



Environmental Representation and Ecological Wisdom in a Sumbawa Folktale: An Ecocritical Study of "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis"

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Abstract. Oral literature as an archive of local wisdom can contribute an ecological perspective amid growing efforts to address environmental crises. This study analyzes the Sumbawa folklore “Lalu Dia Lala Jinis” using an ecocritical approach to examine the representation and function of the environment within the tale. Grounded in Greg Garrard's theoretical framework, this research investigates how natural elements like forests, rivers, and animals not only function as passive backgrounds but also play active roles influencing plot, character, and conflict resolution. Data analysis is conducted qualitatively through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate the folklore depicts human-environment relationships, where: (1) the Tiu Kalamung River functions beyond physical geography, holding a crucial role in social interactions and changes within the surrounding community; (2) Animal figures, particularly the rooster, symbolically carry the highest social values (dignity) and deepest spiritual beliefs (fate); (3) The landscape (forest and scrub) represents a testing ground reflecting the ethics and intentions of the protagonists. This study concludes the folklore conveys a view that humans and nature are not viewed as separate entities but as an interconnected and interdependent whole. The ecological wisdom embedded in this story, encompassing principles of harmonious living and mutual respect with nature, is crucial and valuable in contemporary environmental discourse and as material for environmental ethics education.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Sumbawa Folktales, Local Wisdom.

1 Introduction

From a cultural perspective, ecological values are passed down through generations via oral narratives, myths, and cultural practices, which not only teach nature conservation but also shape the environmental ethics of the community [1-4]. Oral narratives in the form of folktales frequently serve as vessels for the representation of ecology-related local wisdom. Folktales, such as those found in Banyumas, Cilacap, and other regions in Indonesia as well as globally, have been identified as containing values of respect

for nature, human-environment harmony, wise utilization of natural resources, and the application of local ecological knowledge for toponymy and rituals [5], [6], [7], [8]. These values are considered a crucial component in addressing the challenges of modern environmental crises.

Ecocriticism, as a discipline that examines the relationship between literature and the environment, serves as an analytical tool to identify the ecological perspectives and values embedded within a literary work. The ecocritical approach, as proposed by Greg Garrard [9], highlights how natural elements such as rivers, animals, and landscapes within a folktale represent the relationship between humans and nature [5], [6], [8]. According to Jabar [10] and Shova [2], folktales can be utilized as educational tools to shift public awareness toward environmental issues, as well as act as a bridge between traditional values and modern necessities. By integrating traditional ecological knowledge into modern environmental practices and policies, community participation and ecosystem resilience can be enhanced. This measure can also underscore the importance of preserving folktales as cultural heritage [2], [11], [4]. Ultimately, the study of local wisdom embedded in the oral tradition of folktales emerges as a significant and relevant academic endeavor amidst climate crises and environmental degradation.

The folktale "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis" from Sumbawa, West Nusa Tenggara, presents not only a rich narrative in terms of plot and characterization [12], [13], but also in its environmental representation. This folktale recounts a story of romance and inter-kingdom conflict, which implicitly encapsulates how the Sumbawa society of the past comprehended and interacted with their surrounding natural environment.

This study aims to (1) identify the representations of natural elements (water, forests, animals) within the tale "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis"; (2) analyze the narratological functions and ecological meanings of these representations utilizing Greg Garrard's ecocritical theoretical framework; and (3) formulate the ecological wisdom embedded in the story and discuss its relevance to contemporary contexts.

2 Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a content analysis method based on library research.

2.1 Research Object

The material object of this study is the manuscript of the folktale "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis" [12]

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The analysis applies the ecocritical theory developed by Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* [9]. Ecocritical theory categorizes environmental issues in literature into several key themes, namely *pollution, wilderness, disaster/apocalypse, dwelling, animals,*

and *earth* [14], [15], [16], [17], [18],[19], [20]. Each of these themes is utilized to analyze how literary works depict the relationship between humans and the environment, whether in the form of conflict, harmony, or a critique of the exploitation of nature. Please note that the first paragraph of a section or subsection is not indented. The first paragraphs that follows a table, figure, equation etc. does not have an indent, either.

