



THE REPRESENTATION OF LAKES AS TRACES OF CURSES AND PUNISHMENT IN INDONESIAN FOLKLORE: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY

Representasi Danau sebagai Jejak Kutukan dan Hukuman dalam Cerita Rakyat Indonesia: Kajian Ekokritik

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the existence of folktales about the origins of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago, which not only explain geographical phenomena but also represent the relationship between human behavior and environmental change as a consequence of violations of moral and social values. This study aims to uncover narratives of curses and punishments in the folktales of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago through an ecocritical literary approach using six concepts from Garrard (2012) namely pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with data consisting of seven folktales: The Origin of Lake Toba, Lake Laut Tawar, Lau Kawar, Lake Maninjau, The Legend of Bulalo La Limutu, Telaga Warna, and Lake Tes. The results of the study indicate that lakes in folk tales are not merely interpreted as moral consequences of human actions but also represent ecological responses to the disruption of environmental balance and function as new ecological spaces that sustain the social and economic lives of surrounding communities. Furthermore, folklore serves as a pedagogical device that instills moral values, social norms, and ecological awareness, emphasizing that humans are part of nature, not its rulers (anthropocentric).

Keywords: curse; ecocriticism; folktales; unishment

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh keberadaan cerita rakyat asal-usul danau di Nusantara yang tidak hanya menjelaskan fenomena geografis, tetapi juga merepresentasikan hubungan antara perilaku manusia dan perubahan lingkungan sebagai konsekuensi pelanggaran nilai moral dan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap narasi kutukan dan hukuman dalam cerita rakyat danau di Nusantara melalui pendekatan ekokritik sastra menggunakan enam konsep Garrard (2012), yaitu pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, dan earth. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa tujuh cerita rakyat, yaitu Asal-Usul Danau Toba, Danau Laut Tawar, Lau Kawar, Danau Maninjau, Legenda Bulalo La Limutu, Telaga Warna, dan Danau Tes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa danau dalam cerita rakyat tidak hanya dimaknai sebagai konsekuensi moral atas tindakan manusia, tetapi juga merepresentasikan respons ekologis terhadap terganggunya keseimbangan lingkungan serta berfungsi sebagai ruang ekologis baru yang menopang kehidupan sosial dan ekonomi masyarakat di sekitarnya. Selain itu, cerita rakyat berfungsi sebagai sarana pendidikan (pedagogical device) yang menanamkan nilai moral, norma sosial, serta kesadaran ekologis bahwa manusia merupakan bagian dari alam, bukan penguasa alam (anthropocentric).

Kata-kata kunci: cerita rakyat; ekokritik; hukuman; kutukan

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INTRODUCTION

Folktales explaining origins generally serve to describe how a place, object, or even tradition came into being and are often linked to real-world locations such as lakes, mountains, and even rocks as part of the social function of legends within society (Batubara & Nurizzati, 2020). Surrounded by magical or supernatural elements such as curses, punishments, and shape-shifting, these are characteristic features of myths or legends in folklore studies (Harahap et al., 2025). The characters portrayed are also close to people's lives, ranging from ordinary folk to kings, and thus are able to convey moral messages such as honesty, loyalty, and the consequences of greed or misunderstanding (Tista et al., 2025). The author considers that these values demonstrate that folklore serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for character education that is relevant to people's lives.

Indonesian folklore is a form of cultural expression rich in local values, spirituality, and the relationship between humans and nature (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Among the various types of folklore, tales recounting the origins of lakes possess a distinct uniqueness. These narratives not only explain the formation of a geographical phenomenon but also record traces of moral values, social conflicts, and cosmological myths that have developed within society. Lakes in folklore are often depicted as the result of tragic events, curses, punishments, or violations of customary and spiritual norms, thus carrying profound symbolic meaning. The author views the choice of curses and punishments as the cause of a lake's formation, not merely as a dramatic element in the story, but as a symbolic representation of the consequences of the breakdown in human relationships with one another and with the environment. Thus, narratives of curses and punishments are important to study as they reveal how traditional societies interpret natural disasters as an ecological response to violations of moral and social values.

The uniqueness of these stories lies in their ability to unite mythological and ecological elements within a coherent narrative. Nature is not positioned merely as a backdrop, but as a living entity that responds and plays a role in shaping the human world order. Consequently, folk tales regarding the origins of lakes often reflect the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment, where harmony and violations of natural laws bring about collective and long-term consequences. This perspective indicates an ecosentric tendency within society, as nature is understood to possess power and a role equal to that of humans in maintaining the balance of life. Nature is not viewed as a passive object to be exploited, but rather as part of a living system capable of responding to human actions.

This view of ecocentrism is also in line with ecocritical studies, which position nature not merely as a backdrop in literary works, but as an entity possessing intrinsic value and a reciprocal relationship with humans. Garrard (2012) explains that ecocriticism focuses on the representation of the relationship between humans and the environment in literary texts through several key concepts, namely pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth. Through this perspective, folklore can be understood as a medium that represents the community's ecological awareness regarding the balance of the relationship between humans and nature.

The study of folk tales explaining the origins of lakes in Indonesia holds a deeper urgency than merely the preservation of traditional stories. Folk tales about lakes, mountains, rivers, and other topographical features are not merely bedtime stories or oral traditions passed down by ancestors, but rather a form of living and dynamic cultural education embedded in collective memory. Lake legends not only serve as cultural narratives but also as local cultural heritage and communal identity (Siregar & Nirmawan, 2025). This research is significant as it

demonstrates that folk tales not only contain moral values but also embody the ecological awareness of traditional communities regarding the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between humans and the environment.

The phenomenon of curses and punishments in the folklore of the Nusantara is an intriguing aspect to examine, as it serves not only as entertainment but also possesses profound meaning as a means of imparting moral values to the community, particularly the younger generation. According to sidanau, n.d. there are currently 6,740 lakes recorded across Indonesia. This figure not only reflects the nation's wealth of water resources but also preserves cultural traces and a living narrative heritage within the Nusantara community.

