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Haunted Environments: Political Violence and Ecologies of Memory in Ayu Utami's *Larung* and Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Kalatidha*

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Political violence damages bodies, historical records, and environments mediating the past. This article examines Ayu Utami's *Larung* and Seno Gumira Ajidarma's *Kalatidha* through comparative close reading informed by haunting studies, material ecocriticism, and environmental approaches to cultural memory. Interconnected episodes involve family remembrance, cave hydrology, bamboo vegetation, psychiatric confinement, documentary fragments, and commercial redevelopment. Three mechanisms emerge: environmental dispersal of victims' traces, restricted remembrance and credibility, and destruction of settings sustaining sensory attachment to the past. *Larung* links embodied intergenerational transmission, hydrological disposal narratives, and activists' renewed political vulnerability. *Kalatidha* juxtaposes spectral persistence with institutional abuse and the loss of bamboo and fog beneath a shopping mall. Haunting reveals unresolved violence without guaranteeing reliable testimony, protection, or repair. The proposed ecology of memory is a vulnerable relation among material carriers, situated perceivers, and conditions of recognition, advancing comparative understanding of political and environmental harm in Indonesian fiction.

INTRODUCTION

This article compares Ayu Utami's Larung (2001) and Seno Gumira Ajidarma's Kalatidha (2007) to examine how material environments, spectral presences, and fragmented memories mediate the remembrance of political violence in Indonesia. Drawing on the historical context of the 1965–1966 anti-communist violence and its continuing social consequences, the article investigates how violence disrupts the relationships between people, places, and memories. In Larung, the absence of a father's body, the grandmother's physical presence, and stories of victims carried through underground waterways reveal how loss and remembrance coexist. In Kalatidha, the narrator's attachment to a bamboo forest, graves, uncertain voices, and memories of violence demonstrates how environments sustain personal and collective memories. The forest's transformation into a shopping mall illustrates how environmental destruction can sever these connections, even when spectral figures continue to appear.

Previous scholarship has examined the novels through trauma, political history, archives, gender, religious authority, madness, intertextuality, and narrative interpretation. Studies of Larung have explored historical trauma, activist repression, patriarchal domination, feminist resistance, and tensions between urban activists and marginalized communities. Research on Kalatidha has investigated political conflict, institutional stigmatization, women's struggles, and the novel's intertextual and interpretive dimensions. Building on these contributions, the present article focuses specifically on how material traces and continuing presences become meaningful through relationships between individuals and their environments. It distinguishes the survival of a physical or spectral sign from the preservation of an effective relationship of remembrance.

The article also contributes to a broader research project examining ten Indonesian novels and their representations of landscapes, access, circulation, and relational worlds. Unlike earlier studies emphasizing extractable landscapes or the circulation of social relationships, this comparison investigates how political violence reorganizes the conditions under which memories can be preserved, communicated, and recognized. Although both novels belong to the project's provisional urban cluster, their mnemonic environments extend across domestic, rural, subterranean, maritime, and urban spaces. These settings demonstrate that remembrance cannot be restricted to geographical categories.

The analysis addresses three central questions: how material and sensory environments mediate encounters with political violence; how silence, documentary loss, institutional classification, and redevelopment influence who can remember and be believed; and what unresolved hauntings reveal about the limitations of historical and ecological repair. The comparison recognizes that neither novel should be treated as a direct historical record, since both combine recognizable historical references with fictional situations, supernatural possibilities, and retrospective narration. It also maintains distinctions between different historical experiences rather than reducing every grave, disappearance, or spectral presence to the violence of 1965–1966.

Ultimately, the article argues that political violence damages not only human lives but also the relationships that make the past accessible and

meaningful. Memories depend on environments, witnesses, material traces, and opportunities for recognition. When these connections are destroyed, the persistence of ghosts or surviving documents does not necessarily restore what has been lost. By comparing Larung and Kalatidha, the article demonstrates that meaningful remembrance requires more than the survival of traces: it requires sustaining the social, material, and environmental relationships through which suppressed histories can be encountered, acknowledged, and responsibly remembered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Haunting and the Continuing Force of Violence

Gordon (2008) conceptualizes haunting as the persistence of unresolved social violence in the present, emphasizing how past injustices disrupt everyday life and demand recognition. Building on Davis (2005), the analysis distinguishes supernatural appearances from family secrets, absent bodies, and institutional exclusion rather than treating all forms of haunting as identical. Dean et al. (2026) further highlight the methodological value and limitations of haunting as a framework for understanding violent histories, emphasizing that knowledge must remain sensitive to specific cultural and historical contexts. Accordingly, haunting is used as an interpretive approach to unresolved violence rather than proof of the literal existence of ghosts. Drawing on Craps (2013) and Sears (2013), the article also recognizes the ethical challenges of witnessing, the limitations of universal trauma theories, and the unequal representation of suffering. This approach avoids speaking on behalf of survivors, diagnosing fictional characters, or treating literary accusations as independently verified historical facts.

