Écriture Féminine as subversion: Reclaiming agency in Javanese historiography through TUTUR DEDES: doa dan kutukan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the use of *écriture féminine*—a feminist writing practice that foregrounds women's bodily experience and subjective voice—in Amalia Yunus' novel Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan as a form of resistance against androcentric literary discourse. The novel challenges conventional stereotypes by portraying Dedes not as a passive object of male desire but as an active historical and political agent engaged in shaping social change. Through strategies such as first-person narration, symbolic representations of birth and motherhood, and the reclamation of female corporeality, the narrative confronts patriarchal constraints that have long defined women's roles in literature. In this context, écriture féminine functions as a subversive practice that destabilizes what Cixous calls "phallogocentric structures"—systems of thought privileging male-centered logic—while simultaneously enabling women to reclaim their voices and identities. Likewise, the study employs Mignolo's concept of "epistemic disobedience," understood here as the deliberate act of resisting dominant frameworks of male-centered knowledge, to show how Yunus' text reconfigures cultural memory. By reimagining Dedes as a figure of intellectual and political agency, the novel disrupts the androcentric canon that often marginalizes women as secondary characters. This study argues that Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan not only redefines female representation through narrative form and thematic symbolism but also contributes to a broader feminist discourse by demonstrating literature's capacity to act as a site of resistance and transformative critique across cultural and disciplinary boundaries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Across diverse literary traditions, women have historically been positioned at the margins of male-centered narratives. Instead of being developed as protagonists in their own right, female characters are frequently constructed as secondary figures whose function is to support and amplify men's stories (Mackay, 2010). This marginalization reflects the enduring influence of patriarchal values that shape literary production and representation, dictating the ways in which women are imagined (Bassiouney, 1970; Hatley and Blackburn, 2013). Within such frameworks, male characters are consistently cast as agents of action, while women appear as passive recipients or ornamental presences in the narrative world.

Even when female figures are given narrative prominence, their portrayal is often mediated through an androcentric gaze that privileges beauty over intellect, the body over the mind, and obedience over autonomy (Anderson, 1995; Millett, 2014; Arifatin, 2019; Kalauserang, 2023; Tsaniya and Prihandini, 2023). Women's value is reduced to physical appeal, while their intellectual, moral, and political capacities remain sidelined (Shoheh, 2010; Hanrahan, 2023). These representational patterns are not incidental but symptomatic of an epistemic imbalance in which literary knowledge has been structured by male-dominated worldviews. As a result, literature both mirrors and perpetuates androcentric thought, reinforcing the subordinate positioning of women's voices and perspectives.

Indonesian literature offers a telling illustration of this tendency, most notably in the legend of Arok and Dedes. In dominant retellings, Dedes is remembered almost exclusively for her extraordinary beauty—a quality portrayed as the trigger for the conflict between Ken Arok and Tunggul Ametung—while her political, intellectual, and moral agency is largely effaced (Toer, 2009; Komandoko, 2015). Such representations cast her as a passive object whose significance derives from the actions of men around her. Yet this portrayal is not inevitable; it reflects selective narrative choices that sustain the androcentric canon. Against this backdrop, Amalia Yunus' Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan stages a striking intervention by reimagining Dedes as an autonomous historical actor endowed with her own voice, desires, and political agency.

This study approaches Yunus' novel through the dual framework of *écriture féminine* and epistemic disobedience. As theorized by Cixous (1976), *écriture féminine* foregrounds women's bodily experience, affective knowledge, and subjective voice, functioning as both a stylistic and political practice. Yunus mobilizes this strategy through first-person narration, corporeal imagery, and symbolic representations of birth and motherhood to center Dedes' embodied agency. Read alongside the concept of epistemic disobedience—the deliberate reconfiguration of male-centered systems of knowledge— as theorized by Mignolo (2009, 2011, 2013), these strategies form a layered resistance that destabilizes phallogocentric structures while creating narrative and epistemic space for women's self-definition.

