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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Peripheral realism and cultural memory in Indonesian literature: Banyumas, social inequality, and rural modernity**Sukirno¹, Eko Suroso^{1*}, Bayu Suta Wardianto², Onok Yayang Pamungkas¹, Nikmah Sari Hasibuan³ & Eli Marlina Harahap³¹Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Purwokerto, Indonesia²Lembaga Kajian Nusantara Raya, Banyumas, Indonesia³Indonesian Language Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padangsidempuan, Indonesia*Correspondence: ekosurosooke@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This article examines how Banyumas Indonesian literature articulates social reality not as a passive local reflection but as a critical archive of peripheral experience within modern Indonesia. The study argues that Banyumas fiction produces a form of peripheral realism: a narrative mode through which rural poverty, local labour, early marriage, moral transgression, historical violence, and urban migration are rendered as interlocking structures of social life rather than as isolated social themes. Drawing on qualitative literary sociology, cultural memory studies, and world-literary debates on periphery and uneven modernity, the study analyses ten book-length literary sources consisting of two novels and eight short-story collections or anthologies by Banyumas and Banyumas-related writers, including Ahmad Tohari and writers represented in the *Kembang Glepang* anthologies. The corpus yielded thirty narrative excerpts, twenty-nine of which were assigned primary thematic codes while one was retained as an overlapping interpretive memo. The findings show that poverty is narrated as structural deprivation; coconut-sap tapping operates as cultural competence and economic precarity; early marriage exposes gendered intergenerational vulnerability; moral transgression reveals contradictions between normative discourse and lived social pressure; historical narratives transform DI/TII, 1965, and Petrus into cultural memory; and urbanization marks the ambivalent reorganization of rural identity. These six formations converge into a literary cartography of Banyumas as a peripheral site from which national contradictions can be read differently. The article contributes to Indonesian literary studies by repositioning regional literature beyond local colour and by demonstrating that peripheral literary traditions generate alternative knowledge about nation, memory, modernity, and social change.

KEYWORDS: Banyumas literature, peripheral realism, cultural memory, Indonesian regional literature, social reality, sociology of literature

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1. Introduction

Regional literature is often admitted into national literary history through a restricted interpretive channel: it is praised for its local colour, dialectal distinctiveness, ethnographic texture, or contribution to cultural diversity, while its capacity to theorize social life remains underdeveloped. This article begins from the opposite premise. Banyumas literature is not merely a provincial variant of Indonesian literature, nor simply a repository of distinctive customs, dialects, and rural settings. It is an epistemic site where the uneven social life of Indonesia becomes visible through the experience of a region located outside the metropolitan centre. This shift matters because the local is not a smaller version of the national; it is one of the sites where the national is made legible, contested, and reassembled. Banyumas, located in the south-western part of Central Java, offers a particularly productive literary site for such a reassessment. Long associated with *Ngapak* Javanese speech, egalitarian social attitudes, agrarian livelihoods, and cultural forms that differ from the court-centred model of Javanese refinement dominant in Surakarta and Yogyakarta, Banyumas provides a literary geography in which social hierarchy, rural labour, cultural memory, and moral life are narrated from the periphery rather than from the centre.

In literary discourse, Banyumas is strongly associated with Ahmad Tohari, whose fictional worlds have made rural poverty, moral ambiguity, gendered vulnerability, ecological knowledge, and political trauma central to Indonesian prose. Yet the literary field of Banyumas is broader than Tohari alone. Anthologies produced by Banyumas Raya writers and regional cultural institutions show that younger and lesser-canonized writers also use fiction to register the everyday pressures of agrarian labour, migration, family breakdown, sexuality, historical memory, and the fragile dignity of ordinary people. The point of departure for this article is a corpus-based qualitative study of Banyumas literary texts that identified six dominant elements of social reality: poverty, local work, early marriage, moral transgression, historical events, and urbanization. The original study treated these elements as thematic evidence of the relationship between literature and society. The present article radically develops that initial insight by asking a more ambitious question: what kind of theory of Indonesian social life is produced when Banyumas literature is read not as a documentary mirror but as a peripheral cultural archive? The argument therefore moves from the descriptive question of what social realities appear in the texts to the interpretive question of how those realities are narratively structured, culturally remembered, and politically made meaningful.

This problem requires a rethinking of the sociology of literature. Classic accounts of literature and society stress that literary works cannot be detached from the social relations, values, and historical conditions from which they emerge (Watt, 1964; Williams, 1977; Bourdieu, 1993; Damono, 2013). At the same time, strong literary sociology does not reduce literature to a transparent reflection of society. Literary texts select, intensify, displace, symbolically condense, and aesthetically organize social materials; they therefore produce knowledge, not merely evidence. Realism, in this sense, is not photographic reproduction but an historically situated mode of social intelligibility (Auerbach, 1953; Lukács, 1971; Jameson, 1981; Felski, 2008). This article uses that understanding to conceptualize Banyumas literature as a mode of peripheral realism: a narrative formation in which local experience reveals the structural contradictions of poverty, labour, gender, morality, memory, and migration. Peripheral realism does not mean that Banyumas literature is marginal in intellectual value. It means that its marginal location allows it to see what central narratives often normalize, simplify, or forget.

