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## **Performances and Rituals for Environmental Campaigns: Structures, Discourses, and Postcolonial Ecocriticism**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses some performing arts and rituals that carry the environmental theme in Jember. Artists and village governments respond creatively to environmental problems by creating several multi-form events, combining performances and certain rituals. We will use postcolonial ecocriticism as a theoretical framework to discuss some of their produced show events. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes analysis to reveal how cultural texts present current ecological problems as a legacy of colonialism in aesthetic works that can function as advocacy and activism. The results of this study show that the performances and rituals develop critical awareness regarding environmental threats and problems in Jember and Indonesia. They bring the topic of the environment to invite the community to jointly maintain the sustainability of the human environment and criticize government policies to legitimize the destruction of nature in the name of development.

[Artikel ini akan mengkaji beberapa seni pertunjukan dan ritual yang mengusung tema penyelamatan dan pelestarian lingkungan di Jember. Para seniman dan pemerintah desa merespons secara kreatif permasalahan lingkungan dengan membuat beberapa even multibentuk, menggabungkan pertunjukan dan ritual ritual tertentu. Untuk membahas beberapa even pertunjukan yang mereka buat, kami akan menggunakan ekokritik pascakolonial sebagai kerangka teoretis. Ekokritik pascakolonial menekankan pada analisis untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana teks kultural menghadirkan permasalahan ekologis masa kini sebagai warisan kolonialisme dalam bentuk karya estetik yang bisa berfungsi *advocacy* sekaligus *activism*. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa pertunjukan dan ritual di Jember mengembangkan kesadaran kritis terkait ancaman dan permasalahan lingkungan yang berlangsung di Jember dan Indonesia. Pertunjukan dan ritual tersebut membawakan topik lingkungan untuk mengajak masyarakat bersama-sama menjaga keberlanjutan lingkungan hidup manusia dan mengkritisi kebijakan pemerintah untuk melegitimasi perusakan alam atas nama pembangunan.]

**Keywords:** performances; postcolonial ecocriticism; ecological arts; exploitation; ecological campaign

### **Introduction**

In 2017, 2018, and 2022, the Jember Arts Council collaborated with the government of several villages and held multi-form events, combining performances and rituals, in Jember Regency, East Java. In 2017-2018 they held *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang* in Mumbulsari Subdistrict. In a lively event in 2022, they held *Krida Sinatria Bhumi*

*Watangan* in the Wuluhan Subdistrict. The primary purpose of the events involving hundreds of artists, students, and villagers was to invite the public back to realize the importance of protecting the natural environment, which is their living space. In Jember, during the last few decades, there have been severe environmental problems. They plan to mine forest areas on the edge of the Indonesian Ocean, clear natural forests for plantation and agricultural purposes, pile plastic up in river mouths, cultivate shrimp ponds on the coastal border, and do other activities. Because *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang* and *Krida Sinatria Bhumi Watangan* were created in response to environmental problems, we can call them *ecological arts*.

Ecological art is a creative process that responds to various environmental damage in this hemisphere, educates people about the ecological crisis and alternative solutions, and fosters respect for the natural environment. This art promotes the importance of the environment and the community's involvement in environmental restoration.<sup>1</sup> One of the trends that developed until the end of the 20th century was installation art (art combining various genres, such as painting, sculpture, etc.) to educate the public about the vital role of nature in human life, including aesthetic creativity.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the form chosen by the artists, this art strives to continue communicating principles that can be present in various media to convey the message that the environment in which humans live and its contents are in crisis.<sup>3</sup> Ecological art has various forms in its development, including sculpture, painting, photography, video art, film, musical presentations, environmental installations, poetry, dance, and many others.

Ecological art aims to build community awareness or society to continue to live life, not only with technical works but also through aesthetic works that can entertain and invite people to continue to do

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Lipton and Tricia Watts. 2004. *Ecological Aesthetics, Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice* (Basel: Birkhäuser Publishers, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandra Mańczak, "The Ecological Imperative: Elements of Nature in Late Twentieth-Century Art," *Leonardo* 35, no. 2 (2002): 131–136, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/6/article/19822/pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Wallen, "Of Story and Place: Communicating Ecological Principles through Art," *Leonardo* 36, no. 3 (2003): 179–185, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002409403321921370walle>.

something for environmental sustainability.<sup>4</sup> This purpose also confirms the artists' political commitment to providing the public with knowledge through creative works on various environmental problems.<sup>5</sup> In this understanding, ecological art is a creative work involving not only artists but also community members and experts from biology, geology, architecture, civil engineering, and others. Community involvement can have positive implications, namely that artists can disseminate educational ideas, promote ecological awareness, and instill conservation values in future generations through fun activities.<sup>6</sup>

This paper analyzes field data from *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang* 2017 - 2018 and *Krida Sinatria Bhumi Watangan* 2022, primarily to discuss the aesthetic aspects of the performance structure, discourse, and criticism of ecological problems in Jember and Indonesia. Our analysis will reveal how the performances and rituals respond to environmental issues in Jember and Indonesia as a legacy of colonialism and discourses useful for advocacy and mobilizing activism. In addition, through this paper, we try to contribute to enriching studies with a focus on art for ecological issues in Indonesia.

