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## Submission original research article

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Mon, Apr 29, 2024 at 11:19 PM

Dear Editor,

We wish to submit an original research article entitled "Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet" for consideration by the Theory and Practice in Language Studies (TPLS).

We confirm that this work is original and has not been published elsewhere, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Sincerely  
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# Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*

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**Abstract**—Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*), consisting of four novels, provides deep insights into the social, political, and implicit ecological impacts of colonialism in Indonesia. This research aims to analyse the themes of environmental exploitation narrated in the novels, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice. This research method uses an ecocritical framework approach with an in-depth reading of the novel's text. The use of this approach aims to explore and interpret how Toer portrays colonial history and its impact on the environment. The results show that an ecocritical study of the *Buru Quartet* reveals the complex interactions between humans, political systems, and the ecological environment monopolised by Dutch colonialism. Although the novel's main focus is racial and social injustice, it also includes ecological aspects, such as the exploitation of natural resources through forced cultivation by Dutch colonials, which drastically changed the local landscape and biodiversity. This study reveals how colonialism was not only socially and politically oppressive but also played a crucial role in damaging the ecology of colonised areas. The implications of this study are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as *The Buru Quartet* offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models.

**Index Terms**—colonial period, environmental exploitation, ecocriticism, Indonesian history, environment

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*) is a monumental series of novels by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). The series consists of four novels written during his time as a political prisoner on *Buru Island*, a remote island in Indonesia's *Maluku Archipelago* that was used as a dumping ground for political prisoners during President Soeharto's *New Order* rule (1966-1998) (Faruk, 2023). Toer was born in *Blora Regency*, *Central Java Province*, *Indonesia*. He is known for his works on Indonesian social life and history, often using a critical lens towards colonialism and social injustice (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020; Niekerk, 2018). Toer experienced incarceration and exile

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throughout his life for his criticism of Dutch colonial rule and also strongly criticised the practices and politics of Indonesia's government. Toer was imprisoned more often than not, first by the Dutch colonials (1947), then under President Soekarno (1960), and finally exiled to Buru Island during the New Order under Soeharto (1965-1979), where he created the Buru Quartet (Herriman, 2010). His works, especially the Buru Quartet, made Toer an important figure in Indonesian literature and international circles. Toer also faced significant difficulties in writing and publishing his works, including the confiscation of manuscripts and a ban on the circulation of his books in Indonesia during the New Order period, which were considered to contain messages of Marxism-Leninism in his stories (Raybin, 2009; Tsao, 2012). However, after the reformation of Indonesia, the Buru Quartet is internationally recognised as one of Indonesia's most important literary works. It has been translated into approximately 20 different foreign languages around the world.

The Buru Quartet is not only a compelling family saga with the protagonist Minke but also a rich literary work with social, political, and historical analyses of Indonesia during colonialism (Teoh, 2018), including the under-exposed issue of the exploitation of Indonesia's natural resources. In the context of the environment, the tetralogy presents its analysis of how colonisers exploited Indonesia's natural resources for their own benefit, often at the expense of the local environment and indigenous people. For example, the cultivation of commercial crops such as tobacco, tea and coffee under the *cultuurstelsel* system exploited indigenous labour and adversely affected soil fertility and local ecosystems (Saefudin et al., 2023; Vickers, 2013). The Buru Quartet provides a critical perspective on Indonesia's history, including how its natural resources have been exploited over the centuries (Herriman, 2010). The importance of a postcolonial ecocritical approach in uncovering the relationship between colonialism and environmental destruction is significant in this work.

The tetralogy is set against social and political changes in late 19th to early 20th century Indonesia that gave rise to the main character, Minke. The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*) (1980), tells the story of Minke, a Western-educated Javanese youth who befriends and later marries Annelies, an Indo woman. Their relationship faces strict social and legal challenges, prompting Minke to question colonial structures. In this novel, Toer also highlights the forced agriculture system (*cultuurstelsel*) implemented by the Dutch colonial forced Indonesian farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugarcane and tobacco, replacing traditional food crops. This not only damaged environmental sustainability but also disrupted local food security. Next, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) (1981) continues the story of Minke being more active in the national movement. He attempts to rally support against the colonisers while facing personal and political dilemmas. The novel also highlights natural resource extraction activities, including logging for agriculture, mining, and other purposes, which are featured as the setting of the characters' interactions and struggles in the novel.

His next novel, *Footsteps* (*Jejak Langkah*) (1985), follows Minke's journey as a writer and activist, fighting for Indonesian independence through pen and speech. The novel explores his growth in the face of oppression and betrayal. Toer also depicts Minke's resistance to exploitation, who, through higher education, begins to understand colonial injustice, not only in social and political contexts but also in utilising natural resources. This illustrates how the issue of environmental exploitation is intertwined with the struggle for independence and social justice. Finally, *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*) (1988) provides a different perspective through Jacques Pangemanann, a police detective tasked with keeping tabs on the nationalist movement, including Minke. Jacques' inner conflicts reveal the moral and political complexities of the era. Through his narrative, Toer shows an early awareness of the importance of critiquing the environmentally destructive development model. Although this is not the main theme, the dialogue and descriptions in the novels reflect a recognition of the value of the environment that must be protected. Thus, while the Buru Quartet does not explicitly focus on environmental exploitation, it provides a rich context for understanding the ecological impact of colonialism in Indonesia. Toer invites readers to reflect on how colonial policies and practices have contributed to various problems, including the environmental issues that Indonesia and many other countries face today.

Historians such as Boomgaard et al. (1997) set out to analyse the interaction between humans and the environment in Indonesia from the colonial period to after independence (1500-1950). This book explores deforestation, agriculture and natural resource exploitation and their impacts on Indonesian landscapes and society. Through analyses of history, ecology and geography, it provides insights into how environmental history has shaped Indonesia today, highlighting the importance of historical context in dealing with today's environmental challenges. All of these elements form an important part of understanding the history of exploitation during the colonial period, which is relevant in the context of ecocritical analyses. The territory of Indonesia underwent drastic changes during and after its occupation by the Dutch. Toer, in his novel, explores the theme of colonial life in all its aspects, which forms the core of the narrative and influences the life journey of the main character, Minke. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyse the theme of environmental exploitation narrated in the novel, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice, especially in the context of the narrative of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet.

## II. LITERATUR REVIEW

### A. Previous Research

Faruk (2023) and Herriman (2010) studied Pramudya Ananta Toer's "Reverse Flow (*Arus Balik*)" This study constructs the island and the sea by referring to the current theoretical framework in critical island studies and spatial production theory in cultural studies. This is in line with the orientation and policy of viewing and signalling islands in Indonesia from a maritime perspective. On the one hand, this study broadens the horizons of island communities that have been considered limited by inviting them to leave the "backwaters" and experience the islands from a broader marine perspective. In addition, Bostock (2017) highlighted the extent of the depiction of father-son relationships in Pramudya Ananta Toer's works published up to 1952. The study found that four works written between 1945 and 1949, when Toer had little contact with his father with whom he had a difficult relationship, contained negative portraits of fathers, including, in one case, Toer's own father and, in another, a character who substantially modelled his father.

Tsao's (2012) research highlights the interpretation of human evolution in the *Buru Quartet*, which has not been widely studied. Linking the Javanese values of Toer's childhood with his Marxist ideology as an adult, the work illustrates the moral transition from individualism to communal consciousness, marking the turn from primitivism to 'modern humanity'. In terms of Javanese and Marxist cosmology, self-denial leads to the replacement of capitalism with socialism. However, Toer's experience in Buru, where brutality and 'animalism' dominate, questions the viability of humanist values. Set in Buru, the *Quartet* criticises the Javanese-Marxist standard of humanity by suggesting that true humanity might mean defying natural selection and favouring failure and the determination to die over survival in power. Niekerk (2003, 2017) examines *Beach Girl (Gadis Pantai)* using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotypes" to analyse. The research identifies three specific chronotypes- houses in the city, village, and street- that structure the narrative. Each of these chronotypes represents a stage in the development of the novel's anonymous female protagonist, who grows up in a small village on the coast of Java and, at the age of 14, is handed over by her parents to an aristocrat in the city to become his "Siri wife". By escaping spatial marginalisation, the protagonist simultaneously develops a more complex sense of time, not only through an awareness of her country's troubled past but also its potential future. The novel can be read as a critique of the power structures that prevailed not only during the colonial period but also in Indonesia after its independence. Studies of Toer's novels are often based on the social and political conditions underlying colonial conditions in Java (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). However, there is no study of Toer's work that raises the theme of environmental ecocriticism in his novels.

Ecocritical studies extend beyond the works of Pramudya Ananta Toer, with researchers such as Gaard (2009) exploring the origins and evolution of ecocriticism from both scholarly and activist perspectives, covering areas such as ecofeminism and environmental justice in literature. This research also investigates the representation of the environment in children's literature from various angles, including animal studies and ecofeminism. James (2015) highlights how postcolonial ecocriticism often overlooks how the environment is imagined in postcolonial literature, suggesting that understanding the narratives in these texts can enrich ecocritical analyses by considering cultural influences and socio-environmental issues. Zapf (2016) links resource scarcity to violence, showing how competition over resources such as water and land can trigger conflict. Garrard (2010) disputes the idea of stable ecosystems, pointing to environmental change as an important factor in human history. The overall literature reflects the need to further integrate environmental issues in literary analysis, including in the study of Toer's works, to better understand how the environment manifests in the narrative and its influence on social and political issues during the colonial period.

There have been no studies that link Toer's work to ecocritical analyses, particularly in relation to ecological justice and the impact of colonial environmental exploitation, particularly regarding natural disasters and their effects on communities in Java and Indonesia as a whole. Recent research on Toer's work tends to focus on the representation of women's voices, issues of militarism, identity crisis, gender, and class conflict in a stratified society. Drawing on real historical events, Toer's novel opens up many research opportunities in the context of ecocriticism, given that no studies have examined it, and its characters reflect diverse interactions with the environmental conditions of the colonial period. However, the limitations of current research are a challenge for readers and an opportunity for researchers to understand and explore Toer's work from a more innovative and new perspective, one of which is the ecocritical approach.

### B. Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial ecocritical discourse highlights issues arising from "colonial relations and their effects" throughout history, including environmental aspects and the influence of colonial power (Cohen, 2004). Historical research exploring the dynamics between coloniser and colonised countries, global development and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the history of development (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). In the literature, many global critics have focused on representations of nature, highlighting particular aspects of postcolonial ecocriticism, such as environmental violence and evidence of historical struggles in Indonesia (Boomgaard et al., 1997). Important figures such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015), have contributed significantly to understanding the narratives of colonised peoples,

particularly on postcolonial ecocriticism and the environment. In particular, the work by Marland (2013) emphasises the importance of land as a source of life and dignity for colonised peoples. Nixon (2011) highlights the need for "environmental research" and the urgency of overcoming the epistemological divide between postcolonialism and ecocriticism to understand environmental and historical realities in postcolonial territories. Works such as "Ecocritical theory: New European approaches" by Goodbody and Rigby (2011) and "Theorizing material ecocriticism: A diptych" by Iovino and Oppermann (2012) emphasise the importance of historical narratives in ecocriticism and the environmental pressures faced by local communities under colonialism. Postcolonial theorists recognise the environmental challenges that postcolonial countries face, often as a result of colonial exploitation. Historical narratives of colonial materiality practices show how indigenous peoples were reduced to referents by colonials to define themselves and claim the future as belonging to the colonisers (Huggan, 2004; Zapf, 2016).

Postcolonial ecocriticism has evolved to illuminate terms related to colonial origins while highlighting discrimination and environmental atrocities by colonial masters. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasises the importance of understanding the "history of colonial violence" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015) that has permeated our existence on earth. Emerging from literary studies, ecocriticism addresses the way critics view the role of humans and non-humans in literature (James, 2015). This approach also recognises that colonial-era environmental policies were often based on the idea that the environment could be preserved and protected, as well as a source of revenue. The development of postcolonial ecocriticism has increased awareness of historical power dynamics, fuelled greater interest in postcolonial texts, and focused on imperial contexts. While ecocriticism is often considered the dominant critical approach, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) describe it as a broad, diverse and regional movement, not monolithic, but "a set of disparate practices". The connection between histories of environmental violence and postcolonial ecocriticism makes this theory a link between mainstream environmental movements and literature. The study of the *Buru Quartet* is a reflective example of the main aim of this research, applying discourse analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism as a framework to critically analyse Javanese and Indonesian society's relationship with the land, culture, history and local environment as depicted in the text.

### III. METHOD

This article utilises postcolonial ecocriticism as an analytical framework to examine Pramudya Ananta Toer's "The Buru Quartet" (1980-1988). The main method of collecting data is through in-depth reading of the texts. Toer highlights the importance of recognising the history of colonial violence that has taken root in various parts of Indonesia. In postcolonial ecocriticism, there is an emphasis on the relationship between human power and subjectivity, adopting complex ecocritical research methodologies. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) criticise the view that the postcolonial field is anthropocentric, pointing out the long-standing presence of ecological concerns in postcolonial criticism. With the increasing global awareness of environmental issues, it is striking that ecocriticism and the struggles of local communities have received considerable attention in the global environmental literature. This research methodology is strengthened by the theoretical concepts of postcolonial ecocriticism from scholars such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015). They contribute to the analysis of the issue of environmental exploitation in history, especially in the context of Pramudya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*. The research also involved extensive analyses using primary and secondary sources from writers and historians, including "Max Havelaar: The Dutch Trading Company's Coffee Auction (*Max Havelaar: Lelang Kopi Perusahaan Dagang Belanda*)" by Multatuli (1860), "Kretek Girl (*Gadis Kretek*)" by Ratih Kumala (2019), "Tea and Traitors (*Teh dan Penghianatan*)" by Iksaka Banu (2019), "The Environmental History of Modern Indonesia" by Peter Boomgaard et al. (Eds) (1997). These works make important contributions to the analysis and exploration of colonial environmental exploitation and Indonesian environmental history.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *The Struggle Against Colonialism*

The study of the first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*), follows the life of Minke, an intelligent Javanese youth who received a European education in the late 19th century, one of the lucky natives to have an education equal to that of the Dutch (Gaard, 2009). Minke meets Annelies, a mixed-blood Dutch-Javanese girl and the daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh, a Javanese woman who became the concubine of a Dutch landlord. This introduction draws Minke into deep social and racial injustice. Minke and Annelies develop a love complicated by the social and legal conditions of the time, while Nyai Ontosoroh uses her intelligence to fight for social status and protect her family (Toer, 1980, p. 150). The conflict reaches a peak when Annelies is forced to leave Minke due to colonial law, prompting Minke to be more passionate in the struggle against colonialism. The novel is not only a love and personal story but also depicts the social, political and cultural injustices during Dutch colonisation, highlighting the struggle for identity and resistance to oppression.

Ecocritical studies in the novel *This Earth of Mankind* can be conducted by exploring the relationship between humans, the environment, and the political systems that govern both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly

focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are ecological elements that can be interpreted through the lens of ecocriticism. Toer demonstrates his remarkable ability to capture the suffering, struggle, and exploitation of people and nature due to the effects of colonialism:

*Such is colonial life everywhere: Asia, Africa, America, and Australia. All that is not European, much less colonial, is trampled on, laughed at, and humiliated just to show off European superiority and colonial might in all aspects of life...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 246)

At the height of colonialism in Java in the 19th century, this indigenous Javanese population was caught up in Dutch colonial exploitation (Garrard, 2010). Toer masterfully explores the relationship between humans, the political system, and the environment that governs both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are some parts of ecological elements that can be interpreted through the lens of ecocriticism. The abundance of natural resources led the Dutch to oppress the indigenous population and automatically exploit its natural resources (Niekerk, 2017). Colonial practices such as monoculture plantations (e.g. sugarcane, cloves, tobacco and coffee), depicted in the novel, destroyed local biodiversity and drastically altered the landscape. In fact, Kretek products, Indonesia's signature cigarettes made from a mixture of tobacco and cloves, became a major industry at the time (Kumala, 2019). This emphasis on how colonial systems changed the environment can provide insight into the destructive relationship between colonisers and nature (Huggan, 2004; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

One of the characters, Nyai Ontosoroh, often expresses her views on nature (Toer, 1980, pp. 185–195). Nyai Ontosoroh, as a strong and reflective character, provides an interesting perspective on the traditional relationship of indigenous people with their natural surroundings. In contrast to the colonial view that sees nature as a resource to be exploited (Boomgaard et al., 1997), Nyai Ontosoroh and some other characters in the novel may emphasise harmony with nature and sustainable use of resources. The metaphors and symbolism of nature are evident in the title *This Earth of Mankind* and, in some passages, are often used as metaphors for freedom or oppression, depending on the context. For example, the beautiful Javanese landscape can be seen as a symbol of wealth and untapped resource potential or as a place that has been dispossessed and exploited by colonial powers (Toer, 1980, p. 246). At the end of the novel, Minke faces deep sadness when Annelies, his true love, is forced to return to the Netherlands due to the pressure of colonial law. This tragedy causes a major transformation in Minke, prompting him to shift focus from personal and academic aspirations to a broader political struggle. The loss of Annelies not only left emotional scars but also strengthened Minke's resolve to fight against colonial oppression and raise awareness of nationalism among the Indonesian people (Toer, 1980, p. 314). This marks a turning point in Minke's life, which steers the narrative in a more political and activist direction in the later novels in the *Buru Quartet*.

