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Sustaining Life under Extraction: Environmental Justice and Community Capabilities in Anindita S. Thayf's *Tanah Tabu* and Korrie Layun Rampan's *Api Awan Asap*

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Extractive pressures threaten collective life despite economic gains. This study examines how environmental injustice reshapes substantive opportunities to sustain livelihoods and pursue valued collective futures. Environmental justice and community capabilities frame readings of Anindita S. Thayf's *Tanah Tabu* [*Taboo Land*] and Korrie Layun Rampan's *Api Awan Asap* [*Fire, Clouds, and Smoke*]. Comparative close reading and reflexive thematic development trace ecological access, differentiated opportunities, caring practices, and narrative form across contextualized episodes. Benefits and recognition coexist with gendered and generational constraints; care sustains practices without securing ecological and social conditions enabling their continuation. The study develops *contingent continuance*, linking narrative form to differentiated freedoms and insecure collective futures.

INTRODUCTION

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Extractive development redistributes access to land, water, livelihoods, and decision-making. Beyond resource removal, global extractivism organizes unequal socioecological relations (Chagnon et al., 2022; Nygren et al., 2022). Employment and market access can improve present circumstances while ecological deterioration and restricted agency undermine their continuation. Intersections of gender, capital, colonization, and power make sustaining life a question of whose needs and intergenerational futures remain possible (Schlosberg et al., 2025).

Set in Papua, Anindita S. Thayf's *Tanah Tabu* [*Taboo Land*] follows Mabel, Mace, and Leksi within a kinship network including Pum the dog and Kwee the pig; child and animal voices connect household life with displacement and mining. Korrie Layun Rampan's *Api Awan Asap [Fire, Clouds, and Smoke]* follows Nori, Petinggi Jepi, and Dempar's Benuaq *lou* ["longhouse"] community amid logging, plantations, and fire. Company purchases initially support Leksi's schooling and well repairs; Nori supplies residents and extractive companies. Contrasting household perspectives with customary management, deliberation, and media representation, the comparison examines how social organization and narrative form articulate insecure collective futures.

Both novels already feature in studies of deforestation and anthropocentrism (Wiyatmi et al., 2022) and environmental wisdom (Arisa et al., 2025). *Tanah Tabu* scholarship examines capitalist and gendered exploitation and resistance (Solichin, 2018; Solichin & Sa'adah, 2021), women's writing and psychology (Sofiatin et al., 2022), and postcolonial ecofeminist accounts of gendered agency (Kasanova et al., 2026). *Api Awan Asap* research addresses social protest (Putri, 2016), *lou–huma* relations and cultural transmission (Kurniawati, 2019), Benuaq deliberation and environmental responsibilities (Anggarista, 2020; Anggarista & Nurhadi, 2018; Putri et al., 2019), and ecological crisis, environmental ethics, and territorial appropriation (Mukaromah et al., 2026).

Indonesian environmental humanities connects extractability with epistemic power (Saputra, Indiarti, et al., 2026), circulation with collective life (Saputra, Wardani, et al., 2026), and narrative visibility with ecological violence and environmental silence (Saputra, Prasetyo, et al., 2026). Materialist ecofeminism examines gendered exploitation (Saputra et al., 2025), complementing research on cultural practices sustaining human–nature relations (Maslikatin et al., 2025). *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* (*EAJMR*) studies address agrarian reciprocity, river ethics (Dasilva & Liliani, 2025; Silmi & Liliani, 2026), and politically situated novelistic conflict and peace (Sativa & Suroso, 2025).

The comparative gap concerns how distribution, recognition, and participation translate into continuing freedoms, beyond resources or achieved activities. Collective capabilities foreground deliberation and plural valuations (Gutiérrez-Zamora et al., 2023). The article examines three propositions: benefits can coexist with insecure opportunities; collective capacities coexist with unequal opportunities across gender, generations, and social positions; and care sustains life under precarious conditions. It connects ecological insecurity with household

authority, market dependence, and representation, examining whose needs, voices, and futures narration makes intelligible.

