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Hanya ada Satu Kata: Lawan! On decolonising and building a mutual collaborative research practice on gender and climate change

Katie McQuaid 🔘 and Desy Ayu Pirmasari 🔘

ABSTRACT

Our title is borrowed from a famous line of Wiji Thukul's poem *Peringatan* (translated as Warning), about the everyday lives of the working class and their struggles to be heard, resonating with many of our experiences in working to decolonise climate knowledge production. As in Thukul's words: 'There is only one word: Fight!' We critically reflect on our recent experiences working with artists, communities, activists, and practitioners to better understand the gender–age–urban interface of climate change: how climate impacts are shaped by gender and age in urban Indonesia. In a deliberate challenge to problematic conventions of academic publishing, we choose to frame this paper around a series of creative processes focused on women's experiences and responses to climate change, including Madihin – a Banjarese tradition of musical storytelling – and *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* (Transgender Superheroes for Climate). We centre these different forms of knowledge and voice in our discussion as a series of provocations for researchers and practitioners to think creatively about the languages we use, the methods we draw on, the collaborations we build, how we disseminate 'academic' knowledge, and to push at institutional barriers and the boundaries of what 'inclusion' truly means at each stage of our research processes. We explore how feminist, ethnographic, and arts-led methodologies can foreground knowledge, perspectives, and art forms that are traditionally excluded in climate change knowledge production – long dominated by colonial and patriarchal hegemonies (and tyrannies) of science and 'experts'; and unpack our un/learning in this imperfect 'fight' to decolonise our research process and build a mutual collaborative research practice.

Notre titre est tiré d'un vers célèbre du poème de Wiji Thukul « Peringatan » (traduit comme « Avertissement »), sur la vie quotidienne de la classe ouvrière et ses difficultés à se faire entendre, ce qui fait écho aux expériences de nombreux d'entre nous, qui cherchons à décoloniser la production de connaissances. Comme l'écrit Thukul : « Il n'y a qu'un mot : 'Lutter' ! ». Nous jetons un regard critique sur nos récentes expériences de travail avec des artistes, des communautés, des activistes et des praticiens afin de mieux comprendre l'interface genre–âge–milieu urbain du changement climatique : en quoi les impacts du changement climatique sont fonction du genre et de l'âge

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dans les zones urbaines de l'Indonésie. Nous lançons délibérément un défi aux conventions problématiques des publications universitaires et choisissons de structurer ce document autour d'une série de processus créatifs axés sur les expériences des femmes et leurs ripostes au changement climatique, y compris *Madihin* – une tradition banjar de contes musicaux, et *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* (super-héros transgenres pour le climat). Nous positionnons ces différentes formes de connaissances et de voix au centre de notre discussion comme une série de provocations pour pousser les chercheurs et les praticiens à réfléchir de manière créative aux langages que nous utilisons, aux méthodes dont nous nous inspirons, aux collaborations que nous bâtissons, à la manière dont nous diffusons les connaissances « universitaires », et à repousser les barrières institutionnelles et les frontières de ce que signifie véritablement l'« inclusion » à chaque stade de nos processus de recherche. Nous examinons la manière dont les méthodologies féministes, ethnographiques et fondées sur l'art peuvent mettre en avant des connaissances, des points de vue et des formes d'expression artistique qui sont traditionnellement exclues de la production de connaissances sur le changement climatique – depuis longtemps dominée par des hégémonies (et tyrannies) coloniales et patriarcales de la science et des « experts », et analysons par ailleurs notre (dés)apprentissage dans cette « lutte » imparfaite pour décoloniser notre processus de recherche et bâtir une pratique de recherche collaborative mutuelle.

El título de este artículo alude al famoso verso del poema de Wiji Thukul "Peringatan" (traducido como Advertencia) sobre la vida cotidiana de la clase trabajadora y sus luchas por ser escuchada; éste resuena con muchas de nuestras experiencias en el trabajo por descolonizar la producción de conocimiento sobre el clima. En palabras de Thukul "sólo hay una palabra: ¡Lucha!". Partiendo de ello, reflexionamos críticamente sobre nuestras recientes experiencias de trabajo con artistas, comunidades, activistas y operadores en la búsqueda por comprender mejor la interfaz género-edad-uebanismo vinculada al cambio climático. Así, analizamos cómo, en la Indonesia urbana, los impactos climáticos están moldeados por el género y la edad. En este sentido, cuestionamos deliberadamente las convenciones problemáticas inherentes a las prácticas editoriales académicas y elegimos enmarcar este documento en una serie de procesos creativos centrados en las vivencias y respuestas de las mujeres al cambio climático, incluyendo la *madihin*—una tradición banjaresa de narración musical–y *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* (superhéroes transgénero por el clima). En nuestro debate empleamos estas diferentes formas de conocimiento y voz como provocaciones encauzadas hacia investigadores y operadores, a fin de que reflexionen de forma creativa sobre los lenguajes que utilizamos, los métodos a los que recurrimos, las colaboraciones que establecemos, la forma en que difundimos el conocimiento "académico", y se superen las barreras institucionales y los límites de lo que realmente significa "inclusión" en cada etapa de nuestros procesos de investigación. Asimismo, exploramos cómo las metodologías feministas, etnográficas y dirigidas por las artes pueden poner en primer plano conocimientos, perspectivas y formas de arte tradicionalmente excluidos de la producción de conocimientos sobre el cambio climático—dominada durante mucho tiempo por las hegemonías (y tiranías) coloniales y patriarcales de la ciencia y los "expertos"; y sustentamos nuestro des/aprendizaje en esta "lucha" imperfecta por descolonizar nuestro proceso de investigación y construir una práctica de investigación colaborativa mutua.

