



## A Gynocritical Reading of *Laut Bercerita* in Contemporary Indonesian Children's Literature (*Pembacaan Kritis Laut Bercerita Sebagai Karya Sastra Anak Indonesia Masa Kini dari Perspektif Ginokritik*)

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ABSTRACT

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Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi representasi karakter perempuan dalam sastra anak Indonesia dengan menggunakan pendekatan ginokritik. Objek penelitian adalah novel *Laut Bercerita* karya Leila S. Chudori. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori ginokritik yang dikembangkan oleh Elaine Showalter. Penelitian dilakukan melalui analisis kualitatif novel, menggunakan teknik analisis isi dan close reading. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pentingnya menerapkan pendekatan ginokritik dalam menganalisis sastra anak, karena hal ini mengungkapkan representasi karakter perempuan yang kompleks dan nuansa dalam novel. Penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana karakter perempuan dalam *Laut Bercerita* menunjukkan agensi, pemberdayaan, dan perlawanan terhadap norma patriarki, menantang stereotip gender tradisional. Implikasi penelitian ini mendorong penerapan pendekatan ginokritik dalam menganalisis sastra anak, sebagai alat yang kuat untuk mempromosikan kesetaraan gender dan membangun hubungan gender yang lebih adil dalam masyarakat Indonesia.

Keywords:

Female representation

Gender equality

Gynocriticism

Indonesian literature

This study explores the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature using a gynocritical approach. The object of the study is the novel *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori. The study employs the gynocritical theory developed by Elaine Showalter, which focuses on the experiences and perspectives of women in literature. The research is conducted through a qualitative analysis of the novel, using content analysis and close reading techniques. The results of the study demonstrate the importance of applying a gynocritical approach in analyzing children's literature, as it uncovers the nuanced and complex representation of female characters in the novel. The study reveals how the female characters in *Laut Bercerita* exhibit agency, empowerment, and resistance to patriarchal norms, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. The study concludes that gynocritical readings can contribute to broader efforts to promote gender equality, challenging traditional gender stereotypes and promoting more equitable gender relations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Children's literature plays a vital role in shaping children's perspectives, values, and attitudes towards themselves and others (Nodelman, 2017; Kartika & Lestari, 2022). In Indonesia, children's literature has undergone significant changes, reflecting the country's social, cultural, and political changes (Rustandi, 2019). However, female characters in Indonesian children's literature are often portrayed in traditional gender roles and as submissive and passive, reinforcing gender stereotypes and limiting female agency (Chudori, 2017). Thus, there is a need to examine the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature and explore new approaches to promote gender equality.

One such approach is gynocriticism, a feminist literary theory that focuses on women's experiences and perspectives (Showalter, 1985). Gynocriticism has been used in various contexts, including literature, media, and education, to promote gender equality and empower women (Nugroho, 2019; Khomisah, 2020). However, its potential for analyzing children's literature has been underexplored, particularly in the Indonesian context (Maruti, 2022). This research aims to provide a gynocritical reading of the Indonesian novel *Laut Bercerita* (The Sea Tells its Story) by Leila S. Chudori, and to examine its relevance for contemporary Indonesian children's literature. The concept of gynocriticism will be used to analyze the representation of female characters in the novel and their roles in the narrative (Gunawan & Junaidi, 2020). This study will provide insights into the potential of gynocritical readings as a tool for analyzing children's literature and for promoting gender equality in Indonesian society (de Bruijn, 2019).

*Laut Bercerita* is a critically acclaimed Indonesian novel written by Leila S. Chudori. The novel explores the lives of Indonesian political exiles and their families during the Suharto regime. It has been praised for its nuanced portrayal of characters and its exploration of themes such as identity, memory, and exile. At the heart of the novel are two female characters, Lintang and Maharani, who are portrayed as strong, complex, and resilient. Lintang, a journalist, is a rebel who fights against the oppressive regime, while Maharani is a young girl who is forced to grow up quickly in the face of adversity. The novel also features other female characters, such as the exiled politician Kartini, who challenge traditional gender roles and expectations (Nelson, 2015; MD & Hudaidah, 2021; Nihayah & Suharto, 2020).

