

Pentadic analysis of environmental communication: a case study of East Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract This research hoped to find out the environmental communication practices in the management of the Wehea protected forest in Nehas Liah Bing Village, East Kutai, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, through the perspective of Kenneth Burke's Dramatism. This research sought human relations in performing symbolic actions by paying attention to the sources, limits, and paradoxes of using symbols, particularly regarding motives in communication actions and revealing discourse contestation among environmental rhetorics. This research used ethnographic communication methods. The data collection was conducted by observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of archival, textual, or visual data obtained from field research. The data was analysed using Kenneth Burke's Pentad analysis. The researchers conclude that four key actors are involved and six distinct scenes or phases in the cycle of drama related to environmental communication in Nehas Liah Bing Village. Among the four actors, three are environmental actors or rhetors, each with different motives and interests driving their involvement in establishing the Wehea protected forest. Nevertheless, they can collaborate to save the environment. This study's theoretical implication shows that dramatism as a new rhetorical theory can be used in environmental communication studies to explore the relationship between agencies, institutions, and power in certain situations or conjunctions involved in the establishment and management of Indigenous community-based protected forests.

Keywords: Dayak tribe; environmental communication; new rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development requires dialogic modes of communication, which are based on interactive and participatory approaches (GHARBAOUI et al., 2023; Ishola et al., 2024; Tabatabaei et al., 2024). Communication has the primary task of facilitating engagement at every level of society, particularly when managing the natural environment, which often arouses conflicts of interest (Fliert, 2014). Communication is at the core of democratic rights, to take action and act together in the environmental movement (Hansen & Cox, 2015, p. 131; Ivie, 2024). However, most research on environmental issues tends to overlook how local communities understand and describe their environment and their efforts to influence environmental policies. Moreover, language obstacles and limited access to local or regional languages remain significant challenges

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The Dayak Wehea tribe who live in Nehas Liah Bing Village (NLB), East Kutai, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, have a protected forest of 38,000 hectares, which is the former Forest Concession Rights (HPH) area of PT. Gunung Raya Utama Timber Industries (GRUTI) III and has been managed according to customary law since 2004. The journey of the Wehea community to obtain permission to manage protected forests was not easy; as a hunter-gatherer tribe that lives around the forest and relies on the forest and rivers to meet their needs and lives in a remote area, it did not make them escape development during the New Order. The New Order government was very centralistic and top-down, while the central government dominated the planning institutions and was exclusive. Planning was done uniformly, and regions had to refer to the planning made by the central government (Setia, 2023). Development in the modernisation paradigm is based on the ideology that science, technology, expertise, and education are the leading solutions to improve the weaknesses of a society (Hite & Seitz, 2021; Lie & Servaes, 2015). At this time, the communication approach used was mainly top-down, and the application of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory was used (Melkote, 2018; Rogers & Svenning, 1969).

The equal development efforts significantly impacted the Dayak Wehea community. The area their ancestors once controlled faced challenges due to the arrival of permits for logging companies and oil palm plantations. Logging operations began in the 1960s, followed by the establishment of oil palm plantations in 1982, initiated through the People's Core Plantation Project (PIR) managed by PT Perkebunan Nusantara VI (East Kalimantan Provincial Plantation Service, 2010). This land conversion process coincided with changes in the lifestyle of the Wehea community, leading them further away from the forest. As more outsiders arrived, particularly in Miau Baru at the end of the 1960s and during the transmigration programs of 1986/1987, the hunting and farming lands available to the Wehea people diminished (RPJMDES, 2019). The New Order government prioritised the transmigration program to ensure successful essential national development, aiming for optimal and equitable development (Pamungkas et al., 2025).

In 2002, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an international environmental NGO based in the United States, with the Faculty of Forestry at Mulawarman University and the Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA), conducted research in the HPH of GRUTI III. This timber industry company had ceased operations. The location was found to be part of the Wehea-Kelay landscape, a habitat for orangutans (*Pongo Pygmaeus*). Based on the results of this research, TNC wants to make it a Special Purpose Forest Area (KHDTK) as an orangutan protection area. In a report uploaded on its website titled Asia Pacific Conservation in a Defining Decade, Impact Report (2022), it is explained that orangutans are the focus of TNC's conservation mission and a symbol of TNC's commitment to people and nature in the world's third-largest tropical forest.

On the other hand, the Wehea Dayak Tribe, an indigenous community with historical ties to the Wehea protected forest area, wishes to return to managing the forest. When companies surrounded their territory, they found it difficult to access the forest, even to collect wood to build houses, find ritual needs, or hunt (Taq, 2021; Hasmadi, 2021). Seeing this fact, TNC, through the Community Development Division, approached and communicated with the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village, the Nehas Liah Bing Village Government, and the Wehea community in general.

The role of the government is inseparable in the journey of establishing and managing the Wehea protected forest. In this case, the village and district governments have played an essential role in advocating the establishment of protected forests so that the indigenous community can manage them. The village government proposed the former HPH GRUTI III area to become a Special Purpose Forest Area to the District Government for several reasons, namely: (1) The results of TNC research that the area is an orangutan habitat, (2) The desire of the village government to create area management, so that not all areas in Nehas Liah Bing Village become oil palm plantations, (3) The desire of the Dayak Wehea indigenous community to have their forest back (Penabulu Foundation, 2015).

The East Kutai District Government then brought this proposal to the Provincial Government. As a result, in February 2004 a meeting was held to present the pre-proposal for the management of the PT GRUTI III Ex-HPH area as a special purpose forest area to the East Kalimantan Provincial Government, which in later approved the proposal and sent an integrated team to conduct a field review.

