

Environmental Exploitation in *Sexy Killers*: Narrative Analysis and Ecocriticism Perspectives

Yusri Fajar¹, John Charles Ryan²
{yusri_fajar@ub.ac.id¹, john.c.ryan@scu.edu.au²}

Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia¹
Southern Cross University, Australia²

Abstract. This paper scrutinizes the narrative technique of the eco cinema *Sexy Killers* by Dandhy Laksono in depicting the exploitation of nature in Indonesia and its impacts. Moreover, it also examines the relationship between human beings, including capitalists, low-class people, and the environment. The results show that *Sexy Killer* presented nature exploitation by constructing a plot which vividly reveals cause and effect. The arrangement of the storyline follows Dandhy Laksono's journey from Jakarta to Kalimantan, then back to Java, and Bali to see the phenomenon of coal mining and its nexus with the development of electric steam power plant companies. Interweaving with the relationship between human beings and nature, *Sexy Killers*, on the one hand, portrays people, such as farmers and fishers, who live in harmony with nature. They use the land to grow crops and water sources for their livelihood. On the other hand, the film also profoundly depicts people who damage nature through coal mining for the sake of their profit. This contrast highlights the cause-and-effect plot showing how coal mining and the development of electric steam power plant companies bring about environmental degradation.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Eco cinema, Documentary Film, Nature Exploitation, Narrative Analysis

1 Introduction

The environment and its various problems have long been an inspiration for movie makers. Films by environmentalist filmmakers are known as eco cinema. This genre directly portrays the relationship between human beings and ecosystems, ecological crises, and various environmental awareness messages [1][2][3]. Dandhy Dwi Laksono, a journalist and a prolific documentary filmmaker, released *Sexy Killers* in 2019. The film raises awareness of the ecological crisis in Indonesia caused by coal mining. The documentary film aims to present the facts and the truth [4]. *Sexy Killers* narrates the real phenomena of coal mining in Indonesia and its nexus with the development of electric steam power plant companies that have brought about environmental damage and low-class people's miserable lives.

The study of environmental films (eco cinema) in Indonesia is essential and enthralling for several reasons. First, environmental problems in Indonesia continue to occur and cause various conflicts. The film is an effective medium in showing those problems and conflicts to the spectators. Second, as a country rich in natural resources, Indonesia needs to protect and conserve natural resources by paying attention to the quality of the ecosystem that will support people's lives. Eco cinema like *Sexy Killers* could be a medium to increase people's awareness of the importance of protecting the environment. Third, environmental films can serve as a

medium of education and criticism. The film will educate the young generation to be aware of the vital function of natural resources for their future life. Environmental criticism through movies can increase people's awareness of nature. Up to March 2021, more than thirty-five million viewers have watched *Sexy Killers* on the YouTube channel. The number of viewers indicates that the film has gained wide attention.

Researchers have scrutinized *Sexy Killers*, such as Perdana [5], who examines audience responses to the film and Pertiwi [6], who analyzed the issue of corporate citizenship and the various impacts of coal mining on human rights. Besides, Yusningtyas et al. [7] examined *Sexy Killer* from the perspective of advocacy journalism. Nevertheless, those studies have not addressed the film's narrative structure, an intriguing topic in film studies. Moreover, existing studies have not scrutinized the characters in the movie who intend to save nature, on the one hand, and those who destroy it, on the other, through an ecocritical perspective.

This study aims to fill the above gap by focusing on the following research problems:

1. How does Dandhy Laksono construct the film's plot in an attempt to narrate environmental exploitation in Indonesia?
2. How does *Sexy Killers* portray the characters' treatment toward nature?