By situating Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan within this theoretical lens, the article demonstrates how literature can operate as a site of feminist resistance and epistemic transformation. The novel does more than insert a female voice into a canonical myth; it

reorients the narrative itself by reclaiming Dedes from centuries of reductionist portrayals. In doing so, Yunus' work not only expands the representational possibilities for Indonesian women in literature but also contributes to feminist and decolonial debates on how canonical texts may be reread through critical frameworks. This article therefore argues that Amalia Yunus' reimagining of Dedes exemplifies how *écriture féminine* and epistemic disobedience can function together as a subversive literary practice, challenging androcentric traditions and opening space for women to be represented as autonomous, complex, and politically engaged subjects.

II. METHOD

The limited portrayal of women in literary works, often reduced to objectification, cannot be separated from androcentric power and knowledge embedded in the minds of authors. This phenomenon is closely related to a worldview shaped by the patriarchal system, where women are frequently placed in subordinate positions and perceived as sexual objects or mere companions in dominant narratives (Rose, 1994).

Androcentric knowledge is not only reflected in the representation of women but also in the broader power structures that shape social and cultural norms. In this context, male authors—both in literature and in intellectual domains—often create and sustain knowledge that ignores or suppresses female perspectives (Anderson, 1995).

Foucault (1972), in his theory of power and knowledge, emphasizes that knowledge is never neutral; it is always intertwined with the power that governs it. In many literary works, knowledge about women is constructed from social constructs that not only reveal gender inequalities but also reinforce patriarchal dominance. This knowledge serves to maintain the status quo by defining "truth" from a male perspective, which in turn influences how women are understood and treated in society.

This dominance is evident in various representations of women in literature, which are often laden with negative stereotypes—depicting women as victims, objects of desire, or even symbols of weakness and incapability (Mulvey, 1975). Consequently, the knowledge produced in literature frequently functions as a mechanism to regulate and control female subjects, further solidifying an unjust gender system.

Moreover, Michel Foucault (1980) also highlights how knowledge serves as a powerful tool of social control. This knowledge shapes how individuals perceive themselves and how they interact with the world around them. In this regard, the knowledge produced by the patriarchal system not only constructs external realities but also internally shapes and constrains female subjects—determining how they perceive themselves within a social and cultural context structured by gender ideology. Such knowledge does not emerge solely through academic discourse but is also reinforced through representations in popular culture, media, and, of course, literature.

It is important to note that androcentric knowledge is not solely a construct produced by male authors; it is often sustained by educational, legal, and religious systems that tend to overlook or suppress female narratives (Phillips, 2009; Mackinnon, 2021). For example, in

many literary traditions, women are frequently depicted as passive figures in need of male protection and supervision. Such representations reinforce the notion that women are dependent entities incapable of existing independently without male guidance or control—an idea that perpetuates inequality in social life.

In this context, androcentric knowledge exemplifies a form of power constructed through discourses that establish certain truths about men's authority over women—for instance, the misogynistic interpretations found in religious traditions. As a result, women are ultimately regarded as second-class human beings, perpetually subordinated to men. Through power, discourse is created to shape knowledge and, even further, to define truth itself.

As Anderson (1995) argues, androcentric knowledge is an intricate entanglement of power (patriarchy) and discourse that is continuously produced. Women are discursively constructed through their bodies, often being defined as second-class beings. Beauvoir refers to this as the mystification of women—a process in which men construct and reinforce narratives that position women in roles that serve their interests (Beauvoir, 1989). This androcentric practice inherently reflects a male-oriented orientation, resulting in the marginalization or even erasure of women from social life. This erasure is evident in numerous historical texts that systematically exclude women's contributions (Scott, 2012).

The representation of women in androcentric literature not only reflects social inequalities but also reinforces patriarchal power structures. In many literary works, women are often portrayed as objects positioned outside the dominant subject, with roles confined within the framework of stereotypes and traditional gender expectations (Rose, 1994). This illustrates how literary texts do more than merely narrate stories; they also produce knowledge that shapes societal perceptions of women. As Foucault (1980) argues, knowledge is always intertwined with power, and in this context, narratives that objectify women serve to reinforce the dominance of patriarchal ideology.

Thus, the only way to challenge the dominant truth of androcentric knowledge is by engaging in counter-narratives and epistemic disobedience against the prevailing meanings ascribed to women. Epistemic disobedience, as articulated by Mignolo (2009, 2011, 2013), is a form of resistance against dominant knowledge that critically interrogates existing norms and assumptions within epistemology and knowledge production. This act of resistance seeks to disrupt androcentric power dynamics and create space for alternative epistemologies.