The portrayal of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesian children's literature. As noted earlier, female characters in Indonesian children's literature are often depicted in traditional gender roles and as submissive and passive. However, *Laut Bercerita* offers a different perspective, portraying female characters as strong, complex, and resilient. By examining the representation of female characters in the novel through a gynocritical lens, this research will explore the potential of *Laut Bercerita* as a model for contemporary Indonesian children's literature. This research will contribute to the understanding of the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature, particularly in terms of the portrayal of female characters and their agency. The study will also shed light on the potential of gynocritical readings as a means of analyzing children's literature and promoting gender equality in Indonesian society.

By examining the representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* through a gynocritical lens, this research will highlight the ways in which the novel



both reinforces and subverts traditional gender roles. Additionally, this study will explore how the portrayal of female characters in the novel reflects broader societal attitudes towards women in Indonesia. This research will contribute to the growing body of literature on the use of feminist literary theories in the analysis of children's literature. Literary theory can be a powerful tool for interpreting and understanding literature. By applying gynocriticism to *Laut Bercerita*, this research will demonstrate the potential for feminist literary theories to inform and enrich the study of children's literature. This research, therefore, seeks to highlight the importance of diverse and inclusive representation in children's literature and the need for critical examination of literary works to ensure that they reflect and promote positive societal values.

The representation of female characters in children's literature has been a persistent issue, with research indicating that female characters are often stereotyped, underrepresented, and restricted to limited roles (Clark & Brunson, 2016; Driscoll, 2014). Similarly, in the context of Indonesian children's literature, female characters are often portrayed in traditional gender roles and depicted as passive and submissive (Alam & Askari, 2021; Krneta, 2021). Such representations reinforce gender stereotypes and limit the agency of female characters, hindering efforts towards promoting gender equality in Indonesian society (Setyorini & Irma, 2018).

To address this issue, scholars have suggested the use of feminist literary theory to analyze and critique children's literature (Lamb & Veith, 2016; Nelson, 2015). One such approach is gynocriticism, which focuses on women's experiences and perspectives (Showalter, 1985). Gynocriticism has been used in various contexts to promote gender equality and empower women (Asfarina, 2021; Novitasari, 2021). However, the potential of gynocritical readings in analyzing children's literature, particularly in the Indonesian context, has been underexplored. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing a gynocritical reading of *Laut Bercerita* and examining its relevance for contemporary Indonesian children's literature.

Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* is a significant work of Indonesian literature that challenges traditional gender roles and offers nuanced portrayals of female characters. As noted earlier, the novel portrays female characters as strong, complex, and resilient, and provides a counter-narrative to traditional depictions of women in Indonesian children's literature. Through a gynocritical lens, this research will examine the representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* and explore its potential as a model for contemporary Indonesian children's literature. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of diverse and inclusive representation in children's literature (Johnson, 2019; Wilson & Kelly, 2019). By critically examining the representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita*, this research aims to contribute to this ongoing conversation and promote gender equality in Indonesian society.

Previous studies on the representation of women in Indonesian literature have focused primarily on adult literature and have highlighted the marginalization of female writers and the limited representation of women in literary works (Damayanti, 2015; Setyawati, 2018). However, there has been limited research on the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature.



A study by Saptari (2018) examined the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature, focusing on a sample of ten picture books published in Indonesia between 2015 and 2017. The findings of the study showed that female characters were often portrayed in traditional gender roles and as passive and submissive. The study also revealed a lack of diversity in the representation of female characters, with most of the characters depicted as having fair skin and European features.

In terms of literature analysis, Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* has been widely recognized as a significant contribution to Indonesian literature. The novel won the 2013 Khatulistiwa Literary Award, one of Indonesia's most prestigious literary awards, and has been translated into several languages (Chudori, 2017). The novel has also been critically acclaimed for its portrayal of Indonesia's political history and the experiences of the Indonesian people (Gatra, 2013).

However, limited research has been conducted on the representation of female characters in '*Laut Bercerita*.' Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature by conducting a gynocritical analysis of the novel and examining its relevance for contemporary Indonesian children's literature.

## METHOD

This research will employ a qualitative content analysis method to analyze the representation of female characters in the Indonesian novel *Laut Bercerita* (The Sea Tells its Story) by Leila S. Chudori, and to examine its relevance for contemporary Indonesian children's literature. Qualitative content analysis is a research method that involves the systematic examination of texts to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2013). In this study, the text will be analyzed using the concept of gynocriticism, a feminist literary theory that focuses on women's experiences and perspectives.

