

The Representation of Politics in Andrea Hirata's Novel *Laskar Pelangi*: A Social, Cultural, and Applied Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract

Abstract

Background of study: The novel reveals real social inequalities, where access to quality education remains a privilege for a few, while children from underprivileged backgrounds must contend with various limitations, from inadequate school facilities to difficult family economic conditions.

Aims and scope of paper: This research explores the representation of politic in the novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata through a social and cultural analysis approach. This novel is a medium for depicting fundamental issues in Indonesian society, such as inequality in access to education, economic injustice and exploitation of natural resources

Methods: This research uses qualitative methods with a descriptive-analytical approach to explore political, social and cultural meanings in the text.

Result: The results of the analysis show that *Laskar Pelangi* not only criticizes educational policies and socio-political dynamics, but also inspires readers to reflect on the role of literature in voicing social change. In this way.

Conclusion: This novel is a reflection of the complexity of Indonesian society as well as a tool for social criticism that is relevant in the study of political and cultural literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Andrea Hirata, through his novel *Laskar Pelangi* (*The Rainbow Troops*), not only presents an inspiring story about the struggle of a group of children in Belitung to access education, but also serves as a medium that awakens collective awareness of fundamental issues within Indonesian society. The novel reveals real social inequalities, where access to quality education remains a privilege for a few, while children from underprivileged backgrounds must contend with various limitations, from inadequate school facilities to difficult family economic conditions.

Furthermore, *Laskar Pelangi* subtly explores political aspects by critiquing the disparities in educational policies and the insufficient investment in human resource development in areas abundant in natural resources (Martono, 2020). Belitung, where the novel is set, ironically stands as a tin-rich region, yet its residents continue to face poverty and lagging development. This situation reflects a broader development paradox in Indonesia, where natural resource exploitation often fails to enhance the well-being of local populations.

Culturally, the novel brings to life various unique local elements, such as Malay traditions, the natural beauty of Belitung, and rich local wisdom (Suaedi, 2021). Hirata incorporates these elements not merely as background but as an integral part of the narrative, enriching the reader's understanding of Indonesia's cultural diversity. Through detailed and poetic descriptions, readers are invited to closely experience both the beauty and the challenges faced by the people of Belitung.

While several studies have examined the novel's educational and inspirational aspects (Djaya et al., 2023; Widiasuti, 2021), fewer have addressed its political representations and how they are influenced by social and cultural elements. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a literary-political reading of the novel grounded in sociocultural analysis. The purpose of this research is to explore how political messages are embedded in the story and how culture and social context shape those messages.

This study is guided by two main research questions: (1) how are political elements represented in *Laskar Pelangi*; and (2) how do social and cultural factors shape the construction of political narratives in the novel. By addressing these questions through the lens of political literary criticism and sociocultural theory, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of literature as a medium of resistance, education, and identity reinforcement in the Indonesian context. The findings of this research are not only valuable to literary scholars but also to language educators and discourse analysts, particularly in the field of applied linguistics, where literature is used to foster critical thinking, raise social awareness, and enhance language comprehension within its sociocultural context.

METHOD

Research Design:

This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method (Purnomo, 2022). The qualitative approach is chosen because the study focuses on an in-depth analysis of a literary text specifically, Andrea Hirata's novel *Laskar Pelangi* in order to uncover the meanings, themes, and representations of political, social, and cultural elements embedded within it. The descriptive-analytical method allows the researcher to portray the phenomena present in the text while critically analyzing them through relevant theoretical perspectives.

Participants:

Since this is a literary study, it does not involve direct human participants. Instead, the data are drawn from textual elements within the novel, such as narrative structure, character development, settings, and dialogue. These elements are analyzed as symbolic representations of real social experiences, particularly those related to educational inequality, economic marginalization, and cultural identity in rural Indonesia.

Population and Methods of Sampling:

The population analyzed consists of selected passages from the novel *Laskar Pelangi* that thematically relate to political discourse, social justice, and local cultural values. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify key parts of the novel that demonstrate the tension between development and inequality, as well as the resilience of local communities. Additionally, supporting academic literature on literary criticism, education policy, and Indonesian cultural studies was reviewed to contextualize the analysis and strengthen the interpretation.

