

Who owns the forest? extractive capitalism, indigenous sovereignty, and narrative resistance in Indonesian environmental literature

Dani Setiaji

Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Apr 19, 2026

Revised May 18, 2026

Accepted Jun 30, 2026

Keywords:

customary forests;
eco-postcolonialism;
extractive capitalism;
indigenous sovereignty;
narrative resistance.

ABSTRACT

Background: Forest conflicts in Indonesia reveal that ownership is not only a legal question but also a struggle over memory, livelihood, ecological authority, and narrative legitimacy. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how Indonesian environmental literature represents extractive capitalism, Indigenous sovereignty, and narrative resistance in forest-centered narratives. **Method:** Using qualitative literary analysis, this study analyzes seven publicly verifiable Indonesian literary texts through political-ecological coding, eco-postcolonial close reading, Indigenous sovereignty analysis, and a narrative-resistance grid. **Results:** Findings show that forest ownership is represented as a contested field where concessionary access, timber labour, ecological depletion, and customary restraint produce competing claims over land and authority. Findings also indicate that Indigenous sovereignty appears through relational forms, including ritual memory, ecological knowledge, sacred trees, mythic agency, livelihood attachment, and more-than-human obligation. **Implication:** Findings further demonstrate that resistance operates through narrative form, especially testimony, labour witnessing, ecological warning, atmospheric symbolism, curse, mythic refusal, and sacred metaphor. **Novelty:** This study offers novelty by integrating extractive capitalism, Indigenous sovereignty, and narrative resistance into one eco-postcolonial framework for reading Indonesian environmental literature as a counter-archive of forest injustice.

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Corresponding Author:

Dani Setiaji

Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

Jl. Raya Telang, PO BOX 02, Kamal, Bangkalan, Jawa Timur, 69162, Indonesia

Email: danisetiaji160603@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's forest question is no longer confined to conservation policy; it has become a conflict over ownership, authority, memory, and narrative legitimacy. Global Forest Watch records that Indonesia had approximately 94 million hectares of natural forest in 2020 and lost about 300 thousand hectares in 2025, while BRWA reported 1,633 registered Indigenous territory maps covering 33.6 million hectares across 32 provinces by August 2025. These figures show that forest loss and Indigenous territorial recognition unfold simultaneously, producing a political contradiction: forests are legally, economically, and culturally claimed by different actors. After Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012 affirmed that customary forests are not state forests, forest ownership became an explicitly contested category rather than a purely administrative matter. For this reason, Indonesian environmental literature offers a critical archive for reading how extraction, sovereignty, and ecological memory are narrated beyond legal and policy language.

Recent scholarship has examined extractive capitalism, Indigenous environmental justice, and forest governance from political-ecological, anthropological, legal, and conservation perspectives. Scheidel et al. (2023) [1] show how extractive and industrial projects affect Indigenous lifeways, lands, and rights globally, while Dunlap, Verweijen, and Tornel (2024) [2] extend this discussion to green extractivism and its contradictory environmental claims. Dawson et al. (2021) [3] foreground Indigenous peoples and local communities as central to equitable conservation, and Youdelis et al. (2021) [4] connect decolonial conservation with Indigenous protected areas. In Indonesian contexts, Niko, Widianingsih, Sulaeman, and Fedryansyah (2024) [5] examine Indigenous women's forest relations, Ahmad, Mardiana, and Wahyuni (2025) [6] analyze struggle over forest-resource access in Pandumaan-Sipituhuta, and Kristin, Markus, and Tuasikal (2025) [7] discuss customary forest protection for Awyu communities. Yet literary studies have not sufficiently connected narrative form, forest ownership, extractive capitalism, and Indigenous sovereignty as one integrated analytical problem.

This study asks how Indonesian environmental literature represents forests as contested spaces where state authority, corporate extraction, Indigenous sovereignty, local livelihood, and more-than-human relations intersect. More specifically, this study examines three linked questions: how do literary texts construct claims over forest ownership and access; how is extractive capitalism narrated through dispossession, ecological violence, plantation expansion, market penetration, or conservation commodification; and how do narrative strategies articulate Indigenous sovereignty and resistance? These questions are addressed through eco-postcolonial criticism, political ecology, Indigenous studies, and narrative analysis. Indonesian literary works are not treated as transparent mirrors of empirical reality, but as symbolic, affective, and epistemic sites where conflicts over land and life are imaginatively reorganized. This methodological position allows this study to distinguish textual representation from social causality while still showing how literature participates in broader debates on forests, power, and justice.

This study advances the argument that Indonesian environmental literature does not simply depict forests as damaged landscapes; it reworks forests as contested archives of sovereignty, violence, and resistance. Extractive capitalism is expected to appear not only through mines, plantations, timber concessions, or market intrusion, but also through narrative structures that expose how land becomes property, forest becomes commodity, and Indigenous memory becomes politically unstable. At the same time, Indigenous sovereignty is likely to emerge through customary law, ancestral temporality, women's ecological labor, ritual knowledge, mythic presence, and more-than-human communication. This argument is informed by Chao's (2024) [8] attention to more-than-human communicative modalities, Anthias and Asher's (2024) [9] critique of colonial representation in Anthropocene discourse, and Efendi, Ahmadi, Indarti, and Kurniawati's (2025) [10] eco-postcolonial reading of Indonesian ecological narratives. By linking ownership, extraction, sovereignty, and literary form, this study positions narrative resistance as an analytical bridge between environmental humanities and Indigenous political ecology.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Extractive capitalism

Extractive capitalism refers to an economic and political formation in which land, forests, minerals, biodiversity, and even conservation values are reorganized as assets for accumulation. Recent studies define extraction not only as resource removal, but also as a regime of territorial control, labour discipline, environmental violence, and epistemic displacement. Scheidel et al. (2023) [1] and Nachet, Beckett, and MacNeil (2021) [11] emphasize its impact on Indigenous lands and lifeways, while Dunlap, Verweijen, and Tornel (2024) [2] extend this critique to "green" extractivism. However, Anthias and Asher (2024) [9] caution that extractivism must also be read through colonial representation, racial capitalism, and violent materialities.

