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The Archive that refuses silence: testimony, documentary imagination, and counter-history in Indonesian literary narratives

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesia's unresolved histories of colonial violence, the 1965–66 massacres, New Order repression, disappearance, exile, and post-authoritarian silence continue to shape literary narratives that confront the limits of official archives and public memory. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian literary narratives construct testimony, documentary imagination, and counter-history as counter-archival practices that refuse historical silence. **Method:** This study applies qualitative literary discourse analysis to a deduplicated corpus of 33 publicly verifiable items, consisting of primary literary texts, secondary scholarship, and contextual archival or human-rights records. **Results:** The corpus shows that testimonial voice is most powerful when mediated through fractured memory, embodied silence, family transmission, and spectral presence rather than through transparent confession. Documentary imagination appears through bureaucratic traces, paratexts, witness fragments, visual residues, and archival gaps that make absence analytically legible. Counter-history is concentrated around 1965 and New Order erasure, but also extends to colonial historiography, gendered memory, peripheral citizenship, and transnational displacement. **Implication:** This study demonstrates that literary narrative can be read as an ethical archive without being reduced to historical evidence. **Novelty:** This study contributes an integrated analytical model that connects testimonial voice, documentary trace, and counter-historical positioning in Indonesian literary memory studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's unresolved archives of political violence remain a crucial social problem because silence has not functioned merely as absence, but as a governing structure of memory. The 1965–66 anti-communist violence alone is widely reported to have caused an estimated 500,000 to one million deaths, while later findings and advocacy reports have linked the violence to mass detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and long-term social stigma. Declassified diplomatic materials further show that the killings were not historically obscure events, but internationally observed and bureaucratically recorded processes of mass violence. Yet official and educational narratives have repeatedly narrowed, displaced, or selectively erased this history, especially within post-New Order memory regimes (Eddyono, 2023 [1]). This condition makes Indonesian literary narratives indispensable objects of inquiry: they do not simply "remember" violence; they ask what kinds of speech, form, witness, and imagination become necessary when public archives remain ethically incomplete.

Recent scholarship has substantially advanced discussion of memory, testimony, and political violence in Indonesian literature. Widyatnyana (2026) [2], Ilma (2026) [3], and Prastiono (2025) [4] foreground trauma, haunting, and counter-memory in post-authoritarian fiction, while Faruk (2024) [5] examines Seno Gumira Ajidarma's Eyewitness through magical realism and testimonial perception. An (2025) [6] and Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [7] extend this debate by reading literary incoherence, silence, and collective trauma in relation to the 1965–66 massacres and their aftermath. Beyond Indonesia, Detue and Lacoste (2021) [8], Ahlskog (2024) [9], Herremans (2026) [10], and Greenwalt (2025) [11] show that testimony and archives are not neutral repositories but contested ethical formations. Nevertheless, existing studies often treat testimony, archive, and counter-history as adjacent themes rather than as an integrated narrative mechanism. What remains underexamined is how Indonesian literary texts formally convert archival absence into testimonial structure, documentary imagination, and counter-historical critique.

This study addresses that gap by asking how Indonesian literary narratives construct an archive that refuses silence. More specifically, this study examines three interrelated questions: how testimonial voices are staged when direct historical evidence is fragmented or politically constrained; how documentary imagination emerges through letters, reports, witness fragments, spectral traces, oral memory, and bureaucratic language; and how literary form produces counter-history without claiming to replace historiography. The object is therefore not historical truth as a recoverable totality, but the literary mediation of incomplete, contested, and ethically charged memory. This study is positioned within literary memory studies, archival criticism, and post-authoritarian Indonesian literary analysis, drawing on work on intergenerational memory and fragmented narration (Leksana & Subekti, 2022 [12]), haunted landscapes and post-authoritarian memory (Leong, 2021 [13]), political allegory and dissent (Refai, 2026 [14]; Kadamehang, 2026 [15]), and literary representations of nationalism, gender, and violence (Jamilah, 2026 [16]; Ridlo, 2026 [17]).

This study advances the argument that Indonesian literary narratives function as counter-archives not because they provide alternative factual inventories, but because they expose the conditions under which certain histories become speakable, unspeakable, or only partially transmissible. Their political force lies in the tension between testimony and form: witness is rarely presented as transparent evidence, while silence is rarely reducible to muteness. Instead, narrative gaps, spectral presences, documentary fragments, and embodied memory become ways of registering what official history cannot fully contain. This argument also has methodological implications. It requires reading literature neither as historical illustration nor as autonomous aesthetic object, but as a site where archive, testimony, and imagination negotiate the ethics of public memory. By testing this proposition through a structured qualitative corpus, this study contributes to debates on Indonesian political literature, post-authoritarian memory, and counter-history while avoiding unsupported causal claims about reception, intention, or historical proof.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Testimony in literary narratives

Testimony in literary narratives is not merely a witness's statement transferred into aesthetic form; it is an unstable relation among memory, injury, address, and belated recognition. Detue and Lacoste (2021) [8] argue that testimony changes literature by unsettling boundaries between evidence and expression, while Ahlskog (2024) [9] cautions that testimony cannot be equated with history because ethical understanding begins where evidentiary certainty becomes incomplete. In Indonesian contexts, Widyatnyana (2026) [2], Prastiono (2025) [4], An (2025) [6], and Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [7] show that testimony often appears through trauma, incoherence, silence, and deferred speech. Thus, testimony must be read as both narrative form and ethical relation.