'Hanya ada Satu Kata: Lawan!' Decolonising gender and climate research practice

This article speaks to our passion for experimentation in forging new feminist routes to applied research on gender, climate change, and disasters. Our work explores the gender–age–urban interface of climate change, focusing on marginalised urban communities including women, people with disabilities, older and indigenous people, informal workers, and sexual and gender-diverse people. Conducted over nine months in 2022, our research in Indonesia comprised participant observation, in-depth ethnographic interviews, and 52 creative workshops that combined critical reflection with visual and applied arts including local art forms, poetry and creative writing, drawing, digital storytelling, songwriting, and photography. We worked closely with over 15 civil society organisations, plus independent activists, as co-facilitators, hosts, and research partners. What role, we ask here, can applied arts – especially those embedded in local ontologies – play in disrupting and decolonising traditional research practices? We argue that decolonial methodologies can lay bare the messy gendered politics of urban life to better understand the complex impacts of climate change, particularly on those with historically excluded voices. In the process, we highlight how feminist collaborative methodologies can foreground polyvocal and embodied local knowledge and responses, and open up new spaces for imagining and articulating alternative radical and inclusive futures that transcend inequalities and thus nurture a politics of hope that speaks directly to local contexts. To do so, we frame our article around two creative processes. We begin by reflecting on our engagement with Madihin – a Banjarese oral tradition of social critique through musical storytelling, and then reflect on our *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* (Transgender Superheroes for Climate). We centre these two (ongoing) creative processes and the different forms of knowledge and voice they evoke as a series of provocations for researchers and practitioners to reconsider creatively what it means to use research to 'fight' not just against climate, environmental, and social injustice, but also the continuing colonisation of research on gender and climate change (see Baldwin and Erickson 2020; Blicharska et al. 2017; Pasgaard et al. 2015; Skelton et al. 2018).

We borrow our title, 'Hanya ada Satu Kata: Lawan!' (There is only one word: Fight!) from a famous line of Wiji Thukul's poem *Peringatan* (Warning), about the everyday lives of the working class and their struggles to be heard (Thukul 1986). Thukul, a poet and activist, came from a poor urban working-class family in Indonesia, and he dropped out of school at age 11 due to poverty. His poetry addresses the everyday struggles of poor and working-class families against capitalist exploitation and oppression (Curtis 2000). Thukul uses poetry to re-tell his experiences, struggles, and calls for action to fight against dominant powers including neoliberal capital, authoritarian regimes, and injustice in the education system. In the literary establishment (and others including education and politics), voices such as Thukul's are often ignored due to their lack of formal education and poor background (Intersastra 2018). However, through his poetry Thukul has created space for marginalised communities – 'the subaltern' – to

name, resist, and fight the injustices they experience. Thukul's famous line has been used in rallies by students, activists, and the labour movement, including during protests against the controversial Omnibus Law in 2020, which aimed to open Indonesia's economy to foreign investment, undermining labour rights and eliminating environmental protections. We evoke Thukul here to underscore the importance of arts in decolonising gender and climate knowledge production and disrupting the inequitable norms and structural injustices this knowledge articulates.

Throughout Indonesian history, arts, literature, and creative works have offered key forms of resistance against first the colonial powers and then the authoritarian New Order regime (1968–1998). Different arts offered tools for critique; reminders of social values and relations, autonomy and strength; warnings against the establishment; and resistance to a status quo maintained by colonial, patriarchal, and extractive regimes and power. In 2022, for example, the residents of Wadas village in Central Java ran an arts exhibition and community stage 'Pokoke Ora Didol': a Javanese phrase that means 'not for sale' at the yard of Kopi Relasi, Purworejo. The event showcased community art works including paintings and murals which explored their struggles against extractive industries turning their land into an andesite quarry, and land grabbing and repression of protests by the authorities (see Setiawan 2021; Suyudi and Rahman 2022). As Indonesian art critic and scholar Yuliman (2020) highlights, arts are integral to collective life. The diversity of art forms in Indonesia offer flexible and inclusive choices for expression that allow people from nearly all backgrounds to utilise their existing skills and knowledge without the need to be formally educated, literate, or elite. We argue in this paper that working with communities through the arts offer decolonial methodologies a 'third grey space', to borrow Homi Bhabha's term (see Bhabha 2004), in which 'the subaltern' can speak their mind through various forms that are connected to them, producing and preserving their local knowledge, and in the process generating a space for resistance and challenge to hegemonic power.[1] For us, it is a space where our Western affiliations can collide, merge, and consolidate with local knowledge(s) and local priorities and responses can be heard and acknowledged, and most importantly the research process can, in itself, become a tool for reflexive resistance.

We represent a partnership of two feminist and activist women, mothers, and scholars working for a global North institution, one from Indonesia and one from the UK. As women and mothers of young children we strive (not always successfully) to find balance between action research, activism, normalised (often patriarchal) academic conventions, and caring responsibilities (to our families, ourselves, and our research participants). At the same time, Desy is further marginalised as a woman of colour and migrant for whom English is not her first language. Our collaboration with each other and our participants unfolds at the confluence of insider/outsider ethnography, whereby we navigate two messy and competing fields and sets of identities, politics, and power relations: the neoliberal university and the grassroots Indonesian field site. As researchers we are encouraged to instrumentalise and audit the knowledge we produce into forms inaccessible and of little use to the communities with which we engage. We are pushed

to publish our (often 'co-produced') work in high impact factor English-language journals (many hidden behind paywalls, although we acknowledge the growing commitment towards open-access publishing), prioritise impact metrics conceptualised by our institutions (and funders) which often translate narrowly into policy influence or quantitative breadth, and use these in turn to generate revenue and reputation for the same institutions in the so-called 'global North' (for excellent discussion and critiques of this elsewhere, see Adriany and Satiti 2017; Connell 2015; Roberts and Connell 2016; Wöhrer 2016).

