

When Language Speaks for Nature: Ecological Discourse and Lamaholot Ethics in *Ama Tewo*

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 2025-08-03

Revised : 2026-07-14

Accepted : 2026-07-24

KEYWORDS

Ecocentric character

Narrative discourse

Ecosemiotics

Literary representation

Ecospirituality

Lamaholot cosmology



ABSTRACT

As ecological crises intensify, literature offers a vital cultural space for reconsidering the ethical relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. Yet ecocritical studies of Indonesian literature have largely emphasized environmental themes, ecological damage, and natural settings, while giving limited attention to how a literary character can embody locally grounded environmental ethics. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how *Ama Tewo* is constructed as an ecocentric character and as a literary representation of Lamaholot ecological values in Silvester Petara Hurit's short story "*Ama Tewo*." Employing a qualitative descriptive design and theory-informed content analysis, the study examined narration, dialogue, characterization, ecological imagery, symbolic expressions, and local cultural concepts through repeated close reading and thematic coding informed by ecocriticism, environmental ethics, and nature spirituality. The findings reveal four interrelated dimensions of *Ama Tewo*'s ecocentric characterization: recognition of nature's intrinsic value and rejection of its commodification; adherence to Lamaholot customary cosmology, sacred boundaries, and ecological taboos; intuitive-ecospiritual sensitivity in interpreting signs from trees, water, birds, and wind; and criticism of modernity's desacralization of nature. Together, these dimensions position nature not as a passive resource or narrative background, but as a living ethical subject embedded in relationships among humans, ancestors, and the environment. The study's originality lies in shifting ecocritical analysis from nature as a theme or setting to characterization as a medium of ecological ethics. It contributes to Indonesian ecocriticism, Flores literary studies, and environmental humanities while offering broader implications for culturally responsive ecological education and the preservation of Indigenous environmental knowledge.

1. Introduction

This document is a version of the instructions for When forests are silenced, springs disappear, and ancestral landscapes become commodities, literature witnesses ecological disruption. It preserves human–nature relationships, reveals environmental damage, and reconsiders the more-than-human world's moral status. By making nature an agent of history, identity, and ethical choice, literature connects ecology with emotion, imagination, values, and lived experience (Bentz, 2020; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). Its influence, however, depends on how non-human life, environmental violence, and responsibility are narrated (Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024). This is especially relevant to Indonesian local literature, where ecology intersects with oral traditions, customary prohibitions, spiritual beliefs, and collective memory. Silvester Petara Hurit's

"*Ama Tewo*" (Hurit, 2024) reflects this context by portraying nature as a moral, spiritual, and cultural presence in the ecological worldview attributed to the Lamaholot community of Flores.

The environmental crisis is scientific and managerial, but also a crisis of values, culture, imagination, and justice. Anthropocentrism values nature mainly for human use, legitimizing exploitation and commodification (Garrard, 2004). Ecocentrism challenges this hierarchy by recognizing values beyond market utility in human and non-human beings and in biotic and abiotic elements. Environmental ethics emphasizes responsibility, interdependence, restraint, and justice (Hourdequin, 2021), while sustainability scholarship acknowledges nature's intrinsic, relational, cultural, and spiritual values because economic valuation often marginalizes local meanings (Pascual

et al., 2021). Ecocriticism examines how literature constructs nature, exposes ecological violence, and imagines alternative human–nature relations (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). It treats nature as more than decorative background (Buell, 1995), reveals assumptions behind ecological representations (Garrard, 2004), and considers the unequal distribution of environmental harm (Sultana, 2022).

Ecocritical scholarship shows that literature shapes environmental imagination and may influence climate-related beliefs and emotions, although temporarily and contextually (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2004; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). Bradfield et al. (2025) likewise show how Indigenous animal narratives reproduce or challenge dominant environmental assumptions.

In Indonesia, Harsono (2008) introduced environmentally oriented literary criticism, while Endraswara (2016) and Sukmawan (2016) developed literary ecology as a framework for human–nature relations, culture, and environmental change. Khomisah (2020) mapped ecocriticism’s development; Larasati and Manut (2022) examined nature in Indonesian short stories; Wissang and Nggaruaka (2024) analyzed Gerson Poyk’s “Ikan-Ikan Hias dari Pasir Putih”; and Zaini (2024) explored ecological messages in the Tuno Wujo performance. These studies establish Indonesian texts as ecological archives but mainly examine destruction, messages, symbolism, landscapes, or human–nature conflict. They rarely address how characters internalize environmental ethics through thought, speech, action, emotion, customary obedience, and spiritual sensitivity.

A further gap concerns Indigenous and local ecological knowledge. It cannot be detached from its cultural context or reduced to a supplement to Western science because it is embedded in land-based practices, languages, relations, governance, spiritual obligations, and community identities (Gadgil et al., 2021; Latulippe & Klenk, 2020). Hird (2025) positions Indigenous theory as an epistemic foundation rather than a decorative addition. Its erosion is inseparable from environmental degradation because biological, linguistic, cultural, and spiritual diversities develop through specific territories. Ancestral cosmologies remain relevant to environmental ethics (Fauzi et al., 2025), while Indigenous knowledge supports sustainable development (Bawack et al., 2025).

Literature can mediate these relationships by presenting non-human beings as ethical subjects and linking ecological learning with culture, affect, and imagination (Bradfield et al., 2025; Dhanyamol & Sethunarayanan, 2025; Kazazoglu, 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Three omissions remain: Flores literature and Lamaholot environmental thought receive limited ecocritical attention; local cosmology is often treated as background rather than a system shaping conduct; and little research examines how interpreting trees,

springs, birds, wind, sacred boundaries, and ancestral signs creates ecospiritual agency. Thus, it remains unclear how characterization can resist commodification, enforce culturally grounded restraint, and criticize nature’s desacralization under modern development.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating ecocriticism, characterization, environmental ethics, and Lamaholot ecospirituality. Rather than treating nature as setting, symbol, theme, or victim, it centres *Ama Tewo*’s characterization. Its novelty lies in conceptualizing an ecocentric character whose thoughts, utterances, actions, emotions, and spiritual interpretations recognize nature’s intrinsic and relational values. *Ama Tewo* is examined not as representing all Lamaholot people but as a fictional construction articulating culturally situated meanings. This avoids homogenization while allowing Ina Tana Ekan, Ema, pemali, sacred customary territory, banyan trees, springs, birds, and wind to form an interconnected moral universe. His characterization operates through four dimensions: recognition of nature’s intrinsic value and resistance to commodification; adherence to Lamaholot customary cosmology; intuitive-ecospiritual sensitivity to environmental signs; and criticism of modernity’s desacralization of nature.

The study shows how characterization embodies environmental ethics, foregrounds Flores literature and Lamaholot cosmology without conflating fiction with ethnography, and contributes to debates on plural values, ecological responsibility, and exploitative development.

Accordingly, this study examines how *Ama Tewo* is constructed as an ecocentric character who embodies Lamaholot environmental ethics. It analyzes how his characterization expresses nature’s intrinsic value, respect for customary cosmology and sacred boundaries, and ecospiritual sensitivity to environmental change. The study further explores how his attitudes and actions challenge the commodification and desacralization of nature associated with anthropocentric modernity and development. The analysis therefore moves from textual construction to cultural-ethical representation and ideological critique. Consistent with qualitative content analysis, it focuses on narration, dialogue, characterization, ecological imagery, symbolic expressions, and culturally specific terminology. Rather than treating fiction as a comprehensive record of Lamaholot society, the study examines how the short story represents Lamaholot environmental ethics.

The study positions “*Ama Tewo*” as a space where ecological responsibility is negotiated among humans, nature, ancestors, and customary order, showing how regional literature brings local ecological philosophies into debates on anthropocentrism, environmental justice, and nature’s plural values. Its main

contribution is to show characterization as an ethical ecology in which nature becomes a living subject, customary responsibility restrains human desire, environmental changes become meaningful signs, and exploitative progress is culturally criticized. This preserves local ecological knowledge without romanticizing or detaching it from its communities. It also suggests that translated or bilingual local literature may connect English Language Teaching with ecological literacy, intercultural reflection, and sustainability-oriented discussion, although classroom research remains necessary (Dhanyamol & Sethunarayanan, 2025; Kazazoglu, 2025; Yu et al., 2024). Thus, the study contributes to Indonesian ecocriticism, Flores literary scholarship, environmental humanities, and culturally responsive ecological education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ecocriticism, Environmental Humanities, and Ecological Characterization

Ecocriticism examines how literature constructs relationships among humans, non-human beings, physical environments, and the cultural systems through which nature is valued. Rather than treating forests, rivers, animals, land, and weather as decorative settings, it explores their narrative agency, influence on human behaviour, and capacity to generate ethical responsibility. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define ecocriticism as the study of literature's relationship with the physical environment, while Buell (1995) positions the non-human world as more than a background to human affairs. Garrard (2004) further demonstrates that representations of wilderness, dwelling, pollution, animals, apocalypse, and the earth reveal cultural assumptions about environmental treatment.

Environmental humanities expand this perspective by incorporating affect, justice, spirituality, cultural memory, and narrative form. Literature may make gradual ecological destruction visible through emotional conflict, cultural loss, and moral choice, although its capacity to foster ecological empathy depends on how human and non-human perspectives are organized (Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024). Climate fiction can shape environmental beliefs and emotions (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023), artistic engagement can connect ecological knowledge with affective learning (Bentz, 2020), and Indigenous animal narratives can expose assumptions about non-human life (Bradfield et al., 2025). Ecocritical analysis must therefore examine narration, symbolism, focalization, and characterization alongside inequalities in environmental vulnerability, authority, and responsibility (Sultana, 2022).

In Indonesia, Harsono (2008) introduced environmentally oriented literary criticism, while Endraswara (2016) and Sukmawan (2016) developed

literary ecology as a framework for examining human–nature relationships, cultural practices, and local knowledge. Khomisah (2020) mapped the development of literary ecocriticism, Larasati and Manut (2022) examined nature in Indonesian short stories, Wissang and Nggaruaka (2024) analyzed marine ecological destruction, and Zaini et al. (2024) identified ecological messages in the *Tuno Wujo* performance. Olamsyah (2024) is also cited in the manuscript, although its bibliographic information requires verification. Collectively, these studies establish Indonesian literature and cultural performance as ecological archives, but they largely emphasize environmental destruction, landscapes, symbolism, cultural messages, and general human–nature relationships. The present study addresses the limited attention to characterization by examining how *Ama Tewo*'s thoughts, speech, emotions, customary observance, ethical choices, and resistance transform ecological values into moral characterization.

