



The Female Body as a Field of Power: Sexism and Performativity in Contemporary Indonesian Novels

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Abstract. This study examines the female body as a field of power in contemporary Indonesian novels by analyzing how sexism operates through affective discourse, moral regulation, and reproductive control. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores literary representations of the body as an ideological space where patriarchal norms are produced, negotiated, and challenged. The analysis reveals that sexism is not only articulated through overt violence, but also through romanticization, moral domestication, and biomedical intervention that naturalize women's subordination. At the same time, the female body emerges as an active site of resistance, where performative gestures such as refusal, mobility, and deviation disrupt normative expectations surrounding femininity, love, and motherhood. These embodied practices transform bodily experience into a form of critical consciousness that contests patriarchal authority. The study concludes that the female body in contemporary Indonesian literature functions not merely as an object of domination, but as an epistemic space in which power relations are exposed and reconfigured through performative subversion.

Keywords: contemporary novel, female body, politics of sexism, performativity, subversion

1 Introduction

The female body constitutes one of the most complex loci within patriarchal cultural constructions. In Indonesian society, the body is frequently institutionalized as a symbol of morality and purity, while at the same time functioning as an arena of domination concealed behind social and religious values. Patriarchal power no longer operates primarily through direct prohibition, but through aesthetic normalization and ideological reproduction. This phenomenon indicates that sexism has transformed into a system of symbolic power operating through the body and naturalized images of femininity.

This perspective aligns with Parker's argument in *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (2005), which conceptualizes the female body as "the political terrain of control and conformity"—a domain in which aesthetics and morality function as instruments of social subjugation [1]. Through the body, women are trained to reproduce discipline and obedience to normative structures. In Asian and Islamic contexts, Yaghoobi, in *Temporary Marriage in Iran: Gender and Body Politics* (2020), demonstrates that the female body is not merely a symbol of moral reproduction, but also an ideological field where resistance to patriarchal power—often masked by religion and

culture—takes place [2]. The body, therefore, is never neutral: it is a political text that simultaneously produces and resists subjugation.

The theoretical framework of Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) provides a radical foundation for this reading. Firestone argues that women's oppression is rooted in the control of biological and reproductive functions [3]. Patriarchy, in her view, transforms the womb and love into ideological apparatuses that regulate women's lives through domestic morality. Sexism, therefore, is not merely a form of social bias, but a structure of power that exploits biology as ideological legitimation. The female body, according to Firestone, is not simply a biological entity, but a field in which patriarchal ideology crystallizes into a system that appears natural and inevitable.

However, as Judith Butler emphasizes in *Gender Trouble* (1990), the body is not static; it is continuously produced through social performativity and remains open to deviation [4]. For Butler, gender and identity do not originate from biological essence, but from the repetition of normative acts that can be destabilized through subversive repetition. In this sense, the female body can become a site of undoing normativity—a space in which “failed” repetitions of norms generate new resistant discourses. Within this framework, the body emerges as a living epistemic agent that rewrites relations of power through gesture, affect, and minor acts that violate social expectations.

In a similar vein, Barbara Brook, in her review of Rose Weitz's *The Politics of Women's Bodies* (2000), asserts that the female body constitutes a political arena where power operates through medicalization, representation, and social discipline, while simultaneously serving as a medium of resistance to oppressive social structures [5]. This argument is further expanded by Chakravarty in *Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Terror in Literature and Culture* (2017), which conceptualizes the female body in transnational literature as a discursive site of defiance, where resistance to colonialism and global patriarchy is materialized through narrative and representation [6]. Within this transnational dimension, the body becomes a locus of a dual dialectic—between ideological reproduction and the production of consciousness—enabling feminist readings that transcend moral, geographical, and epistemic boundaries. Cohen further argues that the female body occupies a central position in the global political economy, as it sustains capitalism through unpaid social-reproductive labor, a condition she identifies as a form of super-exploitation [7].

