

POLITICAL CONFLICT IN *LAUT BERCERITA* BY LEILA S. CHUDORI: INSIGHTS FROM NEW HISTORICISM

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Received: 2024-07-22

Accepted: 2024-11-05

Published: 2024-11-30

Abstract

This research investigates the political conflict depicted in Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita*, focusing on the portrayal of the student's movement and authoritarian regime dominated by military force in Indonesia during the New Order era. Drawing on the theories of Sociology of Literature and New Historicism, the study aims to analyze the socio-political dynamics embedded within the narrative. The qualitative descriptive method is employed to examine the text in-depth, considering its historical significance and literary merits. Through close textual analysis, the research reveals the intricate interplay between fiction and reality, shedding light on the experiences of activists and the repressive tactics of the regime. The novel vividly captures the determination, struggles, and sacrifices of student activists as they challenge authoritarian rule, providing valuable insights into Indonesia's socio-political landscape. Additionally, the study explores the ways in which literature serves as a vehicle for social critique and historical remembrance, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Chudori's work in contemporary discourse. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of Indonesian history and literature, underscoring the importance of literature as a tool for socio-political commentary and cultural preservation.

Keywords: *new historicism; new order era; political conflict; sociology of literature; student's movement*

1. Introduction

Literary works serve as mirrors of society, reflecting and commenting on the various facets of daily life and societal structures. They not only highlight social issues and the stratifications within society but also evoke empathy in readers. Through literature, readers gain insights into the society, conditions, and perspectives of the period in which a work was created. Thus, literature is deeply intertwined with history and society. Wellek and Warren (1995) suggest that literary works can be viewed as a chronological series that forms part of the historical process. Through literature, writers portray the social conditions and events of their time, a perspective central to the founders of New Historicism, who argue that both texts and historical contexts generate social impacts simultaneously (Artika, 2015). From this viewpoint, literature actively

participates in shaping, expressing, and transmitting societal norms, conventions, and cultural values through creative language.

A literary work cannot be separated from the social realities of its time. Indonesia's New Order era, particularly the tragic May 1998 riots, exemplifies such a context. During this period, Indonesia experienced bloody upheavals as demonstrations swept through major cities, involving people from all walks of life—factory workers, farmers, and students. Under the New Order regime, democratic plurality was stifled, fueling public demand for democratic reforms.

One novel that reflects Indonesia's history is *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori. Known for her bold storytelling, Leila S. Chudori tackles taboo themes such as state absolutism, chauvinism, and public hypocrisy. *Laut Bercerita*, a historical fiction novel, uses literary techniques such as conflict, point of view, and symbolism to bring historical events to life through her characters. Chudori presents history as an active force within her characters' lives, employing multiple points of view to convey the experiences of those involved in these historical conflicts, making them emblematic of broader societal struggles.

This study adopts a New Historicism approach, focusing on the political conflicts portrayed in *Laut Bercerita* and their parallels with actual historical events. Here, history serves not only as a backdrop for the narrative but also as an entity shaped by the text itself. As Budianta (2006) explains, an author's creative expression actively contributes to the development and reconstruction of cultural values (p. 4). Consequently, literary and non-literary texts alike, produced in response to socio-political events, play a role in shaping social impact.

This research holds significance, especially since *Laut Bercerita* resonates strongly with younger readers. By examining the political conflicts and historical realities in Chudori's novel, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the power struggles, ideologies, and representations of economic and cultural history, shedding light on the Indonesian reform era, particularly the 1998 tragedy.

2. Literature Review

Literature is a product of human experience, shaped by the time and place of its creation, including the surrounding environment and societal influences. It reflects humanity's social world, the conflicts within families and social classes, and the resolutions addressing these societal issues.

There are three primary perspectives on the nature of literary works. First, literature can be seen as a social document, reflecting the conditions present at the time it was created. Second, it may mirror the social context of the author. Third, literature can serve as a manifestation of broader social conditions. Literary works offer insights into the social, economic, political, and cultural climates of their time.