2.2 Ecocentric Characterization, Lamaholot Ecospirituality, and the Study's Contribution

Ecocentrism provides an ethical basis for examining characters whose responsibilities extend beyond human interests. Unlike anthropocentrism, which values nature primarily for its usefulness, ecocentrism recognizes humans, animals, plants, water, land, and other biotic and abiotic elements as morally significant. Environmental ethics therefore addresses non-human value and responsibilities arising from ecological interdependence (Hourdequin, 2021), although exploitation also operates through economic, political, cultural, and institutional structures (Droz, 2022). Literary analysis should consequently examine whether nature is represented as a commodity or as a living presence, relative, ancestor, moral subject, or member of an ecological community. These perspectives reflect instrumental, intrinsic, and relational values, particularly the meaningful connections among people, places, species, practices, and identities (O'Connor & Kenter, 2019; Pascual et al., 2021).

An ecocentric character may thus be understood as a fictional figure whose thoughts, language, emotions, actions, and decisions recognize the more-than-human world as morally significant. Drawing on Buell (1995) and Garrard (2004), this study examines what *Ama Tewo* notices, values, protects, mourns, interprets, and refuses. His ecological responsibility is embedded in a knowledge system inseparable from territory, language, social relations, institutions, and spiritual obligations. Such knowledge requires respect for community sovereignty (Latulippe & Klenk, 2020), attention to ecological, cultural, territorial, and social consequences (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2020), and recognition of Indigenous environmental agency and conservation significance (Fa et al., 2020; Gadgil et al., 2021). However, because this study analyzes fiction

rather than ethnographic evidence, *Ama Tewo* is treated as a culturally situated literary construction, not a universal representative of Lamaholot society.

The narrative develops this worldview through *Ina Tana Ekan*, *Ema*, *pemali*, sacred customary territory, and ancestral relationships. Addressing the banyan tree as *Ema* transforms it from an exploitable resource into a relative associated with protection, water, air, continuity, and communal survival. This relationship reflects ecospirituality, which understands nature as sacred, interconnected, and morally meaningful (Taylor, 2010). Indigenous theory can provide an epistemic foundation for environmental scholarship (Hird, 2025), while ancestral cosmologies and spiritual knowledge can guide ecological ethics and stewardship amid technological and developmental change (Bawack et al., 2025; Fauzi et al., 2025). *Ama Tewo*'s interpretation of birds, wind, water, trees, and seasonal changes may therefore be understood as *ecospiritual semiosis*, a culturally mediated reading of environmental signs that integrates material, experiential, cultural, and spiritual knowledge without privileging intuition over science.

The study examines four theory-informed dimensions: nature's intrinsic and relational value, customary ecological responsibility, ecospiritual sensitivity, and resistance to commodification and desacralization. These dimensions address analytical, cultural-geographical, epistemological, and conceptual gaps concerning characterization, Flores literature, Lamaholot cosmology, and character-centred environmental ethics. Its novelty lies in shifting ecocritical analysis from nature as setting, theme, symbol, or victim to characterization as a medium of ecological ethics, without romanticizing tradition or portraying all modernization as destructive. It also recognizes ecological loss as physical destruction, cultural displacement, spiritual disruption, and the erosion of inherited responsibilities. Finally, translated or bilingual versions of "*Ama Tewo*" may connect English learning with ecological literacy, cultural comparison, sustainability, and writing development (Dhanyamol & Sethunarayanan, 2025; Kazazoglu, 2025; Yu et al., 2024), although these pedagogical possibilities require classroom-based investigation.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design and content analysis to examine the ecocentric characterization of *Ama Tewo* in Silvester Petara Hurit's short story "*Ama Tewo*" (Hurit, 2024). This qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, literary representations, cultural expressions, and environmental ethics rather than measuring or analyzing numerical data. Content analysis enabled the researcher to identify, classify, and interpret narrative units related to ecological consciousness, Lamaholot cosmology, ecospiritual sensitivity, and resistance to

environmental commodification. The analysis considered both explicit statements and meanings conveyed through characterization, dialogue, symbolism, narrative structure, and representations of banyan trees, springs, forests, birds, wind, customary prohibitions, and ancestral beliefs.

The analysis was guided by literary ecocriticism and environmental ethics. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) informed the examination of relationships between literature and the physical environment, while Buell (1995) supported the interpretation of nature as an active presence rather than a passive setting. Garrard's (2004) concepts were used to analyze anthropocentrism, commodification, and environmental destruction, whereas Taylor's (2010) concept of nature spirituality explained the sacred and spiritual dimensions of Lamaholot ecological consciousness. Together, these complementary frameworks provided a coherent analytical foundation for interpreting *Ama Tewo* as an ecocentric character whose values, perceptions, emotional responses, and actions embody environmental ethics and reflect the ecospiritual worldview of the Lamaholot community.

3.1 Data Source, Data Units, and Collection Procedures

The primary data source was "*Ama Tewo*" by Silvester Petara Hurit (Hurit, 2024), purposively selected because it presents ecological themes, Lamaholot local wisdom, and conflicts involving humans, nature, ancestral beliefs, and modernity. The data consisted of narration, character descriptions, dialogue, symbolic expressions, ecological metaphors, local cultural terms, and statements concerning nature, customary law, sacred spaces, and environmental damage. Particular attention was given to banyan trees, springs, forests, birds, wind, sacred customary territory, *Ina Tana Ekan*, *Ema*, and the consequences of ecological destruction.

Data were collected through a systematic process of close and repeated reading, detailed note-taking, and thematic classification. The initial reading was conducted to identify the story's ecological context and clarify *Ama Tewo*'s narrative role within it. Subsequent readings focused more specifically on marking, comparing, and classifying passages related to ecocentrism, environmental ethics, Lamaholot cosmology, and critiques of modernity. Relevant quotations, actions, emotional responses, narrative descriptions, and symbolic expressions were then organized into four main analytical categories: recognition of nature's intrinsic value, adherence to Lamaholot customary cosmology, intuitive ecospiritual sensitivity, and criticism of modernity's desacralization of nature. Through this structured process, the textual data were examined consistently and remained closely connected to the research questions and analytical framework of the study.

3.2 Coding Process and Data Analysis

The analysis involved identifying textual units representing ecological consciousness, coding them according to their dominant meanings, interpreting them through the selected theoretical frameworks, and organizing the interpretations into major findings. References to banyan trees as village protectors, for example, were coded as recognition of nature's intrinsic value, while *Ina Tana Ekan* and *Ema* were coded as customary cosmology and Lamaholot ecospirituality. Buell (1995) was used to examine nature's narrative agency, Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) connected literary representation with environmental meaning, Garrard (2004) informed the critique of commodification and modernization, and Taylor (2010) explained the sacred relationship between humans and nature.

The findings were organized around four dimensions: *Ama Tewo's* recognition of nature's intrinsic value and rejection of commodification, obedience to customary cosmology as a guide to ecological conduct, ecospiritual sensitivity in interpreting natural signs, and criticism of modernity's desacralization of nature. Trustworthiness was strengthened through repeated textual verification, theoretical triangulation, and consistent alignment among the categories, research objectives, interpretations, and textual evidence. Since the study analyzed a published literary work and involved no human participants, ethical considerations focused on accurate citation, faithful textual interpretation, and respect for the Lamaholot cultural meanings represented in the story.

4. Results

This section presents the findings concerning the construction of *Ama Tewo* as an ecocentric character, the representation of Lamaholot environmental ethics, and the short story's criticism of the commodification and desacralization of nature. The findings are organized according to the three research questions and are supported by narration, dialogue, characterization, emotional responses, ecological imagery, culturally specific expressions, and narrative contrasts.

Each excerpt is followed by a simplified qualitative tag consisting of the coding number, source page, and theme initials. For example, [C01, P1, EM] refers to Code 01, page 1 of the primary text, and the theme of Ecological Memory. All excerpts are the researcher's English translations of the original Indonesian text. The culturally specific terms *Ina Tana Ekan* and *Ema* are retained to preserve their contextual meanings. The analysis is limited to meanings directly supported by the short story and does not make empirical claims about all Lamaholot beliefs or practices.

Table 1. Coding Categories Used in the Results

RQ	Code	Analytical theme
RQ1	EM	Ecological Memory
	AR	Affective Resistance
	MI	Moral Injury
	RA	Reparative Agency
RQ2	MK	Maternal Ecological Kinship
	EL	Ecological Labour
	EC	Eco-social Consequences
	ES	Ecospiritual Sensitivity
RQ3	DM	Developmental Modernity
	RD	Religious Desacralization
	EH	Epistemic Hierarchy
	BR	Bureaucratic Restoration
	CO	Corruption and Commodification

The analysis produced three central findings. First, *Ama Tewo's* ecocentric identity develops through inherited ecological memory, affective resistance, coerced complicity, moral injury, and reparative action. Second, the narrative represents Lamaholot environmental ethics as a relational moral ecology in which humans, trees, animals, water, ancestors, emotions, and communal life exist within an interconnected system. Third, the story exposes a model of development that first removes the sacred and ecological meanings of nature, then converts ecological repair into a bureaucratic performance and an opportunity for economic extraction.

Overall, the story conveys a powerful ecological message: viewing nature as mother, relative, protector, and sacred presence encourages restraint and responsibility, whereas its desacralization and commodification lead to ecological collapse. Through *Ama Tewo*, it affirms that environmental ethics begins with restoring relationships among humans, nature, culture, and spirit.

4.1 How Is *Ama Tewo* Constructed as an Ecocentric Character?

The first research question examines the narrative construction of *Ama Tewo's* ecocentric character. The findings demonstrate that ecocentrism is not represented as an innate or uncomplicated virtue. It emerges through a difficult ethical trajectory involving memory, powerlessness, participation in violence, prolonged guilt, critical reflection, and eventual repair. *Ama Tewo's* significance lies precisely in this moral complexity. He is not positioned outside environmental destruction as a pure observer. He is drawn into it, wounded by it, and later compelled to respond to its consequences.

4.1.1 Ecological memory as a source of moral authority

The story begins by locating the banyan trees within a temporal scale that exceeds living human memory:

“Beringin-beringin ini telah ada sebelum kami lahir. Bahkan kakek-nenek kami pun menceritakan hal yang sama. Saat mereka lahir beringin-beringin ini telah ada.” (“These banyan trees existed before we were born. Even our grandparents told the same story. When they were born, the banyan trees were already here.”)
[C01, P1, EM]

The repetition of *telah ada*, meaning “already existed,” establishes the banyans as prior inhabitants of the village. Their existence precedes the current generation and extends beyond the direct memory of the grandparents. The narrative therefore grants them historical depth and a form of ecological seniority.

This opening challenge the assumption that the current generation has unrestricted authority over the trees. The banyans were not created by the officials who order their removal, and their value cannot be reduced to the needs of one administrative period. They embody a longer ecological time in which human generations appear temporary.

The contrast between human and tree time becomes central to the story’s ethical structure. The officials make decisions through the short duration of policy, command, and visible modernization. The banyans represent accumulated time, slow growth, ecological continuity, and ancestral memory. Their destruction is therefore not only spatial removal. It is a violent interruption of temporal continuity.

