

REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE IN LEILA S. CHUDORI'S *LAUT BER CERITA*

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Received: 2025-04-15

Accepted: 2025-05-08

Published: 2025-05-28

Abstract

This study explores the representation of violence in Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* through the theoretical lens of Johan Galtung's typology of violence—direct, structural, and cultural. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research examines how acts of violence are constructed and conveyed through the narrative strategies and language choices of the novel. Findings reveal that violence is not only experienced by the protagonist, Biru Laut, but also by a wider circle of student activists, portraying a collective trauma rooted in Indonesia's New Order regime. The novel encapsulates various forms of violence: physical torture, psychological torment, and functional oppression—all of which are embedded in both the characters' lived experiences and the oppressive sociopolitical systems that surround them. Chudori's work serves as a literary vehicle to represent silenced histories and resist institutionalized injustice. This research underscores how literature can function as a medium of historical testimony and cultural critique, contributing to the broader discourse on human rights and collective memory. The findings also reinforce Galtung's theory, affirming its relevance in analyzing representations of systemic and symbolic violence in post-authoritarian literary texts.

Keywords: *structural violence; direct violence; cultural violence; Laut Bercerita.*

1. Introduction

Laut Bercerita is a novel by Indonesian author and journalist Leila Salikha Chudori, published in 2017. The narrative centers on themes of friendship, familial bonds, political violence, and personal loss, drawing from the turbulent political period of Indonesia's Reformasi era in the late 1990s. Although presented as historical fiction, the novel is grounded in real-life testimonies and events. Prior to writing, Chudori conducted interviews with former political detainees and the families of the disappeared, thereby lending a documentary quality to her work.

The novel is divided into two parts. The first is narrated from the perspective of Biru Laut, a student activist involved in political resistance against the New Order regime. It chronicles his activism, evasion, arrest, and eventual disappearance. The second part shifts to the viewpoint of Laut's younger sister, Asmara, and captures the emotional turmoil experienced by the families of the missing. This narrative structure highlights the dual suffering—both of the victims and those they leave behind.

This study focuses on the representation of violence in *Laut Bercerita*. The term “representation” refers to the depiction or interpretation of life events through various semiotic modes, including language, imagery, and narrative (Mulyana, 2014: 96). Representation is not merely about imitation but involves the active construction of meaning within specific cultural and political contexts (Barker, 2004: 9; Mulyana, 2014: 97). According to Hall (1997: 15), representation entails producing meaning through language, linking concepts with signs to express both real and imagined events.

Violence, as defined by Putri (2012), is the unjust and harmful use of force, often marked by anger or cruelty. It encompasses physical, verbal, psychological, structural, and symbolic forms (Galtung, 1971). In literary discourse, violence is not limited to action but includes representations that reflect systems of power and marginalization. This study adopts Galtung's framework of direct, structural, and cultural violence (1990) to examine how *Laut Bercerita* portrays state violence and its psychological and social repercussions.

The choice of this novel stems from its vivid and multilayered depictions of violence under authoritarian rule. The researcher aims to analyze these representations critically, both to understand how violence is framed in literature and to contribute to the broader dialogue on political memory and justice. Ultimately, the study hopes to offer insights into how literature can document and resist violence through the power of storytelling.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Representation

Representation comes from English representation, which means representation, picture, or depiction. Representation can be interpreted as a description of something found in life that is depicted through a medium. Representation can take the form of words, pictures, stories, and others that represent ideas, emotions, facts and some of them. Representation is the use of signs as a process of recording ideas, knowledge, or messages in some physical way. Wibowo (2011: 148) defines representation as the use of signs that connect, describe, imitate something that is felt, understood, imagined, or felt in some physical form. According to Baker (2004: 9) representation is a social construction that requires us to explore the formation of textual meanings and aims to trace the way meanings are produced in various contexts. Cultural meanings and representations have a certain materiality. Both are inherent in sounds, inscriptions, images, objects, magazines, books and television programs. They are displayed, produced, used and understood in specific social contexts.