The novel shows the depth of colonial exploitation, with its tragedies of life and far-reaching effects. There is a common thread that connects the Javanese population to the exploitation of nature by the colonisers. Minke, growing up in a colonial environment, experiences even greater violence and threats. The critical approach in *This Earth of Mankind* suggests a productive resolution to the tension between coloniser and colonised through the concept of 'postcolonial synthesis and ecocriticism' (Garrard, 2010; Huggan, 2004; James, 2015). According to Multatuli (1860), Dutch colonial rulers made intensive use of Indonesia's natural resources, including the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*) that required farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugar and rubber, often with adverse consequences for local ecosystems.

### *B. Indigenous People and the National Movement*

After the tragic events that end Minke's story in *This Earth of Mankind*, Minke leaves the town where he went to school and moves to Jakarta (Toer, 1981, pp. 1–5). There, he became involved with activist groups fighting for equality and independence from the Dutch colonisers. This period is referred to as the 'National Movement', which made political, social, and cultural movements aimed at achieving Indonesian independence from Dutch colonisation. This movement developed during the early 20th century and culminated with the proclamation of independence in 1945 (Vickers, 2013). In the novel, Minke meets and interacts with various national movement figures, each of whom provides influence and insight into different aspects of the political and social struggle. These characters include communists, nationalists, and other figures from different ethnicities and backgrounds (Toer, 1981, pp. 85–90). Minke experienced significant intellectual and political growth. He began to write articles and essays critical of colonialism and social injustice, which attracted the attention and irritation of the colonial government. A series of confrontations with the authorities increased the risks faced by Minke and his colleagues but also strengthened their resolve to fight against oppression (Toer, 1981, p. 120). On the personal side, Minke still struggled with his longing and grief over the loss of Annelies, which continued to affect his views on love and personal relationships (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Minke's personal life, combined with his involvement in politics, illustrates the struggles experienced by many freedom fighters of the time.

Overall, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) not only tells the story of political struggle but also highlights Minke's internal struggle in search of his identity as a 'son of all nations', someone who seeks to bring together the various elements of his diverse background in a turbulent colonial context. It is a story of personal growth within a

broader historical context, exploring themes of nationalism, colonialism and resistance (Faruk, 2023; Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). In this novel, Toer implicitly also offers a deep perspective on how colonialism affects the relationship between humans and the environment. Ecocriticism highlights how these traditional values can be a form of resistance to colonial extractive models (Niekerk, 2003, 2017). Toer explores the relationship between cultural identity and ecological practices and how both elements survive or are transformed in the context of colonisation. Moreover, in some parts, landscape transformations due to colonial activities (such as massive land clearing for plantations) had a direct impact on local communities (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Losing land meant not only losing a home but also a source of livelihood and autonomy. The conflict in the novel can often be understood as a metaphor for a larger ecological crisis, where exploitation and oppression represent a disruption to the natural balance (Zapf, 2016). This highlights how environmental and social issues are intertwined and how literature can reveal these interrelationships through narrative (Gogwilt, 2004). Through the lens of ecocriticism, *Child of All Nations* is not only a narrative of anti-colonial struggle but also a critical examination of the ways in which colonialism altered human relationships with nature and how this, in turn, altered social structures and ecological sustainability (Boomgaard et al., 1997).

At the end of *Child of All Nations*, Minke undergoes a significant development in his struggle against colonialism. After a series of events that raised his awareness of the brutality of colonial exploitation and the injustices experienced by his people, Minke became increasingly involved in the nationalist movement. Things become more tense as Minke and his group become more active in challenging colonial rule (Toer, 1981, p. 390). The novel ends on a cliffhanger, showing that the struggle of Minke and his friends is far from over. Minke loses many close friends and faces increasing betrayal and cruelty from the colonials. Despite this, he remains resolute and committed to the struggle. The ending of *Child of All Nations* sets the stage for the continuation of the story in the next novel, *Footsteps*, in which Minke continues to deepen his political role and continue his struggle for social justice and independence.

### C. *The Capitalist World and the Exploitation of Indigenous Nature*

After the events of *Child of All Nations*, Minke has developed into a more mature and influential leader. The novel *Footstep* (*Jejak Langkah*) opens with Minke having moved to Surabaya, where he founded a newspaper called 'Medan Priyayi' (Toer, 1985, p. 54). This newspaper becomes a means to disseminate ideas about empowerment, education, and anti-colonial struggle. The novel also introduces more about Minke's family background and his personal history, which further adds depth to his character and motivations. Throughout the novel, Minke faces various obstacles and challenges, both on a personal and political scale (Toer, 1985, p. 128). He has to deal with colonial repression, betrayal within his own circle, and complicated moral dilemmas. Minke's story is also coloured by personal tragedies, including the loss of those close to him (Toer, 1985, p. 208). On the other hand, Minke also experienced intellectual and spiritual growth (Toer, 1985, p. 216). He interacted with various social and ethnic groups, which enriched his understanding of the social and political complexities of Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 98). Through his newspaper and political activities, Minke endeavoured to unite various groups to fight colonial oppression and build the foundation for an independent and just Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 398).

The novel *Footstep* not only tells more about Minke's struggle but also depicts the evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement. The novel offers a critical and introspective view of Indonesian history and culture while exploring themes of identity, resistance, and the quest for justice (Tsao, 2012). In *Footstep*, Minke's struggle with his friends is not only limited to politics and society but also includes ecological aspects. Ecocriticism helps us see that their struggle is also a struggle to reclaim control over natural resources that have long been exploited by the Dutch colonials (Garrard, 2010; James, 2015). According to Iovino and Oppermann (2012), this reflects how ecology and social struggle are intertwined, with environmental restoration and preservation being an important part of building national independence. Minke, as a character steeped in various aspects of Indonesian life and culture, may consider the environment not only as a physical resource but also as an important component of heritage and culture that must be protected and preserved. As shown in the novel, Minke used his newspaper platform to educate the public (Gogwilt, 2004; Teoh, 2018). In anti-colonial struggles, the environment often became a physical and symbolic battleground. The depiction of nature in *Footstep* may show how nature is not only used as a contested resource but also as a symbol of national identity and freedom.

In the colonial context, land was not only considered an economic commodity but also a symbol of power. Toer often highlighted how fertile land was annexed by the colonial government or by large corporations to be turned into large plantations growing export crops such as rubber, coffee and sugarcane (Banu, 2019). This destroys local ecosystems and displaces peasants from their ancestral lands, who traditionally managed the land sustainably for the will of capitalist financiers in Europe.

*The colonial wars of the past twenty-five years are nothing but the will of capital (capitalism), the interests of the market for the survival of capital in Europe there. Capital has become so powerful, omnipotent. It determines what humanity should do today (including the practice of exploiting the nature of colonised territories)...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 194)



Toer also, in some sections, explores how indigenous people responded to the ecological changes brought by colonialism (Toer, 1985, p. 213). In some cases, there was resistance to the expropriation of land and the use of destructive agricultural practices (Toer, 1985, p. 228). This struggle is not only a conflict over resources but also a fight over identity, culture and independence. In this novel, Toer also uses the symbolism of nature to express the emotional and social conditions of the characters. For example, the destruction of nature can reflect social or moral decay, and the beauty of unpolluted nature can represent memories or aspirations for freedom and harmony (Toer, 1985, p. 339). Through the character of Minke and his interactions with other characters, Toer also touches on the importance of education and awareness in dealing with ecological issues. Minke, as an educated man, uses his knowledge to advocate for social change, showing how knowledge can be a tool for the empowerment of the national movement.

By integrating ecocriticism into the reading of *Footstep*, we gain a more comprehensive perspective on how nature and the environment play a role in colonial and decolonisation narratives (GoGwilt, 2003). This emphasises that the struggle for independence involves not only political and economic aspects but also the importance of valuing and protecting the environment as part of national identity and sovereignty. At the end of the novel *Footstep*, Minke faces increasing colonial repression, which results in the closure of his newspaper, 'Medan Priyayi,' and his arrest by the colonial authorities. This moment illustrates the great risks and challenges faced by nationalist fighters in the face of colonial power (Vickers, 2013). Despite great losses and loss of support, Minke remains steadfast and does not give up on his ideals for justice and independence. The novel leaves the reader with an image of Minke as a figure of resilience and dedication, a symbol of the ongoing struggle in the history of Indonesia's nationalist movement.

The last novel in the Tetralogi Buru series is *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*). In *House of Glass*, the primary focus is on political dynamics, colonialism, and the internal conflicts of characters, particularly Jacques Pangemanann. Although the novel does not explicitly address ecological or environmental themes, an ecocritical approach can be used to explore aspects related to the indirect effects of colonialism on the environment. Unlike the previous three novels, which focus more on the character Minke, *House of Glass* is told from the perspective of Jacques Pangemanann, a native police officer working for the Dutch colonial government. Pangemanann is portrayed as a complex character, revealed through his internal conflicts and moral dilemmas during his duties (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). The metaphor *House of Glass*, or 'glass house,' can be interpreted as a metaphor for a fragile and transparent state where all actions and motivations are visible and subject to judgment (Herriman, 2010). Living under colonialism might feel like being in a 'glass house'—where natural resources are managed and exploited under strict surveillance for the colonisers' profit. Although not directly discussed, it is implied that the Dutch colonial practices in Indonesia, as described in previous novels in the series, involved massive exploitation of natural resources (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism can help us understand the long-term impacts of this exploitation on local ecosystems and the indigenous peoples' way of life (Cohen, 2004).

Pangemanann, a character who is of indigenous ethnic origin but works for the colonials, experiences deep internal conflict. This can be attributed to a feeling of alienation from his own environment and cultural heritage (Nixon, 2011). In ecocriticism, the relationship between indigenous identity and their land or environment is an important topic. This analysis can help explore how colonialism disconnected people from their natural and cultural environment. In the context of ecocriticism, struggles for political and cultural healing often parallel ecological healing efforts (Marland, 2013). By delving deeper into the narrative of *House of Glass*, it may be possible to reveal how resistance to colonisers also reflects a larger struggle to restore environmental integrity and sustainability that has been damaged by colonialism. Although *House of Glass* does not explicitly raise ecological issues, an ecocritical approach could provide additional insights into how colonialism and the characters' internal conflicts affect and are affected by the environment.

Historical research exploring the dynamics between coloniser and colonised countries, global development and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the history of development (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Ecocritical discourse highlights how colonial relations and their impact on the environment have influenced the history and development of postcolonial countries, including Indonesia. Issues such as environmental exploitation and injustice in global development are explored through the lens of ecocriticism to be one of the solutions to the ongoing climate change. Researchers and critics such as Nixon (2011) and Gaard (2009) have examined representations of nature and environmental violence in literature, showing how colonial narratives have reduced indigenous peoples to mere references to reinforce colonial domination. This study emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between colonial exploitation and environmental degradation and the urgency of integrating ecocritical and postcolonial views to better understand the environmental challenges faced by postcolonial states.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, through the lens of ecocriticism, exposes the profound impact of colonialism on the relationship between humans, the environment and power structures. The novel not only reveals the social and racial conflicts faced by the main character, Minke but also exposes environmental exploitation as a reflection of colonial oppression. Ecocriticism reveals how colonial practices such as monoculture plantations damage local biodiversity and alter the landscape, reflecting broader violence against indigenous people. Minke's struggle against colonialism, reinforced by personal tragedy and growing awareness, leads to a greater

commitment to national and social activism, demonstrating how ecological and social struggles are often intertwined. The overall narrative of the Buru Quartet, through ecocritical analysis, offers a deeper understanding of how colonialism is not only political and economic violence but also environmental violence that has long-term impacts on the identity and survival of colonised communities. This emphasises the importance of fighting for ecological justice as an integral part of resistance to historical oppression and discrimination. Ultimately, this research finds that postcolonial environmental literature helps us better understand the transnational and transtemporal processes that contribute to the historical and cultural diversity of indigenous peoples in colonised lands. This research is an important affirmation of the rights of indigenous peoples as well as a dynamic element of the ongoing activist struggle for restitution and sovereignty over indigenous cultures, histories, livelihoods and lands. The paradoxes in the novel exemplify how difficult it is to depict the metamorphosis of settler colonialism while still seeing new horizons of environmental justice and resilience. The implications of this research are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as the Buru Quartet offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models. This perspective is important in improving literacy and shaping policies for a more just and sustainable future, especially with regard to environmental exploitation.

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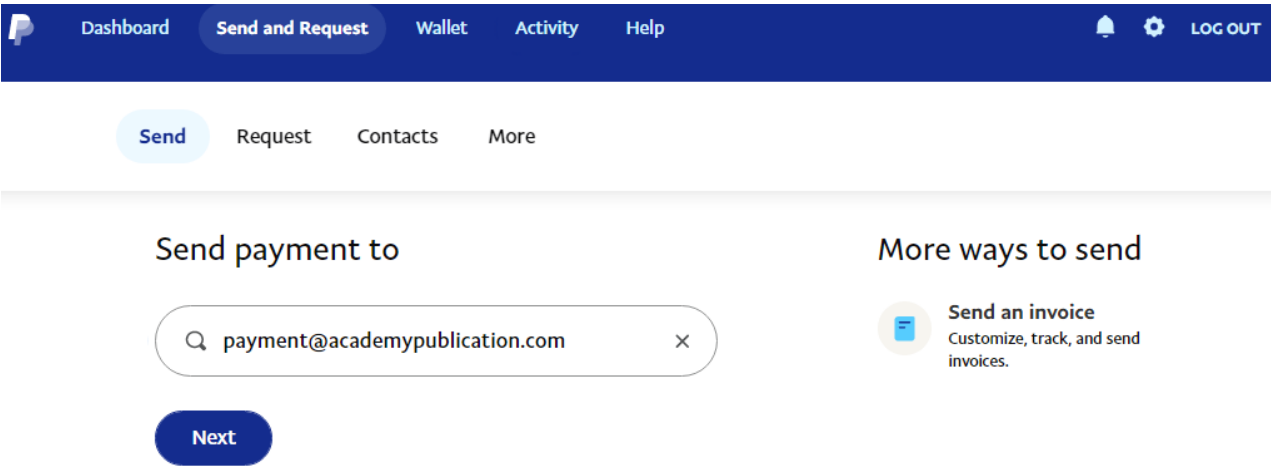
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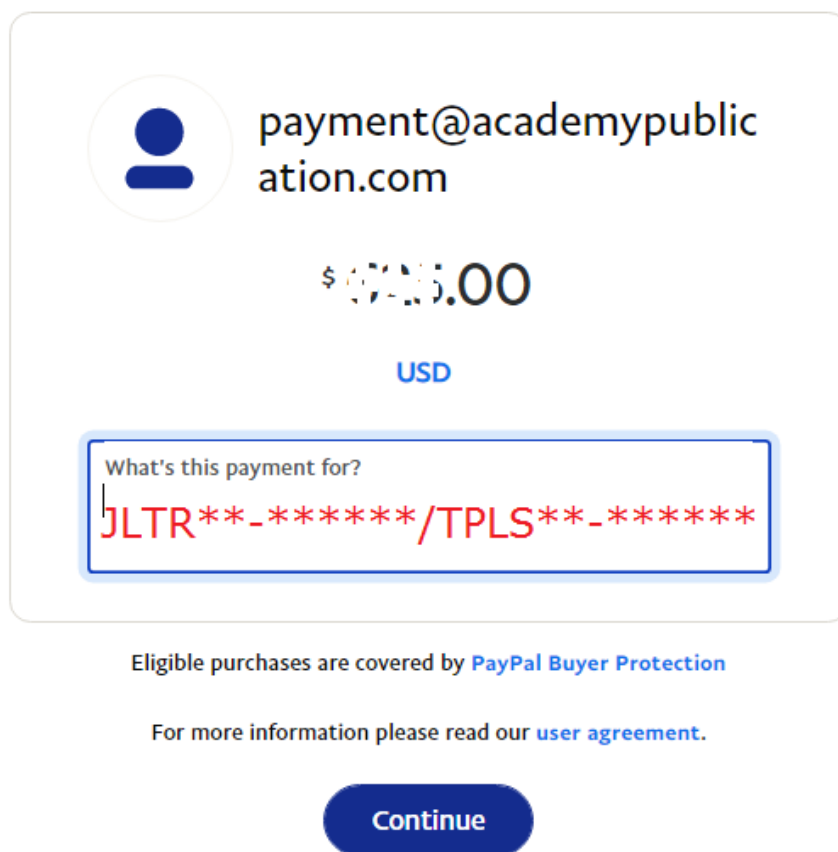


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# Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*

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**Abstract**—Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*), consisting of four novels, provides deep insights into the social, political, and implicit ecological impacts of colonialism in Indonesia. This research aims to analyse the themes of environmental exploitation narrated in the novels, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice. This research method uses an ecocritical framework approach with an in-depth reading of the novel's text. This approach explores and interprets how Toer portrays colonial history and its impact on the environment. The results show that an ecocritical study of the *Buru Quartet* reveals the complex interactions between humans, political systems, and the ecological environment monopolised by Dutch colonialism. Although the novel's main focus is racial and social injustice, it also includes ecological aspects, such as exploiting natural resources through forced cultivation by Dutch colonials, drastically changing the local landscape and biodiversity. This study reveals how colonialism was not only socially and politically oppressive but also played a crucial role in damaging the ecology of colonised areas. The implications of this study are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as *The Buru Quartet* offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models.

