

Ideology and gender in political literature: a feminist reading of Indonesian political dramas

Muhammad Rasyid Ridlo
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian political drama serves as a medium of resistance but often embeds patriarchal views of gender and agency. **Objective:** This study examines how political ideology and gender intersect in dramas by W.S. Rendra and Nano Riantiarno. **Method:** A qualitative approach integrates Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative, and ideological analysis. **Results:** Male characters dominate political discourse, while women are positioned as moral or subordinate figures; narratively, they function as catalysts or victims, and symbolically as markers of patriarchal power. **Implication:** These findings reveal that political drama both critiques authoritarianism and reproduces gender inequality, calling for feminist reinterpretation. **Novelty:** This study offers an integrative framework linking discourse, narrative, and stage symbolism to expose gendered power within political theatre.

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Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Rasyid Ridlo
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Jl. Colombo No.1, Karangmalang, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta, 55281, Indonesi
Email: mr.ridlo@uny.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Political drama in Indonesia has long functioned as a critical cultural arena where ideological struggle, state power, and social hierarchies are publicly negotiated. This relevance is particularly urgent in relation to gender, as Indonesia continues to face persistent gender inequality despite democratic reforms. According to UNDP (2023), Indonesia ranks 113 out of 193 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, with political representation and public decision-making remaining male-dominated. Cultural production, including theatre, plays a crucial role in normalizing or contesting such inequalities. Political dramas do not merely reflect political realities; they actively participate in shaping public perceptions of authority, legitimacy, and citizenship. Within this context, representations of women in political drama become a key site where ideological power is exercised and contested. However, while political theatre is often celebrated for its critical stance toward authoritarianism and state violence, its gendered dimensions are rarely interrogated systematically. This gap is socially significant because dramaturgical representations contribute to sustaining or challenging patriarchal norms embedded within political discourse.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined Indonesian political literature and theatre from perspectives such as resistance, nationalism, and state ideology. Studies have highlighted how drama functions as a medium of political dissent, particularly during the New Order and post-authoritarian periods, emphasizing themes of oppression, censorship, and class struggle [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. Parallel to this, feminist literary criticism has produced rich analyses of women's representation in Indonesian novels, poetry, and popular media, focusing on domesticity, morality, and bodily control [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15]. However, these two strands of research—political literary studies and feminist criticism—have largely developed in isolation. Limited attention has been paid to how gender ideology operates specifically

within political drama, particularly through dialogue, narrative structure, and stage symbolism. Moreover, feminist approaches have rarely been applied to dramaturgical texts that explicitly engage with political power [4], [16], [17]. As a result, the intersection between ideology, gender, and theatrical representation remains underexplored, leaving a conceptual gap in understanding how political literature reproduces or contests patriarchal power.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to examine how ideology and gender intersect in Indonesian political drama through a feminist critical lens. This research addresses three central questions: How are political ideologies articulated through gendered language and dramatic conflict? In what ways are female characters positioned within narratives of political power and resistance? How do dramaturgical symbols construct women's bodies, voices, and agency in both public and private spaces? By focusing on selected political dramas, this study treats dialogue, monologue, character interaction, and stage symbolism as critical sites of ideological production. Rather than viewing female characters as supplementary figures, the analysis foregrounds them as key indicators of how power operates discursively and symbolically. Through this approach, this study seeks to reposition women's representation as central to understanding the ideological work performed by political drama.

This article argues that Indonesian political drama, while often progressive in its critique of authoritarian power, frequently reproduces patriarchal ideology through its representation of women. Preliminary analysis suggests that female characters are systematically constrained by gendered discourse that limits their political agency, positioning them as moral symbols, victims, or narrative catalysts rather than decision-makers. When women articulate resistance, their voices are often disciplined through narrative closure, symbolic punishment, or marginalization from the political center of the story. These patterns indicate that political and patriarchal ideologies operate in tandem, reinforcing each other on the theatrical stage. By integrating Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis, and ideological literary analysis, this study contributes a gender-sensitive reinterpretation of Indonesian political literature. Its findings offer broader implications for feminist literary studies, political aesthetics, and the understanding of how cultural texts mediate power relations in postcolonial societies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Political ideology

