



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Phallic minarets and masculine subjectivity in Ahmad Fuadi's *Negeri 5 Menara*: Daniélouian lingga and Lacanian phallocentrism perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how patriarchal ideology operates in *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009). Minaret imagery and other vertical architectures are read as phallic signs that organize male aspiration, religious discipline, and class mobility. Using qualitative textual analysis, this study reads Ahmad Fuadi's oeuvre through Daniélou's concept of lingga as a sacred sign of male creative power and Lacanian ideas of phallus, subject formation, and phallocentrism. This analysis demonstrates that Islam is not represented only as moral guidance or motivational ethics, but also as a symbolic order that authorises male ascent. Alif Fikri and *Sahibul Menara* emerge as legitimate subjects because their dreams, failures, discipline, and achievements are aligned with minaret as a phallic centre. Female figures, including Amak and Alif's sister, remain structurally marginal, confined to domestic affect, sacrifice, or absence. This article shows that, beneath its inspirational rhetoric of "*Man Jadda Wajada*", the Islamic Bildungsroman later adapted for screen quietly reproduces a long-standing pattern in Indonesian prose, where project of "building civilisation" is reserved for masculine aligned with phallus. This research therefore reframes novel as a crucial text for rethinking gendered subjectivity, Islamic education, and class formation in contemporary Indonesian literature.

Keywords: phallic minaret; Daniélouian lingga; Lacanian subjectivity; phallocentrism; pesantren Bildungsroman; gendered education.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: December 11, 2025

Accepted: June 1, 2026

Published: Juli, 15 2026

LICENSE



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INTRODUCTION

Modern Indonesian literature repeatedly imagines education and social mobility as masculine privilege (Lee, 2011; Novianti, 2024; Yulianeta et al., 2016). Hidjo, Samsul Bahri, Minke, Rasus, Soedarsono, and Ikal mark a trajectory in Modern Indonesian Literature history. As male protagonists, they crystallise a sociological pattern in which boys are authorised to leave village, pursue education, and become the primary bearers of national modernity. By contrast, girls remain tied to sacrifice, marriage, or museship (Atikurrahman et al., 2021, 2023; Niekerk, 2011). Such masculinity encodes unequal access to education and public agency (Prianti, 2019; Udasmoro, 2018). Indonesian reality confirms: patriarchal norms, religious expectations, and classed respectability still decide whose schooling merits investment, especially in rural and pesantren contexts (Azahra, 2024; Fitzsimons, 2007; Lumingkewas et al., 2021; Sudarso et al., 2019; Syamsiah & Aisyah, 2025). Ahmad Fuadi's novel appears as another inspirational story of rural boys reaching centre through schooling, yet its ideological investment in masculinity has not been systematically interrogated (Hidayat & Pamungkas, 2024; Marlina, 2013). Thus *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) is crucial: celebrated as motivational Islamic fiction, it has rarely been read as masculine ideology. Only Alif Fikri and *Sahibul Menara* (Fikri's friend) inhabit discipline, mobility, and a vertical horizon no girl may climb (Fuadi, 2009, 2011).

Previous studies on Indonesian literature, gender, and power has examined how texts reshape femininity and masculinity, but education often remains peripheral, or focus shifts to urban middle-class culture and popular media (Prianti, 2019; Udasmoro, 2018). Development and policy studies offer a sharper empirical frame: gender gaps persist in schooling and labour participation, as reflected in Gender Inequality Index (*Indeks Ketimpangan Gender*, IKG), which measures disparities in reproductive health, empowerment, and labour-market access (BPS, 2025; Gaye et al., 2010; Permanyar, 2013). SDGs 5 places gender equality and women's empowerment as core to sustainable development, with education as a basis of citizenship (Bapennas, 2025; Leal Filho et al., 2023; Ramadhan et al., 2024). What is still missing: reading of how Islamic school narratives such as *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) as imaginative sites that naturalise or challenge unequal opportunity.

