



Reading the Rewriting of National History Through Slavoj Žižek's Approach

Ismail,^{1*} Michael Silvester Mitchel Vinco¹

¹Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia

*hafsahbudi123@gmail.com

Received: 04-02-2026; Revised: 11-04-2026; Accepted: 13-04-2026; Published: 30-04-2026

Abstract: This study examines the reasons behind the omission of the history of sexual violence against Chinese women during the May 1998 Tragedy from Indonesian historiography. The study aims to trace how state ideology operates to exclude women's bodily experiences from the official narrative. By employing Slavoj Žižek's concepts of "the real" and "disavowal," this study analyzes the absence of this issue in textbooks, educational policies, and public discourse. The research employs qualitative methods, specifically critical discourse analysis and a literature review of reports from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), Human Rights Watch, and academic studies. The findings reveal that Indonesian historiography is not neutral but shaped by nationalist fantasies that obscure collective wounds. The erasure of sexual violence is not merely an oversight but a political strategy to maintain the state's image of stability. Therefore, historical writing that acknowledges victims is a crucial step toward narrative justice and social reconciliation.

Keywords: Chinese ethnic; disavowal; ideological fantasy; sexual violence

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji alasan di balik penghilangan sejarah kekerasan seksual terhadap perempuan Tionghoa selama Tragedi Mei 1998 dari historiografi Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelusuri bagaimana ideologi negara bekerja untuk mengesampingkan pengalaman tubuh perempuan dari narasi resmi. Dengan menggunakan konsep "the real" dan "disavowal" dari Slavoj Žižek, penelitian ini menganalisis ketidakhadiran isu ini dalam buku teks, kebijakan pendidikan, dan wacana publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, khususnya analisis wacana kritis dan tinjauan literatur atas laporan dari Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan (Komnas Perempuan), Human Rights Watch, serta studi akademis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa historiografi Indonesia tidak netral, melainkan dibentuk oleh fantasi nasionalis yang menyamarkan luka kolektif. Penghapusan kekerasan seksual bukan sekadar kelalaian, melainkan strategi politik untuk mempertahankan citra stabilitas negara. Oleh karena itu, penulisan sejarah yang mengakui korban merupakan langkah krusial menuju keadilan naratif dan rekonsiliasi sosial.

Kata Kunci: etnis Tionghoa; fantasi ideologi; kekerasan seksual; pengingkaran



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Introduction

The rewriting of Indonesia's national history has once again come under intense public scrutiny. This stems from remarks made by Fadli Zon during a podcast with senior journalist Uni Lubis. He claimed that the rape of ethnic Chinese women in May 1998 was a "myth" lacking factual evidence (Fauziyyah, 2025). This statement immediately drew a wave of criticism from human rights activists, academics, and communities of victims and survivors.

These groups view the claim as a form of state denial. This can be characterized as denial because sexual violence is part of a collective historical wound that has not yet been officially acknowledged by the state.

Fadli Zon's statement is not merely a controversy but reflects a fundamental issue in the construction of Indonesia's national history. A frequently raised question is: who has the authority to write history? Which version of history is adopted as the nation's official history? Thus, a reflective effort on the part of the nation demands clarity and questions the direction in which history will be rewritten this time. Ariel Heryanto (2018) explains how Indonesians who tend to be nationalistic have "misunderstood" nationalism. The misunderstanding in question is that most Indonesians tend to view nationalism as an "inheritance." In Heryanto's view, however, nationalism is seen as a challenge or a shared project (Heryanto, 2018).

The violence against Chinese women in May 1998 has been extensively documented by national and international organizations, such as the report by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999), Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch 1998b, 1998a), and Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 1999). Komnas Perempuan explicitly noted that sexual violence during the May 1998 riots was not only real but was experienced in a systemic and layered manner by ethnic Chinese women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999). Yet to this day, no perpetrators have been brought to trial, and there has been no official state acknowledgment of this tragedy. Naturally, this lack of acknowledgment has implications for the official historical narrative.

Within the broader framework of Indonesian historiography, this event tends to be excluded from textbooks, state addresses, and educational curricula. The state prefers to shape national history within the framework of a harmonious, controlled "national unity" free from conflicts deemed capable of disrupting national stability. The narrative of nationalism, as it has developed, has shown a tendency to lean toward a form of heroism that glosses over past wrongs. No country is without a dark past. However, it is crucial for a nation to confront that past. Historical errors are a defining factor in the formation of a nation (Heryanto, 2018)

In his book *Identitas dan Kenikmatan* (2018), Ariel Heryanto shares his views on the historical perspective. Many Indonesians suffer from a serious case of historical amnesia. The problem is not a lack of historical knowledge, but rather hyper-nationalism. This means that the nation celebrates its official history through the glorification of nationalism and the romanticization of the past. Consequently, the complex and unpleasant aspects of Indonesia's historical journey are not addressed in the writing of official history books (Heryanto, 2018).