Within his theory, the *pollution* theme highlights the negative impacts of modernization and human activities on the environment, while *wilderness* portrays the power and majesty of nature that is frequently beyond human control [16], [17], [18], [19], [20]. The *dwelling* theme emphasizes the emotional attachment of humans to their habitats, *animals* theme discusses the role of animals in ecosystems and social life, and *earth* examines the changes or degradation of the planet caused by human actions. Garrard's approach has been extensively applied in various literary and film analyses to uncover the complexities of human-nature interactions and to underscore the importance of ecological awareness in culture and literature [14], [15], [17], [18], [19], [20].

This study specifically focuses on the categories of *wilderness* (forests/wild landscapes), *dwelling* (the concept of place/residence, in this case, the river), and *animals*.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a qualitative research approach, specifically through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (verification).

The data reduction stage was conducted by identifying and compiling excerpts from the manuscript that explicitly or implicitly describe natural elements such as rivers, animals, and forests. This step aligns with the data identification and classification methods employed in ecocritical studies by Anggarista & Munasip [21] and Zahra et al. [22]. Data display, presented in the form of descriptive narratives and analytical tables, assists in mapping the function of each natural element within the story's structure. This is consistent with previous research on the representation of ecological wisdom and human-nature relations by Anggarista & Munasip [21], Sultoni et al. [2], and Zahra et al. [22].

The conclusion drawing or verification stage was carried out by interpreting the displayed data to formulate findings regarding representations and ecological wisdom, subsequently linking them to Garrard's ecocritical theoretical framework, specifically the themes of dwelling, animals, and earth. This approach enables the researcher to focus on the values of local wisdom, responsible attitudes toward nature, and critiques of environmental exploitation [6], [21], [22].

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Water Representation: The Tiu Kalamung River as a Transitional Space

The concept of dwelling does not only refer to a house but also to how humans occupy and make sense of a 'place' [9]. The Tiu Kalamung River in this story functions as a crucial 'place' for the surrounding community.

"Sesampainya di Kerajaan Seran, Lalu Dia dan pasukannya tidak menginap di rumah warga seperti yang sudah disepakati sebelumnya. Mereka sengaja membuat gubuk-gubuk kecil di pinggir sungai yang disebut Tiu Kalamung. Di gubuk-gubuk itulah Lalu Dia mencari tahu pada penduduk Kerajaan Seran tentang apa yang membuat Lala Jinis mau dinikahi oleh Raja Seran. Setiap hari Lalu Dia bertanya kepada setiap penduduk yang datang mengambil air di sekitar Tiu Kalamung."

("Upon arriving at the Seran Kingdom, Lalu Dia and his troops did not stay in the villagers' houses as previously agreed. They deliberately built small huts on the banks of a river called Tiu Kalamung. In those huts, Lalu Dia sought information from the inhabitants of the Seran Kingdom regarding what made Lala Jinis willing to be married to the King of Seran. Every day, Lalu Dia inquired of every resident who came to fetch water around Tiu Kalamung.")

"Tinggal Lalu Dia bersama Puntuk di gubuk itu. Seolah terjadi kontak batin antara Lalu Dia dengan Lala Jinis, Lala Jinis ingin sekali berjumpa dengan Lalu Dia. Lala Jinis beserta seorang dayangnya minta izin kepada ibunya untuk mandi besok pagi di Tiu Kalamung. Permintaannya pun dikabulkan oleh sang ibu. Sesampainya di Tiu Kalamung, mereka tidak mandi tapi semata-mata ingin bertemu dengan Lalu Dia dan Puntuk."

("Lalu Dia stayed with Puntuk in that hut. As if there were a telepathic connection between Lalu Dia and Lala Jinis, she desperately wanted to meet him. Lala Jinis, along with a lady-in-waiting, asked her mother's permission to bathe the next morning at Tiu Kalamung. Her request was granted by her mother. Upon arriving at Tiu Kalamung, they did not bathe but merely wanted to meet Lalu Dia and Puntuk.")

"Waktu terus berlalu, Lala Jinis setiap hari berkunjung ke Tiu Kalamung. Dia berharap bisa bertemu lagi dengan Lalu Dia tetapi harapannya tinggallah harapan."

("Time passed, and Lala Jinis visited Tiu Kalamung every day. She hoped to meet Lalu Dia again, but her hopes remained merely hopes.")

