

Indonesia: Forget Jakarta - Nusantara from an Ecofeminist Perspective

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The move of Indonesia's capital city from Jakarta to Nusantara on Borneo cannot erase the socio-ecological cost of environmental damages, despite the claims of sustainability and economic growth for the new capital city. The prospect of physically shifting to a different landscape allows a 'new reality' to forget what was there before, but the nature of Capitalism is frontier-seeking, and the challenge for policymakers is to address long-term ecological solutions, rather than the limited view of short-term gains.

Jakarta will no longer be the capital city of Indonesia. This year, the construction of [Indonesia's new capital](#) ('*Ibukota Negara*' in Bahasa Indonesia, also known as 'IKN') Nusantara (with the meaning 'archipelago' from Old Javanese), begins in East Kalimantan province on Borneo Island, reaching the North Penajam Paser and Kutai Kartanegara regencies. Climate change impacts and disasters are among the reasons for the capital movement, promising the newly made location will be 'eco-friendly' under the tagline 'City in the Forest'. The plan is to 'fix' socio-ecological issues with sustainable development initiatives under the promise of green, modern, and net-zero emissions ambitions.

The ecofeminist perspective of this article will look at the logic of human domination over nature to cause the socio-ecological effects to expose inherent biases that prevail surrounding the "fantasy of a new world" in Borneo Island - one of them as a "techno-fix" ([Haraway, 2016](#)). Instead of implicating humanity as the driver of planetary transformation in the Anthropocene era, an alternative designation of the Capitalocene is presented to recenter the role of market and neoliberalism in a 'technified' landscape of the new [IKN](#), Nusantara.

The monsters and ghosts of our time

We live and witness our capital move in the Anthropocene, a geological period in which human activities are the dominant force changing the Earth's ecological processes toward the sixth mass extinction. Jakarta has been the gravity of Indonesia's development, attracting many people to inhabit the city sphere. Within the centuries of human activities dominating Jakarta's space, myriad non-human species have become extinct due to habitat destruction. Anna L. Tsing, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, introduces [Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene](#) (2017) as a timely reminder that we need a collaborative survival of human - and more-than-human - to survive in a global-scale disaster and climate crisis. The Anthropocene's monsters and ghosts are not the supernatural creepy inhuman creatures; instead, they are the more-than-human entities of environmental degradation that we have ignored, neglected, and underestimated. Take a mosquito, for example; they may seem innocuous in an extensive swampy area, the historical landscape ground of Jakarta. Wetland native vegetations in Jakarta naturally preserve mosquito predators and absorb flood water with their dense root systems and foliage. Replacing natural drainage areas with a human-created pretentious concrete jungle not only destroys the mangrove ecosystem to prevent flooding, but also creates a

livability hybrid space for symbiotic entanglements of monsters, like *Aedes aegypti* mosquitos confronting human space with the threat of dengue hemorrhagic fever. From the first outbreak in Jakarta in 1968, it is still endemic in densely inhabited cities in Indonesia, and now entangled with the presence of the global pandemic of COVID-19.

Jakarta on Java Island, the once-upon-a-time largest metropolitan area in Southeast Asia, has lost its ecological capacity to support the urban livelihood of more than 30 million people (covering its peripheries). In between flooding, access to groundwater is lacking, just like the premise of the [OECD Principles on Water Governance](#) (2015): water is a critical issue when it is “too much,” “too little,” and “too polluted.” As the megacity has been the hub of economic activities since the pre-Dutch colonial era, the cascading anthropogenic environmental disturbance (overcrowded, traffic congestion, air-land-water pollution, excessive extraction of groundwater use) are inescapable. Exaggerated by climate change impacts, as shown by many studies, Jakarta will be submerged because of the increased sea level by 2050.

Despite the efforts to relocate to the new capital city, Jakarta remains the old capital home of economic activities. Rapid human growth remains to keep inhabiting, consuming, extracting, and dominating the urban landscape, where the dynamism of capital cities and climate change deplete “the web of life” (Moore, 2005) of numerous organisms entwined in the political, economic, and cultural systems. Jakarta still pays the socio-ecological cost for the irreversible environmental damages while the existential threats from COVID-19 and climate change are persistent. The moving of the capital city will be a quick techno-fix solution to relocate the power arena into a new (C)apital frontier in support of eco-modernist claim without actually reversing the root of multispecies extinction towards a sustainable city.

