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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Forest as friend: Indigenous narratives in Madurese, Banjarese, and Sentani folklore structures for environmental and food sustainability (reflections on today's disasters)

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the roles of forests, local food sources, and non-human agents in three Indonesian folktales: Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura, Datu Awang Sukma from the Banjar community, and Dame and Dufun from Sentani. It aims to compare their narrative structures and interpret representations of ecological knowledge, food sustainability, and human–non-human relationships. This qualitative study employed a hybrid ethnographic approach involving online and in-person observations, interviews, documentation, transcription, and translation. Data were descriptively analyzed using Alan Dundes's motif and motifeme framework, complemented by deep ecology and posthumanist folklore as interpretive perspectives. The analysis identified 20 motifs and motifemes in Aghung Jaka Tarub, 10 in Datu Awang Sukma, and 21 in Dame and Dufun. Findings reveal that forests function not merely as settings but also as food sources, interaction spaces, and mediators between human and non-human worlds. These narratives preserve local ecological knowledge through practices that acknowledge plants, animals, sacred sites, and natural resources, positioning non-human entities as active agents in sustaining human life. The novelty lies in integrating narrative structure, deep ecology, and posthumanism into a cross-cultural comparative framework for examining ecological and food-related knowledge in folklore. This study contributes an interpretive framework for understanding folklore as a repository of local ecological knowledge relevant to food sustainability, forest conservation, and contemporary environmental challenges, particularly forest degradation and wildfires.

Keywords: folklore; narrative structure; deep ecology; posthumanism; food sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

The urgency of this research is supported by Indonesia's environmental and food security challenges. The Ministry of Forestry (2025) recorded 175,400 hectares of net deforestation in 2024 and approximately 376,805 hectares affected by forest and land fires. Meanwhile, the Food Security and Vulnerability Atlas (FSVA) 2025 identified 81 regencies and cities (15.76%) as vulnerable to food insecurity (National Food Agency, 2025). Although these figures do not establish a direct causal relationship between forest degradation and food insecurity, they highlight the importance of examining ecological and cultural dimensions of food sustainability. Forests provide food resources while sustaining indigenous knowledge of biodiversity utilization and preservation.

In Indonesian folklore, forests function not merely as narrative settings but also as food sources and spaces of interaction between humans and nature. They represent the close relationship between local communities, food availability, biodiversity, and ecological knowledge. Forest degradation may therefore threaten not only ecosystems but also local food resources and the cultural knowledge associated with their utilization. Folklore consequently offers an important medium for preserving and transmitting ecological knowledge across generations.

This study examines these relationships through three Indonesian folktales: Aghung Jaka Tarub (Madurese), Datu Awang Sukma (Banjar), and Dame and Dufun (West Sentani, Papua). In particular, Jaka Tarub illustrates the forest's role in the development of the narrative. These traditions are relevant to contemporary environmental challenges, including forest fires and ecological degradation in Kalimantan and Papua. By conceptualizing forests as natural food banks, this study emphasizes their importance as ecological resources that sustain human life.

Previous research has addressed food security and cultural strategies at global, national, and regional levels. However, folklore as a repository of local food knowledge and ecological relationships remains insufficiently explored. Folktales should therefore be understood not only as cultural heritage but also as sources of knowledge about food resources, human–nature interactions, and environmental sustainability. This study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective to examine how ecological knowledge and local food systems are represented and preserved through folklore.

Jaka Tarub is a folktale with various versions across Indonesia. The widely known Javanese version tells the story of a young man who marries a celestial maiden through deception involving her shawl. Similar narrative patterns occur in other regions (Harjito,

2022), including Aghung Jaka Tarub (Madurese), Datu Awang Sukma (Banjar), and Dame and Dufun (West Sentani, Papua), which have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. Despite their distinct cultural origins, these narratives share elements involving humans, celestial beings, and ecological environments, reflecting cultural values and imaginative patterns across societies (Brakel-Papenhuyzen, 2006). Their differences, particularly in the representation of plants, animals, food sources, occupations, and natural resources, reflect the sociocultural characteristics of their communities. Food sources therefore constitute significant motifs in Indonesian folklore (Alamsyah & Maziyah, 2020).

The ecological dimensions of these narratives are also evident in representations of non-human beings and interactions between humans and supernatural entities. Previous studies have identified motifs involving nature, food, occupations, flora, and fauna in Jaka Tarub-related narratives (Stephen, 2010), as well as celestial maidens as supernatural beings (Clinci, 2023). Narrative conflicts involving broken agreements and betrayal often lead to the separation of human and non-human characters, while unions between them may produce hybrid identities that challenge conventional boundaries of existence (Czudek, 2025). These elements provide a basis for examining human–nature relationships and the interconnectedness of different forms of life in folklore.

Narrative structure provides an analytical foundation for investigating these relationships. Motifs are essential elements of folklore, while their arrangement and interconnections shape narrative development (Mansur & Vardar, 2025). Analyzing motifs and narrative patterns can reveal how cultural meanings and ecological elements are organized within folktales (You, 2025). Accordingly, Alan Dundes's (1965) framework is employed to identify motifs and motifemes and compare the narrative structures of the three folktales, particularly their representations of forests, food sources, plants, animals, and human–non-human interactions.

