

The Crisis of Care: State, Family, and Shifting Caring Space in Contemporary Indonesia

Ciptaningrat Larastiti¹ & Elan Lazuardi²

¹ SurveyMETER. A research team member at Care Network in Later Life Project, University of Southampton and University of Atmajaya; Guest-editor in Humaniora

² Department of Anthropology, Universitas Gadjah Mada; Editor-in-Chief Humaniora

* Corresponding Author: elan.lazuardi@ugm.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

This special issue on the Crisis of Care is the result of extensive collaborative research, discussions, and interactions among contributors. In 2022, with colleagues from the University of Southampton, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia in Jakarta, and Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, we co-organised a conference entitled ‘Care Dynamics in Contemporary Indonesia’. Ciptaningrat Larastiti was part of a two-year research collaboration between the University of Southampton (United Kingdom) and Atma Jaya Catholic University (Jakarta), titled ‘Care Network in Later Life’. Her research focuses on care for landless older people with a state of dependency in rural Yogyakarta. Elan Lazuardi, having completed her PhD on HIV care, co-organised the conference as the representative of the Department of Anthropology, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

The two-day conference was able to convene scholars from various disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, gerontology, population studies, psychology, sociology, public health, and public policy. Many of the presentations at the conference, which took place on January 11–12, 2023, at the Center for Population and Policy Study Universitas Gadjah Mada, highlighted the multitude of challenges faced by Indonesians in providing care for the sick, older people, and children. These challenges exist in both formal and informal care settings and shed light on the increasing vulnerability experienced in rural or urban areas. Such vulnerabilities significantly impact the care arrangements for dependent groups.

Our conversations after the conference were a source of inspiration for this special issue. We reached out to several conference presenters, both those connected to the Care Network in Later Life research and others whose work aligns with the idea of a care crisis. Originally, we asked relevant presenters to submit their extended abstracts, but not everyone responded positively. Therefore, we decided to issue a limited call for papers to scholars who we knew were working on similar topics. While not all who submitted extended abstracts and expressed interest were ultimately able to contribute, the final selection of articles offers a comprehensive and nuanced discussion on the crisis of care and its impacts on individuals and communities.

This special issue contains a collection of six original research articles and one short report



that addresses a variety of queries related to the crisis of care in the age of neoliberalism. These essays explore topics such as paid and unpaid care work, as well as the dynamics of informal and formal care provision. The essays are based on empirical studies, primarily using qualitative and ethnographic methods. Every author has been guided by the following themes: (1) the lack of state support and intensified market intervention concerning care arrangements; (2) growing tensions and vulnerabilities due to the shared burden in providing and receiving care; (3) gaps in care and inadequate treatment; (4) underappreciation of care work that is influenced by gender; and (5) care arrangements that extend beyond the scope of family. We invite contributors to discuss their research findings in relation to the crisis of care, particularly with regards to these themes. In some cases, we suggest that different presenters collaborate on a joint article when their presentations' focus overlaps in a fruitful way.

THE CRISIS OF CARE

The discussion of social reproduction theory inspired the initial concept for this special issue, although not all authors have incorporated it into their analyses. The crisis of everyday life, a concept inspired by the French sociologist Henry Lefebvre, highlights the deep structure of reproductive work and sexual division of labour (Federici, 2019). Nancy Fraser, a renowned American philosopher, critical theorist, and feminist, addresses this issue through what she calls the 'crisis of care'. In 2016, she published her essay "Contradictions of Capital and Care" in the 100th edition of *New Left Review*. A long-time scholar of social reproduction theory, she used that essay to highlight what she calls the 'crisis of social reproduction', or more specifically, the 'crisis of care'. Although this crisis is often overshadowed by forms of crises (ecological, economic, and political), she argues pointedly that, "no society that systematically undermines social reproduction can endure for long" (2016: 99).