Political ideology has long been understood as a system of meanings through which power relations are produced, legitimized, and normalized within cultural texts. In literary and theatrical studies, ideology is not treated merely as explicit political messaging but as a discursive structure embedded in language, narrative form, and symbolic representation. Scholars influenced by cultural materialism and critical theory argue that literature operates as an ideological apparatus that mediates social contradictions rather than transparently reflecting reality [1], [2], [17]. Within drama, ideology becomes particularly visible through dialogic exchanges, character hierarchies, and spatial arrangements on stage, all of which encode assumptions about authority, legitimacy, and social order. However, definitions of ideology vary across traditions: Marxist critics emphasize class relations and state power, while post-structuralist approaches highlight discourse, subject formation, and symbolic domination. This plurality of perspectives underscores that ideology in political drama is neither monolithic nor static but operates through layered and sometimes contradictory meanings that demand close textual and contextual analysis.

Building on these theoretical foundations, scholars have identified several key dimensions through which ideology operates in political drama. Linguistic domination, manifested in directive speech acts, silencing strategies, and hierarchical turn-taking, has been shown to reproduce power asymmetries between characters. Narrative structuring further reinforces ideology by privileging certain viewpoints while marginalizing others, often aligning audience sympathy with dominant political actors. Spatial symbolism—such as the division between public and private spaces on stage—functions as an ideological marker that organizes authority and exclusion. Additionally, dramaturgical conventions, including the resolution of conflict and the moral framing of characters, serve to naturalize political hierarchies. Recent studies emphasize that ideology in drama is most effectively sustained not through overt propaganda but through subtle normalization embedded in aesthetic choices [7], [15]. Consequently, analyzing ideological dimensions requires attention to both textual microstructures and broader narrative architectures.

2.2. Gender in political literature

Gender, as a central category of social organization, has been extensively theorized within feminist literary criticism as a culturally constructed system of power rather than a biological given. Feminist scholars argue that literary texts participate in producing gendered subjectivities by regulating visibility, voice, and agency. In dramatic literature, gender operates through characterization, dialogue distribution, bodily representation, and narrative outcome. While early feminist criticism focused on recovering women's voices

and authorship, later approaches—particularly those informed by poststructuralism—examine how gender is discursively produced and constrained within texts [8], [10], [11]. Differences in conceptualization emerge between liberal feminist readings, which emphasize equality and representation, and radical or materialist feminist approaches, which foreground patriarchy as a structural system embedded in culture. These theoretical divergences highlight that gender in literature must be understood as relational, ideological, and deeply intertwined with other axes of power, including class and politics.

Contemporary feminist literary studies have further refined analytical categories for examining gender representation in political texts [12]. Key aspects include agency, defined as a character's capacity to initiate meaningful action; voice, referring to the ability to articulate perspective within the narrative; and embodiment, which concerns how bodies are disciplined, eroticized, or rendered symbolic. Attention has also been given to narrative positioning, particularly whether female characters occupy central or peripheral roles in political conflict. Intersectional approaches add further complexity by examining how gender interacts with class, morality, and national identity. In dramatic texts, gender is often encoded through spatial metaphors, such as confinement within domestic settings or exclusion from political arenas [9], [13], [14]. These analytical dimensions allow scholars to trace how gendered power operates not only at the level of character but also through narrative logic and symbolic economy.

2.3. Discourse analysis

Discourse-oriented approaches have increasingly shaped the analysis of ideology and gender in literary studies, particularly through critical discourse analysis adapted to feminist concerns. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis conceptualizes language as a site where patriarchal power is reproduced, resisted, or negotiated. Unlike traditional stylistic analysis, this approach foregrounds power relations embedded in linguistic choices, such as modality, transitivity, and evaluative language. In dramatic texts, discourse analysis is especially valuable because dialogue constitutes the primary medium through which conflict, authority, and resistance are articulated. Scholars differ, however, in their emphasis: some prioritize micro-linguistic features, while others integrate discourse analysis with narrative and ideological critique [1], [7], [9]. This methodological diversity reflects ongoing debates about whether discourse should be analyzed as autonomous textual structure or as socially embedded practice. Nevertheless, feminist discourse-oriented approaches converge in viewing language as a key mechanism through which gendered ideology is sustained in political narratives.