Leaning into such tensions and choosing to prioritise locally relevant forms of knowledge and creation developed our solidarity and shared passions for transformative and post- and decolonial studies. We engaged throughout with reflexive processes to address the tensions of our positionalities and how we could achieve a better distribution of power both between us and with our participants. We aimed to subvert historical and colonial research power dynamics by enabling communities themselves to determine how research is produced, shaping research questions, what methods and art forms are used, and how to analyse and apply the knowledge co-produced. Language is of critical concern. Conversations, interviews, and workshops were conducted in either Banjarese, Sasak, or Bahasa Indonesia, and where necessary translated by local research assistants (including those with disabilities). Desy, who led the fieldwork, is from Kalimantan and speaks fluently Banjarese, Dayak Bakumpai, Bahasa Indonesia, and English, and intermediate Javanese and Malay. Katie, a fluent English-speaker, has only beginner's Bahasa Indonesia, which presented a barrier to her fully embracing decoloniality, which she is seeking to resolve through intensive language training. All interviews and workshops were recorded and transcribed in full and data, where possible, were first analysed in the original language to stay connected with local context and centre local values and idiom. All data were collected in adherence with strict ethical and safety protocols co-designed with communities themselves to incorporate local situated knowledge and expertise within the ethical standards set by the University of Leeds and Indonesia National Research and Innovation Agency. All arts were produced in local languages and then translated into Bahasa Indonesia and lastly into English.

Our work has generated outputs created by professional artists that synthesise key experiences and perspectives shared by participants, and artists have co-facilitated a series of workshops over time with groups of participants to provide them with the skills to produce their own arts. These workshops combine discussion, reflection, and action in a series of dialogic cycles to achieve a 'plenitude of praxis'; what Freiere (1970) termed *conscientização*: strengthening and promoting participants' critical awareness and articulation of (and pathways to challenge) the structural and social inequities shaping vulnerability to climate change and disasters, while embracing multiple voices and ways of knowing including knowledge that is embodied, sensory, and non-linguistic. All outputs have continued to enjoy a political life independent of our research, and remain the intellectual property of the artists and communities. We reproduce them here with their full consent.

Hati sedih tidak karuan (So, the sadness comes to yell): creative methodologies as decolonising research praxis?

https://youtu.be/yE39tX6oEDs (Link to Madihin video)

In June 2022, in collaboration with Muhammad Budi Zakia Sani and Syahril, two leading Banjarese performers, we co-facilitated a performance on the riverside in Banjarmasin, a city in South Kalimantan. Perched on chairs on a wooden *jembatan* (bridge) extending over one of Banjarmasin's fabled 1,000 rivers, the two musicians perform a Madihin they composed in response to our interview transcripts. It spotlights the everyday experiences of riverside women who live around the Kuin Estuary, and besides us and our camera, a series of riverside residents (including those who shared their stories) are the only audience. Madihin 'on the street' like this was novel to both the performers and our eclectic audience bemused by the impromptu performance unfolding on their doorstep. The bridge on which they perform was chosen for its significant value to the people in this neighbourhood: it sits higher than most of the surrounding houses, so when flood waters rise, people seek refuge there until the waters recede. The Pamadihinan sing:

> *Kemudian pada hari ini perkenankan kami membawa seni budaya, irama Madihin khas bahari kala. Bersama saya Syahril yang mirip Farel Bramasta dan juga Zaky yang mirip batubara.* [Now, today, we'd like to present the performance of art and culture from our ancestral heritage: the rhyme of Madihin. You are having me, Syahril who is like Farel Bramasta, and Zaky who is like coal.*]

> *Kita mulai'i ini dari startnya. Acil-acil tadi beusaha memang ngalih imbah musim corona. Apa lagi banjir pasang banyu tentunya. Ngalih bajualan handak kemana-mana. Sudah meulah, ngalih memasarkannya. Sudah bejual kadada nang menukarnya. Baluman lagi amun di rumah masalah rumah tangga. Baisi laki memang luar biasa. Syukur amun begawi kawa membantu ini beusaha. Mudah-mudahan jadi berkah saja. Becari duit ada nang menghabiskannya. Mudah-mudahan ini jadi petanda naik rezeki gasan hidup kaina. Ikam tadi sudah memulai'inya memang keadaan ini luar biasa berubah iklim ini di tempat kita. Musim kemarau atau musim banjir ngalih menangguhnya. Kadang-kadang hujan bisa panas jua. Kasehatan kita bisa tertanggu juga. Mudah-mudahan Acil-acil semua dilindungi oleh Allah ta'ala …* [We're starting this from the beginning. The aunts were trying really hard during the pandemic of coronavirus. Moreover, there is an absolute flood. It's hard to sell anything anywhere. Products have been produced, but no market at all. Had been trying to sell them, but no one buys. More, domestic problems. Having a husband a very extraordinary one. It's great if he's willing to work to help. We hope all is a blessing. One works to earn, another spends it. Hopefully, this is a sign that the sustenance for life will increase. You have already started it, indeed this situation is unusual; climate change in our place. The presence of a dry season or a flood season is so hard to predict. Sometimes it rains, and sometimes it can be hot too. Our health is possibly disturbed too. Hopefully, all of you are protected by Allah ta'ala …]

In 2014, Madihin was recognised by UNESCO as a form of Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is a spontaneous musical monologue repartee by one or more Pamadihinan (musicians) in traditional dress, who use a drumming instrument called a *tarbang*. It comes from the word *madah*, which means telling something or giving advice in poetry-style lyrics, in which every final word of the verses has to have the same rhyme (Sani 2017).