Material Relations and Environmental Approaches to Memory

Material ecocriticism examines how matter, agency, and narrative interact in shaping experiences of memory and loss (Iovino & Oppermann, 2012, 2014). In this study, natural elements and material objects, including water, vegetation, soil, photographs, and paper, influence how traces of violence are preserved, displaced, or erased. Environmental memory scholarship further connects remembrance with ecological conditions, environmental violence, and the built environment (Craps et al., 2018; Gülüm et al., 2024; Knittel, 2023; Leworthy, 2024). Memory, however, does not reside in places or objects independently. As Nora (1989) and Erll (2011) suggest, remembering depends on collective practices, encounters, interpretation, and the transmission of traces. Physical movement does not necessarily ensure meaningful communication or recognition. Although social-ecological memory research emphasizes the continuity of knowledge and practices within environmental systems (Cardoso et al., 2025), this article focuses on how literary representations reveal disruptions in the relationships connecting material traces, people, and remembrance. It argues that memory can be damaged even when physical traces survive, particularly when the social and environmental conditions necessary for recognizing and transmitting them have been destroyed.

Situated Knowledge and the Conditions of Care

Ardisa (2025) examines environmental memory in Osing (Using) culture in Banyuwangi, demonstrating how springs, vegetation, landscapes, and irrigation practices sustain intergenerational memory and collective identity. The loss of natural features can therefore weaken the social relationships and cultural meanings associated with them. Similarly, Hidayat et al. (2026) and Nashah and Sari (2026) explore how environmental relationships influence the transmission of cultural values and historical memory in different contexts. These studies provide comparative perspectives for understanding how remembrance depends on material and social environments. Furthermore, Till (2012), DeSilvey (2017), and Whigham (2024) emphasize place-based care, the limitations of preservation, and the preventive significance of memory spaces. Together, these perspectives encourage an examination of what surviving traces make possible and whether they restore meaningful relationships. The central argument is that preserving a physical trace, memorial object, or suppressed narrative does not automatically guarantee safety, justice, or recovery; meaningful remembrance also requires sustaining the social and environmental relationships through which memory acquires significance.

Conceptual Synthesis

An ecology of memory is defined here as a vulnerable relation among three elements: material carriers or settings; situated perceivers; and conditions of recognition. Carriers and settings include bodies, water, soil, vegetation, buildings, and documents. Situated perceivers include kin, witnesses, and narrators whose knowledge is shaped by sensory access and narrative position. Conditions of recognition include access, credibility, bodily protection, and practices of care. The three elements are interdependent, but their survival is uneven: a carrier may persist without a recognized witness, or a remembered presence may continue after its environment has been removed.

Figure 1 summarizes this framework. Political violence and its afterlives are examined through changes in these relationships, with attention to trace displacement, restricted recognition, and transformed environments of attachment. These are analytical questions tested against the narratives, including counterexamples and asymmetries between the novels. Haunting identifies the continued perceptibility of unresolved injury; repair asks which relationships of access, recognition, and protection have become possible again. The figure organizes comparative reading rather than a statistical causal model.