**Index Terms**—colonial period, environmental exploitation, ecocriticism, Indonesian history, the *Buru quartet*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*) is a monumental series of novels by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). The series consists of four novels written during his time as a political prisoner on *Buru Island*, a remote island in Indonesia's Maluku Archipelago that was used as a dumping ground for political prisoners during President Soeharto's New Order rule (1966-1998) (Faruk, 2023). Toer was born in Blora Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. He is known for his works on Indonesian social life and history, often using a critical lens towards colonialism and social injustice (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020; Niekerk, 2018). Toer experienced incarceration and exile

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throughout his life for his criticism of Dutch colonial rule and also strongly criticised the practices and politics of Indonesia's government. Toer was imprisoned more often than not, first by the Dutch colonials (1947), then under President Soekarno (1960), and finally exiled to Buru Island during the New Order under Soeharto (1965-1979), where he created the Buru Quartet (Herriman, 2010). His works, especially the Buru Quartet, made Toer an important figure in Indonesian literature and international circles. Toer also faced significant difficulties in writing and publishing his works, including the confiscation of manuscripts and a ban on the circulation of his books in Indonesia during the New Order period, which were considered to contain messages of Marxism-Leninism in his stories (Raybin, 2009; Tsao, 2012). However, after the reformation of Indonesia, the Buru Quartet is internationally recognised as one of Indonesia's most important literary works. It has been translated into approximately 20 different foreign languages around the world.

The Buru Quartet is a compelling family saga with the protagonist Minke and a rich literary work with social, political, and historical analyses of Indonesia during colonialism (Teoh, 2018), including the under-exposed issue of exploiting Indonesia's natural resources. In the context of the environment, the tetralogy presents its analysis of how colonisers exploited Indonesia's natural resources for their benefit, often at the expense of the local environment and indigenous people. For example, cultivating commercial crops such as tobacco, tea and coffee under the *cultuurstelsel* system exploited indigenous labour and adversely affected soil fertility and local ecosystems (Saefudin et al., 2023; Vickers, 2013). The Buru Quartet provides a critical perspective on Indonesia's history, including how its natural resources have been exploited over the centuries (Herriman, 2010). The importance of a postcolonial ecocritical approach in uncovering the relationship between colonialism and environmental destruction is significant in this work.

The tetralogy is set against social and political changes in late 19th to early 20th century Indonesia that gave rise to the main character, Minke. The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*) (1980), tells the story of Minke, a Western-educated Javanese youth who befriends and later marries Annelies, an Indo woman. Their relationship faces strict social and legal challenges, prompting Minke to question colonial structures. In this novel, Toer also highlights the forced agriculture system (*cultuurstelsel*) implemented by the Dutch colonial forced Indonesian farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugarcane and tobacco, replacing traditional food crops. This not only damaged environmental sustainability but also disrupted local food security. Next, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) (1981) continues the story of Minke being more active in the national movement. He attempts to rally support against the colonisers while facing personal and political dilemmas. The novel also highlights natural resource extraction activities, including logging for agriculture, mining, and other purposes, which are featured as the setting of the characters' interactions and struggles in the novel.

His next novel, *Footsteps* (*Jejak Langkah*) (1985), follows Minke's journey as a writer and activist, fighting for Indonesian independence through pen and speech. The novel explores his growth in the face of oppression and betrayal. Toer also depicts Minke's resistance to exploitation, who, through higher education, begins to understand colonial injustice, not only in social and political contexts but also in utilising natural resources. This illustrates how the issue of environmental exploitation is intertwined with the struggle for independence and social justice. Finally, *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*) (1988) provides a different perspective through Jacques Pangemanann, a police detective tasked with keeping tabs on the nationalist movement, including Minke. Jacques' inner conflicts reveal the moral and political complexities of the era. Through his narrative, Toer shows an early awareness of the importance of critiquing the environmentally destructive development model. Although this is not the main theme, the dialogue and descriptions in the novels reflect a recognition of the value of the environment that must be protected. Thus, while the Buru Quartet does not explicitly focus on environmental exploitation, it provides a rich context for understanding the ecological impact of colonialism in Indonesia. Toer invites readers to reflect on how colonial policies and practices have contributed to various problems, including the environmental issues Indonesia and many other countries face today.

Historians such as Boomgaard et al. (1997) set out to analyse the interaction between humans and the environment in Indonesia from the colonial period to after independence (1500-1950). This book explores deforestation, agriculture and natural resource exploitation and their impacts on Indonesian landscapes and society. Through analyses of history, ecology and geography, it provides insights into how environmental history has shaped Indonesia today, highlighting the importance of historical context in dealing with today's environmental challenges. All of these elements form an important part of understanding the history of exploitation during the colonial period, which is relevant in the context of ecocritical analyses. The territory of Indonesia underwent drastic changes during and after its occupation by the Dutch. Toer, in his novel, explores the theme of colonial life in all its aspects, which forms the core of the narrative and influences the life journey of the main character, Minke. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyse the theme of environmental exploitation narrated in the novel, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice, especially in the context of the narrative of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet.



## II. LITERATUR REVIEW

### A. Previous Research

Faruk (2023) and Herriman (2010) studied Pramudya Ananta Toer's "Reverse Flow (*Arus Balik*)" This study constructs the island and the sea by referring to the current theoretical framework in critical island studies and spatial production theory in cultural studies. This aligns with the orientation and policy of viewing and signalling islands in Indonesia from a maritime perspective. On the one hand, this study broadens the horizons of island communities that have been considered limited by inviting them to leave the "backwaters" and experience the islands from a broader marine perspective. In addition, Bostock (2017) highlighted the extent of the depiction of father-son relationships in Pramudya Ananta Toer's works published up to 1952. The study found that four works written between 1945 and 1949, when Toer had little contact with his father with whom he had a difficult relationship, contained negative portraits of fathers, including, in one case, Toer's father and, in another, a character who substantially modelled his father.

Tsao's (2012) research highlights the interpretation of human evolution in the *Buru Quartet*, which has not been widely studied. Linking the Javanese values of Toer's childhood with his Marxist ideology as an adult, the work illustrates the moral transition from individualism to communal consciousness, marking the turn from primitivism to 'modern humanity'. In terms of Javanese and Marxist cosmology, self-denial leads to the replacement of capitalism with socialism. However, Toer's experience in Buru, where brutality and 'animalism' dominate, questions the viability of humanist values. Set in Buru, the *Quartet* criticises the Javanese-Marxist standard of humanity by suggesting that true humanity might mean defying natural selection and favouring failure and the determination to die over survival in power. Niekerk (2003, 2017) examines *Beach Girl (Gadis Pantai)* using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotypes" to analyse. The research identifies three specific chronotypes- houses in the city, village, and street- that structure the narrative. Each of these chronotypes represents a stage in the development of the novel's anonymous female protagonist, who grows up in a small village on the coast of Java and, at the age of 14, is handed over by her parents to an aristocrat in the city to become his "Siri wife". By escaping spatial marginalisation, the protagonist simultaneously develops a more complex sense of time, not only through an awareness of her country's troubled past but also its potential future. The novel can be read as a critique of the power structures that prevailed during the colonial period and in Indonesia after its independence. Studies of Toer's novels are often based on the social and political conditions underlying colonial conditions in Java (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). However, no study of Toer's work raises the theme of environmental ecocriticism in his novels.

Ecocritical studies extend beyond the works of Pramudya Ananta Toer, with researchers such as Gaard (2009) exploring the origins and evolution of ecocriticism from both scholarly and activist perspectives, covering areas such as ecofeminism and environmental justice in literature. This research also investigates the representation of the environment in children's literature from various angles, including animal studies and ecofeminism. James (2015) highlights how postcolonial ecocriticism often overlooks how the environment is imagined in postcolonial literature, suggesting that understanding the narratives in these texts can enrich ecocritical analyses by considering cultural influences and socio-environmental issues. Zapf (2016) links resource scarcity to violence, showing how competition over resources such as water and land can trigger conflict. Garrard (2010) disputes the idea of stable ecosystems, pointing to environmental change as an important factor in human history. The overall literature reflects the need to further integrate environmental issues in literary analysis, including in the study of Toer's works, to better understand how the environment manifests in the narrative and its influence on social and political issues during the colonial period.

No studies have linked Toer's work to ecocritical analyses, particularly about ecological justice and the impact of colonial environmental exploitation, particularly regarding natural disasters and their effects on communities in Java and Indonesia. Recent research on Toer's work tends to focus on the representation of women's voices, issues of militarism, identity crisis, gender, and class conflict in a stratified society. Drawing on real historical events, Toer's novel opens up many research opportunities in the context of ecocriticism, given that no studies have examined it, and its characters reflect diverse interactions with the environmental conditions of the colonial period. However, the limitations of current research are a challenge for readers and an opportunity for researchers to understand and explore Toer's work from a more innovative and new perspective, one of which is the ecocritical approach.

### B. Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial ecocritical discourse highlights issues arising from "colonial relations and their effects" throughout history, including environmental aspects and the influence of colonial power (Cohen, 2004). Historical research exploring the dynamics between colonisers and colonised countries, global development, and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the development history (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Many global critics have focused on representations of nature in the literature, highlighting particular aspects of postcolonial ecocriticism, such as environmental violence and evidence of historical struggles in Indonesia (Boomgaard et al., 1997). Important figures such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015), have contributed significantly to understanding the narratives of

colonised peoples, particularly on postcolonial ecocriticism and the environment. In particular, the work by Marland (2013) emphasises the importance of land as a source of life and dignity for colonised peoples. Nixon (2011) highlights the need for "environmental research" and the urgency of overcoming the epistemological divide between postcolonialism and ecocriticism to understand environmental and historical realities in postcolonial territories. Works such as "Ecocritical theory: New European approaches" by Goodbody and Rigby (2011) and "Theorizing material ecocriticism: A diptych" by Iovino and Oppermann (2012) emphasise the importance of historical narratives in ecocriticism and the environmental pressures faced by local communities under colonialism. Postcolonial theorists recognise the environmental challenges that postcolonial countries face, often due to colonial exploitation. Historical narratives of colonial materiality practices show how indigenous peoples were reduced to referents by colonials to define themselves and claim the future as belonging to the colonisers (Huggan, 2004; Zapf, 2016).

Postcolonial ecocriticism has evolved to illuminate terms related to colonial origins while highlighting discrimination and environmental atrocities by colonial masters. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasises the importance of understanding the "history of colonial violence" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015) that has permeated our existence on earth. Emerging from literary studies, ecocriticism addresses how critics view humans' and non-humans' roles in literature (James, 2015). This approach also recognises that colonial-era environmental policies were often based on the idea that the environment could be preserved and protected as a source of revenue. The development of postcolonial ecocriticism has increased awareness of historical power dynamics, fuelled greater interest in postcolonial texts, and focused on imperial contexts. While ecocriticism is often considered the dominant critical approach, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) describe it as a broad, diverse and regional movement, not monolithic, but "a set of disparate practices". The connection between histories of environmental violence and postcolonial ecocriticism makes this theory a link between mainstream environmental movements and literature. The study of the *Buru Quartet* is a reflective example of the main aim of this research, applying discourse analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism as a framework to critically analyse Javanese and Indonesian society's relationship with the land, culture, history and local environment as depicted in the text.

### III. METHOD

This article utilises postcolonial ecocriticism as an analytical framework to examine Pramudya Ananta Toer's "The *Buru Quartet*" (1980-1988). The main method of collecting data is through in-depth reading of the texts. Toer highlights the importance of recognising the history of colonial violence that has taken root in various parts of Indonesia. In postcolonial ecocriticism, there is an emphasis on the relationship between human power and subjectivity, adopting complex ecocritical research methodologies. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) criticise the view that the postcolonial field is anthropocentric, pointing out the long-standing presence of ecological concerns in postcolonial criticism. With the increasing global awareness of environmental issues, it is striking that ecocriticism and the struggles of local communities have received considerable attention in the global environmental literature. This research methodology is strengthened by the theoretical concepts of postcolonial ecocriticism from scholars such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015). They contribute to analysing the issue of environmental exploitation in history, especially in the context of Pramudya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*. The research also involved extensive analyses using primary and secondary sources from writers and historians, including "Max Havelaar: The Dutch Trading Company's Coffee Auction (*Max Havelaar: Lelang Kopi Perusahaan Dagang Belanda*)" by Multatuli (1860), "Kretek Girl (*Gadis Kretek*)" by Ratih Kumala (2019), "Tea and Traitors (*Teh dan Penghianatan*)" by Iksaka Banu (2019), "The Environmental History of Modern Indonesia" by Peter Boomgaard et al. (Eds) (1997). These works contribute important to analysing and exploring colonial environmental exploitation and Indonesian environmental history.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *The Struggle Against Colonialism*

The study of the first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*), follows the life of Minke, an intelligent Javanese youth who received a European education in the late 19th century, one of the lucky natives to have an education equal to that of the Dutch (Gaard, 2009). Minke meets Annelies, a mixed-blood Dutch-Javanese girl and the daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh, a Javanese woman who became the concubine of a Dutch landlord. This introduction draws Minke into deep social and racial injustice. Minke and Annelies develop a love complicated by the social and legal conditions of the time. At the same time, Nyai Ontosoroh uses her intelligence to fight for social status and protect her family (Toer, 1980, p. 150). The conflict peaks when Annelies is forced to leave Minke due to colonial law, prompting Minke to be more passionate in the struggle against colonialism. The novel is a love and personal story and depicts the social, political and cultural injustices during Dutch colonisation, highlighting the struggle for identity and resistance to oppression.