Several previous studies have discussed the phenomenon of curses in Indonesian folklore, yet research into curses that result in geographical features such as lakes remains very limited. Research conducted by Wulandari (2016) highlights the transformation of characters into stone as a symbol of a curse resulting from disobedient behaviour. Furthermore, Juliastuty (2018) explores five legends of curses that culminate in transformation into stone. Furthermore, research by Widiono et al., (2026) examines natural symbols in the legend of the Origin of Lake Ranau through a literary ecocritical perspective, positioning the lake, mountains, and water as symbols of the community's ecological consciousness. The study demonstrates that nature is not merely positioned as a narrative backdrop, but as an entity possessing power and responding to human behaviour.

Meanwhile, several earlier studies have also discussed the phenomenon of punishment in Indonesian folklore, yet research on punishment resulting in geographical features such as lakes remains very limited. A study conducted by Sugiarti et al., (2023) examines the role of folklore as an instrument of moral formation. Furthermore, Leoni & Indrayatti (2017) emphasise that folklore contains principles, norms, and social rules passed down through narrative. Another study by Kusyani et al., (2025) demonstrates that folk tales contain the ecological awareness of traditional communities as well as the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Furthermore, research on environmental pollution in the folktale *Mengusir Mesin Raksasa* by Rama Aji, examined through an ecocritical perspective by Nabila et al., (2025) demonstrates that literary works can represent the ecological impacts of human activities, such as noise and air pollution, that disrupt environmental balance.

Based on a review of previous research, no study has yet been found that examines curses in the folklore of the Indonesian archipelago, which give rise to natural phenomena such as lakes from an ecocritical perspective. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to link narratives of curses and punishment with representations of ecological change, specifically the formation of lakes as a consequence of moral and social transgressions within society. Furthermore, this study not only positions lakes as symbols of punishment but also as ecological spaces that represent the relationship between humans and nature from an ecocritical perspective.

This study aims to reveal and describe the narratives of curses and punishments contained in several lake-related folk tales from the Nusantara region by examining the construction of events, the characters involved, namely the perpetrators and recipients of the curse or punishment, and the underlying motives. This study also analyses the symbolic reasons for the selection of lakes as a form of consequence for violations of moral and social values in folk tales. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the development of literary studies, particularly literary ecocriticism and folklore, whilst strengthening the understanding of the ecological values and local wisdom contained within the folklore of the Nusantara region.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cultural representations in folklore contain the life philosophy of traditional

communities that emphasise ecological balance and collective responsibility towards the surrounding environment (Putriani et al., 2025). Myths that are alive within a community not only shape social norms but also build a moral system born from the interplay between humans and the forces of nature (Franige et al., 2025). In this regard, myths serve as a reference for shaping collective behaviour and the ethical boundaries that must be upheld by the local community.

Folklore is an important part of culture that reflects the identity of a community as a form of art and a form of traditional heritage that shapes public consciousness (Putri et al., 2025). The term folklore derives from a combination of two words, namely, folk and lore. “Folk” refers to the people or a social group possessing specific characteristics, whether physical, social, or cultural. Meanwhile, ‘lore’ means tradition or knowledge passed down from generation to generation by ancestors through both oral and non-oral channels (Alfisyah et al., 2023). Folktales are a form of narrative folklore passed down through generations within a community’s oral tradition (Qur’ani, 2021). As explained by Danandjaja (1984), folktales thrive and evolve within society because they serve a strategic function as a means of cultural education and as a reinforcement of prevailing social norms. This view is in line with the opinion of (Ardhyantama, 2017), who asserts that folk tales function as an effective educational medium for shaping character, introducing local culture, and instilling social values in the younger generation.

The phenomenon of curses and punishments in the folklore of the Indonesian archipelago serves not only as a dramatic element within the narrative but also carries profound meaning as a means of teaching moral values to society Nurhuda et al., (2021). Within the structure of folklore, curses are frequently presented as consequences for deviant behaviour such as disobeying one’s parents, breaking promises, or acting greedily.

According to Wulandari (2016), curses in folk tales are positioned as a strategic narrative device for educating children and serve as an educational tool that conveys moral messages symbolically. Curses represent a form of punishment that remains embedded in the collective memory of the community because they are presented in the form of engaging and memorable stories. Furthermore, Zaharani et al., (2025) explain that punishment is understood as a cultural mechanism rich in moral, ethical, and spiritual values that functions as a reminder and a shaper of community character.

In line with this view, Twinanda et al., (2025) emphasise that cultural values and character values in folk tales play a significant role in shaping the social consciousness of society. Through their study of the Legend of the Twin Lakes, they explain that folk tales contain religious values, honesty, hard work, and care for the environment, which are represented through the characters and the plot.

These values demonstrate that folk tales not only contain literary aesthetic elements but also serve as strategic instruments in character formation and in maintaining the balance of the relationship between humans and the environment in traditional society.

The interconnection between moral values and environmental change in folklore can be analysed through an ecocritical approach. Ecocriticism is an approach in literary studies that examines the relationship between humans and the environment as represented in literary works. This approach positions nature not merely as a narrative setting, but as an integral part of the life system that plays a role in shaping the text’s meaning.

According to Garrard (2012), ecocriticism focuses on how literature represents the relationship between humans and the environment, as well as the impact of human actions on ecological balance. Garrard identifies six key concepts in ecocritical studies: pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth.

The concept of pollution is used to identify damage to values or social relations that

disrupt environmental balance. The concept of wilderness refers to natural conditions beyond human control, whilst apocalypse relates to ecological destruction as a consequence of human actions. Furthermore, the concept of dwelling is used to understand changes in human living spaces resulting from environmental transformation, whilst the concept of animals highlights the interconnectedness between humans and other living beings within the ecosystem. As for the concept of Earth, it positions the environment as part of the Earth system that plays a role in sustaining human life.

