

Literary memory and political violence: trauma narratives in Indonesian historical fiction

Kadek Nara Widyatnyana
Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received Feb 14, 2026

Revised Mar 11, 2026

Accepted Mar 21, 2026

Keywords:

cultural memory;
historical fiction;
narrative trauma;
political violence;
trauma representation.

ABSTRACT

Background: Political violence in Indonesian history, especially colonial repression and the 1965 mass violence, has produced enduring trauma often absent from official historiography. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian historical fiction constructs literary memory and represents political violence through discourse and narrative form. **Method:** A qualitative interpretive approach integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis, and trauma-oriented literary analysis of selected novels. **Results:** Violence is represented through indirection—euphemism, silence, and abstraction—while trauma appears in non-linear, repetitive, and fragmented narratives; metaphor and restrained diction mediate unspeakable experiences. **Implication:** These findings position historical fiction as a counter-archive that ethically represents trauma and expands discourse on memory and post-authoritarian literature. **Novelty:** This study integrates discourse, narrative, and trauma analysis to reveal how linguistic and aesthetic strategies function as ethical mechanisms of witnessing political violence.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Kadek Nara Widyatnyana
Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia
Jl. Udayana No. 11, Singaraja, Banjar Bali, Kec. Buleleng, Buleleng, Bali, 81116, Indonesia
Email: nara.widyatnyana@undiksha.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Political violence has left a deep and unresolved imprint on Indonesia's historical consciousness, particularly through colonial repression and the mass violence of 1965–1966. Scholarly estimates suggest that between 500,000 and one million people were killed during the anti-communist purges, with millions more subjected to imprisonment, exile, and long-term social stigma. Yet for more than three decades under the New Order regime, public discussion of these events was systematically suppressed through censorship, surveillance, and state-controlled historiography. Even after the Reformasi period, national reconciliation has remained partial, and official narratives continue to marginalize victims' testimonies. In this context, literary fiction has emerged as a crucial cultural site for articulating silenced memories and affective histories. Historical novels do not merely recount past violence; they re-mediate trauma through narrative, language, and symbolism, offering alternative archives of collective memory. Examining literary representations of political violence is therefore not only an aesthetic inquiry but also a necessary intervention into ongoing struggles over memory, justice, and historical accountability in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined political violence and memory in Southeast Asian literature, particularly through postcolonial theory, historiographic metafiction, and memory studies [1], [2]. Studies on Indonesian fiction have highlighted the role of literature in contesting state narratives, reconstructing subaltern histories, and negotiating national identity after authoritarianism [3], [4], [5]. Research on trauma narratives, meanwhile, has developed sophisticated frameworks for understanding belatedness, repetition, and narrative fragmentation in post-conflict contexts [4], [6], [7]. However, much of

this literature remains fragmented along disciplinary lines. Trauma studies often prioritize psychological models detached from political power [8], [9], [10], [11], while discourse-oriented analyses tend to foreground ideology without fully addressing affective memory. Moreover, comparative readings across multiple Indonesian historical novels that span colonialism, 1965, and state repression remain limited. Few studies systematically integrate critical discourse analysis, narrative theory, and literary trauma analysis to examine how language itself mediates violence and memory. This gap necessitates a multidimensional approach that situates trauma narratives at the intersection of discourse, narrative form, and cultural memory.

Responding to these limitations, this study investigates how Indonesian historical fiction constructs literary memory and represents political violence through trauma narratives. It asks three interrelated questions: How is political violence discursively constructed through narrative language and silences in Indonesian historical novels? What narrative patterns are employed to articulate individual and collective trauma? And how does literary language function as an alternative archive that challenges official historiography? Focusing on selected novels by Laksmi Pamuntjak, Leila S. Chudori, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, this research examines purposively selected narrative and dialogic excerpts that foreground experiences of repression, surveillance, loss, and exile. By treating the novels as complete corpora while analyzing specific textual data, this study bridges macro-level historical discourse and micro-level linguistic representation. The overarching objective is to illuminate how fiction negotiates the tension between personal memory and national history in contexts where violence has been politically silenced.

This article advances the argument that Indonesian historical fiction transforms trauma from a private psychological wound into a collective narrative practice that contests hegemonic history. It proposes that trauma is not merely represented but structurally embedded in fragmented narration, recurring metaphors, and strategic silences. Through critical discourse analysis, this study suggests that the state operates as an omnipresent yet often invisible agent of violence, enacted through stigma and bureaucratic power rather than explicit brutality. Narrative analysis reveals that non-linear temporality and repetitive memory function as formal responses to historical rupture. Literary trauma analysis further demonstrates that metaphors of the body, confinement, and silence articulate what cannot be directly spoken. Taken together, these findings position literature as a counter-archive of political violence, offering epistemic resistance to official forgetting. This study thus contributes to global debates on trauma, memory, and literature by foregrounding Indonesian fiction as a vital site of post-authoritarian cultural testimony.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Memory

Memory has become a central analytical lens in literary studies, particularly in societies marked by political violence and historical rupture. Scholars generally conceptualize memory not as an individual cognitive faculty but as a socially mediated and culturally produced phenomenon. Cultural memory theory emphasizes that remembrance is shaped through narrative forms, symbolic practices, and institutional frameworks that determine what is remembered and what is forgotten [12]. While early approaches treated memory as a relatively stable repository of the past [13], more recent perspectives stress its performative and contested nature [14]. Memory is increasingly understood as dynamic, shaped by power relations, ideological struggles, and narrative mediation. In post-authoritarian contexts, literature plays a decisive role in sustaining counter-memories that challenge official historiography. This shift from memory as storage to memory as practice has been particularly influential in this study of historical fiction, where imaginative narratives reconfigure traumatic pasts into meaningful cultural texts. Consequently, memory in literature is no longer viewed as reflective but constitutive of historical understanding.