Indonesian national historiography since the *Orde Baru* (New Order Era) has tended to prioritize a singular narrative that is masculine, heroic, and militaristic. This tendency has sidelined attention to the role of women in the nation's history, particularly the bodies of women who have experienced violence. During the New Order era, history was shaped to serve the purposes of morality and a hegemonic nationalist ideology. The absence of women's representation in historical narratives reflects the dominance of power dynamics in historical writing. As a result, individual experiences are obscured by official narratives. Maurice Halbwachs emphasizes that collective memory is shaped within a social context, and historical institutions, such as museums or military archives, often serve as the institutionalization of official memory, reinforcing the dominance of specific narratives (McGregor, 2007).

In this context, this study draws on Slavoj Žižek's theory of ideology, starting with the premise that society or an individual is actually aware of what they are doing (Žižek, 1989). Nevertheless, society or an individual continues to act in this way regardless of whether it is good or bad. Žižek views this as a process that emphasizes illusion or false consciousness. In every ideological act, society or an individual acts unconsciously and continues to do so. For

example, saluting the flag is done automatically without considering the conscious process or the reasons behind the salute. Thus, ideological fantasy constructs false consciousness in two stages: first, by blocking curiosity from discovering the primary consciousness or truth; second, by creating a false consciousness that appears to be the truth (Žižek, 1989).

In the context of what Fadli Zon has stated, this can be linked to the analysis of ideological fantasy offered by Žižek. Ideological fantasy employs methods to perpetuate false truths so that they are accepted by society. Those in power can utilize ideological fantasy in historiography to promote national unity (nationalism). This means that nationalism or patriotism is constructed based on highly selective facts for the sake of illusion. The sexual violence of May 1998 was a “rumor” according to the official version. The historiography constructed by Fadli Zon constitutes an ideological fantasy because it has suppressed the primary truth. Thus, the intended narrative of nationalism is built upon an illusion.

This concept is complemented by Michel-Rolph Trouillot's perspective on “silencing the past,” namely, how power determines what is worthy of remembrance and what is to be forgotten. Power plays a significant role in constructing narratives of the past through the filtering of facts and sources (Trouillot, 1995). Additionally, Hayden White's ideas are employed to deconstruct narrative constructions in historiography. This is emphasized as a rhetorical and ideological form rather than merely the presentation of facts (White, 1973). In the context of the May 1998 sexual violence, the national historical narrative not only failed to provide symbolic justice for the victims but actually reinforced the patriarchal power structure

Several previous studies have highlighted this issue. For example, McGregor discusses how history has sidelined narratives of state violence in order to legitimize development (McGregor, 2007). Blackburn points out the marginalization of women's history in history education in Indonesia (Blackburn, 2004). Wieringa specifically examines the “politics of the body” in state narratives that position women's bodies, such as those of the Gerwani, the mural depictions at *Lubang Buaya*, and sexual regulations for civil servants, as symbols that must be controlled for the sake of national moral stability (Wieringa, 2003a). However, this paper offers a novel perspective by combining historiographical criticism, Žižek's ideological approach, and the contemporary context following Fadli Zon's statement. This effort demonstrates that the erasure of women's history is not merely a form of injustice but also an ideological strategy to maintain a sterile and ahistorical nationalist fantasy.

By reexamining the construction of national history, this paper seeks to open up new discursive spaces. The aim is to reinterpret history not as a rigid archive, but as an arena of contestation over meaning, memory, and representation. A history that fails to make space for women's pain and trauma is ethically and politically flawed. Within this framework, the key questions to be analyzed in the discussion section are: First, how do ideological mechanisms operate in the formation of Indonesia's national historical narrative? Second, why is the history of sexual violence against Chinese women in May 1998 not accommodated in official history? And third, how does the state's symbolic strategy erase women's experiences from the nation's collective memory through history, framed as an ideological project?

Research Methods

This paper employs a qualitative research method. Creswell (2008) defines qualitative methods as an approach or inquiry designed to explore and understand a central phenomenon, involving data in the form of words or text (Raco, 2010). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative research consists of key elements: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Strauss, 2013). Data collection is generally conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. However, this study does not use

observation or interview techniques because the data sources are literature or scholarly texts. Data collection was conducted solely through documentation. The documents include official reports (Amnesty International 1999; Human Rights Watch 1998a, 1998b; Komnas Perempuan 1999, 2002), mass media articles (Hendrastiti & Irianto, 2025; Ilaa, 2021; Subono et al., 2025; Putri, 2024a), academic publications (Heryanto, 2018; Roosa, 2008), history books (Nordholt et al., 2008; Utama, 2024), and history textbooks (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2017), including historiographical works and critical analyses by McGregor (2007), Blackburn (2004), Wieringa (2003), as well as ideological critiques by Žižek (1989). The selection of sources was conducted purposefully, taking into account the relevance, credibility, and depth of information regarding the focus of the study.

The data reduction phase involves selecting, focusing, and organizing the information obtained in accordance with the boundaries of the established theories, namely Žižek's critical ideology analysis (Žižek, 1989), Silencing the past (Trouillot, 1995), and rhetorical and ideological historiography (White, 1973). At this stage, irrelevant data is set aside, while data related to issues of ideology, power, and the representation of women is retained for further analysis. Data is presented in the form of systematic analytical descriptions to reveal the patterns of discourse emerging across various sources. The analysis was conducted by considering the selected theories and prior research. For example, McGregor (2007) discusses how the New Order's official history sidelined narratives of state violence to legitimize development (McGregor, 2007). Blackburn (2004) highlights the marginalization of women's history in history education in Indonesia (Blackburn, 2004). Wieringa (2003) specifically examines "body politics" within state narratives (Wieringa, 2003b, 2003a).