This research fills a void that there is currently no specific study has yet examined *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) as a literary site where Islamic education, rural mobility, and national aspiration are organised through masculine privilege. This article consists in reframing textual novel beyond its conventional interpretation as a story of motivation,

discipline, and character formation to interrogate gendered ideology that legitimises male access to education, mobility, and modernity while marginalising female peripheral to its central narrative of achievement.

This study focuses on patriarchal ideology and masculine subjectivities embedded in *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) through recurring image of minaret and related vertical architectures. This study also addresses three linked questions: how does this novel mobilises phallic minarets to mediate male creativity, Islamic religiosity, and social mobility?; how are Alif and *Sahibul Menara* constituted as phallic subjects within universe?; and, how are female figures positioned as remainder, lack, or abject, and with what ideological implications for gendered discourses on education and class?

Fuadi's novel centres its spatial imagination and characterisation on what may be called phallic minarets: vertical structures that turn civilisational achievement into a horizon reserved for male subjects. Read through Daniélouian (1995) *lingga* as sacred symbol of male creative power and Lacanian (2020) *phallus* as an empty signifier organising lack, desire, and symbolic order. *Sahibul Menara* signifies more than friendship. It marks a masculine claim to knowledge, travel, and leadership. Women's labour, emotions, and aspirations, recede into background. This article tests and refines that claim to show what is at stake for gendered educational justice in contemporary Indonesian culture. Alain Daniélou (1995) reads phallus, or *lingga*, not as a vulgar sexual emblem but as a sacred sign of cosmic creativity. As vertical form, it marks visible axis through which divine generative power enters human history (Beigi et al., 2022). Erect phallus condenses continuity across levels of manifestation: an image of creator in humankind and a privileged symbol through which worlds are founded, ordered, and sustained (Kis & Ranjitsingh, 2013). Within such a cosmology, vertical forms (pillars, standing stones, and cultic towers) materialise an invisible creative principle that grounds yet exceeds individual bodies. This novel's obsessive investment in minarets and other vertical architectures appears far from innocent.

Minaret of *Pondok Madani* mosque, Monas Jakarta, Big Ben London, Washington Monument, minarets of Masjid al-Haram, and spires of al-Azhar Mosque are not decorative backgrounds for Alif and his friends' educational journey. They script a phallic cartography in which male students alone appear as legitimate bearers of creative agency. Upward learning, transnational mobility, and monumental height translate Daniélou's sacred phallus into a modern Islamic-bourgeois pedagogy of masculine self-making. Women, then, are horizontalised within houses, kitchens, and peripheral villages, outside of power and recognition (Atikurrahman et al., 2023; Harjito, 2021; Izharuddin, 2017). *Negeri 5 Menara*

(2009) constructs a layered regime of phallic signs: minaret as secular-religious *lingga*, *Sahibul Menara* as male covenant, and global towers as civilisational beacons. Its visual field links pesantren courtyard, nation, and global civilisation through towers that privilege ascent, oath, and projection within novel's gendered symbolic order and its wider narrative of recognition. Together, these motifs make feminine, domestic, and horizontal spaces illegible as sites of knowledge, creativity, or historical agency.

Lacanian signification of phallus refers not to an anatomical organ but structural site of absence: signifier of subject's constitutive incompleteness, which both men and women negotiate in language (Rae, 2020; Zohar, 2010). Lacanian phallic shifts phallus from biology to signification, as an empty yet privileged marker that organises lack, desire, and entry into symbolic order. Phallus thus distributes positions of having, being, or lacking rather than merely affirming male anatomy (Beigi et al., 2022; Zohar, 2010). Fawaid's (2021) discussion of "the logic of phallus" in Indonesian women's writing makes a similar point: literary desire often turns around elusive objects that cannot be possessed, exposing masculinity as fragile performance, not stable essence. *Alif* and *Sahibul Menara* are interpellated through Lacanian logic. Their subjectivity forms around a deferred promise of success, global mobility, and spiritual elevation. Minaret and its global doubles become phallic signifiers of absent "something" that gives their lives form, direction, and narrative momentum (Baba & Rice, 1973; Hendrix et al., 2006). Their nightly conversations beneath tower, punctuated by *man jadda wajada*, dramatise subjects orbiting around a signifier of meritocratic salvation they can never master. Fuadi's novel repeatedly places these boys within a phallic order of recognition, where Alif must prove his worth through Arabic, leadership, and discipline. His missteps are narrated as temporary failures to live up to an implicitly phallic ideal of firmness, uprightness, and control. Raja, Said, Dulmajid, Atang, and Baso occupy different roles (comic, pious, strategic) yet share one orientation: embodying minaret's promise. Their subjectivity rests less on interior psychology than on external signifiers: tower, globe, English phrases, admission letters, and photographs before Western monuments. Alignment with these signs grants narrative coherence; failure risks marginality or disappearance.

