



## Abjection towards Women by Tribes and the State in the Niduparas Erlang's *Burung Kayu*

Cahyaningrum Dewojati\*  
Universitas Gadjah Mada  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
cahyaningrum@ugm.ac.id

Riqko Nur Ardi Windayanto  
Universitas Indonesia  
Depok, Indonesia  
riqko.nur@ui.ac.id

### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose**

*This research aimed to reveal the process of abjection experienced by women by the tribes and the state with its developmentalism ideology in the *Burung Kayu* by Niduparas Erlang. It also explores the implications of these two regimes, which ultimately contribute to women's abjection.*

#### **Method**

*This research employed notetaking and literature review techniques for collecting the data. Linguistic data depicting abjection in the novel were interpreted by the researcher according to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. The analysis was supplemented with findings from previous research.*

#### **Results/findings**

*This research presented several findings. Women experienced abjection because the Mentawai tribe practiced a paternalistic culture. This culture reinforced abjection towards women, especially when state intervention with developmentalism ideology was introduced. This development did not provide opportunities for women. Women were abjected as they adhere to their husbands' will, rather than their own desires. This research shed light on the fact that although the tribal and state regimes might seem contradictory, they fundamentally reinforce each other in positioning women as abject.*

#### **Conclusion**

*This research concluded that abjection was multidimensional, as gender intersected with tribal and state elements supported by developmentalism ideology.*

#### **Keywords**

*Abjection, state, development, women, tribes.*

\*) Corresponding Author

### Abstrak

#### Tujuan

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendiskusikan proses abjeksi yang berlangsung terhadap perempuan oleh suku dan negara dengan ideologi pembangunannya dalam novel *Burung Kayu* karya Niduparas Erlang. Penelitian ini juga membongkar implikasi kedua rezim tersebut, yang membuat perempuan pada akhirnya menjadi abjek.

#### Metode

Penelitian ini menggunakan teknik simak catat dan studi pustaka dalam pengumpulan data. Data lingual yang menarasikan abjeksi dalam novel diinterpretasikan oleh peneliti sesuai dengan teori abjeksi menurut Julia Kristeva. Analisis juga dilengkapi dengan temuan penelitian terdahulu.

#### Hasil/temuan

Penelitian ini mengemukakan beberapa temuan berikut. Perempuan mengalami abjeksi karena suku Mentawai menjalankan tradisi dan kehidupannya dengan kultur paternalistik. Kultur ini memperkuat abjeksi terhadap perempuan ketika intervensi negara masuk dengan ideologi pembangunan. Pembangunan tersebut tidak memberikan kesempatan pada perempuan. Perempuan adalah abjek yang mengikuti kodrat suami, bukan karena kehendaknya sendiri. Meskipun rezim suku dan negara berseberangan, pada dasarnya mereka saling memperkuat dalam meletakkan perempuan sebagai abjek.

#### Kesimpulan

Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa abjeksi bersifat multidimensional karena gender terkait dengan suku dan negara yang ditopang oleh ideologi pembangunan.

#### Kata kunci

Abjeksi, negara, pembangunan, perempuan, suku.

### المخلص

#### الهدف

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة عملية الاحتقار التي تحدث تجاه المرأة من قبل القبائل والدولة وأيديولوجيتها التنموية في رواية بورونج كابو للكاتب نيدوباراس إرلانج. ويكشف هذا البحث أيضًا عن آثار كلا النظامين، اللذين يحولان النساء في نهاية المطاف إلى مجرد خاضعات.

#### الطريقة

تستخدم هذه الدراسة تقنيات الملاحظة وتدوين الملاحظات ودراسة الأدبيات في جمع البيانات. يقوم الباحث بتفسير البيانات اللغوية التي تروي البذاءة في الرواية وفقًا لنظرية البذاءة لجوليا كريستيفا. ويستكمل التحليل أيضًا بنتائج الأبحاث السابقة.

#### النتائج

وتقدم هذه الدراسة النتائج التالية: تعاني النساء من الاحتقار لأن قبيلة مينتاواي تحافظ على تقاليدها وتعيش في ثقافة أبوية. وتعمل هذه الثقافة على تعزيز احتقار المرأة عندما يتدخل الدولة بأيديولوجية التنمية. هذا التطور لا يوفر فرصا للنساء. المرأة هي كائنات تتبع طبيعة زوجها، وليس بإرادتها الخاصة. وتؤكد هذه الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن الأنظمة القبلية والدولة قد تبدو متعارضة، إلا أنها في الأساس تعزز بعضها البعض في وضع المرأة كإنسانة مذلولة.

#### الخلاصة

وخلصت هذه الدراسة إلى أن البؤس متعدد الأبعاد لأن الجنس مرتبط بالعرق والبلد اللذين تدعمهما أيديولوجية التنمية.

#### الكلمات الرئيسية

الذل؛ دولة؛ تطوير؛ امرأة؛ مجموعة عرقية

## INTRODUCTION

The government's development aspirations in modern states often neglect the existence of local communities or specific ethnic groups. In Indonesia, one such experience is faced by the Mentawai people in West Sumatra, as have been demonstrated in many anthropological-sociological studies (see Persoon, 1998; Eindhoven, 2007; Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Delfi, 2013a; Irwandi & Saleleubaja, 2021). The experiences of these groups have inspired literary works, as seen in the recent *Burung Kayu* by Niduparas Erlang. Literature always offers various possibilities beyond reality. Similarly, this novel not only depicts the threatened lives of the Mentawai people but also presents a narrative about women who face both a patriarchal tribal life and threats from the state. This novel tells the story of a woman who is marginalized within her tribe. Her position becomes even more vulnerable due to the government's power as the representation of the state, which intervenes in the lives of the tribe, who previously lived according to traditional values in the upper reaches of the river. The tribe's traditional activities and values include inter-tribal warfare, pig farming, and the existence of a tribal leader. In *Burung Kayu*, there is a conflictual relationship between the state and the tribes. Development is the reason behind this conflict. The state sees these tribal groups as needing empowerment and civilization to align with the modern order according to the government's version. The government wants them to live in a modern order, not a traditional one, by forcing them to move from the upper reaches to the lower reaches or estuaries of the river and ordering them to abandon old norms deemed primitive. In this conflict, the relationship between tribal and governmental authority implies that gender issues faced by women are not only influenced by their own tribe but also by the state.

