

FROM HISTORICAL WOUND TO MORAL REALIGNMENT: ECOTHEOLOGICAL RECOVERY IN AHMAD TOHARI'S JANTERA BIANGLALA

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Abstract

Political violence is often read as a human tragedy alone. That frame is too narrow for Ahmad Tohari's Jantera Bianglala. The novel links wounded bodies, damaged habitats, and a returning sense of the Divine. This study examines how the novel organizes that relation and what conceptual contribution follows from it. The primary corpus is the full 182-page novel. It was processed into 48,434 running words, 187 paragraph units, and 4,808 sentence units. Lexical screening flagged 182 paragraph units with ecological markers, 172 with violence markers, 110 with spiritual-ethical markers, and 129 with care-restoration markers. A denser core of 76 four-way-overlap paragraphs was then read closely with support from a chapter-page matrix, motif counts, and a relational co-occurrence table. The findings reveal five linked movements. First, the novel stages historical violence as ecological rupture. Second, natural matter functions as a witness that stores fear, endurance, and memory. Third, fragile repair grows through relational shelter, especially around Srintil, Goder, Rasus, and the damaged village environment. Fourth, the text turns ecological signs into moral and theological correction through the teak forest, the swing, the sea, and the final rainbow image. Fifth, Rasus's movement from soldier to shepherd-like caretaker gives narrative form to restorative agency. These findings support the concept of an Ecotheological Recovery Spiral. Recovery is not linear in this model. It is recursive, fragile, place-based, and ethically demanding. The novelty of the study lies in showing that nature in the novel is not background. It is a witness, a refuge, a moral mediator, and an active force in post-violence realignment.

Keywords: Ahmad Tohari, ecotheology, historical violence, material ecocriticism, recovery

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism now extends beyond the study of natural scenery. It examines how narrative form distributes vulnerability, agency, and responsibility across human and more-than-human worlds. James and Morel (2018) argue that ecocriticism becomes more rigorous when it engages directly with narrative theory. Sequence, perspective,

temporal structure, and metaphor shape the ethical scale of a literary text, while shifts between intimate scenes and wider ecological frames alter the reader's sense of responsibility (Clark, 2019). Material ecocriticism strengthens this approach by treating matter as an active carrier of stories, traces, and relations (Iovino & Oppermann, 2012, 2014). Alaimo (2016) develops this view through trans-corporeality, which presents the human body as open to material exchanges with its environment. Haraway (2016) and Tsing et al. (2017) likewise show that damaged worlds can still sustain partial and vulnerable forms of coexistence. These perspectives reveal how a village house, lichen-covered wood, cultivated fields, and the smell of confinement can preserve memory and exert ethical pressure.

Ecotheology adds a moral and spiritual dimension to this ecological framework. It treats land, animals, water, and atmosphere as parts of creation rather than as neutral resources. Latour (2009) challenges the modern assumption that salvation concerns human beings alone, while Deane-Drummond (2017) places theology within the conditions of a fragile Earth. Francis (2015) similarly connects environmental suffering with the suffering of marginalized communities. Religious language can therefore shape ecological responsibility, public hope, and moral interpretation (Hogg, 2022; Koehrsen, 2021; Salter & Wilkinson, 2024). Trauma studies deepen this discussion by examining the difficult relation between violence and its later representation (Caruth, 1996). Craps (2013) stresses the need to read historical injury through colonial and postcolonial difference, while Albrecht et al. (2007) and Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) show how environmental loss can produce solastalgia and ecological grief. Verlie and Neimanis (2023) extend the idea of testimony to atmosphere, breath, and damaged environments, which allows trauma to be read as both a human wound and a material condition.

