

The demonization of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) program in the media: A critical ecolinguistic study

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's food security program has been implemented to increase the national crop production and economic gains. However, the policy has sparked a nationwide debate about its ecological and social issues. Mass media play an important role in bringing the policy to the spotlight. In its reports, Mongabay frequently represents the program through negative evaluative language that emphasizes its environmental and sociocultural consequences.. This study aims to examine how the media demonize the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) program and scrutinize its ecological and ideological implications. This qualitative study employs critical ecolinguistic discourse analysis to examine ecological representations in media texts. The data of demonization were ascertained from news articles about the MIFEE program published by Mongabay during the period 2012–2024. The results of the study indicate that firstly demonization of the MIFEE project by the media is a discursive strategy to frame that the program is represented as causing ecological, social, and cultural harm that outweighs its claimed benefits for food production and economic growth. Secondly, the nature is presented as a living entity directly impacted by human intervention. Thirdly, food security policies are presented to be entwined with human rights issues, and the shifting in local food systems is seen as a form of gastrocolonialism. The analysis results demonstrate that demonization of the project by the media has shaped an alternative ecological narrative and policy makers should ensure that food sovereignty projects go hand in hand with environmental sustainability and the life and culture of the local people.

Keywords: Demonization, critical ecolinguistics; food security, MIFEE, media discourse

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INTRODUCTION

Food security programs have long been strategic concern in many countries. In Indonesia, government efforts to ensure food availability can be traced back to several historical periods, including the colonial era, the Old Order, the New Order, and the Reform era. Prior to the reform period, the Green Revolution program was implemented to increase food production and intensify the use of technology in order to achieve rice self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the transformation of food security programs, such as the food estate initiative, has continued through various policies in response to demographic challenges and global food dynamics (Rahakbauw, 2025). Various food security projects that have been implemented are not only efforts to ensure food availability and increase production, but also reflect the political dynamics of national food policies that continue to evolve (Sutrisno, 2022). In practice, food security projects are often framed within development discourses aimed at improving production and economic efficiency. However, the social and ecological dimensions are often overlooked.

As strategic government programs, food security initiatives inevitably attract media attention. With different backgrounds and interests, the media highlight the environmental issues. These concerns include not only ecological degradation but also sociocultural disruption, which is represented, framed, and evaluated through demonizing discourse.. In this regard, mass media play an important and strategic role in shaping public perspectives on environmental issues as well as development policies, including food security programs, through the language choices they employ. Demonization is used to portray individuals, groups, or policies as dangerous, harmful, or even inhumane (Goffman, 1963; Said, 1979).

It can be identified through the use of emotional, provocative, and stigmatizing language that constructs certain moral or ideological judgments for readers (Hall, 1997).

In the context of mass media reporting on food security programs, demonization may influence how readers understand the relationship between food security, the environment, humans, the government, and corporations. In this sense, the language used in media discourse does not only describe ecological events but also shapes ecological awareness, social actions, and readers' attitudes. Therefore, investigating demonization by the mass media reporting on food security programs from an ecolinguistic perspective is important because it can reveal how language is used to construct, damage, or negotiate ecological relationships between humans and the environment (Fadli, 2021; Fill & Muhlhausler, 2004; Haugen, 1972; Stibbe, 2014, 2021).

Ecolinguistics as an interdisciplinary field has experienced a significant development in examining the relations of language, humans, and their environment. A body of research has been done to uncover any environmental issues through the use of metaphors, specific lexical choices, and the selection of discourse strategies (Nerlich & Koteyko, 2009; Xiong & Wang, 2023; Xue & Xu, 2021; Yuniawan, 2017). Various studies have shown that the media also play a role in shaping public perspectives on environmental issues, climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources carried out in the name of development.