Despite these critical developments, **feminist literary criticism in Indonesia has predominantly approached the female body as a representational object**, emphasizing bodily signs, moral symbolism, and narrative suffering through thematic and semiotic readings of women's oppression in literary texts [8]. While such approaches are crucial for mapping representational patterns of femininity, they often remain confined to descriptive and moral analysis, without fully engaging the epistemic dimension in which the body functions as a locus of ideology and consciousness.

The Indonesian literary context presents a distinctive configuration of these dynamics. In contemporary Indonesian literature, the female body appears as a site of encounter between tradition and modernity, normativity and desire, power and freedom. Novels such as *Korpus Uterus* by Sasti Gotama, *Nyi Sadikem* by Artie Ahmad, and *Gentayangan* by Intan Paramaditha depict the body as a living ideological text, continuously negotiated between biological suffering and existential consciousness [9–

11]. These works articulate bodily politics across multiple layers: sexual violence, moral domestication, medicalization of the womb, and performative resistance that generates new forms of awareness. Through such representations, the female body becomes a social archive that records how patriarchal power operates, while simultaneously revealing the fissures through which that power is destabilized.

This study seeks to move beyond representational paradigms by integrating Firestone's biological materialism [3] with Butler's discursive theory of performativity [4], in order to reveal the body as an ideological text that is simultaneously productive and resistant. Through this theoretical synthesis, the body is understood not only as a space of patriarchal domination, but also as an epistemological arena where ideology operates, is negotiated, and disrupted through performative acts that deviate from normative expectations.

Accordingly, the research gap addressed by this study lies in the absence of a sustained synthesis between Firestone's politics of reproduction and Butler's theory of gender performativity in reading the body as a site of ideology and resistance. The novelty of this research resides in its articulation of the body as a reflexive epistemic space—a text that writes and resists itself—where sexism is not only reproduced but also subverted through symbolic, affective, and discursive actions.

2 Method

This study employs a qualitative–descriptive approach grounded in radical feminist literary criticism, drawing upon a theoretical synthesis of Shulamith Firestone's biological materialism and Judith Butler's theory of performativity [3,4]. This approach conceptualizes literary texts as ideological spaces in which the female body is produced, regulated, and subverted through language, affect, and representation.

The research corpus consists of three contemporary Indonesian novels—*Nyi Sadikem* by Artie Ahmad, *Korpus Uterus* by Sasti Gotama, and *Gentayangan* by Intan Paramaditha [9–11]—all of which foreground the complexities of the female body, reproduction, and resistance. The data comprise selected narrative excerpts, bodily metaphors, and symbolic representations, which are analyzed through close reading and a critical feminist discourse analysis framework to uncover the ideology of sexism and the strategies of bodily resistance articulated within the texts.

The analysis integrates two epistemic horizons. Firestone's framework is employed to expose the material and reproductive dimensions of patriarchal domination, particularly the political control exercised over women's biological functions [3]. Butler's theory, meanwhile, elucidates how the body negotiates, destabilizes, and reconfigures normative structures through performative acts and subversive repetition [4]. This combined theoretical approach enables a reading of the body as an embodied epistemology—a form of knowledge that is lived, enacted, and articulated through bodily experience and discourse.

Methodologically, this study positions literature not merely as a reflection of social reality, but as an embodied practice of knowledge production. Within this frame-

work, the female body functions as a critical text that simultaneously records, interrogates, and resists the historical operations of patriarchal power. Literature thus becomes a site where bodily experience and ideological critique converge, allowing the female body to write and contest the very structures that seek to regulate it.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 The Politics of Sexism and Romanticization

The female body in the three contemporary novels—*Nyi Sadikem* (Ahmad, 2025), *Korpus Uterus* (Gotama, 2025), and *Gentayangan* (Paramaditha, 2024)—articulates a single ideological system operating through affect, biology, and morality. Sexism in these texts does not appear as overt or brutal repression, but rather as a softened system of power mediated through love, responsibility, and guilt. In this context, patriarchy asserts its authority not through direct violence alone, but by cultivating an *affective economy*—a circulation of emotions that transforms love and motherhood into a language of domination that appears virtuous and noble.