Conclusions were drawn through a process of data interpretation by linking the findings to the theoretical framework used and the results of previous research. To ensure the validity of the data, cross-checking was performed using source triangulation, which involves comparing various documents to identify consistency, differences, and trends in the construction of the historical narratives under analysis. Thus, this study aims to provide a deep understanding of how historical discourse is shaped, selected, and interpreted within the context of power and ideology. This research was conducted in November 2025. This study examines Fadlizon's controversial claim that violence against women in 1998 was merely a rumor or never actually occurred (Fauziyyah, 2025).

Research Result

State Ideology in the Narrative of Indonesian National History

Within Slavoj Žižek's paradigm, ideology does not conceal the truth. Rather, ideology appears as a symbolic representation that is regarded as natural and beyond question. In his book "The Sublime Object of Ideology" (1989), Žižek emphasizes that the power of ideology is most alive precisely when people feel they have been liberated from it. People accept the dominant narrative as a neutral and objective truth (Žižek, 1989). This concept suggests that ideology operates unconsciously, subtly, and systematically.

In the context of Indonesian politics from the early years of independence through the New Order era, the construction of national history was closely tied to the state's ideological agenda. In the early years of independence, Indonesia was still "a nation without a history" (Nordholt et al., 2008). The intentions of the 1957 Constituent Assembly were thwarted by the rulers of the time, who extolled the grandeur of the Majapahit Kingdom. The Majapahit Kingdom was deemed significant as the foundation of Indonesia's independence. However, this drew opposition from intellectuals outside Java, who rejected it as potentially reinforcing Javanese centralization. Meanwhile, the New Order's version of history successfully

militarized historiography. The writing of history silenced the voices of those deemed disruptive and threatening to the ruling military government (Nordholt, Purwanto & Saptari, 2008).

This mechanism aligns with Althusser's (1971) conceptualization, in which the state is divided into repressive and ideological apparatuses that operate through the manipulation of power, values, and beliefs (Aminah, 2024). During the New Order, the state presented itself by developing powerful rhetoric and persuasive force (Vincekrs, Bourdieu, and Passeron) that succeeded in imposing meaning and adding symbolic weight to the power underlying it (Heryanto, 2018). This is also primarily done to build the nation's collective identity. Following the Reformation, the national narrative has continued to uphold the spirit of ideological dominance. This narrative has not changed significantly because most historians from the New Order era were still tasked with writing post-New Order history (Nordholt et al., 2008). The national consensus on "Indonesian unity" is maintained through various symbolic vehicles such as state archives, educational curricula, official speeches, museums, and monuments. Yet behind this rhetoric lies a systematic tendency to marginalize historical experiences related to structural violence, particularly those tied to ethnic, gender, and political trauma.

In this regard, such ideological operations are closely linked to hyper-nationalism and severe historical amnesia (Heryanto, 2018). The narrative constructed is a singular narrative. This narrative views Indonesia as an "inheritance" rather than a challenge or a shared project. Consequently, it invites fierce contention over who holds the right to that inheritance (Anderson 1999, cited in Heryanto, 2018). On the other hand, as Ariel Heryanto further explains, education in Indonesia during the New Order era exacerbated this situation. He notes that education tended to employ "absolute logic" and "natural bonds," while erasing the complex and uncomfortable aspects of the nation's history from official history textbooks. The New Order was actively engaged in attempting to erase or distort collective memory regarding violence, particularly the events of 1965–66. This can be observed through book bans, censorship, and indoctrination via the education system (Subono et al., 2025).

In Žižek's terminology, the development of Indonesia's national history constitutes a form of ideological fantasy. The concept of fetishism from a Marxist perspective, as discussed by Žižek, helps elucidate this mechanism (Žižek, 1989). Fetishism is an obsession with an object that supplants relational truth; similarly, ideology replaces historical reality with symbolic illusion. This is what is termed a fantasy. Such fantasies also occur within ideology. Ideological ideas, as embodied in Indonesia's national history, are deviations from the truth. This is especially true when various narratives of truth are silenced and concealed. In this context, the role of women or sexual violence against women's bodies in history is distorted.

During the New Order era, this national historical narrative was reinforced by the idea of stability and the uniformity of ideal values, as well as the promotion of Suharto's image as the "Just Ruler," who was regarded as Indonesia's savior from the communist threat (Pertiwi, 2024). Fundamentally, this constructed national historical narrative is a conjectural account of a coherent history pieced together from scattered fragments (Sarah Lincoln, quoting Walter Benjamin, cited in Heryanto, 2018).

In this context, the role of women, or sexual violence against women's bodies, in history has been distorted. Consequently, it cannot be interpreted within a coherent narrative of the past that serves to obscure the nation's failures and social wounds. This fantasy dictates how society must remember history while concealing the dimension of reality (the Real). The Real is the totality of what actually occurred. Tragedies such as the 1965 massacres or sexual violence against ethnic Chinese women during the May 1998 riots serve as the real. The reality of these events is undeniable, yet they are repressed from official discourse and erased to conceal the

nation's social wounds. Meanwhile, according to data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999), there were 85 reported cases of sexual violence against ethnic Chinese women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999).