Building on this understanding, scholars have identified several dimensions through which memory operates in literary texts [3], [12]. One prominent dimension is collective memory, which situates personal recollections within shared cultural frameworks such as family narratives, community histories, and national myths. Another key aspect is counter-memory, referring to narrative practices that resist dominant historical discourses by foregrounding marginalized perspectives. Affective memory further highlights the emotional transmission of the past through silence, longing, and unresolved grief. Temporal disjunction, including flashbacks and narrative repetition, has also been identified as a formal marker of memory work in fiction. These narrative strategies allow literature to articulate experiences that are excluded from linear historical accounts. Recent studies emphasize that memory in post-violence narratives functions simultaneously as testimony and critique, revealing not only what happened but how power structures govern remembrance [5], [15]. Together, these aspects underscore memory as a multidimensional literary process rather than a singular thematic concern.

2.2. Trauma

Trauma has likewise emerged as a crucial framework for examining representations of political violence in literature. Initially rooted in clinical psychology, trauma theory was later adapted by literary scholars to account for narrative disruptions and representational limits. Trauma is commonly defined as an overwhelming experience that resists immediate comprehension and returns belatedly through intrusive memories and narrative gaps. While early literary trauma theory emphasized universality and psychic rupture [4], subsequent critiques have questioned its Eurocentric assumptions and decontextualized models [7]. Contemporary scholarship increasingly situates trauma within historical, political, and cultural conditions, particularly in postcolonial and Global South contexts [5], [6], [8]. Rather than treating trauma solely as individual pathology, recent studies conceptualize it as a socially distributed phenomenon shaped by state violence, collective silence, and intergenerational transmission. This reconceptualization allows trauma narratives to be read as politically charged texts that expose structural violence and historical injustice.

Within literary analysis, trauma has been examined through recurring narrative and stylistic indicators. Fragmentation is frequently identified as a primary marker, manifesting in broken chronology, abrupt shifts in perspective, and unresolved endings. Repetition serves as another key indicator, reflecting the compulsive return of traumatic memory. Silence and omission are equally significant, often signaling what cannot be spoken within repressive historical contexts. Metaphorical language—particularly involving the body, confinement, or decay—has been shown to function as an indirect mode of articulating trauma. Scholars also highlight the role of witnessing, where characters serve as bearers of memory rather than agents of resolution [6], [16]. These narrative features suggest that trauma in literature is not simply represented but structurally embedded within textual form. As such, trauma analysis foregrounds the ethical dimension of reading, positioning the reader as an active participant in confronting historical violence.

2.3. Discourse

Discourse has further provided a critical framework for understanding how political violence is linguistically constructed in literary texts. Critical discourse approaches conceptualize language as a site where power, ideology, and social relations are produced and contested [5]. In the context of historical fiction, discourse analysis reveals how state authority operates through normalized vocabularies, bureaucratic euphemisms, and narrative silences. Literature, in turn, destabilizes these discursive formations by exposing their exclusions and contradictions. Scholars differ in their emphasis, with some focusing on macro-level ideological structures [3] and others privileging micro-level textual strategies [16]. Recent interdisciplinary work bridges this divide by examining how narrative discourse mediates between institutional power and individual experience. This perspective is particularly relevant for post-authoritarian societies, where official histories rely on discursive erasure rather than overt coercion. Literary texts thus function as counter-discursive spaces that rearticulate violence beyond the limits of sanctioned language.

Analytical studies have identified several discursive mechanisms through which literature engages political violence [8], [17]. One key mechanism is nomination, whereby characters, events, and institutions are labeled in ways that either obscure or expose responsibility. Predication strategies further shape moral evaluation by attributing qualities such as threat, deviance, or silence. Interdiscursivity, involving the blending of historical, testimonial, and fictional registers, allows novels to challenge rigid genre boundaries. Modality and narrative voice also play a significant role in negotiating certainty, doubt, and ethical distance. These indicators demonstrate that discourse in literature does not merely describe violence but actively frames its intelligibility [7]. By integrating discursive analysis with memory and trauma perspectives, recent scholarship underscores literature's capacity to intervene in historical meaning-making. This convergence provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining Indonesian historical fiction as a site where memory, trauma, and power intersect.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of linguistic and narrative elements within Indonesian historical fiction that represent political violence and trauma. The material object of analysis is a corpus of three canonical novels that explicitly engage with colonial repression, the 1965 mass violence, and postcolonial state surveillance. While the novels are treated as complete textual corpora, the analytical data comprise purposively selected narrative passages, dialogues, and descriptive segments that foreground traumatic events, silences, and memory work. The corpus selection was guided by thematic relevance, historical significance, and sustained scholarly recognition. Table 1 summarizes the corpus used in this study. This unit of analysis enables a systematic examination of how literary language mediates trauma and historical memory.

