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# PROCEEDINGS

The 7<sup>th</sup> Literary Studies Conference

# Rethinking Environmental Issues through Literature, Language, Culture, and Education

9-10 October 2019



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## The Interaction between Human and Nature in “Puisi Alam”: Ecocriticism Studies

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### Abstract

The research examines the interaction between human and nature in “Puisi Alam” by Vincen Kotouki. The poem is deeply analysed to discover how nature is interpreted by the characters that represent various social groups and how the interaction between characters as well as between the characters and nature is portrayed. The analysis is based on a close relationship between Papuan people and nature, which has been disturbed by the modernization movement and capitalism (read: Freeport gold mining). This study also investigates how Papuan people try to exclaim their voice regarding to the exploitation of the land and forest by the (im)migrant/colonizer. This research is a descriptive qualitative method which uses library research. Moreover, the data collection technique is documentation. Ecocriticism is used as the approach to highlight the interaction between literary text and nature. This approach also becomes a media to educate people in preserving and preventing the destruction of nature. In addition, the interconnectedness between human, animals, and nature will be unveiled using this theory. This research is expected to highlight the meaning of human and nature relation especially Papuan people who respect and worship nature as a way of preserving nature for their life sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Ecocriticism, nature, Papua, interconnectedness*

### Introduction

Literary work is the mirror and reflection of the real life. It illustrates the interaction between men and society as well as men and nature. This statement is in line with the poem, “Puisi Alam”, which is analysed in this research. This poem is chosen because it was written by Vincen Kotouki, a Papuan who is familiar with and highly valued nature for human life’s sustainability. Through his poem, Kotouki does not only educate people about the environmental issues in Papua but he also raises a criticism on the harmful effects of aggressive mining activities. Based on the issues above this research is aimed to find the answer for these three questions: how is nature interpreted by the characters in the poem that represent various communities and groups? Second, how do the interactions among characters and between the characters and nature are illustrated in the poem? Third, how does the poem educate the reader about the environmental preservation and criticize the natural destruction? What is meant by characters here are those who represent indigenous people of Papuan and migrants who invade and exploit natural resources in Papua.

Papua is a source of massive amount of natural resources and it has a great beauty of nature and rain forest. Its richness has attracted many groups, companies, and even countries to “control” the valuable natural resources. The government’s effort and programs to “civilize” Papua is also another problem faced. The indigenous people have lived in terror and various external forces that threaten them for many years. People there are “afraid of being arrested and shot by the military” (Firdaus, 2017). Mining companies have left the land destroyed and unable to be planted, the rivers polluted, and the indigenous wildlife extinct. Papuan people depend on their life to the rainforest because it is not only their home but also the source of life. Kotouki tries to illustrate the catastrophic impact towards the environment caused by mining and farming activities and also raises the solution to overcome them in his poem.

Due to the background and problems mentioned above, this research aims to highlight the interaction and importance of nature for the characters from socio-historical point of view. On the other hand, it has other goals which are to unveil the interactions among characters and between the characters and nature, and to encourage natural protection by enlightening the readers about natural destruction. Another is to revisit various types of Ecocriticism theory, especially which is related to interracial social conflict and between classes. Other are that these conflicts are compared based on their socio-historical background. The other is observing whether natural and racial problems are always associated. Practically, it is beneficial for the students in Literary Criticism and Thesis Writing class to train and sharpen their critical thinking in analysing literary works from Ecocriticism perspective. Other than that, it will be used as a way to educate the reader that keeping our environment is essential and to develop their critical thinking towards natural destruction practices.

This research was a descriptive qualitative research which uses library study method. The data collection technique was documentation. It was analysed with by explicating the poem and implementing Ecocriticism perspective. As a result, it revealed the relation and interaction between human and nature. The explication was done by peeling off the structure of the poem and classified the data. The data then analysed to see the interaction between human and nature through the characters and setting. It was done to dig the message and education in the environment preservation and criticism in natural destruction.

The primary datum of this research is a selected poem which is written by a native person, Vincen Kotouki, who has nature as his place to live. Later, “Puisi Alam” will be analysed using Ecocriticism theory. Moreover, the secondary data are Ecocriticism books; socio-cultural studies on the relation between nature and Papuan people; as

well as various studies on Papuan poetry importantly which is related to natural environment. Papua Literature has been developed by Papuan people who try to share their stories when they stand face-to-face with the migrants who want to rob Papua's natural resources. Some literary studies on Papua Literature refer to the Oral Literature from various tribes which focus on the spiritual totems symbols. Ummu Fatimah Ria Lestari, for instance, she wrote *Totem(isme) Papua: Sebuah Penelusuran Sastra Lisan* (2014) which digs out local values from various tribes which support Papuan culture and customs.