Epistemic disobedience demands not only questioning dominant narratives but also constructing and amplifying alternative narratives derived from previously marginalized perspectives. Mignolo (2009, 2011, 2013) underscores the significance of "delinking," a process of disconnecting from ways of thinking imposed by dominant power structures and moving toward new modes of understanding and interpreting the world.

This disobedience manifests through various means, such as rewriting history, critiquing existing social constructions, and redefining perspectives on women's roles and

representations in society. One notable form of such resistance is the use of literary production to deconstruct narratives long dominated by male voices. For instance, literary works that embrace the perspective of *écriture féminine* not only challenge prevailing gender norms but also explore women's experiences that have often been marginalized or excluded from dominant discourses (Cixous, 1976). Through writing, women can alter or even recreate narratives that shape their understanding of identity, subjectivity, and agency.

As a response to androcentric knowledge, feminists have developed the concept of *écriture féminine*, which proposes a new approach to writing and representing women's experiences (Cixous, 1976). This approach aims to dismantle the dominance of masculine narratives by foregrounding the voices and experiences of women that have long been marginalized.

Écriture féminine, a term introduced by Cixous (1976), refers to the way women inscribe their bodies into language and text as a form of resistance against androcentric discourse while simultaneously liberating the female body from patriarchal representation (Gamble, 2010, p. 262). Cixous advocates for the practice of *écriture féminine*, arguing that only through writing can women transform the world and reconstruct societal perceptions of femininity.

For Cixous (1976), by writing themselves into texts, women can transcend the constraints of censorship, interpretation, vision, and male authority (Cixous and Kuhn, 1981, p. 53). The kind of writing that liberates itself from masculine command is what Cixous refers to as "true texts of women—female sexed texts" (Cixous, 1976). Cixous further emphasizes that the notion of femininity in *écriture féminine* is not solely defined by the writer's identity as a woman but rather by the nature of the text itself. In other words, to resist phallogocentric— and, consequently, androcentric—logic, which does not align with women's ways of thinking, Cixous urges women to write in their own language: the language of women (Lanser, 1989; Gamble, 2010).

The portrayal of women as objects and men as subjects has perpetuated an oppressor-oppressed dynamic (Jacobus and Barreca, 1999, p. 2). Thus, through *écriture féminine*, women can explore their experiences and resist patriarchal culture. This practice of feminine writing allows women to express their emotions, articulate their thoughts, and voice their opinions without being overshadowed by the ghosts of dichotomy, domination, sexism, and patriarchy.

For Cixous (2020), patriarchy can be challenged by generating counter-discourses. If there is more than one woman participating in discussions on patriarchy, then multiple discourses will inevitably emerge. This is why women must create counter-discourses—counter-narratives—by writing themselves into texts, writing about women, and bringing women into literary representation. In other words, women must inscribe themselves into texts, thereby deconstructing androcentric knowledge, which emphasizes the concept of individual subjectivity as something whole, stable, and fixed.

By generating more balanced and inclusive narratives through *écriture féminine*, women contribute to a broader discursive struggle, paving the way for a deeper understanding of

women's realities and fostering societal change towards greater justice and equality. This practice also creates space for more authentic expressions and recognition of women's experiences (Schwindt-Bayer, 2007; Outshoorn, 2010).

Écriture féminine serves as a crucial foundation for women writers in crafting narratives that liberate women from the injustices of representation (Cixous, 1976; Jacobus and Barreca, 1999). It encourages women writers to inscribe themselves into texts, delving into the complexities of female emotions, experiences, and existence without being confined by linguistic structures shaped by androcentrism.

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA), which enables an in-depth examination of the ideological and power relations embedded in literary texts. CDA is particularly effective for examining how language, style, and perspective reproduce—or contest—patriarchal norms, making it an appropriate framework for analyzing the representation of women within texts shaped by androcentric traditions.