Key indicators of extractive capitalism include concessionary land control, plantation expansion, timber extraction, mining, carbon-market environmentalism, biodiversity commodification, and livelihood displacement. In Indonesia, Ahmad, Mardiana, and Wahyuni (2025) [6] show how forest-resource access becomes contested in Pandumaan-Sipituhuta, while Toumbourou and Dressler (2023) [12] reveal how livelihood interventions may intensify exclusionary land claims in oil palm enclaves. Benabou (2021) [13] demonstrates that market environmentalism can transform forests into carbon assets, creating tensions with Indigenous sovereignty. These studies suggest that extraction operates through both material appropriation and discursive legitimation, making literature a relevant site for examining how forests become narratively converted into property, commodity, or sacrifice zone.

2.2. Indigenous sovereignty

Indigenous sovereignty refers to collective authority over land, law, memory, livelihood, and ecological relations, yet scholars differ in how they conceptualize its foundation. Legal studies often frame sovereignty through recognition, territorial status, and customary forest protection, as seen in Kristin,

Markus, and Tuasikal's (2025) [7] discussion of Awyu customary forests. Conservation-oriented scholarship stresses governance participation and equity, especially in Dawson et al. (2021) [3] and Youdelis et al. (2021) [4]. By contrast, Arjaliès and Banerjee (2024) [14], Simpson, Atleo, and Braun (2024) [16], and Winchell and Howe (2024) [15] approach sovereignty as relational, future-oriented, and disruptive of extractive emplacement. This distinction is crucial because sovereignty exceeds administrative recognition.

The indicators of Indigenous sovereignty therefore include customary law, ancestral territory, ritual authority, intergenerational memory, gendered forest labour, ecological restraint, and more-than-human kinship. Indonesian studies sharpen this framework: Niko, Widianingsih, Sulaeman, and Fedryansyah (2024) [5] foreground Indigenous women's forest relations among Dayak Benawan communities, while Kissiya and Biczó (2025) [17] emphasize local wisdom in environmental governance. Az-Zahra and Guntur (2025) [18] similarly position Indigenous knowledge as an economic strategy against market penetration. Chao (2024) [8] expands this vocabulary by reading hunger as more-than-human communication on West Papuan oil palm frontiers. Together, these works show that sovereignty is not merely territorial possession, but an ecological grammar of belonging, obligation, and refusal.

2.3. Narrative resistance

Narrative resistance describes how literary and cultural texts contest dominant regimes of power by reorganizing voice, memory, temporality, and ecological meaning. Unlike direct political resistance, narrative resistance works through form: allegory, testimony, myth, trauma memory, irony, silence, counter-history, and more-than-human narration. Recent decolonial literary studies are useful here. Karmakar (2024) [21] links subaltern environmentalism with decolonial practices, while Karmakar and Pal (2025) [19] read Indigenous ecology as a mode of hope in the Anthropocene. Noroña and Aguinda (2025) [20] connect Kichwa storytelling with environmental justice, showing that narrative can challenge settler extractive governmentality. These studies position storytelling as an epistemic practice, not decorative representation.

In Indonesian literary scholarship, narrative resistance is increasingly examined through eco-postcolonialism, ecological trauma, cultural memory, and political allegory. Efendi, Ahmadi, Indarti, and Kurniawati (2025) [10] read Indonesian literature through local voices, ecological narratives, and postcolonial struggle, while Efendi et al. (2025) [10] develop an ecosemiotic-cultural perspective on Indigenous ecological narratives. Hidayani, Alung, and Nasution (2024) [22] analyze horizontal conflict in "Dataran Melengen," and Mahendra (2025) [23] examines environmental trauma in Indonesian climate fiction. Political-literary studies by Refai (2026) [24], Kadamehang (2026) [25], Widyatnyana (2026) [26], and Yani (2026) [27] further show how Indonesian texts encode dissent, memory, and populist rhetoric. This study therefore positions Indonesian environmental literature as a narrative field where extractive capitalism, Indigenous sovereignty, and resistance converge.