## Discussion

### *The Meaning of Nature for Papuan People*

Puisi Alam” is written by Vincen Kotouki, a Papuan who highly pays his attention on the nature in Papua which is disturbed by mining and palm-oil farming operation. Freeport and Permata Nusa Mandiri, for instance, have flattened thousands hectares of mountains and forests in Papua. In the first stanza, Kotouki portrays the indigenous people of Papua who are proud of the richness of their nature and forest. Besides, he also narrates his restlessness and sadness towards the natural destruction caused by the migrants. Poverty and oppression in Indonesia's land of gold have forced Papuan people to find money from gold. As a result, they also exploit their nature to survive.

In the beginning, Papuan people have what is called as *religio magis* relationship with their land and natural resources (Deda and Mofu, 2014). Papuan people have a sacred connection with the customary law community in Papua. This relationship can be seen from the ceremonies which are conducted to communicate with the spirits of their ancestors. The ceremonies are held as one of the ways to request the increase of their growth of sago palm and the catch fish in the river (Pouwer, 2010). In the Special Regulation of Papua Province Number 22 Year 2008 also found that both nature and the indigenous people of Papua have inseparable relationship.

Moreover, mountains and forests are heaven for the locals because those are source of life and food for them. Here, they can hunt, farm, and collect foods like fruits, sweet potatoes, and sago (Boissière, 2006). In “Puisi Alam” we can find that Papua is fertile and very beautiful like heaven. The land of Paradise, with its green forest, has given life to many people. In general, the indigenous people of Papua who live in the mountain areas are highly dependent and attached to their natural resources. It can be seen from the third stanza in “Puisi Alam” which illustrates the richness of Papua's natural resources.

*Indahnya tanahku di atas negeri Cendrawasih  
Ribuan kekayaan menyapa senyum bijaksana  
Papua tercinta tertumbuh'an menghijau  
Aku lahir di sini.*

The fertile land in Papua is filled with green forests and many natural resources. Kotouki illustrates Papua, his homeland, as a land which is filled with natural resources. This natural richness has brought joy, excitement, and hope for the people of Papua. Many things can be found here so that only smile which can be seen on the indigenous people's face. Importantly, the beauty of nature and the diversity of the animals have coloured Papua's natural environment.

### *The Interaction among Characters and the Characters and Nature*

Oppermann (2016) classifies Ecocriticism study into three waves. The first wave is known as nature writing, which problematized the issue on the relationship between energy, material, and idea. The second wave is related to the revolution about justice and urban ecology and various human experiences from ecological perspective. The third wave unveils the existence of the relation between Ecocriticism and the other fields which are interdisciplinary, for instance race, class, gender, and colonialism. Nowadays, Ecocriticism study refers to the complex study which is not only about the relation between human and nature but it also involves flora and fauna studies, studies on environmental justice, global studies, ethical studies, and sociological and psychological studies. Thus environmental issues are related to race, gender, ethnicity, identity, and social issues such as the power of hegemony, domination of a culture over other culture, and social injustice. This study, moreover, try to show how Oppermann's idea in the relationship between energy, material, and idea is presented here.

Papuans have a close relationship with nature. They inherit their love and appreciation to nature through myths which are told from generations to generations as a way to maintain natural preservation. For them, forests have to be respected and kept because nature is a blessing from God and forests are sacred places where the spirits of the ancestors reside. By respecting the forests, local people try to keep their environment, forests, nature, and natural resources which they have. They also believe that trees, animals, and humans have the same soul. Furthermore, in the forests, we can find springs which are believed as the place where the spirits of the ancestors live.

The indigenous people of Papua rest on their live to nature so they are very protective to their forests and nature. They will not let anyone go there without any proper ceremonies. Conversely, Freeport—which was supported by the Old Order—came in and put their iron wheels on Papua easily. They exploit Papua's mineral wealth only for the benefit and wealth of their country. This American mining company has “invaded” Papua with its heavy equipment which digs out the bowels of Papua to get as much gold as possible.

Kotouki asks the readers to think about the destruction of the forests which are the result of the mining and palm oil farming in Papua. Freeport and Permata Nusa Mandiri are the example of two big companies which are responsible to the natural destruction in Papua. Since the beginning of mining and palm oil farming, there is no intention to develop and preserve the nature of Papua. Mambor shows that Freeport has exploited the mountain since being operated but never given the benefits to the local community (2015). Kotouki supports the fact above by describing the migrants who devastate natural resources in Papua in his poem.

