poetika
Jurnal Ilmu Sastra
https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/poetika

Vol. 12, No. 2, October 2024
page 109—121
https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v12i2.99577

Land and Legacy: Investigating Horizontal Conflicts in the Short Story "Dataran Melengen" through Postcolonial Ecocriticism Framework

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ABSTRACT

The issue of ecology in former colonies is an inevitable consequence of past colonialism. The difference now is that the "colonial" subjects have transformed into multinational corporations that exploit nature and people by seizing the land on which communities depend for their livelihoods. This land grabbing is sanctioned by Indonesia through the legalization of laws that allow capitalism to flourish, while local communities become increasingly impoverished. This ecological issue is depicted in literature that critically addresses environmental issues. Therefore, this study examines the short story "Dataran Melengen" (2003) by Korrie Layun Rampan, which actively portrays the ecological issues in Kalimantan caused by companies holding Forest Concession Rights. This research actively employs postcolonial ecocriticism theory by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin as its formal framework and critically analyzes the text using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method. This theory extensively discusses ecological issues in postcolonial countries, highlighting how state approval and abuse of power contribute to these issues. The study reveals ecological issues within the Dataran Melengen community, including horizontal conflicts driven by poverty, along with cultural loss, terror, and trauma. The short story "Dataran Melengen" serves two key functions as mentioned by Huggan and Tiffin: aesthetic and advocacy. These functions are expected to catalyze a third function—activism—where literature can drive social change. The research process involved a close reading of the text, contextual analysis, and a critical discourse approach to explore the interplay between narrative, power, and ecology.

Keywords: *"Dataran Melengen"; Forest Concession Rights; horizontal conflict; land and legacy; postcolonial ecocriticism*

INTRODUCTION

The dispossession of indigenous land, arbitrarily claimed as state property, has been a persistent issue since the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia. This practice continues today, as multinational corporations are given the green light to exploit Indonesia's natural resources while local communities bear the pain of being forcibly displaced from their land. Land is not just a piece of solid ground; it embodies nationhood, history, and the identity of the people tied to it. Furthermore, land holds significant economic value for those who live on and rely on it (Permadi, 2023). The loss of land, therefore, strips away all these aspects,

as it carries monumental significance (Zakie, 2016). However, this vision seems increasingly unattainable, much like the Indonesian proverb, *"jauh panggang dari api"* (far from the fire).

For example, the Dutch dispossession of land involved creating a hierarchical racial distinction that segregated Europeans, Indo-Europeans, foreign Asians *(vreemde Oosterlingen),* and indigenous people (*inlander*). The Dutch consolidated the concept of the village as a unit of land ownership through the Agrarian Law of 1870, which declared that indigenous land ownership existed in the form of customary law communities (*rechtsgemeenschap*) with "rights of avail" over designated land areas. However, the concept of "rights of avail" remained ambiguous and was not further elaborated, and the Dutch did not intend to recognize these rights as ownership for the indigenous people. The situation worsened as the Dutch excluded forests and vacant lands from the definition of villages, meaning farmers had no space to expand cultivation, and all "vacant land" was allocated to the state or European-owned plantations (Li, 2010). The Dutch colonial administration used indigenous land for plantations under the *erfpacht* system, granting absolute control for ninety-nine years. In contrast, the other two rights were allocated to local Indigenous communities and Indigenous people from outside. This system transformed the local tradition of communal land ownership into a more centralized and exclusive system (Ritonga et al., 2022).

After Indonesia gained independence, Soekarno made a significant move by nationalizing foreign companies and transferring their ownership to Indonesians. The Basic Provisions of Agrarian Principles known as Undang-Undang Pokok Agraria (UUPA), Number 5 of 1960, Soekarno dismantled the colonial agrarian law of 1870, prioritized land redistribution for poor farmers, highlighted the social function of land and banned private dominance in the agrarian sector (Nurdin, 2022). However, the UUPA faced controversy due to ambiguities surrounding the term "state land", which led people to view land merely as a commodity and a tool for capital accumulation (Nugroho & Kav, 2018). Soeharto, through the 1967 Forestry Law, then facilitated the commercial exploitation of forest areas and granted Forest Concession Rights, known as *Hak Pengusahaan Hutan* (HPH), to both state and private companies (Barr, 1998). From then on, the state officially engaged in large-scale resource exploitation. The New Order regime assumed three major roles in land control, management, and utilization: first, as the sole authority over agrarian resources; second, as a manager of state-controlled lands; and third, as a protector of agrarian resources. Consequently, many scholars view the New Order's economic development strategy and implementation as heavily inclined toward capitalism (Aprianto, 2021).