Lacanian phallocentrism sharpens novel's gendered architecture. If symbolic order is structured like language and organised by phallus, feminist critics define phallocentrism as a regime that codes meaning, authority, and rationality as masculine, while rendering femininity derivative or unspeakable (Butler, 2007; Cossi & Dunker, 2017; Joodaki & Elyasi, 2015; Rae, 2020). The one-sex model and phallic norm show how classical psychoanalysis imagines female body as deficient, placing woman as lack, excess, or abjection before a

universalised masculine standard (Gruman, 2021). In *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) this normative structure is not theorised but quietly naturalised. Novel narrates boys who recite, debate, travel, and imagine institutions as global Muslim subjects, while women appear as mothers, food providers, or honoured figures who cannot be followed. Alif's mother shapes his path through insistence and sacrifice, yet remains immobile in village; her educational desire displaced onto her son's mobility. His sister barely registers as a subject at all, nor as a bearer of tower's promise. Novel's world is phallocentric: language, law, and learning circulate among men under and around minarets, while women remain silent conditions of possibility, not co-authors of civilisation (Mouzelis, 2014). These phallocentric dynamics can be specified at level of recurring narrative patterns. The structure recurs across educational spaces: courtyard, dormitory, debating hall, airport, and universities of global North and Middle East are opened to male bodies. Women, even when intelligent or devout, are confined to kitchens, rural homes, and family backgrounds, echoing Indonesian patterns in which gender inequality persists despite formal progress (Atikurrahman et al., 2023). Female speech is limited to care, prohibition, or blessing; only *Sahibul Menara* articulate civilisation. Novel rehearses a phallic distribution of educational capital, making towers, diplomas, and passports masculine attributes.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design based on close reading and theory-thematic analysis of Fuadi's work (Donà et al., 2020; Watt, 2015). Fuadi's novel is selected its narrative of pesantren discipline, male friendship, rural mobility, and global educational aspiration provides a concentrated literary site for examining gendered organisation of Islamic education and masculine subject formation. The primary data consist of textual novel, including metaphors, spatial descriptions, dialogues, narrative focalisation, character positioning, and silences related to education, mobility, towers, monuments, masculine aspiration, and female marginalisation. Secondary sources on *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009), Indonesian masculinity, Islamic education, Lacanian phallic subjectivity, phallocentrism, and symbolic readings of vertical architecture are used to contextualise the interpretation rather than as primary data.

This analysis is guided by three interrelated concepts: (a) *lingga* as a sacred sign of male creative power (Daniélou, 1995), (b) phallic subjectivity, and (c) phallocentrism as a symbolic order that privileges male presence (Hook, 2006; Kirshner, 2023; Lacan, 2020). Data collection was conducted through repeated reading. First reading mapped narrative

structure, character constellation, and dominant spatial motifs. Subsequent readings identified and annotated passages concerning *Pondok Madani* mosque minaret, minarets of Masjid al-Haram and al-Azhar, Monas Jakarta, Big Ben London, The Skyline of Washington D.C., scenes of Alif and *Sahibul Menara*, statements on discipline and success, and episodes involving mothers, sisters, and female students. These textual units were then organised into three analytic categories: phallic or lingga-like vertical imagery, male educational subjectivity and mobility, and phallocentric exclusion of female figures. Each selected passage was recorded with its narrative context, interpretive note, and theoretical relevance to ensure that analysis remained textually grounded.

