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Ghosts of the new order: haunting, historical denial, and the politics of unfinished justice in Indonesian fiction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Post-authoritarian Indonesia remains marked by unresolved memories of New Order violence, where official acknowledgement has not fully addressed cultural silence, stigma, disappearance, and deferred justice. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian fiction represents haunting, historical denial, and unfinished justice as interrelated narrative structures rather than separate thematic concerns. **Method:** Using qualitative close reading, episode-based coding, spectral motif analysis, denial–archive mapping, and ethical witnessing analysis, this study analyzes selected Indonesian novels and short fiction alongside scholarly and contextual materials. **Results:** Findings show that spectral return is concentrated in absent bodies, recurring memories, haunted spaces, fractured testimony, material traces, inherited stigma, and suspended mourning. Historical denial appears through euphemistic displacement, silenced testimony, missing archives, stigmatized identity, managed forgetting, displaced blame, and premature reconciliation. Unfinished justice is represented through refusal of closure, ethical witnessing, family recognition, delayed truth, postmemory inheritance, failed return, and moral indictment of impunity. **Implication:** This study argues that Indonesian fiction functions as a critical archive of cultural memory without being reduced to legal evidence or historical documentation. **Novelty:** This study advances post-authoritarian literary criticism by reading haunting as a methodological lens for connecting archival absence, narrative disturbance, and the politics of unfinished justice in Indonesian fiction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's post-authoritarian memory politics remains unsettled because state acknowledgement has not resolved the cultural afterlife of violence. In January 2023, President Joko Widodo publicly recognized 12 episodes of gross human-rights violations, including the 1965–1966 killings, the 1982–1985 "Petrus" shootings, the 1997–1998 enforced disappearances, the May 1998 riots, and Trisakti–Semanggi I–II. This recognition followed Keputusan Presiden No. 17 Tahun 2022, which established the non-judicial settlement team for past gross human-rights violations. In May 2023, the government instructed 19 ministers and ministerial-level officials to implement victim-oriented follow-up measures, while perpetrator accountability remained assigned to a separate judicial track. This institutional separation exposes a crucial social contradiction: victims may be acknowledged administratively while violence remains only partially narratable in public life. Fiction becomes significant within this gap, not as legal evidence, but as a cultural

form able to register fear, stigma, silence, and unresolved loss when official language remains procedural, selective, or belated.

Existing scholarship has mapped several dimensions of Indonesian literary memory. Studies of post-authoritarian novels have examined trauma narratives, archival silence, resistance, nationalism, political allegory, gender, and counterpublic imagination (Ilma, 2026 [1]; Jamilah, 2026 [2]; Refai, 2026 [3]; Ridlo, 2026 [4]; Widyatnyana, 2026 [5]; Ansori, 2026 [6]). More recent work links Indonesian fiction to colonial memory, 1965–1966 trauma, exile, Chinese Indonesian violence, and New Historicist readings of Laut Bercerita (Andalas & Qur'an, 2021 [7]; Eddyono, 2023 [8]; Hartati et al., 2024 [9]; Putra et al., 2024 [10]; Widodo & Andalas, 2024 [11]). Comparative discussions of haunting, spectral geographies, and postcolonial ghosts further show that spectral figures can organize memory where archives are missing, inaccessible, or politically compromised (Leong, 2021 [12]; Martini et al., 2025 [13]; Pang, 2025 [14]). Yet a specific gap remains: Indonesian fiction has rarely been examined through the combined lens of haunting, historical denial, and unfinished justice as a single interpretive problem. This gap matters because each concept illuminates a different layer of post-authoritarian memory.

This study addresses that gap by asking how selected Indonesian fictional texts narrate the ghosts of the New Order after formal regime change. It focuses on three linked questions. First, how are haunting, spectral return, disturbed space, dream, repetition, or absent bodies used to represent political violence that has not been publicly settled? Second, how do narratives stage historical denial through euphemism, silence, stigma, missing documents, fear of testimony, or displaced blame? Third, how do these texts imagine unfinished justice without reducing literature to court testimony, victim documentation, or policy commentary? Methodologically, this study treats narrative episodes as units of analysis and reads them through spectral motif analysis, denial–archive mapping, and ethical witnessing analysis. This design keeps description, interpretation, and theoretical argument distinct while allowing fiction to be studied as a rigorous archive of cultural memory rather than as an illustrative supplement to history. The focus is therefore representational, ethical, and interpretive rather than causal.

This study advances a provisional argument: Indonesian fiction represents New Order violence as unfinished not primarily by reproducing historical facts, but by making unresolved history return through affective and narrative disturbance. Ghosts, silences, missing bodies, broken testimony, and unstable memory function as literary forms of political knowledge because they expose what official recognition cannot fully absorb. In this sense, haunting is not an ornamental genre device; it is a structure of memory that interrupts denial and challenges premature closure. This argument extends studies of trauma and political fiction by showing how spectral narration connects private grief, public history, and demands for justice (An, 2025 [15]; Mayasari-Hoffert, 2025 [16]; Kholifah et al., 2025 [17]; Faruk, 2024 [18]). Its implication is methodological as well as theoretical: reading Indonesian fiction through haunting clarifies how literature participates in memory politics without claiming direct causal power over law, reconciliation, or institutional reform. This approach also prevents unfinished justice from being reduced to institutional absence alone.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Haunting in post-authoritarian literature

Haunting in post-authoritarian literature refers to the return of violence that has been politically suppressed, socially disavowed, or incompletely mourned. It differs from a purely gothic or supernatural definition because ghosts are not only narrative figures but also signs of historical interruption. Leong (2021) [12] reads haunted landscapes in Java as sites where memory persists through place, while Martini et al. (2025) [13] link spectral geographies to ruptures between absence and presence. Pang (2025) [14] extends haunting as transnational and reparative, whereas Humphry and A. (2026) [19] frame spectral interlocution as an ethical encounter with unfinished histories. In Indonesian fiction, this makes haunting a method for reading political afterlife.