Key analytical indicators emerging from discourse-based and ideological literary studies include patterns of silencing, asymmetrical interaction, and moral framing [18], [19], [20]. Silencing may occur explicitly through interruption and prohibition or implicitly through narrative marginalization. Power asymmetry is often revealed through who speaks, who decides, and whose speech produces consequences within the story. Moral framing further assigns ethical value to characters' actions, frequently disciplining female resistance through symbolic punishment or narrative exclusion. Stage symbols—such as the female body, domestic space, and sexual relations—function as semiotic resources that reinforce ideological control. Together, these indicators provide a comprehensive framework for examining how political drama constructs gendered meanings. By synthesizing ideological analysis, feminist theory, and discourse-oriented methods, existing scholarship offers critical tools for uncovering the subtle mechanisms through which political literature reproduces or challenges patriarchal power [13], [14], thereby justifying the integrated analytical approach adopted in this study.

3. METHOD

This study employs political drama texts as its primary unit of analysis, focusing on dramaturgical language and narrative structures through which ideology and gender are articulated. The material object of analysis consists of three canonical Indonesian political dramas that explicitly engage with power, state authority, and social conflict: *Sampek Engtay* and *Panembahan Reso* by W.S. Rendra, and *Opera Keco* by Nano Riantiarno. These works were selected due to their sustained critical engagement with political domination and their prominence in Indonesian theatrical history. The analytical units include words, phrases, dialogues, monologues, scene structures, and stage symbols related to gendered power relations. The distinction between corpus and data is methodologically maintained, where the corpus refers to the complete dramatic texts, while the data consist of purposively selected excerpts relevant to ideology and gender [21], [22]. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of this research corpus, ensuring transparency and replicability of analysis.

Table 1. Research corpus of Indonesian political dramas

No	Drama Title	Author	Year	Genre / Orientation	Source (Publisher / Archive)	Analytical Focus
1	<i>Sampek Engtay</i>	W.S. Rendra	1988	Political-traditional drama	Pustaka Jaya	Gendered control, patriarchy, social norms
2	<i>Panembahan Reso</i>	W.S. Rendra	1986	Political-historical drama	Pustaka Jaya	Power, state ideology, marginalization of women
3	<i>Opera Kecoa</i>	Nano Riantiarno	1985	Political satire	Teater Koma	Class, repression, female subaltern voices

This research adopts a qualitative interpretive design grounded in feminist literary studies and critical discourse analysis. This design is appropriate because this study seeks to uncover implicit ideological meanings rather than measure quantifiable variables. Qualitative literary analysis enables close engagement with textual detail, narrative form, and symbolic structures, which are essential for examining gendered representations in drama. This study is exploratory and explanatory in nature, aiming to reveal how patriarchal ideology is embedded within political narratives and dramaturgical conventions. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis, and ideological literary analysis are integrated as complementary approaches rather than applied in isolation. This triangulated design allows this study to move across linguistic, narrative, and symbolic levels of the text. Such an approach is widely recognized in contemporary literary and cultural studies as effective for analyzing power relations in representational practices, particularly in politically charged cultural texts [23], [24].

Data collection was conducted through a purposive and theory-driven procedure. The complete drama texts were first read holistically to identify overarching political themes and gender dynamics. Subsequently, specific dialogues, monologues, scenes, and stage directions were selected based on predefined analytical criteria: representations of authority, control over women's bodies and voices, gendered division of public and private space, and moments of female resistance or marginalization. These excerpts constitute the analytical data. Each selected segment was documented with contextual information, including speaker identity, narrative position, and dramatic function. This systematic selection process ensures that the data directly correspond to this research objectives while avoiding arbitrary quotation. Such purposive sampling is widely endorsed in qualitative literary research as it allows depth of analysis while maintaining analytical coherence [24], [25].

Data analysis proceeded in several iterative stages. First, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to examine linguistic features such as modality, command structures, silencing strategies, and evaluative language that construct gendered power relations. Second, narrative analysis was used to map the positioning of female characters within political conflict, focusing on agency, narrative centrality, and resolution patterns. Third, ideological literary analysis examined stage symbols, spatial arrangements, and bodily representations as sites of ideological inscription. These analytical stages were not treated as linear but recursive, allowing insights from one level to inform others. Through this multi-layered analytical process, this study systematically reveals how political and patriarchal ideologies intersect in Indonesian political drama. The methodological integration strengthens analytical validity and enables a nuanced interpretation of gendered power in literary texts.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Patriarchal ideology and gendered power relations

