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Ecological crisis and extractive capitalism in Sangihe: A Garrardian reading of *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut*

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ABSTRACT

Ecological crisis has become a prominent theme in contemporary Indonesian literature, particularly in narratives portraying the environmental consequences of extractive industries. This study examines how ecological crisis is represented in Dian Purnomo's *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut (2nd ed.*), set in the mining-affected Sangihe Islands. Using qualitative textual analysis, 89 purposively selected textual units from p. 3–271 were coded according to Greg Garrard's tropes of pollution and earth and interpreted ecocritically, with extractive capitalism serving as the interpretive horizon rather than a second analytical lens. Pollution appears as mercury-contaminated wells, discolored rivers, polluted seas, damaged burial grounds, and the gendered burden of water insecurity, all normalized as conditions of mining. The earth is constructed as a living, maternal, ancestral, and ethically agentive entity whose wounding registers the disruption of ecological dwelling. Pairing the two tropes reveals what single-trope or socio-political readings cannot: that material contamination and relational loss are mutually constitutive, and that extractive capitalism is critiqued as a system dissolving the reciprocal conditions of inhabitation. The study extends Garrard's framework to contemporary Indonesian fiction and suggests the analytical value of pairing materialist and relational tropes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating ecological crisis has become one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly in the Global South, where environmental degradation is closely intertwined with economic development based on intensive natural resource extraction. Rather than emerging solely from natural processes, ecological crises are increasingly

understood as socio-political and economic phenomena shaped by the expansion of extractive capitalism (dell'Agnese, 2021; Gudynas, 2020; Svampa, 2019). Extractive capitalism refers to a mode of capitalist accumulation that relies on the large-scale extraction of natural resources while externalizing ecological and social costs to local communities (Putri & Harahap, 2025). Within this system, land, forests, rivers, and minerals are transformed into economic commodities, often resulting in pollution, ecosystem degradation, and the displacement of vulnerable populations (Nixon, 2011; Saptawartono et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2023). Consequently, ecological degradation cannot be understood merely as environmental damage but must also be interpreted as a structural consequence of political-economic processes that privilege capital accumulation over ecological sustainability and social justice.

From an ecocritical perspective, extractive capitalism is significant because it reshapes the relationship between humans and the non-human world (Leopold, 2020; Ojebode, 2023; Pal, 2023; Ray, 2013). Ecocriticism examines how literary texts represent, negotiate, and critique environmental issues while revealing the cultural and ideological assumptions that govern human interactions with nature (Banerjee, 2016; Buell, 2011; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). Rather than treating environmental degradation as a purely scientific or economic issue, ecocriticism understands ecological crisis as a cultural narrative embedded within systems of power, development, and environmental ethics (Akyol, 2020; Berbel, 2022; Tajane, 2024). Extractive capitalism is not merely a socio-economic background but an environmental discourse that legitimizes the commodification of nature while obscuring its ecological and social consequences. Literary texts therefore become important cultural sites for examining how extractive practices are represented, contested, and reimagined through narrative (Arisa & Rahmi, 2024; Nofrahadi, 2022).

Indonesia, as one of the world's most resource-rich archipelagic countries, illustrates the complex dynamics of extractive capitalism in the Global South. The expansion of mining, plantation industries, and other large-scale extractive projects has generated significant economic benefits while simultaneously accelerating environmental degradation and social inequality (Kadir et al., 2020). Across many regions, extractive activities have contributed to contaminated water sources, degraded land, biodiversity loss, and the disruption of local livelihoods, particularly among peripheral and Indigenous communities (Abdillah, 2025; Hidayat & Supriandi, 2024). These environmental transformations frequently intersect with broader issues of social conflict, gendered vulnerability, and unequal access to natural resources, suggesting that ecological degradation is inseparable from questions of power and environmental justice (Bruhn, 2020; Fathinah & Asyrafunnisa, 2024). These realities have increasingly influenced contemporary Indonesian literature, which represents ecological crisis not merely as physical disaster but as the outcome of unequal social, political, and economic relations (Abimubarok et al., 2024; Apriyani & Rosly, 2024; Busairi et al., 2021; Prabawati, 2023; Saputra et al., 2026).

One literary work that powerfully engages with these issues is *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut* by Dian Purnomo. Set within a mining-affected community in the Sangihe Islands, the novel portrays ecological degradation not as a sudden catastrophe but as an everyday condition experienced through polluted water, damaged landscapes, and the gradual erosion of communal life. By foregrounding the lived experiences of communities affected by mining, the novel provides an important literary representation of how ecological crisis becomes embedded within the logic of extractive capitalism.

Among contemporary ecocritical scholars, Greg Garrard (2004, 2012) proposes a widely adopted framework through recurring environmental tropes: pollution, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth. Two distinctions are important. First, dwelling is a Heideggerian concept describing an ecological mode of inhabitation grounded in mutual dependence rather than domination, whereas earth is the trope through which literature imagines the planet as a living, relational, and ethically significant entity. Dwelling describes the practice of inhabitation; earth describes the object of environmental imagination. This study treats dwelling as the ethical horizon against which the trope of earth is read. Second, this study employs pollution and earth specifically because they correspond most closely to the ecological consequences of extractive industries depicted in the novel: pollution enables examination of environmental contamination as a material manifestation of industrial exploitation, while earth highlights land as a lived, cultural, and ethical space whose transformation reflects changing human–environment relationships.