One contemporary example of this ideological mechanism is evident in Fadli Zon's statement during a podcast with Uni Lubis, which sparked public debate. According to Fadli Zon: "Sexual violence against the Chinese ethnic group in 1998 is a rumor... It's not written in the national history books.... This rewriting of history aims to unite the nation (nationalism)." (IDN Times, 2025). This opinion does not stand alone but is an articulation of the formula of fetishistic disavowal. This formula, as intended by Žižek: "I know very well, but still... to the current exemplifications of this formula ('I know that Mother has not got a phallus, but still...'; 'I know that Jews are people like us, but still...') we must undoubtedly add also the variant of money: 'I know that money is a material object like others, but still... [it is as if it were made of a special substance over which time has no power]." (Žižek, 1989).

In this formula, we can see that the subject, at the level of consciousness, is aware of reality. Yet, in social practice, they continue to act as if that reality does not apply. Within this framework, Fadli Zon engages in what is termed a form of Disavowal to uphold an ideological fantasy rooted in nationalism within a historiography characterized by fetishistic illusion. Continuing this logic, the state acknowledges that violence occurred but conceals it within the symbolic narrative of national history. Meanwhile, B.J. Habibie had officially condemned acts of violence and sexual harassment against women, particularly those targeting the Chinese ethnic group. Habibie's concern regarding such violence stemmed from the fear that it could tarnish the nation's reputation (AP Archive, 2015)

Larasati's research shows that since the New Order era, women's bodies have been repressed through cultural representations. In this context, women are merely symbols rather than subjects of history (Larasati, 2013). This finding aligns with Michel-Raphaël Trouillot's concept of "structural silence," which describes how official history erases certain groups for the sake of power (Trouillot, 1995). The actors of history can simultaneously become the narrators of their own footsteps. Michel-Raphael Trouillot asserts that professional historians themselves do not construct the narrative framework to place their stories. Rather, they tend to be others who have already taken the stage first and set the stage (Roosa, 2008).

Furthermore, the state's ideological mechanism operates through interpassivity. In this way, the state claims to "feel" the victims' trauma through institutions such as the National Commission on Violence Against Women or the Ministry of Education, so that the public does not have to confront the reality of violence directly. According to Žižek, the concept of interpassivity explains the delegation of emotions or experiences to other institutions (Žižek, 1997). However, the state continues to ignore the TGPF report on the 1998 sexual violence (Komnas Perempuan, 1999)

Educational narratives also play a significant role. The national history curriculum overlooks the sexual violence incidents of 1998. In her study of the politics of education, Blackburn demonstrates that from the colonial era through the New Order, Indonesian education has been rife with gender bias that limits the representation of women (Blackburn, 2004). Post-reform, this has not entirely ceased. In a study by Utama, it is noted that contemporary history textbooks and curricula still reproduce selective narratives by ignoring women's experiences (Utama, 2024). Even the latest Merdeka Curriculum merely refers to May 1998 as a "political and economic crisis" without mentioning the dimension of sexual violence (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2017). This can be seen as a form of active rejection of formal or symbolic representation. Such efforts constitute a strategy of the power structure for erasure through total neglect.

The emphasis on ideological fantasy, disavowal, and the Real in historical writing reveals how women's roles continue to be marginalized by the state. National holidays still highlight male and military figures, while victims and marginalized groups are entirely absent, demonstrating that the state remains the primary subject of history, whereas the people are merely objects expected to celebrate without engaging in critical reflection.

The Erasure of the History of Sexual Violence Against Ethnic Chinese Women in 1998 in the Official Narrative

The history of Indonesia, specifically the May 1998 Tragedy, represents a turning point in the country's political history. The collapse of the New Order regime opened up space for discussions regarding democratic transition and information transparency (Dewi, 2024). However, behind the euphoria of reform lies a traumatic reality systematically perpetrated by the state: sexual violence against ethnic Chinese women. The National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999) has documented this violence in detail (Komnas Perempuan, 1998), and a Human Rights Watch report further corroborates these findings (Human Rights Watch, 1998c, 1998a). Nevertheless, the official narrative of national history has excluded it from the public sphere of representation.

Within Slavoj Žižek's theoretical framework, this erasure is not merely negligence or ignorance, but an active expression of ideological repression. Examples can be found during the Japanese colonial period and the post-G30S massacres, when the exploitation of women (*Jugun Ianfu*) and Gerwani women was erased from the national narrative through mechanisms that excluded the dimension of the Real. This pattern was repeated in the case of sexual violence against Chinese women in 1998. This erasure is supported by the historical context of the New Order's policies toward the Chinese ethnic group. The policies enacted placed the Chinese ethnic group in a vulnerable position: their economic investments were needed and welcomed, yet their voices or justice in national politics were completely disregarded. This created a situation where issues involving the Chinese ethnic group could easily be ignored or forgotten (Heryanto, 2018).

