

# Representing Indonesian's Woman in *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*: Critical Discourse Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Gender equality has been an issue in many societies. It becomes a highlighted issue, and novels *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* offer the reader insight into the issue. This research compared two novels about gender issues, especially how women are represented. The research found that inequality occurs in a society because of factors of Power and Resistance from the superior and inferior groups. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Framework, the researcher uncovers how the novel's writer shares their thought about the gender issue. The analysis also integrates Halliday's Transitivity theory to parse clauses and Mills' theory of sexism to deconstruct discourse practices. This study reveals two different perspectives. *Cantik Itu Luka* portrays women as passive objects bound by patriarchal stereotypes, while *Larung* presents women who are independent and reject domination through active resistance. A comparison of the two shows a clear ideological difference. *Cantik Itu Luka* highlights the suffering caused by oppression, while *Larung* emphasizes the idea of women's emancipation and freedom.

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of how people perceive gender has been highlighted in various ways, used to present the problem, whether it involves discrimination or gender inequality. Many literary works, such as the novels *Larung* (2023) by Ayu Utami and *Cantik Itu Luka* (2002) by Eka Kurniawan, describe how gender inequality, especially for women, occurs in society. The novels contain many generic words representing women, such as *Larung*, the name for a woman, and *Cantik*, describing women's beauty. *Larung* was the name of a woman given to a man who represented a man with inner beauty, as a woman who affected his traits as a man. *Cantik Itu Luka* delivered a story of a woman with a beauty in appearance that affected her society, and how people appraised her as a woman. The different perspectives from both novels show the value of appreciating women through the linguistic markers that represent women. The markers from the titles of those novels showed the sexism that related to a specific gender, which described whether a woman was a superior gender or an inferior gender, relating to another gender, causing overt sexism (Mills, 2004).

Overt Sexism creates a stereotypical statement that a gender, which is described as an inferior one, believes something that people tell them. It will portray them as what people believe about it (Mills, 2004). It constructs a mindset in many people that some inferior gender will be portrayed differently from what it should be. Therefore, this stereotypical statement becomes the main reason for this research to uncover how novels describe women. Because it gives a mindset that gender is asserting in doing something related to an activity that both men and women can do. In portraying women, the novels served as a text that could be analysed linguistically to find how a society emphasises women as an inferior gender according to people's perspective and different timelines that provide a socio-cultural aspect of how a society's perspective takes part in portraying women. Because of this, the researcher found that this research had to be conducted to explain how media such as novels could bring about discrimination for women, especially from *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*, which have different applications in sharing a society's perspective in giving a value to women. The comparison of both

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novels will give a brief explanation of how the novels portray women differently in terms of describing stereotypes in society.

Several studies have been done relating to the novels and gender inferiority, especially for women. Savitri et al. (2025) utilizing Sara Mills' Framework, analyzed the novel *Serat Centhini* to uncover how domestic oppression is represented and how women navigate their roles in oppressive environments. Maknun et al., (2023) using Feminist Stylistic Method from Sara Mills, found that the discrimination occurs in several aspects that influenced how people are described in the novel and convince people to open their minds, avoiding discrimination widely. Relating to gender discrimination, the perspective of gender in leading a group has been analysed by Widyawati et al. (2022). It showed that the communication style and competence in leading a group from women had a significant difference in several variables of the research. Representing a gender with Fairclough's CDA framework was done by Andini et al. (2023), resulting in gender representation by frequency. It shows that males have more chances to associate with higher education and knowledge. Mir (2021) found that in a book about the odd women, gender role expectations for the women were dynamic based on the norm and dominant discourse, using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Although the issue of gender inequality has been widely researched, most studies focus only on a single literary work or a partial aspect of gender discrimination. Previous studies rarely provide a comparative perspective between two novels that discuss similar issues. There is still room to explore how *Cantik Itu Luka* and *Larung* represent the position of women in a socio-cultural context. Therefore, this study attempts to present the representation of Indonesian women through a comparative analysis of the two novels.

This research aims to uncover how the novels, *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*, deliver the discourse within the text to deliver the meaning of the stereotype of women. It describes a discrimination and domination of several groups that are involved in the novels, portrayed as people who uttered sexist words to make a difference between men and women. The comparison between the novels will create a research gap in how the writers share their thoughts about discrimination that happens in society within novels. From that reason, it concludes there are three research problems (1) What kind of sexism or discrimination words uttered to women from both of novels frequently written (2) How the novels pointed the Discourse Practice to explain discrimination and sexism to women (3) Why discrimination and sexism word creates a stereotype based on the society portrayed in the novels.