The major indicators of testimonial narration include voice, mediation, fragmentation, embodied memory, and conditions of address. Leksana and Subekti (2022) [12] emphasize intergenerational memory as fragmented transmission, while Karp (2023) [18] shows that memory may exceed direct testimony when the dead, absent, or silenced cannot speak in conventional terms. Miñano-Mañero (2025) [19] similarly foregrounds embodied agency in women's oral histories of violence, complicating assumptions that testimony must be verbal, complete, or linear. In Indonesian literary studies, Faruk (2024) [5], Ferdinal (2021) [20], and Leong (2021) [13] suggest that testimonial force may emerge through magical realism, terror narrative, haunting, and spectral geography.

2.2. Archive

Archive is commonly understood as a repository of records, but contemporary memory studies treats it as a contested structure of power, selection, and erasure. Eddyono (2023) [1] demonstrates how official narratives in post-New Order Indonesia selectively erase the 1965 massacre, showing that silence is produced institutionally rather than naturally. Greenwalt (2025) [11] and Herremans (2026) [10] extend this view by conceptualizing archival resistance and informal archives as practices that contest authorized memory. Banks

(2025) [21] adds that silence itself can become aesthetic and political. Consequently, archive in this study is not a neutral container, but a field where memory, authority, and absence struggle.

The indicators of archival imagination include documentary fragments, missing records, bureaucratic language, visual traces, oral testimony, and material remnants that literature reorganizes into meaning. Chung (2022) [22] theorizes communal discourse archive as a form of collective historical memory, while Pesarini (2022) [23] shows how counter body-archives can make colonial invisibility visible. Duarte (2025) [24], Ružić (2024) [25], and Yang (2023) [26] further demonstrate that documentary forms—image, oral memory, and experimental witnessing—can unsettle official narratives. In Indonesian fiction, Efendi and Nurgiyantoro (2021) [27] reveal how political facts and wayang structures interact, suggesting that documentary imagination may operate through hybrid narrative rather than direct realism.

2.3. Counter-history

Counter-history refers to narrative practice that challenges dominant historical closure without claiming to replace historiography with fiction. Wadhawan (2025) [28], Nidhi (2025) [29], and Rai and Bhat (2025) [30] show that memory and fiction can resist nationalist simplification, particularly when partition, trauma, and nostalgia exceed official accounts. In Indonesian literary scholarship, Refai (2026) [14], Kadamehang (2026) [15], Jamilah (2026) [16], and Yani (2026) [31] examine resistance, dissent, nationalism, and populist rhetoric, while Ilma (2026) [3] and Sadani (2026) [32] situate counter-memory within unfinished death and peripheral citizenship. These studies establish counter-history as a literary intervention into who may narrate, mourn, and remember.

The key indicators of counter-history include opposition to official closure, recovery of marginal voices, disruption of linear chronology, critique of state-centered memory, and reconstruction of silenced political experience. Ridlo (2026) [17], Jaya (2026) [33], Efendi et al. (2025) [34], Setiaji (2026) [35], and Abdukalykowna (2026) [36] broaden this framework by linking memory to gender, mobility, ecology, sovereignty, statelessness, and precarious belonging. Ansori (2026) [37] and Ramadhan (2026) [38] further show that contemporary literary resistance is shaped by digital visibility and algorithmic circulation. This study therefore positions testimony, archive, and counter-history as one integrated analytical framework for reading Indonesian literary narratives as counter-archives that refuse silence.

3. METHOD

This study uses literary and documentary items as its unit of analysis, with each item treated as a verifiable document-level unit before any excerpt-level close reading is conducted. The corpus contains 33 deduplicated items: 12 primary literary narratives, 14 secondary scholarly sources, and 7 contextual records. Primary data include novels, testimonial prose, and literary narratives connected to colonial memory, 1965–66 violence, New Order repression, exile, and counter-memory. Secondary data provide theoretical and interpretive grounding, while contextual data establish publicly verifiable historical and archival frames. This layered design prevents this study from treating literary texts as factual proof while still allowing systematic analysis of testimony, archive, and counter-history.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Count	Characteristics	Status
ID-LIT-001–004	Primary literary narratives	Penguin Random House	Java / Dutch East Indies	Late colonial–early twentieth century	4	Pramoedya's Buru Quartet; colonial archive, nationalism, surveillance	Verified, retained
ID-LIT-005–008	Primary literary narratives	Deep Vellum, Penguin SEA, Gramedia, author site	Indonesia, Paris, Buru	1965–1998	4	Exile, state violence, gendered memory, Reformasi threshold	Verified, retained
ID-LIT-009–012	Primary testimonial/literary narratives	EUDL, TAPOL, Jurnal Perempuan, book records	Indonesia, East Timor, Sulawesi, Buru	New Order and aftermath	4	Witnessing, testimony, imprisonment, documentary memory	Verified, retained
ID-SCH-013–019	Secondary scholarship	Memory Studies, GEMA Online, Journal of Postcolonial Writing	Indonesia	1965 memory and post-authoritarian literature	7	Trauma, silence, haunting, intergenerational memory	Verified, retained
ID-SCH-020–021	Secondary theory	Synthesis; History and Theory	Comparative	Testimony and historical understanding	2	Testimony, literature, ethics, historical limits	Verified, retained
ID-SCH-022–026	Secondary archive/documentary studies	Memory Studies, Studies in Documentary Film, Art Journal, JPW	Comparative/postcolonial	Contemporary memory studies	5	Informal archive, documentary trace, body-archive, archival resistance	Verified, retained
ID-CTX-027–030	Contextual archive/human-rights records	National Security Archive, HRW, IPT 1965	Indonesia / transnational	1965–68; 2015–17 releases	4	Declassified records, tribunal reports, human-rights context	Verified, retained
ID-CTX-031–033	Contextual public memory records	OAPEN, The Guardian, Komnas HAM	Indonesia	Post-1965 to contemporary debate	3	Memory culture, textbook controversy, institutional context	Verified, retained
All items	Deduplicated corpus	Publicly traceable sources	Indonesia and comparative frame	Colonial period–2026	33	Primary, secondary, and context data integrated	Unique retained