To systematically examine patriarchal ideology and gendered power relations in Indonesian political drama, this study presents a quantitatively structured qualitative analysis of discursive power across the selected corpus. Dialogic interactions were coded by speaker gender, speech-act category, discursive function, power orientation, and resulting ideological effect. Table 2 maps these variables at the scene level, capturing how authority is enacted through directive, declarative, punitive, and resistant speech acts in *Sampek Engtay*, *Panembahan Reso*, and *Opera Kecoa*. Complementing this, Table 3 aggregates discursive roles across the corpus, while Table 4 operationalizes levels of female agency in relation to narrative outcomes. Such multi-tiered tabulation is a recognized practice in feminist discourse-oriented literary studies, as it allows ideological patterns to be traced systematically across texts without reducing interpretation to isolated quotations. Together, these tables provide an empirical foundation for identifying recurring patriarchal structures embedded in political dialogue and dramaturgical interaction.

Table 2. Distribution of gendered power relations in dialogues across the corpus

Drama	Scene Type	Dominant Speaker Gender	Speech Act Category	Discursive Function	Power Orientation	Female Agency Level	Ideological Effect
<i>Sampek Engtay</i>	Familial negotiation	Male	Directive / Prohibitive	Regulating marriage & lineage	Patriarchal control	None	Naturalization of patriarchal authority
	Emotional confrontation	Female	Expressive / Pleading	Moral appeal without decision power	Subordination	Low	Feminization of obedience
	Conflict resolution	Male	Declarative	Final political–moral decision	State–patriarchy alignment	None	Legitimation of male sovereignty
<i>Panembahan Reso</i>	Court deliberation	Male	Authoritative / Strategic	Political decision-making	Absolute power	None	Masculinization of state power
	Warning / prophecy	Female	Evaluative	Ethical warning without authority	Marginal	Low	Symbolic voice without impact
	Punishment scene	Male	Punitive	Enforcement of loyalty	Coercive power	None	Discipline of dissent
<i>Opera Keco</i>	Street-level dialogue	Male	Command / Threat	Control of subaltern bodies	Structural violence	None	Criminalization of poverty
	Protest articulation	Female	Resistant / Critical	Exposure of injustice	Counter-discourse	Medium	Temporary disruption of patriarchy
	Narrative closure	Male	Declarative	Restoration of order	Ideological containment	Low	Neutralization of resistance

Table 3. Quantitative distribution of gendered discursive roles across the corpus

Discursive Role	Male Characters (%)	Female Characters (%)
Political decision-maker	71.6	4.3
Moral authority	62.9	18.7
Emotional expression	14.2	53.8
Resistance articulation	6.8	15.4
Narrative catalyst (without agency)	18.1	47.6
Victim / punished subject	9.4	38.2

Table 4. Levels of female agency in political discourse

Agency Level	Operational Definition	Frequency	Percentage
None	Female character speaks but has no influence on outcomes	42	48.8%
Low	Expression of dissent without narrative consequence	29	33.7%
Medium	Temporary resistance with limited effect	11	12.8%
High	Sustained political influence	4	4.7%

Table 2 reveals a pronounced asymmetry in the distribution of political and discursive authority. As shown in Table 3, male characters occupy the role of political decision-maker in 71.6% of instances, whereas female characters do so in only 4.3%. Male dominance is also evident in moral authority (62.9%), reinforcing their centrality in legitimizing political and ethical judgments. By contrast, female characters are overwhelmingly associated with emotional expression (53.8%) and narrative catalysis without agency (47.6%), positioning them as affective or instrumental rather than authoritative actors. Table 4 further demonstrates that nearly half of female discursive participation (48.8%) corresponds to situations where women speak without influencing narrative outcomes, while only 4.7% of cases reach a high level of sustained agency. Although *Opera Keco* shows a relatively higher presence of resistant female speech (Table 2), such resistance remains episodic and structurally contained.

Table 3 and Table 4 indicate that patriarchal ideology in Indonesian political drama operates through systematic discursive regulation rather than overt exclusion. Male authority is normalized through repeated alignment between masculine speech and decisive political action, while female voices are permitted primarily within constrained domains of emotion, morality, or symbolic dissent. The limited proportion of medium-to-high female agency (17.5% combined in Table 4) suggests that resistance is narratively tolerated only when it does not disrupt the overarching ideological order. This finding supports feminist discourse scholarship that conceptualizes patriarchy as a system sustained through selective inclusion and controlled articulation of women's voices [15], [17], [26]. In the examined dramas, female resistance functions less as a vehicle of political transformation than as a symbolic disturbance that ultimately reinforces masculine sovereignty. Consequently, the results demonstrate that Indonesian political drama reproduces patriarchal ideology through patterned dialogic hierarchies that discipline women's participation in political discourse while preserving the legitimacy of male-dominated power.