Using Schlosberg's (2007) environmental justice framework and Schlosberg and Carruthers's (2010) account of community capabilities, comparative close reading asks how extractive pressures reshape ecological and social conditions; how distribution, recognition, and participation differentiate capabilities across gender and generations; and how care, collective organization, and selective market and technological engagement sustain life without securing its future. Connecting narrative form, everyday practices, and collective conditions, the article contributes a literary account of uneven freedoms that brings Indonesian fiction into global environmental justice debates.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Environmental Justice and Community Capabilities

Schlosberg's (2007, 2013) plural environmental justice framework integrates distribution of benefits, resources, and harms; recognition of identities, knowledge, and needs; participation as effective decision-making influence; and capabilities as substantive opportunities. These dimensions interact: misrecognition can weaken political standing, while exclusion can reproduce unequal access and exposure. Recognition and participation also possess intrinsic value through respect and collective agency, extending justice beyond material welfare.

Community capabilities concern ecological and institutional relationships enabling provisioning, care, cultural transmission, and collective decisions (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010). Community is identified through narrated dependence, cooperation, and authority in Mabel's household networks and the Benuaq *lou*. Income or formal recognition alone does not establish their security. Continuity must accommodate unequal experiences, competing futures, and members' freedom to question obligations, learn, and shape priorities.

Extractive Pressures and Differentiated Collective Life

Extraction comprises resource removal and the reorganization of territory, access, labor, and decisions. Extractivism links appropriation with asymmetrical control (Chagnon et al., 2022; Nygren et al., 2022); cultivation or exchange alone does not establish it. Property and coercive authority produce land control (Peluso & Lund, 2011), while capitalist frontier relations require attention to internal differentiation alongside dispossession (Li, 2014).

In *Tanah Tabu*, gold extraction involves displacement, damaged subsistence, and dependence on corporate employment or purchases. *Api Awan Asap* presents forest concessions, plantations, territorial disputes, and fire. Employment and trade may support capabilities while reproducing dependence; their narrated consequences guide assessment.

Analytical Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

Five provisional, revisable domains organize comparison: livelihoods and access to food and water; bodily safety and secure dwelling; learning and

choosing futures; cultural continuity; and effective voice in environmental decisions. Derived from narrated needs and disputes, these draw on Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011) without imposing Nussbaum's list. Episodes distinguish resources, opportunities, and functionings while examining concealed costs and differences across gender, generation, and social position.

Figure 1 links extractive pressures, ecological and social conditions, environmental justice, and substantive opportunities. Capabilities are distinguished analytically within this integrated framework. Care and collective organization may sustain opportunities and reshape their conditions. Voice, focalization, temporality, and silence mediate every connection. Arrows guide interpretation, not statistical causation; symbolic recognition, market access, and customary authority are assessed through whose possibilities they sustain.

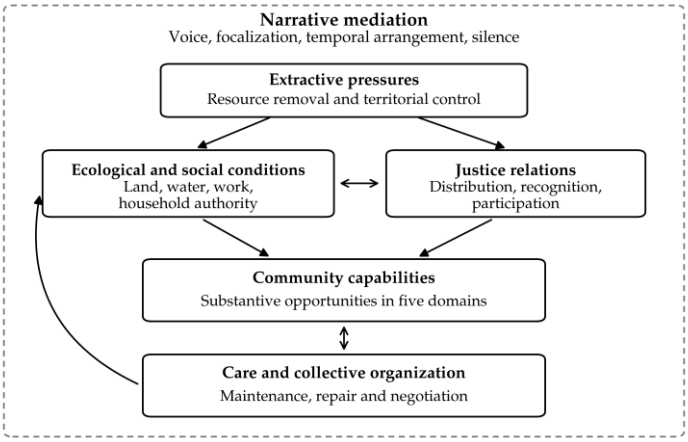


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Comparative Reading
Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Comparative Logic

This interpretive qualitative study combines comparative close reading and reflexive thematic development to examine narrated relationships among extraction, collective living conditions, and substantive freedoms at individual and collective levels. Comparison addresses a shared problem without presuming social equivalence. Reading attends to language, voice, focalization, temporality, and context (Kramnick, 2023; Ohrvik, 2024).

Tanah Tabu's Dani and Amungme networks and *Api Awan Asap*'s institutionalized Benuaq *lou* differ in scale, authority, and narration. Document analysis organizes sources (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022); attention to ecological change and actors aligns with Vasudevan and Mukherjee (2025).

Corpus and Textual Units

Information regarding the novels serving as the research corpus indicates that the second printing of *Api Awan Asap* was published in 2015 (first printing: 1999), while for *Tanah Tabu*, the copyright year listed is 2023 (first published: 2009). This 2023 date does not imply any revisions. Citations refer to the page

numbering in the printed versions: *Api Awan Asap* (Rampan, 2015) and *Tanah Tabu* (Thayf, 2023).

