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Patriarchal ideology in *Pengakuan Pariyem* and *Damar Kambang*: Javanese and Madurese culture in a comparative feminist perspective

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Abstract: *Although patriarchy has been widely studied in Indonesian literature, cross-cultural comparisons of its manifestations remain limited. This study compares patriarchal ideology in Pengakuan Pariyem by Linus Suryadi AG and Damar Kambang by Muna Masyari, examining how Javanese and Madurese cultures shape gender relations. Using an interpretive qualitative approach, the study applies comparative literary analysis through close reading and cross-cultural interpretation, guided by the Comparative Cultural Patriarchy (CCP) framework. The analysis focuses on the female body, family, domesticity, language, honour, and women's agency. The findings reveal two distinct forms of patriarchy: symbolic patriarchy in Pengakuan Pariyem, sustained through acceptance, social harmony, politeness, and hierarchy; and communal-honor patriarchy in Damar Kambang, reinforced through family honour, marriage rituals, kinship obligations, and social surveillance. Both novels portray women's agency as culturally negotiated. This study proposes the CCP framework to explain how culture shapes patriarchal power and women's agency across literary traditions.*

Keywords: *Comparative Cultural Patriarchy (CCP), comparative literature, feminist literary criticism.*

INTRODUCTION

Giving women a voice in literature does not necessarily grant them authority over the circumstances they narrate. A female character may articulate desire, interpret relationships, and defend personal choices while remaining embedded in arrangements that restrict her access to resources, recognition, or decision-making. Conversely, expressions of acceptance do not automatically eliminate the possibility of judgment or agency. These tensions make the representation of patriarchal ideology a problem of narrative interpretation as well as gender politics. Feminist narratology connects the organisation of narrative voice with the social conditions under which particular speakers acquire authority (Warhol & Lanser, 2015). Accordingly, examining patriarchy in literary texts requires attention not only to the inequalities represented but also to how narration renders those inequalities intelligible, legitimate, contradictory, or contestable. The distinction between a character's explanation of her circumstances and the text's broader treatment of those circumstances is particularly important when apparent accommodation coexists with expressions of desire or criticism.

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Patriarchal ideology is understood here as the ideas and evaluative assumptions through which unequal gender relations are justified and reproduced. Its operation cannot be separated from the class positions, kinship obligations, material dependencies, and moral expectations within which authority is exercised. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of patriarchal bargaining directs attention to women's strategies within specific constraints, including arrangements that provide limited security without dismantling the inequalities sustaining them. Mahmood (2001), from a different ethnographic and theoretical context, questions the identification of agency exclusively with resistance to domination. Read together, these perspectives encourage an examination of what women seek, which courses of action are available, and what consequences follow from their choices. They do not warrant treating every instance of compliance as agency. Cultural specificity likewise requires more than assigning distinctive patriarchal characteristics to different communities. Mohanty's (2003) critique of homogenising representations underscores the need to locate women within differentiated historical and social relations rather than treating culture as a self-contained explanation of their circumstances.

These concerns inform a comparative reading of Linus Suryadi AG's *Pengakuan Pariyem* and Muna Masyari's *Damar Kambang*. First published in 1981, *Pengakuan Pariyem* presents the self-narration of a woman working within a Javanese aristocratic household, bringing domestic service, sexuality, social hierarchy, and personal identification into close relation (Suryadi, 1999). *Damar Kambang*, published in 2020, places women's experiences within a Madurese setting structured by marriage, familial expectations, and unequal authority (Masyari, 2020). Their juxtaposition offers an opportunity to examine how comparable questions of gendered obligation and recognition are articulated through different narrative arrangements. However, the texts are not treated as representative samples of Javanese and Madurese cultures. As Niehof (2023) emphasises, the diversity of Indonesian women's circumstances complicates the extension of findings from particular groups to broader categories. Differences between the selected works must therefore be considered alongside their publication periods, literary forms, and authorial positions, rather than attributed exclusively to cultural background.

Existing scholarship provides substantial foundations for this comparison. Supriyadi (2014) examines masculine language in *Belenggu* and *Pengakuan Pariyem* through feminist stylistics, establishing the relevance of linguistic choices and contextual interpretation to the study of gendered representation. Ekasiswanto et al. (2022) connect the representation of social classes in *Pengakuan Pariyem* with symbolic domination and masculine ideology, particularly through the relationship between domestic service and aristocratic authority. Research on *Damar Kambang* has developed complementary perspectives. Feri and Khoshimov (2023) identify forms of violence against female characters and examine their association with patriarchal power and familial relationships. Hermawati et al. (2024), meanwhile, foreground female narrators, subjectivity, and resistance to normative expectations surrounding marriage. These studies demonstrate that inequality, language, and women's responses have already received critical attention. They also provide grounds for examining how interpretations centred on domination relate to those emphasising subjectivity and

resistance, particularly when the same action may express personal intention while remaining entangled in unequal relations.

Recent scholarship further sharpens this interpretive problem. Rauf et al. (2025) examine the relationship between linguistic choices, bodily autonomy, and patriarchal narratives in *Wa Ndiu-Diu*, extending the discussion of gendered authority within Indonesian narrative traditions. Oktasari et al. (2026) connect cultural practices, narrative strategies, and women's subjectivities across six novels depicting Madurese life, highlighting agency articulated through endurance, reflection, and the reinterpretation of inherited norms. Kasanova and Rudiyanto (2026) similarly examine the naturalisation of patriarchal ideology and the negotiation of women's agency in *Paraban Tuah*, *Damar Kambang*, and *Rumah Jeddah*. The present study therefore does not claim that culture, narrative, and agency have previously been examined only in isolation. Its point of departure is the need to distinguish more precisely between the legitimation voiced within a story, the narrative treatment of that legitimation, and the practical consequences of women's actions. Bringing *Pengakuan Pariyem* and *Damar Kambang* into dialogue allows this distinction to be examined across two differently situated literary representations without presupposing either a uniform patriarchy or a fixed opposition between Javanese acceptance and Madurese resistance.

