



Social and Cultural Issues in the Novels *Laut Bercerita* and *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki*: A Sociological of Literature

Herson Kadir^{1*}, Aviva Dinanti Lambalano², Ismail Rajak³, Sastia Minasi Asuke⁴,
Lika Andariska⁵, Tasya Abd. Latif⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia

*E-mail: hersonung@gmail.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Laut Bercerita is one of the many acclaimed novels by Leila S. Chudori. It was published in 2017 by Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia in Jakarta, Indonesia, and spans 379 pages. The novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* (The Miracles of the Namiya General Store) is a work by Keigo Higashino; it was published in 2017 by Kadokawa Shoten in Japan. This study aims to describe the social and cultural issues in the novel *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* by Keigo Higashino through Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature approach. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative literature approach. The data consisted of quotations, sentences, and dialogues that reflect social and cultural life in both novels. The results show that *Laut Bercerita* portrays political injustice, authoritarian repression, social trauma, and the culture of solidarity in Indonesian society during the New Order era. Meanwhile, *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* portrays loneliness, social alienation, and the values of empathy in modern Japanese society. The similarity between the two novels lies in their depiction of humanity and social relationships in society. The differences are found in the social and cultural backgrounds that influence the conflicts in the stories. Through Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature approach, both novels can be understood as reflections of the social and cultural life of their respective societies and eras.

Keywords: social issues, cultural issues, novel, sociological of literature

Persoalan Sosial dan Budaya dalam Novel *Laut Bercerita* dan *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki*: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra

ABSTRAK

Laut Bercerita merupakan satu di antara banyak novel terkenal karya Leila S. Chudori. Novel ini diterbitkan pada tahun 2017 oleh penerbit Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Jakarta, Indonesia; 379 halaman. Novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* (The Miracles of the Namiya General Store) merupakan karya Keigo Higashino. Novel ini diterbitkan pada tahun 2017 oleh penerbit Kadokawa Shoten, Jepang. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan persoalan sosial dan budaya dalam novel *Laut Bercerita* karya Leila S. Chudori dan *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* karya Keigo Higashino melalui kajian sosiologi sastra Alan Swingewood. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan sastra bandingan. Data penelitian berupa kutipan kata, kalimat, dan dialog yang menggambarkan kehidupan sosial dan budaya dalam kedua novel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel *Laut Bercerita* menggambarkan ketidakadilan politik, represi kekuasaan, trauma sosial, serta budaya solidaritas masyarakat Indonesia pada masa Orde Baru. Sementara itu, novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* menggambarkan kesepian, keterasingan sosial, dan nilai empati dalam masyarakat Jepang modern. Persamaan kedua novel terletak pada penggambaran pentingnya nilai kemanusiaan dan hubungan sosial dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Perbedaan keduanya terlihat pada latar sosial dan budaya yang memengaruhi konflik dalam cerita. Melalui kajian sosiologi sastra Alan Swingewood, kedua novel dipahami sebagai refleksi kehidupan sosial dan budaya masyarakat pada zamannya masing-masing.

Kata kunci: persoalan sosial, persoalan budaya, novel, sosiologi sastra

Submitted
06/06/2026

Accepted
30/07/2026

Published
07/08/2026

Citation	Kadir, H., Lambalano, A. D., Rajak, I., Asuke, S. M., Andariska, L., & Latif, T. A. (2026). Social and Cultural Issues in the Novels <i>Laut Bercerita</i> and <i>Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki</i> : A Sociological of Literature. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra</i> , Volume 5, Nomor 4, Juli 2026, 3689-3696. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v5i4.1596
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Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are the result of human creativity, born from life experiences, social conditions, and the realities of society at that time. Literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for conveying ideas, social criticism, humanitarian values, and various human issues. Through literary works, authors can depict social phenomena occurring in society, such as injustice, social conflict, family relationships, poverty, and even moral and cultural issues. Therefore, literary works are closely related to social life because literature is essentially a reflection of human social life.