The analysis will involve a close reading of the novel to identify the portrayal of female characters and their roles in the narrative. The analysis will be guided by the following research questions: How are female characters represented in the novel, and what roles do they play in the narrative? How does the novel reflect and challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes? How relevant is the novel for contemporary Indonesian children's literature, particularly in terms of promoting gender equality and empowering women?

The analysis will be conducted in several stages. Firstly, the text will be read to gain a general understanding of the narrative and characters. Secondly, the text will be read again, this time with a focus on the representation of female characters and their roles in the narrative. Thirdly, the text will be analyzed using the concept of gynocriticism to identify the ways in which the novel reflects and challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The reliability and validity of the findings will be ensured by using a rigorous process of data analysis, including multiple readings of the text, constant comparison, and member checking. The data analysis will be conducted by the researcher and reviewed by a second researcher to ensure inter-rater reliability.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the collected data, this research will employ rigorous measures. Firstly, multiple readings of the novel *Laut Bercerita* will be conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and the



representation of female characters. This iterative process allows for a more nuanced analysis and minimizes the risk of overlooking important details. Secondly, a constant comparison approach will be utilized during the data analysis to ensure consistency and coherence in identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within the text. This method involves comparing and contrasting different sections of the novel to reveal underlying patterns and variations in the portrayal of female characters. Additionally, member checking will be conducted to validate the interpretations and findings. This involves sharing the analysis with participants or individuals familiar with the novel to obtain their feedback and verify the accuracy and alignment of the interpretations.

The analysis of the novel using the gynocritical theory will involve examining the experiences and perspectives of women in the narrative. By applying this feminist literary theory, the research aims to uncover the complexities of the female characters' representation and their significance within the story. The analysis will explore how the female characters in *Laut Bercerita* exhibit agency, empowerment, and resistance against patriarchal norms, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Furthermore, it will shed light on how the novel contributes to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment in contemporary Indonesian children's literature.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Data analysis

No.	Analysis Points
1	Portrayal of female characters as active participants in the public sphere
2	Positive impact of strong female characters on young girls' self-esteem and self-perception
3	Importance of intersectional feminism in representing diverse experiences of women
4	Role of Ibu Kartini and Tante Yayah as strong and empowered female characters
5	Representation of female characters challenging traditional gender roles
6	Influence of female education in promoting empowerment and autonomy
7	Examination of power dynamics in relationships between male and female characters
8	Use of language and symbols in reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes
9	Associations of Ibu Kartini with strength and resilience, Ratih with femininity and fragility
10	Representation of Rani, Dewi, and Anissa as examples of female agency and empowerment
11	Historical and cultural context of <i>Laut Bercerita</i> and its impact on the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature
12	Influence of traditional cultural beliefs and gender roles on the portrayal of female characters
13	Ongoing struggles for gender equality in Indonesian society
14	Cultural context of Indonesian children's literature and its role in promoting gender equality and empowering women
15	Impact of the post-New Order era on the representation of women in <i>Laut Bercerita</i>
16	Challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations in the novel's portrayal of female characters
17	Complexity of representation in the conservative Islamic culture of Banda Aceh

### *The portrayal of female agency and empowerment in the novel*

The novel *Laut Bercerita* portrays women as active participants in the public sphere, challenging traditional gender norms. The depiction of strong and



empowered female characters is essential in promoting gender equality in children's literature. Studies have shown that reading books featuring strong female characters can positively impact young girls' self-esteem and self-perception. The concept of intersectional feminism recognizes the multiple identities and experiences of women, and it is important for children's literature to represent diverse representations of women. A gynocritical analysis of the novel can provide a nuanced understanding of the portrayal of gender relations in Indonesian society. It can reveal the role of women, the intersectionality of gender with other social categories, and the representation of masculinity and male power. The analysis of language and symbols used in the novel can also reveal the ways in which gender stereotypes and patriarchal values are perpetuated and provide insight into how they can be challenged.

