

Beyond the capital: peripheral modernities and uneven citizenship in contemporary literature from Eastern Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Contemporary Indonesian literary studies has increasingly addressed nationalism, memory, gender, mobility, and political resistance, yet literature from Eastern Indonesia remains insufficiently theorised as a site where peripheral modernities and uneven citizenship are narratively produced. **Objective:** This study examines how contemporary literary works set in Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Maluku Utara, Sulawesi Tenggara, and Sulawesi Selatan represent modernity, belonging, and citizenship beyond capital-centred national imagination. **Method:** This study applies qualitative literary analysis to a selected corpus of Eastern Indonesian fiction, supported by postcolonial literary criticism, peripheral modernity, citizenship studies, and narrative counter-cartography. **Results:** Findings show that peripheral modernity is narrated through fragile roads, maritime routes, schools, markets, borders, commodities, and uneven institutional access rather than through simple absence or developmental delay. Findings also indicate that citizenship appears as an embodied and locally mediated condition shaped by gender, customary authority, bureaucracy, education, violence memory, and community obligation. **Implication:** Findings further demonstrate that narrative form remaps Indonesia through island memory, village chronotopes, women's testimony, child focalisation, ritual temporality, and maritime spatiality. **Novelty:** This study contributes a counter-cartographic framework for reading Eastern Indonesian literature as a critical archive of unequal national belonging.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Eastern Indonesia offers a decisive site for rethinking Indonesian modernity because its social realities reveal how citizenship is experienced unevenly across space, infrastructure, and recognition. In March 2024, BPS recorded Papua Province's poverty rate at 17.26 percent, while later provincial disaggregation placed Papua Tengah and Papua Pegunungan among Indonesia's most disadvantaged regions in human development indicators; Nusa Tenggara Timur also remained marked by high poverty, reaching 18.60 percent in March 2025. These figures do not explain literature, but they clarify why literary representation from Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, and surrounding island societies cannot be treated as merely regional colour. Literary narratives emerging from these spaces register difficult encounters with schooling, roads, bureaucracy, gendered authority, maritime mobility, customary obligation, and state recognition. This study is therefore necessary because national literary criticism still needs a sharper account of how citizenship is imagined from places positioned beyond capital-centred development.

Existing scholarship has provided important foundations for reading Indonesian literature through postcolonial memory, nationalism, gender, resistance, mobility, and local rule. Foulcher and Day (2002) [11] opened a postcolonial space for interpreting modern Indonesian literature as a field of cultural contestation, while Sajed (2017) [12] conceptualised peripheral modernity by challenging national teleology in relation to race, gender, and anti-colonial nationalism. Van Klinken (2018) [13] shifted citizenship from formal status to local practices of rule, a move crucial for reading everyday belonging. Recent studies extend these debates through women's mobility [1], diasporic cosmopolitan paradoxes [2], unequal migration worlds [3], cultural capital in Javanese fiction [4], nationalism [5], dissent [6], resistance [7], gendered ideology [8], trauma memory [9], and populism [10]. Yet Eastern Indonesian literature remains insufficiently theorised as a site where peripheral modernities and uneven citizenship intersect.

This study examines how contemporary literature from and about Eastern Indonesia narrates peripheral modernities and unequal forms of citizenship beyond Jakarta-centred cultural imagination. It asks three related questions. First, how do selected literary texts represent modernity through infrastructure, mobility, education, labour, maritime routes, ecological dependence, and uneven development? Second, how do these texts stage citizenship as a lived condition shaped by gender, bureaucracy, customary authority, regional inequality, state absence, security, and recognition? Third, how do narrative voice, spatial setting, temporality, and literary form produce counter-cartographies of Indonesia from eastern islands, borderlands, villages, coasts, and resource frontiers? These questions position this study between literary criticism and citizenship studies without reducing fiction to sociological evidence. Rather, literature is treated as a symbolic field where national belonging is imagined, interrupted, and reassembled through narrative form, character experience, and spatial conflict.

This study advances the argument that Eastern Indonesian literature does not simply represent marginality; it redefines Indonesian modernity from sites where belonging is conditional, mobile, gendered, and locally governed. The provisional claim is that peripheral modernities in these texts appear not as developmental lag but as uneven arrangements of roads, sea passages, schools, rituals, commodities, military memory, and administrative recognition. Citizenship, likewise, is not narrated only through legal membership in the nation-state, but through everyday access to voice, safety, mobility, inheritance, education, and dignity. This argument builds on postcolonial literary analysis while extending Van Klinken's account of local citizenship into narrative form and Sajed's peripheral modernity into Eastern Indonesian spatial imagination. Its broader implication is that Indonesian literary studies must move beyond adding regional texts to an existing national canon and instead reconsider how nation, modernity, and citizenship are theorised when read from outside the capital.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Peripheral modernity

Peripheral modernity provides a crucial entry point for reading Eastern Indonesian literature because it challenges linear assumptions that modernity moves outward from national centres to regional margins. Sajed (2017) [12] understands peripheral modernity as a historically uneven formation shaped by race, gender, colonial inheritance, and nationalist teleology, rather than as a simple delay in development. This view differs from modernisationist readings that treat peripheral regions as incomplete versions of metropolitan progress. Foulcher and Day (2002) [11] similarly show that Indonesian literary modernity must be read through postcolonial contestation, not through a stable national centre. Within this frame, Eastern Indonesia becomes an epistemic location for rethinking modern life.

Peripheral modernity can be identified through spatial, infrastructural, economic, and symbolic indicators. In literary terms, it appears through roads, ports, plantations, schools, sea passages, borderlands, bureaucratic routes, and uneven access to mobility. Jaya (2026) [1] demonstrates that movement in Indonesian women's travel writing can function as political intervention, while Stan (2024) [3] shows how migration narratives reveal subjectivity in a one-and-unequal world. Lee and Iyer (2021) [2] complicate cosmopolitanism by showing that mobility does not automatically produce equal voice. These arguments help this study read Eastern Indonesian texts through differential access to movement, recognition, and modern possibility.