However, Garrard's framework is a taxonomy of environmental representation, whereas extractive capitalism is a political-economy concept drawn from Gudynas, Svampa, and others. The connection between them is not self-evident and requires a mediating framework. This study proposes Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence and environmental justice as that mediation. Slow violence describes environmental damage that is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive," with casualties "most likely not to be seen, not to be counted" as they unfold across years or decades (p. 2–3). This concept authorizes reading literary tropes of pollution, contaminated wells, discolored rivers not merely as descriptive imagery but as evidence of a political-economic logic that distributes ecological harm unequally. Environmental justice further specifies that pollution and land degradation affect the poor and ethnically marginalized disproportionately, linking literary representation to structural inequality (Ardhianti et al., 2026; Pal, 2023). Together, slow violence and environmental justice provide the conceptual bridge between Garrard's tropes and the critique of extractive capitalism.

Previous studies on *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut* have predominantly examined the novel from socio-political perspectives. Safitri et al. (2024) and Wahyudin et al. (2024) emphasize social resistance and community struggle, while Lutfiyah & Raharjo (2025) analyze women's roles through an ecofeminist perspective, arguing that the novel stages a

transformative ecofeminism in which women in the Sangihe Islands resist environmental exploitation and forge cooperation with men against extractive power. Emilia & Pamungkas (2025) discuss the construction of nationalism, whereas Salsabila (2024) investigates hegemonic power relations. The ecofeminist reading is particularly relevant here because the novel's own representation of pollution surfaces a gendered environmental burden: when wells become murky and smelly, women's domestic labor intensifies (Purnomo, 2023, p.80). Rather than treating this as incidental, the present study engages Lutfiyah & Raharjo's finding directly, asking how the ecocritical tropes of pollution and earth might supplement an ecofeminist reading by showing that gendered vulnerability is embedded within a broader ecological logic of extractive capitalism. Collectively, previous studies demonstrate that the novel has primarily been interpreted through issues of identity, resistance, gender, and political power, with ecological issues generally remaining a contextual background rather than the central analytical focus.

Despite these valuable contributions, three gaps remain. First, previous studies have not systematically examined pollution and earth as recurring narrative structures that organize the representation of ecological crisis throughout the novel. Second, the ecological dimensions of the novel have rarely been interpreted using Garrard's ecocritical framework, particularly the interconnected tropes of pollution and earth. Third, the relationship between literary representations of ecological degradation and the logic of extractive capitalism has not been explicitly theorized. Consequently, the novel's environmental discourse remains underexplored, especially regarding how ecological violence functions as a critique of extractive development.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How is ecological crisis represented through the tropes of pollution and earth in *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut*, and how do these representations articulate the logic of extractive capitalism? The study examines how Garrard's concepts of pollution, earth, and dwelling operate as analytical categories for interpreting the novel's representation of ecological degradation, with slow violence and environmental justice serving as the mediating framework between trope analysis and political-economic critique. Its novelty lies in systematically applying Garrard's framework, mediated by slow violence and environmental justice, to analyze the interconnected tropes of pollution and earth within contemporary Indonesian environmental fiction. While previous studies have primarily emphasized resistance, nationalism, gender politics, ecofeminism, and social struggle, this article suggests how ecological crisis functions as a literary representation of extractive capitalism through the symbolic construction of contaminated environments and damaged land, thereby contributing to Indonesian ecocritical scholarship, expanding Garrard's framework in Southeast Asian literary studies, and enriching discussions of environmental humanities concerning ecological degradation and resource extraction in the Global South.

II. METHOD

Research design and corpus

This study employed qualitative textual analysis within an ecocritical framework to examine representations of ecological crisis in *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut* by Dian Purnomo (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2023). The novel served as the primary data source, while books and scholarly publications on ecocriticism, Garrard's theory, and extractive capitalism served as secondary sources (Furidha, 2024). Because the object of analysis was a literary text, no empirical fieldwork or participant involvement was undertaken.

A textual unit was defined as a sentence or coherent clause containing at least one lexical or semantic marker of ecological crisis as operationalized below. During the second analytical reading, 147 textual units were identified as potentially relevant. Following condensation, 89 units were retained for final analysis; the remaining 58 were excluded because they duplicated thematic content already captured, described general landscape without ecological transformation, or addressed social conflict without an explicit environmental dimension. The 89 analyzed units are distributed across the novel from pg. 3 to pg. 271 and form the evidentiary basis for Section III. The roughly one dozen quotations in the Results section were selected from this larger corpus as the most representative instantiations of each trope.

Data collection and operational definitions

Data collection proceeded through three stages of close reading: an initial reading for narrative structure and environmental conflict; a repeated analytical reading to identify passages related to ecological crisis (yielding the 147-unit corpus); and a coding stage in which each unit was classified according to the tropes below. Each quotation was documented with its page number, original Indonesian text, English translation, and analytical notes.

