

Alienation and Isolation: A Marxist Analysis in *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 01 April 2026 Approved 24 April 2026 Published 30 April 2026 Keywords alienation, isolation, Marxism, political oppression, literature	This study examines the representation of alienation and isolation in <i>The Sea Speaks His Name</i> by Leila S. Chudori through a Marxist perspective. It focuses on how socio-political conditions during Indonesia's New Order era shape the characters' experiences of disconnection from the self and society. Using a qualitative, library-based approach, the research analyzes selected dialogues, monologues, and narrative elements in the novel. Drawing on Karl Marx's concept of alienation, the findings indicate that the characters experience various forms of estrangement, particularly in relation to identity, social relations, and agency. These conditions are closely associated with state repression and authoritarian control, which contribute to both physical and psychological forms of isolation. However, the effects of alienation are not uniform, as the narrative also presents moments of awareness and relational connection. Overall, the study suggests that the novel portrays alienation as a complex condition shaped by structural forces while still allowing space for human agency. In this way, literature functions not only as a reflection of socio-political realities but also as a medium for exploring the tensions between domination and resistance.

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INTRODUCTION

In many societies undergoing rapid social and political transformation, individuals may experience a sense of disconnection from their surroundings and social roles. The concepts of alienation and isolation resonate deeply in the human experience in societies characterized by rapid change and socio-political upheaval (Evans, 2024). Marx (1844), in *Economic Philosophic Manuscript of 1844*, states that alienation refers to the estrangement that individuals feel from their work, their essence, and each other, which is often compounded by systemic structures that prioritize profit over personal fulfillment. He further argues that the more wealth a worker produces, the more their condition declines, as they are devalued and

treated as commodities within the system they sustain (Marx, 1844). Isolation, on the other hand, reflects a deep sense of disconnection from society and community, leading to emotional and psychological distress (Baarsen et al., 2001). Similarly, the states that alienation refers to a generalized expectancy that one's own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, one seeks, highlighting the psychological dimension of powerlessness within oppressive structures (Seeman, 1959). These themes are relevant in various social contexts as they serve in a critical lens through which to analyze literary works.

Literature has the power to preserve memory and give voice to suppressed histories, allowing marginalized experiences to remain

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visible despite attempts at erasure (Assmann, 2011). This quote aligns with the idea that labor under oppressive systems leads to self-estrangement, literature often functions as a reflection of social and political conditions, portraying the emotional and psychological consequences of oppression experienced by individuals and communities (Marx & Engels, 1978). Through various literary texts, issues such as injustice, repression, and the pursuit of freedom are often examined from a profoundly human perspective, these representations reflect how oppression shapes the psyche, where violence and domination turn to the interior of the oppressed (Fanon, 1961). Within this framework, the notions of alienation and isolation emerge as crucial analytical lenses for interpreting how individuals navigate and respond to restrictive socio-political structures, particularly in systems where power produces a sense of distance and difference between the self and others (Said, 1978).

A Marxist reading can be particularly useful in this context because it can provide a deeper understanding of how individual experiences of suffering are shaped by broader structural forces rather than merely personal or psychological conditions. Marx (1844) argues that alienation arises when the worker is separated from the product of his labor, from his own activity, and from his species-being, highlighting that estrangement is rooted in systemic conditions rather than individual experience. In *The Sea Speaks His Name*, this framework is useful for examining how state power operates during the New Order era. It produces forms of alienation that extend beyond labor into political repression, enforced disappearance, and social disconnection. The use of a Marxist perspective extends the concept of alienation into the realm of political and ideological control. Furthermore, Louis Althusser (1971) highlights that ideology shapes individuals' perception of reality, suggesting that systems of power influence not only material conditions but also consciousness and identity. This approach enables the analysis to understand literature as both a reflection of social reality and a product of ideological conditions (Eagleton, 1976). It also allows the study to position the novel as a form of resistance that challenges dominant historical narratives and exposes the human consequences of

political oppression. Therefore, a Marxist framework is important for understanding how the novel represents both the mechanisms of oppression and the silencing of marginalized voices within a broader socio-political context.

