

Exploration of Literary Works as Media to Form and Maintain National Identity through Narratives and Cultural Symbols

¹Yulius Kurniawan, ²Jeje Abdul Rojak, ³Didit Darmawan, ⁴Abbas Sofwan Matlail Fajar

¹Widya Kartika University, Surabaya, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

³Mayjen Sungkono University, Mojokerto, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how literary works contribute to the process of national identity formation through narratives, symbols and cultural value structures. Using a qualitative approach based on literature study, this research evaluates the role of literary texts in building people's collective understanding of the meaning of nationality. Literature is understood not simply as an aesthetic product, but as a narrative space where history, social experiences, and national aspirations are formulated and passed on. The analysis shows that literature facilitates the construction of nationhood through the creation of cultural symbols and characters that represent collective values. Narratives in literature function as a conduit between generations in conveying historical values and local identities. In educational curriculum and public discourse, literary works have demonstrated their ability to strengthen emotional attachment to the country, although they have not yet been given a proportionate place. This research proposes the importance of recognizing the narrative dimension in the study of nationhood and encourages the integration of literary approaches in education and cultural policies. Literary works, through their reflective fictionality, provide a space for people to reflect on the meaning of togetherness within a national framework. The research concludes that literature is a vital element in the formation of national consciousness that lives and moves in social dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

In various historical periods, literary works have always existed not merely as aesthetic mediums, but as arenas where national ideas are formulated, negotiated and voiced. Not only a reflection of cultural aesthetics, literature also forms a collective narrative that unites diverse social elements. Through symbolic language, narrative imagination, and characters that reflect social reality, literature is able to convey collective meanings that transcend political documents or legal discourse (Xu et al., 2018). Literature often serves as a space to negotiate nationhood by synthesizing diverse identities and interests into a more inclusive and humane form. Authors, with all their courage and sensitivity to social problems, are often the first to record the dynamics of national identity, even long before formal terminologies are introduced by state officials or academics (Farber, 2005).

In the midst of social upheaval and colonialism, literary works were born as a space for the articulation of marginalized collective voices, emphasizing the line between subordination and aspiration. In nationalism, literary texts become a vehicle to build a sense of belonging to an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Through characters and plot, writers are able to depict the complexities of history and form a shared sense of collective origins and direction. Such works often embed national visions in personal narratives, making them more accessible and internalized by readers across social strata (Grytsenko, 2020). The vision of nationhood in literature is not conveyed normatively like a political document, but through the experiences of characters who live and conflict. Literature is able to channel big ideas in an intimate and humanistic form, thus strengthening people's emotional attachment to the idea of nationhood.

* Corresponding author, email address: dr.diditdarmawan@gmail.com

In contemporary times, literary texts retain their relevance as one of the pillars that shape collective consciousness. When globalization poses a threat to local identity, literary texts are present as a means to strengthen collective memory and domestic narratives. The existence of literary texts in the education curriculum, in the public sphere, and in the realm of popular culture production shows how literary texts have never lost their reflective and constructive function towards the national spirit. In this regard, it is important to understand that literary contributions to nationhood do not always take the form of explicit invitations, but work through subtle and deep structures of meaning (McNamara, 2016).

Despite this great potential, research that explores the relationship between literary works and the construction of national identity is still often marginalized from the main discourse of social and political science. In fact, in many cases, literary texts are able to offer a more sensitive understanding of the nuances of emotions, symbols, and value structures that live in society. Research that places literary texts as strategic subjects in strengthening national awareness is needed, especially in a social climate that is facing an identity crisis and ideological polarization (Urys et al., 2021).

Although literary works have long been part of the formation of national symbols and collective narratives, the understanding of their strategic function in strengthening national identity still tends to be limited and fragmentary. Many educational institutions and public discourse spaces still position literature as a purely aesthetic field, without taking into account its political and cultural potential in shaping the collective perception of a nation. Said (1993) emphasized that literary works have the capacity to form ideological structures, but when marginalized from the national discourse, this capacity becomes unrecognized and unoptimized in the formation of collective consciousness.

Another weakness that emerges is the lack of integration between literary studies and discourse on nationalism in the academic realm. Many studies on nationalism tend to rely on historical and political approaches, while the narrative and symbolic dimensions of the construction of nationhood contained in literary texts often go unnoticed. In his analysis, Bhabha (1990) points out that the concept of nation is a cultural construct that can be read productively through literary narratives. This approach has not been widely adopted in local studies which still focus on historical facts rather than narrative structures as a medium of national meaning.

