

Critical realism and political imaginaries in the poetry of Kusfitria Marstiyasih

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Received:
07 September 2025

Revised:
22 February 2026

Accepted:
27 February 2026

Published:
28 February 2026

Abstract

This study investigates how poetic realism and political imaginaries are constructed in 38, a poetry collection by Kusfitria Marstiyasih. The objective is to examine how the poems articulate socio-political critique within the post-Reformasi Indonesian context. Using a qualitative textual analysis informed by the sociology of literature and the aesthetics of resistance, the study analysed selected poems to identify patterns of representation, tone, and thematic focus. The findings suggest that Marstiyasih employs subtle realism through concise, ironic, and contemplative expression to critique power relations, human rights violations, and emotionally detached bureaucratic practices. Rather than presenting overt grand narratives, the poems operate as counter-discourses that quietly challenge dominant state ideology while foregrounding experiences of marginalization, denial, and symbolic death. The study concludes that 38 positions poetry as both aesthetic expression and civic engagement. The collection demonstrates how contemporary Indonesian poetry can function as a reflective space for cultural resistance and socio-political critique.

Keywords: aesthetics; Marstiyasih; poetry; political; realism

INTRODUCTION

Poetry functions not only as a vehicle for personal expression but also as a powerful form of social testimony. Through poetic devices and thematic engagement, poets critique political structures, reflect universal human experiences, and preserve collective memory (Arcilla Jr., 2024; Rogova Gaxha, 2022). In contemporary Indonesian poetry, the poet is no longer seen merely as a voice of private emotion but as a cultural agent who articulates social critique through artistic language. As such, poetry becomes both an expressive and dialogic medium, one that bridges individual emotion with collective experience and broader socio-political realities. The political environment itself often shapes poetic production and reception (Dahana 2001).

Poetry may be understood as an “echo” that confirms meaning beyond literal communication (Mohamad, 2011). Rather than delivering direct statements, poems extend readers’ consciousness and invite reflective

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interpretation. Prior studies indicate that poetic style, imagery, and themes are strongly influenced by social issues such as injustice, poverty, and identity (Abdullah & Hussein, 2025). Figurative strategies like metaphor and personification create multilayered meanings that connect diverse readers to shared concerns (Adekunle, 2023; Arcilla Jr., 2024; Wang, 2022). For this reason, poetry remains a significant medium for articulating marginalized experiences and unsettling dominant discourse.

Existing scholarship has widely acknowledged poetry's social function and its dialogic relationship with readers. Studies grounded in sociological and reader response perspectives show that readers interpret socially engaged poetry through their identities and lived realities (Abdullah & Hussein, 2025; Hogg & Rinella, 2018; Pianzola et al., 2020; Seema, 2023). Other research demonstrates that poetic language can express collective consciousness rather than merely individual emotion Goldmann (as cited in Teeuw, 1988). Work on Indonesian poetry also highlights how diction, imagery, and figurative language enhance communicative power and aesthetic impact (Fathoni, 2012; Andrian, 2018; Ramdhaniyah and Safi'i, 2023; Kholiq and Tjahjono, 2021).

However, prior studies tend to emphasize either stylistic features or general socio political themes. Less attention has been given to how contemporary Indonesian poetry constructs political imaginaries through subtle realism, especially in the post Reformasi context. The notion of poetry as a space for "hidden transcripts" of resistance (Scott, 1990) has also rarely been applied in close readings of recent Indonesian poetic works. As a result, the mechanisms through which concise and contemplative poetic language produces socio political critique remain insufficiently examined.

METHOD

Research methodology was essentially a set of scientific procedures employed to discover truth and to understand principles related to natural, social, and human phenomena within a particular discipline. In other words, research methodology functioned as a guideline that provided systematic direction for addressing research questions or problems. In line with Usman and Akbar (2009), research methodology was understood as a structured procedure or a series of steps undertaken by researchers to acquire knowledge that could be scientifically justified.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with the poems in the collection 38 by Kusfitria Marstiyasih serving as the primary objects of analysis. The inquiry focused on understanding how these poems constructed a mode of critical realism while simultaneously presenting political imagery rooted in the social experiences of post Reformasi Indonesian society. To uncover these dimensions, the study applied critical close reading, which enabled the researcher to trace multiple layers of meaning, symbols, poetic idioms, and aesthetic strategies used by the poet in articulating socio political concerns.