This study uses Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine how sexist language related to women is formed, maintained, and questioned through discourse practices in both novels. This analysis aims to reveal practices of gender discrimination and domination and to evaluate whether the texts represent gender equality or inequality. The study focuses its analysis on words or expressions that contain sexist language related to women to highlight forms of gender domination or equality (Maknun et al., 2023). Based on this focus, the texts are deconstructed using Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework, which divides the analysis into three constructs, namely Text, Discourse Practice, and Socio-Cultural Practice. To break down the text, the word or clause that relates to describing women as an inferior group will be chosen to highlight the stereotype that both novels bring into the story. Those novels also brought a cultural aspect, which gives additional information on how people in a society portrayed in the novels appraised women. In addition, this aspect will be discussed further to give a comprehension of critical discourse analysis because socio-cultural factors play a part in providing information on how a society runs based on the novels' background. Discourse Practice is how the text is produced, distributed, and used or consumed to deliver the text (Fairclough, 1995). This gives a comprehension of how text becomes creative and could have many meanings, which could emphasise the socio-cultural aspect of the origin of the text (which could be background, society, or a group) as it is related to the socio-cultural aspect. Fairclough (1995), mentioned that sociocultural approaches are used to identify word works within the cultural instance from the level of grammatical and other points related to cultural comprehension. Therefore, the socio-cultural aspect in this research is important to highlight the differences in how both novels delivered the aspects from each different background.

Both novels were written by different writers who had different styles of writing; for that reason, the textual content in each novel had a different delivery system in construing the novels. To help the researcher, transitivity occurs to break down the text so as to reveal the socio-cultural aspect of it. Halliday & Matthiessen (2013) said that transitivity helps to break down an event from the lexicogrammar provided by the text. Shi & Fan (2019) said that material process is a process involving physical activity, and mental process is a process of doing something based on consciousness. Behavioural Process is a process of something that the activity is

still going on or describes someone in the text. Because the text has many words within the novels, it requires categorising the words that are used mainly in the novels. The words will show how often the words that were used for appraising women due to the stereotype, and how they saw independence.

*Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* had different preferences to share about women's inferiority. *Larung* presents a man named *Larung* who experiences gender inferiority because of his name, while *Cantik Itu Luka* tells the story of a beautiful woman's struggle for independence that ends in oppression. The difference in these narrative approaches encourages research to discover the socio-cultural aspects of the novel, which will be analyzed using Sara Mills' (2008) Theory of Overt Sexism. This theory is relevant because the textual data contains many forms of explicit language that discriminate against women. According to Mills (2008), sexism is language that influences society's conversations and beliefs, which has the potential to create stereotypes about women's abilities compared to men. Therefore, to identify discursive practices in the text that indicate discrimination and sexism against women, the analysis of *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* will interpret how their discursive practices reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes and women's independence.

Socio-cultural aspects that *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* offer in revealing *Larung* are mostly about dominance, status, and power in a society. The socio-cultural concept that is offered in those novels relates to how men are better than women, although in some instances, they had the same opportunities. Foucault proposed a discourse analysis that focuses on the concept of power in a local situation, and it serves as a comprehension of social power, which can change people's perspectives (Powers, 2007). The difference in aspects of dominance creates a resistance that has an opposite value to power. Foucault mentioned that because of the power, some of the groups that oppose the power or resist the power to dominate will create a group of resistance. These opposite groups will have the power to dominate each other. The impact of both power and resistance will create an atmosphere where both sides affect society. Both novels, *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*, brought society to an upper level, which indicated there was discrimination against an inferior group, women, especially in terms of gender differences. Those novels also shared about sexism and words uttered by several groups which has the power to mention women with sexist words. Therefore, a comprehension of revealing social status and power will be retained in the Socio-cultural aspect because it impacted and became a reason why people who had power could utter sexist words to the powerless ones.

This study reveals new dimensions of female representation in the novels *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* by examining the texts and the author's choice of words. These findings demonstrate linguistic strategies used to reproduce and challenge gender inequality and present a critical perspective on the position of women in Indonesian literature. Furthermore, this research enriches the academic discourse on the relationship between language, gender, and power in the context of Indonesian literature.

