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River metaphors in *Orang-Orang Proyek* and *Heart of Darkness*: A cognitive-comparative literary study

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Abstract: *In literary works, rivers serve not merely as geographical settings but also as conceptual spaces representing life, journeys, identity, power, conflict, and change. This study examines how rivers are constructed through conceptual metaphors in the novels Orang-Orang Proyek by Ahmad Tohari and Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, and how the resulting conceptual similarities and differences reflect distinct cultural contexts and historical experiences. The research focuses on three issues: (1) the forms of metaphorical expression used to represent rivers in both novels; (2) the mapping of source and target domains that shape the conceptual metaphors of the river; and (3) the similarities, differences, and cultural implications of river conceptualization in both works. The study employs a descriptive-qualitative method, utilizing cognitive linguistic and comparative literature approaches. The data consist of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences containing metaphorical expressions related to rivers in both novels. Data analysis involves identifying metaphorical expressions, mapping source-target domains, categorizing conceptual metaphors, and interpreting narrative, social, and cultural contexts. The findings reveal that rivers are constructed through several key conceptual metaphors, including: river as life, river as journey, river as boundary, river as power, and river as transformation. While some conceptualizations are universal, the two novels exhibit differences in semantic emphasis. Orang-Orang Proyek strongly links the river to social life, development, and human-environment relations, whereas Heart of Darkness constructs the river as a space of journey, power, colonialism, and psychological transformation. These findings demonstrate that the conceptual metaphor of the river serves as a meeting point between local experience and universal meaning in cross-cultural literature.*

Keywords: *conceptual metaphor, river, cognitive linguistics, comparative literature, & world literature*

INTRODUCTION

In literary works, rivers do not merely serve as geographical settings; they can also function as conceptual media for representing life, journeys, boundaries, power, and change. The presence of a river in a literary text often bridges the natural realm and human experience; thus, the river is understood not only as a physical object but also as a space imbued with meaning through social, historical, and cultural experiences. From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor is viewed not merely as an ornament or a stylistic device, but as a conceptual mechanism enabling humans to comprehend one domain of experience through another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Consequently, when a river is conceptualized as life, a journey, a boundary, or power, this interpretation reveals a process of conceptualization linking the concrete experience of the river to more abstract human experiences. Within the framework of conceptual metaphor, this process unfolds through a systematic mapping between a source domain and a target domain (Kövecses, 2010). The source domain typically

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provides a more concrete experiential structure, while the target domain represents the concept understood through that structure. Therefore, metaphorical expressions involving rivers can be used to explore how authors—and the societies they represent—conceive the relationships among nature, humanity, space, and life.

Metaphorical conceptualization is not entirely universal, as the mapping between source and target domains is also influenced by embodied experience, environment, history, and culture. Kövecses (2005) demonstrates that metaphors possess both universal dimensions and cultural variations; thus, the same concept may undergo different metaphorical elaborations across distinct cultural contexts. This perspective is significant for comparative literature studies, as it allows metaphors to be analyzed not only based on their linguistic forms but also in light of the social and cultural experiences that underpin their emergence. In this context, the river serves as a strategic object; materially, it constitutes an ecological space, a route for mobility, and a geographical boundary, while also being an integral part of community life. This experiential structure allows the river to acquire various conceptual mappings when represented in literary works.

The significance of this study is particularly evident in Ahmad Tohari's novel *Orang-Orang Proyek*. The Cibawor River does not appear merely as a neutral geographical feature; rather, it is intertwined with bridge construction, community life, historical memory, and socio-political issues. The relationship between the river and the bridge, for instance, illustrates how natural space intersects with mobility and shifts in the community's way of life. The river is also linked to collective memory and the history of a community undergoing transformation due to development. Mandra's (2019) research on *Orang-Orang Proyek* has highlighted the importance of stylistic choices in conveying the novel's meaning and moral values. That study establishes that figurative language is a crucial aspect of understanding meaning construction in Tohari's work, even though its specific focus was not on the conceptualization of the river metaphor (Mandra, 2019).