Borneo Island, home of the world’s biggest rainforest and biodiversity hotspot, is not *Terra nullius* (nobody’s land) ([Plumwood, 1993](#)) to build the new city of IKN from scratch. Nusantara is already a “haunted landscape” of the ghosts of neoliberal Capitalism, human, and more-than-human traces from the multiple pasts, noticing the *Longue durée* of environmental destruction. In this sense, climate crisis and global warming are not merely anthropogenic; it is capitalistic. Jason W. Moore, a professor of sociology at the University of Binghamton, suggests renaming the Anthropocene into the ‘Capitalocene’ to blame for global environmental changes on the logic of Capital, the concentration of power in the hands of the elite, the patriarchal power structure, and the destructive logic of techno-scientific industrial extractive Capitalism. Humans do not inherently deforest and appropriate the ancestral community lands, expand pulp, rubber, and oil palm plantations, operate mining construction on a large and rapid scale, or illegally process commercial logging – Capitalism does.

Based on Moore’s understanding, Capitalism can move from one historical nature to another ([Moore, 2015](#)), expanding from one place to the next, transforming socio-ecological relations, producing more and more kinds of goods and services that circulate through an expanding series of exchanges. Frontier expansion is integral to Capitalism’s ability to sustain ongoing accumulation (Moore, 2015; [2018](#)). According to [Moore \(2017\)](#), “capitalism not only has frontiers; it exists only through frontiers”. Concurrently, in global capitalism discourse, women and the Earth are exploited as cost-free or cheap resources. Therefore, the Capitalocene is a fundamental orienting argument that our era of human destruction has trained our eyes only on the immediate promises of power and profits, focusing on now, biased with the term sustainability that is merely anthropogenic.

Blind spots in Anthropogenic/Capitalogenic policy myopia

Val Plumwood, best known for her book [Feminism and the Mastery of Nature](#) (1993), is a key figure in ecofeminism. She criticizes the simplistic dichotomies of ‘nature-culture’, ‘female-male’, and

'savage-civilized' as an ideology that underpins human superiority and nature's inferiority, resulting in the "master rationality" of a mechanistic development project that hyper-separate "interspecies communication" ([Plumwood, 1997](#)), generating "blind spots" (Plumwood, 1993) that threaten the survival of the multispecies that humans are evolved and interdependent. Humans have detached themselves from nature and admitted that humanity is alone in controlling their complex social, political, economic, cultural, and ethical aspects. Alarmingly, the shifting baseline syndrome foregrounds admiration to the new landscape as the new reality to forget what was there before.

North Penajam Paser and Kutai Kartanegara regencies are lands given by nature and protected by their ancestors. The existing neoliberal Capitalist system is built upon oppression against women in their homeland and the destruction of nature, allowing men to master nature and dominate women in unequal power and economic benefits. Indigenous women are less likely to be strategic as decision-makers. Their livelihood space for farming and foraging is reduced by expanding industrial infrastructure. Floods destroyed their lands leading to crop failures. Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist and ecofeminist mentions that "capitalism is gendered, racialized, and anti-nature in both cultural assumptions and economic instruments" to reach the point where "the marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand" ([2014](#)). Women are central to biodiversity conservation allowing the reproductive cycles of the Earth to sustain life because "they work between 'sectors' and because they perform multiple tasks" (Shiva, 2014). However, as Shiva argues, "women produce through biodiversity, whereas corporate scientists produce through uniformity" to describe how the 'sacred' position of women to maintain diversity on the Earth is perverted by the world patriarchal capitalist system.

Our current conditions in the Anthropocene/Capitalocene are no longer just about climate change; we are now living in a terrifying state of "a new climatic regime" of climate collapse ([Latour, 2017](#)). Under the promise of sustainable development and economic growth, a critical challenge for policymakers responding to the monstrous-ghostly landscape is not to fall into the myopic policy responses to address short-term issues rather than long-term ecological solutions. [Mies \(1986\)](#) further argues the need to replace the scientific standpoint that she describes as the "view from above" with "the view from below" to participate in the women's struggle, especially the indigenous female, contextually in building the new capital city of Nusantara.

Philosopher Glenn Albrecht (2005) coined the term "Solastalgia", a lexicon to describe the melancholic feeling of homesickness experienced by individuals while they are actually at home. There is a disconnection between humans and their home environment with a sense of powerlessness over the unstoppable ecological change process for the worse. Environmental degradations, natural disasters, and global development are intertwined and altering the more-urbanized landscape, overwhelming the human population with rapid alterations in their lived experience of the world and their ability to understand it. The damaging alteration produces environmental-based anxiety, pain, and distress to losing a once-comforting environment close to home. Forget Jakarta, meet Nusantara.

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