## 2. Methods

This study implements a qualitative approach based on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework as the main methodological framework. The research data is sourced from a textual analysis of two Indonesian novels, *Larung* by Ayu Utami and *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, which thematically contain discourse on gender inequality, particularly discrimination against women and the depiction of unequal power status between men and women. This analysis is designed to be comparative in order to present a comprehensive comparison of how the two novels convey the authors' thoughts and representations of women in society through a comparison of textual content and narrative strategies related to female stereotypes, utilizing a list of words and linguistic features collected as the main data. Specifically, this comparative design aims to reveal ideological differences: *Larung* potentially emphasizes emancipation and freedom, while *Cantik Itu Luka* focuses more on the suffering caused by oppression.

The researcher collected data in this section by carefully reading both novels, focusing on the main characters. In *Larung*, the main character is male, so information about women is obtained primarily from supporting characters with important roles in the plot. In contrast, *Cantik Itu Luka* features a female main character, Dewi Ayu, whose interactions with supporting characters are relevant data sources. Data collected through observations of both novels were then transcribed into text form for further analysis. The units of analysis in this study consist of words, word groups (phrases), and clauses. Words were analyzed to see the frequency of occurrence and representation of female characters, word groups were analyzed to understand social and symbolic meanings, including epithets or metaphorical terms, while clauses were analyzed using

Halliday's transitivity framework to examine the processes, participants, and circumstances involved, thereby identifying women's roles as agents, participants, or objects in the narrative.

The data analysis in this study employed a layered analytical framework centered on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (Fairclough, 1995). This model structurally divides the analysis into the domains of Text, Discourse Practice, and Socio-Cultural Practice, an approach used to identify fundamental differences in the portrayal of female stereotypes in the novels *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*. Fairclough's CDA framework serves as an overarching structure for examining how sexist language is constructed, maintained, and questioned through discursive practices. To deepen the textual dimension, this study integrates Transitivity Theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) to analyze clauses and lexical choices, which is vital for identifying the dominant types of processes and the role of women as narrative participants. Furthermore, Overt Sexism Theory (Mills, 2008) is applied to uncover and categorize forms of sexist language by analyzing vocabulary frequency and the use of derogatory nicknames. As a sociocultural contextual layer, Foucault's Theory of Power and Resistance is used to reveal the socio-cultural conditions that underline the characters' behavior, explaining the dynamics of domination, power, and opportunities for women's resistance in the societies of each novel. The comprehensive analytical model is integrated into the research to systematically compare the distinct discursive strategies employed by each author.

### 3. Results

This chapter presents empirical data obtained from a linguistic analysis of selected clauses and words related to the representation and assessment of women in the novels *Larung* by Ayu Utami and *Cantik Itu Luka* (CIL) by Eka Kurniawan. This presentation focuses on the linguistic patterns found. The findings are categorized based on lexical frequency (Overt Sexism, according to Mills' framework) and functional role (agency) revealed through Halliday's Transitivity analysis. This section only presents the data, while an analysis of the meaning and socio-cultural implications of using this vocabulary will be discussed in the discussion section.

#### 3.1 Sexist Vocabulary in Novels

The frequency of certain vocabulary words in literary texts reflects important aspects the author wishes to highlight (Stubbs, 1996). In the context of gender, sexist vocabulary is used to examine how women are represented in discourse. Therefore, this section presents data on sexual vocabulary in the novel *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*. This vocabulary was collected from dialogues and narratives involving female characters in the novel. The following table displays vocabulary related to sexuality that appears with high frequency. This frequency data indicates the dominance of lexicon related to physicality and sexual activity in the discourse of female characters.

##### 3.1.2 Frequency of Sexist Vocabulary in *Larung*

The following table displays data on sexual vocabulary in Ayu Utami's novel, *Larung*. This data shows words related to the body and sexuality, and their frequency.

No	Word/Phrase	Frequency
1	Tubuh (Body)	60
2	Seks (Sex)	25
3	Dada (Chest)	17
4	Bersetubuh (Have Sex)	12
5	Perawan (Virgin)	12
6	Tubuhku (My Body)	11
7	Penis (Penis)	7
8	Fantasi (Fantasy)	7
9	Payudara (Breast)	5
10	Berzinah (Commit Adultery)	4

11	Bercumbu (To Caress)	4
12	Orgasme (Orgasm)	4
13	Kondom (Condom)	4
14	Persetubuhan (Sexual Intercourse)	4
15	Ereksi (Erection)	4

Table 1. Vocabulary Related to Sexuality in *Larung*

### 3.1.2 Frequency of Sexist Vocabulary in *Cantik Itu Luka*

The following table displays data on sexual vocabulary appearing in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka*. This data shows words related to sexuality and the number of times they appear.