3. METHOD

This study uses narrative segments from Indonesian environmental literature as its unit of analysis. Each unit consists of a scene, paragraph, dialogue, symbolic image, or narrative statement that represents forest ownership, extraction, Indigenous sovereignty, ecological memory, or resistance. Primary data include seven literary texts verified through public archives, journal articles, OPAC records, and language-agency publications. Secondary data consist of literary-critical studies that validate textual relevance, while contextual data provide legal, institutional, and territorial background. This corpus design enables this study to connect close reading with political-ecological coding without treating literary representation as direct empirical evidence.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive design combining eco-postcolonial criticism, political ecology, Indigenous studies, and narrative analysis. This design is appropriate because forest conflict in literature is not examined as measurable causality, but as a representational field where land, property, law, memory, and ecological relations are symbolically organized. Political ecology clarifies how extraction and ownership are structured by power, while eco-postcolonial criticism addresses colonial inheritance, developmentalism, and narrative marginalization. Indigenous studies further prevents this study from reducing sovereignty to formal recognition alone. Thus, this design treats literature as an archive of ecological imagination, not as substitute field data.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Number	Characteristics
PRI-LIT-001	Short story	<i>Dataran Melengen</i>	East Kalimantan	2003	1	Forest concession, trauma, cultural loss
PRI-LIT-002	Short story	<i>Banjirkap</i>	Mahakam, East Kalimantan	2015–2023	1	Timber labour, riverine forest economy
PRI-LIT-003	Short story	<i>Batun Kokoq</i>	Upstream Mahakam	2015	1	Forest depletion, medicinal plant loss
PRI-LIT-004	Novel	<i>Api Awan Asap</i>	Dayak Benuaq, East Kalimantan	1999	1	HPH/HTI, fire, customary ecology
PRI-LIT-005	Short story	<i>Roh Meratus</i>	Meratus, Kalimantan	2016	1	Forest curse, elder authority, extraction anxiety
PRI-LIT-006	Short story	<i>Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon</i>	Toraja, Sulawesi	2014	1	Sacred tree, body, death, kinship
PRI-LIT-007	Short story	<i>Orang Bunian</i>	Minangkabau ecological imaginary	2012	1	Forest myth, local ecological belief
SEC-001–003	Literary studies	Poetika, Belajar Bahasa	Kalimantan	2023–2024	3	Corpus validation and theoretical bridge
CTX-001–003	Context sources	BRWA, AMAN, MK 35 materials	Indonesia	2013–2025	3	Customary territory and legal context
THE-001–003	Theory sources	Scheidel et al.; Dunlap et al.; Anthias and Asher	Comparative/global	2023–2024	3	Extractivism, Indigenous rights, racial capitalism

Information sources were divided into primary literary texts, secondary literary scholarship, contextual documents, and theoretical works. Primary sources provided narrative materials for coding and close reading. Secondary studies were used only to verify textual relevance and support interpretive positioning, especially where public access to full literary texts was limited. Contextual sources such as BRWA, AMAN, and Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/PUU-X/2012 informed legal and territorial background on customary forests. Theoretical sources from Scheidel et al. (2023) [1], Dunlap, Verweijen, and Tornel (2024) [2], Anthias and Asher (2024) [9], Dawson et al. (2021) [3], and Youdelis et al. (2021) [4] framed extraction, sovereignty, and environmental justice.

Data collection followed a transparent corpus-building procedure. First, keywords related to forest, adat, extraction, ecological trauma, and Indonesian environmental literature were searched across public literary archives, OPAC records, journal databases, and institutional websites. Second, each candidate item was screened using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Third, metadata were stored in *corpus_metadata.csv*, textual notes in *corpus_text.csv*, and analytical codes in *corpus_coding.csv*. Fourth, duplicate mirrors, spelling variants, and repeated records were consolidated under one canonical document code. Fifth, visual/contextual sources were supplemented with fields for image description, visual actor, symbol, layout, timestamp, transcript, and screenshot reference.

Data analysis proceeded through three integrated stages. First, a political-ecology actor/ownership matrix identified how forests were represented as concession, commodity, livelihood, sacred space, or customary territory. Second, Indigenous sovereignty and relational ecology coding examined ancestral memory, ritual authority, gendered livelihood, ecological restraint, and more-than-human agency. Third, a narrative-resistance grid analyzed myth, testimony, trauma, counter-memory, silence, curse, and refusal as literary strategies. Coding was descriptive before interpretive claims were made, and each interpretation had to be traceable to a textual segment, metadata record, or contextual source.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Forest ownership and extractive capitalism in narrative space

Forest ownership emerges as a narrative struggle over authority, not merely as a legal or economic question. Across seven coded primary literary segments, forests are represented through concessionary access, timber labour, ecological depletion, extractive targeting, and non-commodity restraint. This distribution matters because it shows that Indonesian environmental literature does not isolate extraction from questions of livelihood, memory, and community authority. Rather, forest space is repeatedly narrated

as a contested field in which state, corporate, local, customary, and more-than-human claims intersect. This pattern is consistent with political-ecological scholarship that treats extractivism as a regime of territorial reorganization, not only as resource removal [1], [2]. Consequently, this study reads literary forests as sites where ownership becomes narratively unstable.