The analysis proceeded from recurring images, motifs, and subject positions were identified. Then, these patterns were examined through concept of lingga as a sacred sign of male creative power, phallus as a signifier of desire and symbolic authority, and feminist critiques of phallocentrism. Finally, findings were connected to broader debates on gendered education, pesantren culture, rural-to-centre mobility, and masculine modernity in Indonesian literature. Trustworthiness was maintained through repeated textual checking, consistent use of same analytic categories, comparison with relevant studies, and attention to ambivalent or contradictory moments in textual novel. The procedure allows this study to avoid impressionistic reading and to produce an accountable interpretation of how masculine privilege is naturalised through imagery, plot, and narrative voice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The narrative of *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) is saturated with vertical images that return reader to minaret as an axis of vision, aspiration, and power. Early in novel, Alif's first sight of *Pondok Madani* is framed by a "...sebuah menara yang tinggi menjulang" (...a tall soaring minaret), rising beside pale dome. The structure cuts horizon and pulls his gaze upward, toward a world beyond his village. Later, boys call themselves *Sahibul Menara* (Fellowship of the Manara, *pemilik menara*). This name fixes their shared subject-position around tower. Their act of "...berkumpul di menara Pondok Madani adalah lanjutan ketakjubanku" (...gathering at the Pondok Madani minaret was the continuation of my wonder) turns architecture into ritual centre of their conversations, dreams, and imagined futures. Text of the novel sutures these scenes to Alif's earlier experience of "*naik ke puncak Jam Gadang*" (climbing to the top of Jam Gadang), peering over Bukittinggi from another tower in West Sumatra, so his life-story is literally traced from one height to another.

Reading *lingga* as a vertical sign linking earth and sky, image of the world's creator rather than a mere organ, these scattered images form a coherent chain: minaret, Jam Gadang clock tower, and later global towers function as phallic emblems that focalise creative, upward-striving energy reserved almost exclusively for male characters (Daniélou, 1995; Graham, 2016). Side by side, these scenes reveal a clear pattern of phallic verticality. *Pondok Madani* minaret is not a mere backdrop. It trains the boys' gaze and gives form to their imagined future. From this tower, they read world through other vertical monuments. Monas in Jakarta, with its obelisk thrusting above Merdeka Square. London's Big Ben as shorthand for British modernity. The Governmental Skyline of Washington D.C. High minarets of Masjid al-Haram and al-Azhar as icons of Islamic civilisational authority. Even when these foreign towers are mentioned only in passing, they cluster around same semantic field: elevation, visibility, global centrality.

Comparative urban studies show skyscrapers and monumental towers often encode masculine fantasies of dominance and transcendence through stone, steel, and concrete (Brown, 2013; Heiserová, 2021; Rupasinghe & Botejue, 2023). In Fuadi's novel, architectural code is woven into structure of aspiration: Alif and his friends are not merely dreaming of "going abroad", but of inserting themselves into a world-system symbolised by a chain of phallic monuments. Each one a local instance of cosmic *lingga* that, for Daniélou (1995), figures a creative principle "standing at centre of world" and opening a vertical route between human and divine.

1. Monument Name	2. Geographic Location	3. Symbolic Meaning	4. Character Connection	5. Gender Association	6. Themes Represented
Pondok Madani Minaret	Pondok Madani (Ponorogo, East Java)	Phallic emblem, ritual centre of dreams, axis of vision, and creative energy	Alif & Sahibul Menara (the six boys)	Exclusively for male characters; phallic work of creation reserved for men	Education, discipline, mobility, ritual, aspiration, and cosmopolitanism
Jam Gadang	Bukittinggi, West Sumatra	Phallic verticality and local instance of cosmic <i>lingga</i> ; the starting point of Alif's trajectory	Alif	Masculine trajectory of becoming; associated with male height	Life-story tracing, mobility, and rural-to-urban transition
Monas	Jakarta, Indonesia	Obelisk representing masculine fantasies of dominance,	The Sahibul Menara (imagined or dreamed of)	Masculine fantasy of transcendence and dominance	National centrality, global mobility, and power