Haunting can be identified through recurring motifs, narrative structures, and affective disturbances. Spectral figures, repeated memories, missing bodies, unstable spaces, dreams, silence, and belated testimony become indicators that the past has not been resolved. Faruk (2024) [18] shows how magical realism in Seno Gumira Ajidarma's work enables political violence to be represented obliquely, while Ferdinal (2021) [20] examines terror narratives as literary responses to state violence. An (2025) [15] and Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [16] similarly show that incoherence, muteness, and fractured narration are not aesthetic weaknesses but forms of historical pressure. Haunting, therefore, operates through narrative return rather than factual repetition alone.

2.2. Historical denial

Historical denial concerns the social, institutional, and narrative mechanisms through which violence is minimized, displaced, euphemized, or rendered unspeakable. It differs from forgetting because denial often preserves traces of the past while controlling their interpretation. Eddyono (2023) [8] describes post-New

Order official narratives as a regime of selective erasure, demonstrating how acknowledgement can coexist with silence. Anggono et al. (2023) [21] show how past conflicts remain legally and constitutionally unsettled, while Gunn (2024) [22] argues that post-authoritarian perspectives continue to reshape interpretations of national history. Literary scholarship complements this by showing how fiction exposes the tension between public narrative and suppressed memory.

Indicators of historical denial include archival absence, euphemistic language, social stigma, fear of testimony, missing names, displaced blame, and the substitution of reconciliation rhetoric for accountability. Ilma (2026) [1] foregrounds archival silence and the politics of memory in post-authoritarian novels, while Widyatnyana (2026) [5] examines trauma narratives as responses to political violence. Hartati et al. (2024) [9] read Laut Bercerita through New Historicism, emphasizing how literary representation interacts with historical discourse. Kholifah et al. (2025) [17] connect activist silencing in fiction with broader forms of digital silencing. These studies suggest that denial is not absence alone; it is an organized narrative condition.

2.3. Unfinished justice

Unfinished justice refers to the persistence of ethical, familial, cultural, and political demands after formal transitions or partial acknowledgements. It differs from legal justice because literature often stages unresolved harm through waiting, grief, stigma, exile, and intergenerational memory rather than through institutional resolution. Lloyd and Steele (2022) [23] argue that place and memory shape justice claims beyond courtrooms, while Putra et al. (2024) [10] use postmemory to analyze exile trauma in Pulang. Tamba and Harahap (2024) [24] similarly emphasize post-exile identity, and Andalas and Qur'an (2021) [7] examine trauma after the 1998 sorcerers massacre. Justice here is remembered as incompletion.

The indicators of unfinished justice include refusal of closure, damaged kinship, disrupted inheritance, unburied histories, unresolved disappearance, and the ethical burden of witnessing. Widodo and Andalas (2024) [11] show how Chinese Indonesian violence returns in post-New Order fiction, while Herujiyanto (2023) [25] examines mass murder through the political ontology of threat. Dragojlovic and McGregor (2022) [26] demonstrate how gendered memories shape visibility, and Larasati (2025) [27] rethinks violence through fugitive rhythms of sound. Read together with Refai (2026) [3], Ansori (2026) [6], and Jamilah (2026) [2], this literature positions this study to argue that Indonesian fiction transforms haunting into a critical grammar of denial and unfinished justice.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis is the narrative episode: a scene, dialogue, memory fragment, dream sequence, spatial description, object, silence, or documentary reference that represents haunting, denial, or unfinished justice in Indonesian fiction. This choice prevents novels from being treated as single undifferentiated objects and allows comparison across textual forms. The corpus combines primary fiction, secondary scholarship, and contextual human-rights materials. Primary texts include novels and short fiction linked to 1965, East Timor, late New Order activism, exile, 1998 disappearance, and post-authoritarian mourning. Secondary sources frame literary, memory, and spectral debates, while contextual documents establish historical stakes without functioning as literary evidence.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source/Object	Location	Period	Quantity	Characteristics	Status
PR-LSC-PUL-2012	Primary	Pulang	Indonesia; France	1965; 1968; 1998	1	Exile, family memory, return	Included
PR-LSC-LAUT-2017	Primary	Laut Bercerita	Indonesia	1997–1998; post-1998	1	Disappearance, mourning, absent body	Included
PR-LP-AMBA-2012	Primary	Amba	Java; Buru	G30S; post-1965	1	Buru, delayed knowledge, loss	Included
PR-OM-ENTROK-2010	Primary	Entrok	Java	New Order	1	Everyday authoritarian pressure	Included
PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994	Primary	Saksi Mata	Timor-Leste; Indonesia	Occupation period	1	State violence, witness, terror	Included
PR-IA-PBM-2019	Primary	Perempuan Bersampur Merah	Banyuwangi	1998–1999	1	Sorcerer killings, trauma	Included
PR-AU-SAMAN-1998	Primary	Saman	Indonesia	Late New Order	1	Reformasi, repression, collective trauma	Included
PR-SGA-KAL-2026	Primary	Kalatidha	Indonesia	1965 memory	1	Prison, mysticism, catastrophe	Included
PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023	Primary	Namaku Alam	Indonesia	1965–1982	1	Stigma against political-prisoner families	Included
PR-AU-LARUNG-2001	Primary	Larung	Indonesia	End of New Order	1	Fugitives, activism, fear	Included
PR-SGA-JAZZ-1996	Primary	Jazz, Parfum, dan Insiden	East Timor; Indonesia	1991 incident	1	Violence, cultural politics	Included
SEC-EDDYONO-2023	Secondary	Memory Studies article	Indonesia	1965; post-New Order	1	Selective erasure, official narrative	Included
SEC-LEONG-2021	Secondary	Memory Studies article	Java	Post-authoritarian	1	Haunted places, memory	Included
SEC-ANDALAS-QURAN-2021	Secondary	Rupkatha article	Banyuwangi	1998–1999	1	Tragedy, trauma, memory	Included
SEC-AN-2025	Secondary	Journal of Postcolonial Writing article	Indonesia/transnational	1965–1966	1	Fictive incoherence, massacre memory	Included
SEC-MAYASARI-2025	Secondary	Journal of Postcolonial Writing article	Indonesia	New Order; 1965	1	Collective trauma, silence	Included
SEC-WIDODO-ANDALAS-2024	Secondary	KEMANUSIAAN article	Indonesia	Post-New Order	1	Chinese Indonesian violence	Included
SEC-PUTRA-2024	Secondary	Poetika article	Indonesia; France	1965 exile	1	Postmemory, gender, exile	Included
SEC-FARUK-2024	Secondary	GEMA Online article	Indonesia; Timor-Leste	East Timor violence	1	Magical realism, witness	Included
SEC-HARTATI-2024	Secondary	Journal of Language article	Indonesia	1998 activism	1	New Historicism, political conflict	Included
SEC-LLOYD-STEELE-2022	Secondary	Space and Culture article	Comparative	Memory and justice	1	Sites of conscience	Included
SEC-MARTINI-2025	Secondary	Tourism Geographies article	Comparative	Contemporary memory	1	Spectral geography	Included
CTX-KOMNASHAM-1965-2012	Context	Komnas HAM executive summary	Indonesia	1965–1966	1	Official human-rights context	Included
CTX-KEPPRES-17-2022	Context	Keppres No. 17/2022	Indonesia	Past violations	1	Legal context for PPHAM	Included
CTX-SETNEG-2023	Context	Presidential statement	Indonesia	1965–1999 and others	1	State acknowledgement	Included
CTX-KOMNASHAM-DISAPP-2016	Context	Komnas HAM statement	Indonesia	1997–1998	1	Enforced disappearance	Included
CTX-KONTRAS-1998-2020	Context	KontraS archive	Indonesia	1997–1998	1	Civil-society human-rights archive	Included