A different phenomenon appears in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The Congo River serves as a central element in Marlow's journey into the African interior, while simultaneously connecting to the colonial experience, the unknown, and the protagonist's shifting perception of the world around him. In the novel, the river is not merely a route for physical travel but also acquires various symbolic and metaphorical associations. Igrutinović (2024) demonstrates that water symbolism in *Heart of Darkness* relates to journeys into primordial realms, mythology, and the colonial experience. Representing the river with imagery such as an outstretched snake suggests it can be construed as a living entity—one that is both alluring and threatening. Thus, the river becomes an integral part of the structure of Marlow's experience as he moves from a familiar setting into a space constructed as alien and unknown.

Although both novels assign significant importance to the river, their respective conceptualizations of it do not necessarily yield identical meanings. In *Orang-Orang Proyek*, the Cibawor River is closely linked to community life, development, social memory, and the spatial transformation of society; conversely, in *Heart of Darkness*, the Congo River is intimately tied to the journey into the interior, the colonial experience, a space perceived as alien, and the transformation of the protagonist's experience and consciousness. These differences illustrate that conceptual metaphors cannot be

divorced from the cultural and historical contexts in which they are employed (Kövecses, 2005). At the same time, both novels reveal the possibility of similar cognitive schemas, particularly regarding experiences of movement, travel, boundaries, and change.

However, there remains scope for a study that specifically compares the conceptualization of the river in *Orang-Orang Proyek* and *Heart of Darkness* through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory. This study offers a novel approach by bringing together Cognitive Linguistics and comparative literature to identify metaphorical expressions regarding rivers, map the relationships between source and target domains, and elucidate the similarities and differences in the conceptualization of rivers across two distinct cultural and historical contexts. Specifically, the research examines how rivers are constructed as metaphors for life, journeys, boundaries or thresholds, mediums of power, and transformation. Through this comparison, the study not only explains the mechanics of metaphorical language in the two novels but also reveals how the experience of riverine space is constructed through the lenses of Indonesia's socio-historical perspective and the African colonial experience. Thus, the study positions the river as a cognitive and cultural space where ecological, social, historical, and ideological experiences converge within literary works.

The introduction requires revision to strengthen the synthesis of previous studies, clarify the research gap, and explain the novelty of comparing the conceptual metaphors of rivers in *Orang-Orang Proye*k and *Heart of Darkness*. The authors should incorporate more relevant studies on conceptual metaphor in literary texts, river symbolism, and the socio-political representation of nature in both novels, critically comparing their theoretical approaches and findings. Furthermore, the integration of Cognitive Linguistics and comparative literature should be explained more explicitly, and the proposed metaphor categories should be justified theoretically. The introduction should also reduce repetitive explanations, support contextual claims with reliable sources, and conclude with clear research questions that guide the analysis.

Although previous scholarship has examined figurative language and social criticism in *Orang-Orang Proyek* and water symbolism and colonial experience in *Heart of Darkness*, the two novels have rarely been brought together to examine how river-related expressions organize conceptual mappings. This study addresses that gap by combining Cognitive Linguistics with comparative literature: Conceptual Metaphor Theory identifies the linguistic evidence and mappings, while comparative interpretation relates those patterns to each novel's narrative, social, and historical setting. The categories are treated as analytical hypotheses rather than predetermined findings; each is retained only where the wording or narrative context supports a relevant mapping. The study asks: (1) What river-related metaphorical expressions occur in the two novels? (2) What source–target mappings do these expressions support? (3) How do the mappings converge or differ, and what do those differences reveal about each novel's socio-cultural and historical context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual metaphor approach in this study is grounded in the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, which views metaphor not merely as a stylistic device, but as a conceptual mechanism humans use to understand and organize experience. Lakoff and