Units are contextualized episodes connecting dialogue, environmental description, action, and narrative framing, including perspective shifts and endings. Purposive selection follows relevance to ecological conditions, injustice, opportunities, or care, retaining counterevidence and surrounding narrative. Linked passages share episode identifiers to prevent treating fragments as independent evidence; analytically unconnected scenery remains contextual.

Reading Coding and Comparison

Reading proceeds recursively. First, plot, character relations, and ecological settings contextualize episodes. Second, records identify actors, ecological changes, benefits, risks, and narrative positions, distinguishing events from reports, allegations, and speculation. Irony, reported speech, and human–animal perspectives are examined for their effects on credibility.

Third, justice dimensions guide initial coding, supplemented by textual codes for promised purchases, recognition without secure living conditions, selective representation of women, and threatened care. Resources, capabilities, and functionings are recorded separately. Codes evolve reflexively (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021); capability domains orient attention without predetermining themes, which develop around central interpretive propositions.

Fourth, within-novel matrices connect episodes, codes, narrative devices, and capability implications for comparison. Fifth, comparative memos develop themes, checked against contrasting episodes and endings for coherence, evidence, and relevance to research questions. Counterreadings challenge uniformly harmful markets, harmonious communities, and fully restorative care, keeping textual evidence linked to interpretation.

Interpretive Credibility and Research Position

Claims can be traced back through copies of identification materials, original documents, working translations, codes, and memos. Page images verify transcription and pagination. Memos separate observation from interpretation, document alternatives and revisions, and interrogate the environmental justice orientation. Contextual rereading supports credibility; statistical intercoder agreement is not required (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS

Ecological Conditions of Collective Life

Collective life in the two novels depends on connections between ecological access and the social organization of everyday work. *Tanah Tabu* makes these connections visible through a household history: before displacement, Mabel maintains gardens, prepares sago, weaves noken, and cares for her family, while Pace Mauwe hunts. These activities sustain a shared domestic world rather than separate economic and cultural sectors (Thayf, 2023, pp. 134–135). The later market scene extends this arrangement through vegetable cultivation and selling, with Leksi helping to organize the produce (Thayf, 2023, pp. 78–79). Food,

income, and care therefore depend on relationships linking gardens, forest, river, house, and market.

Displacement reveals what replacement housing fails to replace. Pum recounts that the gold company relocates Pace Mauwe's village downhill, away from forest and river. The forest subsequently ceases to yield sago, while company waste contaminates the river and dead fish float on its surface (Thayf, 2023, p. 135). The household receives shelter but loses proximity to the places through which it sustains itself. Mabel's refusal to eat the fish expresses a practical judgment about bodily safety under hunger. Her refusal also exposes the inadequacy of treating available food as usable nourishment: obtaining something edible in appearance does not establish that it can safely sustain life.

Api Awan Asap presents collective dependence through the more visibly institutionalized setting of *lou* Dempar. Residents construct the longhouse together using forest timber, and its alignment follows the river used for bathing, cooking water, and washing (Rampan, 2015, pp. 7–10). The description calls the *lou* "napas kehidupan warga" ["breath of life for the residents" (Rampan, 2015, p. 9, ["authors' translation"]). This metaphor joins building material, embodied survival, and collective residence. The forest becomes habitable social space through cooperative labour, while the river connects domestic routines to the surrounding terrain. Timber use here belongs to the material reproduction of dwelling; its presence alone does not establish extractivism.

Petinggi Jepi's television interview explains six land allocations: communal fruit groves associated with the *lou*; individually held permanent gardens; rotational huma fields; forest reserved for construction and boat materials; customary forest for gathering and hunting; and forest beyond the *lou*'s communal territory accessible to outsiders (Rampan, 2015, pp. 31–36). Different rules organize ownership, access, and regeneration. Field rotation involves returning to previously cultivated land after fallow, rather than continually abandoning exhausted plots (Rampan, 2015, pp. 33–34). However, Jepi acknowledges that only five categories remain under community management and that their protection has become fragile (Rampan, 2015, pp. 36–37).