The analysis focuses on two primary sources: (1) the Pararaton, a 16th-century mytho-historical chronicle central to Javanese historiography (Hakim, 2018), and (2) Amalia Yunus' Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan (2022). This pairing enables a direct intertextual comparison between a canonical androcentric account—where Dedes is remembered mainly for her beauty and as a trigger of male conflict—and a contemporary feminist reimagining that restores her voice and agency. By narrowing the scope to these two texts, the study privileges depth of analysis over breadth, ensuring a close, textually grounded comparison.

The methodological framework combines CDA with écriture féminine—a feminist writing practice that foregrounds women's bodily experience, affective knowledge, and subjective voice (Cixous, 1976; Todd and Moi, 1987). Within this dual lens, Tutur Dedes is treated not only as a literary work but also as an epistemic intervention that resists androcentric historiography through narrative strategies emphasizing corporeality, memory, and affect. This approach enables the study to interrogate both the ideological content of the text and the stylistic techniques through which phallogocentric structures are subverted.

To identify narrative markers of resistance to androcentrism, the analysis followed a two-stage coding process. First, open coding was conducted manually by the researcher, highlighting recurrent linguistic and stylistic features such as diction, narrative perspective, and corporeal imagery. Second, axial coding was used to cluster these markers into broader thematic categories: (a) embodied experiences (e.g., wounds, childbirth, prayer); (b) symbolic motifs (e.g., curses, religious imagery) articulating women's struggles; and (c) shifts in narrative perspective privileging female consciousness. To enhance rigor, codes were compared across multiple close readings, and where ambiguities arose, categories were refined to ensure conceptual clarity. Although this study relied on manual coding rather than software, the process emphasized consistency by documenting coding decisions in an iterative memo-writing system.

By situating textual analysis within the historical and cultural framework of Javanese literature, this methodology highlights how Tutur Dedes operates as a counter-discursive intervention. Its narrative strategies are interpreted as acts of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), directly challenging androcentric historiography while reimagining Dedes as a political and intellectual subject. In doing so, the novel demonstrates how literature can disrupt entrenched gender hierarchies and reshape cultural memory through feminist and decolonial storytelling practices.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beginning with birth: Rewriting the center of history

Amalia Yunus deliberately opens Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan with the moment of Dedes' birth—an unconventional choice in the landscape of historical epics, which are often dominated by scenes of war, conquest, or the exploits of male rulers. By doing so, Yunus reframes the starting point of history itself. Birth, a moment often relegated to the private sphere, here becomes a public and politically charged event. This shift reflects one of the core principles of *écriture féminine*: centering women's embodied experiences as legitimate sites of narrative and historical significance (Cixous, 1976). In the study's coding process, this moment aligns closely with the category of embodied experiences, marking it as a thematic anchor for the novel's counter-narrative strategy.

The scene is narrated with a balance of tenderness and authority—what can be described as soft yet incisive diction. This is especially evident in the prophecy addressed to the newborn:

> "*Kamu Dedes, namamu akan terukir dalam sejarah sebagai ratu alam semesta. Kamu akan menjadi prameswari dan ibu suri di istana yang megah tak terlukiskan... Kisah hidupmu akan mengilhami dan dinyanyikan bahkan oleh orang-orang yang hidup jauh setelah masamu...*"

> "You are Dedes, and your name will be inscribed in history as the queen of the universe. You will become a prameswari and queen mother in an indescribably grand palace... Your life story will inspire and be sung by those who live long after your time..."

> (Yunus, 2022, p. 8)

Here, the language envelops the child in intimacy while simultaneously projecting her destiny onto the grand canvas of history. The diction is gentle in rhythm and imagery, yet it carries a clear assertion of political agency. This is not merely the celebration of a birth; it is the installation of a female subject at the center of a historical narrative—an act that disrupts the androcentric conventions of both the Pararaton and much of Indonesia's literary canon (Wiyatmi, 2015).

In traditional Javanese historiography, Dedes' role is almost exclusively tied to her beauty and its perceived effect on male political rivalries (Ricklefs, 2008; Hakim, 2018). The Pararaton positions her as the catalyst for conflict between Ken Arok and Tunggul Ametung, stripping her of autonomy and reducing her presence to that of a symbolic prize (Toer, 2009; Komandoko, 2015; Hakim, 2018). By beginning her retelling with Dedes' birth, Yunus

overturns this framing. She displaces the male rivalry as the narrative's inciting event and replaces it with a moment that affirms female presence, agency, and potential. This inversion operates as an act of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009), rejecting the male-centered logic that defines historical significance through violence and conquest.