To pursue this comparison, the study combines feminist literary criticism with attention to narrative voice, focalisation, dialogue, repetition, imagery, and evaluative positioning. Cultural mediation is approached as the process through which particular meanings and obligations become resources for justifying or questioning gendered authority. Narrative mediation concerns how literary form organises readers' access to those justifications and to the experiences of the characters affected by them. This approach keeps the representation of patriarchal practices analytically distinct from their endorsement by a narrator or by the work as a whole. It also treats accommodation, desire, and resistance as potentially overlapping orientations whose significance depends on context and consequence. Building on Lanser (2015), Kandiyoti Kandiyoti, 1988), and Mahmood (2012), the comparison attends to contradictions and counterexamples rather than assigning each text a predetermined patriarchal type.

The study aims to explain how the two works represent patriarchal power, how cultural meanings and narrative strategies shape its legitimacy, and how female characters negotiate its constraints. Three questions guide the analysis: (1) How do *Pengakuan Pariyem* and *Damar Kambang* represent patriarchal power through intersecting relations of gender, class, and kinship? (2) How do the two texts mobilise cultural values and narrative strategies to legitimise, complicate, or contest patriarchal authority? (3) What possibilities, costs, and limits of women's agency emerge from the characters' negotiations of patriarchal constraints across the two texts? The intended contribution is a comparative account that connects ideological justification, narrative authority, and the consequences of situated action. This account provides the basis for developing Comparative Cultural Patriarchy (CCP) as a provisional interpretive heuristic, whose value depends on what it clarifies in the selected texts rather than on a claim to represent Javanese and Madurese cultures in their entirety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Patriarchal Ideology and the Cultural Legitimation of Gendered Power

Patriarchal ideology concerns the assumptions and evaluative distinctions through which unequal gender relations become justified, normalised, and reproduced. It is analytically distinguishable from patriarchal power: the latter concerns the organisation and exercise of unequal authority, whereas ideology concerns the meanings that make such arrangements appear appropriate or necessary. Kandiyoti (1988) directs attention to historically situated configurations of patriarchal relations rather than a uniform system operating identically across societies. This perspective makes it necessary to examine gender alongside class positions, kinship obligations, and material dependencies. Within literary analysis, identifying a dominant male character is therefore insufficient. The relevant questions concern the grounds of his authority, the relationships sustaining it, and the representations through which its exercise becomes intelligible.

The concept of legitimation helps specify these processes. Van Leeuwen (2019) distinguishes authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis as forms of discursive legitimation. Authorisation invokes recognised persons, institutions, or traditions; moral evaluation appeals to values; rationalisation presents practices as useful or necessary; and mythopoesis communicates legitimacy through narratives that reward or punish particular actions. These distinctions provide resources for examining how familial obligations, reputational concerns, and claims of propriety operate within fictional worlds. Their application nevertheless requires attention to narrative context. A character's appeal to tradition does not establish that the work endorses that appeal, just as a character's suffering does not necessarily constitute narrative punishment for violating a norm.

Cultural mediation should consequently be understood as contested meaning-making rather than the transmission of a fixed cultural essence. Mohanty (2003) challenges representations that homogenise women while obscuring the historical and political relations differentiating their experiences. Niehof (2023) similarly questions the generalisation of findings about particular groups to Indonesian women as a whole, emphasising diversity, agency, and social change. These perspectives caution against identifying acceptance as an inherently Javanese disposition or honour as an exclusively Madurese mechanism. The present comparison instead examines how particular cultural meanings are mobilised within each text, by whom, and with what consequences. Culture provides resources for legitimation and contestation; it does not independently determine either domination or women's responses.

Women's Agency: Patriarchal Bargaining, Accommodation, and Resistance

Agency requires differentiation from both autonomy and empowerment. An individual may act purposefully without controlling the conditions under which action becomes possible, while a successful action may leave unequal relationships substantially unchanged. Kandiyoti's (1988) account of patriarchal bargaining illuminates strategies through which women pursue security or advantage within specific constraints. Such arrangements may involve accommodation as well as

opposition, and their benefits can depend on the continuation of the structures that restrict women. For literary analysis, this perspective directs attention to a character's objectives, dependencies, anticipated risks, and available alternatives rather than classifying conduct solely by its apparent conformity to social expectations.

Mahmood (2012) approaches the problem from a different direction by questioning the assumption that agency must take the form of resistance to domination. Her analysis of the Egyptian Islamic revival examines capacities cultivated within normative practices, challenging the treatment of freedom from norms as the universal measure of action. This argument should not be reduced to the claim that obedience is inherently agentic. Instead, it requires an account of the capacities, commitments, and practices through which action becomes meaningful. Kandiyoti's emphasis on strategies within patriarchal arrangements and Mahmood's critique of resistance-centred definitions are therefore complementary without being interchangeable.

Kabeer (2020) supplies a further distinction among resources, agency, and achievements. Her framework situates choice within its enabling conditions, content, and consequences, making it possible to distinguish an action from a substantive expansion of the ability to choose. Adapted to literary interpretation, this distinction prevents expressions of desire, isolated decisions, or temporary advantages from being treated automatically as empowerment. A character's initiative must be read alongside her access to resources, the constraints on refusal, and the consequences represented by the narrative.