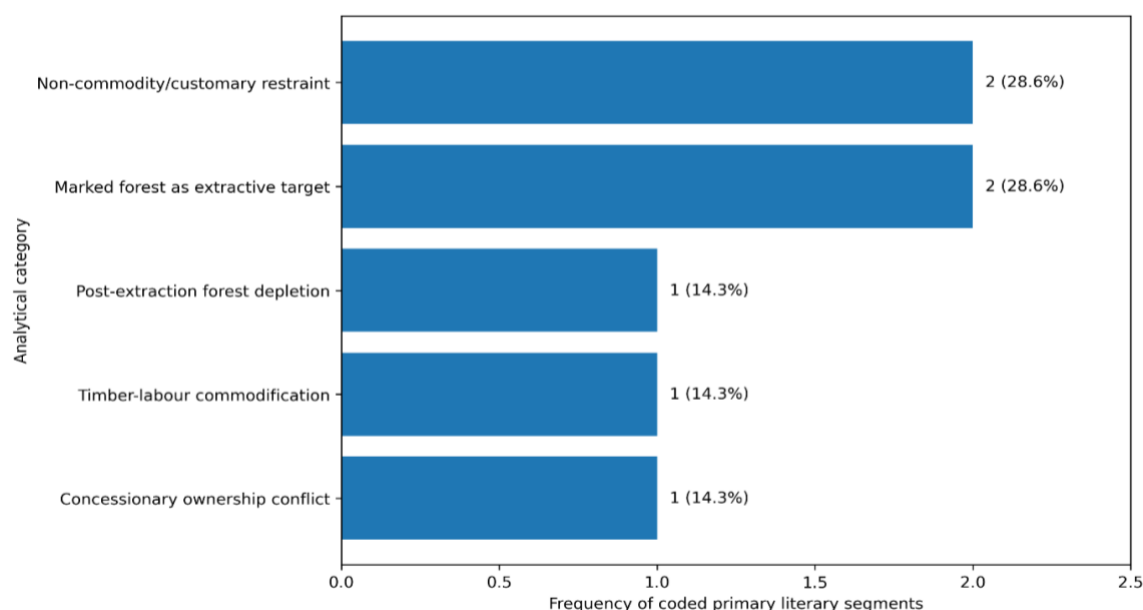


Figure 1. Forest ownership and extractive capitalism in primary literary segments

The dominant pattern appears in two clusters with equal frequency: marked forest as extractive target and non-commodity/customary restraint, each representing 28.6% of coded primary segments. This indicates that narrative conflict is not limited to scenes of completed destruction; it also appears in moments of anticipation, warning, marking, ritual boundary, and symbolic refusal. Three single-segment categories—concessionary ownership conflict, timber-labour commodification, and post-extraction forest depletion—each account for 14.3%. Objectively, this distribution suggests that forest extraction is narrated through a sequence: claims over access, incorporation of labour, ecological depletion, and counter-claims grounded in sacred or customary relation. Variation across Dataran Melengen, Banjirkep, Batun Kokoq, Api Awan Asap, Roh Meratus, Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon, and Orang Bunian demonstrates a broad but coherent representational field.

Theoretically, this pattern strengthens an eco-postcolonial reading of forest ownership as a struggle between commodifying and relational ontologies. Extractive capitalism appears not only through HPH, HTI, logging, fire, or timber labour, but through narrative procedures that turn forest into an administrable and convertible object. At the same time, sacred trees, taboo, myth, elder authority, and ecological memory interrupt that conversion by presenting forest as kinship, obligation, and ancestral continuity. This tension resonates with Anthias and Asher's (2024) [9] critique of colonial representation, Chao's (2024) [8] more-than-human ecological communication, and Dawson et al.'s (2021) argument on Indigenous and local communities in equitable conservation. This study therefore positions Indonesian environmental literature as a counter-archive where extractive property regimes are exposed, questioned, and symbolically displaced.

Table 2. Forest ownership and extractive capitalism in primary literary segments

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Actor/Ownership Claim	Extraction Mode	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Note	Data Code	Interpretation
Concessionary ownership conflict	State/corporate access versus local community claim	Forest access is framed as contested authority over land, livelihood, and memory	State/corporate concession versus local community access	Forest concession / HPH context	1	14.3%	Conflict, trauma, cultural loss, ecological pressure	Dataran Melengen is publicly verified as addressing ecological issues, horizontal conflict, poverty, cultural loss, terror, and trauma	SEG-001; PRI-LIT-001	Forest ownership is represented as a political dispute rather than neutral resource administration
Timber-labour commodification	Local labour absorbed into extractive economy	Forest value shifts from subsistence or local ecology to timber work and riverine extraction	Local labour incorporated into timber economy	Logging / timber transport	1	14.3%	Livelihood shift, river mobility, timber work	Banjirkep is publicly noted as depicting Parhan's shift from farming to forest timber work with other villagers	SEG-002; PRI-LIT-002	Extraction reorganizes community labour and turns forest dependency into market dependency
Post-extraction forest depletion	Ecological aftermath of extractive access	Forest loss appears through depleted plants, altered livelihoods, and damaged everyday ecology	Extractive access overriding local ecological dependence	Forest exploitation	1	14.3%	Loss of medicinal plants, local adaptation, ecological scarcity	Batun Kokoq is publicly verified as addressing forest exploitation and its effects on surrounding communities	SEG-003; PRI-LIT-003	Forest degradation is narrated through local ecological loss rather than abstract environmental decline
Marked forest as extractive target	Developmental extraction and anticipated logging	Forest is marked, planned, or targeted for conversion into extractive value	Corporate/state development versus Indigenous or elder/community authority	HPH/HTI, plantation, fire, logging anticipation	2	28.6%	Fire, tree marking, elder warning, extraction anxiety	Api Awan Asap and Roh Meratus foreground forest vulnerability under development, logging, and moral-ecological warning	SEG-004–SEG-005; PRI-LIT-004–005	Extractive capitalism appears before full destruction, through planning, marking, and anticipatory fear
Non-commodity/custodial restraint	Sacred tree and taboo-governed forest	Forest is positioned as kinship, ritual space, restraint, or ecological relation rather than commodity	Tree, taboo, and local belief challenge market ownership	Non-extractive contrast; hunting regulation; ecological restraint	2	28.6%	Sacred tree, body, death, kinship, mythic ecology	Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon and Orang Bunian represent forest relations through sacred trees, myth, taboo, and local ecological belief	SEG-006–SEG-007; PRI-LIT-006–007	Non-commodity forest relations operate as narrative counterpoints to extractive ownership