Ecocritical studies in the novel *This Earth of Mankind* can be conducted by exploring the relationship between humans, the environment, and the political systems that govern both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are ecological elements that can be interpreted through

the lens of ecocriticism. Toer demonstrates his remarkable ability to capture the suffering, struggle, and exploitation of people and nature due to the effects of colonialism:

*Such is colonial life everywhere: Asia, Africa, America, and Australia. All that is not European, much less colonial, is trampled on, laughed at, and humiliated just to show off European superiority and colonial might in all aspects of life...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 246)

At the height of colonialism in Java in the 19th century, this indigenous Javanese population was caught up in Dutch colonial exploitation (Garrard, 2010). Toer masterfully explores the relationship between humans, the political system, and the environment that governs both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, some ecological elements can be interpreted through ecocriticism. The abundance of natural resources led the Dutch to oppress the indigenous population and automatically exploit its natural resources (Niekerk, 2017). Colonial practices such as monoculture plantations (e.g. sugarcane, cloves, tobacco and coffee), depicted in the novel, destroyed local biodiversity and drastically altered the landscape. In fact, Kretek products, Indonesia's signature cigarettes made from a mixture of tobacco and cloves, became a major industry at the time (Kumala, 2019). This emphasis on how colonial systems changed the environment can provide insight into the destructive relationship between colonisers and nature (Huggan, 2004; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

One of the characters, Nyai Ontosoroh, often expresses her views on nature (Toer, 1980, pp. 185–195). Nyai Ontosoroh, as a strong and reflective character, provides an interesting perspective on the traditional relationship of indigenous people with their natural surroundings. In contrast to the colonial view that sees nature as a resource to be exploited (Boomgaard et al., 1997), Nyai Ontosoroh and some other characters in the novel may emphasise harmony with nature and sustainable use of resources. The metaphors and symbolism of nature are evident in the title *This Earth of Mankind* and, in some passages, are often used as metaphors for freedom or oppression, depending on the context. For example, the beautiful Javanese landscape can be seen as a symbol of wealth and untapped resource potential or as a place that has been dispossessed and exploited by colonial powers (Toer, 1980, p. 246). At the novel's end, Minke faces deep sadness when Annelies, his true love, is forced to return to the Netherlands due to the pressure of colonial law. This tragedy causes a major transformation in Minke, prompting him to shift focus from personal and academic aspirations to a broader political struggle. The loss of Annelies not only left emotional scars but also strengthened Minke's resolve to fight against colonial oppression and raise awareness of nationalism among the Indonesian people (Toer, 1980, p. 314). This marks a turning point in Minke's life, which steers the narrative in a more political and activist direction in the later novels in the *Buru Quartet*.

The novel shows the depth of colonial exploitation, with its tragedies of life and far-reaching effects. A common thread connects the Javanese population to the exploitation of nature by the colonisers. Minke, growing up in a colonial environment, experiences even greater violence and threats. The critical approach in *This Earth of Mankind* suggests a productive resolution to the tension between coloniser and colonised through 'postcolonial synthesis and ecocriticism' (Garrard, 2010; Huggan, 2004; James, 2015). According to Multatuli (1860), Dutch colonial rulers intensively used Indonesia's natural resources, including the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*) that required farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugar and rubber, often with adverse consequences for local ecosystems.

#### *B. Indigenous People and the National Movement*

After the tragic events that end Minke's story in *This Earth of Mankind*, Minke leaves the town where he went to school and moves to Jakarta (Toer, 1981, pp. 1–5). There, he became involved with activist groups fighting for equality and independence from the Dutch colonisers. This period is called the 'National Movement', which made political, social, and cultural movements to achieve Indonesian independence from Dutch colonisation. This movement developed during the early 20th century and culminated with the proclamation of independence in 1945 (Vickers, 2013). In the novel, Minke meets and interacts with various national movement figures, each providing influence and insight into different aspects of the political and social struggle. These characters include communists, nationalists, and other figures from different ethnicities and backgrounds (Toer, 1981, pp. 85–90). Minke experienced significant intellectual and political growth. He began to write articles and essays critical of colonialism and social injustice, which attracted the attention and irritation of the colonial government. Confrontations with the authorities increased Minke and his colleagues' risks but strengthened their resolve to fight against oppression (Toer, 1981, p. 120). On the personal side, Minke still struggled with his longing and grief over the loss of Annelies, which continued to affect his views on love and personal relationships (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Minke's personal life, combined with his involvement in politics, illustrates the struggles experienced by many freedom fighters of the time.

Overall, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) not only tells the story of political struggle but also highlights Minke's internal struggle in search of his identity as a 'child of all nations', someone who seeks to bring together the various elements of his diverse background in a turbulent colonial context. It is a story of personal growth within a broader historical context, exploring themes of nationalism, colonialism and resistance (Faruk, 2023; Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). In this novel, Toer implicitly offers a deep perspective on how colonialism affects the relationship between humans and the environment. Ecocriticism highlights how these traditional values can be a form of resistance

to colonial extractive models (Niekerk, 2003, 2017). Toer explores the relationship between cultural identity and ecological practices and how both elements survive or are transformed in the context of colonisation. Moreover, in some parts, landscape transformations due to colonial activities (such as massive land clearing for plantations) directly impacted local communities (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Losing land meant losing a home and a source of livelihood and autonomy. The conflict in the novel can often be understood as a metaphor for a larger ecological crisis, where exploitation and oppression represent a disruption to the natural balance (Zapf, 2016). This highlights how environmental and social issues are intertwined and how literature can reveal these interrelationships through narrative (Gogwilt, 2004). Through the lens of ecocriticism, *Child of All Nations* is not only a narrative of anti-colonial struggle but also a critical examination of how colonialism altered human relationships with nature and how this, in turn, altered social structures and ecological sustainability (Boomgaard et al., 1997).

At the end of *Child of All Nations*, Minke undergoes a significant development in his struggle against colonialism. After a series of events that raised his awareness of the brutality of colonial exploitation and the injustices experienced by his people, Minke became increasingly involved in the nationalist movement. Things become more tense as Minke and his group become more active in challenging colonial rule (Toer, 1981, p. 390). The novel ends on a cliffhanger, showing that Minke's struggle with his friends is far from over. Minke loses many close friends and faces increasing betrayal and cruelty from the colonials. Despite this, he remains resolute and committed to the struggle. The ending of *Child of All Nations* sets the stage for the continuation of the story in the next novel, *Footsteps*, in which Minke continues to deepen his political role and continue his struggle for social justice and independence.

### C. *The Capitalist World and the Exploitation of Indigenous Nature*

After the events of *Child of All Nations*, Minke has developed into a more mature and influential leader. The novel *Footstep* (*Jejak Langkah*) opens with Minke moving to Surabaya, where he founded a newspaper called 'Medan Priyayi' (Toer, 1985, p. 54). This newspaper becomes a means to disseminate ideas about empowerment, education, and anti-colonial struggle. The novel also introduces Minke's family background and personal history, adding depth to his character and motivations. Throughout the novel, Minke faces various obstacles and challenges, both on a personal and political scale (Toer, 1985, p. 128). He has to deal with colonial repression, betrayal within his circle, and complicated moral dilemmas. Minke's story is also coloured by personal tragedies, including the loss of those close to him (Toer, 1985, p. 208). On the other hand, Minke also experienced intellectual and spiritual growth (Toer, 1985, p. 216). He interacted with various social and ethnic groups, enriching his understanding of Indonesia's social and political complexities (Toer, 1985, p. 98). Through his newspaper and political activities, Minke endeavoured to unite various groups to fight colonial oppression and build the foundation for an independent and just Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 398).

The novel *Footstep* tells more about Minke's struggle and depicts the evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement. The novel offers a critical and introspective view of Indonesian history and culture while exploring themes of identity, resistance, and the quest for justice (Tsao, 2012). In *Footstep*, Minke's struggle with his friends is not only limited to politics and society but also includes ecological aspects. Ecocriticism helps us see that their struggle is also a struggle to reclaim control over natural resources that have long been exploited by the Dutch colonials (Garrard, 2010; James, 2015). According to Iovino and Oppermann (2012), this reflects how ecology and social struggle are intertwined, with environmental restoration and preservation being an important part of building national independence. As a character steeped in various aspects of Indonesian life and culture, Minke may consider the environment a physical resource and an important component of heritage and culture that must be protected and preserved. The novel shows that Minke used his newspaper platform to educate the public (Gogwilt, 2004; Teoh, 2018). In anti-colonial struggles, the environment often became a physical and symbolic battleground. The depiction of nature in *Footstep* may show how nature is not only used as a contested resource but also as a symbol of national identity and freedom.

In the colonial context, land was considered an economic commodity and a symbol of power. Toer often highlighted how fertile land was annexed by the colonial government or by large corporations to be turned into large plantations growing export crops such as rubber, coffee, and sugarcane (Banu, 2019). This destroyed local ecosystems and displaced peasants from their ancestral lands, who traditionally managed the land sustainably for the will of European capitalists.

*The colonial wars of the past twenty-five years are nothing but the will of capital (capitalism) and the market's interests in ensuring the survival of capital in Europe. Capital has become so powerful and omnipotent that it determines what humanity should do today (including exploiting the nature of colonised territories).*

(Toer, 1980, p. 194)

Toer also, in some sections, explores how indigenous people responded to the ecological changes brought by colonialism (Toer, 1985, p. 213). In some cases, there was resistance to the expropriation of land and the use of destructive agricultural practices (Toer, 1985, p. 228). This struggle is not only a conflict over resources but also a fight over identity, culture and independence. In this novel, Toer also uses the symbolism of nature to express the emotional and social conditions of the characters. For example, the destruction of nature can reflect social or moral decay, and the beauty of unpolluted nature can represent memories or aspirations for freedom and harmony (Toer, 1985, p. 339). Through the character of Minke and his interactions with other characters, Toer also touches on the importance of

education and awareness in dealing with ecological issues. As an educated man, Minke uses his knowledge to advocate for social change, showing how knowledge can empower the national movement.

By integrating ecocriticism into the reading of *Footstep*, we gain a more comprehensive perspective on how nature and the environment play a role in colonial and decolonisation narratives (Gogwilt, 2003). This emphasises that the struggle for independence involves political and economic aspects and the importance of valuing and protecting the environment as part of national identity and sovereignty. At the end of the novel *Footstep*, Minke faces increasing colonial repression, which results in the closure of his newspaper, 'Medan Priyayi,' and his arrest by the colonial authorities. This moment illustrates the great risks and challenges faced by nationalist fighters in the face of colonial power (Vickers, 2013). Despite great losses and loss of support, Minke remains steadfast and does not give up on his ideals for justice and independence. The novel leaves the reader with an image of Minke as a figure of resilience and dedication, a symbol of the ongoing struggle in the history of Indonesia's nationalist movement.

The last novel in the Tetralogi Buru series is *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*). *House of Glass* focuses primarily on political dynamics, colonialism, and characters' internal conflicts, particularly Jacques Pangemanann. Although the novel does not explicitly address ecological or environmental themes, an ecocritical approach can be used to explore aspects related to the indirect effects of colonialism on the environment. Unlike the previous three novels, which focus more on the character Minke, *House of Glass* is told from the perspective of Jacques Pangemanann, a native police officer working for the Dutch colonial government. Pangemanann is portrayed as a complex character, revealed through his internal conflicts and moral dilemmas during his duties (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). *House of Glass*, or 'glass house,' is a metaphor for a fragile and transparent state where all actions and motivations are visible and subject to judgment (Herriman, 2010). Living under colonialism might feel like being in a 'glass house'—where natural resources are managed and exploited under strict surveillance for the colonisers' profit. Although not directly discussed, it is implied that the Dutch colonial practices in Indonesia, as described in previous novels in the series, involved massive exploitation of natural resources (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism can help us understand the long-term impacts of this exploitation on local ecosystems and the indigenous peoples' way of life (Cohen, 2004; Nuraedah & Saefudin, 2024).

Pangemanann, a character who is of indigenous ethnic origin but works for the colonials, experiences deep internal conflict. This can be attributed to alienation from his environment and cultural heritage (Nixon, 2011). The relationship between indigenous identity and their land or environment is an important topic in ecocriticism. This analysis can help explore how colonialism disconnected people from their natural and cultural environment. In ecocriticism, political and cultural healing struggles often parallel ecological healing efforts (Marland, 2013). By delving deeper into the narrative of *House of Glass*, it may be possible to reveal how resistance to colonisers also reflects a larger struggle to restore environmental integrity and sustainability that colonialism has damaged. Although *House of Glass* does not explicitly raise ecological issues, an ecocritical approach could provide additional insights into how colonialism and the characters' internal conflicts affect and are affected by the environment.

Historical research exploring the dynamics between colonisers and colonised countries, global development, and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the development history (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Ecocritical discourse highlights how colonial relations and their impact on the environment have influenced the history and development of postcolonial countries, including Indonesia. Issues such as environmental exploitation and injustice in global development are explored through the lens of ecocriticism to be one of the solutions to the ongoing climate change. Researchers and critics such as Nixon (2011) and Gaard (2009) have examined representations of nature and environmental violence in literature, showing how colonial narratives have reduced indigenous peoples to mere references to reinforce colonial domination. This study emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between colonial exploitation and environmental degradation and the urgency of integrating ecocritical and postcolonial views to better understand the environmental challenges postcolonial states face.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, through the lens of ecocriticism, exposes the profound impact of colonialism on the relationship between humans, the environment and power structures. The novel not only reveals the social and racial conflicts faced by the main character, Minke but also exposes environmental exploitation as a reflection of colonial oppression. Ecocriticism reveals how colonial practices such as monoculture plantations damage local biodiversity and alter the landscape, reflecting broader violence against indigenous people. Minke's struggle against colonialism, reinforced by personal tragedy and growing awareness, leads to a greater commitment to national and social activism, demonstrating how ecological and social struggles are often intertwined. The overall narrative of the *Buru Quartet*, through ecocritical analysis, offers a deeper understanding of how colonialism is not only political and economic violence but also environmental violence that has long-term impacts on the identity and survival of colonised communities. This emphasises the importance of fighting for ecological justice as an integral part of resisting historical oppression and discrimination. Ultimately, this research finds that postcolonial environmental literature helps us better understand the transnational and transtemporal processes contributing to indigenous peoples' historical and cultural diversity in colonised lands. This research is an important affirmation of the

rights of indigenous peoples as well as a dynamic element of the ongoing activist struggle for restitution and sovereignty over indigenous cultures, histories, livelihoods and lands. The paradoxes in the novel exemplify how difficult it is to depict the metamorphosis of settler colonialism while still seeing new horizons of environmental justice and resilience. The implications of this research are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as the Buru Quartet offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models. This perspective is important in improving literacy and shaping policies for a more just and sustainable future, especially environmental exploitation.

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# Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*

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**Abstract**—Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*), consisting of four novels, provides deep insights into the social, political, and implicit ecological impacts of colonialism in Indonesia. This research aims to analyse the themes of environmental exploitation narrated in the novels, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice. This research method uses an ecocritical framework approach with an in-depth reading of the novel's text. This approach explores and interprets how Toer portrays colonial history and its impact on the environment. The results show that an ecocritical study of the *Buru Quartet* reveals the complex interactions between humans, political systems, and the ecological environment monopolised by Dutch colonialism. Although the novel's main focus is racial and social injustice, it also includes ecological aspects, such as exploiting natural resources through forced cultivation by Dutch colonials, drastically changing the local landscape and biodiversity. This study reveals how colonialism was not only socially and politically oppressive but also played a crucial role in damaging the ecology of colonised areas. The implications of this study are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as *The Buru Quartet* offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models.

**Index Terms**—colonial period, environmental exploitation, ecocriticism, Indonesian history, the *Buru quartet*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*) is a monumental series of novels by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). The series consists of four novels written during his time as a political prisoner on Buru Island, a remote island in Indonesia's Maluku Archipelago that was used as a dumping ground for political prisoners during President Soeharto's New Order rule (1966-1998) (Faruk, 2023). Toer was born in Blora Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. He is known for his works on Indonesian social life and history, often using a critical lens towards colonialism and social injustice (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020; Niekerk, 2018). Toer experienced incarceration and exile throughout his life for his criticism of Dutch colonial rule and also strongly criticised the practices and politics of

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Indonesia's government. Toer was imprisoned more often than not, first by the Dutch colonials (1947), then under President Soekarno (1960), and finally exiled to Buru Island during the New Order under Soeharto (1965-1979), where he created the Buru Quartet (Herriman, 2010). His works, especially the Buru Quartet, made Toer an important figure in Indonesian literature and international circles. Toer also faced significant difficulties in writing and publishing his works, including the confiscation of manuscripts and a ban on the circulation of his books in Indonesia during the New Order period, which were considered to contain messages of Marxism-Leninism in his stories (Raybin, 2009; Tsao, 2012). However, after the reformation of Indonesia, the Buru Quartet is internationally recognised as one of Indonesia's most important literary works. It has been translated into approximately 20 different foreign languages around the world.