The interview's form qualifies its account of harmony. Jepi speaks as chief while the camera selects attractive objects and images framed as antique and authentic; meanwhile, smoke enters the scene, and the narrator observes that the camera can record its clouds but not its smell (Rampan, 2015, pp. 30–37). Public representation cannot contain the whole lived environment. This reading develops the attention to *lou–huma* organization and environmental wisdom in Kurniawati (2019) and Anggarista and Nurhadi (2018), alongside the cultural–ecological relationships examined by Maslikatin et al. (2025). Comparatively, household memory and institutional exposition reveal ecological continuity as a maintained social achievement whose material conditions can deteriorate even while its cultural image remains recognizable.

Unequal Benefits and the Erosion of Livelihoods

Economic benefits are materially consequential in both novels, but their occurrence does not establish durable opportunities. In *Tanah Tabu*, Mabel initially welcomes the company's agreement to purchase vegetables. The previous harvest sold out: "Jadinya, aku bisa menyekolahkan Leksi dan memperbaiki dinding sumur" ["So, I could send Leksi to school and repair the well's walls"] (Thayf, 2023, p. 79). Schooling and water infrastructure are concrete improvements enabled by sales. Mabel's pride prevents a reading that dismisses all exchange with the company as illusory. Nevertheless, the evidence establishes what one successful transaction enabled; it does not establish reliable purchasing, secure land access, or a continuing ability to finance education.

Leksi gives this uncertainty an immediate domestic scale. Mabel promises to cook chicken once the vegetables sell, remembering the child's desire to eat what she has watched others enjoying. Mace responds by discussing the chicken's high price and rising living costs (Thayf, 2023, p. 80). An ordinary meal becomes an anticipated benefit requiring favourable sales. Later, vendors assemble because the company has cancelled that month's purchases. Their anger concerns a broken undertaking with consequences for goods already grown and livelihoods already organized around an expected buyer (Thayf, 2023, pp. 172–174). Market access is therefore consequential precisely because sellers cannot determine whether it will continue.

In *Api Awan Asap*, Nori's enterprise offers a different arrangement of exchange. Her store supplies residents and neighbouring villages at affordable prices through bulk purchasing and coordinated transport. The narrator attributes her pricing to service rather than the pursuit of large margins (Rampan, 2015, pp. 76–77). Cultivation generates earnings for workers, while produce also reaches gold-mining companies, timber concessionaires (HPH), and industrial timber plantation enterprises (HTI) (Rampan, 2015, p. 78). These connections create material benefits within a wider extractive economy. The elevated description of workers regarding Nori as a saviour reinforces this hopeful image but supplies no corresponding account of their control over land or working arrangements (Rampan, 2015, p. 78). Their reported gratitude establishes a represented benefit without resolving inequalities within production. Supplying these buyers is not itself narrated as the destruction of forest. The relevant distinction concerns what the different activities do to the conditions supporting continued production and exchange.

That distinction becomes visible when the narrator follows logging residues into fire risk. Felled trees leave interconnected dry branches and foliage that can carry flames across degraded terrain (Rampan, 2015, p. 127). Logging, plantations, and mining disturb the *lou*'s land allocations; the narration connects forest transformation with depleted dry-season rivers, floods, erosion, and damaged routes (Rampan, 2015, p. 128). Plantation burning then produces heat, restricted visibility, respiratory illness, and ash-contaminated water, interrupting everyday activities (Rampan, 2015, pp. 129–130). Successful agricultural trading and deteriorating environmental conditions coexist. Nori can coordinate

distribution, but this capacity does not give her control over the surrounding activities that endanger its ecological foundations.

The novels make this coexistence legible differently. Leksi's anticipated chicken meal concentrates unequal access in a child's bodily desire; Rampan's explanatory sequences trace risks across forest, water, transport, and household routines (Thayf, 2023, p. 80; Rampan, 2015, pp. 127–130). These findings extend Mukaromah et al.'s (2026) account of ecological crisis toward livelihood continuity and connect with Saputra, Wardani, et al.'s (2026) attention to access and circulation. Libassi (2024) and Valdivia et al. (2022) provide comparators for contested resource relations. The textual result is specific: sales and wages can improve present consumption while dependence, dispossession, or environmental deterioration constrains the opportunity to sustain it.