Ama Tewo’s first moral position is defined through his relationship with his grandfather:

“Ama Tewo berada di pihak kakeknya. Waktu itu kakek dan beberapa tetua seusianya coba mencegah.”
 (“*Ama Tewo* stood on his grandfather’s side. At that time, his grandfather and several elders of the same generation tried to prevent the destruction.”)
[C02, P1, EM]

The phrase *berada di pihak kakeknya* places *Ama Tewo* within an intergenerational ecology of knowledge. His initial environmental position does not emerge from formal education or scientific terminology. It develops through trust in the elders who have lived with the banyans and understood their place within the village.

His alignment with the elders indicates that ecological consciousness is transmitted through relationships, memory, and communal experience. The elders do not treat the trees as external objects because the banyans form part of the history through which the community recognizes itself.

However, *Ama Tewo* lacks the rhetorical authority to defend this inherited knowledge:

“Ama Tewo bisa merasakan apa yang ada di pikiran tetua waktu itu. Tapi ia tak punya cukup kepandaian untuk berargumen.” (“*Ama Tewo* could understand what the elders were thinking at that time, but he did not possess enough learning to formulate an argument.”)
[C03, P2, EM]

The distinction between *merasakan*, meaning “to feel or understand intuitively,” and *berargumen*, meaning “to formulate an argument,” reveals an epistemic hierarchy. *Ama Tewo* possesses ecological understanding, but his knowledge is not expressed in the institutional language recognized by educated officials and religious teachers.

The passage does not portray him as intellectually empty. Instead, it exposes a system that equates formal argumentation with legitimate knowledge. The elders’ long environmental experience becomes politically ineffective because it cannot be translated into the discourse of administration, mission education, and state authority.

Ama Tewo’s silence therefore carries analytical importance. It is not the silence of ignorance. It is the silence of knowledge deprived of institutional legitimacy.

4.1.2 Affective resistance under coercive authority

Ama Tewo’s opposition initially appears through bodily emotion:

“Ini perintah!’ Darah Ama Tewo seperti mendidih. Namun ia tak kuasa membela apa yang dipertahankan tetua kampung.” (““This is an order!’ *Ama Tewo’s* blood seemed to boil. Yet he was powerless to defend what the village elders were trying to preserve.”)
[C04, P1, AR]

The command *Ini perintah!* closes the possibility of dialogue. It does not explain why the trees should be removed or respond to the elders’ objections. Instead, it replaces ecological deliberation with compulsory obedience.

The brevity of the command contrasts with the long history of the banyans. A single official utterance is presented as sufficient to terminate a living presence that has endured for generations. This contrast reveals the violence of administrative language. The command is short, but its ecological consequences are extensive.

Ama Tewo’s “boiling blood” functions as an embodied rejection of this authority. His opposition cannot be expressed publicly, so it appears through physiological intensity. The body becomes the first site where the command is resisted.

His powerlessness is reinforced by the presence of armed officers:

“Aparat sangar dengan senjata di tangan. Siap menendang, siap menembak. Siapa berani?” (“The officers appeared threatening, with weapons in their hands. Ready to kick, ready to shoot. Who would dare to resist?”)
[C05, P1, AR]

The repetition of *siap*, meaning “ready,” places human violence beside environmental violence. The officers are prepared to harm villagers in order to ensure that the villagers harm the trees. Ecological destruction is therefore sustained by the threat of social and physical punishment.

The rhetorical question *Siapa berani?* reveals why collective resistance collapses. The villagers’ compliance is produced through fear, not through consensus. The passage consequently prevents the reader from interpreting the cutting as a community decision.

Ama Tewa is then compelled to enter the group of cutters:

“Ama Tewa dan teman-teman seusianya diperintahkan untuk menebang pohon-pohon beringin yang rata-rata seperti rumah besarnya. Mereka diulakukan sebagai kesatria yang turun ke medan perang. Ia menjadi bagian dari barisan itu walau hatinya berontak.” (“*Ama Tewa* and his companions were ordered to cut down the banyan trees, each of which was approximately as large as a house. They were celebrated as warriors going into battle. He became part of the group even though his heart rebelled.”)
[C06, P2, AR]

The military metaphor is central to the ideological construction of the event. Calling the cutters *kesatria*, or warriors, converts ecological destruction into bravery and civic achievement. The banyans are symbolically transformed into enemies that obstruct progress.

The metaphor also reveals how language can normalize violence. The young men are not described as destroyers but as heroes. The trees are not described as protectors but as obstacles to be defeated. The authorities therefore change the moral meaning of the act before carrying it out.

The description of the banyans as being as large as houses intensifies the violence. A house is associated with habitation, protection, memory, and belonging. Comparing the trees with houses indirectly strengthens their status as dwellings, both for animals and for collective history.

Ama Tewa’s *hati berontak*, or “rebellious heart,” creates a division between his body and conscience. His body is absorbed into the official line of cutters, but

his moral self remains resistant. This division is the foundation of his moral injury.

4.1.3 Moral injury as the internal consequence of ecological violence

Ama Tewa’s ethical conflict becomes sharper when he compares his lifespan with the age of the trees:

“Ama Tewa sadar usianya berlipat-lipat puluhan bahkan ratusan kali baru sama dengan usia beringin-beringin itu. Membinasakan yang mestinya dipelihara bikin jiwanya terguncang.” (“*Ama Tewa* realized that his own age would have to be multiplied tens or even hundreds of times to equal the age of those banyan trees. Destroying what should have been cared for shook his soul.”)
[C07, P2, MI]

The numerical comparison undermines human superiority. *Ama Tewa* recognizes that his life is temporally small in relation to the banyans. The officials may possess political power, but the trees possess ecological duration.

The contrast between *membinasakan*, meaning “to destroy,” and *dipelihara*, meaning “to care for or preserve,” defines the act as an ethical reversal. What should receive protection is subjected to violence. The problem is not simply that the trees are environmentally useful. It is that the relationship between human beings and the trees has been inverted from care into destruction.

Ama Tewa’s questioning becomes more explicit:

“Apa salah beringin-beringin ini? Manusia tak lagi peduli jasa-jasanya. Kemajuan yang bagaimanakah sampai mengorbankan pohon-pohon yang melindungi kampung dan jadi rumah yang nyaman bagi sekian binatang selama ini?” (“What wrong had these banyan trees done? Human beings no longer cared about what they had given. What kind of progress sacrifices the trees that have protected the village and provided comfortable homes for so many animals?”)
[C08, P2, MI]

The question *Apa salah beringin-beringin ini?* places the trees within a moral structure usually reserved for human subjects. If punishment requires wrongdoing, then the destruction of innocent trees becomes ethically unjustifiable.

The word *jasa*, meaning “service or contribution,” emphasizes the asymmetry between what the trees provide and how humans respond. The banyans protect the village without demanding compensation. Human beings answer this protection with violence.

The final question directly exposes the contradiction within the official concept of progress. Development is expected to improve life, yet this form of progress destroys the beings that protect human and animal life. The question therefore does not reject

change itself. It asks whether an action that sacrifices ecological protection can legitimately be called progress.

The reference to animals is particularly important. *Ama Tewo* recognizes that the trees are homes for other species. His environmental concern therefore exceeds a narrow human-centred argument. The banyans matter because they sustain a wider community of life.

His conflict is registered through bodily symptoms:

“Setiap kali mau tebang hatinya kecut. Mukanya pucat. Dadanya berdegup. Demi membebaskan segala kecamuk, ia membabi buta. Seperti orang kerasukan mengayunkan kapak bertubi-tubi sampai terkulai lemas.” (“Each time he prepared to cut, his courage failed. His face became pale. His chest pounded. To release everything raging within him, he swung the axe wildly, like a possessed person, until he collapsed from exhaustion.”)
[C09, P2, MI]

The short clauses create a fragmented rhythm that mirrors *Ama Tewo*’s psychological disturbance. His moral conflict is not presented as an abstract reflection. It appears through pallor, heartbeat, fear, frenzy, and physical collapse.

The expression *seperti orang kerasukan*, meaning “like a possessed person,” suggests a temporary loss of self-control. The official command does not simply make him perform an unwanted action. It separates him from the self that recognizes the action as wrong.

His body becomes the point at which political coercion and ecological conscience collide. The axe injures the trees, while the act of swinging it injures *Ama Tewo* psychologically. Environmental violence is thus shown to damage both the non-human victim and the human participant.

The event remains psychologically active:

“Peristiwa itu membekas bertahun-tahun. Ia harus melakukan kekejaman terhadap beringin-beringin yang tak bersalah.” (“The event left a lasting mark on him for years. He had been forced to commit cruelty against innocent banyan trees.”)
[C10, P2, MI]

The verb *membekas* indicates an enduring wound. The event is not completed when the physical cutting ends. It continues within *Ama Tewo* as memory and self-judgment.

The phrase *kekejaman terhadap beringin-beringin yang tak bersalah* explicitly identifies the act as cruelty against innocent beings. The narrative therefore moves beyond environmental regret and enters the language of ethical violation.

Ama Tewo imagines the trees as potential claimants of justice:

“Jika beringin-beringin itu bisa menuntut, betapa besarnya hukuman yang harus dijalankannya.” (“If the banyan trees could demand justice, he wondered how severe the punishment he would have to endure would be.”)
[C11, P2, MI]

The verb *menuntut* carries legal and moral force. The trees are imagined as subjects capable of making a claim against the person who harmed them. *Ama Tewo*’s conscience thus constructs an alternative court of ecological justice.

Within official law, he acted under command. Within his ecological conscience, coercion does not erase the trees’ injury. The passage reveals a difference between legal obedience and moral innocence.

His guilt is also intergenerational:

“Ama Tewo tak sanggup menatap wajah kakek dan sejumlah orang tua yang begitu menghormati beringin-beringin itu. Sebagai anak ia merasa tak berguna karena tak bisa membela. Malah turut menghancurkan perasaan mereka.” (“*Ama Tewo* could not bear to look at the faces of his grandfather and the other elders who deeply respected the banyan trees. As a young man, he felt useless because he had been unable to defend them and had instead helped break the elders’ hearts.”)
[C12, P3, MI]

The destruction of the trees also destroys the elders’ emotional and cultural world. The phrase *menghancurkan perasaan mereka* parallels the physical destruction of the banyans. The same action wounds nature materially and the elders culturally.

Ama Tewo therefore experiences a double betrayal. He has harmed the trees and failed the people who transmitted their meaning. His guilt connects ecological violence with cultural dispossession.

The grandfather summarizes this relationship:

“Lihat saja: kalau tak lagi hormat pada pohon, orang akan sesukanya dengan sesama!” (“Just watch: when people no longer respect trees, they will begin treating other people however they please!”)
[C13, P3, MI]

The grandfather’s statement identifies respect as a relational disposition rather than a behaviour limited to one object. A society that normalizes the domination of trees may also normalize the domination of vulnerable people. This statement functions as a narrative prediction that anticipates the exploitative pattern developed later in the story. The same instrumental logic eventually applied to the trees is also imposed on the villagers involved in the reforestation project. In both cases, human and non-human life are reduced to functional resources whose value is determined primarily by their usefulness in fulfilling the interests, policies, and authority of those in power.

