

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MASCULINE POWER IN *CANTIK ITU LUKA* BY EKA KURNIAWAN: AN EXISTENTIALIST FEMINIST STUDY

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Received: 2025-10-25

Accepted: 2025-11-16

Published: 2025-12-05

Abstract

This study analyzes the representation of women as victims of masculine power in *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. The novel was chosen for its intricate portrayal of women's suffering and social positioning within Indonesia's patriarchal structure, marked by violence, sexuality, and moral oppression. While earlier research has explored themes of women and patriarchy in Kurniawan's works, studies explicitly connecting *Cantik Itu Luka* to Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory remain scarce. This study therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of women's freedom and existence in Indonesian literature. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research draws on the text of *Cantik Itu Luka* as the primary data source. Analysis is conducted through close reading of narrative elements, symbols, and character actions, framed by Beauvoir's concepts of freedom, oppression, and woman as the "Other." The findings reveal that masculine power in the novel manifests through physical violence, sexual exploitation, and moral or social control over women's bodies. The protagonist, Dewi Ayu, together with other female characters such as Alamanda and Maya Dewi, embodies the subjugation of women under patriarchy. Yet, amid this suffering emerges an existential awareness that urges women to assert freedom and autonomy as self-determining subjects. Through his use of magical realism, Kurniawan captures the tension between oppression and resistance, illuminating women's search for meaning and agency. Ultimately, this study enriches feminist literary criticism in Indonesia by showing how literature reflects women's existential struggles toward liberation and self-sovereignty.

Keywords: *cantik itu luka; Eka Kurniawan; existentialist feminism; masculine power; representation of women.*

1. Introduction

Literary works are a complex reflection of human life, processed through a medium of aesthetic and meaningful language. They are not merely entertainment or expressions of imagination; rather, they serve as a social representation that captures the realities, ideologies, and cultural values of a society. According to Rahmawati et al. (2024), literature is a form of artistic work that contains a wealth of language styles and imagination in

expressing ideas and social conditions in society with the aim of attracting readers' interest and awareness. Meanwhile, according to Yupianto et al. (2022), literature is an expression of the human personality in the form of experiences, thoughts, enthusiasm, and beliefs in the form of concrete images that arouse fascination with the tools of language and the embodiment of life as a result of the writer's observations of the life around them.

Through literary works, especially novels, authors attempt to present complex human experiences, including suffering, inequality, and power relations in the form of vivid and meaningful stories. According to Fals et al. (2023), a novel is a literary work that can describe the problems of human life, which are expressed deeply and subtly through monologues and dialogues carried out by the characters in the story. Novels as a literary genre are unique in depicting the journey of human life through dynamic characters, conflicts, and plots.

In the context of modern Indonesian literature, novels are often used as a space to express social tensions between individuals and the social system that restrains them. According to Pramudita et al. (2025), *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan is one of the monumental works that displays this complexity. First published in 2002, this novel combines magical realism style with Indonesian historical narrative, unfolding a story filled with violence, colonialism, politics, and deep psychological wounds. One work that strongly reflects this complexity is Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*. This work centers on the figure of Dewi Ayu, an Indonesian woman who has become a symbol of women's suffering in a patriarchal society. In her narrative, Dewi Ayu is depicted as a victim of a social system that places women's bodies as commodities. According to Beauvoir (1949), she became a prostitute not because of her free will, but because of life's compulsion and oppressive social structures. Through this character, Eka Kurniawan not only tells the story of a woman, but also reveals the social reality of how women are often reduced to objects of male desire and symbols of family or national honor.