In *Nyi Sadikem*, sexual violence is legitimized through a narrative of love. Bondan's declaration that he "truly loves" Moerni moments before raping her demonstrates how the language of affection operates as an ideological instrument. This act constitutes a manifestation of *reproductive violence* as conceptualized by Firestone (1970): male power exploiting biological difference to reinforce social hierarchy. Moerni's body becomes a locus of conquest softened by romantic rhetoric, marking the first stage of this ideological system—*affective domestication*, or the disciplining of the female body through emotion.

In *Nyi Sadikem*, Bondan's confession of love immediately before raping Moerni—"I love you, Moer..." (Data 1)—illustrates how affectionate language is transformed into an instrument of power. When Moerni's body is silenced ("Bondan's mouth then covered mine..." (Data 2)), love is converted into a form of reproductive violence that legitimizes male domination. Within Firestone's framework (1970), this scene represents a concrete manifestation of the *biological class system*, in which male desire exploits biological difference to assert patriarchal authority. Moerni's body loses both affective and biological autonomy, becoming an arena of domination masked by a narrative of love.

[1] "I love you, Moer. Truly love you. Not because you are like a *noni*, no! But because I truly love you!" (Ahmad, 2025: 18)

[2] "Bondan's mouth then covered mine... Pain spread from the lower part of my body. I wanted to scream, but I could not. At its peak, I completely collapsed." (Ahmad, 2025: 18–19)

Data (1) and (2) reveal that the female body functions as a locus of biological domination. According to Firestone (1970), the root of gender inequality lies in biological differences in reproduction that are subsequently exploited by patriarchy to construct systems of domination. Moerni's body is positioned not as a body with agency, but as a body to be possessed—its violation even legitimized by love. Violence

“wrapped in love” thus constitutes *reproductive violence*: the female body is controlled through male desire rather than personal will. This scene exemplifies Firestone’s thesis that genuine liberation for women requires emancipation from the tyranny of politicized reproduction and sexuality.

A similar system is materialized in *Korpus Uterus*, where the female body is not only affectively subordinated but also regulated through the *biopolitics of reproduction*. The character Kalimah’s rejection of a child conceived through rape as “filth” represents an extreme expression of *reproductive alienation*—a body that functions without meaning, a womb that operates without subjectivity. Within Firestone’s logic, this condition reflects the most insidious form of *biological slavery*: reproduction imposed as destiny rather than choice. The sexual-economic exchange between Nur and Soleh further reinforces the capitalist dimension of this system: the body becomes a commodity, and love is transformed into a transactional relationship. Here, patriarchy and capitalism converge within a *material affective regime* that exchanges affection for power and money.

In *Korpus Uterus*, forced pregnancy, abortion, and uterine trauma shape female figures alienated from their own biological functions. Kalimah’s perception of a child conceived through rape as “filth” constitutes an extreme form of reproductive alienation—a body that gives birth without meaning, a womb operating without consciousness. Firestone interprets such conditions as the highest form of *biological slavery*: women are subordinated by a social system that normalizes biological suffering as “destiny.” In the context of modern political economy, sexual relations exchanged for money further indicate the commodification of the female body within capitalist patriarchy, marking the shift from love as affect to love as transaction.

Romanticization in *Korpus Uterus* is not articulated through tenderness or care, but through fear and power embedded in intimate relationships. Kalimah does not perceive her child as a symbol of life, but as the product of violence or sin imposed upon her body. From Firestone’s perspective (*The Dialectic of Sex*, 1970), this represents the most extreme form of reproductive alienation: women are forced to undergo biological processes—pregnancy and childbirth—without agency over their origin or meaning. Firestone insists that “biological reproduction must be freed from the tyranny of the biological class system.” Kalimah’s body (Data 3) demonstrates how her reproductive function has been fully colonized by social and moral structures, leading her to regard the product of reproduction with disgust rather than affection. This reaction is not instinctual, but ideological—a response to patriarchal power that renders the female body a site of moral contamination.