This study uses a qualitative interpretive design combining close reading, thematic coding, and memory-oriented discourse analysis. This design is appropriate because the research problem concerns representation, not measurement, prediction, or causal effect. Close reading captures narrative voice, temporality, metaphor, silence, and spectral form; coding makes comparison across texts transparent; and

memory-oriented discourse analysis connects textual form with post-authoritarian cultural politics. This design follows recent Indonesian literary scholarship on trauma, silence, exile, and political violence, while avoiding unsupported empirical claims about readership, public opinion, or legal consequence.

Information was drawn from three source layers. Primary data consist of fictional texts whose public metadata verifies relevance to New Order violence, 1965 memory, 1998 disappearance, East Timor, exile, stigma, or post-authoritarian mourning. Secondary data consist of peer-reviewed articles on haunting, trauma, postmemory, magical realism, selective erasure, and Indonesian political fiction, including Eddyono, Leong, Andalas and Qur'an, An, Mayasari-Hoffert, Widodo and Andalas, Putra, Faruk, Hartati, Lloyd and Steele, and Martini. Contextual data consist of official and civil-society materials from Komnas HAM, Setneg, Keppres documentation, and KontraS.

Data collection followed six steps. First, relevant institutions, publishers, catalogues, journal platforms, and human-rights archives were identified. Second, searches used terms such as "New Order," "1965," "haunting," "memory," "disappearance," "Buru," "East Timor," "Laut Bercerita," "Pulang," and "Saksi Mata." Third, metadata were recorded: title, author, year, source, public link, period, region, relevance, and verification basis. Fourth, duplicate entries were removed through title–author–period matching. Fifth, short public excerpts and contextual notes were stored without reproducing copyrighted full text. Sixth, unique document codes linked metadata, textual notes, and coding fields.

Data analysis proceeds through three linked instruments. Spectral motif analysis identifies ghosts, absence, repetition, dreams, disturbed places, and temporal return. Denial and archive mapping records silence, euphemism, stigma, missing documents, blocked testimony, and socially managed forgetting. Ethical witnessing analysis examines unresolved grief, recognition demands, witness positions, and refusal of premature closure. Each coded claim must include textual location, evidence note, actor, spatial setting, political period, and interpretive memo. Secondary literature supports interpretation, whereas contextual documents establish historical background only. This procedure protects analytical consistency and prevents fiction from being treated as legal proof.