2 Research Method

This study uses narrative analysis and ecocritical theory. According to Ida [8], narrative analysis is used to understand or to find out how filmmakers create stories and storylines. By using narrative analysis, the researcher will first identify the film plot, namely the sequence of events from start to finish, which is linked through the concept of cause and effect. Ecocriticism is used to scrutinize how nature is treated by human beings, including capitalists and ordinary people, like farmers and fishermen. Kovel [9] stated that under a regime that prioritizes economic aspects, nature tends to be exploited for profit so that an environmental crisis emerges. *Sexy Killers* profoundly discloses the ecological exploitation and the relationship between human beings and nature. Ecocriticism is relevant to employ in examining the *Sexy Killers* as it focuses on the relationship between nature, the physical environment, and humans (Glottfey 1996, as cited by Garrad [10]). Furthermore, the interdisciplinary studies between film and ecocriticism perspectives will sharpen the analysis. Chu [1] stated the synergies of ecocriticism and film studies bring about the new paradigm of eco cinema studies.

3 Result and Findings

3.1 Narrative Technique in *Sexy Killers*

The storyline in *Sexy Killers* begins with the romantic scene of the young couple in a luxury hotel room. The audience will not be aware of the environmental damage issues raised in *Sexy Killers* until they realize that Dandhy Laksono focuses on the couple's use of electronic devices in the hotel room, not on the romantic action, even the intimacy of the couple. Through this opening scene, *Sexy Killers* provides a clue that the use of electronic goods requires electric power, which in the process of producing it, has a devastating impact on nature, the environment and human life.



Picture 1. The Couple is Watching TV.



Picture 2. The Man is Using Laptop.

The picture 1, at 22 seconds, when the couple is watching television and the picture 2, at 28 seconds when the man is using the laptop, are scenes that become the opening plot in *Sexy Killers*. The scenes end with the couple going to bed. The next honeymoon scene could be imagined even though Dandhy Laksono does not delineate the following vulgar scene. Then, Dandhy Laksono provides the information “what we do not see in everyday life is how electricity can reach this room” (second 59). This statement marks the movement of the storyline. The film *Sexy Killers*, using long and medium shots, then shows how electric power is generated through coal mining which becomes the fuel for electricity generation.



Picture 3. Mining coal by blasting the ground.



Picture 4. Coal is transported by truck.

Through pictures 3 and 4, Dandhy Laksono depicts how coal mining is carried out. Humans exploit nature to dredge coal. As a result of the explosions that were carried out, various black holes appeared. The buried coal is then dredged and transported by truck. Heavy equipment such as tractors and trucks have become symbols of power for coal mine owners.

From this picture of coal mining above, we are then shown the route of the expedition carried out by journalists, namely Dandhy Laksono and his team, who started the journey from Jakarta to several parts of Indonesia where coal mining was carried out. This description of the journey provides an overview of Dandhy Laksono's coverage and observations to make the film *Sexy Killers*. The film production process is carried out through direct observation in the field to identify mining and its various consequences closely.



Picture 5. Start the journey from Jakarta in January 2015.



Picture 6. Dandhy Laksono arrived in Borneo Kalimantan in October 2015.

From the sequence of events above, namely the description of mining and then the story of Dandhy Laksono's journey, it can be figured out that the storyline in that section is forward then backward. Dandhy Laksono arrived in Kalimantan to observe as well as document the phenomenon of coal mining. He started his journalistic route from Jakarta.

The next scene shows the lives of farmers affected by coal mining. From this scene, it can be pointed out that the storyline is arranged based on the cause of effect. As a result, the spectators know how coal mining has damaged the environment and nature which is the source of livelihood for the farmers.



Picture 7. A farmer shows water to drink.



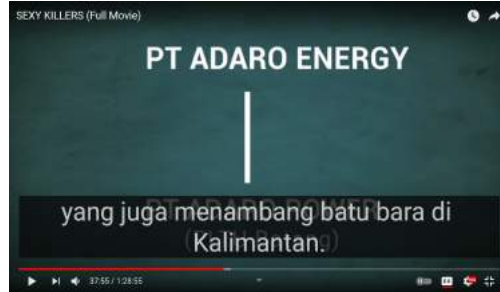
Picture 8. Turbid water due to mining.

Figures 7 and 8 show that the water in the villages around the mining site has been polluted. Mud that comes from coal mining also pollutes agricultural rice fields. In the next scenes, Dandhy Laksono shows how the new coal mining has damaged the natural ecosystem. The life of the peasants became miserable. In addition, through *Sexy Killers*, Dandhy Laksono also depicts that the former mining pits have killed several children because they fell in them.