Johnson (1980) explain that abstract concepts are often understood through more concrete experiences those closely tied to the body, space, movement, and daily life. Consequently, metaphors in literary texts can be understood as linguistic manifestations of the conceptual structures that underpin how humans make sense of the world. This perspective is particularly relevant for examining rivers, as a river is a concrete entity possessing experiential characteristics such as flowing, moving, connecting, separating, carrying, and changing. These characteristics allow the river to be conceptually constructed to understand more abstract experiences, such as life, journeys, boundaries, power, conflict, and transformation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Conceptual Metaphor and Domain Mapping

In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Kövecses (2002) explains that a conceptual metaphor involves at least two domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain is generally more concrete, possesses an experiential structure that is relatively easy to grasp, and is used to provide an understanding of the target domain, which tends to be more abstract. The relationship between these two domains is established through a series of mappings that allow specific characteristics of the source domain to be projected onto the target domain (Kövecses, 2002, pp. 15–28). APA 7 style

In this study, the RIVER is positioned as the source domain because it possesses a concrete experiential structure that can be projected onto various abstract concepts. For instance, the continuous flow of a river can motivate the conceptualization of LIFE as something that moves and unfolds over time. Its nature as a pathway connecting one location to another can shape the conceptualization of a JOURNEY, while its function as a territorial divider can give rise to the conceptualization of a BOUNDARY. Rivers can also be construed as spaces that are controlled, utilized, or contested, thereby linking them to the concept of POWER. Thus, the metaphorical analysis in this study does not stop at identifying metaphorical words or phrases but aims to explore the underlying conceptual structures and correspondences that inform the use of such expressions.

Metaphor, Experience, and Culture

CMT also provides a framework for explaining the relationship between metaphor, human experience, and culture. Kövecses (2005) asserts that metaphors possess both universal dimensions and cultural variations. Some metaphors arise because humans share relatively similar bodily and environmental experiences, whereas metaphorical variations can develop from differences in physical environments, historical experiences, cultural models, and social conditions. Consequently, the same object does not necessarily yield identical conceptualizations across different cultures.

This framework is crucial for the study of *Orang-Orang Proyek* and *Heart of Darkness*. Both novels feature the river as a vital component of the narrative space, yet the social, cultural, and historical experiences surrounding it differ. Universal characteristics of rivers—such as movement, flow, journeying, and change—can give rise to similar metaphorical structures. However, cultural and historical contexts can lead to distinct forms of "cultural elaboration." Kövecses (2010) also emphasizes that the use of actual metaphors must be understood through context, as metaphorical

meaning is determined not only by general conceptual structures but also by the specific situation and environment of their use. Thus, interpreting the river metaphor in both novels requires consideration of the narrative, social, and historical contexts of each work.

The River Metaphor from a Comparative Literature Perspective

Regarding *Heart of Darkness*, *Igrutinović* (2024) demonstrates that water and river journeys serve symbolic functions linked to voyages into the unknown, water mythology, and the colonial experience. The river functions not merely as a geographical route for Marlow's journey but also as a pivotal element of the narrative structure that leads him to the heart of the colonial experience in the Congo. In this way, the river acquires symbolic dimensions associated with journeying, uncertainty, power, and the colonial experience. Meanwhile, *Orang-Orang Proyek* presents the Cibawor River in close association with bridge construction, community life, and the various social issues accompanying the development project. In the novel, the river appears not merely as an element of the physical environment but is also intertwined with the lives of the community and the relationships between humans, development, and the environment. These differing functions and contexts make both novels suitable subjects for study through the lens of comparative literature.