There are problems in selecting and preserving literary works that are relevant to strengthening national identity. Educational curriculums, publishing policies, and national documentation systems have not shown strong favoritism towards works that shape local historical and cultural awareness. Many historically and culturally important works do not have access to republishing, digitization, or cross-media promotion. Hobsbawm (1992) notes that nations are built through the discovery and preservation of culturally produced traditions, but without systemic support, many national narratives in literature disappear from public circulation. This results in a vacuum of symbolic references that can serve as the foundation of collective identity amidst rapid social change.

The minimum understanding of the potential of literary works as a medium of national meaning presents a serious problem in the development of collective identity, especially in the midst of a crisis of cultural representation due to increasingly massive global influences. Literature is not just entertainment or aesthetic expression, but a symbolic space where social experiences, historical conflicts and collective aspirations are interpreted and passed on. In an increasingly fragmented information flow, national identity can lose its strong narrative foundation if it is not supported by the production and strengthening of cultural symbols that live in literary works. Research that examines the relationship between literary texts and the formation of collective awareness becomes increasingly relevant as societies experience shifting values and weakening collective memories of historical experiences. Literary works offer an imaginative bridge that other forms of discourse do not, making them an authentic source of reflection on social reality.

Given the ideological currents that play out in polarized digital and political spaces, it is important to realize that narratives conveyed through literary texts are often more capable of reaching the emotional and existential aspects of the community. Research that explores how literary works shape depictions of "us" versus "them" can open up new space for understanding the mechanisms of symbolic and cultural formation of national identity. Literature creates imaginary boundaries that define who is considered part of the national community and who is marginalized. An examination of literary works that feature collective struggles, local histories and community memories can be an alternative source in strengthening the roots of national identity that are not always contained in the official state narrative. These alternative narratives enrich understanding of the diversity of national experiences.

This research aims to critically examine the role of literary works in the process of national identity formation, by exploring how narratives, characters, cultural symbols, and collective experiences represented in literary texts shape national consciousness in the community. This research seeks to understand the dynamics of national meanings that are symbolically built in literary texts and reconstruct national values that live through the narrative medium. This research is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the strengthening of the interdisciplinary approach in nationality research by involving the aesthetic and narrative dimensions contained in literary works, as well as expanding the cultural discourse as a pillar of national identity formation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with the literature study method as the main analytical framework. The focus of this method lies on exploring relevant written sources such as literary works, cultural essays, previous research results, and critical documents that discuss national narratives in the literary medium. The literature reviewed covers different historical periods to show the development of representations of national identity in literary texts. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that a qualitative approach through document study allows researchers to explore meaning in depth and see patterns of meaning that emerge in cultural discourse. This method is suitable for examining the symbolic, ideological and historical dimensions of the process of nationalism representation in narrative texts.

Data collection was done through the selection of texts that have narrative power in voicing collective values and national history. Data analysis was conducted thematically with an interpretative approach, emphasizing the power of symbols, metaphors, and narrative structures that convey national messages. In line with the approach developed by Krippendorff (2004), this research focuses on the process of interpreting the text contextually to capture the meaning hidden behind the language structure and writing style. The validity of the analysis is maintained through triangulation of sources, both primary and secondary, and by placing the text within its cultural framework and history of social production. This research does not aim to provide generalizations, but rather to build theoretical understanding that can be used to re-examine the relationship between literary and national imagination.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The awareness of community in a nation is not solely formed through political structures or formal rules. It grows from narratives that create a sense of belonging and a shared understanding of the past, present and hopes. While political structures provide the legal and administrative framework, a sense of belonging to the nation grows out of narratives that tap into the emotional dimensions and identity of individuals as part of a collective. At this point, literary texts play an important role. It is not just a space for individual expression, but a place where collective meanings are constructed emotionally and symbolically (Ijdens & Zernitz, 2019). Literature provides space for reflective and emotional interpretations of social reality, which in turn strengthens a shared sense of national identity.

Through story structures that blend with social reality, literary works offer an alternative understanding of national life. Not with slogans or appeals, but through stories that touch the reader's daily life and bring them together with the values that form a shared identity. In literary works, readers not only encounter characters or events, but also a portrait of society with all its complexities, which gives weight to a sense of nationality indirectly (Linder, 2021). Literature provides an alternative perspective on social conditions and forms a more empathetic understanding of life together within the framework of nationality.