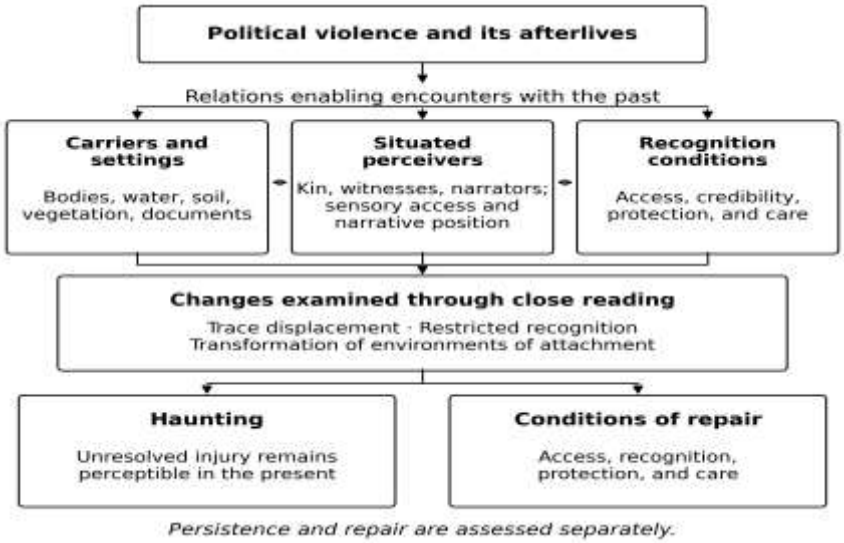


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, comparative close-reading method, viewing interpretation as an evidence-based practice grounded in the relationship between textual details and arguments (Kramnick, 2023). Ohrvik's (2024) approach guides the iterative examination of language, form, genre, and context. Morgan (2022) underscores the importance of document selection and acknowledges the limitations of existing texts; the analysis remains situated within a literary framework rather than attempting to evaluate these documents merely as transparent historical records. The primary sources for this research are the novels *Larung* and *Kalatidha*. Copyright information indicates that the edition of *Larung* used is the fourth printing (May 2013) (following its initial publication in November 2001) while the edition of *Kalatidha* is the third printing (April 2026) (following its initial publication in January 2007). In this analysis, these editions are cited as Utami (2013) and Ajidarma (2026), with all page references corresponding to the pagination printed in the books themselves. The preliminary matter and the introductory material for the 2026 edition of *Kalatidha* are excluded from the discussion of narrative evidence that follows.

A text-tracing method was employed to locate passages addressing topics such as violence, enforced disappearance, graves, water, vegetation, confinement, documents, and redevelopment. The screening process identified interconnected sequences of events (encompassing memories of violence, missing persons, encounters with supernatural figures, environmental changes, and the emergence or disappearance of evidence). The selected passages were re-examined and re-read within the context of their surrounding narrative arcs. Selection was purposive: an event qualified if it involved a material or institutional connection explaining how the violence became visible, obscured, inherited, or displaced. Mere passing references to trees or supernatural entities were insufficient. The resulting working list comprised 24 event clusters (12 from each novel) serving as contextual reference points for comparison. These clusters represent chosen interpretive units rather than a frequency-based sample or an

exhaustive tally of every relevant text segment. The clusters encompass topics such as the figure of the grandmother and childhood memories, tales of caves, the arrest of activists, bamboo forests and burning houses, the treatment of a surviving twin, newspaper clippings, and the construction of a shopping mall.

The unit of analysis is an episode or a connected passage sequence. Each reading records four aspects: the carrier or setting of remembrance; the perceiver and narrative position; the action affecting the relationship; and the interpretive limit. This preserves distinctions between bodily memory, a tangible document, a narrated rumor, and an analyst's inference. The procedure draws on the systematic development and revision of interpretive themes described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), while keeping close reading as the principal method. Coding connects descriptive observations with revised comparative categories; themes are interpretative constructions. Contextual rereading, cross-episode comparison, and counterexamples supply the principal checks. Passage frequency and inter-coder agreement are not used to validate the interpretations. Following Dean et al. (2026), attention to haunting remains situated within the text's knowledge relations and does not authorize the analyst to settle supernatural ontology.

Analysis proceeded through three interdependent activities. First, the selected sequences were described in their narrative order, retaining indications of uncertainty, retrospective distance, and hearsay. Second, relationships were compared within each novel, particularly between an apparent survival of memory and a later disruption of its material support. Third, cross-novel comparison tested whether similar analytical mechanisms operated through different carriers and institutions. Interpretations were revised when adjacent passages contradicted an initial reading. For example, the bulldozer's failure to destroy the child's grave in *Kalatidha* was read together with the later excavation that removes the mound. Likewise, the grandmother's practical knowledge in *Larung* was considered alongside her troubling account of survival through sacrificing others.

Historical and theoretical literature provides context and conceptual orientation; it does not authenticate every narrated detail. The cave testimony is analysed as Suprihatin's account within *Larung*, not as independent proof of a disposal site. Newspaper fragments in *Kalatidha* are analysed in their fictional arrangement; their correspondence to external newspaper originals has not been systematically verified. The analysis similarly distinguishes a woman's institutional designation as "mad" from a clinical diagnosis that this study is neither equipped nor intended to make. These controls are especially necessary where supernatural narration offers knowledge beyond ordinary observation.

The project's broader interest in the use of ethnoscience offers a comparative horizon for relational thinking. Ardisa's (2025) work serves as a secondary source regarding the environmental memory of the Osing community. This study does not present the community observations contained in that book as fieldwork conducted specifically for this comparison, nor does it assume that the novels reflect identical local cosmologies. Brief excerpts are translated here, while retaining the original Indonesian terms where doing so clarifies a crucial

interpretive point. Table 1 summarizes the operational questions employed during this reading process.

Table 1. Operational Relations for Comparative Close Reading

Analytical Relation	Textual Question	Interpretive Control
Carrier or setting	What body, object, material process, or place makes a past available?	Specify its operation; do not assume that all matter remembers.
Situated perception	Who encounters the trace, and through what sensory or narrative access?	Separate observation, recollection, hearsay, and supernatural narration.
Conditions of recognition	What permits or prevents access, credibility, and protection?	Relate silence and classification to concrete social arrangements.
Transformation and limit	What persists, disappears, or becomes inaccessible?	Read later disruptions alongside apparent resistance or survival.

