

The nation's unfinished dead: haunting, archival silence, and the politics of memory in post-authoritarian Indonesian novels

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ABSTRACT

Background: Post-authoritarian Indonesian fiction emerges from a national memory field marked by unresolved political death, forced disappearance, inherited stigma, and incomplete public reckoning with authoritarian violence. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how post-authoritarian Indonesian novels narrate haunting, archival silence, and necropolitical memory as literary responses to unfinished death and contested national belonging. **Method:** Using qualitative literary analysis, this study combines close reading, coded narrative-unit analysis, and memory-oriented discourse analysis across selected novels and contextual scholarly sources. **Results:** Findings show that haunting appears most strongly as temporal residue, where past violence continues through fugitivity, exile, delayed searching, family memory, and inherited fear rather than through literal ghostly presence alone. Findings also indicate that archival silence functions as a counter-archival force, enabling novels to transform missing documents, suppressed testimony, family fragments, and absent bodies into alternative modes of remembrance. **Implication:** Findings further reveal that necropolitical memory positions dead, disappeared, exiled, and stigmatized subjects as unstable members of national history, exposing unequal access to mourning, recognition, and symbolic belonging. **Novelty:** This study offers novelty by conceptualizing unfinished death as an integrated analytical category linking hauntology, archival silence, and necropolitical memory in post-authoritarian Indonesian literary studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's post-authoritarian public memory remains structured by unresolved death. In January 2023, Indonesian President Joko Widodo acknowledged twelve cases of gross human rights violations, ranging from the 1965–1966 anti-communist violence to the 1997–1998 abduction of pro-democracy activists. Civil society records also continue to identify the 1997–1998 disappearances as an unfinished case: twenty-three activists were forcibly disappeared, and thirteen remain missing. These facts matter for literary studies because political death in Indonesia is not only a legal or historical issue; it is also a narrative problem. Bodies that are not recovered, names that are stigmatized, and testimonies that remain institutionally unsettled produce a memory field in which fiction becomes a crucial medium for imagining what official discourse cannot fully resolve. This study therefore begins from a social condition in which the dead of authoritarian violence remain politically present, yet unevenly archived, mourned, and recognized.

Existing scholarship has examined Indonesian memory politics through several important directions. Eddyono (2023) [4] shows that post-New Order narratives of 1965 did not simply end silence but reorganized it through selective erasure. Głab (2024) [5] extends this problem by reading Suharto-era memory through necropolitics, where bodies are differentially sanctified, cursed, or excluded. Leong (2021a) [18], (2021b) [19] demonstrates that haunted places, graves, and ritual guides in Java function as alternative historical media when formal archives fail to speak. Literary studies have also addressed collective trauma, colonial memory, gendered silence, and post-authoritarian violence in Indonesian fiction [1], [2], [3]. Yet these studies have rarely been brought together through a sustained framework that links haunting, archival silence, and the politics of unfinished death in post-authoritarian Indonesian novels. This gap defines the analytical necessity of this study.

This study examines how post-authoritarian Indonesian novels narrate the dead, the missing, and the unburied as figures of unresolved national memory. Rather than treating haunting as a merely gothic device or trauma as a private psychological wound, this study asks how spectral narration makes visible the political afterlife of authoritarian violence. Three questions guide the analysis. First, how do novels represent bodies, ghosts, absences, and delayed mourning as signs of unfinished historical accountability? Second, how do literary texts respond to archival silence through testimony, family memory, fragmented documents, dreams, ritual, or counter-narration? Third, how do these narrative strategies reconfigure national belonging when some victims remain unrecognized, unburied, or politically disavowed? By placing Indonesian novels in dialogue with memory studies, hauntology, and necropolitical theory, this study seeks to clarify how literature participates in the struggle over what can be remembered, who may be mourned, and which dead are allowed to belong to the nation.

This study advances the argument that haunting in post-authoritarian Indonesian novels operates as a narrative technology of unfinished memory. Spectral figures, missing bodies, broken archives, and recurring voices do not simply represent the return of the past; they expose the incompleteness of national history when violence has not been adequately named, mourned, or adjudicated. Comparative work on haunted speakability, queer remembrance, spectral interlocution, sound, and post-war afterlife strengthens this claim by showing that haunting often emerges where formal historical closure is politically unavailable [6], [7], [8], [9], [10]. In this sense, Indonesian novels should be read not as substitutes for legal truth, but as counter-archival forms that register the ethical pressure of the dead upon the living. This study thus tests the proposition that post-authoritarian fiction transforms unresolved death into a critique of national memory itself.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Haunting

Haunting has become a crucial vocabulary for reading histories that remain unresolved after authoritarian violence. In foundational terms, hauntology does not treat ghosts as supernatural residue alone, but as signs of unfinished historical claims that disturb linear time, public memory, and political closure. Derrida's (1994) [20] spectrality and Gordon's (2008) [22] sociological account of haunting both frame ghosts as evidence of what official knowledge fails to settle. Recent scholarship extends this view across postcolonial and post-conflict contexts: Deng (2023) [6], Dragojlovic (2021) [7], Humphry and A. (2026) [8], and Saji (2025) [10] show that haunting often appears where mourning, testimony, and justice remain blocked. In Indonesian contexts, Leong (2021a) [18], (2021b) [19] demonstrates that ghosts, graves, and haunted landscapes mediate hidden histories that formal archives cannot fully absorb.

