

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE INDONESIAN AND ENGLISH VERSIONS OF 'LAUT BERCERITA

Aulia Tsabita Fathiya (122111233004), Sabrina Faiza Putri (123221137), Nesha Atria Navyra (123221158), Fairuz Rania Widamulya (123221171), Fanya Grace Tahulending (123221205), Rina Saraswati S.S, M.Hum. (197805182007012002), Pujo Sakti Nur Cahyo S.Hum., M.Hum. (198509232015041003)

Faculty of Humanities, Airlangga University
Email: aulia.tsabita.fathiya-2021@fib.unair.ac.id
sabrina.faiza.putri-2022@fib.unair.ac.id
nesha.atria.navyra-2022@fib.unair.ac.id
fairuz.rania.w-2022@fib.unair.ac.id
fanya.grace-2022@fib.unair.ac.id
rinasaraswati@fib.unair.ac.id
pujosakti-n-c@fib.unair.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* explores collective trauma and political oppression in Indonesia, focusing on enforced disappearances during the New Order. This comparative study examines how the Indonesian and English versions convey themes of memory, identity, and justice. Both versions highlight the characters' inner conflicts and the symbolism of the sea and melarung ritual, though these elements carry different cultural nuances. A psychoanalytic analysis reveals how trauma and identity suppression are addressed, with the English version broadening the interpretation to universal psychological themes. Ultimately, the study shows how both versions preserve the core message of resistance while offering distinct cultural perspectives.

Keywords: *Laut Bercerita, Collective trauma, Psychoanalytic analysis, Indonesian and English Version, Symbolism and Identity*

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I. Introduction

Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* raises issues relevant to Indonesia's dark history, namely the atrocities of the New Order government in the late 1990s. The story centers on the enforced disappearances of activists who fought against authoritarian rule, leaving victims and their families deeply traumatized. The novel's overarching theme is how collective memories of past atrocities need to be kept alive to prevent repetition, while exploring the sense of loss and the struggle for justice amid repressive political pressures.

Biru Laut, the novel's main character, is an English Literature student who is active in the student movement to fight for freedom and justice. Through his point of view, the reader is taken through the dynamics of the student activists' struggle, which is full of betrayal, fear, and tension.

On the other hand, the second part of the novel uses the point of view of Asmara Jati, Biru Laut's younger brother, who narrates the impact of this loss on the family, describing the deep trauma and the family's efforts to keep the memory of Laut alive.

The novel deals in depth with issues such as government brutality against activists, the power of friendship in the midst of crisis, and the relationships between family members damaged by regime atrocities. The journey of identity in the novel is depicted through Biru Laut's struggle to solidify his position as an idealistic activist, to Asmara Jati's emotional transformation as he slowly accepts the bitter reality of losing his brother.

The novel's strength lies in its ability to evoke the reader's emotions through a touching narrative. The story structure that highlights various perspectives provides a deep understanding of the complexity of collective trauma. The author hopes that readers can reflect on the importance of fighting injustice and maintaining historical memory as a form of respect for those who have fought.

II. Body

A. Identity Transformation of the Main Character in the Novel Laut Bercerita

The transformation of the main character's identity, Biru Laut, in the novel *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori is a complex and meaningful journey. As an English Literature student who initially loved literature and critical thinking, Laut entered the world of activism with great passion and idealism. Joining the Winatra organization, she played an active role in intellectual discussions and resistance movements against the repressive New Order regime. This activism not only shaped his political views, but also strengthened his identity as a person committed to the struggle for social justice.

Laut's identity journey was marked by a major shift when he faced the harsh realities of his struggle. His arrest, torture and enforced disappearance reflected how the New Order government tried to destroy the character and idealism of activists. However, Laut remained steadfast in her principles, even in deadly situations. At this point, his identity is not only as an activist, but also as a symbol of resistance and courage in the midst of brutality.

Laut's identity transformation is also seen through the way she maintained hope in the darkest of circumstances. The imaginary letters she wrote from the bottom of the sea represent the voice of an individual trying to connect her struggle with a more just future. With this, Leila S. Chudori succeeds in making Laut's identity not only a fictional character, but also a historical and emotional representation of the student struggle in the late 1990s in Indonesia.