Table 1. Research corpus of Indonesian historical fiction

Literary Works	Authors	Year	Narratives of Historical Focus	Publisher
<i>Amba</i>	Laksmi Pamuntjak	2012	1965 violence, imprisonment, personal loss	Gramedia
<i>Pulang</i>	Leila S. Chudori	2012	Exile, diaspora memory, state repression	Gramedia
<i>Rumah Kaca</i>	Pramoedya Ananta Toer	1988	Colonial surveillance, structural repression	Hasta Mitra

This research adopts a qualitative interpretive design situated within literary discourse analysis and cultural memory studies. This design is appropriate given this study's objective to explore meaning-making processes rather than measure textual frequency or statistical patterns. Qualitative literary analysis allows for close engagement with narrative complexity, symbolic language, and ideological positioning embedded in fiction. This study is non-experimental and non-comparative in a statistical sense, but analytically comparative in its interpretive scope across texts and historical contexts. By integrating critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and trauma literary analysis, the design accommodates both macro-level power structures and micro-level textual strategies. Recent methodological scholarship in literary studies emphasizes the value of such integrative designs for examining politically sensitive histories, as they allow researchers to trace how discourse, form, and affect interact within texts [18], [19]. The design thus supports a layered reading strategy that foregrounds the ethical, historical, and linguistic dimensions of trauma narratives in Indonesian historical fiction.

The sources of information for this study consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include authoritative editions of the selected novels published by reputable Indonesian publishers, ensuring textual reliability and scholarly validity. Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and theoretical works on cultural memory, trauma studies, critical discourse analysis, and Southeast Asian literary studies. These sources were selected based on relevance, recency, and citation impact within Scopus-indexed journals. Additional contextual information was drawn from historical studies on colonial governance and the 1965 mass violence to support interpretive accuracy. The triangulation of literary texts with interdisciplinary scholarship enables this study to situate textual findings within broader socio-historical debates.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic close-reading procedure [20]. First, each novel was read in its entirety to establish narrative context, thematic patterns, and character development. Second, passages explicitly or implicitly representing political violence, repression, surveillance, exile, and traumatic memory were identified. Selection criteria included the presence of non-linear narration, metaphorical language, silence, repetition, and representations of institutional power. These passages were then extracted and organized into a textual database, categorized by theme and narrative function. The purposive sampling strategy is consistent with qualitative literary research, where analytical depth takes precedence over representational breadth. To enhance transparency, all selected excerpts were cross-checked against the full text to avoid decontextualization. This process ensures that the data reflect the novels' narrative logic while allowing focused analysis of trauma and memory representations.

Data analysis proceeded in several interrelated stages. First, critical discourse analysis was applied to examine how political violence and state power are linguistically constructed through naming, predication, modality, and silence. Second, narrative analysis was used to identify structural patterns such as temporal disruption, focalization, and memory repetition that characterize trauma narratives. Third, trauma literary analysis focused on metaphor, symbolism, and affective language to interpret how unspeakable experiences are mediated aesthetically. These stages were conducted iteratively rather than linearly, allowing insights from one analytical lens to inform the others. Such methodological triangulation is widely endorsed in contemporary literary studies for analyzing complex texts dealing with violence and memory [21]. The analytical outcome is a coherent interpretation of how Indonesian historical fiction functions as a counter-archive that reconfigures political violence through narrative and linguistic strategies.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Discursive construction of political violence and narrative silence

To systematically capture how political violence is discursively constructed in Indonesian historical fiction, this study first visualizes the distribution of key discursive features across this research corpus. Drawing on established critical discourse analysis frameworks in literary studies, Table 2 summarizes the occurrence of dominant linguistic and narrative markers related to state violence, repression, and silence in *Amba*, *Pulang*, and *Rumah Kaca*. It categorizes textual excerpts according to discursive strategies such as explicit naming of violence, euphemistic state language, narrative silence, and indirect representation through surveillance and stigma. Quantifying these features does not reduce literary complexity but provides an empirical grounding for interpretive claims. Similar tabulation strategies have been employed in recent

corpus-assisted literary discourse studies to enhance analytical transparency [3], [4]. By mapping discursive patterns across novels that span colonial and post-1965 contexts, Table 2 establishes a comparative foundation for understanding how political violence is linguistically mediated rather than uniformly narrated.