Table 1. Ecological Conditions and Livelihood Dependence

Aspect	***Tanah Tabu*** **(Thayf, 2023)**	***Api Awan Asap*** **(Rampan, 2015)**	**Comparative Finding**
Ecological and social basis	Gardens, sago, river access, and care sustain household provisioning (pp. 134–135).	River-oriented *lou* residence and differentiated land allocations organize daily life (pp. 7–10, 31–37).	Provisioning depends on ecological access and social organization.
Material benefits	Vegetable sales enable schooling and well repairs, but subsequent purchases are cancelled (pp. 79, 172–174).	Affordable supplies and crop sales support residents and connect Nori's enterprise with extractive buyers (pp. 76–78).	Present benefits do not establish durable livelihood opportunities.
Loss and exposure	Replacement housing is distant from forest and river; damaged subsistence sources narrow livelihood options (pp. 135–137).	Forest transformation and burning impair water, air, routes, and everyday activity (pp. 127–130).	Access and environmental conditions qualify the value of income or shelter.

Source: Authors' synthesis of episodes analyzed in RESULTS. Page numbers refer to the pagination within the novels.

Recognition Voice and Unequal Futures

The novels locate unequal opportunities both between communities and external powers and within collective life. In *Tanah Tabu*, a vendor describes failed communication through successive language shifts: when residents speak a Papuan language, company representatives use Indonesian; when residents use Indonesian, representatives turn to a foreign language. He concludes, "mereka menganggap kita ini bodoh" ["they consider us stupid"] (Thayf, 2023, p. 172). This is his account of being denied equal standing. The proposed demonstration responds to perceived refusal to listen, while Mabel anticipates both economic withdrawal and the reinforcement of stereotypes about threatening Indigenous residents (Thayf, 2023, p. 173). Their disagreement concerns how to make a claim effective under unequal conditions, rather than whether the lost purchases matter.

In *Api Awan Asap*, the *lou*'s meeting juxtaposes ancestral ownership, permits, and documentary authority. Some participants regard the Kalpataru award as recognition of the community's existence; others question its protective value when land remains vulnerable (Rampan, 2015, pp. 103–107). One asks, "Apa gunanya Kalpataru kalau sesudah diberi hadiah justru tanahnya diserobot?" ["What use is Kalpataru if, after the award, the land is seized?"] (Rampan, 2015, p. 107). Jepi expresses confidence in certificates, while another resident cites reports of eviction despite certification. Surveyors' arrival without permission further troubles the chief's reassurance (Rampan, 2015, pp. 107–109). These exchanges stage competing understandings of protection, not authoritative statements of Indonesian law. Internal deliberation is demonstrable; effective influence over concession decisions remains uncertain.

Recognition also depends on whose contribution becomes publicly visible. The departing television crew remembers that it has not interviewed Nori, but a member insists, "Kita hanya mewawancarai tokoh yang dianugerahi Kalpataru di Jakarta" ["We only interview the figure who was awarded the Kalpataru in Jakarta"] (Rampan, 2015, p. 39). The selection privileges the recognized officeholder. The boat's engine then swallows the conversation as the crew leaves through thickening smoke (Rampan, 2015, p. 39). Narrative attention preserves the omission for readers even as the broadcast's production moves on without correcting it. Its significance sharpens when set beside Nori's later provision of irrigation, electricity, and productive facilities (Rampan, 2015, pp. 115, 125–126). The novel gives readers access to work omitted from the broadcast's authorized account. Media visibility, institutional leadership, and practical contribution consequently overlap only partially.

Nori's position also changes over time. Her earlier wish to study economics is restricted by her father's insistence on marriage and her mother's concern that a university qualification would create imbalance with Jue's schooling. The family's rubber and rattan gardens could readily fund further education (Rampan, 2015, pp. 11–12). The constraint therefore exceeds affordability. Later entrepreneurial authority demonstrates substantial agency, while her access to established family assets qualifies any treatment of her success as representative of all women (Rampan, 2015, pp. 12, 76–78). Alongside Leksi and Yosi, she reveals different combinations of support, obligation, and opportunity. The male voices foregrounded in the *lou* meeting establish that scene's representational pattern; they do not establish a formal prohibition on women's participation.

Table 2. Recognition Voice and Differentiated Opportunities

Aspect	***Tanah Tabu* (Thayf, 2023)**	***Api Awan Asap* (Rampan, 2015)**	**Comparative Finding**
Political voice	Vendors dispute cancelled purchases and protest risks; their meeting ends without agreement (pp. 172–174).	Residents debate permits, customary claims, certificates, and Kalpataru's protective value (pp. 103–109).	Internal deliberation does not establish influence over external decisions.