The indicators of haunting in literary analysis therefore include spectral figures, disturbed chronology, recurring dreams, sensory residues, revenant voices, haunted places, and bodies that cannot be symbolically buried. These indicators should not be reduced to gothic ornamentation because their function is historical and political. Larasati (2025) [9], for instance, expands haunting into rhythm and sound, suggesting that violence may return through embodied and sonic traces rather than visible apparitions. Mayasari-Hoffert (2025) [2] similarly reads silence and voicelessness in Indonesian fiction as signs of collective trauma rather than narrative emptiness. Ritonga, Pratiwi, Suhery, and Nadrah (2025) [3] show how "night" in Acehnese novels condenses violence, fear, and collective memory. Haunting thus becomes a method for reading forms of presence produced by unresolved absence.

2.2. Archival silence

Archival silence provides a second framework for understanding how political violence becomes difficult to narrate. Foundational archive theory, especially Trouillot's (1995) [23] account of silencing and Derrida's (1996) [21] archive fever, clarifies that archives are never neutral repositories; they organize visibility, legitimacy, and historical authority. In Indonesia, this problem is intensified by state violence, censorship, stigma, and selective commemoration. Eddyono (2023) [4] argues that post-New Order Indonesia

did not simply move from silence to disclosure; rather, official narratives reorganized silence through selective erasure of 1965 violence. Głab (2024) [5] adds that memory under Suharto was governed through differentiated treatment of bodies, where some deaths became sacred while others were cursed or excluded. These studies show that silence is produced, managed, and politically distributed.

The analytical indicators of archival silence include missing documents, broken testimony, unnamed perpetrators, family secrecy, censored histories, stigmatized victims, and narrative dependence on fragments, rumours, letters, photographs, or oral memory. Indonesian literary scholarship increasingly recognizes fiction as a counter-archival form. S., Andalas, and Taufiqurrohman (2025) [1] examine collective memory of Dutch colonialism in Indonesian fiction, while Yasin, Anwar, Umaroh, and Hanafi (2026) [11] connect cultural memory with postcolonial perspectives in modern Indonesian novels. Widyatnyana (2026) [12] similarly links literary memory with trauma narratives in Indonesian historical fiction. Yet these studies tend to foreground memory representation more than archival absence itself. This study therefore treats novels not only as texts that remember, but as narrative structures that expose how remembrance is made difficult.

2.3. Politics of memory

The politics of memory concerns how societies decide which pasts are publicly recognized, which victims become grievable, and which forms of suffering remain marginal. Foundational memory studies by Halbwachs (1992) [25], Nora (1989) [26], and Assmann (2011) [24] establish that memory is collective, mediated, and institutionally shaped rather than merely individual recollection. Recent Indonesian literary studies show that nationalism, resistance, gender, and populism remain contested within literary representation. Jamilah (2026) [13] examines nationalism in Pramoedya's works, Kadamehang (2026) [14] analyzes protest poetry as dissent, Refai (2026) [15] studies political allegory in post-Reform novels, Ridlo (2026) [16] foregrounds ideology and gender in political drama, and Yani (2026) [17] examines populist rhetoric in popular literature. Together, these works confirm that literature participates in political struggles over national meaning.

The indicators of memory politics include competing narratives of nationhood, unequal recognition of victims, symbolic burial, public mourning, inherited stigma, ritual mediation, and narrative conflict between state history and intimate memory. Necropolitical theory, especially Mbembe's (2003) [27] work on sovereign power over life and death, sharpens this analysis by asking how political authority classifies bodies after death. Głab (2024) [5] is central here because Suharto-era memory is read through sacred and cursed bodies, while Leong (2021a, 2021b) shows that graves and haunted spaces preserve narratives displaced from public history. This study positions post-authoritarian Indonesian novels at the intersection of haunting, archival silence, and necropolitical memory. Its theoretical claim is that unfinished death becomes legible in fiction when national history cannot fully name, mourn, or archive its own victims.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the narrative segment in post-authoritarian Indonesian novels where death, disappearance, haunting, silence, archival fragments, or contested memory becomes textually visible. The material object consists of ten primary novels published from the Reformasi threshold onward, supported by six scholarly studies and three contextual documents. Each novel is treated not as a single undifferentiated object but as a set of coded passages, scenes, motifs, and narrative devices. This unit is appropriate because the research problem concerns how unfinished death is narrated, mediated, and politically positioned within fiction, rather than how authors' biographies or readership reception determine meaning.

This study employs a qualitative literary research design combining close reading, thematic coding, and memory-oriented discourse analysis. This design is selected because the research investigates symbolic, narrative, and political meanings rather than measurable causal effects. Close reading identifies how narrative form organizes silence, absence, and spectral return; thematic coding makes recurring patterns traceable across texts; memory-oriented discourse analysis links literary representation to broader struggles over national remembrance. This combination prevents interpretation from becoming purely impressionistic while preserving the interpretive depth required by literary analysis. Accordingly, this study treats fiction as a counter-archival practice that mediates unresolved political death through form, voice, temporality, and narrative fragmentation.