No	Word/Phrase	Frequency
1	Bercinta (Making Love)	84
2	Telanjang (Naked)	40
3	Berahi (Sexual Desire)	32
4	Kemaluan (Genitals)	18
5	Buah Dada (Breasts)	14
6	Selangkangan (Crotch)	7
7	Kutang (Bra)	6
8	Bercumbu (Intercourse)	2
9	Keperawanan (Virginity)	1
10	Mencumbunya (Intercourse Her)	1
11	Persetubuhan Sexual (Intercourse)	1
12	Masturbasi (Masturbation)	1

Table 2. Vocabulary Related to Sexuality in *Cantik Itu Luka*

Apart from tables, the use of sexual vocabulary in the novel can also be seen in several quotes that show the use of these words in the text.

“Satu-satunya yang bisa dilakukan Sang Shodanco sekarang adalah menyerah pada nasib untuk tak pernah merasakan rasanya bercinta dengan perempuan, kecuali kesempatan-kesempatan darurat bercinta dengan bantal dan guling di atas tempat tidur.” (Kurniawan, 2015:223)

This quote illustrates the use of sexual vocabulary in the novel *Cantik Itu Luka*. The data in the table above shows differences in the patterns of sexist vocabulary use between *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*.

### 3.2 Sexist Epithets Against Women in Novels

The representation of women in both novels is also demonstrated through the use of nicknames or aliases attached to female characters. These nicknames are usually derogatory and reflect prevailing societal stereotypes. In Ayu Utami's novel, *Larung*, several nicknames are used to refer to female characters. These nicknames appear in both the narrative and dialogue as forms of referring to women.

No	Novel	Sexist Nicknames
1	<i>Larung</i>	Piala Bergilir (Trophy), Pelacur (Prostitute), Lonte (Whore)
2	<i>Cantik Itu Luka</i>	Pelacur (Prostitute), Hamil (Pregnant), Bunga (Flower), Gundik (Concubine), Iblis Betina (Female Devil), Gadis Bengal (Wild Girl)

Table 3. Sexist Nicknames in *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka*

These nicknames represent terms attached to female characters, either to demean them or to signify a certain social status within the storyline. The use of these terms provides insight into how female characters are constructed through language in the narrative texts of both novels. The data on nicknames appearing in both novels demonstrates that female characters are not only described through sexual vocabulary but also through the labels attached to them. These labels shape a particular image of women in the texts.

#### 4. Discussion

This section outlines the research findings presented in the results section. While the results section emphasizes data presentation in the form of sexist vocabulary, epithets, and quotations that portray women's positions in both novels, the discussion section focuses on data analysis and interpretation. Utilizing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework and Mills's concept of overt sexism, the discussion examines how language shapes women's representations and reveals power relations within literary texts. Furthermore, the discussion highlights how discursive practices in *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* relate to broader social structures, particularly patriarchal dominance and spaces of resistance for women.

##### 4.1 Linguistic Devices Describing Women's Characters

The representation of female characters in Ayu Utami's *Larung* and Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka* is evident through linguistic devices in the form of sexist vocabulary, nicknames, and stereotypes attached to them. Through these language choices, both novels depict the construction of women in unequal social relations, both in the form of resistance and in positions of dominance. Resistance to gender inequality is often expressed through language, where women who were previously "silenced" now have space to speak out and shape their own identities. (Bachrin et al., 2024). This can be seen in the use of sexist vocabulary and expressions, which are used to place women in an inferior, unequal, or demeaning position (Sholikhati et al., 2022).

##### 4.1.1 Representation of Women in *Larung*

In uncovering overt forms of sexism, this study uses Mills' (2008) framework and Foucault's (1978) theory of power and resistance. The analysis is conducted by examining discourse practices through sexist vocabulary and epithets attached to female characters, as well as through Halliday's transitivity aspect (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). This use of language, which is not commonly used by women in patriarchal societies, reflects dynamic discursive practices. It is a form of resistance to the power that seeks to define and limit women, as explained in Foucault's theory of power and resistance (1978).

Resistance against gender inequality is often expressed through language, where women who were previously "dibungkam" now have space to speak out and shape their own identities (Bachrin et al., 2024). This can be seen in the use of sexist vocabulary and expressions, which are used to place women in an inferior, unequal, or demeaning position (Sholikhati et al., 2022) as a tool of resistance in the novel. According to Stubbs (1996) word frequency is a key indicator of what is considered important in a text and is therefore directly related to its meaning and purpose. Therefore, the high frequency of sexist vocabulary in *Larung* may indicate that the female characters in it not only reflect the dynamic phenomenon of gender representation but also deliberately use language to challenge norms and strengthen their agency. By using vocabulary previously used to demean them, the female characters in this novel actively challenge norms and demonstrate that they have the ability to define themselves. This view is supported by Munafidsyah et al. (2023), modern literature is often used as a tool to express resistance against patriarchal structures, with female characters becoming active agents. In the case of *Larung*, this is evident in the frequency of use of certain vocabulary.