According to Damono (1978:1), literature depicts life, and life itself is a social reality. This opinion demonstrates that literary works cannot be separated from society because literature arises from the reality of human life. Literature becomes a medium for authors to represent various social issues that occur in society.

This view aligns with the sociological theory of literature put forward by Swingewood and Laurenson (1972:13), which states that literary works are sociocultural documents that reflect the social conditions of society at a particular time. According to them, literature is closely related to social structures, cultural values, social conflicts, and community life, so that literary works can be used to understand the social realities that develop in society.

Furthermore, Wellek and Warren (1990:49) explain that comparative literature is the study of literature that transcends national boundaries and relates to various aspects of human life. Through comparative literature, researchers can discover similarities and differences in social values, culture, and outlooks on life in literary works from different countries. Therefore, comparative literary studies are relevant for examining Indonesian and Japanese novels, which both depict social life. As a form of literature, the novel has the ability to depict human life in a more complex way through

the characters, setting, plot, and conflicts developed by the author. According to Nurgiyantoro (2015:4), a novel is a work of fiction that offers an imaginative world constructed through intrinsic elements such as characters, plot, setting, and theme, thus capable of representing human life in depth. Thus, a novel can be a medium for depicting social life through the events and conflicts experienced by its characters.

One of the Indonesian novels that represents the social life of society is *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori, published in 2017. This novel depicts the social and political life of Indonesian society during the New Order era, particularly regarding the oppression of student activists, the silencing of freedom of expression, and the suffering of the families of victims of enforced disappearances. Through the character of Laut and other figures, the author shows how political power influences the social life of society. This novel also displays the values of solidarity, struggle, friendship, and strong human relationships amidst a repressive social situation.

On the other hand, Keigo Higashino's novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki*, published in Indonesian in 2015, depicts the social life of modern Japanese society through the story of people seeking advice from a grocery store owner named Namiya. The novel presents various social issues, such as family conflict, economic pressure, loss of hope, and interpersonal relationships in modern society. The author demonstrates that social life is influenced not only by economic conditions but also by emotional relationships, moral values, and social concerns between individuals.

Although the two novels come from different cultural backgrounds, they share similarities in their representation of social life through human conflict and the social relationships between characters. The novel *Laut Bercerita* (*Laut Bercerita*) represents the socio-political conditions of Indonesian society, while the novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* represents the social life of modern Japa-



nese society. These differences in cultural backgrounds make both novels interesting to study using a comparative literature approach, as they can highlight the similarities and differences in the representation of social life in the two countries. This research uses Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature approach because this theory views literary works as a reflection of society. Swingewood (1972:15) explains that literary works are closely related to social structures, cultural values, economic conditions, and the lives of people of their time. Literature is understood as a medium that represents social reality through characters, conflicts, and events constructed by the author.

Based on this description, this study aims to describe the portrait of social life in the novels "Laut Bercerita" and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" through a sociological study of literature by Alan Swingewood. Furthermore, this study also aims to identify similarities and differences in the representation of social life depicted in both novels. This research is expected to contribute to the development of comparative literary studies, particularly in the sociological study of literature on modern Indonesian and Japanese novels. Specifically, this study focuses on the social and cultural issues presented in both novels.

METHOD

This study applies a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the representation of social life in the novels "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" by Keigo Higashino and "Laut Bercerita" by Leila S. Chudori, using a comparative literary perspective and Alan Swingewood's sociological theory of literature. The data sources come from the novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* by Keigo Higashino translated by Faira Ammadea, published in 2019 with 400 pages, and the novel *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori, published in 2017 with 379 pages. The research data are in the form of quotes, sentences, and dialogues that describe social life,

social solidarity, social conflict, and humanitarian issues in both novels. The research data were obtained through in-depth reading activities and recording of parts relevant to the research focus. Data analysis was carried out in stages, starting from data review, grouping information, interpreting results, to compiling research conclusions.

