

Article

Biopolitics of Gender: Judith Butler's Discourse on Sexuality and State Intervention in the Politics of Life

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH:

This article explores the political issue of intervention in life within the paradigm of contemporary political philosophy. This exploration specifically highlights ideas regarding biopolitics and gender, which will be compared in an analysis of the dimensions of sexuality within the state. This discourse presents a comparison of Judith Butler gender theory with Michel Foucault's biopolitics theory. These comparisons offer philosophical reflection and argumentation by dissecting how power intervenes in gender as a form of political control. The research method employed in this article utilizes a model of philosophical and conceptual analysis. Meanwhile, the methodological used include: 1) conceptual decomposition, 2) identification of necessary and sufficient conditions, 3) adaptation of methods to contextual cases, 4) disambiguation, and 5) testing of logical coherence. This article presents findings from an exploratory argumentation, including a genealogy of Butler's thought within the biopolitical dimension of gender, an understanding of sexuality as a contemporary political discourse, and examination of the political implications of gender-intervening policies. These research findings reveal a philosophical insight that gender and sexuality are components of commodities power control. Based on this control, power inserts a political agenda as an alternative way for power to operate. As such, this article offers a contemporary discourse regarding biopolitical discourse within the gender dimension.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Gender, Judith Butler, Discourse, Politics of Life.

ABSTRACT INDONESIAN:

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi isu politik intervensi kehidupan dalam paradigma filsafat politik kontemporer. Eksplorasi ini secara spesifik menyoroti pemikiran tentang biopolitik dan gender yang akan dikomparasikan dalam membedah dimensi seksualitas pada negara. Diskursus ini menghadirkan komparasi pemikiran gender Judith Butler yang akan dikomparasikan dengan pemikiran biopolitik Michel Foucault. Komparasi ini memberikan refleksi dan argumentasi filosofis dengan membedah cara kerja kekuasaan mengintervensi gender sebagai kontrol politik. Metode penelitian pada penyusunan artikel ini menggunakan model philosophical and conceptual analisis. Adapun unsur metodis yang digunakan antara lain, 1) dekomposisi konsep, 2) identifikasi kondisi/syarat dan kecukupan, 3) penyesuaian metode terhadap kasus-kasus kontekstual, 4) disambiguasi, dan 5) pengujian koherensi logis. Artikel ini memberikan temuan argumentasi eksplorasi berupa genealogis pemikiran Butler dalam dimensi biopolitik gender, pemahaman seksualitas sebagai diskursus politik kontemporer, dan telaah implikasi politik pada kebijakan politik yang intervensi gender. Hasil penelitian ini menyajikan temuan filosofis bahwasanya, gender dan seksualitas merupakan bagian dari komoditas kontrol kekuasaan. Berdasarkan kontrol ini kekuatan menyelipkan agenda politik sebagai alternatif cara kekuasaan bekerja. Dengan demikian, artikel ini memberikan wacana kontemporer terkait diskursus biopolitik dalam dimensi gender.

Kata Kunci: Biopolitik, Gender, Judith Butler, Wacana, Politik Kehidupan.

Introduction

Modern political developments have led to a discourse of a state that considers power to extend beyond the articulation of law, policy, and the military. The discourse of the state in modern politics has developed in terms of regulating the “biological body” and “sexuality” of society as a public preference (Foucault, 1978: p. 141-143). This major shift in the state discourse on how political power works is viewed critically by Michel Foucault as biopolitics. In this biopolitical thesis, Foucault asserts that the discourse of the state on political power has entered a new phase by making biological existence part of political affairs. Furthermore, objects of human life that were originally considered “natural” and had no “political involvement” have become “new objects” of observation, knowledge, and intervention by those in power (Foucault, 1978: p. 141-143).

Foucault criticizes this shift in state discourse toward the element of the “biological body” as a political strategy that works through sovereign power and biopower (Foucault, 1978: p. 141-143). These two political strategies in state discourse not only open up understanding of the framework of social control arguments in law and the threat of death. Instead, power works on the object of society as a social entity whose entire life is under the state's control. The state needs to have direct knowledge of the general life of the community, such as consumption, reproduction, health, and so on. The discourse of the state in Foucault's biopolitical thesis indirectly makes the “biological body” of society a political object that is free to be gambled with.