Literature can play an important role in giving voice to those who are often silenced in society. Through storytelling, authors can present experiences that may not be visible in official histories, particularly those related to oppression and injustice. In many literary works, oppression is depicted not only through physical violence but also through the silencing of voices and the erasure of personal narratives. This form of control limits individuals' ability to express themselves and participate in social life, leading to a deeper sense of disconnection and powerlessness (Foucault, 1977). As Michel Foucault (1977) himself argues, power operates not only through force but also through subtle forms of discipline that shape and regulate individuals' behavior and identity. Literary works can help readers understand how individuals feel and respond when they are placed in difficult social and political conditions (Thiong'o, 1986). This statement suggests that literature is not only a form of artistic expression but also a platform for social awareness and critical reflection. Literary works also served as platforms for the colonial interpretation of indigenous culture, history, and textual analysis (Reynolds, 2020, as cited in Darmawan, 2023, p.196).

Furthermore, the themes of alienation and isolation are closely connected to the experiences of individuals living under systems of control. When individuals are denied freedom, separated from others, or stripped of their identity, they may experience a sense of disconnection from both themselves and their surroundings. This condition is not only emotional but also shaped by social and political, as it is shaped by power structures that can limit human agency. (Fromm, 1941). Examining these themes in literary works allows readers to understand how oppression affects individuals in interconnected ways, influencing their psychological, social, and existential conditions, as well as their responses to such circumstances, including forms of resistance, even in small or symbolic ways (Marcuse, 1964).

Moreover, narratives about political violence and enforced disappearance often

illustrate how individuals are excluded from both social life and historical recognition. This absence creates a gap in collective memory, which can make it difficult for societies to fully acknowledge past injustices (Ricoeur, 2004). As Paul Ricoeur (2004) emphasizes, memory plays a crucial role in shaping historical understanding, and its loss can lead to the distortion or erasure of truth.

Leila S. Chudori's novel *The Sea Speaks His Name* (translated by John H. McGlynn from *Laut Bercerita*) portrays the political conditions of Indonesia's New Order era through the story of Biru Laut, a student activist who becomes a victim of enforced disappearance. Set during the final years of President Suharto's regime, the novel presents state repression and the struggle for justice experienced by individuals affected by political violence. Through a Marxist perspective, this study examines how alienation and isolation influence the characters' identities and social relationships, while also considering forms of resilience that emerge within these conditions. Although the narrative is grounded in the New Order period, the issues it raises, such as restrictions on expression, human rights concerns, and authoritarian governance, remain relevant in various socio-political contexts.

Marx's theory of social class explains that alienation arises from relations of domination between classes, in which one group exerts control over another. In this context, the analysis focuses on how *The Sea Speaks His Name* represents alienation and isolation as experiences shaped by socio-political conditions during the New Order era. Accordingly, this study examines how these conditions influence the characters' sense of identity and social relationships, as well as how they respond to such circumstances within the narrative.

The existing body of literature demonstrates that Marxist theory provides a critical framework for understanding class dynamics, oppression, and structural inequality in literary works. John Milios (2003) in his article entitled *On the Theory of Social Classes (From the Classical Political Economy to Marxist Theory)* discussed the evolution of the social class concept on Marxist theories revolutionizing the classic approach by emphasizing class exploitation, class antagonism, and power relations, and viewing the social class as the result

of class struggle. The Marxist theory in John's article viewed social inequality as the result of the exploitation of the middle class by the government class (Millios, 2003). While Bhriugu Kalita (2021) with the article entitled *Marx's Concept of Class Struggle: A Study* provides a thorough explanation of Marx's theory of class struggle, which can serve as a theoretical basis for the author's analysis of class dynamics in *The Sea Speaks His Name*. Kalita's article re-analyzes Karl Marx's theory that society is divided by classes in constant conflict and emphasizes that class struggle is driven by conflicting interests due to the nature of capitalist exploitation (Kalita, 2021).

