

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

Darsono\*

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

Fahrudin

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

Muhammad Iqbal Birsyada

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

Loso Judijanto

IPOSS Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia

Asbullah Muslim

Department of Islamic Education, Institut Elkatarie, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

Arif Saefudin

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

Kundharu Saddhono

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

**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 Indonesia's government. Toer was imprisoned more often than not, first by the Dutch colonials (1947), then under

---

\* Corresponding Author. Email: [darsono@upy.ac.id](mailto:darsono@upy.ac.id)

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 Pramoedya 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), "Kretiek Girl (*Gadis Kretiek*)" 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 displace 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.

## V. 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.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Banu, I. (2019). *Teh dan pengkhianat* [Tea and traitors]. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- [2] Boomgaard, P., Colombijn, F., & Henley, D. (1997). *Paper Landscapes: Explorations in the Environmental History of Indonesia*. KITLV Press.
- [3] Bostock, D. (2017). 'Anehnja hubungan ayah dan anak ini': Fathers and sons in the early writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 45(131), 108–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1290895>
- [4] Cohen, M. P. (2004). Blues in the green: Ecocriticism under critique. *Environmental History*, 9(1), 9–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985943>
- [5] Faruk. (2023). Islands In The Stream A Spatial Perspective on Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Reverse Flow. *Kritika Kultura*, 2023(40), 552–584.
- [6] Gaard, G. (2009). Children's environmental literature: From ecocriticism to ecopedagogy. *Neohelicon*, 36(2), 321–334. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-009-0003-7>
- [7] Garrard, G. (2010). Problems and prospects in ecocritical pedagogy. *Environmental Education Research*, 16(2), 233–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504621003624704>
- [8] Gogwilt, C. (2004). Opera and the passage of literature: Joseph Conrad, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and the cultural dialectic of abysmal taste. In *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century: Contemporary Approaches and Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203312919>
- [9] Gogwilt, C. (2003). The voice of Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Passages, interviews, and reflections from The Mute's Soliloquy and Pramoedya's North American tour. *Cultural Critique*, 55, 217–246. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cul.2003.0048>
- [10] Goodbody, A., & Rigby, K. (2011). *Ecocritical theory: New European approaches*. University of Virginia Press.
- [11] Herriman, N. (2010). Objects of manipulation: The people and the rural village in Indonesia's culture wars. *South East Asia Research*, 18(3), 451–470. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2010.0003>
- [12] Huggan, G. (2004). "Greening" postcolonialism: Ecocritical perspectives. *MFS - Modern Fiction Studies*, 50(3), 701–733. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2004.0067>
- [13] Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2nd Edition). Routledge.
- [14] Iovino, S., & Oppermann, S. (2012). Theorizing material ecocriticism: A diptych. *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19(3), 448–475. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/iss087>
- [15] James, E. (2015). *The storyworld accord: Econarratology and postcolonial narratives*. University of Nebraska Press.
- [16] Kumala, R. (2019). *Gadis Kretek* [Kretek Girl]. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- [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.
- [18] Marland, P. (2013). Ecocriticism. *Literature Compass*, 10(11), 846–868. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12105>
- [19] Multatuli, J. (1860). *Max Havelaar: lelang kopi maskapai dagang Belanda* [Max Havelaar: The Dutch Trading Company's Coffee Auction]. Djambatan.
- [20] Niekerk, C. (2003). Rethinking a problematic constellation: Postcolonialism and its Germanic contexts (Pramoedya ananta Toer/Multatuli). *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23(1–2), 58–69. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-23-1-2-58>