Capitalism does not just subordinate nature and the environment as "second-class" non-human elements; it also treats Indigenous communities with the same disregard, stripping them of their rights to live on their own land. Plumwood describes this issue as a "culture" where hierarchical relationships between humans and non-humans create a hegemonic centrism. This hierarchy leads to a hegemonic centrism that exploits nature and minimizes non-human claims to our shared planet (Plumwood, 2005). This claim is implicitly concealed behind the national development projects promoted by the New Order regime.

After the New Order regime fell in 1998, President Habibie's interim reform cabinet passed the Forestry Law in September 1999, placing Indigenous communities as central figures. Despite its populist language, the law failed to recognize Indigenous communities the right to manage their own resources. "The government is to decide whether or not '*masyarakat adat*' exists as a legally recognizable" and unfortunately, forest and land management practices remain under the strict guidance and control of the Department of Forestry (Li, 2001).

Based on our analysis, we clearly demonstrate that horizontal conflicts, environmental issues, poverty, and the extinction of certain ethnic groups are just a few of the logical consequences and legal implications created by state policies. At this point, we can trace the genealogy of natural resource control by foreign companies in Indonesia as a continuation of colonial practices still affecting postcolonial societies. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin specifically address this in their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism.*

Huggan & Tiffin (2015) combined two different fields of knowledge and ethics into one unified discipline: postcolonial studies, which is more anthropocentric, and ecological studies, which usually adopts an anti-anthropocentric stance. Huggan believes that these two approaches can influence each other, as discussions about the environment inevitably

lead to considerations of humanism. In the context of environmental degradation, they highlight the discourse of "development" and the abuse of power. The "development" discourse becomes particularly interesting when examined in post-reform Indonesia, with regional autonomy and decentralization, and their impact on the "fate" of Indigenous people.

Postcolonial ecological issues in former colonies are powerfully captured in literature, serving as a vital medium for discourse—an idea articulated by Huggan regarding literature's role in "aesthetics, advocacy, and activism" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015). The short story "Dataran Melengen" from Korrie Layun Rampan's collection *Melintasi Malam* (2003) stands out as a significant work for analysis. It effectively illustrates both direct and indirect consequences of Forest Concession Rights, revealing the profound disillusionment with reform processes that have largely failed to benefit Indigenous people (Rampan, 2003).

In "Dataran Melengen", the main character faces conflicts arising from the exploitation of natural resources by corporations, mirroring the issues raised within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism. The injustices experienced by Indigenous communities are vividly depicted through the character's struggle to retain their land rights, symbolizing their identity and historical connection to the land. Understanding the historical and social context surrounding Dataran Melengen is crucial for grasping the impact of colonialism in Indonesia. The work not only reflects current events but also engages with a complex historical legacy that intertwines Indigenous people with their land.

Additionally, specific examples from the text enhance this analysis. In a poignant section, the author illustrates how forests, once vital to the livelihoods of Indigenous people, have been replaced by large plantations. The phrase "the forest that once spoke now lies silent beneath the roar of machines" dramatically captures this transformation and highlights the loss of voice and rights experienced by Indigenous communities.

Analyzing this short story is urgent due to its timely exploration of horizontal conflicts and power abuses stemming from colonial and neocolonial legacies. By addressing these issues, "Dataran Melengen" not only reflects the struggles faced by marginalized communities but also highlights the broader implications of transnational corporate interests in natural resource exploitation. This research focuses on two key questions: first, how do transnational issues influence the emergence of conflict and power dynamics within the narrative? Second, what role does literature play in postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly in confronting the ecological challenges Indigenous people encounter? Through this examination, we aim to uncover the intricate connections between narrative, identity, and environmental justice.

To explore the answers to these questions, we use Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's theory of Postcolonial Ecocriticism. This theory addresses the extension of traditional forms of colonialism in relation to environmental and animal exploitation. What the postcolonial/ecocritical alliance emphasizes is the need for a broad materialist understanding of the changing relationship between humans, animals and the environment—which in turn requires attention to the politics of cultural representation and then leads to an anticolonial critique (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015). Huggan quotes Na'Allah in discussing the context of the Ogoni people's struggle against neocolonialism in their country:

> The primary context against which the continuing narrative of Ogoni struggle needs to be read is that of colonialism or, perhaps better, neocolonialism, the long and at times elaborate process by which 'the multinational companies [came to] replace colonial power in Nigeria, and indeed in the Third World as a whole'.
>
> (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015: 36).

Postcolonialism itself is laden with the ideology of humanism and thus implies anthropocentrism. However, the supremacy of the species on the "human" ignores the roles of non-humans, including the environment (Braidotti, 2019; Gane, 2006). Therefore, it becomes a logical consequence that there is large-scale exploitation of nature for the good of "humans", even though we also need to talk about which humans are affected and who benefits the most from this exploitation. One of the theories of ecocriticism was born to look at discursive symptoms about nature/environment from a literary perspective.