Aspect	*Tanah Tabu* (Thayf, 2023)	*Api Awan Asap* (Rampan, 2015)	Comparative Finding
Education and care	Leksi attends school; Yosi's care obligations restrict attendance (pp. 17–19, 22–24).	Family expectations constrain Nori's university plans despite available resources (pp. 11–12).	Gendered obligations shape opportunities within collective life.
Authority and visibility	Kwee's account preserves competing vendor positions rather than a single communal view (pp. 172–174).	The television interview omits Nori; later enterprise reveals agency supported by family assets (pp. 12, 39, 76–78).	Public visibility, practical contribution, and opportunity remain distinguishable.

Source: Authors' synthesis of episodes analyzed in RESULTS. Page numbers refer to the pagination within the novels.

Practices of Care and the Fragility of Collective Futures

Care sustains activities whose future remains insecure. In *Tanah Tabu*, Mabel accepts a noken commission hoping to fulfil her postponed promise of chicken for Leksi. The work connects income with the skills and materials she values, although the order requires purchased thread rather than her preferred bark or sago fibre (Thayf, 2023, pp. 208–211). While discussing the craft with Leksi, she insists, "Aku tidak mau kau hanya jadi perempuan yang pintar, tapi lupa tradisi leluhur" ["I do not want you to become a clever woman who forgets ancestral traditions"] (Thayf, 2023, p. 217). Schooling and inherited knowledge are imagined as compatible. Her wish to teach preserves a possible relationship across generations rather than demonstrating that transmission is already secure. Her account also associates weaving competence with female maturity and readiness for marriage (Thayf, 2023, p. 217). Cultural continuity carries expectations about women's responsibilities as well as valued skills.

The knock interrupting this conversation makes that insecurity structural to the scene. Armed men seize Mabel, interpret the ordered bags as enemy flags, reject her explanation of their colours, and destroy her work. Before being taken away, she urges Leksi to continue schooling and resist deception (Thayf, 2023, pp. 217–222). Livelihood diversification and cultural teaching become exposed to coercive accusation. The attackers' conduct is directly narrated; a corporate order directing them is not established. This distinction preserves the specificity of the violence without weakening its consequences for the household's protection and continuity.

Care continues after the removal. Mace tends the distressed Leksi and works in the garden despite her own fear; visitors bring food, including the market vendor's pumpkins (Thayf, 2023, pp. 229–232). Her continued labour indicates the burden she carries after Mabel's removal, rather than recovery from fear. Earlier onlookers fail to intervene during the arrest, whereas some neighbours later risk approaching the household with food (Thayf, 2023, pp. 221–222, 231–232). Solidarity is uneven and constrained by intimidation. Pum searches for Mabel and witnesses further violence against her, while Kwee attempts to help the injured dog. Pum understands their difference within shared kinship: "Kita memang berbeda, tetapi tetap satu keluarga" ["We are indeed

different, yet we remain one family"] (Thayf, 2023, p. 236). The closing blows, pursuit, and animal cries deny a secure return home (Thayf, 2023, pp. 235–237). Animal narration makes the beings who protect the household vulnerable subjects of violence themselves.

Api Awan Asap gives care a broader infrastructural reach. Nori's irrigation supports cultivation, while electricity, fishponds, and poultry production diversify everyday provision. Residents may use her incubator without rental charges (Rampan, 2015, pp. 115, 125–126). These arrangements distribute practical means of maintaining life. Their benefits coexist with an ethical limit: protecting poultry involves catching predators and selling their skins (Rampan, 2015, p. 126). Provisioning humans and domestic animals therefore entails costs for other nonhuman lives. The passage complicates any inference that locally organized prosperity necessarily protects every being within the surrounding ecology.

Collective preparedness similarly remains distinct from secured protection. When considering approaching fire, residents repeat, "Kita padamkan bersama-sama" ["We will put it out together"] (Rampan, 2015, p. 115). Yet the narrator subsequently explains why fires advancing from multiple directions may overwhelm local methods (Rampan, 2015, pp. 127–130). The final communal rescue of Pune brings Jue back from underground, reopening the family's history. The ending explicitly attributes his disappearance to Sakatn cutting the rope because he wanted to marry Nori (Rampan, 2015, pp. 166–169). This disclosure locates responsibility within an intimate betrayal; the reunion leaves the wider extractive threats unresolved. Compared with *Tanah Tabu*'s endangered animal caregivers, the extraordinary return offers partial familial restoration. Both endings distinguish the persistence of caring action from collective command over the conditions needed to sustain future life.

