Indonesian Journal of Politics and Literary Studies
Vol. 1, No. 3, September 2026, pp. 184~194
ISSN: 3163-3811, DOI: https://doi.org/10.67490/ijpl.v1i3.1041

Mothers of the missing: gendered grief, state violence, and the politics of mourning in Indonesian literature

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Aug 16, 2026
Revised Sep 20, 2026
Accepted Sep 30, 2026

Keywords:

counter-memory;
gendered grief;
Indonesian literature;
mourning politics;
state violence.

ABSTRACT

Background: Enforced disappearance in Indonesian political history has produced unresolved forms of grief in which mothers and female relatives confront absent bodies, incomplete archives, and delayed public accountability. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian literature represents gendered grief, state violence, and the politics of mourning through figures of mothers, sisters, wives, and families of the missing. **Method:** Using a qualitative corpus-based design, this study applies close reading, gendered mourning narrative analysis, disappearance–state violence memory mapping, and public mourning counter-memory mapping to literary, paratextual, scholarly, and contextual records. **Results:** This study finds that maternal and familial grief functions as narrative witness by transforming suspended loss into ethical testimony. This study also shows that disappearance is represented not only through coercive violence but through archival silence, temporal rupture, absent bodies, and unresolved accountability. This study further demonstrates that mourning becomes counter-memory when private grief enters public address through repetition, testimony, translation, and refusal of forgetting. **Implication:** This study reframes Indonesian political-literary criticism by shifting attention from victimhood to gendered agency, and from trauma as content to mourning as narrative structure. **Novelty:** This study offers an integrated feminist, memory-studies, and literary-counterarchive framework for reading mothers of the missing in Indonesian literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's unresolved history of enforced disappearance makes mourning a public, legal, and literary problem rather than a private affect alone. In the 1997–1998 activist abductions, at least twenty-three pro-democracy activists were reportedly taken by security forces; nine returned, one was found dead, and thirteen remain officially unaccounted for. This unfinished record matters because disappearance suspends ordinary mourning: families are denied a body, a verified death, and a legally accountable perpetrator. Since 18 January 2007, Aksi Kamisan has transformed that suspension into a weekly grammar of public grief in front of the Indonesian presidential palace, where relatives and supporters continue to demand state accountability. Literature enters this field not as ornament but as a counter-archive: it gives narrative form to absences that official institutions have not fully resolved. For this reason, gendered grief in Indonesian literature requires analysis as a political practice of memory.

Recent scholarship has productively examined trauma, memory, and political violence in Indonesian fiction. Widyatnyana (2026) [1] foregrounds literary memory as a mode of narrating historical violence, while Ilma (2026) [2] examines haunting and archival silence in post-authoritarian novels. Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [3] extends this discussion through Indonesia's collective trauma in Ayu Utami's fiction, and Ridlo (2026) [4] clarifies how gender ideology structures political literary representation. Beyond Indonesia, Bourguignon et al. (2021) [5] conceptualize grief among relatives of disappeared persons as an almost impossible process, while Ashraf et al. (2023) [6], Tafakori (2022) [7], and Kodikara (2024) [8] show how women's activism around missing persons can convert intimate loss into public dissent. Yet existing studies rarely bring these strands together by asking how Indonesian literary texts specifically figure mothers and female relatives as mourners, witnesses, and political subjects. This gap is significant because disappearance reorganizes narrative authority around those who remain.

This study examines how Indonesian literature represents mothers and female kin of the missing within overlapping registers of gendered grief, state violence, and political mourning. It asks three interrelated questions. First, how are maternal and familial voices positioned as witnesses to disappearance when official truth remains incomplete? Second, how do literary texts narrate mourning when death cannot be ritually, legally, or emotionally concluded? Third, how do these representations shift grief from the domestic sphere into a politics of public memory and accountability? To answer these questions, this study reads selected Indonesian literary works in relation to scholarship on disappearance, feminist resistance, memory, and mourning. The analytical focus is not to verify historical events through fiction, but to examine how fiction organizes affect, silence, testimony, and symbolic protest into a politically legible narrative structure. In this sense, literary form becomes central to understanding how unresolved violence continues to inhabit social imagination.

This study argues that mothers of the missing in Indonesian literature should be read not simply as figures of suffering, but as producers of counter-memory whose grief contests state-managed silence. This argument is informed by work on mourning as political action, especially Manivannan's (2025) [9] account of grief as a justice-seeking practice and Corrigan and Ritholtz's (2025) [10] account of feminist aesthetic resistance after political violence. It also draws on Ruhe's (2023) [11] discussion of thanatographical fiction and Chloptsioudis and Kotopoulos's (2024) [12] attention to poetics of loss, while remaining grounded in Indonesian debates on trauma, ideology, and historical fiction. The implication is methodological as well as theoretical: reading maternal mourning as political discourse allows this study to connect narrative voice, gendered affect, and public memory without reducing literature to testimony or activism to sentiment. Such an approach clarifies how Indonesian fiction keeps unresolved violence ethically and politically speakable.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gendered grief

Gendered grief refers to mourning shaped by social expectations about women's emotional labor, kinship responsibility, and moral authority after violence. In disappearance contexts, grief is not only psychological but also political because loss remains legally unconfirmed and socially unresolved. Bourguignon et al. (2021) [5] describe such mourning as an "impossible process," while Malik and Ansari (2025) [13] show how female relatives of missing men inhabit fractured identities between widowhood, motherhood, and suspended hope. Smith (2023) [14] historicizes women in mourning as producers of public memory, whereas Chloptsioudis and Kotopoulos (2024) [12] emphasize poetic forms of loss. These approaches converge in treating grief as socially organized, not merely private.