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code	Source/Material	Author/Institution	Location/Focus	Period/Event	Quantity	Characteristics	Status
PJN-PRI-001	Saman	Ayu Utami	Indonesia; New York	Late New Order; Reformasi	1 novel	Activism, fugitivity, repression	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-002	Larung	Ayu Utami	Indonesia; New York	27 July 1996; activist pursuit	1 novel	Clandestine politics, escape, spectral figure	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-003	Manjali dan Cakrabirawa	Ayu Utami	Indonesia	1965-related memory	1 novel	Historical naming, political residue	Catalog verified
PJN-PRI-004	Kalatidha	Seno Gumira Ajidarma	Java; Indonesia	1965 killings	1 novel	Newspaper clipping, prison, historical fracture	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-005	Cantik Itu Luka	Eka Kurniawan	Halimunda; Indonesia	Colonial to postcolonial violence	1 novel	Return from grave, curse, gendered violence	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-006	Amba	Laksmi Pamuntjak	Buru; Java	G30S; Buru detention	1 novel	Loss, exile, post-1965 memory	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-007	Pulang	Leila S. Chudori	Jakarta; Paris	1965; 1968; 1998	1 novel	Exile, family memory, political return	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-008	Laut Bercerita	Leila S. Chudori	Jakarta; Yogyakarta	1998 disappearances	1 novel	Forced disappearance, testimony, mourning	Verified metadata
PJN-PRI-009	Namaku Alam 1	Leila S. Chudori	Indonesia	Post-1965 stigma	1 novel	Child memory, execution, inherited trauma	Catalog verified
PJN-PRI-010	Entrok	Okky Madasari	Java	New Order repression	1 novel	Militarized everyday life, state violence	Verified metadata
PJN-SEC-001-006	Journal articles	Eddyono; Glab; Leong; Dragojlovic; Mayasari-Hoffert	Indonesia/comparative	1965; haunting; trauma	6 articles	Theoretical and contextual scholarship	DOI/public metadata
PJN-CTX-001-003	Reports/executive summaries	Komnas HAM; KontraS	Indonesia	1965–1966; 1997–1998	3 documents	Public human-rights context	Public archive verified

Information was drawn from three source layers. Primary information consists of legally accessible novels, public publisher metadata, library catalogues, and short public synopses. Secondary information consists of peer-reviewed studies on haunting, archival silence, trauma, necropolitics, and Indonesian memory politics, especially Eddyono, Głab, Leong, Dragojlovic, Mayasari-Hoffert, and related scholarship. Contextual information consists of public reports and executive summaries from Komnas HAM and KontraS concerning 1965–1966 violence and 1997–1998 forced disappearances. These sources are separated to avoid conflating literary evidence with historical context. Novel passages serve as textual evidence; scholarly literature supports interpretation; public reports provide contextual grounding without replacing literary analysis.

Data collection followed a documented protocol. First, public sources were identified through publisher pages, Google Books, library catalogues, Komnas HAM, KontraS, and scholarly DOI records. Second, search terms were organized around “Indonesian novel 1965,” “post-authoritarian memory,” “forced disappearance 1998,” “haunting,” “archival silence,” “Orde Baru,” and “political trauma.” Third, metadata were recorded for title, author, year, publisher, source type, geographic focus, historical event, verification status, and access note. Fourth, duplicated editions were collapsed under one analytical document using title-author-year keys. Fifth, only short public excerpts, synopses, and legally accessible textual units were stored. Copyrighted full text was not reproduced in the dataset.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage coded spectral narration, including ghosts, revenant figures, disturbed temporality, haunted places, dreams, and recurring voices. The second stage mapped archival silence through missing documents, suppressed testimony, fragments, rumours, family secrecy, and counter-archival narration. The third stage positioned political death through necropolitical memory, focusing on unburied bodies, excluded victims, differential mourning, stigma, and contested national belonging. Each coded unit was checked against its source metadata and evidence status. Interpretation was then synthesized across novels to examine how unfinished death becomes a critique of national memory without claiming direct causality beyond what qualitative literary analysis permits.

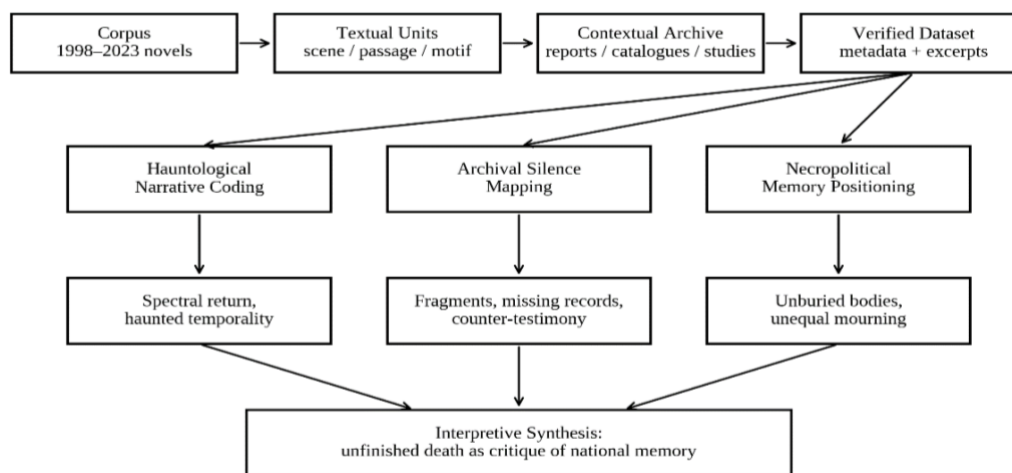


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Spectral return and narrative haunting

