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The Swamp as Counter-Archive: Internal Colonialism, Subaltern Memory, and Postcolonial Ecology in Fitri's *Paya Nie*

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Abstract:
In Fitri's *Paya Nie*, the swamp becomes the site through which the Aceh conflict is remembered, through its muddy terrain, waterways, everyday activities, and stories passed down by local communities. These details bring into view experiences of violence and loss that official histories often overlook. We used close reading and motif mapping. They are used to examine how the swamp serves as a counter-archive of the Aceh conflict. The analysis brings postcolonial theory into conversation with internal colonialism, collective memory, and the relationship between landscape and historical representation. This study pays attention to bureaucratic and military control and extractive development with the same stress on the marginalisation of women's voices and the difficulties of remembering violence after the conflict. The findings reveal that unequal power relations between the Indonesian state and Aceh have continued since independence. However, they cannot be equated with European colonial rule. By portraying the swamp as a place where memories of violence remain part of everyday life, *Paya Nie* shows that official histories

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do not fully capture the experiences of local communities. The novel also suggests that ending armed conflict does not necessarily end suffering or resolve the lasting effects of violence.
Keywords: Aceh, postcolonial literature, internal colonialism, counter-archive, wetland, subaltern memory.

Introduction

Paya Nie is set in a landscape largely marginal to Indonesia's official histories. Paya Nie is located near a peat swamp in Salamanga, Aceh. However, the novel makes *Paya Nie* its central theme and memorial centre. The novel places ordinary life apart from the conflict involving the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). It depicts scenes of fishing, gathering wetland plants, concealment, flight, and encounters with the dead and Indonesian forces (Fitri 3–4) as other important issues in ordinary lives. In the novel, the swamp is not a neutral backdrop but a central participant in shaping harm, survival, and memory. This emphasis directs attention to peripheral geographies and memories that exceed official representations (Ang 26–41; Hauthal and Toivanen 291–301; Parui 725–33).

This article argues that *Paya Nie* portrays the swamp as a place-based counter-archive that challenges the authority of the conflict's centralised narratives. We frame the “counter-archive” as a narrative structure that collects elements typically fragmented or subordinated by centralised archives. According to Baines (18–23), alternative archives preserve stories and experiences that official records often exclude. For Pesarini (625–39), archives of memory expressed through bodily and lived experience can challenge official accounts of the past. Institutional archives often represent marginalised communities from the perspective of those in authority, leaving their own experiences unheard. Literature and art can help reveal these neglected experiences and expose the limitations of official historical records (Johnson 1–2). In *Paya Nie*, the archive is the locality.

Therefore, it is not represented by a building or a collection in storage but by mud, water, plants, graves, ruins, and echoed paths, routes, stories, and acts of return. Wetlands are ecologically and narratively significant. Their opacity formally limits the idea that any single institutional point of view can make the past completely transparent.

It is necessary to exercise conceptual care in this regard. The conflict in Aceh is not the same as European colonialism. This is why a revised form of postcolonial analysis remains useful in examining how the hierarchical relationships between the centre and the periphery persist or are reestablished after independence. Said's account of the relationship between geographical knowledge and political authority offers a starting point (Said 54–72), while Colpani (54–72) cautions against treating postcolonial theory as a fixed explanatory template. These debates highlight material inequality, epistemic hierarchies, and institutional power as ongoing aspects of coloniality.

In the Indonesian context, Li and Zheng (462–74) examine state-building and internal colonialism in Aceh and West Papua. The term *internal colonialism* does not suggest that Indonesia functions as a traditional colonial empire. Instead, it highlights how populations in national peripheries experience state authority as uneven and frequently violent, manifested through extraction, surveillance, classification, and forced integration into national projects. This article uses internal-colonial spatiality to describe how this hierarchy is geographically organised. It marks spaces and populations as remote, suspect, or subject to control by a national centre that positions itself as normative.

In this study, we focus on three questions, beginning with: How does *Paya Nie* construct the swamp as a wetland counter-archive of Aceh's past? Second, how are the postcolonial relations of internal colonial spatiality materialised through bureaucracy, militarisation, and development?

Third, how do gendered and ecological memories challenge heroic narratives of conflict and the assumption that peace has been fully achieved? These questions matter because we argue that peace in post-conflict Aceh cannot be measured simply by the end of fighting. It depends on whose experiences are remembered and whose remain absent from public memory.

Following the conceptual and methodological discussion, we examine the wetland counter-archive, bureaucratic and military power, and extractive development. We then consider women's testimony and the politics of memory and return. The final analytical section considers how these readings make the swamp a distinctive postcolonial literary form.