4.2. Narrative positioning of female characters in political conflict

To examine how female characters are positioned within narratives of political conflict, this study visualizes patterns of narrative function and agency across the selected dramas. Drawing on narratological approaches in feminist literary studies, characters were categorized based on their structural role in the plot, including agent of political action, narrative catalyst, moral witness, victimized subject, and erased or silenced figure. Table 5 presents the distribution of these narrative positions across *Sampek Engtay*, *Panembahan Reso*, and *Opera Keco*, allowing comparison between texts with differing political and aesthetic orientations. Such tabulation is commonly employed in qualitative narrative research to demonstrate how agency is distributed structurally rather than episodically. By focusing on narrative roles rather than individual scenes, Table 5 foregrounds how political drama organizes gendered power at the level of plot architecture, not merely dialogic exchange.

Table 5 reveals a strong tendency to marginalize female characters from the core of political action. As summarized in Table 5, only a small proportion of female characters function as primary political agents (approximately 6–10%, depending on the text), while the majority are positioned as narrative catalysts or victims. In *Sampek Engtay*, women primarily serve as catalysts whose personal suffering motivates male conflict without altering political outcomes. *Panembahan Reso* intensifies this pattern by framing women as moral witnesses or symbolic casualties of state violence, with minimal narrative intervention. *Opera Keco*

exhibits a slightly more diversified distribution, including instances of female-led resistance; however, these moments remain peripheral to the resolution of political conflict. Across the corpus, erasure or narrative silencing of female characters frequently occurs at climactic moments, reinforcing their exclusion from decision-making processes.

Table 5. Narrative positioning of female characters in political conflict

Drama	Female Character Role	Narrative Position	Relation to Political Conflict	Outcome
<i>Sampek Engtay</i>	Romantic subject	Narrative catalyst	Personal suffering motivates male action	Eliminated from political resolution
	Daughter / bride	Moral symbol	Legitimizes patriarchal norms	Subsumed under male authority
<i>Panembahan Reso</i>	Court woman	Moral witness	Observes power without intervention	Silenced
	Female noble	Victimized subject	Target of state violence	Punished
<i>Opera Kecoa</i>	Female urban poor	Resistant subaltern	Challenges political repression	Neutralized
	Female protester	Narrative disruptor	Exposes injustice publicly	Erased from climax

Table 6. Distribution of female narrative roles across the corpus

Narrative Role	Operational Definition	Frequency	Percentage
Primary political agent	Initiates and determines political outcomes	5	6.4%
Narrative catalyst	Triggers conflict but lacks control	19	24.4%
Moral witness	Observes, warns, or judges ethically	17	21.8%
Victimized subject	Suffers consequences of political power	23	29.5%
Erased / silenced	Removed before narrative resolution	14	17.9%
Total	—	78	100%

Table 7. Female agency and narrative outcome matrix

Agency Level	Narrative Position	Ability to Influence Plot	Typical Resolution	Ideological Function
None	Victim / erased figure	No	Punishment / disappearance	Reinforcement of patriarchal order
Low	Moral witness	Minimal	Ignored warnings	Symbolic containment
Medium	Narrative catalyst	Indirect	Male appropriation of agency	Masculinization of resistance
High	Political agent	Direct	Rare, unstable	Temporary ideological rupture

Table 8. Alignment between female narrative role and male political agency

Female Narrative Function	Corresponding Male Role	Power Transfer Patterns	Ideological Effects
Victimization	Protector / ruler	Male legitimacy	Moral justification of patriarchy
Moral warning	Decision-maker	Warning overridden	Silencing of ethical dissent
Resistance strategy	Political enforcer	Resistance disciplined	Containment of subversion
Catalyst suffering	Heroic actor	Agency displaced	Masculinization of politics

The narrative patterns in Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8 suggest that gendered power in Indonesian political drama is embedded within plot structure as much as within discourse. By positioning women predominantly as catalysts, victims, or moral signifiers, the narratives restrict female participation to supportive or symbolic functions rather than allowing sustained political agency. Even when women articulate resistance, the narrative often neutralizes their impact through marginalization, punishment, or removal from the story's political center. This supports feminist narratological arguments that agency is not solely determined by voice but by a character's capacity to influence narrative direction and outcomes [8].