In such a context, it is important to further debunk the position of women in relation to tribal and state rules without viewing subjects and objects in a binary way. This can be replaced with the concept of abjection from Julia Kristeva. The meaning of abjection is not about cleanliness and health making something abject, but it is considered disturbing to systems, identities, and regulations (Candraningrum, 2020, p. 92). Abjection induces a sense of "disgust" because of its liminality (Pickard, 2019, p. 2). These systems, identities, and regulations refer to the symbolic order, which comprises all the values and norms that govern life according to a particular order. In *Burung Kayu*, for example, there is a female character named Taksilitoni, or Bai Legeumanai, who becomes abject in her life. She is neither an object nor a subject—she continues to live within the tribal and state order, but she is not fully recognized as a subject because she is considered contravening the symbolic order imposed by both the tribe and the state. Exile, marginalization, and exclusion are key terms inherent in the various events in the novel. She occupies a liminal space, or in-between space, and this position is connected to other characters, especially the male characters who regulate her life within both the tribe and the state. This liminality generates a sense of "disgust," meaning that there are various impacts faced by women who are abjected. This study raises the problem of how the female characters in *Burung Kayu* experience abjection by both the tribe and the state, leading to a double abjection.

Based on the problem formulation above, there are three questions to be answered through this research: first, how is abjection of women represented by the tribe? Second, how is abjection of women represented by the state, as represented by the government? Third, as an implication, how is double abjection depicted in the novel as the culmination of processes that abject the female characters? The main argument presented in this study is that within the relationship between men and women in tribal life, there exists a symbolic order that positions women as abject. Similarly, the tribal life is connected to the broader context of the state. From the state's perspective, tribal life—including the female characters within it—is seen as abject and in need of empowerment and civilization in order to conform to the symbolic order according to the government's version, namely development, as discussed further in the analysis section. This research offers the finding that women experience double abjection in layers from two powers surrounding them: the

patriarchal power exerted by men who govern tribal life, and the modern development power carried out by the state.

Research on the abjection of the female characters in *Burung Kayu* is important to complement and expand the existing research map. The novel has been previously studied by scholars on various topics, such as local wisdom in the novel by Aji et al. (2021) and Nurjanah et al. (2022), disruption of local cultures by the government by Windiyarti (2021), and the role of modernization in marginalizing local communities by Wahyuni et al. (2023). This research map shows that the study of abjection and gender on a broader scale has not yet been explored. Research examining the implications of government and development processes has not focused on how these implications affect women. Therefore, this study serves as a source of knowledge that can complement and enrich previous studies on *Burung Kayu*. It also plays a role in enriching gender studies that examine the abjection of women in relation to tribes and modern development. In this research, abjection will be dismantled and demonstrated through the application of Kristeva's theory of abjection as the main theory, as discussed in the following methodology section.

## METHOD

This study employs the theory of abjection, as explained by Julia Kristeva as an analytical tool. Kristeva (1982, p. 5) states the following.

“If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5).

The quotation explains that abjection occurs when a subject attempts to identify itself with what lies outside of itself. This *outside* refers to symbolic order. However, the subject must be more capable of fully reaching the symbolic, leading to exhaustion and futility. This impossibility is itself part of the subject, resulting in abjection and becoming an abject. This explanation clarifies why, in much literature, the abject is described as neither subject nor object. The abject is an entity that strives to become a subject under the idealized order, but is ultimately incapable of doing so. To identify abjection, it is crucial to understand what makes up the symbolic order. Contextual understanding is also important, as the symbolic order differs between various realms. This supports Kristeva's (1982, p. 68) explanation that abjection manifests in multiple forms and codes. Understanding the symbolic order in a novel requires knowledge of the context of the story.

Sjöholm (2005, p. 14) states that symbolic order is manifested through and in language. Language is a representation of reality. This study identifies the symbolic order as norms, rules, identities, and values that exist within the context of tribe and state as a reality represented in the novel. Identifying the symbolic order is, of course, done by understanding the story's context such as the relationship between female and male characters in the tribe with its various traditional lifestyles, as well as how women as tribal member relate to the modern life of the state that intervenes in their lives. By understanding this symbolic order, it will be possible to reveal how women are perceived as deviating from that order, leading to their abjection.

It should be emphasized that in the analysis of the *Burung Kayu*, abjection is related to the position of women in tribal and state life. Therefore, borrowing from Olsen's (2018) framework, this study also applies the relevant concept of intersectionality. Olsen (2018, p. 182) suggests that this concept views intersectionality as an approach to describe and analyze how various social identities may complement or contradict each other. The concept of intersectionality and gender provides valuable insights for indigenous studies (Olsen, 2018, p. 182). In *Burung Kayu*, there are female identities connected to specific ethnic identities and traditional ways of life, so this concept can expand the analysis to

explore how abjection operates on female characters in relation to their gender, ethnic, and traditional identities. It also allows for the expression of the position of women as abject in tribe and state.

Methodologically, this study investigates how abjection operates on women in tribal life and through state and development forces. With this focus, the primary corpus and data source for this research is the *Burung Kayu*. The steps taken to collect and process data from the novel are as follows. First, the researcher conducts a close reading using a note-taking technique to identify linguistic units that represent symbolic order and abjection. Second, the analysis is conducted by interpreting the data based on the understanding of the story's context, as well as theories of abjection and intersectionality. This interpretation aims to unravel the symbolic order present in the story, how deviations from this order occur, the implications of these deviations for the abjection of women, and how women become abject in relation to tribe and state.