Thus, these six concepts are used as an analytical framework to examine the interrelationship between human behaviour and environmental change in the folktales of the origins of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative analysis with an ecocritical literary approach as the primary analytical tool. Descriptive qualitative analysis is used to identify, uncover, and interpret representations of the relationship between humans and the environment found in the folklore texts. The ecocritical approach is used to examine how narratives of lake formation not only represent moral and social conflicts but also reflect ecological impacts as consequences of human actions towards the environment.

The research data consists of Indonesian folk tales containing narratives of the formation of lakes resulting from curses and punishments. The data sources were obtained from four books, namely *Dongeng Asal-Usul Nusantara* by Wijayanti (2019), *Ensiklopedia Dongeng dan Cerita Rakyat Nusantara* by Daru Wijayanti (2019), *Dongeng Nusantara Pilihan dari 34 Provinsi* by De Rosya (2020), and *The Legend of the Origin of Lake Tes* by Kak Nita (2024). These seven folk tales were selected because each source contains a narrative of the formation of a lake caused by two main factors: a curse and a punishment as a consequence of moral and social transgressions. This selection aligns with the research focus to examine the representation of lakes as symbols of ecological consequences and forms of punishment from an ecocritical perspective. The scope of analysis in this study comprises narratives that demonstrate: (1) the causes of the curse or punishment, (2) the characters acting as perpetrators and those receiving the curse or punishment, (3) the form of ecological consequences incurred, (4) changes in the community's living space following the formation of the lake, and (5) the representation of the relationship between humans and nature.

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher as a human instrument, who plays a role in reading, selecting, and interpreting data in accordance with the theoretical framework employed (Sugiyono, 2019). Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis by examining the texts of folk tales found in book sources as the primary research data (Molelong, 2017). The documentation process involved extracting sections of text containing accounts of transgressions, forms of curses or punishments, and the environmental impacts leading to the formation of the lake. The use of documentary analysis also allowed for the systematic and in-depth collection of data, as all written sources were analysed within the ecocritical framework employed in the study.

The data collection procedure was carried out in several stages, namely: (1) reading all the folklore texts intensively to understand the sequence of events and the social cultural context underpinning them, (2) selecting stories that meet the assessment criteria based on the presence of narratives of transgression leading to environmental change, (3) identifying and recording text sections containing the perpetrators of the transgression, the nature of the offence, the type of curse or punishment, and the resulting ecological impacts, (4) classifying the data according to narrative type, namely curses and punishments, and (5) grouping the data according to the research focus, which includes the construction of events, motives for transgression, changes

in the community's living space, and the function of the lake in social life following its formation.

Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and identifying elements from the seven folktales used as reference sources, such as instances of moral and social transgressions, forms of curses and punishments, environmental changes, and the relationship between humans and nature. The selected data were then systematically presented in the form of thematic categorisation to facilitate the identification of each value and the changes that occurred. Subsequently, the data is interpreted using six eco-critical concepts Garrard (2012), namely pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth, to understand the representation of the relationship between humans and nature, the ecological meanings formed from a curse or punishment, and the cultural and philosophical values contained within the folk tales. The final stage involves drawing conclusions based on the patterns of findings emerging from the overall analysis of the stories.

The concept of pollution is used to identify characters' actions that reflect the erosion of values or social relations, which in turn disrupt the environmental balance. The concept of wilderness is used to interpret the dominance of nature as an entity beyond human control through changes in the environmental landscape. The concept of 'apocalypse' is used to interpret the formation of the lake as a symbol of ecological destruction resulting from the violation of values. The concept of dwelling is used to examine changes in the community's living space following the formation of the lake, whilst the concept of earth is used to understand the lake as part of the Earth system, representing the interconnection between humans and the environment. The concept of animals is used to identify the representation of characters' transformed forms as part of the lake's ecosystem.

The validity of the data in this study was established through theoretical triangulation. Theoretical triangulation was used to test the consistency of data interpretation by utilising a specific conceptual framework (Molelong, 2017). Data were analysed using the six ecocritical concepts proposed by Garrard (2012), namely pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth, thereby ensuring the results obtained possess a higher level of credibility.

DISCUSSION

Across the archipelago, many folk tales explain the origins of lakes through stories of humans, magical creatures, and natural disasters linked to curses and punishments. These tales represent the relationship between human behaviour and environmental change as consequences that must be accepted. There are four famous legends: Lake Toba, Lake Laut Tawar, Lake Lau Kavar, and Lake Maninjau, which demonstrate how moral transgressions, broken promises, and violations of custom can lead to far-reaching and permanent consequences, resulting in lakes becoming symbols of a curse. Meanwhile, the legends of Bulalo La Limutu, Telaga Warna, and Lake Tes represent the formation of lakes through events related to changes in human nature and greed.

The results of this study are presented in two main tables. Table 1 presents a classification of the forms of curse, whilst Table 2 displays the forms of punishment found in the data. This separate presentation aims to facilitate the reading and analysis of each category of findings, which are as follows.

Table 1. Classification of Curses

No	Title of Folktale	Character	Cause of the Curse	Form of Curse
1	The Origin of Lake Toba (North Sumatra)	The curser: a woman transformed into a fish Recipients of the curse: Toba and Samosir	Toba's breach of his vow	After Toba broke his oath by revealing that their child was descended from a fish, his wife, who was a fish in human form, was enraged. She asked her child to climb the hill, then transformed back into a giant fish,