The main indicators of gendered grief include narrative voice, kinship position, embodied suffering, ritual interruption, and the transformation of care into testimony. Tafakori (2022) [7], Ashraf et al. (2023) [6], and Kodikara (2024) [8] demonstrate that mothers and wives of disappeared persons often become justice-seeking figures precisely because familial attachment gives public legitimacy to protest. In Indonesian literary studies, Ridlo (2026) [4] and Rahman et al. (2025) [15] help clarify how gender ideology shapes female resistance, while Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [3] links women's silence and trauma to national memory. This literature suggests that maternal grief should be read as a structured discourse of witness, not passive victimhood.

2.2. State violence

State violence in this field is best understood not only as visible coercion but also as disappearance, archival erasure, surveillance, silencing, and delayed accountability. Widyatnyana (2026) [1] and Ilma (2026) [2] position Indonesian historical fiction as a site where political violence survives through trauma narratives, ghosts, and missing archives. Refai (2026) [16] and Kadamehang (2026) [17] similarly read literary dissent as a response to authoritarian power, although their emphasis falls more on allegory and protest language than on gendered mourning. Ansori (2026) [18] extends this discussion to digital authoritarianism and

surveillance. Together, these works show that state violence operates materially and symbolically through bodies, records, and memory.

Analytically, representations of state violence can be traced through perpetrators, institutions, spatial confinement, temporal rupture, bureaucratic silence, and narrative gaps. Jamilah (2026) [19] connects literature to national construction, while Andalas et al. (2025) [20] show how Indonesian fiction reworks collective memory of colonial violence across time. Setiaji (2026) [21], Sadani (2026) [22], and Abdukalykowna (2026) [23] broaden this frame by showing how sovereignty, uneven citizenship, and precarious belonging appear in contemporary Southeast Asian narratives. However, much of this scholarship privileges national, ecological, or migratory structures. This study narrows attention to disappearance as a form of violence that leaves families narrating what state archives fail to settle.

2.3. The politics of mourning

The politics of mourning refers to practices through which grief becomes a claim for recognition, justice, and historical truth. Manivannan (2025) [9] conceptualizes writing grief as political action, while Corrigan and Ritholtz (2025) [10] foreground feminist aesthetics as repair after political violence. Ruhe (2023) [11] adds that death, mourning, and ritual in fiction generate thanatographical forms through which societies narrate loss. In Indonesian criticism, Al-Ma'ruf et al. (2024) [24] identify moral dimensions in contemporary literature, and Ramadhan (2026) [25] shows how poetic dissent gains visibility through circulation. These studies shift mourning from affective expression toward cultural practice, but gendered kinship remains under-theorized within Indonesian disappearance narratives.

The key indicators of political mourning include counter-memory, public address, symbolic protest, ethical witnessing, ritual repetition, and refusal of closure. Yani (2026) [26] shows how popular literature can mobilize political rhetoric, whereas Mahendra (2025) [27] demonstrates that trauma can be aestheticized without losing ethical force. Yet mourning becomes politically distinctive when it refuses both private containment and state forgetfulness. This study therefore positions Indonesian literature as a counter-archival field where mothers and female relatives of the missing transform intimate grief into narrative accountability. Its theoretical stance integrates feminist mourning, state-violence memory, and literary counter-memory to explain how absence becomes politically speakable through form.

3. METHOD

This study uses documentary and textual units rather than human participants as its material object. Unit of analysis is each verified literary record, paratext, scholarly article, or contextual document that supports interpretation of mothers, female relatives, disappearance, state violence, and public mourning in Indonesian literature. Corpus comprises 31 public and verifiable records: 7 primary records, 16 secondary scholarly records, and 8 contextual records. Primary data ground literary interpretation; secondary data support conceptual positioning; contextual data establish historical and public-memory background without being treated as literary evidence. This distinction prevents interpretive overreach and keeps textual claims aligned with available corpus material.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Quantity	Characteristics	Status
MM-PRI-001–002	Primary literary records	Gramedia/KPG; Penguin Random House SEA	Indonesia; Southeast Asia; online	2017–2025	2	Publisher records for Laut Bercerita and The Sea Speaks His Name	Included
MM-PRI-003	Primary paratext	University of Melbourne Indonesia Forum	Australia/Indonesia; online	2021–2026	1	Authorial/literary discussion on writing and historical violence	Included
MM-PRI-004–007	Primary comparative literary records	Publisher and author-controlled public sources	Indonesia; international; online	1998–2026	4	Comparative records for Indonesian novels relevant to memory, gender, and political violence	Included
MM-SEC-001–006	Secondary scholarship	Indonesian Journal of Politics and Literary Studies	Indonesia; online	2026	6	Studies on nationalism, dissent, trauma, gender ideology, populism, and political allegory	Included
MM-SEC-007–012	Secondary scholarship	International peer-reviewed journals	Global; online	2021–2026	6	Feminist, memory, disappearance, grief, and political mourning studies	Included
MM-SEC-013–016	Secondary scholarship	Literary, trauma, and mourning studies journals	Global; online	2023–2026	4	Studies on thanatography, collective trauma, aesthetics of loss, and gendered memory	Included
MM-CTX-001–004	Context records	Human-rights institutions and NGOs	Indonesia; global; online	1997–2026	4	Records on enforced disappearance, accountability, and state violence	Context only
MM-CTX-005–008	Context records	Public-memory, policy, and media sources	Indonesia; online	2007–2026	4	Records on Aksi Kamisan, civic mourning, and public remembrance	Context only