RESULTS

Comparative close reading yields five interconnected groups of findings. The groups describe the narrative operation of sensory attachment, trace displacement, institutional and documentary recognition, spectral retaliation, and environmental loss. Together they support three comparative mechanisms developed in the discussion: dispersal of traces, restricted recognition, and the loss or vulnerability of settings that sustain attachment. Their distribution is uneven across the two novels.

Sensory Attachment and the Unequal Transmission of Memory

The analysis examines how Larung by Ayu Utami and Kalatidha by Seno Gumira Ajidarma represent memory, ecological relationships, and historical violence through childhood experiences. In Larung, the grandmother's instruction to forget the father's disappearance demonstrates how silence functions simultaneously as protection and repression. Her teachings about consuming larvae transmit practical ecological knowledge and human interdependence, but they also raise ethical questions when survival is used to justify violence against others. The novel connects personal memories with hunger, environmental disaster, economic inequality, anti-Chinese violence, and anti-communist violence while maintaining distinctions between historical events.

In Kalatidha, the narrator's attachment to fog and bamboo forests presents the environment as an essential part of personal identity. The forest and its surrounding atmosphere provide a space where childhood experiences, uncertain memories, and historical violence intersect. The graves and recollections of suffering gradually transform this sensory attachment into a relationship with an unresolved past.

Both novels demonstrate that memory develops through relationships with human and nonhuman environments. However, Larung emphasizes intergenerational transmission through the grandmother's physical presence and speech, whereas Kalatidha highlights ecological attachment as a means of sustaining personal experience amid limited historical recognition. Together, the novels suggest that relationships transmit not only knowledge and belonging but also silence, ethical uncertainty, and unresolved historical trauma.

Water, Soil, and the Environmental Dispersal of Victims' Traces

The analysis compares how Larung by Ayu Utami and Kalatidha by Seno Gumira Ajidarma portray environmental processes as material conditions shaping historical memory and disappearance. In Larung, Suprihatin's account of victims taken to a cave describes how underground water carries bodies toward a river and eventually the sea, preventing identification, burial, and commemoration. Although this narrative explains a mechanism of disappearance during the violence associated with 1966, it does not establish the fate of Larung's father. The cave also remains dangerous, demonstrating that encounters with traumatic history do not necessarily provide certainty or safety.

In Kalatidha, the destruction of a bamboo forest and the excavation of a grave mound illustrate how development can erase physical traces of the past. Although a bulldozer initially fails to remove the mound, subsequent excavation carries its soil to an unknown destination. This displacement destroys the grave's recognizable location and complicates future remembrance.

Both novels show that memory depends on material traces and the places where people can locate, identify, and commemorate them. However, Larung emphasizes the dispersal of human remains through flowing water, while Kalatidha focuses on the displacement of soil and the destruction of a memorial landscape. Their comparison reveals how environmental processes can make historical loss difficult to recover without equating political massacre with redevelopment or treating nature itself as responsible for human violence.

Houses, Institutions, and Documents: Controlling Recognition

Material survival alone cannot explain whether a person or trace will be recognized. *Kalatidha* extends the aftermath of the burning house through the surviving twin's exclusion. With relatives killed and identifying documents destroyed, her claim to a former home becomes vulnerable. Others occupy the house, and her presence disturbs their settled life. Her removal to a psychiatric institution restores that household's ordinary order by placing the survivor elsewhere (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 35–41). The house is therefore a setting in which one group's security depends on the disappearance of another person's unresolved claim.

The novel's descriptions of madness participate in this arrangement. The woman is not treated as an authoritative interlocutor whose account might complicate ownership and belonging. Her institutional designation makes removal appear as care while facilitating exclusion. Transfer from the contested house to an institution changes who can encounter her and what obligations her

presence might generate. This finding concerns the narrative's particular spatial and social arrangements; it does not assign a retrospective clinical diagnosis.

The institutional scenes expose the gap between protective designation and lived protection. The woman is handled as an object and subjected to sexual abuse by people positioned to care for her (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 40–41, 69–73). The narrator explicitly cannot render the entirety of her experience. This limit should prevent the analyst from occupying her perspective without qualification. Bodily harm and the denial of an authoritative voice therefore continue after the family's destruction.

The surviving and dead twins are linked through spectral narration, yet this relation initially fails to stop the abuse. Only later does the revenge sequence transform their relation into a capacity for violent retaliation (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 91–99). Reading these stages together prevents supernatural connection from being mistaken for continuous protection. Haunting can register the existence of a wrong before any effective response becomes available. It can also intensify the wrong's visibility without producing a socially accountable process for addressing it. The survivor's case thus illustrates a loss in the conditions of recognition, rather than merely an absence of memory.