The analytical framework was based on Garrard's (2004, 2012) ecocritical theory, specifically the tropes of pollution and earth. Pollution was operationalized as textual representations of environmental contamination caused by extractive activities. A unit was coded as pollution if it contained at least one of the following: (a) explicit reference to toxic substances (*merkuri, limbah, racun*); (b) sensory descriptions of degraded water or soil (*keruh, berbau, pekat, kotor*); (c) representation of ecosystem damage (dead fish, destroyed springs, contaminated land); or (d) normalization of pollution as an everyday condition and the surrounding narrative context attributed the condition to extractive or industrial activity. Earth was operationalized as representations of land as material, cultural, social, and ethical space. A unit was coded as earth if it contained at least one of the following: (a) maternal or kinship metaphors (*ibu bumi, menyusui, memberi makan*); (b) ancestral knowledge or prohibition concerning extraction (*moyang, leluhur, dikutuk*); (c) bodily or corporeal imagery applied to land (*dilubangi, dilukai, marah*); (d) expressions of reciprocity (*timbal balik, kebaikan hati bumi*); or (e) land as site of

memory, burial, or collective identity and land was represented as possessing value beyond economic productivity.

When a unit contained indicators from both categories, the primary coding was assigned based on the dominant trope in the immediate clause, and the secondary coding was recorded for interpretive consideration during the discussion.

Operationalizing the logic of extractive capitalism

Because the research question foregrounds "the logic of extractive capitalism," this concept was also operationalized so that political-economy claims rest on method rather than assertion. Drawing on extractive capitalism literature (dell'Agnese, 2021; Gudynas, 2020; Svampa, 2019), three textual indicators were established. First, externalization of ecological costs: environmental harm imposed on local communities while economic benefits accrue to external actors, indicated by (a) pollution or land degradation affecting residents' water, food, or health; (b) absence of remediation or compensation; and (c) attribution of harm to corporate or state actors. Second, commodification of land and resources: land, water, or minerals treated as economic commodities separable from their ecological and cultural functions, indicated by (a) language of ownership, sale, or extraction (*menambang, menggali, menguasai*); (b) framing of land in monetary or developmental terms; and (c) displacement of prior ecological or cultural meanings. Third, uneven distribution of harm: negative consequences borne disproportionately by marginalized groups, indicated by (a) explicit contrast between corporate benefit and community suffering; (b) gendered or ethnic dimensions of environmental burden; and (c) references to legal or political powerlessness of affected communities. A unit was coded as articulating the logic of extractive capitalism if it contained at least one indicator from at least two of the three categories.

Coding procedure and inter-coder adjudication

Each quotation was coded according to its dominant trope and, where relevant, according to the extractive-capitalism indicators. Ten percent of the final corpus (nine units) was randomly selected and dual-coded independently by a second reader with training in literary analysis, working from the same operational definitions without access to the first coder's decisions (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2002). Inter-coder agreement was $\alpha = 0.83$ for the two-trope classification and $\alpha = 0.79$ for the extractive-capitalism indicators. Disagreements in two units with overlapping pollution–earth indicators were adjudicated through a three-step procedure: (1) independent re-examination of the unit in full narrative context; (2) discussion of whether primary emphasis lay in material contamination or relational significance of land; and (3) where disagreement persisted, assignment of the primary coding supported by surrounding paragraphs, with the competing coding recorded as a secondary interpretation for the discussion.

Translation and dialectal features

The novel uses standard Indonesian for narration and Manado Malay and Sangir for dialogue (Adelaar & Himmelmann, 2004), including pronouns *torang* ("we/us") and *ngana* ("you") that mark Sangihe cultural identity and distinguish the community from the mining company. All English translations were produced by the present authors through a three-step procedure: lexical-fidelity rendering, checking against Indonesian–English dictionaries and existing scholarly translations, and review by a native Manado Malay speaker. Original terms with analytical significance (*dilubangi, dilukai, ibu bumi*) are retained in parentheses, acknowledging that translation is itself interpretive (Cronin, 2017).

Data analysis and treatment of disconfirming evidence

Data analysis followed an iterative process adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña: data condensation, thematic categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). During condensation, the 147 preliminary units were reduced to 89 by excluding those that did not directly represent ecological crisis or extractive capitalism as operationalized above. The remaining units were organized thematically according to pollution, earth, and the three extractive-capitalism indicators before being interpreted through Garrard's perspective.

To address the possibility that purposive selection of passages instantiating the two tropes might produce a circular argument, two safeguards were implemented. First, during the second reading, all textual units containing lexical markers of ecological crisis were recorded (not only those conforming to pollution or earth) producing the 147-unit corpus that includes non-conforming passages (e.g., generic descriptions of mining infrastructure or economic development). Second, during interpretation, the analysts actively searched for disconfirming passages. Three were identified: one representing mining as employment and modernization, one attributing environmental damage to natural disaster rather than industrial causation, and one employing apocalyptic imagery not assimilable to either trope. These passages are discussed in Section III where relevant, demonstrating that the tropes function as dominant but not exhaustive interpretive structures. Interpretive validity was further maintained through repeated close reading, continuous comparison between textual evidence and theoretical concepts, theoretical triangulation, and peer discussion (Novela et al., 2025).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pollution as material trace of extraction

In Garrard's (2004, 2012) framework, pollution is not merely physical contamination but a cultural and ideological trope that reveals the environmental consequences of industrial modernity and exposes the unequal distribution of ecological risks generated by capitalist development. It embodies the disruption of ecological relationships through economic systems that prioritize extraction over sustainability. This conceptualization provides an appropriate lens for interpreting *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut*, in which pollution repeatedly appears as a narrative pattern that exposes the ecological consequences

of mining. Throughout the novel, contamination is represented not as an isolated incident but as a recurring condition permeating freshwater systems, rivers, coastal ecosystems, agricultural land, and domestic life. These recurring representations suggest that ecological crisis is produced systematically through extractive practices rather than accidental mismanagement.