In this regard, Žižek asserts that the core of ideology does not lie in ignorance, but in the illusion of fetishism. There is a pattern of denial that reveals an ideological mechanism designed to eliminate aspects of the Real that disrupt the state's ideological fantasy, as Žižek emphasizes when explaining the concept of the illusion of fetishism (Žižek, 1989). He analogizes this through the fetishism of money: individuals know that money is merely a representation of social relations, yet act as though money possesses its own substantial power. Following the same logic, the state "knows" of the sexual violence against Chinese women in May 1998, yet acts as though it never occurred.

According to Ariel Heryanto, Chinese women became double victims. This means they are viewed as a homogeneous group defined by race and rigid cultural norms (Heryanto, 2018), and as oppressed women. On the other hand, women's issues in patriarchal societies like Indonesia have been sidelined and rejected in public discourse (Arivia, 2006). Even violence against women is rooted in power imbalances and the stigma of women's inferiority, a phenomenon deeply entrenched in social and cultural structures, norms, and values (Utaminingsih, 2023). It is at this point that, in "The Plague of Fantasies, Žižek explains that fetishism serves to obscure a disturbing reality, namely the Real (Žižek, 1997). This distortion of the Real is evident in national historiography.

In this context, Honnet's perspective in his book *Disrespect* (2007), as cited by Siti Aminah, holds that injustice is rooted in "misrecognition" (failure to acknowledge). Neglect, denial, and non-recognition constitute a rejection of social inclusion and an insult or degradation

of the dignity experienced by the victim or an injury to a person's integrity (Aminah, 2024). As noted by Zurbuchen (2005), as conveyed by Ariel Heryanto, injustice is exacerbated by trauma from (sexual) violence and causes victims of human rights violations to suffer and be reluctant to recount such experiences of mistreatment. This, in turn, provides the state with an additional justification for failing to address such incidents (Heryanto, 2018).

Still in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek asserts that ideology is not merely an illusion that obscures individual knowledge, but an additional mechanism embedded within social reality. Individuals know the true conditions, yet they act as if they do not: "They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know" (Žižek, 1989). This illustrates how the state's official narrative produces social activities that appear rational, yet in reality follow the structure of ideological fantasy. In the Indonesian context, the narrative of democratic transition is used to cover up sexual violence against Chinese women. On a symbolic level, the state manages social reality through symbols of nationalism, stability, and reformist rhetoric. This allows ideology to develop not through blatant lies, but through symbolic mechanisms accepted by the public. Žižek asserts that within the symbolic realm, individuals take pleasure in their ignorance, a condition that makes the aspect of the Real difficult to restore (Žižek, 2008). At this stage, the state's ideological fantasy provides a distinct form of enjoyment for society, enabling it to reject the reality of such violence (Žižek, 2008).

The disregard for the Real is also evident in how the state produces heroic and nationalistic historiography. Dominant narratives about heroes, the military, and national stability form an ideological fantasy that hypnotizes society into feeling comfortable with its ignorance. Consequently, sexual violence against Chinese women during the May 1998 riots is increasingly marginalized. The process of disavowal occurs when society becomes aware of the violence but acts as if it does not know. This is reinforced in educational policies, as McGregor demonstrates, where the state actively removes the dimension of state violence from the history curriculum to maintain ideological legitimacy (McGregor, 2007).

Empirical evidence of disavowal can be seen in the National Commission on Violence Against Women's (Komnas Perempuan) report, which documented at least 85 cases of sexual violence against Chinese women (Komnas Perempuan, 1999). However, to this day, not a single perpetrator has been fully prosecuted, and there are no state policies to incorporate victims' memories into the public narrative. Narratives of denial are also evident in political statements such as those by Fadli Zon, who referred to the 1998 sexual violence as a "myth"—a form of state-sponsored denial. Conversely, this logic is also explained by Ariel Heryanto: during the New Order era, populist elements were discarded, and a new framework was elevated after the regime's military elements, such as uniforms, official ceremonies, combat-ready masculinity, and fear of anything foreign, were disciplined. And this functioned effectively under direct government control, or what is termed government sponsorship (Heryanto, 2018).

From Joan W. Scott's perspective, historiography is not merely the reproduction of dominant narratives, but a critical practice that documents neglected experiences and challenges hegemonic constructions (Scott, 1991). The bodies of Chinese women who were raped became erased historical wounds, as they were deemed to undermine the state's image of stability. Judith Butler emphasizes that vulnerability and grief are political dimensions that expose structural injustices in society (Butler, 2004). Nichterlein asserts that the writing of Indonesian history is dominated by a patriarchal perspective, where heroic narratives focus on men and disregard women's experiences (Nichterlein, 1974). The National Commission on Violence Against Women's report also indicates that sexual violence during the riots was triggered by systemic intersectional racism (Komnas Perempuan, 1999). In this context, Žižek's framework can be understood as the libidinal economy of ideology, that is, how the state regulates public

desire and creates enforced ignorance. Ideology operates not only in the realm of representation but also in the fantasies and desires that underpin society's symbolic structure (Žižek, 1989). This aligns with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's notion that the state creates a "structural silence" that excludes certain groups from historical narratives (Trouillot, 1995).