Postcolonial Frame and Method

The study fuses postcolonial close reading with motif scanning throughout the novel. Our close reading concentrates on diction, narrative point of view, spatial movement, and recurring objects. The relationship between remembered and narrated time is another key focus of this study. We analysed all chapters of *Paya Nie* by tracing recurring references to the swamp, identity documents, aircraft, weapons, roads, and industrial infrastructure. We also examined women's voices, graves, and journeys of return. We compared their appearances across chapters to understand what they meant in different situations. This reading allowed us to explore how recurring details shape the novel's portrayal of violence, power, and memory.

Four theoretical perspectives guide the analysis, used together rather than as separate approaches. The first is postcolonial spatial analysis, which examines how restrictions on movement, surveillance, and unequal access to resources reinforce divisions between powerful centres and marginalised regions. Kloos (389–412) explains how colonial authorities portrayed parts of Aceh as isolated or dangerous, while Gedacht (364–88) examines how exile and territorial

control restricted people's movement during colonial rule. Both studies help explain the historical roots of unequal power relations between Aceh and the political centre. This historical perspective also helps us understand how such inequalities continue or take new forms after Indonesian independence.

Secondly, memory studies explain the importance of fiction in societies in the aftermath of conflict. Adebayo's account of unresolved pasts in postcolonial fiction (Adebayo 215–22) clarifies how narrated time can resist the neat closure of such political chronology. Fiction can thus create "memory friction", showing incomplete reconciliation and competing versions of the past without settling them into single account. Lifson's analysis of embodied remembrance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Morrison 36–53) offers a comparison in literary form, not an equation between racial slavery and the Aceh conflict itself.

Third, counter-archival scholarship explains how fragments and absences challenge the apparent completeness of official knowledge (Johnson 1–2; Pesarini 625–39). Johnson and Pesarini's arguments highlight that forms of testimony and material traces cannot be accommodated by institutional records. In this study, we therefore ask not only what the swamp preserves but also which experiences remain inaccessible in its fragmented record.

Fourth, postcolonial ecocriticism links the domination of people to the organisation of land and resources. Nixon's account of slow violence (Nixon 2) emphasises injuries whose effects accumulate over time. Dang (1004–16) further emphasises how struggles over land and resources challenge inherited spatial hierarchies. Rather than treating the environment as a background element, these approaches interpret ecological change as being closely tied to colonialism, capital, and race.

We do not treat the novel as a historical record. However, we use historical and social-science studies to situate its fictional world within Aceh's experiences of conflict. Our reading focuses on how Fitri transforms the swamp into a counter-archive that brings neglected experiences to light. These experiences emerge without being reduced to a complete or authoritative account of the past.

Paya Nie as a Wetland Counter-Archive

The first role of the swamp is that of an archive: it holds traces without organising them into an official sequence of events. In the early chapters, the characters walk through thick undergrowth, narrow channels, mud, peat, and unstable ground. Mawa's warning, "Jangan terlalu banyak bergerak" ("Do not move too much"), makes knowledge of the ground an immediate condition of safety (Fitri 74). What is important in this situation is practical, hands-on knowledge: people find out which plants actually support a person's weight, which paths can be relied upon, where fish are likely to be found, and how the water will change, not because of abstract principles but as a result of habits acquired through direct experience and from continuous conversations. Over time, this day-to-day activity of observing and giving advice leads to a kind of spatial competence that is accessible to local people but generally out of reach for outsiders who rely on maps or official classifications. In this way, wetlands challenge the usual colonial hierarchy, which assumes that space, as it is administratively categorised and as it appears on maps, is more reasonable than the geography actually lived; instead, they give recognition to those who live in and tell the story of the land rather than to those who only observe and classify it from a distance. Batarseh's discussion of place-making and Dang's analysis of landscape are useful here because both question the assumption that mapped space is necessarily better understood than inhabited space (Batarseh 232–52; Dang 1004–16).

The novel's portrayal of the bunkers, hidden routes, weapons, armed groups, and bodies shows the contest for power. The swamp also conceals what political power seeks. While wetlands can offer protection to fighters, they can also trap civilians and leave them open to unpredictable violence. Therefore, its resistance to being seen is ethically ambiguous. Fitri does not regard opacity as a form of pure resistance. The swamp has insects, fear, hunger, the risk of drowning, and uncertainty. Biet fears she may be swallowed by the swamp: "Ia tak mau tertelan ke dasar rawa" ("She does not want to sink to the bottom of the swamp") (Fitri 106). This ambivalence matters because a counter-archive is not necessarily more reliable or morally superior. It also contains gaps and distortions, along with rumours and conflicting memories. Johnson's focus on the fragment (Johnson 1–2) and Pesarini's description of counter-archives (Pesarini 625–39) mark the bodies and help explain why the novel prefers partial knowledge to a fully comprehensive historical account.