Although this study focuses on a single corpus, the analysis does not stop at the context of the story itself, but also considers external representations beyond the literary work. These representations are drawn from previous studies on abjection and the anthropology of the Mentawai tribe in development in Indonesia. The analysis of the literary context and the external context is conducted dialectically or retrospectively, ensuring that it does not fall into abstract and detached analysis. This approach moves from the literary work to earlier research, yielding coherent findings that are not segregated. The study holds that literature does not emerge from a vacuum, but is a discursive practice shaped by political, social, and cultural conditions in specific times and places. Therefore, information from outside the text can actually strengthen the analysis, as the discourse in the novel is inseparable from its external context, explaining why the author presents a particular representation and potentially revealing other narrative portrayals offered in the novel. This kind of analysis can broaden the findings, even though the study focuses on a single primary corpus.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section comprise three parts. The first part will identify, describe, and elaborate on the abjection experienced by the female characters in their position as the member of a tribe living under traditional norms. The abject position that women occupy is inseparable from their relationship with male characters who shape and regulate the tribal way of life. The second part presents findings and arguments that, as the member of the tribe, women are also subjected to abjection through the presence of the state, which controls their lives through modern development. This section underscores that abjection is related to the state's development with its modern ideology. The first and second discussions complement each other, demonstrating that the women in the *Burung Kayu* experience double abjection, which occurs intersectionally because of their identities as women, tribal member, and traditionalists—identities that are incompatible with both the patriarchal symbolic order of the tribe and the government of the modern state.

### Abjection Towards Women in Tribal Life

Discussion about tribal life implies that the *Burung Kayu* cannot be separated from its status as an ethnographic novel. This type refers to ethnographic fiction, which is aimed at evoking cultural experiences and a sense of them with literary techniques to transform conventional ethnographic material into engaging stories (Jacobson & Larsen, 2014, p. 179). This study does not, in fact, address or discuss the nature of ethnographic notes or how such notes are compiled by the author. However, one thing that can be emphasized is that *Burung Kayu* offers a cultural experience of the Mentawai people. This offering is achieved using language, where the author predominantly uses Indonesian, but also incorporates local language words.

Therefore, it is important to understand local words because they influence the comprehension of the story and, in this context, understanding the position of women as abject within the tribal life. Some frequently appearing local words are *uma*, *barasi*, and *sikerei*. The author does not provide a glossary or explanatory notes, thus allowing readers a certain freedom to interpret the meanings of these words. From the reading of the entire context of the story, *uma* can be interpreted as 'a tribal group with its own territory where tribal members live'. *Uma* is located upstream. *Barasi* means 'a settlement downstream or at the river mouth provided by the government for the tribes'. Lastly, *sikerei* means 'a male tribal-leader'. This interpretation needs to be reinforced by anthropological discourse presented in previous studies. Bakker (2007, p. 269) states that *uma* is a small patrilineal group consisting of 50 members; they inhabit a territory also called *uma*. In other words, this term has a dual meaning, referring both to the group identity and the space where they live. *Uma* is located along the upstream of the river, separated from one another by virgin forests, fields, and gardens (Schefold, 1982, p. 126). Singh et al. (2021, p. 62) define *barasi* as a residential village created as part of a government resettlement program; this village has a school, mosque, church, and clinic. Meanwhile, *sikerei* or *kerei* is a shaman who can transcend clan boundaries (Hammons, 2016, p. 406).

Understanding the ethnographic meanings of the above words becomes a crucial tool for further comprehending the cultural situation within the tribal environment. This, in turn, allows for an understanding of how the objectification of women occurs within the tribe. The main female character who is objectified is Taksilitoni. In the *Burung Kayu*, it is described that Taksilitoni is the mother of Legeumanai and the wife of Saengrekerei. However, she was previously a widow who remarried her late husband's younger brother. Her first husband, Aman Legeumanai, had passed away. In the novel, the story is narrated in a flashback to when Taksilitoni was still the wife of Aman. This is presented in the following narrative.

*Bai Legeumanai yang sedari tadi tepekur sembari memasukkan tepung sagu ke dalam bumbung bambu, sesekali menatap suaminya dari ambang pintu dengan perasaan tak tentu tuju. Suaminya itu masih menetak burung kayu di antara rumpun tebu dan semak bunga kembang sepatu. Bai Legeumanai waswas sekaligus cemas pada suaminya yang berdarah panas* (Erlang, 2023, p. 23).

The context of the narrative above involves a conflict between Aman Legeumanai's *uma* and another *uma*. This conflict is resolved by betting on which tribe can shoot a wood bird at the top of a tall tree. Aman is determined to defeat the other *uma* as it concerns the dignity and honor of the tribe he leads. However, this bet naturally carries the potential to cost lives. Therefore, Bai Legeumanai is depicted as being anxious about her husband, as his easily provoked emotions in inter-tribal disputes could endanger him. Anxiety or worry is a significant psychological condition to consider in the study of abjection. In abjection, a state of disgrace involves threats, both internal and external, and these threats are distressing (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1). The rivalry between the *umas* and the potential for death present threats that could lead Bai Legeumanai to become abjected, and as a result, her feelings of worry emerge. Unfortunately, Aman Legeumanai's death occurs, leading Bai Legeumanai to become abjected. This status is showed by two things. First, she may no use her husband's name, "Legeumanai". She resumes using her original name: Taksilitoni. The second indication is narrated in the following quotation.

*...Bai Legeumanai mesti bersiap untuk kembali ke uma orang tuanya. Kembali ke haribaan saudara-saudara lelakinya, menanggalkan nama Bai Legeumanai, ibu dari Legeumanai, dan menyandang sebutan sebagai silumang atau kembali mengenakan nama kecilnya: Taksilitoni* (Erlang, 2023, p. 67).