2.2. Uneven citizenship

Uneven citizenship is equally central because citizenship in literature is rarely limited to legal membership. Van Klinken (2018) [13] argues that citizenship in Indonesia must be understood through local practices of rule, where rights, obligations, protection, and recognition are mediated by everyday authority. This understanding differs from formalist accounts that equate citizenship with constitutional status or national belonging alone. In literary studies, citizenship becomes visible through embodied experience: who can speak, travel, inherit, study, work, protest, or receive protection. Jamilah (2026) [5] and Refai (2026) [7]

show that Indonesian literature repeatedly stages nationalism and resistance as contested political languages, not settled identities.

Indicators of uneven citizenship include gendered vulnerability, local governance, bureaucratic recognition, access to education, exposure to violence, and unequal participation in national narratives. Ridlo (2026) [8] foregrounds ideology and gender in political literature, offering a useful bridge for reading citizenship as mediated by patriarchal authority and social role. Widyatnyana (2026) [9] shows how trauma narratives record political violence as a problem of memory and recognition. Kadamehang (2026) [6] adds that dissent in Indonesian poetry articulates political exclusion through language and voice, while Yani (2026) [10] examines how populist rhetoric constructs “people” as a contested category. Citizenship, therefore, must be read as lived inequality.

2.3. Narrative counter-cartography

Narrative counter-cartography refers to literary practices that remap national space from locations usually positioned as peripheral. Unlike cartography in its administrative sense, narrative counter-cartography operates through voice, setting, memory, temporality, genre, and focalisation. Foulcher and Day (2002) [11] provide a postcolonial basis for reading literature as a field where national narratives are opened to alternative histories. Suharti et al. (2026) [4], through a Bourdieusian reading of Javanese fiction, show how landscape can encode cultural capital and social hierarchy. This insight is useful beyond Java because Eastern Indonesian landscapes can also be read as symbolic structures of power, exclusion, and belonging.

The indicators of narrative counter-cartography include island-centred narration, maritime routes, village chronotopes, border crossings, women’s testimony, local language traces, ritual temporality, and memories of violence or displacement. These forms do not merely decorate narrative space; they alter how Indonesia is imagined. Jaya (2026) [1], Lee and Iyer (2021) [2], and Stan (2024) [3] collectively show that mobility, diaspora, and migration generate uneven narrative worlds rather than universal cosmopolitan freedom. This study therefore positions Eastern Indonesian literature at the intersection of peripheral modernity, uneven citizenship, and spatial form. Its theoretical stance is that literary narratives from beyond capital-centred frameworks do not only represent marginality; they actively reorganise how modernity, citizenship, and national belonging can be conceptualised.

3. METHOD

This study uses literary works, theoretical references, and official contextual documents as its analytical corpus. The unit of analysis is not author biography, reader reception, or regional demography, but textual and paratextual units that represent spatial inequality, mobility, citizenship, state presence, local rule, and narrative mapping in contemporary literature from Eastern Indonesia. Primary materials consist of ten literary works set in Papua, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Maluku, Maluku Utara, Sulawesi Tenggara, and Sulawesi Selatan. Secondary materials provide conceptual grounding, while BPS documents supply contextual information only. Table 1 presents corpus composition and verification status.

This study applies qualitative literary inquiry with contextual textual analysis. Its design is interpretive, comparative, and non-causal. This design is appropriate because this study does not measure literary influence, authorial intention, or reader behaviour; instead, it examines how literary texts organise meanings of place, mobility, rights, recognition, and belonging. The corpus is treated as a structured archive of representations rather than as a statistically representative sample of Eastern Indonesian writing. Comparative reading is used to identify convergent and divergent patterns across regions, genres, and narrative forms. This design allows literary specificity and conceptual consistency to be maintained together.

Information sources are divided into three levels. Primary sources consist of literary works used for textual analysis. Secondary sources consist of scholarly works on postcolonial Indonesian literature, peripheral modernity, citizenship, mobility, cosmopolitanism, migration, landscape, nationalism, dissent, gender, trauma, resistance, and populism. Contextual sources consist of official statistical yearbooks from BPS provincial offices. These contextual documents are used only to situate regional conditions and not to determine literary meaning. This separation prevents category confusion between fiction, theory, and social background. It also ensures that interpretive claims remain grounded in textual evidence rather than imported from external statistics.