4.1.4 Reparative agency and the refusal of permanent complicity

Five decades later, *Ama Tewa* participates in reforestation:

“Di usianya yang sudah 72 tahun, Ama Tewa dan orang-orang sekampungnya memikul 15 koker anakan beringin mendaki di siang terik untuk penghijauan di bukit-bukit yang dulu penuh beringin.” (“At the age of seventy-two, *Ama Tewa* and the other villagers carried fifteen containers of banyan seedlings uphill under the burning midday sun to reforest the hills that had once been filled with banyan trees.”)
[C14, P3, RA]

The narrative creates a bodily reversal. The young *Ama Tewa* holds an axe; the elderly *Ama Tewa* carries seedlings. His body becomes the site of both ecological destruction and attempted restoration.

This reversal does not purify him or erase the past. Instead, it gives ethical direction to his guilt. His later action acknowledges that ecological responsibility continues after the original harm.

The passage also reveals the asymmetry between destruction and repair. Mature banyans were cut within a relatively short period. Their restoration requires physically demanding labour, appropriate seasons, long-term care, and decades of growth. The story therefore portrays environmental damage as fast but ecological recovery as slow.

Ama Tewa recognizes the political irony:

“Ia merasa dipermainkan seperti anak kecil. Dulu diperintah buat ditebang, sekarang disuruh menanam lagi.” (“He felt that he was being played with like a child. In the past, they had ordered the trees to be cut down; now they ordered the people to plant them again.”)
[C15, P4, RA]

The contrast between *dulu* and *sekarang* exposes institutional inconsistency. The authorities control both destruction and repair without publicly accepting responsibility for either.

The villagers remain in the same subordinate position. They were previously ordered to cut and are now ordered to plant. The policy changes, but the structure of command remains intact.

Ama Tewa’s strongest act of repair occurs after the project collapses:

“Kabar dari sekretaris desa tersebut membuat warga melepaskan anakan-anakan beringin dan pulang. Tinggal Ama Tewa dan Ama Pelatin. Keduanya terus menggali lubang. Menanam anakan-anakan beringin yang ditinggalkan itu.” (“The news from the village secretary made the residents release the banyan seedlings and return home. Only *Ama Tewa* and *Ama Pelatin* remained. They continued

digging holes and planting the abandoned banyan seedlings.”)
[C16, P5, RA]

The villagers’ departure is understandable because the project has exploited their labour and failed to provide the promised wages. *Ama Tewa* and *Ama Pelatin* nevertheless remain.

At this moment, planting is detached from payment, supervision, documentation, and institutional legitimacy. The seedlings retain value even when the project that produced them has become morally bankrupt.

The phrase *anakan-anakan beringin yang ditinggalkan*, meaning “the abandoned banyan seedlings,” is significant. The seedlings are treated as disposable when the economic structure collapses. *Ama Tewa* refuses this logic of abandonment. His action recognizes that living beings do not lose their value merely because a project has failed.

The ending provides a final environmental sign:

“Angin kemarau berembus. Dingin.” (“The dry-season wind blew. Cold.”)
[C17, P5, RA]

The cold wind contrasts with the persistent heat, drought, and dust that dominate the later narrative. It does not indicate that ecological recovery has already been completed. The seedlings remain young, rain remains uncertain, and institutional corruption remains unresolved.

The coldness instead functions as a subtle narrative response to a change in ethical action. Earlier planting was controlled by deadlines and money. The final planting continues through responsibility and care. The atmosphere changes at the precise moment when the act is released from project logic.

The answer to RQ1 is that *Ama Tewa* is constructed through *wounded and reparative ecological agency*. His ecocentrism develops from intergenerational memory, coerced involvement, embodied guilt, and a refusal to abandon responsibility after harm has occurred.

4.2 How Does *Ama Tewa*’s Characterization Represent Lamaholot Environmental Ethics?

The second research question examines how the character represents Lamaholot environmental ethics through maternal kinship, ecological agency, relational value, and ecospiritual sensitivity. The findings show that the narrative does not divide nature into separate material and spiritual domains. Ecological functions, sacred meanings, ancestral connections, animal life, human emotions, and communal survival are deeply interconnected within a single relational system in which each element influences, sustains, and gives meaning to the others.

4.2.1 Maternal kinship as an environmental ethic

The banyans are placed within the cosmology of *Ina Tana Ekan*:

“*Beringin-beringin itu bagian dari perwujudan Ina Tana Ekan.*” (“The banyan trees were part of the manifestation of *Ina Tana Ekan*.”)
[C18, P2, MK]

The expression *perwujudan*, meaning “manifestation or embodiment,” gives the trees more than symbolic value. They materially embody a sacred maternal presence. Nature is therefore not spiritually empty matter to which culture later assigns meaning. The material tree and sacred meaning are narratively integrated.

The human relationship with the trees is defined through maternal language:

“*Oleh karena itu, manusia menyapanya: Ema.*” (“Therefore, human beings addressed them as *Ema*, meaning Mother.”)
[C19, P2, MK]

Calling the trees *Ema* establishes an ethic of kinship. The term communicates dependence, gratitude, protection, continuity, and obligation. A mother sustains life but is not reducible to the services she provides.

This naming resists the logic of property. Property may be used, exchanged, or removed according to human preference. A maternal relative places limits on what humans may legitimately do. The term *Ema* therefore functions as a cultural restriction against unrestricted exploitation.

The relationship is expressed through shared suffering:

“*Jika beringin-beringin tersebut dilukai, kehidupan terluka. Sakitnya pohon adalah juga sakitnya manusia.*” (“If the banyan trees were wounded, life was wounded. The pain of the trees was also the pain of human beings.”)
[C20, P2, MK]

The repeated use of bodily injury language creates continuity between trees, human beings, and life as a whole. The text does not say that hurting the trees may eventually harm people. It says that tree pain is already human pain.

This distinction is crucial. The narrative does not defend nature only because ecological destruction has negative consequences for humanity. This representation constructs human and non-human life as mutually constituted and deeply interdependent within a shared ecological community. The tree is not separate from human existence but part of the living relationships that sustain the community’s identity, spirituality, continuity, and survival across generations and communal life.

4.2.2 Ecological labour and the agency of trees

The banyans’ sacred status is inseparable from their material functions:

“*Tugasnya menjaring awan, menyimpan air, menahan banjir dan longsor, memberi udara bagi hidup manusia.*” (“Their task was to gather clouds, store water, prevent floods and landslides, and provide air for human life.”)
[C21, P2, EL]

The noun *tugas*, meaning “task,” assigns the trees an active role within the ecosystem. They are not passive objects placed within the landscape. They perform atmospheric, hydrological, geological, and biological work.

The sequence of verbs creates a chain of ecological agency. The banyans gather clouds, retain water, reduce disaster, and support breathing. Their value lies in the relationships they maintain across different ecological systems.

The passage also demonstrates that local cosmology carries observational environmental knowledge. The maternal and sacred meaning of the trees is associated with water storage, air, erosion prevention, and protection from floods and landslides. Spiritual meaning functions as a cultural form through which ecological relations are recognized and remembered.

The narrative repeatedly emphasizes the silence of this labour:

“*Beringin-beringin tersebut bekerja dalam diam melindungi kampung dan memberi kesejukan. Menjadi saksi banyak hal, banyak peristiwa. Melewati musim-musim dengan setia.*” (“The banyan trees worked silently, protecting the village and providing coolness. They witnessed many things, many events. They faithfully endured the seasons.”)
[C22, P2, EL]

The phrase *bekerja dalam diam* draws attention to labour that becomes invisible because it is constant and unpaid. The trees do not announce their work. Their contribution becomes apparent only after it disappears.

The trees are also “witnesses,” which joins ecological function with historical memory. They sustain environmental life and preserve continuity across events and generations.

The word *setia*, meaning “faithfully,” introduces an ethical contrast. The banyans remain faithful to the village through changing seasons, while human institutions fail to remain faithful to the ecological relationships sustaining village life.

Their physical form connects multiple ecological levels:

“*Tumbuh menjulang ke atas menjaring awan, menahan angin sekaligus menjulurkan akar-akarnya*”

ke bawah membumikan air.” (“They grew upward to gather clouds and restrain the wind while extending their roots downward to hold water within the earth.”) [C23, P2, EL]

The vertical imagery positions the banyan as an ecological axis joining sky, wind, soil, roots, and water. Its body mediates among environmental levels that administrative planning treats as separate.

The verb *menahan*, meaning “to hold back or restrain,” is ethically suggestive. The trees preserve life by restraining wind and retaining water. The authorities, by contrast, fail to restrain political power and economic desire. The tree’s ecological function implicitly models the principle of limitation absent from the institutions that destroy it.

4.2.3 Ecological destruction as an eco-social cascade

The removal of the banyans generates an interconnected sequence of losses:

“Setelah beringin-beringin tak ada, tak terdengar lagi kicau burung-burung. Pohon-pohon pun seperti murung. Merana. Hawa langsung berubah panas. Air kali menyusut dari tahun ke tahun. Mata air musiman tak muncul lagi.” (“After the banyan trees were gone, birdsong was no longer heard. The remaining trees appeared gloomy and miserable. The air immediately became hot. River water diminished from year to year, and the seasonal springs no longer appeared.”) [C24, P3, EC]

The narrative begins with sound. The loss of birdsong is the first sensory sign of ecological disruption. Before water scarcity becomes measurable, the village becomes acoustically empty.

This silence indicates habitat loss, but it also represents the disappearance of more-than-human participation in village life. The ecological community loses its voices.

The description then moves from sound to heat and water. This sequence shows that environmental damage spreads across connected systems rather than remaining confined to the felled trees.

The time scale also changes. Heat appears immediately, while river decline unfolds “from year to year.” The narrative therefore represents ecological crisis through both sudden disturbance and slow deterioration.

The seasonal springs no longer appearing indicates the breakdown of ecological recurrence. The village loses not only water but also the predictable rhythms through which environmental life was previously organized.

The ecological changes enter human emotions:

“Semakin banyak yang hilang. Orang-orang makin cepat gerah dan tersulut amarah. Panas bikin orang makin tidak sabar, tidak betah dalam banyak

hal.” (“More and more things disappeared. People became irritated more quickly and were easily provoked. The heat made them increasingly impatient and uncomfortable in many situations.”) [C25, P3, EC]

The repetition of loss creates a cumulative atmosphere. Ecological decline becomes emotional decline as heat and scarcity intensify frustration and impatience.

The narrative does not claim that climate alone determines human behaviour. It shows that social relationships are environmentally situated. When ecological conditions deteriorate, the physical and emotional pressures of everyday life also change.