Recent debates in world literature and postcolonial literary studies further sharpen this argument. Scholars of peripherality have shown that literary works from marginal, semi-peripheral, or small-language locations cannot be adequately read if they are judged only by the standards of metropolitan visibility or canon formation (Casanova, 2004; Moretti, 2013; Beecroft, 2015; WReC, 2015; Juvan, 2019). Peripheral texts often register uneven development with unusual intensity because they inhabit the fractures between agrarian life and modern state power, local cosmology and national ideology, communal ethics and market pressure, historical trauma and official forgetting. Davies (2021) and Lazzari (2021) use the term peripheral realism to describe how literary works from marginal positions can reveal systemic continuities otherwise obscured by central narratives. Cultural memory studies also provide a crucial conceptual frame because literature does not merely represent events; it mediates remembrance and transforms lived or inherited experience into transmissible narrative forms (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989; Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2018). In contexts marked

by political violence, ideological silencing, and uneven access to official archives, literary narrative often becomes an alternative memory apparatus (Ricoeur, 2004; Trouillot, 1995; Rothberg, 2009; Eddyono, 2023). Banyumas fiction is particularly significant in this respect because its historical imagination includes the DI/TII conflict, post-1965 anti-communist violence, and the New Order's Petrus operations, not as decorative background but as forces that shape the moral weather of villages, families, bodies, and social relationships.

Previous studies of Banyumas literature have provided important foundations. Suhardi (2013) reads Banyumasan culture in Ahmad Tohari's prose beyond the question of dialect. Trianton (2013, 2016, 2021) develops the cultural and intellectual vocabulary of cablaka and Banyumas identity. Hanifah et al. (2021) examine social reality in *Lingkar Tanah Lingkar Air*. Yulisatiani, Suwandi, Suyitno, and Subiyantoro (2020) show the ecological wisdom of Banyumas women in Tohari's novels, while Sultoni, Suwandi, Andayani, and Sumarwati (2023) identify ecological wisdom in Banyumas folklore. These works demonstrate that Banyumas literature is a serious site of cultural analysis. However, three limitations remain: much of the research is single-author or single-text oriented; social themes are often catalogued without being theorized as an interlocking structure; and regionality is still frequently framed as local specificity rather than as a position from which the nation can be reinterpreted. This article addresses those gaps through three research questions: first, how do Banyumas literary texts represent social reality through narrative events, characters, settings, and conflicts? Second, how are the six dominant social formations—poverty, local work, early marriage, moral transgression, historical violence, and urbanization—connected into a broader social structure? Third, how does Banyumas literature produce peripheral realism and cultural memory as alternative forms of knowledge about Indonesian modernity? The contribution is therefore both empirical and conceptual: empirically, the article synthesizes evidence from a broader Banyumas literary corpus than studies focused only on Ahmad Tohari; conceptually, it proposes Banyumas literature as a peripheral archive that stores local experience while enabling a critique of national development, social morality, historical violence, and rural transformation.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative design grounded in the sociology of literature, thematic interpretation, and cultural memory analysis. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because the object of analysis is not merely the frequency of textual items, but the relationship between narrative form, social meaning, and historical context (Patton, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study therefore treats literary texts as symbolic structures whose social significance emerges through the interaction of textual evidence, cultural context, and interpretive reasoning (Krippendorff, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Rather than using literature as a passive reflection of society, the analysis examines how Banyumas literary texts organize social experience into narrative patterns that make poverty, labour, gendered vulnerability, moral contradiction, historical violence, and migration intelligible as interconnected formations of regional life.

The corpus was selected purposively. A text was included when it met at least one of the following criteria: it was written by a Banyumas or Banyumas Raya writer; it used Banyumas or Banyumas-related social space as a significant setting; it represented social conditions strongly associated with Banyumas life; or it circulated through regional literary institutions and anthologies. The final corpus consists of ten book-length sources: two novels and eight short-story collections or anthologies. This composition is methodologically important because it prevents Banyumas literature from being reduced to a single canonical author while still acknowledging Ahmad Tohari's central position in the field. It also allows the study to read Banyumas literature as a wider regional formation composed of canonical, national, and locally institutionalized texts.