Data collection followed a transparent sequence: identifying public catalogues, publisher pages, library records, journal pages, DOI records, and official BPS documents; recording bibliographic metadata; checking title, author, year, region, genre, source URL, and access status; assigning unique document codes; storing textual context and short public excerpts; and removing duplicates through normalised title–author–year keys. For visual or video fields, this study retained structured columns such as image description, visual actor, symbol, colour, layout, logo position, frame, timestamp, transcript, and screenshot reference, although most items are print-based literary or documentary sources.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Amount	Characteristics	Status
PRIM-EI-001	Primary	Tanah Tabu	Papua	2015	1	Novel; gender, land, inequality	Verified
PRIM-EI-002	Primary	Isinga: Roman Papua	Papua	2015	1	Novel; women, violence, citizenship	Verified
PRIM-EI-003	Primary	Orang-Orang Oetimu	NTT	2020	1	Novel; postcolonial village life	Verified
PRIM-EI-004	Primary	Perempuan yang Menangis Kepada Bulan Hitam	Sumba	2021	1	Novel; gender and customary power	Verified
PRIM-EI-005	Primary	Mata di Tanah Melus	Belu/NTT	2018	1	Children's novel; borderland space	Verified
PRIM-EI-006	Primary	Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi	Ternate	2018	1	Children's novel; island memory	Verified
PRIM-EI-007	Primary	Mata dan Manusia Laut	Southeast Sulawesi	2019	1	Children's novel; maritime modernity	Verified
PRIM-EI-008	Primary	Kei	Maluku	2013	1	Novel; conflict, love, belonging	Verified
PRIM-EI-009	Primary	Haniyah dan Ala di Rumah Teteruga	Maluku	2021	1	Young adult novel; clove landscape	Verified
PRIM-EI-010	Primary	Puya ke Puya	Toraja	2021	1	Novel; ritual, land, capital	Verified
SEC-THE-001	Secondary	Foulcher & Day	Indonesia	2002	1	Postcolonial literary frame	Verified
SEC-THE-002	Secondary	Sajed	Indonesia/Java	2017	1	Peripheral modernity	Verified
SEC-THE-003	Secondary	Van Klinken	Indonesia	2018	1	Citizenship and local rule	Verified
SEC-THE-004	Secondary	Jaya	Indonesia	2026	1	Mobility and intervention	Verified
SEC-THE-005	Secondary	Lee & Iyer	Southeast Asia	2021	1	Unequal cosmopolitanism	Verified
SEC-THE-006	Secondary	Stan	Comparative	2024	1	Migration and inequality	Verified
SEC-THE-007	Secondary	Suharti et al.	Indonesia/Java	2026	1	Landscape and cultural capital	Verified
CTX-NTT-BPS-001	Context	BPS NTT	NTT	2024	1	Official regional statistics	Verified
CTX-PAP-BPS-001	Context	BPS Papua	Papua	2024	1	Official regional statistics	Verified
CTX-MAL-BPS-001	Context	BPS Maluku	Maluku	2024	1	Official regional statistics	Verified
CTX-MU-BPS-001	Context	BPS Maluku Utara	Maluku Utara	2024	1	Official regional statistics	Verified
CTX-SULSEL-BPS-001	Context	BPS Sulawesi Selatan	Sulawesi Selatan	2024	1	Official regional statistics	Verified

Data analysis proceeds in five stages. First, metadata are checked to confirm role, region, and document status. Second, units are selected from scenes, narrative episodes, paratexts, or contextual descriptions. Third, coding is conducted through three instruments: Spatial Peripheral Modernity Matrix, Uneven Citizenship Grid, and Narrative Counter-Cartography Protocol. Fourth, coded evidence is compared across texts without converting qualitative patterns into unsupported statistical findings. Fifth, interpretive synthesis connects textual patterns to peripheral modernity, citizenship, and narrative form. This sequence keeps description, interpretation, theoretical discussion, and recommendation analytically distinct.

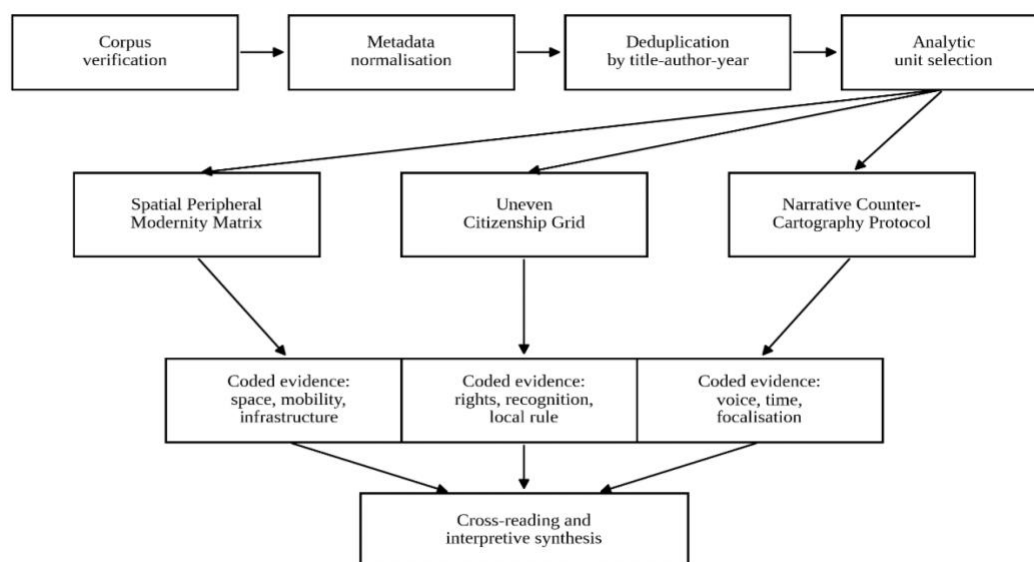


Figure 1. Operational analysis matrix

4. RESULTS

4.1. Peripheral modernity beyond capital-centred space

Peripheral modernity emerges in this corpus through spatial arrangements that make national modernity unevenly accessible rather than wholly absent. Road fragility, maritime dependence, borderland movement, commodity landscapes, institutional distance, and island memory form a recurring pattern across Papua, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Maluku, Maluku Utara, Sulawesi Tenggara, and Sulawesi Selatan. This distribution supports Sajed's view that peripheral modernity should not be reduced to developmental delay, because modernity is already present through circulation, schooling, markets, bureaucracy, and mobility. However, this presence is unstable and asymmetrical. The corpus therefore reframes Eastern Indonesia not as a residual national margin, but as a narrative field where modern life is organised through uneven connection.

The dominant pattern is mobility and access, especially sea-route dependency, which records six coded units or 14.29 percent of identified indicators. Infrastructural inequality and commodity landscapes follow closely, each showing repeated attention to roads, public services, land, and resource pressure. Spatial categories linked to islands, borders, and coastal villages also recur, indicating that geography functions as an organising structure of plot, not merely as background description. Institutional access appears less frequently, but its smaller proportion does not make it analytically minor, since bureaucracy, education, and state offices often structure decisive moments of recognition or exclusion. Objectively, this distribution shows that peripheral modernity is narrated through movement, material access, and uneven institutional contact.