Critical ecolinguistics is inherently interdisciplinary because it combines linguistic analysis, ecological perspectives, and critical discourse studies to investigate how language reproduces or challenges power relations and ecological ideologies (Norton & Hulme, 2019). The integration of ecolinguistics and critical discourse studies provides a framework for examining the ecological and ideological dimensions of discourse (Laili, 2008). Critical ecolinguistics focuses on how environmental discourse is produced and used to justify, assess, evaluate, or criticize various actions related to environment and society (Kumari et al., 2025; Mantiri & Handayani, 2018; Rijal, 2019; Suhandano et al., 2023; Yunanto et al., 2024; Yuniawan, 2017). Furthermore, research on demonization has been widely discussed and developed within psychology, sociology, and critical discourse studies, particularly in revealing and analysing various stigmatization practices directed at certain groups, authorities, political actors, religious groups, or public figures (Goffman, 1963; Said, 1979; van Leeuwen, 2018). Therefore, the eclectic perspective is considered suitable to be applied in revealing demonization on the environmental issue reporting.

One environmental issue that is interesting to study is food security in Indonesia, particularly the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) program. This food security program, located in Merauke, was initiated during the administrations of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo. The program has received both support and criticism, which has attracted public attention. Large areas of land that are not suitable for agricultural ecosystems have been used to develop this project. As a result, many studies have examined this program from different perspectives, including its physical and social impacts (Djaja et al., 2019; Ito et al., 2014), economic and political aspects (Lamonge, 2012; Shafhira, 2019), human rights issues (Suryani, 2016), gender and nature relations (Rifandini & Triguswinri, 2020), and genocide and neo-colonialism (McDonnell, 2021). The studies show that the Merauke food security project has many ecological, social, cultural, and political problems. The novelty of this research lies in analyzing demonization strategies in media discourse regarding MIFEE through a critical ecolinguistic perspective. Unlike previous research that focused more on policy impacts, this study reveals how media language choices construct ecological narratives that represent development, the environment, and indigenous peoples. Thus, this research not only expands critical ecolinguistics studies on food security but also makes a conceptual contribution by explaining how media discourse shapes counter-discourse to state food politics through the construction of ecological ideologies, environmental justice, and indigenous food sovereignty.

However, the studies mentioned above have not yet positioned language as the primary data source and unit of analysis. The use of language in food security reporting plays an important role in constructing representations of development programs, including through demonization as a discursive strategy. In addition, demonization of food security reporting using a critical ecolinguistics approach is still underresearched. Thus, This study aims at investigating how demonization in food security reporting in Merauke is used to construct ecological and ideological relations within mass media reporting discourse.

The study of demonization from a critical ecolinguistic perspective attempts to reveal how negative images of certain actors, policies, or environmental issues, are constructed and ecological narratives that can influence how humans perceive the environment are created. Media reporting on food security using linguistic units such as “Kala MIFEE *Hancurkan* Hutan Merauke dan Singkirkan Suku Malind” Greenpeace: 300 Ribu Hektare Hutan Papua *Rusak* Tiap Tahun” can ideologically portray power relations, ecological impacts, and representations of conflict between development, humans, and nature. These linguistic choices are certainly not neutral, as they may reflect the ideological position of the media in presenting issues of development and the environment (Hall, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 2010).

The analysis of demonization in food security reporting through a critical ecolinguistic approach attempts to demonstrate that discourse can contribute to either building or undermining public ecological awareness. The integration of these two approaches is used to examine and assess how language in the media can influence the public regarding environmental sustainability, Indigenous rights, policy, and the legitimacy of development (Stibbe, 2012, 2020, 2021). Based on this background, the research question is how demonization strategies are constructed in media coverage of the MIFEE program and how these strategies represent the relationship between development, the environment, and indigenous peoples from a critical ecolinguistic perspective. Specifically, this study aims to identify the forms of demonization used by the media and explain how linguistic choices construct ecological stories that support or oppose the country's development ideology and food politics.