A related distinction concerns the power to interpret experience. Herissone-Kelly (2025) differentiates hermeneutical agency—the capacity to interpret social life for oneself—from hermeneutical authority—the capacity to shape how others understand it. Applied cautiously to fictional characters, this distinction allows self-understanding to be considered separately from social recognition or decision-making power. The present study therefore approaches agency through situated interpretation and action, asking what characters understand, seek, and attempt, while examining whether their actions alter their circumstances, reproduce existing dependencies, or produce contradictory outcomes.

Feminist Narratology and the Representation of Female Subjectivity

Feminist narratology examines how narrative form participates in the organisation of gendered meanings and authority. Lanser (2015) connects narrative voice with the social conditions under which speakers acquire legitimacy, challenging an exclusively formal treatment of narration. This approach requires distinctions among the author, narrator, character, and narratee. A female narrator may articulate a socially marginalised perspective, but her narrative prominence does not automatically establish practical autonomy or a feminist position for the work. Interpretation must consider how her statements are framed, what knowledge she possesses, and how other elements of the narrative support or unsettle her account.

Warhol and Lanser (2015) extend these debates by bringing feminist and queer perspectives into conversation with narrative theory, including approaches attentive to race, religion, and national culture. Their collection underscores the importance of examining form and social positioning together. For the present study, this entails

attention to voice, focalisation, dialogue, repetition, imagery, and evaluative distance. These features shape whose experience becomes accessible and whose judgment appears authoritative. They also permit discrepancies between what characters say, what they perceive, and what the narrative allows readers to infer. Such discrepancies cannot be established from isolated quotations alone.

Recent work demonstrates the relevance of these questions to Madurese literary representation. Oktasari et al. (2026) examine how narrative contexts and strategies organise women's cultural subjectivities, highlighting forms of agency associated with reflection, endurance, and the reinterpretation of inherited norms. Their account invites further examination of the evidence needed to distinguish meaningful endurance from constrained persistence. Feminist narratology makes this distinction a question of representation as well as action: how does the text frame endurance, and what possibilities or losses accompany it? This concern also accords with Váňa's (2020) critique of approaches that detach literary fiction from its aesthetic qualities when interpreting its social significance.

Patriarchy and Women's Agency in Indonesian Literary Scholarship

Scholarship on *Pengakuan Pariyem* has established the relevance of language and class to interpretations of gendered power. Supriyadi (2014) compares masculine language in *Belenggu* and *Pengakuan Pariyem* through feminist stylistics, demonstrating that linguistic form and contextual interpretation already constitute an important strand of research on the latter work. Ekasiswanto et al. (2025) examine power relations and social classes in *Pengakuan Pariyem*, interpreting the position of the domestic servant within an aristocratic household in relation to symbolic domination and masculine ideology. Together, these studies provide a basis for examining how gendered authority intersects with status and domestic dependence. The present study engages this scholarship by distinguishing the hierarchical relations represented from the narrative treatment of the character's identification with, evaluation of, or accommodation to them.

Research on *Damar Kambang* has developed approaches centred on violence and female subjectivity. Feri and Khoshimov (Okta Feri & Khoshimov, 2023) identify physical, emotional, and sexual violence against female characters and examine its association with patriarchal and familial authority. Hermawati et al. (2024), by contrast, foreground female narrators and resistance to normative expectations, particularly within marriage. These emphases need not be mutually exclusive: the representation of violence can coexist with the representation of judgment, desire, and resistance. Their relationship nevertheless poses an interpretive question. An action undertaken within violent or dependent circumstances may express intention without providing substantial control over its consequences. Reading these studies together therefore makes the relationship between subjectivity, constraint, and outcome particularly important.

More recent comparative research further limits broad claims of novelty. Kasanova and Rudiyanto (2026) investigate the naturalisation of patriarchal ideology and women's agency in *Paraban Tuah*, *Damar Kambang*, and *Rumah Jeddah*, emphasising discursive strategies and negotiations within unequal relations. Oktasari

et al. (2026) likewise connect cultural obligations, narrative strategies, and women's subjectivities across multiple novels. Consequently, neither comparison itself nor the conjunction of culture, narrative, and agency can serve as the principal contribution of the present study. Its more specific task is to distinguish three interconnected matters across *Pengakuan Pariyem* and *Damar Kambang*: the justifications circulating within the fictional world, the narrative organisation of those justifications, and the possibilities and consequences of women's responses. This distinction provides a basis for examining both convergences and contradictions without assigning either work a predetermined ideological position.

An Integrated Framework for Comparative Feminist Reading

The preceding discussion supports an analytical framework that connects relations of power, processes of legitimation, narrative mediation, and situated agency. These are treated as interdependent dimensions rather than successive stages in a fixed causal sequence. Kinship or material dependence may shape the conditions of action; moral language may justify an obligation; and narrative form may reinforce or destabilise the credibility of that justification. Women's responses must then be interpreted in relation to both available choices and represented consequences. Table 1 summarises the framework and its guiding questions.

