



The Peacock's vision of ecology

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Of the handful of Indonesian poets, W.S. Rendra was one of the most vocal critics launching stern attacks against the authoritarian New Order regime. Ever up to a few years before he passed away, through his poems in particular, Rendra tirelessly voiced his stance on such crucial issues as democracy, clean governance, justice, combating corruption and poverty, aiding the poor and the oppressed, and so on. However, little if no attention at all is given to Rendra's concerns over the matters of ecology and the environment, which were crucial parts of his existential struggle as an enlightening poet. In the midst of perpetual political hubbub, people's clear consciences often turn rigid and cannot be easily moved or touched by other issues that may appear simple but may not be, like ecology and the environment. However, if truth be told, Rendra made an exception. Despite the fact that by the time he breathed his last, the Peacock, as Rendra was affectionately known, bequeathed nothing, not even alluding to his art training camp of Bengkel Teater that he took care of for decades; he nevertheless requested his oldest daughter, Clara Shinta,

that his land, measuring up to 6 hectares, in Citayam be planted with trees and protected. On that land, hundreds of Borneo ironwood and ebony trees have been planted, with strict instructions not to fell them for another 20 years (*Kompas*, Aug. 9, 2009). In keeping with a line from a poem of his that reads, "Struggle is the implementation of words", Rendra not only talked more, but in truth he did more. He made a significant effort in terms of environmental and natural conservation. And in this regard, he deserves special appreciation for his visionary ecological efforts. It can also be a real example, especially to state authorities, to take real action in the restoration of deforested areas. While much of our rainforests are deteriorating, in terms of quantity and quality, as a result of ongoing deforestation, colossal illegal logging, wildlife hunting and trafficking as well as environmental pollution, we have hardly ever been successful in reforesting them, let alone in carrying out the greening of other public spheres. If we take a thorough look at towns and cities across our country, it can be easily found that most of them are losing their green belts, due in large part to very vision-poor development projects. Not surprisingly, then, city forests and green comfortable public parks where families and people can take

it easy and have fun, where birds and other animals can coexist with humans, are scant and hard to find. So it is safe to say that city forests and green public spheres have almost faded from our environmental vocabulary. Up until the early 1970s, still fresh in our memory, our towns and cities were still so green. Then the wave of development projects came, inundating them with buildings. At the time, nature and the environment had been so friendly to people, cutting down air pollution, preventing floods and nurturing wildlife. We didn't need, for example, to hunt for birds and put them in cages to hear them twitter, for there was an abundance of birds living out there in the wild, warbling for free. But this is all gone; now, we have to pay hundreds of thousands just to hear the chirping again. By comparison, during a short trip to neighboring countries like Singapore and Malaysia, I didn't come across the kind of ugly environmental scene we have here. In those countries, at first glance, it seems their towns and cities are designed and developed with such integrative city management that city forests, green public parks and green areas, among other things, are inseparable and non-negotiable necessities. Along with that, the environmentally friendly towns and cities,

can work out well, for sure, only because their supporting policies, laws and regulations are determinedly upheld that no one, for example, is allowable to cultivate any land without allocating green space; and that any kind of illegal wildlife possession, hunting and trafficking is completely prohibited. It is essential that our state authorities learn from them how to develop and manage cities with visionary planning. Also, learning from Rendra's ecological attempt at foresting his own land, the Peacock has taught us a lesson that in addition to comprehensive policies, laws and regulations, we also need national leadership with strong willingness, real action and integrative visionary planning to be able to reach a time when our towns and cities become green, environmentally friendly. It is a must to educate people on political behavior by means of democratic ways, so I think in the current emergency condition of the environment it is more often than not workable to educate them to be more environmentally aware and nature-friendly by force. The writer is currently a lecturer in English at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN Walisongo), Semarang.