The film's plot then moves to the Karimun Java islands to illustrate the damage to coral reefs caused by coal-carrying barges to be used as fuel for the electric steam power plant in Batang, Central Java. Even though there is a change of location, from Kalimantan to Central Java, the plot of *Sexy Killers* still shows a causal relationship. From the phenomenon of coal mining in Kalimantan to the condition of the people in Batang, Central Java, the movement of the plot is a continuation of the storyline that seeks to present the relationship between mining and steam power plants in Batang, Central Java. This narrative strategy is used to reveal the actors involved in the process of damaging the environment in Kalimantan and other areas in Indonesia. A consortium of Japanese and Indonesian companies, as shown in the picture 9, owns the Batang steam power plant.



Picture 9. The Owner of Batang electric steam power plant.



Picture 10. PT Adaro Energy, Owner of Batang Electric Steam Plant.

Figure 10 shows that one of the owners of the steam power plant is PT. Adaro Energy also operates coal mining in Kalimantan. Thus, the storyline of *Sexy Killers* is arranged to find the clue between the coal mining in Kalimantan and the establishment of a steam power plant in Batang, Central Java. In the storyline part that describes the steam power plant in Batang, Dandhy Laksono also tells how the fishermen in Batang are threatened because the coastal area where they start fishing activities will become smaller due to the existence of the electricity company building.

Apart from polluting the environment around mining, coal transported by ships through the oceans also threatens the marine ecosystem. Barges carrying coal to coal-fired power plants can contaminate the sea areas where the ships dock. As a result, the sea is polluted, and the servants are threatened with their livelihoods. Apart from polluting the sea, the position of the barges also disturbs fishing boats that will go to sea.



Picture 11. Coal-carrying barges dock to the Power Plant.



Picture 12. A fisherman protests against the planned construction of a power plant on the Batang sea shore.

Figure 11 shows a long shot shooting technique that shows a coastal area that has been filled with several coal barges. The position of the stick boats can of course, prevent the fishermen from going to sea. Meanwhile, the coal grains scattered or fallen into the sea will pollute the marine environment where the fish breed. The barges deliver coal to coal-fired power plants. On another part of the shoreline, the power plant will be rebuilt. The plan to build the power plant received protests from the community, namely one of the fishermen, as in Figure 12. The fisherman criticized the land on the shore and on the coast that would be used as a power plant building.

In the next storyline, film viewers will be able to witness the phenomenon of the establishment of the power plant company in other areas such as Indramayu, Cirebon and Bali which have negative impacts on the environment and society. The seashore area has been damaged, and people have been suffering from illness because they had breathed air contaminated by the smoke emitted from power generation machines. The existence of this coal-fired power plant company is related to the interests of entrepreneurs to carry out massive coal mining in Kalimantan. Unfortunately, even though mining activities and steam power plants have damaged the environment and resulted in casualties, the government has not taken firm action against the various violations committed by mining owners and power generation companies.

Following the narrative concept of Nick Lacey (as quoted by Ida [8]), I follow the chronology of the crime (against the environment), the planning of the crime, and then how the crime is observed by detectives (in this case journalists) who reveal coal mining and its dangerous impact. However, the plot of *Sexy Killers* is not as linear as what Nick Lacey describes. The police do not arrest the perpetrators of environmental damage and do not process them legally.

3.2 Human Beings' Vision and Treatment toward Nature

Sexy Killers, on the one hand, shows people, such as farmers, who live in harmony with nature. They use land to grow crops and water sources for their livelihood. These farmers do not take actions that destroy nature and the environment, because their lives depend on nature. One example of community members who wanted to preserve the culture of farming were transmigration participants who came to Kalimantan to get a better life by utilizing land.