It is as witty as it is fast-paced, in which musicians perform by responding to each other, making observations about each other and those around them. The lyrics are often sarcastic, contain social messages, and at the same time make people laugh. Pamadihinan also use tone, pitch, and facial and bodily expressions to create humour for their audiences (Sani and Sulisno 2022). At the end of their performance, Pamadihinan will often (jokingly) apologise to the audience in case their performance has offended them, before saying goodbye. Madihin is usually delivered in the Banjarese language, although in some cases it can also be delivered in Bahasa Indonesia, depending on the audience. We chose to celebrate the heritage of our participants by exclusively using Banjarese.

In the performance above, the two Pamadihinan introduce themselves through jokes: one of the Pamadihinan compares himself with a national celebrity and the other one to coal. South Kalimantan is known for its coal-mining industry, and just before we start filming a giant coal barge slowly makes its way up river behind us, literally evidencing its status as one of the main routes for coal distribution. Banjarmasin sits 'downstream' on the Martapura river, as vulnerable to the exertions of global extractive capitalism (including palm oil, coal, and logging) unfolding upstream as they are to the rising sea levels fuelled by anthropogenic global climate change. The Pamadihinan then turn their focus to the women who live on the riverside, most of whom work as *tanggui* (traditional hats integral to people of South Kalimantan, weaved out of *nipah* leaves) makers. The Madihin highlights how *tanggui* makers are struggling against the climate, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and global extractive capitalism. The Pamadihinan use the word *acil-acil* (aunties) to emphasise the gendered and inter-generational nature of this livelihood. While many women were taught these skills at a young age by older women relatives, they wish their own children never have to rely on them. During the pandemic they could not sell *tanggui* as many economic activities were paused due to protracted lockdowns. The women's work is threatened by rain and even on cloudy days they cannot properly dry their leaves. If it rains continuously for a few days the leaves are ruined and cannot be used at all, and the women lose money from buying the leaves. When floods enter their houses the leaves and hats are at risk of ruin through getting wet. The Madihin adds, if they are finally able to make the *tanggui* hat despite all these barriers, they still struggle to sell them as the market for this product is getting harder. Today *tanggui* are not as popular as they used to be. Local people speak of how the growth of global fast fashion has relegated the *tanggui* to function more as decoration, souvenirs, or used by very limited communities such as those working at the floating market in Banjarmasin, now a prominent tourist attraction rather than historic and vibrant hub of economic and social relations; while furthermore polluting their rivers (Cordova et al. 2022; Roosmini et al. 2010).

In a few short verses, the Madihin highlights a tapestry of local and global forces at work in the everyday lives of working-class women living on Banjarmasin's riverside, laying open the messy and contentious politics at work in shaping how climate impacts land. For example, using an implicitly sarcastic message, the lyrics centre the experiences of a woman trapped in a toxic relationship. The Pamadihinan evocatively use the term *luar*

biasa (extraordinary) to spotlight the widespread economic abuse of women by husbands. Patriarchal gender norms with roots in Indonesia's colonisation and 30 years under the New Order regime (see Robinson 2009; Suryakusuma 2011) conspire, they sing, so that *tanggui* women must bear domestic, economic, and environmental burdens within their households. The Madihin makes visible the invisible and devalued labour carried out by women not just in the every day, and how this exacerbates disadvantage when enduring and coping with disasters.

In the preceding days to this riverside performance, Zakia Sani led a series of Madihin workshops with a group of nine research participants, teaching them how to drum, the different Madihin rhythms, and how to create the couplets to end and begin on the same rhyming word. The group comprised informal workers of mixed ages and gender, including market vendors and bin pickers, including people with disability; selected because they represent a community integral to the social infrastructure that feeds and cleans the city, yet who are neglected in decision-making, urban planning, and disaster risk-reduction processes. They are also on the frontline of increasingly unpredictable weather and hazards, living at the intersections of climate, environmental, and social injustice. They navigate the everyday challenges of increasingly frequent and rising floodwaters and unpredictable weather that decimates their daily incomes, while they hope and pray for God's protection in times of difficulty. As they sing below:

Pagi-pagi pergi jalan	Walking around in the morning
Cakep (in Banjarese)	Oh, cool
Beli barang untuk berjualan	Buying kinds of stuff to sell
Mantap	Fabulous!
Hujan turun sepi pelanggan	Rain comes, no buyers coming
Cakep	Cool
Hati sedih tidak karuan	So, the sadness comes to yell
Hebat	Great!
Ayo, bermain Madihin lagi	Come on, let's do the Madihin again
Ayo	Come on!
Oke	Okay
(*intro musik*)	(music intro)
Inilah semua keadaan kita	These are all our condition
Warga tepi sungai inilah namanya	This riverside resident is their name
Berbagai macam pekerjaannya	Various kinds of jobs they work on
Akibat banjir semua terkendala	Because of the flood, everything is lame
Hari panas tidak bisa diprediksi	Hot dry days are unpredictable
Cuaca ekstrem atau pancaroba	Extreme or transitional weather
Kalau banjir airnya tidak terkira	If there is a flood, it is immeasurable
Mencari nafkah anak keluarga	to earn a living for the family member
Kita hanya bisa berdoa	We can only pray
Supaya dilindungi oleh Allah Ta'ala	To be protected by Allah Ta'ala

Sitting on mats on the shaded porch of Desy's mother's house, the Madihin workshops created space for participants to share stories about how climate change is affecting their lives and livelihoods, their anxieties, sadness, and hope. Their stories evidence how poverty forces people into vulnerable environments, poor-quality housing, and informal precarious livelihoods, and restricts their capacity to plan for, and sustainably recover from, disasters including floods and fire. Inequitable postcolonial, patriarchal, hetero-

normative, and non-disabled social norms conspire to shape the ways in which urban communities can respond to disaster, layering disadvantages and burdens on the already marginalised. Many of the group were illiterate and had never engaged on the topic of climate change (or gender) which was thought to be of concern only to those with 'high formal education'.