Documentary objects offer another route through the same problem. The narrator's sister assembles newspaper clippings in an accounting book, producing a scrapbook that he later continues to read. Her own disappearance, under the label of Gerwani, changes the relationship between collection and collector: the surviving object carries traces of public discourse while the person who organized it is absent (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 25–30, 101–102). The book's yellowing and prolonged retention make memory a practice of material keeping. This does not mean that every clipping speaks transparently. Arrangement, the narrator's discontinuous reading, and the difference between reported claims and lived events remain part of its significance.

Larung represents related difficulties through photographs and a retelling of Calon Arang. A photograph and associated correspondence help connect Larung's inquiry about his grandmother to Suprihatin, making an object a prompt for movement and questioning (Utami, 2013, pp. 22–25). In the mythic sequence, the chroniclers do not record Manjali's tears. Her writing is absorbed into paper's fibres and becomes unreadable (Utami, 2013, p. 44). Material retention and legibility separate: a trace can be incorporated without being accessible as an acknowledged account. This is a narrated critique of the selection through which histories become writable, not evidence that Manjali was a witness to the twentieth-century killings. The photograph, the scrapbook, and the unreadable tears make different relationships between retention and recognition visible.

Spectral Justice and The Limits of Moral Certainty

The revenge narrative in *Kalatidha* seems to promise a response to institutional and communal violence that ordinary social arrangements have failed to provide. The force associated with the dead child and surviving twin pursues those involved in abuse and the destruction of the family, extending

responsibility toward people who witnessed the burning (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 91–118). The expansion disrupts a moral map restricted to an immediately identifiable assailant. It brings the non-intervening observer and the beneficiary of another person's removal into the horizon of accountability.

The novel also frustrates a simple celebration of retaliation. Its killings are mediated through stylized descriptions and uncertain attribution, while the relation between the twins, bodies, and agencies remains strange. Revenge makes suppressed injury consequential, but its own violence does not establish a trustworthy procedure of judgment. A reader may recognize the demand for accountability while resisting the idea that spectral power guarantees proportionality or moral clarity. This distinction is consistent with the article's broader separation of the persistence of a demand from the achievement of repair.

The encounter with the final elderly target sharpens this difficulty. His refusal to accept the ghost's authority is followed by the arrival of a grandchild and, later, his own tears of remembrance (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 117–118). The scene interrupts the trajectory of killing without authorizing the analyst to pronounce either acquittal or reconciliation. Domestic vulnerability and remembered grief enter a situation organized by revenge. The past remains active, yet its resolution cannot be inferred from the interruption of a death. The episode makes a demand for memory and responsibility coexist with the limits of deciding another person's fate.

Ethical ambiguity is equally important in *Larung*. The grandmother's protective role and knowledge of bodily interdependence do not erase her tendency to naturalize sacrifice. Suprihatin's account exposes denunciation and mutual distrust, while the cave encounter leaves his guidance open to question. Later exchanges around activism likewise contain disagreement about political action and the recurrent violence of regimes (Utami, 2013, pp. 250–253). These positions belong to particular speakers. Their variation complicates the relation between fatalism and political action without establishing that all parties are equally responsible for violence.

The final capture brings the problem of responsibility into a different sensory form. In the maritime escape sequence, the captives' restricted vision gives voices, physical sensation, and the sounds of gunfire particular weight. The narrative culminates in shots, falls, and silence, strongly implying killing without furnishing a recovered body or an unrestricted view of the scene (Utami, 2013, pp. 284–295). This ending makes the reader encounter a limit comparable to Larung's childhood knowledge of his father: disappearance and lethal threat organize what can be known, while an absent body prevents closure. The later sequence renews vulnerability rather than merely repeating a complete historical record.

Spectral Persistence After Environmental Loss

The shopping mall provides the clearest test of the distinction between haunting and recovery. After the grave's removal, stories continue to circulate about a girl in white carrying a white cat. She appears among shoppers, and

employees and guards become witnesses to unsettling encounters (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 166–168). The narrative thereby prevents commercial redevelopment from entirely containing the site's unresolved past. The new building can organize consumption and circulation, yet it cannot make its space free of disturbing presences. This is a form of spectral persistence, but the novel supplies no grounds for treating it as the return of the former forest.

The social arrangement around the mall makes that distinction concrete. Nearby houses remain standing; the narrative does not describe their demolition. Exclusion instead operates through a high rear wall, controlled entry, construction disturbance, and the residents' inability to afford the goods sold inside (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 164–166). The promise of parking facilities and employment coexists with a built form that turns its back on the surrounding community. Remembered violence is thus encountered within an environment that reorganizes everyday access as well as material traces.