The symbolic power of this birth scene also emerges from the way it fuses the personal with the political. The prophecy's vision—Dedes as "queen of the universe," "prameswari," and "queen mother"—is layered (Yunus, 2022, p. 8). On one level, it foreshadows her future roles in the public sphere; on another, it acknowledges the multiplicity of women's identities, from sovereign leader to nurturer and cultural symbol. This multiplicity directly challenges the binary roles often imposed on female characters in epic narratives, where women are either romanticized beauties or moral supports for male heroes. In Yunus' telling, Dedes is from the very beginning both a leader and a subject with inner life, aspirations, and historical purpose.

From a perspective analysis discourse, this passage encapsulates several coded elements identified in the analysis. The soft yet incisive diction tempers prophecy with emotional warmth, avoiding the militaristic rhetoric common in epic openings. The embodied experiences are not limited to the physical act of birth but extend to the mother's voice, the tactile intimacy of the scene, and the way these are used as vehicles for political and cultural prophecy. This aligns with feminist stylistics (Walters, 2015), which emphasizes how linguistic choices at the micro level—here, the soothing yet declarative tone—work to subvert macro-level ideological norms.

By foregrounding birth, Yunus also redefines temporality in epic narrative. In male-authored histories, the "real story" often begins with acts of territorial expansion or violent confrontation, rendering women's life events as preludes or digressions. In contrast, Tutur Dedes positions birth as the originary moment from which all subsequent historical developments flow. This reorientation destabilizes the chronological hierarchy of traditional epic structure, placing a woman's experience not before or outside history, but at its very center.

The narrative also invites a theological reading. The prophecy's reference to Dedes' destiny evokes divine sanction, linking her embodied existence to a cosmic order (Tur, Munandar and Winarti, 2023). This spiritual dimension resonates with the novel's broader use of religious symbolism—another recurring theme identified in the analysis. By integrating religious language into the scene of birth, Yunus elevates the female body from an object of male desire to a vessel of sacred purpose. In doing so, she resists the secular-political framing of the Pararaton, offering instead a vision of history in which the origins of power are inseparable from the lived realities of women.

Ultimately, the opening birth scene functions as a multi-layered act of resistance. It challenges the androcentric privileging of male deeds as history's starting points, reclaims the narrative space for women's bodies and voices, and establishes a thematic foundation upon which the rest of the novel builds its counter-discourse (Wiyatmi, 2015; Rodiah, 2016;

Vachhani, 2019; Nurrahmawati and Puspita, 2021). Through the interweaving of *écriture féminine's* corporeal poetics and epistemic disobedience's challenge to dominant knowledge systems, Yunus asserts that women are not appendages to historical events but their originators. In this way, Dedes' first breath is also the novel's first political act—one that reclaims history by rewriting its very beginning.

Dedes and Resistance Against Traditional Female Representation

The narrative presented in this novel offers a reversed depiction of the conventional female image. In many narratives, women are portrayed as weak, obedient, and powerless beings (Fakih, 1996; Farihah, 2013; Suryawati, Badara and Sahidin, 2020). This stereotype has long haunted literary writing, creating norms that limit women's space to fully explore their potential.

In Amalia Yunus' novel *Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan*, the character Dedes is not merely depicted as a woman experiencing oppression but as an active agent of resistance against patriarchal power. Through her actions and words, Dedes challenges the narratives that have long restricted women's roles in society. One of the pivotal moments in the novel occurs when Dedes refuses the sexual violence imposed by Tunggul Ametung with a firm act that illustrates her courage and internal strength:

> "*Tunggul Ametung mengangkat tangannya, dengan jarinya dia menyentuh daguku untuk mengangkat pandanganku. ...aku mendorong tubuhnya menjauh...*"

> "Tunggul Ametung lifted his hand, using his fingers to touch my chin to raise my gaze. ... I pushed his body away..." (Yunus, 2022, p. 73)

In this excerpt, Dedes not only resists physically but also symbolically liberates herself from the male-dominated body that seeks to control her. This action can be understood in the context of *écriture féminine*, which represents women's writing as a form of empowerment that focuses on the female body as a source of strength. Through her physical rejection, Dedes not only preserves the integrity of her body but also illustrates women as empowered subjects rather than passive objects.