METHOD

This study on demonization in food security news was designed in a qualitative research as it aims to understand meanings, ideologies, and power relations embedded in produced discourse. Demonization was identified through negative lexical choices, evaluative expressions, and ecological representations used in media discourse. In this research, the qualitative method is combined with a critical ecolinguistic approach. This approach is chosen because the study critically examines the relationship between language, the environment, and power, particularly in food security news produced by mass media (Laili, 2008; Stibbe, 2014, 2021). Furthermore, critical ecolinguistics is integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal how food security discourse constructs representations, ideologies, and specific practices (Fairclough, 1995; Laili, 2008; Norton & Hulme, 2019; Stibbe, 2014, 2021). Thus, in this study, food security discourse is viewed not merely as a communication tool, but as a social practice with ideological and ecological implications.

The data source of this study consisted of news articles on food security related to the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), obtained from Mongabay, an international media outlet focusing on environmental issues. Mongabay is relevant as a research corpus on demonization, ecological discourse, and critical ecolinguistics because it consistently focuses on issues of the environment, indigenous peoples, and ecological justice. Furthermore, Mongabay places nature and indigenous peoples at the center of its narratives and critiques development paradigms oriented toward resource exploitation. These characteristics make Mongabay a rich data source for examining demonization strategies and ecological discourse through a critical ecolinguistic perspective. The articles were collected from 2012 to 2024. Meanwhile, the data of this study were ascertained from instances of demonization in MIFEE-related food security news texts. The linguistic units of demonization included lexical items, phrases, clauses, or sentences.

The primary instrument of this research was the researcher. In this role, the researcher determined the criteria of demonization, identifies its forms, and interprets the ideological meanings present in food security news. The identification of demonization was based on criteria from critical ecolinguistic studies, such as negative labeling, the use of metaphor, and the portrayal of social actors as threats within food security discourse. In addition to the human instrument, this study also employed a supporting tool in the form of software, namely AntConc. This tool was used to identify lexical patterns and collocations associated with demonization in food security news.

The data were collected through a documentation technique allowing the researcher to access widely produced discourse representations by mass media. News texts can reflect dominant constructions of discourse on environmental issues, food security, and social actors (Bowen, 1997; Cresswell, 2014; Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection process involved three steps: (1) identifying instances of demonization in all news related to MIFEE food security, (2) collecting news

articles that contain demonization related to environmental issues, indigenous communities, corporations, and government policies, and (3) archiving the selected news texts in written form for analysis.

Data analysis in this study was conducted in two stages. First, intralingual analysis was used to examine the linguistic structures within news texts that contain demonization. At this stage, the analysis focused on lexical choices, phrases, and grammatical constructions that represent power relations in news discourse. Thus, intralingual analysis aimed to identify linguistic units within media texts (Hall, 1997; Stibbe, 2014). Second, extralingual analysis was employed to connect linguistic findings with broader social, ideological, and ecological contexts. At this stage, demonizing linguistic data were linked to discourse production, as well as to the interests of individuals, groups, governments, corporations, and media institutions, in order to uncover ecological implications. This analysis aimed to explain how linguistic units function in shaping ecological awareness and public perception of a program. The data in this study were validated through theoretical triangulation, integrating critical ecolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of demonization strategies, power relations, and ecological ideology in food security reporting (Fadli, 2021; Fairclough, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stibbe, 2021). Critical ecolinguistics was used to identify ecological stories and ecological values constructed through language, while CDA served as the primary framework for analyzing how language choices reproduce or challenge power relations and ideology in media discourse. Before conducting the discourse analysis, the data were first organized through repeated readings and thematic coding to identify patterns of demonization in MIFEE reporting (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis then follows the AWK procedure, which includes identifying discursive strategies, interpreting actor representations and power relations, and explaining the ecological ideology underlying the discourse construction. With this procedure, this study not only reveals how demonization is constructed linguistically but also explains how media language reproduces and constructs counterpoints to the state's development ideology and food politics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demonization as a Discursive Strategy in Critical Ecolinguistics

Analysis of MIFEE reporting shows that the media employed demonization as a discursive strategy to negatively portray the food security project. This strategy was characterized by the use of evaluative linguistic units, such as "destroy," "get rid of," "damaged," "torn down," and "squeezed." These lexical choices constructed the MIFEE project as causing environmental damage, marginalizing indigenous communities, and threatening the survival of the Papuan people.