In addition, *Capitalism and Alienation: Towards a Marxist Theory of Alienation for the 21st Century* revisits Marx's theory of alienation, highlighting that alienation should not be seen merely as a subjective experience or inherent to all social organizations, but as an objective process stemming from capitalist production (Oversveen, 2022). Possibly, this article will provide an analytical framework for understanding alienation and powerlessness in a capitalist context. Together, these studies establish a strong theoretical foundation for examining how class conflict and alienation operate within the novel.

Furthermore, several studies focusing specifically on *The Sea Speaks His Name* offer complementary insights that support this research. *The Portrayal of Marine Life in Chudori's The Sea Speaks His Name* by Maria Vincent as an example, her article highlights the important role of Laut life and its surroundings in supporting the spirit of love and student movement in Chudori's *The Sea Speaks His Name*. The article emphasizes the unity and togetherness of the student movement, which includes participants from various islands, not just Java (Vincent, 2023). Similarly, Mafriha Azida and Alifa Nur Fitri (2021) in their article entitled *Content Analysis of the Novel Laut Bercerita in the Frame of Ecofeminism* explore broader struggles against oppression; Laut's experience of alienation due to political oppression and his activism resonates with Marxist notions of alienation under capitalist structures. This article shows that the novel depicts a struggle for justice and equality that cannot be separated from environmental preservation and community well-being, and emphasizing women's unique roles and

perspectives in environmental activism (Azida & Fitri, 2021).

Meanwhile, the article entitled *The Portrayal of the Student Movement's History in the Novel Laut Bercerita by Leila S. Chudori: A New Historicism Study* by Mita Saputri, Nurhadi, and Denitha Nafalitha (2023) identifies four significant student movements during the reformasi era depicted in the novel *The Sea Speaks His Name*. The New Historicism approach used in this article also connects historical events with the experiences of the characters in the novel, so as to illustrate the socio-political struggles of the time. This article situates the narrative within historical realities by linking it to student activism and state repression during the Reformasi era (Saputri et al, 2023). These studies collectively show that while previous research has addressed themes of oppression, violence, and historical context, a focused Marxist analysis of alienation and isolation remains necessary to further uncover the structural dimensions of the characters' experiences.

This study contributes to existing scholarship by examining the interconnected experiences of alienation and isolation within a Marxist framework. While previous studies tend to emphasize class struggle, historical representation, or environmental perspectives, this research focuses on how socio-political power structures shape characters' psychological and emotional disconnection.

By applying Karl Marx's concept of alienation to character analysis, this study extends the discussion of structural class conflict to include individual experiences. It demonstrates how political repression affects identity, agency, and interpersonal relationships. In addition, this research provides a contextualized reading of *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori, showing how alienation operates across social, psychological, and existential dimensions. Overall, this study situates Marxist theory within an analysis of personal and emotional experiences in the context of Indonesian literature.

Karl Marx's theory of alienation explains that estrangement occurs when workers are disconnected from the products of their labor, their own human essence, and their social relations. This framework supports the analysis of how

structural conditions shape the characters' experiences in the novel.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design based on textual analysis. The data are derived from the novel and analyzed using qualitative interpretative techniques to examine its content (Creswell, 2009, as cited in Darmawan et al., 2024, p. 4). The primary data source is *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori, while secondary data are obtained from books and scholarly articles related to Marxist theory and literary criticism. This study applies a library research method to examine representations of alienation and isolation within the socio-political context of Indonesia's New Order era

Data are collected through close reading to achieve a detailed and contextual understanding of the text. The researcher serves as the primary instrument by identifying and selecting relevant excerpts that represent experiences of alienation and isolation, such as moments of confinement, disconnection, and loss of identity. These excerpts are selected based on their relevance to the research focus and their ability to illustrate how socio-political structures influence the characters' experience of alienation.

The collected data are categorized into thematic groups, including physical, social, psychological, and existential alienation, to support systematic analysis. Through this process, the study examines how meanings of alienation and isolation are constructed in the novel, and how it relates to broader social and political contexts (Belsey, 2002). This approach ensures that the analysis remains closely connected to the text while engaging with relevant theoretical concepts.