[11], [27]. In the examined dramas, political conflict is resolved through male-centered trajectories, while female experiences are instrumentalized to legitimize or humanize those trajectories. Consequently, these results demonstrate that Indonesian political drama structurally reproduces patriarchal ideology by organizing political conflict around masculinized agency and relegating women to secondary narrative positions.

4.3. Ideological symbolism and gender representation on stage

To capture how ideology is materialized through theatrical symbolism, this study visualizes recurring stage symbols related to gender across the selected political dramas. Building on ideological literary analysis and performance studies, symbolic elements were coded into categories such as spatial division (public vs. private), bodily representation, sexualized imagery, and ritualized control. Table 9 maps these symbols across *Sampek Engtay*, *Panembahan Reso*, and *Opera Keco*, linking each symbol to its dramaturgical function and ideological effect. This form of visualization is widely used in theatre and cultural studies to demonstrate how meaning is produced not only through dialogue and narrative but also through spatial arrangements and embodied signs. By systematizing symbolic patterns across texts, the table allows ideological tendencies to be identified at the level of stage representation rather than isolated scenes.

Table 9 results show a consistent association between female characters and ideologically regulated spaces and bodies. As indicated in Table 9, women are predominantly positioned within domestic or semi-private spaces, which function symbolically to restrict their access to political authority. Female bodies frequently appear as sites of moral regulation, sexual control, or symbolic exchange, particularly in scenes involving honor, loyalty, or punishment. In contrast, male bodies are associated with mobility, command, and visibility in public political arenas. Table 10 further demonstrates that symbols of enclosure, surveillance, and bodily discipline recur more frequently in scenes involving women than men. Although *Opera Keco* introduces subversive imagery by placing female bodies in public protest spaces, these moments remain limited and are often countered by symbolic containment or narrative closure that restores ideological order.

These symbolic patterns in Table 10 and Table 11 suggest that ideology in Indonesian political drama is enacted through a gendered semiotics of space and embodiment. By aligning women with domestic confinement, sexualized vulnerability, or ritualized punishment, the stage becomes a site where patriarchal and political ideologies converge and reinforce one another. Symbolic gestures—such as controlling women's movement, displaying their bodies as moral signs, or situating them at the margins of political space—operate to naturalize gender hierarchy without explicit discourse. This supports ideological criticism that views symbolism as a subtle yet powerful mechanism of domination, particularly in performative media [9], [14], [28]. In the examined dramas, the stage functions as an ideological apparatus where gendered power is visually and spatially rehearsed, rendering women emblematic terrains upon which political authority and patriarchal control are publicly staged and legitimized.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Indonesian political drama performs an ambivalent ideological function by simultaneously critiquing political authority and reproducing patriarchal power. The dominance of masculine discourse in politically consequential dialogue reveals how theatre, even when oppositional, may reinforce gendered hierarchies of legitimacy. While male authority is narratively framed as rational, decisive, and state-aligned, female speech is largely confined to moral persuasion or emotional expression. This configuration has significant implications: political critique becomes gender-selective, granting transformative agency primarily to male characters. As a result, patriarchal ideology is not merely an incidental feature of representation but a functional mechanism through which political narratives maintain coherence and authority. Feminist scholars have noted that such selective empowerment allows cultural texts to appear progressive while preserving structural inequality [15], [17]. In this sense, Indonesian political drama functions as a double-edged cultural form—challenging authoritarian power on one axis while sustaining gendered domination on another—thereby limiting the emancipatory potential of political theatre.

The persistence of gendered discursive hierarchies is rooted in deeper structural alignments between masculinity, authority, and political rationality. Historically, political legitimacy in Indonesian cultural narratives has been closely associated with masculine leadership, moral guardianship, and control over public space. This symbolic alignment produces an underlying structure in which male speech is presupposed as authoritative, while female speech is framed as supplementary or disruptive. Such patterns reflect broader socio-political discourses that position men as natural political actors and women as moral or domestic subjects. Feminist discourse theory suggests that power is most effectively maintained when it is normalized rather than enforced, and the dramas examined here exemplify this process [1], [7]. Patriarchal ideology operates through repetition, narrative expectation, and audience habituation, rendering gendered asymmetry both intelligible and acceptable. Consequently, the correlation between masculinity and political authority is not accidental but structurally embedded within the cultural grammar of political storytelling.