Narratological Function. In the tale of *Lalu Dia Lala Jinis*, the river serves as the location where the plot experiences a turning point. At this juncture, Lalu Dia sets up his camp, obtains key information about Lala Jinis's suffering, and begins devising his strategy. It is also at this point that the first romantic encounter between Lalu Dia and Lala Jinis occurs, free from the rigid structures of the palace.

Ecological Meaning. This representation demonstrates the significance of the river as the center of community life. The river is presented not merely as a water source, but also as a public space, a conduit for information, and an arena for social negotiation. Lalu Dia's decision to camp by the riverbank rather than in the settlement indicates a strategic understanding of utilizing the natural landscape. Meanwhile, for Lala Jinis, the river becomes a symbol of hope and a pathway to a new life, underlining the spiritual connection between humans and water.

This function aligns with research on river ecosystem services, which emphasizes the importance of rivers as providers of ecological, social, and cultural services for communities, as well as spaces that foster social and spiritual interactions [23], [24],

[25]. The characters' decision to camp by the riverbank demonstrates a strategic and symbolic utilization of the natural landscape, illustrating the spiritual connection and new hope represented by water in the narrative. This representation affirms that rivers in folktales act not solely as settings but as vital ecological and social actors.

3.2 Fauna Representation: The Role of Animals in the Narrative of Ecological Wisdom

Garrard emphasizes that animals in literature frequently serve as symbols or reflections of human values [9].

"Dia seorang pangeran yang sangat baik, tangkas, dan memiliki hobi memelihara ayam."

("He is a very kind and agile prince who has a hobby of raising chickens.")

"Bukan hanya itu, Lalu Dia juga membisikkan kepada Puntuk untuk selalu membawa ayam jantan kesayangan sang raja." ("Not only that, Lalu Dia also whispered to Puntuk to always bring the king's beloved rooster.")

"“Begini saja wahai panglima, kamu tantang mereka untuk beradu ketangkasan dan sabung ayam! Mengenai besar taruhannya, tergantung kesanggupan mereka,” ungkap Sang Raja."

("Here is the plan, O Commander, you challenge them to an agility and cockfighting contest! As for the wager amount, it depends on their capability," stated the King.)

"Setelah kedua pihak sepakat untuk beradu ketangkasan dan sabung ayam, mereka menyepakati kapan dan di mana acara itu dilangsungkan."

("After both parties agreed to compete in agility and cockfighting, they agreed upon when and where the event would take place.")

"Setelah lomba memainkan bola takraw, lomba selanjutnya adalah sabung ayam. Pada lomba sabung ayam, Raja Seran kalah. Ayam Raja Dia yang diberi nama Puti Malino berhasil mengalahkan ayam Raja Seran yang diberi nama Ijo Kóró Bawi. Alhasil, perlombaan itu dimenangkan oleh Kerajaan Alas Lokq ke pondok atau tenda tempat mereka tinggal. Mereka tiba di pondok atau tenda tempat menjelang sore hari. Malam itu, Lalu Dia langsung memerintahkan pasukan dan hulubalangnya agar pulang ke kerajaan mereka karena takut terjadi perampokan terhadap hadiah yang sudah mereka dapat. Pasukan dan hulubalang pun bergegas meninggalkan tenda menuju Kerajaan Alas Lokq."

("Following the sepak takraw (rattan ball) competition, the next event was cockfighting. In the cockfighting match, the King of Seran lost. Raja Dia's rooster, named Puti Malino, successfully defeated the King of Seran's rooster, named Ijo Kóró Bawi. Consequently, the competition was won by the Alas Kingdom. All the prizes obtained from the competition were brought by the Alas Lokq Kingdom troops to the hut or tent where they resided. They arrived at their hut or tent towards the late afternoon. That night, Lalu Dia immediately ordered his troops and commanders to return to their kingdom out of fear of being robbed of the prizes they had acquired. The troops and commanders hastily left the tent, heading towards the Alas Lokq Kingdom.").

Narratological Function. The cockfighting match serves as a minor climax in the story. The victory of Lalu Dia's rooster, Puti Malino, directly determines Lalu Dia's supremacy over King Ranpangantan. Here, the animal functions as a non-human agent that helps determine the main character's fate.

Ecological Meaning. This depiction reflects the society's view that a leader's dignity and capabilities are intertwined with their ability to foster a relationship with the animal world. The chicken is not merely a property, but an extension of its master's character. This illustrates a form of wisdom born from a reciprocal relationship and a profound understanding of animal characteristics.