This framework is especially relevant to Indonesia's anti-communist violence of 1965–1966, which produced mass killing, detention, exclusion, and prolonged silence (Heryanto, 2006; Melvin, 2018; Roosa, 2020). Women also faced sexualized accusations, bodily danger, and persistent social stigma (Pohlman, 2015). The violence entered village life through fear, surveillance, damaged homes, disrupted livelihoods, and later development pressure, which reflects Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence. Ahmad

Tohari's *Dukuh Paruk* trilogy records this history through the changing relations among power, time, and local life (Cooper, 2004). Existing studies have examined its ecological messages, its ecofeminist dimensions, and its place within Indonesian ecocriticism (Dewi, 2016; Mukhlis, 2023; Qomariyah et al., 2024). Other scholars have shown that Islamic discourse can support environmental ethics and ecological action in Indonesia (Abdelzaher et al., 2019; Fikri & Colombijn, 2021; Reuter, 2015; Smith et al., 2024). However, little attention has been given to nature as a witness or to the role of ecological signs in theological recovery. This article addresses that gap through three questions and proposes the Ecotheological Recovery Spiral, which links historical rupture, material witnessing, relational shelter, cosmic-ethical correction, and restorative agency through corpus mapping, close reading, and comparative interpretation.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive design supported by descriptive corpus analysis. The primary source is the complete digital text of Ahmad Tohari's *Jantera Bianglala* (1986), which spans 182 PDF pages. The text was processed at two analytical levels. The macro corpus contained 187 paragraph units and was used to map thematic distribution across chapters. The micro corpus contained 4,808 sentence units and supported lexical screening and motif counting. A coding matrix recorded chapter location, page span, characters, ecological elements, violence markers, spiritual-ethical cues, and narrative functions. Four lexical families guided the screening: ecological, violent, spiritual-ethical, and care-restorative markers. The quantitative counts served as descriptive anchors rather than statistical proof, and they were used to strengthen close reading and improve analytical transparency.

The screening produced a chapter-level map of thematic density and identified areas of strong co-occurrence. Seventy-six of the 187 paragraph units contained all four coding families and formed the core close-reading corpus. Further analysis traced recurring motifs such as the moon, birds, rice fields, thatch grass, teak forest, sea, swing, and rainbow. It also mapped paragraph-level relations among major characters and distinguished sheltering ties from extractive ones. The tables and figures in the Results

section were derived from this matrix and were used to support interpretation. The interpretive process remained iterative. Descriptive clusters were first examined by chapter and motif, then read against scholarship in ecocriticism, trauma studies, and ecotheology. Negative cases were also reviewed to avoid imposing a redemptive reading on scenes in which nature did not produce repair or spiritual language did not lead to ethical change. In this mixed evidentiary design, quantified textual features establish the strength of recurring patterns, while close reading explains their narrative and conceptual significance.

Table 1. *Analytical corpus profile and lexical screening results*

Chapter	Page span	Paragraph units	Word count	Ecological markers	Violence markers	Spiritual-ethical markers	Care-restoration markers
I	pp. 3–33	33	8,366	32	31	16	18
II	pp. 34–85	54	14,192	53	48	29	39
III	pp. 86–130	45	12,231	44	45	28	36
IV	pp. 131–180	55	13,645	53	48	37	36
Total	pp. 3–180	187	48,434	182	172	110	129

Table 1 shows two clear tendencies. First, ecological markers remain dense across the whole novel. They are not confined to reflective or pastoral scenes. Second, violence markers remain high long after the prison opening. The narrative therefore treats violence as an ongoing condition of life rather than a closed event. Spiritual-ethical and care-restoration markers rise most strongly in Chapters II and IV. This matters because it shows that repair emerges only after the text has fully established the persistence of damage. Figure 1 visualizes this chapter-level pattern.