## Methods

We cannot only explain them descriptively to understand cultural texts that present environmental problems as an aesthetic structure. Ecological problems in cultural texts produced in the postcolonial present indeed respond aesthetically to the conditions in life. However, when talking about environmental issues, we cannot ignore the fact that it is an undeniable legacy of the colonial past continued by the postcolonial government regime. The colonial practice of exploiting nature in colonized countries for the benefit of commercial plantations, monoculture agriculture, and mining became the

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<sup>4</sup> Young Imm Kang Song, "Community Participatory Ecological Art and Education," *Jade* 28, no. 1 (2009): 4-13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2009.01588.x>.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas J. Bullot, "The Functions of Environmental Art," *Leonardo* 47, no. 5(2014): 511-512, [https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON\\_a\\_00828](https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON_a_00828).

<sup>6</sup> Susan K. Jacobson, Mallory D. Mcduff, and Martha C. Monroe, "Promoting Conservation through the Arts: Outreach for Hearts and Minds," *Conservation Biology* 21, no. 1 (2007): 7-10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4124633>. See Hilary Inwood, "Mapping Eco-Art Education," *Canadian Review of Art Education* 35 (2008): 58-60. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ822675>.

forerunner of various policies and actions the postcolonial government took in treating natural and mineral resources. This understanding is the theoretical heart of *postcolonial ecocriticism*.<sup>7</sup>

Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes the importance of understanding 'aesthetics committed to politics,' where aesthetic work does not only describe environmental problems amid society.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the aesthetic sequence that forms the structure of the text needs to be critically reviewed about the historical context of the origins of environmental problems that have been going on from colonial to postcolonial times. Thus, the analysis can show the position of cultural texts, especially their discourses and criticisms, which can be the basis for advocacy that can provoke social actions to save the environment so that the analysis is actively involved in ecological issues. Advocacy interests show that postcolonial ecocriticism has a political goal of engaging in eco-cultural movements on environmental issues.<sup>9</sup> So, it is not only sophisticated in analysis but only becomes beautiful writing that does not dare to relate it to various contexts and interests, both involving the government and the capitalists.

Postcolonial ecocriticism continues to prioritize the aesthetic function of cultural texts, such as literary works and performing arts, while focusing on their social and political uses, particularly their capacity to offer symbolic direction for the material transformation of the universe.<sup>10</sup> In this case, it is preparing a discourse that allows readers and viewers to engage in concrete actions to improve the condition of damaged ecosystems or prevent damage from occurring. Activism, therefore, cannot be separated from postcolonial ecocriticism because, in addition to preparing a group of discourses to fight the domination and exploitation of the ruling groups and investors, it also inspires the birth of an ecological struggle.

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<sup>7</sup> Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, 14.

With the theoretical framework above, we will first analyze the various forms of performance that combine folk art in Jember with rituals related to the earth to understand the local community. This analysis is essential to explain the dynamics of performances and discourse production associated with the importance of harmonious relations between humans and nature, wildlife, ecological disasters, the contribution of women in dealing with environmental problems, mythological creatures, and other discourses. These discourses are a form of the ecological campaign amid environmental problems in Jember, in particular, and Indonesia, in general.

The analysis of various aesthetic forms and discourses constructed in the performance is the basis for the assumption that artists want to criticize the Indonesian government's impartiality towards the environment's future with policies that allow production activities that exploit natural resources with little regard for the negative impacts. Various discourses and development practices that the government has been and will continue to carry out are criticized for exploitative actions that destroy many ecosystems. Such exploitation and destruction are colonial actions still taking place amid postcolonial conditions.

## **Results**

### **Performances for Environmental Issues: *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang***

Environmental problems require comprehensive multidisciplinary approaches to provide alternative solutions or movements. One of the approaches is using performing arts and rituals to campaign for the need to harmonize with the natural environment. When people in an area ignore the harmony principle, they usually will no longer pay attention to regional land management, which promotes relations between humans, the natural environment, and other creatures that live on earth. Environmental management for the benefit of humans, such as agriculture and plantations, ignores the rules related to the sustainability of ecosystems in an area. So, one alternative is re-inviting the community to understand and apply particular harmony principles in environmental management through ecological arts such as performing arts and rituals.

In 2017-2018, the Jember Arts Council collaborated with several village governments and junior high schools in Mumbulsari

Subdistrict, Jember, East Java, and held *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang* (Devotion to Earth in Mount Mayang). We read the event under the hills, which residents call Gunung Mayang, as a creative response to the depletion of natural forests on the slopes due to the conversion to agriculture legalized by state policy. The ecological problem is the lack of water for residents' agriculture and daily needs. Although the land conversion for various crops such as corn and coffee is challenging, at least with this activity, residents are invited not to expand the clearing area in natural forest areas because they will experience the negative impact.

### ***Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang 2017***

In 2017, *Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang* (hereinafter BBGM) presented a colossal performance involving artists, students, and community members. The central theme was forest and water. The performance began with the attraction of several paragliding athletes who flew from the top of Mount Mayang and landed on the village field as the venue. The athletes handed a *kentongan*, a musical instrument made from bamboo, to Regent Faida, who then beat it as a sign of the event's opening. After giving a speech, Regent Faida gave saplings to villagers to plant on lands on the forest's edge and in their yards. As a series of opening ceremonies, the handover of the tree seedlings is a formal invitation to *thethelan* community, residents of the edge of the forest who depend on their lives by looking for firewood or farming by renting land to Perhutani (State-owned enterprises in forestry).