Research design is qualitative, interpretive, and corpus-based. This study combines close reading, feminist memory analysis, and discourse mapping to examine how literature gives form to disappearance, gendered grief, and mourning as political address. This design is appropriate because selected materials do not provide measurable behavioral data, nor do they permit causal inference. Instead, they enable analysis of narrative position, symbolic structure, affective register, and counter-memory. Following recent work on

Indonesian trauma fiction, feminist resistance, and mourning after political violence, this study treats literary form as a site where absence, silence, and kinship become analytically visible.

Information sources are divided into three levels. Primary sources include literary works, publisher records, translation paratexts, and authorial public discussions related to Indonesian narratives of disappearance and political violence. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed studies supplied in the reference list, especially work on Indonesian political literature, trauma narratives, feminist literary criticism, mourning, enforced disappearance, and memory politics. Contextual sources include lawful public records from human-rights, policy, and civic-memory channels. These contextual records are used only to situate historical background and public mourning practices; they do not replace textual interpretation or become evidence for claims about narrative meaning.

Data collection followed a documented protocol. First, official publisher pages, author-controlled sites, university forums, scholarly databases, and human-rights sources were identified. Second, searches used terms such as “mothers of the missing,” “enforced disappearance,” “Indonesian literature,” “gendered grief,” “state violence,” “Aksi Kamisan,” “mourning,” “trauma narrative,” and “counter-memory.” Third, records were screened using inclusion criteria: relevance to Indonesian literature, political violence, disappearance, women’s mourning, memory, or public grief. Items were excluded when they lacked public verification, duplicated existing records, or offered no conceptual or contextual relevance. Metadata, short lawful excerpts, URLs, dates, context notes, and document codes were then stored.

Data analysis proceeds through three connected instruments. Gendered Mourning Narrative Analysis identifies mourning actors, kinship positions, voice, silence, affective register, and agency. Disappearance–State Violence Memory Mapping examines missing-body status, archive mode, testimony, temporal rupture, and accountability frame. Public Mourning and Counter-Memory Mapping traces how grief moves from domestic loss to public address through symbolic protest, circulation, translation, and civic memory. Coding is conducted in corpus_coding using stable document codes, then compared across corpus_metadata and corpus_text. This procedure supports interpretive triangulation while maintaining a clear boundary: this study analyzes representation, discourse, and memory, not legal causality or historical verification.