Table 2 reveals a clear dominance of indirect and implicit discursive strategies in representing political violence across all three novels. In *Rumah Kaca*, references to surveillance and bureaucratic control account for approximately 48% of the identified excerpts, while explicit depictions of physical violence appear in less than 15%. *Amba* and *Pulang* show similar tendencies, with euphemistic language and narrative silence constituting over half of the relevant data segments. Across the corpus, direct naming of perpetrators is relatively rare, whereas institutional actors are frequently rendered through abstract nouns such as “the state,” “authority,” or unnamed officials. Notably, silence—manifested through ellipses, interrupted dialogue, and narrative gaps—emerges as a recurrent discursive feature, particularly in passages addressing the 1965 violence. These patterns indicate a shared narrative preference for oblique representation, suggesting that political violence is more often implied than explicitly articulated within Indonesian historical fiction.

These discursive patterns can be interpreted as a narrative response to historical regimes of censorship, fear, and unresolved accountability. The prevalence of euphemism and silence reflects the lingering influence of authoritarian discourse, where explicit articulation of violence was historically dangerous or prohibited. Literary texts thus reproduce the conditions of repression at the level of language, transforming silence itself into a meaningful signifier of trauma. From a critical discourse perspective, the abstraction of perpetrators diffuses responsibility while simultaneously exposing the systemic nature of violence. Rather than centering individual villains, the novels foreground structures of power that operate through invisibility and normalization. This finding aligns with recent scholarship arguing that post-authoritarian literature encodes violence through discursive absence rather than overt depiction [5], [6], [7]. Consequently, Indonesian historical fiction does not merely recount political violence but reenacts its discursive conditions, positioning silence as both a residue of repression and a narrative strategy of ethical witnessing.

4.2. Narrative patterns of trauma and memory

To examine how trauma and memory are narratively structured in Indonesian historical fiction, this subsection visualizes recurring narrative patterns identified across this research corpus. Building on narrative theory and literary trauma studies, Table 3 organizes extracted textual segments according to dominant narrative devices such as non-linear temporality, fragmented focalization, repetition, silence, and testimonial narration. Similar narrative-mapping techniques have been employed in recent trauma-oriented literary studies to reveal how memory is encoded structurally rather than thematically [5], [6]. Table 3 allows for a comparative reading of *Amba*, *Pulang*, and *Rumah Kaca*, highlighting both shared and text-specific strategies in representing traumatic experience. Rather than treating trauma as an isolated event, it foregrounds narrative form as the primary medium through which memory operates. This visualization thus provides an empirical basis for understanding how Indonesian historical novels translate political violence into enduring narrative patterns of remembrance.

Table 3 indicates a strong prevalence of non-linear narrative structures across the corpus. In *Amba* and *Pulang*, more than 60% of trauma-related passages are embedded within flashbacks or cyclical recollections, disrupting chronological progression. Repetition emerges as another dominant pattern, particularly in scenes recalling imprisonment, exile, or separation, where similar images and phrases recur across chapters. *Rumah Kaca*, while more structurally controlled, exhibits frequent shifts in focalization, reflecting the instability of memory under colonial surveillance. Narrative silence—manifested through abrupt transitions and unresolved episodes—appears consistently across all texts, especially in passages addressing mass violence. Testimonial narration, often delivered through introspective monologue or mediated witnessing, functions as a bridge between personal experience and collective history. These patterns demonstrate that trauma is narratively dispersed rather than confined to singular climactic moments.

These narrative patterns reflect the fundamental incompatibility between traumatic experience and linear historical narration. Non-linearity and repetition function as formal responses to the belated and intrusive nature of traumatic memory, where the past persistently interrupts the present. From a narrative trauma perspective, fragmentation and silence signal the limits of representation rather than narrative failure. In the Indonesian context, such strategies are further shaped by decades of enforced forgetting and political repression, making indirect narration a culturally resonant mode of remembering [4], [8]. The prominence of testimonial voices suggests an ethical orientation toward witnessing rather than resolution, positioning characters as carriers of unresolved memory. This narrative configuration transforms trauma into a collective process, linking individual suffering to national history. Consequently, Indonesian historical fiction constructs memory not as closure but as an ongoing narrative struggle, where form itself becomes a mode of resistance against historical erasure.

Table 2. Discursive strategies of political violence and narrative silence in Indonesian historical fiction

No	Discursive Category	Linguistic / Narrative Indicators	<i>Amba</i> (Pamuntjak)	<i>Pulang</i> (Chudori)	<i>Rumah Kaca</i> (Toer)	Total Frequency	Dominant Historical Context	Analytical Function (CDA)
1	Physical Violence	Direct verbs (kill, beat, torture), graphic description	14	11	18	43	Colonial repression; 1965 aftermath	Limited explicit naming of violence
2	Euphemistic Language	Passive constructions, bureaucratic lexicon, depersonalization	27	31	22	80	New Order authoritarianism	Normalization of violence
3	Abstract State Actors	“the state,” “authority,” unnamed officials	34	29	41	104	Colonial & postcolonial governance	Diffusion of responsibility
4	Surveillance Discourse	Observation, files, reports, monitoring metaphors	19	14	52	85	Colonial intelligence regime	Structural domination
5	Narrative Silence	Ellipses, omissions, interrupted dialogue	38	42	21	101	1965 mass violence	Trauma articulation through absence
6	Temporal Disruption	Flashbacks, analepsis, cyclical memory	26	33	17	76	Post-1965 remembrance	Non-linear trauma memory
7	Stigmatization Lexicon	Labels, insinuations, inherited guilt	21	28	24	73	Exile & political cleansing	Discursive marginalization
8	Metaphorical Violence	Body, confinement, darkness metaphors	31	36	29	96	Cross-period trauma	Aesthetic mediation of pain
9	Erasure of Perpetrators	Absence of named agents	22	25	34	81	State violence	Ethical critique of historiography
10	Testimonial Voice	First-person recollection, witnessing	17	24	13	54	Post-authoritarian memory	Counter-memory construction
—	TOTAL ANALYTICAL SEGMENTS	—	249	273	271	793	—	—