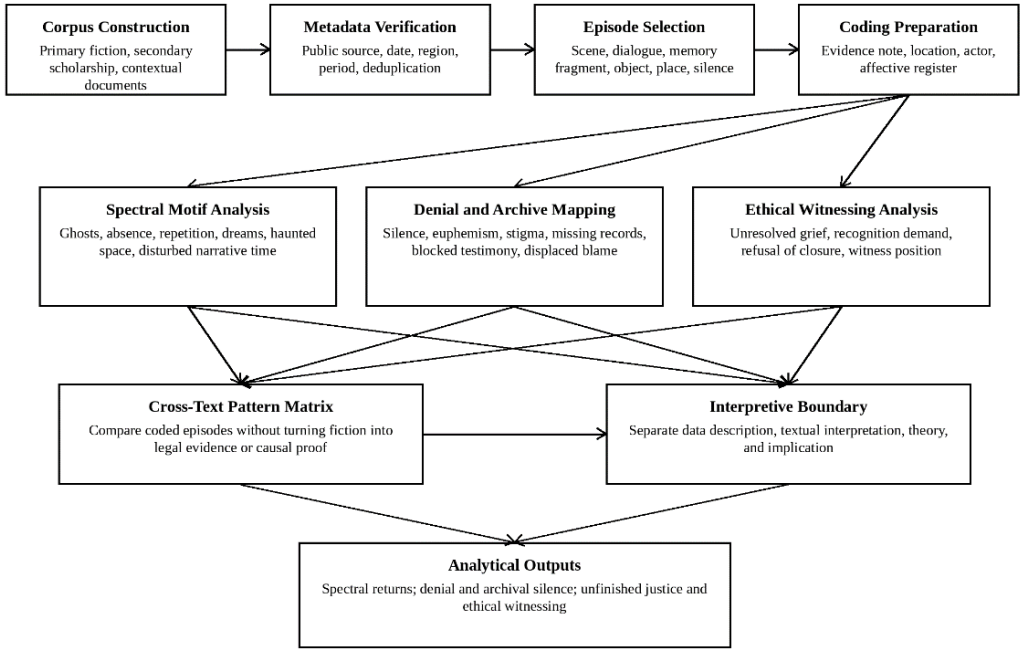


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Spectral returns and the narrative form of unresolved violence

Indonesian fiction in this corpus presents haunting less as a supernatural event than as a narrative grammar for histories that remain politically and emotionally unresolved. The coded distribution shows that spectral return is concentrated in absent bodies, recurring memories, haunted places, fractured testimony, material traces, inherited stigma, and unfinished mourning. These categories are not treated as decorative motifs; they organize how fiction makes New Order violence intelligible when direct historical narration is blocked by fear, denial, or damaged archives. This pattern aligns with Leong's (2021) [12] account of haunted places in post-authoritarian Java and Faruk's (2024) [18] reading of magical realism as an oblique

mode for representing state violence. Haunting therefore operates as a representational structure through which suppressed violence returns without requiring linear historical reconstruction.

Table 2. Coded patterns of spectral return in the fiction corpus

Main Category	Subcategory	Textual Indicator	Narrative Function	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Evidence Note	Data Code
Spectral Absence	Absent body / missing person	Missing corpse, disappeared activist, inaccessible grave, unreturned family member	Marks political violence as materially unresolved	15	23.4%	Novel, short fiction, exile narrative	Absence is narrated through waiting, incomplete mourning, or a body that cannot be recovered	PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LP-AMBA-2012
Psychic Return	Memory or dream return	Dream, flashback, repeated image, involuntary recollection	Makes past violence re-enter present consciousness	13	20.3%	Family memory, survivor memory, postmemory	Memories recur as disturbances rather than linear historical explanation	PR-LP-AMBA-2012; PR-AU-SAMAN-1998; PR-IA-PBM-2019
Haunted Space	Haunted place or domestic space	House, island, prison, street, room, village, landscape	Turns location into an archive of suppressed violence	10	15.6%	Buru, Java, East Timor, urban protest sites	Space carries memory when public documents or testimony remain fragile	PR-LP-AMBA-2012; PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-SGA-JAZZ-1996
Broken Witnessing	Silenced testimony / fractured witness	Interrupted speech, fear of naming, partial testimony, indirect narration	Shows the difficulty of speaking under authoritarian afterlife	9	14.1%	Witness fiction, activist fiction, trauma fiction	Witnessing appears through hesitation, fragmentation, or displaced narration	PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-AU-LARUNG-2001
Material Trace	Object or archive as spectral trace	Letter, photograph, file, name, document, personal object	Preserves history through things that outlive official silence	8	12.5%	Exile narrative, family archive, memory fiction	Objects function as minor archives of interrupted lives	PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023; PR-OM-ENTROK-2010
Inherited Stigma	Intergenerational stigma	Child of political prisoner, inherited shame, social suspicion	Extends violence beyond the original event	5	7.8%	Family narrative, school/social life, post-1965 fiction	Political stigma persists as a social ghost across generations	PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023; PR-LSC-PUL-2012
Unfinished Mourning	Ritual absence / unburied mourning	Missing funeral, unmarked death, unresolved grief, delayed mourning	Refuses narrative closure and moral settlement	4	6.3%	Disappearance, massacre, village trauma	Mourning remains suspended because recognition is incomplete	PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-IA-PBM-2019