Instrumentation:

This study does not utilize empirical instruments such as surveys or interviews. Instead, it relies on qualitative textual analysis, including close reading, thematic categorization, and interpretive analysis. The interpretation process was guided by existing theoretical frameworks, particularly political literary criticism and sociocultural theory, which were employed to examine how the novel critiques structural injustice and affirms the value of local identity and solidarity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result:

This study finds that Andrea Hirata's *Laskar Pelangi* holistically represents interconnected political, social, and cultural elements that shape a complex narrative. The novel does not merely tell an individual's story; it also portrays the dynamics of marginalized communities within the context of Indonesia's socio-political and cultural realities. *Laskar Pelangi* is not merely a literary work but also a social reflection that urges its readers to contemplate the profound issues facing Indonesian society. The novel underscores the important role of literature in voicing aspirations and social critiques, while also serving as an inspiration to fight for justice and equality in all aspects of life. Set in Belitung, *Laskar Pelangi* highlights the struggle of a group of children seeking education amid limitations.

The novel not only tells individual stories but also exposes the social and political structures that influence community life in the region ([Indah Purwandari et al., 2024](#)). The depicted inequality in educational access reflects the reality of educational politics in Indonesia, where policies often fail to reach remote communities. This reveals the close relationship between literature and politics, especially in how literature can become a medium to critique policies and power structures. In addition, *Laskar Pelangi* showcases a rich cultural dimension, portraying the life of the Belitung Malay community, along with their traditions, values, and the challenges they face. These cultural aspects are inseparable from social and political analysis, as culture often underpins social dynamics and policy implementation ([Katharina Woli Namang, 2025](#)).

Hence, the novel offers a lens through which to understand how social, political, and cultural elements interact to shape a complex narrative. Political literary analysis becomes relevant in this context, providing a framework for analyzing how literary narratives reflect and influence our understanding of power, policy, and social struggle ([Baharuddin, 2024; Fahmi & Herman, 2021](#)). In the case of *Laskar Pelangi*, educational politics emerges as a central theme. Education is positioned not only as a basic right but also as a tool for social mobility and empowerment. However, the unequal access to education demonstrates how policies often fail to reach those who need them most, creating a cycle of injustice that is hard to break.

Globalization not only brings opportunities but also challenges for local communities in preserving their identity. By highlighting local values and global challenges, *Laskar Pelangi* becomes a bridge between local and universal cultures. The novel reminds readers of the importance of education, solidarity, and social justice in facing global dynamics. On the other hand, the novel also highlights the importance of solidarity, hard work, and dreams as forms of resistance against existing limitations. These messages are not only relevant on an individual level but also reflect the collective aspirations of society for change.

In other words, *Laskar Pelangi* presents a politics of hope that can inspire readers to reflect on their roles in creating a more just society. This study is also important in uncovering how the social and cultural elements within the novel shape its political representation. For instance, values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), belief in education as a pathway out of poverty, and criticism of unjust social structures all offer insight into how local culture can become a source of strength and resistance. In the context of globalization, these values become even more crucial to uphold, as culture is often threatened by the homogenization brought by global currents.

The political dimension of *Laskar Pelangi* can also be examined through a framework of social analysis ([Laksono et al., 2024](#)). For example, the relationships between the main characters and educational institutions, the surrounding community, and local government reflect the tension between hope and reality. These conflicts do not merely illustrate individual challenges but also depict how social and political structures can influence daily life. Thus, the novel can be considered a microcosm of the broader socio-political dynamics in Indonesia.

In the academic world, analysis of *Laskar Pelangi* has been widely conducted, particularly regarding themes of education and individual motivation. However, studies that specifically emphasize the political aspects of the novel remain relatively limited. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring how political, social, and cultural elements interact to construct a complex narrative. Through this approach, the study will not only deepen our understanding of *Laskar Pelangi* but also contribute to the fields of political literature and cultural analysis more broadly. In the Indonesian context where social and political inequalities remain prominent this study holds high relevance. Literature can serve as an effective tool to communicate these issues to a wider audience while encouraging critical reflection on the role of policy and society in driving change. Thus, this research is not only academic in nature but also has significant practical implications.

Disscusion:

The research questions to be addressed in this study center on two main areas: how political elements are represented in the novel *Laskar Pelangi*, and how social and cultural elements shape the political narrative within the novel. These two questions form the foundation for analyzing the complex narrative presented in the text, while also exploring literature's contribution to the understanding of politics and culture in Indonesia.

1. Literature as a Representation of Social and Political Realities

Literature has long been recognized as a medium capable of reflecting the social, political, and cultural conditions of a society. According to [Lukin \(2020\)](#), literature is not merely an aesthetic expression, but also an ideological discourse that often portrays power relations within society. In this context, literature can be seen as a tool to critique existing policies and social structures. Andrea Hirata's novel *Laskar Pelangi* can be categorized within this tradition. The novel highlights various social issues such as unequal access to education, economic injustice, and the exploitation of natural resources all of which reflect the political dynamics of Indonesia. As [Selamet Yusuf \(2023\)](#) points out, literary works often serve as a "reflective mirror" of social realities, in which authors express collective concerns through personal narratives.