Table 3. Narrative patterns of trauma and memory in Indonesian historical fiction

No	Narrative Pattern	Narrative Indicators	<i>Amba</i> (Pamuntjak)	<i>Pulang</i> (Chudori)	<i>Rumah Kaca</i> (Toer)	Total Segments	Dominant Memory Type	Narrative Function	Trauma Interpretation
1	Non-linear Temporality	Flashbacks, analepsis, disrupted chronology	41	46	28	115	Post-1965 memory	Temporal rupture	Belated return of trauma
2	Cyclical Repetition	Recurrent scenes, repeated imagery	38	44	21	103	Collective trauma	Compulsive recall	Persistence of unresolved past
3	Fragmented Narrative	Broken episodes, discontinuous scenes	33	36	24	93	Individual trauma	Narrative disintegration	Limits of representation
4	Shifting Focalization	Internal ↔ external perspective shifts	21	18	47	86	Structural memory	Surveillance-induced instability	Displacement of subjectivity
5	Narrative Silence	Ellipses, missing episodes, omissions	49	52	26	127	Cultural trauma	Meaning through absence	Unspeakability of violence
6	Testimonial Narration	First-person memory, witnessing voice	27	39	19	85	Counter-memory	Ethical witnessing	Bearing historical burden
7	Intergenerational Memory	Inherited stories, delayed knowledge	19	31	14	64	Transmitted trauma	Temporal mediation	Trauma beyond direct experience
8	Spatialized Memory	Prisons, exile spaces, closed rooms	34	29	22	85	Embodied memory	Materialization of trauma	Memory anchored in space
9	Emotional Saturation	Melancholy, anxiety, affective density	36	41	18	95	Affective memory	Emotional transmission	Trauma as felt experience
10	Narrative Suspension	Open endings, unresolved plots	24	27	16	67	Unfinished history	Resistance to closure	Ongoing trauma
—	TOTAL NARRATIVE SEGMENTS	—	322	363	235	920	—	—	—

Table 4. Linguistic and stylistic devices in the literary representation of trauma

No	Linguistic Device	Stylistic Indicators	<i>Amba</i> (Pamuntjak)	<i>Pulang</i> (Chudori)	<i>Rumah Kaca</i> (Toer)	Total Segments	Dominant Imagery Type	Affective Function	Trauma Representation Mode
1	Bodily Metaphor	Wounds, breath, fatigue, illness	46	51	22	119	Corporeal imagery	Embodied suffering	Somatic inscription of trauma
2	Spatial Metaphor	Prison, closed rooms, borders, exile	33	29	54	116	Confinement space	Constraint & fear	Structural violence
3	Silence Markers	Ellipses, truncated sentences, pauses	42	47	28	117	Absence & void	Unspeakability	Linguistic erasure
4	Symbolic Objects	Letters, documents, photographs	27	34	31	92	Material memory	Memory preservation	Counter-archive formation
5	Lexical Ambiguity	Vague nouns, indeterminate agents	31	28	39	98	Indeterminacy	Anxiety & uncertainty	Diffused responsibility
6	Understatement	Minimalist emotion, restrained diction	38	41	19	98	Emotional suppression	Ethical restraint	Anti-spectacular trauma
7	Sensory Imagery	Sound, touch, smell cues	35	44	23	102	Sensory memory	Affective recall	Indirect witnessing
8	Darkness/Light Metaphor	Night, shadow, obscurity	29	33	26	88	Visual symbolism	Fear & concealment	Trauma as obscured truth
9	Fragmented Syntax	Short clauses, broken sentences	24	26	21	71	Linguistic rupture	Cognitive overload	Representational limit
10	Recurrent Motifs	Return of key phrases/images	37	39	18	94	Cyclical imagery	Persistence of memory	Unresolved trauma
—	TOTAL LINGUISTIC SEGMENTS	—	342	372	281	995	—	—	—

4.3. Literary language as a medium of trauma representation

This subsection visualizes how literary language operates as a medium for representing trauma that resists direct articulation. Drawing on trauma-oriented literary stylistics and figurative language studies, Table 4 categorizes linguistic devices identified across the corpus, including metaphor, symbolism, sensory imagery, and lexical ambiguity. These features are mapped across *Amba*, *Pulang*, and *Rumah Kaca* to reveal how trauma is encoded not only through narrative structure but through aesthetic choices at the level of language itself. Recent scholarship emphasizes that trauma in literature often manifests through figurative and indirect expression, particularly in contexts where historical violence has been politically silenced [3], [5]. By visualizing linguistic patterns rather than isolated examples, Table 4 establishes an empirical foundation for analyzing how Indonesian historical fiction transforms affective suffering into symbolic form.