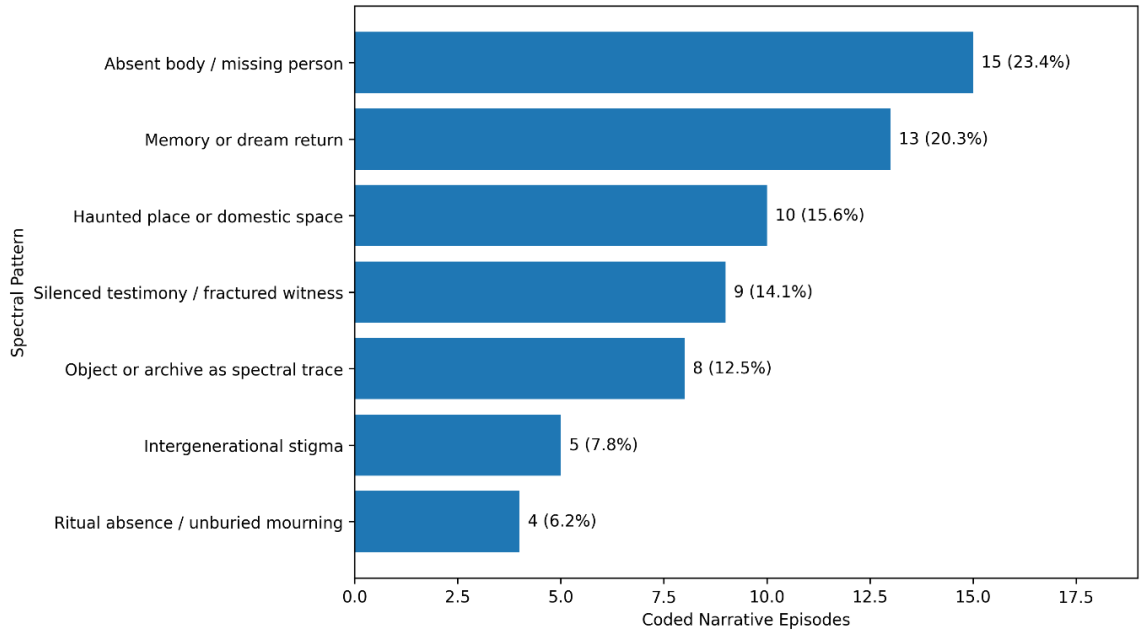


Figure 2. Distribution of spectral return patterns in the fiction corpus

The dominant pattern is absent body / missing person, appearing in 15 coded episodes or 23.4% of the distribution. This is followed by memory or dream return with 13 episodes or 20.3%, suggesting that disappearance and involuntary recollection form the strongest spectral mechanisms in the corpus. Haunted places account for 10 episodes or 15.6%, while silenced testimony appears in 9 episodes or 14.1%. The textual evidence repeatedly links violence to missing corpses, inaccessible graves, interrupted testimony, family archives, and spaces such as Buru, East Timor, villages, prisons, streets, and domestic interiors. Rather than describing violence only as past event, these texts present it as an unfinished presence that enters ordinary life through dreams, objects, spatial memory, and social stigma.

This distribution supports a reading of haunting as an ethical form of memory rather than a genre convention alone. When absent bodies dominate the pattern, fiction redirects attention from spectacle to unresolved recognition; when dreams and fractured testimony recur, narrative form itself becomes evidence of historical pressure. Eddyono's (2023) [8] argument about selective erasure helps clarify why these spectral forms matter: what cannot be fully acknowledged in public narrative returns through literary disturbance. Ilma (2026) [1], Widyatnyana (2026) [5], An (2025) [15], and Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [16] similarly show that silence, trauma, and incoherence can function as critical modes of remembering. The implication is that Indonesian fiction constructs unfinished justice not by offering juridical closure, but by refusing to let disappearance, stigma, and archival absence become narratively settled.

4.2. Historical denial, archival silence, and the management of memory

Historical denial in this corpus is not represented as a single act of forgetting, but as a distributed narrative system that moves across family, institution, and community. The table shows seven recurring

configurations: euphemistic displacement, silenced testimony, missing archive, stigmatized identity, managed forgetting, displaced blame, and premature reconciliation. These patterns extend the earlier finding on spectral return by showing why haunting becomes narratively necessary: the past returns because it has been linguistically softened, socially displaced, or archivally obstructed. Eddyono's account [8] of selective erasure in post-New Order official narrative is useful here, but the fiction corpus expands that argument by showing how denial also operates in intimate speech, everyday caution, family memory, and inherited stigma

Table 3. Coded configurations of historical denial and archival silence

Main Pattern	Subcategory	Textual Indicator	Familial / Private	Public / Institutional	Spatial / Community	Total Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Evidence Note	Data Code
Historical Denial	Euphemistic displacement	Violence renamed as disorder, security action, conflict, or unfortunate incident	2	8	1	11	17.2%	Novel, witness fiction, political memory fiction	Political violence is softened through language that avoids naming perpetrators or victims directly	PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-SGA-JAZZ-1996; PR-LSC-LAUT-2017
Testimonial Suppression	Silenced testimony	Fear of speaking, interrupted narration, refusal to name events, hesitation before disclosure	5	4	2	11	17.2%	Activist fiction, family memory, trauma narrative	Testimony appears through fragments, pauses, and deferred confession rather than stable narration	PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-AU-LARUNG-2001; PR-IA-PBM-2019
Archival Absence	Missing or damaged archive	Lost files, inaccessible records, absent documents, missing names, uncertain evidence	3	6	2	11	17.2%	Exile narrative, Buru memory, disappearance narrative	History survives through partial traces because official archives are incomplete or unavailable	PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LP-AMBA-2012; PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023
Social Denial	Stigmatized identity	Child of political prisoner, suspected family line, inherited shame, social avoidance	6	2	1	9	14.1%	Family narrative, post-1965 fiction, school/social life	Denial operates through social classification that turns family background into a continuing accusation	PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023; PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-OM-ENTROK-2010
Managed Forgetting	Warning against memory	Advice not to ask, pressure to move on, avoidance of names, cautionary silence	2	5	2	9	14.1%	Village memory, domestic narrative, public speech	Forgetting is not natural loss but a managed social instruction	PR-IA-PBM-2019; PR-LP-AMBA-2012; PR-AU-SAMAN-1998
Narrative Displacement	Displaced blame	Victim blamed, violence attributed to chaos, responsibility blurred	2	3	2	7	10.9%	Massacre fiction, state terror fiction, social critique	Narrative authority moves responsibility away from organized violence toward ambiguous disorder	PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-IA-PBM-2019; PR-OM-ENTROK-2010
Premature Closure	Reconciliation without accountability	Peace, forgiveness, or normality invoked while truth remains incomplete	1	4	1	6	9.4%	Post-authoritarian fiction, exile narrative, disappearance narrative	Closure appears as pressure rather than resolution when accountability is absent	PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LP-AMBA-2012