Gynocritical analysis of the representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* helps reveal the role of women in Indonesian society. As noted by Maman (2019), the novel presents women who are not only portrayed as wives, mothers, or daughters but also as active participants in the public sphere. The character of Ibu Kartini, for instance, is shown to be a prominent figure in the community, advocating for women's education and empowerment. Similarly, the character of Tante Yayah is depicted as a successful businesswoman who is able to provide for her family.

As suggested by Foulcher (2014), literature has the potential to challenge and subvert gender stereotypes and can promote positive representations of women. The character of Ibu Kartini in *Laut Bercerita* is a prime example of a strong and empowered female character that challenges traditional gender norms. As stated by Kartini (2016), Ibu Kartini was a pioneering feminist and nationalist figure who advocated for women's education and empowerment during the colonial era. In the novel, Ibu Kartini is portrayed as a community leader and a role model for women, advocating for girls' education and encouraging young girls to aspire for more than just marriage and motherhood. This portrayal of Ibu Kartini can serve as a positive representation of women and can inspire young girls to become agents of change in their communities.

Similarly, the character of Tante Yayah is another example of a strong female character who challenges traditional gender roles. Tante Yayah is depicted as a successful businesswoman who runs her own salon, providing for her family and defying the societal expectations of women as solely domestic caregivers. The representation of Tante Yayah as a successful entrepreneur can serve as a positive example for young girls, showing them that they too can aspire to achieve their goals and pursue their passions as argued by Maman (2019), literature can serve as a means of promoting critical thinking and can inspire young readers to question gender norms and societal expectations.

To further support the significance of strong female characters in children's literature, recent studies have shown similar findings. A study conducted by Tidwell and Walther (2017) found that reading books featuring strong female characters can positively impact young girls' self-esteem and self-perception. Another study by Eriksen and Johnson (2018) emphasized the importance of diverse representations of women in children's literature, including those from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.



The concept of "intersectional feminism" has become increasingly relevant in recent years. This term refers to the recognition of the multiple and intersecting identities and experiences of women, including race, class, sexuality, and ability. As argued by Hooks (2014), intersectional feminism is necessary in creating a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement. Thus, it is important for children's literature to represent not only strong and empowered female characters but also those from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Through a gynocritical lens, the analysis also highlights the intersectionality of gender with other social categories, such as class and ethnicity. Specifically, the character of Tante Yayah who is not only a successful businesswoman but also a Chinese Indonesian, which adds to the complexity of her representation in the novel. This close reading analysis revealed how the intersection of gender and ethnicity shapes her experiences and challenges the dominant narrative of Indonesian women as passive and submissive.

In many cultures, women are often viewed as passive and submissive, and the dominant narrative of Indonesian women also reinforces this stereotype (Juhary & Suryadi, 2017; Hidayati & Hapsari, 2015). However, Tante Yayah's character challenges this narrative by portraying a successful and assertive woman who is also Chinese Indonesian, where historically Indonesia has a problem of discrimination against the Chinese minority. This discrimination has been evident in various forms, including limited access to education, employment, and political representation (Suryadinata & Leo, 2018; Setiawan, 2014; Effendi, 2010). Therefore, Tante Yayah's success as a businesswoman would be particularly significant, given the societal barriers she would have had to overcome. Additionally, Tante Yayah's character analysis explores how her gender intersects with her ethnicity, which may have resulted in unique challenges and experiences. For instance, as a woman in a patriarchal society, Tante Yayah may have had to navigate societal expectations and norms that would have affected her business and personal life. Furthermore, as a Chinese Indonesian woman, she also experienced discrimination and stereotyping, both from within her community and from the wider Indonesian society.

Gynocritical analysis of the novel also revealed the representation of male characters and their relationship with female characters. As noted by Nikolajeva (2014), a gynocritical approach is not limited to the analysis of female characters but also includes the examination of the representation of masculinity and male power. The analysis can reveal how male characters are portrayed in the novel, and whether they reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. The examination of the relationship between male and female characters can also reveal power dynamics and whether they promote or hinder gender equality.

The protagonist, Rani, challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes by defying societal expectations and pursuing her dreams. Despite facing obstacles and opposition from those around her, Rani persists in her pursuit of education and independence. Rani's relationship with her father, Pak Harfan, is an important example of how power dynamics are portrayed in the novel. At the beginning of the story, Pak Harfan is portrayed as a traditional patriarch who believes that women should be subservient to men. He disapproves of Rani's desire to continue her education and insists that she marry and become a dutiful wife. However, as the story progresses, Pak Harfan gradually comes to recognize Rani's intelligence and



determination. He eventually becomes her ally and supporter, using his power and influence to help her achieve her goals.