Table 1. Analytical Framework for the Comparative Feminist Reading

Analytical dimension	Guiding questions	Relevant textual evidence	Principal conceptual resources
Gendered power relations	Who controls decisions, labour, bodies, resources, and recognition? How do gender, class, and kinship intersect?	Domestic arrangements, obligations, restrictions, dependencies, and decision-making scenes.	Kandiyoti (1988); Niehof (2023).
Cultural legitimation	Through what authorities, values, purposes, or narrative consequences is unequal authority justified or questioned?	Appeals to tradition, moral judgments, claims of necessity, and represented rewards or sanctions.	van Leeuwen (van Leeuwen, 2019); Mohanty (Mohanty, 2003).
Narrative mediation	Who speaks and perceives? How does the narrative support, complicate, or distance readers from particular judgments?	Voice, focalisation, dialogue, repetition, imagery, irony, and contrasts between scenes.	Warhol and Lanser (2015).
Situated agency and consequences	What do female characters understand, seek, and attempt? What alternatives, costs, and outcomes accompany their actions?	Self-interpretation, negotiation, accommodation, refusal, and changes or continuities in available choices.	Kandiyoti (1988); Mahmood (2001); Kabeer (1999); Herissone-Kelly (2025).

The framework preserves distinctions that are central to the comparison. Narrative visibility is not equivalent to social authority, self-understanding is not equivalent to control, and successful action is not necessarily structural transformation. Cultural differences likewise remain matters for contextual interpretation rather than

explanations assumed in advance. Contradictory passages and plausible alternative readings are therefore integral to the analysis.

This framework constitutes the study's initial interpretive orientation. Comparative Cultural Patriarchy (CCP) is reserved for the provisional synthesis developed through the comparison, rather than introduced as an independently validated model. Its analytical value depends on whether it clarifies relationships among cultural legitimation, narrative authority, and women's agency in the selected works while remaining open to revision and attentive to the limits of a two-text corpus.

METHOD

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative design integrating comparative feminist literary analysis, contextual interpretation, and close reading. It examines how patriarchal ideology becomes narratively intelligible and culturally legitimate, and how female characters negotiate its constraints. Close reading connects linguistic detail with the organisation of meaning across passages and narrative contexts (Greenham, 2025). Feminist narratology directs attention to the relationship between gender, narrative voice, and authority (Warhol & Lanser, 2015). The analysis therefore considers both represented social relations and the formal means through which readers encounter them. Interpretations remain situated and open to competing readings rather than treating literary representation as transparent sociological evidence.

The primary corpus comprises Linus Suryadi AG's *Pengakuan Pariyem*, using the 2009 KPG edition of the work first published in 1981, and Muna Masyari's *Damar Kambang*, published by KPG in 2020. Complete texts constitute the contextual basis for selecting and interpreting passages. Selection rests on their analytical relevance to gendered authority, class hierarchy, kinship obligations, marriage, and women's negotiation of constrained choices.

Following Damrosch's (2020) attention to the historical, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of comparison, the study preserves differences in publication context, literary form, and authorial positioning. These differences inform interpretation rather than functioning as controlled variables. Comparison concerns culturally situated representations within two literary works, not representative accounts of Javanese and Madurese populations. Differences between the texts cannot therefore be attributed exclusively to ethnicity, historical change, or authorial gender.

The principal units of analysis are contextualised scenes, narrative passages, and sequences of dialogue. Individual expressions constitute supporting evidence rather than self-sufficient units detached from their narrative surroundings. Passage selection addresses representations of bodies, sexuality, domestic labour, family relations, marriage, and reputation, while retaining instances that complicate expected patterns. Each passage is examined for its speakers, addressees, narrative position, social relationships, and consequences. Attention to diction, repetition, modality, imagery, focalisation, and evaluative commentary connects thematic interpretation with textual form (Greenham, 2025; Warhol & Lanser, 2015). Evidence records identify the edition, printed page, narrative context, provisional interpretation, and plausible alternatives. A character's statement is not automatically equated with the narrator's position or the ideological orientation of the work.

Analysis proceeds iteratively through five interconnected stages. First, each work is read independently to establish its narrative organisation, character relationships, and recurring tensions. This preliminary mapping prevents comparison from imposing identical structures on texts with different formal and historical characteristics.

Second, relevant passages are documented and examined through close reading. Initial analytical categories address power relations, cultural legitimation, narrative mediation, and situated agency. These categories guide attention without predetermining findings.

Third, coding and analytical memo writing organise evidence and refine interpretive categories, drawing selectively on Saldaña (Saldana, 2025). Theory-informed categories are revised when passages reveal unexpected relationships, ambiguities, or contradictions. Coding supports interpretation rather than replacing it; frequency alone does not establish literary significance.

Fourth, cross-text comparison examines similarities and differences in how authority is justified, obligations are distributed, and women's choices acquire consequences. Comparison follows shared analytical questions rather than requiring equivalent scenes or character types.

Finally, provisional interpretations are examined against counterexamples and competing explanations. Apparent compliance is considered alongside available alternatives, dependence, desire, and narrative framing; apparent resistance is assessed in relation to its consequences. Interpretive synthesis develops from these comparisons rather than confirming a predetermined cultural binary. Any conceptual formulation emerging from the analysis remains a provisional synthesis, not an independently validated model.

Interpretive accountability rests on transparent connections between textual evidence and analytical claims. Adapting Tracy's (2010) criteria of qualitative quality, the study prioritises contextual detail, reflexivity, and coherence between research questions, procedures, and interpretations. An analytical record links quotations, category revisions, interpretive decisions, and counterreadings. Primary narration is distinguished from introductions, endorsements, and other paratextual commentary. Quotations extracted digitally require checking against page images or printed editions.