Kristeva (1982, p. 68) argues that abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic

orders, where abjection manifests in various forms and codes that align with the symbolic order, resulting in different variants of abject conditions. It is previously mentioned that *uma* is a patrilineal tribal group. This order implies that lineage follows the paternal or male line. Patrilineality is a symbolic order upheld to sustain and preserve the tribe's existence. Consequently, anything that does not align with the symbolic order must be discarded and thus become abject. Taksilitoni becomes abject because Aman Legeumanai's death severs the connection between them. As a result, Taksilitoni no longer has ties to her husband's *uma*, and her status as a widow represents a contravention of the symbolic order. To restore the order, she must return to her parental *uma* and her male relatives. Top of Form

Abjection of women, according to tribal rules, is also manifested in the form of separation between mother and child. While Taksilitoni is expelled from the membership of the *uma*, her child, young Legeumanai, remains within the *uma* and even inherits various belongings of his father: livestock, plants, and weaponry (p. 67). This is supported by the patrilineal order, which grants inheritance rights exclusively to male children, disregarding the presence of the child's mother. Thus, the patrilineal symbolic order in the *uma* has a patriarchal nuance that honors men (husbands and children), but not women. Besides the issue of inheritance, the most striking nuance concerns the matter of names. The child retains the name "Legeumanai", but Taksilitoni does not. In Siberut, Mentawai tradition, a wife may only adopt her husband's name after having a child, making her name "Bai anak A" (Delfi, 2013b, p. 15). This indicates that in building a symbolic order, women are dependent on and assigned to men, including in matters of identity and naming. When a disruption occurs in this order, abjection is imposed on women as if they are the ones who must be expelled from the order, whereas, fundamentally, the disruption is caused by men (inter-tribal male conflict).

In the patriarchal power that seeks to position women as abject, there is inevitably resistance from women to maintain and defend their position. This is exactly what Taksilitoni does. She decides to remain in her deceased husband's *uma* to care for Legeumanai until he grows up and is ready to inherit his father's possessions (p. 68). Despite her status as abject, which is considered as having deviated from the order, she defies this order by ignoring tribal rules for the sake of her child. However, once again, male power reasserts itself to restore the order by positioning women as those who need pity and help. This power comes from Saengrekerei, Taksilitoni's brother-in-law. This is illustrated by the following quotation.

*Mulanya, memang, Saengrekerei sekadar prihatin kepada Legeumanai kecil yang mesti ditanggungnya sebagai anak sendiri. Atau barangkali, ia merasa bersalah karena kematian Aman Legeumanai. Bagaimanapun, kematian kakaknya itu dipicu oleh petingkahnya yang telah membikin malu ayah seorang gadis dari uma di seberang uma mereka* (Erlang, 2023, p. 9).

*...Saengrekerei lebih sering menyaksikan silumang itu bermuram durja; duduk bermenung-menung dengan tatapan kosong ketika hari hampir senja* (Erlang, 2023, p. 9).

The first quotation illustrates that empathy arises from Saengrekerei, and it is directed only towards his nephew, Legeumanai. Concern is given exclusively to the male child and not to the woman, who, by customary law, is considered no longer part of the *uma* after her husband's death. This depiction reinforces the positioning of women as abject, disgraceful, and unwanted. The situation shifts in the second quotation, which shows that Saengrekerei notices Taksilitoni, who appears to be lonely and sorrowful—this loneliness and sadness represent the reaction and manifestation of her abject status. This is why he eventually marries the widow. Implicitly, this suggests an act of pity towards the woman due to her condition, so to remain aligned with the symbolic order, the widow must be

married off to another man, in this case, Saengrekerei. In other words, Taksilitoni becomes like a “rescued abject woman” in the context of the symbolic order.

In the first quotation, there is also an important fact to highlight: Saengrekerei’s action of shaming the father of a girl. This fact illustrates the case of abjection towards women within the tribe. Although the girl is significantly absent from the narrative, her appearance as a source of conflict shows how abjection appears in the story. This is evident in the depiction of the following event.

Nen! Beberapa waktu lalu, ia mengurung gadis itu di rusuk-nya dan membiarkan kaum sesuku di seberang sungai mencari anak gadis mereka dalam cemas dan kecewa. Tapi sial, siokkok yang jelita itu tidak menyukainya dan malah berhasil kabur. Kembali ke uma seberang sungai dan mengadukan apa-apa yang telah menimpanya kepada keluarganya. Tentu saja hal itu membuat malu ayah si gadis yang kemudian menuntut talou kepada keluarga Saengrekerei.

*Tapi Saengrekerei mengelak. Ia tak mau membayar denda apa pun kepada keluarga si gadis. Sebab, kegagalan dalam menangkap seorang gadis yang berarti kegagalan untuk meminangnya, bakal membikin malu dirinya dan keluarganya juga. Ia akan diperolok teman-temannya dan dicemooh saudara-saudaranya* (Erlang, 2023, p. 26).

This narrates the initial event that triggers the rivalry between Aman Legeumanai’s *uma* and the *uma* across the river. The abduction of a girl, who subsequently escapes, results in different consequences for both *umas*. The quotation implies that for her parents, the girl is no longer considered pure because she has been abducted and escaped from her captor. Meanwhile, for Saengrekerei’s *uma*, the girl caused embarrassment because her escape signifies the failure of the man to secure a marriage, and it is taboo for him to pay the *talou* (fine). The position of this girl can be understood through the concept of *abjection* in terms of ambiguity. Kristeva (1982, p. 9) explains that abjection is ambiguity, which does not entirely release the subject from what treats them, but places the subject continuously in danger. This ambiguity is manifested as liminality (the space in between) (Tesar & Arndt, 2019, p. 1), which dismantles the binary opposition between self and other (Beghetto, 2022, p. 46).

In her parents’ *uma*, the girl remains accepted as a member. She does not entirely lose her status as a self; therefore, she is clearly not considered another. However, the shame felt by her parents implies that she becomes an ambiguous figure, occupying a space between a virgin girl and one who is officially betrothed or married. Here, virginity does not pertain to sexuality, but rather to whether or not she has been touched by a man. She is no longer considered a virgin because she has been abducted. Conversely, she is not recognized as a formally betrothed girl, let alone married, because she escaped captivity. This ambiguity disrupts the symbolic order, and to restore it, a *talou* or fine must be presented. However, as noted, the fine is rejected by Saengrekerei’s *uma* because paying the fine would mean enduring shame. In this situation, the girl becomes abject. She fled to preserve her dignity and self-respect as a woman, refusing to form a relationship with a man she does not love. Yet, according to the tribal symbolic order and the inter-*uma* relations, this action abjects her: on one hand, she is no longer wanted by Saengrekerei’s *uma*, and on the other, she is seen as bringing shame to her own family and *uma*. The girl’s experience is similar to Taksilitoni’s situation; she is perceived as the cause of shame and, more significantly, triggering a rivalry between the two *umas*.