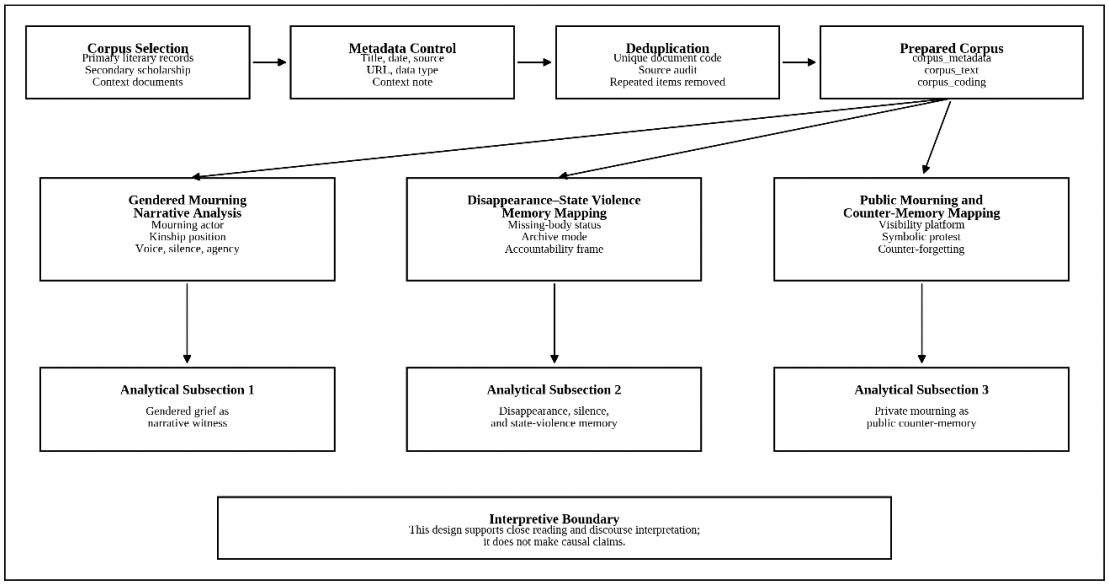


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

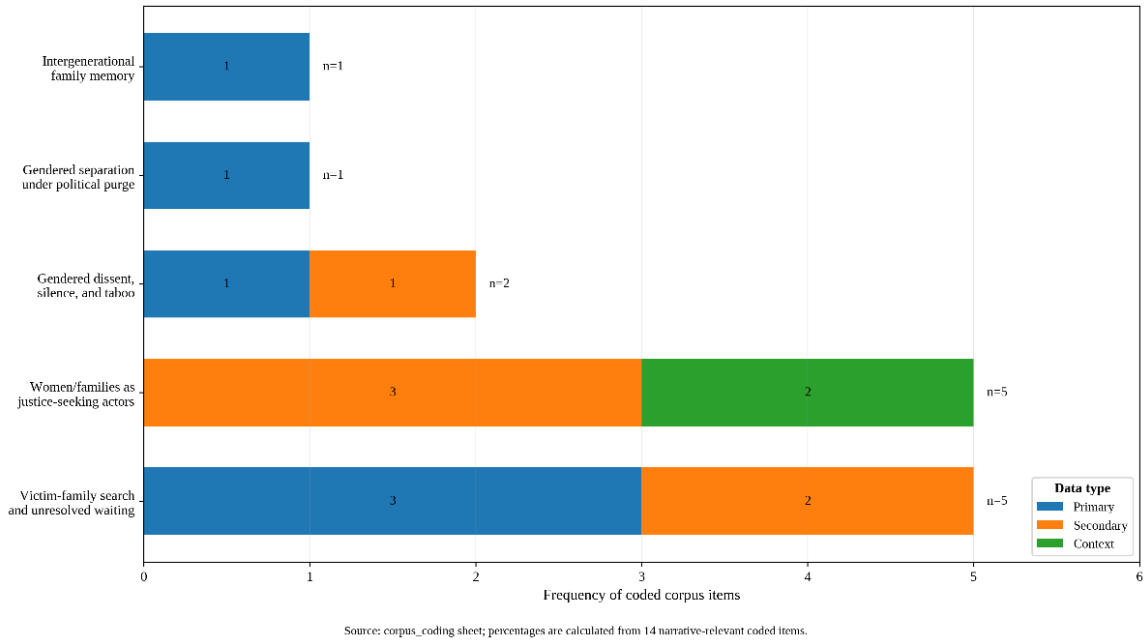
4. RESULTS

4.1. Gendered grief as narrative witness

The coding foregrounds mourning as a narrative position rather than a merely emotional theme. The table organizes fourteen narrative-relevant corpus items through five patterns: unresolved family search, justice-seeking women and families, gendered dissent, politically imposed separation, and intergenerational memory. This structure follows the analytical concern of this study: how Indonesian literary and paratextual materials make grief legible through kinship, gendered voice, and memory work. The corpus does not treat all materials equally. Primary literary and paratextual records anchor textual interpretation, secondary scholarship supports conceptual refinement, and contextual records clarify public-memory conditions. This separation is necessary because gendered grief in disappearance narratives emerges through the interaction of literary form, familial address, and unresolved political violence.

Table 2. Gendered mourning as narrative witness in the coded corpus

Main Pattern	Subcategory	Operational Indicator	Primary	Secondary	Context	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Short Excerpt	Data Code
Victim-family search and unresolved waiting	Sibling and family grief	The missing person is narrated through waiting, search, denial, hope, and unresolved familial loss	3	2	0	5	35.7%	Publisher record, translation paratext, reception source, hermeneutic study	"perasaan keluarga korban penghilangan paksa"; "the desaparecidos of Indonesia"; "Asmara as the main narrator"	MM-PRI-001; MM-PRI-002; MM-PRI-007; MM-SEC-007; MM-SEC-008
Women/families as justice-seeking actors	Mourning as public demand	Female relatives, mothers, widows, and victims' families appear as moral actors demanding truth, recognition, or accountability	0	3	2	5	35.7%	Comparative scholarship, human-rights context, official archive context	"keluarga korban terus diingkari"; "Keluarga korban penculikan 1997/1998"	MM-SEC-010; MM-SEC-011; MM-SEC-013; MM-CTX-002; MM-CTX-008
Gendered dissent, silence, and taboo	Female voice under constraint	Women's grief appears indirectly through silence, taboo, defiance, or gendered speech limits rather than explicit maternal mourning	1	1	0	2	14.3%	Comparative literary text and trauma scholarship	"mendobrak tabu"	MM-PRI-006; MM-SEC-006
Gendered separation under political purge	Intimate loss and belated search	Political violence separates bodies, lovers, and families, producing memory, delayed inquiry, and unresolved attachment	1	0	0	1	7.1%	Comparative primary literary record	"driven apart by one of the bloodiest"	MM-PRI-005
Intergenerational family memory	Exile, return, and family archive	Family memory becomes a cross-generational narrative structure for political loss and return	1	0	0	1	7.1%	Comparative primary literary record	"kisah dua generasi"	MM-PRI-004



Source: corpus_coding sheet; percentages are calculated from 14 narrative-relevant coded items.