The choice of Madihin, the Banjar language, and local dialect, and a popular local form of oral storytelling, subverts the emphasis on 'expert' knowledge production on to experiential and lived knowledge, allowing the climate change discussion to open according to local vernacular and logics. It offers a tool through which people can share their stories in an entertaining way, bringing participants, researchers, and musicians together to release sadness while simultaneously laughing together. Humour and laughter not only shape the emerging narratives but are deeply generative and embodied. Humour becomes (and is) a key coping mechanism and way of challenging a perceived lack of agency. It undoes negative emotion, changing the way people see a difficult event, which changes its meaning for them and how they respond to the situation (Samson and Gross 2012). Yet it is not only a defence mechanism to release tension. In the context of Madihin, humour, sarcasm, and laughter become a form of powerful social critique of the local status quo, offering a familiar tool for communicating indignation and naming injustice. It does so by creating a social relationship between the performer and the audience that is generated by an understanding of the shared experience and critical observation, underscoring solidarity and reinforcing the power of collective life. In this, it begins the work of creating a shared image of a radical alternative state in which the issues raised are no longer normalised; shifting from interpreting the world to trying to change it (see also Critchley 2002). As bell hooks, quoted in Yancy (2015), suggests, 'we cannot have a meaningful revolution without humour'.

Pamadihinan make jokes and use sarcasm to critique social injustice, which invites people to both critically reflect and simultaneously laugh; as we can see in our riverside Madihin performance that centres 75-year-old Radiah (a pseudonym):

Jadi langsung kita mulai kisah cerita. Takisah saorang manusia. Inspirasi untuk kehidupan kita sebagai kearifan ini di benua. Meulah tanggui memang luar biasa, kearifan lokal tanah Banjar kita. Harus dilestarikan generasi muda. Seorang Nini yang luar biasa beliau hidup itu sabatang kara, hanya seorang untuk mengarunginya. Sehari-hari mencari nafkah bekerja meulah tanggui itu keahliannya. Pas sumalam itu musim banjir atau musim pasang naiklah banyunya. Ada nang unik lucu ini kisahnya. Bila banyu pasang lawang dikancingnya supaya piring jangan keluaran tehambur kemana-manaaa …	So, let's start the story. It is about a person who inspires us to live life in wisdom. Making *tanggui* is wisely incredible as one of our local wisdom in Banjar. It must be preserved by the youth. Once, there was an incredible granny who lived alone. She makes *tanggui* every day to live; she's an expert on it. When the high-tide season came, and the water flooded into the houses. There's something unique and funny about it. When it happened, the doors in every house are locked so the plates are not able to be carried away by the water; floating away out of the house to everywhere!

She is created as an inspirational figure, while highlighting how she must bear the brunt of climate and environmental injustice. Radiah does not have the choice to move to safer accommodation, so she continues to live in this house with its rotten floor. Yet, the Madihin remarks next on the social support systems critical to survival in the Kuin Estuary:

Kita himung ini menyaksiakan. Bujur sidin tuha semangat beliau mengarungi kehidupan. Tapi satu lagi aku sangat terkesan. Sebagai urang Banjar kita meutamakan hidup batatangga saling babatulungan. Pas musim banjir ada haja yang menulungakan, tatangga ini kiri dan kanan. Solidaritas ini membuktikan kalau urang Banjar jangan lagi diragukan. Walau kita susah menolong orang, harus dilakukan. Prinsip ini memang sudah sejalan dengan filosofi urang Banjar kehidupan saling tolong menolong didalam kehidupan	We proudly witness it. It is true that she is old, but her enthusiasm for life is outstanding. And, one more thing I was very impressed with is that, as Banjar people, we prioritise living as neighbours; helping each other. During the flood season, there are always those who help each other, neighbours on the left and right. So, the solidarity of Banjar people is undoubted. Even if we are in a hard time, helping others is still our priority. Indeed, this principle is in line with the philosophy of the Banjar people: helping each other in life.

The lyrics evoke a collective memory of traditional values in Banjarese society, appealing to the audience to honour this social cohesion and sense of collective responsibility for the most vulnerable in their community. It celebrates the power of community and makes visible the everyday gendered labour taking place at the grassroots in the face of often overwhelming disempowering circumstances, which is simultaneously systematically undervalued and unacknowledged by the state. Madihin, a form of oral storytelling, resists the hegemony of the written tradition still so dominant in knowledge production about climate change through foregrounding the local values, identities, and priorities that bring people together and shape their resilience to crisis. It creates a safe space for making visible systemic social, climate, and broader tensions and injustices without recourse to forms of resistance or protest that could endanger participants. It thus invites us to confront contested notions of agency, power, and inclusion typically obscured in climate research that creates binaries of victims and villains, and shifts our focus from the narratives of 'experts' and 'decision-makers' to consider the (mostly devalued) everyday labour of people who must adapt and carry each other along.

