

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ecofeminism in Indonesian fiction: Gender, land, and resistance in the era of environmental degradation

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ABSTRACT

Ecocritical studies in Indonesian literature have developed rapidly; however, most still focus on the human–nature relationship without adequately integrating gender and postcolonial contexts into their analyses. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing the representations of the relationships between women, land, and power in Indonesian fiction through a postcolonial ecofeminist framework. The study focuses on three works: Tanah Tabu by Anindita S. Thayf, Saman by Ayu Utami, and Sihir Perempuan by Intan Paramaditha. This study used a qualitative approach with narrative and thematic analyses conducted through coding processes and comparative synthesis across texts. The results revealed three main patterns. First, women are represented as ecological victims in colonised and exploitative landscapes. Second, women appear as agents of resistance who negotiate power relations through their bodies and spirituality and through social practices. Third, women function as epistemic mediators who utilise local myths and spiritual knowledge to challenge the dominant ecological discourses. These findings show that literary works not only represent environmental crises but also produce alternative ecological knowledge that is grounded in local contexts. This study contributes to the development of ecofeminist studies by emphasising the importance of intersectional perspectives from Global South contexts in Indonesian literary studies and by expanding ecocriticism as a field of knowledge production and ecological resistance.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; ecocriticism; narrative analysis; thematic coding; Indonesian fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, studies on Indonesian literature and the environment have grown significantly. These studies examine how books discuss environmental problems, resource use, and social impacts. Some research has focused on how Indonesian literature shows these issues and criticises capitalism and environmental unfairness (Darsono et al., 2024; Yulisatiani et al., 2020). However, many studies still mainly look at the general link between people and nature. They do not include how gender, the body, and power affect women's experiences with the environment. Consequently, the connection between harming the environment and women's lower status is often just a side topic, not the main focus in understanding how literature shows ecological issues.

Ecofeminism is a way of thinking that connects the unfair treatment of nature and women. This happens because of systems such as patriarchy, capitalism, and social injustice (Bakhmetyeva, 2021; Shrestha, 2025). Recently, ecofeminism has started to include ideas about colonialism, social class, race, local knowledge, and where people live (Antara Saha, 2024; Van Wyk, 2022). This new way of thinking is important for countries in the Global South to consider. Environmental problems are linked to colonial history, including resource extraction, ignoring local communities, and dismissing traditional knowledge.

The combination of ecofeminism and postcolonial perspectives is not common in Indonesian literary studies. Most research on ecology in Indonesia does not focus on women's bodies as important ecological and political areas. This means that the link between gender and the environment is often only partially understood (Hendrastiti et al., 2023; Oktarina & Yulianti, 2022; Pakasi et al., 2024). Studies on women in literature usually focus on identity, gender issues, or social resistance but do not connect much to ecological or colonial topics (Muslimat et al., 2025). Because of this, there is still a gap in understanding how Indonesian literature shows the link between women, nature, and power as part of the ecological experience, which is historical, social, and knowledge-based.

Previous studies often portray women as objects in ecological discussions. They do not explain how women create meaning, resist, and share different ecological knowledge. In many post-colonial areas, women's experiences with the environment are influenced by patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and the clash between local and modern knowledge. We need a framework to better understand the links between gender, ecology, and power.

This study examines how women are portrayed in modern Indonesian literature through a post-colonial ecofeminist lens. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on themes or descriptions, this research views literary texts as sites where meaning is constructed. These texts not only show ecological problems but also create ways to resist and offer new knowledge based on local experiences. This approach enables us to comprehend the influence of power dynamics—ecological, social, cultural, and knowledge-related—on the connections between women and the environment.

This study looks at three modern Indonesian books: "Tanah Tabu" by Anindita S. Thayf, "Saman" by Ayu Utami, and "Sihir Perempuan" by Intan Paramaditha. These books were picked because they show different environmental issues. These include fights over resources in traditional lands, land grabbing in farming areas, and feeling disconnected from nature in cities. Also, all three books focus on women as key figures in how bodies, the environment, and power interact. So, these books help us see common themes in today's Indonesian literature.