Figure 2. Distribution of gendered mourning patterns by data type

The dominant pattern is shared by two categories, each appearing in five coded items or 35.7% of narrative-relevant records. The first concerns victim-family search and unresolved waiting, supported by Laut Bercerita, The Sea Speaks His Name, and reception sources that identify "perasaan keluarga korban penghilangan paksa," "the desaparecidos of Indonesia," and "Asmara as the main narrator." The second concerns women and families as justice-seeking actors, supported by scholarship on women's activism and contextual records referring to "keluarga korban terus diingkari" and "Keluarga korban penculikan 1997/1998." Less frequent categories show important variations: Saman contributes dissent and taboo, Amba contributes politically imposed separation, and Pulang contributes intergenerational family memory.

These patterns suggest that maternal and familial mourning operates as narrative authority because disappearance leaves ordinary closure unavailable. Bourguignon et al. [5] frame grief among relatives of disappeared persons as an impossible process, while Tafakori [7], Ashraf et al. [6], and Kodikara [8] show that women's mourning often becomes justice-oriented public action. In the Indonesian literary frame, Widyatnyana [1], Ilma [2], Ridlo [4], and Mayasari-Hoffert [3] help explain why trauma, gender ideology, and archival silence cannot be separated from narrative form. The strongest implication is that mothers and female kin should not be read only as victims of state violence. They function as counter-archival figures whose waiting, testimony, silence, and refusal of forgetting keep unresolved violence publicly speakable.

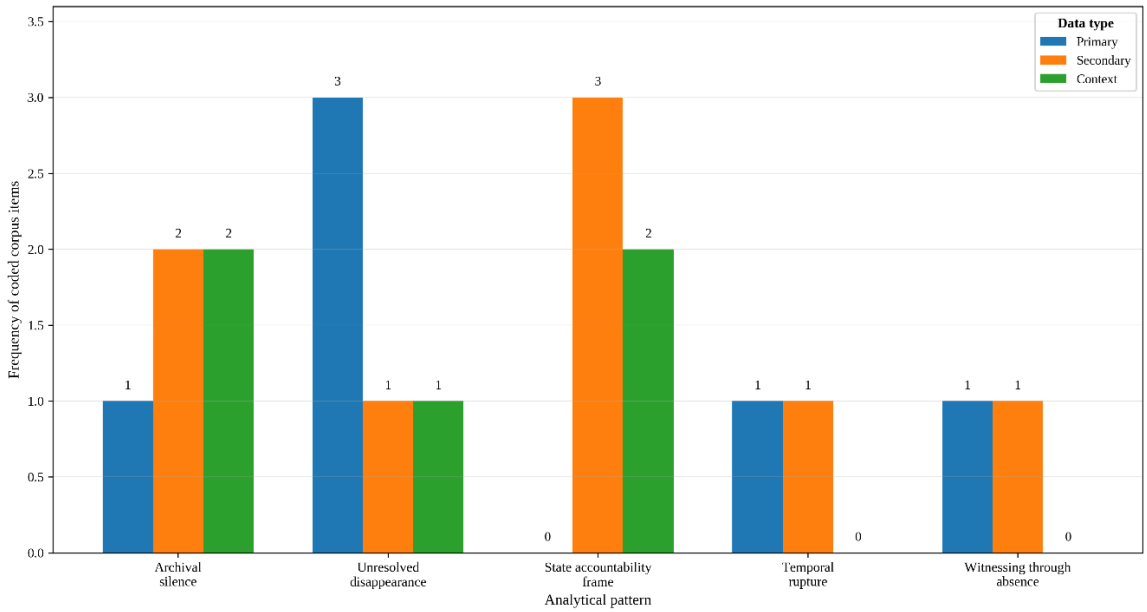
4.2. Disappearance, silence, and state-violence memory

The second analytical movement keeps the same fourteen narrative-relevant coded items but shifts attention from who mourns to how disappearance is remembered as state violence. The table is organized around five patterns: archival silence, unresolved disappearance, state accountability, temporal rupture, and witnessing through absence. These categories were selected because they connect literary representation to the political problem of missing bodies, incomplete records, and delayed recognition. Primary materials

remain the basis for claims about narrative structure, while secondary and contextual materials clarify how disappearance becomes legible as a public-memory issue. This organization protects the analysis from treating contextual documents as literary evidence while still allowing them to explain why silence and absence carry political weight.