Yet, how can Madihin and its inclusion of lived perspectives compete with the ongoing dominance of techno-science approaches – or 'solutions' – that have little space or appetite for feminist analyses of the messy lived politics of systemic inequality? How can it go beyond speaking of systemic injustices and evoking solidarity to fight growing social inequalities and complicit models of governance? And whose burden is this fight to bear; surely not the communities whose struggles they evoke? We must also acknowledge the Pamadihinan we worked with are men and trained musicians, with the social capital and capacity to interweave complex arguments and articulate social injustices. We are compelled to raise further questions about who has the power to author/structure/perform arts-as-knowledge? What gender, class, and colonial politics are complicit (or reinforced) in our research practice and how do we better lean into these tensions? How do we ensure that arts do not become another vehicle of hierarchy/exclusion based on gendered and social orders?

Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim: feminist creative and applied methodologies as a politics of hope

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0oXxTtxy_M (Link to Sanggar Seroja monologue)

In late 2021 we launched an international arts competition on gender and climate (in)justice in the city. Over 130 applications were considered by two panels of artists and

activists. The 'winning' entry in Indonesia was a video monologue (performed by Sanggar Seroja, a collective of transgender women in Jakarta. It spotlights the intersecting challenges posed by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic to transgender women living in the congested and polluted Kampung Duri, a sub-district in West Jakarta and one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in South-East Asia. Many of these women are forced to earn livelihoods that expose them to weather extremes, social stigma, and pollution through street busking and sex work. The monologue, performed in the humidity and semi-darkness of a small rented room, speaks of the unique vulnerabilities of transgender women to climate change, pollution, and disasters, and demonstrates the need for deeper, intersectional approaches to gender and climate research and policy that better understand its entanglement with environmental injustice and the legacies of colonialism and global capital. It compelled us to reach out to co-develop a project to better understand how – beyond the binary of male to female – gender norms disciplining sexual and gender diversity are exacerbating vulnerability to climate change.

Locating our knowledge of climate impacts and disasters within local experiences that subvert hegemonic and heteronormative narratives of gender and climate (that equate gender with cisgender women, and emphasise women as passive victims of both climate and patriarchy) pushes us to confront the technocratic, top-down, and colonial models that continue to dominate knowledge production and policymaking in the climate and disasters fields. As Gaard (2015, 24) remarks, 'all our climates are both gendered and sexualized, simultaneously material, cultural and ecological'. Climate change can better be described, she continues, as a 'white industrial-capitalist heteromale supremacy on steroids … boosted by widespread injustices of gender and race, sexuality and species' (*ibid.*, 27).

Discrimination against sexual and gender-diverse people in Indonesia is inseparable from colonialism as same-sex activities were common and tolerated prior to this (Boomgaard 2012; Khoir 2020). Christianity, introduced by Dutch colonialism, perceived homosexuality as abnormal and prohibited. The Dutch government regulated that those committed to homosexuality were against the *Wetboek van Strafrecht* of the Dutch Criminal Code and were to be punished by hanging, strangling, and drowning to death (Bloembergen 2011). Under the New Order era (1966–1998), although facing challenges and discrimination, transwomen communities were involved in some government programmes, political parties, sport events, and media publications (Koenig et al. 2018). The first transwomen's organisation was formed in the late 1960s with the establishment of the Association of Jakartas's Wadam (HIWAD), which was supported by Jakarta's governor. Slowly, similar organisations were established in other cities and received support from local governments on the basis that they were understood to be disadvantaged or psychologically disabled communities (UNDP and USAID 2014). While the downfall of the New Order era in 1998 opened the gate for democracy and freedom of expression, it also enabled the growth of religious activism and formalisation of Shari'a regulations in many cities and provinces, and Islamic discourses are increasingly used to regulate people's gender and sexuality (Buehler 2016; Pirmasari 2020). There has been a recent rise in discrimination and political targeting of the 'LGBT+' label, including the new criminal code (Human Rights Watch 2023).

To better understand the gendered and sexualised climates articulated by Sanggar Seroja, we initiated a year-long digital ethnography, using video diaries collected on WhatsApp to capture the experiences of transgender women living across Indonesia, and a new creative collaboration with Sanggar Seroja to co-develop the *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* (Trans Superheroes for Climate). Sanggar Seroja was founded in 2016 by two transgender women who had more than 20 years of experience in the arts, particularly dance, *lenong* (traditional theatre of Betawi people in Jakarta) and theatre. Bringing together a group of art lovers, Sanggar Seroja specialises in theatre performances at festivals and cultural events, drawing on traditional and contemporary forms of performance to generate income while forming a hub for social support and solidarity for transgender women in the Kampung Duri; which has, since the 1970s, provided a refuge for queer people seeking livelihoods and community in Jakarta. Reflecting on the lack of environmental awareness in the Kampung Duri and high levels of pollution, as well as continuing discrimination against sexual and gender-diverse communities, we came together to co-design initiatives to increase residents' awareness of environmental responsibility, promote gender equality and tolerance, and increase community resilience to the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. The Trans Superheroes were born.