For Huggan and Tiffin, literature is positioned in relation to its role in aesthetics, advocacy and

activism. Postcolonial ecocriticism maintains the aesthetic function of literary texts while drawing attention to their social and political utility, serving as symbolic guides for social transformation. In terms of advocacy, literature acts as a medium for social and environmental advocacy, with the potential to transform imaginative literature into a catalyst for social action and exploratory literary analysis, which ultimately develops into a form of cultural criticism. Finally, postcolonial ecocriticism can be seen as an interventionist effort that aims to reshape the social order in favor of marginalized subjects, both human and environment (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

One of the central issues in postcolonial ecocriticism theory is the abuse of power. In other words, the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and the environment carried out by colonials is now replaced by multinational corporations that are condoned by the state, through state actors, legality, licensing, and others (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015). After all, addressing ecological degradation is as crucial as addressing the erosion of social order, and environmental issues cannot be separated from questions of social justice and human rights.

The short story "Dataran Melengen" has previously been researched by Nurkirana et al (2020). The research focused on ecocritical analysis and its relation to teachers' teaching materials in writing ecological short stories in schools. Another study focuses on the book *Melintasi Malam* which uses literary anthropology theory to look at cultural elements, local wisdom, and the impact of violating locality values. In addition, it also generally explains ecological issues such as forest destruction, inter-community conflicts, poverty, and curses (Kamilah et al., 2022). This research distinguishes itself from previous studies by employing postcolonial ecocriticism to examine horizontal conflicts associated with state power abuse. We aim to illuminate these issues as integral to ongoing transnational interests involving superpowers and multinational corporations as a novelty in this research.

This study is qualitative with the results presented descriptively. The formal object of this article is the postcolonial ecocriticism theory by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin. The material object is the short story "Dataran Melengen", which Korrie Layun Rampan included in his book *Melintasi Malam*, published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2003. The data consists of linguistic units, including sentences, characters, and sequences of events, which explore ecological issues caused by the implications of colonization in postcolonial countries from the perspective of Huggan and Tiffin. Data analysis involves connecting and interpreting these elements to uncover insights that are not immediately apparent when examining them in isolation. By linking the data together, conclusions can be drawn, and patterns identified that might otherwise remain hidden if the data were considered separately (Faruk, 2020).

This study uses Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the data analysis method, which views each text as an integration of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. This research specifically employs an ideational reading approach, where ideational meaning is understood as a language used to express physical reality, which also relates to the interpretation and representation of experience (Fairclough, 1993). The process of reading the text is centered on the text itself, on the tensions and ambiguities that the text contains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

America and Horizontal Conflicts in "Dataran Melengen"

After the Second World War, America emerged as the new world superpower, aligning itself with Britain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Japan. Following Indonesia's proclamation of independence, the Netherlands once again asserted itself through a failed invasion in 1947, despite incurring some losses against Indonesia through the outcomes of the conference in 1949 *(Konferensi Meja Bundar).* Nevertheless, Indonesia successfully defended its independence. Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, led the country by ingratiating himself with the major ideologies of the time: nationalists, religious groups, and communists. The implication was that Soekarno also governed the country based on the principles of socialism-communism, which resonated with marginalized groups such as farm workers. In the ensuing period, Soekarno implemented the Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) and executed land reform. This land reform was also a form of resistance to colonialism and the domination of foreign capital. Soekarno also explicitly rejected aid from America through the World Bank, which offered loans, famously declaring, "Go to hell

(America) with your aid." At that time, Soekarno had discerned a troubling indication regarding the pretext of the loans proposed by the United States.

The 1965 was a pivotal moment that drastically altered Indonesian politics. Soeharto executed a coup that began with the assassination of several generals, leading to mass killings across Indonesia—an event that can be more accurately described as genocide in the context defined by Lemkin (1946). These systematic mass killings targeted the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and associated organizations and individuals, carried out by a regime that had only recently come to power under Soeharto. Notably, in the weeks leading up to September 30, 1965, policymakers in Washington cautioned one another not to allow the Vietnam War to distract from the equally urgent situation in Indonesia (Roosa, 2008).

A meeting involving a small group of State Department officials and Deputy Secretary of State George Ball in late August 1965, underscored that Indonesia was at least as crucial as the rest of Indochina, because Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Indonesia, contained vital resources such as natural rubber, tin, and petroleum. Although the logic of war is often complex, Richard Nixon, in a 1965 speech, justified the bombing of North Vietnam as a measure to safeguard the "tremendous mineral potential" of Indonesia. American ground troops had begun entering Vietnam as early as March 1965, and their presence would have been rendered ineffective had the communists gained control in a larger and more strategically significant nation like Indonesia (Roosa, 2008).