Literature and history are deeply interconnected; stories capture the essence of an era, mirroring societal norms, achievements, and challenges. Through character development and settings, literature immortalizes historical contexts, providing a lens to view past worlds. Authors present specific events, characters, and settings in detail, grounding their works in historical reality. Therefore, this research adopts the New Historicism approach, which emphasizes the relationship between literary texts and the social, economic, and political forces that shape them (Brannigan, 1999: 421). This approach allows researchers to examine literary and non-literary texts as discursive formations, particularly in representing political conflicts within their historical periods.

Viewed as historical texts, literature is a record of human civilization's journey. Both literary and historical texts are treated as equals, as each constructs ideologies, political dynamics, and socio-cultural backgrounds. However, a distinction must be made between text and context (Darma, 2004), as these are different phenomena.

According to Wirawan (2010: 67), political conflict arises when parties attempt to secure, accumulate, and wield power to achieve their goals or ideologies. Political conflicts can be categorized into two main types: the use of battle "weapons" and political strategies. The weapons of battle include violence, authority, organizational structures, and information media. Political strategies encompass the deployment of political tools, open and hidden struggles, internal regime conflicts, struggles for regime control, two-block or centrist strategies, and the use of camouflage.

This current research differs from prior studies in its focus and analytical scope, particularly in its emphasis on New Historicism as a framework for understanding how literary texts address political conflict within their historical context. The following studies provide context but differ significantly in approach and focus:

1. Putri Amanda & Devi Wika S. (2022), "*Refleksi Tragedi Kerusuhan Mei 1998 dalam Novel Notasi Karya Morra Quatro*".

This study analyzes the social reflections in Morra Quatro's novel *Notasi*, which addresses the theme of reformation from the perspective of students outside Jakarta, specifically in Yogyakarta. Unlike the current research, which examines political conflicts broadly, this prior study focuses specifically on student perspectives within a single societal movement.

2. Yosep Yopi (2013), "*Representasi Tragedi 1965: A Historicist Approach on Literary and Non-Literary Texts between 1966-1998*." Gajah Mada University.

This study investigates literary and non-literary texts from 1966 to 1998 to understand the influence of social and political situations on these works. It compares literary representations of the 1965 tragedy with journalistic accounts from the same period, emphasizing representation over thematic political conflict. In contrast, the current research applies New Historicism to explore how literary works construct and reflect political conflicts as discursive formations, providing a more comprehensive examination of the mechanisms of conflict representation.

While prior studies focus on specific historical tragedies or regional perspectives, this research aims to offer a broader analysis of political conflict representation within literary works. It uniquely applies New Historicism to uncover how literary texts not only mirror political struggles but actively engage with the socio-political forces of their historical period.

3. Research Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method. According to Creswell (2007: 32), qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social or human problems. The research process includes developing emergent questions and procedures, collecting data in the participants' natural setting, analyzing data inductively to build general themes from specific details, and interpreting the data to understand its meaning. This study also qualifies as literary research, as it gathers data from both literary and non-literary texts, analyzing them through the lenses of the sociology of literature and New Historicism.

approaches. Lin (2009) describes literary research as a methodology involving reading, analyzing, and organizing texts to discern the core attributes of the material.

The primary data in this research are derived from *Laut Bercerita*, a novel published in 2017, consisting of 379 pages across 16 chapters. The data are sourced from words, sentences, statements, and dialogues in the novel that depict political conflict from a historical perspective. Secondary data sources include books, essays, and articles from journals and proceedings relevant to the reformation era in 1998.

Data collection methods in this study are conducted through several stages (Sugiyono, 2017: 62):

1. Identifying Theoretical Data: Gathering relevant theories aligned with the research problem, specifically applying a New Historicism approach to analyze political conflict within the novel.
2. Selecting the Research Object: Using *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori as the primary object of study.
3. Comprehensive Reading and Observation: Conducting a detailed, critical reading of the novel and identifying passages—particularly dialogues and descriptions—that depict political conflict.
4. Coding: Identifying language elements (words, phrases, sentences) in characters' dialogues, actions, and events that represent political conflict.
5. Synthesizing and Note-Taking: Developing synopses, taking notes, and gathering references pertinent to political conflict.
6. Classification and Analysis: Organizing and analyzing the data according to predetermined analytical points.
7. Explanation and Correlation: Interpreting the analyzed data and correlating it with the applied theoretical framework.
8. Conclusion: Summarizing the research findings based on the analysis.