This literary representation acquires particular force when read alongside the documented realities of extractive mining in the Sangihe Islands. A 2025 study by Politeknik Negeri Nusa Utara and Greenpeace Indonesia (2025) documented arsenic levels in surface seawater reaching 0,0228 mg/L (standard: 0,012 mg/L) and lead reaching 0,0126 mg/L (standard: 0,008 mg/L). Mercury was detected in *ikan layang* (scad), a primary protein source, with risk analysis indicating daily exposure for toddlers could exceed safe limits up to four times. Land conversion for gold mining increased 45,53% between 2015 and 2021, causing erosion that carried hazardous materials into the sea, resulting in mangrove destruction and coral bleaching. These documented conditions provide the material substrate for the novel's representation of pollution as a lived condition rather than fictional exaggeration.

The novel introduces this pattern through mercury contamination of freshwater wells:

> *"Sumur-sumur yang airnya tercemar merkuri, dengan apa orang akan menggantinya?"* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 38).
> ("What will people use to replace wells whose water is contaminated with mercury?")

Rather than describing contamination through scientific terminology, Purnomo presents it through the voices of local residents. This narrative choice shifts focus from the technical process of mining to the lived experience of degradation. The rhetorical question does not seek an answer; it emphasizes the impossibility of replacing an ecological resource that sustains everyday life. The interrogative form is significant: it constructs the reader as a witness implicitly asked to contemplate the irreplaceability of the wells. Wells are not represented as economic commodities substitutable through technology or compensation; they constitute the principal source of drinking water, sanitation, and agriculture, making them indispensable to ecological and social continuity.

From Garrard's perspective, pollution becomes significant because it exposes how industrial production separates economic gain from ecological responsibility. Modern extractive industries accumulate economic benefits while transferring environmental risks to communities closest to extraction sites (DeLoughrey, 2011). Mercury therefore functions as more than a toxic substance; within the narrative, it becomes the material residue of extractive capitalism, leaving visible traces of industrial intervention on ecological systems that previously sustained human life. The poisoned wells symbolize the disruption of what Garrard conceptualizes as ecological dwelling, a reciprocal relationship in which human survival depends upon the health of surrounding ecosystems. Once water becomes contaminated, that

reciprocity is fundamentally altered: the community no longer encounters water as life-giving but as a source of uncertainty, fear, and vulnerability.

The novel subsequently expands this representation to the marine environment:

> *"Laut yang tercemar, akankah akan tetap menjadi sumber hidup manusia yang tinggal di dekatnya?"* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 38).
> ("Will polluted seas remain a source of life for the people who live near them?")

The sea functions simultaneously as a source of food, livelihood, cultural identity, and collective memory for coastal communities. By questioning whether polluted seas can continue to sustain life, the narrative reframes environmental degradation as a threat to community continuity rather than merely to biological ecosystems. The quotation illustrates Garrard's argument that pollution should be understood relationally: contamination inevitably transforms social practices, economic activities, and cultural identities because ecological systems are inseparable from the communities inhabiting them. This relational understanding is corroborated by documented impacts on Sangihe's fishing communities, where fishermen face increased distances to fishing grounds, higher fuel costs, heightened safety risks, and declining incomes.

This representation also reveals the unequal distribution of environmental burdens characteristic of extractive capitalism. While mining generates economic value for industrial actors, environmental consequences are borne primarily by local communities whose survival depends directly on ecological resources (Ojebode, 2023). The novel therefore positions pollution as a manifestation of environmental injustice, illustrating how ecological costs are externalized while economic benefits remain unevenly distributed. The documented Sangihe case suggests this concretely: PT Tambang Mas Sangihe (TMS) obtained a permit to exploit gold and copper across 420 km² for 33 years, yet the company's environmental impact assessment indicated that ore processing facilities and waste ponds would be located in residential areas inhabited by approximately 90 families in Bowone village (Prasetyadi, 2021b). The externalization of ecological costs onto peripheral communities is thus not merely a narrative device but a documented political-economic reality that the novel transposes into literary form.

Environmental degradation becomes even more tangible through recurring visual imagery of polluted rivers:

> *"Sungai mereka lebih pekat dari susu cokelat, begitu pula muaranya."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 41).
> ("Their rivers are thicker than chocolate milk, as are their estuaries.")

The comparison between polluted rivers and "chocolate milk" creates a striking paradox. The metaphor employs familiar domestic imagery that appears ordinary and even comforting, yet this familiarity conceals toxic reality. The simile's domestic register *susu cokelat* evokes childhood, nourishment, familiarity produces unsettling cognitive dissonance: the very

substance that should signify sustenance has become a vehicle for toxicity. Rather than describing mercury through technical language, the novel represents pollution through sensory perception, allowing readers to visualize degradation as part of everyday experience. This narrative strategy corresponds to Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, in which environmental destruction develops gradually, accumulates over time, and often escapes immediate public attention.

Read through Garrard's concept of pollution, the altered color of the river signifies more than physical contamination: it illustrates the normalization of environmental degradation within daily life. Pollution is no longer an exceptional disaster but an ordinary feature of the landscape. The repeated descriptions of contaminated water construct a broader narrative pattern in which ecological destruction becomes socially normalized despite its irreversible consequences.

Importantly, the consequences of pollution extend into spaces associated with cultural continuity and communal identity:

> *"Torang nimau kalau mati nanti, torang dikubur di tanah rusak."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 68).
> ("We don't want to be buried in damaged land when we die.")