The comparison is therefore not designed to treat the river as having an identical meaning in both works. Instead, it separates (a) textual metaphorical expressions, (b) the source–target correspondences they motivate, and (c) the broader symbolic and socio-political meanings produced by the narratives. Prior studies of water symbolism in Conrad and stylistic meaning in Tohari provide important contextual interpretations, but the present study extends them by comparing the cognitive mappings across the two works. The combination of cognitive analysis and comparative literature makes it possible to relate small-scale linguistic choices to wider narrative structures without treating contextual interpretation as direct proof of a metaphor.

This analysis also draws on work that distinguishes linguistic metaphor from discourse-level and literary symbolism; Kövecses (2015) further emphasizes that metaphor interpretation depends on context. Cognitive and discourse-oriented studies show that metaphor identification requires attention to contextual meaning, not only to an isolated figurative word (Cameron & Maslen, 2010; Gibbs, 1994; Semino, 2008; Steen et al., 2010; Charteris-Black, 2004). Environmental literary criticism, meanwhile, situates representations of nature within ethical, cultural, and material relations between human communities and their environments (Buell, 1995; Glotfelty, 1996; Garrard, 2012). For Heart of Darkness, debates about race, imperial representation, and colonial ideology remain essential context (Achebe, 1977; Brantlinger, 1985; Said, 1978; Watts, 1996; Shihada, 2015). These traditions do not replace close textual analysis; rather, they guide the interpretation of the cultural work performed by river imagery. The present comparison therefore combines close linguistic coding with historically informed literary interpretation, while avoiding the assumption that every recurring motif is necessarily a conceptual metaphor.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach combining Cognitive Linguistics and comparative literature. The primary texts are Ahmad Tohari's *Orang-Orang Proyek* (2nd ed., 2015; originally published in 2002) and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (the 1902 book version in Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories; the work was first published serially in 1899). The analysis focuses on river-related words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, including references to water flow, crossing, river routes, bridges, and the spaces directly organized by the river. Cognitive Linguistics is used to identify metaphorical language and map source–target domains; comparative literature is used to interpret convergences and differences in relation to narrative and socio-historical context.

Data were collected by reading both novels in full and recording candidate expressions together with the sentence and surrounding narrative context. An expression was included when its contextual meaning differed from a more basic, concrete meaning and the comparison could be understood through the basic meaning, following the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Merely symbolic or thematic references were not automatically coded as conceptual metaphors unless the wording or narrative context supported a cross-domain mapping. Each record was coded for novel, quotation, page, contextual meaning, basic meaning, source domain, target domain, proposed mapping, and interpretive note.

Analysis proceeded in four stages: (1) identify candidate expressions using MIP; (2) check the contextual meaning against the basic meaning; (3) assign source and target domains and record only those correspondences supported by the expression and context; and (4) compare the resulting patterns across the novels. Table 1 provides illustrative coding based on quotations already verified in the manuscript; Table 2 summarizes the comparative mapping patterns. The categories were revised when a label described a broad theme rather than a metaphorical mapping. Ambiguous cases were re-read in their full narrative context and conservatively coded as symbolic or contextual evidence when a stable source–target mapping could not be established.

To improve consistency, the same coding fields and decision rules were applied to both novels, followed by a second pass through all recorded expressions to check whether the quotation, page reference, contextual meaning, and proposed mapping agreed. Ambiguous cases were reviewed against the surrounding narrative and Conceptual Metaphor Theory; where the evidence did not support a clear mapping, the interpretation was qualified rather than treated as a definitive conceptual metaphor. The analysis also triangulated linguistic form, narrative function, and socio-historical context. Because no independent second coder was involved, consistency is reported as an intra-researcher review procedure rather than inter-rater reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis identifies several recurring ways in which river-related language organizes experience in the two novels. The evidence supports a cautious distinction between direct metaphorical expressions and broader interpretive patterns. Two explicit expressions retained in the manuscript are the Cibawor River looks weary (Tohari, 2015, p. 5) and the Congo River resembling an immense snake uncoiled (Conrad,

1902, p. 10). These directly support mappings from human to river and from animal/snake toriver, respectively. Other categories journey, boundary or threshold, power, and transformation are interpreted through recurring narrative relations involving movement, bridges, colonial travel, and changes in perception; they are not all treated as direct lexical metaphors unless a specific expression supports that classification.