This structured approach allows the research to systematically uncover the nuanced depictions of political conflict in *Laut Bercerita*, providing a comprehensive understanding of the text's historical and sociopolitical context.

4. Discussion

To analyze the political conflict within the narrative, this research applies the sociology of literature and New Historicism approaches. These frameworks are used to uncover the layers of political conflict portrayed in *Laut Bercerita*, examining the historical and sociopolitical context of the 1990s Indonesia in which the novel is set. *Laut Bercerita* delves into the political turmoil of that era, specifically focusing on student movements resisting the Suharto regime. To deepen the analysis, additional non-literary texts from the same period were incorporated, including newspaper articles, government documents, personal letters, diaries, and other forms of historical documentation that echo the themes and events represented in the novel.

The story begins with the birth of Biru Laut Wibisono, who grows up to be a student deeply concerned with social inequalities prevalent during Suharto's presidency. Biru Laut becomes a university student and a human rights activist, actively opposing the numerous human rights violations occurring during the New Order period. The novel vividly depicts the struggles faced by activists, including the brutal kidnappings of student protesters. Laut's journey into activism ultimately leads to his tragic fate, symbolized by "the bottom of the sea," as he becomes a casualty in his fight for justice.

The novel also portrays the anguish of families, friends, and fellow activists who, in response to the kidnappings, gather outside the State Palace to demand answers from the government regarding the fate of their loved ones.

In *Laut Bercerita*, sentences and phrases offering insights into the political conflict are identified and categorized into two main aspects: the weapons of battle and political strategies. This classification provides a focused framework for analyzing how the novel reflects the broader struggles of the era and the tactics employed within political conflicts.

4.1 Weapon of Battle

There are four weapons of battle found in the novel *laut Bercerita*, namely (1) physical violence, (2) wealth (position), (3) organization, and (4) information media.

1. Physical Violence

The novel illustrates the pervasive influence of military power in maintaining control and suppressing dissent. Through various characters and incidents, Chudori elucidates the mechanisms of oppression, including surveillance, intimidation, and violence, employed by the state to stifle opposition. This aspect of the narrative reveals the harsh realities faced by those who dared to challenge the regime, shedding light on the broader implications of living under an authoritarian regime.

Hanya beberapa pekan setelah kegiatan itu kami ditahan. Sekitar tujuh orang, satu per satu diinterogasi dan ditempeleng, disiram air, ditelanjangi. (Chudori, 2017: 25)

The lines quoted above depict the brutal tactics employed by the authoritarian regime, which is characterized by military dominance, to suppress dissent and intimidate activists. The mention of being detained shortly after the mentioned activity underscores the regime's swift and harsh response to any perceived challenge to its authority. The use of interrogation, physical violence such as slapping, waterboarding, and forced nudity illustrates the extreme measures taken by the authorities to instill fear and quash opposition. These acts of violence serve as a form of psychological and physical torture aimed at breaking the spirit of activists and deterring others from engaging in similar acts of resistance. The phrase "*diinterogasi dan ditempeleng, disiram air, ditelanjangi*" (interrogated and slapped, doused with water, stripped naked) vividly portrays the dehumanizing and degrading treatment endured by the detainees at the hands of the regime's agents. Such brutal tactics are indicative of the regime's authoritarian nature, where the military is used not only to maintain control but also to intimidate and silence dissenting voices.

Itulah kali pertama aku mendengar tentang pembunuhan massal di Jawa Tengah, Jawa Timur, dan Bali. Semakin banyak aku mendengar berbagai cerita yang sama sekali tak pernah tertera di buku sejarah, apalagi di media, semakin aku menyadari betapa buruknya situasi kehidupan di negeri ini. (Chudori, 2017: 34-35)

The lines quoted above reveal the dark and oppressive nature of the New Order regime in Indonesia, highlighting the authoritarian leadership dominated by military force. *Laut Bercerita* poignantly captures the brutality of authoritarian leadership dominated by military force and the indomitable spirit of resistance it can engender. The use of torture

as a means of control, the psychological impact on individuals, and the resulting increase in militancy and solidarity among activists are all central themes in this analysis. Through these lines, Chudori effectively conveys the complex dynamics of oppression and resistance, highlighting the resilience and determination of those who fight against authoritarian rule.