According to Gaviota (2021) in her book *ABC Feminisme*, Simone de Beauvoir's analysis focuses on the social construction of women as the other. Beauvoir identifies this concept as the basis for the oppression of women, where historically women have been seen as deviant and abnormal, while men are regarded as the universal ideal standard. Therefore, Beauvoir asserts that this view must be set aside for feminism to progress towards freedom and existential equality. According to Lubis (2021), in *Cantik Itu Luka*, this idea is reflected through female characters such as Dewi Ayu, Alamanda, and Maya Dewi, who struggle to define themselves amidst the constraints of patriarchal power. The masculine power depicted by Eka Kurniawan manifests in various forms: physical violence, sexual oppression, and moral and social control. Men are portrayed as the rulers of public space and women's bodies, while women are placed in subordinate positions. According to Wikanditha (2024), characters like Komandan Kamp and Ma Gedik represent the patriarchal authority that controls women's bodies and wills, making them victims within a systemic power circle. Fazalani (2021) also emphasizes that the oppression of women is not only individual but also structural, as part of the social mechanisms that sustain male dominance. Moreover, the historical backdrop in the novel reinforces this depiction of masculine power. The colonial period, Japanese occupation, and post-independence periods served as a stage for violence legitimized by political and military structures. In this context, women's bodies become symbols of power and national honor that are often exploited. Eka Kurniawan employs magical realism to expand the meaning of suffering: seemingly irrational events become metaphors for the social and spiritual chaos resulting from masculine hegemony.

Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminist theory posits that men are named "the self," while women are "the other." If the other is a threat to the self, then women are a threat to men. Therefore, if men wish to remain free, they must subordinate women to themselves (Tong, 2019). Due to societal stigma, women develop a mindset that men are useful figures, while women are seen otherwise.

The subjectivity of female characters in the novel *Zeina* encompasses differences in identity, resilience, and self-formation, internal and external conflicts, as well as the struggle for emancipation and freedom. This study asserts that women can empower themselves even within a patriarchal environment. Empowerment through education, employment, and psychological support is crucial as a foundation for women's roles as agents of change (Nur'aini & Basid, 2025). We found that novels written from a male perspective systematically objectify female characters, while novels written from a female perspective do not show significant objectification towards either gender (Luo et al., 2024).

This research employs a feminist approach as a basis for analyzing the representation of women in Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*. This approach is chosen because it highlights gender inequality, patriarchal systems, and women's struggles to assert their existence amidst male dominance. Through a feminist perspective, literature is understood not only as an aesthetic form, but also as a medium reflecting the social realities and ideologies that influence women's lives.

Recent research by Pramudita et al. (2025) focuses on the dynamics of internal and external conflicts within the narrative structure of the novel, asserting that *Cantik Itu Luka* presents social and psychological conflicts rooted in power relations. However, these studies have not fully uncovered how the representation of women is constructed as victims of masculine power and how their struggles are interpreted through the lens of existential feminism. According to Pertiwi et al. (2023), this research examines forms of gender injustice in *Cantik Itu Luka* using a feminist approach. The findings indicate that women experience subordination, objectification, marginalization, and social stereotypes that position them as weak and passive. Meanwhile, Adhilla et al. (2025) trace how patriarchal culture in the novel produces suffering for female characters. Women are depicted as victims of male domination through sexual exploitation, physical violence, and moral control.

Previous research indicates that studies on *Cantik Itu Luka* still focus on the social and cultural dimensions of patriarchy. Pramudita et al. (2025) highlight the social-psychological conflicts resulting from power relations, while Pertiwi et al. (2023) reveal gender injustices such as subordination and objectification, and Adhilla et al. (2025) examine the suffering of women due to male domination. However, none of these three studies has addressed how women's existential awareness is formed amid oppression. Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by examining the representation of women as victims of masculine power through the lens of existential feminism.

By combining text analysis and existential feminist theory, this study hopes to provide a conceptual contribution to Indonesian feminist literary studies. This analysis also seeks to demonstrate that women's struggles in literature are not limited to social dimensions but also represent an ontological struggle to become conscious, sovereign, and free subjects.

The focus of this research is directed at uncovering the meaning and forms of representation of women as victims of masculine power, as well as the existential struggles of women facing male dominance, as depicted in Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*. This study is grounded in an existential feminist perspective, a school of thought that positions women

as subjects with the freedom to determine their existence within the patriarchal social system. The primary focus of this research highlights how Eka Kurniawan portrays women as victims of masculine power structures. In *Cantik Itu Luka*, male power is represented through acts of violence, oppression, and the exploitation of women's bodies occurring in various social and historical contexts. Characters like Dewi Ayu become symbols of women whose bodies are commercialized and objectified by colonizers, local rulers, and society itself, which is built on patriarchal values (Pramudita et al., 2025). This form of oppression is not only physical but also symbolic, illustrating how women lose control over themselves and are compelled to submit to social norms created by men (Fazalani, 2021).