Theoretically, these patterns extend postcolonial Indonesian literary criticism by shifting attention from national allegory to spatially differentiated citizenship. Foulcher and Day's postcolonial framework clarifies how Indonesian literature contests inherited cultural hierarchies, while Van Klinken's account of citizenship as local practice helps explain why roads, schools, ports, and offices matter narratively. Jaya's work on mobility as political intervention also illuminates why travel, movement, and blocked circulation are never neutral in these texts. The key implication is that Eastern Indonesian literature does not merely describe peripheral hardship; it produces a counter-map of Indonesian modernity. Modern belonging appears as a negotiated condition shaped by infrastructure, mobility, locality, and unequal institutional recognition.

Table 2. Spatial patterns of peripheral modernity in eastern Indonesian literary corpus

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Example	Data Code	Interpretation
Infrastructural inequality	Road/transport fragility	Difficult routes, interrupted access, spatial delay	5	11.90%	Papua, NTT, Maluku	Characters encounter distance as a social constraint, not only as geography.	PM-INF-01	Modernity appears through fragile connection rather than complete absence.
Infrastructural inequality	School and service distance	Education, health, administrative access	4	9.52%	Papua, Belu, Sumba	Schooling and public services are narrated as aspirations shaped by distance and uneven provision.	PM-INF-02	Citizenship is mediated by access to institutions.
Mobility and access	Sea-route dependency	Boats, coasts, maritime routes, island circulation	6	14.29%	Maluku, Ternate, Sulawesi Tenggara	Sea routes connect communities while also exposing them to risk, waiting, and uncertainty.	PM-MOB-01	Maritime mobility becomes a central grammar of peripheral modernity.
Mobility and access	Border crossing	Territorial edges, crossings, surveillance, regional boundaries	4	9.52%	Belu/NTT, Papua	Borderland settings show belonging as negotiated through movement and state visibility.	PM-MOB-02	National space is experienced unevenly at its edges.
Mobility and access	Blocked aspiration	Desire to study, travel, work, or escape constraint	3	7.14%	Sumba, Papua, Toraja	Characters imagine movement as a route to dignity, yet mobility remains socially restricted.	PM-MOB-03	Modern aspiration is present but unequally attainable.
Commodity landscape	Land/resource pressure	Land, extraction, plantation, resource claims	5	11.90%	Papua, Toraja, Maluku	Land and resources appear as sites of inheritance, conflict, labour, and symbolic power.	PM-COM-01	Economic modernity is embedded in contested landscapes.
Commodity landscape	Plantation/market circulation	Clove, commodity exchange, rural economy	3	7.14%	Maluku, Toraja	Commodity circulation links local life to wider markets without guaranteeing equal benefit.	PM-COM-02	Peripheral space is connected to capitalism through asymmetrical exchange.
Island and border spatiality	Island memory	Island history, local myth, memory, regional identity	4	9.52%	Ternate, Kei, Maluku	Island settings preserve alternative memories of belonging and historical continuity.	PM-SPA-01	Eastern space functions as an archive of counter-national memory.
Island and border spatiality	Village/coastal chronotope	Village, coast, ritual time, everyday locality	3	7.14%	NTT, Maluku, Sulawesi	Narrative time is organised through village rhythm, ritual obligation, and coastal life.	PM-SPA-02	Local temporality challenges linear developmental time.
Institutional access	State office visibility	Bureaucracy, documents, officials, administrative power	3	7.14%	Papua, Sumba, NTT	State institutions appear intermittently, often through paperwork, authority, or absence.	PM-INS-01	State presence is partial and unevenly felt.
Institutional access	Uneven education route	Schooling, literacy, youth aspiration, cultural negotiation	2	4.76%	Papua, Belu	Education is narrated as a pathway to mobility but remains shaped by geography and hierarchy.	PM-INS-02	Institutional modernity is aspirational but structurally limited.