Table 1. Literary corpus used in the study

No.	Author / compiler	Title in source manuscript	Type	Year	Analytical relevance
1	Indonesian short-story writers	History of a Haru Country (Selected Kompas Short Stories 1981–1990)	Short-story collection	2006	National short-story frame; comparative social realism
2	Muna Masyari et al.	Earth Mattress (Kompas Selected Short Story 2017)	Short-story collection	2018	Contemporary short fiction and social marginality

No.	Author / compiler	Title in source manuscript	Type	Year	Analytical relevance
3	Ahmad Tohari	Karyamin's Smile	Short-story collection	2023	Poverty, early marriage, Petrus memory
4	Ahmad Tohari	Eyes That Are Nice to Look At	Short-story collection	2019	Urban migration, rural vulnerability, everyday ethics
5	Ahmad Tohari	Project People	Novel	2002	Structural poverty, corruption, labour precarity
6	Ahmad Tohari	Land Circle Water Circle	Novel	2015	DI/TII memory, ideology, political identity
7	Greater Banyumas writers	Glepang Flower Anthology 1	Regional anthology	2019	Local labour, moral contradiction, rural economy
8	Greater Banyumas writers	Glepang Flower Anthology 2	Regional anthology	2020	Poverty, early marriage, sap-tapper life
9	Greater Banyumas writers	Glepang Flower Anthology 3	Regional anthology	2021	1965 memory and village trauma
10	Greater Banyumas writers	Glepang Flower Anthology 4	Regional anthology	2022	Continuation of regional social archive

The primary unit of analysis was the narrative excerpt, defined as a sentence, cluster of sentences, scene, or descriptive passage in which social reality becomes textually visible. Thirty excerpts were inspected. Twenty-nine were assigned a primary code for distributional mapping, while one excerpt was retained as an overlapping memo because it simultaneously indexed more than one social formation without a defensible primary category. This distinction is important in qualitative literary analysis because it avoids forcing ambiguous textual material into an artificial single category. The coding protocol was therefore designed not only to classify themes, but also to identify the social function performed by each narrative unit.

Table 2. Coding protocol for analysing social reality

Main code	Operational definition	Textual indicators	Interpretive question
Poverty	Material and structural deprivation affecting food, schooling, work, shelter, dignity, and social mobility.	Hunger, interrupted education, low wages, debt, insecure housing, marginal occupations.	How does the text connect deprivation to structure rather than personal failure?
Local labour	Occupations rooted in Banyumas ecology, skill, social habitus, and rural economy.	Coconut-sap tapping, sugar production, agrarian labour, risk, non-formal skill.	How does labour function as both identity and vulnerability?
Early marriage	Marriage involving underage or socially immature girls/boys, often reproduced intergenerationally.	Child pregnancy, parental pride in early marriage, mystical coercion, low education.	How does the text narrate gendered time and inherited vulnerability?
Moral transgression	Narratives of sexuality, prostitution, infidelity, stigma, trafficking, or norm violation read as social contradiction, not moral judgement.	Rumour, shame, sexual exchange, betrayal, patriarchal blame, village surveillance.	What contradiction emerges between public norms and lived pressure?
Historical violence	Narratives in which local life is shaped by national or regional political violence and ideological conflict.	DI/TII, 1965, anti-communist stigma, Petrus, fear, corpses, silence.	How does fiction preserve memory excluded from official history?
Urbanization	Movement, aspiration, or dislocation between village and city.	Going home, recruitment agents, Jakarta/Surabaya, family separation, prestige.	How does migration reorganize rural identity and belonging?

The analytical procedure consisted of five stages. First, the selected texts were read closely to identify narrative units related to deprivation, work, gender relations, morality, historical violence, and migration. Second, these units were coded through a deductive-inductive protocol: the six main categories were derived from the initial study, while the subcodes were refined through repeated reading. Third, excerpts were classified according to dominant social function rather than surface topic. For example, a scene about hunger was coded as poverty when it represented structural deprivation, but as gendered vulnerability when it primarily exposed the unequal burden placed on women. Fourth, representative excerpts were interpreted in relation to Banyumas cultural context and wider Indonesian social history. Fifth, the findings were synthesized into a conceptual model of peripheral realism and cultural memory, enabling the study to move from thematic description to theoretical explanation.

To strengthen trustworthiness, the study used thick description, corpus triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and audit-trail logic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thick description was applied by situating textual excerpts within their narrative, cultural, and historical contexts. Corpus triangulation was achieved by reading across novels, national short-story collections, and regional anthologies. Theoretical triangulation combined literary sociology, world-literary periphery studies, and cultural memory studies. The audit trail is represented through the corpus table, coding protocol, and the documented distinction between inspected excerpts, primary codes, and overlapping memos. Because the corpus consists of publicly available literary texts, the study did not involve human participants or collect private data. Translated excerpts are used sparingly as short evidence anchors, while interpretation is conducted primarily through paraphrase to avoid overdependence on extended quotation.