The results of the review reported that, (1) in the PT Gruti III former HPH area there were no longer any management activities carried out by the company; (2) with relatively intact forest conditions, efforts to protect the area as an orangutan habitat were needed; (3) the area also functions as a supporter of the hydrological functions of the Skung River and Seleq River as the headwaters of the Wahau River in East Kutai Regency (Penabulu Foundation, 2015). Finally, the former HPH area of PT GRUTI III was designated as a protected forest whose management lies with the Regency Government, which is managed by the Wehea Protected Forest Management Agency, Keldung Laas Wehea Long Skung Metguen following the Regent Decree. Wehea Protected Forest consists of representatives from various groups and stakeholders of Wehea Protected Forest, including the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village, which then handed over the daily management to the Customary Institution by applying customary rules (Penabulu Foundation, 2015).

It is apparent that in the environmental communication process in Nehas Liah Bing Village, three ecological actors/rhetors have different motives for interpreting the forest. For the Wehea community, the forest is deeply significant; they believe it serves as a 'barn of life'. For the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the forest is an area that must be protected due to its role in orangutan conservation, as it is a vital orangutan habitat. Meanwhile, the East Kutai district government views the forest as an ecological area essential for hydrological functions. Each actor's understanding of the forest can be analysed through Kenneth Burke's drama theory, which refers to the motives or reasons behind human actions (Branaman, 2022; Kareem, 2025). Burke emphasises that understanding an individual's motives is crucial for analysing and uncovering the reasons behind their words and actions (Branaman, 2022; Burke, 1969).

Burke's dramatism seeks to understand the actions of human life as drama. Dramatism allows researchers to examine the object of study from multiple angles, conceptualising life as a drama and focusing critically on the actions performed by various players to reveal motives (West & Turner, 2021). Dramatism theory provides a framework for analysing the rhetorical discourse choices (verbal actions) of characters in the text and the reader's response to the text. By examining the use of language, we can discover the motives that drive people to act as another party (Johnson, 2025; Lazić, 2025).

For Burke, the actions performed by the human body are purposeful movements, meaning that humans deliberately move towards a goal that they have chosen. Communicative efforts help humans realize their ultimate goal. Burke uses the analogy of drama to illustrate everyday social reality; Burke argues that language paradoxically creates interdependent identities between people in the same way that characters in a play allow each other to act out their roles (Burke, 1969).

Burke's concept of dramatism is also seen in the phenomenon of land conversion into logging areas and oil palm plantations, which gradually makes the Wehea community have to travel long distances to find vacant lands to farm because the Dayak farming system is shifting cultivation. The reduction of land for farming, the loss of forests, and the difficulty in finding jobs have caused conflicts for individuals in the Wehea community. Another conflict arises when the Wehea community realises their identity will be lost because the forest is no longer there, and they can no longer find jobs. There is a desire to re-access the forest, but it is not easy because the knowledge and capacity of the Wehea community do not support it. Individuals experience continuous conflict, which results in suffering, and then, in their suffering, humans seek redemption to cleanse themselves of guilt (Burke, 1969).

In Indonesia, Pentad analysis and dramatism theory has been dominated by political communication studies (Ariadi et al., 2024; Moekahar et al., 2024; Naufal & Moekahar, 2024; Suparno, 2022), movie analysis (Martilova, 2024; Rianto, 2024), and social media content analysis (Rahayu, 2024; Reviyanti, 2023; Witjaksono & Setyono, 2024). Environmental communication studies require another perspective to answer criticism of the transmission model approach that cannot encourage community involvement (Flor, 2004). Previous studies, such as the essay 'Environmental Melodrama' by Steve Schwarze (2006), discuss the role of melodramatic rhetoric in environmental controversies. Schwarze argues that melodrama can reveal the moral dimensions of environmental issues, mobilise communities, and influence public decision-making. Another study by Kinsella and Mullen (2008) discusses the case of the downwinder community affected by a US government facility producing plutonium for use in nuclear weapons; melodramatic rhetoric serves to mobilise and unite community members. Meanwhile,

Burgy's thesis (2018) analyses social orientations and reveals the motives underlying the controversial discourse on solar energy policy in Nevada.

Indonesia's dearth of studies on environmental communication (Comfort & Park, 2018). Among 480 articles published in leading Indonesian communication journals, only 19 papers (3.9%) were identified as focusing on environmental communication (Rochyadi-Reetz & Wolling, 2023). No research explicitly examines the dynamics of environmental communication between various actors—including indigenous peoples, government, and non-governmental organisations- in managing protected forests in Indonesia, especially in Nehas Liah Bing Village, East Kalimantan. Kenneth Burke's Dramatic Pentad Analysis can be a practical approach to understanding how act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose interact in this context. This approach identifies motives and social orientations that underlie environmental communication discourses and practices in the Wehea Protected Forest and reveals the contestation of discourse between environmental rhetoricians.

METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic communication method is being used in this interpretive qualitative research. Qualitative research studies things in natural circumstances, trying to understand and interpret phenomena based on available meanings. Interpretative makes meaning of the daily experiences of individuals with their social behaviour (Lim, 2024) and looks at the way group members live a social life, which aims to document different processes through the appearance of objects in everyday reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 693)

The research was conducted in Nehas Liah Bing Village, East Kutai, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Nehas Liah Bing Village was chosen as the research location because it won 3rd place in the 2008 Schooner Prize Award in Vancouver, Canada. Its forest conservation management model was considered adaptive and aligned with current developments. This achievement also led to the Wehea Protected Forest receiving the Kalpataru Award directly from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2009.

This research focused on the forms of environmental communication by environmental actors in Nehas Liah Bing Village from Kenneth Burke's dramatism perspective. It looked for the motives of each environmental actor and the language they used to achieve their goals.