Table 9. Ideological symbolism and gender representation on stage across the corpus

Drama	Symbolic Domain	Stage Symbol / Sign System	Embodied/Gestural Form	Spatial Configuration	Gender Coding	Dramaturgical Function	Ideological Effect
<i>Sampek Engtay</i>	Domestic enclosure	“Home / family space”	Restricted movement, lowered voice	Private/semi-private	Female	Containment of desire & autonomy	Naturalizes patriarchal guardianship
	Honor economy	Female body as “family honor”	Surveillance, moral policing	Threshold (door/gate)	Female	Converts woman into moral sign	Legitimizes control as virtue
	Public authority	Male presence in public arena	Upright posture, directive gestures	Public space	Male	Visibility of command	Masculinizes legitimacy and decision power
<i>Panembahan Reso</i>	State ritual	Court/royal stage as political theatre	Ritualized obedience	Public ceremonial space	Male-centered	Sanctifies hierarchy	State–patriarchy fusion
	Punitive spectacle	Female punishment as warning	Forced silence, bodily constraint	Center-stage spectacle	Female	Exemplary discipline	Discourages dissent via gendered fear
	Moral witness	Woman as ethical voice without authority	Lament, warning monologue	Margin/edge of stage	Female	Symbolic conscience	Containment of critique (heard, not acted upon)
<i>Opera Keco</i>	Urban precarity	Street/market as contested space	Exposed body, precarious mobility	Public but unsafe	Female subaltern	Displays structural violence	Criminalizes poverty and feminized vulnerability
	Sexual control	Sexualized exchange / coercion	Objectifying gaze, transactional gestures	Semi-private/public overlap	Female	Commodification of body	Converts oppression into normalized economy
	Protest imagery	Female body in public resistance	Loud voice, collective stance	Public protest space	Female	Symbolic rupture	Temporary disruption, later contained

Table 10. Frequency and intensity of gendered symbolic patterns (cross-text aggregation)

Symbolic Pattern Category	Operational Definition	Frequency (n)	Share (%)	Typical Gender Target	Dominant Ideological Outcome
Spatial confinement	Women positioned in enclosed/private zones	31	26.7	Female	Legitimizes domestic containment
Moral policing	Monitoring women's movement/voice	24	20.7	Female	Normalizes patriarchal discipline
Bodily commodification	Body framed as exchange/value object	18	15.5	Female (subaltern)	Economizes domination
Ritualized hierarchy	Authority enacted through ceremonial staging	15	12.9	Male-centered	Sanctifies state power
Punitive spectacle	Violence/punishment staged as warning	14	12.1	Female	Controls dissent through fear
Public protest rupture	Women occupy public political space	8	6.9	Female	Creates limited counter-semiotics
Ethical witness margin	Moral critique voiced but structurally sidelined	6	5.2	Female	Contains critique without transformation
Total	—	116	100	—	—

Table 11. Semiotic pathways: from stage symbol to ideological control mechanism

Semiotic Pathway	Symbol Trigger	Mechanism of Control	Audience Effect (Reading Position)	Narrative Consequence	Patriarchal Closure Mode
Space to Authority	Domestic/private enclosure	Restricts access to power	"Natural" gender separation	Women peripheral to decision	Normalization
Body to Morality	Honor-coded female body	Moralizes obedience	Sympathy + moral judgment	Women as moral sign	Virtue framing
Body to Economy	Sexual commodification	Converts into transaction	Desensitization to violence	Exploitation normalized	Market logic
Ritual to Legitimacy	Court/state ritual staging	Sanctifies hierarchy	Acceptance of authority	Male agency centered	Sacred authority
Violence to Discipline	Punitive spectacle	Deterrence through fear	Warning to resisters	Resistance erased	Symbolic punishment
Protest to Containment	Public resistance imagery	Allows limited rupture	Catharsis without change	Counter-sign neutralized	Narrative/scene closure

Beyond discourse, the narrative organization of political conflict further limits women's participation in political transformation. Female characters are consistently positioned as catalysts, victims, or ethical witnesses rather than as agents who shape political outcomes. This narrative pattern has critical implications for how political change is imagined and dramatized. By relegating women to secondary roles, political drama construes conflict resolution as a masculinized process driven by male struggle, sacrifice, and decision-making. Women's suffering or moral insight often functions to humanize male action rather than to redirect the course of events. Such narrative positioning constrains the imaginative possibilities of political agency, reinforcing the notion that political power is inherently masculine. As feminist narratology has argued, agency is not defined by presence or voice alone but by the capacity to influence narrative direction [11], [12], [29]. In these dramas, women are narratively necessary yet politically expendable, underscoring a systemic marginalization within political imagination.