This study further integrates deep ecology and posthumanism as complementary interpretive perspectives. Deep ecology examines nature's intrinsic value, ecological interdependence, and human relationships with the environment, extending the understanding of forests and local food resources beyond their instrumental value. Meanwhile, posthumanism challenges anthropocentric perspectives by recognizing non-human agency in shaping relationships and sustaining life. Their integration with Dundes's framework enables the analysis of narrative structures, ecological values, local food knowledge, and the roles of non-human entities.

Previous studies have approached Jaka Tarub through various theoretical perspectives. Nisa and Andalas (2021) employed feminist theory to examine women's objectification and gender relations, while Rozaqi et al. (2025) used comparative literature to investigate similarities and differences in characters, plots, values, and settings. However, neither primarily addressed ecological meanings, local food resources, or their functions within narrative structures. Firnanda et al. (2025) introduced an ecological and educational perspective through EcoEduLitera and the Sustainable Development Goals, but the relationship between narrative structure, local food, and non-human agency remains insufficiently explored. Similarly, Dobrogoszcz's (2025) study of Alistair Mackay's novel examined plant ecology and human trauma, offering a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding human–non-human relationships through posthumanist ecocriticism.

These studies demonstrate the development of gender-based, comparative, educational, and ecological approaches to literary research. Nevertheless, an integrated examination of narrative structure, local food, ecological knowledge, and non-human agency across folktales from different Indonesian cultural communities remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap through the integration of four interconnected dimensions: narrative structure, local food, ecology, and non-human agency. Its novelty lies in examining how motifs and motifemes organize ecological representations and local food knowledge while positioning forests, plants, animals, food resources, and supernatural beings within relationships that challenge anthropocentric perspectives. By integrating Dundes's narrative structure, deep ecology, and posthumanism, this study positions folklore not only as cultural heritage but also as a repository of ecological knowledge and local food wisdom relevant to food sustainability, forest conservation, and ecological awareness.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How are motifs and motifemes constructed and comparatively represented in Aghung Jaka Tarub, Datu Awang Sukma, and Dame and Dufun? (2) How are local food sources and ecological knowledge represented through relationships between humans, forests, and natural resources? (3) How are non-human agents represented as active participants in ecological relationships and the sustainability of human life? This study aims to identify and compare the narrative structures of the three folktales, interpret their representations of local food and ecological knowledge, and examine non-human agency through the integration of narrative structure, deep ecology, and posthumanism.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative design examining three Indonesian folktales: Aghung Jaka Tarub (Madurese), Datu Awang Sukma (Banjar), and Dame Dufun (Mooi, Sentani, Papua). Data comprised words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs containing relevant motifs and motifemes. The study integrated Spradley's (1997) ethnographic approach with oral literature methods from Danandjaja (2002), Hutomo (1991), and Sudikan (2001) to document, transcribe, classify, and interpret the narratives within their cultural contexts.

A hybrid ethnographic approach combining online and in-person activities was adopted to accommodate the communities' geographical distribution. Following Przybylski (2021), this approach facilitated direct interaction and digital communication with informants through observations, interviews, and follow-up discussions, depending on their accessibility and research locations.

The research objects, cultural communities, research locations, and informants are presented in Table 1.

Research object	Cultural community	Research location	Data sources	Number of informants
Aghung Jaka Tarub	Madurese	Pesarean Jaka Tarub, Talang, Muntok, Larangan District, Pamekasan Regency, East Java	Oral narrative, interview recordings, observations, and field notes	1
Datu Awang Sukma	Banjar	Sungai Malang, Amuntai Tengah District, Hulu Sungai Utara Regency, South Kalimantan	Oral narrative, interview recordings, observations, and field notes	1
Dame Dufun	Mooi (Sentani)	Sentani–Abepura, Papua	Oral narrative, interview recordings, observations, and field notes	1
Total	Three cultural communities	Three research locations	Primary oral narrative data	3

Table 1. Research Objects, Locations, Data Sources, and Informants
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Research locations were selected based on cultural relevance, accessibility, opportunities for direct observation and interaction, and the availability of reliable data, following Sudikan's (2001) criteria. Research activities took place from January 23, 2025, to October 22, 2026, involving data collection and follow-up discussions with informants to clarify narrative information and support publication.

The study involved three key informants, one from each cultural community, identified as the last-generation bearers of the respective folktales. Selection followed Hutomo's (1991) recommendation to obtain informant referrals from trusted community members and Spradley's (1997) criteria emphasizing cultural knowledge and the ability to explain

local traditions. The use of one informant per folktale reflected the availability of recognized narrative bearers. As Sudikan (2001) argues, informant numbers should correspond to research objectives and the availability of relevant cultural knowledge. Data adequacy was therefore assessed through narrative completeness, informants' cultural authority, consistency between oral accounts and transcripts, repeated verification, and supporting academic publications and cultural documentation.

Data collection followed oral literature research procedures proposed by Danandjaja (2002), Hutomo (1991, 1979), and Sudikan (2001), involving site selection, informant identification, observation, interviews, recording, and documentation. Research settings and informants were selected based on accessibility, cultural relevance, and the availability of credible information (Sudikan, 2001).