Political death in post-authoritarian Indonesian fiction appears first as a disturbance of time. The dominant pattern is not the direct appearance of ghosts, but the persistence of unresolved violence through fugitive lives, delayed searches, family memory, and historical return. This pattern is significant because haunting does not merely decorate narrative atmosphere; it organizes how novels transform political death into an unfinished temporal condition. The table shows that temporal residue accounts for 44.44% of coded units, while other forms of haunting appear in smaller but analytically distinct clusters. This distribution supports a reading of Indonesian post-authoritarian novels as narratives where the past remains active because legal, archival, and ritual closure remains incomplete.

Table 2. Spectral return and narrative haunting across coded units

Main Category	Subcategory	Narrative Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Short Example/Excerpt	Data Code	Interpretation
Haunting as temporal persistence	Temporal residue	Political past remains active through delayed memory, fugitivity, stigma, or post-violence searching	4	44.44%	Fugitive activism; Buru memory; exile memory; inherited New Order fear	“Saman, an activist who becomes a fugitive”; belated search in Amba; 1965–1968–1998 linkage in Pulang	PJN-PRI-001; PJN-PRI-006; PJN-PRI-007; PJN-PRI-010	Haunting appears most dominantly as historical time that refuses closure, rather than merely as literal ghostly appearance.
Haunting as mediation	Dark/spectral mediator	A figure, object, or darkened space connects the present to unresolved political violence	1	11.11%	Political rescue; clandestine movement; mysterious figure	“helps leftist student activists escape”	PJN-PRI-002	The mediator figure suggests that political memory often circulates through secrecy and clandestine networks rather than official archives.
Haunting as ontological instability	Unstable worlds	Realist, mystical, political, and irrational worlds overlap within the narrative structure	1	11.11%	Prison memory; clipping; madness; political violence	Realistic, mystical, political, and irrational worlds overlap	PJN-PRI-004	Narrative instability exposes the fractured boundary between history, trauma, and political fantasy.
Haunting as bodily return	Return of the dead	A dead figure or body presumed to be finished returns to disturb social and familial narration	1	11.11%	Grave return; gendered violence; family history	A dead woman returns and discloses historical and familial violence	PJN-PRI-005	The returning dead body transforms death into a medium for revealing inherited violence.
Haunting as absent presence	Absent-body haunting	A missing body remains present through family search, testimony, and victim memory	1	11.11%	Missing activist; family search; unresolved mourning	A missing activist remains present through family memory and continued searching	PJN-PRI-008	Bodily absence becomes narratively central because the lack of remains prevents historical and ritual closure.
Haunting as inherited memory	Inherited haunting	A later generation imagines, inherits, or carries political death not directly experienced	1	11.11%	Child memory; executed father; inherited stigma	A child imagines the father’s final moments after political death	PJN-PRI-009	Haunting works genealogically when political trauma is transmitted to children as a burden of identity and memory.