As shown in Table 1 the vocabulary related to sexuality in *Larung* includes words such as "tubuh" (60 times), "seks" (25 times), "dada" (17 times), and "orgasme" (4 times), which illustrate how the female characters use language as a means to assert their existence and independence rather than merely becoming passive objects within patriarchal discourse. *Larung* presents stereotypical perspectives usually associated with men, which appear unusual when spoken by women, yet the author offers reasons for readers to recognize that such stereotypes are not entirely accurate. The discourse dynamics in *Larung* emphasize that although women are

often linked to sexism, the female characters are depicted as independent individuals, reinforced by the dominant vocabularies frequently spoken, such as “tubuh” and “seks”, which appear with high frequency and represent how women describe sexuality openly. In terms of frequency, these vocabularies significantly serve as key words whenever sexual content occurs in the conversations, indicating that the female characters in *Larung* have autonomy in expressing themselves sexually or in articulating the voices of other women within the same group. Through this, Ayu Utami conveys that women can speak openly about sexuality in ways similar to men, offering an alternative perspective that women, as a group, may consider sexual matters as common thoughts in patriarchal society. Such use of language reflects a dynamic discursive practice and simultaneously becomes a form of resistance against power attempting to restrict women, aligning with Foucault’s (1978) perspective on power relations and resistance.

Sexist Epithets Table 3 in the results section, shows how pejorative terms are used to characterize the status and behavior of female characters in the narrative. A pejorative is defined as a word that carries a culturally constructed socio-negative content, whose semantic function is to explicitly or implicitly belittle, demean, or look down on the target subject (Diaz-Leon, 2020). The vocabulary used in *Larung* represents women's values by concealing derogatory terms through the use of aliases. One of the pejorative aliases is “Piala Bergilir,” which represents women who are associated with having many partners or frequently changing partners, both in the context of good and bad relationships (Allagbé & Amoussou, 2020). The vocabulary suggests that it can be an achievement for a woman, especially one who likes to change and interact with many men, or it can be a shame for a woman who disrespects someone unfaithful. *Larung* provides a free space for readers to understand the meaning of women through these aliases. Ayu Utami seeks to provide a perspective to many people about women who have different choices but share the same ideology that feminism is equal to masculinity. This differs from the previous nicknames, “Pelacur” and “Lonte,” which are meant to demean women themselves. The insulting remarks directed at female characters show how women often experience social wounds due to words or aliases attached to them (Fitriyah, 2023). These nicknames represent someone who has no dignity (for women), who easily gets attached to many men to fulfill sexual desires (Ernanda, 2023). These labels devalue women because the stereotypes still cling to them, and because of these stereotypes, not only do women feel the need to be independent in choosing whether to be close to many men or not, but also, good women who do not comply with patriarchal rules will be given these nicknames. *Larung* provides an example of colonial people at that time, where the stereotype was strongly directed at women who rejected the patriarchal system and who lived with many men intentionally. This bias creates stereotypes that stick to women, whether women choose to be independent or remain under patriarchal rules.

*Larung* attempts to represent discourse to explicitly show the unstable condition of women’s gender. This can be seen from the dominance of patriarchal terms in society, which mostly use vocabularies such as “patriarki,” “kesucian,” and “keperawanan.” These words semantically provide standards for feminism if they want to be equal to men. These words represent the status of women who still maintain their “keperawanan”; when they lose it, they will not be recognized by the superior group (in the context of *Larung*, men). Since these standards place the inferior group in a disadvantaged position, this becomes a stereotype in society. Therefore, Ayu Utami describes inequality for both genders through stereotypes under the patriarchal system, whether women should follow those stereotypes or become independent women without thinking about them, which constitutes sexism.

Furthermore, this study uses Halliday's Transitivity aspect to analyze the clauses and vocabulary in the excerpt. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2013), transitivity is a grammatical system that describes how experiences about the world are represented through the processes (actions), participants, and conditions involved. In other words, this theory analyzes how language describes events, actions, and experiences, as well as who acts as the agent in them.

The dynamics of *Larung*'s thinking, represented by the female characters, can be seen in this quote, which discusses sexuality and describes it as a normal thing; both men and women can have opinions about it.