According to Althusser (1971), the erasure of victims is the work of the State Ideological Apparatus. This apparatus regulates how knowledge, memory, and history are shaped. Schools, the media, state archives, and the curriculum serve as tools for producing nationalist fantasies. Consequently, the history of sexual violence has never had a place within state-controlled institutional structures (Aminah, 2024). The consequences of this ideological repression are profound: historical erasure, the closure of avenues for social healing, and the loss of restorative justice for victims. The Real is completely disregarded in favor of the state's ideological fantasy. Therefore, the honest writing of national history is an act of resistance against the dominant symbolic order. History must not be written merely to preserve the nation's image, but must make space for those who have been marginalized. In this regard, the bodies of Chinese women shattered in the mass violence of 1998 must be restored to the national memory.

Ideological Fantasies and the Repression of Bodies in Indonesian National Historiography

In the context of post-Reformasi national historiography, the traumatic events of sexual violence in May 1998 continue to be overlooked. This neglect is not merely factual but is also reframed through symbolic narratives. These symbols are those that overlook the state's wrongdoing and violence through the construction of national idealism. This is found within the contexts of democracy, social justice, and prosperity. However, the Other (the authorities), sought and fought for, is ultimately found to be merely symbolic. Ideological fantasy functions as a strategic instrument to conceal the truth or manipulate people so that they not only remain ignorant, but also pretend to be ignorant (Salam, 2020). This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of ideological fantasy in the thought of Slavoj Žižek, where history is produced not as a reflection that allows society to engage with reality, but rather as an ideological construct. Ideological fantasy is a tactic used to manipulate the subject's knowledge of the Real. This is also described by Žižek as a cynical consciousness (Žižek, 1989).

This ideological fantasy operates extensively through the reshaping of women's images that do not align with the state's stability agenda. According to Wieringa, for instance, the narrative of the New Order radically shifts and erases women's participation and contributions within the spectrum of nationalist movements. This constitutes a strategy that can be explained as an effort to create a deliberate historical void within national memory. In the Indonesian context, history is often written from the perspectives of the state, mainstream academics, and movement elites. Consequently, the voices of grassroots women as active historical subjects are frequently overlooked (Hendrastiti & Irianto, 2025).

For example, the Gerwani organization, which had revolutionary ideals, was sidelined and portrayed as immoral women who defied the will of fate. This propaganda was created by the New Order regime, which depicted Gerwani members during the G30S incident as engaging in acts of torture and lewd dancing. These details are depicted on the *Monumen Pancasila Sakti*. Conversely, the state established rival organizations like the PPK, which promoted devotion and service to husbands and dedication to household affairs, emphasizing the values of obedience and minimal resistance, in line with the agenda of maintaining power stability. This construction simultaneously reinforces the depoliticization of women (Pertiwi, 2024). This is consistent with Simone de Beauvoir's view that the representation of the world is always narrated from a male perspective, creating standards and "gender roles" that force women into

the roles of mother, wife, and respectable woman—characterized by weakness, gentleness, and fragility (Ilaa, 2021)

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek explains that ideological fantasies serve to mask unresolved social antagonisms. These fantasies do not merely conceal reality, but provide a symbolic framework of illusion so that society can go about its life without confronting the Real. The Real, in this context, refers to a dimension of reality that the state deems too disruptive (Žižek, 1989). This can be seen, for example, in sexual violence during riots. Thus, national historiography functions not only as a historical record but also as the construction of a collective fantasy that reinforces the nation's symbolic stability. This is further underscored by the view that knowledge is neither neutral nor objective but is always tied to desired social, political, and historical contexts. According to Haraway (1988), the concept of objectivity is heavily influenced by a dominant, often patriarchal, lens (Putri, 2024b)

Sexual violence against Chinese women during the 1998 riots was part of the Real. This violence served as material evidence of state failure, the breakdown of social order, and the emergence of deep-rooted racial hatred and misogyny. The hatred displayed during those riots reflected the value systems or norms within the nation-state. It is precisely these values that gave rise to sexual violence against Chinese women. In the context of sexual violence, the body is not merely a victim but a political site that disrupts national harmony. Referring to Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain*, a body experiencing suffering possesses subversive power because it presents “a truth that cannot be reduced to a symbol” (Scarry, 1985). A body subjected to sexual violence reveals the corruption of state politics that divides society. Thus, the victim's body becomes an object that must be repressed within the historical narrative to preserve the fantasy of a unified nation (Scarry, 1985)

Within the framework of historiography, repression against the body occurs through three mechanisms: (1) physical repression through direct violence, (2) narrative repression through erasure from official historical records, and (3) ideological repression through symbolic fantasies of a peaceful, stable, and moral nation (Scarry, 1985). All three can be interpreted as state ideological fantasies in the context of the 1998 sexual violence. Physical repression is evident in the incidents of rape. Narrative repression is clearly visible in official historical records that exclude past facts. Meanwhile, ideological repression manifests through symbolic fantasies that erase the facts of sexual violence and replace them with constructions such as “horizontal conflict.”

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has pointed out, the exercise of power over historical narratives means that history is never simply what it is; narratives always pass through a “cycle of silence” that operates across four stages: the creation of facts (sources), the organization of facts (archives), the selection of facts (narratives), and retrospective significance (the final making of history) (Trouillot, 1995). Through this process, the state can create a description of reality that directs society toward a specific narrative. Within this silence, power always determines what is worthy of remembrance and what must be erased from collective memory.