Analysis privileges the Indonesian wording; English translations serve the presentation of evidence. Translation is treated as an interpretive intervention whose choices require explanation (Temple & Young, 2004). Culturally specific expressions are retained where necessary and accompanied by contextual glosses, particularly when translation risks flattening hierarchy, obligation, or ambiguity. The source of each translation is identified. Reflexivity addresses how feminist commitments and cultural familiarity shape interpretation while acknowledging that neither provides privileged access to authorial intention or exhaustive cultural meaning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The selected passages reveal patriarchal authority operating through interconnected relations of labour, property, sexuality, family standing, and narrative representation. Their comparison complicates an opposition between Javanese

acceptance and Madurese honour: acceptance is explicitly taught in *Damar Kambang*, while family reputation shapes Pariyem's account of her position. The analysis examines these overlapping mechanisms while distinguishing characters' evaluations from the perspectives made available through narrative form. References to *Pengakuan Pariyem* (Suryadi, 1999) and *Damar Kambang* (Masyari, 2020) are abbreviated as PP and DK, respectively; page references follow printed pagination. English glosses accompanying Indonesian quotations are provided here. Claims concerning DK remain restricted to the available extracts rather than its complete narrative development.

Gendered Hierarchies: Domestic Labour, Class, and Kinship

In PP, domestic service provides a social position through which Pariyem repeatedly identifies herself and assesses her relationship with the household. Her declaration, "Sebagai babu saya tahu tempatnya" [As a domestic servant, I know my place], connects occupational identity with an understanding of permissible conduct (PP, p. 196). The following lines explain that remaining in the household or having to leave depends on the householder's goodwill. Her position therefore involves more than a division of domestic tasks: continued residence and livelihood are represented as contingent on another person's judgement.

The wording places dependence within a moral relationship. Goodwill can provide protection, but protection remains discretionary. Pariyem's acknowledgement of her position does not establish that she lacks understanding of inequality. Earlier, she explicitly describes distinctions between aristocrats and ordinary people and connects social standing with ancestry (PP, pp. 5–6). She can articulate the hierarchy within which she locates herself. The tension lies between this interpretive capacity and her limited authority over the conditions of belonging.

DK represents a related separation between women's contribution and control over household resources. In the opening episode, a wife recalls working on the family's salt ponds after learning that her husband has lost them through gambling. Her memory of constructing channels under the sun associates the property with bodily effort and anticipated possibilities. The husband's announcement, by contrast, presents the transfer as an accomplished fact requiring no prior consultation (DK, p. 2). What the narrator calls shared property is exposed to a decision represented as his alone.

The subsequent exchange of ownership documents sharpens this division. While the men joke about the loss and future wagers, the wife prepares and serves coffee, overhearing the transaction from behind the door (DK, p. 3). The spatial arrangement connects domestic service with exclusion from decision-making: her labour sustains the encounter through which resources important to her livelihood change hands. Nevertheless, the passage also records that the ponds return to the husband two years later. The evidence therefore supports a claim about unequal decision-making and exposure to risk, not an uninterrupted trajectory of dispossession.

Kinship and class also converge in Madlawi's response to the wedding gifts. His complaint that the groom's family behaves as though it were taking a servant makes service a devalued position against which his daughter's marital recognition is measured (DK, p. 27). This differs from Pariyem's incorporation of domestic service into her self-description. Yet both passages connect the value assigned to women with

classed household relations. One speaker recognises herself within service; another invokes service to identify an unacceptable status for his daughter. Neither position, by itself, transfers authority over household arrangements to the woman concerned.

The Female Body: Sexuality, Marriage, and Reproductive Recognition

PP gives Pariyem an explicit language of sexual desire that prevents her relationship with Den Bagus from being reduced to passive availability. She distinguishes her wish for a child from the expectation of marriage: "Pernikahan bukan dambaan saya / yang saya damba adalah anak" [Marriage is not what I long for; what I long for is a child] (PP, p. 189). The statement identifies an objective in her own terms. It challenges an interpretation in which marriage must constitute the sole meaningful outcome of her intimate relationship.

Her account also explicitly describes voluntary participation and occasions on which she initiates intimacy (PP, p. 189). These statements constitute evidence of represented desire and self-understanding. They should not, however, be converted into a general conclusion that the relationship is free from unequal power. The same narrative locates Pariyem's livelihood within the household whose son is her lover. Desire and dependence coexist, and the text requires both to remain visible.

This coexistence becomes particularly apparent when her reflections are read alongside the family's response to her pregnancy. On page 196, Ndoro Kanjeng [His Lordship] describes reproduction through an agricultural metaphor that assigns the seed to Ario and the field to Pariyem. The metaphor makes pregnancy intelligible through familiar productive relations, but it also distributes reproductive roles asymmetrically. Pariyem's body becomes the terrain within which the son's reproductive contribution develops. This formulation differs from her own emphasis on wanting a child and extending familial continuity.

The family hearing nonetheless complicates an interpretation of authority as exclusively punitive towards the woman. Ndoro Kanjeng [His Lordship] condemns the possibility that Ario might abandon Pariyem and treats dismissing her as even more reprehensible (PP, pp. 197–198). Patriarchal authority here restrains a younger man's evasion of responsibility. Its protective effect does not remove the hierarchy through which protection is delivered: the father remains the person who formulates the judgement and determines its moral terms.

In DK, the bridal preparation scene presents a different relation between verbal assent and personal preference. Asked whether she agrees to the marriage, the bride nods hesitantly. Her account places this response beside parental wishes, her friends' similar experiences, and her limited familiarity with the prospective husband (DK, p. 35). The hesitation matters because it prevents assent from functioning as self-explanatory evidence of an independently chosen relationship. Equally, it does not justify replacing the character's account with an invented declaration of refusal.

The comparison is therefore asymmetrical. Pariyem expressly articulates sexual and reproductive preferences, whereas the available DK scene foregrounds uncertainty within an expected marital transition. These passages cannot establish an equivalent account of motherhood in both works. They do demonstrate why bodily autonomy

requires attention to what a character desires, how agreement is expressed, and who controls the institutional consequences of intimacy.