The control of Indonesia by the PKI would have undermined U.S. intervention efforts in Vietnam (Roosa, 2008). Ten days after September 30, reports from New York Times journalists indicated a noticeably improved mood in Washington, reflecting a positive outlook on the events in Indonesia. Thus, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman correctly asserted that the massacres in Indonesia, which Chomsky termed a "holocaust," served the interests of American foreign policy (Chomsky & Herman, 1979).

The United States' response to the tragedy in Indonesia was notably passive; no members of Congress condemned the events publicly, nor did any major U.S. aid organizations offer assistance. The World Bank, seemingly unfazed by the widespread terror and systematic looting of financial resources, proceeded to make Indonesia its third-largest borrower, granting approximately $2 billion in loans over the preceding decade (Chomsky & Herman, 1979). The close relationship between the United States and Soeharto was further solidified with the enactment of the Investment Law in 1967. During this early period, multinational corporations such as Weyerhaeuser, Georgia Pacific, and Unilever engaged in resource extraction in Indonesia. Additionally, Bob Hasan became the sole agent responsible for determining which entities could obtain Forest Concession Rights licenses from the early 1970s onward. Between 1967 and 1980, the Indonesian government issued at least 519 Forest Concession Rights licenses to state-owned enterprises known as Badan Usaha Milik Negara (BUMN) and private corporations, with a significant concentration of these licenses in Sumatra and Kalimantan.

Forest Concession Rights licenses has given rise to a range of complex issues, including the appropriation of customary land grabbing by the state. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of state recognition for Indigenous communities, which hinders their ability to protect their living spaces (Wijaya, 2024). Furthermore, Forest Concession Rights contribute to new forms of poverty among communities, resulting in significant ecological damage. The environmental challenges faced in various regions of Indonesia—often in villages that are not widely recognized on the national stage—are both direct and indirect consequences of global interests, particularly those connected to the United States. In addition, MacAndrews (1994) asserts that discussions of environmental issues in Indonesia cannot be separated from the political landscape.

One of the significant challenges that emerged following the introduction of Forest Concession Rights in Kalimantan, as depicted in the short story "Dataran Melengen", is the horizontal conflict between tribes. These horizontal conflicts among residents of the Dataran Melengen can be attributed to two primary factors. The first factor is the natural consequence of HPH, which leads to the appropriation of inter-tribal lands not managed by the state or companies, prompting communities to encroach upon each other's individual land ownership. This can be seen from the following quote:

> "D*ataran itu telah menjadi ajang rebutan," Ayaubura berkata.*

"Masing-masing warga dari kampung sebelah-menyebelah mengklaim kawasan itu masuk dalam wilayah mereka. Karena kakekmu sudah lama tidur di dalam bumi, semua orang berani mematok sesuka hati."
"Petinggi tak menyelesaikan tapal batas kampung?"
"Jangankan Petinggi, camat saja tak mereka dengarkan," Laiqputi ikut memberi penjelasan. "Sekarang orang sedang rebutan hutan karena kayu yang bermutu mulai langka sehingga mahal harganya!"

(Rampan, 2003: 73).

"The plain has become a bone of contention," Ayaubura said.
"People from neighboring villages each claim the area as their own. Since your grandfather has been sleeping in the earth for a long time, everyone dares to peg it at will."
"The higher-ups didn't settle the village boundaries?"
"Let alone the higher-ups, they don't even listen to the subdistrict head," Laiqputi explained. "Now people are fighting over the forest because quality timber is scarce and therefore expensive!"

A closer look at the quote indicates that economic factors have significantly contributed to the land struggles in the Dataran Melengen. Furthermore, the role of the customary leader, known as the "Petinggi" has become increasingly diminished, leaving residents without the opportunity for consultation or guidance. In various areas of the forest, makeshift and worn wooden markers have been placed to signify ownership, reflecting the changes that have occurred over the past twenty years. Unfortunately, evidence of deforestation and environmental degradation is now visible throughout the forest, with a long highway cutting through the area.

Jalan ini berasal dari base camp di Keleu," Ayaubura berkata menjelaskan. "Penggunanya ganti-berganti selama dua puluh tahun ini. Satu perusahaan lari atau bangkrut, diganti lagi perusahaan HPH lainnya. Perusahaan-perusahaan itulah yang menguras habis pohon-pohon berharga!"

(Rampan, 2003: 74)

This highway originates from the base camp in Keleu," Ayaubura explained. "The users have changed over the past twenty years. One company ran away or went bankrupt, and another HPH company replaced it. It's those companies that are draining the precious trees!"