This study applies a qualitative literary discourse design informed by memory studies, testimonial theory, and archival criticism. Its purpose is not to measure reception, authorial intention, or historical impact, but to examine how literary form organizes silenced memory. This design is appropriate because testimony and archive are not treated as transparent empirical objects; they are mediated by voice, genre, paratext, fragment, and narrative address. Following Detue and Lacoste's account [8] of what testimony does

to literature and Ahlskog's distinction [9] between testimony and history, this study reads literary evidence as ethically charged mediation rather than direct historical recovery.

Information was drawn from three source layers. Primary sources consist of selected Indonesian literary narratives whose public bibliographic records can be verified through publishers, author pages, scholarly discussions, or recognized book records. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles and scholarly works on Indonesian memory, political violence, testimony, haunting, documentary form, and archival resistance, including Eddyono [1], Leksana and Subekti [12], Leong [13], Faruk [5], Prastiono [4], An [6], Mayasari-Hoffert [7], Herremans [10], Greenwalt [11], Duarte [24], Miñano-Mañero [19], and Pesarini [23]. Contextual sources include public archival and human-rights records such as declassified documents, tribunal reports, memory-culture studies, and institutional pages. These sources support interpretation without collapsing literature into historiography.

Data collection proceeded through source identification, keyword searching, screening, metadata extraction, deduplication, and coding preparation. Search terms included "Indonesian literature testimony," "1965 Indonesian massacre fiction," "archive silence Indonesian novels," "counter-memory Indonesian literature," "documentary imagination," "Pramoedya archive," "Laut Bercerita testimony," "Saman trauma," and "Seno Gumira Ajidarma eyewitness." Items were included when they addressed testimony, archival silence, documentary traces, political violence, counter-history, or Indonesian public memory. Items were excluded when bibliographic status could not be verified, when literary relevance was weak, or when claims required unavailable reception data. Each retained item received a unique document code.

Analysis followed five stages: document-level mapping, excerpt-level close reading, categorical coding, cross-case comparison, and audit memo writing. The first stage established each item's role within primary, secondary, or contextual data. The second identified textual evidence related to testimony, silence, archival trace, and counter-history. The third applied the initial codebook consistently across the corpus. The fourth compared patterns across literary and contextual materials without changing category meanings. The final stage recorded limitations, evidentiary gaps, and interpretive boundaries. Through this process, this study sustains methodological alignment between title, corpus, theory, and claims.

Table 2. Operational analytical framework

Analytical Tool	Core Question	Main Evidence Fields	Coding Focus	Interpretive Caution
Testimonial-Archival Voice Matrix	Who speaks, who remains silent, and how is testimony mediated?	Voice, silence mode, mediation, address	Witness position, structured silence, ethical mediation	Do not equate testimony with complete historical proof
Documentary Imagination Inventory	What documentary traces shape literary narration?	Letters, files, reports, paratexts, fragments, records	Archival trace, documentary form, fragment logic	Do not treat documentary style as factual verification
Counter-History Positioning Grid	Which dominant historical closures are challenged?	Official history, marginal memory, narrative opposition	Historical opposition, recovered voice, memory critique	Avoid causal claims about public impact or reception