This study uses ecofeminist theory to examine Indonesian literature. It aims to understand how the link between women and nature is portrayed in the Global South during the postcolonial era. Traditional ecofeminism states that women and nature are connected because both face oppression from patriarchy and capitalism (Foster, 2021; Mellor, 1996). However, this study argues that this link is not the same in all countries. It is shaped by colonial history, class, social position, and various knowledge systems. Therefore, women's experiences with nature should be viewed as specific to their context, relationships, and history.

This study examines three ways in which women are shown in texts: as victims of environmental harm, as fighters against it, and as knowledge keepers. These roles are important because they show that women are not just suffering in environmental crises. They also fight back and create new ecological knowledge. The victim role shows how women are most affected by environmental harm and lack of resources. The resistance role shows how women fight back through their actions, culture, and daily life. The knowledge keeper role shows how women protect and share ecological knowledge, challenging modern ways of thinking. This study helps us understand how gender, environment, and power are connected in literature.

This article examines and questions some common ideas in ecofeminism. Ecofeminism often views the link between women and nature as the same everywhere. However, this study shows that this link changes with history and society. In the books

studied, women are not merely symbols of nature. They are active in power struggles involving colonialism, capitalism, city life, and different knowledge systems. This study suggests a new way to read ecofeminism. It focuses on the experiences of women from the Global South. This helps change the idea that all women's experiences are the same. It also supports a postcolonial view that pays more attention to colonial history, environmental problems, and local knowledge.

This study investigates the link between women's bodies and nature in contemporary Indonesian literature. It focuses on how women are portrayed as environmental fighters using different storytelling methods. The study also explored how these stories offer new ideas that challenge common views about the environment. The goal is to determine how literature discusses environmental problems and acts as a space to discuss and resist different kinds of power, such as social and colonial control. This study aims to demonstrate that Indonesian literature highlights environmental issues and creates new discussions that combine gender, local beliefs, and resistance in postcolonial society.

METHOD

Research design

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach with a literary text analysis design grounded in an ecofeminist-postcolonial perspective. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on interpreting representations, meaning construction, and power relations manifested in literary texts, thus requiring an in-depth reading of narrative structure, symbolism, and meaning production processes (Riessman, 1993). In this context, literary texts are understood not merely as aesthetic objects but as discursive arenas that simultaneously represent and produce an understanding of the relationships among women, the environment, and power.

Research Corpus and Selection Rationality

The research corpus consists of three contemporary Indonesian literary works: *Tanah Tabu* by Anindita S. Thayf (2009), *Saman* by Ayu Utami (2013), and *Sihir Perempuan* by Intan Paramaditha (2017). The three texts were selected through purposive corpus selection based on their relevance to the research focus on the relationship between women, ecology, and power.

The corpus was selected based on four criteria. First, the text presents explicit or implicit representations of the relationship between women and the environment. Second,

the text contains ecological conflicts related to structures of power, such as the state, extractive capitalism, colonialism, or patriarchal domination. Third, the text displays forms of women's resistance to ecological and social exploitation practices. Fourth, the text includes dimensions of local knowledge, spirituality, and mythology that pertain to how humans understand and interact with nature in the region.

These three works are considered representative of Indonesian ecofeminist studies because they depict a spectrum of different ecological experiences. *Tanah Tabu* portrays the ecological conflict in Indigenous Papuan communities facing resource exploitation and internal colonialism. *Saman* presents issues of land grabbing, agrarian conflict, and the relationships between the state, corporations, and local communities within Indonesia's ecological landscape after the New Order. *Sihir Perempuan* offers a more symbolic representation of women's bodies, spirituality and ecological alienation in a modern urban context. This variety of contexts enables the identification of patterns of representation that are not only thematic but also reflect the diverse ecological dynamics of contemporary Indonesian literature.

Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The research data consisted of textual units comprising narratives, dialogues, character descriptions, metaphors, symbols, and story fragments that represented the relationships between women, the environment, and power structures. The entire corpus was read intensively and repeatedly to identify the sections of text relevant to the research focus.

The unit of analysis was determined based on the occurrence of representations related to three main aspects: (1) the relationship between women's bodies and the ecological landscape; (2) forms of women's resistance to environmental exploitation and social injustice; and (3) practices of knowledge, spirituality, and mythology that function as alternatives to the dominant ecological discourse. Fragments unrelated to gender, ecology, and power relations were not included in the analysis process.