Observations and unstructured interviews (wawancara tidak terarah) were conducted to explore the folktales and their cultural contexts while allowing informants to express their knowledge freely (Hutomo, 1991). Interviews were conducted through in-person and online interactions using Zoom, Google Meet, and WhatsApp, depending on informant accessibility. Follow-up discussions facilitated narrative clarification and information verification.

Oral accounts and interviews were recorded using audio or audiovisual equipment, considering informant comfort, recording conditions, and data clarity (Hutomo, 1979; Sudikan, 2001). Documentation and field notes covered recording details, research settings, and available informant profiles, including cultural and social backgrounds. Following Hutomo (1993), these records were compared with interview recordings to ensure contextual accuracy and support subsequent analysis.

Recorded oral narratives were transcribed into written texts, preserving their original sequences, expressions, and cultural meanings. Transcription followed the Fifth Edition of the Indonesian Spelling System (EYD), implemented in August 2022, while retaining local expressions and culturally specific vocabulary to maintain narrative authenticity.

The transcripts were then classified and repeatedly checked against audio or audiovisual recordings. Informants were consulted to clarify ambiguous expressions, verify narrative sequences, and confirm cultural information. Where necessary, translations were cross-checked against the original transcripts to ensure fidelity to the oral accounts.

The study employed qualitative descriptive analysis integrating Alan Dundes's narrative structure framework, Arne Naess's deep ecology, and Tok Thompson's posthumanist folklore perspective to examine narrative patterns, local food, ecological knowledge, and non-human agency across the three folktales.

First, the transcribed narratives were segmented into analytical units (words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs) relevant to characters, actions, events, objects, food resources, and human–non-human interactions. Second, motifs and motifemes were identified based on their narrative elements, structural functions, and positions within the story sequences, following Dundes's framework. Particular attention was given to forests, plants, animals, food resources, and ecological interactions.

Third, the identified motifs and motifemes were compared across the three folktales to determine shared structural patterns and culturally distinctive representations of food resources, ecological practices, and human–non-human relationships among the Madurese, Banjar, and Mooi communities.

Fourth, the narratives were interpreted through deep ecology and posthumanist folklore. Deep ecology examined ecological interdependence, nature's intrinsic value, and environmental sustainability (Oktaviani & Ruddin, 2024; Kasmawati et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Thompson's posthumanist perspective examined the agency of plants, animals, supernatural beings, and other non-human entities in shaping narrative events and relationships beyond anthropocentric interpretations (Amil et al., 2023).

Finally, these perspectives were integrated to explain how narrative structures convey local food knowledge, ecological values, human–nature interdependence, and the roles of non-human entities in sustaining human and non-human life.

Data validity was maintained through method triangulation and repeated checking and rechecking. Method triangulation compared observations, interviews, audio or audiovisual recordings, field notes, and supporting documentation. Each folktale was verified against its corresponding recordings, transcripts, contextual documentation, and informant confirmation rather than through direct comparison between informants.

The checking and rechecking procedure identified transcription errors, omissions, and inconsistencies in narrative sequences. Ambiguous expressions and cultural information were clarified through follow-up communication with informants, while translations were compared with original transcripts to preserve meaning.

Theoretical integration provided additional analytical verification by examining narrative elements through Dundes's structural framework, deep ecology, and posthumanist folklore. These perspectives complemented data interpretation without replacing source verification. Independent researcher triangulation was not claimed, as validation relied on method triangulation, informant confirmation, and theoretical integration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first level of analysis concerns the narrative structure, specifically, motifs and motifemes. Next, the analysis moves to the second level, which addresses food security in relation to deep ecology. Finally, the third level of analysis examines food security in relation to post-humanism in folklore. These three levels of analysis remain linked to the goal of dissecting the "forest" from the perspectives of three communities (Madura, Banjar, and Sentani) through their respective theoretical approaches. The final outcome of the analysis will culminate in a reflection on the disasters occurring today.

The Forest as a Friend: Traditional Food Wisdom of Madura, Banjar, and Sentani in the Narrative Structure of Folktales

Based on an analysis of data regarding the narrative structure of the stories, it can be concluded that there are 20 (twenty) motifs and motifemes in the folktale of Aghung Jaka Tarub. Furthermore, in the story of Datu Awang Sukma, there are 10 (ten) motifs and motifemes. Additionally, in the story of Dame and Dufun, 21 (twenty-one) motifs and motifemes were identified.

Each of the motif categories described above contains motifemes that align with Alan Dundes's theory of narrative structure. This narrative structure not only serves as a label identifying the stages of the storytelling process but is also an integral part of understanding all three stories in their entirety, with specific and unique motifs and motifemes that distinguish these stories from other versions. See the following table.