Through the symbolism of the "highway", we can discern the large-scale projects underway in Dataran Melengen. The construction of the highway primarily serves the needs of buses and heavy transport trucks rather than the local villagers. Although the names of the large companies may change, their practices remain consistent, continuing the exploitation of valuable timber resources. Tragically, as the trees have vanished, so too have the animals, while the local population continues to live in dire conditions.

Based on the excerpt from Rampan (2003) above, it appears that the community now finds itself competing for the meager remnants of wood, while valuable timber on a larger scale remains under the control of HPH. Consequently, the poverty affecting the community is significantly more severe than it was prior to the arrival of Forest Concession Rights.

Another factor that triggered horizontal conflict in Dataran Melengen was an external factor, the HPH itself. The government is only concerned with profits from commission deductions, taxes and shares from joint ventures, so damage to the community and deaths are not a big problem. In the silent forest, there was a big feud between villagers. Some shouted, "just kill the Ludah people!" while others shouted, "kill the Sental people". Each numbered about fifty people, and all carried machetes, spears, and other sharp weapons. Meanwhile, the narrator as the true heir to his grandfather's village land could not do anything. He was trapped in the middle of the battle arena, confused, and could not do anything. The silent forest witnessed the fall of the abstinence from swearing and cursing in it. Both the residents of Ludah and Sental hated each other and accused the other of being the usurper of the forest land.

Amid rising tensions between the two village factions, two logging trailers laden with timber entered the crowd, leaving little time for the villagers to escape. Many were trampled under the heavy tires of the trucks resulting in horrific injuries—bodies severed, brains splattered, and blood inundating the once-silent forest. This narrative illustrates that the conflicting parties are ultimately victims of a

larger, overpowering force. Without clarity on who initiated the conflict or the underlying agreements, the residents find themselves converging in the very forest that has become the locus of their dispute.

The trucks belong to the Forest Concession Rights company, highlighting its role in seizing the remaining forest resources from the community. Consequently, the villagers' aspirations to claim even a fraction of timber were obliterated; not a single log remained in the hands of the rightful owners: the villagers and Indigenous people. What Forest Concession Rights doing is effectively reflects the abuse of power described by Huggan and Tiffin, which exploits nature while simultaneously continuing the oppression of the people within it—who, although they are formally independent, remain far from the essence of that independence.

Since the crackdown on the PKI during the Soeharto regime, which resulted in an estimated death toll of five hundred thousand to one million (Chomsky & Herman, 1979), the humanitarian and ecological issues arising from extensive forest exploitation have been largely disregarded. Corrupt officials prioritized the protection of American-led companies, upholding domestic investment values under the guise of a "development" narrative that ultimately benefited themselves. What occurs in the "Dataran Melengen"—characterized by poverty and horizontal conflicts among residents—can be viewed as a manifestation of neocolonialism, implicating both America and the Soeharto regime.

Indigenous People in the Grip of Land Conflict and Capitalist Interests

The extensive history of colonization in Indonesia, marked by the subjugation of its people by various powers, has profoundly shaped the social systems within its communities. The short story illustrates the profound impact of colonial history on Indonesia's social systems, particularly through the lens of land and community dynamics. The establishment of "villages" by colonial powers, as discussed by Breman (1982), was a construct aimed at facilitating agricultural governance and resource extraction. This administrative system had far-reaching implications, including the enforcement of agreements that prioritized the interests of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) over the well-being of local populations (Ahmadin, 2007). Even after Indonesia gained independence, external influences continued to permeate Indigenous communities, often leading to conflicts over land ownership and governance. The excerpt from the short story "Dataran Melengen" underscores this tension, illustrating how Indigenous groups expressed their frustrations against traditional leaders perceived as complicit with exploitative interests.

> *"Bunuh mati petinggi. Kita bagi tanah milik kita! Kita pertahankan Kawasan kita! Jangan sampai direbut orang Ludah!"*
>
> (Rampan, 2003: 78)

> "Kill the leaders. We'll divide our land among ourselves! We'll defend our territory! Don't let the Outsiders take it!"

The ongoing land conflicts affecting Indigenous people in Indonesia can be traced back to a complex history of colonization and subsequent government policies favoring foreign investments, particularly those aligned with American interests. These policies have systematically marginalized Indigenous communities, stripping them of their land and livelihoods. The resulting displacement has deepened their poverty, while companies holding Forest Concession Rights continue to exacerbate this situation by prioritizing profit over the rights of Indigenous populations.