To enhance analytical transparency, the data identification process was conducted through systematic documentation of relevant excerpts, which were then grouped according to initial themes before being comparatively analysed within and across texts.

Work	Author	Ecological Context	Focus of Representation
<i>Tanah Tabu</i>	Anindita S. Thayf	Exploitation of resources and indigenous Papuan communities	Women, land, ecological colonialism
<i>Saman</i>	Ayu Utami	Agrarian conflict and land grabbing	Women, bodies, nation, and capitalism
<i>Sihir</i>	Intan	Urban modernity and ecological	Women, spirituality, and

Table 1. Research Corpus and Analysis Focus

Data Analysis

This study used two methods: narrative and thematic analyses (Boyatzis, 1998; Riessman, 1993). First, the researchers read all the texts carefully to identify themes related to women, nature, power, spirituality, and local knowledge. Next, they coded the texts to identify common patterns in how these themes were presented in different texts.

Subsequently, they conducted a narrative analysis to examine how the text creates meaning using plot, characters, point of view, metaphors, symbols, and storytelling methods. This helps them understand not only what is shown, but also how it is shown in terms of ideas and style. Finally, they used a postcolonial ecofeminist approach to explain the links between gender, nature, colonialism, and knowledge. They move back and forth between text and theory until they find consistent and clear patterns.

Interpretive Validity

There are four ways to ensure that the interpretation is valid. First, corpus triangulation checks patterns in three different texts so that the results do not depend on just one. Second, theoretical triangulation uses both ecocriticism and postcolonialism to help interpret the texts. Third, all arguments are based on clear evidence from the texts, such as quotes and symbols, which can be verified. Fourth, comparing different texts helps identify similarities and differences, strengthening the interpretation. By using these methods, this study aims to ensure that the interpretation is not merely a personal opinion but is also clear, consistent, and academically valid.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Ecology

The theme of gender ecology emerges as the dominant pattern of representation in the three analysed texts. This theme demonstrates that the ecological crisis in Indonesian literature is not represented as an isolated environmental issue but is always interconnected with power relations that shape women's experiences differently. From an ecofeminist perspective, the connection between women and nature is not understood as a biologically natural relationship but rather as the result of social, political, and economic structures that position both as vulnerable to exploitation (Foster, 2021). An analysis of *Tanah Tabu*, *Saman*, and *Sihir Perempuan* shows that women are represented as subjects

who experience the direct and indirect impacts of ecological colonialism, extractive capitalism, and modernity, which separates humans from their environment.

Tanah Tabu

The most explicit representation of the connection between women and the environment is found in *Tanah Tabu*. This is evident in the following excerpt:

“People come dressed neatly and speaking softly, but they bring machines that destroy our land, just like they destroy the bodies of the mothers in the village...” (Thayf, 2009)

The phrase “like destroying the bodies of the village mothers” indicates that the novel draws an analogy between women’s bodies and land as objects of the same logic of domination. From an ecofeminist perspective, this representation reflects a shared logic of domination, an ideological mechanism that enables the simultaneous exploitation of women and nature (Foster, 2021). However, unlike essentialist ecofeminism, which views women as inherently close to nature, *Tanah Tabu* situates this relationship within the context of ecological colonialism. Environmental destruction is understood not merely as the degradation of nature but as a form of violence that simultaneously attacks the body, living space, and continuity of Indigenous communities.

Through this narrative strategy, the novel constructs women not only as victims of ecological exploitation but also as primary indicators of the impact of internal colonialism on Indigenous communities. Thus, the relationship between women and nature is represented as a political relationship born from the shared experience of confronting the seizure of living space and natural resources.

Saman

In *Saman*, representations of gender ecology emerge through agrarian conflicts and ecological dispossession, mediated by the state and corporations. This is reflected in the following quote.

“We no longer have any land. They claim that the land belongs to the state. But the only ones who come are soldiers and corporations.” (Utami, 2013)

This quotation indicates that land loss is not merely an ecological event but a consequence of power relations involving the state, capital, and local communities. In contrast to *Tanah Tabu*, which depicts ecological violence directly and materially, *Saman* demonstrates how environmental exploitation operates through legal, bureaucratic, and economic mechanisms.