A year later, Tithi Bhattacharya's edited volume, *Social Reproduction Theory*, featured the same essay, underscoring that the crisis of care serves as an acute manifestation of the social reproductive contradiction inherent in financialized capitalism. Fraser (2017) asserts that the capitalist economy depends on unpaid caregiving, affective labour, and social interaction to maintain social bonds. These bonds, as highlighted in this special issue, occur outside of market spaces - such as in households, neighbourhoods, kinship networks, and public institutions - and can also shift between unpaid informal and commodified formal care.

But what is this phenomenon called the 'crisis of care'? To what extent has neoliberalism caused and worsened this crisis in a country where the responsibility for care work traditionally falls on women, and where there is pride in existing communal care? Are we—Indonesians—affected by this so-called crisis of care?

The term 'crisis of care' refers to "the pressures from several directions that are currently squeezing a key set of social capacities: those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally" (Fraser, 2016:99). It also emphasizes what feminist scholars have referred to as the devaluation of reproductive labour resulting from the impoverishment brought on by capitalist development and the defunding social protection programs (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2019).

In this special issue, we situate the crisis of care within the framework of neoliberalism, exploring the interconnectedness of gendered human labour in both the production and reproduction spheres. Some critical questions arise: what are the processes that allow workers to arrive at their workplaces or produce a future labour force (Bhattacharya & Vogel, 2017)? Furthermore, how do we address the issue of providing care for older people who are no longer productive, employed, or part of the labour market (Federici, 2014)? What about those without pensions? By examining care work within a unitary framework, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the precarious conditions caused by inequality and uncertainty, particularly for middle-aged women who often assume the role of primary caregivers and face subordinations (Costa, 1996; Khairiyah & Thohir, 2023; Schroder-Butterfill, 2004). Is it possible to envision an alternative model of community care that serves as a counter to the inequitable commodified care system (Federici, 2014, 2019)? Lastly, how can we address the limitations of care delivery from the community and extended family, which represent the main sources of informal care discussed in this special issue?

A recent special edition of *Jurnal Perempuan* Vol. 28 No. 3—December 2023, a collection of rigorous studies led by feminist scholars, offers relevant insights into the questions mentioned above and advocates for the recognition of care work as decent work within the framework of universal rights (Gina, 2023). Whether performed in informal or formal care settings, the majority of care work remains unpaid or underpaid, persistently associated with women's role. Indonesian policies are contributing to the standardization of traditional gender roles that subordinate women, as evident in the Marriage Law of 1974 and the Population and Family Development Law of 2009 (Eddyono, 2023). Even when women work, society still expects them to take on the responsibility of providing childcare. This can be shown by either purchasing childcare services or entrusting other female family members to fulfill this role (Boangmanalu & Aprilia, 2023; Khairiyah & Thohir, 2023; Saleh, Swastika, & Fatikhah, 2023). In the manufacturing industry, the interdependent working system with unrealistic production targets prevents women from breastfeeding due to limited time for expressing breastmilk, forcing many to rely on formula milk (Saleh et al., 2023). Therefore, the failure to recognise and redistribute the dual burden of care work could potentially exclude women from productive work (Eddyono, 2023). Given the interdependence of care work and the economy, affirmative policies such as paid maternity and paternity leave, flexible working hours, and access to daycare are necessary to facilitate the redistribution of care work from women to men (Boangmanalu & Aprilia, 2023).

The above studies confirm that unequal gender roles in caregiving and reproductive labour continue to exist in Indonesia, putting women at risk of exclusion from the labour market and fair pay. The state's failure to support reproductive services, as a result of dismantling welfare programmes, has worsened inequality by relying on family care to maintain a workforce. Sylvia Federici, a Marxist feminist scholar, observed that in the 1970s, the feminist movement, initially focused on women's entry into the workforce, struggled to understand the relationship between production and reproduction (Federici, 2019). The reduction in state funding for education, healthcare, and hospital services characterises the rise of neoliberalism, which requires women, as the main caregivers, to stay at home and care for dependent family members. However, those who can afford to hire paid domestic workers also face challenges, as many of them are immigrant women seeking better employment opportunities due to difficult economic conditions in their

home countries (Federici, 2014, 2019).