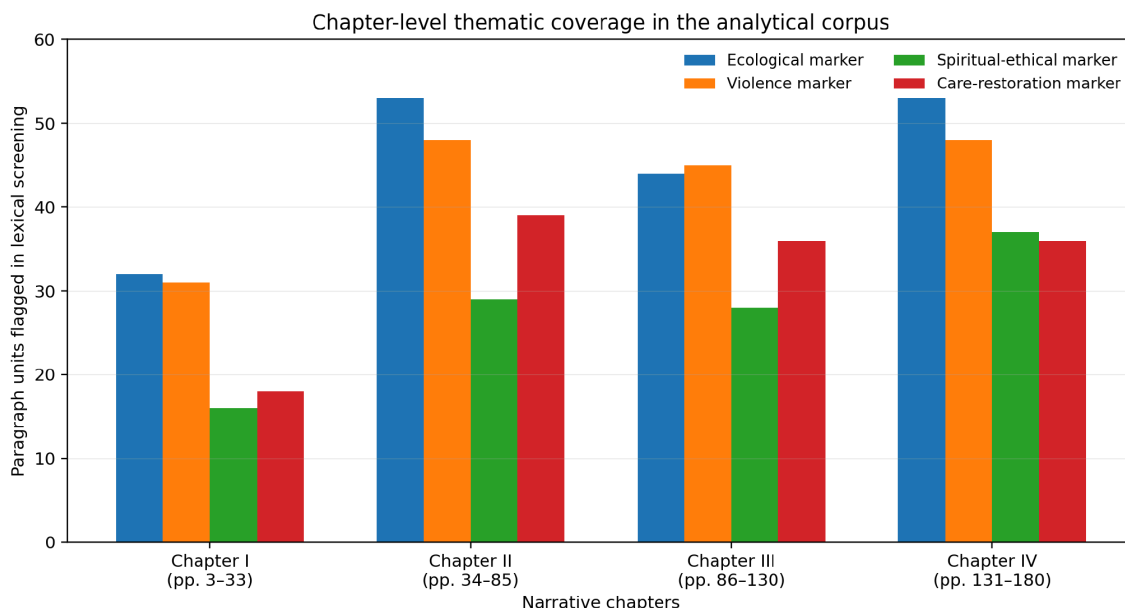


Figure 1. Chapter-level thematic coverage in the analytical corpus.

Figure 1 confirms that the novel distributes ecology and violence together. The highest ecological density appears in Chapters II and IV. These are also the chapters in which fragile care and spiritual redirection intensify. The pattern supports the article's main claim. Recovery in this novel does not move away from the material world. It moves through it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals a sequence of related changes rather than a set of isolated themes. Political violence first enters the novel through bodies, buildings, sound, and atmosphere. It then persists in the damaged ecology of Dukuh Paruk. From this field of injury, the narrative develops fragile forms of shelter, moral reflection, and responsibility. The five subsections below follow that movement. Each combines descriptive textual evidence with close reading so that the numerical patterns remain connected to the scenes that give them meaning.

Historical-Ecological Rupture

The first pattern is a widening of violence. The novel begins with detention and armed control, but the injury soon extends into houses, village space, livelihood, and

land. Violence therefore changes form as the narrative moves forward. It appears first as terror, then as stigma, and later as bureaucratic pressure. To make this movement visible, the coded scenes were grouped into four connected clusters. Table 2 presents their narrative locations, material signs, and interpretive force.

Table 2. *Strong data clusters for historical-ecological rupture*

Rupture cluster	Primary locus	Coded scenes	Key material evidence	Interpretive force
Carceral nightscape	Chapter I	12	Locked detention house, urine, sweat, rifle shots, red horizon	Violence occupies atmosphere, sound, and bodily habitat.
Burned village ecology	Chapters I-II	10	Charred houses, damaged huts, disrupted subsistence, funeral smell	The village becomes a wounded environment, not only a wounded community.
Stigma and toxic social space	Chapter II	9	Srintil's shame, social avoidance, narrowed domestic mobility	Trauma turns social life into an enclosure that feels environmental.
Developmental dispossession	Chapters III-IV	12	Bulldozers, irrigation project, reduced compensation, bureaucratic extraction	Spectacular violence mutates into slow violence and land pressure.

The carceral cluster establishes the novel's basic grammar of rupture. The detention house is crowded, wet, foul, and airless. Gunfire controls its acoustic field, while the red horizon suggests burning beyond the walls. Violence therefore becomes an atmosphere that people must breathe and inhabit. Tohari makes smell, darkness, and sound carry the political crisis. This extends Caruth's (1996) account of belated injury because trauma is stored in the sensory environment. It also supports Verlie and Neimanis's (2023) view that witnessing can exceed the human witness. The same pattern appears when Rasus returns to Dukuh Paruk and finds burned houses, charred trees,

fragile huts, and villagers who still fear military uniforms. Cooper (2004) shows that Tohari links political power to local time, but the novel also binds violence to roofs, soil, smoke, burial space, and damaged livelihoods. The image of lichen on stone captures this condition because survival appears as a quiet and persistent attachment to a wounded surface.