To instill empathy for the community's efforts to maintain forest areas, the artists, collaborating with junior high school students in Mumbulsari, held a colossal performance. Approximately two thousand spectators, from children to older people, watched in an orderly manner. They stood in a circle on the edge of the village square. They were very enthusiastic because there had never been a show like this. Structurally, this colossal show consists of several scenes that combine dance, theater, and music.

In the first scene, dozens of female dancers performed simple choreographic movements with the tree figures played by the actors. They danced happily, as did the trees that welcomed their presence and dance. The performers deliberately presented an atmosphere of joy to attract the villagers' attention so they could understand the messages constructed in it. This aspect of empathy is vital in the performance

because no matter how good a choreographic work is, the performance may fail to convey its message or discourse to the public if it cannot be enjoyed and understood by the audience. Indeed, what they dance was not a complicated attraction in contemporary dance. However, the dance represents a discourse on the harmonious relationship between humans and the forest.

Humans have no problem taking trees and other forest products according to their needs. Using according to need and not being greedy is crucial in human relations with nature. With this principle, the trees and animals will 'rejoice' when the community takes them for their living needs. Of course, the ideal discourse seems naive when juxtaposed with human greed, which tends to be exploitative and does not respect the traditional ecological knowledge inherited from the ancestors. Indeed, the harmonious relationship between humans and the forest is just a story, but that does not mean it has disappeared from the community's memories. The memory of utilizing the forest as necessary is what they present through a dance performed together between the female dancers and the trees.

In the next scene, dozens of male dancers entered, disrupting the women and the trees. They performed dance and theatrical actions that symbolized greedy people who exploited the forest for their economic interests. The teenage male dancers walked wide, laughing, crashing into the trees, and disturbing the female dancers. The women were in disarray, and the trees fell. Once again, they did not have complicated choreographic works. With such a structure, the scene represents discourse about greed to extract the maximum benefit from the forest, which makes modern humans' use of knowledge and technology exploitative and destructive. This discursive construction intertwines with the reality that tropical rainforest clearing has occurred in many parts of Indonesia, both for plantations and mining. The greedy capitalists get land concessions to clear forests. Then, they ignore the impact of environmental damage, dredge minerals that sell in the international market, or plant oil palm, rubber, and other commercial crops.

In the local scope, destroying forest areas in Jember is not a new problem. In the colonial age, the coming of private investors into the Jember area as a result of the campaign of economic liberalism in the Netherlands led to the clearing of many tropical rainforest areas to become new plantations, which gave extraordinary benefits to Dutch



investors.<sup>11</sup> The native workers cleared dense forests for rubber, coffee, cocoa, and tea plantations. Investors also grew tobacco and sugar cane. Migrants could plant food crops such as rice and corn to meet their food needs.

The need for land for settlement, especially for Javanese and Madurese ethnic communities and several other ethnic groups, was also increasing. Thus, discussing ecological problems today cannot leave its connection with environmental destruction as a result of exploitative practices in the colonial era that used indigenous lands for the economic interests of the government and investors.<sup>12</sup> Technological inventions such as advanced tools for plantation product management and sugar factories accelerated the production process with various wastes. Technology also contributed significantly to colonialism, accumulating economic benefits and environmental damage.<sup>13</sup>

*Colonial sustainability* is an appropriate term to describe how greedy humans, as represented through male dancers, continue to try to maximize profits by continuing the same process that the colonialists carried out in the postcolonial era. Investors freely destroy forest areas in the name of investments that the State legitimizes in the name of national development. The performers construct discourses of environmental destruction and human sadness after the male dancers succeed in destroying the forest. The female dancers suffered and walked on all fours to get drinking water. They found it difficult to get drinking water, the most vital need for humanity. Many of them were lying on the ground. With such a scene structure, the discourse of environmental damage that endangers human life becomes an ecological message.

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<sup>11</sup> Nawiyanto, "Berakhirnya Frontier Pertanian: Kajian Historis Wilayah Besuki, 1870-1970," *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya* 14, no. 1 (2012): 77-98, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v14i1.88>

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer L French, "Voices in the Wilderness: Environment, Colonialism, and Coloniality in Latin American Literature," *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 45, no. 2 (2012): 157-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08905762.2012.719766>. See also Jen Preston, "Racial Extractivism and White Settler Colonialism: An Examination of the Canadian Tar Sands Mega-Projects," *Cultural Studies* 31, no. 23 (2017): 353-375, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2017.1303432>.

<sup>13</sup> David Arnold, "Europe, Technology, and Colonialism in the 20th Century," *History and Technology: An International Journal* 21, no. 1 (2005): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07341510500037537>

Extensive environmental degradation has been a continuous process from the colonial to the postcolonial era. In many cases, indigenous communities experienced the adverse impacts directly, from the difficulty of eating and drinking due to the ecological crisis to disease and death, the ecocide-genocide nexus.<sup>14</sup> Massive exploitation of nature for mining and other capitalist production activities is one of the main factors for the occurrence of ecocide-genocides.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, developmentalism, which becomes the main formula for modernity projects in postcolonial countries, contributes to the ecocide-genocide nexus through a colonial transformation in policies to exploit nature on a large scale.<sup>16</sup> One should not ignore the destructive impact of environmental damage on human life and culture, which depends on their living space ecosystem.<sup>17</sup> In Indonesia, extractive industry investors continue to exploit and destroy forest areas with permits from the government. The government plots 159 million hectares of land for the extractive industry. Conversely, oil palm plantation conglomerates