The Manado Malay pronoun *torang* ("we/us") functions as an in-group marker that situates the speaker within a specifically Sangihe community and distinguishes that community from outsiders, including the mining company and its representatives. The use of dialect is therefore not ornamental; it indexes the cultural specificity of the ecological ethic being articulated. This statement expands the meaning of pollution beyond environmental degradation by connecting ecological damage to burial practices. Within many local cosmologies, burial grounds symbolize continuity between generations, ancestral memory, and the enduring relationship between humans and the land. The fear of being buried in damaged soil expresses anxiety that extractive activities have disrupted places carrying profound cultural and spiritual significance. Rather than claiming that the novel depicts an "epistemic rupture," it is more accurate to argue that environmental degradation erodes the ecological conditions through which cultural relationships with the land are sustained. Pollution affects not only living ecosystems but also spaces associated with memory, ancestry, and communal belonging.

The novel further suggests that environmental pollution generates unequal social consequences by increasing women's domestic responsibilities:

> *"Ketika sumur-sumur mereka mulai keruh dan berbau, beban para perempuan menjadi semakin berat."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 80).
> ("When their wells became murky and smelly, the burden on women became even heavier.")

Here, pollution is represented not only as ecological deterioration but also as a gendered experience. Contamination of household water sources compels women to invest additional

time and labor in securing clean water, maintaining sanitation, and caring for family members. Environmental degradation therefore reshapes everyday social relations by disproportionately affecting those responsible for domestic reproduction. This representation supports ecocritical discussions of environmental justice, which argue that ecological crises rarely affect communities equally but instead reinforce existing social inequalities (Vakoch, 2018).

This gendered dimension is central rather than incidental to the novel's critique. The protagonist, Shalom Mawira, is a woman who returns to her ancestral land and becomes a leader in community resistance against the mining company. Lutfiyah & Raharjo (2025) have argued that the novel stages a transformative ecofeminism in which Sangihe women resist environmental exploitation and forge cooperation with men against extractive power. The present analysis builds on this reading by suggesting that the novel's gendered representation of pollution is structurally connected to its critique of extractive capitalism: women's increased domestic burden is not merely a side effect of contamination but a manifestation of how extractive economies redistribute ecological harm along existing axes of social inequality. The documented Sangihe case supports this reading. In Bowone village, 53 housewives collectively filed a lawsuit against PT TMS after the company announced plans to purchase land and establish ore processing facilities in their village (SIEJ, 2021). The novel's fictional representation of women's environmental leadership thus corresponds to a documented historical instance of women-led resistance to extractive capital. This convergence between literary representation and documented social reality strengthens the claim that the novel engages with, rather than merely invents, the gendered dimensions of extractive capitalism.

Taken together, these recurring representations suggest that pollution functions as a coherent narrative structure throughout the novel. Mercury-contaminated wells, polluted seas, altered rivers, damaged burial grounds, and increased domestic burdens are not isolated episodes but interconnected manifestations of ecological degradation produced by extractive mining. Read through Garrard's framework, these textual patterns reveal pollution as the material trace of extractive capitalism: a visible expression of how industrial development transforms ecological systems while transferring environmental costs to peripheral communities. Rather than portraying ecological crisis as a sudden disaster, the novel consistently represents it as a structural condition generated through the continuous logic of resource extraction. Pollution functions not merely as the setting of the narrative but as the principal mechanism through which the novel critiques the ecological consequences of extractive capitalism.

Earth as relational and ancestral space

Unlike pollution, which foregrounds material consequences, the trope of earth emphasizes ethical, cultural, and existential relationships connecting humans with land. Garrard (2004, 2012) argues that earth should not be understood merely as physical resource or geographical territory but as the ecological foundation of dwelling, where human existence is sustained

through reciprocal relationships with the more-than-human world. It is important to distinguish dwelling from earth as analytical categories. Dwelling is a Heideggerian concept describing an ecological mode of inhabitation grounded in mutual dependence rather than domination. Earth is the trope through which literature imagines the planet as a living, relational, and ethically significant entity. Dwelling describes the practice of inhabitation; earth describes the object of environmental imagination. This study treats dwelling as the ethical horizon against which the trope of earth is read.

The trope of earth challenges anthropocentric assumptions that reduce nature to economic capital and foregrounds the interdependence between ecological integrity, cultural identity, and communal survival. Read through this perspective, the novel consistently represents earth as a living and relational entity whose degradation signifies not only environmental loss but also the disruption of social, cultural, and ethical relationships. Across the novel, land functions simultaneously as a source of livelihood, ancestral inheritance, cultural memory, spiritual belonging, and ecological responsibility. These recurring representations construct earth as the central site through which the novel critiques the logic of extractive capitalism.

This relational understanding is articulated most explicitly through the metaphor of Mother Earth:

> *"Ibu bumi... Buat torang, tanah adalah ibu. Ibu yang menyusui torang, memberi torang makan, dan tempat torang kembali nanti."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 27).
> ("Mother Earth... For us, the land is our mother. She nurses us, feeds us, and is the place we will return to later.")

Rather than portraying land as private property or exploitable economic asset, the novel represents earth as a maternal presence that nurtures, sustains, and ultimately receives human life. The metaphor of motherhood is significant because it shifts the relationship between humans and land from ownership to reciprocity. A mother is not valued according to economic productivity but through care, nourishment, and relational attachment. The repeated use of *torang* reinforces the communal and culturally specific nature of this ecological understanding: the relationship to land is articulated not as individual possession but as collective inheritance.