Table 1. Illustrative Coding of River Related Expressions

Novel and edition	Textual evidence (quotation)	Page	Basic/source domain	Target domain and interpretation
Orang-Orang Proyek (Tohari, 2015 ed.)	"the Cibawor River looks weary"	5	Human/body	River: bodily fatigue is attributed to the river
Heart of Darkness (Conrad, 1902 ed.)	"resembling an immense snake uncoiled"	10	snake/animal	River: the river is represented through animal form

The patterns in Table 1 show why the analysis distinguishes an explicit linguistic metaphor from an interpretation of narrative function. The weary expression and the snake image provide direct evidence for entity-based mappings; bridge crossing and upriver travel instead support interpretations involving movement, access, and transition when read in context. Table 2 brings these observations together comparatively. It is a summary of the strongest supported patterns, not a claim that every category is expressed by an equally explicit metaphorical phrase in both novels.

Table 2. Comparative Patterns of River Conceptualization

Novel / comparison	Pattern	Domain mapping or narrative relation	Evidence status
Orang-Orang Proyek	River as embodied entity	Human/Body > River	Direct metaphorical expression (Tohari, 2015, p. 5)
Heart of Darkness	River as animal-like entity	Snake/Animal > river	Direct simile motivating a mapping (Conrad, 1902, p. 10)
Orang-Orang Proyek	River as boundary / bridge as connection	River as separator; Bridge as means of crossing	Narrative relation; verify specific wording in edition
Heart of Darkness	River as journey / threshold	River Route > Journey into unknown space	Narrative pattern, not a direct quotation in this table
Both novels	River setting and power / transformation	River-related movement and access shape social or psychological change	Contextual interpretation; distinguish from direct metaphor

Table 2 summarizes the comparison between the two novels. It shows that the clearest metaphorical mappings are *human/body* as *river* in *Orang-Orang proyek* and *Snake/Animal* as *River* in *Heart of Darkness*. The other patterns boundary, journey, power, and transformation are supported mainly by narrative context. This distinction helps separate direct textual metaphors from broader symbolic interpretations.

Discussion

Metaphorical Expressions of the River in Both Novels

Table 1 records two explicit expressions that anchor the analysis in textual evidence. In *Orang-Orang Proyek*, the narrator says that the Cibawor River looks weary (Tohari, 2015, p. 5). Weary ordinarily describes a human or animate body, but here it is predicated of the river. The mapping can therefore be represented as human/body > river, with the river construed as an entity capable of experiencing a bodily condition. The description follows flooding and the movement of debris, so the metaphor also directs attention to the river's ecological condition. This is a conceptual mapping supported by a lexical cue, rather than a symbolic meaning inferred from the river's presence alone.

This construction is significant because Tohari does not portray the Cibawor as a completely passive natural object. The river is endowed with the capacity to experience states akin to those of a human being, particularly after a flood and the transport of debris from upstream (Tohari, 2015, p. 5). Thus, the metaphor can be formulated as the river is a living being or more specifically, the river is a body experiencing fatigue. This interpretation aligns with ecological analyses of the novel, which suggest that the depiction of flooding and refuse in the opening section serves to highlight the problematic relationship between humans and the environment (Febriyanti et al., 2025).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow sees the Congo River on a map as resembling an immense snake uncoiled (Conrad, 1902, p. 10). This comparison explicitly maps snake > river, foregrounding the river's elongated shape and its potential to appear alluring or threatening. The snake image is a direct simile and may motivate a conceptual mapping; the broader associations with colonial travel and uncertainty arise from the narrative context and should be distinguished from the literal content of the phrase (Igrutinović, 2024).