The data also showed that demonization was directed not only at ecological impacts but also at the legitimacy of development. Reports presented the MIFEE project as raising moral, social, and ecological issues through the use of vocabulary that emphasized forest destruction, the loss of indigenous peoples' living space, and the continued clearing of natural forests.

The Representation of the Environment as a Living Subject

The analysis showed that the environment in MIFEE reporting was represented as a living subject, not simply an object of development. This representation is evident through the use of linguistic units such as destroying forests, causing suffering to residents, birds of paradise, biodiversity, food sources, and taking away. These language choices depict the environment as an entity experiencing suffering due to development activities.

Furthermore, the news coverage also portrays forests, endemic wildlife, and local foods as integral parts of the lives of indigenous peoples. Forest destruction is accompanied by the loss of biodiversity and the disruption of local food systems, thus positioning the environment as crucial to the sustainability of Papuan life.

Human Rights and Gastrocolonialism

The analysis shows that human rights issues are a key part of the construction of MIFEE's demonization. The news coverage highlights human rights violations, food crises, loss of access to livelihoods, and the hardships faced by the Marind Anim community as a result of the food security project.

The data also demonstrates changes in the local food system through the displacement of traditional foods by foods introduced through the food security program. This shift is presented alongside narratives about forest loss, reduced community access to food sources, and increasing social problems faced by indigenous peoples.

Discussion

Demonization as a Discursive Strategy in Critical Ecolinguistics

Demonization in mass media reporting on the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) is capitalized not only to construe a critical rhetoric but also to structure a systemized discursive mechanism representing the ideology of the media. The media employs this strategy to construct the food security initiative as being problematic in terms of moral, social, and ecological dimensions. From an ecolinguistic standpoint, discourse is not a neutral representation of reality but an active shaper of the "stories we live by." Discursive texts function as a medium through which relationships between humans, nature, and power are understood (Stibbe, 2015, 2021). By deploying demonization, the media contests hegemonic narratives, challenging the premise that environmental exploitation is an unavoidable price of economic progress within food security frameworks. This approach seeks to dismantle the anthropocentric and capitalistic logic underpinning the food estate, which positions nature as a mere reservoir of resources to be exploited without due consideration for ecological integrity, moral responsibility, or social equity (Dryzek, 2013). The following excerpts exemplify this phenomenon. (1) Kala MIFEE Hancurkan Hutan Merauke dan Singkirkan Suku Malind (001/M/21/10/2012). (2) Kawasan Dusun Sagu dan tempat penting bersejarah ikut dirusak dan dirobokkan (019/M/21/10/2012). (3) Fakta ini menunjukkan, keberlangsungan hidup masyarakat Papua makin terhimpit karena perizinan pembukaan hutan alam yang terus bergulir dari waktu ke waktu hingga kini (1053/M/07/06/2024).

The lexical choices in data (1), (2), and (3) illustrate the strategic function of demonization in shaping discourse. The lingual units employed do not merely convey emotional expression but operate as a media strategy in reporting on the food security project in Merauke. The verbs "*hancurkan*" and "*singkirkan*" in datum (1) cast the MIFEE project as a destructive force, an agent actively responsible for forest degradation and the marginalization of the Malind indigenous community. This representation reveals the power relations existing between the state, corporations, and local communities. Moreover, the project is depicted as morally and ecologically problematic. Through the lens of critical ecolinguistics, the construction of narratives such as these aims to create "stories we live by" that function to reject hegemonic development perspectives. The food estate project has conventionally been viewed as a technocratic solution advanced under the justification of addressing food crises (Stibbe, 2015, 2021). The selection of lingual units carrying negative and evaluative meanings indicates that demonization is deployed not implicitly but explicitly to articulate moral judgment against the government or corporations involved. Through such lexical choices, the actors associated with the MIFEE food security project are constructed as environmental destroyers and violators of moral principles, humanitarian values, and justice. When examined in relation to Critical Discourse Analysis, such practices can be characterized as a form of discursive delegitimization, involving systematic efforts to undermine the ideological authority of dominant parties through discourse, thereby revealing power asymmetries and policy contradictions (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Susan, 2007; van Dijk, 2008).