Aghung Jaka Tarub (Madura)	Datu Awang Sukma (Banjar)	Dame and Dufun (Papua)
Lack (Socio-Economic Background)	Lack (Socio-Economic Background)	Lack (Economic Background)
Task (Hunting or Wandering)	Task (Obtaining Food Resources)	Task (Hunting or Wandering)
Deceit (Stealing from or Deceiving a Fairy)	Lack Liquidated (Socio-Economic Background)	Deceit (Stealing from or Deceiving a Fairy)
Lack (Device for Flying)	Task (Hunting or Wandering)	Lack (Device for Flying)
Deception (Marriage Strategy)	Deceit (Stealing from or Deceiving a Fairy)	Deception (Marriage Strategy)
Lack Liquidated (Giving Birth to a Child)	Lack (Device for Flying)	Task (Obtaining Food Resources)
Task (Obtaining Food Resources)	Deception (Marriage Strategy)	Lack Liquidated (Giving Birth to a Child)
Interdiction (Prohibition against Violating the Sacred)	Lack Liquidated (Giving Birth to a Child)	Violation (Violation of a Command)
Lack (Seeking a Way to Transfer Sacredness)	Attempt Escape (The Fairy's Way of Finding the Flying Device)	Attempt Escape (The Fairy's Way of Finding the Flying Device)
Lack Liquidated (A Way of Preserving Sacredness)	Consequences (Entertaining and Caring for the Child)	Consequences (Entertaining and Caring for the Child)
Lack (Seeking a Way to Meet the Fairy)	–	Consequences (The Fairy's Way of Returning to the Heavens)
Lack Liquidated (A Way to Meet the Fairy)	–	Lack Liquidated (A Way to Follow the Fairy to the Sky)

Task Completed (A Way to Preserve Sacredness)	–	Lack (Reception by Celestial Beings)
Interdiction (Prohibition against Violating a Command)	–	Lack Liquidated (Punishment for Earthly Beings)
Violation (Violation of a Command)	–	Task (First Test)
Consequence (Obtaining Food Resources)	–	Task Completed (How to Complete the First Test)
Attempt Escape (The Fairy's Way of Finding the Flying Device)	–	Task (Second Test)
Lack (A Way to Follow the Fairy to the Sky)	–	Task Completed (How to Complete the Second Test)
Lack Liquidated (Reception by Celestial Beings)	–	Task (Third Test)
Consequences (Impact of the Tragedy)	–	Task Completed (How to Complete the Third Test)
–	–	Task Completed (The Way Back to Earth)

Table 2. Comparison of Narrative Structures (Dundes' Motifs and Motifemes) in the Three Stories (Source: Personal Documentation)

Through this structural analysis, it can be seen that forests are part of the ecological motif and that food security can be found in several structural parallels. There are two broad narrative structures related to the ecological motif and food security. First, in a structure with a high degree of similarity, the forest plays a direct role in the story. Beginning with the "lack" structure, this motif is followed by a socioeconomic backdrop, introducing the diverse backgrounds of the characters, ranging from religious figures, fishermen, and hunters (ordinary people) to wanderers who become rulers of the region and custodians of tradition (datu). Next, the "lack" motif is followed by motifs involving hunting or wandering to obtain food sources, indicating that the forest is a place for obtaining sustenance and sustaining life. Finally, the "lack liquidated" motif shows that the forest on earth serves as a bridge to the celestial realm.

Second, regarding structures that share general and implicit similarities. This structure encompasses several sequences of motifs. The first motif sequence is "Lack," "Lack Liquidated," "Deceit," "Deception," and "Task." In this sequence, the structure influences the narrative's progression and the message conveyed. It begins with a character who desires to change their fate, travels to a certain place (often symbolized by nature), meets a fairy, and commits a deception, which becomes the initial cause of the deteriorating relationship between humans and the symbolization of nature.

The second motif sequence consists of "Interdiction," "Violation," "Attempted Escape," "Consequences," "Lack," and "Lack Liquidated." The prohibition expressed through the symbolism of nature (the fairy) is overcome by human ego, leading to a violation that impacts

the character's attempt to save themselves and results in consequences. This creates problems and prompts efforts to resolve them.

The third sequence of motifs is Lack, Lack Liquidated, Task, Task Completed, Interdiction, Violation, and Consequences. This refers to characters who attempt to solve problems, some through tasks and the completion of those tasks, which lead to a second set of consequences or new stories, until they reach the stage of prohibition, violation, attempts at self-preservation, and ultimately, consequences.

Forests as a Food Source Devastated by Wildfires from a Deep Ecology Perspective

This second-level analysis aims to address the fact that forests, which were once friends and a source of food security, as mentioned in the three folktales, are now being destroyed by humans themselves through devastating wildfires. Rooted in deep ecology, this approach encourages people to manage nature more wisely and to be critical in formulating nature-related policies. An understanding of deep ecology emphasizes the awareness that nature does not belong entirely to humans alone; rather, nature is an inseparable part of our existence that must be internalized, one way being through a relationship of mutual respect.

The Integration of Local Wisdom and Ecology

In the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM), an interesting form of the Integration of Local Wisdom and Ecology (PKLE) is found. The integration of local wisdom is evidenced by the mention of a local plant called "cikal kelapa," as well as an explanation of the procedures for harvesting natural resources (cutting down trees) under specific conditions; the resulting ecological relationship is one between humans and nature that is ethical and full of respect. Consider the following data.