Data were collected using observation, interview, and documentation study techniques. Data was collected during 2021-2022. Informants were selected using purposive sampling. Informants were divided into three categories, such as: Wehea people, TNC Community Development, and East Kutai Regency Government. After that, the researcher set the following criteria: (1) residents of Nehas Liah Bing Village who are Wehea Dayak tribe, (2) have knowledge and understanding of the customs and culture of Wehea Dayak Tribe, (3) community leaders, (4) have interest in the customs of Wehea Dayak Tribe, (5) TNC workers who assist in Nehas Liah Bing Village, (6) Kutim Tourism Office who knows about the cultural tourism programme in Nehas Liah Bing Village.

Documents used are: Nehas Liah Bing Village Profile in 2018, The preparation of Village Medium Term Development Planning (RPJMDes) documents for the period 2019-2024 of Nehas Liah Bing Village, Wehea Ethnic Civilisation History Book by Mansyur Bit sing (community leader of Nehas Liah Bing Village), writing by the Customary Chief of Nehas Liang Bing Village, Ledjie Taq entitled Brief History of Wehea Tribe and the Origin of the Arrival of Kayan Umaq Lekan Tribe in Wehea River (Wahau), and booklet Lomplai, Traditional Feast of Wehea Dayak produced by East Kutai Regency Youth, Sports and Tourism Office.

The researcher used several recording models, namely condensed accounts, expanded accounts, fieldwork journals, and the researcher's analysis and interpretation notes, which contain efforts to integrate various data obtained during fieldwork.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To explain the cycle of dramatism that occurs in Nehas Liah Bing Village in the process of environmental communication, especially in the management of Wehea protected forest, the researchers used the Pentad method created by Burke to understand symbolic activity.

The pentad method consist ofed of five points, including act (what is being done), scene (under what circumstances or situation the action is performed), agent (what is being done), agency (in what way does it do it) and purpose (for what purpose), in 1968, Burke added a sixth

point, attitude. However, people still call it the Pentad analysis (Hagen-Gates, 2025; Mingua-Lopstain, 2025; West & Turner, 2021). In this study, the researchers only used 5 elements of Pentad. The dramatistic perspective implies a focus on the motives for human action. Burke argues that language (and the symbolic domain in general) is the foundation of human action, since language is the most basic means of symbolically communicating their ideas of reality to one another (Landes, 2023). So the pentad is intended as a tool to analyse the motives that a person presents in his discourse (Golembiewski et al., 2024; Jarmolińska, 2024; Perinbanayagam, 2024). The researcher divided the dramatism cycle that occurs in Nehas Liah Bing Village into six scenes, as followed:

Scene one: The New Order development phase and marginalisation of Wehea Dayak Tribe

Though New Order development is a valuable change towards a social and economic system that is decided as the will of a nation (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971), the development process has negative impacts. The study found development has caused environmental degradation and marginalised the Wehea Dayak Tribe.

Forest exploitation occurred during the reign of Soeharto's New Order, which issued the Basic Forestry Law No. 5 of 1967 concerning the introductory provisions of forestry. This legal product became the basis for private companies to encroach on forests and compete to obtain Forest Concession Rights (HPH) permits (Nabandan, 2004). Since then, during the period 1967-1980, 519 HPHs have been recorded as having been issued with a concession area of around 53 million hectares. In the East Kutai area, a logging company entered around 1967. Then, in 1982, a palm oil company entered, which caused local communities to no longer have access to the forests around their settlements.

TNC's community development team reported that when the TNC-Indonesia team arrived in Nehas Liah Bing village, three large palm oil companies were already operating in the area. However, the Wehea people did not receive any benefits, such as access to the job market. When they did secure positions at these companies, they only worked as manual labourers or security guards. This is large because the overall quality of human resources in Nehas Liah Bing village remains low; many residents lack skills in computer operation and have a low level of education (See Table 1).

Although the development of the New Order was a helpful change towards a social and economic system that was decided as the will of a nation (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971), the development process had negative impacts. This research found that development had caused environmental degradation and marginalised the Dayak Wehea Tribe.

Table 1. Cycle of dramatism scene I

Scene	Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
The New Order Development Phase and Marginalisation of Wehea Dayak Tribe	Central Government	Top-down development communication	Granting land use licenses to companies	Increasing state income and equitable development

Source: Author processed, 2024

Scene two: Phase of palm oil company attempting to invite Dayak Wehea community to plant palm oil

In scene one, the presence of palm oil companies tends not to involve the community significantly in the development process. This is reflected in the minimal attention to improving the quality of local human resources (HR) so that local people do not get direct benefits from the development of the industry (TNC's community development, 2022).

The communication carried out by the company to the community in 2011 used a press agency approach focused on promotional and publicity efforts (TNC's community development, 2022), which aimed to gain attention and instil a common perception of the benefits of palm oil. The traditional community, the Dayak Wehea Tribe, was positioned as a party that had to change according to the wishes of the organisation and not vice versa because the company had not considered the wishes, conditions, or needs of the community (Childers, 1989; Lattimore, 2010).

Village Head, Kristian Hasmadi, admitted that he had been invited by one of the palm oil companies to conduct a comparative study of a palm oil company in Lampung. This kind of trip is also one of the ways that the company tries to please the opinion leaders as a means of

entertainment apart from providing information about palm oil. By identifying the social conditions of the Nehas Liah Bing Village community, the company determined an approach that could benefit the company. The use of rhetoric developed by the company lures welfare and modern values, which represent the motivation to pursue one's own success and dominance over others or gratification for oneself (Lie & Servaes, 2015).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) or community development management carried out by companies before 2011 has not emphasised strengthening HR capacity but relies more on material solutions. These efforts can gradually replace society's life structure, values, and behaviour (Melkote, 2018; Rogers & Svenning, 1969), which initially depended on forests and planting rice in shifting fields to rely on oil palm (See Table 2).

