
Kalimantan Narratives of the Wounded Earth: Mirrors of Sumatra Disaster

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to see how environmental degradation in Kalimantan, depicted in two Indonesian short stories, “Pohon Pongo” by Rinto Andriano and “Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan” by Han Gagas, parallels the current Sumatra flash floods. A comparative analysis in light of Econarrative is applied to explore the interplay of Narrative, Science, and Action in both stories, filling gaps in Environmental Humanities research that generally rely on ecocritical theories. The article shows that the characters’ efforts to save orangutans and confront brutal mining activities are critiques of corrupt, incapable leadership and of industrial greed that exacerbate ecological damage. Through salient storytelling that combines literary perspectives, scientific outlooks, and a call for restoration, the short stories are mirrors of disasters, serving as profound cautionary tales for conservation and environmental advocacy. The beneficial narrativization of conflicts surrounding ethics and moral dilemmas makes both stories relatable to human experiences in dealing with real-world ecological realities. Econarrative reading reveals the short stories’ emphasis on the value of local knowledge and the spiritual connection between humans and nature. As such, integrating local-based literary works in sustainable education is highly recommended to foster awareness of today’s global ecological problems.

KEYWORDS: advocacy, econarrative, restoration, science-in-fiction

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of a wide range of discourse, from news reports to scholarly debates about the cyclone-triggered floods that stormed Sumatra throughout 2025, the power of narratives is frequently overlooked in favour of tangible technicalities in mitigation efforts, medical recovery, and, of course, political propaganda. Ecological crises can be seen through a literary lens to unveil the ecohumanistic aspects of the events, as shown by significant research that confirms the effectiveness of literary works in transmitting ecological messages for sustainable education (e.g., Bhattacharjee, 2025; Dewi, 2018; Saiful & Shein, 2025). Using sacred texts and poetry instead of news articles, Saiful & Shein (2025), for instance, applied three instructional methods in ELT, i.e., human-centred, ecosystem-centred, and ecosystem-spirituality-centred. The study reveals that the spirituality-centred approach was the most effective to impart a belief of nature as inherently valuable. Consequently, by perceiving protection as a sacred responsibility, students are able to make a holistic connection to the ecosystem. Earlier, Dewi (2018) argued that ELT in twenty-first century contexts should be ideological, with the goal of cultivating ecologically conscious global citizens. Incorporating Martha Nussbaum’s theory of capabilities and Pope Francis’s *Laudato si’*, which calls for a moral duty to care for all Divine creation across all faiths, the study applies creative poetry writing in EFL

for Indonesian pre-service teachers. It suffices to say for now that using literary works as a pedagogical approach can provide emotional and spiritual connections to nature, allowing for the transmission of ethical values and environmental care as a moral duty.

This current study would argue that short stories can help translate the dynamics of Narrative, Science, and Action to address the ecological crises such as recent rampant floods that nearly submerged the island of Sumatra, particularly the hardest-hit Aceh Province. Literature can bridge the gap between scientific facts surrounding environmental crises and meaningful pro-environmental actions. On the one hand, scientific facts confirm that climate change is a real human-induced threat such as life cycle disruptions in palm oil plantations (Koh, 2008; Lubis et al., 2024). On the other hand, literary representations of climate change almost always unveil the human face and morality of the disaster (e.g., Favez, 2024; Selby, 2021). Furthermore, using narratives that incorporate local wisdom and disaster management strategies as a framework can practically help transform cultural insights into real-world actions (Meyer et al., 2021; Misbah, 2024; Saiful & Shein, 2025). By treating nature as agency, the Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) seen in literature may shed light on global sustainable efforts in promoting climate justice.

In particular, this article examines two selected short stories from Dalang Publishing to show how local wisdom-based narratives can contribute to worldwide lessons of resilience in the face of ecological disasters. A few words about this California-based publication: Dalang Publishing LLC. aims to provide Indonesian writers with an international platform to share their stories to make Indonesian literature accessible to the global community. The American writer Lian Gouw began this non-profit project in 2010; Gemah Rahardjo, a freelance Indonesian journalist, fortifies Dalang with nationalism and passion for the arts, establishing a scholarship for underprivileged Indonesian youth. It regularly publishes Indonesian short stories written and subsequently translated by all Indonesian writers and/ or translators (<https://dalangpublishing.com/home-english>.)