The Buru Quartet is a compelling family saga with the protagonist Minke and a rich literary work with social, political, and historical analyses of Indonesia during colonialism (Teoh, 2018), including the under-exposed issue of exploiting Indonesia's natural resources. In the context of the environment, the tetralogy presents its analysis of how colonisers exploited Indonesia's natural resources for their benefit, often at the expense of the local environment and indigenous people. For example, cultivating commercial crops such as tobacco, tea and coffee under the *cultuurstelsel* system exploited indigenous labour and adversely affected soil fertility and local ecosystems (Saefudin et al., 2023; Vickers, 2013). The Buru Quartet provides a critical perspective on Indonesia's history, including how its natural resources have been exploited over the centuries (Herriman, 2010). The importance of a postcolonial ecocritical approach in uncovering the relationship between colonialism and environmental destruction is significant in this work.

The tetralogy is set against social and political changes in late 19th to early 20th century Indonesia that gave rise to the main character, Minke. The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*) (1980), tells the story of Minke, a Western-educated Javanese youth who befriends and later marries Annelies, an Indo woman. Their relationship faces strict social and legal challenges, prompting Minke to question colonial structures. In this novel, Toer also highlights the forced agriculture system (*cultuurstelsel*) implemented by the Dutch colonial forced Indonesian farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugarcane and tobacco, replacing traditional food crops. This not only damaged environmental sustainability but also disrupted local food security. Next, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) (1981) continues the story of Minke being more active in the national movement. He attempts to rally support against the colonisers while facing personal and political dilemmas. The novel also highlights natural resource extraction activities, including logging for agriculture, mining, and other purposes, which are featured as the setting of the characters' interactions and struggles in the novel.

His next novel, *Footsteps* (*Jejak Langkah*) (1985), follows Minke's journey as a writer and activist, fighting for Indonesian independence through pen and speech. The novel explores his growth in the face of oppression and betrayal. Toer also depicts Minke's resistance to exploitation, who, through higher education, begins to understand colonial injustice, not only in social and political contexts but also in utilising natural resources. This illustrates how the issue of environmental exploitation is intertwined with the struggle for independence and social justice. Finally, *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*) (1988) provides a different perspective through Jacques Pangemanann, a police detective tasked with keeping tabs on the nationalist movement, including Minke. Jacques' inner conflicts reveal the moral and political complexities of the era. The following table illustrates the buru quartet:

TABLE 1  
THE DEPICTION OF THE FOUR NOVELS IN THE BURU QUARTER

Number	Characteristics of The Buru Quartet			
	Title	Main Theme	Main Character	Summary
1	<i>This Earth of Mankind</i> (1980) ( <i>Bumi Manusia</i> )	Colonialism, the awakening of consciousness	Minke, Nyai Ontosoroh	Minke's story of fighting Dutch colonial injustice through education and writing.
2	<i>Child of All Nations</i> (1981) ( <i>Anak Semua Bangsa</i> )	National identity, struggle	Minke, Nyai Ontosoroh, Jean Marais	Minke's journey to find his identity and understand the perspectives of those around him.
3	<i>Footsteps</i> (1985) ( <i>Jejak Langkah</i> )	National movement, politics	Minke, Kommer, Semaun	Minke founded organisations that fought for indigenous rights in the political sphere.
4	<i>House of Glass</i> (1988) ( <i>Rumah Kaca</i> )	Colonial surveillance and repression, resilience	Jacques Pangemanann, Minke	Seen from the perspective of Pangemanann, who supervised and controlled Minke's movements.

Through his narrative, Toer shows an early awareness of the importance of critiquing the environmentally destructive development model. Although this is not the main theme, the dialogue and descriptions in the novels reflect a

recognition of the value of the environment that must be protected. Thus, while the Buru Quartet does not explicitly focus on environmental exploitation, it provides a rich context for understanding the ecological impact of colonialism in Indonesia. Toer invites readers to reflect on how colonial policies and practices have contributed to various problems, including the environmental issues Indonesia and many other countries face today.

Historians such as Boomgaard et al. (1997) set out to analyse the interaction between humans and the environment in Indonesia from the colonial period to after independence (1500-1950). This book explores deforestation, agriculture and natural resource exploitation and their impacts on Indonesian landscapes and society. Through analyses of history, ecology and geography, it provides insights into how environmental history has shaped Indonesia today, highlighting the importance of historical context in dealing with today's environmental challenges. All of these elements form an important part of understanding the history of exploitation during the colonial period, which is relevant in the context of ecocritical analyses. The territory of Indonesia underwent drastic changes during and after its occupation by the Dutch. Toer, in his novel, explores the theme of colonial life in all its aspects, which forms the core of the narrative and influences the life journey of the main character, Minke. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyse the theme of environmental exploitation narrated in the novel, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice, especially in the context of the narrative of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Previous Research

Faruk (2023) and Herriman (2010) studied Pramudya Ananta Toer's "Reverse Flow (*Arus Balik*)". This study constructs the island and the sea by referring to the current theoretical framework in critical island studies and spatial production theory in cultural studies. This aligns with the orientation and policy of viewing and signalling islands in Indonesia from a maritime perspective. On the one hand, this study broadens the horizons of island communities that have been considered limited by inviting them to leave the "backwaters" and experience the islands from a broader marine perspective. In addition, Bostock (2017) highlighted the extent of the depiction of father-son relationships in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works published up to 1952. The study found that four works written between 1945 and 1949, when Toer had little contact with his father with whom he had a difficult relationship, contained negative portraits of fathers, including, in one case, Toer's father and, in another, a character who substantially modelled his father.

Tsao's (2012) research highlights the interpretation of human evolution in the Buru Quartet, which has not been widely studied. Linking the Javanese values of Toer's childhood with his Marxist ideology as an adult, the work illustrates the moral transition from individualism to communal consciousness, marking the turn from primitivism to 'modern humanity'. In terms of Javanese and Marxist cosmology, self-denial leads to the replacement of capitalism with socialism. However, Toer's experience in Buru, where brutality and 'animalism' dominate, questions the viability of humanist values. Set in Buru, the Quartet criticises the Javanese-Marxist standard of humanity by suggesting that true humanity might mean defying natural selection and favouring failure and the determination to die over survival in power. Niekerk (2003, 2017) examines *Beach Girl (Gadis Pantai)* using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotypes" to analyse. The research identifies three specific chronotypes- houses in the city, village, and street- that structure the narrative. Each of these chronotypes represents a stage in the development of the novel's anonymous female protagonist, who grows up in a small village on the coast of Java and, at the age of 14, is handed over by her parents to an aristocrat in the city to become his "Siri wife". By escaping spatial marginalisation, the protagonist simultaneously develops a more complex sense of time, not only through an awareness of her country's troubled past but also its potential future. The novel can be read as a critique of the power structures that prevailed during the colonial period and in Indonesia after its independence. Studies of Toer's novels are often based on the social and political conditions underlying colonial conditions in Java (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). However, no study of Toer's work raises the theme of environmental ecocriticism in his novels.

Ecocritical studies extend beyond the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, with researchers such as Gaard (2009) exploring the origins and evolution of ecocriticism from both scholarly and activist perspectives, covering areas such as ecofeminism and environmental justice in literature. This research also investigates the representation of the environment in children's literature from various angles, including animal studies and ecofeminism. James (2015) highlights how postcolonial ecocriticism often overlooks how the environment is imagined in postcolonial literature, suggesting that understanding the narratives in these texts can enrich ecocritical analyses by considering cultural influences and socio-environmental issues. Zapf (2016) links resource scarcity to violence, showing how competition over resources such as water and land can trigger conflict. Garrard (2010) disputes the idea of stable ecosystems, pointing to environmental change as an important factor in human history. The overall literature reflects the need to further integrate environmental issues in literary analysis, including in the study of Toer's works, to better understand how the environment manifests in the narrative and its influence on social and political issues during the colonial period.

No studies have linked Toer's work to ecocritical analyses, particularly about ecological justice and the impact of colonial environmental exploitation, particularly regarding natural disasters and their effects on communities in Java



and Indonesia. Recent research on Toer's work tends to focus on the representation of women's voices, issues of militarism, identity crisis, gender, and class conflict in a stratified society. Drawing on real historical events, Toer's novel opens up many research opportunities in the context of ecocriticism, given that no studies have examined it, and its characters reflect diverse interactions with the environmental conditions of the colonial period. However, the limitations of current research are a challenge for readers and an opportunity for researchers to understand and explore Toer's work from a more innovative and new perspective, one of which is the ecocritical approach.

### *B. Theoretical Framework*

Postcolonial ecocritical discourse highlights issues arising from "colonial relations and their effects" throughout history, including environmental aspects and the influence of colonial power (Cohen, 2004). Historical research exploring the dynamics between colonisers and colonised countries, global development, and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the development history (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Many global critics have focused on representations of nature in the literature, highlighting particular aspects of postcolonial ecocriticism, such as environmental violence and evidence of historical struggles in Indonesia (Boomgaard et al., 1997). Important figures such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015), have contributed significantly to understanding the narratives of colonised peoples, particularly on postcolonial ecocriticism and the environment. In particular, the work by Marland (2013) emphasises the importance of land as a source of life and dignity for colonised peoples. Nixon (2011) highlights the need for "environmental research" and the urgency of overcoming the epistemological divide between postcolonialism and ecocriticism to understand environmental and historical realities in postcolonial territories. Works such as "Ecocritical theory: New European approaches" by Goodbody and Rigby (2011) and "Theorizing material ecocriticism: A diptych" by Iovino and Oppermann (2012) emphasise the importance of historical narratives in ecocriticism and the environmental pressures faced by local communities under colonialism. Postcolonial theorists recognise the environmental challenges that postcolonial countries face, often due to colonial exploitation. Historical narratives of colonial materiality practices show how indigenous peoples were reduced to referents by colonials to define themselves and claim the future as belonging to the colonisers (Huggan, 2004; Zapf, 2016).

Postcolonial ecocriticism has evolved to illuminate terms related to colonial origins while highlighting discrimination and environmental atrocities by colonial masters. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasises the importance of understanding the "history of colonial violence" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015) that has permeated our existence on earth. Emerging from literary studies, ecocriticism addresses how critics view humans' and non-humans' roles in literature (James, 2015). This approach also recognises that colonial-era environmental policies were often based on the idea that the environment could be preserved and protected as a source of revenue. The development of postcolonial ecocriticism has increased awareness of historical power dynamics, fuelled greater interest in postcolonial texts, and focused on imperial contexts. While ecocriticism is often considered the dominant critical approach, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) describe it as a broad, diverse and regional movement, not monolithic, but "a set of disparate practices". The connection between histories of environmental violence and postcolonial ecocriticism makes this theory a link between mainstream environmental movements and literature. The study of the Buru Quartet is a reflective example of the main aim of this research, applying discourse analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism as a framework to critically analyse Javanese and Indonesian society's relationship with the land, culture, history and local environment as depicted in the text.

### III. METHOD

This article utilises postcolonial ecocriticism as an analytical framework to examine Pramudya Ananta Toer's "The Buru Quartet" (1980-1988). The main method of collecting data is through in-depth reading of the texts. Toer highlights the importance of recognising the history of colonial violence that has taken root in various parts of Indonesia. In postcolonial ecocriticism, there is an emphasis on the relationship between human power and subjectivity, adopting complex ecocritical research methodologies. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) criticise the view that the postcolonial field is anthropocentric, pointing out the long-standing presence of ecological concerns in postcolonial criticism. With the increasing global awareness of environmental issues, it is striking that ecocriticism and the struggles of local communities have received considerable attention in the global environmental literature. This research methodology is strengthened by the theoretical concepts of postcolonial ecocriticism from scholars such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015). They contribute to analysing the issue of environmental exploitation in history, especially in the context of Pramudya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet. The research also involved extensive analyses using primary and secondary sources from writers and historians, including "Max Havelaar: The Dutch Trading Company's Coffee Auction (*Max Havelaar: Lelang Kopi Perusahaan Dagang Belanda*)" by Multatuli (1860), "Kretek Girl (*Gadis Kretek*)" by Ratih Kumala (2019), "Tea and Traitors (*Teh dan Penghianatan*)" by Iksaka Banu (2019), "The Environmental History of Modern Indonesia" by Peter Boomgaard et al. (Eds) (1997). These works contribute important to analysing and exploring colonial environmental exploitation and Indonesian environmental history.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### A. *The Struggle Against Colonialism*

The study of the first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*), follows the life of Minke, an intelligent Javanese youth who received a European education in the late 19th century, one of the lucky natives to have an education equal to that of the Dutch (Gaard, 2009). Minke meets Annelies, a mixed-blood Dutch-Javanese girl and the daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh, a Javanese woman who became the concubine of a Dutch landlord. This introduction draws Minke into deep social and racial injustice. Minke and Annelies develop a love complicated by the social and legal conditions of the time. At the same time, Nyai Ontosoroh uses her intelligence to fight for social status and protect her family (Toer, 1980, p. 150). The conflict peaks when Annelies is forced to leave Minke due to colonial law, prompting Minke to be more passionate in the struggle against colonialism. The novel is a love and personal story and depicts the social, political and cultural injustices during Dutch colonisation, highlighting the struggle for identity and resistance to oppression.

Ecocritical studies in the novel *This Earth of Mankind* can be conducted by exploring the relationship between humans, the environment, and the political systems that govern both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are ecological elements that can be interpreted through the lens of ecocriticism. Toer demonstrates his remarkable ability to capture the suffering, struggle, and exploitation of people and nature due to the effects of colonialism:

*Such is colonial life everywhere: Asia, Africa, America, and Australia. All that is not European, much less colonial, is trampled on, laughed at, and humiliated just to show off European superiority and colonial might in all aspects of life...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 246)

At the height of colonialism in Java in the 19th century, this indigenous Javanese population was caught up in Dutch colonial exploitation (Garrard, 2010). Toer masterfully explores the relationship between humans, the political system, and the environment that governs both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, some ecological elements can be interpreted through ecocriticism. The abundance of natural resources led the Dutch to oppress the indigenous population and automatically exploit its natural resources (Niekerk, 2017). Colonial practices such as monoculture plantations (e.g. sugarcane, cloves, tobacco and coffee), depicted in the novel, destroyed local biodiversity and drastically altered the landscape. In fact, Kretek products, Indonesia's signature cigarettes made from a mixture of tobacco and cloves, became a major industry at the time (Kumala, 2019). This emphasis on how colonial systems changed the environment can provide insight into the destructive relationship between colonisers and nature (Huggan, 2004; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

One of the characters, Nyai Ontosoroh, often expresses her views on nature (Toer, 1980, pp. 185–195). Nyai Ontosoroh, as a strong and reflective character, provides an interesting perspective on the traditional relationship of indigenous people with their natural surroundings. In contrast to the colonial view that sees nature as a resource to be exploited (Boomgaard et al., 1997), Nyai Ontosoroh and some other characters in the novel may emphasise harmony with nature and sustainable use of resources. The metaphors and symbolism of nature are evident in the title *This Earth of Mankind* and, in some passages, are often used as metaphors for freedom or oppression, depending on the context. For example, the beautiful Javanese landscape can be seen as a symbol of wealth and untapped resource potential or as a place that has been dispossessed and exploited by colonial powers (Toer, 1980, p. 246). At the novel's end, Minke faces deep sadness when Annelies, his true love, is forced to return to the Netherlands due to the pressure of colonial law. This tragedy causes a major transformation in Minke, prompting him to shift focus from personal and academic aspirations to a broader political struggle. The loss of Annelies not only left emotional scars but also strengthened Minke's resolve to fight against colonial oppression and raise awareness of nationalism among the Indonesian people (Toer, 1980, p. 314). This marks a turning point in Minke's life, which steers the narrative in a more political and activist direction in the later novels in the *Buru Quartet*.

The novel shows the depth of colonial exploitation, with its tragedies of life and far-reaching effects. A common thread connects the Javanese population to the exploitation of nature by the colonisers. Minke, growing up in a colonial environment, experiences even greater violence and threats. The critical approach in *This Earth of Mankind* suggests a productive resolution to the tension between coloniser and colonised through 'postcolonial synthesis and ecocriticism' (Garrard, 2010; Huggan, 2004; James, 2015). According to Multatuli (1860), Dutch colonial rulers intensively used Indonesia's natural resources, including the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*) that required farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugar and rubber, often with adverse consequences for local ecosystems.