In addition, the study incorporated an intertextual approach by situating the poems in dialogue with Indonesia's historical, political, and social contexts. This step was essential for examining the extent to which poetry functioned not merely as personal expression but also as a dialogic space engaging social

realities and operating as counter discourse against dominant power. Accordingly, the methodology did not focus solely on the internal structure of the poems but also examined the relationship between the text and the external contexts shaping the interpretation of Marstiyasih's 38.

Respondents

The primary object of this study was the poetry collection 38 by Kusfitria Marstiyasih (2020). The selection of this text was not based solely on its aesthetic value but also on its relevance to the research focus, namely how poetry could construct a mode of critical realism while simultaneously presenting political imagery rooted in the social experiences of post Reformasi Indonesian society. Each poem in 38 contained poetic idioms that recorded traces of power, injustice, and power relations in everyday life, thereby making it an appropriate object of inquiry for uncovering the aesthetic strategies of resistance.

Kusfitria's poems demonstrated how poetic language was crafted not merely as a medium for personal expression but also as a space for articulating collective voices, particularly those of marginalized groups. Through symbolic representation and strategies of subtle realism, these works conveyed anxieties regarding repressive bureaucracy, military violence, and violations of civil rights. Consequently, 38 functioned not only as a contemporary literary work but also as a cultural document that affirmed the role of poetry as a form of social and political critique. Against this background, the texts in 38 were selected as the "respondents" of this study, as they effectively revealed the dynamic interplay between aesthetics, critique, and political imagery that constituted the central focus of this research.

Instruments

The primary instrument of this study is the poems contained in 38 by Kusfitria Marstiyasih (2020). All poems in the collection are treated as primary data sources, analyzed both textually and contextually. Through close reading, each line, stanza, and poetic structure is examined to identify idioms, symbols, linguistic styles, and aesthetic strategies employed by the poet in constructing social critique and presenting political imagery.

This instrument enables the researcher to highlight how poetry not only showcases the beauty of language but also functions as a medium for articulating collective experiences and symbolic resistance. Consequently, the poetic texts are understood not merely as standalone aesthetic entities, but as spaces for meaning production that are closely connected to Indonesia's post-reform social and political realities. The identification of poetic idioms depicting state violence, bureaucratic absurdities, the female body, and narratives of historical denial is conducted to demonstrate how Kusfitria's poems represent a subtle yet incisive critical realism.

The use of poems in 38 as research instruments was supported by an interpretive literary analytical framework grounded in the sociology of literature, hermeneutic close reading, and the aesthetics of resistance. From the sociological perspective, literary texts are viewed as cultural products that reflect and negotiate social realities and power relations (Damono, 2002; Faruk,

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2012). This perspective justified treating the poems as meaningful social documents rather than purely aesthetic artifacts.

Hermeneutic close reading provided the procedural lens for examining layers of meaning within the poems. This approach assumes that poetic language contains symbolic density that must be interpreted through careful textual analysis of diction, imagery, and structure. It enabled the study to trace how subtle realism and political imagery were constructed within the text.

In addition, the framework drew on Scott's concept of hidden transcripts (1990) and the broader aesthetics of resistance tradition. These perspectives positioned poetry as a potential site of symbolic opposition where marginalized voices may appear indirectly through irony, restraint, and metaphor. Through this combined framework, the poems in 38 were analytically justified as valid instruments for investigating the interplay between literary form, social critique, and political imagination in post Reformasi Indonesia.

Procedures

The study of Kusfitria Marstyasih's poetry collection 38 was conducted through several structured stages to ensure a systematic and in-depth analysis. The first stage involved the process of inventorying and classifying the texts, which entailed collecting all the poems in the book and then selecting those that explicitly or implicitly contained socio-political critique. At this stage, the researcher highlighted lines related to issues of power, human rights violations, the female body, bureaucracy, and marginalized historical narratives.

The second stage involved reading the texts using a literary sociology approach. This step was undertaken to uncover the connection between the poems and the socio-political reality of post-reform Indonesia. The analysis focused on how the poems not only reflect the poet's individual experiences but also articulate the collective anxieties of society regarding oppressive political conditions. At this stage, concepts such as public transcript and hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) were employed to understand the distinction between dominant discourse and alternative discourse presented through the poems.

The third stage involved the application of hermeneutic analysis. Hermeneutics was chosen to interpret layers of meaning emerging from the interaction between the poet's consciousness and the reader's horizon. This process goes beyond the literal meanings apparent on the surface and moves toward deeper interpretations, including symbolic dimensions, poetic idioms, and aesthetic strategies that shape critical realism and political imagery within the texts. Through hermeneutics, the poems are read as a dialogical space where the poet's voice and the reader's experience converge, generating richer and more contextualized meanings.