The existential feminist perspective aids this research in understanding that the struggles of women in *Cantik Itu Luka* are not only social but also philosophical and ontological. The resistance exhibited by female characters is an effort to free themselves from social determinism and assert their right to "become" fully human. Thus, this novel becomes a symbolic space that illustrates how Indonesian women, in the context of colonial and post-colonial history, continue to strive for true existential freedom (Wikanditha, 2024). Overall, the focus of this research emphasizes that *Cantik Itu Luka* does not merely present a tragic story of women but also showcases the dynamics of women's consciousness in confronting oppression. Through his magical realism style, Eka Kurniawan offers a narrative about women who are wounded yet resilient, battered by the patriarchal system, but still striving to affirm their existence in a world that seeks to nullify them (Pramudita et al., 2025). Thus, this research centers on how the representation and existential struggles of women in the novel reflect efforts to reclaim autonomy and personal freedom amid hegemonic masculine power.

2. Literature Review

Literature serves as a mirror of the complex human experience, rich with social and cultural values. According to Rahmawati et al. (2024), literature expresses reality and social ideas through aesthetic language. Yudianto et al. (2022) add that literature is an expression of human experiences and thoughts beautifully articulated, while Fals et al. (2023) state that novels are effective media for deeply portraying human life issues through characters and conflicts.

Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka* (2002) employs magical realism to reflect history, colonialism, and the suffering of women within a patriarchal system. The character Dewi Ayu symbolizes a woman whose body and identity are controlled by masculine power. Beauvoir's concept of the Other and Sartre's existential idea of freedom form the basis for understanding the struggles of female characters in the novel, where their existence is determined by patriarchal power relations. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949) in *The Second Sex*, women are positioned as the Other due to male dominance as the center of power. This notion is supported by Gaviota (2021) and Lubis (2021), who explain that women's struggles in literature reflect efforts to assert their existence amid patriarchal structures.

In this context, Nuraulia et al. (2025) explain that feminist representation in karya in literature showcases the power imbalances between men and women, as well as women's struggles to gain autonomy over their bodies, voices, and lives. They assert that the patriarchal system shapes gender roles that position women as weak, emotional beings dependent on men. This perspective gives rise to injustices such as marginalization, subordination, and symbolic violence that constrain women's freedom. A feminist approach

is employed to reveal the forms of gender injustice experienced by women in society, particularly those caused by patriarchal social and cultural structures (Maharani et al., 2025).

Masculine power in the novel is depicted through physical violence, sexual exploitation, and moral control over women (Wikanditha, 2024; Fazalani, 2021). This condition illustrates that oppression is not only personal but also structural and ideological. Based on existential feminist theory, as explained by Tong (2019) in *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, patriarchal dominance gives rise to women's struggles to liberate themselves from subordinate positions toward awareness as independent subjects.

Previous research by Pramudita et al. (2025), Pertiwi et al. (2023), and Adhilla et al. (2025) has focused more on social aspects and gender injustice but has not addressed women's existential awareness. Therefore, this study employs an existential feminist approach with a qualitative descriptive method (Siswanto, 2020; Creswell, 2014) to analyze the representation of women as victims of masculine power and their struggles to assert their existence. This research emphasizes that the struggles of women in *Cantik Itu Luka* are not merely social but also existential and philosophical.

3. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to Siswanto (2020:56), qualitative descriptive methods are ways to solve research problems by describing or explaining the research object based on real facts and actual conditions. Qualitative research is essential in behavioral sciences because it aims to uncover the motives underlying human behavior (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019). This method is employed because literary research is not oriented towards numbers but towards the interpretation of meanings, symbols, and values contained within literary texts. Through the qualitative descriptive method, this study aims to thoroughly describe the representation of women as victims of masculine power in Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka*, as well as to interpret the forms of existential struggle of female characters using an existential feminist perspective.

This research is grounded in the existential feminist theory proposed by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), which highlights that women become "the Other" due to constructions created by masculine social norms and structures. In the context of *Cantik Itu Luka*, this theory is used to explore how female characters such as Dewi Ayu, Alamanda, Adinda, and Maya Dewi experience structural oppression while also showcasing their efforts at resistance and existential awareness against male dominance.