Srintil's return adds a gendered and social dimension to this rupture. Her trauma appears through silence, lowered eyes, restricted movement, and a deep sense of contamination. Dukuh Paruk offers belonging, but it cannot free her from public shame. Stigma therefore becomes a toxic social space rather than a private feeling alone. Pohlman (2015) helps explain this condition because women associated with the 1965 crisis remained exposed to accusation, sexualized judgment, and moral suspicion after detention. The irrigation project extends the same structure through a quieter form of coercion. Land is measured, compensation is reduced, and local people enter procedures they cannot control. Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence clarifies how harm accumulates through files, officials, measurements, and development claims. Taken together, these patterns show that historical rupture is bodily, atmospheric, domestic, and developmental. Once place becomes a carrier of injury, natural matter can also become a carrier of memory and ethical meaning.

Nature as Material Witness

The second pattern emerges from repetition. The novel repeatedly returns to the moon, birds, rice fields, thatch, sky, forest, sea, and rainbow. Their recurrence gives continuity to a story marked by imprisonment, stigma, and social change. The counts are not treated as proof of meaning by themselves. They help identify which more-than-human elements remain active across the narrative and which appear at decisive turning points. Table 3 brings these motifs together before the discussion turns to their different forms of narrative work.

Table 3. *Recurring more-than-human motifs and their narrative functions*

Recurring motif	Frequency	Main chapter range	Narrative work	Analytical value
Moon	45	I-IV	Temporal witness to fear, waiting, and reflection	Shows continuity across violent and restorative scenes.
Birds	44	II-IV	Acoustic and kinetic signs of everyday life	Register fragile normalcy amid social damage.
Rice field (sawah)	41	II-IV	Subsistence ground and spatial measure of village change	Links livelihood to memory and power.
Thatch grass / ilalang	26	II-IV	Material sign of poor yet adaptive dwelling	Embodies precarious shelter and resilience.
Sky	24	I-IV	Scale expander from local pain to cosmic frame	Prepares theological enlargement.
Swing (ayunan)	20	III	Model of movement and balance	Translates ethics into a spatial metaphor.
Teak forest	11	II and IV	Site of contemplation and reorientation	Slows desire and opens moral reflection.
Lichen	9	I-IV	Figure of stubborn endurance	Stores the memory of survival in matter.
Sea and coast	15	II and IV	Sublime corrective to human greed and confusion	Reframes the self before a larger order.
Rainbow / bianglala	8	I and IV	Closing image of renewed alignment	Names the horizon of recovery.

The novel's most frequent motifs belong to its ordinary ecological world. The moon appears forty-five times, birds forty-four times, and rice fields forty-one times. Their importance lies in their persistence across political change and social collapse. The moon accompanies fear, waiting, and reflection. Birds preserve sound and movement within scenes of poverty and surveillance. Rice fields connect survival to land, labor, and power. These motifs keep Dukuh Paruk within a living world despite its historical wounds. In this sense, they resemble the "storied matter" described by Iovino and

Oppermann (2012), because material forms carry traces and guide interpretation without speaking as human witnesses.

Lichen, thatch, forest, sea, and rainbow deepen this material testimony. Lichen appears only nine times, yet it offers the novel's clearest image of endurance. Dukuh Paruk survives as lichen survives on stone, without abundance or spectacle. Thatch grass appears twenty-six times and links poor human dwellings with birds that reuse it for nests. Birds and fields also widen the social scale, since their cycles of feeding, nesting, and exposure to danger echo the village's precarious life (Heise, 2016). The teak forest slows Srintil's panic and directs her attention to balance among roots, leaves, light, and competing forms of life. The sea humbles human desire, while the final rainbow condenses the novel's movement toward renewed alignment. Nature in *Jantera Bianglala* therefore acts as witness, memory, and ethical measure, which extends Dewi's (2016) argument that Indonesian ecocriticism must attend to the moral position created by literary environments.

Relational Shelter and Fragile Repair

The movement from witness to repair becomes clearer when the analysis shifts from motifs to relationships. Srintil stands at the center of several strong narrative ties, but these ties do not lead in the same direction. Some offer shelter. Others turn care into access, obligation, or control. Paragraph-level co-occurrence was used to map this contrast without reducing the characters to numerical nodes. Table 4 identifies the strongest pairs and the spaces through which each relationship operates.