The narrator's loss is still more specific. The destruction of the bamboo forest ends the availability of the fog-filled world through which he previously experienced freedom and attachment. By the end of the sequence, he cannot summon that environment as before and confronts the cold, moss-covered wall of his prison (Ajidarma, 2026, pp. 169–171). It would therefore be inaccurate to argue that the spirit's continuing appearances prove the indestructibility of memory. The novel distributes mnemonic survival unevenly: a spectral figure remains narratable, while an embodied way of inhabiting the world becomes unavailable to the person who had depended on it.

The girl's appearance does not restore roots, worms, the grave's location, the narrator's former sensory attachments, or the survivor's protection. These losses remain differentiated: the narrative supplies continuing spectral encounters and the simultaneous failure to regain a former environment. The finding is not that all memory has vanished, but that the survival of one presence cannot demonstrate the recovery of its associated relationships.

Larung offers a related but differently organized pattern. The grandmother's body, speech, food practices, and associated objects continue to connect the protagonist with a past that cannot be fully verified. The cave account extends remembrance into a material route of disappearance. The final maritime capture, however, renews the prospect that bodies will again become unavailable to those seeking them. The comparison thus differentiates environmental removal from the continued force of violence: *Kalatidha* dramatizes the loss of an environment of attachment under redevelopment, while *Larung* places inherited recollection beside the reproduction of conditions that threaten future remembrance. Table 2 condenses these convergences and differences.

Table 2. Comparative Mechanisms and Limits of Mnemonic Repair

Mechanism	*Larung*	*Kalatidha*
Dispersal of traces	Suprihatin recounts victims carried from a cave through water toward the sea (pp. 38–40).	Foundation excavation removes the child's grave with discarded soil (p. 166).
Restricted recognition	Domestic protection involves a command to forget; mythical tears remain outside readable history (pp. 15, 44).	Political labeling, destroyed documents, and institutional classification limit the survivor's claims (pp. 35–41, 101–102).
Vulnerable attachment and transmission	Bodily presence and food practices transmit reciprocity alongside silence and fatalism (pp. 15, 69–78).	A scrapbook outlasts its collector, while the forest's removal ends a sensory relation despite spectral persistence (pp. 101–102, 166–171).
Limit of repair	The maritime capture renews the threat of disappearance and killing (pp. 284–295).	Haunting continues, while environmental attachment and bodily protection remain damaged (pp. 69–73, 169–171).

DISCUSSION

From Haunted Locations to Relationships of Remembrance

The comparison extends haunting studies by showing how disturbance depends on relationships that can be interrupted independently. Gordon's (2008) account explains why an apparently settled present remains troubled by unresolved violence. The novels specify how that disturbance reaches someone: through a grandmother's body and speech, a cave guide's account, a collected clipping, or a forest whose fog makes a remembered presence available. A haunted location is thus a point of encounter within a wider arrangement of material support, situated perception, and recognition. This relational specification develops existing archive and testimony readings of Utami (Sears, 2007, 2013) rather than replacing them.

The distinction also clarifies the ecological expansion of memory studies (Craps et al., 2018; Gülüm et al., 2024). The analysis concerns changes in the conditions of remembering, including the environments through which something can be seen, heard, sought, or retained. The river's dispersal of bodily traces and the scrapbook's material retention have different effects. Material ecocriticism helps articulate that difference because agency and narrativity are relational capacities rather than a single property assigned equally to all objects (Iovino & Oppermann, 2012, 2014). The interpretive contribution lies in specifying what each material relation does and how its effects intersect with social power.

Nora (1989) and Erll (2011) provide complementary checks on treating traces as permanently secured deposits. A grave without an accessible place, or a document without a recognized account, does not become a complete memory

site merely by surviving. Likewise, a trace's physical movement is not necessarily the successful transmission of memory. The bodies in Suprihatin's account move toward the sea while their individual identification remains unavailable; the clippings circulate as public language, but their collector disappears. The comparison shifts attention from the presence of a carrier to the viability of its relationships with people and interpretive practices. Bodden's (2016) account of relational gaps across urban and rural worlds sharpens this point for *Larung*: spatial movement can connect settings while leaving unequal credibility and understanding intact.

This emphasis also distinguishes the argument from a generalized resilience claim. Cardoso et al. (2025) examine social-ecological memory as a potential resource for renewal and reorganization. In these novels, however, persistence can coexist with reduced access, renewed danger, or an irrecoverable environment. Haunting is therefore not a sufficient indicator of resilience. The continuing child at the mall and the narrator's loss of the fog-world are analytically inseparable precisely because they demonstrate different outcomes within a damaged ecology of memory.