From the discussion about Taksilitoni and the girl, this study finds Sjöholm’s (2005:80) idea crucial, which posits that abjection is not just a matter of the subject, but also involves sacrifice as a condition for establishing the symbolic order. What is also important in abjection is the presence of a purification or cleansing rite (Sjöholm, 2005:80). An abjected woman, who is considered deviant from the symbolic order, faces two possi-



bilities: being sacrificed or being purified. Taksilitoni faces sacrifice, which involves having her identity stripped away, being required to return to her parental *uma*, and being separated from her child—although this sacrifice is later revoked by her second marriage to Saengrekerei. In contrast, the girl is not discarded; she remains accepted and retained. However, the purification rite is carried out by male authority through the imposition of a fine on the man. This demonstrates how the symbolic order is constructed by and for masculine power and interests. The discussion of these two women also underscores that, within the same cultural environment, experiences and abjection of women differ according to the context of issues that enable abjection to occur and operate.

### Abjected Women, Government, and Development

The *Burung Kayu* does not specifically address the abjection of women. The central issue narrated in the novel is the relationship between the state, represented by the government, and the Mentawai tribe. This relationship is underpinned by the state's ambition and will to advance development, which has the potential to both disrupt and threaten the existence of the *uma* tribes living upstream. However, it cannot be denied and must be emphasized that development targeting all tribes also affects women. To discuss the abjection occurring in this context, this section first presents the historical background surrounding the story in the novel by detailing the narrative about the dynamics between the state and the Mentawai tribe within the framework of development. This is important in line with Tyler's perspective that abjection is multidimensional, produced by imperialist and nationalist projects as markers of the boundaries of governance itself (Savage & Schmidt, 2020:6).

The Indonesian government, driven by the ideology of development or developmentalism, identified certain groups as backward and alienated from national progress and development; consequently, the government implemented various development and assimilation programs to integrate these groups as ideal citizens (Eindhoven, 2007, p. 72). This occurred during the height of the New Order regime. During this period, the relationship between the Siberut (Mentawai) people and the modern state was strengthened by incorporating their territory into the state administration (Darmanto & Setyawati, 2012, p. 60). This implies that the Mentawai people's territory is intertwined with the goals and interests of national development. As an ideal order, development, therefore, marginalizes what is deemed unsuitable and thus in need of development. This is reflected in the discourse of language, particularly in the case of referring to people as "isolated" (see Persoon, 1998, p. 287).

Subsequently, the ideology of development manifests in practice. This is achieved by intervening in existing and established social practices, which are then replaced with new social practices based on the state's version. Irwandi & Saleleubaja (2021, p. 195) state that the Indonesian government implemented ecological politics by replacing sago, the staple food of the Mentawai people, with rice, which was considered modern and advanced. This fact is supported by Bakker (2007, p. 271), who explains that the local religion of the Mentawai tribe, Arat Sabulungan, was banned, and they were required to adopt one of the official religions recognized by the government. Arat Sabulungan plays a crucial role in Mentawai life, where it is believed that all objects in the world had spirits (Delfi, 2013a, pp. 478–479). Besides religion, cultural practices, such as tattooing, were also prohibited; loincloths were banned, and in their place, T-shirts, trousers, and skirts were distributed (Bakker, 2007, p. 271). Physical development was also emphasized through the relocation of the tribes to *barasi*. *Barasi* are villages constructed as part of government projects (Darmanto & Setyawati, 2012, p. 123), followed by the establishment of various infrastructures, such as district offices, mosques, schools, healthcare facilities, and other basic infrastructure (Bakker, 2007, p. 72).

Next, when explaining the relationship between literary works and historical facts, it is important to emphasize, as Faruk (2018, p. 15) has stated, that literature has a productive

function in relation to culture. This implies that literature is not only a product of culture but also can produce culture itself. The development ideology targeting the Mentawai tribe, with all its manifestations and consequences, occurred during the New Order era, which is significantly distant from the present time or at least from the period of this research. Over this distance, the *Burung Kayu* produces culture by memorializing how development unfolded and its implications for cultural and political-economic politics for the affected communities. In the novel, these impacts are evident in the following two quotations.

*Di bawah tatapan polisi, tak ada lagi anak-anak muda yang bernyali merajah tubuhnya dengan ti'ti. Tak ada lagi sikerei-sikerei yang mengakui diri sebagai yang paling sakti. Semua orang sekadar mengaku sebagai simata belaka—sebagai orang awam saja. Sebagian mengaku telah menanggalkan agama lama dan menggantinya dengan salah satu agama-baru-resmi-pula. Bahkan, sebagian benar-benar mencampakkan bakat katsaila dan menggantinya dengan besi-kecil-bersilang yang dengannya, konon, seseorang di suatu tempat teramat jauh—beratus tahun lalu—telah naik ke surga (Erlang, 2023, p. 71).*

*Juga melayarkan sampan kayu yang dikayuh-kendalikan Saengrekeri di buritan bersama Taksilitoni yang mengayuh di haluan, dan Legeumanai kecil yang hanya celingukan di lambung sampan. Ketiganya tengah berlayar menuju barasi, menuju dusun bikinan pemerintah, menuju rumah-rumah kayu dan kelewat mungil dibanding uma yang mereka tinggalkan (Erlang, 2023, p. 5).*

The first quotation presents a complete picture of the historical discourse regarding government intervention into the lives and culture of the Mentawai tribe. In the quotation, tattooing becomes a prohibited practice. Similarly, shamans or *sikerei*, who were once considered sacred, now have to pretend to be ordinary people because their presence does not align with the government's ideology. Christianity or Catholicism became one of the religions permitted by the regime, offering a choice of religion for the tribal members. In this situation, they—both men and women—are essentially undergoing a process of abjection. They become abject because, on one hand, state intervention uproots and separates them from the socio-cultural identity they previously shared within the *uma*. They never fully become modern citizens because their experiences represent merely a process toward becoming ideal citizens. In their effort to align with the symbolic order, they undergo various purificatory rites: avoiding tattoos, adopting monotheistic religions, and so on.