Big Ben	London, United Kingdom	elevation, and visibility Shorthand for modernity, global centrality, and the world-system	The Sahibul Menara (imagined or dreamed of)	Masculine trajectory of global conquest	Modernity, transnational education, and world-making
The skyline of Washington, D.C.	Washington, D.C., USA	Governmental authority, global centrality, and phallic verticality	The Sahibul Menara (imagined or dreamed of)	Masculine dominance	Global centrality and political authority
Masjid al-Haram & al-Azhar Minarets	Mecca, Saudi Arabia and Cairo, Egypt	Icons of Islamic civilisational authority and the vertical route to the divine	The Sahibul Menara (imagined or dreamed of)	Masculine principle of cosmic creation	Islamic virtue, civilisational authority, and religious education

Table 1. *Vertical structures in Negeri 5 Menara as symbolic sites through which male characters are linked to education, discipline, mobility, and global aspiration.*

Repeating tower imagery in novel allegorises male creative power. *Pondok Madani* minaret directs boys' desire into prayer, study, and disciplined conversation. Their repeated ascent and horizon-gazing stage a movement from rural "below" to cosmopolitan "above". Minaret is not a neutral Islamic symbol. It is a phallic relay that concentrates Daniélou (1995) "cosmic creative energy" of the masculine principle. The boys' intellectual labour, bodily endurance, and detachment from home are all framed as effects of their alignment with this vertical axis. Female figures (Amak, Alif's mother, Alif's sister, and unseen santriwati/*female scholars*) receive no comparable relation to towers or elevated spaces. Their horizon remains domestic, peripheral, or off-stage. This asymmetry echoes Indonesian fiction, where men dominate travel, study, and world-making, while women remain bound to care and sacrifice (Yulianeta et al., 2016). In *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009), gendered division is not argued explicitly. It is naturalised in way narrative distributes who may climb, see far, and thereby participate in what Daniélou (1995) would call the phallic work of creation.

Stakes of phallic cartography emerge in its ideological relation to education and mobility. Most researchers on *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) celebrate its representation of character education (Huda, 2021), moral values (Hasby & Islami, 2020), and Islamic virtues (Apriani et al., 2020), *akhlak*, discipline, creativity, and gratitude, as a model for youth (Putri & Aulia, 2021). Film-adaptation studies likewise stress hard work and perseverance as routes to social uplift (Pangistika & Hidayati, 2024). This pedagogical reading is valid but

partial. Towers in textual of novel reveal a narrower logic: only male subjects convert *akhlak* and discipline into global mobility. The “sacred” energy of creation becomes power to remake class position through transnational education, yet it flows only through bodies aligned with *menara* (minaret). Against women’s near-absence from spaces of study, title *Negeri 5 Menara* names a phallic utopia: nation and world as vertical structures for young men to conquer. By reading narrative of novel, then, is to reveal how an ostensibly universal ethic of striving is materially anchored in a gendered architecture that privileges masculine trajectories of becoming.

Phallic logic does not emerge in isolation. Narrative of novel is shaped by a century-long tradition of Indonesian prose in which educational mobility is coded as “a male prerogative”. From Hidjo, Samsul Bahri, Minke, Rasus, and Soedarsono to Ikal, canonical Indonesian fiction repeatedly centres educated man who moves from periphery to centre as figure through whom nation narrates its modernisation (Hellwig, 1994; Soedarwo, 2014; Wajiran & Fadillah, 2020; Yulianeta et al., 2016). Women, paradoxically, are often sacrificed, left behind, or confined to domestic sphere. Their restricted access to schooling both reflects and reproduces patriarchal limits on female education (Arimbi, 2017; Asmawati, 2018; Chandra, 2011; Syamsudin, 2025; Widarwati & Purnomo, 2025). This novel places itself within a pesantren-based *Bildungsroman*, secular school tradition, yet it leaves that tradition’s masculinist bias intact. Instead, it renews bias by turning older figure of aspiring male student into a phallic topography of minarets and global monuments. Reason behind novel’s union of towers, travel, and male subject positions is thus historical as well as ideological. *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) inherits and intensifies a long-standing formula: right to ascend, architecturally and socially, belongs to male bodies aligned with phallus/lingga, while women remain in background as facilitators, constraints, or obstacles.