Although Kalimantan is the setting of “Pohon Pongo” by Rinto Andriono and “Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan” by Han Gagas, the ecological damages depicted in the selected narratives mirror the human abuse of nature that caused recurring floods in Sumatra today. “Pohon Pongo” follows Miranti, a veterinarian at the Sebangau National Park, as she cares for smoke-injured orangutans while also searching for Lukman, her environmental activist husband who went missing during palm oil-related forest fires. Miranti has a vision of her husband’s spirit while watching the dying orangutans perform the *barzanji* ritual at the Pongo tree, reflecting on deep human-nature bonding in the mid of ecological disasters. Meanwhile, “Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan” tells the story of Mawinei, a female environmental science engineer who returns home to find her Central Kalimantan village suffering from water and land abuses. The story begins with the death of a five-year-old neighbour from an unknown illness that no local traditional doctor could treat. She later discovers that the Kahayan River is heavily polluted, causing various diseases. Massive gold mining and corporate expansion exacerbate the damage to Borneo ecosystem. Despite the failed efforts, Mawinei and her childhood friends continue to fight the authorities to reclaim their exploited space.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to demonstrate how nature as agency depicted in both stories can illustrate how Narrative, Science, and Action interweave to explain the ecological precarity in today’s world including Indonesia.

METHOD

Anchored within Environmental Humanities research, this qualitative-interpretative study employs Econarrative approach (Stibbe, 2023) to compare the inter-island dialogue between the imagination of ecological destruction in Kalimantan and the current context of Sumatra's National Disaster. Given the ever-increasing human-caused ecological damages, new language of communication is necessary to redefine and shape harmonious relationships among all of God's creation.

Econarrative is an interdisciplinary approach that provides the language by putting human beings, other species, and the physical environment in genuine interaction with one other. Examining the two stories in light of Econarrative concepts provides new alternatives to the bulk of studies using Ecocriticism to read Indonesian short stories that address climate crises for the past five years (e.g., Arisandi et al., 2025; Merta et al., 2022; Novianti & Rosa, 2020; Suryani & Yarkovska, 2024). Specifically, while no scholarly works are found to date that explore Han Gagas' short story, existing studies that discuss Rinto Andriano's "Pohon Pongo" focus on human-nature relations and the disruption of it for the sake of capitalistic developments (e.g., Anhar et al., 2024; Padmasari et al., 2024). Padmasari (2024) depict the dry season and orangutans as haze victims, highlighting the human-animal bond. Anhar (2024) further examine the interactions to critique people's greed, calling for spiritual awareness. While the aforementioned studies are valuable, significant gaps still remain, as they do not go beyond representations of ecological damage and broken relationships between people and nature.

The current discussion attempts to address the lacuna by unravelling the science-led narratives and their doable implications seen in the two short stories. Besides the study's methodological novelty, the Econarrative approach used herein gives more blatant analysis for short story genre given its brevity and short attention span required in reading it.

Stibbe himself (2023) acknowledges that longer pieces like novels are best read using ecocritical theories. To allow Narrative, Science, and Action to intersect, detailed analyses of each pillar are required to oppose the one big, overarching story when discussing sustainability, i.e. growth is good, and conservation is out of date. What follows is the discussion of both stories in accordance to the Narrative-Science-and Action linkage.

Unlike the existing studies that use Andriano's original text (Anhar et al., 2024; Padmasari et al., 2024), this article uses the English versions of the chosen texts to maximize the Econarrative approach in showing how crises are narrativized for the international audience. The purpose is to enhance the global ecological citizenship via local-based literature that this study seeks to achieve. All citations in this article refer to Rinto Andriano's "Pongo's Caring Tree" and Han Gagas' "Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan" found in Dalang Publishing website with the URL <https://indonesian.dalangpublishing.com/past-stories>.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narratives of Crises

Learning from orangutans about natural balance

The forest fire that destroyed the Sebangau National Park at the peak of the 2019 dry season became the backdrop of Rinto Andriano's "Pongo's Caring Tree". The fire occurred at the same time as development plans were tabled for Indonesia's new national capital in the Sepaku area, Penajam Paser Utara, Kalimantan. Fire is the

most economical and easiest way to clear up forests. The juxtaposition between humans and nature has not been implemented well in the megaproject, emphasizing its anthropocentric approach.