The grandfather’s earlier warning is therefore fulfilled at an affective level. Disrespect for trees contributes to conditions in which people become less patient and more hostile toward one another.

The loss also affects cultural memory:

“Tak ada lagi cerita mandi di genangan air kali, menangkap ikan, udang, ataupun belut.” (“There were no longer stories of bathing in river pools or catching fish, shrimp, and eels.”) [C26, P3, EC]

The phrase *tak ada lagi cerita* signifies more than the disappearance of activities. Environmental destruction removes the experiences from which communal stories are created.

The loss of fish, shrimp, and eels is simultaneously ecological and cultural. Younger generations lose access to river life, while older generations lose the material setting that makes their memories socially meaningful.

The transformation of housing produces another form of ecological contradiction:

“Rumah beratap alang-alang yang dibongkar dulu dan diganti seng ketika siang mengusir orang keluar dari rumah. Mencari pohon-pohon untuk bernaung.” (“The houses with grass roofs had previously been dismantled and replaced with metal sheets. During the day, the heat drove people out of their homes to search for trees under which they could shelter.”) [C27, P3, EC]

The replacement of grass roofs with metal sheets is presented as another sign of modernization. However, the new material makes houses unbearably hot.

The irony is structural. Trees and traditional roofs are removed because they are considered incompatible with progress, yet people must later search for the shade of the remaining trees to escape their modernized houses.

The modern structure depends on the ecological protection that modernization has destroyed. The

narrative therefore judges development by its lived consequences rather than by its appearance.

Water scarcity produces economic commodification:

“*Di mana-mana orang mengeluh susah air. Harga air bersih per drum 15 ribu rupiah. Kering bikin semua meranggas.*” (“Everywhere, people complained about the difficulty of obtaining water. A drum of clean water cost fifteen thousand rupiah. The drought caused everything to wither.”)
[C28, P3, EC]

Water that was previously supported by trees and springs becomes an item sold by the drum. Ecological destruction converts a shared condition of life into a commodity.

This represents a secondary form of exploitation. The community first loses the ecosystem that sustains water and then must purchase the water made scarce by that loss. The passage therefore reveals how environmental damage creates markets from ecological absence. Scarcity becomes economically profitable even though it is socially destructive.

4.2.4 Ecospiritual sensitivity as relational knowledge

During reforestation, *Ama Tewo* connects the condition of the seedlings with the emotional and ethical condition of the workers:

“*Bagaimana bisa tumbuh baik kalau perasaan kita ketika tanam sedang tidak baik?*” *Ama Tewo mengeluh.*” (“How can they grow well if our feelings while planting them are not good?” *Ama Tewo* complained.”)
[C29, P4, ES]

The statement does not need to be interpreted as a literal claim that trees mechanically absorb human feelings. It expresses a relational understanding of ecological restoration.

The workers are planting under resentment, exhaustion, uncertainty, and economic exploitation. Their negative feelings reveal that the social relations surrounding the activity are damaged.

Ama Tewo’s question therefore identifies an ethical contradiction. A project cannot claim to restore ecological relationships while reproducing harmful human relationships. The emotional condition of the workers becomes evidence that the restoration process lacks integrity.

Ama Pelatin sharpens this criticism:

“*Beringin-beringin tidak tumbuh oleh uang, tapi oleh tangan kita yang tanam,*” *sambung Ama Pelatin.*” (“Banyan trees do not grow because of money, but because of the hands that plant them,” *Ama Pelatin* added.”)
[C30, P4, ES]

The contrast between “money” and “hands” distinguishes financial abstraction from embodied ecological labour. Money can fund planting, but it cannot replace knowledge, timing, physical care, and long-term maintenance.

The emphasis on hands also restores visibility to local labour. Government officials control budgets and documentation, but villagers physically place the seedlings into the soil.

The excerpt creates a parallel between trees and villagers. Banyans “work silently” to protect the community, while villagers work with their hands to restore the banyans. Both forms of labour are necessary, embodied, and undervalued.

The answer to RQ2 is that the story represents Lamaholot environmental ethics as a *relational moral ecology*. Trees are not passive resources. They are maternal relatives, ecological workers, ancestral witnesses, habitats, water keepers, and participants in communal life. Damage to them spreads through environmental, emotional, cultural, social, and economic systems.

4.3 How Does the Story Critique Commodification and the Desacralization of Nature?

The third research question examines how the narrative critiques modern development. The analysis identifies five interconnected mechanisms: semantic reclassification, religious desacralization, epistemic exclusion, bureaucratic control of ecological time, and economic extraction through restoration.

4.3.1 Semantic reclassification and the aesthetics of modernity

The removal of the banyans is justified through the language of visual order:

“*Ini desa gaya baru. Harus tertata, rapi, bersih. Tidak bisa seperti semak belukar, apalagi hutan rimba.*” (“This is a new-style village. It must be orderly, neat, and clean. It cannot look like bushes, let alone a jungle.”)
[C31, P2, DM]

The terms *tertata*, *rapi*, and *bersih* redefine ecological density as visual disorder. The trees are not removed because they are proven dangerous. They are removed because they do not fit an administrative image of a modern village.

The phrase *desa gaya baru* implies that modernization requires a break from the existing cultural and ecological landscape. Mature trees become signs of backwardness, while cleared space becomes evidence of advancement.

The language performs a form of semantic violence before physical violence occurs. The banyans first lose their identities as mothers, protectors, and

water keepers. They are renamed as bushes and jungle. Once their relational meanings are removed, their physical destruction becomes easier to legitimize.

The religious teachers publicly endorse this redefinition:

“Guru-guru agama bertepuk tangan, mengacungkan jempol, tersenyum senang. Camat tambah besar kepala karena didukung oleh orang-orang berpendidikan.” (“The religious teachers applauded, raised their thumbs, and smiled with satisfaction. The subdistrict head became increasingly proud because he was supported by educated people.”)
[C32, P2, DM]

The applause transforms destruction into a public spectacle. It also creates an alliance among political authority, religious legitimacy, and formal education.

The subdistrict head’s confidence grows because “educated people” support him. Education becomes a symbol of legitimacy rather than a source of critical ecological understanding. The scene therefore exposes a circular structure of authority. The official policy is treated as correct because educated people approve it, while the educated people approve it because it is associated with modernization and official power.

4.3.2 Religious desacralization as a condition of exploitation

The mission-educated teachers celebrate the separation of sacredness from nature:

“Orang tak lagi menyembah pohon-pohon. Ke depannya orang hanya menyembah Tuhan Bapa yang bertakhta di langit tinggi.” (“People would no longer worship trees. From then on, they would worship only God the Father, enthroned high in heaven.”)
[C33, P1, RD]

The spatial phrase *di langit tinggi*, meaning “high in heaven,” relocates sacredness away from the material environment. Trees, soil, water, and earthly life are separated from divine presence.

Once the banyans are no longer understood as sacred, the ethical limits protecting them become weaker. Desacralization therefore precedes exploitation. Nature must first be spiritually emptied before it can be physically removed without moral discomfort.

The story criticizes the teachers’ refusal to understand another worldview:

“Guru-guru yang sangat fasih bicara tentang Tuhan itu tak pernah mau tahu bahwa beringin-beringin itu bagian dari perwujudan Ina Tana Ekan.” (“The teachers who spoke so fluently about God never wanted to understand that the banyan trees were part of the manifestation of *Ina Tana Ekan*.”)
[C34, P2, RD]

The contrast between verbal fluency and unwillingness to understand exposes the limits of rhetorical authority. The teachers can speak confidently about God but refuse to listen to the ecological meanings expressed through Lamaholot cosmology.

The narrative’s criticism is therefore more precise than a simple opposition between Christianity and Indigenous belief. It criticizes religious exclusivity that denies the possibility that another cosmology may contain legitimate environmental knowledge and ethical responsibility.

4.3.3 Epistemic hierarchy and the politics of not listening

Ama Tewo challenges the equation between authority and truth:

“‘Apa orang yang lebih tinggi kuasa itu selalu paling benar dan harus kita ikut?’” (“‘Are people with greater authority always the most correct, so that we must follow them?’”)
[C35, P3, EH]

The question separates political power from epistemic validity. Officials may have the power to enforce policy, but their power does not establish the truth of their environmental judgment. The village secretary refuses to respond:

“Sekretaris desa yang mendampingi Markus seolah tak mendengar.” (“The village secretary accompanying Markus acted as if he had not heard.”)
[C36, P3, EH]

The silence is not neutral. It is an exercise of institutional privilege. The secretary does not need to answer because *Ama Tewo* lacks the authority to require a response.

This scene reveals that epistemic hierarchy operates not only by speaking over local people but also by refusing to listen to them. *Ama Tewo*’s argument is not disproved. It is made institutionally inaudible. He then questions the prestige attached to outside knowledge:

“‘Selalu lebih tinggi, lebih maju, lebih unggulkah segala yang dari luar itu?’” (“‘Is everything from outside always higher, more advanced, and more excellent?’”)
[C37, P3, EH]

The repeated comparative terms expose an ideological hierarchy. External origin is equated with superiority, while local origin is treated as evidence of inferiority.

Ama Tewo’s question reveals that “outside” functions as a status category rather than an objective measure of quality. Knowledge is valued according to where it comes from, not according to the ecological results it produces.

He defends ancestral knowledge through the language of testing:

“*Yang kita sudah miliki sejak zaman leluhur itu belum teruji?*” (“Has what we have possessed since the time of our ancestors not already been tested?”)
[C38, P3, EH]

The question reverses the discourse of validation. Formal institutions often describe external knowledge as tested, while dismissing customary knowledge as unverified. *Ama Tewa* argues that ancestral knowledge has been tested through generations of environmental experience.

The ecological decline after the cutting becomes an unintended experiment. The officials’ policy is followed by heat, water scarcity, disappearing springs, and habitat loss. The narrative therefore judges knowledge through its consequences.

Ama Tewa also questions formal education:

“*Untuk apa kalau sekolah tinggi-tinggi lalu tak tunjukkan satu pun yang lebih dari kita?*” (“What is the purpose of higher education if it cannot demonstrate anything better than what we already know?”)
[C39, P3, EH]

The criticism is not anti-educational. It targets education that produces social status without ecological competence, humility, or accountability.

The phrase *tak tunjukkan satu pun yang lebih* demands evidence. *Ama Tewa* refuses to accept formal education as automatically superior. He evaluates it according to what it protects, sustains, or improves.

4.3.4 Bureaucratic restoration and ecological time

The later reforestation programme repeats the structure of command:

“*Dulu diperintah buat ditebang, sekarang disuruh menanam lagi.*” (“In the past, they had been ordered to cut the trees down; now they were being ordered to plant them again.”)
[C40, P4, BR]

The policy changes, but the villagers’ position does not. They remain objects of instruction rather than participants in ecological governance.