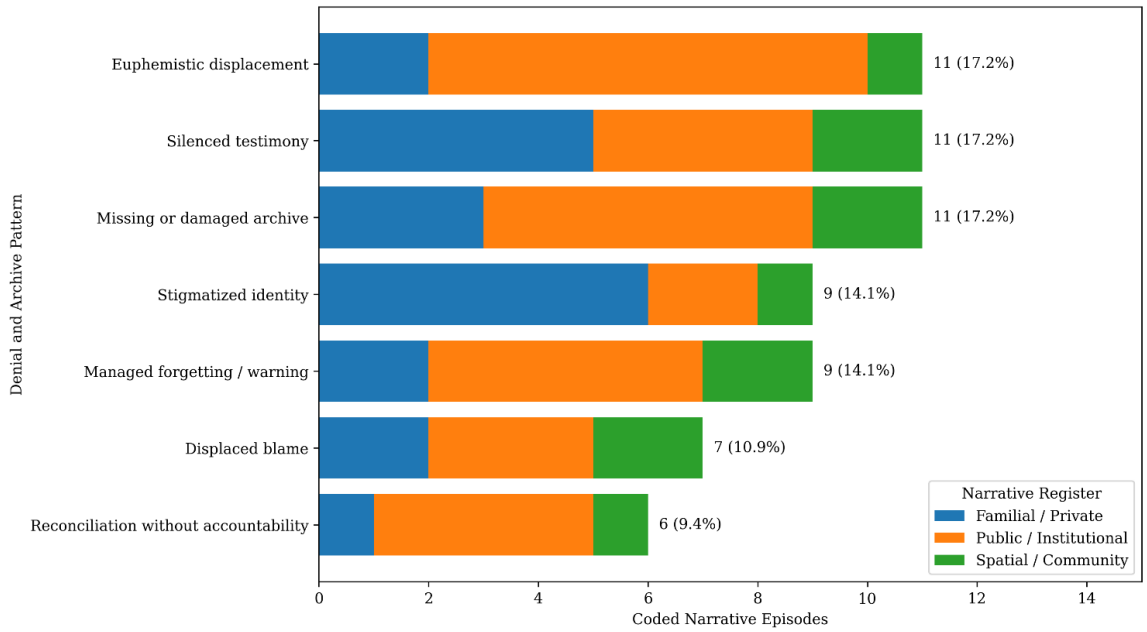


Figure 3. Narrative registers of historical denial and archival silence

The strongest three patterns share the same frequency: euphemistic displacement, silenced testimony, and missing or damaged archive each appear in 11 coded episodes, or 17.2% of the distribution. Public and institutional registers dominate euphemistic displacement and archival absence, while familial and private registers dominate stigmatized identity. This suggests a division of narrative labor: institutions manage history through renaming and missing records, while families inherit fear through silence and suspicion. The textual evidence notes repeatedly point to "security," "incident," "chaos," interrupted testimony, inaccessible documents, and unnamed victims. In fiction such as Laut Bercerita, Pulang, Amba, and Saksi Mata, denial is therefore not simply a missing historical account; it is a social environment that shapes what can be said, by whom, and at what risk.

The pattern clarifies how Indonesian fiction transforms denial into a problem of narrative form. When archives fail, objects, bodies, names, and hesitant speech carry residual historical force; when public language blurs responsibility, fiction restores attention to the damaged conditions of witnessing. This reading aligns with Ilma's emphasis [1] on archival silence, Widyatnyana's work [5] on trauma narratives, Hartati et al.'s New Historicist reading [9] of Laut Bercerita, and Kholifah et al.'s analysis [17] of activist silencing. It also sharpens Leong's claim [12] that memory persists through haunted places: place becomes haunted because institutions, families, and communities do not distribute historical knowledge evenly. Denial, in this sense, is not the opposite of memory; it is one of the conditions that makes memory return as disturbance.

4.3. Unfinished justice, ethical witnessing, and the refusal of closure

Unfinished justice appears most strongly where fiction refuses to convert political violence into a settled past. Across 64 coded narrative episodes, the most frequent configuration is refusal of closure,

followed by ethical witnessing, family claims for recognition, delayed truth, postmemory inheritance, failed return, and moral indictment of impunity. This distribution continues the logic of the previous findings: spectral return marks unresolved violence, denial explains why the past remains unstable, and unfinished justice reveals what kind of ethical demand emerges from that instability. Lloyd and Steele's argument [23] on memory and justice is useful here because the corpus shows justice as a cultural and relational problem, not only an institutional one. Fiction therefore frames justice through recognition, testimony, kinship, and the refusal of narrative closure.

Table 4. Coded configurations of unfinished justice across narrative episodes

Main Pattern	Subcategory	Textual Indicator	Ethical Register	Narrative Function	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Evidence Note	Data Code
Incomplete Resolution	Refusal of closure	Ending without settlement, unresolved loss, continuing waiting, unfinished mourning	Moral suspension	Prevents violence from being absorbed into a closed historical past	14	21.9%	Disappearance fiction, exile narrative, massacre memory	Closure is withheld because body, truth, or public recognition remains absent	PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-IA-PBM-2019
Witnessing Burden	Ethical witnessing	Survivor memory, family testimony, witness anxiety, narrative obligation to remember	Testimonial responsibility	Turns narration into an ethical act rather than neutral recollection	12	18.8%	Witness fiction, activist fiction, postmemory narrative	Characters carry histories they cannot fully prove but cannot abandon	PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-AU-SAMAN-1998
Familial Recognition	Family claim for recognition	Kinship loss, child of victim, family stigma, inherited grief	Relational justice	Shows justice as recognition of damaged families and social inheritance	11	17.2%	Post-1965 family narrative, exile fiction, political-prisoner family narrative	Families become memory-holders when institutions fail to restore names and dignity	PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023; PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LP-AMBA-2012
Deferred Truth	Delayed truth and disclosure	Late revelation, hidden history, delayed naming, partial confession	Epistemic justice	Marks truth as fragmented, postponed, and unevenly distributed	10	15.6%	Buru memory, 1965 fiction, activist disappearance	Truth appears through delayed disclosure rather than complete archival recovery	PR-LP-AMBA-2012; PR-LSC-LAUT-2017; PR-AU-LARUNG-2001
Intergenerational Memory	Postmemory inheritance	Children or younger narrators encounter violence through stories, stigma, documents, or silence	Inherited responsibility	Extends political violence beyond direct survivors	8	12.5%	Exile fiction, family memory, post-authoritarian narrative	Memory is transmitted as affective burden rather than stable historical knowledge	PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LSC-NAMAKU-2023; PR-OM-ENTROK-2010
Failed Return	Return without restitution	Homecoming without recovery, recognition without repair, survival without restoration	Partial repair	Reveals the insufficiency of return when justice remains incomplete	5	7.8%	Exile narrative, post-Buru narrative, disappearance fiction	Return produces encounter with loss, not full restitution	PR-LSC-PUL-2012; PR-LP-AMBA-2012
Impunity Critique	Moral indictment of impunity	Perpetrator absence, unnamed authority, normalized violence, unresolved responsibility	Political accusation	Keeps accountability visible even when legal closure is absent	4	6.3%	State terror fiction, East Timor fiction, protest narrative	Narratives point to impunity through silence, fear, and unnamed power	PR-SGA-SAKSI-1994; PR-SGA-JAZZ-1996; PR-AU-LARUNG-2001