Cantik Itu Luka was chosen as the research object because this work represents the complexity of gender relations, masculine power, and the existential struggles of women in the historical context of colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. Furthermore, the novel features strong yet tragic female characters who symbolize suffering and resistance against the patriarchal system. Eka Kurniawan's work possesses thematic depth and philosophical value relevant to existential feminist analysis, making it an appropriate choice for exploring how women's consciousness is formed amid social and cultural dominance.

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data comprises the text of *Cantik Itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan (2002), while secondary data is obtained from books, journals, and scholarly articles relevant to existential feminist studies. Data collection techniques involve intensive reading, note-taking, and classifying parts of the text that indicate forms of oppression and women's resistance against masculine power.

The data analysis procedure is conducted in three stages. The first stage is identifying and coding the data, which involves marking quotes or narratives that demonstrate

masculine power relations and women's experiences in the text. The second stage is thematic categorization, where the results of the identification are grouped into themes such as sexual oppression, social violence, and existential awareness. The third stage is theoretical interpretation, which involves interpreting the findings using Beauvoir's concept of the Other to uncover the existential meaning of women in the context of the patriarchal dominance depicted in the novel.

The accuracy of the data is maintained through triangulation of theories and sources by comparing the researcher's analysis results with various references on global feminism and the social context of the novel. Thus, this qualitative descriptive method not only explains the facts present in the text but also reveals the philosophical meanings and existential awareness of women in facing masculine dominance as depicted in the literary work.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Representation of Women as Victims of Masculine Power

The novel *Cantik Itu Luka* depicts male domination that oppresses women through physical, social, and symbolic power within a patriarchal society. Characters such as Dewi Ayu, Alamanda, and Si Cantik illustrate how women experience oppression while simultaneously struggling to assert their existence. From the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism (1949), women are positioned as other beings whose existence is determined by men, resulting in a loss of freedom and subjectivity. In this context, the research conducts an in-depth analysis of the text by linking quotes from the novel, forms of masculine power, and theoretical interpretations of existential feminism. The analysis shows that the oppression of women occurs not only through physical violence but also through social and symbolic constructions that negate their existential freedom. However, behind this oppression, the female characters exhibit forms of resistance and self-awareness in their pursuit of freedom and authenticity. Through mechanisms of psychological, social, and symbolic power, the novel portrays the process of women's struggle against patriarchal structures and their effort to reconstruct their identities as independent subjects. Thus, this discussion not only describes the suffering of women but also interprets the philosophical meanings of their existential struggles, while reinforcing the contribution of this research to the study of feminist literature in Indonesia.

Data 1

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu – became a prostitute due to colonial coercion	"We treat the souls of sick soldiers," he said. "That's how we became prostitutes, forced and unpaid." (page 96)

Data 1 shows the oppression of women experienced by Dewi Ayu, who was forced to become a prostitute by colonial powers. The quote "That's how we became prostitutes, forced and unpaid" emphasizes the loss of freedom and control over her body.

This condition reflects masculine domination and the dehumanization of women, where women's bodies are used as tools of power. However, Dewi Ayu's awareness of the injustice that befell her emerged, marking the beginning of existential awareness to affirm her existence amidst patriarchal oppression.

Data 2

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Alamanda-relationship of love and power	"Don't you love me?" "I already have a girlfriend." (p. 220)

Data 2 shows a love relationship characterized by masculine domination and women's resistance efforts. The man's questions illustrate emotional pressure, while Alamanda's answers emphasize her independence to resist control. In Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective, Alamanda tries to become a free subject who makes her own choices and rejects her position as the Other. His actions reflect existential awareness and resistance to patriarchal power.

Data 3

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Beauty and the suffering of physical judgment	"Waiting for my Prince to come," said the girl finally, although she still didn't refuse. "To free me from the curse of an ugly face." (p. 20)

Data 3 depicts women's suffering due to oppressive standards of beauty and physical judgment. Beauty feels her life is cursed because her face is considered ugly, showing how patriarchal values place women based on appearance. This character represents women as the Other whose existence is determined by the male gaze. His hope for a "prince" shows existential alienation, but also a desire to free himself from the shackles of social values that limit his existence as a free human being.