From the perspective of postcolonial ecofeminism, this situation reflects a form of structural domination that removes communities' access to their ecological spaces. Its impact on women is significant because, in the agrarian context, land functions not only as an economic resource but also as a social and cultural space that sustains community identity. Therefore, women in *Saman* are not represented as passive victims but as subjects who experience the consequences of structural imbalances produced by the relationships among the state, capitalism, and the environment.

These findings broaden the understanding of ecological victims from individual experiences to forms of injustice institutionalised through broader social and political structures.

Sihir Perempuan

Unlike the previous two novels, *Sihir Perempuan* shifts ecological issues from the domain of material exploitation to the epistemological and symbolic domains. This is evident in the following excerpt.

"In that city, the trees no longer have roots. They hang in the air... Everything is sterile, and therefore everything is dead." (Paramaditha, 2017)

The metaphor "trees no longer have roots" describes environmental degradation and represents the rupture of the human relationship with the ecological world as a result of the logic of modernity. From an ecofeminist perspective, this condition reflects a more subtle form of domination, namely, the separation of the body, nature, and spirituality through a modern epistemology that positions nature as an object to be controlled.

The women in this novel do not experience land dispossession, as in *Tanah Tabu* or *Saman*. Instead, they face ecological alienation, resulting in the loss of connection with ecological knowledge, memory, and experience, which once formed a part of their daily lives. Thus, *Sihir Perempuan* expands the concept of ecological crisis from environmental destruction to an epistemological crisis that erases alternative ways of understanding nature.

Cross-Text Synthesis

A comparative analysis shows that the three novels construct representations of women and ecology through different configurations of meaning. In *Tanah Tabu*, women are depicted as direct victims of ecological colonialism, which simultaneously targets both the body and the land. In *Saman*, women are situated within a structure of injustice

produced by the relationship between the state, capitalism, and agrarian conflicts. Meanwhile, *Sihir Perempuan* shifts the focus from material exploitation to epistemic domination through the ecological alienation produced by urban modernity.

These differences indicate that women's ecological experiences in Indonesian literature cannot be understood through a single universal model. In contrast, the relationship between women and nature is shaped by diverse historical, social, and cultural contexts. These findings show that the category of women in ecocriticism must be understood intersectionally and contextually, rather than as a homogenous category with identical ecological experiences.

Theoretical Interpretation

Theoretically, the findings on gender ecology support and expand ecofeminism's basic assumptions. The findings support the argument that the domination of women and nature operates through interconnected logics of power (Anjum, 2020; Wang, 1999). However, the data show that this relationship is not universal, as assumed in some strands of classical ecofeminism. In the context of Indonesian literature, the relationship between women and nature is always mediated by ecological colonialism, extractive capitalism, urban modernity, and the politics of knowledge (Al - Qolbi, 2025; Dewi, 2020; Efendi et al., 2025).

Therefore, the category of women as ecological victims (ecological victimhood) identified in this study cannot be understood solely as a consequence of patriarchy but also as the result of the interaction of various power structures operating simultaneously. These findings reinforce the importance of a post-colonial ecofeminist perspective in understanding how women's ecological experiences in the Global South are shaped by coloniality, environmental inequality, and epistemological marginalisation.

Narrative of Resistance

In addition to representing women as ecological victims, the three texts construct women as subjects who actively respond to various forms of ecological, social, and epistemological domination. From a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, resistance is not understood solely as a confrontational act against power structures but as a practice that allows women to reclaim control over their bodies, living spaces, and knowledge systems that have long been marginalised. An analysis of *Saman*, *Tanah Tabu*, and *Sihir Perempuan* shows that women's resistance manifests in diverse forms, ranging from bodily affirmation

and community-based ecological practices to producing alternative languages and knowledge.