Picture 13. One of The Farmers, Nyoman, plant cucumber



Picture 14. Ketut, Nyoman's Son who Continues Agricultural Tradition

In pictures 13 and 14, a father named Nyoman and his son Ketut want to develop an agricultural culture to utilize agricultural land. Ironically, the agricultural culture they wish to develop is seriously challenged by coal mining activities. Coal mining in the areas where the farmers live have damaged ecosystems to affect their agricultural life. Moreover, the destruction of nature because of mining has caused future generations to lose the opportunity to continue farming properly because the rice fields have been damaged. The capitalists who establish cooperation with the government agent and apparatus exploited the land. Kovel [9] calls those people "enemy of nature" because they merely exploit nature without preserving it. As shown in *Sexy Killers*, those people are employed by coal mining companies that have damaged the nature. They cause ecological crisis that reflects the so-called cultural crisis [11]. The cultural

turmoil shows how humans no longer treat nature well, merely making it an object of exploitation, as happened in Borneo.



Picture 15. Information about the damage of waterway because of coal mining.

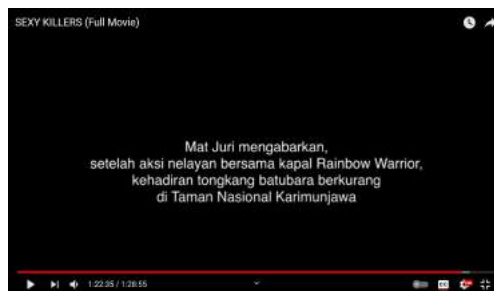


Picture 16. An ex-mining hole located not far from residential areas.

Pictures 15 and 16 profoundly give us a description of the environmental damage caused by coal mining. This damage is caused by the actions of people who do not care about environmental sustainability. People who have a culture of destroying nature are only concerned with profit and have no concern for the lives of the poor whose lives depend on land. Coal mining makes the water quality in the surrounding villages decrease or even become damaged. Dandhy Laksono shows the fact that the quality of water for cooking is no longer clean and healthy. The plants that function to store water and maintain the debit of water sources have disappeared, so that the ecosystem can no longer function normally. Polluted water for cooking and drinking is caused by coal mining. Looking at the residents' houses, we can find out the living conditions of the communities around the coal mining, which are far from prosperous. This phenomenon is ironic because the mining in the vicinity has generated huge profits. Unfortunately, the surrounding residents have received negative impacts because the water source has been polluted, and their welfare has not improved.



Picture 17. Marine environmental activists ask coal barges to leave the coral reef area.



Picture 18. Information about the reduced number of coal barges in Karimun Java Sea.

The mining and various mining activities that have threatened the ecosystem have met with resistance from environmental activists and residents. They called for actions that damage the environment to be discontinued. Some residents also refused to sell their land to steam power companies. The phenomenon of the community movement to fight the exploitation of nature shows that there are still members of the community who have the awareness to conserve and

save the environment. This resistance, which is clearly portrayed in the film *Sexy Killers*, brings about a message to the public that various acts of ecological exploitation should not be tolerated.

4 Conclusion

Sexy Killers profoundly discloses nature exploitation through the storyline following the journalists, Dandhy Laksono and his team. Plots are not arranged in a detailed time sequence but instead based on cause and effect.

Through the sequence of events, *Sexy Killers* also reveals how people treat nature differently. On the one hand, the farmers around the mine area show how their culture lives in harmony amid nature. Meanwhile, a group of other people place nature inferiorly, merely making it into an object. The film highlights the environmental impact of coal mining. The new mining has damaged the ecosystem and disturbed the people's lives around the new coal mining. The green area where the trees used to grow has been damaged and turned into a mining area. The loss of vegetation causes nature to degrade in quality, disrupting water sources that farmers use to grow crops and meet their daily needs.

Through *Sexy Killers*, Dandhy Laksono tries to increase public awareness of the mining phenomenon and its various negative impacts in various areas that are far from our attention. Watching this film, we as spectators become furious and angry. Mining to exploit natural resources and, of course profit has changed the nature that was previously fertile and became a source of livelihood for the people that has been badly damaged. The various environmental impacts depicted in *Sexy Killers* stun the audience. Apart from social consequences and natural damage, the use of coal to fuel power plants has caused air pollution, which threatens public health.

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