				accompanied by torrential rain and a flood that submerged their homeland, forming Lake Toba.
2	The Origin of Lake Laut Tawar (Aceh)	The curser: the parents of Putri Pukes Recipient of the curse: Princess Pukes, a prince from another kingdom, and the guard	Disobeying the message given by her parents.	Princess Pukes' body slowly turned to stone, whilst the rain fell heavily and the water continued to rise until it eventually formed Lake Laut Tawar.
3	The Origin of Lau Kawar (North Sumatra)	The curser: grandmother Recipient of the curse: the grandmother's child, the grandmother's daughter-in-law, grandchild, and the villagers of Kawar	The grandmother's misunderstanding of her daughter-in-law and son.	The grandmother felt disrespected and treated unfairly. She cursed and triggered an earthquake and relentless torrential rain that eventually submerged Kawar Village, destroying all its inhabitants and transforming the village into Lake Lau Kawar.
4	The Origin of Lake Maninjau. (West Sumatra)	The Curser: Siti Rasani, known as Sani (the younger sister of the nine bachelors), and Giran Recipients of the curse: the nine bachelors (Kukuban, Kudun, Bayua, Malintang, Galapuang, Balok, Batang, Bayang, and Kaciak), and residents Supporting characters: Datuk Limbatang, Datuk, Limbatang's wife	Jealousy and slander from his siblings.	Mount Tinjau erupted; the crater formed by the eruption filled with water and became a lake. Meanwhile, Bujang Sembilan was cursed to transform into a fish living in Lake Maninjau.

Table 2. Classification of Punishments

No	Folktale	Character	Reason for Punishment	Form of Punishment
1	The Legend of Bulalo La Limutu – Lake Limboto (Gorontalo)	The Punisher: Mbui Bungale, and Julimoto Recipients of the punishment: Four travellers, supporting character, Tolango Hula, the daughter who hatched from the Bimelula gem, and the fairies.	The greed of the four travellers who sought to take what belonged	The occurrence of rumbling water, the earth shaking, and flooding in the area
2	Telaga Warna (West Java)	The Punisher: King Suwartaiaya, Queen Purbamanah Recipients of the punishment: Gilang Rukmini Supporting characters: The People of the Kingdom, Jewellery craftsman	Arrogance and ingratitude towards the gift bestowed	Her punishment took the form of a natural disaster, in which Queen Purbamanah's tears fell, flooding the palace. Then torrential water gushed forth from the ground, submerging the kingdom of Kutatangeunah and forming a colourful lake.
3	Lake Tes (Bengkulu)	The Punisher: The Bitter Tongue, The Child of Si Lidah Pahit Recipient of the punishment: the traditional chief of Kutai Donok, and the traditional leaders, Village elders	Negligence in guarding one's speech.	The punishment in the Lake Tes folktale occurred when Si Lidah Pahit, who possessed magical speech, believed the news that his son had died and spoke it as truth. Those words immediately became reality, so that his child truly died. His grief and anger caused Si Lidah Pahit to continue digging and throwing earth into the Air Ketahun River until the river's flow was blocked, the water overflowed, and Lake Tes was formed as a punishment for negligence in guarding one's words.

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 indicate the existence of two forms of consequence for the violation of values in Indonesian folklore: curses and punishments. These two forms of consequence not only affect the individual perpetrator of the violation but also trigger environmental changes leading to the formation of a lake; furthermore, the data were analysed using six ecocritical concepts Garrard (2012) namely pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth, to reveal the relationship between humans and the environment in folklore.

Narratives of Curse and Punishment in Folktales

The story begins at Lake Toba, recounting a farmer named Toba who married a woman who was the reincarnation of a fish. This marriage was bound by a sacred condition: Toba was forbidden to reveal his wife's origins to anyone, including their child, Samosir. However, one day, when his emotions boiled over because his child was deemed disobedient, Toba broke his promise by revealing the secret.

Data 1

"You insolent child. You don't know your place. You really are a girl who came from a fish!" said Toba as he struck his son (Wijayanti, 2019).

These words constituted a breach of his oath, which enraged his wife, who then cursed her husband. She ordered Samosir to climb the hill, whereupon he was transformed once more into a giant fish. Shortly afterwards, torrential rain fell without ceasing, and the floodwaters swamped the area where they lived. This great flood formed Lake Toba, whilst the remaining land in the centre became Samosir Island. This legend teaches that promises hold sacred significance, and their breach can have consequences that are not merely personal but also drastically affect the environment.

Lake Laut Tawar was born from the story of Princess Pukes, a princess who loved a prince from another kingdom but did not receive her parents' blessing. The princess's persistence eventually paid off, and she was permitted to marry her beloved. However, as she was about to leave the kingdom, her parents gave her a message filled with concern.

Data 2

"Once you have left this kingdom, do not, under any circumstances, look back, my child. Remember this message well. If you do not obey it, we fear something may happen to you. After all, you are our beloved daughter..." her parents' message to her (Wijayanti, 2019).

Her heart was in turmoil as she listened to the conditions set, but with a heavy heart, the princess left the kingdom, accompanied by the soldiers. Midway through the journey, she could not contain her sadness and, without realising it, turned her head back, thus breaking the promise. At that very moment, heavy rain and thunder struck, and Princess Pukes's body slowly hardened into stone. The heavy rain continued to fall, and the water overflowed, flooding the surrounding area and forming a lake that came to be known as Lake Laut Tawar. This story emphasises the importance of heeding one's parents' advice and respecting established rules.

Lake Lau Kavar originated from a fertile village named Kavar, situated at the foot of Mount Sinabung, where the inhabitants lived prosperously from abundant agricultural yields. One day, their harvest doubled compared to usual. As an expression of gratitude to God, the community came together to hold an annual traditional ceremony attended by almost the entire village, except for an ailing grandmother who was left alone at home, starving. Her son and daughter-in-law, who were attending the event, had forgotten to prepare food for her. When they finally remembered, they sent their grandson to deliver a parcel of food, but on the way, the grandson felt hungry and ate most of the food, leaving only bones. Seeing the food she had received, the old woman felt deeply humiliated and hurt. Filled with sadness and anger. That feeling of being neglected then drove her to pray for justice.

Data 3

"Oh, God! Do they now regard me as an animal? Why have they given me scraps of food and bones?" muttered the old grandmother in exasperation (Wijayanti, 2019).