This representation closely reflects Garrard's concept of dwelling. The expression "*memberi torang makan*" positions land as the material basis of everyday survival, while "*tempat torang kembali nanti*" extends this relationship beyond biological life by connecting earth to ancestry, burial, and collective memory. Land functions not only as productive space but also as a moral landscape in which birth, livelihood, and death are interconnected. The novel therefore rejects the modern developmental assumption that land exists primarily for economic exploitation and instead presents it as the foundation of ecological belonging.

The ethical relationship between humans and earth is further reinforced through the narrative's representation of ancestral knowledge concerning gold:

> *"Bukan kita pe moyang nyanda tahu... Dorang tahu di dalam ibu bumi... ada serbuk logam kuning yang menjadi lambang kemenangan, kekayaan, juga keserakahan dan kejahatan."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 36).
> ("It's not that our ancestors didn't know... They knew that inside Mother Earth... there was yellow metal powder that symbolized victory, wealth, as well as greed and evil.")

The quotation does not suggest that previous generations lacked knowledge of mineral resources. Instead, it suggests that they consciously chose not to extract them despite understanding their economic value. Gold is represented ambiguously: although it symbolizes wealth and prosperity, it simultaneously signifies greed and moral danger. This ambivalence distinguishes the worldview represented in the novel from the extractive logic of industrial capitalism. Within Garrard's framework, such restraint illustrates an ecological ethic based upon limits rather than unlimited accumulation. The refusal to mine reflects an understanding that not every natural resource should be transformed into economic capital simply because technological capacity permits extraction (Nofrahadi, 2022). The conflict represented in the novel therefore concerns differing conceptions of land: one understands earth as a living relational space, whereas the other interprets it primarily as a repository of extractable commodities. This conflict is not merely fictional. The documented Sangihe case suggests precisely this collision of worldviews: PT TMS offered to purchase land at Rp 50 million per hectare, yet residents of Bowone village reported they had never been consulted about the mining project (Prasetyadi, 2021a).

The collision between these contrasting understandings becomes increasingly visible through repeated descriptions of mining activities:

> *"Sangihe kita... akan habis dilubangi pa mereka perusahaan tambang." (Purnomo, 2023, p. 77).*
> ("Our Sangihe... will be completely destroyed by the mining companies.")

> *"Mau menggali sampai setengah mati pun, yang mereka lukai adalah tanah mereka sendiri." (Purnomo, 2023, p. 175).*
> ("Even if they dig until they drop dead, the only thing they are damaging is their own land.")

The verbs *dilubangi* ("pierced") and *dilukai* ("wounded") transform land into a corporeal presence capable of suffering injury. The choice of *dilukai* is particularly significant: it is the verb typically used for injury to a person or animal, not for damage to an object. By applying it to land, the novel grammatically constructs earth as a subject capable of being harmed, thereby challenging the objectifying logic of extractive capitalism. Such imagery fundamentally challenges developmental narratives that portray extraction as inevitable economic progress. Instead, the repeated association between mining and bodily injury emphasizes that ecological transformation is experienced as loss rather than advancement. This metaphorical pattern also reinforces Garrard's argument that environmental degradation should be understood through the disruption of ecological dwelling. Once land is represented as wounded, ecological damage is no longer confined to physical alteration of landscapes; it simultaneously affects the relationships, memories, and forms of livelihood rooted in those

landscapes. Mining changes not only geographical space but also the cultural meanings attached to it.

The emotional consequences of this transformation become explicit in the following passage:

> *"Tanah yang tenang... surga yang diturunkan ke bumi tiba-tiba direnggut begitu saja..."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 229).
> ("The peaceful land... a paradise on earth suddenly snatched away...")

The description of Sangihe as "paradise on earth" does not simply idealize nature. Rather, it expresses the community's affective attachment to place. The sudden loss of this "paradise" signifies the erosion of environmental security, cultural familiarity, and everyday belonging. Garrard describes ecological crises as disruptions of dwelling because they undermine the conditions through which people inhabit and identify with particular places (Garrard, 2004; Johns-Putra, 2016). The novel similarly suggests that environmental degradation transforms landscapes into unfamiliar spaces where previous relationships with the land become increasingly difficult to sustain.

The agency of earth is further emphasized through personification:

> *"Tanah tambang telah dikutuk leluhur. Bumi marah dan menolak mereka."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 243).
> ("The mining land has been cursed by the ancestors. The earth is angry and rejects them.")

Rather than treating this as mythical superstition, the novel uses personification to express an environmental ethic in which nature possesses moral significance. The image of an "angry earth" communicates that ecological degradation has ethical consequences extending beyond material destruction. By attributing agency to earth, the narrative rejects the assumption that land is a passive object awaiting human exploitation (Pal, 2023). Instead, earth becomes an active participant in the moral universe of the community, reinforcing a worldview based upon reciprocity and responsibility rather than domination.

This ecological interdependence is articulated most comprehensively in the novel's depiction of cascading environmental degradation:

> *"Hari ini tanah kita diserang, mata air kita akan dirusak, sungai kita dikotori, laut kita dijadikan tempat buang limbah." (Purnomo, 2023, p. 183).*
> ("Today our land is under attack, our springs will be destroyed, our rivers polluted, our seas turned into dumping grounds.")