The data are analyzed using a descriptive analytical method based on a Marxist perspective, particularly the concept of alienation proposed by Karl Marx. Marxist criticism views literary works as products of social conditions and power structures, making it appropriate for analyzing themes of oppression, control, and resistance (Eagleton, 1976). The analysis involves interpreting selected excerpts by linking them to theoretical concepts and socio-political contexts.

To ensure the validity of interpretation, the analysis is conducted systematically by maintaining consistency between textual evidence and the theoretical framework. The findings are also compared across different excerpts to identify recurring patterns. This approach helps minimize interpretative bias and ensures that conclusions are supported by coherent and consistent analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion by examining how alienation is portrayed in *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori. The analysis focuses on the experiences of the characters, particularly Biru Laut, within the oppressive political environment of the New Order era. From a Marxist perspective, the novel depicts alienation as a condition in which individuals become separated from their social relations, freedom, and sense of self due to dominant political and social structures. In the narrative, this condition is reflected through experiences of repression, enforced disappearance, and isolation imposed by state authority. These experiences illustrate how power structures marginalize individuals who challenge the system, leading to disconnection from both social relationships and personal identity. By examining key events, dialogues, and character experiences, this section shows how alienation is constructed as a consequence of political control and social domination. This section applies the concept of alienation developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to interpret how oppressive political structures contribute to the isolation of activists during the New Order period. One of the passages illustrating political isolation appears in the following excerpt:

After nearly three months detained in darkness, they took me somewhere. Black. Pitch dark (Chudori, 2017, p.2).

This quotation reflects the intense physical and psychological isolation experienced by the main character during detention by state authorities. In *The German Ideology*, the state often presents itself as a representation of the common interests, while functioning as an instrument of domination for the ruling class (Marx, 1844).

Although the state appears to unify society politically, it materially alienates individuals from control over their lives and social freedom. In relation to this idea, the excerpt illustrates a form of political isolation imposed by the state. The prolonged detention in darkness signifies the removal of the individual from social interaction and public space. From a Marxist perspective, such treatment reflects how the state can operate as a mechanism of repression against those who challenge dominant power structures. The darkness described in the passage represents not only physical confinement but also an effort to suppress dissenting voices. Thus, the novel portrays how political authority can isolate individuals as part of maintaining ideological control.

However, this condition of isolation extends physical confinement to include a deeper loss of agency and control over the self, as reflected in the following passage:

My eyes were blindfolded... My hands were handcuffed. And I felt like I was floating into a strange space, a space with no floor and no ceiling. (Chudori, 2017, p.2).

This quotation reflects alienation from the agency. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx (1844) states that individuals in a condition of alienation become passive, separated from themselves, and lose control over their actions and capacities. The imagery of blindfolded eyes and handcuffed hands signifies the loss of sensory and physical control, while the description of a space without floor or ceiling suggests the absence of social structure and existential orientation. This passage represents the loss of self-essence (species-being) described by Marx (1844), where individuals are no longer able to engage with their social reality. Laut is stripped of autonomy and reduced to an object under coercive power, reflecting his alienation from the capacity to act freely.

When these two excerpts are read together, they show that alienation in the novel operates both political and bodily levels. The first passage emphasizes external control through state power, while the second illustrates internal disorientation and loss of self-regulation. This relationship indicates that alienation is a layered process in

which structural repression becomes embodied experience. While Marx's framework explains the loss of agency and domination by external forces, the novel further illustrates how power affects perception and consciousness.

Another dimension of alienation in the novel is existential alienation, which reflects a loss of meaning and control over one's existence. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the worker becomes disconnected from the product of their labor, viewing it as something separate and beyond their control (Marx, 1844). As a result, their work no longer reflects their identity but serves external interest (Marx, 1844). This statement means that humans become alienated when the fruits of their labor do not belong to them, when their activities lose their subjective meaning as an expression of themselves, and when their existence is no longer under their own control. This condition is illustrated in the following passage:

Is this a darkness that will become dawn, or a well with no promised bottom? (Chudori, 2017, p.2).