The increased commodification has led to precarity, a state of perpetual instability concerning food, shelter, care, education, income, social bonds, mental health, and any means to sustain human life (Federici, 2014, 2019; Van Eeuwijk, 2020). The term precariousness also describes “a bounded historical condition of those who find themselves subjects to intermittent casual forms of labour... and live at the juncture of unstable contract labour and loss of state provisioning” (Han, 2018). In this context, neoliberalism significantly reduces the ability to provide quality care for others. For example, in order to meet basic needs with minimum welfare programs, older women often take on childcare and caregiving roles to support their daughters in the workplace (Vera-Sanso, 2012). Additionally, neoliberalism also shifts all reproductive and care responsibilities to individuals, families, relatives, and communities, resulting in inadequate informal care rooted in affection and voluntary work, and exacerbated by the lack of pensions, the breakdown of social bonds, and extreme poverty.

OUR FRAMEWORKS: STATE, FAMILY, AND SHIFTING CARING SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

Neoliberalism has exacerbated the situation in care provision and has had a significant impact on the caring space by combining market logics, individualism, and structural inequalities. In both rural and urban Indonesian settings, precarious livelihoods often diminish the amount of effort required to care for dependent family members. The unevenness of social welfare has resulted in nuclear families having to take on the responsibility of caring for their loved ones on their own, relying solely on unpaid female labour. This has worsened inequalities and left dependent individuals with insufficient support. This special issue illustrates important features of how neoliberalism shapes care arrangements throughout Indonesia, taking into account different kinship backgrounds, rural-urban context, cultural norms, and social class.

The articles in this special issue are organised around three topics. We begin this special issue with an illustration of how neoliberalism, which is characterised by the lack of social welfare, undermines the capacity of the working class to provide care for dependent family members. The first article, co-authored by Larastiti, Widjaya, and White, compares the experiences of three agrarian classes—landowners, petty commodity producers, and labour classes—in caring for the elderly and managing intergenerational dependencies. Drawing on social reproduction theory, the three authors provide an illustration of the process of “generational (inter)dependency” taking place in rural Yogyakarta. This phenomenon is partly driven by the out-migration of young individuals. Based on an ethnographic study, the article shows the vital roles that women in the middle generations play in caring for both older and dependent grandchildren. These roles are necessitated by the precarious state of the economy and the need to support the younger generation in the labour market. As a result, elder care needs are in neglect, leading to increased vulnerability for older people. While some government programs, such as PKH-Lansia and BPJS-PBI, have greatly reduced the vulnerability and uncertainty for those facing major medical costs, they are not accessible to everyone.

Similar to Larastiti et al’s piece, the second article adopts the concept of the crisis of care to argue that formula milk creates the perception that women workers have freedom to work, while

in reality it makes them reliant on it. Based on qualitative research in an industrial complex in East Jakarta, Shabia emphasizes that industrial production targets in the garment and textile industries have systematically disregarded the ability of women workers to breastfeed their newborns. The women interviewed in Shabia's study were aware that they could easily be replaced. Therefore, they saw formula milk as a practical alternative when they were unable to breastfeed (exclusively). Despite the existence of laws supporting breast milk, the government continues to normalise the market and promote formula milk industries as substitutes for breastfeeding, while failing to provide adequate leave and support for maternity care for women in the workforce.

Three of the articles that follow address the second topic, namely the shift of the caring space under neoliberalism. This shift is influenced by the interplay between the state, the market, and individuals, which can result in either a scarcity or an abundance of care provisions. In the third article, Solekhah presents an autoethnographic account of finding various increasingly commodified childcare options in Yogyakarta. While dual income parents have more options for safe and comfortable childcare, these options often fall short of the standards of an ideal public care space. By discussing her experience with paid playgrounds in Yogyakarta, Solekhah highlights the diminishing availability of free childcare areas in public spaces. She also notes the growing reliance of middle-class mothers on commercialised alternative childcare options. Solekhah contrasts the past use of local neighbourhood spaces as children's playgrounds, where *rewang* (older women employed to care for the house and children) and female neighbours commonly supervised the children, with the current trend of using paid playgrounds in shopping malls and fee-based parks. In these commercial settings, she observes an increased presence of men supervising children, although she did not go into detail in her data and analysis about how this commercialisation may shift gendered roles in childcare. Although these commercialized childcare facilities, such as playgrounds, offer more options for working parents, they also subject them to exorbitant costs.