The two examples show a shared tendency to animate or embody the river, but their imagery differs: Tohari uses bodily fatigue, while Conrad uses animal form. As Table 1 demonstrates, these interpretations are tied to identifiable wording and page references. The broader social and colonial meanings discussed below are contextual interpretations supported by the narratives and relevant scholarship, not additional direct quotations.

Mapping the Source and Target Domains

The mapping analysis follows the distinction summarized in Table 2: a source domain is assigned only when a concrete experiential structure is projected onto another concept, and the mapping is partial rather than a total equivalence (Kövecses, 2002, 2010). For example, *human/body* > *river* is supported by weary*, while sanke* > *river* is supported by the snake comparison. By contrast, *river/path >jouney or river route > colonial mobility* describes a broader conceptual interpretation of the plot and must be supported by the narrative sequence rather than presented as a direct lexical metaphor.

In *Orang-Orang Proyek* , for instance, regarding the river is life metaphor, the characteristics mapped are not all attributes of life onto the river; instead, they are the capacity to undergo change and movement, to experience fatigue, and to play a role in the continuity of ecological life (Tohari, 2015, p. 5). The river becomes an entity

possessing a history and a specific condition, rather than merely a water channel. This mapping is further reinforced by the presence of the local community, anglers, food stalls, project work, and bridge construction in the vicinity of the Cibawor River (Tohari, 2015).

In *Orang-Orang Proyek*, the river and bridge organize movement between spaces. The bridge enables crossing and is linked to community access and development (Tohari, 2015). This narrative relation supports a boundary-crossing interpretation: river as obstacle/separator and bridge as means of connection. The mapping concerns spatial relations and social mobility; it does not mean that the river itself is literally a journey. This qualification keeps the conceptual label consistent with the textual evidence and with the distinction between metaphor and narrative symbol.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's upriver travel organizes the narrative as movement toward an increasingly unfamiliar interior (Conrad, 1902). The river can consequently be interpreted as a route structuring a journey and a changing understanding of the world. This is a narrative-level mapping supported by the plot, while the direct snake comparison provides the clearest quoted metaphorical expression. Igrutinović (2024) similarly discusses water symbolism in relation to the journey into an unknown or primordial realm.

This mapping reveals a significant distinction. In Tohari's work, the river journey is a social one, concerned with inter-spatial relationships and community life; in Conrad's work, the river journey is psychological and epistemological, centering on the voyage into the unknown and a transformation of consciousness (Tohari, 2015; Conrad, 1902).

Rivers as Boundaries, Power, and Spaces of Transformation

The river's boundary function in *Orang-Orang Proyek*is most clearly understood through the bridge that allows people to cross it. The river separates locations while the bridge creates a connection (Tohari, 2015). This relationship is a spatial pattern that can be extended to social access, but it should not automatically be labelled a lexical metaphor unless a specific expression in the novel verbalizes that mapping.

The novel also connects the bridge and river setting with historical memory, including the account of a bridge destroyed during conflict and later rebuilt (Tohari, 2015, pp. 13–15). This context allows the river setting to participate in a broader symbolic pattern linking past and present. Because this meaning is developed across the narrative, it is treated here as contextual symbolism rather than as a standalone conceptual metaphor.

In *Heart of Darkness*, upriver movement marks a transition from familiar settings into a space represented as increasingly unknown to Marlow (Conrad, 1902). The river therefore functions narratively as a threshold. The colonial implications of that threshold depend on the novel's representation of European movement into the Congo and should be interpreted alongside historical and literary scholarship rather than inferred from the river image alone (Shihada, 2015; Igrutinović, 2024).