Data 4

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu is the victim and interpreter of her life	"Look, that's Mama," he said to Alamanda. "Photographed by a Japanese, sometime later raped by a Japanese too, and it could be your father's Japanese." (p. 105)

Data 4 shows Dewi Ayu's awareness as a victim of masculine power as well as an interpreter of her own suffering. She realized that the violence that happened to her was not just a personal incident, but part of a patriarchal and colonial system that oppresses women. This awareness marks the first step towards existential freedom, where he tries to understand and affirm his existence even though he is entangled in masculine domination.

Data 5

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu's existential awareness of the masculine world	"There is no more terrible curse than bringing out beautiful baby girls in a world of men who are as perverted as dogs in mating season." (p. 4-5)

Data 5 shows Dewi Ayu's existential awareness of the harshness of a world dominated by masculine power. She realized that being a beautiful woman was actually a burden and a source of suffering in a patriarchal society. However, by expressing her views critically, Dewi Ayu asserts her subjectivity and freedom to assess the reality of her own life, a form of resistance to masculine domination that oppresses women.

Data 6

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu becomes a prostitute and the object of men's gaze	"She's the best prostitute here, her name is Dewi Ayu," said Mama Kalong. "I will piss on his cock like a tiger marking his territory." (pages 126-127)

Data 6 shows how Dewi Ayu is reduced to a sexual object in the eyes of men. Remarks that compare her body to a marked territory of power demonstrate a form of masculine domination that makes women objects of ownership and exploitation.

Data 7

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Alamanda was forced to marry by Shodancho	"Until finally he heard a fisherman say that one evening he saw Shodancho driving a truck out of the forest while Alamanda looked unconscious beside him." (page 231)

Data 7 shows the forms of violence and coercion experienced by Alamanda against women. The condition of "unconscious next to her" describes the loss of control of a woman's body and will due to the actions of male domination. This event confirms that the relationship between Alamanda and Shodancho is not based on love, but coercion that reflects patriarchal power. However, this traumatic experience also became a starting point for existential awareness to understand and reject the masculine system that oppressed him.

Data 8

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Rosinah is a mute servant and subordinate lower-class woman	"Rosinah just smiles. She can't talk except for meaningless mumbling sounds, but she can smile and she likes to smile." (p. 9)

Data 8 shows the form of subordination and silence of lower-class women experienced by Rosinah. The condition of being mute and only able to "smile" illustrates the limitations of women in expressing themselves under oppressive social structures. She becomes a symbol of women who are marginalized, whose existence is only recognized as a servant without a voice.

Data 9

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Objectification of women in society's view	"A woman threw her baby into the bushes, and a father carried a banana stalk." (p. 2)

Data 9 depicts the degradation of women's human values due to the strong patriarchal social construction. The woman's action of "throwing her baby into the bushes" shows the loss of the meaning of motherhood and moral values as a result of oppressive social and cultural pressures. Meanwhile, "a father carrying a banana stalk" is a symbol of the absurdity of a society that has lost empathy and humanity.

Data 10

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Exploitation of the body as a social identity	"One hundred and seventy-two men. The oldest is ninety-two years old, the youngest is twelve." (p. 3)

Data 10 This illustrates the exploitation of women's bodies as a form of loss of dignity and social identity. The phrase "one hundred seventy-two men" depicts the extent to which women's bodies are objectified to satisfy desires without consideration for their humanity. This quote emphasizes that women's bodies are reduced to tools for fulfilling masculine needs and egos, indicating extreme patriarchal domination.

The data above shows that *Cantik Itu Luka* places women in vulnerable positions due to layered patriarchal practices of body exploitation, violence, and social and moral restrictions. This portrayal is not merely an individual incident but part of a structure and discourse that maintains male dominance. Nevertheless, the text also presents the beginnings of awareness among female characters, a seed of awakening that leads to efforts to assert themselves as subjects. This finding aligns with other studies that emphasize the role of literature in uncovering power inequalities and fostering gender awareness (Nuraulia, Suaedi, & Vardani, 2025).