Cultural Legitimation and Social Surveillance

Patriarchal legitimacy in the selected passages depends partly on presenting unequal expectations through recognisable moral vocabularies. In PP, lineage, social standing, and household obligation provide terms through which Pariyem understands her position. Her reference to "Bibit, Bobot, dan Bebet" accompanies an account of naming and class distinction rather than an abstract description of an undifferentiated Javanese culture (PP, pp. 5–6). The narrative identifies the social classifications through which people acquire different standings.

Family reputation also matters. During the household hearing, Pariyem expresses readiness to face what follows without bringing down the family's name (PP, p. 195). Her concern links an intimate situation to collective standing. Yet the scene does not simply punish sexual transgression: the subsequent judgement states that no breach of moral propriety has occurred while insisting that the relationship has consequences (PP, p. 198). Authority consequently operates through the power to interpret conduct and distribute responsibility, not merely through prohibition.

DK makes the teaching of acceptance especially explicit. While preparing the *damar kambang*, the bridal attendant instructs the bride to cultivate sincerity, acceptance, and a heart compared to clean, soft cotton. "Tidak banyak mengeluh. Tidak banyak menuntut" [Do not complain much. Do not demand much] condenses the recommended disposition into restrictions on complaint and expectation (DK, p. 39). The symbolic explanation links a material object to an anticipated mode of marital conduct.

The preceding passage nevertheless offers a qualification. The attendant states that both the bride and her husband must exercise patience because marriage involves differences between two people (DK, p. 35). Her instruction is not wholly expressed as a unilateral duty. The asymmetry lies in the scene of transmission: the bride is the person being prepared, instructed, and asked to absorb the lesson. The text thus permits a distinction between a formally reciprocal ideal and its gendered delivery.

The bride's attention further complicates the effectiveness of this moral instruction. She reports watching the attendant's hands more closely than understanding the explanation (DK, p. 39). The ritual does not transparently produce internal acceptance. Its meaning is offered, but immediate comprehension remains incomplete. This gap prevents the critic from treating the attendant's speech as proof that the bride has fully adopted its expectations.

Communal judgement supplies another means of enforcing gendered value. During the wedding gathering, women exchange comments about the gifts, combining laughter, contempt, sympathy, and indifference (DK, p. 23). These different responses matter: the crowd is not represented as a single, unanimous moral voice. Nevertheless, its speech makes the bride's marital standing publicly discussable.

On page 27, the narrative connects a particular taunt to an earlier rejected marriage proposal involving Musahrah's son. The wife's pointed comment participates in a history of rivalry and class exclusion. Gossip therefore acquires force through

specific relationships and grievances, rather than through an anonymous cultural consensus. Madlawi's anger develops within this field of anticipated humiliation.

When the wedding is cancelled, some relatives defend the decision as necessary for family dignity and the bride's welfare (DK, p. 43). Their argument suggests that insufficient gifts might lead others to consider her cheap and treat her accordingly. Protection is articulated through a valuation that ties treatment of the woman to material recognition. The passage also records disagreement and protests from the groom's side, making honour a contested claim rather than a uniformly shared interpretation.

Across the texts, acceptance and reputation overlap. Pariyem's narrative contains concern for familial standing, while DK explicitly associates marriage with patient acceptance. The distinction lies in how these vocabularies are mobilised: household judgement organises responsibility in the PP hearing, whereas ceremonial instruction, gossip, and competing family claims intersect in the DK extracts. These are differences between represented situations, not evidence of mutually exclusive ethnic dispositions.

Narrative Voice and the Ambivalence of Female Subjectivity

PP's first-person narration allows Pariyem to describe social hierarchy while also evaluating people who occupy positions above her. The repeated self-introduction beginning "Ya, ya, Pariyem saya" returns to her name, place of origin, and domestic role across different contexts (PP, pp. 49–50, 188, 196). This recurrence has an ambivalent effect. It repeatedly anchors her identity within service, but it also sustains the recognisability and continuity of the person speaking. The servant is not merely described by others; she becomes the organising voice through which the reader encounters the household.

Her account of Den Bagus's desire demonstrates the critical possibilities of this voice. She describes emotional excess and compares aroused male behaviour with that of domesticated animals, using repeated animal sounds to puncture elevated masculine standing (PP, pp. 49–50). The effect is not an uncomplicated rejection of the relationship, since the surrounding passage also expresses enjoyment. Instead, sexual attachment coexists with an irreverent assessment of the man involved.

Narrative authority also permits Pariyem to represent the insecurity of her own position. The household hearing is narrated through her awareness that remaining or leaving depends on the householder, followed by a description of growing reassurance as family members respond (PP, p. 196). Readers encounter the affective consequences of an arrangement she does not control. Her ability to narrate this transition should therefore be distinguished from the power to determine its outcome.

DK likewise gives readers access to experiences that are not fully expressed in the immediate social encounter. The bride's hesitant nod is accompanied by recollections of awkward meetings and minimal conversation with her prospective husband (DK, p. 35). Her outward response becomes intelligible through an interior account that exceeds what the attendant hears. The difference between gesture and narrated context makes uncertainty visible without requiring an explicit spoken refusal.

The available extracts also juxtapose first-person narration with italicised second-person address. On page 39, commentary directed towards "kau" projects a later effort to understand the attendant's explanation in solitude. This interruption creates distance between participation in the ritual and comprehension of its meaning. Because the extracts do not establish the complete distribution or identity of this voice, it should not be confidently assigned to the author or described as the narrative system of the entire novel. Its local effect is nevertheless discernible: the scene's symbolic instruction remains open to subsequent interpretation.