Table 4. *Relational shelter and extraction in paragraph-level co-occurrence*

Character pair	Paragraph co-occurrence	Relation type	Main ecological mediator	Interpretive value
Srintil-Goder	41	Shelter and repair	Yard, flowers, insects, domestic air	Care becomes possible without public stigma.
Srintil-Rasus	44	Fragile restorative bond	Paths home, village space, memory of place	Love is recast as ethical responsibility.

Character pair	Paragraph co-occurrence	Relation type	Main ecological mediator	Interpretive value
Rasus-Sakarya	20	Intergenerational trust	Dukuh Paruk as ancestral ground	Moral duty is transferred through place-based memory.
Rasus-Grandmother	22	Filial return	House, death room, burial atmosphere	Local belonging corrects military abstraction.
Srintil-Bajus	42	Extractive tie	Project house, coast, vehicle routes	Instrumental kindness masks exploitation.
Srintil-Marsusi	23	Coercive desire	Domestic enclosure and bodily pressure	The female body is treated as usable property.
Srintil-Nyai Kartareja	31	Ambivalent protection	Interior household space	Older survival economies both protect and commodify.

The relational map reveals a sharp tension between shelter and exploitation. Srintil appears with Rasus in forty-four paragraph units and with Goder in forty-one. These are the two main sheltering relations. She also appears with Bajus in forty-two units and with Marsusi in twenty-three. Narrative prominence therefore does not indicate moral value. The same woman is protected, exploited, remembered, and misrecognized by different figures. The Srintil-Goder relation offers the clearest form of immediate shelter. Goder receives her through touch, play, hunger, and daily dependence rather than through the language of guilt. Flowers, insects, birds, warm air, and domestic routines create a softer sensory space where Srintil can practice care before society restores her dignity. This improvised bond reflects Haraway's (2016) idea of making kin as a practical form of survival under pressure.

The Srintil-Rasus relation offers a slower and more demanding form of repair. Its forty-four co-occurrence units make it the strongest dyad in the relational map. Yet the bond cannot simply return to childhood romance. Rasus returns as a soldier, witness, grandson, and member of a wounded community. Grandmother, Sakarya, graves, village

paths, and the memory of Dukuh Paruk transform private longing into communal responsibility. Bajus and Marsusi move in the opposite direction because they treat Srintil as available matter. Pohlman (2015) helps explain this pattern, since women marked by the politics of 1965 remained vulnerable to sexual and social appropriation. Tohari represents this vulnerability through houses, vehicles, offices, roads, and coastal spaces that become instruments of pressure. Care becomes restorative only when it rejects utility, accepts vulnerability, and creates room for a damaged life to continue without being reduced to its injury.

Cosmic-Ethical Correction

The narrative does not stop with shelter. It gradually asks how desire itself might be redirected. This movement occurs through a small group of ecological and theological cues. Some appear only once, while others recur across several chapters. Their force lies in the way they connect bodily experience with ideas of balance, humility, and a larger order. Table 5 traces this progression from explicit religious language to forest, swing, sea, and rainbow imagery.

Table 5. *Eco-theological cues that redirect desire and action*

Eco-theological node	Textual signal	Page locus	Function in the plot	Ethical redirection
“La ilaha illallah”	Single explicit utterance	pp. 14-15	Marks a break in Paruk’s inherited horizon	Introduces a monotheistic orientation of humility.
Teak forest reflection	11 motif mentions	pp. 61-68; 181	Suspends haste and desire	Encourages reflection on order and measure.
Erotic-cosmic rhythm	“Berahi” appears 20 times	pp. 59-66	Binds desire to larger life rhythms	Rejects possession as the only form of intimacy.
Swing philosophy	Ayunan appears 20 times	pp. 87-103	Turns motion into ethical metaphor	Teaches balance rather than linear progress.
Sea and “Selera Agung”	Sea/coast 15; phrase 4	pp. 133-134; 174	Confronts human greed with a larger order	Humbles the self before moral depth.
“Sang Wujud” and rainbow	1 divine naming; bianglala 8	pp. 180-181	Frames the ending and communal future	Recasts recovery as alignment before the Divine.