The short story is just one example of fiction that critiques such a huge environmental destruction in the name of Development. While the story tells of Miranti's plights, it also features Laksmi the orangutan whose "skin was mottled with scars" (Andriono, n.d., Para 29) enduring tortures by the cruel plantation foremen who hang around the park along with the development of the palm plantations. While still mourning with the loss of her husband, Miranti never abandons her duties of caring for orangutans who "were weak from dehydration and suffered from severe burns" as fire swallowed the Penajam Paser Utara region (Andriono, n.d., Para 25).

Plain narratives often feature human characters in constructed settings, hence ignoring the relationships that exist between people and larger ecological systems. Conversely, Stibbe (2023) differentiates Econarrative from narrative *per se* by highlighting the interaction of human and nature as well as ethics of the interaction that are present in the narration. Seen from Econarrative perspectives, the description of the forest fire below clearly points out nature as sentient being that is unethically mistreated due to industrial activities.

That morning's news had reported that the park fires had spread. The dry peat, a result of the long drought, was a good conductor of fire. The fires did not spread from the tips of green branches, but rather crept uncontrollably along the peat-covered soil. The smell of burning damp wood wafted through the area. A mixture of water vapor and carbonic acid filled the air with thick white smoke, which made it hard for the animals and the village inhabitants at the edge of the forest to breathe. (Andriono, n.d., Para 30)

As a form of imaginative art, the story has different ideas from scientific reports or public policies. Instead, it creatively fosters ecological awareness exemplified by Miranti and her family who display a deep emotional connection with orangutans. Miranti's daughter Kasih seems unaffected by the family's unfortunate incidents, as she happily accompanies the rangers in feeding the orangutans each day. Andriono writes:

In fact, [Kasih] often saved her fruit from lunch for Pongo, her favourite orangutan. Although she and Pongo were two creatures of different species, they didn't act like it. They often reached out to each other, as if they had known each other for a long time, and sometimes Pongo exchanged sweet potatoes for bananas. They played together while Miranti and Laksmi, Pongo's mother, just watched from a distance. (Andriono, n.d., Para 26)

Laksmi is a name invented by Miranti. The name-giving here is a gesture indicating the worth of the orangutan as an agent in the narrative. Econarratives differ *active* from *passive* agency as world-building power strategies (Stibbe, 2023).

In the short story, the tortured orangutans are active. Orangutans come across as resilient creatures. They often gather in a *barzanji* ritual encircling a tree known as Pohon Agung, the huge caring tree, that is believed to hold the jungle's Spirit. The ceremony is meant to express their anxiety when life goes wrong with the forest, especially during food shortage, exacerbated by the white, smoke-filled dry season. The senior orangutans like Laksmi usually lead the litany, swinging from branch to branch while singing the fading song that is only known to them:

Led by the *berida*, a senior orangutan, they performed a litany of woe: surrendering their starving bodies, suffocated by the smoke and sinched by the fire, to the Spirit, manifested this time as the Caring Tree. It was all the manifestation of the Spirit of the jungle. (Andriono, n.d., Para 46)

The depiction of orangutans here is of spiritual beings who fear and long for the forest's life-force. Miranti's 8-year-work in the forest allows her to conclude that orangutans are sincere, "very spiritual creatures" acting entranced during the barzanji to face the jungle's Spirit to surrender, not to blame for the fire and hunger (Andriono, n.d., Para 49). This is shown by the gradually quiet forest as the barzanji ceremony completes. Miranti's reflection is as follows.