Although Foucault wanted to narrate political and biological relations, this biopolitical thesis has shortcomings in examining gender subjects, both individuals and groups. Later, Foucault's thesis of biopolitics was further developed by Judith Butler as gender biopolitics. As a new thesis, Butler formulates her thoughts on biopolitics as state control in politics through the “biological body” that determines gender identity. For Butler, the discourse of the state in modern politics not only prohibits and regulates biologically, but the state is also present and politically active in reproducing the subject of the “biological body” in accordance with dominant preferences. As a result, subjects of sexuality and gender that do not conform to the state's perception of the “biological body” will be subject to certain political actions. Drawing on Foucault's biopolitics, Butler deconstructs biopolitics by grouping it into objects of sexuality and gender. This deconstruction aims to reduce sexuality in biopolitics to nothing more than a biological fact. Meanwhile, gender is an understanding of cultural expression. This deconstruction of biopolitics uses gender biopolitical narratives intended to reveal problems in the construction of sexuality imposed by the state as a cultural construction of gender (Butler, 2006: p. 23-24).

Butler considers gender biopolitics to be a new perspective that plays an important role in state discourse. Gender biopolitics critically attempts to reveal the ontology of the “biological body” in politics, which cannot be understood neutrally. The shift in state discourse in modern politics necessitates the “biological body” as a gender perspective that can be reproduced in socio-political dynamics. Using a set of social norms, institutions, and policy discourses, the “biological body” becomes an important object for determining social

control. This has resulted in the “biological body,” which was originally a blank canvas, now becoming the subject of public preference in political policy (Butler, 2006: p. 23-24).

Butler understands the “biological body” not as a “natural” entity in society. With the advent of modern politics, the “biological body” has become the object of political action in the public sphere. The discourse of the state views this object as an opportunity to take action in the areas of planning, supervision, and regulation oriented toward political interests. Gender biopolitics interprets this phenomenon as “biological existence was reflected in political existence,” emphasizing that human life is always directly related to political decisions. This critical review of gender biopolitics in state discourse is bridged by law as the basis for determining state actions in society. Butler views the law as the basis for state action, which has evolved from determining the right to kill and perpetuate life in society to the obligation to determine life based on the paradigm of how society can live, be healthy, reproduce, and determine death (Butler, 2011: p. 174-175).

The existence of sexuality in state discourse through this gender biopolitical approach does not stop at social concepts. In fact, gender biopolitics offers a new discourse for the state to determine the “machinery of power” through public policy, legal frameworks, and administration. The object of sexuality in modern politics makes the state define it only as a reference for social categorization. This determination is used by the state to differentiate and classify society for social control purposes. Moreover, state discourse tends to ignore gender through the process of producing what is considered “normal”. Using the country's legal basis and public policy to superficially understand gender as a single entity in political strategy. Sexuality and gender entities that are considered “abnormal” by the state are deemed unworthy of recognition in terms of reproduction, labour, family roles, health, and education. This discourse makes biopolitics understandable by obscuring social problems that use governance over gender equality. Gender biopolitics actually plays a role here in revealing social problems that are recognized as “abnormal”. Biopolitics is not merely a concept used by the state as the basis for the most modern form of social control to determine effective strategies based on economic and political objectives (Repo, 2015: p. 16).

The discourse of the state, which encompasses public policy, law, and administration, uses a gender biopolitical approach to present another perspective. Rooted in the history of the transition of political power in the state, Butler reveals that the state has a changing political view. In the past, the state determined the “right to kill”, then changed it to the “duty to regulate” (Butler, 2011: p. 174-175). This transition also determines the impact of gender in politics through the categories of “normal” and “abnormal”. Using this categorization, Butler dissects the problem by arguing that biopolitics in the discourse of the state originally had no universal and democratic foundation. In fact, biopolitics as a state discourse tends to categorize gender in terms of determining who is considered to “deviate” from what is considered “normal” political life. The discourse of the state in modern politics only uses superficial gender categorizations under legal protection. The state formally considers gender to be part of the perception of men and women. This view actually reinforces sexuality as the key to thinking about superficiality, making it easy for the state to determine which members of society are considered “deviant”. This superficial view is a fundamental problem in civil

rights that makes the legal status of gender unclear. The narrow view of the state, which standardizes sexuality and gender, means that identities outside the “biological body” are politically considered a “state problem” that must be corrected. The existence of a state that has a superficial understanding of gender and sexuality poses a threat to the freedom of individuals in society to define their personal identities (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: p. 7).

The problem of the “biological body” being controlled by power means that “my gender” or “my sexuality” cannot be my personal property. Butler considers that the “biological body” that has been influenced by politics actually obscures the element of “personality” into “autonomy”. Indirectly, gender and sexuality in the country have a relational connection that is not only personal. Butler argues that gender biopolitics is necessary to reveal new dimensions of the state's efforts to control society by shaping gender itself. Operational logic in state discourse links control of life to cultural frameworks. If gender substance involvement in state politics does not determine the goal of equality as it should, it will instead become “being possessed”, which will result in the loss of personal ownership. This gender biopolitics became a new solution in the state discourse to determine how the “biological body” would be controlled by the state in determining which gender objects would be protected and which would be ignored (Butler, 2004b: p. 23).