Table 3. Care and the Insecurity of Collective Futures

Aspect	***Tanah Tabu* (Thayf, 2023)**	***Api Awan Asap* (Rampan, 2015)**	**Comparative Finding**
Everyday provision	Noken work links anticipated income with cultural teaching (pp. 208–211, 217).	Irrigation, electricity, and shared production facilities support residents' provisioning (pp. 115, 125–126).	Care sustains material and cultural activities across different social scales.
Care amid danger	Mace's work and neighbours' food assistance continue under fear after Mabel's removal (pp. 229–232).	Collective firefighting commitments coexist with fires that may overwhelm local methods (pp. 115, 127–130).	Cooperation persists while protective capacity remains insecure.
Animal lives	Pum and Kwee undertake care while becoming vulnerable to violence (pp. 235–237).	Protecting poultry involves predator capture and skin sales (p. 126).	Practices benefiting some lives expose other beings to harm.

Aspect	*Tanah Tabu* (Thayf, 2023)	*Api Awan Asap* (Rampan, 2015)	Comparative Finding
Endings	The closing violence denies a secure return to household life (pp. 235–237).	Jue returns and Sakatn's betrayal is disclosed; wider extractive threats remain unresolved (pp. 127–130, 166–169).	Continued care and partial restoration do not secure collective futures.

Source: Authors' synthesis of episodes analyzed in RESULTS. Page numbers refer to the pagination within the novels.

DISCUSSION

From Extractive Benefits to Substantive Freedoms

Material benefits do not guarantee substantive opportunities. Vegetable sales fund schooling and well repairs, but cancellation exposes vendors' dependence on company purchases (Thayf, 2023, pp. 79, 172–174); Nori's provisioning enterprise remains environmentally vulnerable (Rampan, 2015, pp. 76–78, 127–130). Community capabilities distinguish achieved activities from their continuing feasibility (Schlosberg & Carruthers, 2010).

Holland's (2008) ecological meta-capability explains why income alone cannot replace ecological enabling conditions. Distant replacement housing restricts forest and river access (Thayf, 2023, pp. 135–137), while successful produce circulation coexists with polluted water, unhealthy air, and disrupted activity (Rampan, 2015, pp. 127–130). Food Estate research similarly distinguishes production from land rights, participation, and livelihood security (Sapriana et al., 2026).

Deliberation and accountability direct attention to whose valuations influence decisions (Gutiérrez-Zamora et al., 2023). Vendors deliberate, yet protest's purchasing consequences remain uncertain (Thayf, 2023, pp. 172–174). Economic dependence, unequal standing, and institutional obstacles can compound (Pearse et al., 2025); opportunities to speak need not confer influence.

Kalpataru does not settle permits, customary claims, or certification disputes (Rampan, 2015, pp. 106–109). Awards differ from formal Indigenous forest recognition, which can yield uneven outcomes (Abdullah et al., 2024). Bureaucratic politics shapes policy co-production, complicating procedural influence (Sahide et al., 2023). Jepi's confidence in documentation expresses a contested character position, not current Indonesian law. Justice requires sufficiently reliable access, workable alternatives, and opportunities to contest changing terms, rather than acknowledgment alone or permanent control over every risk.

Community Capabilities across Internal Differences

Accounts of communal continuity can conceal unequal labour and permission. Intersecting gender, capital, colonization, and power require evaluating how members participate in, benefit from, and revise sustaining relationships (Schlosberg et al., 2025). Shared ecological conditions therefore do not establish equal freedoms.

Family support enables Leksi's schooling, whereas care responsibilities restrict Yosi's attendance (Thayf, 2023, pp. 17–19, 23). Care's necessity does not settle who should bear its costs or whether obligations are negotiable. Gendered ecological exploitation (Saputra et al., 2025) and women's subjection and resistance (Solichin & Sa'adah, 2021; Kasanova et al., 2026) inform attention to freedoms without reducing women to victims or exemplary custodians of nature.

Despite family wealth, Nori's university plans are blocked; Pune attends university in Banjarmasin and assists with bulk purchasing (Rampan, 2015, pp. 11–12, 76). Nori's later economic authority coexists with privileged access to family assets and omission from the television interview (Rampan, 2015, pp. 12, 39, 76–78). Agency, education, and visibility remain distinct; neither her success nor intergenerational change establishes equal opportunities throughout the community.