[3] “No need, Mother,” Kalimah hissed while blinking her eyes. To her, the child was nothing but filth. And what is born of filth must also be filth, unworthy of a name.” (Gotama, 2025: 9)

[4] “Before Nur got off the red motorcycle, Soleh slipped an envelope into her hand. This time it was not very thick, because it was only for one day.” (Gotama, 2025: 46)

This novel reveals how patriarchy governs the female body through both reproductive and affective logics. Sexuality is moralized, the womb is regulated, and

pregnancy is interpreted as a moral curse. Kalimah's reference to a child conceived through rape as "filth" (Data 3) marks an extreme form of reproductive alienation: her body performs a biological function devoid of personal meaning and subjectivity. Firestone identifies this condition as the purest form of biological enslavement, in which women are compelled to fulfill reproductive roles in service of an oppressive social order. Meanwhile, Nur (Data 4) represents a contemporary form of oppression integrated into modern economic systems, where the body becomes a commodity within relationships falsely framed as love. Firestone argues that capitalist–patriarchal systems transform reproduction and sexuality into *means of production*, sustaining social hierarchies through the objectification of women's bodies as sources of exchange value.

Gentayangan, by contrast, introduces a more subtle ideological dimension—*moralized biopolitics*. Maimunah's body, condemned for giving birth to a "rodent-like baby," illustrates how reproductive function is controlled by collective moral discourse. The womb becomes *collective moral property*, a component of the social body subject to religious and moral law. Within Firestone's framework, this represents the final stage of the biological class system: the female body no longer belongs solely to men, but to public morality itself. Sexism here operates through the internalization of sanctity and guilt, imprisoning women within sacralized motherhood. The female body thus becomes a site of *moralized biopolitics*, where biological functions are regulated, evaluated, and sanctified through social discourse.

In Gentayangan (Paramaditha, 2024), communal surveillance over Maimunah's relationship with a dwarf man (Data 5–6) confirms that sexism is internalized and enforced by the community. When the female body becomes an object of gossip and judgment, the womb ceases to be private and instead becomes collective moral property. Firestone rejects the naturalization of motherhood that confines women within biological destiny. Maimunah's condemnation for giving birth to a "rodent-like baby" exemplifies an extreme form of *moralized biology*, in which reproductive function is treated as evidence of sin rather than life.

[5] "The villagers began to sense her illicit relationship... some claimed to have seen the tall woman and the dwarf man entangled in the bushes." (Paramaditha, 2024: 43)

[6] "A bastard child, of course! She gave birth to a baby like a rodent!" (Paramaditha, 2024: 43)

Taken together, these three texts demonstrate ideological continuity: sexism is consistently rooted in the politics of the body. From oppressive love (*Nyi Sadikem*), to colonized reproduction (*Korpus Uterus*), to politicized motherhood (*Gentayangan*), patriarchy operates through biological logics justified by social norms. Firestone emphasizes that genuine liberation for women is only possible through *material revolution*—emancipation from biological and reproductive dependency. Consequently, the politics of sexism in these novels is not merely a narrative of violence, but an ideological representation of how the female body becomes a social instrument that guarantees the persistence of patriarchy.

3.2 Reproductive Power and the Female Body

Within the horizon of radical feminist discourse, the female reproductive body is no longer understood as a neutral biological entity, but as an ideological construct that sustains the continuity of patriarchal social systems. The womb becomes a political locus that links power, morality, and technology. Through close readings of *Nyi Sadikem* (Ahmad, 2025), *Korpus Uterus* (Gotama, 2025), and *Gentayangan* (Paramaditha, 2024), it becomes evident that contemporary Indonesian women's bodies are situated within complex configurations of power—disciplined by doctrines of patience, mediated by biotechnology, and simultaneously negotiating freedom through symbolic mobility.

In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone (1970) asserts that the structural roots of women's oppression lie in biological differentiation that is capitalized into a social system—what she terms the *biological class system*. Within this system, women's capacity to conceive and give birth is manipulated into an instrument of domestication. Biological function is transformed into an ideological structure that determines women's social position. Reproduction thus ceases to operate as a process of life and instead becomes a mechanism of power regulated by morality, law, and medicine.