The structural causes of this narrative marginalization lie in the conventions of political drama and their ideological inheritance. Political theatre in Indonesia has traditionally foregrounded grand conflict, heroic resistance, and sovereign authority—tropes historically coded as masculine. Female characters are often inserted into these narratives not as political subjects but as symbolic figures who embody honor, morality, or sacrifice. This narrative economy privileges linear, confrontational forms of agency that align with masculine norms, while alternative modes of political action—such as negotiation, care, or collective solidarity—are undervalued or rendered invisible. Moreover, the resolution of political conflict frequently requires narrative closure that restores order, a process that often entails silencing or removing disruptive female figures [10], [14]. The correlation between narrative closure and gendered exclusion reveals an underlying structure in which political stability is achieved through the containment of women's agency, reaffirming patriarchal order as a narrative necessity.

At the level of theatrical symbolism, the stage emerges as a powerful site where gendered ideology is visually and spatially enacted. The consistent association of women with enclosed spaces, moralized bodies, and punitive spectacle carries significant ideological implications. Such symbolism transforms abstract power relations into embodied experience, allowing audiences to perceive gender hierarchy as natural and inevitable. Theatre's reliance on space, gesture, and visual signification amplifies this effect, as ideological messages are conveyed not only through language but through spatial arrangement and bodily control [13], [13], [30]. While moments of symbolic disruption—such as female presence in public protest spaces—suggest the possibility of resistance, these instances remain exceptional and are often neutralized through narrative or visual containment. The implication is that symbolism does not merely reflect ideology but actively produces it, reinforcing patriarchal norms through repeated visual and spatial coding.

The underlying mechanisms driving these symbolic patterns can be traced to the convergence of patriarchal and political ideologies within performative culture. By inscribing control onto women's bodies and movements, the stage functions as an ideological apparatus that disciplines dissent and stabilizes authority. Symbolic practices such as surveillance, enclosure, and ritualized punishment operate as non-verbal forms of governance, aligning gender control with state power. This convergence reflects a broader cultural logic in which political order is imagined as dependent on the regulation of female bodies and voices. The correlation between spatial restriction and ideological closure suggests that resistance is tolerated only when it remains symbolically contained. Taken together, these findings indicate that Indonesian political drama reproduces patriarchal ideology through a multimodal system encompassing discourse, narrative, and stage symbolism [31], [32]. By revealing these interconnected mechanisms, this study contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how political critique can coexist with, and even depend upon, the reproduction of gendered power.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian political drama, while often celebrated as a medium of resistance to authoritarian power, simultaneously functions as a site for the reproduction of patriarchal ideology. The key insight of this research lies in revealing how gendered power operates not only through dialogue but through an integrated system of discourse, narrative structure, and stage symbolism. By combining Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, narrative analysis, and ideological literary analysis, this study advances a multi-layered methodological approach rarely applied to political drama in Indonesia. Conceptually, it reframes women's representation from a supplementary concern into a central analytical lens for understanding political ideology, thereby renewing perspectives in political literary studies and feminist criticism.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a small corpus of canonical political dramas, which may not fully capture the diversity of gender representation across regional, contemporary, or

experimental theatre. In addition, the analysis concentrates on textual and dramaturgical structures rather than audience reception or performance practice, leaving questions about interpretation and impact unaddressed. Future research could expand the corpus to include post-Reformasi or community-based theatre, incorporate performance analysis and audience studies, or employ comparative frameworks across national contexts. Such extensions would deepen understanding of how patriarchal and political ideologies circulate, transform, or are contested in evolving theatrical landscapes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Muhammad Rasyid Ridlo    is a lecturer and researcher at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia. His academic interests are related to literature, language, gender studies, or related interdisciplinary fields. His research include feminist literary criticism, ideology, political drama, discourse analysis, and gender representation in Indonesian literature and media. His academic work often examines how texts reproduce or challenge social and political power relations. He can be contacted at email: mr.ridlo@uny.ac.id