3. Results

The analysis identifies six social formations that structure Banyumas literature: poverty, local labour, early marriage, moral transgression, historical violence, and urbanization. These formations are not treated as isolated themes, but as interdependent social forces through which Banyumas literature organizes the lived contradictions of Indonesian regional modernity. Their distribution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Primary thematic distribution of coded excerpts

Social formation	Primary coded excerpts	Percentage	Interpretive weight
Moral transgression / sexual economy	9	31.0%	Most frequent; reveals the contradiction between public norms, stigma, sexual regulation, and socio-economic pressure.
Poverty	6	20.7%	Foundational condition shaping hunger, interrupted education, labour vulnerability, and damaged dignity.
Local labour	5	17.2%	Marks Banyumas locality through sap-tapper work, agrarian skill, ecological knowledge, and occupational risk.
Historical violence	5	17.2%	Transforms national conflict into local memory, fear, trauma, silence, and fractured social relations.
Early marriage	2	6.9%	Low in frequency but conceptually significant for reading gendered precarity and intergenerational vulnerability.
Urbanization	2	6.9%	Low in frequency but crucial for interpreting rural-modern transition, migration, aspiration, and abandonment.
Total primary-coded excerpts	29	100%	One additional excerpt was retained as an overlapping interpretive memo.

The distribution shows that Banyumas literature constructs social reality not through a single dominant issue, but through a layered ecology of vulnerability. Moral transgression / sexual economy appears most frequently, yet its significance lies less in sexuality itself than in the way shame, stigma, infidelity, prostitution, and village surveillance expose contradictions between public morality and socio-economic pressure. Poverty functions as the structural ground that links hunger, interrupted education, precarious work, and damaged dignity to wider systems of inequality. Local labour anchors the corpus in Banyumas ecology through sap-tapper work,

agrarian skill, bodily risk, and economic fragility, while historical violence expands this local world into the national memory of DI/TII, post-1965 anti-communist violence, and Petrus operations. Although early marriage and urbanization appear less frequently, both carry strong conceptual weight: early marriage reveals the intergenerational reproduction of gendered precarity, whereas urbanization shows how migration reorganizes rural belonging, family structure, aspiration, and abandonment. Taken together, these six formations demonstrate that Banyumas literature produces peripheral realism by transforming local experience into a critical archive of Indonesian social inequality, historical trauma, and uneven rural modernity.

The six social formations identified in the corpus are distributed unevenly, indicating that Banyumas literature constructs social reality through a layered ecology of vulnerability rather than through a single dominant issue. As shown in Figure 1, moral transgression / sexual economy appears most frequently, followed by poverty, while local labour and historical violence occupy a substantial middle position, and early marriage and urbanization occur less often in strictly numerical terms.

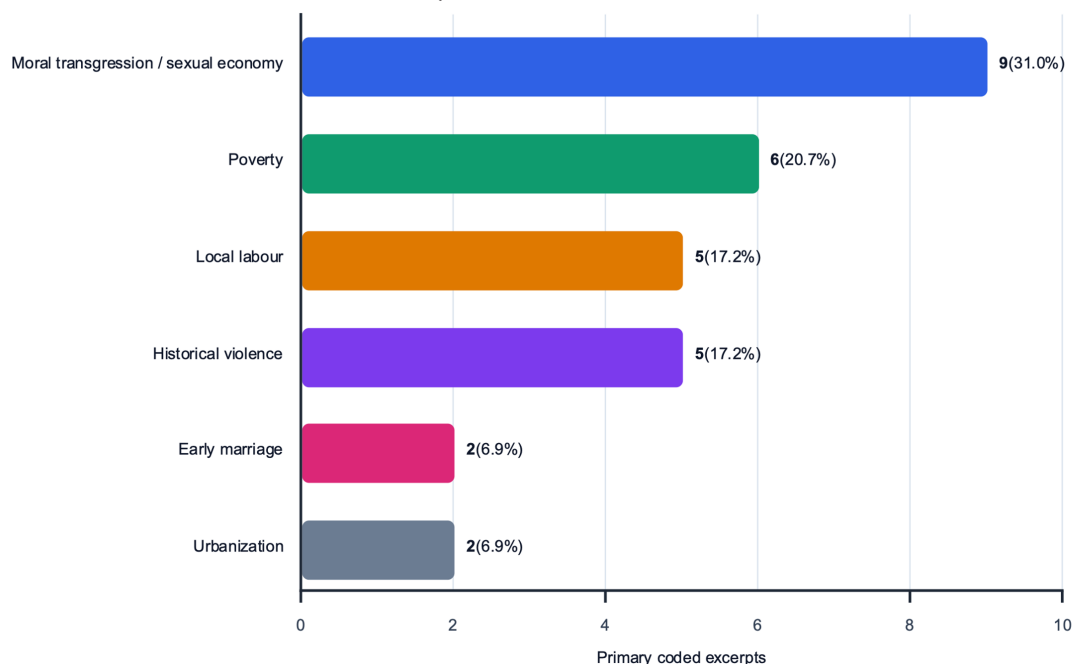


Figure 1. Distribution of primary-coded social formations in the Banyumas literary corpus.