Through these stages, the study demonstrates that the poetry collection 38 is not merely a compilation of literary works, but also an important representation of aesthetic and cultural strategies that convey social critique and counter-discourse against the domination of power.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was grounded in the frameworks of social literary criticism and the aesthetics of resistance. Social literary criticism was chosen for its ability to reveal the connection between poetic texts and the

socio-political realities that shape them. This approach emphasizes how literature reflects historical conditions and engages with broader cultural and ideological structures. In parallel, the aesthetics of resistance provided a lens to examine how the poet articulates critique through nuanced and reflective means, avoiding overt agitation or pamphleteering. Rather than delivering direct protest, the poet employs layered aesthetic strategies to challenge dominant structures through irony, contemplation, and symbolic expression. Together, these approaches demonstrate how literature not only mirrors social conditions but also acts as a catalyst for social awareness and transformation, offering new models for political engagement and ethical inquiry (Kazmi, 2022; Saad, 2021; Tamrin, 2025).

The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, the poetic idioms, symbols, stylistic devices, and imagery in the poems of 38 were examined. These elements were interpreted as both aesthetic expressions and carriers of social critique. Through this lens, poetic language operates on two levels: it presents literary beauty while simultaneously offering critical insight into socio-political realities ((Arcilla Jr., 2024; Chadegani et al., 2024; Sene, 2021). Second, attention was directed to the narratives constructed within the poems, particularly in relation to themes of power, bureaucracy, the female body, and marginalized histories. These narratives were understood as strategies for representing inequality and generating symbolic resistance. The concept of subtle realism played a central role here, referring to the poet's method of presenting political critique through understated and contemplative expressions. Third, the theoretical framework of public and hidden transcripts, as developed by Scott (1990), was applied to explore how the poems function as counter-discourses. The public transcript reflects the dominant, official discourse of those in power, while the hidden transcript represents the voices of the oppressed that emerge in private or symbolic spaces. The poems in 38 were thus interpreted as forms of hidden transcript, offering resistance through veiled critique and metaphor. This multi-layered analysis makes it possible to view the poems not only as literary texts but also as spaces for articulating subaltern voices and exposing the ideological blind spots of dominant narratives (Alkhatib, 2024; Arcilla Jr., 2024; Chadegani et al., 2024; Dhillon, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of Kusfitria Marstyasih's 38, the subtle and fragmentary aesthetic strategies used to expose power can be read in parallel with the findings of Raharja et al. (2025) regarding Apito Lahire's works. Their study emphasizes that a fragmentary aesthetic combined with lyrical language does not merely produce broken or disjointed texts; rather, it opens a space for reflective interpretation for readers.

The presence of fragmentary strategies in 38, for example in the line, "Kami mengantre dengan nomor di tangan/lebih panjang dari sabar yang kami punya" ("We queued with numbers in our hands/longer than the patience we possess") (Marstyasih, 2020, p. 32), reveals how the poem exposes bureaucratic absurdities in a manner consistent with Lahire's poetic strategies. As noted by Raharja, Andrian, & Ripai (2025), linguistic fragmentation in poetry can serve as an aesthetic strategy that evokes emotional depth while simultaneously inviting layered interpretations.

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Analysis of 38 demonstrates how the poetry becomes a space for articulating voices that are often marginalized, while also presenting symbolic resistance to dominant narratives. From a theoretical standpoint, this can be understood through two perspectives: Scott (1990) on public transcript versus hidden transcript, and Spivak (1988) on the subaltern who “cannot speak.”

According to Scott (1990), in oppressive conditions, subordinated groups develop a hidden transcript—counter-discourse expressed through symbols, humor, or veiled language. In 38, Kusfitria’s lines clearly exemplify this form of hidden transcript.

For example, in the poem titled “*Hari Kemerdekaan yang Berlalu*” (The Independence Day That Passed) (p. 2):

"Rintih dan regek kelaparan kami diredam oleh masker yang terpasang berjam jam/... Kami hanya mampu menyebut diri sebagai orang-orang bodoh/ Yang tak berkutik oleh undang-undang dan peraturan yang sering menjadi tali/ jeratan menuju tiang gantungan." (Marstyasih)

These lines reveal the reality of marginalized people within the official discourse of the state (public transcript) and simultaneously produce a voice of concealed resistance (hidden transcript). The critique of the state is not expressed as a political pamphlet but through poetic gestures that are subtle yet sharp. In other contexts, poets like Nancy Morejón and Alice Walker use narrative, persona, and emotive techniques to subvert stereotypes and reclaim agency for marginalized groups, often without direct confrontation (Hafez et al., 2023; Mahmoud, 2020a). Through these understated yet powerful strategies, poetry becomes a medium for both revealing the mechanisms of oppression and nurturing the hope and solidarity necessary for resistance (Alsyouf, 2024; Hafez et al., 2023; Mahmoud, 2020b; Segura & Sekulova, 2024).