Lacan’s logic of phallus clarifies how this symbolism structures subjectivity. Alif and *Sahibul Menara* are formed through a signifier that exceeds them. Motto “*Man jadda wajada*” promises fullness through effort, yet novel keeps foregrounding lack: Alif’s resentment at not entering a secular high school, his shame over rural origins, Baso’s economic poverty, Raja’s unstable Betawi bravado. These lacks are directed toward *menara* and world it opens. They study under tower’s shadow, climb it for reassurance, and project their futures toward Mecca, Cairo, London, and America. In Lacanian terms, *menara* functions as an empty signifier. It gathers religious devotion, global modernity, and middle-class success without fully coinciding with any of them (Hook, 2006; Jones, 2021; Lacan, 2020). Minaret is not organ but symbolic phallus: the point around which desire is organised and lack becomes

productive striving (Zohar, 2010). Only those within its orbit (male students, or *santriwan*, of Pondok Madani) can speak as desiring subjects. Amak, Alif's sister, and other peripheral figures appear only through their relation to these aspiring boys, not as bearers of autonomous desire.

Fuadi's novel constructs Lacanian phallic subjectivity through repeated narrative patterns. Subjectivity is voiced mainly through Alif's first-person perspective and interior monologue, then extended through *Sahibul Menara's* jokes, debates, anxieties, and imagined futures. Other male figures (teachers, kiai, and senior santri) enter this discursive space as models or antagonists. Together, they stabilise "proper" male subject: disciplined, articulate, and oriented toward a transnational horizon. Language of these scenes reinforces phallic signifier: studying is described as "*mendaki*" (climbing), failure as "*jatuh*" (falling), and success as "*berdiri tegak*" (standing upright) in the world. Amak's discourse moves elsewhere. It is tied not to *menara*, but to domestic morality, filial duty, and religious respectability. She negotiates Alif's schooling, yet not as a path for her own or her daughter's self-fashioning. This asymmetry mirrors what Lacanian literary critics identify as distribution of phallic signifier in narrative: some characters are written as "having" phallus (in symbolic sense) and thus being legible as full subjects, while others are located on its margins, their speech confined to reproducing or policing the phallic order (Fawaid, 2021; Jones, 2021).

Alif and his fellows can be read as exemplary male subjects of a phallicised symbolic order whose master-signifier is *menara* (minaret). Their anxieties of failure and exclusion (not passing exams, not gaining scholarships, not leaving the village) are instances of what Lacan calls "symbolic castration": moments when subject faces impossibility of fully possessing phallus and thus of becoming complete (Lacan, 2020). Narrative texts does not resolve these anxieties by dismantling phallic order. It reaffirms by showing that those who persist are eventually rewarded with access to global towers they once imagined from *Pondok Madani* minaret. *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) performs ideological work that Fawaid (2021) identifies in other Indonesian texts: masculinity is reconfigured not by rejecting phallus, but by relocating it (from colonial school to pesantren, from secular nationalism to Islamic cosmopolitanism) while preserving its status as organising principle of subjectivity and desire.

Narrative of novel offers a precise model of how a young Indonesian Muslim man should inhabit desire. To be a subject is to bind oneself to *menara* as phallic signifier: to

accept lack, endure discipline, and convert labour into credentials and transnational mobility. This model resonates with Islamic self-help and educational discourse that frame male youth as “*agen perubahan*” (agents of change), expected to maximise human capital for family, *ummah*, and nation. However, by limiting phallicised trajectory to male characters, this novel also implicitly defines femininity as outside orbit of phallus-as-desire: women may support, worry, or resist, but their own wishes for education or mobility are never elaborated as subjective projects in their own right. Its thus double: at level of form, *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) trains its reader (or audience) to identify with a phallicised male subjectivity defined by lack and striving; at this level of ideology, it re-naturalises assumption that men (not women!) who are called to bear the burdens and rewards of educational modernity.