In the Indonesian version, the main characters of *Laut Bercerita* are usually more deeply developed through rich social and cultural nuances. The characters in this novel, such as Saraswati and Dewa, are formed against a strong Indonesian cultural background, where their personal experiences are heavily influenced by the political, historical and social context of Indonesia, particularly during the New Order and post-reform era.

1. **Character Introduction:** In the Indonesian version, the physical descriptions, emotions, and motivations of the characters are portrayed with great depth, highlighting the way they adapt to the pressing political and social realities.
2. **Relationships Between Characters:** In Indonesian, the relationships between characters tend to be more explicit in depicting feelings, conflicts, and dialogues that reflect the social and cultural conditions of Indonesia.

On the other hand, in the English version, the translator faces a huge challenge to adapt these characters to remain relevant to international readers, who may not share the same Indonesian cultural background. This process can affect how the main characters are understood and interpreted.

1. Cultural Adjustment: In translating these characters, translators may have to change or simplify some aspects of the local culture that are not immediately understandable to English-speaking readers. For example, cultural references such as daily habits, social values, or Indonesian symbols must be adapted to ensure the characters remain alive in the wider context.
3. Language and Dialogue: Dialogue derived from Indonesian culture may require adjustments to maintain similar depth and meaning, but in a language that is easily understood by foreign readers. Although translators try to maintain authenticity, there are times when local expressions and idioms are replaced with more universal ones, which can affect the characterization of the main characters. (Rahmawati, 2023; Renita et al., 2020)

There are obstacles in Translating Characters to English, namely: (a) Internal Conflicts: One of the major challenges in transforming the main characters is how to express their internal conflicts in a different language. Feelings and thoughts that are very much related to the Indonesian context have to be adjusted to remain meaningful in the eyes of English-speaking readers, (2) Cultural Identity: In the context of globalization, it is important for the translator to maintain the cultural identity of these characters without compromising the depth of the story. The translation of these characters should be sensitive to cultural differences so that the story remains authentic and understandable without changing its essence.

B. The Relationship Between Memory and Identity in the Novel Laut Bercerita

The novel *Laut Bercerita* deeply explores the relationship between memory and identity, both at the individual and collective levels. Through the story of Biru Laut and his family, readers are brought into the dynamics of how memories of past events, especially tragic ones, shape and reconstruct personal and group identities.

At the individual level, the memory of past experiences becomes an important element in shaping Biru Laut's identity. As a student who chose to be involved in the resistance movement against the New Order regime, Laut not only faced physical risks but also carried deep memories of solidarity, friendship and collective struggle. These memories strengthened his belief in the values of freedom and justice, as well as becoming the foundation of his identity as a courageous activist despite having to face betrayal and enforced disappearance.

At the collective level, the memory of Laut and other missing activists plays a significant role in shaping the identity of families and communities. Narratives from the perspective of Asmara Jati, her sister, reveal how Laut's family preserved her memory through daily rituals, such as providing food for her despite her long disappearance. This is not only an effort to preserve memories, but also a symbol of resistance to the repressive regime's attempts to erase history.

More broadly, this memory becomes an important element in building the collective identity of the Indonesian people who try not to forget the dark history of the New Order era. Through this novel, Chudori illustrates the importance of maintaining collective memories of injustice and atrocities as part of national identity. This can be seen in emotional scenes, such as

the families of the victims throwing the photos of their missing children into the sea, a symbol of sincerity as well as a statement to keep their memories alive.

The relationship between memory and identity in *Laut Bercerita* shows that memory, though often painful, is an important tool for understanding self and community. The novel asserts that identity, both individual and collective, is shaped not only by present experiences, but also by the way we remember and respond to the past. Thus, *Laut Bercerita* serves as a reminder that memory is the foundation that connects history and the future, keeping human values alive in the midst of changing times. (Furqan et al., 2023)

C. Symbolism and Meaning in the Narrative of the Novel *Laut Bercerita*

In Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita*, **In the Indonesian version** symbolism is used profoundly to describe the emotional, political and historical experiences of the characters, especially Biru Laut. Through these symbols, the novel's narrative becomes not only an individual story but also a collective reflection of Indonesian society towards oppression and hope.