Table 2. Cycle of dramatism scene II

Scene	Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
Phase of Palm Oil Company Attempting to Invite Dayak Wehea Community to Plant Palm Oil	Corporation	Press Agency and Two-Way Asymmetrical	Involving Wehea Dayak opinion leaders	The leitmotif: Dayak Wehea tribe changes livelihoods and patterns of life

Source: Author processed, 2024

Scene Three: The phase of realising the threat of losing one's identity

After the second phase, the land conversion to oil palm is very high. The 2019 NLB RPJMDES (Village Medium Term Development Plan of Nehas Liah Bing) explains that there is a division of clusters based on regional characteristics between other areas of community farming and community plantations with an area of oil palm land of ± 1200 hectares, while other commodities are only complementary, such as rubber plants ± 32 ha, coconut ± 1.2 ha, rambutan ± 1 ha, mango ± 1 ha and agarwood ± 5 ha. Most of the community farming areas previously planted with rice (dry land) have been converted into community plantation areas planted with oil palm, both independent oil palm land and through partnership development programs (plasma).

The data indicates that the conversion of land to oil palm is one of the decisive factors influencing residents to no longer extend farms. Strengthened by the data in the village profile, the increase in the community's economy comes from 47% of oil palm plantations and 29% from partnership plantations with third parties. In comparison, only 13% comes from agriculture (permanent farming).

These facts has caused anxiety and pressure on Kristian Hasmadi, who sees that the company has destroyed the forest in the Dayak Wehea Tribe area, drastic lifestyle changes, long distances when looking for ritual materials, difficulty in getting work in the company, and most importantly, the Wehea community is never considered equal are negative things, which arise when people see their place or existence in social order and are the result of a mismatch in the expectations built by the Wehea community when the company entered because humans are susceptible to failure (West & Turner, 2021). In this phase, Kristian is an agent who represents the Dayak Wehea Tribe in understanding the truth that threatens the Dayak Wehea Tribe. Kristian felt guilty after completing the identification procedure, bolstered by his experience during a comparative study of Lampung conducted by a palm oil company and his reflections on the state of society at the time. Since Kristian saw only palm oil plantations on the journey and no woods in the area, he reasoned that the Dayak Wehea Tribe, whose identity is reliant on the forest, would suffer significantly if this were to occur in his community.

Then came Kristian's rhetorical efforts. In a meeting with Wehea Dayak leaders, Kristian conveyed his desire for the Wehea community to be able to access the forest again. The desire for the Wehea community to have a beautiful forest again motivates Kristian to perform an act in the form of Praxis, the motive to do something, namely by holding discussions with traditional leaders and the community in Nehas Liah Bing Village so as to unite feelings based on the same values that are believed.

Then, the idea of gaining rights to the forest received support. The symbols/language that Kristian uses to present his goals are the result of filtering experiences in social life through a terministic screen. Each human filters information and experiences to form an interpretation of reality. Humans see experiences and explain experiences through special filters according to

beliefs (Aji et al., 2023). Kristian, as a Wehea Dayak tribe, restores the experiences and values embraced by Wehea ancestors and presents them back to the Wehea community.

Kristian describes the condition when an area no longer has forests so that the Wehea people can get an idea of what happens when the forests are completely gone. The most important part is that Kristian reminds the Dayak tribe of their identity as a tribe that needs forests.

However, it was not only the rhetorical persuasion of Kristian as the Village Head that made the leaders support the pan, but also their shared idealistic identification as part of the Wehea Dayak Community. Forests have an important value for the Wehea community, passed down by their ancestors as a source of life. The forest as the granary of life, provides various needs for the Wehea community, especially for performing rituals, the ritual materials needed can only be found in the forest (material identification).

The customary values that Kristian raised can be an instrument (agency) to achieve goals mixed in rhetoric or use of language. Through language, Kristian has united the Wehea people to have the same understanding (Andersen, 2023; West & Turner, 2021). After the elders and traditional leaders have the same knowledge, the Wehea people will slowly be brought into the same mindset because of the role of elders and traditional leaders as opinion leaders (Silva Dos Santos et al., 2024). This is the purpose that Kristian wants to achieve.

It is hoped that an agent will emerge in the environmental communication process, namely the Wehea Dayak community, which certainly has an ulterior motive in its plot that will form a drama. Guilt-redemption cycle is the root of all rhetoric (Bloomfield & Rice, 2023). Burke believes that the final motivation of all actors is to cleanse themselves of the guilt they experience. In this case, the actor is Kristian, the village head of Nehas Liah Bing. Kristian's act is to make the Wehea people aware of the environmental crisis they are experiencing and the possibility of the extinction of the Wehea Dayak customs, which also means the loss of the Wehea Dayak identity. The Wehea community also conveyed this to TNC.

In this scene, the Wehea Dayak Tribe was excluded from the development process, and the government seized all the land and distributed it to government and private companies. As a victim (victimage), the Wehea Dayak Tribe tends to blame the company and the government (Scapegoat) for excluding them (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022, p. 14), so that they cannot access the forest and are marginalised until they finally the initial agent is able to unite the voice of the Wehea community. It can be seen that the motive of Kristian's symbolic action is for the Wehea Dayak Tribe to continue to have a forest that can be accessed by the community and for the benefit of the community (See Table 3).