Datum (2) extends this pattern by depicting the destruction of historical sago plant areas. For indigenous Papuans, sago represents more than a local staple; it embodies ecological knowledge and cultural identity. The lexical choice *dirusak* and *dirobokkan* intensify the portrayal of the MIFEE project as a threat to both ecological sustainability and cultural heritage. This representation functions as a critique of anthropocentric and capitalistic development paradigms, wherein nature and indigenous lifeways are sacrificed for developmental objectives (Dryzek, 2013).

Datum (3) further reinforces this narrative through the clause *keberlangsungan hidup masyarakat Papua makin terhimpit*. This frames the food security project as being detrimental to the fundamental social order of Papuan society. The project is represented as the one which is more than just an incidental policy. It is instead framed as a systemized and engineered project detrimental to the social order and well-being of the indigenous people. The media thereby redirects the reader's attention from the narratives of development success to a critique of state policies that implicitly sanction the exploitation of Papua's natural and social landscapes. Such demonizing discourses serve to uncover

dominant narratives that normalize environmental and social degradation as inevitable collateral damage of development.

Collectively, data (1)-(3) illustrate a process of delegitimization directed at the MIFEE project. However, this differs from conventional political delegitimization. Whereas traditional CDA often focuses on power, class conflict, and ideology, critical ecolinguistics centers on ecological sustainability as its primary analytical concern. By framing the food security project through demonization, the media scrutinizes the moral legitimacy of development models that sacrifice ecosystems and community life systems. This represents a form of protest against development paradigms that fail to foster symbiotic relationships between human societies and their environment (Fadli, 2021; Fill & Muhlhausler, 2004; Stibbe, 2021). Furthermore, demonization in this context contributes to constructing counter-stories of modern development narratives that normalize monoculture, deforestation, and the dispossession of indigenous lands in the name of economic growth (Stibbe, 2015). In doing so, it places nature, local food systems, and indigenous people as entities entitled to protection and preservation.

Ultimately, demonization in mass media reports on MIFEE does not merely signify mass media opposition to the project; it embodies an ecologically-oriented discursive practice aimed at cultivating critical awareness of the public. It seeks to reorient the reader's perspectives from an exploitative development to sustainable, ecological and equitable development. These findings reinforce the analytical power of integrating ecolinguistics with CDA in revealing the ideological dimensions of environmental and food security discourses.

The Representation of the Environment as a Living Subject

Research findings indicate that the demonization in the mass media reports regarding the MIFEE food security initiative does not portray the environment merely as a passive object. From a critical ecolinguistic perspective, media discourse constructs an ecological narrative (the story we live) that shapes how readers understand the relationship between humans and the environment. Therefore, the representation of the environment in MIFEE news coverage is crucial for uncovering how the media frames nature as an entity with intrinsic value and an inextricable relationship to human life. Instead, the environment is constructed as a living subject, an entity that actively suffers adverse consequences resulting from human intervention justified under the guise of development. This representation is evident in a distinct linguistic shift: the discourse moves away from technocratic language to an ethical and ecological register. The following excerpts illustrate this transformation: (4) *MIFEE banyak merusak hutan dan menyengsarakan warga pemilik lahan.* (039/M/05/08/2012); (5) *Mana ada bird of paradise menari-nari di dahan sawit?* (533/M/02/09/2016); (7) *Deforestasi merenggut keanekaragaman hayati dan potensi sumber pangan di Papua lalu menggantikan dengan komoditas lain seperti beras yang jadi bagian dari proyek food estate, seperti proyek Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE).* (1036/M/07/06/2024).