##### B. *Indigenous People and the National Movement*

After the tragic events that end Minke's story in *This Earth of Mankind*, Minke leaves the town where he went to school and moves to Jakarta (Toer, 1981, pp. 1–5). There, he became involved with activist groups fighting for equality and independence from the Dutch colonisers. This period is called the 'National Movement', which made political,

social, and cultural movements to achieve Indonesian independence from Dutch colonisation. This movement developed during the early 20th century and culminated with the proclamation of independence in 1945 (Vickers, 2013). In the novel, Minke meets and interacts with various national movement figures, each providing influence and insight into different aspects of the political and social struggle. These characters include communists, nationalists, and other figures from different ethnicities and backgrounds (Toer, 1981, pp. 85–90). Minke experienced significant intellectual and political growth. He began to write articles and essays critical of colonialism and social injustice, which attracted the attention and irritation of the colonial government. Confrontations with the authorities increased Minke and his colleagues' risks but strengthened their resolve to fight against oppression (Toer, 1981, p. 120). On the personal side, Minke still struggled with his longing and grief over the loss of Annelies, which continued to affect his views on love and personal relationships (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Minke's personal life, combined with his involvement in politics, illustrates the struggles experienced by many freedom fighters of the time.

Overall, *Child of All Nations* (*Anak Semua Bangsa*) not only tells the story of political struggle but also highlights Minke's internal struggle in search of his identity as a 'child of all nations', someone who seeks to bring together the various elements of his diverse background in a turbulent colonial context. It is a story of personal growth within a broader historical context, exploring themes of nationalism, colonialism and resistance (Faruk, 2023; Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). In this novel, Toer implicitly offers a deep perspective on how colonialism affects the relationship between humans and the environment. Ecocriticism highlights how these traditional values can be a form of resistance to colonial extractive models (Niekerk, 2003, 2017). Toer explores the relationship between cultural identity and ecological practices and how both elements survive or are transformed in the context of colonisation. Moreover, in some parts, landscape transformations due to colonial activities (such as massive land clearing for plantations) directly impacted local communities (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Losing land meant losing a home and a source of livelihood and autonomy. The conflict in the novel can often be understood as a metaphor for a larger ecological crisis, where exploitation and oppression represent a disruption to the natural balance (Zapf, 2016). This highlights how environmental and social issues are intertwined and how literature can reveal these interrelationships through narrative (Gogwilt, 2004). Through the lens of ecocriticism, *Child of All Nations* is not only a narrative of anti-colonial struggle but also a critical examination of how colonialism altered human relationships with nature and how this, in turn, altered social structures and ecological sustainability (Boomgaard et al., 1997).

At the end of *Child of All Nations*, Minke undergoes a significant development in his struggle against colonialism. After a series of events that raised his awareness of the brutality of colonial exploitation and the injustices experienced by his people, Minke became increasingly involved in the nationalist movement. Things become more tense as Minke and his group become more active in challenging colonial rule (Toer, 1981, p. 390). The novel ends on a cliffhanger, showing that Minke's struggle with his friends is far from over. Minke loses many close friends and faces increasing betrayal and cruelty from the colonials. Despite this, he remains resolute and committed to the struggle. The ending of *Child of All Nations* sets the stage for the continuation of the story in the next novel, *Footsteps*, in which Minke continues to deepen his political role and continue his struggle for social justice and independence.

### C. *The Capitalist World and the Exploitation of Indigenous Nature*

After the events of *Child of All Nations*, Minke has developed into a more mature and influential leader. The novel *Footstep* (*Jejak Langkah*) opens with Minke moving to Surabaya, where he founded a newspaper called 'Medan Priyayi' (Toer, 1985, p. 54). This newspaper becomes a means to disseminate ideas about empowerment, education, and anti-colonial struggle. The novel also introduces Minke's family background and personal history, adding depth to his character and motivations. Throughout the novel, Minke faces various obstacles and challenges, both on a personal and political scale (Toer, 1985, p. 128). He has to deal with colonial repression, betrayal within his circle, and complicated moral dilemmas. Minke's story is also coloured by personal tragedies, including the loss of those close to him (Toer, 1985, p. 208). On the other hand, Minke also experienced intellectual and spiritual growth (Toer, 1985, p. 216). He interacted with various social and ethnic groups, enriching his understanding of Indonesia's social and political complexities (Toer, 1985, p. 98). Through his newspaper and political activities, Minke endeavoured to unite various groups to fight colonial oppression and build the foundation for an independent and just Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 398).

The novel *Footstep* tells more about Minke's struggle and depicts the evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement. The novel offers a critical and introspective view of Indonesian history and culture while exploring themes of identity, resistance, and the quest for justice (Tsao, 2012). In *Footstep*, Minke's struggle with his friends is not only limited to politics and society but also includes ecological aspects. Ecocriticism helps us see that their struggle is also a struggle to reclaim control over natural resources that have long been exploited by the Dutch colonials (Garrard, 2010; James, 2015). According to Iovino and Oppermann (2012), this reflects how ecology and social struggle are intertwined, with environmental restoration and preservation being an important part of building national independence. As a character steeped in various aspects of Indonesian life and culture, Minke may consider the environment a physical resource and an important component of heritage and culture that must be protected and preserved. The novel shows that Minke used his newspaper platform to educate the public (Gogwilt, 2004; Teoh, 2018). In anti-colonial struggles, the environment often became a physical and symbolic battleground. The depiction of nature in *Footstep* may show how nature is not only used as a contested resource but also as a symbol of national identity and freedom.

In the colonial context, land was considered an economic commodity and a symbol of power. Toer often highlighted how fertile land was annexed by the colonial government or by large corporations to be turned into large plantations growing export crops such as rubber, coffee, and sugarcane (Banu, 2019). This destroyed local ecosystems and displaced peasants from their ancestral lands, who traditionally managed the land sustainably for the will of European capitalists.

*The colonial wars of the past twenty-five years are nothing but the will of capital (capitalism) and the market's interests in ensuring the survival of capital in Europe. Capital has become so powerful and omnipotent that it determines what humanity should do today (including exploiting the nature of colonised territories).*

(Toer, 1980, p. 194)

Toer also, in some sections, explores how indigenous people responded to the ecological changes brought by colonialism (Toer, 1985, p. 213). In some cases, there was resistance to the expropriation of land and the use of destructive agricultural practices (Toer, 1985, p. 228). This struggle is not only a conflict over resources but also a fight over identity, culture and independence. In this novel, Toer also uses the symbolism of nature to express the emotional and social conditions of the characters. For example, the destruction of nature can reflect social or moral decay, and the beauty of unpolluted nature can represent memories or aspirations for freedom and harmony (Toer, 1985, p. 339). Through the character of Minke and his interactions with other characters, Toer also touches on the importance of education and awareness in dealing with ecological issues. As an educated man, Minke uses his knowledge to advocate for social change, showing how knowledge can empower the national movement.

By integrating ecocriticism into the reading of *Footstep*, we gain a more comprehensive perspective on how nature and the environment play a role in colonial and decolonisation narratives (Gogwilt, 2003). This emphasises that the struggle for independence involves political and economic aspects and the importance of valuing and protecting the environment as part of national identity and sovereignty. At the end of the novel *Footstep*, Minke faces increasing colonial repression, which results in the closure of his newspaper, 'Medan Priyayi,' and his arrest by the colonial authorities. This moment illustrates the great risks and challenges faced by nationalist fighters in the face of colonial power (Vickers, 2013). Despite great losses and loss of support, Minke remains steadfast and does not give up on his ideals for justice and independence. The novel leaves the reader with an image of Minke as a figure of resilience and dedication, a symbol of the ongoing struggle in the history of Indonesia's nationalist movement.

The last novel in the Tetralogi Buru series is *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*). *House of Glass* focuses primarily on political dynamics, colonialism, and characters' internal conflicts, particularly Jacques Pangemanann. Although the novel does not explicitly address ecological or environmental themes, an ecocritical approach can be used to explore aspects related to the indirect effects of colonialism on the environment. Unlike the previous three novels, which focus more on the character Minke, *House of Glass* is told from the perspective of Jacques Pangemanann, a native police officer working for the Dutch colonial government. Pangemanann is portrayed as a complex character, revealed through his internal conflicts and moral dilemmas during his duties (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). *House of Glass*, or 'glass house,' is a metaphor for a fragile and transparent state where all actions and motivations are visible and subject to judgment (Herriman, 2010). Living under colonialism might feel like being in a 'glass house'—where natural resources are managed and exploited under strict surveillance for the colonisers' profit. Although not directly discussed, it is implied that the Dutch colonial practices in Indonesia, as described in previous novels in the series, involved massive exploitation of natural resources (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism can help us understand the long-term impacts of this exploitation on local ecosystems and the indigenous peoples' way of life (Cohen, 2004; Nuraedah & Saefudin, 2024).

Pangemanann, a character who is of indigenous ethnic origin but works for the colonials, experiences deep internal conflict. This can be attributed to alienation from his environment and cultural heritage (Nixon, 2011). The relationship between indigenous identity and their land or environment is an important topic in ecocriticism. This analysis can help explore how colonialism disconnected people from their natural and cultural environment. In ecocriticism, political and cultural healing struggles often parallel ecological healing efforts (Marland, 2013). By delving deeper into the narrative of *House of Glass*, it may be possible to reveal how resistance to colonisers also reflects a larger struggle to restore environmental integrity and sustainability that colonialism has damaged. Although *House of Glass* does not explicitly raise ecological issues, an ecocritical approach could provide additional insights into how colonialism and the characters' internal conflicts affect and are affected by the environment.

Historical research exploring the dynamics between colonisers and colonised countries, global development, and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the development history (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Ecocritical discourse highlights how colonial relations and their impact on the environment have influenced the history and development of postcolonial countries, including Indonesia. Issues such as environmental exploitation and injustice in global development are explored through the lens of ecocriticism to be one of the solutions to the ongoing climate change. Researchers and critics such as Nixon (2011) and Gaard (2009) have examined representations of nature and environmental violence in literature, showing how colonial narratives have reduced indigenous peoples to mere references to reinforce colonial domination. This study emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between colonial exploitation and

environmental degradation and the urgency of integrating ecocritical and postcolonial views to better understand the environmental challenges postcolonial states face.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, through the lens of ecocriticism, exposes the profound impact of colonialism on the relationship between humans, the environment and power structures. The novel not only reveals the social and racial conflicts faced by the main character, Minke but also exposes environmental exploitation as a reflection of colonial oppression. Ecocriticism reveals how colonial practices such as monoculture plantations damage local biodiversity and alter the landscape, reflecting broader violence against indigenous people. Minke's struggle against colonialism, reinforced by personal tragedy and growing awareness, leads to a greater commitment to national and social activism, demonstrating how ecological and social struggles are often intertwined. The overall narrative of the *Buru Quartet*, through ecocritical analysis, offers a deeper understanding of how colonialism is not only political and economic violence but also environmental violence that has long-term impacts on the identity and survival of colonised communities. This emphasises the importance of fighting for ecological justice as an integral part of resisting historical oppression and discrimination. Ultimately, this research finds that postcolonial environmental literature helps us better understand the transnational and transtemporal processes contributing to indigenous peoples' historical and cultural diversity in colonised lands. This research is an important affirmation of the rights of indigenous peoples as well as a dynamic element of the ongoing activist struggle for restitution and sovereignty over indigenous cultures, histories, livelihoods and lands. The paradoxes in the novel exemplify how difficult it is to depict the metamorphosis of settler colonialism while still seeing new horizons of environmental justice and resilience. The implications of this research are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as the *Buru Quartet* offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models. This perspective is important in improving literacy and shaping policies for a more just and sustainable future, especially environmental exploitation.

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## Letter of Acceptance

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tpIs <tpIs@academypublication.com>  
To: "Darsono, M.Pd." <darsono@upy.ac.id>

Mon, May 27, 2024 at 9:48 AM

## Latter of Acception (LoA) 27 Mei 2024

Dear author,

Enclosed is the Letter of Acceptance. Please print it out, using a color printer.

Sincerely,  
Ms Linda Zhao,  
Assistant Editor,  
TPLS - Theory and Practice in Language Studies  
Academy Publication, UK

From: "Darsono, M.Pd." <darsono@upy.ac.id>  
Date: 2024-05-26 14:35:21  
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Subject: Re: revised paper

Dear Editor,

We need LoA as an administrative requirement at our campus. Can we request LoA from TPLS Journal?

Sincerely  
Authors

On Sun, May 26, 2024 at 8:05 AM Darsono, M.Pd. <darsono@upy.ac.id> wrote:

Thank you for your information.

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Dear author,

The revised paper has been received. Thanks.

\* The paper will NOT be sent to the author for proofreading before publication.



The paper will be published according to the final version you've sent to us. **Revisions after publication should be avoided.**

(Post-publication revision will be charged a handling fee of 50--100 USD)

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From: "Darsono, M.Pd." <[darsono@upy.ac.id](mailto:darsono@upy.ac.id)>

Date: 2024-05-25 10:56:22

To: [tpls@academypublication.com](mailto:tpls@academypublication.com)

Subject: Re: about the revised paper

Dear Editor,

We've double-checked and improved the article.

Thank you,

Sincerely

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Dear author,

(1) Grammatical errors/incorrect usages/spelling errors are found in the paper.

For example:

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II. **LITERATUR** REVIEW

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**Please check the paper again**, word by word, sentence by sentence!

(2)

[17] Laksmi, & Juwitasari, F. F. (2020). Perception of pramoedya on knowledge management in dutch colonial in indonesia as its representation in rumah kaca | Percepción de pramoedya sobre la gestión del conocimiento en la colonial holandesa en indonesia como su representación en rumah kaca. Opcion, 36(SpecialEdi), 863–881.

should be

[17] Laksmi, & Juwitasari, F. F. (2020). Percepción de pramoedya sobre la gestión del conocimiento en la colonial holandesa en indonesia como su representación en rumah kaca. [Perception of pramoedya on knowledge management in dutch colonial in indonesia as its representation in rumah kaca.] Opcion, 36(SpecialEdi), 863–881.

Please send it again.

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Assistant Editor,  
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Darsono et al

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1. Your paper now has been formally scheduled to Issue 8 of 2024 (to be published in August).

2. For the other two publication procedures (paper revision, and copyright transfer), please see attached.

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Failure to send the required documents in time might lead to the postponement of the publication!

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Assistant Editor,

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Thanks

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Editorial Office

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Academy Publication, UK

From: "Darsono, M.Pd." <[darsono@upy.ac.id](mailto:darsono@upy.ac.id)>

Date: 2024-05-14 19:06:18

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Subject: Re: TPLS Editor's Decision - <TPLS24-043004> (Accept)

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Is there a bank transfer method?

Or is the coordinator contact for paypal payment from Indonesia credible?

Sincerely

Darsono et al

Pada Sen, 13 Mei 2024 2.09 PM, [tpls@academypublication.com](mailto:tpls@academypublication.com) menulis:

Dear author,

As a result of the reviews, we are pleased to inform you that your paper numbered <TPLS24-043004> has been formally accepted as a regular paper.

Congratulations! Your paper has been tentatively scheduled to Issue 8 of 2024 (to be published in August).

Three publication procedures are expected to be completed: 1 paper charge payment, 2 paper revision, and 3 copyright transfer.

-----

1 paper charge payment

You are required to **pay 1450 USD (paper charge + the fast track fee + the transaction fee) within 3 days.**

(no hard copy is included in the paper charge)

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Should you have any questions, please let us know.

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36K



Darsono  
Department of History Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Kundharu Saddhono  
Department of Indonesian Language, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

May 27, 2024

Dear Darsono, Fahrudin, Muhammad Iqbal Birsyada, Loso Judijanto, Asbullah Muslim, Arif Saefudin, and Kundharu Saddhono,

We are pleased to inform you that your following paper has been formally accepted for publication in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* (TPLS, ISSN 1799-2591).