Material Displacement and the Afterlives of Political Violence

The material comparison identifies three linked mechanisms. First, violence can enlist an environment to disperse victims' traces beyond places where relatives might seek them. Second, social arrangements can withhold credibility and protection from those who remain. Third, subsequent transformation can dismantle a setting through which a past was sensorially available. These mechanisms intersect without sharing an identical chronology or perpetrator. The disposal described in *Larung* belongs to an account of mass violence; the mall excavation in *Kalatidha* belongs to later redevelopment. Their comparison concerns how traces become detached from recognizable locations, not a legal equivalence between killing and construction.

Knittel's (2023) dialogue between environmental violence and implication supports this attention to entangled harms. Historical work establishes the political organization and social consequences of the Indonesian killings (Melvin, 2018; Roosa, 2020), while the novels represent encounters with absences that their characters cannot resolve through such documentation. Reading the fiction in that historical horizon does not authenticate the cave route or identify every grave. The distinction between recognizing a narrated mechanism and verifying an individual fate preserves the evidentiary difference between historical research and literary interpretation.

Kluwick's (2024) discussion of haunting and water offers a useful comparison for the variety of water's narrative capacities. In *Larung*, those capacities include circulation, concealment, danger, and the limits of a listener's knowledge. The natural movement of water is enlisted in a violent arrangement rather than substituted for human responsibility. This qualification is equally necessary when reading excavated soil: matter's relocation has mnemonic consequences because a socially meaningful relationship has been broken, not because the soil independently chooses to erase a victim.

Redevelopment also changes the conditions of ordinary participation. The mall's rear wall and unaffordable goods reorganize access for surrounding residents while the spectral child continues to appear within the new commercial setting. Leworthy (2024) directs attention to the mnemonic significance of construction materials and built forms. Bond and Rapson's (2024) analysis of selective industrial remembrance supplies a comparative question about who benefits from narratives of progress. The histories remain distinct, but both perspectives sharpen the reading of a building that can retain a disturbing presence while reducing access to the relations it has displaced.

Gendered Recognition and the Limits of Spectral Accountability

The surviving twin's treatment shows that retaining a person is different from recognizing her claim. Nurcholish (2015) makes the novel's discourse of madness visible; this study connects that discourse with spatial removal, lost identifying documents, and the continuation of abuse under the designation of care. Pohlman's (2015) research on the gendered violence of the Indonesian killings provides a historical reason to attend closely to whose injuries become publicly speakable. Fitria and Asri (2020) foreground women's struggles against patriarchal domination in *Kalatidha*. Read beside that account, the institutional episodes analysed here distinguish a narrated capacity for resistance from effective recognition and bodily protection. The fictional narrative adds a particular institutional arrangement through which a survivor's presence becomes containable while her claim remains unheard.

Female or familial agency in these novels carries conflicting ethical effects. Suharyo et al. (2025) emphasize women's resistance and discursive authority in *Larung*. Arnez and Dewojati (2010) and Kasanova et al. (2026) also make the persistence of gender hierarchies within discourses of emancipation an important interpretive problem. The grandmother's protective actions and environmental knowledge make such authority consequential, yet her command to forget and her analogy naturalizing sacrifice expose its ambivalence. Setiawan et al. (2018) identify the consequences of political conflict in *Kalatidha*; the present reading further asks how those consequences persist through property claims and institutional recognition. In both novels, a relationship must be evaluated through what it permits and what it restricts, not through intimacy or continuity alone.

Rothberg's (2019) account of implication helps distinguish responsibility beyond direct assault. Abusive staff, occupants benefiting from a survivor's removal, and witnesses to a burning do not occupy identical positions. The revenge sequence brings those positions into a shared horizon of accountability while leaving their differences unresolved. Davis's (2005) account of spectral criticism and Craps's (2013) attention to the boundaries of witnessing caution against making the ghost's force equivalent to reliable judgment. Recognizing a demand for justice does not establish that violent retaliation supplies a proportionate or publicly accountable response.

Steenbrink (2014) identifies traditional spirituality and activist repression among *Larung*'s thematic strands. That juxtaposition provides a context for

examining how the novels' different narrative forms mediate moral authority and uncertainty. The final encounter with the elderly man introduces a grandchild and tears, interrupting killing without demonstrating reconciliation. The maritime ending of *Larung* places the reader amid restricted sight, gunfire, falling bodies, and silence, strongly implying death without furnishing recovered bodies. Supernatural access in one novel and restricted focalization in the other give readers different kinds of proximity to suffering. These formal operations explain why uncertainty is part of the findings rather than an obstacle removed by theory. They also show how the threat to recognition can be renewed across generations.