The absence of narratives of sexual violence in official history textbooks signifies the state's repressive efforts to eliminate the Real, thereby allowing, within Slavoj Žižek's paradigm, the maintenance of ideological fantasy (Žižek, 1989). Consequently, the construction of historiographical narratives not only produces a skewed collective memory but also reinforces the *jouissance* derived from misrecognition. This is a pleasure that arises from ignorance, when the subject derives pleasure from falsehoods or misunderstandings accepted as truth (Žižek, 1989). In this context, society “enjoys” the fantasy of national stability without having to confront the actual collective trauma. Society feels at peace with its ignorance of the state's wrongdoings and violence.

The reenactment of fantasies about sexual violence against Chinese women in 1998 also took place through symbols of heroism. The state constructed the figure of the “reformation hero” without including women who were victims of sexual violence. This tendency is clarified by Elizabeth Grosz through the theory of “corporeal feminism,” which views the body as an entity possessing its own experiences and history, not merely a senseless biological object (Grosz, 1994). The body of a war victim is a body torn apart by conflict, and the body of a woman victim of the 1998 sexual violence is a body that cries out due to state failure, ethnic suspicion, and systematic erasure. Violence against women’s bodies has never been granted a historical position; these bodies exist merely as a neglected surface in the history of Indonesia, which has been written to uphold ideological norms (Grosz, 1994). The presence of disavowal can be seen as part of ideological jouissance. The state and society “revel” in the illusion that the nation has moved past its dark past and now lives in democratic order. Yet Fadli Zon’s statement shows that the state still refuses to confront this trauma seriously. The state silences the voices of the victims of the 1998 sexual violence. This disavowal is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an ideological strategy to maintain a fragile symbolic status quo.

As a result of the state’s suppression of sexual violence against Chinese women in 1998, national historiography has become deeply detrimental. This denial of the past has led to the emergence of a new generation that is unaware of its nation’s historical wounds. Through the history curriculum, the state has erased sexual violence from the public narrative, causing this generation to live amidst historical distortions. This runs counter to the goals of the democratization of knowledge and historical justice. Knowledge should serve as a medium of liberation for oppressed groups (Freire, 2019). Meanwhile, history should create space for collective memory and acknowledgment of denied trauma, so that justice can be upheld through a process of remembrance that not only records but also reflects (Assmann, 2004). The 1998 sexual violence against Chinese women must be understood as gender-based racial violence that deserves recognition within the narrative of national historiography, not marginalized in order to preserve the nation’s image.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion outlined above, it can be concluded that the erasure of sexual violence against ethnic Chinese women in 1998 was the result of a structured ideological process, not merely negligence or ignorance. This draws on Slavoj Žižek’s theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of ideological fantasy, disavowal, and the Real. The state actively constructs symbolic boundaries by denying (disavowal) the collective trauma, a dimension of reality (the Real), that does not align with the nationalist project (ideological fantasy). Women’s bodies, in this context, are not only excluded from historical narratives but also ideologically repressed as symbols that disrupt the fantasy of unity and stability. The crux of the matter is that the mechanisms of fantasy allow society to enjoy (jouissance) national pride, while unconsciously setting aside what is painful. This is understood as an ideological condition that traps society in the enjoyment of ignorance. It is in this context that critical understanding is needed to reconstruct a national history that should be more ethical and inclusive. Recognition of the sexual violence that occurred during the events of May 1998 and the trauma experienced by women as part of the nation’s collective history is a crucial step toward memory justice. The writing of history must no longer be subject solely to the interests of symbolic stability; rather, it must make space for realities that have long been denied. Furthermore, true reconciliation can occur when history is no longer a tool to suppress the nation, but rather a medium to honestly confront the wounds. Recognition of this sexual violence is not merely narrative justice, but also the most fundamental prerequisite for the

democratization of historical knowledge and justice in the healing of the nation's collective trauma

