

The Relationship between a Woman and Nature in Empowering Orang Rimba through Education Depicted in Butet Manurung's *The Jungle School*

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Abstract

This study investigates a woman's characteristics that reflect the ecofeminist perspective in empowering Orang Rimba through education depicted in *The Jungle School*. In analyzing the problem, this study applied descriptive-qualitative research using ecofeminism. The theory of character and ecofeminism describes a woman character's characteristics and relationship with nature in empowering the local people who still kept their local wisdom. The data is obtained through close reading focusing on the character's actions, responses, and reactions in educating Orang Rimba. It reveals that the main character is described as an intelligent, creative, and courageous woman who supports her in creating eco-friendly education to save nature from exploitation and preserve the indigenous people's local wisdom.

Keywords: a woman character, ecofeminism, education

Introduction

The Jungle School (Manurung, 2012) was published in the present civilization era when there were some complex developments in the educational system and cultured and civilized society. In her book, Butet Manurung shares some suitable methods when teaching jungle children but still preserves the local wisdom. She takes the readers on an educational adventure of indigenous people in Bukit Dua Belas, Jambi's rainforest, through her prose writing, first published in Bahasa Indonesia entitled *Sakola Rimba*. It was translated into English under the title *The Jungle School* in 2012. It is exciting to study her real experiences in teaching counting, reading, and writing of the *Orang Rimba* with suitable materials without leaving the local wisdom.

Manurung's works have successfully triggered some studies (Mulatsih & Aurora, 2021; Anggi, 2020; Anggraini, 2019). In the study entitled *Self-Regulated Learning in Butet Manurung's The Jungle School*, Mulatsih and Aurora (2021) focuses on some learning processes in work combined with a theory of education. It shows that *The Jungle School* gives learners some insights into being independent learners who apply self-regulated learning. This self-regulated learning takes form in three aspects; metacognition, motivation, and repeated good behavior, which jungle children did, which could be one of the keys to facing some learning problems in remote areas during the pandemic. Anggi (2020) coins some values for building character in the educational field, such as religiosity, persistence, and creativity, which also support knowledge, awareness, intelligence, and local wisdom, which were identified through intrinsic elements of Manurung's writing. Anggraini (2019) brings the discussion of local wisdom into her study. It underlines the importance of preserving local wisdom to save natural resources in the jungle. This study concludes that the Orang Rimba communities highly regarded the values of their local wisdom.

Those previous studies prove that Butet Manurung's *The Jungle School* is worth studying. In this nonfiction literature, she informs her transformation from the outsider who was rejected by Orang Rimba, the indigenous community in Bukit Dua Belas, Jambi, to becoming a trusted teacher. She attempts to help the Orang Rimba protect its habitat from outsiders taking over the jungle through reading, writing, and counting. As a woman living in the rainforest, she faces many challenges, such as cultural barriers, limited facilities, and other personal matters in teaching the jungle people. Her goal was to uplift the indigenous group's social, economic, cultural, and political status and her environmental concerns. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate her struggle to empower the Orang Rimba with an eco-friendly education that still preserves the local wisdom and protects the local people's environment, rights, and lives. However, unlike previous studies, this study emphasizes the characteristics of Butet Manurung (Butet), a woman character in *The Jungle School* who struggles to educate the indigenous people in Bukit Dua Belas seen through ecofeminism.

During these decades, a study on the ecofeminism movement has become very interesting (Clara, 2018). Feminism and ecological movements have become the research trends, discussing the close relationship between women and nature. All ecofeminist argues that human beings correlate with one another and interact with non-human objects, such as nature. Women are closer to nature and tend to preserve it (Zans & Ezpeleta, 2021). Thus, this study discusses the relationship between a female character and nature linked with the character's characteristics in empowering Orang Rimba through education. It is known that empowerment is a multidimensional social process that fosters people to gain control over their own lives (Pachaiyappan, 2014). It is a process to make someone powerful, facilitating the weak to attain strength, increasing one's self-esteem, helping someone to be assertive/self-confident, confronting injustice and oppression, and supporting someone to fight for their rights. This process is linked to education. According to Pachaiyappan, education is the first step toward empowerment. Education is said to be the most crucial factor in the overall development of an individual and a nation (2014). In line with the previous concept and approach, this research describes the relationship between a woman and nature in empowering Orang Rimba through education in Jungle School.