In modern Indonesian women's narratives, the womb is not merely a biological organ but a political arena controlled by legal, moral, and medical discourses. Both *Nyi Sadikem* by Artie Ahmad and *Korpus Uterus* by Sasti Gotama demonstrate that the female reproductive body never fully belongs to the woman herself. It is regulated, judged, and intervened upon by the state, by men, and even by other women who function as extensions of the system—revealing moments in which the female reproductive body is fully politicized.

Nyi Sadikem illustrates this condition through the ideology of patience imposed upon women. As shown in the character's address to Moerni—"You must be patient and endure. You are not sick, Moer. Bondan's bastard seed has taken root in your womb..." (Data 7)—patience is articulated as an ideological doctrine that normalizes biological suffering. Patience no longer functions as a spiritual value, but as a disciplinary mechanism. From Firestone's perspective, this condition reflects *psychological conditioning* that subjugates bodily consciousness through morality. Women are trained to interpret reproductive violence as natural destiny rather than as a violation of bodily autonomy.

Moerni's subsequent statement—"News of my pregnancy spread throughout Temenggungan. Dissonant voices reached my ears" (Data 8)—further reinforces the notion that the female womb functions as a social text. Pregnancy is no longer understood as a personal biological experience, but as a public event subject to moral accountability. Firestone describes this phenomenon as the *moralization of biology*, a process in which biological functions are transformed into the basis of social legitimation. In this context, the womb is not merely an organ of life, but a symbol monitored and controlled by society as an indicator of female purity.

[7] "You must be patient and endure. You are not sick, Moer. Bondan's bastard seed has taken root in your womb..." (Ahmad, 2025: 21)

[8] “News of my pregnancy spread throughout Temenggungan. Dissonant voices reached my ears.” (Ahmad, 2025: 25)

These quotations confirm that women’s reproduction functions as an instrument of social morality. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone (1970) argues that the female reproductive body constitutes the foundation of the sexual class system, as societies construct moral orders through control over the womb. In the text, pregnancy is not celebrated as life, but sanctioned as moral transgression. The womb is transformed into evidence of sin. The female body becomes a social document—read, evaluated, and judged.

In *Korpus Uterus*, power over the womb shifts from moral discourse to clinical intervention. The scene in which “Dr. Markus inserts an IUD into the woman’s womb so that she will not bear children again” (Data 9) exposes a new dimension of modern patriarchy—*technological patriarchy*. Power is no longer exercised symbolically, but through scientific intervention cloaked in medical and health narratives. Firestone warns that technology, rather than liberating women, often deepens the alienation of the biological body (*reproductive alienation*). In this situation, the female body is reduced to an object of experimentation and medical surveillance, stripped of authority over its own biological rhythms. Science and health become new discourses that legitimize patriarchal control over reproduction, replacing religion and tradition while operating with equally subtle disciplinary force.

[9] “Dr. Markus inserted an IUD into the woman’s womb so that she would no longer bear children...” (Gotama, 2025: 109)

The medicalization of the womb in this novel also reveals a dual colonization of the female body: biological colonization that regulates organic bodily functions, and epistemic colonization that erases women’s affective experience from medical discourse. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone identifies such conditions as the reproduction of *biological slavery* in modern form. Scientific knowledge and medical policy—ostensibly rational and neutral—operate as control systems that conceal ideological power beneath claims of progress.

By contrast, *Gentayangan* presents a female body that refuses reproductive logic altogether. The statement, “You find yourself in a taxi... heading toward John F. Kennedy Airport, preparing to leave New York City” (Data 10), depicts a body that crosses domestic and moral boundaries. Bodily movement beyond the home becomes a representation of *biological revolt*—a refusal of the symbolic prison of the womb. The female wanderer rejects biological destiny and replaces it with a mobile and reflexive mode of existence.