Similarly, in “*Bangsa yang Kenyang Asumsi*” (The Nation Full of Assumptions) (p. 10):
"Seharian jemari dan bola mata bersinergi/memacu benak agar memproduksi asumsi-asumsi/biar dikira aktivis biar serupa para cendekia/."

This poem critiques the bureaucratization of digital discourse: the people are portrayed as preoccupied with producing “assumptions” that are illusory, while the state’s official discourse remains dominant. The critique is ironic, functioning as a hidden transcript that exposes absurdities.

In Kusfitria Marstyasih’s 38, the female body and maternal roles appear as a political locus that articulates the subaltern’s voice—not through political slogans, but through subtle poetic language.

In “*Perempuan Tak Betah di Rumah 3*” (Women Uncomfortable at Home 3) (p. 30):

"Anak-anak kita di rumah di dipan dipan/Bergelung dalam sarung usang/Membaui bekas kasih sayang/Menyeruput bekas kasih sayang//Anak-anak menunggu rahim kita kembali/."

The female body is positioned in the tension between domestic and public spheres. The voice of women here is not dominant; it is soft, full of longing and loss—precisely the articulation of the subaltern Spivak describes.

In “Pulanglah Ibu yang Pernah Hilang!” (Return, Mother Who Was Once Lost!) (pp. 3–4):

*"Para begal tak hanya berbekal golok dan rantai kapal/Mereka
berkalung tasbih/Bersorban dan berlidah ayat/...
Esok pagi anak-anak sudah akan menemukan/senyum ibu di samping
guling mereka."*

Kusfitria Marstiyasih's 38 presents poetry as both an aesthetic and political strategy, exposing how the maternal body and spaces of motherhood are embedded in power relations shaped by religion, the state, and dominant cultural norms. Through a soft and wounded tone, the mother's voice is rearticulated as a subaltern presence that challenges its historical silencing. The poems illustrate the tension between the state's public transcript, which promotes official narratives, and the people's hidden transcript, which carries concealed critique (Scott, 1990). This approach resonates with the concept of prophetic literary ethics in the poetry of Ahmadun Yosi Herfanda, particularly his emphasis on transcendental epistemology, literature as worship, and inter-consciousness (Turahmat, Andrian, & Rachman, 2024). Like Herfanda, who positions poetry as a space of spiritual consciousness, Kusfitria presents it as a socio-political and ethical practice that affirms the right to life, memory, and resistance.

1) Temporal Fragmentation and Everyday Bureaucracy

In the poem “*Hari Kemerdekaan yang Berlalu*” (“The Independence Day That Passed”), the narrative is fragmented into monthly segments—fragments that mark the disruption of citizens' lives and the bureaucratic logic of the pandemic. For example, the lines read:

*“March / Suddenly everything shrank” (p. 1).
“We were trapped in thousands of terms that twisted our tongues / WFH
and PSBB legalized isolation from the doors of relatives” (p. 1).
“The moans and cries of our hunger were muffled by masks worn for
hours” (p. 1).
“We could only call ourselves fools / Helpless under laws and regulations
that often became ropes / binding us to the gallows” (p. 2).*

Based on these excerpts, “*Hari Kemerdekaan yang Berlalu*” fragments the narrative temporally into months—fragments that signify disruptions in citizens' lives and the bureaucratic logic of the pandemic

The poetic critique reaches its peak in the lines:

*“We could only call ourselves fools / Helpless under laws and regulations
that often became ropes / binding us to the gallows” (p. 2).*

These lines reveal how laws and regulations meant to protect are instead perceived as instruments of entrapment. Thus, the poem presents temporal fragmentation and pandemic bureaucratization as an aesthetic strategy to expose the contradictions between official state narratives and everyday experiences of the people.

The temporal fragments, marked by month-by-month references, together with technocratic terms like “WFH/PSBB” and “laws/regulations,” show how citizens' lives are seemingly segmented and reduced to a series of official

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terminologies. Thus, the poem exposes the tension between rule-bound official language and fragile, distanced, and often disconnected everyday life.