> *"Bukan cuma kita yang mati, tapi seluruh Sangihe akan hilang." (Purnomo, 2023, p. 185).*
> ("It is not only us who will die, but the entire Sangihe Islands will disappear.")

The sequence illustrates that ecological systems cannot be separated into isolated components. Damage to land inevitably affects freshwater systems, rivers, and marine ecosystems because these elements exist within an interconnected network. The novel therefore represents ecological crisis as cumulative rather than fragmented. Environmental degradation spreads across multiple domains while simultaneously threatening community identity and local livelihoods (Leopold, 2020). The rhetorical structure of the passage mirrors the accumulative logic of slow violence, in which discrete injuries coalesce into systemic collapse.

Despite these representations of ecological loss, the novel concludes this narrative trajectory by emphasizing reciprocity rather than despair:

> *"Mereka yang hidup mengandalkan kebaikan hati bumi... Harus ada timbal balik..."* (Purnomo, 2023, p. 224).
> ("Those who live relying on the kindness of the earth... There must be reciprocity...")

Reciprocity functions as the ethical principle underlying the novel's representation of earth. Human survival depends upon the generosity of ecological systems, yet this generosity requires reciprocal care and responsibility. In Garrard's conception of dwelling, sustainable inhabitation is possible only when humans recognize their dependence upon the environment they occupy rather than seeking unlimited control over them. The novel therefore proposes an alternative ecological ethic grounded in mutual care, environmental restraint, and respect for ecological limits.

Taken together, these textual patterns suggest that the trope of earth operates as a coherent narrative structure throughout the novel. Maternal metaphors, ancestral knowledge, bodily imagery, environmental personification, and recurring calls for reciprocity collectively construct earth as a living relational entity rather than an economic resource. Through Garrard's ecocritical perspective, these representations challenge extractive understandings of land by emphasizing ecological interdependence, cultural continuity, and ethical responsibility. Consequently, the novel positions earth as the principal site through which competing understandings of development, environment, and human existence are negotiated.

Synthesis: Ecological crisis as critique of extractive capitalism

The analyses of pollution and earth suggest that *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut* represents ecological crisis not as a series of isolated environmental problems but as a structural consequence of extractive capitalism. Rather than functioning independently, the two tropes operate as complementary narrative strategies. Pollution reveals the material consequences of mining through contaminated water, degraded landscapes, and unequal environmental burdens experienced by local communities. At the same time, earth foregrounds the cultural, ethical, and relational meanings of land as a source of livelihood, ancestral identity, and ecological belonging. Read together, these representations show that extractive activities simultaneously degrade ecosystems and transform the relationships through which communities inhabit, value, and depend upon their environment. Ecological crisis therefore emerges as a systemic condition in which environmental degradation, social vulnerability, and the erosion of human–environment relationships are mutually reinforcing. This systemic representation aligns with ecolinguistic analyses of Indonesian environmental discourse, which show that ecological ideology is constructed not through isolated statements but through recurring patterns of representation that naturalize or contest extractive logics (Ardhianti et al., 2026). The novel's paired tropes function similarly: pollution and earth do not merely describe environmental damage but construct an ecological ideology that positions extractive capitalism as a system dismantling the conditions of inhabitation.

This synthesis acquires additional analytical weight when the literary representation is placed alongside the documented Sangihe conflict. The novel's representation of pollution corresponds to measured heavy metal contamination and documented ecosystem damage, while its representation of earth corresponds to the ancestral and cultural values that have motivated community resistance to mining. The convergence is not coincidental. The novel draws on a real conflict in which a foreign-backed mining company obtained permits to exploit 420 km^2 of Sangihe Island for 33 years, in violation of Indonesian regulations prohibiting mining on small islands under 200,000 hectares. The documented failure to realize environmental justice and progressive law in Sangihe, as analyzed by Soemarmi et al. (2025) provides the political-economic context within which the novel's literary critique operates. The novel does not merely reflect this context; it translates the material and cultural dimensions of the conflict into narrative form, making visible the human and ecological costs that quantitative reports can only partially capture.

These findings support Garrard's (2004, 2012) argument that ecocritical tropes function not merely as descriptive environmental themes but as interpretive frameworks for understanding how literature constructs relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. In the novel, pollution is consistently represented as the material manifestation of extractive practices that transfer environmental risks to peripheral communities, while earth is portrayed as a living and relational entity whose ecological and cultural significance

challenges anthropocentric assumptions of development. Considered together, these tropes suggest that environmental degradation is inseparable from the cultural values and ethical relationships through which land is understood. In this respect, the novel reinforces Garrard's concept of ecological dwelling by suggesting that the destruction of ecosystems also undermines the social practices, collective memory, and reciprocal relationships that enable sustainable ways of inhabiting the environment. This convergence between ecological and social critique resonates with studies of power relations in contemporary Indonesian fiction, which demonstrate how novels expose the hegemonic structures that sustain unequal social arrangements (Apriyani & Rosly, 2024). Extractive capitalism, as represented in Purnomo's novel, operates through a similar logic: the commodification of land and the externalization of ecological costs are not merely economic processes but exercises of power that reshape social and ecological relationships.