Saman

The representation of resistance in *Saman* is primarily constructed through affirming the body as a space of autonomy and resistance to various forms of patriarchal control. This is evident in Shakuntala's statement:

"I want to celebrate my body. I want to be a goddess in my own ritual." (Utami, 2013)

In the narrative context, the statement is not merely an expression of individual freedom but a form of resistance against the social and religious structures that have historically controlled women's bodies. The use of the "goddess" metaphor indicates an effort by the character to reposition the body as a source of authority and meaning that is no longer determined by patriarchal institutions.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the female body in this text functions as a political and ecological space. The effort to reclaim the body from the mechanisms of social control represents a form of resistance against the same logic of domination that enables the exploitation of nature. Thus, *Saman* shifts the concept of resistance from the domain of formal activism to the process of reconstructing female subjectivity. Resistance occurs not only through collective action but also through negotiations over identity, the body, and personal experience, which have thus far been defined by the external structures of power.

Tanah Tabu

In *Tanah Tabu*, women's resistance is not represented through direct confrontation with power but rather through practices of caring for and restoring relationships with the environment. This is evident in the following statement:

"I want to plant a tree on that former patch of black earth. Perhaps not because I know how, but because I want the Earth to remember that we love it." (Thayf, 2009)

The act of planting trees cannot be understood as merely an environmental rehabilitation activity. Symbolically, this act represents a rejection of the logic of extractivism, which regards nature as a source of economic commodities. Through caretaking, women construct forms of resistance rooted in affective and ethical relationships with the land.

This perspective broadens the understanding of resistance in ecofeminism. While most political theories view resistance as direct opposition to power, *Tanah Tabu*

demonstrates that safeguarding, nurturing, and sustaining ecological relationships are effective forms of resistance. In the context of Indigenous communities, such actions are strategies to maintain communal continuity while rejecting ecological colonialism, which seeks to sever the relationship between humans and the land.

Additionally, the female characters in this novel serve as guardians of the community's ecological memory. Resistance is enacted not only against environmental exploitation but also against the loss of knowledge and cultural identity embedded in the ecological landscape of the community.

Sihir Perempuan

Unlike the previous two texts, *Sihir Perempuan* constructs resistance primarily through language, myth, and alternative knowledge systems. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"We exchanged spells... it was the only language not censored by power." (Paramaditha, 2017)

From a literary perspective, the mantra serves as a symbol of a communication system that exists outside the control of dominant institutions. This text indicates that power operates not only through control over bodies or material resources, but also through the regulation of what is considered legitimate knowledge. Therefore, the practice of sharing mantras becomes a form of resistance against epistemological domination that marginalises women's experiences and knowledge.

From a post-colonial ecofeminist perspective, this form of resistance can be understood as epistemic resistance, namely, the effort to maintain alternative knowledge systems that reject the separation between humans, nature, and spirituality. Unlike *Saman*, which centres on the body, and *Tanah Tabu*, which centres on the land, *Sihir Perempuan* positions language and imagination as the primary arenas of resistance. Thus, this novel demonstrates that ecological resistance does not always occur in the material realm but also in symbolic and discursive spaces.

Cross-Text Synthesis

A comparative analysis shows that the three novels present different forms of resistance according to their respective social contexts. In *Saman*, resistance centres on the body and the formation of female subjectivity. In *Tanah Tabu*, resistance is manifested through ecological practices that sustain the relationship between the community and land.

Meanwhile, *Sihir Perempuan* constructs resistance through language, mythology, and producing alternative knowledge.

These differences indicate that women's resistance in Indonesian literature cannot be reduced to a single form, such as activism or political confrontation. On the contrary, resistance appears as a spectrum of practices encompassing the body, ecological spaces, culture, and knowledge (I Gusti Ayu Andani Pertiwi et al., 2025). This variation demonstrates that women not only respond to the domination they experience but also create new ways to build more just relationships with their environment and communities (Maybom & Funder, 2025).

Theoretical Interpretation

Theoretically, these findings expand the concept of agency in ecofeminist studies. Many previous studies have associated agency with direct and confrontational political actions (Ayanian et al., 2021; Lima, 2021; Uysal et al., 2024). However, the three novels demonstrate that women's agency can emerge through affective, ecological, cultural, and epistemological practices that are often overlooked by conventional theories of resistance.