Reference

- Aminah, S. (2024). *Teori Politik Sosial*. PT Gramedia.
- Amnesty International. (1999). Indonesia: An audit of human rights reform. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/012/1999/en/>. Diakses tanggal 20 Juni 2025.
- AP Archive. (2015, July 22). Indonesia: President Habibie's first speech to parliament. <https://youtu.be/2HO3YDrqW64?si=KiDnHn1TCI9l0gB2>. Diakses tanggal 18 Juni 2025.
- Arivia, G. (2006). *Feminisme: Sebuah Kata Hati*. PT Kompas Media Nusantara.
- Assmann, A. (2004). *Cultural memory and Western civilization: Functions, media, archives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Blackburn, S. (2004). *Women and the state in modern Indonesia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.
- Dewi, N. K. (2024). Reformasi 1998: Transisi dari Orde Baru ke era demokrasi di Indonesia. *Historia Vitae*, 4(2), 78–79.
- Fauziyyah, A. N. (2025, June 13). Fadli Zon sebut pemerkosaan Mei 1998 hanya mitos, aktivis: Kebohongan publik. <https://www.tempo.co/politik/-fadli-zon-sebut-pemerkosaan-massal-1998-hanya-rumor-aktivis-kebohongan-publik-1685974>. Diakses tanggal 16 Juni 2025.
- Freire, P. (2019). *Pendidikan Kaum Tertindas*. Narasi.
- Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Indiana University Press.
- Hendrastiti, T. K., & Irianto, S. (2025). Gerakan Perempuan Tanpa Label: Menemukan Feminis Subaltern di Indonesia Pra-Reformasi. *Jurnal Perempuan*, 30(1), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v30i1.1139>.
- Heryanto, A. (2018). *Identitas dan Kenikmatan*. PT Gramedia.
- Human Rights Watch. (1998a). Indonesia: The Damaging Debate on Rapes of Ethnic Chinese Women. <https://www.hrw.org/report/1998/09/01/indonesia-damaging-debate-rapes-ethnic-chinese-women>. Diakses tanggal 26 Juni 2025.
- Human Rights Watch. (1998c). New Report Says Official Denials of Indonesian Rapes Hinder Investigation. <https://www.hrw.org/news/1998/09/08/new-report-says-official-denials-indonesian-rapes-hinder-investigation>. Diakses tanggal 22 Juni 2025.
- IDN Times. (2025, June 10). Real talk: Debat panas!! Fadli Zon vs Uni Lubis soal revisi buku sejarah. <https://youtu.be/H1gYkKIZjKU?si=xBWrG2yAwP3zC9TR>. Diakses tanggal 18 Juni 2025.
- Ilaa, D. T. (2021). Feminisme dan kebebasan perempuan Indonesia dalam filosofi. *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia*, 4(3), 211–216. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v4i3.31115>.
- Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia. (2017). *Sejarah Indonesia: SMA/MA/SMK/MAK kelas XII*. Kemdikbud.

- Komnas Perempuan. (1999). *Seri dokumen kunci: Temuan tim gabungan pencari fakta peristiwa kerusuhan Mei 1998*. Komnas Perempuan.
- Komnas Perempuan. (2002). *Saat Meneguhkan Rasa Aman: Langkah Maju Pemenuhan Hak Perempuan Korban Kekerasan Seksual dalam Kerusuhan Mei 1998*. Komnas Perempuan.
- Larasati, R. D. (2013). *The Dance That Makes You Vanish: Cultural Reconstruction in Post-Genocide Indonesia*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McGregor, K. E. (2007). *History in uniform: Military ideology and the construction of Indonesia's past*. NUS Press.
- Nichterlein, S. (1974). Historicism and Historiography in Indonesia. *History and Theory*, 13(3), 253. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504779>.
- Nordholt, H. S., Purwanto, B., & Saptari, R. (2008). *Perspektif baru penulisan ulang sejarah*. Yayasan Obor.
- Pertiwi, D. K. (2024). *Mengenal Orde Baru*. Buku Mojok Group.
- Putri, R. D. D. G. S. (2024a). Kebutuhan Kerja Kolektif dalam Menangani Kasus Kekerasan Seksual di Universitas Indonesia. *Jurnal Perempuan*, 29(1), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v29i1.974>
- Putri, R. D. D. G. S. (2024b). Kebutuhan Kerja Kolektif dalam Menangani Kasus Kekerasan Seksual di Universitas Indonesia. *Jurnal Perempuan*, 29(1), 75–87. <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v29i1.974>
- Raco, J. (2010). *Metode penelitian kualitatif: jenis, karakteristik dan keunggulannya*. PT Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/mfzuj>
- Roosa, J. (2008). *Dalih pembunuhan massal: Gerakan 30 September dan kudeta Soeharto*. Hasta Mitra.
- Salam, A. (2020). Discursive Construction of Subject and Ideological Fantasy in Postcolonial Indonesia. *Jurnal Humaniora*, 32(1), 68. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.50562>
- Scarry, E. (1985). *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford University Press.
- Scott, J. W. (1991). The Evidence of Experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17(4), 773–797. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448612>.
- Strauss Anselm, & Corbin, J. (2009). *Dasar-dasar Penelitian Kualitatif*. Pustaka Belajar.
- Subono, N. I., Arivia, G., Wiguna, F. A., & Saragih, G. S. (2025). Melawan Kekerasan Negara: Peran LSM Perempuan Daerah pada Masa Orde Baru. *Jurnal Perempuan*, 30(1), 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v30i1.1163>
- Trouillot, M. R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Beacon Press.
- Utama, T. R. (2024). Narasi sejarah yang tidak setara: Mengurangi bias gender dalam buku teks sejarah Indonesia. *Historiography: Journal of Indonesian History and Education*, 4(4), 442–456. <https://journal2.um.ac.id/index.php/JDS/article/view/54823>.
- Utaminingsih, A. (2023). *Kajian Gender: Berperspektif Budaya Patriarki*. UB Press.

White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wieringa, S. (2003a). *Sexual politics in Indonesia*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Wieringa, S. (2003b). The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia: Sexual Politics and Nationalism. *Journal of Women's History*, 15(1), 70–91.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0039>.

Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. Verso.

Žižek, S. (1997). *The plague of fantasies*. Verso.

Žižek, S. (2008). *For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor*. Verso.