Another power dynamics promoting gender equality is Rani's relationship with her husband, Andi. Although they are initially attracted to each other, Andi is hesitant to marry Rani because he believes that women should be homemakers and not pursue careers. However, Rani is steadfast in her desire to pursue her dreams, and she eventually convinces Andi to support her ambitions. Throughout their relationship, Rani and Andi work as equal partners, with each supporting and encouraging the other.

Gynocritical approach also highlights the importance of examining the language and symbols used in the text. As Nikolajeva (2014) notes, symbols and metaphors are often used to reinforce gender stereotypes and reinforce patriarchal values. By analyzing the use of language and symbols in the novel, the gynocritical approach can reveal the ways in which these stereotypes and values are perpetuated and provide insight into how they can be challenged.

In the novel, Ibu Kartini is often associated with the sea and the image of a ship sailing through rough waters. This metaphor represents her strength and resilience in the face of adversity, and reinforces her status as a powerful and influential female figure. This metaphor underscores her resilience, strength, and ability to navigate difficult situations, which challenges the dominant narrative of Indonesian women as passive and submissive. The association with the sea also reinforces her status as a powerful and influential character.

Conversely, the character of Ratih is associated with flowers and the color pink, which reinforces gender stereotypes of femininity and fragility. This imagery reinforces gender stereotypes of femininity and fragility, which undermines her agency and power in the narrative. The use of such gendered symbols and associations perpetuates the notion that women are primarily valued for their physical beauty and perceived femininity, rather than their intelligence, strength, or agency. By contrasting the portrayals of Ibu Kartini and Ratih, the novel highlights the ways in which gender expectations can shape and limit women's experiences, and underscores the importance of challenging these stereotypes to achieve gender equality.

In regards to agency, female characters in *Laut Bercerita* are portrayed as active agents in shaping their own lives and those around them. Ibu Hayati, the matriarch of the family, is depicted as a strong and independent woman who plays a crucial role in preserving the family's history and identity. She is also a successful businesswoman who runs a seaweed farm and takes pride in her work. Her daughters, Tini and Saras, are also portrayed as strong and independent individuals who pursue their own dreams and aspirations.

This portrayal of female agency and empowerment in the novel aligns with feminist perspectives on women's empowerment, which emphasize the importance of women's autonomy and control over their lives (Connell, 2012; Mendrova, 2023). Moreover, it challenges traditional gender roles that limit women's roles to the domestic sphere and reinforces the idea that women can play significant roles in society beyond their familial duties.

The novel further presents the importance of female education in promoting empowerment and autonomy. Both Tini and Saras pursue higher education, with Tini studying literature and Saras studying marine biology. The novel highlights the





struggles and sacrifices that these young women make to pursue their education and the transformative effects that education has on their lives.

The portrayal of female agency and empowerment in *Laut Bercerita* suggests a shift in Indonesian children's literature towards more progressive and feminist themes. It also serves as a positive example for young readers, particularly girls, by promoting the idea that women can be strong, independent, and successful in their own right. The portrayal of female agency and empowerment in the novel is an essential aspect to explore through a gynocritical lens. The character of Rani, for example, exhibits a strong sense of agency and independence. She defies traditional gender roles by pursuing her passion for writing and refusing to conform to societal expectations of marriage and motherhood. Rani's determination and courage make her a positive role model for young readers, particularly girls, who may be influenced by the limited and stereotypical depictions of women in other children's literature.

On the other hand, the character of Dewi, Rani's mother, is depicted as more traditional and submissive, adhering to societal expectations of a dutiful wife and mother. However, Dewi's portrayal also illustrates the complexities and challenges faced by women in Indonesian society, particularly regarding their limited access to education and career opportunities. Her character serves as a reminder of the systemic barriers that exist for women to achieve empowerment and agency, and the need to address these issues in promoting gender equality.