Central to this issue is the persistent stigma of "laziness" that has been unfairly attributed to Indigenous people in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. As Syed Hussein Alatas points out, this label was historically employed by colonial powers to justify exploitative labor practices in their pursuit of profit (Alatas, 1988). Today, HPH companies perpetuate this stereotype, framing Indigenous communities as impoverished due to a lack of motivation and education. This narrative not only misrepresents their realities but also further marginalizes them, resulting in shrinking land, entrenched poverty, and minimal state protection. The government's legal framework often reinforces these injustices, siding with HPH companies that provide financial benefits to the state through administrative fees and taxes. This dynamic exemplifies how capitalist interests undermine the rights of Indigenous people, contributing to their ongoing disenfranchisement.

The broader implications of capitalism in postcolonial contexts are echoed in the works of Huggan and Tiffin, who highlight the detrimental impacts of resource extraction on local populations. In Nigeria, for example, the extraction of oil has left communities impoverished, while in India, dam construction has displaced countless residents. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) describe these practices as a form of ethnic genocide, emphasizing the existential threats faced by Indigenous tribes. While the situation in Kalimantan in the short story may not yet equate to ethnic cleansing, the relentless displacement of Indigenous people poses significant risks to their cultural identities and heritage (Rampan, 2003).

In light of these challenges, the question arises: can capitalism be eco-friendly? This inquiry, posed by Magdoff and Foster, reflects the ongoing struggle of ecological thinkers to reconcile capitalist frameworks with sustainable practices. Despite attempts to create a non-corporate, eco-friendly model of capitalism, practical solutions often fail to materialize within the capitalist paradigm. As David Harvey succinctly states, if capitalism were compelled to internalize all social and environmental costs, it would be unsustainable (Magdoff & Foster, 2018).

> *"Inikah makna reformasi? Inikah makna otonomi daerah yang terdengar sangat indah? Inikah kebablasan di semua lini? Dan akhirnya berujung pada mati?"*
>
> (Rampan, 2003: 80)

> "Is this the meaning of reform? Is this the meaning of regional autonomy that sounds so beautiful? Is this an act of overreach on all fronts? And ultimately lead to death?"

This reflection captures the disillusionment surrounding the reforms anticipated to fundamentally change Indonesia's socio-political landscape, particularly regarding the rights of communities affected by forest exploitation since the Soeharto era. Ultimately, regional autonomy has failed to provide genuine benefits to Indigenous people; instead, it has often reinforced abuses of power by local authorities. The narrative surrounding Indigenous people in the grip of land conflict and capitalist interests highlights a pressing need for critical examination and advocacy. Insights drawn from these stories reflect the complex interplay between displacement, identity, and resistance. Such narratives not only shed light on the challenges faced by Indigenous communities but also call for deeper exploration into the intersections of culture, politics, and environmental justice.

Face of Kalimantan in "Dataran Melengen": Literature in Aesthetics and Advocacy

At the beginning of the short story, we are introduced to the beauty of Kalimantan's distinctive flora, with a diverse array of sturdy trees standing tall, adorned with colorful fruits, towering high, and providing shelter for the animals within. The presence of animals is also described as living in peaceful harmony with humans. The narrator, who lives in Jakarta, cannot stop marveling at Kalimantan's beauty—something that monotonous school textbooks could never capture. The narrator recalls everything seen there, memories that linger for the next twenty years.

> *Tapi saat aku tiba di hutan itu bersama beberapa warga, pembabatan meranti, balau, dan kayu-kayu yang berharga lainnya dilakukan dengan rakus tanpa memikirkan kerusakan ekologi. Jalan tembus lalu-lalang di tengah hutan, membuat aku pangling, di manakah dulu kami memasang poti dan oyot untuk menangkap babi dan rusa yang memangsa padi huma. Tak kulihat lagi pohon jelutung, pohon jaan yang buahnya enak sekali diemut karena daging buahnya lunak berasa manis sedikit asam. Sama seperti rasa buah tamarin yang pernah kumakan di Thailand, seakan rasa keasaman asam jawa*
>
> (Rampan, 2003: 74)

> "However, when I arrived in the forest with some villagers, Meranti, Balau and other valuable timber were being greedily cut down with no regard for ecological damage. The road that cuts through the middle of the forest makes me wonder where we used to set up *poti* and *oyot* to catch the pigs and deer that preyed on the *huma* rice. I no longer see the jelutong tree, a *jaan* tree whose fruit is delicious to eat because its soft flesh is sweet and slightly sour. Like the tamarin fruit I had eaten in Thailand, it tasted sour like tamarind".