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Crook, Damien Short, and Nigel South, "Ecocide, Genocide, Capitalism and Colonialism: Consequences for Indigenous Peoples and Global Ecosystems," *Theoretical Criminology* 22, no. 3 (2018): 305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480618787176>. See also, Michael J. Lynch, Averil Fegadel, and Michael A. Long, "Green Criminology and State-Corporate Crime: The Ecocide-Genocide Nexus with Examples from Nigeria," *Journal of Genocide Research*, (2020): 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1771998>. See also, Kübra Kalkandelen and Darren O'Byrne, "On Ecocide: Toward a Conceptual Framework," *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 3 (2017): 334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2017.1331857>.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Dunlap, "The Politics of Ecocide, Genocide and Megaprojects: Interrogating Natural Resource Extraction, Identity and the Normalization of Erasure," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23, no. 2 (2021): 212-35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1754051>. See Martin Crook and Damien Short, "Marx, Lemkin and the Genocide-Ecocide Nexus," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014): 301. See also Malayna Raftopoulos and Joanna Morley, "Ecocide in the Amazon: The Contested Politics of Environmental Rights in Brazil," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 24, no. 10 (2020): 1616-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2020.1746648>.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Crook and Damien Short, "Developmentalism and the Genocide-Ecocide Nexus," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2020): 22.

<sup>17</sup> Tim Lindgren, "Ecocide, Genocide and the Disregard of Alternative Life-Systems," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 4 (2018): 525-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2017.1397631>.

control 12.3 million hectares.<sup>18</sup> As a result, ecocide practices with quite sad impacts on humans and other living things, such as floods, landslides, fires, and droughts, continue to occur in Indonesia because of corporate actions to make maximum profits in the name of national development and people's welfare.

The scene of environmental destruction and the difficulty of human life construct the discourse of *environmental apocalypticism*, a condition resembling the apocalypse due to severe environmental damage.<sup>19</sup> Natural disasters due to the destruction of forest, mountain, and marine ecosystems occur in many places in Indonesia. Again, this is not only happening in the present era but has been since the colonial era. In postcolonial times, when development uses an exploitative model of natural wealth, damage to forest areas will continue to occur, and various disasters that cause material losses and loss of life will continue.

To save the forest ecosystem and recover from the long-suffering caused by the ecological crisis, in the next scene, several teenage female dancers invited dozens of other dancers to plant tree seedlings in damaged forest areas. They danced while planting saplings. The joy of planting signifies that efforts to save the environment that involve residents will work well when they get communal support because the community also needs the improvement of natural ecosystems for their lives. In addition, the choice to perform female dancers as the prominent figures who carry out a mission to save the environment is related to the figure of *Dewi Sri*, the fertility goddess in Javanese mythology. The dominant role of female dancers brings ecofeminism ideas that emphasize the role of women in dealing with ecological problems to ensure human life.<sup>20</sup> Women can participate in the movement by prioritizing efforts to maintain harmonious relations between humans and the natural environment despite the ongoing exploitation of nature.

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<sup>18</sup> Walhi, "Kondisi Lingkungan Hidup di Indonesia di Tengah Isu Pemanasan Global," (2021), <https://www.walhi.or.id/kondisi-lingkungan-hidup-di-indonesia-di-tengah-isu-pemanasan-global>.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86.

<sup>20</sup> Fred H. Besthorn and Diane Pearson McMillen, "The Oppression of Women and Nature: Ecofeminism as a Framework for an Expanded Ecological Social Work," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* 83, no. 3 (2002): 224-225, <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.20>



**Figure 1.** Dozens of Female Teenagers Dance and Bring Bamboo Containers

At the end of the performance, the residents could enjoy the benefits of forests for life, such as abundant water. The female dancers also expressed their joy by dancing. They took to the water in bamboo containers happily. We can see the effort to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature to continue living in the present and the future. Using the forest for human life is not bad, as long as humans can manage it wisely, not greedy and exploitative. Indeed, inviting people to behave in this way is not an easy matter. Many *thethelan* residents live on the forest's edge and clear forest areas for agricultural land with Perhutani's permission. However, it is never too late to invite them to maintain the remaining forest area in Mumbulsari. Because if they do not, *thethelan* residents will experience adverse impacts, such as diminishing water sources, which are very important for their lives. At least, as the next generation, the children and youth who attended this event could understand the ecological message that invites them always to take care of the forest so that their lives in the future will also continue.

### ***Bhakti Bhumi Gunung Mayang 2018***

BBGM 2018 continued to present cultural attractions that convey ecological messages to the public, both *thethelan* residents and other villagers in Mumbulsari Subdistrict. The committee gave the

show's title in BBGM 2018, *Watu Jubang Opera* (hereinafter WJO). Watu Jubang is the valley area under Mount Mayang. WJO combined dance, theatrical actions, and musical compositions to present ecological messages to the public, especially about 'environment, culture, and life.' Environmental sustainability will ensure human life in various cultures. On the other hand, we can use multiple cultures to campaign for the importance of caring for the environment.