Furthermore, the author illustrates how Dedes fights tenaciously to survive despite experiencing continuous defeat and humiliation. In this narrative, Dedes does not succumb to despair but chooses to persevere and fight until the end:

> "*Demikian seterusnya pertarungan senyap antara aku dan Tunggul Ametung... Jika perempuan lain mengalami apa yang kualami lalu merasa ingin mati, aku justru ingin terus hidup untuk suatu hari melihat Tunggul Ametung mati di depan mataku.*"

> "Thus, the silent battle between me and Tunggul Ametung continued, where I occasionally celebrated a false victory in silence and at other times swallowed a defeat that further humiliated me. If other women experienced what I did and felt like dying, I, on the other hand, wanted to continue living to one day see Tunggul Ametung die before my eyes."

(Yunus, 2022, p. 76)

Dedes, who recognizes that women often become victims in this narrative, refuses to become a victim in her own story. Epistemic disobedience is clearly evident here—Dedes resists the knowledge that perceives women as mere passive objects. She chooses to alter the narrative by surviving and imagining a day when the perpetrator of violence meets his demise. This is a rejection of the patriarchal view that sees women as beings who can only suffer helplessly. Instead, Dedes becomes a symbol of strength, capable of rewriting her own story with determination and resilience.

Additionally, in a more explicit scene, Dedes resists gender stereotypes that have long confined women to traditional roles. She proudly asserts her abilities beyond the constraints of femininity:

> *"Aku juga tidak bertingkah laku seperti perempuan! ....aku menunggang kuda, aku memanah dan aku bisa baca-tulis! Aku bahkan lebih tangkas di ketiga bidang itu dibanding sebagian besar laki-laki!"*

> "I do not behave like a woman either! ... I ride horses, I shoot arrows, and I can read and write! I am even more skilled in all three areas than most men!" (Yunus, 2022, p. 198)

In this scene, Dedes explicitly rejects the traditional feminine identity imposed by patriarchal society. She asserts that women are not limited to domestic roles or the physical strength often associated with masculinity. Instead, Dedes demonstrates that women can also master skills traditionally viewed as male domains. This act represents defiance against the rigid gender norms that have long dictated social boundaries. Dedes not only questions traditional female roles but, with her bravery, proves that women possess the capacity to transcend existing social limitations.

Through these three scenes, the author successfully portrays how Dedes engages in epistemic disobedience against the patriarchal constructions that have dictated how women are perceived in literature and real life. *Écriture féminine* in this context is not merely about writing from a female perspective but also about creating space for women to express their own experiences and identities. In each of Dedes' actions—whether rejecting violence, enduring suffering, or challenging traditional roles—there is a narrative of liberation that transforms how women are viewed and treated. Dedes becomes a symbol of women's struggle to rewrite their destiny, liberating themselves from patriarchal narratives, and taking full control over their lives.

The author's courage in reconstructing Dedes as a character who defies patriarchal norms and takes control of her own life creates knowledge that contrasts with the traditional image of women who are submissive to men or husbands (Kamajaya, 1995).

Dedes, in this novel, does not merely follow the path predetermined for her by male authors (Toer, 2009; Komandoko, 2015). Instead, she carves her own path, builds her own identity, and pursues education that grants her intellectual strength. The author portrays this

in another scene where Dedes, who is "forced" to become Tunggul Ametung's concubine, makes two extraordinarily bold requests:

> "*Hanya dua kali aku berusaha memanfaatkan kekuasaanku atas Akuwu. Yang pertama saat aku minta diizinkan berlatih memanah dan yang kedua saat aku minta diizinkan untuk mengunjungi perpustakaan Pakuwon secara rutin.*"

> "Only twice did I attempt to use my influence over Akuwu. The first was when I asked for permission to practice archery, and the second was when I requested permission to visit the Pakuwon library regularly." (Yunus, 2022, p. 87)

In this scene, Dedes emerges as a character who does not merely accept the role imposed by patriarchal structures or preexisting narratives but actively seeks to define herself and create space for her intellectual and physical growth. Through her two "extraordinarily bold" requests—to practice archery and to access the library regularly—Dedes challenges the restrictions set by traditional female roles and the patriarchal system's constraints on women's access to knowledge and education.