The declaration “Good girls go to heaven, bad girls wander” (Data 11) constitutes the most explicit form of ideological inversion. The term wander (*gentayangan*), typically stigmatized, is re-signified as an affirmation of freedom. Within Firestone’s framework, such a body rejects the *biological destiny* constructed by patriarchy. By leaving the home—the symbolic space of domestic reproduction—the female subject transcends the ideology of the “sacred womb” and “natural motherhood.” She is no

longer bound by moral definitions, but constructs bodily consciousness grounded in choice and desire.

[10] “You find yourself in a taxi... heading toward John F. Kennedy Airport, preparing to leave New York City.” (Paramaditha, 2024: 10)

[11] “Good girls go to heaven, bad girls wander.” (Paramaditha, 2024: 27)

Across these three texts, reproductive power operates through three modes: morality, technology, and resistance. Together, they form a dialectic of the female body confronting the *biological class system* produced by patriarchy. Moerni is forced to accept her womb as destiny; women in *Korpus Uterus* are rendered medical objects; while the female subject in *Gentayangan* rewrites the womb as a symbolic space of resistance. These dynamics affirm that bodily politics are not merely biological, but epistemological—concerning how women understand, interpret, and reclaim their bodies from oppressive discourse.

Firestone emphasizes that genuine revolution can only be achieved through the liberation of the body from reproductive determinism. The female bodies in these three novels demonstrate that the womb can no longer be understood as an “instrument of life,” but rather as an “arena of ideology.” Within it, love, patience, medicine, and morality interact to subjugate women, yet at the same time, conscious bodies transform biological wounds into revolutionary awareness. Thus, the female body ceases to be an object of reproductive politics and instead becomes the subject of a biological revolution that refuses submission.

Taken together, these texts form an interlocking ideological chain. *Nyi Sadikem* constructs the body as an affective locus of oppressive love; *Korpus Uterus* materializes control within medical and reproductive regimes; while *Gentayangan* disciplines the body through moral and religious norms. Read intertextually, they articulate a single ideological system of the body: patriarchy dominates women by naturalizing affect, biology, and morality. Sexism, therefore, is not merely social prejudice, but an *affective-moral economy* that produces compliance through emotion, the body, and value.

Within Firestone’s framework, this system reveals the paradox of modernity: the more advanced a society becomes, the more subtle the mechanisms of bodily control. Patriarchal power no longer operates as explicit prohibition, but as the internalization of values—coercive love, sanctified motherhood, and inherited guilt. Consequently, the politics of sexism in contemporary Indonesian literature is not merely a narrative of physical violence, but an ideological expression that positions the female body as a medium for moral and social reproduction in the perpetuation of patriarchal power.

3.3 Performativity and the Subversion of the Female Body

The female bodies represented in *Nyi Sadikem*, *Korpus Uterus*, and *Gentayangan* articulate different phases of feminist bodily consciousness: from wound to meaning, from coercion to subversive performance. If Firestone conceptualizes the body as the

material locus of oppression, Butler repositions it as an arena of *discursive insurgency*—a space in which gender norms can be repeated, destabilized, and undone through performative misalignment. When read intertextually, these three novels demonstrate that the body is not merely a site of patriarchal power, but also an epistemic source that generates new knowledge about women's resistance and existence.

In *Nyi Sadikem*, Moerni's decision to "kill love" and reject biological reproduction constitutes an *undoing of normativity* against patriarchal affective discipline. Her body becomes an *embodiment of violence* that is transformed into consciousness—she refuses the logic of affection that compels women to submit in the name of morality. By rejecting love, Moerni performs a *performativity of refusal*: a language of silence that destabilizes emotional norms themselves. She does not articulate resistance through speech, but inscribes it through a body that ceases to love; and it is precisely in this cessation that a new epistemology emerges—a body that recognizes silence itself as discourse.