According to Stuart Hall (1997:15) representation is a production of meaning concepts in the mind through language in the relationship between concepts and language that describes objects, people, or even real events into objects, people, and fictional events. Representation can be said as we use language in using or conveying something meaningfully to others. Faruk (2012), reveals that representation as part of literary works is a combination of fictional and imaginative powers. These two forces are able to directly capture the social world building that is outside and beyond the world of direct experience, objects, and movements.

2.2 Violence

According to (Putri, 2012), violence is the use of physical strength and power, threats or actions against oneself, an individual, or a group of people or society. The

term violence comes from the Latin language, namely *violentia*, which means ferocity, persecution, and rape. According to H. Jamaludin. (2022), violence is an attack or abuse of physical force against a person or animal; a very violent, violent, cruel, and vicious attack or destruction of property or something that could potentially belong to someone. Violence indicates the existence of pressure that is beyond the ability of the object affected by violence and can result in physical or psychological damage or psychiatry. Violence is any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural or spiritual condition, as well as any behavior, attitude, policy or condition that disempowers, dominates or destroys ourselves and others (Galtung, 1971).

Violence, in a broad sense, is said by Galtung, as a barrier that should be avoided which causes a person not to be able to actualize themselves naturally. According to Galtung, this barrier can actually be avoided, so that violence can also be avoided if the barrier is removed (Muchsin, 2006). Galtung (1980) defines violence as an avoidable impediment to self-realization. So, violence is something that causes people to be prevented from actualizing their potential. Based on Galtung's conceptualization, two types of violence can be separated: direct or personal and indirect or structural. Direct violence is that which is perpetrated by one or a group of actors against another party (violence - as - action). Direct violence can take many forms. In its classic form, it involves the use of physical force, such as murder or torture, rape and sexual violence, as well as beatings. Verbal violence, such as insults, is also widely recognized as violence (Galtung, 1971). Meanwhile, indirect violence is something that is built-in in a structure (violence - as - structure). The misuse of resources, insights and the results of progress for other purposes or monopolized by a few people, then there is violence in this system. This is because the situation causes the level of actualization of society to be below its potential level, referred to by Galtung as indirect violence. Borrowing Galtung's thinking, a conceptualization can be developed that allows discussion of violence that is not only committed by a group of community members, but can also be committed by state officials and controllers of private capital.

Based on these various opinions, physical, verbal, and biocratic violence is commonly found. The most widely recognized violence is physical violence (physical violence) Baryadi (2012: 35-36). Physical violence is the most popular violence. This violence involves the limbs against the opponent. Examples of physical violence are beatings, abuse, rape, stabbings, murder, arson, raids, shootings, beatings, massacres, bombings, deprivation, and so on. Violence that uses words, sentences, and other elements of language. This violence is called verbal violence. Djawanai (in Baryadi, 2012: 36) states that language acts are part of human behavior and in that behavior it is very possible for people to do something that can be categorized as a verbal attack. An attack using words on others is an act of violence. Symbolic violence is violence that is symbolic in nature. Bureaucratic violence is violence carried out by power holders who have formal institutions with legal rules authorized by the government (Latifah, Syahrotul & Putra, C.R.W., 2020). Symbolic violence can be divided into two types, namely violence carried out through non-verbal symbols or also known as non-verbal symbolic violence and violence carried out through verbal symbols or also known as verbal symbol violence or verbal violence (Baryadi, 2002: 20).

Violent behavior or aggression, according to Stephan & Stephan (1985), contains the intention of making others suffer and there is a legal and normative rejection of this behavior. According to Gurr (1970), violent behavior is more emphasized in political violence, namely all events whose main element is the threat of

using power. Based on this understanding, political violence is not carried out by the ruler but by those who oppose him. Whereas in reality, the ruler also commits many acts of violence against the people or his followers. According to Syamsul (2010:191), violent behavior does not only include aspects of physical action, but also includes verbal, psychological, and symbolic violence or a combination of all these aspects. Verbal violence is violence that uses language, namely violence that uses words, sentences, and other elements of language.

Djawanai Baryadi (in the journal *Metakom* 2017: 41) states that language acts are part of human behavior and in that behavior it is very possible for people to do something that can be categorized as a verbal attack, meaning an attack using words (verbal attack) on others which is nothing but an act of violence. Violent acts are actions that harm others, such as murder, looting, beatings, and others. Jehel (2003: 123 in Haryatmoko (2007: 119-120) describes violence as follows.