The parallel structure reveals institutional amnesia. The authorities do not acknowledge that earlier policies created the need for restoration. They simply issue a new command.

Power is reproduced through family succession:

“*Dulu Guru Lambert, sekarang Markus cucunya sebagai pengawas proyek penghijauan. Dulu camat Andreas, sekarang Stanis anaknya; kepala dinas yang bertanggung jawab terhadap proyek penghijauan ini.*” (“In the past there had been Teacher Lambert; now there was Markus, his grandson, supervising the

reforestation project. In the past there had been Subdistrict Head Andreas; now there was Stanis, his son, the head of the department responsible for the reforestation project.”)
[C41, P4, BR]

The villagers inherit ecological damage, while elite families inherit administrative authority. This parallel reveals an unequal distribution of historical consequences.

Ama Tewa carries guilt and ecological loss across generations. The descendants of the officials inherit positions of control. The narrative thus contrasts inherited responsibility with inherited privilege.

The low survival rate exposes the weakness of the project:

“*Ini tahun kedua. Tahun pertama cuma hitungan jari saja yang hidup dari ribuan anakan yang ditanam.*” (“This was the second year. During the first year, only a handful of the thousands of seedlings planted had survived.”)
[C42, P3, BR]

The contrast between “thousands” and “a handful” reveals the difference between administrative output and ecological outcome. The project counts the moment of planting, while the ecosystem requires survival and growth.

The planting figures therefore produce an illusion of achievement. Numerical success conceals biological failure.

The conflict between administrative and ecological time becomes explicit:

“*Hujan datang terlambat. Namun ini tuntutan proyek. Ada batas waktunya. Maka harus tanam walau hujan belum turun.*” (“The rain arrived late. Yet this was a project requirement, and there was a deadline. Therefore, they had to plant even though the rain had not fallen.”)
[C43, P4, BR]

The project demands that planting proceed despite the absence of rain. Bureaucratic time is treated as more authoritative than ecological time.

The deadline does not adapt to the seasonal needs of living seedlings. Instead, the seedlings are expected to adapt to the deadline. Nature is treated as an object that must conform to administrative scheduling.

This reversal explains the poor survival rate. The project is organized around completion rather than life.

The monitoring system intensifies this performative logic:

“*Setiap hari dipantau. Diambil foto dan video.*” (“They were monitored every day. Photographs and videos were taken.”)
[C44, P4, BR]

The photographs and videos make labour visible to officials, but they do not make seedling survival more likely. Documentation becomes a substitute for ecological effectiveness.

The passive structure also obscures the observer. The villagers and seedlings are monitored, while the institutions controlling the project remain beyond equivalent scrutiny.

The narrative therefore distinguishes between visibility and viability. The project succeeds visually because activities can be photographed. It fails ecologically because living conditions are ignored.

4.3.5 Corruption and the commodification of ecological repair

The villagers' wages are only partly paid:

"Upah kerja mereka selama sebulan, tahun lalu yang ditunggu-tunggu hanya terbayar seminggu. Katanya ada refocusing. Istilah yang dia sendiri tidak paham." ("Of the wages they had awaited for a month the previous year, only one week was eventually paid.

They said there had been 'refocusing,' a term he himself did not understand.")

[C45, P4, CO]

The imported administrative term *refocusing* creates distance between decision and consequence. Ama Tewo may not understand the terminology, but he directly experiences its material meaning through unpaid labour.

The language functions as a shield. Bureaucratic vocabulary makes economic injustice appear technical and impersonal, even though it affects the villagers' survival.

The unequal distribution of funds is explicit:

"Anggaran yang nilainya miliaran itu sampai di tangan mereka yang capek menanam hanya 30 ribu per hari." ("From a budget worth billions, only thirty thousand rupiah per day reached those exhausted from planting.")

[C46, P4, CO]

The contrast between billions and thirty thousand rupiah reveals a vertical economy of restoration. Financial resources accumulate within administrative structures, while minimal payment reaches the people performing the ecological labour.

The wording *mereka yang capek menanam*, meaning "those exhausted from planting," places bodily exhaustion beside financial abstraction. The project's apparent value is measured in billions, but its actual work is performed through tired human bodies.

The effects of non-payment enter household life:

"Ina Uto, misalnya, sudah janji sore nanti membayar utang beras dua kilo yang ia pinjam ke Ina Berek tetangganya. Atau Ama Ola sudah janji dengan

kepala sekolah untuk besok pagi membayar biaya sekolah anaknya yang nunggak." ("Ina Uto, for example, had promised to repay a debt for two kilograms of rice that afternoon. Ama Ola had promised the school principal that he would pay his child's overdue school fees the following morning.")

[C47, P4, CO]

The two kilograms of rice and overdue school fees translate corruption into concrete deprivation. The missing wages affect food, education, social trust, and personal dignity.

These small financial details sharply contrast with the multibillion-rupiah budget. The narrative reveals how large-scale corruption is experienced through ordinary household shortages.

The villagers continue to work:

"Walau muncul rupa-rupa perasaan, warga bekerja dengan sungguh-sungguh. Keringat bercucuran. Menjadi pekat bercampur debu tanah."

("Although various feelings emerged, the villagers continued working earnestly. Sweat poured from their bodies and became thick as it mixed with the soil dust.")

[C48, P4, CO]

The physical imagery reveals the material reality behind institutional reports. Ecological restoration is produced through sweat, dust, heat, and suspended livelihoods.

The villagers' bodies become resources within the project. Like the seedlings, they are exposed to conditions determined by administrative objectives rather than their own needs.

The project's corruption is finally revealed:

"Markus dan kepala dinas ditangkap. Sudah pakai rompi oranye." 'Ditangkap kenapa?' 'Sebab ketahuan makan uang proyek sejak tahun lalu.'"

("Markus and the head of the department have been arrested. They are already wearing orange detention vests.' 'Why were they arrested?' 'Because they had been caught embezzling the project funds since the previous year.'")

[C49, P5, CO]

The Indonesian expression *makan uang proyek*, literally meaning "eating project money," creates a strong metaphor of consumption. The officials consume the resources intended to restore life. The metaphor creates a sharp contrast among three forms of need. The villagers need food and school fees. The seedlings need water and care. The officials consume the funds intended to meet these needs. The reforestation programme therefore reproduces extractive logic. The banyans were first destroyed to serve an image of progress. They are later replanted to serve a financial project. In both cases, the trees are subordinated to institutional interests.

The answer to RQ3 is that the narrative critiques development through semantic, spiritual, epistemic, temporal, and economic dispossession. The trees lose their relational names, the elders lose authority, the villagers lose decision-making power, natural seasons lose control over planting time, and restoration funds are separated from ecological and human needs.

5. Discussion

The ecological crisis represented in “*Ama Tewo*” is not limited to the physical removal of banyan trees. It is simultaneously a crisis of value, memory, cultural authority, spiritual relationship, environmental justice, and institutional responsibility. Previous ecocritical scholarship has established that literature can expose environmental damage and reposition the non-human world as ethically significant. However, Indonesian ecocritical studies have more commonly concentrated on environmental themes, natural settings, ecological messages, and representations of degradation than on the process through which a character internalizes, violates, mourns, and ultimately attempts to restore an ecological relationship. The present study addresses this analytical problem by showing that *Ama Tewo*’s environmental ethics are constructed through characterization, particularly through ecological memory, affective resistance, coerced complicity, moral injury, relational cosmology, critical questioning, and reparative action. Its central contribution is therefore the concept of *ecocentric characterization as an ethical ecology*, in which a character’s consciousness, body, language, memory, and actions become the narrative location where the moral status of nature is negotiated.

The findings also clarify that “*Ama Tewo*” should not be reduced to a simple conflict between environmentally harmonious tradition and environmentally destructive modernity. The narrative presents a sharper conflict between two systems of value. One system understands trees, water, animals, ancestors, and humans through kinship, reciprocity, restraint, memory, and long-term ecological continuity. The other system recognizes them primarily through administrative order, visual modernization, institutional authority, project targets, deadlines, and financial utility. Environmental ethics scholarship increasingly stresses that ecological disputes involve competing conceptions of value, obligation, justice, and human membership within the wider community of life rather than only disagreements over resource management (Hourdequin, 2021; O’Connor & Kenter, 2019; Pascual et al., 2021).

5.1 Ecocentric Characterization as Wounded and Reparative Agency

The first major finding is that *Ama Tewo*’s ecocentrism develops through moral conflict rather than moral purity. His environmental consciousness initially comes from intergenerational memory and

emotional alignment with his grandfather and the village elders. However, armed coercion forces him to participate in the very destruction he inwardly rejects. This complicates the conventional figure of the ecological hero. *Ama Tewo* is neither a detached observer of environmental damage nor a triumphant activist who successfully prevents it. He is an implicated character whose body becomes an instrument of ecological violence while his conscience remains ethically opposed to the act.

This finding extends the foundational ecocritical positions of Buell (1995), Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), and Garrard (2004). Buell’s environmental imagination emphasizes that the non-human world must be more than a passive background, while Glotfelty and Fromm connect literary representation with the physical environment. Garrard demonstrates that cultural representations organize how pollution, wilderness, animals, dwelling, and environmental crisis become ethically intelligible. “*Ama Tewo*” confirms these positions because the banyan trees shape the story’s plot, emotional atmosphere, historical memory, and moral judgment. Yet the story also extends them by locating ecological meaning within a character’s divided agency. Nature does not become ethically significant only because it occupies narrative space. Its significance is revealed through what *Ama Tewo* feels compelled to do, what he believes should have been done, and how he judges himself afterward.

Ama Tewo’s bodily reactions during the cutting are particularly important. His boiling blood, pale face, pounding chest, fear, frenzy, and exhaustion reveal that environmental violence is not external to human subjectivity. The body registers an ethical contradiction that institutional language attempts to suppress. The command to cut treats obedience as sufficient justification, but *Ama Tewo*’s physical distress shows that legal or administrative authorization cannot automatically produce moral acceptance. His body therefore becomes a counter-narrative to the official celebration of the cutters as warriors.

This characterization can be understood through the distinction between coerced participation and moral innocence. *Ama Tewo* acts under threat, but he continues to recognize the banyans as innocent beings that should have been protected. His imagined possibility that the trees could demand justice grants them moral standing beyond their instrumental benefits. This supports Hourdequin’s (2021) argument that environmental ethics concerns the scope of moral consideration and the responsibilities owed to non-human entities. It also expands Garrard’s (2004) criticism of anthropocentrism by showing that the moral consequences of anthropocentric power are internalized by the person forced to implement it.

Ama Tewo’s prolonged guilt may be interpreted as a literary representation of ecological grief and moral

injury, although the present study does not clinically diagnose a fictional character. Ecological grief scholarship explains that the loss of ecosystems, species, familiar landscapes, and ways of life can produce distress while also motivating environmental commitment. Such emotions should not automatically be dismissed as dysfunctional because grief, anxiety, anger, and guilt may reflect recognition of a meaningful ecological relationship and may become sources of action when accompanied by agency and collective meaning (Comtesse et al., 2021; Ojala et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2022).