Community denotes contested relationships. Plural valuations (Gutiérrez-Zamora et al., 2023) and relational Indigenous aspirations (Waldmüller et al., 2022) require examining whose futures and labour become legible, and who can challenge obligations. Solidarity and customary organization do not automatically reconcile collective protection with members' freedoms.

Ngerumat Sumber [*Caring for Springs*] links water, agrarian routines, and inherited narratives in Osing life in Banyuwangi (Anasrullah et al., 2025, pp. 40–41) [other references use the term Using; *Osing* and *Using* refer to the same ethnic group in Banyuwangi]. This documentary comparison concerns life, memory, and responsibility across distinct contexts; it supplies neither empirical evidence about Papuan or Benuaq communities nor a universal customary model.

Narrating Capability Loss and Contingent Continuance

Narrative form makes capability loss perceptible. Child and animal voices, including Pum's account relayed by Kwee, locate knowledge within dependence (Thayf, 2023, pp. 23, 134–137). Television interviews and collective dialogue distribute authority differently (Rampan, 2015, pp. 30–37, 39, 103–115). Such visibility illuminates slow violence beyond immediate spectacle (Nixon, 2011).

Building on studies of deforestation, environmental wisdom, and ethics (Wiyatmi et al., 2022; Arisa et al., 2025; Mukaromah et al., 2026) and environmental silence (Saputra, Prasetyo, et al., 2026), this article connects narrative visibility with differentiated opportunities and incomplete protection. Its contribution is this connection, rather than the established corpus pairing.

Care persists amid Mabel's removal and household violence, while Jue's return leaves land and ecological threats unresolved (Thayf, 2023, pp. 229–237; Rampan, 2015, pp. 127–130, 166–169). Whyte's (2018) *collective continuance* concerns Indigenous relationships under colonial ecological disruption. *Contingent continuance* names valued activities narrated as persisting under conditions their practitioners cannot adequately secure, without equating colonial histories. Poultry protection through predator capture and skin sales sustains some lives at others' expense (Rampan, 2015, p. 126).

The comparison's global relevance is conceptual: activity may persist as influence over future conditions declines. Consent, trust, reciprocity, and

accountability (Whyte, 2020), unequal human–nonhuman relations (Kenney-Lazar et al., 2023), and enabling conditions for justice (Schlosberg et al., 2026) clarify this reach. The novels do not test empirical movements' effectiveness.

EAJMR studies examine agrarian reciprocity (Dasilva & Liliani, 2025) and river ethics (Silmi & Liliani, 2026). Cultural knowledge and care can sustain life, while narrative interruption and unresolved endings expose unequal power to secure its continuation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In *Tanah Tabu*, displacement and damaged subsistence disrupt household reproduction; in *Api Awan Asap*, forest transformation, contested land, and fire threaten communal arrangements. Sustaining life requires ecological access and social relationships beyond housing or income.

Benefits, recognition, and deliberation alone do not guarantee continuing opportunities or external influence. Gender, generation, and kinship resources differentiate freedoms: care can support one future while restricting another's, and women's economic contributions may exceed public visibility. Community capabilities encompass shared conditions and members' substantive freedoms.

Care, inherited skills, and infrastructure sustain activities amid insecurity. Child and animal voices, layered testimony, selective media representation, and unresolved endings reveal *contingent continuance*: agency sustains valued activities without securing their enabling conditions. Comparative literary research should connect living conditions, differentiated opportunities, and narrative form, questioning assumed harmony. Interdisciplinary inquiry should integrate food, water, bodily safety, cultural continuity, and voice; technical recommendations for particular Indigenous communities require contextual empirical research.

FURTHER STUDY

Interpretations of these two novels do not directly measure communities' lived freedoms. *Tanah Tabu*'s kinship networks differ in scale and organization from *Api Awan Asap*'s institutionalized Benuaq *lou*. Capabilities are reconstructed through focalization, plot, and narrative selection; Dani, Amungme, and Benuaq contexts remain documentary, without ethnography.

Further research could compare verified editions and paratexts, extend comparison across extractive landscapes and literary traditions, and examine readers' and communities' evaluations of ecological loss, care, and futures through separate studies using new interview, discussion, or survey data.

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