It has been previously stated that abjection is related to nationalist and imperialist projects. In this context, based on the first quotation, *Burung Kayu* narrates that the state's administration, supported by developmentalism as its ideological foundation, has a significant potential to turn certain communities targeted by development into abjects. Abjection here results from efforts to delineate the boundaries of governance, where the boundaries distinguish what aligns with development and what does not, thus directing what is deemed inappropriate. The abjection depicted in this novel reflects the imperialist project of the state, which is re-colonizing the indigenous tribal groups living in the river valleys. It is also important to highlight from the first quotation the involvement of the police, who ensure, for example, that tattooing is no longer practiced. From a cultural studies perspective, the police are one of the state apparatuses that act as supporters of political authorities (Rak, 2018, p. 58). Therefore, this research argues that abjection, because of the implementation of state ideology, is also supported by the presence and involvement of state apparatuses, including the police and potentially other authorities.

Windiarti (2021, p. 177—178), in her study on the representation of local culture, argues that tribal characters negotiate with modern life. This negotiation is demonstrated by their acceptance and assimilation into modern culture, which causes them to lose access

to their original cultural heritage. Meanwhile, research by Wahyuni et al. (2023, p. 83—85) shows that in *Burung Kayu*, various forms of resistance emerge from tribal members against the government, represented by the police. For instance, some continue to live in the *uma*, while those residing in *barasi* discreetly maintain their tattooing practices as long as they are not discovered by the police, who conduct ongoing raids. These two studies highlight that power is not centralized, but rather diffuse or distributive. This means that even the dominated groups have opportunities and power to empower themselves and activate their agency to resist the dominant power, even if the resistance is carried out covertly and subtly. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Kristeva's theory of abjection, this research argues that such negotiation and resistance actually reinforce their position as abjects. The tribal members attempt to preserve their original culture because of the pressure exerted by modern culture, but they cannot fully maintain it. They try to subtly resist modern culture, but this does not eliminate their abject status, as the government's power continually forces them to abandon their old ways and transition to a new modern life order.

Saengrekerei, Taksilitoni, and Legeumanai, being member of the tribe, are not exempt from the status of abject within the entire tribe residing in the valley. This can be observed in the second quotation above. The quotation explicitly depicts that the three are paddling a boat towards *barasi* because they have relocated and are now living there. Narratively, the quotation includes a comment from the narrator stating that *barasi*, consisting of wooden houses, is much smaller in area compared to the *uma* they previously inhabited. This comment implicitly indicates that the government-created village does not compare with the *uma* that had long accommodated the tribe's life. A crucial point to emphasize is that women experience abjection not only according to tribal rules, but also by the government and development policies. Moreover, in a patrilineal culture, women follow the choices and decisions of men. When Saengrekerei decides to move to *barasi*, Taksilitoni, as his wife, has no choice but to follow him. This research argues that in Taksilitoni's case, women experience dual abjection. After being abjected by the tribe, the intervention by the state further layers this abjection. The patrilineal tradition exacerbates this dual abjection. The following quotation also implicitly reflects this abjection.

*Terlebih, saat itu, Saengrekerei sudah cukup menyadari bahwa pembangunan barasi-barasi—yang telah dimulai sejak zaman teteu-teteu-nya dulu—akan terus dilakukan pemerintah demi program memajukan-menyejaherakan yang telah disusun-rencanakan di sekujur pulau-nya ini. Salah satunya dengan cara mengirim sumbangan pangan ke berbagai lembah... (Erlang, 2023, p. 86—87).*

*Dan kini, dihadapkan pada persoalan beras yang tak pernah tumbuh subur di pulau-nya ini, Saengrekerei mesti menuntut dirinya untuk berpikir cepat dalam mengambil keputusan itu (Erlang, 2023, p. 87).*

Irwandi & Saleleubaja (2021, p. 199) explain that during the New Order era, there was a rice paddy program that led to a shift from sago fields to rice paddies, even though the Mentawai people lacked knowledge about rice cultivation and rice is unsuitable for growing in Mentawai. This is consistent with the depiction in the quotation above that rice paddy never flourished in Mentawai, causing concern for Saengrekerei. The government provided food aid from outside the region, including rice as one of the aid items. This issue affects all members of the tribe as they are confronted with a staple food they do not fully recognize. However, it also implies abjection towards women. In previous discussions, a quotation describes Taksilitoni processing sago flour into bamboo (p. 23). This emphasizes that sago is indeed the staple food for the Mentawai tribe. Yet, with the state's intervention, the non-human entity, sago, is also abjected as it is displaced by rice. Women are required to adopt a new way of life to process this new staple. Here, Taksilitoni and other women—who are not featured in the story—are abjected, forced to conform to the

symbolic order, but they never truly become ideal. They exist in a liminal space, caught between being uprooted from their original culture on one side and, on the other, being compelled to accept the new culture introduced by the state. This compulsion reflects their abject status.

In the *Burung Kayu*, Taksilitoni experiences abjection on a strong scale. This can be compared to the male characters, namely her husband and her own child, although all three are similarly categorized as abject. Saengrekerei, for instance, who has lived in *barasi* for 12 years, has become familiar with and established relationships with people outside his community (p. 86). He is even entrusted with the position of village chief. This shows that as an abject, he is in a position that allows him to negotiate with the state. As someone from an ethnic group, he is trusted to be part of the modern state system. In contrast, the child, Legeumanai, are portrayed differently. This is illustrated by the following quotation.