These findings point to the second category of the representation model proposed in this study: ecological resistance. This category indicates that women in Indonesian literature are represented not only as victims of environmental destruction but also as agents who develop strategies of resistance against various forms of ecological and social domination (Rauf et al., 2025; Supandi et al., 2025; Widiанти, 2022). In the context of the Global South, such resistance does not always manifest as formal political movements but often arises through everyday practices, cultural relationships with nature, and the production of alternative knowledge that enables community sustainability (Mukono & Faustine Sambaiga, 2022; Santos, 2026). Therefore, this study asserts that women's ecological resistance must be understood as a relational, contextual multidimensional process.

Subversive Mythology and Eco-Spirituality as Epistemic Strategy

The analysis of the three texts indicates that women are represented not only as ecological victims and agents of resistance but also as epistemic mediators who connect humans, nature, and alternative knowledge systems. In this context, mythology, spirituality, and symbolic practices do not merely function as narrative ornaments; they serve as mechanisms for knowledge production that challenge the dominance of modern

epistemology. This perspective is in line with post-colonial ecofeminism, which views the ecological crisis not only as an environmental crisis but also as a crisis of knowledge, resulting in the severing of the human-nature relationship and the marginalisation of local epistemologies (Aswani et al., 2018; Manion & Shah, 2019).

Sihir Perempuan

The most explicit representation of epistemic resistance is found in *Perempuan Sihir* (The Witch). Through the use of mythology, spells, and gothic elements, this novel constructs an alternative space for women to produce and transmit knowledge outside systems recognised by dominant institutions.

“We exchange spells... it is the only language not censored by power.” (Paramaditha, 2017)

In the narrative context, mantras serve as a medium of communication. However, ideologically, mantras represent a knowledge system that lies outside modern rationalism. The use of magical language demonstrates that women construct an epistemic space that is not subject to the authority of the state, formal religion, or modern science. Thus, mythology in this text is not positioned as a form of irrationality but as a strategy for maintaining women’s epistemic autonomy.

From a postcolonial-ecofeminist perspective, this practice can be understood as a form of epistemic resistance, an effort to maintain alternative ways of understanding the relationship between humans and nature. This novel demonstrates that ecological domination always goes hand in hand with epistemological domination. Therefore, preserving language, myths, and imagination becomes important in the ecological struggle.

Tanah Tabu

In *Tanah Tabu*, eco-spirituality is constructed through the close relationship between women and the land and their ancestors. This representation is evident in the portrayal of Mama Kalipa as a figure with a special connection to the ecological landscape and the community’s collective memory of it.

“His eyes are sharp, like the eyes of an old tree that knows the secrets of the forest.” (Thayf, 2009)

This metaphor does not merely illustrate the symbolic closeness between humans and nature. The novel constructs the idea that ecological knowledge originates from direct engagement with the living environment and is passed down through intergenerational experiences. In this context, women serve as custodians of ecological memory, connecting the community to their land, forests, and ancestors.

Furthermore, when the forest is represented as a space inhabited by ancestral spirits, the text shows that the relationship with the environment is not constructed through the logic of ownership but through ethical and spiritual relations. This perspective implicitly critiques the modern paradigm that views nature as an object of economic exploitation and commodification. Thus, *Tanah Tabu* constructs spirituality as an ecological knowledge system that possesses its own legitimacy and serves as the basis for environmental ethics in Indigenous communities.

Saman

Unlike in *Sihir Perempuan* and *Tanah Tabu*, eco-spirituality in *Saman* emerges through a process of negotiation between institutional religion and personal spiritual experience. This is evident in the statement:

“I want to become a goddess in my own ritual (Utami, 2013)

This statement demonstrates women's efforts to reclaim authority over their spiritual experiences. In this context, spirituality is no longer mediated entirely by religious institutions but is constructed through bodily experience and personal reflection. This narrative strategy reveals how women challenge boundaries set by religious and social authorities.

From an ecofeminist perspective, this representation shows that ecological and spiritual knowledge does not always exist outside formal religion but can emerge through processes of reinterpreting existing structures. Therefore, *Saman* presents a form of epistemic resistance that is negotiable. Women do not entirely reject the dominant system; instead, they transform its meaning and function.

Cross-Text Synthesis

A comparative analysis shows that the three novels present different forms of ecospirituality. In *Sihir Perempuan*, mythology serves as a space for producing alternative knowledge that challenges modern rationality. In *Tanah Tabu*, spirituality functions as a mechanism for preserving the ecological memory and ethical relationships with nature. *Saman* demonstrates how spirituality can become an arena for negotiating personal experiences and institutional authority.