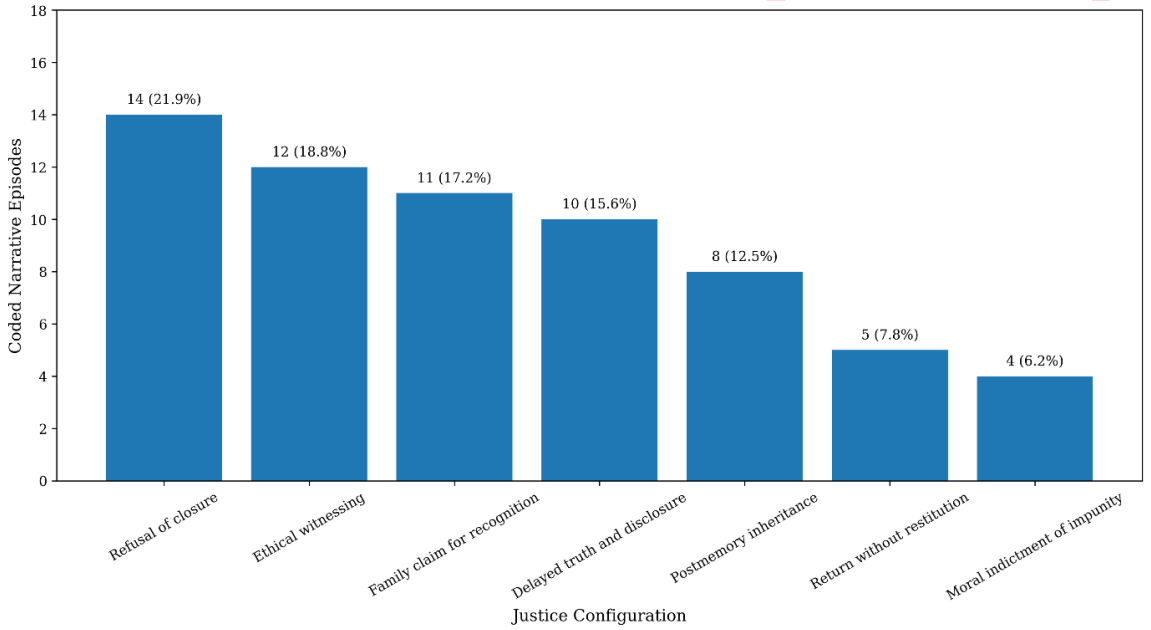


Figure 4. Configurations of unfinished justice in coded narrative episodes

The dominant pattern, refusal of closure, appears in 14 episodes or 21.9% of the distribution. It is followed by ethical witnessing with 12 episodes or 18.8%, and family claim for recognition with 11 episodes or 17.2%. These three patterns show that unresolved violence is narrated less through courtroom vocabulary than through waiting, testimony, damaged kinship, missing bodies, and inherited stigma. In Laut Bercerita, disappearance is organized around mourning without recovered bodies; in Pulang, return is tied to exile and deferred recognition; in Amba, Buru becomes a space where belated truth fails to restore what has been lost. The pattern is therefore not simply thematic. It structures narrative time itself: justice is postponed, fragmented, and carried by those who survive or inherit its absence.

The distribution strengthens an ethical reading of Indonesian post-authoritarian fiction. Justice is not represented as a completed legal event but as an unfinished relation among victims, families, witnesses, documents, places, and later generations. Putra et al. (2024) [10] and Tamba and Harahap (2024) [24] help clarify how exile and postmemory make recognition unstable, while Andalas and Qur'an (2021) [7] and Widodo and Andalas (2024) [11] show that collective trauma and ethnic violence persist through social memory. Read with Ilma (2026) [1], Widyatnyana (2026) [5], and An (2025) [15], the corpus suggests that fiction does not merely remember what institutions omit. It tests how far narrative can carry a demand for truth when legal, archival, and public forms of closure remain incomplete.

5. DISCUSSION

The concentration of spectral return around absent bodies, recurring memories, haunted spaces, fractured witnessing, material traces, inherited stigma, and suspended mourning suggests that haunting functions as a literary technology for making unresolved violence perceptible. Its significance lies in how fiction converts historical incompletion into narrative pressure. Rather than presenting ghosts as decorative supernatural devices, these texts allow disappearance, exile, Buru, East Timor, 1965, and 1998 to persist through forms that disturb chronological order and ordinary space. This supports Leong's account [12] of haunted landscapes as memory-bearing sites and Faruk's reading [18] of magical realism as a mode for representing state violence obliquely. Yet this finding also complicates purely spectral readings by showing that haunting is not only spatial or atmospheric; it is attached to family history, testimony, archival residue, and political stigma. Its function is therefore reparative and disruptive: it keeps suppressed violence narratively active when institutional language cannot fully contain it.