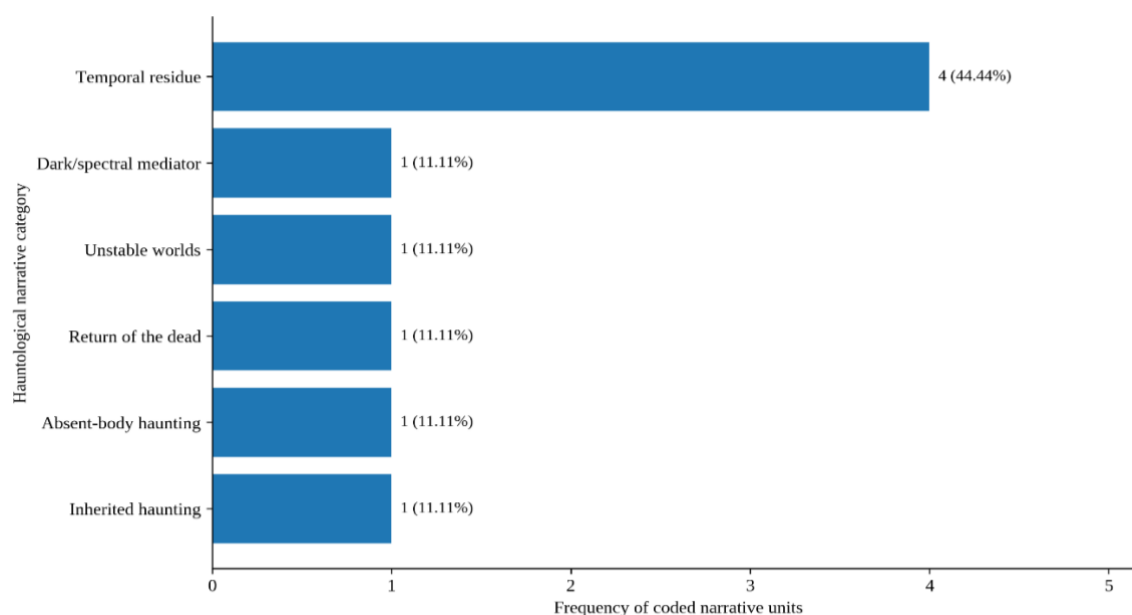


Figure 2. Spectral return and narrative haunting across coded units

The most visible pattern is the dominance of temporal residue across *Saman*, *Amba*, *Pulang*, and *Entrok*. These novels do not position authoritarian violence as a completed historical episode but as an afterlife that shapes movement, family relations, exile, fear, and delayed testimony. Other categories occur once each, yet their distribution is methodologically meaningful. *Larung* foregrounds a dark or spectral mediator; *Kalatidha* stages unstable worlds; *Cantik Itu Luka* turns bodily return into historical disclosure; *Laut Bercerita* centers the missing body; and *Namaku Alam 1* emphasizes inherited memory. The pattern therefore shows both concentration and variation: haunting is strongest as temporal persistence, but it also operates through body, space, mediation, and genealogy.

This distribution aligns with memory studies that read haunting as the social return of unresolved violence rather than a purely supernatural motif. Leong's work on haunted places and hidden narratives in post-authoritarian Indonesia helps explain why spectrality becomes a medium for histories that remain displaced from official narration. Eddyono's analysis of selective erasure clarifies why temporal residue is dominant: silence after authoritarianism does not disappear, but is reorganized through partial narration and omission. Głab's necropolitical reading of Suharto-era memory further explains why bodies, graves, and the unburied remain politically charged. Thus, haunting in these novels functions as a counter-archival structure, transforming unfinished death into a critique of national memory.

4.2. Archival silence and counter-archival voice

Archival silence in these novels is not represented as empty absence, but as a field of displaced speech, partial evidence, and unofficial remembrance. The strongest pattern is suppressed testimony or voice, which accounts for 33.33% of coded units. This pattern appears in fugitive activism, inherited family testimony, and ordinary voices silenced under authoritarian truth-making. The point is that silence does not erase memory entirely; it changes the route through which memory can be narrated. This finding is consistent with Eddyono's argument that post-New Order silence is reorganized through selective erasure rather than simply removed. In these novels, silence becomes narratively productive because it forces fiction to build alternative channels of remembrance.

A second dominant pattern appears in missing-person archives and clandestine counter-memory, each representing 22.22% of coded units. *Amba* and *Laut Bercerita* turn disappearance into an archive of searching, where absent bodies generate narrative pressure through unresolved mourning. *Larung* and *Pulang* shift archival authority toward secrecy, escape, exile, and intergenerational testimony. Smaller categories remain important because they clarify the formal diversity of archival silence. *Kalatidha* uses newspaper clippings as fragmentary access to 1965 memory, while *Cantik Itu Luka* recodes national violence through grotesque return and family curse. The pattern is therefore not uniform: silence appears as blocked speech, missing bodies, fragments, clandestine circulation, and distorted counter-history.

Table 3. Archival silence and counter-archival voice across coded units

Main Category	Subcategory	Narrative Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Short Example/Excerpt	Data Code	Interpretation
Silence as suppressed testimony	Suppressed testimony/voice	Political truth is blocked, displaced, or voiced indirectly through fugitive, family, or ordinary speech	3	33.33%	Fugitive activism; suppressed family testimony; silenced ordinary voice	“an activist who becomes a fugitive”; family memory substitutes for inaccessible truth; “their voices are silenced”	PJN-PRI-001; PJN-PRI-009; PJN-PRI-010	Archival silence appears most strongly as blocked testimony, where political truth survives through indirect speech rather than official record.
Silence as missing-person archive	Missing person archive	Absence of body, grave, or legal certainty produces a narrative archive of searching and mourning	2	22.22%	Buru disappearance; forced disappearance; family search	Bhisma remains absent after arrest and Buru exile; Biru Laut remains present through family search	PJN-PRI-006; PJN-PRI-008	Missing persons become archival centers because unresolved disappearance forces family memory to replace institutional closure.
Silence as clandestine counter-memory	Clandestine counter-memory / counter-testimony	Memory circulates through underground rescue, exile testimony, or counter-narrative against official forgetting	2	22.22%	Activist escape; exile narrative; intergenerational testimony	leftist student activists escape state pursuit; Lintang records family/victim testimony	PJN-PRI-002; PJN-PRI-007	Counter-memory emerges through mobility, secrecy, and testimony that contests state-centered historical narration.
Silence as material fragment	Archive fragment	A partial document or object mediates access to political violence that cannot be narrated directly	1	11.11%	Newspaper clipping; prison reading; 1965 memory	“reading newspaper clippings about the 1965 events”	PJN-PRI-004	Fragmentary documents reveal that archives may preserve traces of violence while still withholding full historical intelligibility.
Silence as grotesque counter-history	Grotesque counter-history	Curse, bodily excess, and familial disorder recode national violence outside official historical form	1	11.11%	Family curse; return from death; gendered historical violence	a dead woman returns and exposes familial and historical violence	PJN-PRI-005	Grotesque narration functions as a counter-history when official discourse cannot accommodate embodied and gendered violence.