Although different in form and context, the three texts display the same pattern: women serve as a bridge between humans and the marginalised ecological knowledge systems. Women not only safeguard this knowledge but also transform it to remain

relevant in the face of social and ecological changes. These findings indicate that spirituality and mythology in Indonesian literature cannot be reduced to folkloristic or aesthetic elements but must be understood as mechanisms for the production and transmission of ecological knowledge.

Theoretical Interpretation

Theoretically, these findings expand the scope of ecofeminist studies by positioning spirituality and mythology as important epistemological categories for understanding the relationship between women and nature (Bell et al., 2022; Furlan Štante, 2023). Many Western ecofeminist studies tend to focus on the material dimension of environmental exploitation, whereas the spiritual and epistemic dimensions are often positioned as secondary aspects (Lawrence et al., 2025; MacGregor, 2021). In contrast, the three novels demonstrate that in the Global South, ecological crises are always linked to struggles between knowledge systems.

Thus, this study proposes a third category in the post-colonial ecofeminist representation model: epistemic mediation. This category explains how women function as mediators, connecting ecological experiences with alternative systems of knowledge through mythology, spirituality, collective memory, and cultural practices. These findings expand the agenda of postcolonial ecocriticism by demonstrating that ecological struggles occur not only at the material and political levels but also at the epistemological level (Karmakar & Chetty, 2024). Thus, Indonesian literature does not merely represent environmental crises but also offers alternative models of ecological knowledge rooted in women's experiences and the Global South context (Ryan, 2020).

Gender, Class, and Ecology Intersection

An analysis of the three texts shows that women's ecological experiences cannot be understood solely through the lens of gender. The women in the analysed novels experience the impact of ecological crises differently depending on their class position, geographic location, access to resources, and their place within broader social structures. These findings demonstrate that the relationship between women and nature in Indonesian literature is intersectional, in which various forms of inequality overlap and produce non-uniform ecological experiences. This perspective aligns with developments in contemporary ecofeminism, which rejects the view of women as a homogeneous group and emphasises the importance of understanding the connections between gender, class, coloniality, and the environment.

Saman

In *Saman*, the intersection of gender and class emerges through the differing positions of urban middle-class women and agrarian communities experiencing land dispossession. This is evident in the following narrative:

“They came from the city, bringing cameras and words. We only have land that is no longer ours.” (Utami, 2013)

This imbalance in the distribution of representational power is evident here. Some women have access to education, media, and public spaces that enable them to speak about ecological issues. In contrast, women from directly affected communities often lose access to define their own experiences.

From an intersectional perspective, this situation demonstrates that women’s ecological experiences are shaped not only by gender, but also by class position and access to social and cultural capital. This novel critiques the assumption that all women experience the same oppression. In contrast, *Saman* shows that even among women, hierarchies influence their ability to participate in the production of ecological discourse.

Tanah Tabu

In *Tanah Tabu*, intersectionality emerges in a more complex manner through the interplay of gender, indigenous identity, and economic marginalisation. This is reflected in the statement:

“We do not know about those documents, we only know that this land has belonged to us since our ancestors.” (Thayf, 2009)

The narrative illustrates a clash between local knowledge systems and the formal legal system used to legitimise land control. Indigenous women in this novel face vulnerability not only because of their gender but also because of their position as members of a politically and economically marginalised community.

From the perspective of post-colonial ecofeminism, this condition demonstrates how ecological coloniality operates through the delegitimisation of local knowledge. Indigenous women are the most affected group because they are positioned at the intersection of gender injustice, cultural marginalisation, and environmental exploitation. Thus, this novel shows that ecological destruction never occurs in isolation but is always intertwined with broader social inequalities.

Sihir Perempuan

Unlike the previous two novels, *Sihir Perempuan* presents a form of intersectionality related to urban modernity and ecological alienation. This is evident in the statement:

“We live in a tall apartment, but never truly touch the ground.” (Paramaditha, 2017)

This quotation represents the paradox of modernity. The women in this text have access to education, social mobility, and urban living spaces, but they experience a disconnection from the ecological environment. Thus, the marginalisation they face is not material, as in *Tanah Tabu*, but takes the form of epistemological and existential alienation instead.