This perspective sharpens the interpretation of *Ama Tewo*'s later replanting. His action is not a sentimental return to an undamaged past because the mature banyans cannot be restored immediately, the hydrological system remains disturbed, and institutional corruption continues. Instead, replanting gives his grief a reparative direction. The same hands that were forced to hold an axe later carry and plant seedlings. His body consequently becomes the site of both ecological violation and attempted repair.

The final scene makes this transformation especially clear. *Ama Tewo* and *Ama Pelatin* continue planting after the other villagers justifiably abandon the corrupt project. At that moment, ecological responsibility is separated from contractual obligation. *Ama Tewo* no longer plants for payment, supervision, documentation, or institutional approval. He plants because the abandoned seedlings remain living beings with value beyond the project that has failed them.

The distinction is theoretically significant. *Ama Tewo*'s reparative agency does not cancel his complicity or restore his innocence. Instead, it demonstrates that ecological responsibility can begin from recognition of participation in harm. This challenges a simplified moral division between innocent environmental defenders and guilty environmental destroyers. The narrative suggests that ethical agency may emerge through the more difficult process of remembering harm, accepting responsibility, and refusing permanent complicity.

The character's ethical trajectory also clarifies why literary form matters to environmental understanding. Literature can connect environmental knowledge with imagination, emotion, and moral reflection, but its effects depend on how narrative perspectives and ethical relationships are organized. Bentz (2020) shows that artistic engagement can bring different ways of knowing into dialogue, while Schneider-Mayerson et al. (2023) demonstrate that environmental fiction may influence beliefs and emotional responses, although its effects are contextual rather than automatic. In "*Ama Tewo*," characterization performs this mediating function by making ecological destruction perceptible through memory, bodily distress, guilt, and action rather than through abstract environmental instruction alone (Bentz, 2020;

Lahtinen & Löytty, 2024; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023).

The first finding therefore contributes to ecocriticism by defining ecocentric characterization as a process rather than a fixed trait. An ecocentric character is not simply a fictional person who expresses affection for nature. Such characterization may involve how a figure perceives non-human agency, recognizes ecological value, responds emotionally to environmental violence, evaluates institutional authority, assumes responsibility for harm, and undertakes repair. *Ama Tewo*'s ecological identity is constructed through this entire sequence.

5.2 Lamaholot Environmental Ethics as a Relational Moral Ecology

The second major finding is that Lamaholot environmental ethics, as represented in the short story, operates through relational rather than exclusively instrumental value. The banyan trees gather clouds, store water, provide shade, reduce floods and landslides, and support human and animal life. These functions give the trees clear instrumental importance. However, the trees are also addressed as *Ema*, identified with *Ina Tana Ekan*, remembered across generations, and imagined as beings capable of being wounded. Their value therefore exceeds the ecological services they provide.

This interpretation refines the manuscript's earlier emphasis on nature's intrinsic value. Intrinsic value remains important because the trees are not considered disposable when their immediate usefulness is ignored. Nevertheless, the concept of relational value more accurately captures how the narrative constructs their ethical significance. Relational value emerges through meaningful relationships among people, places, species, practices, memories, identities, and obligations. Environmental values are rarely isolated as purely intrinsic, instrumental, or relational because these dimensions interact within lived ecological relationships (Norton & Sanbeg, 2021; O'Connor & Kenter, 2019; Pascual et al., 2021).

The designation *Ema* is central to this interaction. Calling a banyan tree "Mother" communicates dependence, gratitude, nourishment, protection, continuity, and responsibility. The name does more than assign cultural symbolism to a biological object; it defines the ethical relationship humans should maintain with the tree. Cutting the banyan is therefore not the removal of neutral vegetation but an injury to a maternal relative and the ecological relationships she sustains.

Language therefore participates directly in environmental valuation. Inglis and Pascual (2023) argue that language shapes how nature's values are articulated, transmitted, and made available for collective recognition. This insight is especially relevant to *Ema* and *Ina Tana Ekan*. The meaning of

the banyan changes depending on whether it is named as mother, manifestation, protector, jungle, bush, or obstacle. Each name carries a different ethical orientation and makes different actions appear legitimate.

The story thus represents ecological conflict partly as a conflict over naming. The elders' language places the banyans within kinship, sacredness, memory, and ecological care. The officials' language recategorizes them as untidy vegetation incompatible with a "new-style village." Physical destruction becomes possible after this semantic transformation. The trees must first lose their relational identities before they can be treated as disposable.

The concepts of *Ina Tana Ekan* and *Ema* also support Taylor's (2010) understanding of nature spirituality, in which the natural world is experienced as sacred, interconnected, and morally meaningful. In the story, sacredness is not detached from ecological observation. The banyans' maternal identity is associated with water retention, clouds, coolness, air, animal habitat, and protection against floods and landslides. Lamaholot ecospirituality is therefore represented as a culturally situated environmental epistemology in which material, moral, spiritual, and experiential knowledge remain connected.

This finding supports recent calls to treat Indigenous and local knowledge as an epistemic foundation rather than as decorative cultural information. Latulippe and Klenk (2020) stress that engagement with Indigenous knowledge must respect sovereignty, context, and political agency rather than absorbing local knowledge into dominant frameworks. Gadgil et al. (2021), Gómez-Baggethun (2022), Sinthumule (2023), and Bawack et al. (2025) similarly demonstrate that locally grounded environmental knowledge remains relevant to conservation, governance, sustainability, and technological change. Hird (2025) and Fauzi et al. (2025) further strengthen the argument that Indigenous theory and ancestral cosmologies can provide substantive foundations for environmental ethics and stewardship.

However, this comparison must remain carefully delimited. "*Ama Tewa*" is a literary work, not an ethnographic account, and *Ama Tewa* cannot be treated as an empirical representative of every Lamaholot individual or community. The findings show how the short story constructs a culturally situated environmental ethic. They do not establish that all Lamaholot practices are uniform, unchanged, or inherently sustainable. This distinction protects the analysis from romanticizing Indigenous culture or converting a complex society into a single ecological ideal.

The narrative's representation of the banyans as beings that "work silently" further develops the idea of more-than-human agency. The trees act by gathering clouds, restraining wind, storing water, protecting the

village, providing habitats, and sustaining coolness. These activities influence human survival and the direction of the plot. Their agency is ecological rather than intentional in a human sense, but the story grants their actions moral and narrative importance.

This finding confirms Buell's (1995) argument that environmentally oriented literature gives the non-human world a presence beyond decorative setting. It also extends Glotfelty and Fromm's (1996) definition of ecocriticism by showing that the physical environment enters literary meaning through action, memory, language, and moral consequence. Bradfield et al. (2025) similarly emphasize the importance of attending critically to the lived spaces of non-human beings rather than reproducing shallow environmental representation.

The contrast between the trees' silent labour and the government project's highly visible activity is especially revealing. Mature banyans sustain the village without photographs, budgets, daily monitoring, or public reports. The reforestation project produces images and numerical records, yet only a few of the thousands of seedlings survive. The story therefore creates a distinction between ecological effectiveness and institutional visibility. What works ecologically may remain administratively invisible, while what appears successful in official documentation may fail biologically.

The disappearance of birdsong, river water, springs, cool air, aquatic animals, and communal activities after the trees are removed demonstrates that the story imagines an ecological system through cascading relationships. Tree loss is not presented as a single environmental incident. It spreads through habitat, sound, water, temperature, emotion, memory, social interaction, household expenditure, and community dignity.

This eco-social cascade strengthens the study's interpretation of Lamaholot environmental ethics as a relational moral ecology. Environmental degradation is also cultural degradation because the disappearance of rivers and animals removes the practices and stories through which community memory is formed. It is psychological because heat and scarcity intensify discomfort and anger. It is economic because water that was previously supported by the ecosystem must be purchased by the drum. It is spiritual because the destruction breaks a maternal and ancestral relationship.

The finding also supports Fernández-Llamazares et al. (2020), who show that environmental pressures affecting Indigenous Peoples cannot be understood solely through physical contamination or resource loss because ecological damage can also disrupt livelihoods, cultures, territories, knowledge, and well-being. In "*Ama Tewa*," environmental destruction similarly travels across ecological, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual domains.

Ama Tewa's sensitivity to birds, heat, water, wind, and seasonal change can consequently be understood as *ecospiritual semiosis*, a culturally mediated interpretation of the natural world as a field of meaningful signs. The concept does not require the analysis to verify supernatural communication or place intuitive knowledge above science. It explains how the narrative integrates observation, memory, spirituality, emotion, and ecological consequence into a unified mode of understanding.

This interpretation sharpens the second finding. *Ama Tewa*'s environmental knowledge does not consist only of information about what trees do. It includes an ethical capacity to read what environmental change means for the relationships joining human and non-human life. Ecospiritual sensitivity is therefore not passive contemplation. It becomes a basis for judgment, restraint, mourning, and restorative responsibility.

5.3 Desacralized Modernity, Epistemic Exclusion, and Projectized Restoration

The third major finding concerns the story's criticism of modern development. The narrative does not reject education, religion, government, infrastructure, or environmental projects in themselves. Instead, it criticizes forms of modernization that claim superiority while refusing ecological evidence, local knowledge, moral accountability, and community participation.

This distinction is necessary because anthropocentrism alone cannot explain the entire conflict. [Garrard's \(2004\)](#) critique of anthropocentric representation remains relevant, but the destruction in "*Ama Tewa*" also depends on institutional power, coercive government, religious authority, social hierarchy, bureaucratic procedure, and financial corruption. [Droz \(2022\)](#) cautions against treating anthropocentrism as a single scapegoat for environmental crisis because destructive practices are also organized through political, economic, cultural, and legal structures. The story supports this more complex interpretation. The banyans are destroyed not simply because humans value themselves more than trees, but because specific institutions possess the power to define progress, delegitimize competing knowledge, command labour, and avoid responsibility.

The official language of a village that must be "orderly," "neat," and "clean" exemplifies semantic modernization. Ecological density is recoded as disorder, while clearing becomes visible evidence of progress. The central problem does not lie in cleanliness itself, but in the values, assumptions, and practices through which cleanliness is defined and pursued. It is the use of aesthetic categories to erase ecological functions and cultural relationships. The banyans' size, roots, shade, habitats, and historical presence are interpreted as visual obstacles rather than as components of village survival.

The religious teachers reinforce this reclassification by celebrating the end of tree worship and relocating divinity to "high heaven." This process removes sacredness from material nature and weakens the moral limitations surrounding its destruction. The text therefore represents desacralization as a condition that makes exploitation easier. Once the banyans are no longer understood as *Ema* or manifestations of *Ina Tana Ekan*, they can be treated as spiritually empty matter.