The mediating role of Nixon's (2011) slow violence and environmental justice is particularly important here. Without these concepts, the connection between Garrard's tropes and extractive capitalism would remain implicit. Slow violence provides the conceptual bridge: it explains how the novel's representation of incremental contamination constitutes a literary form of political critique rather than mere environmental description. Environmental justice specifies the distributive dimension: the novel consistently represents ecological harm as falling disproportionately on communities that are politically and economically marginalized. Together, these concepts authorize reading the tropes of pollution and earth not only as aesthetic devices but as analytical categories through which literature registers, and critiques, the political economy of extraction. This analytical framework extends recent ecocritical scholarship on Indonesian fiction, which has demonstrated that literary representations of ecological violence operate through cumulative, often silent modes of harm rather than through discrete moments of catastrophe (Abimubarok et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2026). Where that scholarship foregrounds forest loss and environmental silence, the present study shows how the pairing of pollution and earth makes visible the simultaneity of material contamination and relational dissolution under extractive capitalism.

The present findings also extend previous studies on the novel, which have primarily examined themes of resistance (Wahyudin et al., 2024), gender politics (Lutfiyah & Raharjo, 2025), nationalism (Emilia & Pamungkas, 2025), and social struggle (Safitri et al., 2024; Salsabila, 2024). While these studies provide important insights into the novel's socio-political dimensions, environmental degradation is generally positioned as the context within which these conflicts occur. Building upon this scholarship, the present study suggests that ecological crisis constitutes the narrative's central organizing principle rather than merely its environmental background. Through Garrard's tropes of pollution and earth, the novel reveals that environmental degradation structures the representations of social conflict, gendered

vulnerability, and community resistance, thereby positioning extractive capitalism as the underlying force connecting ecological destruction with broader social transformations.

The gendered dimension deserves particular emphasis. The novel represents pollution as a gendered burden, while positioning a woman as the central agent of ecological resistance. Lutfiyah & Raharjo (2025) have demonstrated the ecofeminist dimensions of this representation; this study supplements their reading by showing that the gendered experience of pollution is structurally connected to the critique of extractive capitalism: the same economic logic that externalizes environmental costs onto the community also intensifies the gendered division of labor through which those costs are absorbed. This connection is not merely thematic but formal: the novel alternates between environmental description and passages focalized through Shalom's consciousness, constructing the reader's understanding of ecological crisis through a woman's perceptual and ethical engagement with her damaged environment. The documented Sangihe case corroborates this: the lawsuit against PT TMS was filed by 53 housewives, making women the primary agents of legal resistance to extractive capital. The novel thus represents, rather than invents, the gendered agency that environmental justice scholarship has increasingly recognized as central to resource conflicts. This gendered agency can be understood as a form of counter-hegemonic practice in which women's environmental leadership challenges the hegemonic logic of resource extraction (Apriyani & Rosly, 2024).

These findings contribute to Indonesian ecocritical scholarship in two respects. First, they suggest that Garrard's tropes of pollution and earth provide a productive framework for examining contemporary Indonesian environmental fiction, particularly narratives addressing mining. Second, they show that the novel constructs ecological crisis not only through environmental damage but through the interaction between material pollution and relational understandings of earth. By integrating ecocritical analysis with extractive capitalism and grounding the interpretation in the documented Sangihe conflict, this study extends existing scholarship on Indonesian environmental literature and highlights contemporary fiction's capacity to interrogate the ecological and social consequences of resource extraction in the Global South.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that *Perempuan yang Menunggu di Lorong Menuju Laut* represents ecological crisis as a structural consequence of extractive capitalism rather than as an isolated environmental problem. Read through Greg Garrard's tropes of pollution and earth, the novel represents environmental degradation as both a material reality and a transformation of human relationships with the natural world: pollution registers the ecological consequences of mining through contaminated water, damaged landscapes, and environmental injustice, while earth constructs land as a relational space embodying cultural memory, livelihood, and ethical responsibility.

The distinctive contribution of this study lies in what the pairing of the two tropes makes visible. A single-trope ecocritical reading would document either material contamination (pollution) or cultural-relational loss (earth) as discrete findings. Prior socio-political readings of the novel treat ecological degradation as the context within which social conflict unfolds. Reading pollution and earth together suggests something neither approach can reach on its own: that material contamination and relational loss are mutually constitutive under extractive capitalism. The same logic that externalizes mercury into wells and rivers also dissolves the reciprocal conditions of dwelling, the ancestral, maternal, and ethical relationships through which the community in the novel inhabits its land. Pollution is not merely the cause of cultural loss, and cultural loss is not merely a consequence of pollution; each is a dimension of the same political-economic process. This pairing also illuminates the gendered dimension of extractive capitalism: the same logic that externalizes ecological costs onto the community intensifies the domestic labor through which women absorb those costs, while simultaneously positioning women as agents of resistance. Extractive capitalism, on this reading, is critiqued not simply as a producer of environmental damage but as a system that dismantles the very conditions of inhabitation. This is the theoretical payoff that Garrard's tropes, mediated by Nixon's slow violence and environmental justice, enable literary analysis to deliver: a way of reading ecological crisis in fiction as simultaneously material and relational, and therefore as a critique of political economy rather than a theme.

This study is limited in several respects. The analysis focuses on a single novel, is confined to two of Garrard's tropes, and does not compare the novel with other Indonesian works addressing mining or extractive industries, thereby limiting broader comparative interpretation. Future studies may address these limitations by conducting comparative analyses across regions, authors, or extractive contexts, and by combining Garrard's framework with approaches such as political ecology, postcolonial ecocriticism, or environmental justice to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian literature responds to ecological crisis and extractive development.

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