The deployment of the verbs "merusak" and "menyengsarakan" in Excerpt (4) constructs the forests and Indigenous Papuan as entities directly subjected to the adverse impacts of the food security programs. This linguistic choice signifies a paradigm shift: the environment is no longer framed as an inanimate object, an empty space, or merely an economic resource. Instead, it is represented as an integral component of life relations that bears both moral and ecological consequences. From the perspective of critical ecolinguistic study, such representations function as a counter story, actively challenging the normalization of development narratives and disputing the prevailing perception that ecological degradation is a collateral damage.

The representation of the environment as a living subject is vividly realized through the rhetorical imagery of the "dancing Bird of Paradise." As an iconic species endemic to Papua, the Bird of Paradise is positioned here not merely as wildlife, but as an intrinsic element of the forest ecosystem, a habitat fundamentally incompatible with oil palm plantations. This form of representation aligns with what (Stibbe, 2021) terms "voicing the more-than-human world." It serves as a discursive strategy to restore agency and visibility to non-human entities that are frequently marginalized or silenced within anthropocentric development narratives. Consequently, the deployment of demonization in food security reporting functions as a critical mechanism to expose the ecological asymmetry between industrial food projects and the sustainability of non-human life systems.

Datum (6), the verb *merenggut* (to snatch/tear away) personifies deforestation, framing it as an act of violence committed against both biodiversity and the local food systems of Papuan communities.

The substitution of sago, the staple of Papuan, with rice signifies a constriction of ecological relationships and local food cultures. Through the lens of critical ecolinguistics, such discourse seeks to uncover “destructive stories” surrounding food homogenization and environmental exploitation, which are often justified in the name of national food security agendas (Dryzek, 2013; Stibbe, 2015).

From the perspective of ecolinguistic analysis, media coverage of food security project employing demonization can be understood as a linguistic strategy that reflects a modern dualistic worldview. This perspective is characterized by a stark separation between humans as primary subjects and nature as mere objects (Fill & Muhlhausler, 2004; Harré et al., 1998). The attribution of qualities to nature and the use of emotional nuances in food security reporting aim to encourage readers to perceive the environment as an integral part of an interconnected and interdependent life cycle. Employing such linguistic devices fosters empathy between humans and nature, while also sharpening the critique of development projects, particularly food security initiatives that frequently disregard ecological boundaries.

The representation of the environment as a living subject in the news coverage of food security projects also functions as a form of delegitimization of the mainstream discourse of sustainable development. This perspective aligns with the concept of weak sustainability, in which nature is reduced to natural capital that can be replaced by technology and other forms of economic capital (Dryzek, 2013). Based on the news coverage above, the media clearly rejects this assumption. The destruction of forests and the loss of sago as the staple food of Papuan people cannot be replaced either functionally or culturally. Instead, forests and sago are portrayed by the media as essential elements, not merely as instrumental values but as entities with intrinsic value for the Papuan community. This representation is highly significant in the context of the lives of Indigenous Papuan communities. The media shows that forests and sago are not always related to economic resources, but also represent identity and cultural wealth, spirituality, and the collective memory of the Papuan people. Environmental destruction ultimately triggers various forms of crises, including ecological, social, and cultural crises. Therefore, through the perspective of critical ecolinguistics, the discourse of food security is not only viewed in terms of production and economic issues, but also as a relational issue connected to the ecological, cultural, social, and ethical values of indigenous communities within development discourse (Stibbe, 2015, 2021).

The analysis also indicates that the representation of nature as a living subject is used by the media as a tool of resistance against anthropocentrism in development discourse. The positioning of nature as a suffering subject is also used to reevaluate the moral legitimacy of development that ignores ecosystems in pursuit of short-term economic growth. This demonization does not only represent ecological concern, but also serves as a way to shape ethical and ecological awareness within society.

The findings further indicate that the representation of the environment as a living subject in the discourse of MIFEE food security is not merely a linguistic or stylistic device, but also a discourse strategy within an alternative ecological narrative. Through this representation, the media attempts to renegotiate the paradigm of exploitative development toward a model of development that is ecologically sustainable, culturally respectful, and socially equitable.