The first cue appears when Rasus whispers “La ilaha illallah” beside his dying grandmother. Its rarity strengthens its structural force. The phrase interrupts Dukuh Paruk’s inherited spiritual closure and introduces a new orientation toward death, power, and human limitation. The teak forest develops this shift through sensory experience. It slows Srintil’s panic and draws attention to roots, leaves, light, competition, and balance. The forest contains danger, but it also shows how different forms of life still find space. Hogg (2022) argues that religious narratives create hope by reshaping moral imagination. Tohari achieves this effect through material order rather than direct instruction. The recurring image of the swing makes the lesson explicit. Life moves between opposing positions, while conscience must remain at the center. This image reflects the humility and relational responsibility emphasized by Deane-Drummond (2017) and Francis (2015).

The sea, “Selera Agung,” “Sang Wujud,” and the final rainbow extend this moral correction. At the coast, money, masculine desire, and project authority lose their claim to final meaning. The sea changes the scale of perception and exposes the limits of human control. Latour (2009) calls for an ecotheology that keeps the nonhuman world within the horizon of salvation. The coastal scene gives narrative form to that principle. It measures greed against a depth that human schemes cannot master. The later invocation of “Sang Wujud” and the rainbow gathers these moments into a final image of moral alignment. This progression also expands discussions of Green Islam, which often focus on institutions, preaching, and activism (Abdelzaher et al., 2019; Fikri & Colombijn, 2021; Koehrsen, 2021; Smith et al., 2024). *Jantera Bianglala* presents another route through narrative encounter. Its theology emerges when damaged places deepen moral perception and redirect human action.

Restorative Agency and the Ecotheological Recovery Spiral

The final movement gathers the earlier patterns into Rasus’s changing form of agency. His development cannot be reduced to a return of romantic feeling. He must move through military discipline, family loss, village memory, Srintil’s collapse, and the moral pressure of the landscape. The stages in Table 6 summarize this movement. They

show how the same character shifts from proximity to violence toward a long-term commitment to care.

Table 6. *Rasus's agency shift and the novel's final ethical trajectory*

Phase	Rasus's dominant identity	Key material cue	Ethical action	Analytical value
1	Soldier-observer	Rifle, guard post, red horizon	Witnesses violence but cannot yet repair	Begins the spiral in rupture.
2	Returning villager	Grandmother's death room, damaged hamlet	Reads national violence through local loss	Links history to place.
3	Burdened companion	Goder, yard, thatch shelter	Learns that care is slow and relational	Converts memory into sheltering practice.
4	Tested moral agent	Irrigation project, swing, coast	Rejects exploitative masculinity and project logic	Moves from desire to moral correction.
5	Shepherd-like caretaker	Hospital journey, homeward return, rainbow	Chooses long-term care for Srintil and Paruk	Embodies restorative agency.

Rasus begins as a soldier who can see suffering but cannot yet answer it. The guard post, rifle, and red horizon place him close to violence. His return to Dukuh Paruk changes the moral scale of what he has witnessed. Grandmother's death, the burned hamlet, and the villagers' fear make national history intimate. State power is no longer an abstract duty. It has entered the house, the grave, and the memory of his own childhood.

This change remains incomplete until Rasus encounters Srintil's condition. He must learn that repair cannot be achieved through rescue alone. Care is slower than intervention. It involves Goder, the yard, the damaged huts, and the village relations that have kept Srintil alive. Rasus is also tested by the irrigation project and by the forms of masculinity represented by Marsusi and Bajus. His moral development depends on rejecting both military abstraction and instrumental desire.

The sequence does not form a linear path from injury to healing. Each stage changes the conditions of the next, but unresolved violence can reactivate earlier forms of rupture. Material traces keep the wound visible, relational shelter makes survival possible, and cosmic-ethical correction reshapes the moral meaning of care. Restorative

agency emerges when these forms of recognition become sustained responsibility. The process then returns to the historical wound, but it does so with a deeper capacity for ethical response. Figure 2 represents this recursive movement as an Ecotheological Recovery Spiral.