The relationship between the river and power in *Orang-Orang Proyek* is indirect: the river and bridge form the setting for a development project in which technical, economic, political, and community interests intersect (Tohari, 2015). The damaged bridge described as abandoned and lonely (Tohari, 2015, p. 250) supports a critique of

failed development. This evidence makes the river a setting within which power is exercised and its consequences become visible; it does not establish that RIVER is itself synonymous with power.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the Congo River is a route used for colonial travel and trade (Conrad, 1902). The river's role as infrastructure for movement can be interpreted as a conduit of colonial mobility, but this is a contextual and historical reading rather than a direct metaphorical phrase. Shihada (2015) places the novel in relation to King Leopold II's colonial rule, while Igrutinović (2024) examines the river's symbolic role in the narrative.

Similarities, Differences, and Cultural Implications

The comparison summarized in Table 2 shows that both novels draw on embodied experiences of movement, spatial separation, and change, but elaborate them differently. In *Orang-Orang Proyek*, the river is closely associated with community, bridge construction, development, and social memory. In *Heart of Darkness*, it organizes travel into an unfamiliar colonial space and accompanies Marlow's changing perceptions. The shared patterns are therefore best understood as broad cognitive and narrative structures, while the strongest direct linguistic evidence concerns the river as a bodily or animal-like entity.

However, shared cognitive structures do not yield identical cultural meanings. Kövecses (2005) explains that metaphors possess both universal dimensions and cultural variations. While human experiences of movement, space, water, and travel can generate relatively common metaphorical patterns, cultural and historical contexts determine how those patterns are elaborated (Kövecses, 2005). Such differences are clearly evident in both novels.

In *Orang-Orang Proyek*, the Cibawor River is connected to work, bridges, fishing, social interaction, memories of the past, and development (Tohari, 2015). The damaged bridge described as abandoned and lonely (Tohari, 2015, p. 250) is a textual detail supporting the critique of development failure. This pattern extends the river's narrative significance beyond a physical setting, while remaining distinct from the explicit body-to-river mapping in the phrase looks weary.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the river shapes the route toward an increasingly unfamiliar colonial interior. The snake comparison is explicit textual evidence; the interpretation of the journey as a movement into psychological and epistemological uncertainty is supported by the wider narrative and scholarship on water symbolism (Conrad, 1902; Igrutinović, 2024). The distinction between the quoted image and its contextual implications prevents the analysis from treating every symbolic association as a conceptual metaphor.

These differences have cultural implications. Tohari's river setting is embedded in communal life and development, whereas Conrad's river route is embedded in a colonial journey into the Congo (Tohari, 2015; Conrad, 1902; Shihada, 2015). The comparison therefore contributes more than a list of similarities: it shows how a shared experiential domainriver movement and spatial access can be recruited into different narrative projects and ideological contexts.

Earlier work on *Heart of Darkness* has examined water symbolism, mythic journeys, and colonial experience (Igrutinović, 2024; Shihada, 2015), while research on

Orang-Orang Proyek has considered language style and the novel's social criticism (Mandra, 2019; Febriyanti et al., 2025). The present study extends these strands by using a common coding framework across the two novels and separating explicit metaphorical expressions from narrative-level symbolic interpretation. This provides a more precise basis for comparing how linguistic choices, plot structures, and socio-historical contexts interact.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that river-related language and narrative structures in *Orang-Orang Proyek*and *Heart of Darkness* connect physical space with social, historical, and psychological experience. The clearest direct mappings are *human/body → river* in the Cibawor River looks weary and snake > river in Conrad's snake comparison. Other patterns involving journey, boundary or threshold, power, and transformation emerge mainly through the novels' narrative organization and must be distinguished from explicit lexical metaphors. Tohari's river setting is closely tied to community life, bridge construction, development, and memory; Conrad's river organizes movement into a colonial interior and Marlow's changing understanding. By combining Conceptual Metaphor Theory with comparative literary interpretation, the study shows how shared experiences of movement and space are shaped differently by the social and historical contexts of each work. Its contribution lies in offering a transparent comparative procedure that links textual evidence, domain mapping, and cultural interpretation while avoiding the assumption that every symbolic association is itself a conceptual metaphor.

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