Human Rights and Gastrocolonialism

Human rights and food security are directly related to the demonisation of the MIFEE program's food security narrative. The Marind Anim indigenous group is considered to have suffered systematic human rights violations due to deforestation and the displacement of local food systems. Here, it is clear that the media reconstructs the causal relationship between environmental, social, and cultural crises and development. Human rights and food security are closely related to the demonization of the food security narrative in the MIFEE program. The Marind Anim indigenous community is represented as the victim of systematic human rights violations resulting from deforestation, land grabbing, and the destruction of local food systems. Through these representations, the media establishes a causal relationship between ecological, social, and cultural crises and development policies. This demonization not only critiques the impact of MIFEE but also forms a counter-discourse to the country's food politics by rejecting gastrocolonial domination, namely the domination of the state and corporations over territories, food systems, and the sovereignty of indigenous peoples in the name of food security. Thus, the media shifts the dominant narrative of food security to one of ecological justice and indigenous food sovereignty. (7) *Inkuiri Ungkap Banyak Pelanggaran HAM Dera Masyarakat Adat di Kawasan Hutan*

(357/M/18/12/2014). (8) *Fakta, memunculkan krisis pangan bagi masyarakat lokal sekitar hutan* (013/M/21/10/2012). (9) *“Orang Malind yang kehidupan sangat tergantung pada tanah, kawasan hutan, padang dan rawa, mengalami kesulitan. Akses mereka terbatas dalam memanfaatkan sumber kehidupan, utama pangan,”* (191/M/25/07/2013)

The issues of Human Rights and food security are closely linked to the lives of local tribe, the Marind Anim (data 7, 8, and 9). The loss of forests and the collapse of local food systems not only depict ecological damage but also are constructed as structural HAM violations under the guise of policy. Demonization successfully builds a cause and effect relationship between food security projects and ecological problems, social crises, cultural issues, and horizontal conflicts. The nature and indigenous people suffer due to large-scale policies and development. This representation shows that food security projects are not only related to economic interests but also to humanitarian, social, and cultural issues (McMichael & Weber, 2024).

Data (8) and (9) are concerned about gastrocolonialism, a colonization system through food project systems (Udin et al., 2025). These data indicate that a food colonization system has occurred by imposing consumption patterns of dominant groups, severing local ecology, knowledge, and food security practices. The replacement of sago and other local protein sources with rice or other instant foods is a form of new colonialism manifested through food security program policies. The shift in food patterns through food security project policies is a form of new colonialism (García, 2022). The state and market needs become the main actors in controlling food production and distribution (Patel & Moore, 2017). Critical ecolinguistics views media language use as an ideological arena where power relations are produced and negotiated (Stibbe, 2021). The use of demonization in MIFEE food security program reporting serves as a form of symbolic resistance against colonization. Additionally, demonization is used to maintain an alternative narrative about the ecology and local indigenous culture.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that media coverage of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) constructs demonization as a systematic discursive strategy through language choices that represent the project as environmentally destructive, socially unjust, and negatively impacting indigenous communities. The analysis identifies eight main categories of demonization that collectively represent development as a cause of ecological degradation, human rights violations, threats to the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, and the weakening of local food sovereignty. Through these categories, the media reconstructs the relationship between development, the environment, and the Marind Anim indigenous peoples, positioning the environment as a living subject and indigenous peoples as those most impacted by state-initiated food security policies.

This research also shows that demonization functions not merely as a form of negative evaluation of the MIFEE program but also as a discursive strategy that challenges the dominant narrative of food security constructed by the state. Instead, the media constructs an alternative ecological narrative that places environmental justice, indigenous peoples' rights, and local food sovereignty as core values, while highlighting the social, ecological, and humanitarian consequences of industrial-based food development.

From a critical ecolinguistic perspective, these findings confirm that media discourse is an arena where language, power relations, and ecological ideologies are produced and negotiated. In this context, demonization functions as a counter-discourse that challenges the hegemonic and anthropocentric ideology of development in state food politics. Thus, this study shows that media language not only represents reality, but also plays a role in shaping public understanding of development that is more just, ecologically sustainable, and respects the rights of indigenous peoples.

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