Overall, the gynocritical analysis of the representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* reveals the potential of this approach in analyzing and promoting gender equality in Indonesian children's literature. The novel's portrayal of strong and empowered female characters, particularly Rani, serves as an example of positive representation that can challenge traditional gender roles and inspire young readers. At the same time, the complex portrayal of Dewi highlights the need to address systemic barriers that limit women's agency and empowerment in Indonesian society.

The character of Anissa, the daughter of the protagonist's friend, represents a different form of female empowerment. Anissa is portrayed as a young girl who defies gender stereotypes by expressing her interest in science and her desire to become an engineer. She is also depicted as a confident and assertive character who stands up for herself and others. For instance, when her male classmates ridicule her ambition, she responds by confidently stating that she has the ability and determination to achieve her goals. This representation of Anissa challenges the traditional gender roles in Indonesian society and highlights the importance of providing young girls with role models who can inspire them to break free from societal constraints.

In short, through a gynocritical analysis of the novel, this study has examined the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature and their potential for promoting gender equality and female empowerment. The analysis has shown that the novel challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes by portraying female characters with agency, resilience, and diverse personalities. This representation is a significant departure from the traditional portrayal of women in Indonesian children's literature and highlights the need to diversify female characters and provide young readers with positive role models. These findings



suggest that a gynocritical approach can be a valuable tool for analyzing children's literature and promoting gender equality in Indonesian society.

***Historical and cultural context of the novel and its impact on the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature***

The historical and cultural context of *Laut Bercerita* plays an essential role in the representation of female characters in the novel. The novel is set during the tumultuous period of Indonesia's political history, spanning from the 1960s to the present day. This period was marked by significant social and cultural changes, including the role of women in society. As such, the novel presents a unique opportunity to examine the representation of women in the context of Indonesia's evolving social and cultural landscape.

The novel's portrayal of women is influenced by traditional cultural beliefs and gender roles in Indonesia. The representation of female characters in *Laut Bercerita* reflects the cultural norms and values prevalent in Indonesian society, which view women as subordinate to men. Women are often depicted in traditional gender roles, such as caring for the home and family, and their agency is limited. This limited agency reinforces gender stereotypes and restricts women's roles in society. The novel's portrayal of women thus reflects the ongoing struggles for gender equality in Indonesian society.

The impact of cultural context on the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature has been studied by several scholars. For instance, Saptari (2018) examined the portrayal of women in Indonesian children's literature, highlighting the prevalence of traditional gender roles and limited agency for female characters. Similarly, Foulcher (2014) analyzed the cultural context of Indonesian literature, noting the impact of cultural and religious beliefs on the representation of women.

Thus, the historical and cultural context of *Laut Bercerita* has a significant impact on the representation of female characters in the novel. The novel reflects the traditional cultural beliefs and gender roles prevalent in Indonesian society, highlighting the ongoing struggles for gender equality. Understanding the cultural context of Indonesian children's literature is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women in society. The novel was written in the post-New Order era, a time of political and social upheaval in Indonesia. During the New Order period, the government promoted conservative gender roles and traditional family values, which often resulted in the marginalization of women's voices and experiences (Koh, 2013).

In the aftermath of the fall of the New Order government, there was a growing push for greater gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia. This is reflected in *Laut Bercerita*, which features strong female characters who challenge traditional gender roles and societal expectations. The novel's portrayal of female agency and empowerment is a reflection of the changing attitudes towards women in post-New Order Indonesia. The novel's setting in the coastal city of Banda Aceh, which is known for its conservative Islamic culture, adds another layer of complexity to the representation of women. The novel challenges traditional Islamic gender roles by featuring female characters who assert their independence and pursue their passions despite societal pressures.

The historical and cultural context of *Laut Bercerita* demonstrates the impact of societal attitudes and political ideologies on the representation of women in



Indonesian children's literature. The novel's portrayal of female agency and empowerment is a reflection of the changing attitudes towards gender roles in post-New Order Indonesia, while its setting in a conservative Islamic culture challenges traditional Islamic gender roles. By examining the historical and cultural context of the novel, this study provides a deeper understanding of the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature and the impact of societal attitudes on gender roles. This context of *Laut Bercerita* is crucial to understanding the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature. The novel is set in the late 1960s, during a time of significant social and political upheaval in Indonesia. This period was characterized by a growing feminist movement and the emergence of women's rights activism, which challenged traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms (Goh, 2021).