Betul Raka, saya mengalami semua yang tak terbayangkan: ditonjok, digebuk, dipukul dengan penggaris besi setiap kali jawaban saya tidak jujur, disetrum dari jam 10 malam hingga subuh...itu semua terjadi. Saya yakin apa yang terjadi pada 12 kawan lainnya juga sama.” (Chudori, 2017: 181)

The speaker recounts their harrowing experience of physical violence, including being punched, beaten with an iron ruler, and subjected to electric shocks throughout the night. This testimony underscores the extent of the regime's brutality and its willingness to resort to extreme measures to silence opposition. The narrative also underscores the harsh reality faced by individuals targeted by oppressive governments, highlighting the psychological and physical torment inflicted upon them.

2. Wealth and Positioning

Duverger (1996: 283) states that wealth is one of the things that characterizes forms of political conflict. In the novel *Laut Bercerita*, there are five forms of wealth in the form of excess factors such as strength, charisma, power, intellectual ability, and economic ability.

The following data can represent the wealth in the form of power owned by the government.

Tentara sudah mulai masuk dan mengecek rumah-rumah para petani satu per satu. Suara mereka yang membentak-bentak semakin lama semakin terdengar. Mereka menanyakan di rumah manakah para mahasiswa menginap dan tentu saja para petani berlagak heran. (Chudori, 2017: 130)

The passage here offers a glimpse into the oppressive tactics employed by the authorities to quell political dissent and the resilience of the student's movement in the face of adversity. It underscores the courage and solidarity of the activists and the risks they undertake in their pursuit of justice and social change.

The narrative also depicts the student's vulnerability and the ever-present danger they face as they navigate the oppressive environment of state surveillance and repression. It highlights their resilience and resourcefulness in adapting to changing circumstances while underscoring the constant threat posed by the authorities to their safety and well-being.

Kinan menggenggam tanganku dengan kedua tangannya. “Kita tak ingin selama-lamanya berada di bawah pemerintahan satu orang selama puluhan tahun, Laut. Hanya di negara diktatorial satu orang bisa memerintah begitu lama...seluruh Indonesia dianggap milik keluarga dan kroninya. (Chudori, 2017: 182)

In the quoted lines, Kinan expresses the core motivation of the student's movement, emphasizing the desire to end the prolonged rule of a single individual and

the entrenched dictatorship that characterizes the regime. Kinan's words highlight the movement's aspiration for democratic governance and the rejection of authoritarianism, where power is concentrated in the hands of a single individual.

3. Organization

Organization is one part of the battle weapons that can support the acquisition of power that leads to power

“itulah salah satu tujuan berdirinya kelompok studi dan gerakan Winastra: untuk mendiskusikan berbagai pemikiran alternatif guna melawan doktrin pemerintah yang sudah dijejalkan kepada kita sejak Orde Baru berkuasa”. (Chudori, 2017: 46)

The lines above underscore the pivotal role of the Winastra study group and movement in fostering critical thinking and resistance against the indoctrination imposed by the government during the New Order regime. The establishment of the Winastra study group signifies a conscious effort by students to create spaces for intellectual exploration and dissent within a repressive political environment. By providing a platform for discussion and debate, the group empowers its members to question the official government doctrine and explore alternative perspectives.

4. Information Media

The banning of several media or books during the regim indicates the battle of weapon used to prevent the struggle to protest the regime's policy .

Karena peristiwa penangkapan para aktivis masih saja menggelayuti Yogyakarta, membawa-bawa fotocopy buku karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer sama saja dengan menenteng bom: kami akan dianggap pengkhianat bangsa. Chudori, 2017: 31-32).