The critique is further emphasized through representations of citizens' subdued, silenced, and neglected bodies:

"The moans and cries of our hunger were muffled by masks worn for hours" (p. 1).

"We could only call ourselves fools / Helpless under laws and regulations that often became ropes / binding us to the gallows" (p. 2).

These lines clearly present critical realism: the suffering of marginalized people goes unheard, covered by layers of rules, masks, and official documents. Laws and regulations appear as symbols of cold authority, which, instead of protecting, strangle.

Kusfitria Marstiyasih's poetic strategy in "Hari Kemerdekaan yang Berlalu" uses fragmentation both in time (month by month) and language (technocratic terms like WFH and PSBB) to mirror the fractured, distanced social experience of the pandemic. This approach is not unique; research on pandemic poetry shows that fragmented forms and disrupted structures are widely used to reflect the disjointed, uncertain, and alienating realities people faced during COVID-19 (Brault-Dreux, 2024; Eldaly, 2023; Han, 2025). The use of technocratic or bureaucratic language in poetry, as seen in Kusfitria's work, highlights how official policies and medical jargon became a "foreign language," further distancing individuals from one another and from the true meaning of freedom (Diala, 2022; Eldaly, 2023). The separation between lines, stanzas, and the use of specialized terms in pandemic poetry often serve to expose the limitations and absurdities of daily life under lockdown, where people are confined by regulations and silenced by symbols like masks (Brault-Dreux, 2024). Rather than simply documenting the pandemic as a historical event, such poetry critiques the cold, rigid logic of state administration, revealing how these systems can alienate citizens and diminish intimacy and agency (Diala, 2022). In this way, fragmentation in pandemic poetry becomes a powerful tool for expressing collective trauma, social disconnection, and the search for meaning amid crisis.

2) Digital Discourse Fragmentation: The "Bureaucracy" of Comments and Assumption

In the poem *Bangsa yang Kenyang Asumsi*, the poet reveals how language in digital spaces becomes fragmented into brief pieces: feeds, comments, and posts that circulate uncontrollably. This is evident in the following excerpt:

The hands of the people busy stalking influencer accounts that have already signed tenders. The comment sections erupt with millions of assumptions mixed with misdirected insults // All day, fingers and eyes synergize / driving the mind to produce assumptions / so they are thought activists, so they resemble intellectuals. Forgetting when shadows stretch to the east / because on social media there is no sunrise or sunset. During these times, the people are already full of assumptions. / Very full / Overfull / ASSUMPTION (p. 10).

These lines present a sharp portrait of how the public's "fingers" and "eyes" race through the infinite scroll, splitting attention into endless fragments.

Social reality appears bureaucratized into layers of “assumptions” continuously produced and consumed, aligning with the idea of language fragmentation that creates pauses, cracks, and bitterness (Freelon, D., Marwick, A., & Kreiss, D., 2020).

In this context, digital activity is parodied as ceaseless labor: “fingers” and “eyes” become machines producing assumptions. The resulting irony is the emergence of “false activism,” where public participation is reduced to digital self-presentation rather than real political praxis. Language fragmentation, in the form of scattered comments, represents social reality bureaucratized through algorithms and performative expectations on social media. This is further illustrated in: Forgetting when shadows stretch to the east / because on social media there is no sunrise or sunset (p. 10).

The poem attempts to reveal the absurdity of digital discourse, detached from temporal dimensions. Social media nullifies natural rhythms (day–night, sunrise–sunset), replacing them with endless scrolling that severs awareness of space and time. This temporal fragmentation reinforces the critique that digitalization produces a “world without pause,” a new power that intoxicates society through the noise of discourse. This is captured in: During these times, the people are already full of assumptions. / Very full / Overfull / ASSUMPTION (p. 10).

Kusfitria Marstyasih’s poem highlights how digital discourse, much like formal bureaucracy, fragments communication and creates a sense of hollow fullness. The repeated use of capitalized “ASSUMPTIONS” in the poem’s climax reflects how digital platforms often substitute genuine dialogue with a flood of opinions, rumors, and comments, resulting in a noisy yet ultimately unsatisfying environment. The poem’s critique of digital culture thus aligns with research showing that both digital and bureaucratic systems can alienate individuals, reduce complex experiences to isolated units, and foster a performative rather than substantive form of resistance or communication (Sokolova, 2024; Teubert, 2020). Through these strategies, the poem offers a critical realism of Indonesian digital culture, exposing the absurdity and emptiness of mass communication in the digital age.