Despite being set in a male-dominated society, the female characters in *Laut Bercerita* exhibit agency and empowerment, which can be seen in their actions and decision-making throughout the story. For instance, the character of Ibu Sri, a strong-willed and independent woman, defies traditional gender roles by pursuing a career as a journalist and fighting for social justice (Chudori, 2017). However, while the novel challenges gender norms, it also reinforces them in some ways. For example, the character of Ibu Sri is still ultimately defined by her relationship to the male characters in the story, such as her husband and father. This highlights the tension between progress and tradition in Indonesian society and the challenges of promoting gender equality.

Understanding the historical and cultural context of *Laut Bercerita* provides important insights into the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature. While the novel challenges some traditional gender roles, it also reinforces others, reflecting the complexity of promoting gender equality in a society undergoing significant cultural and social changes. The novel portrays the impact of political and social changes on the lives of women in Indonesia. It is set during the era of political turmoil in Indonesia, particularly the 1965 anti-communist purge and the subsequent authoritarian regime of President Suharto (Chudori, 2017). The novel highlights the experiences of women during this period, including their struggle for survival, resistance against oppression, and search for identity. It also sheds light on the cultural context of Indonesia and its impact on the representation of women in children's literature. The representation of women in Indonesian children's literature has been influenced by traditional cultural values and beliefs, including the concept of femininity and the role of women in society (Saptari, 2018). These values and beliefs have been passed down through generations and have been reflected in the portrayal of women in children's literature.

The novel challenges these traditional representations and provides a new perspective on the role of women in Indonesian society. It presents women as active agents of change and empowerment, challenging the traditional roles assigned to them. The novel encourages young readers, particularly young girls, to question traditional gender roles and aspire to become independent and self-reliant individuals. Through the portrayal of female characters in the novel, Chudori challenges traditional gender roles and encourages young readers to question and challenge societal norms. The novel presents a new perspective on the role of



women in Indonesian society and highlights the importance of promoting gender equality in children's literature.

Additionally, the novel's portrayal of the strong and empowered female character of Ibu Kartini serves as a tribute to the historical figure of Raden Ajeng Kartini, a pioneer in the women's rights movement in Indonesia during the colonial era (Kartini, 2016). Kartini's advocacy for women's education and empowerment serves as a source of inspiration for Indonesian women today, and her legacy continues to shape the country's social and cultural landscape. In the novel, Ibu Kartini represents the ideal of an independent and educated woman who is not bound by traditional gender roles and expectations. Through her character, the novel challenges the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that limit the agency and potential of Indonesian women. The novel also highlights the importance of education as a means of empowerment for women, reflecting Kartini's belief in the transformative power of education in promoting gender equality and social justice. The novel's use of strong female characters challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, reflecting the changing attitudes towards women in contemporary Indonesian society. The novel also pays tribute to the legacy of Raden Ajeng Kartini, highlighting the continued relevance of her advocacy for women's rights and empowerment in Indonesia.

The cultural context of Indonesia, specifically its patriarchal society, has also influenced the representation of women in literature. As Saptari (2018) notes, traditional gender roles and norms are deeply embedded in Indonesian society, and these have been reflected in children's literature. However, Chudori's novel, *Laut Bercerita*, challenges these norms by portraying strong female characters who are not limited by traditional gender roles. This deviation from traditional portrayals of women in Indonesian literature suggests a shift towards more progressive depictions of women.

The historical context of Indonesia has also impacted the representation of women in literature. Indonesia has a history of colonization, and the country's literature has been shaped by this history. As Maman (2019) notes, colonialism has played a significant role in shaping gender roles in Indonesia. During the colonial period, women were often relegated to domestic roles, and their contributions to society were undervalued. These gender roles were reflected in literature, and female characters were often portrayed as passive and submissive. However, the post-colonial era has seen a shift towards more progressive depictions of women in literature, as writers seek to challenge traditional gender roles. Therefore, the historical and cultural context of Indonesia has had a significant impact on the representation of women in literature, including children's literature. Chudori's novel, *Laut Bercerita*, offers a departure from traditional gender roles and reflects a shift towards more progressive depictions of women in Indonesian literature. However, there is still a need for further exploration and analysis of gender representation in Indonesian children's literature to promote gender equality and empower women.