**Figure 2.** The Performance of Can-Macanan Kadduk in BBGM 2018

After the opening ceremony, before WJO, two young male artists performed *can-macanan kadduk*, folk art in which the dancers wear masks resembling tiger heads equipped with the body, hand, and foot coverings made of burlap sacks (*kadduk*). During the colonial period, Madurese communities utilized *can-macanan kadduk* to scare and repel wild animals that wanted to eat food crops in the fields. In BBGM 2018, *can-macanan kadduk* represents wild animals that should be able to live in forest areas, but due to the greedy expansion of humans with various interests displacing their living space. Many cases in Sumatra, for example, show how there is a crisis of space for wild animals such as tigers to be increasingly threatened by the expansion of plantation and mining companies. As a result, tigers enter dwelling

areas, disturbing and threatening.<sup>21</sup> The conversion of land to plantations managed by large investors has drastically reduced the number of animals that fall prey to tigers, so they must enter dwelling areas to find food.<sup>22</sup> So, the entry of tigers into villages is not due to natural factors but because of the greed of investors who clear forests for plantations or mining.

The presence of *can-macanan kadduk*, as the opening show in BBGM 2018, shows that anything humans do to clear and change forest functions are an expansion and exploitation that can cause the extinction of other living things that should have the right to live. So, if people consider the actions of tigers or other wildlife disturbing human life, it all returns to the greed of humans who destroy forests for their commercial interests. In the show, two *can-macanan kadduk* alternately performed scenes of putting children in their mouths and putting them in their bodies. This scene represents the act of eating. Through this scene, the artists do not want to portray the horror of a tiger eating a human. Instead, they want to convey that when human expansionist actions threaten wildlife in the forest, wild animals can threaten human life. It all happened not because of the fault of the wild animals but because of human greed.



**Figure 3.** Teenagers Dance and Play Together in WJO

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<sup>21</sup> Ferri Aryanto, “Harimau masuk lagi ke permukiman warga transmigrasi di Mukomuko,” (2022), <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/2636425/harimau-masuk-lagi-ke-permukiman-warga-transmigrasi-di-mukomuko>.

<sup>22</sup> Masriadi, “Ternyata Ini Penyebab Harimau Masuk ke Permukiman dan Mangsa Ternak Warga Aceh,” (2019), <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2019/12/07/14385741/ternyata-ini-penyebab-harimau-masuk-ke-permukiman-dan-mangsa-ternak-warga?page=all>.

After the performance of *can-macanan kadduk*, which aimed to communicate the relationship between wild animals, forests, and humans, WJO began. More than 20 young women entered the arena and carried bamboo sticks. While singing children's songs in Madurese, they danced cheerfully in simple movements. No load. Of course, this cultural activity is scarce. It is rare for village girls to play together while singing local songs. After all, they experience modernity in various forms, from education, television, fashion, gadgets, cosmetics, and others.

The scene aims to represent the natural charm and culture of the village that was once felt and lived by teenagers who grew up simply. As a reminder, this scene tries to build empathy and memory that various cultures slowly disappear when human relations with the environment are increasingly out of harmony based on the everyday necessities of life. Indeed, the threat of the loss of community culture is not too crucial for the residents because of the presence of modern cultural values and practices that are more pleasant. However, destroying some forest-agrarian traditions will reduce the togetherness that binds them. This scene is a simple cultural event that invites the public to remember the traditions lost in the changing times.

In BBGM 2018, there was also a scene of greedy people cutting down trees in natural forests. The musical illustration features a chainsaw roaring to reinforce the meaning of gluttony. The combination of tree-cutting scenes and the sound of chainsaws represent the greed of big investors who are always eager to destroy the living space for flora and fauna to make profits with mining businesses and monoculture plantations. Many big investors and political elites in Indonesia control forests as the world's lungs. This scene discursively constructs siding with the farmers who cultivate crops for their daily needs. In many parts of Indonesia, such as Kalimantan, ethnic Dayak farmers, for example, have cultural mechanisms to manage land and are not greedy. Meanwhile, chainsaws of large companies owned by national and international investors are always ready to clear forests, replace them with oil palm and other commercial crops, or carry out extractive industry activities. Once again, this problem is inseparable from the role of the State in granting land concession permits.

The severity of forest damage and its impact on human life made the *Goddess of Guardians* have to intervene to overcome various

disasters caused by greedy humans. She ordered the nymphs who wore traditional clothes and brought containers made of bamboo to redistribute saplings. Meanwhile, the tree monsters came to overcome the forest destroyers. Goddesses, nymphs, and monsters are metaphors for positive forces from nature, especially the power to restore the universe's balance. However, humans also have this power if they are willing to realize the ecological sins they have committed through reflection and contemplation.

Furthermore, they must take concrete actions to save nature. Unfortunately, this realization is not easy. Not surprisingly, to facilitate the delivery of messages, goddesses, nymphs, and monsters are presented as savior forces that will bring goodness to humankind.

Presenting mythological creatures such as goddesses, nymphs, and monsters in the show is not just to make the show attractive and exciting. Moreover, their presence reminds residents that mythological creatures can be a metaphor for the forces of nature that will continue to provide human life. In the local community, cosmological beliefs and traditions state that humans do not live alone in the universe. They coexist with God's creatures, similar to the human world. Although these creatures are irrational for a modern reason, they also fill life and often contribute to the sustainability of human life, such as the guardians of big trees. Of course, regardless of presence or absence, oral stories about the guardians of big trees allow local people to be cautious in treating trees and forests because of their essential role in human life.