"Violence involves the domination of others in various forms: physical, verbal, moral, or through images. The use of force, manipulation, slander, untruthful reporting, adverse conditioning, discouraging words, and insults are real expressions of violence. The logic of violence is the logic of death, because it can hurt the body, hurt psychologically, harm, and can be a personal threat".

2.3 Types of Violence

2.3.1 Structural Violence

According to Galtung, the injustice created by a system that causes humans to be unable to fulfill their basic needs is the concept of structural violence. This model of violence can be shown by insecurity due to the pressure of military institutions controlled by authoritarian political policies, unemployment due to the system not accepting human resources in its environment, discrimination by social or political structures to the absence of the right to obtain free and fair education (Galtung, 1990).

2.3.2 Direct Violence

Direct violence can be seen in cases where one person beats another and causes bodily harm. A riot in which another group invades is also direct violence. Threats and terror from groups that cause fear and psychological trauma are forms of direct violence. In direct violence there is a subject-action-object relationship (Galtung 1990).

2.3.3 Cultural Violence

Galtung (1996: 196) defines cultural violence as aspects of culture that we can use to legitimate structural and direct violence. Cultural aspects are the 'symbolic sphere' of our existence. Symbolic spaces, such as language, always mark our social identity as a nation, community, religion, and ethnicity.

2.4 Representation of Violence

There are three kinds of representation of violence, namely: 1. Physical violence is violence perpetrated by the perpetrator against the victim by hitting, slapping, choking, kicking, throwing objects at the body, stomping, injuring with bare hands, or with empty hands, or with tools or weapons, persecution, torture, killing and other things that are relevant. 2. Psychological violence is violence committed by the perpetrator against the victim's mental by yelling, swearing, threatening, demeaning,

ordering, harassing, stalking and spying, or other actions that cause fear (including those directed at people close to the victim, for example family, children, husband or others).
3. Functional violence in the form of social role restriction. Doing something that is not in accordance with their will, obstructing or inhibiting certain activities or certain work, forcing an unwelcome presence, helping without being wanted and others that are relevant. For example, a woman is only a wife, housewife and performer of other reproductive functions (Devina Natalie, & Cosmas Gatot Haryono, 2024).

3. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the representation of violence in *Laut Bercerita*. As a work of library research, the study centers on textual analysis of the novel and draws upon theoretical frameworks, particularly Johan Galtung's typology of violence, as well as supporting literature relevant to the research problem. The qualitative method is appropriate for interpreting narrative data and uncovering patterns, themes, and representations embedded within the literary text.

Descriptive research, according to Kothari (2004:7), includes surveys and fact-finding inquiries that describe the state of affairs as they exist at present. Similarly, Nazir (2014:43) defines descriptive research as a method used to examine the condition of a group, object, system of thought, or class of events, aiming to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of the investigated phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon is the representation of violence in the novel.

The data collection process involved several stages. First, the researcher identified and selected relevant data from the novel *Laut Bercerita* by marking passages related to various forms of violence. Next, the data were organized according to the types of violence being analyzed—structural, direct, and cultural. Finally, selected words, phrases, and narrative excerpts were quoted and examined in light of Galtung's theoretical lens and other scholarly perspectives.

The method adopted in this study facilitates a deep textual reading, allowing for an interpretative analysis of how violence is thematically and linguistically constructed within the novel's discourse.

4. Discussion

4.1 Types of Violence

4.1.1 Structural Violence

Structural violence is arguably a very complex violence because it is not only related to individuals, but also often occurs within groups. The perpetrator can be a group or a person using the legal system, economic system, or norms that occur in society. The following is an excerpt from the novel *Laut Bercerita* that tells about structural violence.

The arrests of activists for possession of a number of banned books including the work of Pramoedya Ananta Toer that occurred three years ago still haunt us. (Chudori, 2017: 16)

In the quotation above, the activists do not have the freedom to read books as they like, so if they violate, the regime will arrest them so that from the arrest there could be violence.