"Oh, Lord! They have treated me with such cruelty. Teach them a lesson!" pleaded the old woman to the Almighty God (Wijayanti, 2019).

Her prayer was then answered; an earthquake struck, thunder roared, and torrential rain fell, submerging the village of Kavar, which subsequently transformed into a vast crater filled with water and became known as Lake Lau Kavar. Lake Maninjau tells a tale of slander, vengeance, and traditional injustice that culminated in a great disaster. The story begins when Giran and Siti Rasani (Sani) were accused of violating social norms by their brothers, known as the Bujang Sembilan, and the villagers, due to incitement, prejudice, and anger fueled by jealousy and hurt feelings. The incident began when Sani was injured whilst in the forest with Giran. Realising that Sani's thigh had been scratched by a thorn, Giran immediately came to her aid.

Data 4

"Oh no, my sarong's torn!" Sani cried out in shock (Wijayanti, 2019).

"Oh dear, it looks like your thigh has been scratched by a thorn. Sit down, little sister, I'll treat your wound!" said Giran (Wijayanti, 2019).

He then searched for medicinal leaves, prepared a poultice, cleaned the blood from Sani's thigh, and treated the wound. However, just then, dozens of people suddenly emerged from behind the trees and surrounded the two of them. They were the Nine Bachelors, along with several other villagers.

Data 5

"Hey, so you're here!" shouted Kukuban.

"Seize them! We'll take them to the customary court!" he ordered (Wijayanti, 2019).

Although he felt he was innocent, Giran tried to explain the situation.

"Please, Sir! We haven't done anything; I was just treating Sani's wound from a thorn," said Giran (Wijayanti, 2019).

However, Kukuban continued to accuse them.

Data 6

"You liar! I saw you rubbing my sister's thigh with my own eyes!" he shouted (Wijayanti, 2019).

Denied a fair chance to defend himself, Giran then asserted his innocence before the villagers.

"Listen, all of you! We have not committed any forbidden acts, and so we are certain of our innocence," he said (Wijayanti, 2019).

In desperation, Giran and Sani pleaded with God for the truth to be proven. Raising his hands to the sky, Giran prayed.

Data 7

"O Lord! Please hear and grant our prayer. If we are truly guilty, destroy our bodies in the hot water of this volcanic crater. However, if we are innocent, let this mountain erupt and curse the Nine Bachelors into fish!" That oath-like prayer was then answered through a catastrophic event (Wijayanti, 2019).

Mount Tinjau erupted violently, the earth shook, and the eruption formed a vast basin that filled with water to become Lake Maninjau. The disaster did not only befall them, but also the entire surrounding region and its people, whilst Bujang Sembilan received the curse of being transformed into a fish living in that lake as a sign of the punishment that clung to him.

In the legend of Bulalo La Limutu, the punishment began when four travellers, driven by greed, discovered the sacred Bimelula gem. They lifted the cover from the gem and claimed it as their own without permission, even though it was guarded and revered. When warned not to take anything from the site, they arrogantly declared:

Data 8

"We do not permit anyone to touch this place, let alone take the items here; this place belongs to us," the four declared loudly (Wijayanti, 2019).

This action demonstrated a violation of established moral boundaries and sanctity. Witnessing the travellers' greed, Mbui Bungale then clasped her hands and raised them towards the spring whilst praying.

Data 9

"My Lord, grant me strength. Expand and enlarge this spring, the spring of the angels... grow larger...!" (Wijayanti, 2019).

Shortly afterwards, the sound of roaring water and rumbling earth could be heard. Slowly, the spring widened and expanded, whilst Mbui Bungale was instantly upon a tree, leaving the four men transfixed as they witnessed the miracle. As a consequence of their actions, Lake Tupalo suddenly expanded drastically, transforming into a vast lake that submerged the surrounding area. This natural event served as a cosmic punishment, signifying that greed and the violation of the sacred bring not only personal loss but also far-reaching consequences for the environment and human life. The formation of the lake stands as a warning against human greed and the failure to respect established boundaries.

Meanwhile, the legend of Telaga Warna tells of Queen Purbamanah, who had a daughter named Gilang Rukmini, renowned for her beauty but known for her arrogance. On her birthday, the people of the Kingdom of Kutatanggeunah, together with the jewellery craftsmen, presented a necklace set with colourful gemstones as a token of love and respect for the princess. Full of hope, Queen Purbamanah urged her daughter to accept the gift.

Data 10

"My daughter, this is a gift from everyone. They made this beautiful necklace for you because they are delighted to see you growing up. Now, please wear it." (Rosya, 2020).

However, Gilang Rukmini arrogantly refused the gift.

Data 11

"I don't want to wear it. This necklace is ugly!" exclaimed Princess Gilang Rukmini, then threw the necklace so that its gems scattered across the floor (Rosya, 2020).

This refusal and her disrespectful attitude towards the people's gift made Queen Purbamanah so sad that her tears kept falling, flooding the palace. Soon after, a torrential stream of water gushed forth from the ground, submerging the entire Kingdom of Kutatanggeunah. This event eventually formed a lake with multicoloured water, now known as Telaga Warna, as a punishment for the princess's arrogance.

Finally, the folk tale of Lake Tes tells of a powerful man named Si Lidah Pahit who lived in the village of Kutei Donok. He was known for the fact that every word he spoke always came true, so he was very careful in what he said. One day, Si Lidah Pahit intended to clear new land on the banks of the Air Ketahun River to turn it into a field after obtaining permission from his neighbours and the Traditional Leader of Kutei Donok. He began to dig up the soil and throw it into the river, an action that subsequently caused concern amongst the villagers as they feared the pile of earth would block the flow of water. To stop him, the villagers held a meeting and sent a neighbour to deliver false news of a death. His neighbour arrived and said:

Data 12

"Lidah Pahit, we bring you news of a death. Your child has passed away. Return to your hometown." (Nita, 2024).