3) Fragmentation of Motherhood Roles and the Female Body

A series of Marstyasih’s poems presents tangible fractures between domestic, social, and affective spaces, so that women’s experiences—especially as mothers do not appear as a singular narrative but as a polyphony of colliding fragments. In the poem “*Perempuan Tak Betah di Rumah 2*,” for instance, the female body is represented as a subject striving to break free from domestic confinement. The lines “*Sibuk selfie repot wefie/Alasan dandan buat ketemu teman*” (p. 29) reveal women’s need to negotiate their identity beyond maternal roles, as if the outside world offers a fresher space for self-expression compared to the “stifling” and “claustrophobic” home. The home, traditionally associated with comfort and stability, instead appears as a prison restricting women’s movement.

Conversely, in “*Perempuan Tak Betah di Rumah 3*,” the voices of the children left behind come to the fore. The lines “*Anak-anak kita di rumah di dipan dipan/Bergelung dalam sarung usang/Membaui bekas kasih sayang/Menyeruput bekas kasih*

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sayang" (p. 30) depict the longing embedded in the mother's body. Here, the female body bears expectations: a womb that once gave birth is now awaited to return love and presence. The emptiness of domestic life due to the mother's absence produces emotional wounds for the children while highlighting the paradox of women's roles, pulled between personal needs and familial affective demands.

This conflict is extended in the poem "*Pulanglah Ibu yang Pernah Hilang!*" The lines "*Para begal tak hanya berbekal golok dan rantai kapal/Mereka berkalung tasbih/Bersorban dan berlidah ayat*" (p. 3) expose the social and religious dimensions that burden women's bodies. On one hand, women face literal threats of violence; on the other, they confront moral and religious claims that reinforce control over them. Yet ultimately, the children's anticipation remains pivotal: "*Esok pagi anak-anak sudah akan menemukan/senyum ibu di samping guling mereka*" (p. 4). These lines reveal the longing for the mother as a source of comfort and continuity in life.

The fragmentation of maternal roles in Kusfitria Marstiyasih's 38 illustrates how the female body is continually negotiated between domestic and public spaces, personal desires and social expectations, familial affection and moral pressure. Through fragmented aesthetics, these poems expose the contradictions embedded in motherhood: the mother figure is at once present and absent, cherished yet burdened, free yet constrained. In 38, the maternal body emerges as a fragmented entity, torn between its symbolic role as a nurturing presence and the political, social, and religious forces that complicate and disrupt that ideal. In the poem "*Perempuan Tak Betah di Rumah 2*," the female voice is presented as a hesitant figure, oscillating between domestic duties and public attraction. The lines "*Sibuk selfie repot wefie/Alasan dandan buat ketemu teman. Di rumah pengap di luar penuh harap/Di rumah suntuk di luar asyik masyuk*" (p. 29) illustrate a binary opposition: home is perceived as stifling and monotonous, while the outside is depicted as an open space full of hope and enjoyment. Domestic life loses emotional intimacy, whereas the public space appears as an opportunity for escape. This kind of fragmentation marks women's division between constraining normative demands and unmet affective needs.

A different nuance emerges in "*Perempuan Tak Betah di Rumah 3*," where the children's perspective becomes central. The lines "*Anak-anak kita di rumah di dipan-dipan/Bergelung dalam sarung usang. Membau bekas kasih sayang/Menyeruput bekas kasih sayang//Anak-anak menunggu rahim kita kembali*" (p. 30) reveal the absence of the mother as the primary source of care. The mother's body is understood not only as biological but also as a locus of longing: a presence that is missing yet continuously awaited. These fragments show that the domestication of maternal roles leaves deep emotional fractures, with children's affection dependent on something not always attainable.

The maternal dimension is further expanded in "*Pulanglah Ibu yang Pernah Hilang!*" linking the mother's role to socio-political violence. The lines "*Para begal tak hanya berbekal golok dan rantai kapal/Mereka berkalung tasbih/Bersorban dan berlidah ayat*" (p. 3) expose bitter irony: violence occurs under the guise of religious symbols, highlighting sharp opposition between doctrine and oppression. Yet amid this horror, subsequent lines offer hope: "*Esok pagi anak-anak sudah akan menemukan/senyum ibu di samping guling mereka*" (p. 4). The mother is depicted both as

a victim of socio-political violence and as the center of intimacy longed for by children at home.