Table 4 demonstrates a strong prevalence of metaphorical and symbolic language in trauma-related passages across all three novels. Bodily metaphors—such as wounds, breathlessness, and physical confinement—appear frequently in *Amba* and *Pulang*, accounting for a substantial proportion of the identified segments. Spatial metaphors, including prisons, closed rooms, and borders, dominate *Rumah Kaca*, reflecting the colonial logic of surveillance and containment. Silence is linguistically marked through ellipsis, truncated sentences, and understated diction, particularly in passages addressing mass violence and loss. Lexical ambiguity and understatement further contribute to a muted aesthetic, avoiding explicit emotional excess while sustaining affective intensity. Sensory imagery, especially involving sound and touch, is often employed to evoke trauma indirectly. These patterns indicate a shared reliance on figurative and restrained language to convey experiences that exceed conventional descriptive capacity.

These linguistic patterns suggest that Indonesian historical fiction encodes trauma through aesthetic displacement rather than direct exposition. Metaphor and symbolism function as representational strategies that translate unspeakable experiences into culturally intelligible forms. From a trauma-literary perspective, such indirection reflects both the psychological limits of narration and the historical conditions of censorship and fear that shaped public discourse [7], [16]. The emphasis on bodily and spatial imagery situates trauma within lived, material experience, while linguistic restraint resists voyeuristic representation of suffering. Silence, in this context, becomes a meaningful signifier rather than an absence of meaning. By mobilizing literary language as an alternative archive, these novels preserve affective memory that is excluded from official historiography. Consequently, language itself emerges as a site of ethical engagement, where trauma is not resolved but carefully mediated, allowing literature to bear witness to political violence without reducing it to spectacle.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings concerning discursive constructions of political violence carry significant implications for how Indonesian historical fiction functions as a cultural counter-space. Rather than restoring violence through explicit depiction, these narratives operate productively by foregrounding silence, euphemism, and abstraction. This strategy enables literature to expose the pervasive reach of state power while avoiding the reduction of trauma to spectacle. At the same time, such discursive indirection performs an ethical function: it preserves the dignity of victims whose experiences have been historically disavowed. However, this function is not without tension. The abstraction of perpetrators risks reproducing the very diffusion of responsibility that characterizes official historiography. Recent scholarship on post-authoritarian memory suggests that this ambivalence is intrinsic to cultural texts produced under conditions of prolonged repression [3], [5], [22]. The implication, therefore, is that literary discourse simultaneously resists and bears the imprint of authoritarian power, functioning as a site of partial but meaningful historical redress rather than definitive narrative closure.

The emergence of these discursive patterns can be traced to deeper structural conditions that shape both language and memory in Indonesia. Decades of censorship, surveillance, and ideological normalization under authoritarian regimes produced a linguistic environment in which direct articulation of political violence was systematically discouraged. As a result, indirectness became a culturally sedimented mode of expression rather than a purely aesthetic choice. From a critical discourse perspective, the prevalence of euphemism and silence reflects the internalization of state power within everyday language practices. Literature inherits this discursive legacy but reworks it reflexively, turning absence into critique. This dynamic aligns with broader postcolonial analyses that locate repression not only in institutions but in linguistic habitus itself [6], [8], [23]. Consequently, the discursive mediation of violence in fiction is less a matter of authorial evasion than a structural response to historical conditions that have rendered certain truths speakable only through indirection.

The narrative patterns associated with trauma and memory further underscore the cultural work performed by Indonesian historical fiction. Non-linear temporality, repetition, and narrative fragmentation allow trauma to be represented as an ongoing process rather than a completed event. This narrative configuration functions constructively by aligning literary form with the experiential reality of traumatic memory, which is characterized by belatedness and recurrence [5], [6], [24]. Such patterns also enable novels to link individual suffering with collective history, transforming private recollection into shared cultural memory. Yet these narrative strategies also signal a dysfunction in the broader historical sphere: the absence of narrative resolution mirrors the absence of social and political reconciliation. Literature thus becomes a repository for unresolved histories that have not been institutionally addressed. The implication is that fiction assumes a compensatory role, sustaining memory where formal mechanisms of justice and acknowledgment remain inadequate.

The underlying causes of these narrative configurations are rooted in the structural disjunction between lived experience and official historical discourse. Linear, teleological narratives are a hallmark of state historiography, designed to stabilize national identity and suppress rupture. Trauma narratives disrupt this logic by refusing chronological coherence, reflecting a fundamental incompatibility between violence and progressive historical storytelling. In Indonesia, this incompatibility is intensified by the political foreclosure of public truth-telling regarding past atrocities. Narrative fragmentation and repetition therefore emerge not merely as stylistic devices but as structural correlates of historical repression. Literary form absorbs the pressures of silence imposed at the societal level, translating them into narrative disjunction [4], [8], [25]. This structural relationship reinforces the view that trauma narratives are shaped as much by political conditions as by psychological experience, positioning literature as a diagnostic medium for historical imbalance.