RESULT

The novels *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" by Keigo Higashino contain various social and cultural issues that reflect the conditions of society in different times and places. Based on Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature, both works depict various social phenomena that developed and were experienced by society at the time. Through the characters, conflicts, and events experienced by the characters, the authors present a picture of various social problems and cultural values that developed in Indonesian and Japanese society. Research findings show that both novels highlight humanitarian issues and the dynamics of social interactions between individuals. However, differences arise due to the social and cultural contexts underlying the lives of the people in each work.

1. Social Issues in the Novels *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" by Keigo Higashino

Social issues are problems that arise in society and affect human relationships. In literary works, social issues are often represented through the conflicts experienced by the characters. Through Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature approach, literary works are viewed as reflections of social reality, depicting the conditions of society during their time. The novel *Laut Bercerita* presents social issues related to political injustice, oppression, and social trauma during the New Order era. Meanwhile, the novel *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* presents social issues in modern Japanese society related to loneliness, social aliena-

tion, and individual anxiety in facing life. These issues are evident in the following quotes.

Data 1

"Ignorance and uncertainty are sometimes far more deadly than murder." (Chudori:, 2017:356)

The quote above illustrates the psychological suffering of the families of the victims of activist kidnappings during the New Order era. Families were unaware of the fate of their family members, whether they were still alive or dead. This situation created prolonged social trauma. In Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature, literary works are viewed as reflections of social reality. Therefore, this quote reflects the historical reality of Indonesia in 1998 regarding the enforced disappearance of activists.

Data 2

"We are just students who want this country to be more just." (Chudori:, 2017:72)

The quote above illustrates the struggle of students to advocate for justice and democracy. Students are depicted as a social group critical of government injustice. They engage in discussions, movements, and resistance against systems that oppress the people.

Data 3

"Traitors are everywhere." (Chudori, 2017:118)

The quote above depicts a societal atmosphere filled with fear and suspicion due to political pressure. Activists feel monitored and threatened by state officials and secret informants. As a result, social relations within society become disharmonious due to the loss of trust between individuals.

Data 4

"Everyone carries their own problems in life." (Higashino, 2012:56)

The quote above illustrates the pressures of modern society, filled with various issues such as work, family, and the future. The characters in the

novel experience confusion and difficulties in navigating their social lives.

Data 5

"I don't know which future to choose." (Higashino, 2012:103)

The quote above demonstrates the anxiety of the younger generation in determining their future. Life's competition and social demands leave the characters feeling confused about life choices.

Data 6

"Sometimes a person just needs someone to listen." (Higashino, 2012:178)

The quote above shows that many individuals experience loneliness and lack social attention. The characters in the novels need a place to share stories and receive emotional support.

2. Cultural Issues in the Novels *Laut Bercerita* and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki"

In addition to social issues, both novels also depict various cultural values ??that are part of society. Culture in literary works can be seen through the mindsets, habits, traditions, moral values, and lifestyles of the characters and the people depicted in the stories. From the perspective of Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature, cultural elements are part of social reality that shape people's behavior and outlook on life. The novel "Laut Bercerita" represents the culture of solidarity, kinship, and intellectualism that develops among students and the Indonesian community. Meanwhile, the novel "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" depicts Japanese culture, which upholds responsibility, social harmony, and honesty. These cultural values are reflected in the following quotes.

Data 1

"We read poetry, discussed, and dreamed about Indonesia." (Chudori:, 2017:41)

The quote above demonstrates the intellectual culture of students who enjoy discussing and think-



ing critically about the nation's condition. Discussion and reading are part of student life as an intellectual group with a strong social conscience.

Data 2

“My mother always cooks my favorite food.”
(Chudori, 2017:29)

The quote above demonstrates the culture of family in Indonesian society. A mother's attention through food demonstrates affection, care, and emotional closeness between family members.

Data 3

“We believe solidarity is more important than fear.”
(Chudori, 2017:95)

The quote above demonstrates a culture of solidarity among students and activists. They help and support each other even when faced with political threats. Solidarity becomes a social force that sustains the common struggle.