The plants, changing water levels, boats, narrow paths, and mud recur throughout the novel. Graves and ruined buildings also appear repeatedly, serving as more than decorative elements. As Pradhan and Kumar's comparative study of literary wetlands shows, swamps and marshes are often linked to both survival and fear, as well as to commodification and difficult ethical relationships (Pradhan and Kumar 21–34). These associations are strengthened in *Paya Nie*'s work, where life in the wetlands is directly connected to the armed conflict. The landscape does not express pressure directly. This is shown through altered, slowed-down, or blocked movement. Steinberg's account of watery materiality (Steinberg 4) is useful because fluid terrain unsettles fixed boundaries and seemingly complete spatial histories. In this way, the swamp disrupts straight lines through bent paths, detours, or disappearances. The characters do not always move forward. At times, they circle, wait, or sink, only to hide and reappear. Biet's movement is repeatedly tied to survival when

she says that “Ia terus bergerak, terus bergerak untuk bertahan hidup” (“She keeps moving, keeps moving to survive”) (Fitri 106). This pattern shapes the narrative's method of gaining knowledge, and the knowledge it contains follows the swamp's rhythm.

This results in a historiography of the wetland. Rather than following a clear timeline, official history is typically organised by dates, institutions, leaders, negotiations, and formal events. In contrast, the novel repeatedly returns to specific places where ordinary people remember what was done to them and the suffering they endured. As Parui (725–33) explains the concept of slow memory, this pattern of time becomes evident: time extends and becomes denser rather than progressing in a straight line. Although major events are still recognised, their aftermath is recorded in everyday routines, in the stories that are told and retold, in bodily reactions, and in the practices that shape the landscape. Similarly, Adebayo (215–22) describes postcolonial fiction as a space in which unresolved pasts continue to affect, and at times distort, the present. The archive presented by *Paya Nie* is, therefore, not treated as closed or grandiose. It is, instead, continually re-opened every time the characters enter the swamp and encounter another layer of what remains. Because of this repeated return, fragments and ambivalence are brought to the fore, and the narrative slowly brings us into the later scenes in which bureaucratic files, military memories, and women's vernacular testimony are all placed side by side, allowed to compete, and never forced into a single authoritative record.

Bureaucratic and Military Coloniality

The most condensed symbol of official legibility in the novel is the identity card. In the chapter, “Cerita Sekelompok Marinir” (“The Story of a Group of Marines”), soldiers ask young men for identification, turning possession of a card into a test of belonging and suspicion (Fitri

98–105). This situation reveals a contradiction regarding citizenship. The national identity card is like life itself (Fitri 102). A document meant to prove national belonging also classifies, questions, and controls people on the margins. In this context, the term *negara induk*, meaning “parent state”, carries an unsettling colonial resonance. It suggests a distant national centre that demands proof of loyalty from people on the periphery.

Li and Zheng's idea of internal colonialism helps us identify this situation without ignoring historical differences (462–74). According to their view, the process of state-building in Aceh was not straightforward; it relied on contested relationships concerning trust, various integration initiatives, and the assertion of central authority. *Paya Nie*'s work does not reduce these histories to a single narrative; rather, readers can detect a postcolonial resonance when administrative categories and armed forces appear in the same scene. The importance of Said's claim that political power is inseparable from geographical imagination (Said 54–72) is particularly apparent in this case, since the state does not come up against a neutral area; it faces a place which has already been regarded as suspicious, rebellious, remote, or in need of control. In this manner, such representations maintain an internal colonial spatiality, and people are seen and moved within the limits imposed.

The hierarchy is given physical form through military violence seen through detention and intimidation. In addition to that, the beatings, gunfire, and aircraft also repeatedly make danger visible. The chapter "Kapan Perang Berakhir?” (“When Will the War End?”) shifts the reader’s attention from heroic combat to Biet’s uncertain survival (Fitri 106–12). This situation is explained by Fanon’s account of partitioned political space (Fanon 3–4), which helps explain the force behind such boundaries, while Mbembe’s analysis of necropolitics further directs attention to whose lives are exposed to death space (Mbembe 11–12). Nevertheless, Fitri does not accept a

simple division in which all violence is on one side. GAM's combatants also instil fear, secrecy, coercion, and danger. Although the authority changes, the state of vulnerability remains.