The genealogy of gender biopolitics pays special attention to gender as a new identity in determining context. Gender cannot be claimed in arguments about the structural apparatus of power in ideological politics. The existence of gender and sexuality form a unity that influences each other in assessing the extent to which state discourse uses political actions in life. In order to fully understand gender and sexuality, it is necessary to critically examine the origins of gender as biopower, power strategies in gender concepts, and the understanding of gender relations and sexuality regimes (Repo, 2014). State intervention in politics means that private identity has no boundaries. The existence of sexuality and gender controlled by the state has the potential to be politicized in accordance with political ambitions. The state-controlled “biological body” requires the disclosure of perspectives outside the state as identity preferences. If biopolitics is not balanced with a critical review of gender, then the politics of life will become a space for exploitation. By revealing new dimensions through gender biopolitics, Butler argues that resistance to the object of the “biological body” can occur when social control does not function properly. The object of the “biological body” has another domain as a “locus of struggle” based on changes in fate. The discourse of the state in political power tends to manipulate arguments about sexuality and gender to intersect with race and class, hence, that society will understand gender in layers within a trapping structure (Butler, 2004b: p. 26-27).

The role of gender biopolitics in state discourse is not as shallow as the paradigm of recognition. Gender biopolitics stands firmly and independently to redefine the object of the “human body” as a basis for thinking about political interests that discredit gender (Cheah, 2013: 105-106). Discourses by the state that potentially misrepresent gender and sexuality have the potential to give rise to claims related to prohibition, repression, and neglect. Gender biopolitics was born and exists to reveal the potential of this problem by distancing itself from

the state in order to determine productive incorporation based on “rational reasons”. This approach clearly becomes the philosophical foundation for reading the social construction of the inevitable politics of life. The gender biopolitics approach is not only a critical analytical tool, but also a medium for reawakening an understanding of the “biological body” and its relationship to politics. The inevitable political consequences of the politics of life determine the extent to which gender can limit and determine attitudes between the politically “normal” and “abnormal” (Wijaya, 2015: p. 333-334).

This article presents a synthesis of the philosophical argument Foucault and Butler. The analysis aims to provide answers to fundamental problems concerning the objects of sexuality and gender within state discourse. These problems constitute issues in contemporary political philosophy that treat human biological life as an object of control. The author presents a synthesis of Foucault’s biopolitical thesis and Butler’s gender thesis to construct a contextual philosophical argument. This article positions the objects of sexuality and gender as specific dimensions within biopolitical control. Furthermore, this article presents a contextual exploration of specific political policies to support theoretical validation. Moreover, it outlines argumentative boundaries to avoid substantive bias in the discussion of political discourses on life. Thus, this article is designed to construct a philosophical discourse on biopolitics focused on the specific subject of gender.

Method

This article employs the philosophical and conceptual analysis research method developed by Jeffrey C. King. This method facilitates a process of conceptual analysis by dissecting the structure of philosophical thought. The philosophical thought examined here refers to the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. There are five methodological stages employed. First, conceptual decomposition. This methodological stage employs a genealogical approach to connect contemporary political philosophy discourse to the thought of Foucault and Butler. Second, necessary and sufficient conditions. This methodological stage provides a critical analysis of the determination of philosophical conditions and limitations regarding contemporary political philosophy within the concept of biopolitics. Third, the method of cases. This methodological element provides a theoretical testing of the biopolitical thesis on the political phenomenon of intervention in life as a central issue in contemporary political philosophy. This phenomenon is examined by combining Foucault’s biopolitical theory as the pioneer of the discourse on intervention in life and Butler’s gender theory as a new dichotomy within the dimension of sexuality, which is considered susceptible to intervention by power. Fourth, disambiguation. This methodological element constructs a philosophical argument that distinguishes overlapping meanings within the discourse on the political relations of intervention in life and gender at the intersection of the dimension of sexuality. Fifth, testing logical coherence. This element serves as the final methodological stage, aiming to reconstruct a logical conceptual foundation that does not contradict the principles of formal logic.

Result and Discussion

The influence of Judith Butler's intellectual work in formulating Gender Biopolitics

Judith Butler is a philosopher from the United States who specializes in gender theory. Butler's ideas have had a significant influence on the development of discourse related to political philosophy, ethics, and feminist theory, particularly queer theory. Her ideas about gender cannot be separated from the influence of Michel Foucault. Butler read Foucault and agreed with his thesis on biopolitics (Butler, 2006: p. 94). In Foucault's thinking, biopolitics is defined as an interdisciplinary study related to life (bio), which becomes the object of politics regulated by state power. Foucault's thinking is based on the discovery of the "history of sexuality" in the 18th century. Foucault reads this history as a step by the state to control the population. Foucault's critical view reveals the role of state power in controlling the population universally. Through diet, housing, birth and death, and life expectancy, everything happens because the state is present in the dynamics of life through the intervention of the "biological body" (Foucault, 1978: p. 25).