2. Education as a Central Theme in Indonesian Literature

Education has been a prominent theme in many Indonesian literary works, especially in depicting the struggle to gain knowledge as a form of empowerment. For example, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works such as *Bumi Manusia* (*This Earth of Mankind*) and *Anak Semua Bangsa* (*Child of All Nations*) also explore education as a tool to resist colonialism and social injustice. In *Laskar Pelangi*, Andrea Hirata focuses on the inequality of access to education, particularly in remote regions like Belitung. According to [Anwar \(2022\)](#), education in Indonesia still faces various challenges, including the urban-rural divide. Hirata vividly illustrates how limited facilities and the lack of government support for small schools create significant barriers for children to reach their full potential.

3. The Political Dimension in Literature

Political literary studies aim to explore how literary works represent political issues and policies. According to [Bellin \(2023\)](#), good literature does not merely reflect reality, but also critiques it through narratives that integrate social and political elements. In *Laskar Pelangi*, criticism of education policy and the exploitation of natural resources emerge as central themes. Hirata portrays the paradox of development, where Belitung's natural wealth does not correspond with the welfare of its local people. As the setting of the story, Belitung becomes a symbol of a region rich in resources but marginalized politically and economically. [Chemulwo and Ali \(2019\)](#) further argue that human development must be grounded in the empowerment of local communities and equitable access to basic services such as education.

4. Local Culture in Indonesian Literature

The cultural dimension in *Laskar Pelangi* also plays a significant role. Hirata blends Malay traditions with universal values such as solidarity, perseverance, and dreams. According to [Conti](#)

(2024), local culture often serves as the foundation of identity and resistance against global homogenization. In the novel, Malay culture is not merely a backdrop but a central element that reinforces the story's moral and social messages. Cultural studies, such as those by [Mikhail Novikov and Alexander Eremin \(2020\)](#), emphasize the importance of understanding local values within a global context. In *Laskar Pelangi*, the traditions and customs of the Belitung community become a source of strength that inspires the main characters to face their challenges. These elements enrich the narrative while offering insights into the cultural complexity of Indonesia.

5. Socio-Political Analysis in Literature

Socio-political analysis in literature focuses on how the relationships between individuals, society, and institutions are portrayed in narratives. *Laskar Pelangi* provides a compelling example of how the tension between individual aspirations and social structures creates conflicts that resonate with Indonesian realities. According to [Damyano \(2024\)](#), institutions such as education often reproduce social inequalities through non-inclusive systems. Through the story of Ikal and his friends, Hirata depicts how educational institutions in Belitung mirror systemic injustice. The conflict between the children's dreams and the limitations they face reflects the struggle of marginalized communities against structural inequality.

6. The Relevance of Literature in the Global Context

In the era of globalization, literature plays a crucial role in preserving local identities and critiquing cultural homogenization. *Laskar Pelangi* offers a unique narrative about struggle amid globalization and modernization. As stated by [Kerubo \(2024\)](#), globalization not only brings opportunities but also presents challenges for local communities in maintaining their identity. By highlighting local values and global challenges, *Laskar Pelangi* serves as a bridge between local and universal cultures. The novel reminds readers of the importance of education, solidarity, and social justice in navigating global dynamics.

From a political perspective, *Laskar Pelangi* raises the issue of unequal access to education—one of the primary challenges in Indonesia, particularly in remote regions like Belitung. Hirata sharply reveals how injustice in the distribution of educational policy limits children's opportunities to access proper education. This is reflected in the portrayal of the under-resourced Muhammadiyah school, which nonetheless strives to provide quality education for its students. Furthermore, the novel critiques the paradox of development: Belitung, despite being rich in natural resources, is inhabited by impoverished communities. This critique highlights the close link between exclusive political policies and evident social inequality.

From a social standpoint, the novel presents the struggle of marginalized communities through its characters. Lintang, a gifted child who must stop attending school due to his family's economic hardships, symbolizes the challenges faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The solidarity among Ikal, Mahar, and their friends serves as a symbol of communal strength in confronting limitations. The novel emphasizes not only individual stories but also collective efforts to achieve shared hopes and dreams. These social dynamics reinforce the importance of collaboration and unity in overcoming structural disparities. Limitations should not extinguish hope but instead fuel change, showing that quality literature not only reflects social realities but also critiques unjust systems and reveals potential for transformation.