The novel avoids presenting the Aceh conflict as a simple opposition. This complexity can be read through Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, in which individuals may occupy different and sometimes contradictory positions within a conflict (86). Although Quayson examines George Floyd in the context of racial violence, his argument against reducing human suffering to political symbolism is also relevant to the representation of civilian experiences in Aceh (127–37). In the novel, civilians are not simply portrayed as victims whose suffering supports a particular political cause. Instead, their experiences raise questions about the violence justified by both state forces and insurgent groups. What follows as the consequences of this violence goes beyond armed confrontations, affecting livelihoods, everyday activities, and personal security. Prolonged exposure to violence also changes how people understand their circumstances and imagine their futures.

The final chapter, “Serangan Itu” (“That Attack”), revisits the armed conflict from the perspective of 2023 (Fitri 195). The commander’s story concludes that the attack produced only “kematian-kematian yang tidak perlu” (“unnecessary deaths”, Fitri 196). Głąb's analysis of necropolitical memory under Suharto is relevant to Indonesia because it shows how regimes treat bodies differently (Głąb 555–71). Nazaruddin's examination of the Aceh Tsunami Museum (Nazaruddin 560–79) shows that cultural memory is always contested. *Paya* Nie's counter-archive opposes the transformation of violent death into a single story that legitimises it and reveals how internal colonial spatiality extends into hierarchies of remembrance.

Developmental-Extractive Coloniality

The way the novel deals with infrastructure does not separate war from development. In chapter 17, "Pembangunan Jalan Len 1984" ("Construction of the Len Road, 1984"), road building, pumps, a water intake, and other infrastructure associated with PT Lancang NGL are discussed (Fitri 155). At first, the villagers understood the project in terms of employment, improved mobility, and material benefits, but the chapter later documents the ecological and social changes surrounding the swamp (Fitri 155–60). The description of a previously peaceful village, filled with the sounds of horns and construction workers, registers changes in everyday experience (Fitri 156). Development is thus presented in terms of double temporality: the immediate benefits are realised quickly, while the costs appear slowly and unevenly.

This pattern resembles Nixon's idea of slow violence (Nixon 2), in which environmental damage builds up over a non-catastrophic period. This also aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism, which holds that environmental change cannot be separated from the histories of political and economic inequality (Huggan and Tiffin 5–6). Dang's criticism of colonial practices concerning the landscape (Dang 1004–16) shows that infrastructure is not politically neutral, since roads, extraction sites, and technical systems arrange access to land while naturalising certain ideas of progress. *Paya Nie* brings this issue to the village level. The road does not merely link the periphery with the centre; it also determines who can enter, take away, measure, and reorganise the landscape.

In Aceh, these ecocritical issues assume special significance because complaints about natural resources are closely linked to separatist talk. Current research on conflict and governance maintains that resource politics alone are insufficient to explain what has happened in Aceh, although extraction has clearly contributed to the region's uneven development. Heger and

Neumayer (394–421) examine the economic legacy of conflict in Aceh. Toumbourou and Dressler's study of an Indonesian oil-palm enclave (Toumbourou and Dressler 89–114) examines a different region and industry; it compares unequal land access in *Paya Nie*. Zainal et al. (1928–47) link conflict resolution in Aceh with questions of ecological sustainability. These studies provide useful context for understanding how infrastructure development is portrayed. It is presented as progress on the one hand, and as reinforcement of unequal control over land and resources on the other. It also creates long-term risks for local communities. This reflects what may be understood as developmental-extractive coloniality.

The counter-archive of the swamp documents these changes in detail. It shows how the environment has transformed fish, vegetation, water, paths, and local labour. Such details cannot be conveyed by a development description that measures only the number of roads built or industrial output. Davies's account of modernity and scale (Davies 1–25) shows that large systems tend to remain abstract until literature gives them sensory quality. In *Paya Nie*, this sensory quality emerges through muddy paths and changing water conditions. This can also be observed in everyday labour and its impact on households. The novel does not reject this development. It questions who defines improvement and who bears the ecological costs.