This passage conveys existential uncertainty and the loss of direction. The metaphor of darkness represents alienation from hope and the future, while the absence of a clear end suggests a lack of control over one's existence. Within oppressive conditions, this experience reflects a disruption of personal meaning and orientation. In this sense, the character's uncertainty parallels the condition described by Marx (1844), where individuals lose control over their activities and sense of purpose.

Taken together, these passages indicate that alienation in the novel cannot be reduced to a single dimension. While Marxist theory explains the loss of agency, structural domination, and disconnection from one's essence, the narrative also reveals forms of psychological and existential uncertainty. These aspects suggest that the experience of alienation extends beyond classical formulations. Therefore, Marxism remains a useful framework, but its application in this context benefits from a more nuanced interpretation that considers both its explanatory power and its limitations.

The novel portrays bodily alienation through depictions of physical restraint and

dehumanization, as shown in the following passages:

Red Eyes pushed me forward. They shackled my legs with iron, making it impossible for me to move. (Chudori, 2017, p.5).

They bound my legs with iron until it was impossible to move. (Chudori, 2017, p.5).

In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx (1844) explain that alienation occurs when individuals lose control over their activity and no longer affirm their identity through it. In this condition, humans are treated as objects rather than active subjects. The use of chains and the presence of nameless guards illustrate how the body is reduced to an object under a system of power. The figure of "Red Eyes," which lacks a personal identity, further emphasizes depersonalization within the structure of domination. These elements show how individuals are positioned as powerless subjects within an authoritarian system.

This condition is reinforced by the statement, the worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces... his labor does not belong to him (Marx, 1844/1972, p.71–72). This quote suggests that the body is compelled to function for purposes beyond its control, creating a separation between physical existence and subjective experience. In this sense, the body no longer serves as a medium of self-expression but becomes an instrument shaped by external forces.

When these excerpts are considered together, they indicate that bodily alienation in the novel involves not only physical restriction but also the transformation of the body into an instrument of control. Laut's body is no longer a subject, it is an object forcibly controlled by repressive forces. He loses control over its own body, which becomes a passive medium of domination. At the same time, the repeated imagery of restraint suggests that this condition is systematic rather than incidental, indicating that alienation is structurally produced. The novel then extends this condition beyond the physical body into a more symbolic dimension, as illustrated in the following passage:

I drifted toward the bottom of the sea. (Chudori, 2017, p.5).

This passage reflects a sense of disorientation and loss of meaning. It can be interpreted as symbolic isolation, where connections to social reality and collective identity begin to weaken. In this condition, the individual is not only physically constrained but also detached from the social structures that provide meaning and belonging. This condition represents an isolation that arises as a condition in which the social world loses meaning for individuals, and individuals feel symbolically disconnected from society or its history (Marx, 1844/1972). As a result, isolation emerges not only as a physical state but also as a condition in which individuals experience a diminished sense of connection to society and its structures of meaning.

This symbolic disconnection is closely related to social alienation, particularly in the weakening of relationships and communal belonging. Marx (1844) discusses in the early section entitled *Estranged Labor*, explaining that in the capitalist mechanism, humans are not only alienated from their work or the fruits of their labor, but also from their social relationships, eliminating the sense of mutual dependence that is at the core of human social life (Marx, 1844/1972, p.71–72). This condition is clearly reflected in the following passage:

Silence. So quiet. So lonely. I am no longer relevant. (Chudori, 2017, p.6).

This statement expresses a sense of insignificance within social relations, suggesting that the subject no longer perceives himself as part of a meaningful social context. It reflects social alienation in the form of detachment from community and collective life. The silence surrounding Laut does not merely indicate the absence of sound, but points to the weakening of social connection, where the individual is positioned outside relational structures that once provided recognition and belonging.