This novel demonstrates that class privilege does not eliminate ecological vulnerability in the following ways: In contrast, modernity can produce forms of disconnection that sever human relationships with nature and diminish the ability to understand the ecological world holistically (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021). Therefore, *Sihir Perempuan* expands the concept of ecological injustice to the dimension of urban experience, which is often overlooked in ecofeminist literature and scholarship.

Cross-Text Synthesis

A comparative analysis shows that the three novels present different forms of intersectionality. In *Tanah Tabu*, women’s vulnerability is shaped by the intersection of gender, indigenous identity, and ecological colonialism. In *Saman*, ecological experience is influenced by class distribution and access to social representation. Meanwhile, *Sihir Perempuan* demonstrates how urban modernity produces ecological alienation, even when women have access to various forms of social privilege.

These differences show that there is no universal ecological experience of women. The position of women within ecological landscapes is always shaped by varying power relations according to social, historical, and cultural contexts (Liu, 2024; Madhavi & Nageswar Rao, 2023). These findings confirm that the category of “women” in ecofeminist studies must be understood as a layered and heterogeneous category, not as a singular identity with a uniform experience.

Theoretical Interpretation

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the argument of intersectional ecofeminism, which rejects essentialist understandings of the relationship between women and nature (Echavarren, 2023; Oksala, 2018; Shahvisi, 2016). The three novels demonstrate that environmental degradation operates through complex social structures and affects women

differently based on class position, cultural identity, geographic location, and access to knowledge. These findings also expand the representational model proposed in this study. The categories of ecological victimhood, ecological resistance, and epistemic mediation do not emerge in a neutral social space but are always shaped by the intersections of gender, class, colonialism, and systems of knowledge. Therefore, this study proposes that literary ecofeminism research should move beyond the universal woman–nature relationship toward a more intersectional and contextual analysis. This perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the ecological crisis as an issue that is simultaneously environmental, social, political, and epistemological in nature.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the portrayal of women, nature, and power in Indonesian literature from a post-colonial ecofeminist perspective. By examining *Tanah Tabu*, *Saman*, and *Sihir Perempuan*, three main themes are identified: women as victims of ecological harm, women as fighters against it, and women as knowledge creators. These themes demonstrate that women in these stories are not only affected by environmental problems but also actively resist and create new ideas to challenge various forms of control. This study shows that environmental issues in Indonesian literature are linked to colonial history, capitalism, social inequality, and disregard for local knowledge. The connection between women and nature in these stories is shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts, not universal, as some ecofeminist ideas suggest. This highlights that women's experiences with nature in the Global South differ from those in other parts of the world.

This study contributes to global literary studies by suggesting a new model of ecofeminist-postcolonial representation comprising three categories: ecological victimhood, resistance, and knowledge creation. This model broadens the study of ecofeminism to include more complex and context-specific analyses. It also enriches post-colonial ecocriticism by demonstrating that ecological struggles in literature occur not only politically and materially but also through the creation and preservation of alternative ecological knowledge. This study suggests a shift in ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism to focus more on Global South experiences, ecological coloniality, and justice in knowledge. It argues that mythology, spirituality, and local knowledge are important in literary analysis for creating new ecological ideas. This opens new directions for ecofeminism theory to explore how marginalised groups create ecological knowledge to address global environmental issues. However, this study only considered three books

from one country. Future research could compare different countries, cultures, or genres to test this model and explore new relationships between gender, ecology, and knowledge in modern literature.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

This study uses data sources in the form of literary texts that have been widely published and does not involve human participants or personal data. Therefore, this study did not require an ethical approval. The entire research process was nevertheless conducted in accordance with the principles of academic integrity, including citation accuracy and respect for intellectual property rights. Thus, an ethics statement was deemed to be inapplicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools ChatGPT (OpenAI), Paperpal, and Consensus AI were used in a limited capacity during the manuscript preparation. ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Paperpal were used for language editing, clarity enhancement, and grammatical improvement, while Consensus AI was used to assist in identifying relevant academic literature. The use of these AI tools did not influence the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. All intellectual decisions, critical analysis, and final content remain the full responsibility of the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article.

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