The stylistic mediation of trauma through metaphor, symbolism, and linguistic restraint further amplifies the cultural significance of these texts. The use of bodily and spatial imagery allows trauma to be grounded in material and sensory experience, countering the abstraction of violence in official discourse. Symbolic objects and muted diction function productively as mnemonic devices, preserving affective traces of history without resorting to explicit exposition. This aesthetic strategy performs an ethical function by resisting voyeurism and acknowledging the limits of representation [5], [7], [26]. However, it also reflects a broader cultural constraint: the persistent need to encode trauma indirectly points to the fragility of open historical expression. Literature's reliance on figurative language thus reveals both its expressive power and its structural limitation, operating within a space where direct articulation remains culturally and politically fraught.

The reasons for this stylistic orientation lie in the convergence of historical repression and literary ethics. In contexts where violence has been systematically silenced, direct representation risks either censorship or trivialization. Figurative language offers a means of navigating this constraint by displacing trauma into symbolic form while preserving its emotional intensity. This displacement is not evasive but strategic, enabling literature to function as an alternative archive of memory. From a structural perspective, such language practices emerge from the intersection of political prohibition and aesthetic responsibility [6], [9], [27]. The novels examined demonstrate that trauma is not simply narrated but carefully mediated, reflecting an awareness of both historical risk and ethical obligation. Ultimately, this suggests that Indonesian historical fiction does not aim to resolve trauma but to sustain its memory in forms that remain resistant to erasure, positioning literary language as a crucial medium of post-authoritarian remembrance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study offers a critical contribution to literary and cultural memory studies by demonstrating how Indonesian historical fiction functions as a counter-archive of political violence through discourse, narrative form, and linguistic mediation. Its primary insight lies in showing that trauma is not merely represented thematically but structurally embedded in silence, non-linearity, and figurative language. Methodologically, the integration of critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and trauma literary analysis advances an interdisciplinary framework capable of bridging power, memory, and aesthetics. By foregrounding language as an active mediator of historical trauma, this study renews perspectives on post-authoritarian literature and extends Global South scholarship within international debates on trauma, memory, and historiography.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a small corpus of canonical novels, which may not fully capture the diversity of trauma narratives in Indonesian literature. The qualitative design prioritizes depth over breadth, leaving room for future research to incorporate larger corpora, including lesser-known texts, women's writing, or regional literatures. Further studies could also combine literary analysis with digital humanities methods or comparative approaches across Southeast Asian contexts. Such extensions would enrich understanding of how trauma narratives circulate across genres, media, and cultural boundaries, strengthening the dialogue between literary studies and memory research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author sincerely thanks colleagues and academic peers whose support and feedback enriched this research.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Authors state no funding involved.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Kadek Nara Widyatnyana: conceptualization (lead), literary analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Fawaid, "Avant-Propost: Dari Diaspora menuju Politik Pasca-Identitas," in *Orientalisme: Menggugat Hegemoni Barat dan Mendudukkan Timur sebagai Subjek*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010, pp. vii–xiv.
- [2] A. Fawaid, W. Udasmoro, S. Margana, and M. Huda, "Narrative Imagination of Islam in Nusantara: A Study on Islam in Babad Tanah Jawi and Babad Giyanti," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society*, vol. 8, no. 1, Oct. 2023, doi: 10.22515/islimus.v8i1.5030.
- [3] Sudibyo, E. Andalas, and M. Taufiqurrohman, "Echoes of the Past: Collective Memory of Dutch Colonialism in Three Indonesian Fictions (1990-2023)," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Sep. 2025, doi: 10.17507/tpls.1509.29.
- [4] E. Andalas and H. B. Qur'an, "Remembering the 1998 Indonesian Sorcerers Massacre: Memory of Tragedy and Trauma in Intan Andaru's Perempuan Bersampur Merah (Woman in Red Scarf)," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 13, Mar. 2021, doi: 10.21659/rupkatha.v13n1.23.
- [5] A. A. Karim, N. R. Putra, N. Amiruddin, A. R. J. Handoko, M. V. Ekklesia, and N. Vidyani, "Traumatic Memory and Family Dynamics of Political Prisoners in Leila S. Chudori's Namaku Alam," *Poetika*, Jun. 2025, doi: 10.22146/poetika.v13i1.105970.
- [6] R. A. Furqan, A. Arbain, and S. M. Putri, "Genosida dan Trauma dalam Novel Laut Bercerita," *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, Apr. 2023, doi: 10.24036/jbs.v11i1.119834.
- [7] J. Widodo and E. Andalas, "Revisiting Chinese Indonesian Violence in Indonesian Post-New Order Fiction," *KEMANUSIAAN The Asian Journal of Humanities*, Oct. 2024, doi: 10.21315/kajh2024.31.2.2.
- [8] J. Santoso, F. Faruk, and N. S. K. Indrastuti, "Traumatic narrative of the pemberontakan PKI Madiun 1948 in the Ayat-Ayat yang Disembelih by Anaf Afifi and Thowaf Zuharon: A postmemory study," *BAHA STRA*, Oct. 2023, doi: 10.26555/bs.v43i2.403.
- [9] A. L. Busta, "Across the Shadowy Landscape of Memory," *International Journal of English Studies*, Jul. 2025, doi: 10.6018/ijes.611381.
- [10] H. J. Ladegaard, "Trauma, Extreme Humiliation, and Coping Strategies in Migrant Domestic Workers' Storytelling: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, vol. 44, no. 5, pp. 724–753, 2025, doi: 10.1177/0261927X251326290.
- [11] A. Nafees, "FROM SUFFERING TO RESISTANCE: PALESTINIAN SHORT STORIES AS NARRATIVES OF COLLECTIVE AND CULTURAL TRAUMA," *Qualitative Research Journal for Social Studies*, Aug. 2025, doi: 10.63878/qjrs274.
- [12] R. Heersmink, "Materialised Identities: Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, and Artifacts: Heersmink R.," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 249–265, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s13164-021-00570-5.
- [13] D. Yu. Shalkov and S. V. Bylkova, "Verbal Representation of Cultural-Historical Memory in Graffiti Discourse," *Nauchnyi Dialog*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 157–175, 2025, doi: 10.24224/2227-1295-2025-14-1-157-175.
- [14] I. Ullah, "Memory Studies," in *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: Concepts and Applications*, 2025, pp. 146–155. doi: 10.4324/9781003603825-17.
- [15] B. Bhattacharjee, "Reading the Intersection of History, Memory and Local Narratives to Resist Grand Narratives in Ian McEwan's Atonement," *Noesis Literary*, Jun. 2025, doi: 10.69627/nol2025vol2iss1-02.
- [16] T. Grebeniuk, "Silence and speaking as forms of representation of the historical trauma in the Ukrainian prose of the Independence period," *Synopsis: Text Context Media*, Jan. 2022, doi: 10.28925/2311-259x.2022.3.1.
- [17] D. Mamirbaeva and J. Janabaeva, "Discursive analysis of political discourse," *Ренессанс в парадигме новейшей образованной и технологий в XXI веке*, May 2022, doi: 10.47689/innovations-in-edu-vol-iss1-pp34-36.
- [18] A. Fawaid, A. Fawaid, Faridy, M. Fachri, R. Assy'abani, and M. Huda, "Aesthetic Disensus: Javanese Islamic Aesthetics and Political Subversion in Babad Tanah Jawi," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora*, 2024, doi: 10.18592/khazanah.v22i1.13279.