The reasons for this asymmetry become clearer when novel is read against studies of gender and education in Indonesia. Despite progress, gender gaps in school attainment and labour outcomes persist, especially in rural and conservative regions, where families often prioritise sons’ education over daughters’ (BPS, 2025; UNDP, 2025). Pesantren studies also note enduring patriarchal norms: men occupy public religious authority, while women remain in domestic or auxiliary roles, even within modernising institutions (Amalia, 2020; Azizah, 2024). In this context, *Negeri 5 Menara*’s all-male circle, male-only scenes of intellectual labour, and masculine framing of global knowledge circulation are not neutral choices. They echo material patterns in which long-distance study seems more acceptable for sons than daughters, and symbolic capital of “global Islam” attaches more strongly to male bodies. Novel’s phallic subjectivities are therefore literary constructs and ideological reinforcements of gendered educational structures in contemporary Indonesia.

Within this symbolic order, *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) quietly reinstates “one-sex model”. Freud and Lacan highlights how this model treats male body as ontological norm, “*man is the measure of all things*”, while assigning woman to lack, deviation, or abjection (Gruman, 2021; Joodaki & Elyasi, 2015). Amak enters narrative as an affective figure of tears, prayers, and ambivalence. Yet she has no developmental arc. Her moral authority matters only as it shapes Alif’s relation to phallic project of education, not as a basis for her own aspiration. Alif’s sister appears briefly, unnamed and psychologically thin, excluded from friendship, rivalry, and mentorship that make male characters legible as subjects. No female scholars (*santriwati*) at *Pondok Madani* exists. No girl climbs towers, maps foreign capitals, or turns perseverance into destiny. *Santriwati*, if present at *Pondok Madani*, remain off-stage. Unlike Anna Althafunnisa in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007), who studies in Cairo, they never enter

novel's aspirational field. Pesantren world is thus imagined as homosocial: phallus, embodied by minaret and disciplined male bodies around it, monopolises symbolic visibility.

Fuadi's oeuvre exemplifies Lacanian phallocentrism: a discursive order where meaning (*logos*) is anchored in phallus, and subjects are recognised or excluded by their relation to that centre (Gruman, 2021; Lacan, 2020). *Sahibul Menara* are subjects who "make sense": they tell stories, make decisions, debate doctrinal and worldly issues, and link rural pesantren to global sites. Even confusion and doubt become productive, leading to journeys and reflection. Female figures become Gruman's (2021) "non-represented remainder": present enough to sustain male affect and obligation, but denied narrative space and symbolic tools needed to enter the phallic order. The ethical ambition of novel (that study and faith can lift the marginalised into nation and *ummah*) therefore rests on exclusion. Only certain bodies may follow vertical route marked by towers and minarets. Others remain below, looking up, or unseen because the narrative gives them no viewpoint. These patterns show how *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) turns patriarchal common sense into narrative inevitability.

This novel makes male bodies ontological norm of educational and spiritual striving. It need not state that women "cannot" or "should not" follow similar paths; their absence from key scenes already performs that negation. Phallocentrism order of text is further reinforced by way dialogue is apportioned: extended conversations on ideals, doctrine, and world politics belong to male characters. Female speech is reduced to brief commands, blessings, or laments. This uneven distribution of voice echoes earlier patterns in Indonesian literature, where women often appear as figures to be saved, married, or mourned, not as agents of their own destinies (Hellwig, 1994; Wajiran & Fadillah, 2020; Yulianeta et al., 2016). Fuadi updates this pattern for a post-Reformasi, pesantren-centred context. Yet its phallic core remains: male subject bears the word, journey, and tower; female is left behind so these can be achieved.