Nevertheless, the story's criticism should not be reduced to a simplistic opposition between Christianity and Lamaholot ancestral religion. The sharper problem is interpretive exclusivity. The religious teachers speak fluently about God but refuse to understand the ecological meanings carried by another cosmology. Their failure lies not merely in holding different beliefs but in treating institutional religious knowledge as the only form worthy of recognition. *Ama Tewa*'s later questions expose this epistemic hierarchy. He asks whether people with greater authority are necessarily more correct, whether everything from outside is inherently more advanced, and whether ancestral knowledge has not already been tested. These questions challenge the equation of political rank, external origin, formal education, and epistemic superiority.

The village secretary's refusal to answer is analytically important. Epistemic domination does not operate only by disproving or openly attacking local knowledge. It can also operate through not listening. *Ama Tewa*'s argument is made institutionally inaudible because the secretary possesses the privilege to withdraw without responding. [Latulippe and Klenk \(2020\)](#) identify similar political problems when Indigenous and local knowledge is invited into decision-making only under conditions controlled by dominant institutions. [Gómez-Baggethun \(2022\)](#) likewise warns that growing recognition of local knowledge does not necessarily remove the deeper inequalities affecting ownership, authority, access, and self-determination.

The narrative judges competing knowledge systems through their consequences. The ancestral understanding of banyan trees is associated with water, coolness, habitat, and protection. The official policy is followed by heat, declining rivers, disappearing springs, water costs, and failed planting. *Ama Tewa*'s statement that ancestral knowledge has already been "tested" therefore appropriates the language of formal validation and redirects it toward long-term ecological experience. The reforestation project initially appears to reverse the destructive policy, but the narrative reveals that the underlying structure remains unchanged. Villagers were first ordered to cut the trees and later to replant them. Although the policy shifts, command remains the dominant form of governance, treating communities as implementers rather than knowledge holders who can shape decisions.

The succession from Teacher Lambert to his grandson Markus and from Subdistrict Head Andreas to his son Stanis intensifies this criticism. *Ama Tewo* and the villagers inherit ecological loss, guilt, heat, water scarcity, and hard labour. The descendants of the former authorities inherit administrative control. The narrative thus contrasts inherited ecological responsibility with inherited institutional privilege.

The conflict between ecological time and bureaucratic time is another major contribution of the findings. Banyans embody slow growth, long memory, seasonal recurrence, water retention, and intergenerational continuity. The project operates through deadlines, completion targets, reporting periods, and budget cycles. When rainfall is delayed, the logical ecological response would be to postpone planting. Instead, the project demands that planting continue because the deadline is fixed.

This reversal treats the living needs of seedlings as subordinate to the administrative calendar. Nature is expected to conform to project time rather than the project adapting to ecological conditions. The low survival rate is therefore not accidental. It results from a system organized around completion rather than life.

Daily photographs and videos reinforce this system. They provide evidence that planting has occurred, but they cannot demonstrate long-term survival. The project is successful at the level of visibility and unsuccessful at the level of viability. Its measurable output conceals its biological failure.

This finding has broader implications for environmental governance. Effective ecological restoration requires more than the physical placement of seedlings. It depends on local knowledge, appropriate timing, continuing care, community agency, ecological monitoring, and accountability. Traditional ecological knowledge scholarship likewise emphasizes that sustainable environmental governance must engage the institutions, worldviews, practices, and locally accumulated experience through which communities relate to ecosystems (Gadgil et al., 2021; Sinthumule, 2023).

The project's corruption connects ecological failure with environmental justice. Villagers work under extreme heat, suspend their ordinary livelihoods, and depend on promised wages for rice debts and school fees. Meanwhile, the project's large budget is diverted by officials. Environmental restoration consequently becomes another extractive economy.

Sultana's (2022) formulation of critical climate justice is relevant because environmental harm and environmental responses are shaped by unequal power, labour, access, and responsibility. In "*Ama Tewo*," those who performed the least physical work possess the greatest authority over the budget, while those who endure heat, dust, unpaid labour, and ecological decline possess the least decision-making power.

The grandfather's warning that disrespect for trees would lead to disrespect for people is therefore fulfilled institutionally. The same logic of disposability governs both groups. Trees are removed when they obstruct the desired image of development and replanted when they become useful to a government project. Villagers are mobilized when labour is required and neglected when wages are due.

The Indonesian expression *makan uang proyek*, literally "eating project money," sharpens this parallel. Officials consume the funds intended to support seedlings and workers. The villagers need food and school fees, while the seedlings need water and care, yet the institutional elite consumes the resources allocated to both.

The narrative thus distinguishes restoration as administration from restoration as care. Administrative restoration is organized through budgets, deadlines, numerical outputs, monitoring, and authority. Relational restoration requires attention to seasons, seedlings, workers, knowledge, fairness, memory, and long-term survival. *Ama Tewo*'s final planting embodies the second form because it continues after the first has collapsed.

5.4 Contributions, Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study addresses four gaps in previous scholarship. Analytically, Indonesian ecocritical research has largely examined environmental destruction, ecological messages, symbolism, cultural performances, settings, and human relationships with nature, while paying less attention to characterization as a medium of environmental ethics (Endraswara, 2016; Sukmawan, 2016; Khomisah, 2020; Larasati & Manut, 2022; Wissang & Nggaruaka, 2024). Culturally and geographically, Flores literature and Lamaholot environmental thought remain underrepresented in Indonesian ecocritical studies. Epistemologically, local cosmology is often treated as cultural background rather than as a system organizing environmental knowledge, value, obligation, and restraint. Conceptually, few studies integrate ecological value, characterization, moral injury, ecospiritual interpretation, environmental justice, and reparative action within one framework. The study's novelty therefore lies in conceptualizing *ecocentric characterization* as a process through which environmental ethics becomes visible in what a character remembers, perceives, values, feels, questions, resists, and repairs. This framework extends literary ecocriticism by connecting non-human agency and environmental value with the development of human moral consciousness (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2004; Taylor, 2010), while introducing wounded and reparative ecological agency, the eco-social cascade, the distinction between administrative visibility and ecological viability, and the conflict between ecological and bureaucratic

temporalities. It also avoids presenting tradition and modernity as absolute opposites by recognizing that ecological destruction is shaped by interacting cultural, economic, political, and institutional forces (Droz, 2022).

The findings have theoretical, literary, educational, and environmental-governance implications. Theoretically, the proposed framework enables researchers to examine what characters notice in the more-than-human world, what values they assign to it, how they respond emotionally to environmental damage, how they evaluate competing authorities, and how they confront complicity and undertake repair. For Indonesian literary studies, the findings position regional texts as sources of environmental philosophy rather than merely illustrations of local culture, extending the Indonesian ecocritical tradition established by Harsono (2008), Endraswara (2016), Sukmawan (2016), Khomisah (2020), Larasati and Manut (2022), Wissang and Nggaruaka (2024), and Zaini et al. (2024). For environmental humanities, the study demonstrates that nature may be valued through utility, intrinsic worth, kinship, memory, identity, spiritual obligation, and place-based relationships, meanings that purely economic valuation cannot adequately capture (Inglis & Pascual, 2023; Norton & Sanbeg, 2021; O'Connor & Kenter, 2019; Pascual et al., 2021). For environmental governance, the story indicates that restoration requires community agency, local knowledge, seasonal appropriateness, fair labour, continuing care, and accountability rather than only budgets and planting targets (Bawack et al., 2025; Gadgil et al., 2021; Gómez-Baggethun, 2022; Latulippe & Klenk, 2020; Sinthumule, 2023). Bilingual or translated versions of “*Ama Tewa*” may also support literary interpretation, ecological literacy, intercultural reflection, vocabulary development, and sustainability-oriented language learning, although these applications require empirical classroom testing (Bentz, 2020; Dhanyamol & Sethunaryanan, 2025; Kazazoglu, 2025; Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2024).

These contributions must be interpreted within the study’s boundaries. The analysis is based on one fictional short story and cannot represent all Flores literature, Lamaholot communities, or customary environmental practices. No interviews were conducted with the author, Lamaholot knowledge holders, readers, educators, or community members, and the researcher-produced English translations may not preserve every cultural and emotional nuance of the Indonesian and Lamaholot expressions. The proposed educational implications also remain conceptual rather than empirically demonstrated. Future research should compare *Ama Tewa* with ecocentric characters from other Flores, eastern Indonesian, and Indigenous literary traditions; investigate how Lamaholot readers, elders, cultural practitioners, and environmental activists interpret *Ina Tana Ekan*, *Ema*, and the story’s

criticism of development; and examine relationships between literary representation and contemporary ecological practices through reception studies, oral histories, or ethnographic research. Further studies should also explore how ecological meanings change through translation, test bilingual environmental literature in language classrooms, and analyse whether the tension between administrative visibility and ecological viability also appears in actual reforestation policies, project documentation, community participation, and environmental-governance discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that Silvester Petara Hurit’s “*Ama Tewa*” represents Lamaholot environmental ethics through the construction of an ecocentric character whose moral consciousness develops through ancestral ecological memory, affective resistance, coerced participation in environmental destruction, prolonged moral injury, critical reflection, and reparative action. *Ama Tewa*’s movement from a young man forced to cut the banyan trees to an elderly man who continues planting abandoned seedlings demonstrates that ecological responsibility does not depend on moral innocence, but on the willingness to acknowledge harm and sustain repair after institutional structures have failed. The narrative further represents the banyans as *Ema*, manifestations of *Ina Tana Ekan*, ecological workers, ancestral witnesses, animal habitats, and protectors of water and communal life, thereby constructing Lamaholot environmental ethics as a relational moral ecology rather than a purely instrumental view of nature. Their destruction produces an eco-social cascade involving the loss of birdsong, increasing heat, declining rivers and springs, cultural memory, social patience, household security, and community dignity. At the same time, the story criticizes a form of modern development that desacralizes nature, excludes local ecological knowledge, subjects’ natural processes to administrative deadlines, and transforms restoration into a visible but biologically ineffective and economically exploitative project.

The study’s principal novelty lies in conceptualizing characterization as a medium of environmental ethics and in identifying wounded and reparative ecological agency, the eco-social cascade, and the contrast between administrative visibility and ecological viability as key interpretive concepts. These findings contribute to Indonesian ecocriticism, Flores literary studies, environmental humanities, Indigenous environmental ethics, and culturally responsive ecological education, while suggesting that ecological restoration requires local knowledge, community participation, appropriate seasonal timing, fair labour, and long-term accountability. Future research should compare ecocentric characters across Flores, eastern Indonesian, and Indigenous literary traditions; investigate Lamaholot readers’ and cultural knowledge

holders' interpretations of *Ina Tana Ekan* and *Ema*; examine the story through reception, translation, ethnographic, and environmental-governance perspectives; and empirically assess the use of bilingual ecological literature for developing ecological literacy, intercultural competence, and language learning.

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