“Ya, gue bisa bilang begitu karena gue udah tidur dengan entah berapa lelaki. Perawan, lakor, duda. Sampe kadang capek. Hubungan-hubungan pendek membikin kita yakin bahwa Cantik dan seks itu nggak istimewa amat.” (Utami, 2013:133)

*“Ada titik-titik di mana aku tak bisa membedakan rasa sakit dan nikmat. Kesakitan berpuncak pada sekon pertama kematian, dan seks berpuncak pada tiga detik orgasme. Jika ejakulasi mengingatkan kita pada kelangsungan hidup, tidakkah seks adalah ketegangan akibat pertentangan hidup dan mati yang hadir bersama di satu titik?”* (Utami, 2013:176)

In this quote, the term "tidur" is not interpreted literally to mean closing the eyes, but rather has a metaphorical meaning, meaning intimate relations or sexual experiences. Ayu Utami's use of metaphor allows for a symbolic exploration of the discourse on female sexuality, emphasizing that women have the reflective capacity and autonomy to assess and construct their sexual experiences. Furthermore, the quote demonstrates women's awareness of how sex is viewed in society. The female characters in "*Larung*" attempt to generalize whether women can accept sexual content, although some women disagree. This is supported by their backgrounds, which give them a sense of self-evaluation. They believe that men's discussions about things that exploit them sexually are wrong. However, they have different perspectives on whether women are exploiting themselves or whether a group of women is discussing it privately.

In terms of transitivity, there are clauses within several processes when describing sexual relations. For example, the sentence "*gue udah tidur dengan entah berapa lelaki*" contains a Material Process that depicts the female character as the speaker having slept (Material Process) with men (Object), illustrating that the woman holds the view that in engaging in sexual relations, women can sometimes be the ones who initiate the action. This also influences their perspective based on how they feel when being the actor in the sexual act. This can be seen from how the female character in *Larung* perceives sex. "*Hubungan-hubungan pendek membikin kita yakin bahwa cantik dan seks itu nggak istimewa amat.*" The word "yakin" refers to the woman's conviction regarding sexual matters, which she regards as something ordinary to engage in, and she no longer considers it enjoyable. The Mental Process portrays how she behaves toward sexual matters and provides a perspective on shaping her belief that sex is not something special because many people can do it, rather than being reserved for a particular circumstance.

From a transitivity perspective, a woman's feelings about sex can be explained as a commonplace experience. This provides the researcher with the perspective that Ayu Utami wants to demonstrate that in society, some women express themselves sexually because it's shared with many others. Conversely, there's a belief that women are merely objects of sexual desire. Therefore, *Larung* provides a perspective on the shared ideology held by a group of women.

#### 4.1.2 Representation of Women in *Cantik Itu Luka*

*Cantik Itu Luka*, as seen in Table 2, uses fewer words than *Larung* in sexually describing women. Some sexual words describe the sexualization of women. This is because in *Cantik Itu Luka*, a beautiful woman is depicted as an object for men. Because the main character of this novel is a woman, this indicates that women in the novel experience oppression due to their beauty, which impacts their environment. Dewi Ayu, as the main character, does not explicitly state anything sexual; however, the representation of masculinity in the novel presents a bias, as if masculinity has the power to sexualize feminism.

As a comparison to *Larung*, in *Cantik Itu Luka*, the vocabulary used provides readers with insight into masculinity over feminism. In the Table 2, the researcher found that the dominant word "bercinta" indicates the sexualization of a woman. Masculinity (men) is not the inferior group in *Cantik Itu Luka*, which illustrates that "bercinta" occurs when a man dominates a woman in engaging in sexual acts. From the frequency of vocabulary, it can be concluded that men hold a higher status than women, and the masculine group has the freedom to sexualize the inferior group (women). Therefore, the frequency of the most commonly used vocabulary portrays how women are powerless in sexual matters and cannot do anything without men. Since women depend on men in this novel, it provides a perspective and stereotype that women are merely objects for sexual purposes.

*“Satu-satunya yang bisa dilakukan Sang Shodanco sekarang adalah menyerah pada nasib untuk tak pernah merasakan rasanya bercinta dengan perempuan, kecuali kesempatan-kesempatan darurat bercinta dengan bantal dan guling di atas tempat tidur”* (Kurniawan, 2015:223)



The researcher found that, in the context of domination over women, masculinity is represented as the party that objectifies women and channels sexual desire by positioning them as objects. Vocabulary such as “dilakukan” and “bercinta” indicates a material process that places women solely as the objects of action. These two material processes represent a literal meaning that serves to firmly establish the position of subject and object within the narrative, without allowing room for implicit interpretation of Dewi Ayu’s or the masculine characters’ perspectives on sexual matters. Thus, the position of women in *Cantik Itu Luka* is depicted as an inferior group trapped within stereotypes, where masculinity holds the power to place them as objects of sexual desire.

