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POSTHUMAN HYBRIDITY IN LEILA S. CHUDORI'S LAUT BERCERITA: A STUDY OF DIGITAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND SPECTRAL AGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *Laut Bercerita* (2017) by Leila S. Chudori through the lens of posthuman hybridity, focusing on the intertwined roles of digital technology, ecological environment, and spectral agency in shaping identity. Amidst the global digital era and ecological crisis, traditional anthropocentric views of human identity are challenged by fluid, relational, and distributed constructions involving human and non-human actors. Utilizing interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks including Braidotti's posthumanism, Hayles' digital cognition, Alaimo's material ecocriticism, and Derrida's hauntology, this study employs qualitative textual analysis to reveal how the novel's characters negotiate identity across three interconnected dimensions: digital archives as extensions of memory and consciousness; the sea as an active ecological agent influencing subjectivity; and spectral presences of political trauma that haunt and shape contemporary identities. The findings demonstrate that *Laut Bercerita* offers a critical intervention in Indonesian post-Reformasi literature by portraying identity as hybrid and emergent from dynamic relations between technology, environment, and history. This article contributes to contemporary Indonesian literary studies by foregrounding posthuman perspectives that move beyond anthropocentrism and emphasize inclusivity in understanding subjectivity in the digital-ecological age.

Keywords: posthumanism, spectrality, digital ecology, hybrid identity.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji *Laut Bercerita* (2017) karya Leila S. Chudori melalui perspektif hibriditas posthuman, dengan fokus pada peran saling terkait teknologi digital, lingkungan ekologis, dan agensi spektral dalam membentuk identitas. Di tengah era digital global dan krisis ekologis, pandangan antropocentris tradisional tentang identitas manusia ditantang oleh konstruksi yang cair, relasional, dan tersebar yang melibatkan aktor manusia maupun non-manusia. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teoretis interdisipliner seperti posthumanisme Braidotti, kognisi digital Hayles, ekokritisisme

materialis Alaimo, dan hauntologi Derrida, penelitian ini menerapkan analisis tekstual kualitatif untuk mengungkap bagaimana tokoh-tokoh dalam novel tersebut menegosiasikan identitas melalui tiga dimensi yang saling terkait: arsip digital sebagai ekstensi memori dan kesadaran; laut sebagai aktor ekologis yang aktif memengaruhi subjektivitas; serta kehadiran spektral trauma politik yang menghantui dan membentuk identitas kontemporer. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Laut Bercerita* memberikan intervensi kritis dalam sastra Indonesia pasca-Reformasi dengan menggambarkan identitas sebagai hibrida dan muncul dari relasi dinamis antara teknologi, lingkungan, dan sejarah. Artikel ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian sastra Indonesia kontemporer dengan menonjolkan perspektif posthuman yang melampaui antropocentrisme dan menekankan inklusivitas dalam memahami subjektivitas di era digital dan ekologis.

Kata Kunci ; Posthumanisme, Spektralitas, Ekologi digital, Identitas hibrida

BACKGROUND

In the digital age and amidst a global ecological crisis, the understanding of human identity has undergone a fundamental shift. Identity is no longer seen as essentialist or detached from the external world; instead, it is now regarded as fluid, relational, and interconnected with technology, the environment, and non-human entities. This development challenges the conventional, anthropocentric view of human subjectivity. Contemporary literature, particularly in the post-Reformasi Indonesian context, has become a crucial expressive space for exploring these new forms of identity. Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* (2017) serves as a vital literary text that not only recounts the historical narrative of political violence but also represents a transformation of identity through complex interactions between humans, digital technology, the natural environment (the sea), and spectral presences from the past.

In recent years, posthumanist approaches in literary studies have gained momentum, offering new readings of human identity that decenter the human subject. Braidotti, (2013), for instance, argues that contemporary identity is formed within a network of relations between human and non-human agents machines, animals, and ecological systems alike. This framework is highly relevant for interpreting *Laut Bercerita*, where characters reconstruct their post-traumatic identities through digital archives, voice recordings, and material as well as affective interactions with the sea a space that functions as both traumatic and transformational. The novel thus offers a discourse on identity that transcends biological embodiment and personal memory, toward a more distributed, ecological, and spectral form of subjectivity.