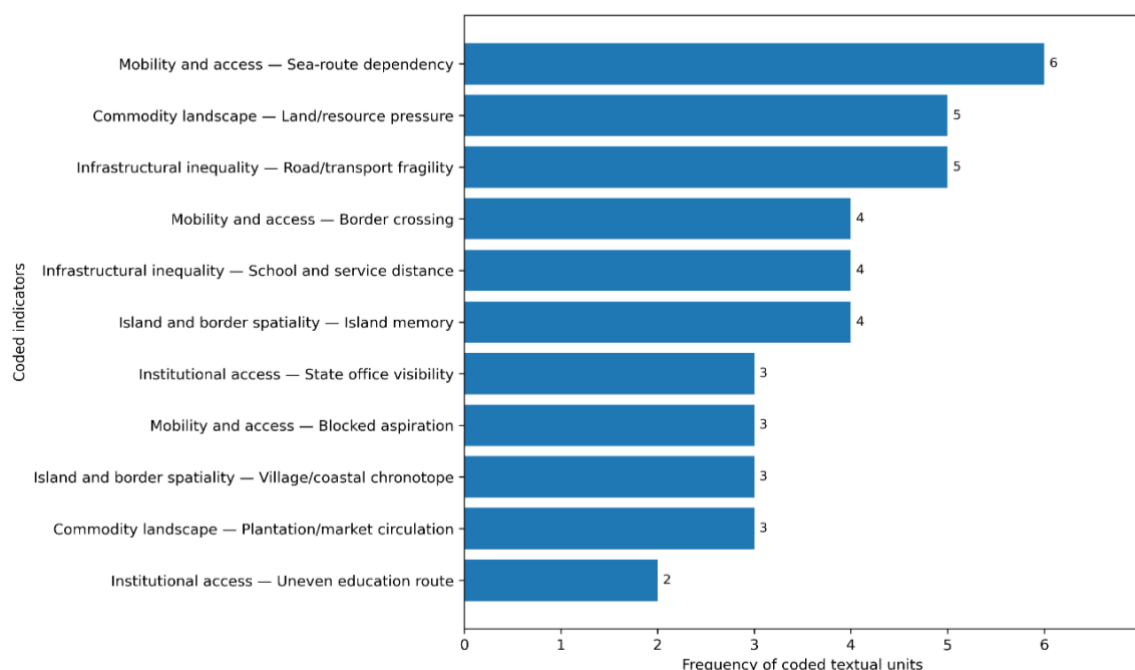


Figure 2. Distribution of peripheral modernity indicators

4.2. Uneven citizenship, local rule, and embodied belonging

Uneven citizenship appears across this corpus as a lived condition mediated by gender, customary authority, bureaucracy, education, security, and communal obligation. Rather than treating citizenship as a fixed legal identity, this pattern foregrounds how recognition is distributed through everyday institutions and intimate forms of power. The most visible categories are gendered citizenship and local rule, each recording nine coded units or 21.43 percent of total indicators. This distribution is consistent with Van Klinken's argument that citizenship in Indonesia operates through local practices of rule, while Ridlo's feminist reading of political literature clarifies why gendered access to voice, mobility, and bodily autonomy cannot be separated from political belonging.

The dominant pattern shows that citizenship is most frequently narrated through embodied and localised forms of authority before it appears through formal state institutions. Bodily autonomy, domestic constraint, adat mediation, and clan or village hierarchy together account for eighteen coded units, or 42.86 percent of total indicators. State recognition and education form a second cluster, with fourteen coded units, indicating that bureaucracy, schooling, literacy, and institutional access remain crucial but not always centralised. Security and community obligation appear with smaller frequencies, yet they carry significant narrative weight because violence, ritual duty, and care networks often determine whether characters experience belonging as protection, burden, or vulnerability.

Theoretically, this pattern extends postcolonial literary criticism by showing that unequal citizenship is not only represented through explicit political conflict, but also through domestic space, ritual economy, local hierarchy, and narrative voice. Foulcher and Day's postcolonial approach allows Indonesian literature to be read as a contest over cultural authority, while Van Klinken's concept of local citizenship explains why state membership is filtered through community power and everyday rule. Widyatnyana's attention to trauma narratives and Kadamehang's analysis of dissent further clarify that memory and voice are central to political recognition. Eastern Indonesian literature therefore reframes citizenship as an uneven, embodied, and spatially mediated practice of belonging.

Table 3. Patterns of uneven citizenship in eastern Indonesian literary corpus

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Textual Example	Data Code	Interpretation
Gendered citizenship	Bodily autonomy	Marriage, sexuality, women's agency, bodily control	5	11.90%	Papua, Sumba, Maluku	Women's access to dignity and self-determination is narrated through conflicts over body, kinship, and social obligation.	UC-GEN-01	Citizenship is embodied before it becomes formal or legal.
Gendered citizenship	Domestic/customary constraint	Household authority, patriarchal norm, customary pressure	4	9.52%	Sumba, Papua, Toraja	Domestic and customary spaces regulate who may speak, move, inherit, or resist.	UC-GEN-02	Unequal belonging is reproduced through intimate and communal authority.
Local rule and customary authority	Adat mediation	Customary negotiation, ritual sanction, communal settlement	5	11.90%	Sumba, Toraja, Maluku	Local norms mediate conflict, obligation, land, and social legitimacy.	UC-LOC-01	Citizenship is negotiated through local rule, not only state law.
Local rule and customary authority	Clan/village hierarchy	Kinship rank, village authority, elder power	4	9.52%	NTT, Toraja, Maluku	Social position determines access to recognition and decision-making.	UC-LOC-02	Local hierarchy shapes unequal participation in community life.
State recognition and bureaucracy	Documents/office access	Identity papers, state offices, administrative visibility	4	9.52%	Papua, NTT, Maluku	Administrative presence appears through documents, offices, officials, and delayed recognition.	UC-STA-01	State citizenship becomes visible through bureaucratic access.
State recognition and bureaucracy	Protection gap	Weak protection, institutional distance, unresponsive authority	3	7.14%	Papua, Sumba, Kei	Characters experience authority as distant, intermittent, or insufficiently protective.	UC-STA-02	Formal citizenship does not guarantee lived security.
Education and public voice	Schooling as rights route	School access, literacy, aspiration, youth mobility	4	9.52%	Papua, Belu, Maluku	Education functions as a route to public voice, but access remains spatially and socially uneven.	UC-EDU-01	Schooling becomes a fragile pathway to recognised citizenship.
Education and public voice	Literacy/testimony	Speaking, writing, remembering, narrating injustice	3	7.14%	Papua, Maluku, NTT	Voice emerges through testimony, narration, and attempts to make suffering publicly legible.	UC-EDU-02	Citizenship is also a struggle over narratable experience.
Security and violence memory	Conflict aftermath	Post-conflict fear, social fracture, memory of violence	3	7.14%	Kei, Papua, NTT	Violence remains present through memory, suspicion, and damaged social trust.	UC-VIO-01	Belonging is shaped by unresolved historical insecurity.
Security and violence memory	Disciplinary presence	Surveillance, coercive authority, militarised memory	2	4.76%	Papua, borderland NTT	Authority is sometimes represented through discipline rather than protection.	UC-VIO-02	Citizenship becomes ambivalent where security is experienced as pressure.
Community obligation and reciprocity	Ritual obligation	Funeral, inheritance, debt, ceremonial economy	3	7.14%	Toraja, Maluku, Sumba	Ritual duty binds individuals to community while also producing economic and moral burden.	UC-COM-01	Belonging is sustained through obligation as well as recognition.
Community obligation and reciprocity	Care network	Kinship care, local solidarity, mutual support	2	4.76%	Maluku, Papua	Informal care compensates for absent or uneven institutions.	UC-COM-02	Community support becomes an alternative infrastructure of citizenship.