**Figure 4.** The Goddess of Guardians in WJO



The scene of the nymphs inviting all residents to plant saplings is the ending of WJO. This scene becomes an ecological message that only with this activity can we save the forest as a living space for many living creatures. As a popular movement, the government regime launched various programs for tree planting, such as planting a million trees. Unfortunately, these programs are often just a formality that costs billions of rupiah without precise results in the future. The reality shows that the campaign for a million trees becomes ironic when the government continues to legitimize the clearing of forests for plantation and mining purposes. The government campaigns for the need to preserve the environment but, at the same time, continue to destroy it in the name of economic interests. So, presenting the nymphs who invite young people to replant damaged forests with seedlings carries a mission of environmental sustainability, not lip service.

At the very least, the young performers give a creative message to the residents that planting is a human act to obtain real welfare. Restoring forest conditions will allow the growth and development of various flora and fauna that can be used wisely for the benefit of humans, including the return of water sources that began to disappear with the loss of large trees and bamboo. The following human task is to protect and care for it. For now, that is one of the tasks of human civilization amid an increasingly real threat of an ecological crisis. We can learn from junior high school teenagers willing to practice for more than a month to present at BBGM 2018.

Once again, the theatrical actions, dance, narration readings, and musical illustrations they present are simple. However, this confirms that there is no need for complicated rhetoric and aesthetic work to carry out cultural actions that support the ecological movement. Teenagers practice a love for the environment culturally. Teenagers facing bare hills daily offer an idea related to environmental awareness, which is the responsibility of human beings everywhere. This planet certainly needs more and more cultural events to continue to spread ecological awareness. Of course, other individuals or communities who carry out advocacy activities against forest edge residents, mining refusals, or greedy opponents of infrastructure projects must get the highest appreciation as part of a discursive formation to build an ecological movement.

WJO in BBGM 2018 and similar events will at least become cultural instruments to empower the ecological movement. The birth of

culture and the survival of human existence are inseparable from nature, which has given us many things. If humans do not want to provide straightforward returns for the sincerity given by nature, then we are just waiting for the extinction of this Adam-Eve descendant species. Humans' willingness to take care of nature will benefit them.

Bamboo, for example, can provide many life benefits, such as preserving water sources for making houses and food containers. In a small scope, WJO aims to re-engage the *thethelan* residents to plant perennials to provide ecological benefits without forbidding them to plant commercial plants as a way of life. However, in broad scope, this opera messages people throughout Jember, Indonesia, and planet Earth that they are responsible for the ecological movement. It is not only the responsibility of *thethelan* community.

### **Maintaining Watangan through *Krida Sinatria Bhumi Watangan***

*Mount Watangan* is the local term for the hilly area stretching south of Lojejer Village, Wuluhan Subdistrict, Jember. This area is directly adjacent to the Indonesian Ocean. Mount Watangan is a natural fortress that protects the Wuluhan area from the threat of a tsunami due to the megathrust earthquake in southern Java. Watangan also has rich biodiversity in the form of flora and fauna. The Dutch colonial government established the Watangan Puger Nature Reserve based on the Governor's Decree GB 83 Stbl 1919 Number 392 dated 11 July 1919 to protect the wealth of flora and fauna. In post-independence, the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia issued the Decree of Number 111/UM/1958 dated 22 July 1958 for the status of Watangan Puger Nature Reserve.

In the nature reserve area, there are various endemic flora and fauna.<sup>23</sup> For flora, we can find *bendo* (*Artocarpus elasticus*), *lo* (*Ficus racemosa*), *banyan* (*Ficus benghalensi*), *luwangan* (*Ficus hispida*), *kedoya* (*Dysoxylum gaudichaudianum*), *kepuh* (*Sterculia foetida*), *winong* (*Tetrameles nudiflora*), *guava* (*Psidium guajava* L), *juwet* (*Syzygium cumini*), *salam* (*Syzygium polyanthum*), *sea hibiscus* (*Thespesia populnea*), *kesambi* (*Schleichera oleosa*), *rau*, *dadap serep* (*Erythrina subumbrans*), *tamarind* (*Tamarindus indica*), *klampis* (*Acacia tomentosa*), *sempur* (*Dillenia indica*), *asam londo*

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<sup>23</sup> BKSDA Jawa Timur, "Cagar Alam Watangan Puger," <https://bbksdajatim.org/cagar-alam-watangan-puger-i>.

(*Pithecellobium dulce*), teak (*Tectona grandis*), *nyamplung* (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), and *tanjung* (*Mimusops elengi*). Meanwhile, we can find gray monkeys, black monkeys, bats, birds, pythons, chameleons, and geckos for fauna. In the 1990s, Watangan still had many wild animals, such as bulls, panthers, and deers. In fact, during the dry season, several bulls and deer stray into the people's farming land, looking for water. Unfortunately, today, the animals are difficult to find. However, residents still claim to encounter deer and panthers. Of course, proving it requires in-depth research.

In addition to being a nature reserve area, in the middle to the bottom, especially those included in the Lojejer Village area, there is a teak forest area managed by Perhutani. Meanwhile, at the bottom is a settlement area of Javanese ethnicity and a fertile agricultural area. The farmers grow rice, secondary crops, cabbage, chilies, and others. Coconut trees also grow pretty well in residential areas. Villagers also go to the forest to look for animal feed, twigs for firewood, and grasshoppers. Once a year, the villagers will go into the forest to look for grasshoppers that usually eat teak leaves. In addition to side dishes, they also sell caught grasshoppers. The income from selling grasshoppers is enough to help the family's needs.