The poems in 38 reveal the female body, particularly the maternal figure, as a space of ongoing tension, situated between screen and home, public and private spheres, doctrine and intimacy. Kusfitria Marstyasih employs fragmentation in both form and meaning to present the body not merely as a biological entity but as a symbolic and political field shaped by ethical, affective, religious, and ideological forces. Within Spivak's framework, this portrayal can be interpreted as a subaltern voice that is often silenced by dominant discourse but continues to resist and assert itself through poetic expression. This strategy reflects broader trends in feminist and confessional poetry, where the female body becomes a paradoxical site of vulnerability, repression, intimacy, and continuity (Bonasera, 2021; Gündar, 2022; Honsalies-Munis, 2021; Walsh, 2021). The mother figure in Kusfitria's work embodies these contradictions, appearing hesitant, conflicted, and at times subjected to violence, yet remaining central to emotional and existential life.

4) Fragmentation of Urban Space, Political Symbols, and Mediation

Urban space in the poems of 38 is not depicted as a coherent landscape but as a collage of fragments that record traces of everyday political life. The city does not appear as a center of order; rather, it is filled with overlapping images: demonstrations, billboards, parliamentary seats, and digital applications. Each fragment functions as a sign conveying politics not through a linear narrative but through a visual and affective montage. This strategy of fragmentation reveals the absurdity of political representation as it emerges through everyday urban life.

The poem "Searching for a Bright-Colored Alma Mater Jacket Amid a Crowd of Demonstrators" shows how urban space is populated by the bodies of young people, who are both political forces and victims of repression. The lines "Searching for the bright colors of the alma mater jacket / like his son's" (p. 7) to "From morning until morning again, the bright alma mater jacket / never appeared on the broadcast" (p. 8) depict a mother waiting for her child amid a crowd of demonstrators. Yet that hope turns into loss: "On the third day, the mother realized that her son / had become one among the young people who no longer / returned / when the demonstration was dispersed" (p. 9). This fragment reveals the rupture between personal and public space: victims disappear in media coverage and state repression, showing how urban politics also means erasing individual identities in the midst of the crowd.

Another political dimension appears in the poem "Anti-Stress Billboard," which portrays the irony of the city as a stage for propaganda. Billboards scattered across public spaces are reduced to empty messages: "Billboards displayed everywhere / Absorb the message that is there" (p. 56). This irony is reinforced with satire: "And since when did the costume of a religious party candidate / become borrowed by Spiderman, / Batman, and Superman? / Not the billboard's fault" (p. 57). This fragment highlights the absurdity of political representation: billboards no longer convey meaningful political ideas but serve as artificial images parodied by fictional symbols.

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Critique of political ownership claims is evident in the poem "Your House." The repetitive lines "This is your house / we are only the guardians. / This is your house! / Why do you not acknowledge it?" (p. 39) reveal the contradiction between slogans of popular ownership and the political reality that excludes them from public space. The house usually understood as a symbol of intimacy and ownership is pulled into the political realm as a metaphor for the state. Yet the claim of ownership is denied, marking a gap between rhetorical representation and social reality.

The poem "Application Finger" introduces a new dimension of urban fragmentation by highlighting digital infrastructure as a form of political mediation. The strong single phrase, "Human life is in the grip of the application finger" (p. 53), emphasizes how public life is now controlled algorithmically. The urban space is no longer shaped solely by physical billboards or street demonstrations but also by virtual interactions that regulate communication patterns, opinions, and even political control through digital mechanisms.

The collage of fragments from these four poems lost alma mater jackets, hyperbolic billboards, slogans of home ownership, and application fingers confirms that urban space is a patchwork of signs full of contradictions. The fragmentation of space and symbols exposes the absurdity of fractured political procedures: democracy manifests through the bodies of victims, artificial propaganda, empty claims, and digital control. Thus, Marstiyasih's poems reveal that the contemporary city can no longer be understood as a stable, unified space but as a political montage continually negotiated through fragile and ironic signs.

In 38, the city is depicted not as a coherent and stable space but as an expanse filled with images, signs, and symbols that collide. Urban reality appears in fragments forming a kind of political montage of everyday life, where demonstrations, campaign billboards, parliamentary seats, and digital applications intertwine within a fractured landscape. Through the strategy of fragmentation, Kusfitria Marstiyasih demonstrates that power operates not through a singular narrative but through scattered, repetitive, and often absurd representations, so that citizens' experiences of the city are also fragmented.