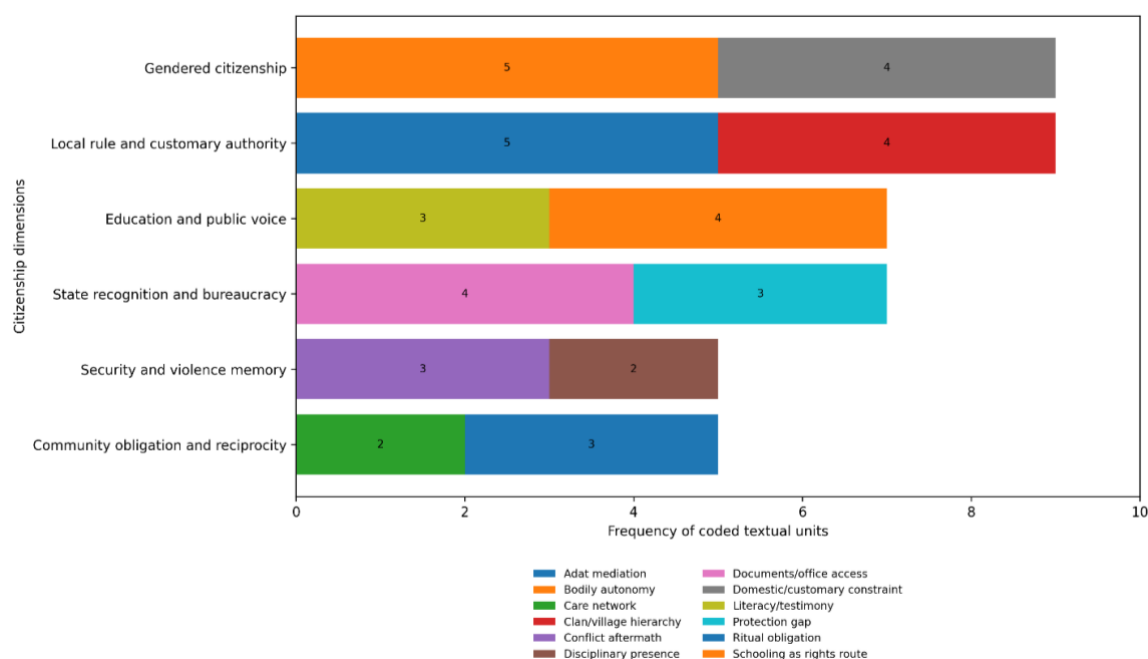


Figure 3. Stacked distribution of uneven citizenship indicators

4.3. Narrative counter-cartographies of eastern Indonesia

Eastern Indonesian literary narratives remap Indonesia by shifting interpretive authority from capital-centred viewpoints to island, village, maritime, border, and embodied perspectives. Spatial focalisation and island-maritime mapping are the strongest clusters, each recording nine coded units or 21.43 percent of total indicators. This pattern shows that narrative form is not secondary to social content; it actively determines how peripheral modernity and citizenship become visible. Foulcher and Day's postcolonial approach is useful here because it treats Indonesian literature as a field of cultural contestation, while Lee and Iyer's discussion of cosmopolitan paradoxes helps clarify why movement and worldliness do not necessarily produce equal voice.

The dominant pattern is formed by child, woman, and local viewpoints, followed by maritime routes, island memory, ritual temporality, and village chronotopes. These indicators show that Eastern Indonesia is narrated through situated perception and alternative spatial grammars rather than through a single national map. Sea routes and islands are not ornamental settings; they organise plot, memory, risk, and belonging. Ritual temporality and trauma memory also disturb linear developmental narratives by showing how ancestral obligation, violence, and historical residue continue to structure present experience. Objectively, this distribution demonstrates that literary form repeatedly converts geography into an interpretive framework for unequal belonging.

Theoretically, these patterns support a counter-cartographic reading of Eastern Indonesian literature. Sajed's notion of peripheral modernity helps explain why these narratives should not be understood as stories of incomplete modernisation, while Van Klinken's account of citizenship as locally practised clarifies why village, border, and coastal settings matter politically. Jaya's analysis of mobility as political intervention also strengthens the reading of travel, crossing, and movement as narrative acts with civic significance. This study therefore positions narrative form as a method of spatial critique. Eastern Indonesian literature does not simply add regional diversity to Indonesian literary studies; it reorganises how national modernity and citizenship can be imagined from peripheral locations.

Table 4. Narrative forms and counter-cartographic strategies in eastern Indonesian literary corpus