Fictional narratives are often more effective at building emotional bonds than historical documents or formal speeches. In stories, the administrative boundaries of countries are replaced by emotional lines that connect the reader to the characters, places and times being told. The emotional bonds formed from these imaginative interactions provide space for readers to experience the characters' experiences as a shared experience, so that the message of nationalism is more easily embedded and internalized. This forms an intuitive sense of who "we" are, who "they" are, and what unites them in the frame of shared experience as one nation (Lacko, 2017).

When we read novels that highlight historical events, poems that reflect the suffering of the people, or dramas that depict social unrest, we are actually being invited into the process of creating a shared identity. This is where the power of literary works lies: they stitch together individual stories into a collective narrative that builds a slow, but strong and rooted understanding of the nation's identity (Khayitov, 2020). Literature invites us to understand reality from a more humane and deeper perspective, showing how the personal experiences raised in the story actually represent the experiences of society at large.

Literary texts, as narrative representations of social and historical realities, have great potential in shaping a collective understanding of who “we” are as a national entity. Through the depiction of characters, settings, and conflicts, literary texts can instill values related to togetherness, history, and cultural heritage that shape national identity. Anderson (1991) refers to the concept of “imagined communities” as the basis of national identification, where narrative is key in creating a sense of community that transcends geographical and social class boundaries. Literary, in this framework, acts as a tool to knit these imaginary threads into a form that can be lived.

Literary works do not stand outside of history. Instead, fictional texts often record events, traumas, and the collective aspirations of the people towards their homeland. In many literatures published during the colonial or post-colonial period, a pattern can be found where writers use stories to elevate the nation's dignity that had been eroded by foreign domination. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) emphasize that postcolonial literary works contain a latent resistance to the dominant narratives of the colonizers, as well as a space where colonized people can symbolically restore their identity.

Narratives of nationhood in literary works are often structured through everyday events experienced by individuals, but are loaded with a collective dimension. Stories that frame people's struggles, concerns about injustice, or hopes for the future of the nation are able to form a shared imagination of what it means to be part of a nation. In this case, the characters in the story function not only as individuals, but as symbols of the collective identity that is being formed and negotiated. Hall (1996) shows that cultural identities are constantly constructed and reconstructed through symbolic narratives that fill the public sphere.

The importance of symbols in literary texts is a major element in the articulation of nationalism. Local symbols such as houses, land, rivers, even traditional rituals, if included in the narrative, will form a cultural archive that gives meaning to nationality intuitively. Eagleton (2000) asserts that in ideological discourse, symbols are the most powerful mechanism to create emotional attachment to an abstract idea such as nation. Literary works become a strategic medium to instill symbols of nationhood that are deeply rooted in collective memory. This process instills a sense of pride in cultural heritage, teaches values of togetherness, diversity, and the spirit of struggle. Literature is one of the most effective tools in shaping and strengthening nationalism that is rooted in people's daily lives and history.

The journey of the characters in the story also represents the dynamics of social change experienced by society. Often, the main character in a national text has a trajectory that represents the nation's collective struggle-from suffering to liberation, from confusion to awareness. This kind of narrative has great transformative power because it is able to touch the emotional layers of readers and lead them to self-definition within a collective framework.

The relationship between literary and nationalism is not always affirmative. In some cases, literary texts critique exclusive constructions of nationhood. For example, in a study by Brennan (1990), nationalism in postcolonial literature is often accompanied by questions of inclusivity, justice and power relations. Literary is also a dialectical space where the meaning of nationality is constantly tested and reconstructed.

Literary has the unique power to connect generations, serving as a bridge between the past and the present. Literary works passed down from one period to the next not only hold aesthetic value, but also play an important role in maintaining the continuity of national identity. Through stories involving history, heroic figures or local myths, literary is able to convey the collective experience of a nation, allowing younger generations to understand and appreciate their cultural heritage. In this way, literary becomes an effective tool for building a strong sense of community and identity among members of a community.

Stories in literary works often reflect the values and norms of a community. For example, stories about heroes who fought for independence or myths that explain the origins of a region can provide inspiration and motivation for the next generation. These works not only serve as entertainment, but also as a source of learning that teaches the importance of courage, sacrifice, and love of country. As such, literary works play a role in shaping individual character and identity, which in turn contributes to the formation of the nation's collective identity.