[Orangutans] never accused. Nor did they plead for punishment of the cruel foremen or the greedy palm oil barons. Orangutans were not vengeful. They merely surrendered themselves to the balance of nature. They believed that nature was just a pendulum swinging between points of equilibrium, and they would simply accept the fact if the pendulum's movement meant the extinction of their kind. (Andriono, n.d., Para 51)

By building worlds with words via activated non-human agents like orangutans who pray, resist, survive, surrender, and, notably, make friends with humans, the story belongs to *beneficial* discourse to live-by. The narrative of crises here offers lessons for "humans, with too many demands and preconceived notions", who are unable to hear the cry of the earth, for "only innocent creatures could hear that song and the raucous feelings of the trees embedded in the jungle floor" (Andriono, n.d., Para 52). Thus, unlike news reports or scientific papers, the short story shows that human beings, ironically, should acquire knowledge and relearn about compassion and ecological balance from other living being.

Listening to cuckoos' cry over suffering landscapes

In what seems to be happy homecoming party vibes, Mawinei is anxious, thanks to her sensitivity to other's feelings and environment since she was a child. The narrative of crises, however, begins when she is confronted by the death of the little boy Hanjak from unknown ailments. The change of landscapes does the explanation:

Something else felt strange in the village. The weather had changed. The still air felt prickly. The cloudless sky was a stark blue. A plaintive cuckoo perched in the top of a *shorea* tree, shrieking. The ear-piercing noise frightened the villagers, who believed the bird to be a bearer of evil and death (Gagas, n.d., Para 13).

To add, Umar Thamrin's translation of the title of Han Gagas' short story "Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan" into "Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan" emphasizes the strength of the Econarrative messages. The damage on land and water in Kalimantan continues at an alarming rate, hence the word "cry" rather than "shriek" of the birds to emphasize its function as natural warnings about the miserably filthy Kahayan River.

Mawinei the environmental sciences graduate appears shocked upon learning from Danum about the mistreated river of her childhood that has caused people sick, culminating in Hanjak's demise. Recalling that the river was still clear five years ago, Danum says, "The river we used to play in is now very dirty. The water makes you itch. The miners have been dumping their toxic waste into the river." (Gagas, n.d., Para 23). Mawinei is taken aback when she arrives at the riverbank, exclaiming, "The river water used to be crystal clear, and now it's muddy. This is strange." (Gagas, n.d., Para 31). The repeated phrase "used to" signifies that

something is missing. The characters realize that the river's beauty in the past is no longer true. At first, she disagrees with Danum's explanation that the peatland destruction upstream changes the river into "a slimy stream of mud with sparkling oil lines on its surface" (Gagas, n.d., Para 32). It is noteworthy that in narrativizing the colour change of the river, the author compares Mawinei's bewilderment with fond memories of playing bridges and drinking from the river without getting sick when they were children.

As the narrative continues, the reader is told that the muddy river is further poisoned by "diesel fuel spilling from the engine" that is caused by gold mining activities (Gagas, n.d., Para 66). The pervasive gold excavations along the banks of the river alarm Maiweni and her three friends as they witness people using powerful dredgers and giant water pumps that caused more damage, "turning the riverbank into one giant mudhole" (Gagas, n.d., Para 73).

Econarrative reading helps unravel ethics of environment due to its underlying Ecosophy (Stibbe, 2023). Vandalisms toward the Kahayan River depicted in the story involve not only giant companies but also local collaborators. Unfortunately, the locals are the disadvantaged parties, to say nothing of the ensuing ecological damages. Maiweni learns from Ekot that people quickly shift their agricultural practices to respond to market demands at the price of deforestation. People give away farming to planting rubber trees when the price of rubber is high. When palm oil business looks promising, people with no hesitation clear their forests for palm oil plantations. Communities' pressure to follow the market is shown below, using concrete and specific description or *salience* in Econarrative (Stibbe, 2023).

"The price of rubber dropped a long time ago," Simpei added. "People don't want to tap rubber anymore. Now people are mining gold. Just look at them!" Simpei pointed at a group panning gold along a destroyed section of the riverbank that was completely void of vegetation (Gagas, n.d., Para 63).