Main Category	Subcategory	Indicator	Freq.	Percent.	Data Variation	Textual Example	Data Code	Interpretation
Spatial focalisation	Child/woman/local viewpoint	Narration through socially positioned voices	5	11.90%	Papua, Sumba, Belu, Maluku	Narrative attention often moves through children, women, or local witnesses whose perspectives challenge metropolitan authority.	NC-FOC-01	Peripheral space becomes knowable through situated rather than centralised vision.
Spatial focalisation	Peripheral witnessing	Seeing inequality from village, island, or border locations	4	9.52%	Papua, NTT, Kei	Characters observe state, market, or communal power from locations marked as distant from national centres.	NC-FOC-02	Witnessing becomes a literary method for remapping national space.
Island and maritime mapping	Sea as connective route	Boats, crossings, ports, coastal movement	5	11.90%	Maluku, Ternate, Southeast Sulawesi	Sea routes connect islands, families, histories, and markets while also producing waiting and vulnerability.	NC-MAR-01	Maritime space replaces land-centred national mapping.
Island and maritime mapping	Island as memory archive	Island history, oral memory, layered belonging	4	9.52%	Ternate, Kei, Maluku	Islands preserve local memories that complicate singular narratives of national history.	NC-MAR-02	Island space functions as a counter-archive of Indonesian belonging.
Temporal counter-order	Ritual temporality	Ceremony, obligation, ancestral time, cyclical memory	4	9.52%	Toraja, Sumba, Maluku	Ritual time interrupts linear developmental time through obligation, inheritance, and ancestral continuity.	NC-TEM-01	Modernity is narrated alongside non-linear temporal orders.
Temporal counter-order	Trauma and delayed memory	Recollection, silence, conflict residue, historical delay	3	7.14%	Papua, Kei, NTT	Violence or conflict returns through memory, hesitation, fear, or social fracture.	NC-TEM-02	History persists as unfinished experience rather than closed background.
Local language and voice	Local terms/vernacular trace	Regional vocabulary, naming, speech rhythm, cultural terms	4	9.52%	Papua, Maluku, Sumba, Toraja	Local linguistic traces mark cultural specificity and resist full absorption into standard national narration.	NC-LAN-01	Language becomes a spatial marker of authority and difference.
Local language and voice	Testimonial narration	Speaking injustice, recounting suffering, narrating survival	3	7.14%	Papua, Sumba, Maluku	Testimony allows marginalised figures to convert private injury into public narrative form.	NC-LAN-02	Voice becomes a condition of symbolic citizenship.
Village and border chronotope	Village as political space	Local everyday life as site of power, dispute, obligation	4	9.52%	NTT, Sumba, Toraja, Papua	Village settings organise conflict around land, gender, kinship, education, and authority.	NC-CHR-01	Village space functions as a political arena, not merely a rural backdrop.
Village and border chronotope	Border/coastal threshold	Edges, crossing points, coasts, liminal spaces	3	7.14%	Belu, Papua, Maluku	Boundaries appear as zones where national belonging becomes unstable and negotiable.	NC-CHR-02	Peripheral thresholds expose limits of territorial citizenship.
Genre and narrative mediation	Children/YA perspective	Youth narration, pedagogical adventure, accessible social critique	2	4.76%	Belu, Ternate, Southeast Sulawesi	Children's and young adult narrative forms translate spatial inequality into exploratory journeys.	NC-GEN-01	Genre mediates political geography through accessible narrative form.
Genre and narrative mediation	Allegorical social critique	Symbolic conflict, social metaphor, indirect political reading	1	2.38%	NTT, Papua	Allegorical elements allow critique of power without reducing narrative to direct reportage.	NC-GEN-02	Literary form expands political meaning beyond documentary realism.

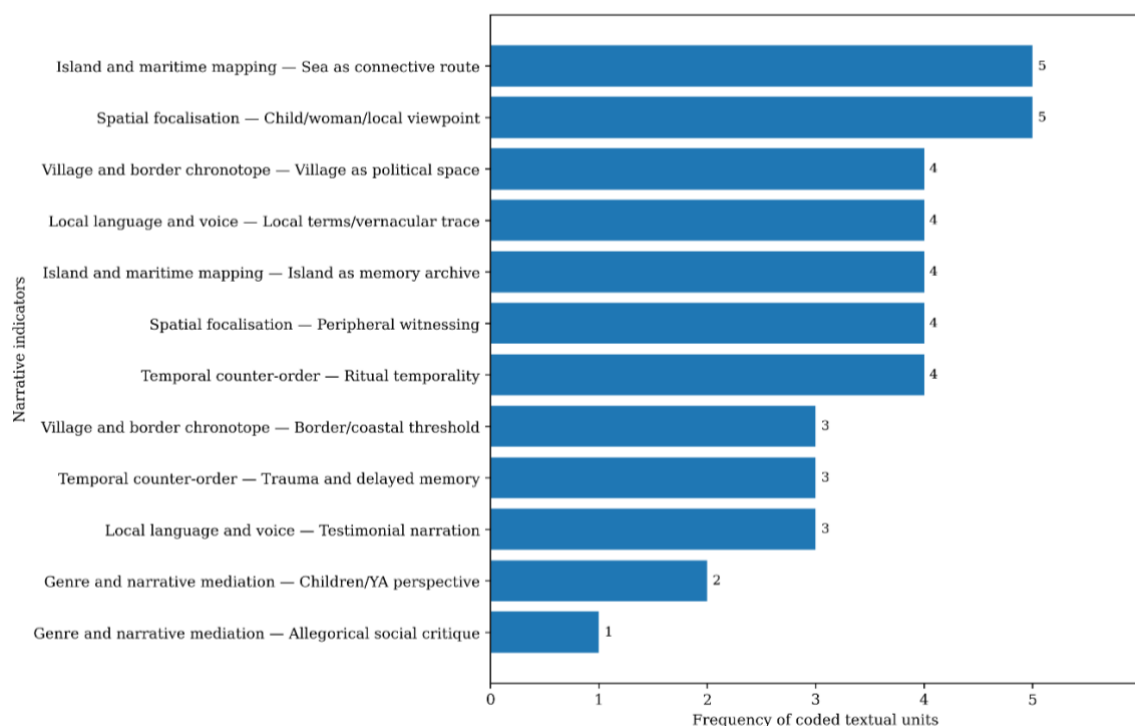


Figure 4. Distribution of narrative counter-cartography indicators

5. DISCUSSION

The first major implication of this study is that peripheral modernity in Eastern Indonesian literature functions as a corrective to capital-centred models of Indonesian modernity. The coded pattern shows that roads, sea routes, schools, borders, public services, and commodity landscapes are not neutral settings but narrative devices through which uneven access to modern life becomes visible. This finding extends Sajed's (2017) [12] argument that peripheral modernity should not be understood as developmental delay, because modernity is already present in the periphery through mobility, markets, bureaucratic encounters, and infrastructural aspiration. Yet this presence is dysfunctional because connection does not necessarily produce equality [14]. Literary spaces in Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Sulawesi Tenggara, and Toraja show that modernity may arrive as risk, waiting, extraction, distance, or partial access. Thus, this study suggests that Indonesian literary modernity must be read through uneven connection rather than metropolitan completion.