The sociocultural context of post 1998 Reformasi Indonesia further underscores the significance of this interpretation. On one hand, contemporary Indonesian society is highly digitized, with digital archives and social media reshaping how individuals recognize themselves and their histories. On the other hand, ecological crises from environmental degradation to climate change have heightened awareness of human-nature entanglement. *Laut Bercerita* captures this zeitgeist by portraying characters whose identities are dynamically negotiated across past and present, between physical bodies and digital traces, and between human memory and the "memory" of the environment. This representation not only reflects current social conditions but also intervenes in our understanding of humanity within the context of modern Indonesia.

Previous studies have analyzed *Laut Bercerita* from various perspectives. Furqan et al., (2023)) emphasized trauma representation and memory mechanisms within the framework of New Order political violence. Head, 2020) highlighted the role of digital media in reconstructing history, albeit focusing mainly on technology as a documentary tool. Meanwhile, Wampole (2021) offered an ecocritical reading, viewing the sea as a metaphor for fluid identity. While these approaches are insightful, they have yet to fully integrate how digital technology, ecological environments, and the spectrality of history simultaneously shape hybrid character identities (Roine & Suoranta, 2022).

This study clarified that *Laut Bercerita* represents hybrid identity through three central dimensions: (1) digital technology as an extension of memory and consciousness; (2) the sea as a non-human actor with ecological and symbolic agency; and (3) spectral figures from the past that affectively shape present identities. Employing a posthumanist framework (Braidotti, 2013), theories of technological cognition (Hayles, 1999), materialist ecocriticism (Alaimo, 2010) and the concept of hauntology (Derrida, 2012) this article aims to fill a gap in contemporary Indonesian literary studies, which have yet to extensively explore identity construction through human–nonhuman interactions. In doing so, this research contributes to a more inclusive literary reading that addresses the dynamics of subjectivity in a posthuman and post-traumatic era.

To support this argument, the study is grounded in critical thought from contemporary literary and cultural theory, particularly those addressing hybrid identity in the interplay between humans, technology, the environment, and non-human entities. One of the main theoretical frameworks employed is posthumanism, as developed by

(Braidotti, 2013). Braidotti clarified that in the contemporary era, human subjectivity can no longer be understood as a separate and autonomous entity, but as part of a network involving technology, other organisms, and the physical environment. Posthumanism thus rejects the classical human/non-human dichotomy and offers a model of identity that is fluid, open, and relational. In the context of *Laut Bercerita*, this approach facilitates a reading of characters such as Biru Laut and his father, Laut, as products of interconnectedness between the biological body, digital technology, and nature. Braidotti's thought also expands the discourse on post-traumatic subjectivity by emphasizing the agency of non-human entities in the process of identity reconstruction (Braidotti, 2013).

The technological dimension in the formation of hybrid identity is further reinforced by Hayles' (1999) theory of digital posthumanism. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles explains that in the information age, human consciousness increasingly relies on digital systems and external cognitive technologies. She introduces the concept of "unconscious cognition" within technological systems, suggesting that cognitive processes occur not only in the human brain but also within external networks such as computers, digital archives, and recording media. In *Laut Bercerita*, digital technologies such as the voice recordings left by Laut serve as media through which his memory and presence remain alive, shaping the consciousness of other characters, particularly Biru Laut. The identity of the father is not solely preserved through biological memory, but is revived through interactions with technology, which becomes part of the affective and epistemological network in identity formation (Hayles, 1999).

Beyond technology, the ecological dimension of the novel is examined through the lens of material ecocriticism. Alaimo (2010), in *Bodily Natures*, proposes the concept of "trans-corporeality," the material interconnection between human bodies and the environment. According to Alaimo, the human body is always in dynamic relation with ecological substances—such as water, air, metals, and toxins negating any rigid boundary between body and environment. This concept enables a reading of the sea in *Laut Bercerita* not merely as a metaphor, but as a non-human entity with both material and symbolic agency. The sea functions as a repository of history, a revealer of truth, and a transformative agent for character identity. Through interaction with the sea, characters undergo psychological and existential change, showing that the environment is not merely

a backdrop, but an active agent in the formation of human identity (Alaimo, 2010); Iovino & Oppermann, 2014).