Gendered Subalternity and Vernacular Memory

The counter-archive is also based on gender. *Paya Nie* contains topics such as domestic violence, widows, mothers, gossip, romantic vulnerability, women's labour, and women who have taken part in armed struggle. The chapter titled "Para Perempuan Juru Gosip" ("The Women Gossipers") is especially revealing, since its title seems to treat women's speech as unimportant (Fitri 68). However, the conversations do provide information on marriage, abuse, disappearance,

reputation, and danger. Khadijah once asked, “Aku malu, Limah. Apa lagi yang harus kulakukan?” (“I am ashamed, Limah. What else can I do?”). Such questions reveal how such conversations expose the limitations of official histories to record (Fitri 9). What patriarchal discourse regards as mere gossip actually forms an informal network of social memories.

Spivak's question about the subaltern remains relevant because the problem is not simply whether women speak or remain silent (Spivak 271–313), and women do speak in the novel. However, their voices are not always heard in the same manner. What matters is whether institutions regard their speech as politically authoritative and whether they can take in testimony presented through domestic or vernacular forms of art. In their study of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Aceh, Ocktaviana and Kamaruzzaman (127–40) show that women's experiences and participation have often been only partially and inadequately included in formal peace processes. Udasmoro (395–414) focuses on women's labour and their involvement in insurgency and ethno-religious conflict. Read alongside this work, Fitri’s domestic scenes are politically significant rather than supplementary to the “real” history of war.

Women fighters associated with GAM, known as *inong balee*, demonstrate another dimension of women's involvement in the conflict. In this frame, women not only took up arms but also held command positions within the military structure. Their inclusion questions the traditional division that separates male combat from female suffering, although the novel does not treat militarisation as automatically leading to women's emancipation. Biet firmly refuses to join “*inong balee*”. Her refusal becomes visible within the armed setting (Fitri 166). This confirms that women can achieve mobility and authority even though they are still subjected to violent male structures. Bhabha's idea of ambivalence helps to account for this precarious position, and de Jong's discussion of postcolonial and decolonial thought (de Jong 89–107) helps to avoid a political

situation in which speaking on behalf of marginalised groups becomes yet another form of appropriation.

Rather than dividing Acehnese women into victims and resisters, *Paya Nie* juxtaposes their conflicting experiences of agency, vulnerability, and responsibility. Drawing on Pesarini's idea of embodied counter-archives (Pesarini 625–39) and Lifson's interpretation of embodied memory, the work illustrates the importance of bodily knowledge when the official language is inadequate (Lifson 36–53). The archive of conflict exists in military records and peace agreements and also in women's experiences and memories. When Kak Limah exposes the scars on her limbs, the body itself becomes a testimony to the violence of detention (Fitri 174). Once these various physical and psychological experiences of testimony are brought to the fore, *Paya Nie*'s depiction of the wetland extends into the domestic sphere. Here, memory survives through stories, gossip, and care, allowing marginalised women's voices to be heard beyond official institutions.

Memory, Return, and Unfinished Peace

The strong urge to return imparts an ethical aspect to the novel's postcolonial memory. Although the characters return to villages, graves, stories, and swamps, these returns never restore an undisturbed past. In "Semua Ingin Pulang" ("Everyone wants to go home"), a grave bearing Cuda Aminah's name is found while Mawa remains missing. The return becomes inseparable from loss and uncertainty (Fitri 169–70). The conflict has changed people's bodies, relationships, livelihoods, and sense of place. Ang's interpretation of mobility as a form of memory (Ang 26–41) is useful since *Paya Nie* also sees movement through space as equivalent to movement through layered time; a path can serve as both the current route and the location of a previous death; a

bunker may be empty yet still have political significance; and a well-known part of the swamp can reawaken knowledge which had appeared to be dormant and forgotten.

Scholars such as Manan et al. and Adebayo conducted their studies after the conflict made the ethical issues involved clear. Manan et al. (162–76) assess reconciliation from victims' perspectives, which *Paya Nie* echoes, but without fully explaining the conflict. Former combatants, civilians, women, migrants, and younger generations inherit different versions of this unsettled past. The account of unresolved pasts (Adebayo 215–22) helps us comprehend why the novel brings incompatible testimonies into proximity. In this sense, literary "memory friction" is visible in the distance between civilian testimony and the commander's later recollection (Fitri 169–74, 194–96). Together, these ideas shed light on Fitri's episodic structure. The twenty-three chapters do not combine into a single authoritative narrator; rather, they are presented as adjacent memories, and their contradictions remain apparent.