Table 3. Cycle of dramatism scene III

Scene	Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
The phase of realizing the threat of losing identity as Wehea Dayak Tribe	Kristian (Nehas Liah Bing Village Chief)	Holding a meeting with traditional leaders and elders to discuss the issue of the impact of forest loss, and to remind them of the Wehea Tribe who live in harmony with and depend on the forest.	Customary values about forests	The leitmotif: Dayak Wehea tribe can access the forest again. Motive in this scene: Equalizing the understanding of traditional leaders and elders about the importance of the forest.

Source: Author processed, 2024

Based on what has been described in scenes I and II, the environmental problems seen in media coverage as a form of environmental communication that emerges in the West are different from what happens and is experienced by a community directly affected by the environmental crisis, through impacts on livelihoods, health, and the loss of their cultural and spiritual values (Takahashi et al., 2021, p. 6). This is experienced by the Dayak Wehea Tribe, who find it difficult to access the natural resources around them, leading to changes in livelihoods and loss of identity.

Scene Four: The powerless phase

The next scene is when the Wehea Tribe does not receive support from the government and does not know the best way to fulfil their wish to manage the forest. As they try to find a way to fulfil their wish, Kristian tries to explain to the villagers that if the village does not have a forest, it will have a negative impact on them. This unified understanding was thought to facilitate the next step.

The motive in this scene is still the same as the first scene, but the purpose is how he finds a way to fulfil his motive and make the Wehea people understand his desire. Kristian socialises with Nehas Liah Bing villagers both formally and informally about the importance of the forest. The tool used by Kristian in his action is trying to convey in simple language so that the Wehea people understand the purpose he wants to convey.

From the actions taken by Kristian to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of having a forest area, the reality that the Wehea Dayak Tribe is now aware of the importance of having a forest again and together realising it, until finally for the next scene the actor has changed from an individual to a group of Wehea Dayak Tribe (See Table 4).

Table 4. Cycle of dramatism scene IV

Scene	Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
Phase has no power	Kristian (Nehas Liah Bing Village Chief)	Conducted socialisation to the residents of Nehas Liah Bing Village	Simple language	Making villagers understand the importance of forests.

Source: Author Processed (2024)

Scene Five: The nature conservancy's arrival phase as a means of clearing Wehea Dayak Guilt

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a global environmental nonprofit from the United States, has named Indonesia as one of the countries in the Asia Pacific that TNC's conservation programme is targeting. East Kalimantan is one of the targets of the programme, as mentioned in a report uploaded on the website, entitled Asia Pacific Conservation in a Defining Decade, Impact Report. Orangutans are the focus of the conservation mission and symbolise TNC's commitment to people and nature in the world's third-largest tropical forest.

In 2002, TNC conducted research (act) in the PT GRUTI III ex-HPH area together with the East Kalimantan Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BKSDA) and the Mulawarman University Faculty of Forestry and found that the area was an Orangutan habitat that stretched into the Bureau Regency area. This resulted in the idea (purpose) of making the area a Special-Purpose Forest Area.

TNC recognised that there was a local community that used to inhabit the area, the Dayak Wehea Tribe, which is currently divided into 6 villages. However, the area is included in the administration of Nehas Liah Bing Village. When TNC approached and communicated with the Wehea people to convey its goal to protect the area and encourage it to become a KHDTK, it can be said that TNC was transferring information to convey instrumental goals related to the environment to the Wehea Dayak leaders (Flor, 2004; Pezzullo & Cox, 2022).

In this scene, TNC is the actor, while the Wehea Dayak Tribe is the audience. The results of the discussion revealed another reality that the Wehea Dayak Tribe has a desire to get the right to access the forest again as before when the company came.

Based on this, TNC coordinated with the Regency Government (act) and found a solution to collaborate between the Regency Government and the community in its management (agency), because the regulation at that time was that the authority to manage protected forests was in the Regency Government. Finally, after a long process, the Wehea Protected Forest was inaugurated. After it was inaugurated, the Wehea Protected Forest Management Agency (BP-HULIWA) was formed, involving many parties with the Wehea Dayak Community through the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village as the implementer in the field using Wehea Customary rules TNC's motivation to take the above actions is to protect Orangutan habitat in accordance with TNC's programme concerns in Indonesia.

TNC's presence answered the Wehea Dayak Tribe's inability to obtain forest management rights when trying to manage their own forest. TNC was present as an actor who

provided a means for the Wehea Dayak Tribe to purge their guilt and offered a form of redemption that could be done by the Wehea community by managing a protected forest that was confirmed with a customary oath in 2004 and named Keldung Laas Wehea Long Skung Metgueen.

The customary oath taken by the Wehea Dayak Tribe is a form of constitutive environmental communication that binds the Wehea community through the values stated and agreed upon, so that in principle, they are subject to protect the Wehea protected forest area, which in turn has an impact on communities outside Wehea who must also obey this customary decision (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022). Customary oaths become a means of communication that is built to bring back shared beliefs and a form of community maintenance (Carey, 2009).

Not only that, TNC also strengthens understanding through formal and informal discussion processes (dialogue) about forest protection efforts to the Wehea community in order to minimise pressure on protected forest areas, this is a form of pragmatic environmental communication (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022), and also a form of attitude from the actions taken. The desire to legalise an area to be managed must definitely have an audience with the government as the holder of policy and administration. For this reason, there is a role for the local government in confirming protected forests so that indigenous peoples can manage them as social communities at the site level (See Table 5).