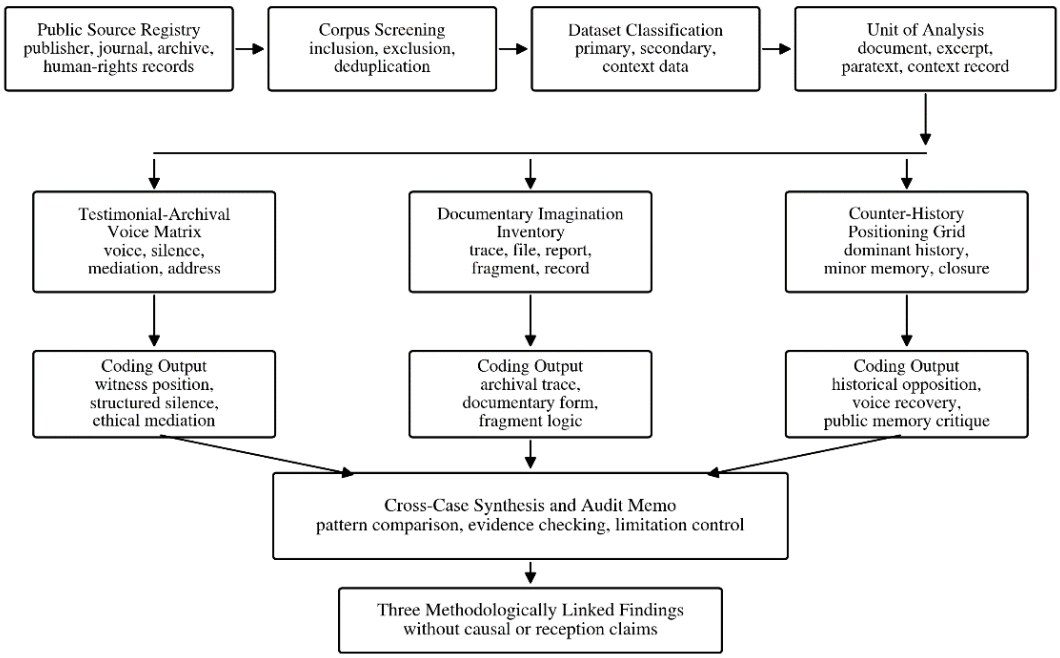


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Testimonial voice and the ethics of unsilencing

The corpus shows that testimonial voice is not concentrated only in explicit survivor narration. It also appears through historical narration, mediated memory, embodied silence, and contextual framing. This distribution matters because Indonesian literary counter-history often depends on indirect voice rather than transparent confession. Pramoedya's colonial sequence is coded through historical narration and archival silence, while texts such as Home/Pulang, The Sea Speaks His Name/Laut Bercerita, Saksi Mata/Eyewitness, and The Mute's Soliloquy rely more strongly on mediated witnessing. This pattern corresponds with Detue and Lacoste's view [8] that testimony reshapes literary form, and with Ahlskog's warning [9] that testimony cannot be collapsed into historiography.

Table 3. Testimonial-archival voice configurations across corpus layers

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Corpus Layer	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Anchor / Short Quotation	Data Code
Testimonial-archival voice	Historical narrator under colonial/state archival silence	Narration reconstructs political memory through colonial hierarchy, surveillance, print culture, and state record-making	Primary: 4; Secondary: 0; Context: 0	4	12.1%	Historical novels centered on colonial modernity and nationalist formation	"This Earth of Mankind"; "House of Glass"	ID-LIT-001–004
Testimonial-archival voice	Mediated testimony under state/social silence	Witnessing is displaced through family memory, survivor mediation, disappearance, exile, or testimonial narration	Primary: 5; Secondary: 0; Context: 0	5	15.2%	Literary narratives of 1965 memory, imprisonment, disappearance, and witnessing	"The Sea Speaks His Name"; "The Mute's Soliloquy"; "Saksi Mata"	ID-LIT-005, ID-LIT-006, ID-LIT-009–012
Testimonial-archival voice	Gendered embodied voice under bodily/political taboo	Silence appears through gendered body, unspeakability, trauma, and constrained agency	Primary: 2; Secondary: 1; Context: 0	3	9.1%	Fictional and scholarly materials linking gendered trauma with political memory	"Saman"; "I made no sound at all"	ID-LIT-008, ID-LIT-010, ID-SCH-019
Testimonial-archival voice	Theoretical/contextual mediation of silence	Scholarship and context records frame silence as institutional erasure, archival incompleteness, or memory politics	Primary: 1; Secondary: 13; Context: 7	21	63.6%	Peer-reviewed scholarship, declassified records, tribunal documents, memory-culture records	"selective erasure"; "fragmented narratives"; "resisting erasure"	ID-LIT-007, ID-SCH-013–026, ID-CTX-027–033