4.2. Indigenous sovereignty and relational ecology in forest narratives

Indigenous sovereignty appears in these texts as a layered relation among place, memory, livelihood, customary authority, and nonhuman agency. The seven coded primary segments do not reduce sovereignty to formal land title or state recognition; instead, they position forest authority within everyday dependence, ritual obligation, ecological knowledge, and mythic restraint. This matters because literary narratives often make visible forms of belonging that legal and administrative categories cannot fully contain. Dawson et al. (2021) [3] and Youdelis et al. (2021) [4] similarly argue that Indigenous and local communities must be understood through governance, justice, and intergenerational continuity, not only through conservation participation. Therefore, this study reads forest sovereignty as relational authority embedded in narrative worlds.

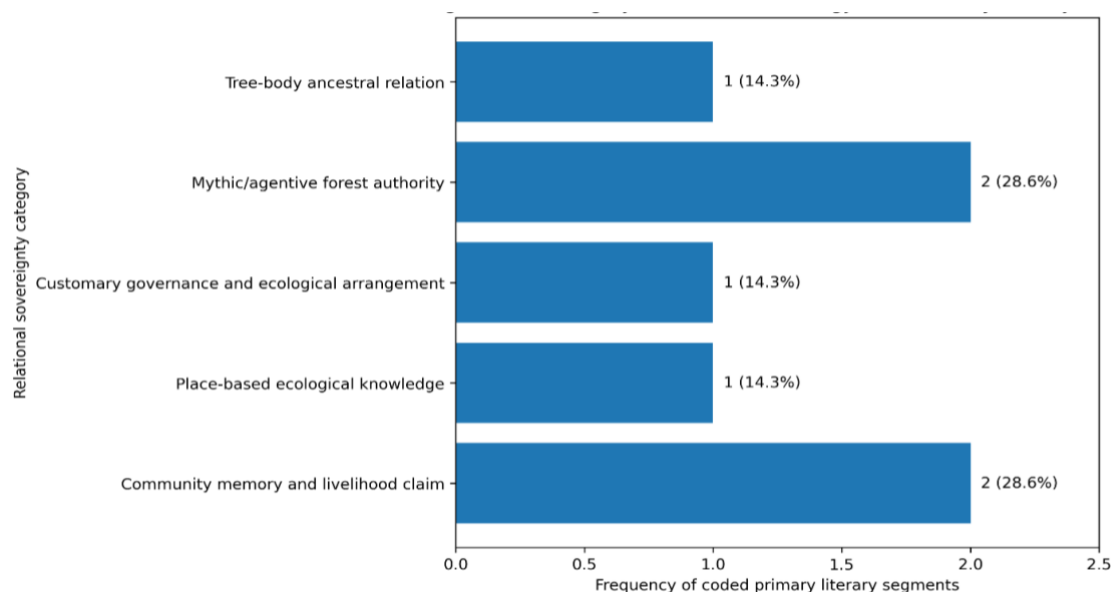


Figure 2. Indigenous sovereignty and relational ecology in primary literary segments

Two dominant patterns structure the corpus: community memory and livelihood claim, and mythic/agentive forest authority, each accounting for 28.6% of coded primary segments. The remaining categories—place-based ecological knowledge, customary governance, and tree-body ancestral relation—each account for 14.3%. Objectively, this distribution shows that forest sovereignty is not concentrated in one representational mode. It appears through disrupted livelihood in Dataran Melengen and Banjirkep, ecological knowledge in Batun Kokoq, Dayak Benuaq spatial order in Api Awan Asap, mythic forest warning in Roh Meratus and Orang Bunian, and ancestral tree-body relation in Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon. The corpus therefore presents sovereignty as a plural ecological grammar.

Theoretically, these patterns complicate property-based understandings of forest ownership. Arjaliès and Banerjee (2024) [14] argue that Indigenous perspectives on biodiversity unsettle capital-centered value, while Simpson, Atleo, and Braun (2024) [16] frame Indigenous forestry through future sovereignty rather than static possession. Chao's (2024) [8] attention to more-than-human communication further clarifies why spirits, trees, hunger, fire, and landscape signs should not be dismissed as ornamental motifs. In this corpus, myth, taboo, ritual, and ecological knowledge operate as narrative infrastructures of authority. This study therefore positions Indonesian environmental literature as a site where sovereignty is narrated through relational accountability: humans do not simply own forests; they are bound by forests, ancestors, nonhuman beings, and collective memory.