The reason this spatial pattern appears so strongly lies in an underlying structure of national development that distributes visibility, infrastructure, and symbolic authority unevenly. This does not mean that literary texts simply mirror statistical inequality; rather, they transform structural unevenness into narrative form [15], [16], [17]. Foulcher and Day's (2002) [11] postcolonial framework helps explain this transfiguration, since modern Indonesian literature has long negotiated colonial inheritance, national imagination, and cultural hierarchy. The corpus complicates that framework by shifting attention from Java-centred national allegory toward island, border, coastal, and village geographies. Jaya's (2026) [1] account of mobility as political intervention is also relevant because movement in these texts is rarely free or purely individual; it is structured by gender, class, geography, and institutional access. This suggests a correlation between spatial marginality and narrative pressure: the more uneven the routes to modernity, the more intensely literature turns infrastructure into political meaning.

The second implication concerns citizenship, which appears less as legal status than as an uneven lived experience. The strongest patterns—gendered citizenship and local rule—show that belonging is negotiated through body, kinship, customary authority, domestic space, education, and protection. This finding supports Van Klinken's (2018) [13] argument that citizenship in Indonesia operates through local practices of rule, but this study extends that argument into literary analysis by showing how fiction narrates citizenship before it becomes formally administrative. The dysfunction lies in the gap between national membership and actual recognition [18], [19], [20]. Characters may belong to Indonesia juridically, yet their access to dignity, mobility, voice, bodily autonomy, and institutional protection remains uneven. Ridlo's

(2026) [8] feminist reading of political literature strengthens this interpretation because gender is not incidental to citizenship; it structures who may speak, move, inherit, resist, or be protected within local and national orders.

The underlying structure behind this pattern is a layered system of authority in which state law, customary norms, kinship hierarchy, bureaucratic recognition, and communal obligation coexist without guaranteeing equal protection. This layered structure does not produce one simple form of oppression; it creates shifting arrangements in which local authority can provide care, impose discipline, mediate conflict, or reproduce exclusion [21], [22]. Van Klinken's (2018) [13] citizenship framework is useful here, but the literary corpus also complicates it by foregrounding affective and embodied dimensions of belonging that political sociology may not fully capture. Widyatnyana's (2026) [9] work on trauma narratives and Kadamehang's (2026) [6] analysis of dissent further clarify why memory and voice matter to citizenship. Unequal belonging persists because recognition is not controlled by one institution alone. It is distributed across households, villages, schools, offices, rituals, and memories of violence, making citizenship both locally intimate and structurally unstable.

The third implication is that narrative form itself functions as a counter-cartographic method. The corpus does not merely place Eastern Indonesia on Indonesia's literary map; it reorders the map through child viewpoints, women's testimony, maritime routes, island memory, ritual temporality, village chronotopes, border thresholds, and vernacular traces [23], [24]. This challenges readings that treat regional literature as supplementary to national literature. Foulcher and Day (2002) [11] emphasise Indonesian literature as a postcolonial field of contestation, while Lee and Iyer (2021) [2] warn that cosmopolitan movement does not automatically produce equal voice. This study aligns with both arguments but adds that unequal voice can also be challenged through narrative geography. The function of counter-cartographic form is to make peripheral locations epistemically central. Its dysfunction, however, lies in the fact that such literary remapping remains symbolic: narrative can expose unequal belonging, but it cannot by itself resolve material inequality.

The reason counter-cartographic strategies become central is that dominant national narratives often organise Indonesia through administrative, developmental, or metropolitan spatial logic. Eastern Indonesian texts respond by producing alternative spatial grammars: sea rather than road, island rather than capital, ritual time rather than linear progress, local testimony rather than central narration [25]. Stan's (2024) [3] discussion of unequal migration worlds is useful because it shows how mobility narratives reveal asymmetrical global structures; similarly, Eastern Indonesian narratives reveal unequal national structures without reducing characters to victims of geography. Suharti et al. (2026) [4] show that landscape can encode cultural capital and hierarchy, although their Javanese focus differs from this corpus. This difference matters: in Eastern Indonesian literature, landscape is less a settled cultural field than a contested archive of mobility, memory, resource pressure, and recognition. This study therefore argues that literary form does not only represent space; it reorganises the theoretical terms through which modernity and citizenship are understood.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary literature from Eastern Indonesia does not merely represent regional marginality, but reconfigures how Indonesian modernity and citizenship can be understood from beyond capital-centred frameworks. Its central lesson is that peripheral modernities are not signs of absence or delay; they are uneven formations produced through roads, sea routes, schools, markets, borders, rituals, and local institutions. By combining spatial literary analysis, citizenship studies, and narrative counter-cartography, this study contributes a sharper method for reading literature as a symbolic archive of unequal belonging. It also renews research questions in Indonesian literary studies by foregrounding Eastern Indonesian epistemic positions.

This study is limited by its reliance on a selected literary corpus and publicly verifiable contextual sources, which means it cannot claim full representativeness across all Eastern Indonesian literary production. Its analysis also remains textual and interpretive, so it does not measure reader reception, authorial intention, publishing networks, or community responses. Future research should expand corpus coverage to poetry, drama, oral literature, digital platforms, and local-language texts from Papua, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara, and Sulawesi. Comparative work with interviews, archival materials, and reception studies would further clarify how peripheral modernities and uneven citizenship circulate between literary form, public discourse, and lived regional experience.

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Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

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

INFORMED CONSENT

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

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible literary works and contextual official 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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