

## “I DON’T UNDERSTAND, HAMADORU”: JUNGLE LAW VS COLONIAL LAW IN LEONARD WOOLF’S *VILLAGE IN THE JUNGLE*

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The legal cases storied in Leonard Woolf’s *A Village in the Jungle* (1913) represent the imbalances of power between the colonizer and colonized during the British colonial period. Woolf’s novel has been previously explored, primarily focussing on its critique of empire and its representations of (hostile) nature. The objective of this paper is to study the courtroom scenes of the trials in the novel – for theft and murder – for the ways in which they depict the power dynamics between the colonizer and colonized and the inequities in the colonial system from an interdisciplinary perspective of law and literature. Thus, this paper closely reads the courtroom scenes, informed by the texts’ overarching narrative, together with Woolf’s diaries and autobiography, through a postcolonial perspective. The analysis of the trials in the novel reveals the judiciary’s alienation from/of the people, voiced by the accused men’s frequent assertions that they do not understand the legal proceedings. Thus, the alienation of the marginalized within the colonizers’ courtroom demonstrates the inequities and imbalances of power during the British colonial period. The narrativity of law – explicit in its dependence on storying – leads the judiciary to be manipulated by those in power, as when the magistrate is forced to apply the law even whilst unconvinced of the story offered in court. The novel demonstrates how the judicial system imposes particular narrative identities on the protagonists, divorced from their lived realities, in line with Paul Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, of individual identity being constructed through storying. Reading the courtroom scenes through Ricoeur’s concept, the analysis highlights the disjuncture between the colonial judicial process and peoples’ lived realities. While *Babun* and *Silindu*’s narratives are appropriated and manipulated by the headman in the first trial, the judiciary fails to consider the realities leading up to the murder in the second trial, captured in the magistrate’s suspicion of protracted provocation. These demonstrate how judicial authority was manipulated and the powerless subjugated by those in power. Thus, the court is represented as a(nother) tool of colonial oppression rather than an arbiter of justice. Moreover, Woolf’s critique of the judicial system echoes his anti-imperial stance through his representation of the trials. Finally, this paper’s analysis highlights the literature’s capacity to both narrate the complexities and inequities of the colonial judicial system as well as humanize legal actors through the novel’s exploration of the colonial judicial process.

**Keywords:** Law and literature, narrativity, colonial, identity, judicial process