The fourth article also highlights the presence of uncertainty in the future and precarious conditions in eldercare. Insriani, Mitra, and Schröder-Butterfill reveal that marginalised groups, such as older people living alone, often struggle to find non-commodified care, relying solely on cultural relationships and compassion from their environment. This paper explores the strategies of older individuals living alone due to the decline of intergenerational co-residence as a result of the impact of family nuclearization or childlessness. Based on a comparative ethnographic study in Yogyakarta and West Sumatera, this paper highlights the challenges older individuals living alone face when they need physical assistance. The inability to rely on family members for physical assistance in later life presents uncertainty for older people, requiring strategic development for long-term care to become a government responsibility. This could potentially address the issue of inadequate support for dependent older individuals, even when they receive care from extended family.

The fifth article addresses a similar topic to Solekha's piece, namely child care. While Solekha and the middle-class parents in her auto-ethnographic study have easily accessible commodified childcare options, the fifth article, authored by Ekawati, Wijaya, and Delpada, documents the restricted childcare options in Abui's community in Alor, West Nusa Tenggara. A grandmother is entrusted with supporting parents who work in the precarious and informal economy outside the region. On the other hand, a young and inexperienced female daughter is given the task of caring for their even younger niece. This care arrangement often leads to inconsistent quality of

child care, placing a greater financial burden on households and communities. Despite viewing caregiving as a duty, Abui women face retirement challenges due to extended caregiving hours. While the article does not provide details on the impact of such inconsistent care on the children, these findings point to a significant gap in childcare.

The third topic addressed in this special issue is the ways in which neoliberalism creates healthcare inequalities. These inequalities are evident through the delegation of care responsibilities to voluntary care workers, resulting in a shift between formal and informal care for community members in need. In their article, Porath, Schröder-Butterfill, Insriani, and Larastiti explore the role of community healthcare cadres (*kader*) and the symbolic efficacy of community health meetings. The paper posits that community values form the basis for recruitment and incentives and that volunteer cadres need to have a direct cultural connection to effectively engage with clients, specifically older people. The paper also discusses the health efficacy of community health meetings as regular structured symbolic events and suggests using a qualitative approach, drawing on ritual healing anthropology, to understand their efficacy.

We conclude this special issue with a short field report that focuses on a topic similar to the fifth article, which is care for older individuals. Jelly and Delpada provide a detailed account of the conflicts that arise within families when it comes to the care of older relatives, especially in relation to kinship ties. These tensions stem from the unequal distribution of care responsibilities, which places a disproportionate burden on female family members and intersects with concerns about inheritance. Older people who are dependent on physical assistance may blame themselves for these tensions, suppress their emotions, and refuse to accept care from their caregivers.

Globally, neoliberalism has dismantled the state-based system of social protection, shifting the focus towards personal and community responsibility. While it was previously assumed that societies influenced by ‘eastern values’, such as Indonesia, would be unaffected by this crisis due to strong communal values, our conversations with scholars working on care-related topics suggest otherwise. It is believed that in these societies, family, friends, and neighbours support each other, including in raising children as well as in caring for older people or other family members. However, the collection of these seven articles emphasizes that we are not shielded from the impacts of this crisis.

STATEMENT OF COMPETING INTERESTS

As the Guest Editor, Ciptaningrat Larastiti was not involved in any of the external peer review processes. The peer review process was handled by Humaniora’s editorial team. Larastiti was not informed about the names of the peer reviewers assigned to the articles in this special issue. Larastiti was also not involved in the editorial decision of any article she co-authored. Each article published in this special issue underwent at least one stage of the external peer review process, similar to that applied to other publications by Humaniora.

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