The banning of literature in Indonesia, particularly during the New Order era under President Suharto, was a method used by the government to suppress dissent and control the flow of information. This period was marked by significant repression, with many works deemed subversive due to their critical stance against the government. Notably, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's books, such as *Bumi Manusia* and *Anak Semua Bangsa*, were banned for their perceived Marxist and Leninist ideologies and their use of historical data to criticize the regime.

“Ringkas, efektif, dan bernas....” Bram mengangguk. “Ini sekaligus meliputi semua pembungkaman. Tuntutan perubahan lima UU Politik, pengecaman terhadap pembredelan tiga media di Indonesia, penghapusan normalisasi kampus, semua tercakup di sini. Terima kasih.” (Chudori, 2017: 201)

The quoted lines show that Bram acknowledges the effectiveness and succinctness of a plan presented by one of the members of the student's movement. The plan is described as concise yet comprehensive, addressing various issues related to censorship and political restrictions. By advocating for the amendment of five political laws, condemning the shutdown of three media outlets, and demanding an end to campus normalization, the plan encapsulates the core demands of the movement. Bram's gratitude signifies the recognition of the importance of strategic planning and clear

objectives in advancing the goals of the student's movement. This interaction underscores the collaborative and organized nature of the movement, as well as its commitment to effecting meaningful change in Indonesian society.

4.2 Political Strategy

Political strategy is a method or tactic used to win a political struggle. The political strategies contained in the novel *Laut Bercerita* are open struggle and secret struggle.

4.2.1 Open Struggle

Open struggle contained in the novel *Laut Bercerita* is carried out by carrying out demonstrations, unfurling banners, and the success of students occupying the Parliament building.

Akhirnya kami berangkat dari Yogyakarta pukul sembilan malam menuju Pasir Putih Situbondo. Perjalanan belasan jam di atas bus itu memang cukup panjang. namun bus besar yang menampung 40 mahasiswa dan aktivis muda yang masih percaya kata "perjuangan" dan "lawan" itu tak menghalangi kami untuk mengisi waktu dengan berbincang, bergurau, dan meneriakkan yel-yel dari bait-bait "Sajak Seongkok Jagung" yang penuh gelora. (Chudori, 2017: 117)

The lines quoted above depict the journey embarked upon by the protagonist, Biru Laut, and fellow activists, signifying a unified effort towards a shared objective and portraying a collective endeavor in the narrative. Despite the taxing voyage from Yogyakarta to Pasir Putih Situbondo, the group of 40 students and young activists persists with unwavering resolve. Their decision to undertake this journey serves as a testament to their allegiance to the principles of "perjuangan" (struggle) and "lawan" (resistance).

*"Jadi maksud Mas Gala, jauh-jauh kita ke sini untuk kemudian pulang lagi ke Yogya begitu?" tanya Alex dengan nada setengah menuntut.
"Tentu tidak, nanti di Surabaya kita bergerak ke DPRD Jatim," Sang Penyair menjawab sambil menghela napas.
"Yaaah...Mas," Daniel melenguh, "DPRD kan seperti septic tanc, kerjanya cuma menampung terus." (Chudori, 2017: 135)*

The excerpt above vividly portrays the dynamics and challenges of the student's movement against Indonesia's New Order regime, highlighting key aspects like determination, strategic planning, and inherent frustrations. The passage begins with Alex questioning their journey's purpose, reflecting the activists' concern about the effectiveness of their actions—a common sentiment in activist movements

Jakarta memanas dan "tugas" memanggil, demikian kata Bram. Ia memutuskan bahwa kami harus pindah ke Jakarta setelah aku diangkat sebagai Sekjen Winatra dengan ketua yang dijabat oleh Kinan. Kini gerakan Winatra, menurut Bram, harus diselenggarakan secara teritorial, tidak lagi sektoral. Beberapa kawan menetap di Yogyakarta, Solo, Surabaya, dan menyebar ke berbagai wilayah di seluruh Pulau Jawa. (Chudori, 2017: 198)

In the lines quoted above, Bram makes a strategic decision regarding the student's movement, emphasizing the need for a territorial reorganization of the Winatra movement. This restructuring aims to expand the movement's reach beyond individual sectors and into broader territories. By relocating to Jakarta and appointing Kinan as the chairperson, Bram signals a shift towards a more centralized and coordinated approach to activism. The decision to establish presences in key cities like Yogyakarta, Solo, and Surabaya reflects a deliberate effort to mobilize support across different regions of Java. This demonstrates the movement's adaptability and determination to strengthen its influence and impact on a national scale.