Theory and Method

This part consists of a review of related theories to investigate the characteristic of a woman's character in empowering Orang Rimba seen through ecofeminism and the method to analyze the data.

Literary nonfiction is often called creative nonfiction because it relates factual information in a literary style. Storytelling techniques lure the reader into the text and make the accurate or factual information read like fiction. The factual information can be expressed in literary terms such as character, setting, and plot. Therefore, understanding the character in nonfiction is similar to revealing the character in fiction; the difference is about the factual person or an imaginative character. Minderop (2005:2) says, "Character can also be a person, community, race, mental and moral attitude, the quality of reasoning, famous people and characters in literature." Similar to Minderop, Abrams stated that characters who appear in a dramatic or a narrative work are people whom the reader interprets as being endowed with moral, dispositional, and emotional qualities expressed in what they say – the dialogue – and by what they do – the action (1988: 22). Krizsner and Mandell adds that character can be portrayed through actions, reactions to the situation, or other characters, physical appearance, speech and gesture, and expression, even though the names (2000: 94). Thus, a close reading through the actions and the character's reaction to a particular situation or other characters reveal characteristics of the characters.

In this study, the theory of character and characterization reveals the main female character, Butet, depicted in *The Jungle School*. It is used in describing Butet characteristics related to her efforts to educate an isolated jungle people in protecting their environments, rights, and lives.

Ecofeminism is the branch of feminism that sees the environment and the relationship between women and the natural world. The term ecofeminism was first introduced by a French writer, Francois d'Eaubonne, in *Le Feminism ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*, published in 1974. It presents much information about women's oppression and the destruction of nature. According to Tong (2009: 237), women are considered to contribute to preserving the environment. The attitude of affection for women plays a significant role in caring for the natural environment. It claims that women have cultural bounds to nature.

Karen J. Warren further specified four basic assumptions of ecofeminism: (1) There are meaningful connections between the oppressions of women and nature; (2) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (3) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (4) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective (Tong, 2009, p. 242)

A similar opinion was expressed by Wiyatmi et al. (2017: 10); ecofeminism is one of the thought and social movements that connect ecological problems with women. Women's ability to care for nature is considered an interactive thing. It is not part of the contemporary political movement operating on the theory that the ideology sanctions the exploitation and degradation of the environment. The existence of ecofeminism has become one of the elements in reducing the impact of massive exploitation and degradation lately. Based on the ecofeminist perspective, this study describes the relationship between a woman's character and nature in preserving nature through education tailored to local wisdom.

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method to describe the characteristic of a female character and her efforts to empower the Orang Rimba. The primary source of data is *The Jungle School*. The processes of this study included 1) a close reading session, 2) gathering the data, 3) analyzing the data, 4) validating the data, and 5) writing the findings. The data was obtained through close reading, focusing on Butet's thoughts, actions, responses, and reactions in educating *Orang Rimba*. The ecofeminism theory supports this data analysis in describing the struggle of Butet to empower the Orang Rimba through education tailored to the local wisdom.

Findings and Discussion

Butet Manurung's jungle diary was published as *The Jungle School* in 2012, presenting her real experiences at Bukit Dua Belas rainforest in Jambi. She wrote her daily activities, thoughts, and feeling living with the Orang Rimba as an education facilitator at WARSI, a local conservation NGO. Therefore, this study reveals the woman character's characteristics through actions, thoughts, and reactions to the situations in showing her relationship with nature in empowering the Orang Rimba through education tailored to the local wisdom.

The first results of this research show that the main character's characteristics reflect ecofeminism. It presents the woman's characteristics which have a close relation to nature. Butet, the main woman character, is described as intelligent, creative, and courageous in educating Orang Rimba. Butet has bright intelligence that supports her in educating the jungle people. She is brilliant in finding ideas to introduce the importance of education and connecting her experiences as a suitable method of introducing and approaching people to learn literacy and counting. One example showing that she is smart happens when she visits Temengung Bedinding Besi's bombing. She should mention the names of some people even

though she asks for names one by one. She needs to correct several things in calling their names. However, she learns quickly with her innovative way of memorizing more than thirty names in less than half an hour. It can be seen from the following quotation:

I have some difficulty recalling their names. Some I find pretty strange. I jot them down in my notebook, along with their characteristics. I slowly learn almost all the names, at least those that are not taboo to say aloud.