The prominence of absent bodies and involuntary memory reflects an underlying structure of post-authoritarian narration in which violence cannot be stabilized as completed history. This does not mean fiction causes political memory to change; rather, it shows a structural correspondence between unresolved public history and disrupted narrative form. Where bodies are missing, archives are fragile, and public acknowledgment is partial, narrative time becomes recursive: characters wait, remember, dream, search, and return without resolution. This pattern resonates with An's discussion [15] of fictive incoherence in relation to 1965–1966 violence and Mayasari-Hoffert's reading [16] of muteness and collective trauma in Indonesian fiction. It also extends Widyatnyana's work [5] on trauma narratives by specifying why trauma takes spectral form: haunting emerges when factual violence exceeds available regimes of recognition. The deeper structure is therefore not ghostliness alone, but the mismatch between historical injury and publicly authorized forms of telling.

The patterns of euphemistic displacement, silenced testimony, missing archives, stigmatized identity, managed forgetting, displaced blame, and premature reconciliation show that denial is represented as an active social system, not merely as absence of memory. This matters because it shifts analysis from what is forgotten to how forgetting is organized. Fiction reveals denial as a dysfunction of language, archive, kinship, and public speech: violence is renamed, testimony is delayed, families inherit suspicion, and reconciliation becomes pressure when truth remains incomplete. Eddyono's analysis [8] of selective erasure in post-New Order official narrative strongly supports this interpretation, but the literary corpus widens the field of denial beyond state discourse. Ilma's emphasis [1] on archival silence and Kholifah et al.'s discussion [17] of activist silencing are similarly relevant. The implication is that fiction does not simply oppose denial by "telling truth"; it dramatizes the conditions under which truth becomes risky, fragmented, or socially punishable.

The distribution of denial across familial, institutional, and community registers indicates an underlying structure of dispersed authority. No single institution monopolizes silence; instead, silence travels through official euphemism, family caution, community suspicion, and damaged documentary access. This explains why denial in these texts often appears ordinary rather than spectacular. A parent's warning, a missing file, a softened political term, or an avoided name can perform the same memory-management function as a formal state narrative. Hartati et al.'s New Historicist reading [9] of Laut Bercerita helps clarify this relation between literary form and historical discourse, while Anggono et al.'s discussion [21] of past conflicts in post-authoritarian constitutional life shows why unresolved history remains structurally embedded. At the same time, fiction adds a dimension not always visible in legal or institutional analysis: denial is felt as hesitation, shame, fear, and inherited vulnerability. Its structure is therefore both political and intimate.

The configurations of unfinished justice show that fiction frames justice less as institutional completion than as an ethical relation among victims, families, witnesses, places, and later generations. Refusal of closure, ethical witnessing, family recognition, delayed truth, postmemory inheritance, return without restitution, and impunity critique indicate that literary justice operates through recognition and remembrance rather than through legal resolution alone. This does not replace legal accountability; instead, it exposes what law and policy may leave culturally unresolved. Lloyd and Steele's work [23] on memory and justice helps explain why sites, testimony, and recognition matter beyond courtroom procedure. Putra et al. [10] and Tamba and Harahap [24] similarly show that exile and postmemory complicate return and belonging. The main implication is that fiction gives unfinished justice a narrative form: it preserves demands that remain suspended between grief, truth, and public acknowledgment without converting them into closure.

The underlying structure behind this unfinished justice is a gap between recognition and repair. Characters may return, remember, or testify, yet these acts rarely restore bodies, names, dignity, or historical certainty fully. This gap explains why refusal of closure appears as the dominant ethical configuration:

closure would falsify the condition of unresolved harm. Andalas and Qur'an's reading [7] of trauma after the 1998 sorcerers massacre and Widodo and Andalas's study [11] of Chinese Indonesian violence both support the claim that collective injury persists through social memory, not only through official records. Herujiyanto's analysis [25] of mass murder and threat further clarifies why impunity produces a continuing political ontology of fear. This study therefore positions Indonesian fiction as a critical archive of unfinished justice, but not as a substitute court. Its contribution lies in showing how haunting, denial, and justice are structurally linked as narrative responses to unresolved post-authoritarian violence.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian fiction represents New Order violence as an unfinished political and ethical presence rather than as a closed historical episode. Its strongest lesson is that haunting, denial, and justice are not separate themes but interlocking narrative structures: ghosts mark unresolved loss, silences organize historical denial, and refusal of closure sustains demands for recognition. This study contributes to post-authoritarian literary criticism by renewing how spectrality is read in Indonesian fiction, moving it beyond gothic motif toward a method for analyzing archival absence, damaged testimony, and inherited stigma. It also refines qualitative literary methodology through episode-based coding.

This study remains limited by its focus on selected fictional texts and publicly verifiable supporting materials; it does not claim to measure readership response, authorial intention, or legal impact. Its interpretive design also means that coded patterns illuminate representational tendencies rather than causal relations between literature and public memory. Further research should expand corpus coverage across regional literatures, genres, languages, and publication periods, while incorporating reception studies, author interviews, or comparative Southeast Asian materials where ethically and methodologically appropriate. Future work may also examine how film, digital fiction, theatre, and translated literature reshape memory politics around unfinished justice.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

M. Rifa Jamaludin Nasir: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible fictional works, scholarly studies, and contextual human-rights documents.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible fictional works, scholarly studies, and contextual human-rights documents, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of publicly accessible fictional works, scholarly studies, and contextual human-rights documents analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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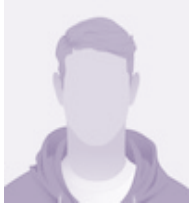
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