Taken together, these passages indicate that alienation in the novel operates across interconnected levels: bodily, symbolic, and social. These dimensions do not function separately but reinforce one another, showing how structure of power affects both physical existence and social meaning. While Marxist theory helps explain

processes such as loss of agency and social disconnection, the novel also presents alienation through emotional and symbolic experiences. This condition suggests that the representation of alienation extends beyond strictly material conditions, requiring a more nuanced application of Marxist analysis.

The narrative further extends alienation into the domain of historical erasure and existential disappearance, as reflected in the following passage:

My body will remain at the bottom of this sea forever. (Chudori, 2017, p.7).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1846) emphasize that certain social conditions can lead to the erasure or marginalization of certain groups and narratives from the dominant history. The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas (Marx & Engels, 1846, p.172-173), this means that history is not neutral, but constructed in ways that privilege certain voices while silencing others. Within this framework, the image of a body remaining at the bottom of the sea suggest more than physical death, it represents the erasure of identity and historical existence. This condition reflects not only physical disappearance but also historical erasure. As Darmawan et al. (2026) argue, the mangroves function as a vegetal archive that records collective trauma, suggesting that memory may persist beyond human testimony. The body is removed from visibility and collective memory, indicating a condition in which the individual is excluded from broader social narratives. It can be interpreted as a form of alienation linked to the shaping of historical representation, where power affects whose existence is acknowledged. This act of erasure reaches a more radical form in the following realization:

I realized: I am dead. (Chudori, 2017, p.7).

Marx (1844) conceptualizes alienation as a total condition in which individuals lose control over their labor, their social relations, and ultimately their own human essence or species-being. Alienation from species-being refers to a state in which individuals no longer recognize

themselves as active participants in social life. In this context, the statement suggests not only physical death but also a loss of self-recognition and social existence. The subject appears detached from meaning, activity, and relational identity, indicating a deep level of alienation. At the same time, the novel presents this condition through psychological and existential expression, suggesting that alienation may also be experienced internally, not solely through material conditions. This fragmentation of consciousness is further illustrated in the following passage:

Everything blurred like a sped-up black-and-white film. (Chudori, 2017, p.7).

Drawing on Georg Lukács' (1923/1967) concept of reification in *History and Class Consciousness*, individuals within oppressive systems may experience reality as fragmented and external, leading to a sense of detachment from their own lived experience. In this case, the blurred and accelerated imagery in this passage suggests a disruption in perception, where experience is no longer stable or continuous. Rather than presenting a fully coherent reality, the narrative reflects a condition in which perception becomes disoriented, indicating a form of detachment from immediate experience. This condition suggests that alienation in the novel also affects the level of consciousness, where the subject struggles to maintain a sense of coherence. The culmination of these experiences is expressed in the following passage:

I felt the underwater current swirling around me. So tight, so warm, as if I were part of this sea. Deeper and deeper, I don't know how many thousands of meters I drifted towards the bottom... And finally my body thudded against the seabed. (Chudori, 2017, p.7)

Marx (1844) emphasizes that alienation is not only an economic condition but also a broader existential one, in which individuals lose control over themselves and their social existence. The imagery of becoming "part of the sea" and the continuous drifting deeper and deeper suggests the dissolution of boundaries between the self and the external environment. Alienated labor manifests in the loss of connection to the product one creates,

which can contribute to diminished sense of self and identity (Marx, 1844). Rather than acting as an autonomous subject, the individual is carried by external forces, reflecting a reduced sense of agency. This condition parallels Marx's idea that individuals under alienation have limited control over their own activity and are shaped by broader structure. Marx (1844) describes the same alienation, where individuals become objects of systemic forces rather than creative subjects who determine their own lives.

Taken together, these passages suggest that alienation in the novel operates across several related dimensions, including historical, existential, psychological, and symbolic. These dimensions appear to be interconnected, as changes in physical condition and social context influence how the subject experiences reality. While Marxist theory helps explain the loss of control and agency, the novel also expands this framework by emphasizing the subjective and psychological depth of alienation. This condition suggests that alienation under authoritarian conditions may not be fully understood solely through economic relations, but must also account for the ways in which power reshapes memory, identity, and perception.