> (PKLE-1)
> Kalau **bekas cikal kelapa** itu yang kecil-kecil, itu ditanam juga, **tumbuh pohon kelapa**, dulu mati, biar ada peninggalannya **disuruh potong, tapi nggak boleh digergaji, dibelah pakai becok** disuruh taruh dibawah langgar atau mushola. (AJTdM, 31-35)
>
> "If the **small coconut sprouts** are planted, they will also **grow into coconut trees**. They used to die, but so that there would be a lasting remnant, they were **ordered to be cut, but they could not be sawn; they had to be split using a machete** and then placed underneath the *langgar* or prayer room." (AJTdM, 31–35)

The data (PKLE-1) can be interpreted through the lens of posthumanism: plants are not merely inanimate objects that can be treated arbitrarily with destructive technology, but rather entities possessing a "body" and a "historical legacy" (relics) that must be respected by humans in order to maintain the harmony of the ecosystem.

In addition to appearing in the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub, this Integration of Local Wisdom and Ecology (PKLE) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS). This data is particularly interesting because it is linked to the local Banjar culture, especially regarding the relationship between humans and the forest. Consider the data below.

(PKLE-2)
Rajin (cangkal) itu seperti dia **semua kerja bisa dilakukan, semangat banget berkebun, tekun banget**. Diatuh **suka sekali di hutan**, dia bersemangat, apalagi **melihat kehidupan di hutan** (DASdKS, 5-8).

Diligent (*cangkal*) means being able to **do all kinds of work, being very enthusiastic about gardening, and being highly persevering**. He **really likes the forest**; he is enthusiastic, especially when **seeing life in the forest**. (DASdKS, 5–8)

The data (PKLE-2) suggests that the character of people who are diligent and dedicated to gardening and who love the forest demonstrates that working in nature is not a form of human domination over the earth, but rather a form of communication, humility, and merging of the self into the living agency of the forest.

Then, in the third story, Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP), a form of PKLE is found in the local wisdom of the Sentani people of Papua, who utilize natural materials as building materials while also protecting themselves from the cold mountain air and the Papuan sea breeze. Consider the data below.

(PKLE-3)
Dufun kaget karena **melihat bayangan** seperti sayap yang berada **diatas atap rumah** yang terbuat dari daun sagu dan rumbia, sayap itu terselip diantara sela-sela atap (DDdP: 49-51).

Dufun was startled upon **seeing a shadow** resembling wings **above the roof of the house**, which was made of sago and thatch leaves. The wings were tucked between the gaps in the roof. (DDdP: 49–51)

Data (PKLE-3) can be interpreted within the context of local wisdom: sago and rumbia plants are not merely economic commodities or inert building materials. They are revered entities, often believed to have "guardians" or to bring the blessings of life (food and shelter).

Human Decentralization

In the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM), an interesting form of Human Decentralization (DM) is found. Humans and celestial beings (manifestations of spirituality but subordinate to the Gods or God, such as celestial maidens, angels, or spirits) possess authority and power derived from the Gods or God, resulting in a significant decentralization of the human position. Consider the following data.

(DM-1)
"Kang mas, sampian kok ngejar saya, itu anaknya tinggal dengan siapa?" "saya nggak bisa ngerawat anak yang masih kecil, kalau sampean nggak pulang ke alam kasar lagi" (kata Agung Jaka Tarub) "**sudah**

sampean pulang, setelah sampai alam kasar sampean buat pagupon" (kata Dewi Nawang Wulan) kayak tempatnya burung dara, disuruh taruh di penyatir sana (sambil menunjuk ke arah pertigaan jalan) katanya orang Madura "pecudun". (AJTdM, 120-129).

"My husband, why are you chasing me? Who will take care of the child if you leave?" "I cannot take care of a young child if you do not return to the *alam kasar* [human realm]." (said by Agung Jaka Tarub). **"You should return. Once you arrive in the *alam kasar*, you should build a *pagupon*," (said by Dewi Nawang Wulan), like a place for pigeons. She told him to put it there at the intersection (while pointing toward the road junction). According to the Madurese people, it is called 'pecudun.'** (AJTdM, 120–129

Data (DM-1) can be interpreted to mean that humans do not possess absolute power and inevitably have shortcomings; humans were sent to Earth (the material world) not to dominate, but to establish ethical ecological relationships based on mutual respect. Building a pagupon signifies respecting the boundaries of cosmic space (pecudun). This data emphasizes that, to ensure their survival, humans must not succumb to their egos.

In addition to appearing in the story of Jaka Tarub, this concept of Human Decentralization (DM) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS). This data is particularly interesting because it is linked to the context of local wisdom among the people of South Kalimantan, especially regarding the food ingredient "candlenut." Consider the data below.

(DM-2)
Lalu si datu itu sadar kalau perpisahan itu tidak bisa dielakkan karena di kehidupan pasti ada masanya, ada perpisahan. Terus putri berujar, "kanda, dinda mohon jagalah bayi kita ini" ujarnya ke suaminya, itu seperti "kamu rawat anak kita baik-baik" begitulah. **Terus pandangan datu tadi hampa melihat putri ke kayangan.** Ujarnya putri "kalau anaknya kaganangan (terkenang) kepada mama nya, ambil tujuh kemiri, terus masukkan lah dalam bakul, diguncang-guncang, habis itu sambil memainkan saruling" (DASdKS, 107-116).