Dedes in this novel is not just an object within a male-centric story or a character confined to domestic and passive roles. Instead, through *écriture féminine*, which emphasizes women's courage to write and express their experiences in ways that highlight the power of their bodies and minds, Dedes demonstrates that women need not be bound by the roles imposed upon them. By demanding the right to practice archery and access the library, Dedes defies narratives that limit women and claims intellectual and physical freedom. Her actions reflect an epistemic disobedience against patriarchal dominance by asserting women's right to access and control knowledge, both in its physical form (archery) and intellectual form (reading and library access).

Through these bold requests, Dedes not only fights for her rights as an individual but also challenges patriarchal narratives and knowledge that restrict women. She engages in epistemic disobedience and demonstrates that women have the right to access and control knowledge, both physically and intellectually. In doing so, Dedes does not merely rewrite her destiny but also rewrites literary narratives about women, taking control of her life with courage and determination beyond merely following a predetermined fate.

This choice is not merely an act of rebellion against social norms but also reflects women's bravery in fighting for rights that are often overlooked. Through Dedes' character, the author presents a narrative that highlights women's strength in facing life's challenges while offering critical reflections on how women should be represented in literary works (Wiyatmi, 2015; Rodiah, 2016; Cixous, 2020). By positioning Dedes as an independent and courageous protagonist, the author reconstructs traditional female narratives, opens space for more inclusive representations, and restores attention to the long-neglected strength of women in literary history.

Embodied Agency and Fluid Identities: Feminist Counter-Narratives in Tutur Dedes

Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan not only stages female resistance against androcentrism and phallogocentrism through the figure of Dedes but also opens a broader discursive terrain around enacted agency and fluid identity. These two axes—embodied by Dedes and Umang—reveal that feminist politics in the novel are not monolithic but instead unfold as a spectrum of resistance against patriarchal norms and epistemologies.

Dedes is reimagined not as the passive beauty of Javanese legend but as a historical subject who contests patriarchal inscription. Through the narrative's use of écriture féminine, her body is no longer framed as a curse but reclaimed as a source of voice, prayer, and resistance (Rodiah, 2016). The female self articulates experience from within, thereby displacing centuries of androcentric historiography that had rendered Dedes as a silent emblem.

This narrative strategy transforms Dedes into a political agent who refuses to be confined by male-centered chronicles. She resists the symbolic roles imposed upon her, asserting instead the possibility of female agency in shaping alternative historical and cultural meanings (Wibowo *et al.*, 2024). By rewriting her destiny, Dedes unsettles the cultural logic that once confined her to ornamental value within Javanese memory.

Yet, Dedes's story does not present autonomy as unbounded. Her tragic fate—marked by entanglements of political intrigue, gendered hierarchies, and cultural expectation—underscores the limits that continue to circumscribe women's agency. In this sense, her rebellion reveals the dialectic of liberation and constraint: women's acts of resistance emerge, but always within structures that delimit their transformative potential.

In contrast, Umang embodies another register of resistance. Her struggle centers not on political upheaval but on gender identity and bodily transformation. Rejected by male warriors who refuse to accept her as their disciple, Umang alters her physical form to become a man. Yet the narrative insists on the persistence of her inner self:

> *"...segalanya pada diri Umang memang berubah menjadi laki-laki. Kecuali hati, pikiran, dan yang tersimpan di balik cawatnya, ketiganya tidak tersentuh jarum hujan Baruna, oleh karena itu tetap berbentuk perempuan."*

> "...everything about Umang had indeed transformed into that of a man. Except for her heart, her mind, and what lay hidden beneath her loincloth—these three remained untouched by Baruna's rain needles and thus retained their female form."
>
> (Yunus, 2022, p. 202)

This passage is central to the novel's feminist politics. By emphasizing the untransformed heart, mind, and inner anatomy, the text resists any simplistic reading of gender as reducible to the body. Umang's metamorphosis reveals the body as a contested site where personal desire collides with social demands. While her external form conforms to patriarchal expectations of masculinity, her internal subjectivity persists in affirming femininity.