Even though it has a strategic position as a natural fortress and provides benefits for residents' lives, Mount Watangan's existence is not entirely safe. Perhutani converted the lower part of Watangan as an area for the East Java Southern Cross Line road project, which stretches from Pacitan to Banyuwangi. Many residents worry that the road project will enable investors to exploit the mineral content in the southern area of Jember, including Watangan. The case of Gunung Tumpang Pitu in Pesanggaran Subdistrict, Banyuwangi, proves that the natural fortress that protects the community's safety from the tsunami disaster may disappear when the central government grants mining approval. Moreover, the Silo area bordering the Indonesian Ocean has been designated as a mining area by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. The cement industries exploit the limestone hills of Puger, adjacent to Lojejer Village.

To campaign for the importance of preserving the ecosystem in Mount Watangan, the Lojejer Village Government and the Jember Arts Council held *Krida Sinatria Bhumi Watangan* in June 2022. *Krida Sinatria Bhumi Watangan* (hereinafter KSBW) means 'Actions of Knights to Defend the Watangan Area.' This event contains cultural,

environmental, and agriculture seminars, exploring ancient caves, *arak-arakan gunung* (a parade of crops shaped like mountains), and multi-form art performances.



**Figure 5.** Arak-arakkan Gunung in Lojejer, Gunung Watangan as the Background

*Arak-arakan gunung* is a popular procession during *Grebeg Maulud*, *Syawal*, and *Besar* rituals at the Yogyakarta and Surakarta Palaces. The popularity of the procession has prompted many communities elsewhere to imitate and organize similar events. A good and exciting cultural expression will usually quickly spread and be emulated by other communities, even though they are not part of the palace or major Javanese tradition. In *Grebeg* tradition, *arak-arakan gunung* is the most awaited part of the community because it symbolizes the prosperity of the palace family distributed to the community.<sup>24</sup> Many residents believe that whoever gets crops from the mountains will get good things, such as abundant harvest, healthy livestock, successful work, and more. Is it wrong? There is no need to look for wrong and right because each has its own beliefs and culture

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<sup>24</sup> Devina Patisara, "Grebeg Maulud Yogyakarta sebagai Simbol Islam Kejawaen yang Masih Dilindungi oleh Masyarakat dalam Perspektif Nilai Pancasila," *Jurnal Pancasila 1*, no. 2 (2020): 20, See also, Ahmad Adib & Kundharu Saddhono, "Paradigma Budaya Islam- Jawa dalam Gerebeg Maulud Kraton Surakarta," *Al-Qalam 35*, no. 2 (2018): 282-85, <https://doi.org/10.32678/alqalam.v30i2.1081>.

that was born from a long historical process and involves various factors. For Yogyakarta, who is accustomed to the palace tradition, which places the Sultan as a leader and role model, it is natural to position objects or things from the palace as a source of benefit. However, for Yogya residents with different beliefs and cultures, the *gunungan* attractions are interesting as a spectacle and tourist destination.

Residents who come from the Javanese community, even though they are far from the palace, such as in Jember, East Java, still connect the mountains they make and fight for with ideal meanings related to blessings, goodness, and benefits. Usually, added meaning relates to expressing gratitude to God Almighty. In addition, they still take on the cosmological meaning of mountains that provide many things for human life, even though they also offer disasters. In addition, *gunungan* symbolizes religious beliefs about the high power of God Almighty for human life.

The Lojejer Village Government and the residents involved in the procession believe that disseminating cultural and ecological meanings can remind them about the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with God Almighty, the natural environment, and all creatures. *Arak-arakkan gunungan* was held on the main road of Lojejer Village so thousands of residents could come to watch it. In addition to parading dozens of *gunungan*, the Village Head, village officials, community members, artists, and religious leaders also participated in the procession to Lojejer Village Hall. Dressed in traditional Javanese clothes, they enthusiastically participated in the entire procession.



**Figure 6.**

*gunungan*

In addition, the committee also presented *gambyong* dancers and a group of female teenagers who symbolized Watangan nymphs. The performance of *gambyong* dance symbolizes the expression of gratitude for soil fertility and the abundance of crops. This meaning comes from *gambyong*'s origin, which is usually danced in agricultural rituals as an expression of appreciation for the fertility and abundance of the harvest. The dancers of *gambyong* symbolize the goodness of Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility in Javanese mythology, who, even though she died, left behind the seeds of food plants and trees that were beneficial to human life on earth. To strengthen the meaning of fertility, the *gambyong* dancers in *arak-arakan gunung* wear green clothes with graceful movements that represent the motion of life in kindness, not greed that only brings disaster.

*Gambyong* is also an ecological discourse to maintain agricultural land in Watangan area, providing many benefits to residents. Preserving Watangan is the same as protecting agrarian regions, which play an essential role in life. Furthermore, the performance *gambyong* is a creative work to criticize against government policies related to environmental issues, especially in mining legalization, which often ignores the safety of residents. Proper forest management can provide economic welfare to community members compared to mining, benefiting only large investors. The government should prioritize forest conservation, which will impact the fertility of regional ecosystems and provide maximum benefits, instead of legitimizing mining and other businesses that damage forest areas and endanger human life.