Conceptualised and brought to life by Sanggar Seroja, these four superheroes represent a series of nested interventions that are simultaneously heroic characters, sustainable fashion, socioeconomic empowerment, gender and climate activists, and knowledge producers. The superheroes perform traditional dance, song, and theatre in elaborate fantastical costumes created by leading Indonesian fashion designers and artists (Omar Al Fahd, Kartika Jahja, Muthiara Rievana, and Mariana) out of recycled materials and common waste. Dana (pictured in Figure 1, top left) is the fundraising superhero. She is good at entertaining and organises social charity performances. She is cheerful, honest, transparent, and anti-corruption. She wears a bra that looks like a gas mask as a form of critique towards conflict and war all over the world and the use of chemical weapons, while the rest of her costume is made up of recycled plastic. Asih (top right) is the Restorer Superhero who selflessly loves the sick. She has a sacred crystal stone wand and an anti-virus shield that can fight radiation, pollution, and free radicals. Her costume is made of bubble wrap, which communicates a form of critique towards the growth of e-commerce and rise of single-use packaging. Her wand is in the shape of a red ribbon: the universal symbol of awareness and support for people living with HIV. Vei Lan (bottom left) is the Cleaning Superhero with a focus on cleaning the environment, killing viruses, and harvesting eco-enzymes for household and commercial cleaning, medicinal use, and income generation. Finally, Tara (bottom right) is the Advocacy Superhero who stands up for and fights to uphold justice and build gender equality. She gathers data on cases of violence facing trans- and cisgender women and lobbies the government to improve policies. She wears a social justice scale headband for all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. A local illustrator is currently designing a web comic that weaves together the lived experiences of this community and visualises the alternative inclusive and equitable future being enacted by these superheroes.

Figure 1. *Trans Superhero Perubahan Iklim* by Sanggar Seroja. Photograph by Rikky MF.

To lift these characters off the page and put their politics of hope into action, we facilitated training for Sanggar Seroja members in advocacy, human rights and paralegal processes, grant management, and livelihood skills including harvesting eco-enzymes from organic waste products and using (and selling) these for medicinal, beauty, and household cleaning products. These skills training needs and the activists who delivered

them were all identified by Sanggar Seroja. On 23 April 2022, Sanggar Seroja ran a public carnival in *Kelurahan* (subdistrict) Kampung Duri, to publicly launch the superheroes. The carnival received robust support from local authorities and did not receive any objections from the area's conservative organisation. During the carnival the four superheroes were accompanied by members of Sanggar Seroja and local civil society organisations, along with national and local media, as they paraded down the main road, supported by the local village security apparatus. The public responded with support, sharing their appreciation for transwomen for leading environmental initiatives and including the wider population in their festivities. Following the carnival, Sanggar Seroja was approached by the local government to discuss support for their work, including the provision of space to expand their eco-enzyme harvesting and an invitation to lead a new waste bank to generate income through recycling. In the year since their launch, they have observed increased social acceptance from the public as well as local and regional leadership, which has translated into broader social support networks and greater access to state welfare mechanisms including health care. Their recognition is growing and the superheroes have been invited into multiple spaces from which they have been traditionally excluded. They have been invited to perform at embassies, cultural and arts centres, international organisations including Greenpeace and Amnesty, and at climate marches and festivals led by national and international organisations and networks. Income from performances has significantly bolstered their emergency fund for supporting transgender women at risk and in crisis. They have been invited to share their research and evidence with researchers at the University of Indonesia, the Crisis Response Mechanism, Greenpeace, an Indonesia Inklusi event organised by Voice, and local disaster management organisations.

While the superheroes broke down traditional social barriers, we sought new creative tools for building empathy and awareness of how intersecting disadvantages are shaped by gender norms. This was how 'Gender Jeopardy: A Game of Trans Resilience' came to be (see Figure 2).

Our vision for a board game that would communicate the layering of disadvantage over time and set out the ways in which socioeconomic, physical, and psychological harms are shaped by gender dynamics was brought to life by Mahawira Dillon, a leading Indonesian board game designer, and illustrated by Kartika Luthfiyah, a talented young illustrator. The 160 cards that make up the game – which you can play as a cisgender man or woman or transgender woman – present a working analysis of multiple overlapping disadvantages and risks, and how they can (or not) be navigated through different social support systems. From livelihood choices and salaries, to the impacts of different crises – both generalised and specific to the community – the player gets to experience what life is like in the shoes of a transgender woman. The game translates lived knowledge into a creative tool for understanding intersectional disadvantage in practice, building empathy, and transforming attitudes and practices at grassroots and policy levels. The crises represented on the cards (for examples, see Figure 3), such as health crises, violent discrimination, family rejection, precarious livelihoods, and environmental catastrophe, are drawn directly from the lived experiences of our collaborators. When playing the

Figure 2. Board game cover by Sanggar Seroja, featuring the four superheroes, Desy, and Katie.

game with transwomen, the cards offer opportunities for the women to share and reflect both on their personal experiences of interlinking structural injustices, and how these were either overcome or continue to manifest today. The experiences represented in the cards have gone on to form the basis for a new crisis management guide published in partnership with CRM Consortium and Arus Pelangi, providing practical pathways to strengthening the resilience of transwomen to overlapping crises and disasters.

However, while facing significant inequalities, transgender women experience greater acceptance in Indonesia than other sexual and gender-diverse people, especially when compared to transgender men and queer women. This highlights for us a continuing need to attend to the hierarchies of gender orders, many of which have their roots in the disruptions of colonialism and global capital (see Boellstorff 2007; Hegarty 2017; Koenig et al. 2018; UNDP and USAID 2014). The Trans Superheroes exist because of a history of transwomen's visibility and organising, and we are hopeful that they can offer a future mechanism for reaching out to less-visible and more-oppressed communities.