Next, when the foursome Mawinei, Danum, Ekot, Simpei consult Idris, who works for an eco-friendly NGO, following the tragic drowning of children in an abandoned mine pit, they realize that ecological crimes in Central Kalimantan is dreadfully hard to stop. Some small mining companies with no licence are later banned following Idris' reports. However, the big ones dispute the NGOs investigation results. They continue to operate their mining activities with local authorities' backups. "Big mining companies, especially coal companies, are nearly unstoppable because they generate huge revenue for the government," said Ekot in desperation (Gagas, n.d., Para 93). Despite the unsuccessful attempt, Mawinei perseveres to keep on fighting, supported by her friends who shout in unison, "And we won't give up easily!" (Gagas, n.d., Para 95) as the story concludes.

Thus, from Econarrative standpoints, the short story is of non-destructive kind as it invites reader to reflect on the harms done by human race toward the environment and non-human creation. The cry of the cuckoos is reminiscent of Rachel Carson's indictment of the toxic habitat that prevents birds from singing and children from playing in the spring. As it is, the narrative belongs to the **beneficial** category to caution people about environmental destruction.

Science in Fiction

Science is present in Rinto Andriano's "Pongo's Caring Tree" in ways different from the conventional disaster reporting, as it places non-human character at the center while the human character is peripheral. The infrastructure arrangement for the new capital city of Indonesia in East Kalimantan caused more problems than

benefits as it accelerated environmental degradation (Kalalinggi et al., 2023; Shimamura & Mizunoya, 2020). Kalimantan's oldest and largest tropical forest in the world has faced rapid deforestation since 2000 so that native species such as orangutans and proboscis monkeys start to become depleted (Nellemann et al., 2007; Schreer, 2023; Sherman et al., 2020). Both events, i.e., capital city relocation and species extinction are narrativized through the predicaments experienced by the orangutans named Laksmi and Pongo.

Likewise, Han Gagas' "Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan" confirms scientific findings about vandalisms happening to Kalimantan land-and-waterscapes. A study conducted from 2004 to 2007 examined mercury contamination in the Kahayan and Rungan Rivers in Central Kalimantan as terrible consequences of gold mining activities (Elvince et al., 2008). When water from both rivers were sampled, they hardly met safety standards, given the total grammage of mercury in fish for safe consumption. To date, more studies reveal that besides mining impacts, ever-increasing non-biodegradable waste from domestic to industrial sources caused prolonged ecosystem disruptions in the Kahayan River (e.g., Kurniawan et al., 2025; Nawan et al., 2025; Sudarningsih et al., 2023).

Interestingly enough, in addition to scientific elements that shape both stories, traditional shrewdness emerges. Miranti inherited from her Sundanese ancestors the LEK called *siloka*, a mystical cultural belief, to help her convinced that Lukman was alive somewhere in the Kalimantan jungle to salvage the family's dream life, that is, "a life in union with the forest" (Andriono, n.d., Para 5). Trained as a qualified doctor to treat diseased or injured animals, Miranti understands that the tortured orangutans are quick to surrender spiritually through performing a litany of woe. Throughout the narrative, it is clear that the character incorporates both LEK and scientific knowledge (SK). Studies recommend the integration of LEK and SK in preservation areas (Cebrián-Piqueras et al., 2020), in particular with orangutans in habitats such as the Sebangau National Park (Ehmann et al., 2021; Morgans et al., 2017). The research of Ehmann and others (2021) specifically shows that immature male orangutans gain important ecological and social learning behaviours from their mothers. The closeness of Pongo and his mother Laksmi can thus be scientifically explained.

Meanwhile, Maiweni's bachelor's degree in environmental sciences appears insufficient until she herself witnesses the appalling damages done to her childhood's waterscape and its complexities. What happened to the sick boy Hanjak is evident that people use the contaminated water from the Kahayan River both for their consumption and daily use. The recurrent epidemic diarrhoea and skin diseases make *balian*, the traditional healer give up. In the absence of medical service, villagers rely on the affordable traditional herbal medication. They believe that "a tea from the spear grass and white jasmine roots" are good natural remedies for treating gastric problems (Gagas, n.d., Para 11). The *salient* narration concerning the dreadfully filthy water is expressed thus: "The river we used to play in is now very dirty. The water makes you itch. The miners have been dumping their toxic waste into the river" (Gagas, n.d., Para 23). These narrative compliments scientific explanations. To mention one, a study on impacts of river contamination toward community health in rural Central Kalimantan finds out that lacks of local healthcare system and limited modern services cause 30% of residents to self-medicate due to financial constraints (Nawan et al., 2025).