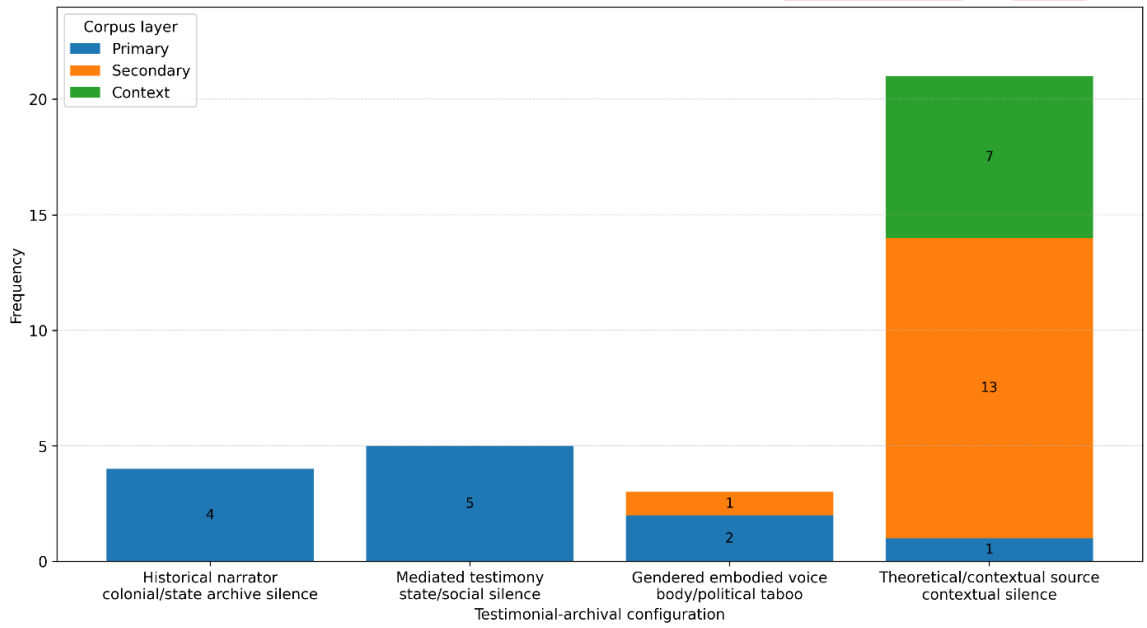


Figure 2. Testimonial-archival voice configurations across corpus layers

The dominant pattern lies in theoretical and contextual mediation, which accounts for 21 of 33 coded items, or 63.6% of corpus. This does not mean literary texts are secondary to scholarship; rather, it shows that silence requires interpretive scaffolding because its evidence is often dispersed across scholarship, archive, and public memory records. The phrases "selective erasure," "fragmented narratives," and "resisting erasure" mark recurring analytical anchors across Eddyono [1], Leksana and Subekti [12], and Herremans [10]. Among primary texts, mediated testimony is more frequent than gendered embodied voice or colonial historical narration. The literary anchors "The Sea Speaks His Name," "Saksi Mata," and "The Mute's Soliloquy" indicate that voice is staged through absence, witness, and belated speech.

This configuration supports an understanding of testimony as an archival relation rather than a simple narrative event. Silence is not treated as emptiness; it becomes a coded structure that determines who may speak, what can be preserved, and which histories remain only partially narratable. Faruk's reading [5] of Eyewitness, Mayasari-Hoffert's discussion [7] of unsounded trauma, and Miñano-Mañero's work [19] on embodied agency clarify why voice may emerge through fracture, muteness, and bodily constraint. The implication is that Indonesian literary counter-history gains force precisely when testimony is incomplete,

mediated, or displaced. This pattern positions literary narrative as a counter-archive that contests official closure without claiming to replace historical documentation.

4.2. Documentary imagination as narrative archive

Documentary imagination emerges in the corpus as a formal strategy through which literature borrows, imitates, interrupts, or reorders evidentiary forms without becoming a historical document in the strict archival sense. The most visible configuration is bureaucratic or state-record trace, appearing in 10 items, followed by oral or witness fragment in 9 items. This distribution indicates that Indonesian literary narratives do not depend only on affective remembrance; they repeatedly stage the archive as file, record, testimony, disappearance, paratext, or visual remainder. Pramoedya's colonial surveillance world, Ajidarma's eyewitness fiction, Chudori's and Kurniawan's memory-centered narratives, and public records on 1965 violence show how documentary texture becomes a narrative device for confronting silenced histories.

Table 4. Documentary imagination traces across corpus layers

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Corpus Layer Distribution	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual / Documentary Anchor	Data Code
Documentary imagination	Bureaucratic or state-record trace	Narrative or contextual material foregrounds files, official language, surveillance, tribunal record, declassified document, or institutional erasure	Primary: 3; Secondary: 2; Context: 5	10	30.3%	Colonial dossiers, state surveillance, human-rights records, tribunal documents, official memory politics	"House of Glass"; "selective erasure"; declassified records; tribunal findings	ID-LIT-003–004, ID-LIT-011, ID-SCH-013, ID-SCH-026, ID-CTX-027–030
Documentary imagination	Paratextual and bibliographic frame	Published title, edition, authorial framing, translation, publisher description, or scholarly classification makes literature readable as archive	Primary: 4; Secondary: 3; Context: 0	7	21.2%	Translated editions, public book records, author pages, critical bibliographic framing	"This Earth of Mankind"; "Home"; "The Question of Red"; "Saman"	ID-LIT-001, ID-LIT-005, ID-LIT-007–008, ID-SCH-014, ID-SCH-018, ID-SCH-020
Documentary imagination	Oral or witness fragment	Text or scholarship constructs memory through spoken recollection, survivor mediation, intergenerational narration, or incomplete testimony	Primary: 4; Secondary: 4; Context: 1	9	27.3%	Witness prose, family memory, testimonial fiction, intergenerational memory studies	"The Mute's Soliloquy"; "Saksi Mata"; "fragmented narratives"	ID-LIT-006, ID-LIT-009–012, ID-SCH-015–017, ID-CTX-031
Documentary imagination	Visual or documentary media trace	Image, documentary film, eyewitness scene, spectral landscape, or visual trace mediates memory beyond textual record	Primary: 1; Secondary: 5; Context: 1	7	21.2%	Documentary film, magical realism, haunted landscape, image-based witnessing, public memory visualization	"Eyewitness"; "haunted places"; "documentary-making"; "archival resistance"	ID-LIT-009, ID-SCH-021–026, ID-CTX-033