The following discussion examines identity alienation within a Marxist framework, focusing how individuals may experience instability in their sense of self under oppressive social structures. Marx (1844) argues that within systems dominated by external power, individuals may become estranged not only from their labor but also from their own identity, resulting in a fractured sense of self that is shaped more by social forces than by personal agency. This act is reflected in the following passage:

Biru Laut... I always wondered if it was a pseudonym like Amir Zein... It turns out that Biru Laut is indeed the name your parents gave you. (Chudori, 2017, p.53).

The uncertainty surrounding Biru Laut's name suggests a tension between personal identity and socially mediated identity. The name carries both political and personal meanings, functioning as a marker of struggle while also connecting him to familial origins. The ambiguity, whether the name is authentic or constructed, suggests that

identity is not entirely self-determined but influenced by broader social and political contexts. In a Marxist sense, this can be seen as reflecting alienation from species-being, where individuals may experience a disruption in their connections to their own essence as social beings. However, rather than suggesting a total loss of identity, the passage also indicates a layered identity shaped by both personal history and collective struggle, suggesting that alienation may coexist with forms of meaning rather than entirely erasing them. The instability is further reflected in the following passage:

I've reached the stage of insanity where I imagine Mas Laut at the bottom of the sea trying to interact with me, with Father, Mother, and Anjani. (Chudori, 2017, p.305).

This excerpt suggests a condition in the boundary between presence and absence, imagined interaction replaces direct social connection. Marx (1844), when a person experiences deep alienation, they lose connection with themselves and with the social world, where they are no longer able to live a connected life. The narrator mentally tries to interact socially with someone who is gone. This condition shows that she is cut off from real social relationships, her mind fills the void with social illusions, and this is the most extreme form of social isolation. In this case, the attempt to maintain interaction with someone who has disappeared reveals a fractured social world, where absence is filled through imagined presence. Rather than reading this solely as irrationality, it can also be understood as a response to unresolved loss, where the subject attempts to sustain relational ties despite their absence. This act reflects how alienation may be experienced internally, not only as an external condition but also through efforts to cope with disrupted relationships. The rupture of social relations extends into a broader reflection on collective loss and the limits of resistance, as expressed in the following passage:

If it's true that Mas Laut, Mas Gala, Kinan, Julius, Dana, and all the missing friends were drowned in the sea, if it's true...will they be able to scream and rebel when they are led to the seaside? (Chudori, 2017, p. 305).

This question appears to draw attention to the weakening of collective agency under conditions of repression. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx (1844) explains that alienation can distance individuals from their social nature, potentially affecting their capacity for shared action. The image of drowning suggests both physical elimination and a form of suppressed voice. At the same time, the question itself may indicate an ongoing awareness of collective struggle. The uncertainty it expresses reflects a tension between constraint and the possibility of resistance, suggesting that while agency is limited, it is not entirely absent.

The tension can be further understood through the discussion of estranged labor, where social structures fragment relationships between individuals and society, producing powerlessness and isolation (Marx, 1844). However, this perspective can be expanded by considering Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, as articulated in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, which highlights how dominant power not only controls material conditions but also shapes social consciousness. Under such conditions, alienation is not merely experienced individually but is reproduced collectively through ideological control. Yet, the novel complicates this condition by presenting moments of solidarity that challenge total fragmentation, as illustrated in the following passage:

In Argentina and Chile, mothers for decades have steadfastly and powerfully sued every Thursday, every year..." (Chudori, 2017, p.337)

These references to collective action suggest that, despite systemic oppression and the alienation it produces, social bonds can be partially reconstructed through shared struggle. While individuals experience loss both physically and socially, practices of solidarity, such as sustained protests and collective mourning, function as efforts to reclaim agency and re-establish social connections. In this sense, alienation does not fully eliminate the possibility of collective life, but instead creates conditions under which solidarity becomes both more difficult and more necessary. This statement also reflects a limitation in Marx's framework when applied rigidly, as it may

emphasize structural domination without fully accounting for the resilience of collective practices that emerge within oppressive contexts. At the same time, the persistence of alienation at the individual level remains evident, as shown in the following passage:

I was definitely on my own, with no one to help me. I only saw two dark-colored Kijang vehicles waiting for us with their engines running. (Chudori, 2017, p.54).