At this stage, Econarrative reading can disclose how Science is creatively interpreted in "Pongo's Caring Tree" and "Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan" by highlighting human and non-human interactions, oscillations of modern and

traditional methods, and values of resilience and conservation. Additionally, the emerging sub-texts include critiques of incompetence and corrupt officials (as in giving little food to orangutans and business collusion); inadequacy of social welfare and health care (increase of sick people with various diseases); and financial difficulties (people changes livelihoods frequently at the expense of environmental degradation). The discussion now turns to how these constructive ecological stories can contribute to sustainable education.

From Storytelling to Advocacy

In the discussion of types of narratives, Arran Stibbe claims his own ecological philosophy, saying, “In one word, my ecosophy is Living!” (2023, p. 33), pointing out that the exclamation mark following the word refers to celebration, respect, and strive for Live itself. He opts for beneficial story, not the ambivalent and destructive ones to talk about the world to live by. This last section examines how Econarrative reading of the two short stories helps promote Stibbe’s “Living!” option.

Contextualization with nowadays’ actual ecosystem is important to start the discussion. Based on the report of the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP) by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and UNESCO, there are between 45,000 and 69,000 Bornean orangutans left in the wild, but only 7,300 or fewer Sumatran orangutans. Together with the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran rhinoceros, and Asian elephants, orangutans are the most endangered species (Nellemann et al., 2007). Worse still, the study of Morgans et al., (2017) shows that inter-organizational collaborations, knowledge sharing, and trust buildings for conservations of Bornean orangutans (*Pongo pygmaeus*) are often hard to carry out, resulting in different levels of success in terms of investment outcomes. Meanwhile, in addition to the difficulties in conserving orangutans, the rapid deterioration of the Earth’s natural ecosystem makes some species precariously under threats, in particular with the growth of infrastructure megaprojects and forest clearance for extractive industries across Indonesia. The capital city set-up in Kalimantan is a proof that the metanarrative is anthropocentric (Shimamura & Mizunoya, 2020), bringing together “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011) and unchecked capitalisms. From a forensic linguistic point of view, a study on legal documents reveals that the relocation of Indonesia’s capital city prioritized economic growth over environmental sustainability as the discourse is pregnant with the growth-related lexemes (Suhandano et al., 2023).

In contrast, the vegetation depicted in Andriono’s short story evokes ecological awareness, as it fortifies natural balance required for the survival of all creation. The buni tree, an offshoot of the bodhi tree family, where the orangutans perform the ritual is described as follows.

[The tree’s] delicious seeds were treats for orangutans, squirrels, and birds. The trunk was large, the branches were stout, the bark contained an effective medicine, and the lush canopy was a home for various animals, including orangutans. The roots of the Caring Tree were strong and bored deep into the soil to uphold the tree’s enormous stature (Andriono, n.d., Para 47).

Cruelty to orangutans as shown in the study of Anhar et al., (2024) worsens the human-nature interactions that the story seeks to critique. Thus, mindful of the ecological precarity, especially the loss of habitat for near-extinct orangutans, the narrative of Miranti family and their orangutan friends in “Pongo’s Caring Tree” is a form of *Action*. Celebration of life and condemnation of death (including violence towards the non-humans) is the message. The author provides a new way of communication to impart such values as natural conservation, interactions and harmony of all creations, resilience, ecological advocacy, and many more. If

autobiographical information is of any use, Rinto Andriono (1974-2021) started writing during his rehabilitation from a stroke in June 2018 as a therapy upon his neurologist's advice. His sickness forced him to leave his permanent job as a post-disaster recovery planner, leaving his ethics of care imprinted in his writings on post-disaster mitigations and numerous short stories. This is to say that "Pongo's Caring Tree" can be used in sustainable education, not inclusive of literature and/or language studies.