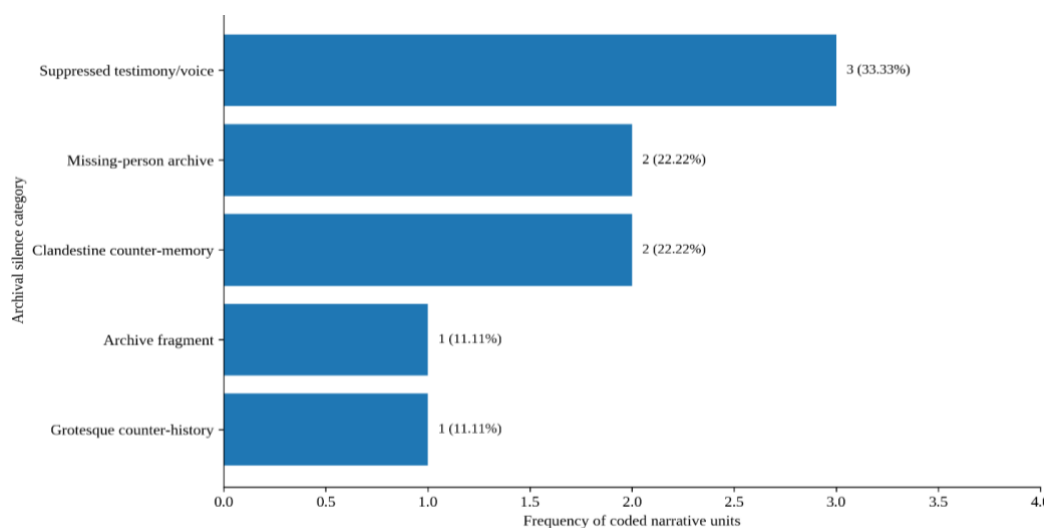


Figure 3. Archival silence and counter-archival voice across coded units

Theoretically, this distribution strengthens a reading of post-authoritarian fiction as counter-archival practice. Trouillot's account of historical silencing and Derrida's archive theory help explain why archives do not merely store memory but regulate what may count as historical truth. In Indonesian contexts, Leong's work on hidden narratives, graves, and haunted spaces shows that non-official memory often survives through mediated, ritual, or spectral forms. Głab's necropolitical reading further clarifies why bodies excluded from official commemoration remain central to literary remembrance. Thus, these novels do not replace legal or institutional archives; they expose where such archives are fractured, selective, or morally incomplete.

4.3. Necropolitical memory and unfinished national belonging

Political death in these novels is structured by unequal access to recognition, burial, and belonging. The most frequent category is criminalized or excluded victimhood, which accounts for 33.33% of coded units. This pattern shows that necropolitical memory does not begin only at the moment of physical death; it starts when subjects are marked as enemies, fugitives, leftists, or socially disposable figures. Such positioning makes violence appear narratively thinkable before it becomes formally acknowledged. The smaller but related categories demonstrate that death is not treated as a single event but as a continuing political condition. Bodies may disappear, return grotesquely, remain exiled, survive as fragments, or be inherited as stigma.

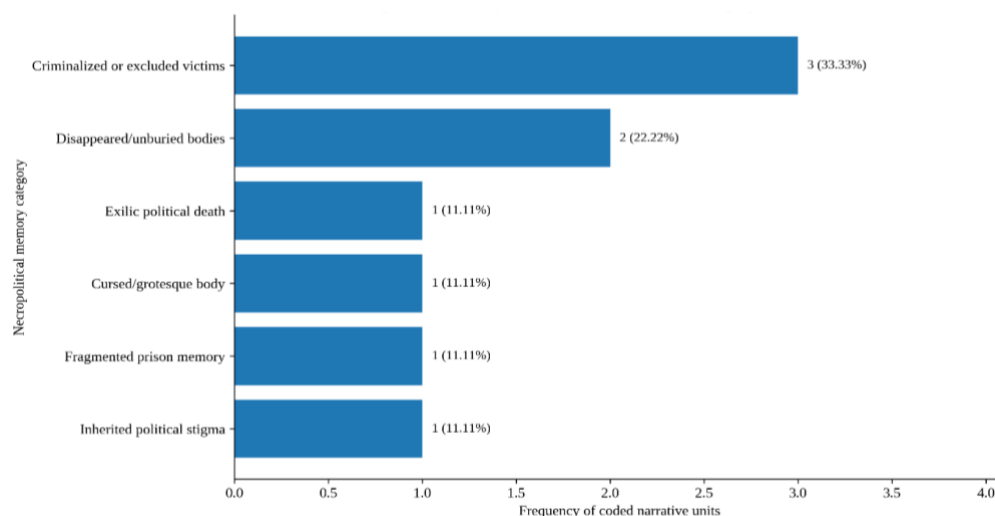


Figure 4. Necropolitical memory and unfinished national belonging across coded units