Then the *datu* realized that the separation could not be avoided, because in life there comes a time when people must part. Then the princess said, "My dear, please take care of our baby," she said to her husband, meaning, "Take good care of our child." **Then the *datu* gazed blankly at the princess as she returned to the heavens.** The princess said, "If the child becomes *kaganangan* (longing for or remembering his mother), take seven candlenuts, put them in a basket, and shake them. Then do so while playing the *saruling* (traditional flute)" (DASdKS, 107–116

The data (DM-2) can be interpreted as a decline in human emotional and domestic sovereignty, as humans are forced to submit to the laws of natural cycles (time/separation) and become dependent on botanical agents (candlenuts), man-made objects (baskets/flutes), and sound frequencies (acoustics). This indicates that humans cannot live without materials from nature, whether living creatures or inanimate objects.

Human decentralization is also evident in the story of Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP), in which the community's belief that sparrows and herons are helpers to humans, and thus part of nature, must be based on a relationship of mutual respect. Consider the data below.

(DM-3)

Burung pipit bersedia membantu Dame. **Burung pipit menyuruh temannya yaitu burung bangau** untuk mengantarkan Dame. Burung bangau datang, **Dame naik keatasnya dan terbang menuju kerajaan langit (kayangan)**. (DDdP: 78-83).

The sparrow was willing to help Dame. **The sparrow asked its friend, the heron,** to take Dame. The heron came, **Dame climbed onto its back and flew toward the celestial kingdom (heaven/*kayangan*).** (DDdP: 78–83)

The data (DM-3) suggests that sparrows and herons, as non-human creatures, indicate that humans are not the center of everything. Therefore, humans must treat all animals well because someday they will surely need them.

Site-Specific Context

In the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM), an interesting form of Site-Specific Context (KST) is found. The forest is not only viewed as a specific place but also as an important source of food that sustains human life; furthermore, within the forest there is a garden that serves as an attraction, drawing celestial maidens down to Earth. Consider the following data.

(KST-1)
Dulu Aghung Jaka Tarub itu **mandi di taman**, tamannya ada di pinggirnya makam sana, sekarang tinggal bekasnya, sebelah utara, sebelah timor, sebelah selatan, jadi makom itu **dikelilingi sama sendang pemandian Dewi Nawang Wulan**. (AJTdM, 9-13).

"In the past, Aghung Jaka Tarub **bathed in a garden**. The garden was located beside the tomb. Now, only traces of it remain, to the north, east, and south. Thus, the tomb is **surrounded by the bathing springs of Dewi Nawang Wulan**." (AJTdM, 9–13)

The data (KST-1) suggests that gardens and bathing springs are depicted as beautiful and sacred areas. They serve as symbols of purity and beauty, and as evidence that the order of nature leads to true beauty.

In addition to appearing in the AJTdM story, this Site-Specific Context (KST) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS). This data is interesting because the site-specific context is also understood as a representation of the connection between the celestial and earthly realms (water and land). Consider the data below.

(KST-2)
Sebulan sekali Awang Sukma ini berkeliling didaerahnya tadi tuh, sampai suatu hari dia tuh ada menemukan **telaga**, (DASdKS, 18-20).

"Once a month, Awang Sukma would travel around his territory. One day, he came across a **lake**." (DASdKS, 18–20)

The story (KST-2) can be interpreted as depicting a lake as the primary source of life for the community. The celestial maiden visits this place as a symbol of fertility, purity, and vitality.

Then, in the final story, Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP), the narrative contains a context specific to Papuan communities regarding their food sources, both from the land and the sea, which are threatened by the irresponsible actions of humans. Consider the data below.

(KST-3)
Di wilayah sekitar **Danau Sentani** dulu sekali, hidup pemuda ramah yang tampan bernama Dame. Tiap hari Dame pergi ke **hutan** buat berburu. (DDdP: 1-3).

"In the area around **Lake Sentani**, there once lived a handsome and friendly young man named Dame. Every day, Dame went to the **forest** to hunt." (DDdP: 1–3)

The data (KST-3) can be interpreted to mean that Lake Sentani in Papua serves as a source of livelihood, food, water, irrigation, and more. In addition, the surrounding forests and seas also serve as sources of livelihood for the community.

Human Ego in Relation to the Forest (Nature) and the Symbolism of Non-Human Agents in Folkloric Posthumanism

This third-level analysis aims to help us understand posthumanism as an alternative perspective that offers a mutually respectful, reciprocal relationship with nonhuman beings (both living and non-living), such as forests, animals, plants, rocks, water, and even digital technology. This analysis also serves to examine how the human ego's dominance over nature and the symbolism of nonhuman agents shape the narrative. The posthumanism proposed by Tok Thompson emphasizes several key concepts, namely: vernacular posthumanist ecology, liminality and in-between spaces, as well as ethics and performance. As follows.

The Concept of Vernacular Posthumanism

Vernacular posthumanism offers a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the relationship between humans and non-human beings; the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM) provides an intriguing example of the Concept of Vernacular Posthumanism (KVP). In Madurese society, human desires are symbolized as something that must be controlled so as not to cause harm to either the human being themselves or other beings. Consider the following data.

(KVP-1)

ketika itu **curiga kok tutup masak nasi nggak boleh dibuka**, dibuka sama Agung Joko Traub **isinya cuman tiga bulir** atau tiga tangkai, ditutup lagi. (AJTdM, 91-94).