*Tengoklah hutanku ini  
Sedikit demi sedikit di habisi oleh  
Orang-orang yang tidak memikirkan masa depan*

In the first stanza, people who do not care about the future are the migrants and the mining and palm oil companies. Those people only concern with their own welfare without thinking about the future of Papua's natural resources. "Puisi Alam" is a path taken by Kotouki to ask and raise his anxiety, disappointment, and sadness over his "house" that has been plundered by the migrants.

Through this poem, Kotouki puts the migrants who destroy Papua's nature under the microscope. Different to Papuan people, the migrant—who are called by Kotouki as colonizers—interprets nature differently. The interaction between colonizer and nature is the relation of power. Coming from different places and countries, they are interested and highly ambitious to control and possess the diversity of natural resources in the bowels of the earth. It can be seen from the fourth stanza below:

*Di tempat surgauwi tanahku subur kekayaan  
Penjajah suka buahku yang bertimpah  
Mereka berkelana dari jarak  
Mereka datang untuk mempunahkan apa yang aku miliki disini*

The colonizers have threatened the environment with the waste from the mining operation. They take as many as possible for their own benefits and wealth. This mining operation is not followed by any efforts in natural conservation and only leaves waste from mining activities.

Schulman (2016) mentions that the mining operation has harmed the Kamoro and Amungme tribes and caused the extinction of several fish species in the river. She adds that:

the indigenous tribes claim their communities have been left in poverty and suffering. In addition, the environmental degradation near the mining area has happened since 1973. The mine waste, which is known as tailing, dumps directly to Aikwa delta system. The practice turns hectares of forests into wasteland, makes River Aikwa into thick and silver, and kills the fish and other animals. Consequently, the mine waste makes many food resources found in the river have disappeared.

For the locals, nature is the place where they get many advantages for their survival. Mountains, forests, and rivers are "heavens" of food and source of live (Boissière, 2006). The extracting activities do not only plunder West Papua's natural resources but also resulting in extreme pollution of the environment (Csevár and Tremblay, 2019). With the extinction of fish species in Aikwa River, then they lose their food sources.

Additionally, deforestation driven by palm oil Plantation and mining companies is a threat for the local tribes for it gives contribution to climate change and the end of the indigenous bird's life. The indigenous Papuans have lost their forests and food sources. This has reduced the food supply that can be taken from forests and rivers such as fruits and fish. However, with the loss of the land and forests, the only way to survive is to get money and money can only be obtained from mining activities. Oppositely, many districts in Papua have surrendered their forests to Permata Nusa Mandiri to be transformed into an expanse of palm-oil farmland.

The interaction between Papuan people and nature—which was considered as sacred because it is a source of life and origin—has now shifted and is no longer sacred. Papua's land and nature are easily traded without the slightest consideration of the sanctity of the relationship between the land and its owner (Deda and Mofu, 2014). From the excerpt below, it can be concluded that there were efforts from migrants who tried to use the hands of local people to change the function of the forests in Papua.

*Akhirnya mereka pergi dan pulang dengan semangat alamku  
Penjajah bercita untuk melenyapkan alamku ditanganku  
Sekarang diri menjarah diriku  
Hutanku telah berkurang sekeping*

Papua's intimate relations with nature were swayed by accepting some money as compensation from Permata Nusa Mandiri. Elisabeth mentions that "the release of a forest area of 32,000 hectares by the Ministry of Forestry would threaten the ecosystem and the sustainability of several species of birds in this region (2019). Kotouki supports her statement by pointing out the fact that the migrants were trying to eliminate a piece of Papuan forest using the hands of the Papuan people themselves.

Freeport has banished the forest, dried the river, and taken away many things (Woodman, 2017). Therefore, the only way to survive is with money and the only way to find money in Papua is from gold and mining activity. This point of view has made a shift in the interaction between the locals and nature. In the very beginning the interaction between human and nature is interdependent. Conversely, they are forced and must continue to survive by involving their life in this mining activity. However, this logging and mining activities pose a threat to the people of Papua because they damage forests and mineral resources. This disappointment is also exacerbated by military activities to Papuans who often use violence and have committed human rights violations.

The disappointment is caused by military activities which are seemed to be protected by the government and the mining company. Csevár and Tremblay (2019) mention that the mining companies "also provide an excuse for the presence of military forces on the territory which leaving them free to use sexual violence to terrorize the indigenous population". In order to get the land, they will do many things to repel the locals. Lastly, government's

transmigration program also causes a competition between the non-Papuan migrants and the locals who want to preserve their sacred land.