**Paper ID:** TPLS24-043004  
**Paper Title:** Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet  
**Authors:** Darsono, Fahrudin, Muhammad Iqbal Birsyada, Loso Judijanto, Asbullah Muslim, Arif Saefudin, and Kundharu Saddhono  
**Journal Title:** *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* (TPLS, 1799-2591)

The paper has been scheduled to the Volume 14, Number 8, to be published in August of 2024.

Thank you for your contribution to the Journal and we are looking forward to your future participation!

Sincerely,

Feng Liu

Mr. Feng Liu  
Managing Editor  
Theory and Practice in Language Studies  
Academy Publication, UK  
Email: [tpls@academypublication.com](mailto:tpls@academypublication.com)

Indexed in Scopus



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## Publication schedule of the August Issue

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### Info Jadwal Publish 1 Agustus 2024

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<https://tpIs.academypublication.com/index.php/tpIs/issue/archive>

2. The journal is indexed in Scopus.

SJR 2023=0.26 **Q2**

3. According to the latest Scopus data, the journal ranks **87**th among all the 1106 journals under the category of "literature and literary theory".

Thank you!

Editorial Office

TPLS- Theory and Practice in Language Studies

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Darsono, M.Pd. <darsono@upy.ac.id>

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## Issue 8 of TPLS published

---

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Dear author,      **Info sudah Publish      8 Agustus 2024**

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Editorial Office

TPLS- Theory and Practice in Language Studies

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Thu, Sep 5, 2024 at 3:04 PM

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TPLS was accepted for inclusion in Scopus in March 2011.  
The journal has an excellent record of indexing.  
All the papers published from 2010 to 2020 except one retracted paper are included here.

Year	The number of papers published by TPLS	The number of papers indexed in Scopus (see Issues 1-2010)
2020	379	379
2021	322	322
2021	213 (one paper was retracted later, due to plagiarism)	212
2020	213	213
2019	219	219

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**Word count:** 7023

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# Environmental Exploitation in the Colonial Period: An Ecocritical Analysis of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*

18

Darsono<sup>1</sup>

Department of History Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*), consisting of four novels, provides deep insights into the social, political, and implicit ecological impacts of colonialism in Indonesia. This research aims to analyse the themes of environmental exploitation narrated in the novels, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice. This research method uses an ecocritical framework approach with an in-depth reading of the novel's text. The use of this approach aims to explore and interpret how Toer portrays colonial history and its impact on the environment. The results show that an ecocritical study of the *Buru Quartet* reveals the complex interactions between humans, political systems, and the ecological environment monopolised by Dutch colonialism. Although the novel's main focus is racial and social injustice, it also includes ecological aspects, such as the exploitation of natural resources through forced cultivation by Dutch colonials, which drastically changed the local landscape and biodiversity. This study reveals how colonialism was not only socially and politically oppressive but also played a crucial role in damaging the ecology of colonised areas. The implications of this study are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as *The Buru Quartet* offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models.

**Index Terms**—colonial period, environmental exploitation, ecocriticism, Indonesian history, environment

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Buru Island Tetralogy* (The *Buru Quartet*) is a monumental series of novels by Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). The series consists of four novels written during his time as a political prisoner on *Buru Island*, a remote island in Indonesia's Maluku Archipelago that was used as a dumping ground for political prisoners during President Soeharto's New Order rule (1966-1998) (Faruk, 2023). Toer was born in Blora Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. He is known for his works on Indonesian social life and history, often using a critical lens towards colonialism and social injustice (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020; Niekerk, 2018). Toer experienced incarceration and exile

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throughout his life for his criticism of Dutch colonial rule and also strongly criticised the practices and politics of Indonesia's government. Toer was imprisoned more often than not, first by the Dutch colonials (1947), then under President Soekarno (1960), and finally exiled to Buru Island during the New Order under Soeharto (1965-1979), where he created the Buru Quartet (Herriman, 2010). His works, especially the Buru Quartet, made Toer an important figure in Indonesian literature and international circles. Toer also faced significant difficulties in writing and publishing his works, including the confiscation of manuscripts and a ban on the circulation of his books in Indonesia during the New Order period, which were considered to contain messages of Marxism-Leninism in his stories (Raybin, 2009; Tsao, 2012). However, after the reformation of Indonesia, the Buru Quartet is internationally recognised as one of Indonesia's most important literary works. It has been translated into approximately 20 different foreign languages around the world.

The Buru Quartet is not only a compelling family saga with the protagonist Minke but also a rich literary work with social, political, and historical analyses of Indonesia during colonialism (Teoh, 2018), including the under-exposed issue of the exploitation of Indonesia's natural resources. In the context of the environment, the tetralogy presents its analysis of how colonisers exploited Indonesia's natural resources for their own benefit, often at the expense of the local environment and indigenous people. For example, the cultivation of commercial crops such as tobacco, tea and coffee under the *cultuurstelsel* system exploited indigenous labour and adversely affected soil fertility and local ecosystems (Saefudin et al., 2023; Vickers, 2013). The Buru Quartet provides a critical perspective on Indonesia's history, including how its natural resources have been exploited over the centuries (Herriman, 2010). The importance of a postcolonial ecocritical approach in uncovering the relationship between colonialism and environmental destruction is significant in this work.

The tetralogy is set against social and political changes in late 19th to early 20th century Indonesia that gave rise to the main character, Minke. The first novel, *This Earth of Mankind (Bumi Manusia)* (1980), tells the story of Minke, a Western-educated Javanese youth who befriends and later marries Annelies, an Indo woman. Their relationship faces strict social and legal challenges, prompting Minke to question colonial structures. In this novel, Toer also highlights the forced agriculture system (*cultuurstelsel*) implemented by the Dutch colonial forced Indonesian farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugarcane and tobacco, replacing traditional food crops. This not only damaged environmental sustainability but also disrupted local food security. Next, *Child of All Nations (Anak Semua Bangsa)* (1981) continues the story of Minke being more active in the national movement. He attempts to rally support against the colonisers while facing personal and political dilemmas. The novel also highlights natural resource extraction activities, including logging for agriculture, mining, and other purposes, which are featured as the setting of the characters' interactions and struggles in the novel.

His next novel, *Footsteps (Jejak Langkah)* (1985), follows Minke's journey as a writer and activist, fighting for Indonesian independence through pen and speech. The novel explores his growth in the face of oppression and betrayal. Toer also depicts Minke's resistance to exploitation, who, through higher education, begins to understand colonial injustice, not only in social and political contexts but also in utilising natural resources. This illustrates how the issue of environmental exploitation is intertwined with the struggle for independence and social justice. Finally, *House of Glass (Rumah Kaca)* (1988) provides a different perspective through Jacques Pangemanann, a police detective tasked with keeping tabs on the nationalist movement, including Minke. Jacques' inner conflicts reveal the moral and political complexities of the era. Through his narrative, Toer shows an early awareness of the importance of critiquing the environmentally destructive development model. Although this is not the main theme, the dialogue and descriptions in the novels reflect a recognition of the value of the environment that must be protected. Thus, while the Buru Quartet does not explicitly focus on environmental exploitation, it provides a rich context for understanding the ecological impact of colonialism in Indonesia. Toer invites readers to reflect on how colonial policies and practices have contributed to various problems, including the environmental issues that Indonesia and many other countries face today.

Historians such as Boomgaard et al. (1997) set out to analyse the interaction between humans and the environment in Indonesia from the colonial period to after independence (1500-1950). This book explores deforestation, agriculture and natural resource exploitation and their impacts on Indonesian landscapes and society. Through analyses of history, ecology and geography, it provides insights into how environmental history has shaped Indonesia today, highlighting the importance of historical context in dealing with today's environmental challenges. All of these elements form an important part of understanding the history of exploitation during the colonial period, which is relevant in the context of ecocritical analyses. The territory of Indonesia underwent drastic changes during and after its occupation by the Dutch. Toer, in his novel, explores the theme of colonial life in all its aspects, which forms the core of the narrative and influences the life journey of the main character, Minke. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyse the theme of environmental exploitation narrated in the novel, providing an ecocritical perspective on colonial practices and their impact on environmental sustainability and social justice, especially in the context of the narrative of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet.



## II. LITERATUR REVIEW

### A. Previous Research

Faruk (2023) and Herriman (2010) studied Pramudya Ananta Toer's "Reverse Flow (*Arus Balik*)". This study constructs the island and the sea by referring to the current theoretical framework in critical island studies and spatial production theory in cultural studies. This is in line with the orientation and policy of viewing and signalling islands in Indonesia from a maritime perspective. On the one hand, this study broadens the horizons of island communities that have been considered limited by inviting them to leave the "backwaters" and experience the islands from a broader marine perspective. In addition, Bostock (2017) highlighted the extent of the depiction of father-son relationships in Pramodya Ananta Toer's works published up to 1952. The study found that four works written between 1945 and 1949, when Toer had little contact with his father with whom he had a difficult relationship, contained negative portraits of fathers, including, in one case, Toer's own father and, in another, a character who substantially modelled his father.

Tsao's (2012) research highlights the interpretation of human evolution in the *Buru Quartet*, which has not been widely studied. Linking the Javanese values of Toer's childhood with his Marxist ideology as an adult, the work illustrates the moral transition from individualism to communal consciousness, marking the turn from primitivism to 'modern humanity'. In terms of Javanese and Marxist cosmology, self-denial leads to the replacement of capitalism with socialism. However, Toer's experience in *Buru*, where brutality and 'animalism' dominate, questions the viability of humanist values. Set in *Buru*, the *Quartet* criticises the Javanese-Marxist standard of humanity by suggesting that true humanity might mean defying natural selection and favouring failure at the determination to die over survival in power. Niekerk (2003, 2017) examines *Beach Girl* (*Gadis Pantai*) using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "chronotopes" to analyse. The research identifies three specific chronotypes- houses in the city, village, and street- that structure the narrative. Each of these chronotypes represents a stage in the development of the novel's anonymous female protagonist, who grows up in a small village on the coast of Java and, at the age of 14, is handed over by her parents to an aristocrat in the city to become his "Siri wife". By escaping spatial marginalisation, the protagonist simultaneously develops a more complex sense of time, not only through an awareness of her country's troubled past but also its potential future. The novel can be read as a critique of the power structures that prevailed not only during the colonial period but also in Indonesia after its independence. Studies of Toer's novels are often based on the social and political conditions underlying colonial conditions in Java (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). However, there is no study of Toer's work that raises the theme of environmental ecocriticism in his novels.

Ecocritical studies extend beyond the works of Pramodya Ananta Toer, with researchers such as Gaard (2009) exploring the origins and evolution of ecocriticism from both scholarly and activist perspectives, covering areas such as ecofeminism and environmental justice in literature. This research also investigates the representation of the environment in children's literature from various angles, including animal studies and ecofeminism. James (2015) highlights how postcolonial ecocriticism often overlooks how the environment is imagined in postcolonial literature, suggesting that understanding the narratives in these texts can enrich ecocritical analyses by considering cultural influences and socio-environmental issues. Zapf (2016) links resource scarcity to violence, showing how competition over resources such as water and land can trigger conflict. Garrard (2010) disputes the idea of stable ecosystems, pointing to environmental change as an important factor in human history. The overall literature reflects the need to further integrate environmental issues in literary analysis, including in the study of Toer's works, to better understand how the environment manifests in the narrative and its influence on social and political issues during the colonial period.

There have been no studies that link Toer's work to ecocritical analyses, particularly in relation to ecological justice and the impact of colonial environmental exploitation, particularly regarding natural disasters and their effects on communities in Java and Indonesia as a whole. Recent research on Toer's work tends to focus on the representation of women's voices, issues of militarism, identity crisis, gender, and class conflict in a stratified society. Drawing on real historical events, Toer's novel opens up many research opportunities in the context of ecocriticism, given that no studies have examined it, and its characters reflect diverse interactions with the environmental conditions of the colonial period. However, the limitations of current research are a challenge for readers and an opportunity for researchers to understand and explore Toer's work from a more innovative and new perspective, one of which is the ecocritical approach.

### B. Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial ecocritical discourse highlights issues arising from "colonial relations and their effects" throughout history, including environmental aspects and the influence of colonial power (Cohen, 2004). Historical research exploring the dynamics between coloniser and colonised countries, global development and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the history of development (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). In the literature, many global critics have focused on representations of nature, highlighting particular aspects of postcolonial ecocriticism, such as environmental violence and evidence of historical struggles in Indonesia (Boomgaard et al., 1997). Important figures such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015), have contributed significantly to understanding the narratives of colonised peoples,

particularly on postcolonial ecocriticism and the environment. In particular, the work by Marland (2013) emphasises the importance of land as a source of life and dignity for colonised peoples. Nixon (2011) highlights the need for "environmental research" and the urgency of overcoming the epistemological divide between postcolonialism and ecocriticism to understand environmental and historical realities in postcolonial territories. Works such as "Ecocritical theory: New European approaches" by Goodbody and Rigby (2011) and "Theorizing material ecocriticism: A diptych" by Iovino and Oppermann (2012) emphasise the importance of historical narratives in ecocriticism and the environmental pressures faced by local communities under colonialism. Postcolonial theorists recognise the environmental challenges that postcolonial countries face, often as a result of colonial exploitation. Historical narratives of colonial materiality practices show how indigenous peoples were reduced to referents by colonials to define themselves and claim the future as belonging to the colonisers (Huggan, 2004; Zapf, 2016).

Postcolonial ecocriticism has evolved to illuminate terms related to colonial origins while highlighting discrimination and environmental atrocities by colonial masters. Postcolonial ecocriticism emphasises the importance of understanding the "history of colonial violence" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015) that has permeated our existence on earth. Emerging from literary studies, ecocriticism addresses the way critics view the role of humans and non-humans in literature (James, 2015). This approach also recognises that colonial-era environmental policies were often based on the idea that the environment could be preserved and protected, as well as a source of revenue. The development of postcolonial ecocriticism has increased awareness of historical power dynamics, fuelled greater interest in postcolonial texts, and focused on imperial contexts. While ecocriticism is often considered the dominant critical approach, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) describe it as a broad, diverse and regional movement, not monolithic, but "a set of disparate practices". The connection between histories of environmental violence and postcolonial ecocriticism makes this theory a link between mainstream environmental movements and literature. The study of the *Buru Quartet* is a reflective example of the main aim of this research, applying discourse analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism as a framework to critically analyse Japanese and Indonesian society's relationship with the land, culture, history and local environment as depicted in the text.

### III. METHOD

This article utilises postcolonial ecocriticism as an analytical framework to examine Pramudya Ananta Toer's "The Buru Quartet" (1980-1988). The main method of collecting data is through in-depth reading of the texts. Toer highlights the importance of recognising the history of colonial violence that has taken root in various parts of Indonesia. In postcolonial ecocriticism, there is an emphasis on the relationship between human power and subjectivity, adopting complex ecocritical research methodologies. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) criticise the view that the postcolonial field is anthropocentric, pointing out the long-standing presence of ecological concerns in postcolonial criticism. With the increasing global awareness of environmental issues, it is striking that ecocriticism and the struggles of local communities have received considerable attention in the global environmental literature. This research methodology is strengthened by the theoretical concepts of postcolonial ecocriticism from scholars such as Nixon (2011), Gaard (2009), Iovino and Oppermann (2012), Goodbody and Rigby (2011), Marland (2013), Cohen (2004), Zapf (2016), Huggan and Tiffin (2015). They contribute to the analysis of the issue of environmental exploitation in history, especially in the context of Pramudya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*. The research also involved extensive analyses using primary and secondary sources from writers and historians, including "Max Havelaar: The Dutch Trading Company's Coffee Auction (*Max Havelaar: Lelang Kopi Perusahaan Dagang Belanda*)" by Multatuli (1860), "Kretek Girl (*Gadis Kretek*)" by Ratih Kumala (2019), "Tea and Traitors (*Teh dan Penghianatan*)" by Iksaka Banu (2019), "The Environmental History of Modern Indonesia" by Peter Boomgaard et al. (Eds) (1997). These works make important contributions to the analysis and exploration of colonial environmental exploitation and Indonesian environmental history.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. The Struggle Against Colonialism

The study of the first novel, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia*), follows the life of Minke, an intelligent Javanese youth who received a European education in the late 19th century, one of the lucky natives to have an education equal to that of the Dutch (Gaard, 2009). Minke meets Annelies, a mixed-blood Dutch-Javanese girl and the daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh, a Javanese woman who became the concubine of a Dutch landlord. This introduction draws Minke into deep social and racial injustice. Minke and Annelies develop a love complicated by the social and legal conditions of the time, while Nyai Ontosoroh uses her intelligence to fight for social status and protect her family (Toer, 1980, p. 150). The conflict reaches a peak when Annelies is forced to leave Minke due to colonial law, prompting Minke to be more passionate in the struggle against colonialism. The novel is not only a love and personal story but also depicts the social, political and cultural injustices during Dutch colonisation, highlighting the struggle for identity and resistance to oppression.