"At that time, he became **suspicious about why the rice pot had to remain covered and could not be opened**. Agung Jaka Tarub opened it and found that **there were only three grains** or three stalks of rice inside, and then he covered it again." (AJTdM, 91–94)

Data (KVP-1) can be interpreted as curiosity, symbolizing worldliness and lust or temptation. When these feelings succeed in overcoming a person and causing them to violate the message, destruction (*bala*) will follow. The human ego, symbolized here in the real world, has also been proven: when humans prioritize their egos to the point of burning down forests, destruction in the form of disasters or nature's retribution will follow and haunt humanity.

This concept of Vernacular Posthumanism (KVP) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS), where "vernacular" (important and strategic) refers to the local wisdom of the people of South Kalimantan in viewing nature and non-human beings, namely the "ayam hirang" (black chicken). Consider the data below.

(KVP-2)
tapi pada **suatu hari ayam hirang (hitam) naik keatas lumbung**, naik **ke atas tempat menyimpan padi**, ayam tadi tuh **"mengikih" padi**, mengikih itu mengais-ngais **(mengacak-acak)**. Habis itu putri bungsu tadi berusaha sekali mengusir ayam hitam tadi, "hus, hus, jangan diatas situ lah yam, kan itu bahamburan" ucapnya. Terus matanya tuh ada **melihat seperti simpanan bambu gitu lah diatas bekas kikihan ayam**, "apa isinya didalam nih?", ujarnya putri tadi. **Pas dibuka isinya tadi tuh ternyata selendang miliknya** yang hilang satu tahun yang lalu. (DASdKS, 87-97).

"But **one day, a black chicken climbed onto the granary**, climbing **onto the place where the rice was stored**. The chicken began **'mengikih' the rice**, which means scratching and **scattering the rice**. Then the youngest princess tried to drive the black chicken away. 'Shoo, shoo! Don't stay up there, chicken. You're scattering everything,' she said. Then she **noticed something that looked like a bamboo container among the rice scattered by the chicken**. 'What is inside this?' the princess wondered. **When she opened it, she discovered that it was her shawl**, which had been missing for a year." (DASdKS, 87–97)

The data (KVP-2) suggests that the black chicken symbolizes a "secret" that, no matter how tightly guarded, will inevitably be revealed. The black chicken also serves as a symbol of a non-anthropomorphic being that embodies truth, without denial, honesty, and courage. The act of chasing the chicken away reflects a self-preservation instinct. Yet the truth is ultimately revealed through the discovery of the shawl inside the bamboo storage container, a discovery that signifies a new reality, an awakening, and an acceptance of fate.

The story of Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP) also embodies this Concept of Vernacular Posthumanism (KVP). "Vernacular" (important and strategic) refers to the local wisdom of the Sentani people in their view of nature and non-human beings, specifically the "eel." Consider the data below.

(KVP-3)

> Dame **was assisted by an eel**, which struck the water with its tail, causing the water and oil to separate. (DDdP, 105–106).

The data (KVP-3) can be interpreted as the eel symbolizing the non-Anthropocene, the interconnectedness of all living beings, and their mutual dependence (harmony).

Liminality and Interstitial Space

Liminality is the point of convergence that connects two worlds, the underworld and the upper world. The story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM) offers an intriguing example of liminality and the in-between space (LRA). At this point of convergence between the human world and the celestial world, what are essentially separate realms share a point of intersection. Consider the following data.

> (LRA-1)
> sampai **mempunyai keturunan, Dewi Nawang Sasi** yang ada (makamnya) didalam cungkup sana, ada makamnya. (AJTdM, 24-26).
>
> "until she **had offspring, Dewi Nawang Sasi**, whose tomb is located inside the *cungkup* over there." (AJTdM, 24–26)

The data (LRA-1) suggests that descent is the result of a bond formed between two beings (of the gross and subtle realms), giving rise to a hybrid entity. In addition to appearing in the story of Jaka Tarub, this concept of Liminality and the In-Between Space (LRA) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS), referring to the relationship between humans and the celestial realm, which can intersect and even produce offspring. Consider the data below.

> (LRA-2)
> Jadinya dia akhirnya tadi memutuskan untuk **mereka menikah** jadi suami istri. Terus sudah **setahun dikaruniai seorang anak**. Bayinya itu "binian", artinya itu **perempuan**, cantik sekali, kemudian dinamai **Kumalasari**. (DASdKS, 81-85).
>
> "Eventually, they decided to **get married** and became husband and wife. After **a year, they were blessed with a child**. The baby was called *binian*, meaning **a girl**, and she was very beautiful. They then named her **Kumalasari**." (DASdKS, 81–85)

Data (LRA-2) is interpreted as a young girl, symbolizing the guardian of bonds and the successor to the next generation, who will foster greater respect for nature and all living beings. The symbol of a young girl was chosen because women are the primary educators of the next generation and symbols of nurturing and resilience.

The story of Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP) also contains Liminality and Interstitial Space (LRA), focusing on the fascinating relationship where humans can experience life in the celestial realm and are able to pass trials with the help of a celestial

creature (a fly), demonstrating the local wisdom of the Sentani people in their view of nature and non-human beings, namely "flies." Consider the data below.