Table 3. Indigenous sovereignty and relational ecology in primary literary segments

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Sovereignty Marker	More-than-Human Marker	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Note	Data Code	Interpretation
Community memory and livelihood claim	Place attachment and livelihood disruption	Forest is narrated as lived territory rather than empty land	Community attachment, cultural loss, local livelihood	Forest as remembered place and livelihood space	2	28.6%	Trauma, loss, farming shift, timber dependence	Dataran Melengen and Banjirkap show how forest relations are reorganized through conflict, work, and local memory	SEG-001–SEG-002; PRI-LIT-001–002	Sovereignty begins from lived attachment before it becomes formal legal recognition
Place-based ecological knowledge	Medicinal and subsistence forest knowledge	Forest value appears through plant use, survival, and ecological dependence	Local ecological knowledge	Medicinal plants and forest ecology	1	14.3%	Plant scarcity, ecological change, local adaptation	Batun Kokoq links forest depletion with loss of practical ecological knowledge	SEG-003; PRI-LIT-003	Ecological knowledge functions as a claim to forest belonging and responsibility
Customary governance and ecological arrangement	Adat-based spatial order	Forest is governed through cultivated landscape, settlement, and customary ethics	Dayak Benuaq relational governance; lou; huma	Fire, smoke, cultivated landscape, forest boundary	1	14.3%	Customary settlement, cultivation, forest-fire relation	Api Awan Asap connects forest politics with Dayak Benuaq ecological order	SEG-004; PRI-LIT-004	Forest sovereignty is represented as relational governance rather than individual possession
Mythic/agentive forest authority	Spirit, curse, and ecological taboo	Forest is given authority through mythic presence and moral warning	Elder voice, forest curse, local belief	Forest spirit, unseen beings, hunting temporality	2	28.6%	Curse, myth, taboo, forest agency	Roh Meratus and Orang Bunian represent forest authority through mythic and agentive ecological forms	SEG-005; SEG-007; PRI-LIT-005; PRI-LIT-007	Myth functions as ecological law that restricts extractive access
Tree-body ancestral relation	Sacred tree and kinship ecology	Tree is represented as body, womb, grave, and ancestral medium	Toraja ritual relation and burial ecology	Tarra tree as maternal and ancestral medium	1	14.3%	Body, death, kinship, sacred vegetation	Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon presents tree relation as cultural and ancestral continuity	SEG-006; PRI-LIT-006	Sovereignty is articulated through embodied kinship between humans, trees, and ancestors

4.3. Narrative resistance and formal strategy in forest literature

Narrative resistance in these texts is built through form as much as through theme. Across seven coded primary segments, resistance appears through testimony, labour witnessing, ecological warning, atmospheric symbolism, mythic refusal, and sacred vegetal metaphor. Such strategies matter because environmental literature does not challenge extractive capitalism only by naming destruction; it reorganizes perception so that forest loss becomes visible as trauma, contaminated atmosphere, broken livelihood, ancestral disruption, or moral violation. This pattern aligns with Karmakar's (2024) [21] reading of subaltern environmentalism and Karmakar and Pal's (2025) [19] emphasis on Indigenous ecology as a decolonial mode of hope. This study therefore treats narrative form as a political-ecological device.

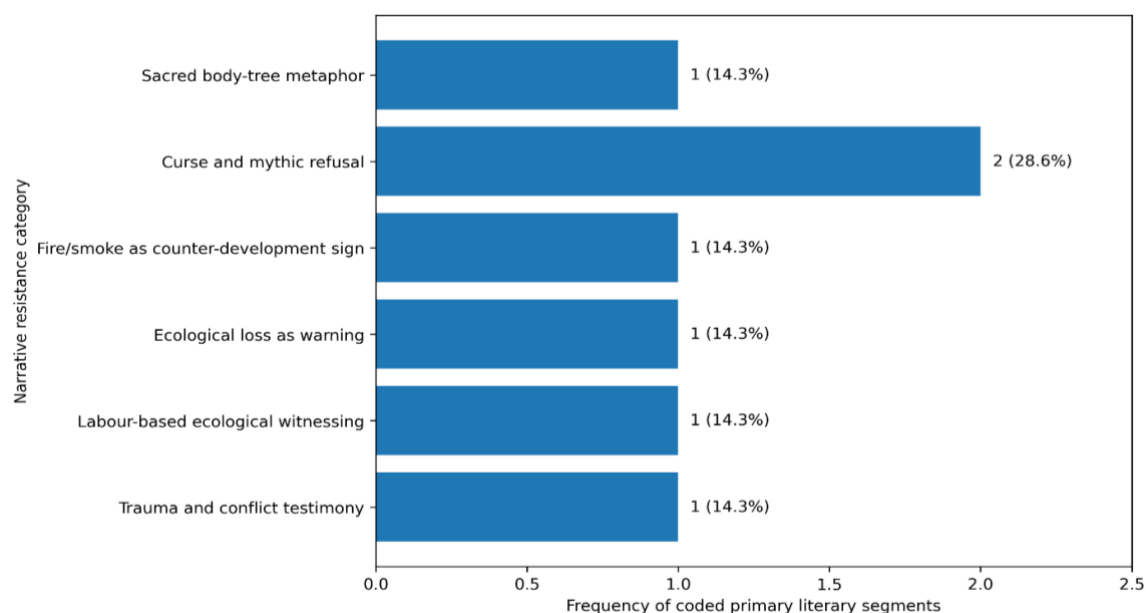


Figure 3. Narrative resistance and formal strategy in primary literary segments

The dominant strategy is curse and mythic refusal, appearing in 28.6% of coded segments. All other categories trauma and conflict testimony, labour-based ecological witnessing, ecological loss as warning, fire/smoke as counter-development sign, and sacred body-tree metaphor each account for 14.3%. Objectively, this distribution shows that resistance is dispersed rather than centralized in one narrative technique. Dataran Melengen foregrounds testimonial injury, Banjirkep uses labour as ecological witnessing, Batun Kokoq turns resource loss into warning, Api Awan Asap converts smoke into counter-development sign, Roh Meratus and Orang Bunian mobilize mythic prohibition, and Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon uses sacred tree-body metaphor. Forest resistance is therefore narrated through multiple formal routes.