Table 5. Cycle of dramatism scene V

Scene: The Nature Conservancy's arrival phase as a means to purge the Wehea Dayak tribe's guilt.			
Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
The Nature Conservancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting research in the former HPH GRUTI III area. - Coordinate and dialogue with TNC - Coordinate with district government, province, and Ministry of Environment and Forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration between the District Government and the community in its management - Strengthening understanding through discussion processes both formal and informal (dialogical) about efforts 	Make the ex-HPH area a Special Purpose Forest (KHDTK) to save orangutan habitat
Dayak Wehea Tribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue with TNC regarding the wishes of the Wehea Dayak Tribe - Taking direction from TNC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting with traditional and community leaders. - Progress related socialisation to the community 	Gaining legality to manage the forest
District and Provincial Environmental Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage the administration required in applying for a change of function of the area - Coordinate and dialogue with TNC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hearing with the ministry and environmental actors of Nehas Liah Bing Village 	Obtain Ministry approval to change the functional status of the area from production forest to protection

Source: Author Processed (2024)

Scene Six: Wehea p[rotected forest management phase and use of environmental services

The Wehea Dayak tribe consists of various instruments, namely the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village, the Village Government, Petkuq Meuhey (PM) or Forest Ranger, and Wehea residents (agent), who conduct various forms of environmental communication in the management of protected forests and environmental conservation efforts (act). During the inauguration of the protected forest, the Wehea Dayak Tribe, led by the Wehea Customary Chief of Nehas Liah Bing Village, took a customary oath and ritual to inaugurate two statues of ancestors who used to live and control the area, namely Hong Nah and Jot Blie, who are believed to protect the area. Customary oaths and rituals are constitutive models of communication. A communication model that conceptualises communication as a constitutive process that generates and reproduces shared meaning (Craig, 1999). So that there is a sense of attachment as a Wehea Dayak tribe to protect and not disturb this forest area.

After the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village was officially appointed as a member of the Protected Forest Management body and entrusted with customary management and supervision (scene), the motive to reclaim the forest as the identity

of the Dayak Tribe was achieved, resulting in a new motive to protect the area and introduce the protected forest to the public.

Then the Wehea Customary Institution made a customary regulation (agency) as outlined in the Nehas Liah Bing Village Customary Decree on the Protection and Limited Utilisation of Keldung Laas Wehea Long Skung Metgween which must be obeyed by anyone who is in the protected forest area, both Wehea people and outside Wehea. The creation of this regulation is a form of environmental communication that is pragmatic, meaning that the message or information conveyed is practical to convey instrumental goals (Peeples & Murphy, 2022; Pezzullo & Cox, 2022).

Whenever visitors come to the protected forest, the customary institution will perform a ritual asking for safety led by the customary leader. During the ritual, the traditional leader will call out 'Juy', which comes from the word 'Meng Juy', which is an appeal to God, when this call is used, it means that the prayer climber is very pleading. There will also be mention of 'Ta Nyiey Ta Wea', which means God Who Protects and Controls. Prayers are verbal language symbols used by humans to communicate, so Burke said humans are symbols using animals (Branaman, 2022).

The ingredients for the ritual are a rooster, a native chicken egg and lekoq keptiaq (a series of offerings to ancestral spirits). The chicken is slaughtered, split open at the abdomen and left gutted, with the egg placed in Tel Kiak, while the lekoq keptiaq is placed on the ground below Tel Kiak. After the prayer ritual, visitors are given bead bracelets made from strands of red thread with intermittent black and red beads. The red bead symbolises the meaning of health and safety, the black bead means that the devil does not interfere, while the red thread means being protected from all demons and devils. Ritual materials and bead bracelets are nonverbal symbols used by the Wehea Dayak Tribe to communicate with the surrounding nature, other creatures, and events. This is in accordance with Burke's opinion, namely when humans use symbols to act (West & Turner, 2021).

Petkuq Meheuy, who serves as a forest ranger, also conducts environmental communication to visitors who come by explaining the customary rules that must be obeyed while in the protected forest, as well as campaigns about the environment, including informing the functions of protected forests for humans and other living things and why they must protect them. In this activity there is two-way communication between Petkuq Meheuy and visitors.

Visitors can also participate in protected forest management through a tree adoption programme. To support sustainable natural resource management, communication in the context of environmental issues requires strategies and methods that accommodate the need to increase knowledge and engagement (Fliert, 2014). Therefore, all actors involved in protected forest management must implement various forms of communication accordingly.

Along the way, TNC together with the Customary Institution and Village Government (actors) tried to publicise that in Indonesia there is a Wehea protected forest which is managed by custom and has a diversity of flora and fauna as well as orangutan habitat as an endangered and protected animal, to be recognised and bringing in visitors from within the country and abroad. News coverage is one of the ways (agency) actors achieve their goals. News coverage of the conservation activities of the Wehea Dayak Tribe is a model of transmission communication. Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages or transferring information from one mind to another (Craig, 1999, pp. 124–125).

The tourism office made efforts to improve the human resource capacity of the Wehea community so that tourists are comfortable visiting Bob Jengea or the protected forest. HR improvement is carried out by organising the certification of local guides by the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP) and homestay management training.

The increasing recognition of Lom Plai as a cultural tourism attracts many tourists every year, but the only drawback is that the Customary Institution and Village Government cannot set an exact date for the peak event (Bob Jengea) due to customary rules that cannot be violated. The development of communication technology such as the emergence of social media with various platforms, makes information about the Wehea Dayak Tribe, conservation efforts and protected forest management, as well as Lom Plai widely published; this fosters a sense of pride as a member of the Wehea community, so that every year the enthusiasm of the Wehea community to participate in this activity is increasing and the younger generation is also proud to be involved (See Table 6).