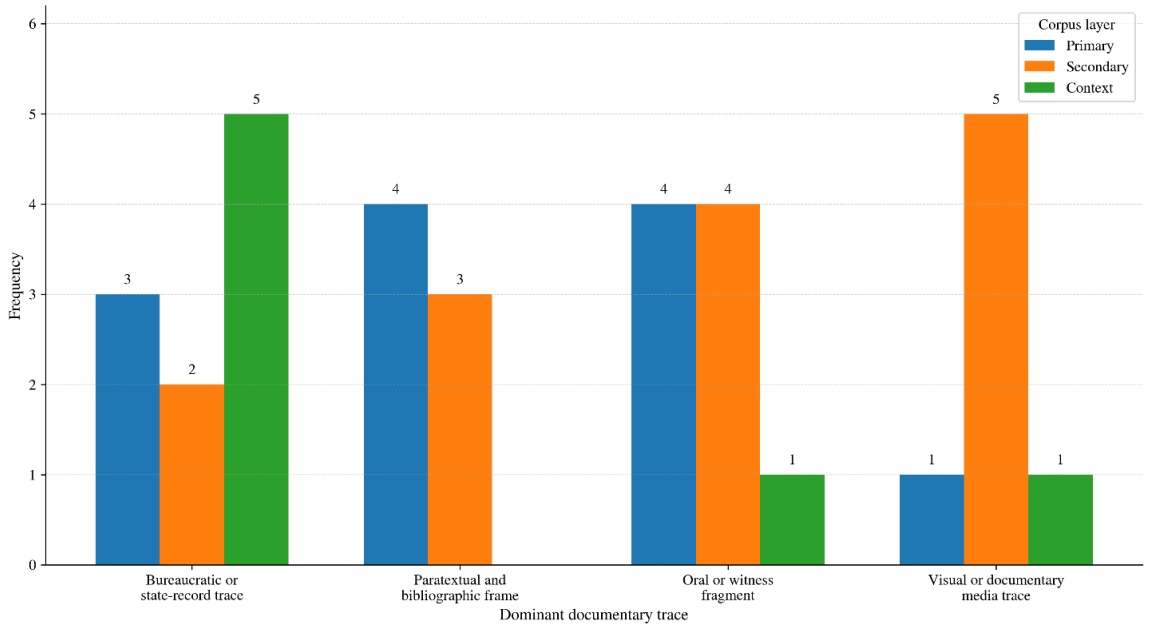


Figure 3. Documentary imagination traces across corpus layers

The dominant pattern is not documentary realism, but documentary pressure. Bureaucratic and state-record traces account for 30.3% of coded items, largely because contextual records and literary narratives converge around surveillance, declassification, tribunal language, and institutional erasure. Oral or witness fragments account for 27.3%, showing that testimony enters the corpus through mediated speech, family memory, and survivor narration rather than through direct historical transparency. Visual or documentary media traces remain significant at 21.2%, especially in materials linked to Saksi Mata, haunting, documentary film, and archival resistance. The short anchors "House of Glass," "The Mute's Soliloquy," "fragmented narratives," and "documentary-making" show that documentary imagination appears across genre boundaries.

This pattern strengthens the argument that counter-archival literature operates by reorganizing evidentiary forms rather than merely adding missing content to history. Eddyono's account [1] of selective erasure clarifies why official record is both necessary and insufficient, while Duarte [24], Ružić [25], and Yang [26] show that documentary image, oral testimony, and experimental witnessing can disturb institutional memory. Greenwalt [11] and Herremans [10] further suggest that archival resistance often emerges outside authorized repositories. In this corpus, literary narrative functions as a hinge between public

record and unspeakable experience: it preserves traces, but also exposes their fractures. Documentary imagination therefore becomes a method of reading absence, not a claim that fiction can replace historiography.

4.3. Counter-history against official closure

Counter-history appears most clearly where literary and contextual materials challenge historical closure rather than merely add alternative content to established narratives. The strongest concentration is found in materials related to 1965 and New Order erasure, with 17 of 33 items, or 51.5% of corpus. This category connects primary narratives of disappearance, imprisonment, exile, and mediated witnessing with secondary scholarship on trauma, haunting, fragmented memory, and selective erasure. Anti-colonial and peripheral configurations appear with equal frequency, each representing 18.2% of corpus. Gendered embodied memory is smaller in frequency, but analytically decisive because it shows how political history becomes legible through body, taboo, and constrained speech.

Table 5. Counter-history positions across corpus layers

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Corpus Layer Distribution	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual / Documentary Anchor	Data Code
Counter-history	Anti-colonial and national historiography	Narrative contests colonial knowledge, elite historiography, or state-centered accounts of national formation	Primary: 4; Secondary: 2; Context: 0	6	18.2%	Colonial modernity, print culture, surveillance, nationalist formation, literary nationalism	"This Earth of Mankind"; "House of Glass"; "Constructing the nation"	ID-LIT-001–004, ID-SCH-014, ID-SCH-020
Counter-history	1965 / New Order state erasure	Text or source reopens histories of massacre, detention, exile, disappearance, censorship, or post-authoritarian silence	Primary: 5; Secondary: 7; Context: 5	17	51.5%	1965 memory, Buru imprisonment, enforced disappearance, official silence, tribunal and declassified records	"The Sea Speaks His Name"; "The Mute's Soliloquy"; "selective erasure"	ID-LIT-005–007, ID-LIT-009–010, ID-SCH-013, ID-SCH-015–019, ID-SCH-026, ID-CTX-027–031
Counter-history	Gendered embodied political memory	Historical violence is reframed through gendered vulnerability, bodily silence, taboo, or feminist critique	Primary: 2; Secondary: 2; Context: 0	4	12.1%	Gendered trauma, sexual-political taboo, embodied witness, feminist literary reading	"Saman"; "The Question of Red"; "I made no sound at all"	ID-LIT-007–008, ID-SCH-018–019
Counter-history	Peripheral and transnational memory	Dominant national memory is unsettled through migration, marginal geography, ecological struggle, statelessness, or comparative archive	Primary: 1; Secondary: 3; Context: 2	6	18.2%	Exile, East Timor, peripheral citizenship, informal archive, transnational memory politics	"peripheral modernities"; "resisting erasure"; "forced migration"	ID-LIT-012, ID-SCH-021–023, ID-CTX-032–033