However, Bitter Tongue did not believe the news. The next day, a community leader was sent to convey the same message, but he remained sceptical. Finally, the village elders came to see him themselves and said:

Data 13

"Bitter Tongue, believe us when we say this is true. You'd better go home, for your child has passed away." (Nita, 2024).

As it was the respected elders who had come, Bitter Tongue finally believed the news.

Data 14

"Very well! Since it is you gentlemen who have come to deliver this news, I now believe that my child has passed away. I shall go home." (Nita, 2024).

However, unbeknownst to her, her words actually made the news a reality, so that her child truly passed away. Grief and anger overwhelmed her, and she continued to dig and throw earth into the Air Ketahun River until the river's flow was blocked, the water overflowed, and the surrounding area was flooded. This event subsequently formed Lake Tes as a reminder of the importance of guarding one's words so as not to bring disaster upon oneself or others.

Violations of Values as Triggers of Ecological Disasters

Based on the data presented in Tables 1 and 2, the formation of lakes in folk tales found across the archipelago is understood not merely as a natural phenomenon but as a consequence of violations of moral or social values committed by the characters in the stories. These violations take various forms, such as breaking promises, disobeying advice given by parents, misunderstandings within the social environment, greed, arrogance, and negligence in guarding one's speech. The variety of these forms of transgression indicates that the conflicts occurring in folk tales are not merely personal in nature, but also relate to breaches of the value systems governing interpersonal relationships and the relationship between humans and their environment.

In the folktales of the Origin of Lake Toba and Lake Laut Tawar, breaches of parental promises and advice lead to torrential rain, causing residential areas to be flooded and forming lakes. A similar pattern is found in the tales of Lau Kawar and Lake Maninjau, which show that social conflicts such as misunderstandings, envy, or slander can lead to ecological disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that alter the landscape. Meanwhile, in the legends of Bulalo La Limutu and Telaga Warna, violations of values such as greed and arrogance trigger a flood that submerges residential areas. In the tale of Lake Tes, a character's negligence in guarding

their speech also triggers environmental change through the blockage of a river's flow, causing the water to overflow and form a lake.

This sequence of events indicates that the curses and punishments in the legends do not merely represent individual moral conflicts, but also reflect the breakdown of the relationship between humans and the environment, a consequence of actions that violate the moral order. From an ecocritical perspective, such transgressions can be interpreted as a symbolic form of pollution: the disruption of social and moral order that leads to the disturbance of ecological balance. The consequences of these violations are then manifested through ecological disasters that cause the submergence of residential areas and the formation of a lake. This phenomenon represents the concept of the apocalypse, namely, ecological destruction as a consequence of the disharmony in the relationship between humans and nature.

Thus, the formation of a lake in the legend is interpreted not only as a form of punishment for a breach of moral values but also as an ecological response to human actions that disrupt the balance of the environment.

The Role of Nature in Environmental Transformation

The data in Tables 1 and 2 show that the formation of lakes in various Indonesian folktales is accompanied by changes in the environment, resulting in land areas transforming into water bodies. These changes are evident in the submergence of a village in the folktale of Lake Toba, the disappearance of a kingdom in the folktales of Lake Laut Tawar and Telaga Warna, and the transformation of the village of Kawar into a lake in the folktale of Lau Kavar.

Data 15

"The river water had overflowed everywhere and flooded the valley through which the river flowed" (Wijayanti, 2019b).

A similar phenomenon is also found in the folktales of Lake Maninjau, Bulalo La Limutu, and Lake Tes, which show that land areas previously inhabited or utilised by humans were transformed as a result of flooding. These changes mark the transformation of the terrestrial landscape into a watery expanse that can no longer be managed or utilised as before. In other words, spaces previously under human management have transformed into areas entirely governed by natural processes, such as flooding, eruptions, or shifts in river flow.

This transformation demonstrates that nature in folklore does not merely serve as a backdrop to disasters, but also as a force capable of altering the environmental structure comprehensively. Land areas that were previously developed have transformed into natural zones no longer inhabited by humans. From an ecocritical perspective, this condition can be interpreted through the concept of wilderness, a state in which the environment remains in its natural condition, untouched by human activity. This concept points to a distinct space beyond the bounds of human management, returning to form part of a natural system that cannot be fully controlled by human civilisation. Thus, the formation of a lake in folklore not only reflects changes in the environment but also demonstrates nature's dominance in transforming terrestrial space into part of an ecological landscape beyond human influence.

Changes in the Living Space of Communities Following the Formation of Lakes

Based on the data in Tables 1 and 2, the formation of lakes in various folklore tales across the archipelago not only alters the form of the environment but also influences the relationship between humans and their living space. Areas previously used as settlements, centres of social activity, or sources of livelihood are transformed, rendering them no longer usable as before. These conditions required communities to adapt to the transformed

environment, leading to a shift in the patterns of human interaction with the spaces they occupied.

These environmental changes have led to a shift in the patterns of human interaction with the spaces they occupy. Areas previously utilised as residential zones or sites for social activities have now transformed into water bodies, demanding different forms of utilisation. In this context, humans no longer occupy these spaces as dwellings but begin to interact with the new environment through the utilisation of lakes as an integral part of their lives, offering different benefits.

This finding aligns with research indicating that folk tales contain ecological wisdom that reflects the relationship between humans and the environment, as well as an awareness of the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance (Kusyani et al., 2025). This research explains that the environmental changes depicted in folk tales not only affect natural conditions but also shape how communities interact with their surrounding environment.

From an ecocritical perspective, these conditions can be interpreted through the concept of ‘dwelling’, which refers to the ways in which humans live and build relationships with the environment over the long term. This concept refers not only to physical dwellings but also encompasses human engagement with the landscape, including work activities, social life, and relationships with surrounding natural resources. Thus, environmental changes resulting from the formation of a lake not only lead to the loss of living space but also foster the emergence of new patterns of relationship between humans and their environment through the utilisation of the lake as an integral part of daily life.