[12] "I widened my eyes. How could I be pregnant?! My womb had already been shut down by the massage healer employed by that damned foreman back then." (Ahmad, 2025: 48)

[13] "Men must never colonize my feelings again. Everything must be extinguished." (Ahmad, 2025: 115)

Within this context, Moerni's body in *Nyi Sadikem* exemplifies what may be described as an *embodiment of violence*: a body that bears wounds produced by power relations that demand women love as a form of moral obligation rather than free will. Moerni's statement (Data 12)—"How could I be pregnant?! My womb had already been shut down..."—depicts a body that refuses its biological function as a site of moral redemption. Her decision to reject love and eliminate the possibility of reproduction (Data 13)—"Men must never colonize my feelings again"—constitutes a clear act of *undoing normativity*: a performative cancellation of the affective script imposed by patriarchy. In this gesture, the body becomes discourse—it refuses not through words, but through biologically subversive acts.

For Butler, violence against women is not only physical, but also affective and discursive. Power embeds itself through regulated emotions: love, loyalty, sacrifice. When Moerni refuses to love, she does not merely lose affection, but liberates herself from the mechanism of *affective discipline* that binds the body to morality. This refusal operates as a performativity of refusal: an act that rewrites the body as a subject conscious of its wounds and unwilling to translate them into the language of male power. By extinguishing love, Moerni produces a new mode of affective existence—a bodily consciousness sovereign over its own pain.

In *Gentayangan*, bodily subversion emerges through mobility and irony. The female subject who continually "wanders" (*gentayangan*) rejects the notion of home as the moral center of patriarchal domestication. She repeats norms of loyalty and motherhood, but through *repetition with difference* that generates counter-meaning: being "wayward" is reframed as an existential ethic rather than deviance. This nomadic body

articulates *embodied discourse*—knowledge that emerges from movement, fragmentation, and placelessness. In Butler’s terms, such misaligned repetition (*misperformance*) constitutes the purest form of *subversive repetition*: failure that destabilizes norms.

The concept of *subversive repetition* operates through irony and symbolic transformation. This is evident in the statement (Data 14): “A wandering ghost moves from one place to another because it is accepted neither in heaven nor on earth... Where is your home now?”—a passage that transforms *gentayangan* from a curse into a reflective existential condition. The woman who keeps moving is not a lost spirit, but a subject resisting the domestication of space and morality. She rejects “home” as an ideological metaphor for patriarchal stability. When Dorothy (Data 15) “keeps repeating the mantra, ‘There’s no place like home,’ to convince herself... yet the glittering shoes on her feet are the inheritance of women cursed to keep walking,” the nomadic body becomes a symbol of *embodied discourse*: a body that no longer obeys social geography, but rewrites relations among space, memory, and identity.

[14] “A wandering ghost moves from one place to another because it is accepted neither in heaven nor on earth... Where is your home now? Perhaps, like a ghost, you merely take shelter but never truly dwell.” (Paramaditha, 2024: 11)

[15] “Dorothy keeps repeating the mantra, ‘There’s no place like home,’ to convince herself... yet the glittering shoes on her feet are the inheritance of women cursed to keep walking.” (Paramaditha, 2024: 26)

Misplaced repetition—*misperformance*—thus becomes the core of Butlerian subversion. When women repeat norms with excess, deviation, or inappropriateness, the meaning of the norm itself is destabilized. Paramaditha’s female characters move through repetition with difference: they refuse to be “good,” and precisely through this refusal, they produce a new ethic—an ethic of courage not to submit. The wandering body rejects moral wholeness and instead becomes a figure of knowledge emerging from fragmentation, homelessness, and instability.

Meanwhile, in *Korpus Uterus*, the act of aborting a fetus and rescuing other women from the “enclosure of suffering” represents a form of *performativity of failure*. The act is not heroic, but deeply ambivalent: it rejects the sanctity of the womb while continuing to carry residues of guilt. Yet it is precisely within this awareness of injury that the potential for *embodied subversion* emerges—meaning is reversed through suffering processed into knowledge. Butler emphasizes that failure constitutes the most productive moment in bodily politics, because it is through failure that norms lose their stability.

This dynamic is evident in the statement (Data 16) describing a woman who saves thousands of fetuses from the “enclosure of suffering”: “She should have felt relieved... but why did she now feel like a wounded male animal?” The sentence exposes reflective awareness of bodily ambiguity. She rejects the sacred maternal role, yet her consciousness of pain reveals that subversion is never free from affective residues of oppression. From Butler’s perspective, such a body embodies *performativity of failure*—a productive failure, because it is within guilt and loss that the norm of sacred motherhood collapses.