Table 6. Cycle of dramatism scene VI

Scene: Wehea Protected Forest Management Phase and utilization of Environmental Services			
Agent	Act	Agency	Purpose
Dayak Wehea Tribe (Nehas Liah Bing Village Customary Institution, Village Government, Petkuq Meuhey, Wehea Residents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish Petkuq Meuhey/ Rangers - Improve the bargaining position of the Wehea community - Utilizing environmental services through nature and cultural ecotourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educating Wehea residents and tourists about the forest - Creating customary rules for Wehea's protected forest - Making the Lom Pai traditional ritual a tourist destination - Applying customary values in protected forest management 	Preservation of Wehea protection forest
The Nature Conservancy (NGO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the bargaining position of the Wehea community - Improve the human resources of the Wehea community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dialogue with the Wehea community to introduce the local wisdom of the Lom Pai ritual to the wider community. - Promote the protected forest and Lom pai ritual at Local, national and international levels. 	Preserving the habitat of orangutans, Wehea people continue to preserve the forest.
District Government; Tourism Office	Increase tourist visits to Nehas Liah Bing Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote protected forest destinations and Lom Pai traditional rituals as cultural tourism. - Conduct training to improve the human resource capacity of the community. 	Increase alternative economy for the community and increase tourist visits.

Source: Author processed, 2024

We can understand the practice of environmental communication by looking at society through the lens of public space (Doudaki & Carpentier, 2025). The public sphere is defined as the arena of social life, a space where humans have the capacity to form public opinions that influence society (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022).

Public space represents a conception of open space where people can exchange discourse on matters of mutual interest. As individuals, members of the public consume information and communicate about social issues that can develop their mindsets (Pezzullo & Cox, 2022), but certain mindsets and identities do not necessarily determine actions, requiring drivers such as language used as a symbolic vehicle to drive actions (Burdy, 2018; Burke, 1969).

The former HPH GRUTI III area is an object that invites the presence of agents with different interests and certainly presents a formed social reality which is then negotiated, contested, and understood through the use of language (rhetoric) and communication, which then influences the decisions made by the actors. The rhetorical process arises from the actors' identification of other actors who create drama in an effort to reach an agreement (Johnson, 2025; Suparno, 2022).

Burke does point to identification as a key term in rhetoric, which today is a very common word and is interpreted as a way of recognising a particular situation or object (Suparno, 2022; Zappen, 2009).

For Burke, placing rhetoric as persuasion can only be realised if there is a identification process, such as by looking for similarities and differences between the communicator and the audience. When actors recognise each other and see a common interest, they will exchange elements in the communication process, then the rhetoric used can build a social community by allowing people divided by opposing interests to co-substantiate with each other (Schmitt et al., 2022; Zappen, 2009).

The co-substance in question is the existence of similarities between actors, such as the similarity of sensations and the similarity of ideas that arise from the communication process that occurs because each party identifies so that it reflects acting together (Suparno, 2022), as though the phenomenon seen in this study shows that there is cooperation between the Wehea people, NGOs, the government and companies in the establishment and management of HULIWA despite having different motives for the forest area. However, what needs to be underlined is that co-substance can occur when the interests of each actor merge or when they feel and believe that their interests can merge. Burke's rhetoric needs to be used as identification because people are often at odds and thus divided from each other. Therefore, identification is a compensation for the division of interests to be combined (Suparno, 2022; Zappen, 2009).

There is a research on environmental communication in Indonesia titled 'Dialectic of Environmental Communication in Indonesian Conservation Areas' (Kamil et al., 2020). The research aims to identify the dialectics of communication regarding conflicts that occur between the government and environmental activists in Indonesian conservation areas. Using environmental communication studies with relational dialectic theory, transactional, and collaborative approaches, this research reveals that conservation conflicts in Indonesia occur due to ineffective communication between the government, stakeholders, and the community. Conflict of interest over the environment is a phenomenon that has emerged in various regions in Indonesia and has been proven by academics through research reports and mass media coverage.

This phenomenon raises the question of how to resolve conflicts between actors who have an interest in accessing the environment, in this research refers to conservation forests and offers a communication model with a transactional communication approach that emphasises shared meaning, a common frame of reference to create a shared understanding between the government and the community, principled negotiation, non-litigation negotiation approaches, and dialogical communication. Building communication across sectors, ministries, stakeholders, and community collaboration by applying the principle of mutual trust in order to create collaborative communication (Kamil et al., 2020).

The solution provided can be refined with Burke's dramatism approach by seeking identification and co-substance to persuade audiences to perform specific actions through the desire that the communicator arouses (Suparno, 2022). Communicators can develop identification and co-substance in very diverse and open directions and types and can consider the ideal, ethical, and material grounds that encourage a person to take action through persuasion (Gass & Seiter, 2022). For example, the language used by Kristian as the village head to the Wehea people to begin to understand that the village is facing environmental problems by presenting the identity of the Wehea tribe as a tribe that relies on the forest but now no longer has access to the forest. Evoking group identity through his statement is a rhetoric or persuasive effort that includes identification and carrying the ideology of the Wehea Dayak Tribe. It is easier to say that, if the communicator is a village leader, that's why Kristian started a dialogue with traditional leaders and persuaded them to speak out about the threat of forest loss and tribal identity, this was done to pursue idealistic interests.

In particular, this orientation corresponds to Burke's concept of dialectical-rhetorical transcendence that has been developing for more than twenty years, starting from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s (Zappen, 2009, p. 281).

In rhetoric, it is dialectical and rhetorical as well as dialogical and mythical, a meeting of rhetorical partisans in a dialogical exchange that dialectically leads to higher-level generalisations represented in mystical images through the power of poetic imagination. Kristian enters the space of transcendence by re-presenting the spiritual or cultural values passed down by ancestors through rituals and understanding of the environment (Bawi, 2025; Nasri et al., 2024). This dialogical exchange can lead to 'pure persuasion' presented in ritual performances that appear to have no persuasive intent or effect and as a final identification step through mysticism and poetic imagination (Burgu, 2018; Burke, 1969; Zappen, 2009).