To move to the second storytelling, "Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan" by Han Gagas, like Stibbe's "Living!" preference of story, sends a message to respect Kalimantan's land and waterscapes. It is told that the foursome, especially Maiweni, at first cherishes the scenery from their hired boat:

Both sides of the riverbank were overgrown with small groves of bamboo, coconut, and fruit trees interspersed by patches of brush and flowering rose myrtles. The fruit trees — bananas, jackfruits, durians, cluster figs and cashews — thrived in the fertile soil of Kalimantan's peatland (Gagas, n.d., Para 56)

Yet, celebration of nature is no more as the boat moved "farther and farther from civilization" and "The stilt houses were now out of sight. Above the noise of the motor, they caught the occasional birds chirping and monkeys squealing from the forest" (Gagas, n.d., Para 60).

By showing the two contrasts of robust nature and dying civilization as warned by distracting noises of birds and monkeys, the short story calls for *Action*. Gagas' depiction of restorative responses to ecological destruction is effective. The narrative of the arduous journey attempted by Mawinei and friends with the NGO supports to stop the destructive mining operations is, in Stibbe's term, beneficial.

Indeed, studies show that non-degradable metal such as lead (Pb), mercury (Hg), and cadmium (Cd) in the Kahayan River is worrisome and villagers including mine workers are the most impactful parties (e.g. Nawan et al., 2025). The recurring landslides owing to shifting cultivation upon market pressures described in the story are evident of the ecocide in Central Kalimantan. Given that ecocide is yet untouchable in Indonesian criminal laws (Arifin et al., 2024; Widiartana et al., 2025), ecological injustice will continue unless literary intervention, among others, is put in place. Environmental activism is therefore implied in this short story. It narrativizes how the four friends make efforts to stop brutal mining activities by procuring samples of contaminated water from the river and taking pictures of the destruction to the authorities.

To sum up, human-culture relationships portrayed in both short stories offer insights to increase public awareness in order to deal with present ecological crises, particularly the similar ecological problems in Sumatra. One way to advocate for a more sustainable and equitable human-nature interactions is to read these short stories as mirrors of disaster. Sadly, transformation does not happen overnight, as "feeling closer to nature" (Saiful & Shein, 2025) requires ongoing habituation and commitments. Nonetheless, when properly facilitated in sustainable education, Literature can be used as political advocacy to fight anthropocentrism and encourage worldwide activism to address environmental issues.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has shown that the Sumatra flash floods resemble the disasters caused by the loss of nature agency to human greed as depicted in the two short stories discussed. The dreadful forest fires in "Pohon Pongo" and the uncompromising water-and-land-abuse in "Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan" are narratives of

the wounded earth that refuse to be silenced. Both short stories also illuminate the usefulness of the local wisdom that calls for people to listen to nature. The swansong rite of the orangutans trapped in the poisonous smog, as well as the birds' cry, are all warnings for people about the endangered ecosystem in Kalimantan. A comparative analysis shows that saving orangutans through restoration and empathy shown by the veterinarian Miranti and clinical investigation led by the engineer Mawinei stand for the Science components of the narratives. Stories of environmental vandalism of all kinds from shifting agricultural practices to corporation's dark dealings with the powerful in the community are reflective of the real-world environmental problems today. Though geographically diverse, lessons from Kalimantan as imagined in the narratives can inform about Action to restore and mitigate the now swamped Sumatra landscapes.

To conclude, Rinto Andriono's and Han Gagas's narrativization of traumatic experiences caused by forest fire and threats to communities' health and wealth can effectively display the intersection of Narrative, Science, and Action. Both short stories published by Dalang provides Indonesia with cyclical cautionary tales to cope with contemporary disasters. Indeed, the name Dalang, or master storyteller, speaks for itself, as the two narratives help elucidate ways in which human morality is often confronted by ecological reality to survive in this archipelagic country. Other Indonesian short stories are worthy of exploration for future research while showing that local-based narratives can partake in global concerns such as climate change and the ensuing social and ecological injustices.

Finally, speaking of implications, it is important to integrate literature studies into sustainable education at all levels. Literary analyses that treat nature as active narrative agencies instead of passive backdrops can help shape human responses to become more aware of this gradually depleted, flawed, world.

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