Seharian ini aku baru selesai rapat di Depok bersama kawan-kawan UI tentang rancangan demonstrasi yang akan kami selenggarakan serentak di beberapa kampus. (Chudori, 2017: 220)

In these lines, the protagonist reflects on their recent activities within the student's movement. They mention attending a meeting in Depok with friends from the University of Indonesia (UI) to discuss plans for a coordinated demonstration across several campuses. This indicates the organizational efforts and strategic coordination involved in the student's movement. The mention of a planned demonstration suggests a proactive approach to advocacy and activism, emphasizing the student's commitment to voicing their concerns and pushing for change through collective action

4.2.2 Secret Struggle

In the novel, Chudori illustrates the power of collective action and moral commitment in challenging authoritarianism, emphasizing that even in the face of repression, the human spirit and community support can drive significant political change. This illustration is vividly depicted in the following lines:

Kami tak punya senapan dengan bayonet; kami tak punya otot, tak punya uang. Gerakan kami semua bermodalkan semangat, uang pribadi, dan sumbangan beberapa individu yang secara diam-diam sudah muak dengan pemerintah Orde Baru yang semakin represif dari tahun ke tahun. Kali ini, kami menambah senjata perlawanan itu dengan sajak dan aksi penanaman jagung (Chudori, 2017: 116-117)

The quoted lines are the words of the protagonist, Biru Laut, which depict a grassroots political movement against Indonesia's New Order regime. The activists lack conventional resources like weapons and money, relying instead on spirit, personal funds, and secret donations. Despite this, their determination and moral conviction serve as powerful tools in resisting the oppressive regime. The movement receives support from individuals disillusioned with the government, indicating widespread dissatisfaction. As the regime becomes increasingly repressive, the urgency of the movement grows.

Seminggu di Lampung, seminggu di Pekanbaru, dan kini di Padang terkadang tak membuat kami merasa seperti buron. Di antara duduk-duduk di dalam kamar sewaan dan sesekali makan di warung untuk numpang menyaksikan televisi mengetahui perkembangan, (Chudori, 2017: 205)

In these lines, the characters reflect on their transient lifestyle as they move from one city to another, seeking refuge and evading authorities. Despite their constant relocation, they don't always feel like fugitives. They spend their days sitting in rented rooms and occasionally eating at local eateries while keeping track of developments through television.

The novel further underscores the challenges faced by activists as they navigate a life on the run, relying on anonymity and support networks to evade detection and continue their activism.

5. Conclusion

Based on the extensive analysis conducted in Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* and its portrayal of political Conflict, several key conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the novel provides a compelling insight into the political conflict during the New order regime in Indonesia which had a deep connection with the reality happened in the society. Secondly the political conflict in *Laut Bercerita* is divided into two, namely weapons of battle and political strategies. The weapons of battle has four forms, namely (a) physical violence, (b) wealth, (c) organization, and (d) information media. Political strategies contained in the novel *Laut Bercerita* consist of open struggle and secret struggle. Through vivid characterization and narrative depth, it captures the determination, strategic planning, and collective spirit of the student activists as they navigate the oppressive political landscape. Chudori's depiction of the Authoritarian Regime dominated by military force offers a chilling portrayal of the regime's tactics to suppress dissent and maintain power. The use of violence, intimidation, and surveillance underscores the regime's authoritarian nature and its disregard for democratic principles. Furthermore, the impact of oppression on the activists is poignantly portrayed, highlighting the physical and psychological toll of resistance. The experiences of arbitrary arrests, interrogations, and disappearances underscore the harsh realities faced by those who dare to challenge authoritarian rule.

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