"Bram and I were arrested with several other friends when accompanying Kedung Ombo residents who survived in loksai..." Kinan told how Kedung Ombo residents were promised compensation of three thousand rupiah per square meter and it turned out they were only given 250 rupiah per square meter. Some desperate residents received compensation, but about 600 berthan families and suffered intimidation. " Just a few weeks after that, we were arrested. About seven people, one by one interrogated and slapped, doused with water, stripped naked."
(Chudori, 2017: 25)

The quotation above proves that people who had higher power during the New Order era could commit structural violence.

4.1.2 Direct Violence

Direct Violence is a form of direct violence committed by the actor. This form of violence is seen from the physical and psychological sides, where there are perpetrators and victims. In the *Sea Speaks* novel, the regime committed a lot of direct violence against student activists during the New Order era. This can be seen in the following quote.

I was kicked for walking fast. (Chudori, 2017: 3)

The Red Eyes pushed me forward. (Chudori, 2017: 5)

The bully kicked me in the back until I fell down in front of the car.
Ah! Shit. (Chudori, 2017: 54)

Suddenly my stomach was hit by an unusually hard fist.
Before I could get up, my body was suddenly trampled and tended,
probably by two or three people. (Chudori, 2017: 55)

As soon as I tried to open my mouth again, a jagged shoe stepped on
my mouth. (Chudori, 2017: 57)

I could feel a hand the size of a log gripping my wrist.
(Chudori, 2017: 93)

Just a few steps away a foot kicked my back
Suddenly one fist flew into my stomach. Ah!! (Chudori, 2017: 94)

The man on my left is as big as a tree, and his hand is as big as my
head. (Chudori, 2017: 96)

The red-eyed man angled his cigarette into my right arm, left arm,
right palm, left palm. Slow down and burn. (Chudori, 201 : 99)
The tree man punched my head through the trellis and I fell.
(Chudori, 2017: 160)

After that it was my turn to kick back Lars the gunner's shoes earlier so that I could return to my ranks. (Chudori, 2017: 166).

The quotations above explain that the main character experienced so much violence committed by the New Orde apparaturs during the arrest and investigation of Winatra. Direct violence is done in several ways, such as pushing, stepping, slapping, kicking. The media used to commit violence are the hands and feet.

4.2 Representation of Physical Violence

Physical violence is violence committed directly by the perpetrator against the victim with physical injuries. In the novel *Laut Bercerita* there are many stories about physical violence experienced by student activists who were arrested during the new order. This is seen through the words conveyed by the author of the novel.

4.2.1 Beating

Beating is one of the acts of physical violence through the medium of hands as a tool to hit. A quotation states that: "Suddenly my stomach was hit by an unusually hard fist head" (Chudori, 2017: 55). It can be concluded that the physical violence experienced by the main character, *Biru Laut*, received a very hard blow. The physical violence experienced is a blow by the use of hand media. This violence is obtained when the main character, *Biuy*, is arrested and imprisoned in one place by New Order officers. Another quote shows that: "The man next to me was as big as a tree, and he held my head with his big hand" (Chudori, 2017: 96). In the second quotation, there is a form of physical violence in the form of beatings experienced by the main character, *Birk*. When viewed from the analysis of the text, there is a word sprawl in the Indonesian dictionary *menggampar* means to hit. The word is a representation of an action that uses a limb as a medium to carry out acts of violence against another person.

4.2.2 Trampling

Trampled is one form of physical violence that uses the feet as a medium of action to commit violence.

I wanted to open my eyes, but it was so hard. Not only because of swelling and pain, but slowly I remembered that one of them stepped on my head with *bergeri* shoes. (Chudori, 2017: 5).

The violence experienced by the main character is physical violence that uses feet and shoes as tools of violence to step on the head. This physical violence is carried out by elements of the New Order regime when the main character is caught and taken to one of the dark rooms.

4.2.3 Persecution

Persecution is a cruel act committed by a person arbitrarily with the aim of torturing or oppressing another person. This action can be done in various ways so that the victim feels tortured. The persecution is represented in the following quotation.