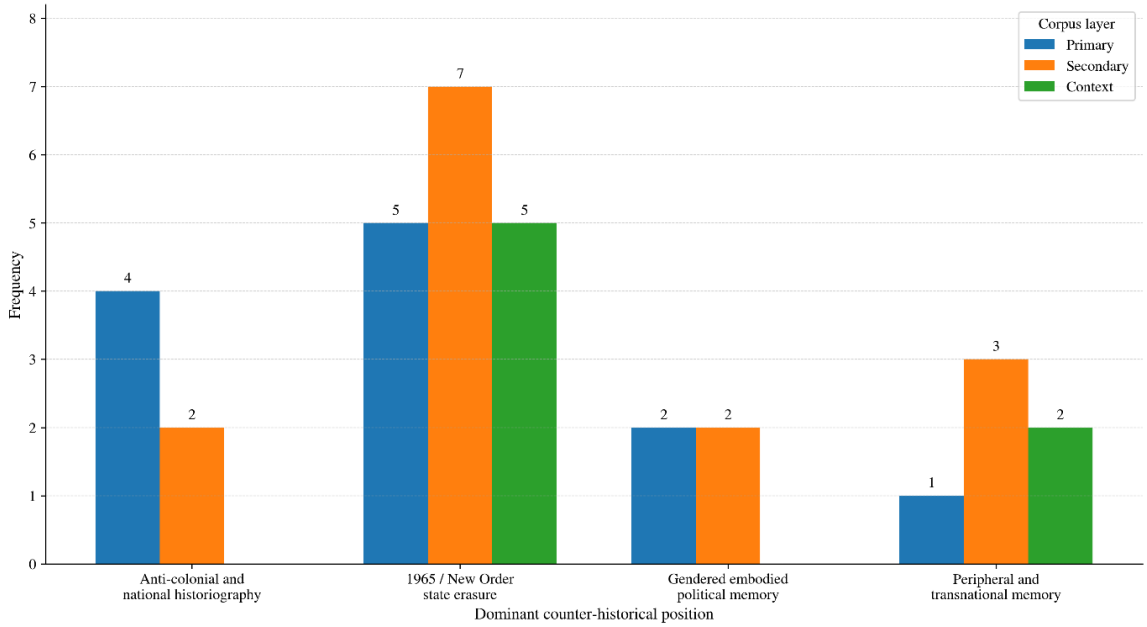


Figure 4. Counter-history positions across corpus layers

The dominant pattern confirms that official closure is contested through different narrative routes. In the primary corpus, The Sea Speaks His Name, The Mute's Soliloquy, Home, and The Question of Red place 1965 and its aftermath within disappearance, imprisonment, exile, and intimate memory. In secondary and contextual layers, "selective erasure," "fragmented narratives," and tribunal or declassified records give this literary pattern its broader memory frame. Anti-colonial counter-history is concentrated in Pramoedya's Buru Quartet, where colonial bureaucracy and nationalist emergence are narrated together. Peripheral and transnational memory expands the archive beyond Java-centered political memory through exile, migration, East Timor, and comparative archival resistance.

This pattern shows that counter-history in Indonesian literary narratives is not a single oppositional gesture. It is a structured practice of re-situating memory from official chronology to testimonial, embodied, peripheral, and documentary forms. Widyatnyana [2], Ilma [3], Prastiono [4], and Eddyono [1] clarify why post-authoritarian silence cannot be read simply as absence, while Herremans [10], Greenwalt [11], and

Pesarini [23] help explain how informal, resistant, and body-based archives contest institutional authority. The corpus therefore supports the central argument that literary counter-history refuses silence by reorganizing what counts as record, who may speak as witness, and how unfinished violence remains present within narrative form.

5. DISCUSSION

The configuration of testimonial-archival voice matters because it shows that Indonesian literary narratives do not depend on direct confession to perform ethical witnessing. The corpus indicates that testimony operates through mediated voice, historical narration, embodied silence, and contextual framing. This has a significant function: literature becomes a space where suppressed experience can be addressed without being forced into evidentiary completeness. Such a pattern supports Detue and Lacoste's argument [8] that testimony changes literary form, while also aligning with Ahlskog's caution [9] that testimony should not be treated as equivalent to historical proof. The dysfunction it exposes is equally important: official or public archives often leave victims, descendants, and marginal witnesses with incomplete modes of narration. Thus, literary testimony becomes meaningful precisely because it preserves fracture rather than smoothing it into closure. This study therefore reframes silence not as narrative weakness, but as an ethical form of historical pressure.