The Transformation of Characters as a Form of Human Engagement with the Ecosystem

The data in Table 1 shows that in several folk tales regarding the origins of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago, there are characters who undergo a transformation into other living creatures and subsequently become part of the natural environment, such as the transformation of the character Bujang Sembilan, who is cursed to become a fish in the legend.

Data 15

“However, if we are not at fault, let this mountain erupt and curse Bujang Sembilan to become a fish!” (Wijayanti, 2019).

Lake Maninjau and Toba’s wife, who returned to the form of a fish in the legend of Lake Toba.

Data 16

“A moment later, she leapt into the river and suddenly turned into a huge fish” (Wijayanti, 2019).

This transformation signifies a shift in humanity’s position from a subject that dominates the environment to becoming part of the ecosystem formed following a disaster or environmental change. This transformation indicates that humans in folklore are not entirely separate from nature, but can become part of the ecological system that sustains life within it. In this context, the transformation of a character into another living being reflects the process of reintegrating humans into an environment previously disrupted by human actions. Thus, the transformation is not merely interpreted as a form of punishment, but also as an effort to restore the ecological balance that has been disrupted.

This finding aligns with eco-critical research stating that the relationship between humans and other living beings in literary works is often used to represent the interconnectedness between humans and the environment and to challenge anthropocentric views of nature (Fadhilla et al., 2023). Narratives involving human transformation or human

interaction with animals serve as a medium for critiquing the relationship between humans and the environment and affirm that humans are part of a broader ecological system.

From an ecocritical perspective, this situation can be interpreted through the concept of “animals”, which represents the relationship between humans and other living beings within an ecosystem. This concept no longer positions humans as a centre separate from nature, but as part of an interconnected environment. Thus, the transformation of a character’s form in folklore not only represents a form of punishment but also illustrates the process of reintegrating humans into the ecosystem as part of the environmental balance.

Lakes as Ecological Systems and Pillars of Social Life

Based on the data in Table 1 and Table 2, lakes in various Indonesian folk tales are not merely interpreted as the result of curses or punishments, but also serve a tangible ecological function as part of the Earth’s system that sustains the lives of the surrounding communities. From an ecocritical perspective, this situation can be interpreted through the concept of “earth,” namely the view that the natural environment is not merely a passive backdrop but rather part of an ecological system that plays a vital role in sustaining human life. This concept positions lakes as ecological spaces that provide natural resources for communities while maintaining environmental balance.

In the legend of Lake Toba, the lake’s existence is not merely a symbol of destruction resulting from a broken promise, but is also utilised by the community as a natural resource supporting fisheries-based economic activities and traditional natural resource management. The management of natural resources by communities in the Lake Toba shoreline region has even been practised for generations as a form of environmental utilisation to improve living standards (Tampubolon et al., 2020). This demonstrates that the lake functions as a new living space, providing a livelihood for communities following environmental transformation.

A similar phenomenon is also found at Lake Laut Tawar in Aceh. This lake holds significant ecological, social, and economic value for communities in Central Aceh Regency. Lake Laut Tawar is utilised as a resource for fisheries, agriculture, and tourism, whilst also supporting forestry activities and sustainable regional development. Furthermore, the lake provides a habitat for various species of freshwater fish, which serve as a food source for the surrounding communities (Andalia et al., 2022). Thus, the lake not only represents a change in the landscape but also functions as an ecological system that sustains community life.

Meanwhile, Lake Lau Kavar plays a vital role in maintaining the diversity of freshwater fish species, which form part of the aquatic ecosystem’s balance. The biodiversity found in this lake demonstrates a vital contribution to the sustainability of freshwater ecosystems and the importance of conservation efforts in maintaining environmental stability (Sitorus & Kodrat, 2024).

In the legend of Lake Maninjau, the lake serves multiple functions as a source of clean water, a source of fish, a tourism destination, a hydroelectric power station, and a guardian of the environmental ecosystem’s balance. These strategic functions demonstrate that the lake’s existence makes a direct contribution to the social and economic lives of the surrounding communities (Endah & Nadjib, 2017).

Lake Limboto, associated with the legend of Bulalo La Limutu, also serves a strategic function as an economic resource for the community through the rapidly developing aquaculture industry in the area. Furthermore, the lake possesses tourism potential that can be developed as part of the sustainable utilisation of natural resources (Hasim, 2018).

Meanwhile, Telaga Warna in the Dieng Highlands is utilised as a natural tourist attraction that serves as the main draw for both domestic and international visitors. Tourism

patterns in this area indicate that Telaga Warna acts as a hub for tourism activities that support the local economy (Masrun & Nastiti, 2021).

Finally, at Lake Tes in Bengkulu, the lake is utilised as a hydroelectric power station (PLTA), serving as an energy source for the Bengkulu Province with a capacity of up to 17 MW. Furthermore, the lake functions as a water supply during the dry season and a flood control mechanism during the rainy season, thus playing a vital role in maintaining environmental stability and supporting the needs of the surrounding community.

Thus, the formation of lakes in folk tales does not merely represent moral consequences for the violation of values, but also demonstrates how the natural environment functions as part of the Earth's system, providing resources for human life. In this context, lakes are no longer viewed solely as symbols of destruction, but rather as ecological spaces that underpin the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the surrounding communities.

Based on the findings in tables 1 and 2, the folk tales of the origins of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago serve not only as narratives shaping the geographical landscape but also as pedagogical devices that instil moral values and social norms in the community. In the legend of Lake Toba, the community is taught the importance of keeping one's word and upholding trust, as the breaking of an oath triggered an ecological disaster in the form of a massive flood that formed the lake. In the case of Lake Laut Tawar, the story emphasises the importance of heeding parental advice as a form of respect for family authority and social norms. Meanwhile, the legends of Lau Kwar and Lake Maninjau demonstrate that neglect of humanitarian values, slander, prejudice, and social injustice can lead to collective destruction. Similar values are evident in the legends of Bulalo La Limutu and Telaga Warna, which emphasise that greed and arrogance are forms of moral transgression that bring about ecological consequences. At Lake Tes, folklore serves as an educational tool regarding the importance of guarding one's speech, as uncontrolled words can lead to fatal consequences for oneself and the surrounding environment. Thus, folklore functions as a medium for transmitting values to ensure that society does not violate moral and social norms that could disrupt the harmony of life.