**Figure 7.** The Group of ‘Watangan nymphs’

The presence of the ‘Watangan nymphs’ in red clothes who participate in the procession signifies the presence of natural powers that provide much goodness to humankind. Likewise, Watangan has given many things to the people of Lojejer and its surroundings. They can get forest wood for charcoal, abundant grass for animal feed, and firewood. However, when humans can no longer balance their lust to dredge the contents of Watangan greedily, the nymphs can become a disaster, ready to destroy human life and culture. Even if there are mineral mines in Watangan, it does not mean that the central government, provincial governments, and district governments can arbitrarily allow the exploration process to be the initial exploitation stage.

For the people, Watangan's existence is their life. Because the mining process destroyed Watangan, the potential for a tsunami due to the megathrust south of Java can sometimes be threatened. In addition, the sea breeze that blows directly into residential and agricultural areas will change the landscape and ecosystem, which requires residents to make long adaptations. The government should rethink these harmful consequences when allowing the mining industry.

The final part of *arak-arakkan gunung* was the distribution of various types of crops to the residents who gathered in front of the Lojejer Village Hall. After the religious leaders led the prayer, the committee threw the harvest to the residents. They also scrambled to get the crops because they believed they would get good in agricultural activities, work, or daily life, preventing them from calamities and disasters. This belief shows that although the villagers have enjoyed modernity in their daily lives, they still believe in some irrational things in modern logic.

This reality is not a problem in post-colonial conditions because villagers maintain traditional beliefs that make them comfortable amid modern life. What is most important is the ecological message of the distribution of the crops to the residents as conveyed by religious leaders. They are all invited to maintain a harmonious relationship with Almighty God, the natural environment, and other creatures in the universe. Humans will get much better if they do not destroy the environment God created. Goodness depends on human efforts to maintain agricultural areas, forests, rivers, water sources, etc. By bringing the crops back to their homes, at least, residents will do good

things so that their business will be successful, including continuing to pray to God Almighty and preserving the natural environment.

*Arak-arakan gunung*, involving various individuals and cultural expressions, confirms that it is true that rural communities are accustomed to living in modernity and commercial agricultural work. However, there is still space to mobilize Javanese culture-based solidarity for the ecological movement. Indeed, commercializing village space and forests has been going on for a long time since the colonial era when the Dutch and Japanese governments exploited natural and mineral resources for their benefit. In fact, since the New Order era, rural communities have become increasingly accustomed to capitalistic agriculture and consumption culture. The conversion of natural forests to production forests for extractive industries and plantations causes serious problems related to the living space of flora, fauna, and communities on the forest's edge. The government legally continues the colonial tradition of forest exploitation in the name of state income and community welfare.



**Figure 8.** The Residents Were Waiting for the Distribution of the Crops from Gunungan

Under these conditions, KSBW is the community's efforts to negotiate amid state power for environmental sustainability and natural fortresses that protect their lives. As the Javanese community living in modernity, the village government, artists, and the people of Lojejer use *arak-arakan gunung* to strengthen togetherness and solidarity in



carrying out the long struggle to defend Watangan. Javanese culture, which is no longer pure as a postcolonial characteristic, is a creative source to create ritual-based performances so that people can catch messages and invitations to take care of nature. Traditional aspects have become the primary material for building works, criticizing environmental problems caused by modernization as the primary goal of national development. Suppose traditional culture can give the community and government an ecological message through an annual ecological-cultural event. In that case, we can still hope that the environmental movement to preserve nature will still exist amid an increasingly common commercial and transactional culture.

### **Conclusion**

BBGM and KSBW are an aesthetic and discursive effort to disseminate the importance of maintaining natural forest areas and restoring damaged forests. By presenting figures representing mythological creatures such as forest guardian goddesses or fairies, tree monsters, and nymphs, the performers recalled the public's memory of fairy tales from the past when humans still feared destroying forests and nature. The presence of these figures facilitates the delivery of ecological messages and discourses to the community. Moreover, artists and residents can utilize mythological creatures that are unreasonable for modern reasons in times of environmental crisis due to greedy modernization as tropes for ecological campaigns through performances. They can create performances using mythological creatures to remind the public that modernization in the name of development without considering the harmonious relationship between humans and nature will only cause ecological disasters.

By presenting performances and rituals with gratitude for soil fertility, the abundance of crops, and the goodness of nature, the artists invite the residents to develop ecological awareness. Nature has given a lot to humans so that they can build societies, cultures, nations, and civilizations. When humans are reluctant to take suitable actions for nature, there is no need to be sad when the ecological apocalypse occurs with many disasters due to damage to natural ecosystems. So, citizens and the government should take concrete actions to save nature from more severe damage.

Furthermore, all the performances and rituals above criticize the government, which, in the name of progress and national development,

often makes policies that legitimize investors' greed. Political economy policies that provide convenience for extractive industries and monoculture plantations/agriculture are a continuation of similar policies in the colonial period. However, a development that legalizes the massive exploitation of natural and mineral resources results in serious environmental problems.

As a result, massive exploitation of the forest, mountain, and sea areas is ongoing. By presenting various tropes about wilderness, the goodness of nature, apocalypse, and mythological creatures, the performers compare the government on things that have good and bad impacts on the nation. The government should continue to find and practice a development formula that does not ignore the sustainability of natural ecosystems and human life. If the government cannot do that, it means that the Indonesian state system will continue to cause ecocides, which always have a deadly impact on the environment, humans, and human civilization.

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