In the poem "Searching for a Bright-Colored Alma Mater Jacket Amid a Crowd of Demonstrators," urban space is projected as an arena of trauma and loss. The lines "Searching for the bright colors of the alma mater jacket / like his son's" (p. 7) to "From morning until morning again, the bright alma mater jacket / never appeared on the broadcast" (p. 8) depict a mother searching for her son in the midst of a crowd. The peak of sorrow occurs when she realizes: "On the third day, the mother realized that her son / had become one among the young people who no longer / returned / when the demonstration was dispersed" (p. 9). The alma mater jacket, a symbol of education and the future, becomes a marker of death and repression. Meanwhile, the media remain silent—"never appeared on the broadcast"—underscoring censorship and erasure. The city, in this poem, emerges as a brutal political landscape where young generations are silenced and families can only witness loss.

A different nuance appears in "Anti-Stress Billboard," where the city is presented as a banal and hyperbolic stage for propaganda. The lines "Billboards

displayed everywhere / Absorb the message that is there” (p. 56) show a flood of campaign images covering the cityscape, while sharp irony appears in “And since when did the costume of a religious party candidate / become borrowed by Spiderman, / Batman, and Superman? / Not the billboard’s fault” (p. 57). These fragments turn political billboards into a parody arena, where candidates’ images are polished like fictional heroes. Irony emerges: politics, which should address citizens’ welfare, appears as empty theatrics duplicating imaginary images to mask a lack of ideas.

The critique of political representation is extended in the poem “Your House,” where the metaphor of a house operates as a symbolic representation of the state. The repetitive lines, “This is your house / we are only the guardians. / This is your house! / Why do you not acknowledge it?” (p. 39), suggest a tension in the logic of ownership constructed within the poem. The speaker positions citizens as “guardians,” while recognition of their rights appears to be withheld. Within this poetic context, the house, typically associated with intimacy and protection, is reconfigured as a site marked by denial and exclusion. This shift highlights a disjunction between democratic ideals of popular sovereignty and the power relations implied in the poem’s imagery.

The spatial critique becomes more layered in “Application Finger,” which introduces digital control as part of the poem’s political imagination. The line “Human life is in the grip of the application finger” (p. 53) portrays technological mediation as a significant force shaping urban experience. Rather than claiming that digital systems universally regulate citizens, the poem appears to dramatize anxieties about algorithmic influence over behavior and perception. In this reading, the city emerges as both a material environment and a mediated digital space, reflecting the poem’s concern with evolving forms of power.

Taken together, the four poems form a collage of urban fragmentation, depicting demonstrations suppressed by media, political billboards turned into satire, homes stripped of meaning, and daily life mediated by digital algorithms. These images reveal the city as a fractured space, where political representation is absurd, contradictory, and shaped more by images and technology than by genuine civic engagement. Kusfitria Marstiyasih’s use of fragmentation transforms poetry into an archive of cultural resistance, exposing cracks in public space that dominant ideologies attempt to conceal. The section on urban space, political symbols, and mediation in 38 emphasizes that the city is no longer experienced as a unified whole but as a site of conflicting signs and contested meanings. This poetic strategy aligns with broader trends in contemporary urban poetry, which portray the city as a zone of tension between power, technology, and everyday life (Çakar, 2025; Hawkins, 2022; Picó-Gutiérrez et al., 2025). Scholars have shown that poetic fragmentation reflects the psychological and social disorientation produced by urban environments, where consumerism, surveillance, and propaganda disrupt collective identity and individual agency (Çakar, 2025; Picó-Gutiérrez et al., 2025; Hawkins, 2022).

CONCLUSION

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Kusfitria Marstyasih's poetry collection 38 affirms the enduring role of poetry as a medium for socio-political critique in post-reformasi Indonesia. Through subtle, ironic, and contemplative language, the poems address themes of power, bureaucracy, the female body, and historical erasure without resorting to overt agitation. Instead, they present resistance through a lyrical and reflective form that blends aesthetic restraint with critical depth. The analysis highlights four focal points: the representation of state violence and trauma through critical realism; the subversion of bureaucratic and state symbols; the portrayal of the female body as a political site echoing Spivak's subaltern framework; and the positioning of poetry as a collective cultural act and counter-discourse. Using literary sociology, hermeneutics, and Scott's (1990) concept of public and hidden transcripts, the study shows that 38 functions not only as a poetic expression but also as a cultural archive and symbolic resistance to dominant ideology. As such, the collection illustrates poetry's capacity to reflect, preserve, and challenge Indonesia's socio-political realities through layered, evolving, and dialogic forms.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Setia Naka Andrian designed the research, collected the primary data, and drafted the manuscript. **Turahmat** assisted in collecting secondary data, conducted the data analysis, and reviewed and edited the article.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude to the institutions and individuals who have supported the completion and publication of this article.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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