*Baginya, mengaku sebagai Saiminang memang bukan untuk menjadi seorang Minang, tapi lebih untuk menjadi apa-apa yang diangankan pemerintah-pembangunan agar ia dan para penghuni lembah di sepanjang aliran sungai Rereiket menjadi orang-orang maju dan berpendidikan. Seperti orang-orang Minang yang bekerja pada Dinas Sosial, Dinas Pariwisata, Pemerintah Daerah, atau perusahaan kayu. Seperti orang-orang Minang yang menjadi tengkulak kelapa, pedagang, atau pengelola penginapan di tepi pantai atau di nusa-nusa kecil milik bule-bule Australia...Orang-orang Minang yang dijadikan cerminan oleh pemerintah-pembangunan atas apa yang disebut maju dan berpendidikan (Erlang, 2023, p. 145).*

The above quotation explains the case of Legeumanai. The Minang ethnic group aligns with development by the government. Therefore, the Minang are regarded as an ideal cultural identity. Not only are they culturally advanced, but socially they are also more established, as they are considered a civilized and progressive group. They work in various government institutions and engage in economic activities. They are in line with development ideologies, which is why they are called advanced and educated people. This represents an ideal symbolic order that Legeumanai aspires to reach and attain. He utilizes educational and religious facilities, joins communities, learns many things, and so on. Importantly, he leaves behind everything related to his tribal life in *uma*. His efforts to reach this symbolic order involve concealing his tribal identity while simultaneously claiming to be Minang (*Saiminang*). This concealment and claim are certainly driven by the stigma that non-Minang ethnicities are backward and inferior.

The effort to attain the symbolic order described above is illusory. This means that he never truly becomes a Minang. He is an abject existing in liminality, occupying a space between being uprooted from tribal life and being a Minang; he is neither fully tribal nor Minang. The more he attempts to reach this ideal identity, the more he becomes abject. However, the status of abjection for this male character differs from that of Taksilitoni. The abjection experienced by Legeumanai provides the opportunity for males to transcend the boundaries of their life towards a broader and more facilitated new life. Males also have a better chance to access public spaces compared to females. They have the opportunity to articulate power and make decisions. This is in contrast to Taksilitoni, who remains a passive abject with no opportunities in the public sphere. Patrilineal tradition causes her to be an abject who follows her husband and, in this participation, she shares experiences that are opposed to those of her husband and child. The subordinate position of women relative to men is also evident in the following quotation.

*Bu Dokter menatap satu per satu perempuan di sapou itu. Sebagai pendatang, ia cukup paham kondisi para istri di lembah ini. Dan ia tak ingin membandingkan kehidupannya di Medan, pendidikannya yang memadai, dengan kehidupan dan*

*pendidikan para perempuan di lembah ini. Apalagi, membandingkan dan memaksakan kebenaran dunia medis kepada mereka. Maka, ia pun menunggu. Menunggu Aman Sanang, yang mungkin masih berunding dan berunding dengan ayah dan kakak-kakaknya. Menunggu keputusan para lelaki yang akan sangat menentukan hidup-mati si bayi* (Erlang, 2023, p. 101).

The above quotation describes Bai Sanang, the wife of Aman Sanang, whose baby is ill and will be examined by the doctor. However, the decision regarding the baby's treatment is not made by Bai Sanang herself, but by Bai Sanang. This decision must also be discussed with other men, namely the father and her brothers. This highlights that in *barasi*, which is equipped with public facilities, including healthcare facilities, women cannot access these services independently. In this case, women are not granted the authority to decide on the access to these facilities for their babies. Power remains in the hands of men. This seems to be supported by the patrilineal culture that places decision-making in the hands of men. As a result, women experience layered abjection because, after being abjected by the state and development, they still undergo a process of abjection by men. They are neither objects nor subjects, as they are not granted the authority to decide.

### Double Abjection of Women

The two previous sub-discussions outline how women are abjected and regarded as abject by both tribal life, and the state and developmentalism as its ideological foundation. This section explains the implied relationship between these two sources of abjection. It argues that women experience layered dual abjection. Traditionally, women have faced the issue of the double burden (Santoso, 2016, p. 83). This concept generally refers to the situation where women bear a double burden in different contexts compared to men. This concept can be adopted in this research to argue that women bear a double burden in their status as abject.

The crucial issue is to uncover why dual abjection continues to persist in an apparently unshakable manner. First, this is related to the values and teachings of tribal life, which, from a modern perspective, can be labeled as local wisdom. Gerung (2024, p. 113) suggests that the basis of knowledge and truth in local wisdom is traditional teachings whose political content is no longer questioned. This implies that various rules, values, and norms embedded in the local wisdom of certain groups are not questioned, are legitimized, and are accepted as given or taken for granted. This makes the life system that actually dominates, subordinates, and abjects women accepted as a normal aspect of the group by all its members, both men and women. In the *Burung Kayu*, the women and Taksilitoni are subjected to a patrilineal system that makes them dependent on men, with their direction and decisions determined by men. Indeed, Taksilitoni once resisted the rules when she did not want to return to her original *uma*. However, in the end, she actually reinforced and perpetuated the system through her marriage to Saengrekerei. Overall, it can be said that the local wisdom of the tribes in *uma* is accepted as a norm.

Subsequently, local wisdom faces disruption when the state intervenes in tribal life. Religion, food systems, cultural practices, and similar aspects are intervened and replaced with a new and ideal symbolic order. However, this intervention does not reduce or eliminate the deeply entrenched patrilineal system within the cultural fabric of the *uma*. This can be observed in the case of Bai Sanang. She, along with her husband and relatives, has been living in *barasi*, indicating that they have become abject under the governmental order. However, in the baby's matter's treatment, the decision remains paternalistic, that is, it is made by her husband, Aman Sanang.

The difference between men and women has been conceptualized by Kristeva (in Condren, 1999, p. 16) as when men face humiliation or abjection, their actions are driven by will, not by nature. Saengrekerei moved to *barasi*, even though under governmental

pressure, by his own volition to engage in the government's modernization project. As noted, he even became a leader within the modern state system. This means he is an abject who benefits from the sources of abjection. In contrast, Taksilitoni moved to *barasi* not by her own choice, but because patriarchal traditions required her to follow her husband wherever he went. Furthermore, as compared to her child Legeumanai, she does not have any freedom to enjoy government facilities. Thus, women become truly marginalized from state development facilities because access to these facilities is controlled and granted to men. Therefore, this research argues that while the novel appears to show a contradictory relationship between the state and tribal life, this contradiction is only superficial. In reality, there is a mutualistic relationship between the two: the development regime and tribal culture both abject women. This results in men and women within the tribe having different experiences. Men, even though they are abject, still have more opportunities than women. Meanwhile, women are ensnared in a dual abjection.