This dialectical-rhetorical transcendence is important to rhetorical theory because it challenges rhetoric as a socially responsible endeavour to see not individual discourses alone but individual discourses in relation to each other messaging for action as well as studying these discourses, and thereby intervening by seeking not only to persuade others in their own best

interests, but also to create community interests that transcend ideology and individual and group interests. (Zappen, 2009).

The use of this approach also occurred in research on the Solar Panel controversy (Burgy, 2018), which in its analysis stated that the advert made by Citizens for Solar and Energy Fairness (CSEF), which is an extension of NV energy, uses an ideology of mysticism built on religious or moral grounds (Zappen, 2009). It turns out that even in the West, this concept of transcendence is still effectively used by emphasising that human actions are good if they are in line with moral goodness or divine guidance, so advertisements are made to communicate moral goodness (Burke, 1969).

When viewed from the data presented in chapter IV related to conflicts between communities and companies that occurred in the Nehas Liah Bing Village area. This explains that there is no alignment between the opening of massive investment by the government and employment opportunities for the community around the company so that it cannot encourage community welfare. So that open investment that is not adequately controlled can actually torment residents. Moreover, development carried out with a technological approach and massive clearing of forest land for industry negatively impacts ecology.

Environmental and forestry issues have actually become global issues (Batmunkh et al., 2022; Dryzek, 2022; Harrinkari et al., 2025; Hite & Seitz, 2021) and discussions between countries that foster and present various types of programmes for the benefit of the environment and climate, because environmental damage hurts climate change that affects the safety of the earth and its inhabitants. Public communication on climate change as well as the question of how to communicate effectively has risen sharply and become one of the main public and political concerns today (Cole et al., 2025; Hansen & Cox, 2015; Mede et al., 2025; Pauw et al., 2022).

Environmental problems spurred TNC's presence in East Kutai based on the results of previous research, the no man's land ex HPH GRUTI III became attractive to TNC because it was per the objectives of its programme to save orangutan habitat, but it turned out that in the area there was a Wehea tribe that had historical ties to the area, so agents from TNC traced and learned about this tribe because it had an interest in the area, this was an identification process carried out by TNC. TNC then persuaded the Wehea community to manage the area, this is an effort to accommodate two interests so that each benefit from the agreed solution.

The rhetoric shown is a process of communication through signs towards the identification and co-substance of the desire for the forest area, the Wehea tribe by being able to access and manage the forest again for ritual needs, while TNC can ensure that the area which is the habitat of orangutans is maintained and there are those who protect it by continuing to assist, because TNC is aware that the human resources of the Wehea people must continue to be improved in order to reduce threats to the sustainability of HULIWA. TNC's act of persuasion is influenced by the nature of the context or situation in which it occurs and depends on the target audience (Suparno, 2022).

TNC as an NGO, it must certainly invite the government as a policy holder, while for the government of course can no longer turn a blind eye to the environmental problems being faced by Indonesia, as a developing country that is pounded with accelerated development, it certainly produces negative effects. For this reason, based on the results of research conducted by TNC, there was communication between TNC and the government to find solutions so that the no man's land ex HPH can become a protection area for the flora and fauna in it. TNC also became a bridge between the community and the government so that the Wehea community is included in managing HULIWA as a social community at the site level.

What TNC did by embracing these two agents was a tactic and strategy to influence and persuade the two agents to work together to protect the former GRUTI III HPH area, which was eventually legalised as a Protected Forest.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that environmental communication among stakeholders in Nehas Liah Bing Village has developed around the establishment and management of the Wehea Protected Forest. This phenomenon emerged after the New Order era, following the arrival of corporations in the area due to government-issued land use permits. These developments had negative impacts on the local community, particularly the Dayak Wehea Tribe, who lost access to the forest, leading to feelings of guilt and the need for redemption. In response, The Nature

Conservancy (TNC) stepped in as a key advocate, offering solutions to help the Dayak Wehea Tribe address their feelings of guilt. TNC supported the designation of the former HPH PT. GRUTI III area as a protected forest, to be managed according to local customs by the Wehea Customary Institution of Nehas Liah Bing Village.

There are six scenes/phases that occur in the cycle of Dramatism in environmental communication in Nehas Liah Bing Village, as followed: first scene- the New Order development phase and marginalisation of Wehea Dayak Tribe; the second scene- phase of palm oil company attempting to invite Dayak Wehea community to plant palm oil; the third scene- the phase of realizing the threat of losing one's identity; the fourth scene, the phase of having no power; the fifth scene, the phase of the arrival of the international NGO as a means to cleanse the guilt of the Wehea Dayak tribe; the sixth scene, the phase of managing the Wehea protected forest and utilising environmental services.

The scenes involve four agents, the Government, Corporations, an International NGO - The Nature Conservancy, and the Dayak Wehea Community. Of these, three actors share the goal of transforming the ex-HPH GRUTI III area into a protected forest, but they have differing motives, leading to a contestation of discourse. The researchers categorised these three actors into two groups. The first group consists of those with formal power, which includes the government (both village and regional levels) and NGOs. The second group is comprised of Indigenous peoples and their leaders, who possess charismatic power.

Dramatism can be used in environmental communication studies to identify the motives of environmental actors as well as their overall symbolic actions. Environmental communication contributes to the understanding of how society builds its relationship with the earth and the drama in environmental management that is rhetorically constructed. It is a useful tool to find solutions to accommodate the various interests of environmental actors in human management of the earth.

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