Culturally, *Laskar Pelangi* adds depth through its integration of Malay traditions and universal values. Hirata does not merely depict Malay culture as a backdrop but as a value system shaping the characters' development. Traditions such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), *pantun* (traditional poetic verse), and other indigenous wisdom serve as strong markers of cultural identity and resistance against global homogenization. The emphasis on local culture aligns with [Bianchin \(2021\)](#), who emphasizes the importance of indigenous values in maintaining social and political dynamics. These elements reinforce the novel's moral and social messages and present local culture as a vital force in driving social transformation.

Overall, *Laskar Pelangi* represents the struggle of marginalized communities through interwoven political, social, and cultural lenses. These elements not only reflect Indonesia's complex realities but also offer a critique of systemic inequality. The novel raises awareness of the need for more inclusive policies and community empowerment through education, solidarity, and cultural preservation. In this context, literature functions not just as entertainment but as a powerful tool that critiques injustice and inspires social transformation. Andrea Hirata successfully creates a narrative that invites readers to reflect on their roles in building a more inclusive and equitable society.

Implications:

This study affirms that literary works like *Laskar Pelangi* have significant potential as tools to raise awareness about injustice and encourage social change. The narrative provides a concrete portrayal of issues related to education, social inequality, and cultural preservation. Therefore, the study's implications extend beyond literature, reaching education, public policy, and cultural awareness. The novel can serve as a reflective source for educators and policymakers to better understand the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Moreover, local literature is recommended for use in school curricula to nurture social consciousness and civic values.

Research Contribution:

This research expands contributions to the field of political literary criticism through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates social, political, and cultural perspectives. By focusing on the political dimension of *Laskar Pelangi*, it fills a gap in previous studies that primarily emphasized educational or motivational themes. Furthermore, the study introduces a fresh approach to understanding how literature reflects and influences power dynamics and social structures—serving as a valuable reference for future research in applied linguistics, cultural studies, and literary sociology.

Limitations:

One of the limitations of this study is its focus on a single literary text, *Laskar Pelangi*. Although the novel offers rich insights, the absence of comparative analysis with other works limits the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, the research does not incorporate field data such as interviews or surveys with readers, which could have provided deeper perspectives on the novel's social and political impact.

Suggestions:

For future research, it is recommended to explore how readers from diverse backgrounds interpret the political themes in *Laskar Pelangi* through empirical methods. Comparative studies involving other Indonesian novels that address similar issues could also enhance understanding. Furthermore, educators can utilize the novel as a learning tool to discuss social justice and local cultural values in educational settings. Interdisciplinary studies bridging literature, public policy, and cultural identity are also highly encouraged to enrich future research in this area.

CONCLUSION

The research titled "*Political Literary Representation in Andrea Hirata's Novel Laskar Pelangi: A Socio-Cultural Analysis*" shows that the novel serves not only as an inspirational narrative of struggle but also as a reflection of fundamental issues in Indonesian society. It highlights the inequalities faced by marginalized communities, especially regarding educational access in remote areas like Belitung. The portrayal of Muhammadiyah school symbolizes resistance and critiques how Indonesia's natural wealth such as tin fails to bring prosperity to its local people, exposing the development paradox.

Socially, the novel presents the collective struggle of marginalized groups through characters like Lintang, Ikal, and Mahar. Their persistence and solidarity reveal how communal strength can challenge social injustice. These individual narratives represent wider societal aspirations and demonstrate that cooperation and resilience are key in facing structural barriers. The novel also emphasizes the cultural richness of the Belitung Malay community, where local traditions are not just

background but sources of universal values such as gotong royong, perseverance, and hope. These cultural elements strengthen the novel's moral message and affirm the importance of identity preservation amid globalization.

Politically, *Laskar Pelangi* critiques the unfair exploitation of natural resources, revealing how development often neglects local welfare. Through this narrative, Hirata shows how literature becomes a tool to voice injustice and inspire reflection on public policy. In conclusion, *Laskar Pelangi* offers a layered portrayal of Indonesia's societal dynamics by blending social critique with cultural storytelling. It not only reflects the struggles of marginalized communities but also promotes values of education, solidarity, and cultural resilience. As literature, it becomes a means for both critique and transformation toward a more inclusive society.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author solely conceptualized, designed, and conducted this study. The author was responsible for the collection and analysis of relevant literature, the development of the theoretical framework, and the interpretation of findings in relation to political, social, and cultural dimensions within *Laskar Pelangi*. All sections of the manuscript including the introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion were written and revised independently by the author. The author confirms that this work is original and has not been submitted elsewhere.

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