(KVP-3)
…dia **dibantu seekor lalat** yang terbang diatas kepala Dufun dan akhirnya bisa mengetahui Dufun dengan tepat. **Setelah berhasil melewati tiga ujian, pernikahan Dame dan Dufun dilangsungkan**, Raja menghadiahi cincin dan kalung kepada Dufun dan gelang serta mahkota kepada Dame. (JTdP, 110-116).

…she was **assisted by a fly** that flew above Dufun's head and eventually enabled her to identify Dufun correctly. **After successfully completing the three tests, Dame and Dufun's marriage was held**, and the King presented Dufun with a ring and necklace, while Dame received a bracelet and a crown. (JTdP, 110–116)

The data (KVP-3) can be interpreted as flies, symbols of creatures that are often underestimated or viewed as repulsive and lowly, yet play a vital role in nature. Evidence of the interdependence among all creatures, no matter how small their role; the three trials, symbols of three proofs; and the ring and necklace as symbols of a sacred "bond" and blessing for both worlds.

Ethics and Performance

Ethics and performance focus on how we act or perform in ways that relate to interactions between humans and non-human beings; the story of Aghung Jaka Tarub from Madura (AJTdM) offers an intriguing example of Ethics and Performance (EP). It explores how to develop an ethics that not only involves humans but also takes into account the well-being of non-human beings and the ecosystem as a whole. Consider the following data.

(EP-1)
curiga Agung Jaka Tarub, **anak saya kalau dimasukkan ke atas itu kok diem, diintipnya** sama Agung Jaka Tarub. **Ternyata yang menyusui kerbau putih**, kepingin ketemu sama kerbau putih naik ke atas pegupon, **nggak ada si kerbau putih, yang ada hanya anaknya**, diambil anaknya dibawa kebawah lalu bilang "**mulai sekarang anak cucu saya tujuh turunan tidak boleh makan daging sapi**". (AJTdM, 31-38).

Agung Jaka Tarub became suspicious because **whenever my child was placed up there, she would remain quiet, so he secretly watched her**. **He discovered that a white buffalo was nursing her**. Wanting to meet the white buffalo, he climbed onto the *pagupon*, but **the white buffalo was not there; only her calf was there**. He took the calf downstairs and then said, "**From now on, my children and grandchildren for seven generations must not eat beef**. (AJTdM, 31–38)

Data (EP-1) suggests that Jaka Tarub's curiosity never ceased; when he once again violated the terms of his second chance, he came upon a cow, a symbol of food and wealth, as well as the foundation of the economy and life itself, but because he once again disobeyed the command and fell prey to the tricks of his curiosity and lust, he ultimately unwittingly made a mistake by vowing not to eat the cow, even though what he saw in his vision was a

white water buffalo. This also served as a form of punishment because Agung had spied on the breastfeeding ritual in the pagupon, where the angel was no longer his wife.

This Ethics and Performance (EP) is also found in the story of Datu Awang Sukma from South Kalimantan (DASdKS), relating to concrete actions in daily life that demonstrate ecological and social responsibility in facing increasingly complex posthuman challenges. Consider the data below.

(EP-2)
Datu bersumpah kalau **dia** dan anaknya **tujuh turunannya** itu **tidak akan memelihara ayam hitam** karena malapetaka. (DASdKS, 113-118).

The *datu* swore that **he** and his descendants **for seven generations** would **never keep black chickens** because they were believed to bring misfortune. (DASdKS, 113–118).

Data (EP-2) emphasizes the symbolic representation of ethics between humans and non-human beings (black chickens). The black chicken is a symbol of honesty and secrecy; when humans choose not to raise black chickens, they actually elevate the black chicken to a sacred status.

Ethics and Performance (EP) are also depicted in the story of Dame and Dufun from Papua (DDdP), which captures the ecological and social responsibilities of the Sentani people in their daily interactions with nature or increasingly complex posthuman agents. Consider the data below.

(EP-3)
…ketika si Dame tu pergi hutan, dia **tidak memanah berbagai hewan** yang dijumpai, **tak seperti biasanya.** (JTdP, 4-5).

"…when Dame went into the forest, he **did not shoot any of the animals** he encountered, **unlike usual**." (JTdP, 4–5)

The data (EP-3) highlight the symbolic identity of livelihoods around Lake Sentani, which are closely tied to nature and nature conservation.

CONCLUSION

Aghung Jaka Tarub (Madurese), Datu Awang Sukma (Banjar), and Dame and Dufun (Sentani) share narrative patterns but express distinct ecological meanings. They contain 20, 10, and 21 motifs and motifemes. Forests provide food and connect human and non-human worlds. Ecological knowledge appears in coconuts and resource regulations (Madurese); gardening, forest life, and candlenuts (Banjar); and sago, rumbia, hunting, and helpful animals (Sentani).

Plants, animals, forests, and supernatural beings shape events and human actions, revealing dependence on nature and challenging anthropocentrism. This study integrates

Dundes's narrative structure, deep ecology, and posthumanist folklore to link narrative patterns, ecological values, food knowledge, and non-human agency.

Limited to three folktales and one key informant per tradition, the study cannot represent narrative variations or environmental and food-security conditions. Future research should include more versions and knowledge holders and examine folkloric ecological knowledge in practices and sustainability.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool ChatGPT was used to assist with language refinement and the preparation of selected manuscript components during the manuscript preparation process. The authors reviewed and verified the resulting text and remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and validity of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

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