The distribution is analytically significant. The prominence of moral transgression / sexual economy does not suggest that Banyumas literature is primarily concerned with sexuality in isolation; rather, it shows that shame, stigma, infidelity, prostitution, and village surveillance function as narrative sites where broader contradictions between public morality and socio-economic pressure become visible. Poverty operates as the structural ground that links hunger, interrupted education, precarious work, and damaged dignity to wider systems of inequality. Local labour anchors the corpus in Banyumas ecology through sap-tapper work, agrarian skill, bodily risk, and economic fragility, while historical violence expands this local world into the national memory of DI/TII, post-1965 anti-communist violence, and Petrus operations. Although early marriage and urbanization appear less frequently, both carry strong conceptual weight: early marriage reveals the intergenerational reproduction of gendered precarity, whereas urbanization shows how migration reorganizes rural belonging, family structure, aspiration, and abandonment. Taken together, these six formations demonstrate that Banyumas literature produces peripheral realism by transforming local experience into a critical archive of Indonesian social inequality, historical trauma, and uneven rural modernity.

3.1 Poverty as structural deprivation and compressed social time

Poverty is the deepest social ground of Banyumas literary realism. It is not represented simply as a lack of money, nor as a sentimental background for rural suffering. Instead, it appears as a structure that reorganizes bodies, choices, family relations, education, and moral possibility. In the regional anthology evidence, Sha, a mother unable to feed her baby after scavenging, condenses multidimensional deprivation into the minimal textual fact that her child “was hungry”. The phrase is short, but its narrative force is large: hunger becomes the most immediate language through which the collapse of income, care, shelter, and social protection is made visible.

Poverty here is not an abstract economic category; it is a bodily temporality in which the future is repeatedly postponed by the urgency of survival.

The same logic appears in Ahmad Tohari's *Orang-orang Proyek*. The narrative of "project children" who leave school early to work shifts the discussion of poverty from personal misfortune to structural reproduction. Education is not abandoned because it has no value; it is abandoned because the stomach becomes more urgent than the future. The novel also reveals the political economy of deprivation when low wages are connected to hidden "X factors" absorbed by project implementers. This detail matters because it relocates poverty within a chain of corruption, wage extraction, informal power, and developmental hypocrisy. In this sense, Banyumas literature resonates with capability-based and sociological accounts of deprivation: poverty is not only the absence of income, but the narrowing of feasible life choices, social dignity, and future agency (Sen, 1999; Bourdieu, 1993). Literary evidence complements statistical reports by making visible what numbers cannot fully narrate: the shame of not feeding a child, the premature adulthood of school-age labourers, and the exhaustion of people whose choices are repeatedly reduced by structural constraint.

3.2 Local labour between ecological competence and economic precarity

The most distinctly Banyumas-coded form of work in the corpus is coconut-sap tapping. The *penderes* is not presented as a decorative ethnographic figure or a picturesque sign of rural authenticity. He represents a labouring body whose expertise depends on ecological knowledge, courage, repetition, and embodied skill. To climb coconut trees, manage sap, protect the *pongkor*, and convert sap into sugar requires a form of practical intelligence rarely recognized by formal institutions. The texts therefore give cultural dignity to an occupation that is central to Banyumas rural life yet remains marginal in modern labour discourse. Sap tapping becomes a narrative site where skill, ecology, and bodily risk converge.

At the same time, the corpus refuses to romanticize this labour. In Ryan Rachman's story about *Dul Komed*, monkeys consume and disturb the collected sap, turning the tapper's work into an encounter with non-human agency. The scene may appear comic, but its social meaning is serious: the tapper's income is radically exposed to ecological contingency. Nature is not a passive background; it participates in the uncertainty of livelihood. In Susanto Aboge's *Kang Mur*, the commitment to "pure sap" rather than adulterated production adds an ethical dimension to labour. Banyumas work is therefore narrated as a triangle of skill, vulnerability, and integrity. Through the sap tapper, the corpus produces a strong version of peripheral realism: the occupation is local, but the contradiction is global. Cultural labour can be rich in meaning while economically undervalued; traditional expertise can sustain identity while failing to protect workers from risk; ecological intimacy can become both dignity and instability.

3.3 Early marriage and gendered intergenerational time

Although early marriage appears less frequently than poverty or moral transgression, it has high interpretive value because it exposes how social vulnerability is transmitted across generations. In Ahmad Tohari's *Si Minem Beranak Bayi*, the shocking image of a child giving birth to a child does more than represent rural backwardness. It reveals a social time in which girlhood is shortened, motherhood is accelerated, and patriarchal pride normalizes the conversion of children into wives. The parents' recollection that Minem's mother also gave birth when she was "only fourteen" turns early marriage into an inherited structure rather than an isolated event. The planned marriage of Minem's younger sister at twelve intensifies this pattern: marriageability becomes a form of family capital, while the girl's body becomes the medium through which social continuity is secured.