They are surprised at how good my memory is when I test me by pointing to individuals saying. "Yoya Lemago, yoya Ejam, yoya sekodi" (This is Legamo, this is Ejam, and this is Sekodi); they ask me how I can remember more than thirty names in less than half an hour. "I use my pen to make notes," I say. Without realizing it, with this simple skill, I leave them in awe (2012: 73).

The quotation shows that she has an intelligent way of introducing education with simple skills. She uses her pen to make notes, jotting down their names in her notebook and their characteristics. This skill helps her memorize the names and make the rombong amazed. Remembering names was an incentive for those people to learn reading and writing. It encourages the member of rombong to join an education program.

More is needed to show her intelligence to approach the jungle people in introducing reading and writing. She continues to amaze those people by reading them her mother's letter, a storybook about the history of the Jambi Kingdom, funny comics about animals, and the names of the members of the Orang Rimba groups nearby from surveys conducted by WARSI. She thinks it is an opportunity to introduce the value of reading and writing. She is so clever in terms of entering some elements of education through various things in life so that the jungle community can make it more accessible to learn and understand literacy education, for example, through songs, letters, stories history, comic stories, memorizing by mentioning the names of friends in the jungle.

Studying Butet's actions and reactions, it can be described that she is a very creative character. Living in a rainforest with limited facilities presents her creativity in continuing daily activities, especially in the teaching-learning process. She often uses materials that she finds in the forest as school supplies. Trees, ground, or mud walls are the media for writing, as can be seen in this quotation, "As for school supplies, I try using the materials available in the jungle around us, Nevertheless, we still use materials found in nature for practice " (89). It shows that she uses the material she finds in the jungle as a teaching medium.

Not only in the education media, Butet also uses creative methods during the learning process. It can be seen clearly through her way of delivering the lessons. There is no formal and structural way of teaching that she adjusts to the situation and condition in the jungle. Seemingly, she knows the habit and the life of the people well. Thus, she lets the process of learning go naturally. These conditions can be found in the following extract:

We can study just about everywhere. It is the same with cooking and sleeping. If the weather is good, we prefer to be outside in the open air, under the trees, or by the river banks. We take walks with our books rolled up, our pens clipped to them or tucked into short or loincloths. We sometimes give lessons lying down (234).

The last characteristic of Butet that reflects ecological feminism is courage. Butet is described as a female character who has full of courage. As a young woman, she is strongly committed to living in the jungle and teaching the people who do not accept her the first

time. There are many rejections from the indigenous people, but she never gives up on building the relationship between them. She needs to learn how to start and what kind of education is needed, but she continues working as an education facilitator in the jungle. It is difficult for her to educate them because of the traditional wisdom rooted deeply in Orang Rimba's life. They think that education will spoil and damage their traditional custom, and they believe that the arrival of an outsider will bring bad luck for them. They reject any form of schooling. It was difficult for her to find an opening, even a tiny insight into understanding the Orang Rimba's educational perspective. She started her education program with children because it was easier for her to interact with them. Generally, they are more communicative, friendly, playful, and helpful. Then, she continues approaching the older man. However, she needs help getting women and girls involved in her program. She understands that women and girls are taught to be cautious of outsiders.

The second result of this research describes the relationship between Butet and nature in empowering Orang Rimba through education tailored to local wisdom. She struggles to help the Orang Rimba become literate and numerate, but she still preserves the jungle and the traditional wisdom. She is concerned with guarding the jungle as the Orang Rimba habitat and against rainforest exploitations and destructions. She knows their life in the jungle is how they prefer to live. The jungle had everything they needed, but when the Orang Rimba cannot read, write, and count, they will lose their habitat and life, and there will be more destruction and exploitation of nature. When she comes to the jungle for the first time, she finds several destructions of the rainforest. It is stated in this quotation:

I observe the Orang Rimba and its surroundings. Are we in the rainforest, or is this just re-growth or brushwood? It is not attractive at all. Nevertheless, I realized I need not have been here if the tropical rainforest were still beautiful and healthy. The beauty is a sign that there are no problems in the rainforest. Why am I here? I cannot imagine what sort of education best fits their needs (12)

Seeing these conditions, she encourages herself to give education to the indigenous community in the Bukit Dua Belas rainforest. The destruction in the tropical rainforest gets her attention. She realized that the forest and the local people should care about the oppression and exploitation. It shows that she has a close relationship with nature, identifying the problems in the rainforest that is not attractive, beautiful, and healthy. She tries to seek problems by approaching the local people. She finds out that the destruction happens because the indigenous people do not have the power to bargain, maintain, and keep their habitat from outsiders. After all, they cannot read the agreement made by the outsider. Therefore, she empowers those people through education which enables them to confront injustice and oppression and fight for their rights. She believes that education can preserve nature and the people. Education is a constructive step forward for the Orang Rimba. Education is a tool of empowerment to fend off aggressive threats from the outside world. It enables the Orang Rimba to increase their standard of living and can give them an understanding of their rights in their jungle (44).

In teaching the jungle people, Butet formulated the basic requirements for an Orang Rimba education program as stated in her writing below:

1. Lessons need to be tailored to the Orang Rimba's daily activities
2. The Orang Rimba needs to receive some benefit from any education program.
3. The education process needs to be locally organized.

4. The education program needs to facilitate critical analytic skills and provide skills to assist the community in coping with the development challenges ahead.
5. The primary goal of any education program includes facilitating the Orang Rimba's capacity for self-realization, providing a vision for the future, and developing self-integrity within the Rimba community (108).

The first formulation of the program reflects that she cares about the *Orang Rimba* problems, then she makes a lesson plan tailored to their habit, tradition, and culture in the jungle. Moreover, she uses educational materials relevant to the jungle people's needs and way of life. The materials are designed appropriately to consider the comprehension level of her students. There is a close relationship between Butet and the Orang Rimba, and she knows the life of the Orang Rimba well with their activities. Besides, she has a good relationship with the nature of the forest in designing her education program. The second consideration is related to the benefits of the education program; the Orang Rimba should recognize that they get some advantages not only during the lesson, but the benefits are maintained into the future life of the people in the jungle. For example, through education, she teaches the jungle people to read the agreement with the outsider who wants to benefit from Orang Rimba and their land. It describes that she focuses her program on the benefits of Orang Rimba and nature preservation that goes along with ecological feminism movements. The following design concentrates on local culture, tradition, and environment. The learning medium involves the local people, language, perceptions, and culture mixed with the education program. There is an integration between the outside and inner worlds, contributing profound insights into any perception gaps between those two worlds. In addition, the educational program should be based on development and environmental changes. It declares that environmental problems become a focus of education, not only on counting, reading, or writing skills. The last agenda is also essential, mentioning the goal of education in preparing the Orang Rimba to fend off external exploitation so they can master their future direction and keep the integrity of the community.

The discussion above describes that Butet, a female character, has a close relationship with nature and the Orang Rimba, which motivates her to make the Orang Rimba powerful with her education program. The education program facilitates the Orang Rimba to attain strength in confronting injustice and oppression and helps them gain control over their lives.

Conclusion

The Jungle School pictures the characteristic of Butet that is closely related to the issues of ecological feminism. It describes an intelligent, creative, and courageous young woman concerned about the Orang Rimba education. Then, she empowers the local people of Bukit Dua Belas rainforest through education which is tailored to the local wisdom. Viewed from ecofeminism, it shows that she has a close relationship with nature. With her intelligence, she tries to attract indigenous people to have the ability to count, read and write. She uses her creativity in finding media for learning but fits with the situation and condition of those people. Besides, she always keeps encouraging the local people to get an education to prepare their future vision of their life while still keeping their culture and tradition. This study concludes that Butet, the female character, has an intimate relationship with nature and Orang Rimba. It motivates her to empower the Orang Rimba through education tailored to the local wisdom. She enables the Orang Rimba to confront injustice and oppression from outsiders and supports them in fighting for their rights.

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