This aligns with Garrard's notion that the presence of animals in narratives can broaden ecological perspectives, challenge human dominance, and assert the importance of ethical relationships between humans and other living beings [26]. Thus, the role of animals in this story not only strengthens the narrative structure but also reinforces ecological values and local wisdom stemming from harmonious interactions with nature.

3.3 Landscape Representation: The Forest as a Space for Ethical Trials

According to Garrard, the category of wilderness is frequently depicted as a space that is challenging yet also purifying [9].

"Suatu ketika, Lala Jinis dan dayang-dayangnya membuat sebuah rencana yang begitu gila. Mereka berencana menyusul Lalu Dia ke Kerajaan Alas. Sebenarnya, mereka sangat takut karena mereka berdua hanyalah perempuan yang tidak punya kemampuan bela diri baik dari serangan binatang buas ataupun dari serangan orang-orang jahat. Menyadari kelemahan yang mereka miliki, mereka sengaja berangkat pada malam hari karena menurut pikiran mereka, malam harilah waktu yang tepat untuk menghindari serangan manusia-manusia jahat. Namun, bagaimana dengan binatang buas? Kekhawatiran mereka terhadap aral dan rintangan yang mungkin dihadapi di dalam perjalanan ternyata tidak sanggup mengalahkan keinginan mereka untuk bertemu Lalu Dia dan Puntuk."

("One day, Lala Jinis and her ladies-in-waiting devised a rather crazy plan. They planned to follow Lalu Dia to the Alas Kingdom. In truth, they were terrified because they were merely women with no self-defense skills against attacks from either wild beasts or evil men. Realizing their vulnerabilities, they deliberately set off at night, reasoning that night was the optimal time to avoid attacks from wicked humans. But what about the wild animals? Their anxieties regarding the obstacles and hurdles they might face during the journey were ultimately unable to overcome their intense desire to meet Lalu Dia and Puntuk.")

Narratological Function: Lala Jinis's journey through the night across forests and underbrush serves as a test of her courage and the sincerity of her love. This wild landscape becomes an obstacle that must be conquered.

Ecological Meaning: The narrative's portrayal of this journey implies an ecological ethic. When Lala Jinis (with pure intentions) traverses the forest, she manages to arrive safely. Similarly, when Lalu Dia embarks on a journey for a noble cause (paying off debts and uniting a family), the journey is depicted as smooth. The landscape here seems to respond to the noble intentions of the characters. This reflects the wisdom that nature will 'befriend' those who possess good intentions and respect it.

This concept aligns with the thought that forests and wild landscapes can serve as spaces for shaping ecological ethics, where humans learn to live in harmony with the "will" and other life forms in nature. The forest is not solely a physical backdrop but also a moral actor that tests and guides humans toward ecological wisdom, as reflected in studies on the ethics of living together with nature and the importance of understanding landscapes as part of an ethical life [27]. This representation affirms that the human relationship with the wilderness in literature can serve as a reflection of profound ethical and spiritual values.

4 Conclusions

The ecocritical analysis of the folktale "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis" aligns with research findings on other Sumbawa and Nusantara folktales, which demonstrate that these narratives indeed serve as repositories of local ecological wisdom. Natural representations such as rivers, animals, and forests in folktales function not merely as settings but also as active narrative elements that shape plots, characters, and values, while instilling a perspective where humans are positioned as part of the web of life, rather than separate entities [28], [29].

Research on the values of local wisdom in Sumbawa folktales affirms the presence of environmental care, responsibility, and harmony with nature, which are reflected in human interactions with natural elements within the stories [28], [29]. Furthermore, local policy approaches in Sumbawa also highlight the importance of local wisdom in the sustainable management of natural resources, reinforcing the position of folktales as mediums for the transmission of ecological and spiritual values [29]. Thus, narratives like "Lalu Dia Lala Jinis" not only enrich the literary repertoire but also play a crucial role in building the ecological awareness and environmental ethics of the Sumbawa community.

The wisdom that can be gleaned—such as the importance of rivers to community life, the reciprocal relationship between humans and animals, and the ecological ethics of interacting with the wilderness—is highly relevant for revitalization in modern life. This study affirms that oral literature can serve as a powerful source of inspiration for environmental education and character building rooted in local culture.

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