Susanto Aboge's *Kang Mur* adds another layer by linking early marriage to a love spell. Read sociologically, the spell is not merely a mystical device. It dramatizes the loss of consent and the symbolic power through which a girl's future is captured by forces beyond her agency. The representation of mystical coercion points to a cultural field in which the boundary between belief, desire, and domination is unstable. The corpus therefore does not simply condemn village tradition from the outside; it reveals the mechanisms through which poverty, low education, patriarchal authority, and cultural habit converge to produce gendered precarity. Early marriage is best understood here as a problem of unequal social time: girls are pushed prematurely into adult roles before they acquire educational, legal, bodily, or economic autonomy.

3.4 Moral transgression, sexual economy, and the social production of stigma

The largest cluster of evidence concerns moral transgression. In the source manuscript this category was labelled immorality, but the present article reframes it as moral transgression and sexual economy to avoid reproducing the stigmatizing vocabulary that the texts themselves often critique. The corpus includes prostitution, infidelity, extramarital relations, trafficking, and the social shame attached to women's sexuality. These narratives do not simply reaffirm moral order. They expose how moral discourse is produced, circulated, and weaponized within relations of class, gender, surveillance, and economic pressure. In this respect, the findings are closer to a sociology of stigma than to a moral inventory of deviance (Foucault, 1978; Rubin, 1984).

Ahmad Tohari's story of Jebris is especially significant. The village memory that a corner of the hamlet was once associated with prostitution returns as "old shame" when Jebris is stigmatized. Shame is therefore not only attached to an individual woman; it is spatial, historical, and collective. The village attempts to purify itself by locating moral failure in Jebris, but the return of the old stigma reveals that communal morality is built on disavowed histories. In Nanang Anna Noor's *Lelaki Air Mata Ikan*, infidelity is connected to material inequality. Neni's relation with a wealthier young man humiliates Parmin not only emotionally but also socially and economically. His anger registers patriarchal injury, yet the deeper narrative structure is the collision between ageing masculinity, poverty, desire, and material aspiration. The literary value of these stories lies in their refusal to separate sexuality from economy, stigma from gender, or moral judgement from social contradiction.

3.5 Historical violence as cultural memory

Banyumas literature also functions as a cultural archive of historical violence. In *Lingkar Tanah Lingkar Air*, the DI/TII conflict enters the fictional world not as abstract national history but as a lived fracture in local identity. Characters who join Darul Islam imagine that they have entered a new political community, while the later capture of Kartosuwiryo and the call to surrender dramatize the collapse of ideological utopia. The novel's achievement is not merely the inclusion of historical facts, but the representation of how villagers experience the tug-of-war between loyalty, religion, fear, and the nation-state. Historical violence is thus localized through affective pressure rather than narrated only as chronology.

Muharsyam Dwi Anantama's *Dua Kisah Wabah* brings the post-1965 atmosphere into the village through suspicion, revenge, and fear of the "red plague". The metaphor of plague is crucial because it shows how ideology becomes contagious stigma: to be associated with the wrong political colour is to be socially infected. The story records not only death, but the destruction of trust among parents, siblings, neighbours, and friends. Ahmad Tohari's *Ah, Jakarta* extends this archive to the New Order's Petrus operations. The discovery of a bloated, disfigured body in the Serayu River turns state violence into local horror, while the narrator's fear of being seen as a friend of a *gali* reveals the social afterlife of extrajudicial violence. In the terms of cultural memory studies, these texts preserve what official history often cannot: the bodily, relational, atmospheric, and affective residues of violence (Halbwachs, 1992; Ricoeur, 2004; Trouillot, 1995; Eddyono, 2023).

3.6 Urbanization and the ambivalence of rural transformation

Urbanization appears in fewer excerpts, but it completes the corpus's social map because it shows how the village is reorganized by the promise of the city. In Ahmad Tohari's narrative of *Karsim*, homecoming is not only a ritual of return; it is a performance of success. The village becomes a stage on which urban achievement must be displayed. Yet this performance collides with agrarian necessity when rice is attacked by sparrows. The scene condenses a larger contradiction: the prestige attached to urban migration can obscure the labour still required to sustain rural life. Rural belonging is not erased by migration, but it is reorganized by the symbolic economy of success.

Rusmi's departure through a job agent reveals the darker side of migration. The uncertainty over whether she went to Jakarta or Surabaya, and her failure to write home, suggest the breakdown of communication, family care, and rural social anchoring. Her children are left with grandparents, while her labouring body disappears into an urban economy that the village cannot fully see. Urbanization is therefore not represented as linear progress. It is ambivalent: it offers escape from rural constraint while producing new vulnerabilities, separations, and forms of disappearance. Peripheral realism here consists in showing that modernization is experienced not as abstract development, but as an intimate rearrangement of obligation, absence, aspiration, and loss.