Hobsbawm's (1992) view asserts that narratively organized traditions have a longer staying power than administrative regulations. This is due to the fact that narratives in literary works touch a deeper affective awareness, creating an emotional bond between the reader and the story. When one is emotionally connected to a literary work, they are more likely to remember and pass on the values contained in it. This is in contrast to administrative regulations that are often perceived as rigid and impersonal, thus less able to evoke a sense of ownership and attachment.

Literary works also serve as a medium to discuss social and political issues that are relevant to the context of the times. Literary works often reflect the challenges and changes faced by the community, providing space for reflection and dialogue between generations. In this way, literary is not only a means to preserve tradition, but also to criticize and evaluate existing social conditions. This allows younger generations to learn from past experiences and apply those lessons in a more modern context.

Literary works also have the ability to adapt and reinterpret old stories in new forms, so that they remain relevant to the times. For example, contemporary writers can take elements from myth or history and rework them into narratives that are relevant to current issues. This process not only enriches the literary repertoire, but also ensures that the values contained in these stories remain alive and accessible to new generations. As such, literary functions as a dynamic medium, able to bridge the past and the present. Finally, the power of literary in connecting generations lies in its ability to create space for dialogue between generations. Through the reading and discussion of literary works, older generations can share their experiences and knowledge with younger generations, while younger generations can provide fresh new perspectives (Kiffli et al., 2021). This process not only strengthens bonds between generations, but also encourages a deeper understanding of the identities and values that shape society. Literary works are not only a cultural heritage, but also a tool to build a better future through understanding and appreciating the past (Ette, 2011).

The role of education is a determining factor in the effectiveness of literary as an identity-forming medium. A curriculum that includes culturally strong literary works has great potential in shaping students' understanding of national values. As highlighted by Apple (2004), text selection in the education system is often controlled by ideological interests rather than cultural considerations. This indicates the need for a critical evaluation of the literary text selection system in educational institutions.

Apart from being a medium of expression, literary works are also a means of social documentation. Many works of fiction provide accurate descriptions of the social and psychological state of a nation in transition. For example, during times of reform and regime change, literary texts become symbolic archives that record popular unrest and hopes for renewal. As collective emotional records, such texts have enormous cultural value in maintaining national memory.

In the public sphere, literary works are often used as a symbolic consolidation tool in times of crisis. When the nation experiences external threats or internal conflicts, narratives told in poetry, novels or drama can help strengthen social solidarity. Based on the research by Jameson (1991), national fiction in developing countries is often presented as a collective project that directs people's awareness towards historical structures and collective interests that are at stake.

In today's digital age, literary forms and mediums are transforming. The emergence of digital literature and online narrative platforms opens up new possibilities for the dissemination and strengthening of national identities. Challenges arise when information globalization infiltrates transnational values that can undermine local narratives. An exploration of new forms of literary in the digital landscape is important to see how national identities are maintained or even reformulated in virtual spaces.

Finally, an understanding of literary as a tool of national representation must be framed within the realization that nationality is not a static entity. National identity is constantly in motion, negotiated and reconstructed. Literary works, with their narrative flexibility, are able to follow these dynamics more sensitively than other media. Examining the relationship between literary and nationality, then, is an attempt to understand how a nation sees, feels and defines itself over time.

CONCLUSION

Literary works have a strategic function in the process of forming national awareness because they are able to convey national ideas through symbolic language that touches the emotional, historical and cultural dimensions of the community. Literary works reflect social reality, and actively contribute to shaping the way a nation understands itself. Narratives about history, collective struggles and local values in literary texts become an important foundation for the process of collective identification within the framework of nationhood. Analysis of literary texts reveals that the imagination of the nation is continuously shaped, passed on and negotiated through the narrative structures and cultural symbols they contain.

The results of this research show that an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis and nationality studies is essential to broaden the understanding of national identity construction. Literary works are capable of organically bridging the space between policy,

history, and the lived experiences of citizens. An understanding of nationhood must take into account the narrative dimension built into literary texts as an affective foundation that strengthens a sense of togetherness in diversity. This research invites educational institutions, researchers, and policy makers to recognize the strategic position of literature in the symbolic development of the nation.

The education system needs to provide more space for local and national literary works to be taught reflectively, not just as aesthetic reading material. The selection of texts embedded in primary to secondary education should consider the representative dimensions of history, social values and national aspirations. Community-based literary documentation and archives need to be built so that works that represent local identities do not drown in the expansion of global popular culture. Literary archives allow works to be studied and understood in the context of local and wider cultural conversations. Literary research also needs to be encouraged as a relevant source of knowledge in the dynamics of modern national discourse.

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