A similar separation between outward silence and inward assessment appears in the salt-pond episode. The wife does not comment to her husband, but her narration registers remembered labour, shock, and loss (DK, p. 2). Silence within the scene thus coexists with an extensive account of injury. It establishes neither approval nor a deliberate strategy of resistance.

Both texts consequently make female subjectivity available beyond the speech women direct towards other characters. Their narrative forms expose discrepancies between social performance, private evaluation, and practical authority. Such discrepancies support a feminist reading without requiring every critical observation to produce a change in the represented social order.

Negotiating Patriarchy: Accommodation, Desire, and Resistance

The preceding comparisons suggest that agency must be assessed through particular objectives, available alternatives, and consequences. Neither verbal assent nor participation in an unequal relationship supplies a sufficient classification of a character as submissive. Conversely, criticism, desire, or narrative prominence cannot automatically be treated as evidence of practical autonomy.

Pariyem's account identifies motherhood as a desired outcome and declines to make marriage the condition of that desire (PP, p. 189). This represents an active interpretation of her intimate life. Her refusal to organise that life around guilt also resists a judgement that would make shame its necessary meaning (PP, p. 188). These positions demonstrate a capacity to evaluate experience rather than merely repeat an externally imposed account.

At the same time, her desire unfolds within material dependence. The possibility of remaining in the household is initially represented as contingent on the householder's goodwill, while the family hearing places responsibility under paternal judgement (PP, pp. 196–198). Pariyem's reassurance is therefore compatible with the continuation of hierarchical authority. The scene supports neither a reading of complete emancipation nor one that denies the significance of the protection she receives.

This combination also clarifies the ambivalence of accommodation. An arrangement can preserve classed dependence while securing an outcome that matters to the character. Describing such an outcome as simply false consciousness would disregard her stated preferences. Describing it as freedom would overlook the distribution of decision-making power. The more defensible interpretation holds personal significance and structural limitation together.

In the DK bridal scene, the evidence supports a narrower account. The bride expresses uncertainty and places marriage within parental wishes and a familiar

sequence followed by her peers (DK, p. 35). Her hesitant responses and incomplete absorption of the attendant's teaching reveal distance from an ideal of effortless acceptance. They do not establish an enacted refusal, a deliberate negotiating strategy, or the later consequences of her position. The available passages make ambivalence visible while leaving the extent of practical resistance unresolved.

The cancellation of the wedding is similarly not evidence of the bride's resistance. On page 43, the decision is attributed to Madlawi and defended by relatives through the language of dignity and protection. Opposition to the proposed marriage is not automatically opposition to patriarchal authority: in this instance, stopping the ceremony can itself exercise familial control over the woman's future. The relevant question is whose objective the interruption serves and whose judgement authorises it.

Nor does women's participation in public speech necessarily advance another woman's autonomy. The wedding gossip displays an ability to influence reputational pressure, but that influence can intensify the expectations imposed on the bride (DK, pp. 23, 27). Female participation and feminist resistance therefore remain analytically distinct.

Across these passages, women's agency emerges unevenly in the capacity to express desire, interpret experience, influence others, and affect decisions. Those capacities do not always coincide. Pariyem can define the meaning of motherhood while depending on household recognition; the DK narrators can disclose uncertainty or injury without demonstrating control over the decisions that produce them. Patriarchal authority is consequently represented as compatible with female speech and subjective complexity. Its operation becomes clearest where women's interpretations remain visible but the power to allocate resources, authorise relationships, and settle consequences rests elsewhere.

Discussion

The passages analysed suggest that patriarchal ideology operates through relationships connecting material dependence, familial obligation, moral evaluation, and narrative authority. Women's subordination is not represented solely through prohibitions or the absence of speech. It also emerges where women can articulate preferences and receive protection while others retain authority over resources, intimate relationships, and social recognition. This distinction connects the three research questions: hierarchical relations establish unequal positions; cultural vocabularies and narrative strategies make those positions intelligible; and women negotiate their circumstances through capacities whose practical effects remain uneven. The comparison therefore directs attention to the relationship between female subjectivity and decision-making power. Because the available *Damar Kambang* material consists of discontinuous extracts, this interpretation concerns the examined passages rather than the complete trajectories of both works.

The relationship between gender and class is particularly evident in the distribution of security and responsibility. Ekasiswanto et al. (2022) interpret *Pengakuan Pariyem* through class hierarchy, priyayi dominance, and masculine ideology. The present reading is consistent with their emphasis on structural inequality but adds attention to the coexistence of dependency, personal preference, and paternal

protection. The household's insistence that Ario accept responsibility benefits Pariyem while preserving the authority through which that benefit becomes available. Kandiyoti's (1988) account of patriarchal bargaining helps explain why security within unequal arrangements can matter to women without dissolving those arrangements. Nevertheless, the hearing should not automatically be described as an explicit bargain initiated by Pariyem. Its significance lies in the conjunction of a favourable intervention and discretionary authority. Similarly, the *Damar Kambang* property episode separates women's productive contribution from control over resources, showing why participation in household labour cannot serve as evidence of equivalent decision-making power.