Aceh's historical background compounds this situation and gives rise to a more complex pattern of colonial spatiality in the region. Hasbi's study of *Perang Sabil* (Hasbi 199–220) and Kloos's analysis of colonial geographic imaginaries (Kloos 389–412) show why Acehnese territorial identity requires a historically specific, rather than generic, postcolonial interpretation. Although *Paya Nie* does not draw a direct causal link between Dutch colonialism and the GAM conflict, it allows the histories of incorporation and resistance to align. Rosenthal's criticism of academic colonialism (Rosenthal 17–34) is relevant here: postcolonial interpretations should not treat local histories as mere examples of a theory developed elsewhere.

From Peripheral Landscape to Postcolonial Form

In *Paya Nie,* what matters is how it transforms the local environment into a theory of reading. The novel uses the wetland in its particular form. Unlike solid ground, where roads, boundaries, and monuments can be clearly established, swamps change with the seasons and are difficult to map or observe fully. Fitri uses these characteristics of the swamp to challenge the assumption that history and truth can only be understood through clear boundaries, visible evidence, and official records. Readers seldom get the full picture from above; instead, knowledge comes to them through fragments, rumours, memories, and repeated experiences of places. This does not imply that uncertainty is politically neutral. Rather, the novel presents uncertainty as a historical condition brought about by violence and the internal colonial organisation of space.

This article contributes to contemporary discussions in postcolonial criticism. Colpani's description of tensions among Marxist, postcolonial, and decolonial approaches (Colpani 54–72) cautions against a form of criticism which reduces coloniality to discourse alone. Meanwhile, Rosenthal (17–34) highlights the institutional inequalities that cause certain places to be treated as objects of theory rather than acknowledged as producers. In response, *Paya Nie* makes the local geography conceptually productive. The question is not simply how Aceh fits into a theory developed elsewhere. What becomes visible when the swamp’s uncertain routes and fragile traces provide a starting point for interpretation?

The novel does the same in relation to a trauma-focused approach to the war. Mukherjee's treatment of suffering (Mukherjee 214–31) and Quayson's postcolonial description of socially contaminated situations (Quayson 127–37) show that pain can become excessively symbolic. This is particularly true when it is removed from ordinary contexts. In contrast, Fitri incorporates suffering into everyday life by fishing, preparing food, walking, marrying, gossiping, looking after

children, seeking work, and facing danger. The women's shared meal in the swamp, for example, places ordinary care beside the threat of armed violence (Fitri 74–75). As familiar places become threatening and absences reshape household routines, the novel locates conflict's afterlife in changes to ordinary practice.

The swamp shapes survival and the conditions under which stories can be told. Nixon's slow violence (Nixon 2), Dang's decolonised landscape (Dang 1004–16), and Pradhan and Kumar's wetland ethics (Pradhan and Kumar 21–34) are all discussed in relation to studies of conflict, memory, and governance specific to Aceh. *Paya Nie* brings these concerns together through a swamp that is both a physical environment and a narrative image of incomplete knowledge. The narrator does not reduce them to one overarching explanation. Attending to these limits of narration may also inform readings of other conflict literatures in which the physical environment shapes what can be remembered, told and shared.

Conclusion

A postcolonial interpretation of *Paya Nie* shows that the novel reorganises the archive of the Aceh conflict through its landscape, the wetland counter-archive. It places civilian testimony, ecological knowledge, and contested remembrance in the same unstable terrain. This challenges the idea that institutional records have a monopoly on the truth without asserting that vernacular memory is either complete or innocent.

Fitri reveals different ways power operates in Aceh through suspicion of government officials and military forces. This is also evident in competing claims over land development and the disregard for women's experiences. The swamp is both a source of livelihood and a place where people face violence. Through this contrast, the novel shows that the conflict cannot be

understood simply as a struggle between an oppressive central government and innocent local communities.

The novel also offers a revision of postcolonial theory from the Acehnese perspective. It does not assert that post-independence Indonesia reproduces Dutch colonialism. Instead, it shows that relations recognisable as coloniality may reappear through several forms. These forms can be internal hierarchy, uneven development, and unequal access to political visibility. The swamp's literary force derives from its material presence: a lived environment that offers an image of histories that resist definitive closure. We acknowledge the limitations of this study, which focuses only on literary representations. Future studies could compare other Acehnese narratives and oral histories to assess the wetland counter-archive's broader relevance from different perspectives.

Paya Nie ultimately suggests that peace cannot be fully achieved when some people's experiences of the past are recognised while others are ignored. The swamp represents memories and histories that official records struggle to document or explain. Through this representation, the novel encourages readers to question official accounts of the conflict and pay attention to the experiences of those whose stories have been overlooked or excluded.

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