3.7 Relational synthesis: Banyumas literature as a peripheral archive

The six findings do not operate as a catalogue of social problems. They form a relational structure in which each social formation clarifies and intensifies the others. Poverty drives premature labour and migration; labour creates dignity while exposing workers to ecological and economic risk; early marriage converts girls into bearers of family continuity; moral transgression reveals how communities project collective anxiety onto women's bodies; historical violence sediments national trauma in local relationships; and urbanization transforms the village into a site of origin, return, abandonment, and memory. This relational logic is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Relational logic of peripheral realism in the Banyumas corpus

Social formation	Local narrative sign	Structural process	Global discussion opened by the corpus
Poverty	Hunger, school dropout, project labour	Compression of life chances and reproduction of deprivation	Social inequality, capability loss, and developmental contradiction
Local labour	Penderes, pongkor, pure sap, ecological risk	Embodied skill under conditions of economic undervaluation	Labour precarity, traditional expertise, and rural knowledge
Early marriage	Childbirth by a child, twelve-year-old bride, love spell	Acceleration of girlhood into reproductive adulthood	Gendered time, consent, and intergenerational vulnerability
Moral transgression	Old shame, infidelity, prostitution, surveillance	Projection of communal anxiety onto sexualized bodies	Sexual economy, stigma, patriarchy, and moral regulation
Historical violence	DI/TII, red plague, Serayu corpse, Petrus	Transformation of national conflict into local fear and memory	Cultural memory, political trauma, and the limits of official history
Urbanization	Homecoming, job agents, Jakarta/Surabaya, silence	Dislocation of care, belonging, and rural identity	Uneven modernization, migration, and rural abandonment

The principal result of this study is therefore conceptual as much as thematic. Banyumas literature does not merely document social reality; it transforms regional experience into a mode of explanation. Its realism is peripheral because it speaks from locations that are socially, geographically, and canonically distant from the metropolitan centre, but this distance becomes an analytical advantage. From the margins, the corpus sees the uneven afterlives of development: the child who works before finishing school, the tapper whose skill is dignified but insecure, the girl whose future is accelerated into marriage, the woman who carries communal shame, the villager who inherits national trauma, and the migrant whose departure reorganizes the household left behind. These figures constitute a literary archive of Indonesian modernity from below. The archive is local in material texture, but global in its theoretical reach: it contributes to debates on inequality, labour, gender, moral regulation, cultural memory, and uneven modernization by showing how those processes are lived, narrated, and remembered in a specific regional world.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how Banyumas literature represents social reality and how these representations can be theorized as peripheral realism and cultural memory within Indonesian regional writing. Rather than treating Banyumas literature as a merely local or ethnographic expression, this study positioned it as a literary formation that produces knowledge about Indonesian social life from the periphery. The findings show that Banyumas literary texts do not simply mirror society; they organize social experience through six interrelated formations: poverty, local labour, early marriage, moral transgression, historical violence, and urbanization. This confirms the central premise of literary sociology that literary works emerge from social relations, historical conditions, and symbolic structures, but also transform those conditions into meaningful aesthetic and narrative forms (Watt, 1964; Williams, 1977; Bourdieu, 1993; Damono, 2013). In this sense, Banyumas literature functions not as a passive record of regional life, but as a critical narrative archive through

which the contradictions of Indonesian modernity become visible.

The first major finding is that poverty, local labour, and early marriage form a structural continuum of vulnerability. Poverty in the corpus is not represented merely as material lack, but as a condition that compresses the future into immediate survival through hunger, interrupted schooling, low wages, scavenging, and precarious work. This finding is consistent with Sen's (1999) view of poverty as capability deprivation and with broader accounts of poverty as multidimensional insecurity rather than income deficiency alone (Misturelli & Heffernan, 2010; Syawie, 2016). In Banyumas literature, poverty also shapes labour. The figure of the coconut-sap tapper represents embodied ecological knowledge, cultural competence, and rural dignity, yet the same figure also reveals occupational danger and economic fragility. This supports Bourdieu's (1984, 1993) argument that social practice is embodied in habitus, while also resonating with recent ecocritical readings of Indonesian and Banyumas literature that connect local knowledge, environment, and community survival (Yulisatiani et al., 2020; Sultoni et al., 2023; Efendi et al., 2025). Early marriage extends this vulnerability into gendered time: girls are pushed prematurely into adult roles before acquiring educational, bodily, or social autonomy. Thus, the corpus shows that poverty, work, and early marriage are not isolated themes but mutually reinforcing structures of peripheral life.