The underlying structure behind this testimonial pattern lies in Indonesia's uneven memory regime, where political violence has often been narrated through displacement, familial transmission, and mediated recall rather than institutional acknowledgment. Eddyono's analysis [1] of selective erasure clarifies why testimony in post-New Order contexts cannot easily appear as stable public speech. Leksana and Subekti [12] similarly show that third-generation memory of 1965 is frequently fragmented, suggesting that witness is often inherited rather than directly possessed. This explains why mediated testimony is stronger than transparent first-person recovery in the corpus. However, this pattern should not be read causally, as if state silence automatically produces literary form. Rather, there is a structural correlation between constrained public memory and narrative strategies that rely on gaps, substitution, haunting, and indirect address. The literary archive emerges from this tension: it speaks because ordinary historical channels remain partial, contested, or morally insufficient.

The documentary imagination identified in the corpus has a different implication: it demonstrates that literary counter-archives are built not only through memory, but through the aesthetic reworking of evidentiary forms. Bureaucratic traces, paratexts, witness fragments, and visual-documentary references make narrative appear close to archive while preventing it from becoming a simple record. This is crucial because Indonesian literary narratives dealing with violence often work between documentation and invention. They do not merely report what happened; they stage how records are produced, lost, withheld, or reactivated. This finding extends Duarte's [24] and Yang's [26] discussions of documentary mediation, while also resonating with Greenwalt [11] and Herremans [10] on archival resistance outside formal repositories. The implication is methodological as well as theoretical: reading such texts requires attention to files, reports, titles, translations, paratexts, and visual residues as narrative devices. Documentary imagination functions as an interpretive bridge between evidence and affective memory.

The reason documentary traces become so prominent is that the archive itself is not a neutral background to Indonesian political literature. It is one of the contested objects of narration. Bureaucratic records, surveillance files, declassified documents, and tribunal language do not simply support memory; they also reveal how memory has been regulated. This explains why state-record traces and oral fragments appear as parallel rather than opposed forms in the corpus. Pesarini's notion [23] of counter body-archives and Chung's idea [22] of communal discourse archive help clarify this structure: when official records are incomplete or compromised, bodies, communities, and narrative forms become alternative sites of preservation. Yet this study does not claim that fiction corrects archives by replacing them. Instead, fiction exposes the archive's conditions of possibility and failure. Documentary imagination therefore arises from the structural gap between institutional documentation and lived historical vulnerability, making absence readable without transforming literature into documentary evidence.

The strongest counter-historical implication concerns how Indonesian literary narratives unsettle official closure. The corpus shows that counter-history is most concentrated around 1965 and New Order erasure, but it also includes anti-colonial historiography, gendered memory, peripheral experience, exile, and transnational forms of remembrance. This breadth matters because counter-history is not simply opposition to one state narrative; it is a redistribution of historical authority. Works associated with disappearance, imprisonment, exile, colonial surveillance, and embodied trauma shift attention from dominant chronology to silenced presence. This aligns with Widyatnyana [2], Ilma [3], and Prastiono [4] on trauma, haunting, and counter-memory in Indonesian fiction, while extending Refai's [14] and Kadamehang's [15] focus on political allegory and dissent. The function of counter-history is therefore not to produce a rival master

narrative. Its critical value lies in keeping unfinished violence open to ethical scrutiny when official memory seeks simplification, normalization, or forgetting.

The structure behind this counter-historical tendency is the uneven distribution of narratable history. Certain events, subjects, and locations receive institutional visibility, while others remain peripheral, stigmatized, feminized, spectral, or transnationally displaced. This explains why 1965 and New Order erasure dominate the corpus but do not exhaust it. Gendered memory, peripheral citizenship, ecological struggle, migration, and statelessness broaden the archive beyond a Jakarta-centered or state-centered political frame. Ridlo [17], Jaya [33], Setiaji [35], Sadani [32], and Abdukalykowna [36] help clarify how literary memory is shaped by gender, mobility, sovereignty, and precarious belonging. At the same time, scholarship on nationalist memory warns that counter-history can itself risk becoming another closed narrative if it overstates recovery. This study therefore treats counter-history as a provisional literary practice, not a final corrective. Its importance lies in sustaining historical contestation, making silence legible, and preserving the ethical demand of those whom official archives fail to hear.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian literary narratives operate as counter-archives by transforming testimony, documentary traces, and structured silence into forms of counter-history. Its central lesson is that silence in post-authoritarian literature should not be read as absence alone, but as an ethical and political structure that shapes how violence becomes narratable. By integrating testimonial analysis, documentary imagination, and counter-history positioning, this study renews literary memory studies with a method that keeps textual form, archival incompleteness, and historical contestation in one analytical frame. Its contribution lies in shifting discussion from what literature remembers to how narrative makes suppressed memory speak.

Its limitation lies in corpus scope and evidentiary modesty. This study relies on publicly verifiable literary, scholarly, and contextual documents, so it cannot claim reader reception, authorial intention, or causal influence on public memory. Coding also privileges document-level patterns, leaving finer stylistic, linguistic, and comparative close readings for future inquiry. Further research should expand corpus across Indonesian languages, regional literary traditions, theatre, poetry, film, and digital platforms, while combining qualitative coding with reception interviews or computational text analysis. Such work could test whether counter-archival narration travels differently across genre, generation, geography, and medium without reducing literature to historical documentation.

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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 verifiable literary texts, secondary scholarship, and contextual archival or human-rights records.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly verifiable literary texts, secondary scholarship, and contextual archival or human-rights records, 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 verifiable literary texts, secondary scholarship, and contextual archival or human-rights records analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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