- [21] Niekerk, C. (2017). Colonial/Postcolonial Chronotopes in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast*. *Symposium - Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 71(1), 14–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.2017.1277869>
- [22] Niekerk, C. (2018). World literature without goethe: On pramoedya ananta toer's labour camp memoirs the mute's soliloquy. *Seminar - A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 54(2). <https://doi.org/10.3138/seminar.54.2>
- [23] Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.
- [24] Nuraedah, & Saefudin, A. (2024). The Dilemma of cultural commodification policy of barkcloth: A study of the Kaili Community in Pandere Village, Indonesia. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 45(2), 625–632. <https://doi.org/10.34044/j.kjss.2024.45.2.29>
- [25] Raybin, D. (2009). Muslim Griselda: The politics of gender and religion in Geoffrey Chaucer's Clerk's Tale and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *The Girl from the Coast*. *Exemplaria*, 21(2), 179–200. <https://doi.org/10.1179/175330709X406401>
- [26] Saefudin, A., Wasino, Susanto, & Musadad, A. A. (2023). "The Netherlands in Indonesia, 1945-49": An Analysis of Argument Narrative Structure in Indonesian History Textbook. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(7), 1721–1729. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1307.15>
- [27] Teoh, J. G. I. (2018). Shadow plays with imperial pasts: Writing Wayang in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's the Fugitive. *MFS - Modern Fiction Studies*, 64(3), 403–430. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2018.0036>
- [28] Toer, P. A. (1980). *Bumi Manusia: Tetralogi Buru# 1* [This Earth of Mankind #1]. Hasta Mitra.
- [29] Toer, P. A. (1981). *Anak Semua Bangsa: Tetralogi Buru# 2* [Child of All Nations #2]. Hasta Mitra.
- [30] Toer, P. A. (1985). *Jejak Langkah: Tetralogi Buru# 3* [Footsteps #3]. Hasta Mitra.
- [31] Toer, P. A. (1988). *Rumah Kaca: Tetralogi Buru# 4* [House of Glass #4]. Hasta Mitra.
- [32] Tsao, T. (2012). The evolution of Java-men and revolutionaries: A fresh look at Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Buru Quartet. *South East Asia Research*, 20(1), 103–131. <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2012.0088>
- [33] Vickers, A. (2013). *A History of Modern Indonesia (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press.
- [34] Zapf, H. (2016). *Handbook of ecocriticism and cultural ecology*. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110314595>



**Darsono** is a lecturer at the History Education Study Programme at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. As an active academic, he has conducted research published in Indonesian national journals and international proceedings. His research focuses on effective history teaching methods, colonial history learning, and the importance of local history in learning. He also explores local history as part of cultural identity and education and emphasises teaching multiculturalism values through history. Contact email [darsono@upy.ac.id](mailto:darsono@upy.ac.id)



**Fahrudin** is a lecturer at the History Education Study Programme, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. Fahrudin obtained his bachelor's degree from the History Education Study Programme of Yogyakarta State University and his master's degree from the History Education Postgraduate Programme of Yogyakarta State University. His expertise is in history learning, evaluation, and historical studies. He has written books and several articles that have been published in education and history journals. He can be contacted via email at [fahrudin@upy.ac.id](mailto:fahrudin@upy.ac.id).



**Muhammad Iqbal Birsyada** holds a Doctorate in Social Science Education from Semarang State University. He is a Permanent Lecturer in the History Education Study Programme at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta and Head of the History Education Study Programme at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. His current research interest is the development of history learning in schools. His research themes and publications are related to Indonesian History, Local History, Social Science, and History Learning Development. He can be contacted via email: [iqbal@upy.ac.id](mailto:iqbal@upy.ac.id)



**Loso Judijanto** was born in Magetan on 19 January 1971. He holds a Master of Statistics degree from the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia and a Master of Management degree from the University of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, as well as a Bachelor of Science degree from Bogor Agricultural University, Bogor, Indonesia. He is a researcher at the public policy research institute IPOSS in Jakarta, Indonesia. He is a multidisciplinary researcher and has authored various book chapters and articles published in national and international journals, mainly in economics, statistics, management, accounting, and education. He can be contacted at [losojudiantobumn@gmail.com](mailto:losojudiantobumn@gmail.com).



**Asbullah Muslim** is a doctoral student in Islamic Education at Mataram State Islamic University and is the Rector of Elkatarie Institute in East Lombok. In his dual role, he focuses on his studies, actively conducts research, and writes books on Islamic Education Philosophy and Local Culture. His work covers a wide range of topics that explore the philosophical concepts of education in Islam and its implementation in the local context. As rector, he is committed to developing Elkatarie Institute into a centre of educational excellence that focuses on academic aspects and the development of student character and culture. Contact the author at [elkatire@gmail.com](mailto:elkatire@gmail.com)



**Arif Saefudin** is a Doctor of Education in the Department of History Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia. He is a lecturer at the Department of History Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He has published articles and book chapters on education, history, and literature. He can be contacted at [arifsae@upy.ac.id](mailto:arifsae@upy.ac.id).



**Kundharu Saddhono** is a professor of Indonesian language education at Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia. His research interests include a wide range of topics related to Indonesian Language and Literature Teaching, applied linguistics, Indonesian local wisdom, and Indonesian Language for foreign speakers. He has published many international journal articles and books and participated in national and international conferences and academic workshops.