4.2 The Struggle of Female Characters Facing Male Power

In the novel *Cantik Itu Luka*, female characters such as Dewi Ayu, Alamanda, and Si Cantik are depicted as living under the shadow of patriarchy, yet they are not portrayed as submissive figures. Eka Kurniawan presents women as individuals with self-awareness and the courage to challenge the oppressive social system. From the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism, their struggles represent a form of transcendence, an effort to move from the position of the Other toward awareness as free subjects. This resistance is manifested through inner consciousness and the assertion of the right to determine their own life paths, rather than through physical actions. The struggles of these female characters reveal three main forms of resistance: awareness of oppression, affirmation of identity and freedom, and opposition to symbols of masculine power. For instance, Dewi Ayu chooses to return to prostitution not out of despair but as an expression of existential freedom that rejects societal moral control. Alamanda demonstrates resistance through psychological strength against her husband, while Si Cantik strives to overcome her inner wounds by building an independent identity. Together, they represent different stages of women's existential awareness in combating the patriarchal structure that positions them as objects.

Data 1

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu rejects male domination with existential awareness	"There's no difference between a lowly soldier or a Japanese emperor, said Dewi Ayu. They all target women's crotch the same way." (page 93)

Data 1 shows the existential awareness of the character Dewi Ayu towards the patriarchal system that oppresses women. He understood that both the authorities and ordinary people treated women as sexual objects. This statement is not just a cynical expression, but a reflection of life experiences that are full of gender injustice

Data 2

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Alamanda is aware of her power over her body and its attractiveness	"I like men," Alamanda once said, "but I prefer to see them cry because of love." (p. 199)

Data 2 shows the character Alamanda's awareness of her position and attractiveness as a woman. She realized that her beauty and charm gave her symbolic power that could reverse the traditional roles between men and women. Alamanda's statement reflects a self-conscious attitude towards power relations, which usually place women as the ones who are controlled. By making men "cry because of love", Alamanda seems to reverse the subordinate position to become emotionally dominant.

Data 3

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Alamanda refuses to love because she wants to be free	"Alamanda raised her hand and made a reverse waving motion in a gesture to make him leave, and Kliwon finally left without saying a word. Undeniable proof that he was in a marriage he didn't want." (page 231)

Data 3 describes Alamanda's rejection of love relationships that limit her freedom. The hand movement used to expel Kliwon becomes a symbol of resistance to emotional and social ties that he does not want. This action shows that Alamanda is aware of the inauthenticity of the relationship she is in, and chooses to maintain her freedom rather than submit to the oppressive demands of love or marriage. Her attitude is a form of resistance to the domestic and emotional roles that are often imposed on women.

Data 4

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu dared to oppose male religious figures	"Because you asked a prostitute to take off her clothes," said Dewi Ayu, "you must have money to pay me." (p. 8)

Data 4 shows Dewi Ayu's courage in facing male figures who act as religious figures, who are usually seen as having high moral and social authority. Dewi Ayu's words are a form of sharp verbal resistance to the hypocritical attitude of men who pretend to be holy but still desire women's bodies. With this statement, Dewi Ayu not only refuses to be humiliated but also asserts control over her body and self-esteem. This action marks awareness of one's social position and is a form of reversal of norms that place women as objects of sin or disgrace.

Data 5

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Rosinah shows a form of silent resistance (passive resistance)	Rosinah had bought it at a bakery, and Dewi Ayu smeared herself with corpse preservative, even though it was a person. People sometimes use it as a mixture to make meatball noodles. (pp. 10-11)

Data 5 describes Rosinah as a woman who carries out a form of silent resistance or passive resistance to the system that oppresses her. In this quote, Rosinah's action of buying corpse

preservation to help Dewi Ayu is not just an ordinary domestic activity but a symbol of support and solidarity among women in a patriarchal society.

Data 6

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Spiritual Awareness against oppression	"I have given four daughters to this cursed world. The time has come for my deathbed to pass." (p. 7)

Data 6 describes Dewi Ayu's inner and spiritual awareness of the suffering that befell herself and her daughters in a world dominated by patriarchal values. Her words show a form of existential reflection on a life full of suffering, where she realizes that the world in which she lives is "cursed" by injustice and oppression of women. This statement also shows resignation which is not just a form of despair, but a deep awareness of the social structure that oppresses and does not provide space for women to freely determine their fate.