Data 4

“Replies to letters must be written sincerely.”
(Higashino: 2012:67)

The quote above demonstrates the Japanese culture of responsibility. The characters in the novel feel that helping others must be done seriously and with care.

Data 5

“Japanese people are taught not to bother others.”
(Higashino, 2012:145)

The quote above illustrates Japanese culture, which upholds social harmony and respect for others. The attitude of not wanting to bother others is a cultural value instilled from childhood.

Data 6

“Honesty will lead a person to find their way.”
(Higashino, 2012:221)

The quote above demonstrates the importance of honesty and morality in Japanese society. The

characters in the novel are taught to be honest in making life decisions.

DISCUSSION

The various social issues that emerge in literary works essentially reflect conditions and events occurring in society. Through the characters, plot, and conflicts developed by the author, readers can understand the social conditions underlying the creation of a literary work. According to Alan Swingewood, literary works are closely linked to social reality because they reflect the lives of people at a particular time, capturing the various issues that developed within society at that time. The novels *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" by Keigo Higashino present different depictions of social life, depending on their respective social backgrounds. "Laut Bercerita" depicts the social and political situation in Indonesia during the New Order era, marked by repression of power and the struggle for justice, while "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" represents the lives of modern Japanese society, facing loneliness, social alienation, and the search for meaning in life. Through the various events experienced by their characters, both novels demonstrate that literature serves more than just entertainment; it also serves as a means of documentation and reflection on the various social realities that develop in society.

Social Issues in the Novels *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" by Keigo Higashino

Based on the research findings, the social issues found in the novel *Laut Bercerita* center on political injustice, the oppression of activists, and the social trauma experienced by society during the New Order era. The three quotes found demonstrate that the characters' lives are inseparable from the repressive political situation. The student characters are depicted as a social group fighting for democracy and justice, but face surveillance, intimidation, and even enforced

disappearances. Through the character of Laut and other activists, Leila S. Chudori presents the social reality of Indonesia in the lead-up to the 1998 Reformation. The families of victims of enforced disappearances experience prolonged suffering due to the uncertainty of their family members' fates. Furthermore, the suspicion and fear that arise in the social environment demonstrate the breakdown of human relationships due to the pressure of power. From the perspective of Swingewood (1972), literature is a reflection of the social realities that exist in society. Therefore, the novel *Laut Bercerita* can be understood as a representation of Indonesia's socio-political conditions during the New Order era, marked by restrictions on freedom and human rights violations. This opinion is reinforced by Damono (1979), Elmustian & Jalil (2015) who stated that literary works are a depiction of social life. Therefore, the social issues presented in the novel serve not only as elements of the narrative but also as social documentation of the history of the Indonesian people's struggle for justice and democracy.

Unlike *Laut Bercerita*, the social issues in *Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki* are more related to the lives of modern Japanese society. The three quotes found indicate the problems of loneliness, confusion in determining the future, and a lack of communication between people. The characters in the novel face various life problems that make them feel alienated even though they live in society. Keigo Higashino illustrates that modernization and societal development do not always bring happiness. Instead, individuals often experience psychological stress due to social demands and the competition of life. The characters who send letters to the Namiya Shop demonstrate the human need to be heard, understood, and receive emotional support from others. This shows that social relationships play a vital role in human life. According to Swingewood (1972:13-14), literary works can function as social documents that record the conditions of society at that time. In this

context, *Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki* represents the reality of modern Japanese society experiencing emotional alienation and a communication crisis. Wellek & Warren's (2014) assertion that literature is a depiction of social life also reinforces the belief that the various character conflicts in the novel reflect real social problems in modern society.