This scene illustrates an immediate experience of social isolation, where the individual is entirely detached from networks of support and placed within a situation controlled by external forces. The imagery of the dark-colored Kijang vehicles suggests the presence of an authoritarian apparatus, reinforcing the idea that individual agency is constrained by structures of power. From a Marxist perspective, this condition reflects alienation from social relations, in which individuals no longer experience themselves as part of a collective social existence but as isolated subjects subjected to external control (Marx, 1844).

Taken together, these passages suggest that social alienation in the novel operates across both individual and collective dimensions. While oppressive structures fragment relationships and weaken collective agency, they do not entirely eliminate the possibility of resistance or solidarity. Instead, the text presents alienation as a contested condition, one that simultaneously produces isolation and generates the need for collective reconstruction. By integrating Marx's concept of alienation with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, this analysis indicates that social disconnection can be understood not only as a material condition but also an ideological one, shaping how individuals perceive themselves, their relationships, and their capacity to resist.

In conclusion, the analysis of *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori suggests that alienation and isolation are experienced by the characters in relation to oppressive socio-political conditions. Drawing on Karl Marx's concept of alienation, the findings indicate that the characters have varying degrees of separation from themselves, their bodies, their social relationships, and their sense of identity. The novel illustrates how state power can regulate individual lives, limit

their freedom, and contribute to both physical and emotional isolation. At the same time, the disruption of social connections often complicates the possibility of resistance, although it does not entirely eliminate it.

Importantly, the narrative also points to the persistence of hope through memory, imagination, and emotional bonds, suggesting that alienation is not a totalizing condition. These elements highlight how individuals continue to negotiate their sense of self and connection even under oppressive circumstances. Overall, the analysis indicates that alienation and isolation can be understood not only as personal experiences but also as conditions shaped by broader structures of power, while still leaving room for agency, ambiguity, and resistance.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that alienation and isolation in *The Sea Speaks His Name* by Leila S. Chudori are closely linked to the oppressive socio-political structures of Indonesia's New Order era. Rather than treating alienation as a single, uniform experience, the analysis shows that it operates across multiple dimensions political, psychological, and existential which intersect but should not be conflated. Through a Marxist perspective, the findings indicate that the characters experience varying degrees of estrangement from their sense of self, their social relations, and their capacity for agency. In this context, alienation emerges not only from material conditions but also from sustained political repression that shapes both external realities and internal subjectivities.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates how state violence, such as detention, disappearance, and enforced silence, can produce layered forms of isolation. These experiences extend beyond physical separation and contribute to psychological disorientation and instability, although not uniformly across all characters. As noted by Judith Herman (1992), prolonged exposure to violence may disrupt an individual's sense of identity and continuity, a condition that is partially reflected in the narrative. However, the text also suggests that alienation does not function as a totalizing condition; its effects are uneven, and

moments of awareness and relational connection continue to emerge despite structural constraints.

In addition, the findings indicate that alienation can contribute to the weakening of social bonds and complicate the formation of collective resistance, particularly when communication and trust are systematically disrupted. Yet, rather than fully eliminating collective agency, the novel presents a more ambivalent dynamic in which fragmentation coexists with the potential for solidarity. This nuance challenges a simplified reading of Marxist theory by highlighting both the limits and the continuing relevance of alienation as an analytical framework in this context.

Finally, the persistence of memory, imagination, and emotional attachment in the narrative points to the possibility of symbolic resistance. These elements suggest that while oppressive systems may constrain individual and collective action, they do not entirely suppress the desire for recognition and connection. In this sense, the novel not only reflects socio-political realities but also foregrounds the tensions between domination and resistance. Overall, this study underscores the importance of approaching alienation as a complex and contested condition, shaped by structural forces while still leaving room for ambiguity, agency, and critical interpretation.

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