The transformation of the beauty of Kalimantan,

once vividly seen by the narrator, is starkly illustrated in the narrative. The forests, which once provided a modest livelihood for the local community, are now being exploited on a massive scale. The quote underscores this shift: "However, when I arrived in the forest with some villagers, Meranti, Balau, and other valuable timber were being greedily cut down with no regard for ecological damage." This poignant imagery emphasizes the ecological devastation that accompanies such exploitation.

Huggan and Tiffin discuss the literary "responsibility" embedded in aesthetics, advocacy, and activism, expressing optimism about the role of literature in addressing these issues. They assert that literature can not only capture the beauty of nature but also vividly depict ecological destruction that readers may never have witnessed yet is undeniably real. This ecological damage often intertwines with social injustices, natural disasters, poverty, and various conflicts.

The themes and discourses presented in literature hold the potential to foster new imaginations that extend beyond the text. Literature serves as a medium to propose solutions rooted in humanity and collective well-being, urging readers to consider ideas for regional development or sustainable tourism that benefit all. Aesthetically, literature appeals to the more sensitive aspects of humanity, training readers to perceive social realities with greater awareness.

In "Dataran Melengen", this journey is exemplified as readers are led through Kalimantan's beauty while grappling with the underlying tragedy. The narrator reflects, "I no longer see the *jelutung* tree, a *jaan* tree whose fruit is delicious to eat..." This nostalgia highlights the loss of biodiversity and cultural heritage, as decisions made by a select few elites and state actors in Jakarta have profound implications on local farmers. As the narrator notes, "the forests that once sustained entire families for generations are transformed into sources of wealth for multinational corporations," resulting in Indigenous people being unable to afford even basic necessities, such as fish.

Through these detailed observations, the narrative reveals how literature can illuminate the social injustices linked to ecological degradation. By providing concrete examples and quotes, the analysis not only reflects the findings of the short story but also enhances transparency in interpretation, emphasizing the urgent need for awareness and advocacy regarding the plight of Indigenous communities in Kalimantan.

Exploring Loss: Terror, Imprisonment, and Cultural Trauma

Questioning land dispossession and conflicts cannot be separated from the discourse of "loss". This loss is often treated as something abstract, existing on an immaterial plane, intangible. It is not recognized as part of the material world and is instead sought to be materialized through the process of "meaning-making" regarding the loss itself. This may also be due to our knowledge, which has long been dominated by the productive dualism of Cartesian and Kantian thought, tending to separate the tangible from the intangible and accepting this distinction as universal (Widayati, 2023).

This view, as we have mentioned in the introduction, also dichotomizes the environment. A dichotomy between human and non-human places the supremacy of the human species and instead views nature/forest as a material object that is free to exploit. For Indigenous people, forests are not only "material" that provide a source of livelihood and life, but there are also certain beliefs, folklore, hopes, and traditions that are closely related to forests. Forests are also linked to community belief systems, some even refer to them as "religions" or local beliefs (Roux et al., 2022). These beliefs function not only concerning the other powers that protect humans but also reciprocally with humans protecting the forest. For example, in the Orang Rimba, the forest is also believed to be a place of separation between the real world and the supernatural world inhabited by humans and Gods (Fauziah, 2022).

The loss of Indigenous people's lands and forests is already explained as the first loss, which is the loss of trust. HPH companies, for example, seem to have come and replaced the Gods that the community trusted. Unfortunately, that is not the only thing that has been taken away from them; the loss is also accompanied by other injustices felt by the community. For example, the "collected memory" of the terror of thuggery during the New Order era (Hidayani et al., 2023), whose function was not only to spread fear among the community but also to become militias and commit violence against civilians. It continues even though reform has passed—"*dan para preman gentayangan di seluruh Kawasan"*—and thugs hang around the neighborhood (Rampan, 2003: 77).

In addition to the persistent terror, local communities advocating for their land also face the constant threat of imprisonment. Numerous cases have emerged where Indigenous people have been imprisoned for years for defending their lands (Sinaga, 2022; Widadio, 2024). This situation reinforces the perception that Indigenous people lack adequate legal protection (Dewi, 2022). Utilizing Foucaul's concept, the presence of thugs functions as a form of panopticon, using control to force compliance and prevent resistance (Foucault, 1978). Even in the absence of thugs, the community remains under continuous surveillance.

> *"Karena mereka lapar," Laiqputi menimpali. "Dulu mereka dikekang dan dipasung, kini mereka dibebaskan. Coba, orang tak bersalah mana yang tak dendam, jika ia telah dilepas dari penjara"*
>
> (Rampan, 2003: 76)

> "Because they're hungry," Laiqputi added. "They were once restrained and shackled, now they're free. Imagine, who wouldn't hold a grudge if they'd been freed after such imprisonment?"