Theoretically, these findings position Indonesian environmental literature as a counter-archive of extractive violence. Noroña and Aguinda (2025) [20] show that Indigenous storytelling can unsettle extractive governmentality, while Winchell and Howe (2024) [15] describe disruptive emplacement as a challenge to extractivist order. Chao's (2024) [8] attention to more-than-human communication also clarifies why spirits, trees, smoke, curses, and ecological signs should be read as active narrative agents rather than decorative motifs. In this corpus, resistance does not always appear as open protest; it emerges through memory, warning, taboo, atmosphere, and kinship. This study therefore argues that narrative resistance operates by denying extractive capitalism full interpretive control over forest meaning.

Table 4. Narrative resistance and formal strategy in primary literary segments

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Formal Strategy	Resistance Mode	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Note	Data Code	Interpretation
Trauma and conflict testimony	Ecological violence as remembered wound	Forest conflict is narrated through fear, loss, poverty, and damaged community relations	Testimonial realism; memory-fragmented conflict	Witnessing and counter-memory	1	14.3%	Trauma, terror, cultural loss, social fracture	Dataran Melengen foregrounds forest conflict through ecological pressure and social injury	SEG-001; PRI-LIT-001	Resistance begins by refusing to let forest violence disappear into development language
Labour-based ecological witnessing	Worker experience inside extractive economy	Forest labour becomes a site for observing timber capitalism from below	Labour narration; riverine movement	Everyday witnessing	1	14.3%	Timber work, farming shift, village participation	Banjirkep presents villagers' movement into timber work as a narrative lens on forest commodification	SEG-002; PRI-LIT-002	Labour is not only economic activity but also a narrative position for exposing extraction
Ecological loss as warning	Scarcity and damaged local knowledge	Forest depletion is narrated through loss of plants, survival practices, and practical ecological memory	Ecological warning; scarcity motif	Lament and cautionary narration	1	14.3%	Medicinal plant loss, local adaptation, degraded forest access	Batun Kokoq links exploitation with disappearance of forest-based knowledge and resources	SEG-003; PRI-LIT-003	Environmental decline becomes legible through everyday loss rather than abstract crisis
Fire/smoke as counter-development sign	Extractive modernity and damaged atmosphere	Fire and smoke transform development into ecological danger	Atmospheric symbolism; spatial contrast	Counter-development critique	1	14.3%	HPH, HTI, fire, smoke, customary landscape	Api Awan Asap stages fire and smoke as signs of disrupted Dayak Benuaq ecological order	SEG-004; PRI-LIT-004	Atmosphere becomes a narrative device for showing how extraction contaminates life-worlds
Curse and mythic refusal	Forest agency against intrusion	Myth, curse, and unseen beings restrict human claims over forest space	Mythic narration; elder speech; taboo	Refusal through ecological fear and moral sanction	2	28.6%	Curse, forest spirit, hunting restraint, unseen authority	Roh Meratus and Orang Bunian use mythic authority to challenge unrestricted forest access	SEG-005; SEG-007; PRI-LIT-005; PRI-LIT-007	Myth functions as a counter-law that resists extractive permission
Sacred body-tree metaphor	Tree as womb, grave, and ancestral body	Human life, death, and ancestry are mediated through tree relation	Embodied metaphor; sacred vegetal imagery	Kinship-based resistance	1	14.3%	Body, death, kinship, tarra tree, ritual continuity	Di Tubuh Tarra, dalam Rahim Pohon frames tree relation as embodied cultural memory	SEG-006; PRI-LIT-006	Sacred metaphor prevents forest from being reduced to timber, land, or commodity

5. DISCUSSION

Forest ownership in this corpus matters because it unsettles a narrow legal-economic understanding of forest access. The findings show that ownership is not represented simply as possession, title, or concession, but as a contested narrative arrangement involving livelihood, memory, damage, and moral legitimacy. This has an important theoretical implication: Indonesian environmental literature functions as a counter-discursive space where forests are not reducible to administrable assets. Political ecology has long argued that extraction reorganizes territories through law, capital, and development discourse; however, this corpus adds that literature can register how such reorganization is experienced as cultural injury and ecological disorientation. This supports Scheidel et al. (2023) [1], Nachet, Beckett, and MacNeil (2021) [11], and Dunlap, Verweijen, and Tornel (2024) [2], who understand extraction as more than resource removal.

This representational pattern emerges because extractive capitalism operates through layered structures rather than isolated acts of environmental destruction. Forests become vulnerable when they are translated into concession, labour opportunity, commodity chain, plantation frontier, or development target. The corpus suggests that this conversion does not occur only after extraction takes place; it begins when forest space is marked, anticipated, renamed, or disciplined into economic possibility. This reading resonates with Ahmad, Mardiana, and Wahyuni's (2025) [6] analysis of forest-resource access conflict in Pandumaan-Sipituhuta and Toumbourou and Dressler's (2023) [12] account of exclusionary land claims in Indonesian oil palm contexts. However, unlike policy-oriented studies that foreground institutional actors, this study shows how literary texts foreground fractured subjectivities, damaged atmospheres, and everyday anxieties.