To understand the dimensions of trauma and history that haunt the characters' identities, this study draws on Derrida's (1994) theory of hauntology. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida introduces the idea that ghosts are not mere symbols of the past, but liminal presences that continue to inhabit the social, political, and psychological structures of the present. Hauntology emphasizes that the past is never truly gone, but lingers in the present as an active absence. In *Laut Bercerita*, the activists who disappeared due to political abductions in 1998 are not portrayed as fully departed, but as spectral entities that continue to shape the lives of those left behind. They appear through voice recordings, left-behind artifacts, and empty spaces in family memory. As such, the identities of the living characters are shaped through ongoing interaction with absences that never fully vanish (Derrida, 1994).

Overall, this literature review demonstrates that an interdisciplinary approach—combining posthumanism, digital theory, ecocriticism, and hauntology opens new interpretive pathways for understanding identity construction in contemporary Indonesian literature. These four frameworks provide analytical tools to read *Laut Bercerita* as a text that articulates hybrid identity not only through social or political relations, but also through broader connections between humans, technology, the environment, and historical memory.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach through textual analysis of *Laut Bercerita* (2017) by Leila S. Chudori. The primary data consist of the literary text, which is analyzed comprehensively through three sequential stages. First, the analysis identifies key passages that illustrate the representation of hybrid identity, particularly those that reveal the entanglements between human subjects, digital technologies, the marine environment, and spectral figures. Second, the interpretive process engages three principal theoretical frameworks: posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), material ecocriticism (Alaimo, 2010), and the notion of spectrality or hauntology (Derrida, 1994). Third, the findings are thematically synthesized to trace patterns of hybrid identity construction within the narrative, highlighting how technology, ecology, and traumatic history

intersect and co-constitute the characters' subjectivities. Data validity is ensured through iterative close reading, theoretical triangulation, and the substantiation of interpretations with scholarly literature concerning contemporary Indonesian literature, posthuman theory, and digital ecologies. While the study acknowledges limitations in terms of interpretive subjectivity and the absence of empirical reader response, the selected methodology affords a nuanced examination of the literary text as both a cultural and ideological artifact. By focusing on the narrative and symbolic mechanisms of the novel, this research elucidates the aesthetic and ideological configurations through which hybrid identities are articulated in contemporary Indonesian fiction.

In addition to textual analysis, this study adopts a digital humanities perspective by situating *Laut Bercerita* within its broader digital circulation. The novel is not only a printed literary artifact but also part of a dynamic digital archive, as evidenced by its resonance on social media platforms, online book reviews, and reader discussions. These digital traces contribute to a living, networked reception that continuously reshapes the novel's meanings and relevance. By treating online engagement as an extension of the novel's interpretive field, the study acknowledges the fluid boundary between text and context a key tenet of digital humanities scholarship. This approach supports the posthuman claim that subjectivity and meaning are not fixed but co-constructed across human and technological assemblages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that *Laut Bercerita* not only presents a narrative of political history and trauma but also constructs the identities of its characters through a network of relations among humans, digital technology, the marine environment, and spectral entities. Identity is not formed linearly through individual experience; rather, it is relationally constituted within material and immaterial contexts.

The three principal findings of this research are as follows:

1. Digital technology in the novel functions not merely as a tool for documentation but as a medium that extends the memory and consciousness of the characters. Voice recordings and digital archives serve as spaces where the presence of missing characters persists, continuously influencing the identities of others, particularly Biru Laut.

2. The sea acts as an active entity endowed with ecological and symbolic agency. It is not merely a backdrop but an agent that stores, reveals, and shapes the memories and identities of the characters. The sea becomes a transformative space that materially connects the characters with history and environment.
3. The disappeared activists do not vanish entirely; instead, they manifest as spectral presences that continuously affect the identity formation processes of the living characters. Their presence, mediated through empty spaces, recordings, and fragments of memory, reinforces the concept of hauntology as a means to understand collective trauma and post-traumatic identity.

Expanding upon the findings, the discussion underscores how identity in *Laut Bercerita* is neither fixed nor autonomous but hybrid, shaped through interrelations among human and non-human agents. The novel reflects posthuman and material ecocritical concerns, foregrounding entanglements between bodies, environments, memories, and digital traces. Through this lens, the narrative constructs subjectivity as porous and co-produced, moving beyond anthropocentric models. The analysis identifies three key dimensions of hybrid identity technological, ecological, and spectralth at illustrate how characters are constituted in ongoing dialogues across organic and inorganic domains.