Environmental Care and the Difference Between Persistence and Repair

Ngerumat Sumber gives the argument a situated comparative horizon. Ardisa (2025, pp. 80–84, 99–104) connects spring names, vegetation, irrigation arrangements, and recurring practices with Osing collective memory. His account indicates why remembering is sustained by continued relationships with places and the work of maintaining them. This helps clarify what the mall sequence removes: not merely a vegetation symbol, but a setting through which a perceiver's self-experience had become possible. It also foregrounds a difference between a recognizable name or apparition and the continued availability of an inhabitable environment.

The comparison is limited to that relational proposition. Ardisa's account does not authenticate the novels' ghosts, establish an Osing cosmology within their narratives, or convert published community observations into this article's field data. Rather, it helps identify the practical and intergenerational dimensions of mnemonic care. Hidayat et al. (2026) similarly analyse transmission as a social-ecological mechanism in Repong Damar governance. The grandmother's combination of reciprocal knowledge and fatalistic justification illustrates why the content and ethical effects of transmission still require evaluation. Continuity alone cannot establish care.

Nashah and Sari's (2026) IJIS discussion links ecological transformation to damage to prophetic memory in a different cultural and theological setting. Read alongside Ardisa (2025), it strengthens an interdisciplinary question: which material relationships must remain available for a remembered world to be encountered? The novels supply their own answers through bodily presence, legible fragments, recognizable locations, and sensory attachment. Their asymmetry is productive: *Kalatidha* represents the destruction of an environment of attachment, whereas *Larung* places inherited knowledge beside a renewed threat of disappearance. The framework must accommodate both rather than turn them into identical stories of landscape loss.

Till's (2012) place-based ethics of care and DeSilvey's (2017) critique of preservation as a final answer make repair a question of relationships rather than retained objects alone. Kusumaningrum et al. (2022) show how relational encounters at sites of violence can reopen intergenerational conversations; Whigham (2024) evaluates memory spaces through activities that mitigate risks of renewed violence. Those studies concern practices outside the present fictional

corpus. They nonetheless supply useful criteria for identifying what the novels leave unresolved: bodily safety, meaningful access, the possibility of being heard, and relationships that can sustain remembrance without reproducing harm.

The theoretical contribution is therefore a comparative specification of memory's vulnerable conditions. A trace can persist while its recognition is denied; a ghost can return while a meaningful environment remains lost; familial knowledge can continue while transmitting an ethically troubling analogy. The article develops environmental memory scholarship through these localized textual contrasts and extends existing studies of the novels by distinguishing spectral persistence from relational repair. A functioning ecology of memory requires more than surviving signs: it requires relationships through which those signs can be encountered, interpreted, and acknowledged.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Larung and *Kalatidha* represent political violence through damaged relationships among people, material traces, and the environments in which a past can be encountered. In *Larung*, a grandmother's continuing presence and environmental knowledge coexist with enforced silence, uncertainty about a missing father, and a cave account of bodies dispersed by water. The late maritime capture renews the threat that violent death will again be withheld from full recognition. In *Kalatidha*, bamboo, fog, graves, a surviving twin, and a newspaper scrapbook sustain different encounters with violence, while institutional exclusion and redevelopment undermine their conditions of recognition and access.

The comparison identifies environmental dispersal, restricted recognition, and the destruction of environments sustaining attachment as mutually connected mechanisms. It also establishes a necessary limit: haunting can make unresolved injury perceptible without securing bodily protection, reliable testimony, a preserved environment, or justice. The continuing spectral child at the mall does not restore the grave and forest. The grandmother's intimacy does not make all inherited knowledge ethically reparative. These counterexamples support an ecology of memory understood as a vulnerable relation rather than a durable collection of surviving signs.

For literary scholarship, the findings recommend analysing the material operation of a setting alongside narrative position and institutional authority. For interdisciplinary discussion of memory and environment, they direct attention to the conditions that allow people to encounter traces and make claims without renewed exclusion or harm. These are analytical implications rather than a tested policy intervention. A responsible account of repair must ask what remains accessible, who can be heard, and which relationships have actually become possible again.

FURTHER STUDY

This study is limited to selected episodes within the two Indonesian novels under consideration. It does not establish the historical geographical authenticity of the caves nor externally authenticate every embedded newspaper fragment. Interpretations regarding supernatural forces rely on narrative form

rather than ontological judgments made by the analyst. Future research could compare original newspaper items with their fictional adaptations, examine translation choices that shape sensory and spectral language, and investigate how readers perceive the distinction between ghosts and remediations. Expanding the scope to a larger corpus of ten novels could test whether the three proposed mechanisms recur across mining, coastal, forest, and utility-based cultural settings. A comparative engagement with the practices documented in *Ngerumat Sumber* would require a separate research design addressing the specific knowledge and historical circumstances of that community. Such work should test the applicability of the current relational framework rather than inferring a shared cosmology based merely on similar material or supernatural motifs.

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