### **The Education in Preserving and Preventing the Destruction of Nature**

Kotouki's poem is a reminder to keep the nature in Papua. To keep and save the forest and nature in Papua, the locals, the government, and the mining and land farming companies must do real actions. Those three elements must synergize and work together for the future generations. In addition, the interconnectedness among them must be kept to create a better future both for the nature and for the life of the indigenous people of Papua. It is along with Kotouki's hope which is illustrated in the seventh stanza.

*Janing di masa mendatang  
Sengaja gambar alamku ini tersimpan  
Agar kau dan aku mengerti takkan ada lagi  
Yang asri kalau kita tak peduli*

He hopes that all parties can work together to maintain and restore the natural conditions of Papua that have been damaged by mining activities. If we do not care about the destruction of nature, it is not impossible if in the future we will no longer be able to enjoy the nature of Papua. Kotouki also invites us all to "look back to a better past" (Williams, 1993), a period where the natural world of Papua is still untouched, beautiful, and green.

Through his poem, Kotouki also reminds the readers to keep the forest and the nature of Papua. We can do the smallest little things to preserve and restore Papua's ecosystem and nature damaged by human greed. Kotouki offers to help even the slightest just because just by "Enough plating everyday" can save the nature of Papua. The poet offers a small way which can be used to save the nature of Papua. It is enough to plant only one tree for this already save people's life.

*Sisa akar-akar yang suram  
Tumpukan jemari, beri yang lain pencerahan  
Cukup tanam setunas sehari  
Atau memelihara yang sudah meranbah  
Tiada kau ketahui kau melestarikan*

Actually, the locals have rituals and ceremonies of communicating with the dead as a way to preserve and keep the nature. For the indigenous people of Papua, trees are crucial to Kamoro cosmology and their system of classification. Forest and trees are heaven, their ancestors' spirits place, and a source of life. Due to this case, the locals will apologise the trees and the nature for removing vegetation in a ceremony for the sake of buildings. Trees are considered to have souls just like animals and humans (Pouwer, 2010). On the other hand, in the social system of people who live in the Foja Mountain, for instance, when someone breaks the rule by destroying the forest, the person concerned will be ostracized and exiled.

### **Conclusion**

"Puisi Alam" by Vincen Kotouki is a poem by a local who wants to help the other Papuans to raise their voice and show their feelings and burden. The locals are marginalized by the migrants and the new colonizers who exploit their sacred land and forest never have any intentions to develop Papua. Even though this research also discusses the suppression and the deprivation of Papuan's property rights, its focus is about human-environment relation, the education on the natural preservation, and a critic on the environmental destruction. The relation between human and nature, human's attitude towards nature, and the importance of nature for human's existence and life sustainability will be dig out more. Kotouki opens his poem by narrating the indigenous people of Papua who are admired and proud of their treasure which are nature and forest. On the other hand, he wants to express his sadness and anxiety because that such of beautiful nature has been destroyed by the migrant. Forests and mountains in Papua have been disturbed by Freeport's gold mine and Permata Nusa Mandiri's palm oil plantation. Those two companies have been clearing up the trees and mountains and endangering the habitat of endemic Papuan birds. Ironically, Papua people also forced to destroy their nature because they want to defend their lives.

Environmental threats in Papua are emanating from governmental, industrial, commercial, and neo-colonial forces. In his poem Vincen Kotouki exposes the horrific destruction of forest and nature in Papua because of mining and palm oil farming activities. He describes the interaction between men and nature which is disturbed by the greed of money and industry. Kotouki's poem is a point of departure for a more complex conversation about finding the answer to the question "now what should we do?" towards the environmental issues in Papua. As a Papuan, he is disturbed by the fact that Papua, whose land is rich in natural resources, but the indigenous population complain they have not benefited enough from their natural wealth (Lamb, 2019). Lamb statement's is along with Kotouki's poem which tells a tale of the destruction of Papua's natural resources.

However, we have to open our eyes that the mining and land farming activities done by several big companies do not only leave environmental destruction but also lead the people into difficult life. Ironically, they are still living in poverty. Even though this island has the largest gold mining in the world, Papua remains the poorest region in Indonesia. Wenda (2011) stressed that all profits from mining in Papua are only enjoyed by other than the people of Papua. More importantly, we have to underline that human and nature must live in harmony. They have to synergize, work together, and support each other. Nature has provided everything that is needed so that human should also need to preserve and keep nature. In the future, we will inherit these natural diversities to the next generations so they can enjoy the products. It must be remembered and should become a lesson that we must always remember. This poem is a reminder that we actually still have hopes and opportunity to inherit and give a beautiful home for

the next generations. Essentially, the present of nature is very important in our life and if we mistreated nature it can fatally affect us.

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