These findings support a contextual understanding of agency while requiring restraint in identifying resistance. Mahmood (2012) challenges the assumption that agency is meaningful only when directed against prevailing norms. This perspective helps preserve the significance of Pariyem's expressed desire for motherhood without measuring her preferences exclusively against an expectation of marriage or overt rebellion. It does not, however, establish that every accommodation is chosen freely or that every silence constitutes action. Hermawati et al. (2024) identify female subjectivity and resistance to normative culture in *Damar Kambang*, including the narrative significance of women's perspectives within marriage. The present analysis qualifies the inferential movement from subjectivity to resistance: hesitation, incomplete acceptance of moral instruction, and narrated discomfort establish complexity, but stronger claims require evidence of objectives, alternatives, actions, and consequences. This qualification does not invalidate findings based on passages beyond the available extracts; it specifies what the present evidence can support.

Narrative form makes these distinctions especially consequential. Lanser's (2015) feminist account of narrative authority provides a basis for examining how gendered voices acquire significance through their formal and social positioning. Pariyem's recurring self-identification and evaluative commentary make her experience available through a sustained speaking position, even where household decisions remain beyond her control. Herissone-Kelly's (2025) distinction between hermeneutical agency and hermeneutical authority offers a complementary conceptual resource: interpreting social experience for oneself differs from shaping how others understand it. Adapted cautiously, this distinction helps explain why self-articulation need not produce socially effective recognition. Neither concept is identical to narrative voice or practical autonomy. Their conjunction instead directs attention to separate questions: who speaks, whose interpretation carries authority, whose preferences receive recognition, and who determines consequences? The analytical contribution lies in tracing relationships among these capacities rather than treating the presence of a female narrator as sufficient evidence of empowerment.

The comparison also complicates the attribution of acceptance to Javanese culture and honour to Madurese culture. Both moral vocabularies appear within the examined material, although they acquire force through different situations and relationships. Their significance depends on who invokes them, what conduct they justify, and whose interests become authoritative. Niehof's (2023) discussion of diversity among Indonesian women supports this caution by examining the implications

of ethnicity, class, historical circumstances, and social setting for claims about women's agency. Her contextual analysis does not validate fictional events as sociological facts; it helps identify the risks of treating cultural categories as homogeneous explanations. Accordingly, the present comparison concerns different literary arrangements of authority rather than contrasting ethnic dispositions. Differences in narrative form and publication context further prevent the two works from functioning as controlled cultural cases or as evidence of a linear transition from female submission to resistance.

The study's contribution must also be positioned against recent scholarship that already recognises ambivalent agency. Kasanova and Rudiyanto (2026), examining *Damar Kambang* alongside other Indonesian novels, discuss patriarchal legitimation through moral language, honour, and obligation, as well as domestic negotiation and implicit resistance. Consequently, neither the identification of cultural legitimation nor the rejection of female passivity constitutes a sufficient novelty claim. The present comparison offers a more specific interpretive distinction between opportunities for self-expression, socially recognised standing, and authority over practical outcomes. It also places classed domestic service in dialogue with familial and ceremonial regulation without assuming that the same mechanism operates identically in both works. Read alongside Ekasiswanto et al. (2022) and Hermawati et al. (2024), this approach brings readings of domination and resistance into conversation while preserving evidence that complicates either emphasis. It constitutes a bounded comparative synthesis rather than a validated explanatory model.

Several limitations delimit this contribution. The discontinuous *Damar Kambang* extracts do not support conclusions about its complete distribution of narrative voices, subsequent character development, or resolution of conflict. A complete-text reading is necessary to establish whether the patterns identified persist, change, or are contradicted elsewhere. More broadly, two literary works cannot represent the diversity of Javanese and Madurese women's experiences, and textual interpretation does not establish authorial intention or actual reader responses. English glosses also risk reducing culturally specific distinctions in hierarchy, obligation, and ambiguity. Further research should therefore prioritise complete-corpus verification before extending the comparison to additional works, translations, or reception contexts. These extensions would help assess the reach of the proposed distinctions while keeping literary representation, readers' interpretations, and social experience analytically separate.

CONCLUSION

The passages examined in *Pengakuan Pariyem* and *Damar Kambang* represent patriarchal ideology through interconnected relations of gender, class, kinship, and material dependence. Authority operates through control over resources and decisions, but also through moral obligation, familial protection, and social recognition. Narrative strategies make women's desires, uncertainties, and evaluations visible without necessarily granting them equivalent influence over practical outcomes. Female subjectivity therefore coexists with unequal authority. Accommodation, self-expression, and participation in intimate or familial relationships cannot be classified as either submission or resistance without examining the objectives, alternatives, and

consequences represented in particular scenes. This distinction preserves women's expressed preferences while recognising the conditions that restrict their choices.

The comparative contribution lies in distinguishing narrative voice, social recognition, and practical authority as related but non-equivalent dimensions of women's represented agency. A character may interpret her experience, articulate desire, or receive protection while remaining dependent on decisions made by others. The analysis also complicates a cultural opposition between Javanese acceptance and Madurese honour. Both vocabularies appear in the examined material, acquiring significance through particular speakers, relationships, and circumstances. Their ideological effects depend on how they justify obligations and distribute responsibility, rather than on their presumed association with a homogeneous culture. The comparison thus offers a situated interpretation of patriarchal relations across the two texts, rather than a typology of ethnic dispositions or a universal model of female agency.

These conclusions remain bounded by the evidence available. The discontinuous *Damar Kambang* extracts do not establish its complete development of character, narrative voice, or the consequences of women's actions. Examination of the full text is necessary to determine whether subsequent passages sustain, modify, or contradict the patterns identified. Neither work should be treated as representative evidence of women's experiences throughout Javanese or Madurese society. Within these limits, the study suggests that comparative feminist reading gains precision by asking not only whether women speak, but also how their speech relates to the authority to determine the conditions and consequences of their represented lives.

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