Previous studies have not yet addressed how women experience abjection linked to the intersection of identities. From the two preceding sections of discussion, this research underscores that the female characters experience abjection, and this process of abjection involves several identities that are interrelated in an intersectional manner. Gender identity as a woman, for example, is subordinated to tribal identity, which is governed by a patrilineal system. In such a system, femininity follows tribal rules, such as a widow having to discard her husband's name and return to her original name. If the husband dies, the woman must return to her ancestral *uma*; she is separated from her children; does not receive inheritance; and is not granted the right to guide her children. The identity of a widow does not conform to the patriarchal symbolic order, which does not provide space for female characters, as experienced by Taksilitoni or Bai Legeumanai.

Taksilitoni's identity is tied to traditional values that have long governed her way of life in the *uma*, and this way of life shapes her identity and that of other women as member of a tribe far removed from modern life as envisioned by the state. After experiencing abjection on the first layer, she undergoes a second layer of abjection originating from the state with its various apparatuses, such as the government, public agencies, and police. When she moves to the *barasi*, a space promoted by the state, it does not mean she is escaping the patriarchal order. Instead, it places her into the modern system that, on one hand, uproots the tribal way of life from its original culture, but on the other hand, grants access to male characters while closing access to women. Female characters are forced into the modern order, which further intensifies and tightens the abjection operating on them, creating a dual abjection. This positions the female characters as abject in relation to double orders: the patriarchal tribal life and the modern state.

## CONCLUSION

In the study of *Burung Kayu*, this research outlines and discusses the practice of abjection operating against female characters. This practice is examined from two sources of power that influence the character's life: the cultural regime of the *uma* tribes and the state with its developmentalism ideology. The research uncovers several key findings. First, women are subjected to abjection as marginalization, (plans for) repatriation, and separation from their children, supported by a paternalistic culture. This culture provides men with opportunities and authority in decision-making practices. In this context, abjection is directly imposed on women by the tribe. Second, the state and development do not directly cause abjection, as it is more collective and comprehensive towards all tribal members. However, in that context, women become even more abjected by the symbolic order of the state. Women are forced to follow the modern order while abandoning their original culture, and in this order, modernity only provides access and opportunities to men, not to women.

This research ultimately shows that both the tribal order and the modern state simultaneously cause women to experience double abjection. This duality is supported by pater-

nalism, which again provides more access to men, because theoretically, men and women experience abjection differently. The new order in *barasi* also merges power in the hands of men, positioning them as the rightful leaders and decision-makers, while simultaneously closing off access to women. Policies such as the relocation of tribes from *uma* to *barasi*, police surveillance, the coercion to abandon old religions in favor of the government-recognized new religion, and the prohibition of traditional practices all further strengthen the abjection experienced by female characters, as they are never fully freed from tribal norms. They are surveilled and forced to conform to the ideal subjectivity as prescribed by the government. This study shows that abjection occurs in two layers within two orders that both position women as subject: the patriarchal tribal life and the modern state, an outcome of the intersection of gender identity, ethnicity, and tradition inherent in the female characters.

Theoretically, this study contributes by demonstrating that Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection is not only useful for understanding the formation of the subject, but also for exploring how the abjection of women intersects with broader contexts, namely specific tribes and the modern state with their respective symbolic orders. This research shows that abjection is multidimensional because, in the relationship between men and women, there is a larger context encompassing the state, development, and culture. The findings of this research also illustrate the potential of operating the concept of abjection alongside intersectionality as a complementary theory, to generate broader and more relevant findings regarding the position of women as subjects in the contexts of tribe and state. This context needs to be understood in order to precisely unravel what causes abjection and what the implications of its continuity are. The practical implication of this study is that it shows how development efforts aimed at "modernizing" tribes considered "backward" have implications not only on the collective surface, but more specifically, cause women to experience double abjection. *Burung Kayu* is a form of discursive practice that offers a narrative on how the reality of development in Indonesia impacts this double abjection.

To expose double abjection, this study primarily relies on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, including the concept of the symbolic order, which focuses on the formation of the subject. Since *Burung Kayu* presents a narrative tied to both tribe and state, this research also applies intersectionality as a supplementary theory. Future research could further explore women and gender issues in this novel using other concepts, such as indigenous feminism and theories related to developmentalism and gender, or even other theories that might offer alternative findings to this study. This research only uses a single corpus, which cannot fully represent how state development impacts gender. There are two recommendations for future research agendas. First, researchers could gather both fiction and non-fiction writings, such as ethnographic notes, that could be examined to uncover how the Mentawai tribe is narrated in these texts or how these texts voice the Mentawai tribe. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and polyphony could be useful in constructing a historical analysis of the narration of the Mentawai tribe, both in fictional and non-fictional writings. Second, other research could compile ethnographic novels in Indonesian literary tradition that depict the relationship between tribal life and development. A comparative analysis (or comparative literary approach) could compare how the implications of development on tribal life, including that of women, are presented in literary works. Such analysis would enable richer and more diverse findings to better understand how the concepts of tribe and state, tradition and modernity, within the framework of development are represented in the treasure trove of Indonesian literature.

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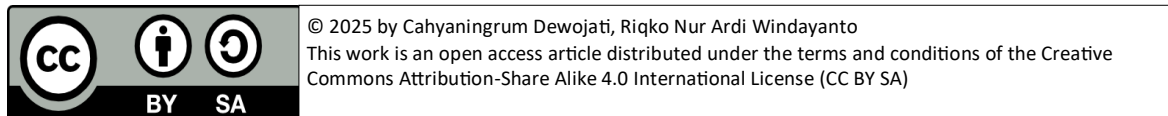
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