If Dedes enacts agency through overt political defiance, Umang expresses it in quieter, yet no less radical, terms: through the refusal to internalize normative gender scripts. Her story destabilizes essentialist binaries by foregrounding the irreducibility of subjective identity to external markers. Agency here manifests not in dramatic historical rebellion but in bodily self-determination and the preservation of inner awareness against societal erasure.

Read together, Dedes and Umang illuminate a continuum of feminist resistance. Dedes interrupts androcentric historiography by inserting women into the domain of political subjectivity, while Umang destabilizes patriarchal epistemologies by affirming the fluidity of gendered identity. These intertwined narratives demonstrate that agency can take multiple forms—whether collective and political or intimate and ontological.

Ultimately, Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan operates as a literary intervention that transforms "curses" into "prayers." It does not portray agency as absolute freedom but as a dynamic negotiation shaped by structural realities. By juxtaposing Dedes's historically bounded rebellion with Umang's insistence on fluid identity, the novel expands the horizon of feminist politics, dismantling androcentric stereotypes and opening imaginative space for voices, desires, and subjectivities long marginalized in culture and history.

IV. CONCLUSION

Amalia Yunus' Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan demonstrates a deliberate and profound subversion of androcentric literary traditions, offering a reimagined framework for female representation that both draws upon and extends the principles *of écriture féminine*. While Hélène Cixous' formulation of *écriture féminine* foregrounds the reclamation of women's bodily experience and subjectivity as a form of textual resistance, Yunus' novel advances this paradigm by embedding it within a distinctly Javanese historical and cultural context. In this sense, the novel not only mirrors Cixous' call for dismantling phallogocentric discourse but adapts it to interrogate the intersection of gender, tradition, and postcolonial historiography.

Central to this advancement is the novel's portrayal of Dedes as an active agent of historical transformation, challenging both the symbolic and narrative constraints imposed by patriarchal myth-making. Through the sustained use of birthing metaphors and the articulation of female corporeality—not merely as biological destiny but as a political act—the narrative reclaims women's capacity to shape their own histories. By positioning Dedes as a creator, intellectual force, and political actor, Yunus departs from conventional depictions that render women passive or ornamental. In doing so, the text mobilizes *écriture féminine* not only as an aesthetic strategy but also as an epistemological intervention capable of unsettling entrenched structures of knowledge production.

Moreover, the novel's intervention is not confined to textual representation but extends to a critique of the mechanisms through which women's stories have historically been silenced, reframed, or appropriated by male-centered historiography. Yunus' use of symbolic motifs—particularly birth, agency, and bodily self-possession—serves as a narrative grammar for reconstituting women's subject positions in literature. This approach both

reaffirms and expands Cixous' framework, demonstrating that *écriture féminine* can operate beyond the Eurocentric contexts in which it was first theorized, accommodating the pluralities of local histories, mythologies, and feminist struggles.

By situating Tutur Dedes within a broader Southeast Asian literary landscape, this study underscores the novel's potential contribution to a regional feminist canon that challenges both colonial and patriarchal epistemologies. Future research could profitably engage in comparative analyses of Southeast Asian feminist literature, examining how writers across the region adapt and localize *écriture féminine* to articulate resistance within their specific socio-historical milieus. Such inquiries could illuminate the ways in which feminist literary practices evolve across cultural and linguistic boundaries, thereby enriching global feminist theory.

Tutur Dedes: Doa dan Kutukan stands as a compelling example of literature functioning as both epistemic disobedience and cultural reclamation. Through its nuanced negotiation of gendered subjectivity, historical narrative, and symbolic resistance, the novel not only redefines female representation in literature but also provides a methodological model for integrating *écriture féminine* into postcolonial and regional feminist frameworks. This contribution affirms literature's enduring potential as a transformative site for reimagining gender relations, challenging dominant ideologies, and fostering the ongoing project of gender justice.

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