Ecocritical studies in the novel *This Earth of Mankind* can be conducted by exploring the relationship between humans, the environment, and the political systems that govern both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly



focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are ecological elements that can be interpreted through the lens of ecocriticism. Toer demonstrates his remarkable ability to capture the suffering, struggle, and exploitation of people and nature due to the effects of colonialism:

*Such is colonial life everywhere: Asia, Africa, America, and Australia. All that is not European, much less colonial, is trampled on, laughed at, and humiliated just to show off European superiority and colonial might in all aspects of life...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 246)

At the height of colonialism in Java in the 19th century, this indigenous Javanese population was caught up in Dutch colonial exploitation (Garrard, 2010). Toer masterfully explores the relationship between humans, the political system, and the environment that governs both aspects. Although *This Earth of Mankind* mainly focuses on racial issues, colonialism, and social struggles, there are some parts of ecological elements that can be interpreted through the lens of ecocriticism. The abundance of natural resources led the Dutch to oppress the indigenous population and automatically exploit its natural resources (Niekerk, 2017). Colonial practices such as monoculture plantations (e.g. sugarcane, cloves, tobacco and coffee), depicted in the novel, destroyed local biodiversity and drastically altered the landscape. In fact, Kretek products, Indonesia's signature cigarettes made from a mixture of tobacco and cloves, became a major industry at the time (Kumala, 2019). This emphasis on how colonial systems changed the environment can provide insight into the destructive relationship between colonisers and nature (Huggan, 2004; Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

One of the characters, Nyai Ontosoroh, often expresses her views on nature (Toer, 1980, pp. 185–195). Nyai Ontosoroh, as a strong and reflective character, provides an interesting perspective on the traditional relationship of indigenous people with their natural surroundings. In contrast to the colonial view that sees nature as a resource to be exploited (Boomgaard et al., 1997), Nyai Ontosoroh and some other characters in the novel may emphasise harmony with nature and sustainable use of resources. The metaphors and symbolism of nature are evident in the title *This Earth of Mankind* and, in some passages, are often used as metaphors for freedom or oppression, depending on the context. For example, the beautiful Javanese landscape can be seen as a symbol of wealth and untapped resource potential or as a place that has been dispossessed and exploited by colonial powers (Toer, 1980, p. 246). At the end of the novel, Minke faces deep sadness when Annelies, his true love, is forced to return to the Netherlands due to the pressure of colonial law. This tragedy causes a major transformation in Minke, prompting him to shift focus from personal and academic aspirations to a broader political struggle. The loss of Annelies not only left emotional scars but also strengthened Minke's resolve to fight against colonial oppression and raise awareness of nationalism among the Indonesian people (Toer, 1980, p. 314). This marks a turning point in Minke's life, which steers the narrative in a more political and activist direction in the later novels in the *Buru Quartet*.<sup>8</sup>

The novel shows the depth of colonial exploitation, with its tragedies of life and far-reaching effects. There is a common thread that connects the Javanese population to the exploitation of nature by the colonisers. Minke, growing up in a colonial environment, experiences even greater violence and threats. The critical approach in *This Earth of Mankind* suggests a productive resolution to the tension between coloniser and colonised through the concept of 'postcolonial synthesis and ecocriticism' (Garrard, 2010; Huggan, 2004; James, 2015). According to Multatuli (1860), Dutch colonial rulers made intensive use of Indonesia's natural resources, including the forced cultivation system (*Cultuurstelsel*) that required farmers to grow export crops such as coffee, sugar and rubber, often with adverse consequences for local ecosystems.

#### *B. Indigenous People and the National Movement*

After the tragic events that end Minke's story in *This Earth of Mankind*, Minke leaves the town where he went to school and moves to Jakarta (Toer, 1981, pp. 1–5). There, he became involved with activist groups fighting for equality and independence from the Dutch colonisers. This period is referred to as the 'National Movement', which made political, social, and cultural movements aimed at achieving Indonesian independence from Dutch colonisation. This movement developed during the early 20th century and culminated with the proclamation of independence in 1945 (Vickers, 2013). In the novel, Minke meets and interacts with various national movement figures, each of whom provides influence and insight into different aspects of the political and social struggle. These characters include communists, nationalists, and other figures from different ethnicities and backgrounds (Toer, 1981, pp. 85–90). Minke experienced significant intellectual and political growth. He began to write articles and essays critical of colonialism and social injustice, which attracted the attention and irritation of the colonial government. A series of confrontations with the authorities increased the risks faced by Minke and his colleagues but also strengthened their resolve to fight against oppression (Toer, 1981, p. 120). On the personal side, Minke still struggled with his longing and grief over the loss of Annelies, which continued to affect his views on love and personal relationships (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Minke's personal life, combined with his involvement in politics, illustrates the struggles experienced by many freedom fighters of the time.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, *Child of All Nations (Anak Semua Bangsa)* not only tells the story of political struggle but also highlights Minke's internal struggle in search of his identity as a 'son of all nations', someone who seeks to bring together the various elements of his diverse background in a turbulent colonial context. It is a story of personal growth within a



broader historical context, exploring themes of nationalism, colonialism and resistance (Faruk, 2023; Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). In this novel, Toer implicitly also offers a deep perspective on how colonialism affects the relationship between humans and the environment. Ecocriticism highlights how these traditional values can be a form of resistance to colonial extractive models (Niekerk, 2003, 2017). Toer explores the relationship between cultural identity and ecological practices and how both elements survive or are transformed in the context of colonisation. Moreover, in some parts, landscape transformations due to colonial activities (such as massive land clearing for plantations) had a direct impact on local communities (Toer, 1981, p. 198). Losing land meant not only losing a home but also a source of livelihood and autonomy. The conflict in the novel can often be understood as a metaphor for a larger ecological crisis, where exploitation and oppression represent a disruption to the natural balance (Zapf, 2016). This highlights how environmental and social issues are intertwined and how literature can reveal these interrelationships through narrative (Gogwilt, 2004). Through the lens of ecocriticism, *Child of All Nations* is not only a narrative of anti-colonial struggle but also a critical examination of the ways in which colonialism altered human relationships with nature and how this, in turn, altered social structures and ecological sustainability (Boomgaard et al., 1997).

At the end of *Child of All Nations*, Minke undergoes a significant development in his struggle against colonialism. After a series of events that raised his awareness of the brutality of colonial exploitation and the injustices experienced by his people, Minke became increasingly involved in the nationalist movement. Things become more tense as Minke and his group become more active in challenging colonial rule (Toer, 1981, p. 390). The novel ends on a cliffhanger, showing that the struggle of Minke and his friends is far from over. Minke loses many close friends and faces increasing betrayal and cruelty from the colonials. Despite this, he remains resolute and committed to the struggle. The ending of *Child of All Nations* sets the stage for the continuation of the story in the next novel, *Footsteps*, in which Minke continues to deepen his political role and continue his struggle for social justice and independence.

### C. *The Capitalist World and the Exploitation of Indigenous Nature*

After the events of *Child of All Nations*, Minke has developed into a more mature and influential leader. The novel *Footstep (Jejak Langkah)* opens with Minke having moved to Surabaya, where he founded a newspaper called 'Medan Priyayi' (Toer, 1985, p. 54). This newspaper becomes a means to disseminate ideas about empowerment, education, and anti-colonial struggle. The novel also introduces more about Minke's family background and his personal history, which further adds depth to his character and motivations. Throughout the novel, Minke faces various obstacles and challenges, both on a personal and political scale (Toer, 1985, p. 128). He has to deal with colonial repression, betrayal within his own circle, and complicated moral dilemmas. Minke's story is also coloured by personal tragedies, including the loss of those close to him (Toer, 1985, p. 208). On the other hand, Minke also experienced intellectual and spiritual growth (Toer, 1985, p. 216). He interacted with various social and ethnic groups, which enriched his understanding of the social and political complexities of Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 98). Through his newspaper and political activities, Minke endeavoured to unite various groups to fight colonial oppression and build the foundation for an independent and just Indonesia (Toer, 1985, p. 398).

The novel *Footstep* not only tells more about Minke's struggle but also depicts the evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement. The novel offers a critical and introspective view of Indonesian history and culture while exploring themes of identity, resistance, and the quest for justice (Tsao, 2012). In *Footstep*, Minke's struggle with his friends is not only limited to politics and society but also includes ecological aspects. Ecocriticism helps us see that their struggle is also a struggle to reclaim control over natural resources that have long been exploited by the Dutch colonials (Garrard, 2010; James, 2015). According to Iovino and Oppermann (2012), this reflects how ecology and social struggle are intertwined, with environmental restoration and preservation being an important part of building national independence. Minke, as a character steeped in various aspects of Indonesian life and culture, may consider the environment not only as a physical resource but also as an important component of heritage and culture that must be protected and preserved. As shown in the novel, Minke used his newspaper platform to educate the public (Gogwilt, 2004; Teoh, 2018). In anti-colonial struggles, the environment often became a physical and symbolic battleground. The depiction of nature in *Footstep* may show how nature is not only used as a contested resource but also as a symbol of national identity and freedom.

In the colonial context, land was not only considered an economic commodity but also a symbol of power. Toer often highlighted how fertile land was annexed by the colonial government or by large corporations to be turned into large plantations growing export crops such as rubber, coffee and sugarcane (Banu, 2019). This destroys local ecosystems and displaces peasants from their ancestral lands, who traditionally managed the land sustainably for the will of capitalist financiers in Europe.

*The colonial wars of the past twenty-five years are nothing but the will of capital (capitalism), the interests of the market for the survival of capital in Europe there. Capital has become so powerful, omnipotent. It determines what humanity should do today (including the practice of exploiting the nature of colonised territories)...*

(Toer, 1980, p. 194)

Toer also, in some sections, explores how indigenous people responded to the ecological changes brought by colonialism (Toer, 1985, p. 213). In some cases, there was resistance to the expropriation of land and the use of destructive agricultural practices (Toer, 1985, p. 228). This struggle is not only a conflict over resources but also a fight over identity, culture and independence. In this novel, Toer also uses the symbolism of nature to express the emotional and social conditions of the characters. For example, the destruction of nature can reflect social or moral decay, and the beauty of unpolluted nature can represent memories or aspirations for freedom and harmony (Toer, 1985, p. 339). Through the character of Minke and his interactions with other characters, Toer also touches on the importance of education and awareness in dealing with ecological issues. Minke, as an educated man, uses his knowledge to advocate for social change, showing how knowledge can be a tool for the empowerment of the national movement.

By integrating ecocriticism into the reading of *Footstep*, we gain a more comprehensive perspective on how nature and the environment play a role in colonial and decolonisation narratives (GoGwilt, 2003). This emphasises that the struggle for independence involves not only political and economic aspects but also the importance of valuing and protecting the environment as part of national identity and sovereignty. At the end of the novel *Footstep*, Minke faces increasing colonial repression, which results in the closure of his newspaper, 'Medan Priyayi,' and his arrest by the colonial authorities. This moment illustrates the great risks and challenges faced by nationalist fighters in the face of colonial power (Vickers, 2013). Despite great losses and loss of support, Minke remains steadfast and does not give up on his ideals for justice and independence. The novel leaves the reader with an image of Minke as a figure of resilience and dedication, a symbol of the ongoing struggle in the history of Indonesia's nationalist movement.

The last novel in the Tetralogi Buru series is *House of Glass* (*Rumah Kaca*). In *House of Glass*, the primary focus is on political dynamics, colonialism, and the internal conflicts of characters, particularly Jacques Pangemanann. Although the novel does not explicitly address ecological or environmental themes, an ecocritical approach can be used to explore aspects related to the indirect effects of colonialism on the environment. Unlike the previous three novels, which focus more on the character Minke, *House of Glass* is told from the perspective of Jacques Pangemanann, a native police officer working for the Dutch colonial government. Pangemanann is portrayed as a complex character, revealed through his internal conflicts and moral dilemmas during his duties (Laksmi & Juwitasari, 2020). The metaphor *House of Glass*, or 'glass house,' can be interpreted as a metaphor for a fragile and transparent state where all actions and motivations are visible and subject to judgment (Herriman, 2010). Living under colonialism might feel like being in a 'glass house'—where natural resources are managed and exploited under strict surveillance for the colonisers' profit. Although not directly discussed, it is implied that the Dutch colonial practices in Indonesia, as described in previous novels in the series, involved massive exploitation of natural resources (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015; Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism can help us understand the long-term impacts of this exploitation on local ecosystems and the indigenous peoples' way of life (Cohen, 2004).

Pangemanann, a character who is of indigenous ethnic origin but works for the colonials, experiences deep internal conflict. This can be attributed to a feeling of alienation from his own environment and cultural heritage (Nixon, 2011). In ecocriticism, the relationship between indigenous identity and their land or environment is an important topic. This analysis can help explore how colonialism disconnected people from their natural and cultural environment. In the context of ecocriticism, struggles for political and cultural healing often parallel ecological healing efforts (Marland, 2013). By delving deeper into the narrative of *House of Glass*, it may be possible to reveal how resistance to colonisers also reflects a larger struggle to restore environmental integrity and sustainability that has been damaged by colonialism. Although *House of Glass* does not explicitly raise ecological issues, an ecocritical approach could provide additional insights into how colonialism and the characters' internal conflicts affect and are affected by the environment.

Historical research exploring the dynamics between coloniser and colonised countries, global development and environmental issues opens up new perspectives on environmental concerns in the postcolonial era, which are linked to uneven discrimination in the history of development (Goodbody & Rigby, 2011). Ecocritical discourse highlights how colonial relations and their impact on the environment have influenced the history and development of postcolonial countries, including Indonesia. Issues such as environmental exploitation and injustice in global development are explored through the lens of ecocriticism to be one of the solutions to the ongoing climate change. Researchers and critics such as Nixon (2011) and Gaard (2009) have examined representations of nature and environmental violence in literature, showing how colonial narratives have reduced indigenous peoples to mere references to reinforce colonial domination. This study emphasises the importance of understanding the relationship between colonial exploitation and environmental degradation and the urgency of integrating ecocritical and postcolonial views to better understand the environmental challenges faced by postcolonial states.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that Pramoe Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*, through the lens of ecocriticism, exposes the profound impact of colonialism on the relationship between humans, the environment and power structures. The novel not only reveals the social and racial conflicts faced by the main character, Minke but also exposes environmental exploitation as a reflection of colonial oppression. Ecocriticism reveals how colonial practices such as monoculture plantations damage local biodiversity and alter the landscape, reflecting broader violence against indigenous people. Minke's struggle against colonialism, reinforced by personal tragedy and growing awareness, leads to a greater

commitment to national and social activism, demonstrating how ecological and social struggles are often intertwined. The overall narrative of the Buru Quartet, through ecocritical analysis, offers a deeper understanding of how colonialism is not only political and economic violence but also environmental violence that has long-term impacts on the identity and survival of colonised communities. This emphasises the importance of fighting for ecological justice as an integral part of resistance to historical oppression and discrimination. Ultimately, this research finds that postcolonial environmental literature helps us better understand the transnational and transtemporal processes that contribute to the historical and cultural diversity of indigenous peoples in colonised lands. This research is an important affirmation of the rights of indigenous peoples as well as a dynamic element of the ongoing activist struggle for restitution and sovereignty over indigenous cultures, histories, livelihoods and lands. The paradoxes in the novel exemplify how difficult it is to depict the metamorphosis of settler colonialism while still seeing new horizons of environmental justice and resilience. The implications of this research are mainly related to the importance of understanding literature as a means of reflection and critique on environmental and colonial issues. In the current global context, where issues of exploitation and environmental degradation are still highly relevant, works such as the Buru Quartet offer important insights into how historical and ecological narratives can converge to critique environmentally unsustainable development models. This perspective is important in improving literacy and shaping policies for a more just and sustainable future, especially with regard to environmental exploitation.

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