Based on the quote, it's clear that prisons silence local people and prevent them from speaking out. Even after they're freed, they're still haunted by their distressing prison experiences. They're eager to get revenge on the big companies that took away their time—an irreplaceable loss. Since they're unsure how to get back at these companies, their built-up anger often leads to conflicts with each other, like the disputes between the Ludah and Sental residents in "Dataran Melengen".

Terror against communities has been deeply systemic, beginning with the United States turning a blind eye to the "holocaust" of the 30th September events, which allowed Soeharto's regime to escape international consequences. This protection enabled the massive exploitation of forests, reaping profits from investors. On a national level, Soeharto's regime used the military to suppress any resistance from the people. Threats against communities were further reinforced by thugs and paramilitary groups, who actively intervened with violence and even murder. We can see similar practices today in the Wadas case (Arumingtyas & Nuswantoro, 2022; Andryanto, 2022). These issues are also reflected in "Dataran Melengen", where the narrative inherently captures these realities, ultimately leading to the most profound loss: cultural trauma.

It is not only thugs who intimidate Indigenous people but also state security forces, including the police and military, who intervene under the guise of maintaining "stability". Regrettably, in cases of land acquisition by capital owners, these state mechanisms become "another form of terror" for them rather than offering protection. This dynamic is evident in the state's encroachment on Indigenous territories, as illustrated by the Wadas case. Such issues are inherently mirrored in the "Dataran Melengen". Consequently, this situation culminates in the profound loss of cultural heritage and trauma.

Cultural trauma, as defined by Eyerman (2019), entails a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, which tears apart the social fabric and affects a group of people who have achieved a certain level of cohesion. This concept describes an event experienced by many individuals, having a significant impact on all involved. However, those who endure the same trauma ultimately rely on the fragmented, individual experiences of those who recall it (O'Brien, 2021). For instance, in the narrative, the narrator observes two groups being run over by a large truck, with bodies scattered on the ground, while they are unable to act due to the considerable distance from "Dataran Melengen" to the nearest hospital or police station.

The pervasive trauma likely underlies the community's pessimism, leading individuals to become silent as they are reluctant to recall painful events. This silence ultimately causes significant incidents to be buried as if they never occurred, allowing perpetrators to live undisturbed while those affected suffer and die in deep trauma and poverty. Meanwhile, companies persistently exploit the territories inhabited by Indigenous people, and both capital owners and the state become complicit in perpetuating the colonization of their own people, driven by profit within the capitalist system. The sentiment of despair is captured in the data:

> *"Kita mau bangun tapi banyak orang ingin meruntuhkan" Kotokpait masih berkata pahit.*
>
> (Rampan, 2003: 76)

> "We want to build but many people want to tear

down," Kotokpait still says bitterly.

Consequently, the community finds it increasingly difficult to contemplate opposing HPH, believing that no matter what actions they take, they will never prevail and will continue to face relentless assaults. This pervasive sense of pessimism is deeply intertwined with their trauma. The past experiences of violence and exploitation have eroded their confidence in effecting change. The weight of their collective suffering fosters a belief that resistance is futile, leaving them trapped in a cycle of despair.

Moreover, this pessimism can create a paralyzing effect, where individuals internalize their trauma and view themselves as powerless against larger forces. The psychological toll of constant oppression stifles hope, making it challenging for community members to envision a future where their rights and livelihoods are protected. They believe that even the slightest attempt at advocacy may only invite further harm, as they grapple with the reality of their circumstances. Thus, trauma not only silences their voices but also extinguishes the flicker of hope necessary for mobilizing collective action against the systemic injustices they face.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of ecological issues in Korrie Layun Rampan's "Dataran Melengen" reveals the enduring impacts of colonial legacies and the complicity of multinational corporations and state actors in systemic injustices. This study highlights how the exploitation of natural resources, facilitated by Forest Concession Rights (HPH), has stripped Indigenous communities of their land while intensifying poverty, cultural loss, and trauma. The narrative illustrates horizontal conflicts between communities, particularly the Sental and Ludah, exacerbated by historical foreign interventions, notably by the United States, in Indonesia's political landscape.

In addressing the key research questions, it is clear that transnational interests significantly shape the power dynamics and conflicts within the story. Literature serves a vital role in both aesthetic reflection and advocacy, challenging readers to engage with urgent ecological issues faced by marginalized communities. "Dataran Melengen" exemplifies the potential for literature to catalyze social change, emphasizing the interconnectedness of ecological degradation, social justice, and cultural identity. The findings underscore the necessity for ongoing literary inquiry into ecological discourse, advocating for transformative approaches that reclaim Indigenous rights, and confront the legacies of colonialism in Indonesia.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the authors declare that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the data collection, analysis, editorial process, and publication process in general.

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