The four superheroes offer a radical (and visual) retelling of the dominant climate narrative that brown women are victims of climate change (see Arora-Jonsson 2011; Resurrección 2013). The heroes draw on their beauty and femininity, creativity, and

Figure 3. Boardgame cards by Sanggar Seroja highlighting crises frequently faced by transwomen. Clockwise from top left: Getting tuberculosis; Being called *bencong* (deeply derogatory term for transwomen in Indonesia); Living in a slum area; Being kicked out of your house by your parents. In each case, the crisis enacts an economic, health, and psychological cost that is dictated by gender.

strength to highlight the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and sexual and gender-diverse people in Indonesia through visualising an alternative future, one of hope, inclusion, and power. They blur the boundary between research, art, and action – the characters are fictional, yet they engage in real-world transformation,

offering role models to young and old alike. Sanggar Seroja chose to use arts to promote leadership, not victimhood, through a meshing together of fiction and fabulous fantasy, layering skill in traditional and local forms of song and dance with innovative tools including web comics and a board game, as well as environmental practice, to advance understanding of how gender norms shape the layering of disadvantage and how social norms can be challenged and reimagined. As knowledge is co-produced it is put into service. The superheroes have shared research with academics and activists as well as policymakers, generated increased social acceptance in their local neighbourhoods, and promoted different ways of being and belonging that transcend the prisons of patriarchal and heteronormative orders. They offer their own community, allies, and detractors alike a new blueprint for relating.

Conclusion

Thukul was last seen on the 10 February 1998, aged just 34 years. His disappearance, and that of many others who stood up to authoritarianism in this period, and indeed the risks to life faced by environmental and human rights defenders today, remind us both of the high stakes of, and the continuing need for, resistance to dominant regimes. As across the global South, precolonial traditional societies in Indonesia had a strong oral tradition practised in everyday life through song, folklore, legends, storytelling, or even traditional customary law (Hagerdal 2017; Hallaq 2009; Sears and Flueckiger 2020; Vansina 1971). The colonial era brought about Western-style literacy and written documents which transformed a lot of local traditions in the colony (Hägerdal 2017). For so long, colonial civilising tropes of European 'empires' acted to invalidate oral traditions as neither significant nor reliable, in contrast with the 'great' written traditions of European literature (wa Thiong'o 1998). As Abdi (2007, 43) emphasises in the colonial context, 'only written literature (in colonial languages) was to be regarded as meaningful literature'. We see echoes of this today in policymaking and knowledge production about climate change. For many of our research participants, climate change discourse is exclusionary, dominated by colonial and patriarchal hegemonies (and tyrannies) of science, quantitative data and models, held hostage by the social capital of 'experts' in global North institutions (ourselves included).

   We have drawn on two very different examples from our work here to demonstrate the role applied arts can play in disrupting and decolonising such climate research practice. Applied arts generate a third space that can centre the complex and lived politics of groups marginalised by gender, class, age, disability, and so on, and provide multiple ways of speaking to and about power through creative forms that have proximity and belong to them. Decolonisation is a struggle against the establishment, the status quo; a fight that needs South and North collaboration to destabilise and re/construct existing hegemonic power relations. Arts offer a constructive opportunity for researchers to build decolonial collaborations that begin with local ontologies and confront coloniality as it manifests in research, climate change action, and daily life. It is a space in which our 'Northern' affiliations can collide, merge, and consolidate with local knowledge(s) and

relations, and in which we can collaboratively magnify local priorities and responses and project them into spaces from which they have been historically excluded.

This does not arise without resistance. It is important to acknowledge the challenges we faced working at the grassroots here and elsewhere. Breaking away from working with large (arguably disciplined) supranational organisations to work at the grassroots led to significant difficulties balancing unapologetic institutional financial reporting mechanisms and due diligence demands with community organisations little used to grants and fund management. While working hard to absorb the labour of most of these (often unyielding) bureaucratic demands ourselves, a distinct challenge of our research has been resolving the practical difficulties of working informally and individually with artists, activists, researchers, and civil society within the confines of a British institution used to habitual collaborations with established and preferably global North-situated partners. Decolonising academic institutions, we often concluded with frustration in trying to get payments to collaborators, seemed more of a conceptual exercise rather than one concerned with revising clunky, convoluted, and Kafkaesque processes that continue to place unforgivable burdens on research participants and collaborators. It further served to highlight the perpetuation of colonial power relations that maintain power over research resources in the global North, and our own roles within this.

Our article has raised questions that we continue to struggle with, and we profess we can offer little resolution. Yet, we hope to have demonstrated a need for us to be attentive to language, locally embed our research from the earliest design stages, compose our research teams with a commitment to equity and inclusivity, and push back against institutional demands in order to prioritise outputs and knowledge exchange that serve our collaborators. In the pursuit of more equitable practice, we hope to have demonstrated that arts can offer tools for better foregrounding the agency of participants, creating a more balanced distribution of power, embedding ethics of care within all aspects of our work, and increasing community engagement and ownership of creative outputs through co-producing outputs that have proximity and belong to them. Arts create a space for diverse communities to explore cumulatively and reflect critically on their experiences and struggles against gender marginalisation and climate change impacts; co-designing and adopting methods that are embodied in their local knowledge and speak directly to urgent struggles. As inequality, climate change, and disasters surge, we have little choice but to fight.

Note

1. We understand the concept of 'the subaltern' as those excluded and marginalised by their location at the intersection of gendered, caste, class, racial, and colonial structures that have and continue to prevent a person or group from speaking or being heard (Spivak 1988). Our work on gender and climate thus aims to foreground 'the margins … of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest state of the urban proletariat' (*ibid*., 283). As Spivak notes: 'both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot

speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (*ibid.*, 287), so too, we argue, are the subalterned identities of sexual and gender-diverse people. Here, we build on: Kapur's (2000, 16) notion of the 'sexual subaltern', who, writing on postcolonial India, highlights the 'complex and at times even contradictory politics' of the sexual subaltern, 'mediated by class, caste and religion'; Stone's (1996, 295) focus on the subaltering of transsexuals by feminist transphobia and medical discourses: 'it is difficult to articulate a counter-discourse if one is programmed to disappear'; and Heaney's (2017) work addressing how the historical emergence of the 'trans feminine allegory' reproduces cis experiences and ideologies.

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