The second major finding is that moral transgression, historical violence, and urbanization reveal the affective and ideological dimensions of Banyumas peripheral realism. By reframing the earlier category of "immorality" as moral transgression / sexual economy, this study avoids moralizing the characters and instead examines how stigma, sexuality, shame, infidelity, prostitution, and village surveillance expose deeper contradictions between public norms and socio-economic pressure. This interpretation aligns with Foucault's (1978) and Rubin's (1984) view that sexuality is socially regulated through discourse, classification, and power. Historical violence further strengthens the cultural-memory dimension of the corpus. Narratives of DI/TII, post-1965 anti-communist violence, and Petrus operations show that violence is remembered not only through explicit political events, but also through fear, silence, suspicion, bodies, rivers, rumours, and fractured social relations. This supports cultural memory theory, which argues that societies remember through narrative, place, affect, and mediated forms of remembrance (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989; Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011; Rigney, 2018). Urbanization completes this structure by showing that migration is not simply mobility or progress; it is an ambivalent process that reorganizes family obligation, rural belonging, aspiration, and abandonment. In this regard, Banyumas literature speaks to wider debates on uneven development and peripheral modernity (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2005; Warwick Research Collective, 2015; Juvan, 2019).

The implication of this study is that Indonesian regional literature needs to be read not only as local colour, but as a theoretical site for understanding national and global social contradictions. Banyumas literature contains dialect, landscape, custom, agrarian work, and rural setting, but these elements are not decorative. They are structures of meaning that determine how poverty is experienced, how work is valued, how women are judged, how violence is remembered, and how migration is imagined. This finding expands previous studies that have examined Banyumas identity, cablaka culture, ecological wisdom, and Ahmad Tohari's literary world (Suhardi, 2013; Trianton, 2013, 2016, 2021; Hanifah et al., 2021; Nurdyanto et al., 2023; Arif et al., 2025). Conceptually, the study contributes to world-literary and postcolonial discussions by showing that peripheral texts can generate concepts that travel beyond their local origin. Banyumas literature is therefore not secondary to the Indonesian national canon; it is one of the ways the nation is interpreted from below. Its contribution lies in the concepts proposed here: peripheral realism, cultural memory from below, and regional literature as social critique.

This study has several limitations. First, although the corpus includes novels, national short-story collections, and regional anthologies, it remains limited to selected published texts and does not include oral narratives, unpublished manuscripts, reader reception, or performance-based literary practices. Second, the analysis relies on qualitative interpretation, so the distribution of coded textual units should not be treated as statistical generalization. Frequency helps map recurrence, but interpretive weight depends on symbolic density, relational position, and theoretical significance (Krippendorff, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Third, the concept of peripheral realism developed in this article requires further testing across other Indonesian regional literatures, such as Madurese, Sundanese, Minangkabau, Bugis, or eastern Indonesian literary formations. Future research may extend this framework through comparative regional analysis, reception

studies, digital corpus methods, or multilingual approaches to examine how non-metropolitan literatures produce alternative knowledge about inequality, memory, gender, ecology, and modernity.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Banyumas literature represents social reality not as a set of isolated local themes, but as an interconnected structure of peripheral life. Poverty, local labour, early marriage, moral transgression, historical violence, and urbanization appear as mutually reinforcing formations through which Banyumas fiction narrates the uneven experience of Indonesian modernity. These findings show that Banyumas literature should not be read merely as local colour, dialectal expression, or regional ethnography. Rather, it functions as a peripheral cultural archive that transforms village life, agrarian labour, gendered vulnerability, moral surveillance, political trauma, and rural-urban mobility into a critical narrative of the nation. The concept of peripheral realism proposed in this article therefore refers to the capacity of regional literature to reveal national contradictions from the margins: the poor are not simply depicted as suffering subjects, workers are not merely cultural figures, women are not only moralized bodies, and history is not only background. They become literary sites where social inequality, memory, and modernity are made visible.

The implication of this study is that Indonesian regional literature needs to be positioned as a serious theoretical field within literary sociology, cultural memory studies, and world-literary debates. Banyumas literature demonstrates that the periphery is not outside the nation, but one of the places where the nation can be most sharply interpreted. However, this study is limited to selected published novels and short-story collections, so it does not yet include oral traditions, unpublished manuscripts, reader reception, performance practices, or comparative regional corpora. Future research may extend the framework of peripheral realism to other Indonesian literary regions in order to examine whether similar patterns of poverty, labour, gendered precarity, historical memory, and migration emerge in different cultural contexts. In this way, the study of regional literature can move beyond documentation of locality toward a broader theoretical contribution: understanding how non-metropolitan literary traditions produce alternative knowledge about inequality, memory, and social transformation.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable. This study analysed publicly available literary texts and did not involve human participants, interviews, experiments, or private data.

Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Data availability: The primary literary texts are publicly available through the cited publications. The coding matrix and interpretive notes are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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