The corpus also shows that Indigenous sovereignty functions as a corrective to property-centered frameworks of forest belonging. Sovereignty is represented through memory, ritual, ecological knowledge, kinship, livelihood, and more-than-human authority, not only through formal recognition. This matters because legal acknowledgment, although crucial, cannot fully describe how communities understand their obligations to forest worlds. The findings align with Dawson et al. (2021) [3] and Youdelis et al. (2021) [4], who argue that Indigenous and local communities must be placed at the center of equitable conservation. They also resonate with Arjaliès and Banerjee (2024) [14], who emphasize Indigenous perspectives that exceed capital-centered biodiversity values. Nevertheless, this study complicates governance-based approaches by showing that sovereignty is not always articulated in institutional vocabulary. Literature preserves forms of authority expressed through taboo, sacred trees, elder speech, ecological memory, and embodied relations. Sovereignty therefore operates as a relational practice before it becomes a juridical category.

This relational sovereignty emerges because forest authority in these narratives is structured by interdependence rather than domination. Human characters do not merely use forests; they inhabit moral and ecological networks shaped by ancestors, plants, spirits, rivers, smoke, labour, and gendered responsibility. This structure explains why forests in this corpus often resist commodification through sacred or mythic frameworks. Such representation supports Simpson, Atleo, and Braun's (2024) [16] argument that Indigenous forestry is tied to future sovereignty, not only present ownership. It also resonates with Chao's (2024) [8] attention to more-than-human communication, particularly where bodily experience, hunger, and ecological signs become politically meaningful. At the same time, this corpus differs from approaches that treat Indigenous knowledge primarily as governance input or conservation resource. Here, relational ecology is not simply knowledge to be incorporated into management; it is a competing ontology. Forests appear as subjects of obligation, not passive objects awaiting sustainable administration.

Narrative resistance has a distinct implication because it demonstrates that opposition to extractive capitalism need not appear only as explicit protest. In this corpus, resistance is distributed through testimony, myth, warning, curse, atmospheric symbolism, labour witnessing, and sacred metaphor. This means literature resists extraction by controlling how forests can be imagined, not merely by denouncing environmental destruction. Karmakar (2024) [21] and Karmakar and Pal (2025) [19] similarly show that decolonial ecological writing can generate hope, subaltern environmentalism, and Indigenous ethical imagination. Noroña and Aguinda (2025) [20] also demonstrate that storytelling can unsettle extractive governmentality. Yet Indonesian environmental literature contributes a specific modality: resistance often emerges through indirect, symbolic, or culturally embedded forms rather than programmatic political speech. This matters because extractive power frequently works by normalizing forests as empty, available, or economically underused.

This resistance takes such forms because literary narrative is structurally suited to represent what extractive regimes tend to erase: affect, taboo, ancestral temporality, nonhuman agency, and local memory. Institutional documents may define forests through boundaries, concessions, maps, or legal status, whereas literature can stage conflicts among visible and invisible authorities. This explains why mythic refusal and

sacred metaphor are not escapist elements, but formal strategies that interrupt capitalist realism. Winchell and Howe's (2024) [15] concept of disruptive emplacement helps clarify how Indigeneity can disturb extractive spatial orders, while Anthias and Asher's (2024) [9] critique of colonial representation explains why environmental discourse must be read alongside racialized and colonial histories. Still, this study does not claim that literature directly transforms forest governance. Its contribution is more precise: Indonesian environmental literature reveals how ownership, sovereignty, and resistance are narratively produced, contested, and reimagined. Forests become political not only because they are exploited, but because stories refuse to let extraction monopolize their meaning.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian environmental literature reframes forest ownership as a struggle over authority, memory, livelihood, and ecological meaning rather than a narrow question of legal possession. Its most important lesson is that extractive capitalism does not merely damage landscapes; it also reorganizes how forests are narrated, valued, and made available to power. By integrating political ecology, Indigenous sovereignty, eco-postcolonial criticism, and narrative analysis, this study contributes a sharper methodological perspective for reading forests as contested literary spaces.

This study is limited by its purposive corpus, reliance on publicly verifiable literary and contextual sources, and focus on textual representation rather than ethnographic field evidence. Consequently, its findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian environmental literature or treated as direct evidence of community experience. Future research should expand corpus size, include regional-language texts, compare genres, and incorporate interviews with writers, Indigenous readers, or affected communities where ethically possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks the reviewers and editorial team for their constructive feedback on this manuscript.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Author states no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Dani Setiaji: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly verifiable Indonesian literary texts and contextual materials.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly verifiable Indonesian literary texts and contextual materials, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required.

DATA AVAILABILITY

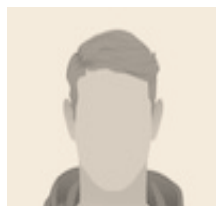
The corpus of documents analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Dani Setiaji     is affiliated with Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia. He focuses his studies on law, language, social sciences, and related interdisciplinary areas. His academic research includes environmental literature, eco-postcolonial criticism, Indigenous sovereignty, and narrative representations of extractive capitalism. His recent work examines how Indonesian literary texts narrate forest ownership, ecological memory, and resistance to extractive power. He can be contacted at email: danisetiaji160603@gmail.com