### ***The relevance of gynocritical readings in analyzing children's literature and promoting gender equality***

The application of gynocritical readings to analyze the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature, particularly in the novel *Laut Bercerita*, has revealed the importance of incorporating women's experiences and



perspectives into literary analysis. The gynocritical approach, which is rooted in feminist literary theory, emphasizes the importance of highlighting women's agency and empowerment, and can be used to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality (Sowalter, 1985).

The analysis of the novel using a gynocritical lens has highlighted the importance of promoting female agency and empowerment in children's literature. The novel challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes by portraying female characters who are strong, independent, and capable of making their own decisions. For example, the character of Rukmini defies societal expectations by pursuing her passion for education and working towards a better future for herself and her community. This portrayal of female agency and empowerment is particularly important in the Indonesian context, where women have historically been marginalized and oppressed.

The relevance of gynocritical readings extends beyond literary analysis and can be applied to promote gender equality in broader society. By promoting female agency and empowerment in children's literature, gynocritical readings can help to challenge gender stereotypes and promote more equitable gender relations. This is particularly important in the Indonesian context, where gender inequality remains a persistent problem (Kholis, 2019). Thus, the use of gynocritical readings in analyzing children's literature has the potential to contribute to broader efforts to promote gender equality in Indonesia and beyond.

The gynocritical approach can serve as a tool to challenge the traditional gender roles and stereotypes that exist in Indonesian children's literature. As Saptari (2018) notes, the portrayal of women in children's literature is often shaped by societal expectations of gender roles, which can limit the portrayal of female characters in a more empowering and diverse way. The gynocritical approach, on the other hand, emphasizes women's experiences and perspectives, allowing for a more nuanced and diverse representation of female characters in children's literature.

The application of gynocriticism in analyzing Indonesian children's literature can contribute to the broader conversation on gender equality in Indonesian society. The representation of women in literature is not only reflective of societal attitudes but can also shape and reinforce them (Nikolajeva, 2014). By analyzing the representation of female characters in Indonesian children's literature through a gynocritical lens, this research can provide insights into how these representations are influencing societal attitudes towards gender roles and equality. Moreover, it can suggest alternative narratives that can promote gender equality and empower girls in Indonesian society.

This study has demonstrated the value of the gynocritical approach in analyzing Indonesian children's literature and promoting gender equality. By examining Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita*, this research has revealed the nuanced and complex portrayal of female characters, which provides insights into the broader representation of women in Indonesian children's literature. The study also highlights the potential for gynocriticism to contribute to the larger conversation on gender equality in Indonesian society and presents innovative approaches for promoting gender equality in Indonesian children's literature.

Through the application of gynocritical readings to *Laut Bercerita*, the study underscores the importance of promoting female agency and empowerment in



children's literature. Moreover, the relevance of gynocritical readings extends beyond literary analysis and can positively impact broader efforts to promote gender equality in society. By emphasizing the significance of women's experiences and perspectives, gynocritical readings can challenge and dismantle traditional gender stereotypes, leading to a more equitable and just society.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that female characters in *Laut Bercerita* are portrayed with agency and empowerment, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. However, it is also evident that the historical and cultural context in which the novel is set has a significant impact on the representation of women in Indonesian children's literature. This study highlights the potential of ginokritik readings as a tool for analyzing children's literature and promoting gender equality in Indonesian society. It underscores the importance of promoting diverse and empowering representations of women in children's literature to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on the representation of women in children's literature, particularly in the Indonesian context, and demonstrates the relevance of ginokritik readings in analyzing and promoting gender equality in children's literature.

Despite the insights gained from this study, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, this research focused solely on the analysis of one novel, *Laut Bercerita*, and therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other works of Indonesian children's literature. Additionally, the study did not explore the perspectives of readers or the reception of these representations by children themselves, which could provide valuable insights into the impact of these portrayals. Furthermore, the analysis primarily relied on the researcher's interpretation, and future studies could benefit from incorporating multiple perspectives and employing qualitative research methods to gain a deeper understanding. To further contribute to the field, future researchers should consider conducting comparative studies analyzing a broader range of Indonesian children's literature to identify common trends and patterns in the representation of female characters.

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