[16] “She had saved thousands of fetuses from the enclosure of suffering. She should have felt relieved... but why did she now feel like a wounded male animal?” (Gotama, 2025: 254)

Taken together, these three novels demonstrate that power over the body is never final. Wounded bodies generate new forms of knowledge about subjectivity and meaning. In every seemingly weak action—silence, wandering, abortion, or the cessation of love—there resides the potential for *embodied subversion*: resistance incarnated in everyday gestures rather than heroic declarations. Bodily subversion does not emerge through revolutionary slogans, but through deviant repetition and women’s persistence in carving out space for themselves amid the ruins of norms.

Accordingly, the female body in these three texts functions as a space of *discursive insurgency*: an arena where power and meaning intersect, negate, and rewrite one another. If Firestone understands the womb as a biological structure that subjugates women, Butler reveals how the same body can become a tool for dismantling that order. Bodies that refuse love, bodies that move without a home, and bodies that abort for a greater meaning all demonstrate that feminist subversion is not merely social, but ontological. In the female body, power is not only reproduced, but also resisted through the awareness that to be a body is to be a living discourse—one that continually writes, refuses, and reinterprets itself within patriarchal history.

Intertextually, these three texts form a dialectic of subversion: Moerni represents *refusal of affect*, Maimunah signifies *mobility of the subject*, and Gotama’s female figure embodies *failure as knowledge*. These bodies move beyond Firestone’s biological framework by demonstrating that resistance does not always arise from material revolution, but from the *micro-politics of gesture*—repetition, failure, and irony that generate knowledge. In this sense, literature functions not merely as representation, but as *embodied epistemology* that intervenes in feminist theory itself: the body writes theory through experience rather than abstraction.

Thus, the female body in these three novels emerges as an epistemic arena where power and meaning intertwine. Subversion does not take the form of total rejection of patriarchy, but of *affective hesitation*—a gentle, ambiguous, and reflective refusal. Moerni’s silence, Maimunah’s wandering, and Kalimah’s abortion are not merely figures of suffering, but bodily practices of knowledge that challenge assumptions about purity, love, and motherhood. At this juncture, contemporary Indonesian literature offers an expansion of global feminist theory: the body is not only that which is “dominated” or “resists,” but that which rewrites the history of power through conscious woundedness, repetition, and acknowledged imperfection.

4 Conclusion

This study affirms that the female body in contemporary Indonesian literature functions as a space of *embodied discourse*—a site where patriarchal power, desire, and ideology intersect and are continuously negotiated. Based on the analysis of the three

principal corpora, the study finds that bodily politics operate through forms of violence mediated by social, economic, medical, and state systems.

In *Nyi Sadikem*, colonial legacies and the political economy of the body emerge through the figure of Elisabeth—an Indo-Dutch woman born of concubinage—where beauty becomes a paradox of both privilege and curse. The body becomes a field of negotiation among desire, coloniality, and dignity, producing an ambivalence between love and moral “salvation.” In *Korpus Uterus*, the female body is positioned within medical biopolitics: a body that is raped, gives birth, and later undergoes abortion as a form of *performativity of refusal* against state power and the moral regime of medical authority. Luh, as an “unwanted” child, embodies an inheritance of injury and *embodied subversion*—the transformation of trauma into a critical consciousness of reproduction. Meanwhile, *Gentayangan* foregrounds women’s *embodied experience* within a global, cosmopolitan landscape. The wandering female body becomes a figure of *undoing normativity*, refusing domestic and moral territoriality, and *generating subversive repetition* through myth, folklore, and modern spirituality.

Accordingly, the female body across these three texts is not only a locus of power, but also an *embodied site of subversion*—a space where the romanticization of sexism, coloniality, and reproductive control is inverted into new forms of consciousness. The body rewrites itself through wound, desire, and freedom, becoming a living text of resistance and women’s sovereignty over existential meaning.

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