behaviour that may likely create the future environmental activists. Therefore, rather than dwelling on the public/private or agent/victim dichotomy, sustainable living practice need to be seen in its unlimited political potential as everyday action.

The utilization of case study method help reveals that sustainable living practices in Indonesia, as in elsewhere, is aided by social media. Furthermore, the case of Indonesia exemplifies another significant aspect, namely the educational focus of the daily practices. This educational orientation is inescapable as it intertwines with cultural and religious elements, which position mothers as the primary educators in the family. When translated in social media activities, the role of mothers in education has bridge the private/public as well as agent/victim distinction. Ultimately, the moral and spiritual weight of the movement has transformed the movement's character from originally individualistic to collectivistic, partly as a response to the global dynamics of the Covid pandemic and the ongoing occupation of Palestine.

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