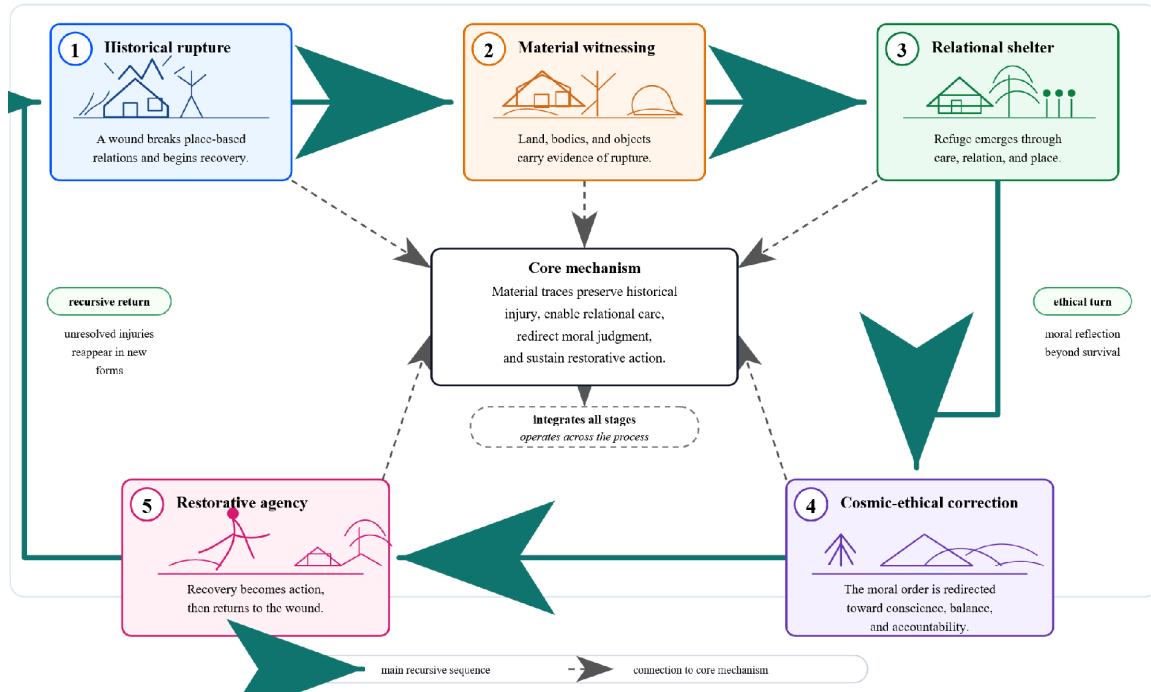


Figure 2. The Ecotheological Recovery Spiral derived from the findings.

Figure 2 shows that the five stages form a recursive process rather than a closed sequence. Historical rupture damages relations among persons, communities, and places. Material witnessing preserves that damage in bodies, objects, and landscapes. Relational shelter creates limited spaces for wounded life to continue. Cosmic-ethical correction then redirects desire toward conscience, balance, and accountability. Restorative agency translates this moral recognition into sustained care. The return arrow does not indicate failure or repetition without change. It shows that care must repeatedly confront unresolved wounds, while each return may deepen ethical understanding and responsibility.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Jantera Bianglala organizes post-1965 suffering through a tightly woven ecology of violence, care, and transcendence. The corpus profile,

motif counts, and relational mapping all support the same conclusion. Political violence in the novel is never only social. It becomes environmental through atmosphere, damaged housing, altered livelihoods, and development pressure. In response, nature does not serve as decorative background. It stores memory, shelters fragile forms of relation, and expands the ethical scale of judgment. The recurring motifs of lichen, thatch, birds, fields, forest, sea, and rainbow are central to this work. They help move the narrative from exposed injury toward morally charged reorientation.

The article's main conceptual contribution is the Ecotheological Recovery Spiral. The model explains recovery as a recursive process that joins historical rupture, material witnessing, relational shelter, cosmic-ethical correction, and restorative agency. Its value lies in refusing two simplifications. It rejects a purely human account of trauma, and it rejects an automatic idea of healing through nature. Recovery remains fragile. It depends on repeated ethical response, especially on care labor that accepts wounded persons and wounded places together. This finding opens a useful path for future work on Indonesian literature, post-conflict narrative, and religion-environment studies. Further research may compare Tohari's model with other post-violence village novels or test whether similar spirals appear in texts shaped by ecological disaster rather than political terror.

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