Table 3. Disappearance, archival silence, and state-violence memory in the coded corpus

Main Pattern	Subcategory	Operational Indicator	Primary	Secondary	Context	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Short Excerpt	Data Code
Archival silence	Missing record and blocked truth	Disappearance is marked by incomplete documentation, absence of official closure, or the need for alternative memory	1	2	2	5	35.7%	Literary paratext, trauma scholarship, human-rights context	"archival silence"; "unfinished dead"; "kasus penculikan dan penghilangan paksa"	MM-PRI-003; MM-SEC-008; MM-SEC-009; MM-CTX-001; MM-CTX-003
Unresolved disappearance	Suspended death and absent body	The missing subject remains narratively present through search, uncertainty, and refusal of final closure	3	1	1	5	35.7%	Main literary record, translation record, reception source, legal-memory context	"the desaparecidos of Indonesia"; "korban penghilangan paksa"; "belum kembali"	MM-PRI-001; MM-PRI-002; MM-PRI-007; MM-SEC-007; MM-CTX-002
State accountability frame	Demand for recognition and responsibility	The narrative or contextual source links disappearance to state power, denial, impunity, or delayed justice	0	3	2	5	35.7%	Political-literary scholarship, women's activism scholarship, human-rights documentation	"state violence"; "justice-seeking mothers"; "accountability"	MM-SEC-010; MM-SEC-011; MM-SEC-013; MM-CTX-002; MM-CTX-008
Temporal rupture	Past violence in present life	Political violence interrupts ordinary time, producing belated knowledge, inherited memory, or return to unfinished loss	1	1	0	2	14.3%	Comparative literary record and memory scholarship	"kisah dua generasi"; "collective memory"	MM-PRI-004; MM-SEC-014
Witnessing through absence	Narrative presence of missing persons	Absence becomes a structuring device through which relatives, narrators, or communities speak for unresolved violence	1	1	0	2	14.3%	Literary paratext and thanatographical scholarship	"family and friends who lose them"; "death, mourning and ritual"	MM-PRI-003; MM-SEC-012



Source: corpus_coding sheet; values are identical to Table 3 and use the same 14 narrative-relevant coded items.

Figure 3. Memory of disappearance and state violence by data type

Three patterns dominate equally, each appearing in five coded items or 35.7% of the narrative-relevant corpus. Archival silence appears through phrases such as "archival silence," "unfinished dead," and public references to "kasus penculikan dan penghilangan paksa." Unresolved disappearance is marked by formulations such as "the desaparecidos of Indonesia," "korban penghilangan paksa," and "belum kembali," all of which foreground an absence that cannot be narratively closed. The state accountability frame is strongest in secondary and contextual records, where disappearance is linked to "state violence," "justice-seeking mothers," and "accountability." Less frequent but analytically important patterns include temporal rupture, visible in "kisah dua generasi," and witnessing through absence, where family and friends become narrative carriers of unresolved loss.

Disappearance operates in this corpus as a memory structure that forces literature to narrate what official closure has not settled. Ilma's discussion [2] of haunting and archival silence, Widyatnyana's account [1] of trauma narratives, and Bourguignon et al.'s framing [5] of disappearance grief as an impossible process help explain why absence becomes narratively productive. Kodikara [8], Tafakori [7], and Ashraf et al. [6] further show that when families confront blocked truth, mourning often becomes a justice-oriented practice rather than a completed ritual. Within this study, state violence is therefore not represented only through perpetrators or coercive institutions. It appears through gaps, belatedness, missing records, suspended bodies, and the ethical burden placed on those who continue to remember.

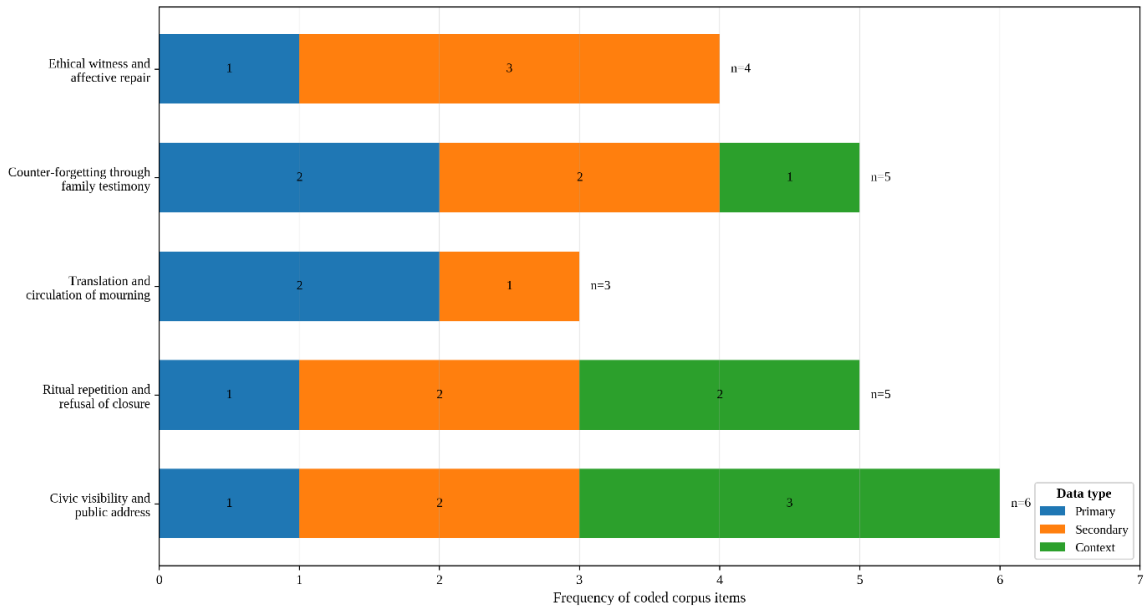
4.3. Public mourning and counter-memory

Mourning becomes politically legible in this corpus when private loss is repeated, circulated, and addressed beyond the household. The same fourteen narrative-relevant coded items are retained from the previous analyses, but the coding here is non-exclusive because a single corpus item may simultaneously

mark visibility, ritual repetition, testimony, and ethical witness. This organization is necessary because public mourning does not operate as one discrete theme; it emerges through overlapping practices of address, memory, and refusal. Primary records indicate how literary and paratextual materials narrate loss, secondary studies clarify feminist and memory-based interpretation, and contextual records explain how mourning enters civic space without replacing literary analysis.