On the other hand, all these folk tales also represent the view that humans are part of nature, not its rulers (non-anthropocentric). This perspective is evident through the presence of curses and punishments in the form of floods, torrential rain, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, or landscape changes occurring as a response to human violations of the moral order. From Garrard's ecocritical perspective, this situation symbolically represents 'pollution' in the form of the breakdown of moral and social order, which subsequently escalates into an 'apocalypse' through the occurrence of ecological disasters. The transformation of land into lakes (wilderness) and the altered relationship between humans and their new environment (dwelling) demonstrate that nature possesses the power to reorganise human life. Indeed, the transformation of characters into fish in the legends of Lake Toba and Lake Maninjau (animals) affirms that humans do not stand above nature, but can instead return to being part of the ecosystem. Therefore, these folk tales not only contain moral messages but also serve as ecological reminders of the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between humans and nature so that disasters caused by human error are not repeated.

Table 3. Key Findings

No	Title of Folktale	Type of Moral	Form of Nature's	Eco-Criticism Concept
1	The Origin of Lake Toba (North Sumatra)	The breach of promise committed by Toba.	The loss of family and the submergence of the homeland.	Pollution, Apocalypse, Animals, Earth.
2	The Origin of Lake Laut Tawar (Aceh)	Breaking the message given by her parents.	Princess Pukes is turning to stone, and the kingdom is sinking.	Pollution, Apocalypse, Earth.
3	The Origin of Lau Kwar (North Sumatra)	A grandmother's misunderstanding of her daughter-in-law and son.	An earthquake and torrential rain submerged Kwar Village,	Pollution, Apocalypse, Wilderness, Earth.

				transforming it into Lake Lau Kavar and destroying the entire village population.			
4	The Origin of Lake Maninjau. (West Sumatra)	Jealousy and slander from his own brother.		The eruption of Mount Tinjau, which formed Lake Maninjau, and the curse upon Bujang Sembilan, who was transformed into a fish	Pollution, Earth.	Apocalypse,	Animals,
5	The Legend of Bulalo La Limutu – Lake Limboto (Gorontalo)	The greed of four travellers who sought to take another's property.		The loss of access to the spring they were targeting after the area was flooded and transformed into a vast lake.	Pollution, Earth.	Apocalypse,	Wilderness,
6	Telaga Warna (West Java)	Arrogance and ingratitude towards the gift bestowed.		The sinking of the Kutatangeunah kingdom, which transformed it into a colourful lake.	Pollution, Dwelling	Apocalypse,	Wilderness,
7	Lake Tes (Bengkulu)	Negligence in guarding one's words.		The death of his child and the formation of Lake Tes due to the overflow of the Air Ketahun River.	Pollution, Earth.	Apocalypse,	Dwelling,

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that the formation of lakes in the folklore of the Indonesian archipelago is linked to violations of moral and social values committed by the characters in the stories. These violations are classified into two forms of consequence: curses and punishments. Curses are found in the legends of Lake Toba, Lake Laut Tawar, Lake Lau Kavar, and Lake Maninjau, whilst punishments are found in the legends of Bulalo La Limutu, Telaga Warna, and Lake Tes. Both forms of consequence not only affect the individual perpetrators of the violations but also trigger environmental changes that lead to the formation of lakes.

As for the conclusions of each folk tale, namely the Legend of Lake Toba, the curse arose due to a moral transgression in the form of Toba's breaking of a sacred promise, which resulted in the loss of his family and the submergence of the region, ultimately forming the lake. In the tale of Lake Laut Tawar, a moral transgression, disobedience to parental advice caused Princess Pukes to be cursed into stone, and the kingdom's territory to transform into a lake. In the story of Lake Lau Kavar, social transgressions, neglect of parents, and misunderstandings within family relations triggered a curse that submerged the village as a form of collective punishment. Meanwhile, in the legend of Lake Maninjau, social transgressions such as slander, prejudice, and customary injustice led to a volcanic eruption and a curse upon Bujang Sembilan, turning him into a fish.

The legend of Bulalo La Limutu, associated with Lake Limboto, involves moral transgressions such as greed and disregard for the sacred, resulting in a punishment where a spring expanded into a vast lake. In the legend of Telaga Warna, arrogance and a lack of appreciation for the people's offerings constitute moral transgressions that ultimately led to the kingdom's submersion. Meanwhile, in the tale of Lake Tes, negligence in guarding one's speech constitutes a moral transgression that caused the death of Si Lidah Pahit's child and the transformation of the environment into a lake.

An analysis using an ecocritical approach shows that violations of norms such as breaking promises, disobeying advice, greed, arrogance, and negligence in guarding one's speech represent the breakdown of the relationship between humans and the environment. This imbalance is manifested through ecological disasters that transform the terrestrial landscape into a watery expanse.

Furthermore, the environmental changes that occur also affect the living space of the

community and encourage the formation of new patterns of relationship between humans and the environment. The transformation of the character's form into part of the lake's ecosystem also demonstrates that humans in folklore are not positioned as entities separate from nature, but rather as part of an interconnected ecological system.

Furthermore, lakes in folklore are not merely interpreted as symbols of moral consequences for the violation of values, but also as ecological spaces that serve a tangible function in sustaining the social, economic, and environmental lives of the surrounding communities. This demonstrates that the natural environment in folklore functions as part of the Earth system, providing resources while maintaining the balance of human life.

Thus, the origin legends of lakes in the Indonesian archipelago represent the interconnection between human behaviour and environmental change as an ecological warning regarding the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between humans and nature.

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