I close my lips, pretending to be deaf. This time another man, probably a tree man, shouted in my ear. Where's the love, where's the passion. I remained silent and even tried to smile mockingly. Maybe

they were upset, maybe they were angry with me. There was a rustling of clean hands and suddenly a stick that released an electric shock hit my head. I screamed to the end of the sky. All my bones are falling out. I cried out God's name. But my voice is hard to get out. The electric stun was like holding everything in my throat.
(Chudori, 2017: 57)

It says that Biru Laut is being questioned by New Order officials about his activist friends named Kasih Kinanti and Gala Pranaya. The act of violence experienced by Biru Laut is cruel persecution. There is the word whack in the great Dictionary of Indonesian whack. In the sentence, the electric shock hitting my head means that Biru Laut was hit with an electric shock that caused him to scream until he mentions the name of God, stating that the event is tormenting him very much.

This time one of the torturers pressed two flat pieces of metal to my thigh, the pain went all the way to my chest. I'm looking for air. My breath was cut off. (Chudori, 17: 58)

In the quotation above, Biru Laut experienced physical violence in the form of persecution carried out by new order officers using metal media as a tool to torture Biru Laut. This makes it difficult for Buu to breathe air. The event makes him persecuted.

4.3 Representation of Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is of the utmost importance from a political point of view. Racism and sexism have been indeed analyzed as forms of violence that a government, or a sect of society, is inflicting on some individuals. From a legal perspective, to recognize that racism is a form of violence even when no physical damage is provoked to the victim of racist behavior is an important instrument for putting some pressure.

The following sentence is a form of representation of psychological violence contained in the novel the *Sea Speaks His Name*.

All of a sudden, my heart stopped and my body started to shake. My legs were tied and hung like grilled chicken sold in warungwarung petak Sembilan. This time the electric whip hit my legs and back. The pain pierces the nerve. I screamed and *asked to be killed because, really, the sting on this nerve was unbearable*.
(Chudori, 2017:110-111)

The sentence above explains the main character, Biru Laut, who is being interrogated by New Order regime elements about his activist friends. The incident experienced by the sea is a form of physical violence that results in body and psychological distress. We can see that the elements of the regime bind bu like animals and, in the last sentence, he felt pain, so he asked to be killed.

4.4 Representation of Functional Violence

Functional violence is violence that violates the forms of human rights that a person exercises with a specific purpose and then justifies.

Along the way, I bowed my head not because of their orders, but because the whole body was bowed by the pain of stun, iron ruler tab, and the kick of lars jagged shoes. But perhaps the least I can say is the feeling of humanity that is slowly being peeled off layer by layer because they treat us like nuisance mosquitoes. (Chudori, 2017: 171)

The sentence above explains that the main character has been subjected to physical violence. The sentence represents the form of the sentence “tabokan”, which means hit, and “tendangan sepatu Lars bergerigi” means Biru Luat kicks using long shoes and on the soles of the shoes are serration-like apparatus shoes. From the next sentence, “perlahan - lahan terkelupas selapis demi selapis karena mereka memperlakukan kami seperti nyamuk-nyamuk pengganggu”, which means a sense of humanity that begins to disappear little by little because of the treatment of New Orde officers against student like bully animals. It can be concluded that the violence experienced is in the form of physical violence that takes away human rights, so it is also called function violence.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Leila S. Chudori’s *Laut Bercerita*, this study concludes that the novel offers a complex and layered representation of violence, particularly within the socio-political context of Indonesia's New Order era. The forms of violence depicted are not limited to the main character, Biru Laut, but extend to the broader community of student activists, underscoring the collective trauma inflicted by authoritarian repression. The impact of this violence manifests in both physical and psychological forms, including anxiety, fear, injury, disability, discrimination, and even death. These consequences illustrate the profound and lasting harm that state-sponsored violence imposes on individuals and families alike. The causes of violence, as identified in the novel, are rooted in political resistance—such as student movements, prohibited readings, and acts of civil disobedience. These acts are met with oppressive responses that reflect the regime’s intolerance toward dissent. This study, employing Galtung’s framework, categorizes the violence into three primary types: structural, direct, and cultural. Each type is represented through narrative language that conveys physical, mental, and functional suffering. Through vivid literary techniques, Chudori reveals how violence operates not only through bodily harm but also through symbolic and institutionalized oppression. Ultimately, *Laut Bercerita* serves as both a literary testimony and a form of resistance. It illuminates the historical silencing of dissent and affirms literature’s role in preserving collective memory and challenging systems of violence.

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