Table 4. Necropolitical memory and unfinished national belonging across coded units

Main Category	Subcategory	Narrative Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Short Example/Excerpt	Data Code	Interpretation
Death as political exclusion	Criminalized or excluded victims	Victims of authoritarian violence are positioned as fugitives, enemies, deviants, or socially disposable subjects	3	33.33%	Fugitive activist; leftist student activists; silenced ordinary subjects	“an activist who becomes a fugitive”; “leftist student activists”; silenced voices under New Order repression	PJN-PRI-001; PJN-PRI-002; PJN-PRI-010	Political death begins before physical death when subjects are marked as disposable, dangerous, or removable from national legitimacy.
Death as unresolved disappearance	Disappeared/unburied bodies	A missing, detained, or unrecovered body prevents legal, ritual, and familial closure	2	22.22%	Buru absence; 1998 forced disappearance; family search	Bhisma remains absent after arrest and Buru exile; Biru Laut remains present through unresolved search	PJN-PRI-006; PJN-PRI-008	The missing body becomes a necropolitical sign because the victim remains neither fully dead nor socially restored.
Death as exilic non-belonging	Exilic political death	Political exile produces a suspended relation to homeland, citizenship, and national memory	1	11.11%	Paris exile; 1965 aftermath; delayed return	exile memory connects 1965, 1968, and 1998	PJN-PRI-007	Exile turns national belonging into an unfinished condition because the subject remains historically tied to Indonesia but politically displaced from it.
Death as cursed embodiment	Cursed/grotesque body	The body returns through curse, excess, or grotesque form to expose violence that official memory cannot contain	1	11.11%	Grave return; gendered violence; familial curse	a dead woman returns and exposes historical and familial violence	PJN-PRI-005	Grotesque embodiment turns the violated body into a counter-memory that refuses sanitized national narration.
Death as fragmented incarceration	Fragmented prison memory	Prison, clipping, and madness mediate political violence through damaged access to historical knowledge	1	11.11%	Prison memory; newspaper clipping; 1965 political violence	“reading newspaper clippings about the 1965 events”	PJN-PRI-004	Incarcerated memory reveals how political death is stored in fragments rather than in complete institutional acknowledgment.
Death as inherited stigma	Inherited political stigma	Descendants carry the social and symbolic burden of political death across generations	1	11.11%	Executed father; child memory; inherited 1965 stigma	a child imagines the father’s final moments after political death	PJN-PRI-009	The dead continue to govern the living when stigma becomes an inherited form of national exclusion.
Total			9	100%				

The dominant pattern appears across *Saman*, *Larung*, and *Entrok*, where authoritarian power places dissident or ordinary subjects outside legitimate national protection. The second most visible pattern appears in *Amba* and *Laut Bercerita*, where disappearance and unrecovered bodies obstruct familial, ritual, and historical closure. Other novels extend this logic through different narrative routes: *Pulang* frames exile as suspended belonging; *Cantik Itu Luka* turns the violated body into grotesque historical return; *Kalatidha* condenses political death through prison memory and clipping; and *Namaku Alam 1* represents stigma as an intergenerational burden. The pattern therefore confirms that unfinished death operates through body, law, family, memory, and national membership at once.

Theoretically, this distribution supports a necropolitical reading of post-authoritarian Indonesian fiction. Mbembe's account of sovereign power over life and death helps clarify why these novels repeatedly stage victims as subjects whose deaths are politically managed even after violence occurs. Głąb's analysis of sacred and cursed bodies in Suharto-era memory is particularly relevant because the dataset shows how some bodies remain excluded from legitimate mourning. Leong's work on graves, ghosts, and hidden histories further explains why unburied or displaced dead retain narrative force. This study therefore reads unfinished national belonging not as an abstract identity problem, but as a literary effect of deaths that remain politically unacknowledged, ritually unsettled, and archivally incomplete.

5. DISCUSSION

Political death in these novels matters because it is narrated less as an event that has ended than as a temporal disorder that continues to structure the present. The strongest implication of this pattern is that post-authoritarian fiction transforms haunting into a diagnostic form: it reveals where national history remains ethically and narratively unfinished. Temporal residue does not merely recall past violence; it shows how fugitivity, exile, delayed searching, inherited fear, and family memory keep authoritarian violence active after formal regime change. This supports Leong's reading of haunted Indonesian landscapes as sites where hidden narratives remain socially operative, and it extends Dragojlovic's argument that traumatic speakability may emerge through affective rather than fully declarative forms. Yet this finding also nuances broader hauntological readings by showing that Indonesian literary haunting is not always centered on spectacular ghosts. Its function is often quieter: it makes time itself unstable. Thus, haunting becomes a literary mechanism through which unresolved death interrupts national self-completion.