*Cantik Itu Luka*, as its title already suggests, portrays how women are represented in society. The novel illustrates that women are less acknowledged compared to men and are often subjected to derogatory words that render their existence weak and inferior. The representation of women in the novel can also be analyzed through the use of nicknames or aliases attached to female characters. As shown in Table 3, these nicknames are degrading and reflect stereotypes that circulate within society. In *Larung* by Ayu Utami, several nicknames appear both in the narrative and in dialogues to refer to female characters. Meanwhile, in *Cantik Itu Luka*, the nicknames used are not only derogatory but also signify certain social statuses within the storyline. The nicknames given by men take the form of insulting vocabulary toward women, such as “Pelacur,” “Hamil,” and “Bunga.” This phenomenon demonstrates how language can reinforce power relations by positioning women in a subordinate role through demeaning labels (Abeywardena, 2016).

The vocabulary is closely related to women who experience discrimination due to their circumstances. “Pelacur” refers to women who have genital contact with multiple men. This nickname illustrates how the main character, Dewi Ayu, is degraded by such a label, which consequently lowers her value as a woman. This stereotype is also reinforced by “Hamil” and “Bunga,” each carrying different meanings in terms of status. “Hamil” denotes a woman who is pregnant and therefore expected to obey her husband. The stereotype attached to pregnant women is that they bear responsibility for caring for both the baby and for their husband, which places a heavier burden on them than they should have to bear. Meanwhile, “Bunga” signifies a responsibility for women if they wish to be socially acknowledged, since “bunga” refers to beauty that attracts men’s praise. However, if a woman fails to meet the “standar” of beauty set by society, men will not recognize her and instead dismiss her. Thus, being beautiful may become a serious issue for women born below society’s imposed standards, or for those who refuse to conform to them. In line with this, beauty representation often functions as an ideological tool to control women’s bodies and to determine their social value (Badr, 2022).

Patriarchy dominates society and prevents women from gaining the power to challenge such domination. To avoid resistance from women, *Cantik Itu Luka* presents several specific words that label women with negative terms. “Gundik,” “Iblis Betina,” and “Gadis Bengal” are examples of vocabulary that portray women as weak objects. “Gadis Bengal” means a stubborn woman and is used to describe women who break the rules established by the patriarchal group. This label functions to mark women in society as unworthy of attention because they are seen as rule-breakers, even though the term is rather absurd since it applies exclusively to women and not to men. Such vocabulary indicates that patriarchal domination persists and diminishes women’s existence. *Cantik Itu Luka* illustrates what society does to women, in which they are only recognized as objects and are not allowed to speak of their dignity. This confirms the view that women’s representation in texts often serves to reinforce dominant ideology by silencing their identity and agency (Allagbé & Amoussou, 2020).

The difference between the two novels is that *Larung* provides readers with insight into how women can choose to be independent or not, related to their ability to maintain their status in a patriarchal society. However, *Cantik Itu Luka* depicts a situation where the main character does not have the opportunity to choose to be independent or not because of the stereotypes created by patriarchy to dominate society. From these differences, the researcher found that the discourse practices in the novels provide readers with an understanding that sexism and gender inequality are necessary in society to reduce the negative impacts on weaker groups. Inequality benefits superior groups more than inferior groups, who can easily change stereotypes to gain power, dominating weaker groups (Mukminin et al., 2024). Conditions like this show how patriarchal discourse operates through the normalization of inequality to maintain the dominance of superior groups (Power et al., 2020).

#### **4.2 Society Affects Women’s Existence within The Novels Dialectical Relationship Between**

### ***Discourse in the Novels and Society***

The researcher found that there is domination and power within an acknowledgement of social status for both genders, men and women. It is described by how society reacts to the phenomenon, which is unfair if there is equality. As Foucault said, power and resistance occurred when they had the same ability and power in different groups (Powers, 2007).

#### ***4.2.1 Larung creates an opportunity for women to choose***

In Foucault's discourse analysis, power and resistance are two sides that have always had different perspectives. From the type of text and discourse practice that *Larung* provides to the reader, the researcher found that *Larung* itself is represented as a woman's declaration of freedom to gain equality. The society described by *Larung* was a society where Power and Resistance were in the same way, which means that both women and men could choose to be independent or follow the stereotype. It shares people's opinion about how society works, which most people could live by their own rules, and all of the aliases mentioned in the novels are only nicknames without meaning.