1. The Symbol of the Sea as a Collective Narrative

The sea in the novel's title and narrative has a strong symbolism. On the one hand, the sea symbolizes freedom, the vastness of dreams, and the power of struggle. However, on the other hand, it also symbolizes loss, silence, and the forced erasure of identity. The sea is a place where memories of those lost are floated, creating a connection between the physical elements of the sea and emotional memories that cannot be erased by repressive forces.

2. Color and the Presence of Darkness

Darkness appears frequently in the novel to represent fear, repression, and uncertainty. In Biru Laut's narrative, darkness represents the ignorance of his fate after his arrest and torture. This symbol reinforces the atmosphere of tension that surrounded the lives of activists during the New Order. However, in some parts, darkness also carries the meaning of serenity and sincerity, especially when the families of the victims accept their loss by floating their memories to the sea.

3. Photography and Personal Objects

Objects such as photographs become irreplaceable symbols of memory and identity. In the novel, photographs are used as a tool to commemorate those who disappeared as well as proof of their existence amidst efforts to erase history. This symbol shows how a simple object can carry great meaning for the families of victims who continue to fight for justice.

4. Melarung Ritual

The ritual of throwing personal objects into the sea is a symbol of acceptance and release, but also resistance to forgetting. It involves families who have lost loved ones as a way to keep their memories alive. In a broader context, this ritual also conveys a critique of the social and political injustices that occurred during the New Order era.

5. The Collective Meaning of Symbolism

The symbolism in this novel not only reflects individual experiences but also creates a collective narrative of Indonesian society. The symbols used by Leila S. Chudori emphasize the importance of preserving memory as part of national identity. Through strong symbolism, readers are invited to reflect on the relationship between the dark past and the struggle for a more just future. (Elia Milane Nainggolan & Ayu Aldina Afriyanti, 2023; Susanti et al., 2023; Yadia Rahma & Dewi Anggraini, 2023)

When translated into English, the symbolism in the Sea of Stories must not only be maintained in its literal sense, but also must adapt so that it can be well understood by international readers who do not have the same Indonesian cultural background. Some aspects of symbolism may have to be adjusted or explained in order for its meaning to remain globally acceptable. (1) Sea: In the English version, the sea symbol still reflects the same meaning as a picture of deep feelings and emotional journeys, but the translator will probably put more emphasis on the universal aspect of the symbol. The sea can also be interpreted as a symbol of the "empty space" or "transition space" in life, which is related to the process of self-discovery or healing from trauma, a global theme. (2) Wind and Waves: Wind and waves in the English version tend to be more articulated in a way that evokes the emotions of global readers, with an emphasis on the uncertainties of life experienced by the main characters, which in turn become a symbol of the challenges faced by many individuals in any world. This element may be more adapted to the language that speaks of change and feelings of loss, in accordance with a broader understanding. (3) Trees and Nature: The symbolism of nature in the English translation may get more emphasis on the aspect of resilience in the face of suffering or change, which has strong resonance in the global context regarding the human struggle in the face of adversity. These differences in context can change the way the reader relates to the natural elements in the story.

D. Psychoanalytic Aspects in the Novel Laut Bercerita

In the psychoanalytic analysis of Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita*, **in the Indonesian version**, readers can see how psychoanalytic theories, especially those related to trauma, memory, and identity, play an important role in understanding the dynamics of the characters. Psychoanalysis, first popularized by Sigmund Freud, focuses on the influence of the unconscious on individual behavior, and this concept is relevant in analyzing this novel, which includes many themes of psychological trauma due to enforced disappearances in Indonesia during the New Order era.

One of the main concepts that can be used to analyze the novel is repression, in which the characters in *Laut Bercerita* repress the traumatic memories they experience. Biru Laut, for example, feels trapped in an inner conflict between hidden memories and the desire to move on after losing his friends. According to Freud's theory, traumatic experiences that cannot be processed properly will be suppressed into the subconscious, but will continue to affect an individual's behavior and identity. In this novel, the inability to fully overcome this trauma creates psychological tension within the characters, which is reflected in their relationships with the outside world and each other.