Table 4. Public mourning and counter-memory in the coded corpus

Main Pattern	Subcategory	Operational Indicator	Primary	Secondary	Context	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Example / Short Excerpt	Data Code
Civic visibility and public address	Mourning enters public space	Grief is represented or contextualized as a visible claim addressed to the state, public memory, or national conscience	1	2	3	6	42.9%	Literary paratext, feminist mourning scholarship, Aksi Kamisan and human-rights records	"Aksi Kamisan"; "justice-seeking mothers"; "public dissent"	MM-PRI-003; MM-SEC-010; MM-SEC-011; MM-CTX-002; MM-CTX-005; MM-CTX-008
Ritual repetition and refusal of closure	Mourning as sustained practice	Repeated mourning practices prevent disappearance from being absorbed into silence, closure, or forgetting	1	2	2	5	35.7%	Literary reception, memory studies, civic protest context	"weekly grammar of public grief"; "refusal of closure"; "unfinished dead"	MM-PRI-007; MM-SEC-008; MM-SEC-012; MM-CTX-005; MM-CTX-006
Translation and circulation of mourning	Cross-lingual memory	Translation, publication, and literary circulation extend local grief into wider regional or global memory publics	2	1	0	3	21.4%	Indonesian edition, English translation, scholarship on literary circulation	"The Sea Speaks His Name"; "desaparecidos of Indonesia"; "platform visibility"	MM-PRI-001; MM-PRI-002; MM-SEC-016
Counter-forgetting through family testimony	Kinship as archive	Family members, especially women and relatives, preserve memory when official records remain incomplete or contested	2	2	1	5	35.7%	Primary literary records, trauma scholarship, contextual documentation	"family and friends who lose them"; "collective trauma"; "keluarga korban"	MM-PRI-003; MM-PRI-004; MM-SEC-007; MM-SEC-009; MM-CTX-002
Ethical witness and affective repair	Mourning as moral claim	Grief becomes an ethical form of witness that demands recognition without reducing literature to legal testimony	1	3	0	4	28.6%	Literary paratext, feminist aesthetics, mourning studies, trauma criticism	"grief as political action"; "feminist resistance"; "poetics of mourning"	MM-PRI-003; MM-SEC-012; MM-SEC-013; MM-SEC-015



Source: corpus_coding sheet; values use the same 14 narrative-relevant coded items. Pattern coding is non-exclusive.

Figure 4. Public mourning and counter-memory by data type

The most frequent pattern is civic visibility and public address, appearing in six coded instances or 42.9% of the corpus. It is supported by references to "Aksi Kamisan," "justice-seeking mothers," and "public dissent," showing how mourning is directed toward public recognition rather than confined to domestic sorrow. Two related patterns follow at five instances each: ritual repetition and refusal of closure, and counter-forgetting through family testimony. These patterns are visible in phrases such as "weekly grammar of public grief," "unfinished dead," "family and friends who lose them," and "keluarga korban." Translation and circulation appear less frequently, yet remain important because The Sea Speaks His Name extends Indonesian disappearance memory into broader readerships.

Public mourning in this corpus works as counter-memory because it refuses the state's ability to define when violence has ended. Manivannan's account [9] of grief as political action, Corrigan and Ritholtz's analysis [10] of feminist aesthetic repair, and Tafakori's work [7] on affective politics of mourning help explain why maternal and familial grief becomes a claim to justice. Within Indonesian literary scholarship, Ilma [2], Widyatnyana [1], Ramadhan [25], and Ridlo [4] support the view that silence, circulation, trauma, and gender ideology shape how political memory is narrated. This study therefore

positions mothers and female relatives not as supplementary figures to political violence, but as narrative agents who keep disappearance publicly visible through testimony, repetition, and refusal of forgetting.

5. DISCUSSION

The prominence of gendered mourning as narrative witness shows that Indonesian literary memory of disappearance is organized less around heroic political actors than around those who remain after violence. This matters because mothers, sisters, wives, and female kin function as ethical mediators between private injury and public remembrance. Their grief enables literature to speak about disappearance without reducing missing persons to statistics or converting trauma into spectacle. This finding extends Bourguignon et al.'s (2021) [5] account of disappearance grief as an impossible process, but it also complicates it: impossibility does not produce silence alone; in fiction, it may generate narrative agency. Ridlo (2026) [4] and Rahman et al. (2025) [15] support this reading by showing that gender ideology shapes how women's resistance becomes intelligible. However, compared with studies that emphasize women primarily as victims, this study shows that grief can function as witness, archive, and moral argument.