*Larung*'s background in society had the freedom to think whether women and men could be someone they want, although it still had a stereotype about women, particularly. The society still acknowledges women as an inferior group to men, and it still lingers over women. However, because of the resistance that the women gave to society, and most of the women described as independent women who stand by themselves, create an identity in *Larung*, there are Modern and Traditional women. Modern women have a positive impact on society through their existence in public, as women who ignore people's stereotypes and choose their own way to live (Huzaifa et al., 2025). However, Traditional women still follow the patriarchal rule under their power.

From Foucault's framework, *Larung* shared that the writer thought that women had a chance to be independent and disobey the power of society as an act of resistance and ignore people's stereotypes. Their identity builds a stigma in a society that women are also equal to men in the chance of a good life, at least they can choose their way to live. *Larung* directs us to see how society could be flexible or equal if there is a resistance from the inferior group to the superior group to reduce their dominance and prevent the stereotype of all women.

#### ***4.2.2 Perspective of Cantik Itu Luka suffers in a society of Patriarchy***

However, *Cantik Itu Luka* deserves less acknowledgement of freedom for women. The writer, Eka Gunawan, described the main character, Dewi Ayu, as a beautiful woman who was affected by her beauty in receiving people's opinions about her. One of the traits that women wanted to have, beauty, becomes their nightmare in society because of people's stereotypes. The stereotypes drive people to be concerned about women physically and mentally, which means that there is a standard that should be achieved, or they will not be acknowledged or ignored (Praminatih, 2022). These horrible circumstances happen because the identity of women has less power than men, and because of the stereotype that the inferior group is expected to behave the same as the superior group.

*Cantik Itu Luka* has the same background as *Larung*, but it has a different society that is still traditional in giving a perspective about genders. From this perspective, people believe that men make all the decisions and that what happens in society, and for women, they are less likely to be heard when they call or make a decision for others. In this society, women who disobey men, women who play a trick on men, and women who do not want to behave and ignore men will be remembered as people who are committing a crime in society. Because of too much power held by men over women, the inferior ones (women) cannot stand up for themselves and ask for an equal chance to men (Alsaraireh et al., 2020). Moreover, the Traditional perspective affected society more than what people should ask for equality, especially women.

The resistance in this society is useless due to the power of the patriarchy dominating the circumstances because of the traditional terms that hold women to sharing and delivering their thoughts in society. Because of the resistance being unequal to the dominating power, women could only survive under the circumstances that the patriarchy created. This domination was a form of traditional thought that society failed to recognise because it prevented the inferior group from having a chance to be equal or better than men. It created a stereotype that will discriminate against people in that society, especially women who have a husband. This situation reflects

how patriarchy works to close off spaces for resistance and perpetuate gender inequality (Mukminin et al., 2024). Therefore, *Cantik Itu Luka* gives the reader a glimpse of a society that denied the form of breaking the domination of one gender (men).

In the narrative of *Larung*, women are depicted as possessing agency and freedom to choose their roles (domestic and public), demonstrating their inability to cope with patriarchal culture or feminist dogma. On the other hand, *Cantik Itu Luka* explicitly depicts women as powerless and shackled by the grip of patriarchy. However, this reading becomes more nuanced when analyzed through the perspective of the femme fatale. In this context, women actually reconstruct their passivity into strategic resistance, using their physicality or beauty as a tool to deceive and secretly rebel against masculine domination.

## 5. Conclusion

Both *Larung* and *Cantik Itu Luka* served the society that was concerned about women's existence. Gender equality is described in those novels with a different approach. *Larung* provided an ideal society for women and men, but *Cantik Itu Luka* described the endless domination of one gender. The researcher believes that both of the novels occurred in real life, and that not all of society had the same circumstances. Sometimes, people face good circumstances in society, and sometimes not, and maintaining gender equality requires resistance and also power to do it. From *Larung*, the researcher found that one needs bravery to be different from society to close and decrease stereotypes directed at a particular gender. *Cantik Itu Luka* teaches us to stay strong in a failing society that did not see gender equality.

Power is not always good, and Resistance is not always a form of antagonism in society. To be different in a society, it takes bravery to make a group of people who have the same perspective. Those novels give us a perspective on how society works and provide us with a stereotype that occurs in society. Therefore, they deliver to the reader how ideology could be accepted by many people or not, based on the perspective and thoughts the society has.

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