The concept of ego and superego in psychoanalysis can also be analyzed in this novel. In the context of *Laut Bercerita*, the ego of the main character, Biru Laut, is often involved in a conflict between his desire to forget the past and the moral impulses that arise in the search for truth. This conflict can be seen as a battle between the ego, which seeks to avoid suffering from traumatic memories, and the superego, which carries the moral burden of truth and social justice. (Prameswari & Pamungkas, 2024; Susanti et al., 2023)

When translated into English, some aspects of psychoanalysis may undergo a shift in the way they are understood, depending on the cultural interpretation of translators and international readers. Some of these changes focus on how trauma and character identities are translated and interpreted in a broader cultural context, as well as how psychoanalysis is applied to figures connected to more global political and social experiences. For example, Universality of

Trauma. In the English version, the trauma experienced by the main characters may be more emphasized on the universal dimension than on the specific context of Indonesian history. International readers may see character trauma more as a universal human experience, such as loss or betrayal, that can resonate with the reader's personal experiences coming from different cultural backgrounds.

E. Analysis Related to the Review of Indonesian Translations of the Novel *Laut Bercerita*

The discussion of the analysis related to the study of the Indonesian translation of the novel *laut cerita* can be seen through the aspects of translation quality, comparison with the original version, and the impact on the reader's experience, as follows:

1. Quality of Translation

The novel *Laut Bercerita* was translated into English by John McGlynn under the title *The Sea Speaks His Name*. The translation process presents great challenges especially in the use of figurative language, such as metaphor, simile, and personification. Research shows that there are changes in rhetoric between the original text and the translation, such as a shift from simile to metaphor or personification. For example, the phrase "dark as a bottomless well" is translated as "a dive into bottomless well," which changes the meaning from explicit to implicit comparison. This shift shows an attempt to maintain literary nuance, but sometimes sacrifices idiomatic precision in translation.

2. Comparison with the Original Version

In the Indonesian version, the language style used by Leila S. Chudori is rich in emotional and cultural nuances, reflecting the collective experience of Indonesia, especially during the repressive political era. The translated version retains the emotional elements, but some local contexts tend to be difficult to translate perfectly due to the different cultural backgrounds of the readers. For example, Indonesian idioms and storytelling styles sometimes lose depth of meaning or context in the English version.

3. Analysis Parameters

Based on Nababan et al.'s theory of translation quality, translations can be assessed through three parameters: accuracy, acceptability and readability. In the case of *Laut Bercerita*, accuracy is mostly met, especially in maintaining the main narrative flow. However, acceptability in some places was felt to be less than optimal due to shifts in rhetorical expression that did not always conform to the linguistic norms of the target readers. In contrast, readability remains high, which makes the novel enjoyable for a global audience without losing its universal appeal.

4. Impact on Readers

The translation of *The Sea Speaks His Name* gives international readers access to Indonesian history and collective trauma. Despite differences in some linguistic and cultural elements, the attempt to present a consistent narrative experience is considered successful. The quality of the translation reflects how literature can bridge cross-cultural understanding without completely erasing the local richness. (Melliana et al., 2021; Rifani Andrian Putri et al., 2023)

III. Conclusion

Laut Bercerita is a powerful literary work that explores collective trauma, political oppression, and the journey of identity in Indonesia during the New Order. Through symbolism

like the sea and the ritual of melarung, the novel connects personal experiences to a broader national history. The main character, Biru Laut, embodies the younger generation's courage to challenge injustice despite facing brutal repression.

A comparative psychoanalytic analysis of both the Indonesian and English versions reveals how political and social trauma influences individual and collective psychology. In both versions, repression of traumatic memories and the tension between ego and superego are central to understanding the characters' struggles with identity and their process of healing. The English translation broadens the interpretation, allowing for a more universal reflection on trauma and memory.

Ultimately, Laut Bercerita is not just a reflection on Indonesia's dark history, but also a reminder of the ongoing fight for justice and truth. The novel's narrative, symbolism, and psychoanalytic insights underscore the importance of remembering history and the need for continued efforts toward collective healing and a more just future.

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