The underlying structure behind gendered mourning lies in the unresolved status of disappearance itself. Because the missing person is neither fully recoverable nor ritually concluded, narrative authority shifts toward family members who live with suspended knowledge. This does not establish a causal law, but it shows a strong interpretive association between absent bodies and the centrality of kinship voice. Malik and Ansari (2025) [13] describe similar suspension through fractured female subjectivities, while Tafakori (2022) [7], Ashraf et al. (2023) [6], and Kodikara (2024) [8] show how women's familial positions can become politically authorized forms of protest. Indonesian literary scholarship has discussed trauma and gender, yet it often separates affect from political accountability. This study bridges that separation by demonstrating why maternal and familial grief becomes structurally necessary: where the state does not complete truth, kinship becomes the narrative site through which loss remains intelligible.

The patterns of archival silence, unresolved disappearance, and state accountability indicate that violence in Indonesian literature is not represented only through scenes of coercion. Its strongest function is often negative: it appears through gaps, missing documents, delayed recognition, and the inability to close a life story. This finding matters because it challenges readings that expect political fiction to represent violence through direct confrontation alone. Ilma (2026) [2] and Widyatnyana (2026) [1] support this view by emphasizing haunting, archival silence, and trauma narratives in post-authoritarian fiction. Refai (2026) [16] and Kadamehang (2026) [17] similarly identify allegory and dissent as literary responses to political power, although their emphasis is less directly concerned with kinship mourning. This study therefore adds a more specific claim: state violence becomes narratively durable when disappearance relocates evidence from official archives to memory, testimony, and unresolved familial address.

The structure behind this pattern is the asymmetry between institutional silence and literary narration. When official records are incomplete, contested, or morally insufficient, fiction does not simply fill factual gaps; it dramatizes what such gaps do to families, memory, and public ethics. This position resonates with Ruhe's (2023) [11] work on thanatographical fiction, where death and mourning shape narrative form, and with Mayasari-Hoffert's (2025) [3] account of collective trauma in Indonesian literature. Yet this study differs from approaches that treat trauma primarily as psychological inheritance. Its emphasis falls on how absence becomes a political structure of narration. State violence is therefore not only an event located in the past; it is reproduced as belatedness, uncertainty, and the burden of remembering. This helps explain why literary representations of disappearance remain politically charged even when they avoid documentary or juridical language.

The movement from private mourning to public counter-memory shows that grief functions as a form of civic address. This matters because mourning is often dismissed as emotional excess or familial attachment, whereas the corpus positions it as a sustained practice of recognition, repetition, and refusal of forgetting. Manivannan (2025) [9] supports this interpretation by conceptualizing grief as political action, while Corrigan and Ritholtz (2025) [10] show how feminist aesthetics can repair political violence without claiming to resolve it. Ramadhan (2026) [25] adds that circulation can alter the visibility of literary dissent, which helps explain the significance of translation and public reception. Still, this study does not suggest that literary mourning directly produces justice. Its implication is more precise: literature keeps unresolved violence available to public memory when formal mechanisms of recognition remain delayed, partial, or contested.

The deeper structure of counter-memory lies in repetition across forms: literary narration, family testimony, symbolic protest, translation, and scholarly interpretation. These forms do not collapse into one another, but together they prevent disappearance from becoming a closed historical category. Tafakori (2022) [7] and Kodikara (2024) [8] show comparable dynamics in justice-seeking mothers' activism, while Smith (2023) [14] demonstrates that women in mourning have long shaped political memory across imperial and post-imperial contexts. In Indonesian literary studies, Jamilah (2026) [19], Yani (2026) [26], and Al-Ma'ruf

et al. (2024) [24] remind us that literature participates in national, moral, and ideological formation. This study builds on those insights by locating mothers of the missing at the intersection of gendered affect and memory politics. The central implication is that mourning becomes politically meaningful not because it ends grief, but because it organizes refusal, address, and ethical remembrance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesian literary representations of mothers and female relatives of the missing transform grief into narrative witness, counter-memory, and political address. Its central lesson is that mourning after enforced disappearance cannot be understood only as private sorrow, because absent bodies, incomplete archives, and delayed accountability reorganize kinship into a public moral vocabulary. The strongest contribution of this study lies in integrating feminist mourning analysis, state-violence memory mapping, and literary counter-archive reading within one coherent framework. By doing so, this study renews Indonesian political-literary criticism by shifting attention from victimhood to gendered agency, from trauma content to narrative structure.

This study is limited by its reliance on public, documentary, literary, paratextual, scholarly, and contextual sources; it does not include interviews with authors, families of missing persons, activists, or readers. Its interpretive design also cannot establish causal relations between literary representation and public political action. Future research should expand corpus coverage across poetry, drama, memoir, film, digital archives, and visual protest materials, while maintaining clear separation between textual evidence and historical documentation. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia, Latin America, or South Asia would further clarify how maternal mourning travels across different regimes of disappearance, memory, and justice-seeking activism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks the reviewers and editorial team for their constructive feedback on this manuscript.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Author states no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Wulan Kurnia Sari: 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 verifiable literary, paratextual, scholarly, and contextual records.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

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

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