This temporal instability emerges because post-authoritarian memory is structured by partial disclosure rather than full historical settlement. The novels repeatedly place characters within temporal gaps produced by disappearance, stigma, exile, and belated testimony, suggesting a correlation between unresolved political violence and disrupted narrative chronology. Eddyono's account of selective erasure helps explain this structure: silence after the New Order is not simply absence, but a reorganized field of omission, partial acknowledgment, and controlled narration. Głąb's work on Suharto-era necropolitics further clarifies why certain deaths continue to unsettle fiction: bodies marked as cursed, deviant, or politically illegitimate cannot easily enter consensual national memory. Compared with studies that emphasize collective trauma as representation, such as Mayasari-Hoffert and Ritonga, Pratiwi, Suhery, and Nadrah, this study suggests that trauma in these novels is not only psychological or communal. It is temporal and institutional. Violence returns because its historical conditions remain insufficiently resolved.

Archival silence functions in these novels not as emptiness but as a generator of counter-archival narration. Its implication is therefore double. On one hand, silence exposes dysfunction in official memory: missing documents, unacknowledged bodies, censored histories, and displaced testimonies prevent the nation from producing a stable moral account of its own past. On the other hand, silence enables literary form to create alternative routes of remembrance through family stories, fragments, rumours, exile testimony, grotesque return, and affective traces. This aligns with Leong's studies of graves, ghosts, and ritual guides as mediators of hidden Indonesian histories. It also resonates with S., Andalas, and Taufiqurrohman's work on collective memory in Indonesian fiction, although this study shifts emphasis from what fiction remembers to how fiction narrates the difficulty of remembering. The key implication is that novels do not merely supplement archives; they disclose the political conditions under which archives fail.

This counter-archival function arises from an underlying structure in which historical authority is unevenly distributed. Official archives tend to privilege documents, institutional recognition, and authorized chronology, whereas these novels privilege fragments, embodied memory, interrupted voices, and intimate testimony. This difference does not mean that fiction replaces historical evidence. Rather, fiction reveals where evidence has been fractured, suppressed, or morally delayed. Derrida's archive theory and Trouillot's account of silencing help explain why the archive is never a neutral container of facts; it is a field of power that determines what becomes sayable as history. In Indonesian memory politics, Eddyono's selective erasure

and Głab's necropolitical hierarchy show why victims may appear in public discourse without being fully restored to justice or mourning. Compared with Yasin, Anwar, Umaroh, and Hanafi's broader account of cultural memory and postcolonial perspectives, this study offers a narrower claim: counter-archival fiction becomes necessary when national memory is present but incomplete.

The necropolitical positioning of the dead carries perhaps the sharpest implication: national belonging is tested at the threshold of death. The novels suggest that some subjects are excluded from protection before death, denied recognition after death, or transmitted to later generations as stigma. This means that memory politics is not only about narrating past violence but about deciding who can be mourned as part of the nation. Głab's distinction between sacred and cursed bodies is especially useful here, because the coded patterns show how fugitives, disappeared persons, exiles, prisoners, and stigmatized descendants occupy unstable positions within national memory. Leong's work on graves and hidden narratives also supports this claim by showing that burial, ritual mediation, and spectral presence are not merely cultural motifs but political acts of historical repair. This study therefore reads unfinished belonging as a literary effect of unequal mourning: the nation remains incomplete where its dead remain unrecognized.

The underlying structure behind this necropolitical pattern is the continuation of sovereign classification after violence itself. Mbembe's theory of necropolitics helps explain how power operates not only by producing death but by organizing the meaning, visibility, and legitimacy of death afterward. In these novels, authoritarian violence persists through categories: fugitive, communist, exile, missing activist, silenced villager, cursed woman, or child of the executed. Such categories produce a correlation between political labeling and narrative exclusion. Yet this study does not claim that the novels simply prove necropolitical theory. Rather, they localize and modify it by showing that post-authoritarian death is mediated through family memory, literary form, gendered embodiment, and intergenerational stigma. Comparative work by Deng, Saji, Humphry and A., and Larasati confirms that haunting often appears where war, partition, sound, or postwar memory remains unresolved. Indonesian fiction adds a specific insight: unfinished death becomes a critique of the nation when memory, archive, and mourning fail to meet.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that post-authoritarian Indonesian novels narrate political death as an unfinished condition rather than a closed historical event. Its most important finding is that haunting, archival silence, and necropolitical memory work together to reveal how unresolved violence continues to shape national belonging. The dead, missing, exiled, and stigmatized do not merely appear as traumatic figures; they expose failures of recognition, mourning, and historical accountability. This study contributes to literary and memory studies by renewing attention to unfinished death as an analytical category. Methodologically, its strength lies in combining close reading, coded narrative units, and memory-oriented discourse analysis within a consistent corpus design.

This study remains limited by its focus on selected post-authoritarian Indonesian novels and publicly verifiable textual units, which restricts broader claims about readership, reception, regional circulation, or authorial intention. Its qualitative design also does not permit causal claims about how literature changes public memory, although it can explain how novels organize memory, silence, and political death narratively. Future research should expand this corpus to include short stories, drama, digital fiction, memoir, film adaptation, and reader reception across different Indonesian regions. Comparative work with other post-authoritarian societies would also clarify whether unfinished death operates similarly across contexts, or whether Indonesian fiction produces a distinct memory grammar.

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

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible literary texts and contextual scholarly sources.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

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

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