1. Digital Technology as a Medium of Hybrid Identity

In *Laut Bercerita* (The Sea Speaks), digital technology functions as a medium for the externalization of memory while simultaneously constructing new identities. The character Biru Laut builds a connection with her missing father through voice recordings and digital documents. This process illustrates what Hayles (1999) terms a *cognitive assemblage*, where human consciousness and technological systems form a new cognitive unity. The voice recordings of Laut are not merely memory storage but extensions of his identity that continue to "live" despite his biological body being gone.

This point is reinforced by a scene in which Biru Laut listens to her father’s voice repeatedly until the voice becomes part of her own consciousness:

> *"Aku memutar rekaman suara ayahku lagi. Suaranya berat, pelan, tetapi jelas. Seperti berbicara langsung kepadaku. Rasanya seperti memeluk bayangan."* (Chudori, 2017)

> *"I played my father's voice recording again. His voice was heavy, soft, but clear. It felt like he was speaking directly to me. It felt like embracing a shadow."*

Furthermore, the recording serves as proof of her missing father's identity. The voice, which usually is ephemeral and transient, becomes an artifact sustaining the continuity of post-mortem identity:

> *"Seiring waktu, aku merasa suaranya ada di kepalaku. Seperti napas yang menemaniku berjalan."* (Chudori, 2017)
>
> *"Over time, I felt his voice inside my head. Like a breath accompanying me as I walked."*

This process illustrates how digital technology enables a form of post-biological identity, where the boundaries between humans and their technologies increasingly blur (Braidotti, 2013). In the context of Indonesia's growing digital society, this representation reflects how younger generations form identities through digital artifacts memory that does not only adhere to the body but lives within external media.

2. The Sea as a Non-Human Actor Shaping Identity

The sea in the novel functions not merely as a passive setting but as an entity possessing ecological and symbolic agency. In several key scenes, the sea "speaks," revealing truths, hiding secrets, or "swallowing" victims of political violence. This personification aligns with the concept of *material ecocriticism* (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014), which recognizes nature as an actor with its own narrative.

In the scene where Biru Laut dives and finds pieces of metal and human bones on the seabed, the sea becomes a space storing unrecorded histories:

> *"Kami menemukan potongan logam, rantai karat, dan sesuatu yang tampak seperti tulang jari. Laut menyimpan segalanya, bahkan yang ingin dilupakan manusia."* (Chudori, 2017)
>
> *"We found pieces of metal, rusty chains, and something that looked like finger bones. The sea stores everything, even what humans want to forget."*

Using the material ecocriticism framework, the sea can be interpreted as an actor with its own narrative agency. Biru Laut's relationship with the sea reflects Alaimo's (2010) notion of *trans-corporeality*, where human bodies and environments interpenetrate. When Biru Laut swims or is close to the sea, a material and symbolic exchange occurs that transforms her identity. Her encounters with the sea are

transformational; she is not merely seeking answers but also discovering herself through the sea's symbolic and material reflection:

> *"Setiap gelombang seperti menghapus dan menulis ulang siapa aku hari ini."* (Chudori, 2017)
>
> *"Every wave feels like it erases and rewrites who I am today."*

This scene, in which Biru Laut finds historical artifacts on the seabed, demonstrates that the sea is not merely a container but a non-human entity mediating identification, healing, and self-reconstruction.

3. Ghosts of the Past as Constituents of Identity

The missing activists in the novel appear as "ghosts" who continuously shape the identities of the living. Their presence is not merely symbolic; they manifest through gaps in family photos, fragments of documents, and incomplete stories. This corresponds to Derrida's (1994) concept of *hauntology*, which helps understand this phenomenon. For Derrida, ghosts exist neither fully present nor absent, but continuously influence present reality:

> *"Ayah tak pernah pulang. Tapi aku masih menyiapkan tempat duduknya di meja makan setiap hari Minggu."* (Chudori, 2017)
>
> *"Father never came home. But I still set his seat at the dining table every Sunday."*

In *Laut Bercerita*, the "existence" of the missing victims is felt through the empty spaces in family photographs, incomplete documents, and fragmentary memories. They are "spectra" that haunt Biru Laut's identity reconstruction process:

> *"Kehilangan bukan berarti lenyap. Kadang ia menjadi bayangan yang memandu jalan."* (Chudori, 2017)
>
> *"Loss does not mean disappearance. Sometimes it becomes a shadow that guides the way."*

In the context of Indonesia's post-1965 history, this representation reflects an unresolved collective trauma. The victims of political violence remain "present" through their absence and constitute an integral part of the process of collective identity formation within society. The phenomenon of the spectral presence of the disappeared victims extends beyond literary narrative; it also offers a broader understanding of how unresolved historical trauma continues to shape the contemporary social and political identity of Indonesian society.

Relevance of Findings to Contemporary Indonesian Context

The findings of this study not only provide a theoretical understanding of hybrid identity in *Laut Bercerita* but also reflect the current social and ecological context of Indonesia undergoing significant transformation; First, the massive digitalization in Indonesia has impacted the formation and preservation of collective memory. Digital archives, audio recordings, and online platforms have become primary media for recording history and collective trauma paralleling the function of digital recordings in the novel. The shift from oral memory and direct experience to digitally documented memory marks a significant change in how younger generations in Indonesia construct their identities. The novel's depiction of the characters' relationship with digital artifacts thus representatively illustrates the mediation process of collective memory in contemporary Indonesian society. Second, the role of the sea as an ecological actor is highly relevant considering the environmental crises affecting Indonesian waters, such as marine pollution, overfishing, and the impacts of climate change. The sea, portrayed in the novel as both a repository of memory and an agent of transformation, can be read as a metaphorical warning underscoring the importance of preserving marine ecosystems. This condition affirms the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment as key to the sustainability of collective memory and national identity. Lastly, the spectral presence of disappeared activist victims reflects unresolved historical trauma that continues to haunt Indonesia socio-politically. Recognition and reconciliation regarding human rights violations and collective trauma are crucial for shaping an inclusive and just national identity. Accordingly, the novel functions as a critical narrative linking a traumatic past with contemporary struggles to interpret identity and justice.

By integrating the contexts of digitalization, ecological crisis, and collective trauma, this study asserts that the identity portrayed in *Laut Bercerita* is a hybrid product continuously evolving through the interactions among humans, technology, environment, and history. These findings enrich our understanding of how literary narratives can serve as mirrors and tools for reflection on contemporary issues in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of *Laut Bercerita* reveals that the novel offers a complex and reflective representation of hybrid identity, where subjectivity is shaped through the

interaction between humans, digital technology, the marine environment, and spectral entities from the past. Leila S. Chudori constructs a narrative that transcends anthropocentric boundaries, illustrating that identity is no longer solely the product of personal experience or biological memory but is also mediated by digital archives, material ecologies, and collective trauma manifested through spectral presence. Consequently, the characters' identities are fluid, relational, and perpetually in the process of becoming.

This study proposes a new understanding of humanity in contemporary Indonesian literature through a posthumanist-materialist framework an approach that remains relatively underexplored in Indonesian literary criticism. The findings demonstrate that non-human elements such as the sea and technology are not merely narrative backdrops but active agents in the construction of identity and memory. In the context of the post-1965 historical legacy and current Indonesian conditions, this approach reveals how past traumas, ecological crises, and the acceleration of digitalization are entangled in shaping subjectivity.

Furthermore, the representation of the sea as both a space of memory and an ecological agent provides a critical intervention into environmental awareness amid threats such as marine pollution, coastal exploitation, and ecosystem degradation. By presenting the sea as an actor that bears the traces of trauma while also offering a contemplative and healing space, the novel opens up the possibility for reinterpreting human-nature relations in more ethical and sustainable terms.

Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach employed in this study not only enriches the field of literary theory but also offers a critical perspective on the dynamics of identity, collective memory, and ecological relations within a digitized and fragmented Indonesian society. Future research should further investigate other literary texts that portray human and non-human relations to explore how fiction can actively shape social, ecological, and historical imaginaries. Particularly important is the integration of local perspectives and the ecological cosmology of the Nusantara archipelago, ensuring that discussions of hybrid identity are not solely framed within global theoretical paradigms but are also grounded in Indonesia's cultural and environmental realities.

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