Indonesia has formally endorsed SDGs 5 on Gender Equality and policy discourse repeatedly links women's empowerment to education and employment (Bapennas, 2025; UNDP, 2025). Yet ethnographic studies of pesantren and Islamic educational institutions show that ideas of complementarity and *kodrat* (innate nature) continue to legitimise unequal access to authority and opportunity (Hasan, 2025; Mumtaz et al., 2024). *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) stands within this tension. It speaks language of meritocracy and global citizenship, but frames both through a phallocentric narrative that excludes women as

subjects of merit. For young male readers, this script is compelling: pious self-improvement, disciplined study, and social mobility appear ethically serious and religiously grounded. Yet novel leaves intact assumption that men are the primary bearers of this project. For women readers, it risks confirming a secondary position: adjacent to, but not inside, civilisation-building drama represented by towers and universities.

Negeri 5 Menara (2009) does not invent these structures: masculinisation of educational mobility in Indonesian fiction, patriarchal organisation of many Islamic educational institutions, or phallogocentric architecture of subjectivity. It condenses them through powerful visual motif of *menara* (minaret). For Daniélou (1995), real and fictional towers condense a mythic image of masculine as cosmic creator. For Lacan (2020), that image becomes a symbolic operator that determines who may appear as a subject of desire and meaning. These operations are gendered: men emerge as normative bearers of phallus, while women are produced as lack, remainder, or abject (Fawaid, 2021; Gruman, 2021; Hook, 2006; Jones, 2021; Mouzelis, 2014). Reading Fuadi's novel through these lenses, then, is not simply to "criticise" its absence of female heroes. It is to expose how a major contemporary Islamic novel helps construct a phallic modernity in which towers, books, and passports are distributed unequally along gendered lines.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that central issue in *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) is not simply prominence of male characters, but symbolic system that makes male ascent appear natural, ethical, and civilisational. Reading by Daniélouian *lingga*, novel's chain of vertical monuments (*Pondok Madani* minaret, Monas Jakarta, Big Ben London, The Skyline of Washington D.C., minarets of Masjid al-Haram, and spires of al-Azhar Mosque) forms a transnational map of creative power reserved for boys. Within this cartography, Alif and *Sahibul Menara* are therefore not only students with dreams; they become authorised carriers of aspiration, mobility, and class transformation. By contrast, female figures remain outside this symbolic route: near home, village, affect, and narrative background. Lacanian frame clarifies ideological force of this arrangement. Masculinity is not merely thematic; it is phallogocentric in structure. Education, civilisation, and upward mobility are made legible through boys under sign of minaret, while women appear as unrepresented remainders or abject supports of male becoming (Fawaid, 2021; Gruman, 2021; Udasmoro, 2018).

Rather than treating *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009) as merely an inspirational Islamic Bildungsroman, it reads Fuadi's popular *pesantren* novel as a dense phallic narrative. This

framing extends debates on masculinity in Indonesian fiction beyond feminist realism and postcolonial critique by foregrounding phallus as an empty yet structuring signifier of desire, authority, and power. It also proposes “phallic cartography” as a critical vocabulary for tracing how towers, classrooms, journeys, and foreign destinations are unevenly assigned to characters. Through this vocabulary, spatial form becomes a means of reading gendered subject positions. This article thus offers both a theoretical intervention and a methodological model: it re-situates Indonesian narratives of educational success within a broader debate on how “man as measure” still determines which bodies may appear as civilisational subjects.

This study is deliberately limited. It examines first volume of Fuadi’s trilogy and male-centred diegesis of *Negeri 5 Menara* (2009), without systematically comparing later volumes or other works that might complicate its phallic cartography. The article also does not pursue reception questions in depth: how santri, ustad, or urban Muslim middle-class readers negotiate, accept, or resist the novel’s alignment of education, mobility, and masculinity. Counter-imaginaries by Indonesian women writers, especially those that refigure pesantren, minarets, and religious learning from non-phallic or anti-phallic perspectives, are addressed only briefly. Future research should place these corpora in closer dialogue. Such work would test, refine, and provincialise the phallocentric reading proposed here, while mapping more fully how gender, Islam, and class are contested in contemporary Indonesian literary culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Department of Indonesian Literature, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and Department of Sociology, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya for providing a supportive academic and research environment.

DECLARATION

Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

AI-assisted tools were used only for non-substantive editorial support, including grammar correction, sentence restructuring, academic phrasing, and proofreading.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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