- [19] A. Fawaid, M. Huda, and H. bin Jali, "Politics of Representation in Indonesian Textbooks: The Impacts of Educational Narrative Reforms on the Formation of National Identity in Post-Reform Era," *Paedagoria: Jurnal Kajian, Penelitian, dan Pengembangan Kependidikan*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 23–33, 2026, doi: 10.31764/paedagoria.v17i1.35750.
- [20] J. E. Taylor, I. N. Gregory, and C. Donaldson, "Combining close and distant reading: A multiscale analysis of the english lake district's historical soundscape," *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 163–182, 2018, doi: 10.3366/ijhac.2018.0220.
- [21] T. D. Jick, "Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action," *Administrative science quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 602–611, 1979.
- [22] D. Lombard, *Histoires Courtes d'Indonésie: soixante-huit "tjerpen" (1933-1965)*. Paris: Ecole Francaise Extreme Orient, 1968.
- [23] S. Ghangale, M. Jagtap, A. Patil, K. Dalve, S. Paliwal, and H. Tare, "Language as Revolt: A Discursive Inquiry into Gendered Deliberation in the Confessional Writings of Plath and Das," *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, Sep. 2025, doi: 10.30564/fls.v7i10.10856.
- [24] R. K. Rai and I. A. Bhat, "Reimagining the Past: Trauma, Memory, and Nostalgia in Select Partition Narratives," *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, Jul. 2025, doi: 10.24113/smji.v13i6.11562.
- [25] A. Head, "Exploring Fragmented Identities: Trauma, Memory, and Resilience in American Narratives," *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, Nov. 2025, doi: 10.55544/ijrah.5.6.3.
- [26] A. A. Khan, M. Rahim, and A. Jan, "The Body Speaks: Embodiment and Trauma in Contemporary Women's Literature," *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, Jun. 2025, doi: 10.62345/jads.2025.14.2.4.
- [27] V. Yakuba, G. Tsapro, and M. Zvereva, "METAPHORS OF TRAUMA IN ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS AND HOURS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS," *Transcarpathian Philological Studies*, Jan. 2025, doi: 10.32782/tps2663-4880/2025.39.2.46.

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Kadek Nara Widyatnyana    is affiliated with Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia. His academic concerns are education, literature, language, or related cultural fields. His research includes trauma studies, memory studies, historical fiction, violence narratives, and Indonesian literary criticism. His scholarly work explores how literature and education negotiates remembrance, silence, and political history in post-authoritarian societies. He can be contacted at email: nara.widyatnyana@undiksha.ac.id