Data 7

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu is reflectively aware of the reality of patriarchy	"If I live to be a hundred years old, then I will give birth to eight babies. That's too many." (p. 7)

Data 7 shows Dewi Ayu's reflective awareness of the social role assigned to her as a woman in a patriarchal system. Her words were not just a complaint, but a form of criticism of society's view of women as mere reproductive tools. The statement "that's too much" contains a critical awareness that women's bodies are often used as objects for men's interests and a social order that requires them to submit to biological nature. Through this awareness, Dewi Ayu began to question the boundaries between personal will and oppressive social demands

Data 8

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu's independence after her resurrection from the grave	"On a weekend afternoon in March, Dewi Ayu rose from the grave after twenty-one years of death." (p. 1)

Data 8 depicts the symbolic moment of Dewi Ayu's awakening as a form of enlightenment and existential independence. After twenty-one years of death, her resurrection from the grave is not just a magical event, but also a metaphor for the awakening of a woman's consciousness that refuses to submit to the fate and suffering of the past. Dewi Ayu, who rose again, shows the ability to "re-live" with a new awareness of no longer just being a victim of patriarchy, but becoming a figure who understands suffering, laughs at it, and stands above it.

Data 9

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Dewi Ayu rejects society's moral stereotypes	"If possible," said Rosinah with a gesture to a mosque imam, "he plans to worship himself." (p. 11)

Data 9 illustrates Dewi Ayu's critical attitude and rejection of society's moral stereotypes, which often look down on women, especially those who are considered socially "impure". Through the symbolic expression that she "plans to worship herself," Dewi Ayu shows a form of spiritual and moral independence, as if rejecting the authority of men, including religious figures, in determining the value and honor of a woman.

Data 10

Characters/Events	Quotes from Novels
Existential awareness that rejects hereditary oppression	"I gave birth to four children, and I died." (p. 10)

Data 10 illustrates Dewi Ayu's existential awareness of the cycle of suffering experienced by women due to the patriarchal system. The sentence "I gave birth to four children, and I died" carries a reflective meaning that women's lives are often reduced to reproductive functions and servitude to constraining social values. This statement indicates that Dewi Ayu is aware of being trapped in a cycle of oppression, where women are born to serve men and subsequently pass on the same suffering to future generations.

From the analysis of the above data, it can be concluded that the representation of women in *Cantik Itu Luka* oscillates between two main axes: the victimization of bodies and identities, and existential awareness and resistance. The victimization of bodies and identities illustrates how the patriarchal system subjugates women through violence, sexuality, and social norms that limit their movements and freedoms. Meanwhile, existential awareness and resistance demonstrate the process by which women begin to understand the forms of oppression they experience and strive to assert their existence as free subjects. Thus, this novel not only depicts women's suffering but also constructs a narrative of existential awakening that aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's idea that "one becomes a woman through her own awareness." Through his magical realism style, Eka Kurniawan presents a symbolic world where wounds become a pathway to consciousness; "beauty" is indeed a wound, but it is through this wound that women discover themselves as free, conscious, and sovereign over their lives.

5. Conclusion

The discussion regarding the representation of women as victims of masculine power in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik Itu Luka* can be concluded that this work portrays women living under the oppressive dominance of a patriarchal system. Masculine power in the novel is evident through physical violence, sexual oppression, and social and moral control that restricts women's freedoms. Characters such as Dewi Ayu, Alamanda, and Maya Dewi represent the suffering of women who are objectified by male power, both individually and structurally. This finding indicates that patriarchy not only limits women physically but also shapes their social consciousness and identity, as explained through existential feminist theory. However, behind this suffering, a spirit of resistance and strong existential awareness is also depicted. Women in this novel do not simply accept their fate as victims; they strive to assert their existence and freedom as independent human beings. Through the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism, the struggles of these female characters reflect efforts to move beyond the position of the Other and to become sovereign subjects of their own lives. This analysis underscores the relevance of existential theory in understanding the philosophical dimensions of women's struggles while also reinforcing the

argument about the limitations on women's freedom and agency within patriarchal structures. Thus, *Cantik Itu Luka* not only reveals gender inequalities and patriarchal power but also showcases the existential struggles of women to find meaning in their existence. This study provides a theoretical contribution to feminist literary criticism in Indonesia, demonstrating how an existential feminist approach can be used to interpret gender representations in the novel. The novel asserts that women's liberation is a process of self-awareness that involves rejecting oppression and affirming existence as equal and free individuals. For future research, this study could be expanded by comparing the representation of women in other literary works, thereby enriching the discourse of feminist literature in Indonesia and enhancing the understanding of women's existential struggles.

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