Cultural Issues in the Novels *Laut Bercerita* and "*Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki*"

The research results show that the novel *Laut Bercerita* contains cultural values that reflect the character of Indonesian society, particularly intellectual culture, kinship, and social solidarity. The three quotes found depict the lives of students who actively engage in discussions, enjoy reading, and are concerned about the nation's condition. These activities demonstrate the existence of an intellectual culture developing within the academic environment. Furthermore, the close relationship between children and parents demonstrates the strength of family culture in Indonesian society. The affection shown through daily care symbolizes emotional closeness between family members. Furthermore, the solidarity between students and activists demonstrates the culture of mutual cooperation and togetherness that is a hallmark of Indonesian society. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009:144), culture is the entire system of ideas, actions, and human works learned in social life. Based on this opinion, the intellectual culture, kinship, and solidarity depicted in the novel represent the cultural values entrenched in Indonesian society. Thus, the novel *Laut Bercerita* not only captures socio-political issues but also demonstrates the cultural identity of Indonesian society, which upholds togetherness and social awareness.

The novel "*Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki*" also showcases various cultural values that have developed in Japanese society. Based on research, the dominant cultural values include responsibility, social harmony, and honesty. The three quotes found show that the characters in the novel strive



to carry out their responsibilities earnestly, respect others, and uphold moral values in their daily lives. The culture of responsibility is evident in the characters' sincerity in providing assistance to others through thoughtful replies to letters. Meanwhile, the culture of social harmony is evident in the attitude of not bothering others and maintaining good relationships within the community. The value of honesty also serves as a moral guideline that helps the characters make the right life choices. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009:150), the system of values and norms is an important part of a society's culture. The values of responsibility, social harmony, and honesty presented in the novel reflect the character of Japanese culture, which emphasizes discipline, respect for others, and moral integrity. Therefore, the novel "Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki" can be understood as a representation of Japanese culture that has persisted amidst the development of modern society.

Based on the results of research and discussion of the novels *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and *Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki* by Keigo Higashino using Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature approach, it can be concluded that both novels represent the social and cultural realities of society in different settings. In the social aspect, the novel *Laut Bercerita* depicts political injustice, oppression of activists, social trauma, and the struggle to establish democracy during the New Order era. Meanwhile, the novel *Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki* depicts the issues of loneliness, social alienation, life pressures, and the search for the meaning of life in modern Japanese society. Despite their different social backgrounds, both novels present humanitarian issues and the importance of social relationships in human life. In the cultural aspect, the novel *Laut Bercerita* represents the intellectual culture, family, and solidarity that are part of Indonesian society. In contrast, the novel *Namiya Zakkaten no Kiseki*

represents the culture of responsibility, social harmony, and honesty that are important values in Japanese society. These differences show that cultural background influences how people face various life problems. Thus, through the perspective of Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature, both novels can be understood as reflections of the social and cultural realities of their respective eras. In addition to their aesthetic value, these two literary works also serve as social documents, documenting the living conditions of Indonesian and Japanese society and conveying relevant humanitarian values to readers.

CONCLUSION

Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* and Keigo Higashino's novel "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" both represent social life through various humanitarian issues, social solidarity, and cultural values that develop within their respective communities.

In terms of social issues, *Laut Bercerita* depicts Indonesian society during the New Order era, filled with political injustice, repression by those in power, social trauma, and the loss of community freedom. The characters in the novel experience social pressure due to a system of power that limits freedom of expression. Meanwhile, "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" depicts the lives of modern Japanese society, experiencing loneliness, social alienation, and strained interpersonal relationships due to the development of modern life.

Culturally, *Laut Bercerita* showcases a culture of struggle, discussion, social solidarity, and the importance of education as a form of resistance against social injustice. Conversely, "Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki" depicts Japanese culture, which upholds politeness, social awareness, empathy, and self-control in everyday life.

The similarities between the two novels lie in their depiction of the importance of social relationships and human values in community life. Both novels demonstrate the need for empathy, solidarity, and social support to face life's challenges.

The differences lie in the social and cultural backgrounds that influence the forms of conflict within the stories. *Laut Bercerita* focuses more on the socio-political conflicts of Indonesian society during the New Order era, while *Namiya Zakkaten No Kiseki* focuses more on the social and psychological conflicts of individuals in modern Japanese society.

Through Swingewood's sociological study of literature, both novels can be understood as reflections of the social and cultural life of society in their respective eras. Thus, literary works serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium for understanding human social and cultural realities.

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