Butler borrows Foucault's framework as a genealogical argument based on the book *The History of Sexuality*. Butler critical reading rejects the existence of life (bio) elements limited to gender (sex). Butler asserts that the term gender in political life is a purely biological fact. In political life, the existence of the "biological body" that becomes the object of power intervention is more appropriately viewed as gender. Butler reveals that the state's dissection of sexuality into biological facts is the result of an unconscious "assignment" of gender. Referring to Foucault's biopolitical thesis, Butler reveals the hidden phenomenon that the category believed to be "sex" is in fact the result of the reproduction of power mechanisms (Butler, 2006: p. 94-95).

Butler's findings on the superficiality of sexuality studies in biopolitics were later refined by gender studies. Butler felt that the "biological body" as a political object had a new paradigm that gave rise to political representation (Wijaya, 2015: p. 331). Butler views gender not as an essential identity that exists before action. Rather, gender is the result of the repetition of social practices that are manifested through the "biological body". This gives rise to the argument that there is no "gender identity" that forms the basis of gender expression. It is precisely because of the existence of this expression of "gender identity" that it begins to take shape. Ontologically, gender is performative in nature, which confirms that gender is "created" through actions that follow a social context. Therefore, to understand gender fully, one cannot use the actions of the "biological body" as a reference; instead, gender can be identified through social actions that are continuously repeated based on social rules (Chambers, 2007: p. 54-55).

Butler emphasizes her thoughts on gender by rejecting the idea that individuals can freely choose and use their gender identity. Butler rejects this idea because, fundamentally, gender is not born individually but is the result of power relations and reproductive norms that regulate the "biological body". This idea emphasizes that gender is organically a product of a power structure that determines social analysis within the framework of recognition.

Butler also offers a critical view of the existence of social norms in society. Implicitly, social norms exist and tend to be productive and regulatory in nature. These two characteristics are inherent because social dynamics always require “category formation” and “category regulation” (Butler, 2011: p. xii-xiii).

When referring to social norms, gender becomes a social object that is formed within categories and category arrangements. These two characteristics of social norms are inherent and do not mean that gender will forever retain this identity. In fact, gender does not have any innate characteristics or a fixed identity (Webster, 2000: p. 4-5). This can occur because the basis for the formation of gender stems from certain actions that follow social norms. Indirectly, when individuals interact with a new social environment, it is highly likely that a new gender will be formed. This critical view of gender as biopolitical is commonplace and can form the basis for studies related to how power regulates society. Gender is not merely a biological determination but a social construct (Fausto Sterling, 2000: p.3). When gender is read in an “essentialist” manner, it is a logical fallacy. The “essentialist” approach tends to use bodily anatomy that emphasizes social constructs in determining the categories of “male” and “female”. In biopolitical thinking, the “essentialist” approach has failed to determine the political perspective on life. In biopolitics, gender is a specific object that emerges systematically to influence who is “worthy of life” and “worthy of having their life regulated” in the contemporary power structure (Quinan and Thiele, 2019: p. 2).

Butler wants to emphasize that gender cannot be understood in terms of fixed social constructs. In addition to dissecting gender thinking, Butler also criticizes the understanding of gender itself. Butler rejects the claim that “gender is only a social construct” because gender constructs are always linked to the arena of power (Butler, 2004b: p. 25). If we examine how social construction occurs, we will find that social construction does not occur organically. Social construction is formed by normative restrictions that trap the impossibility of gender identity. In Butler thinking on gender through queer theory, the ontological status of gender is not natural but practical, social, cultural, and historical. Then, some regulations become steps of power to determine social objects that are considered “natural” and “unnatural”. Butler emphasizes this social reality through a paradigm shift from “revealing construction” to “analyzing power relations”. Gender always exists with uniform claims and forms its own identity subjects. As gender claims that define “women” and “men” show, the power in these claims does not have a clear social construction in reading the diversity of identities.

The shifting gender paradigm in the analysis of power relations is able to reveal unequal social realities. Butler takes the example of the social object of “women”. From an “essentialist” perspective, the lives of “women” have always been the object of claims based on certain innate characteristics constructed by culture (Butler, 2000: p. 42). For example, weak women and women are not worthy of a life equal to that of men. Butler rejects this “essentialist” view. This essentialist claim tends to be extreme due to the construction of power that considers “women” incapable of having equal opportunities. Butler criticizes this “essential” claim by formulating the thesis to be gendered. This thesis shows evidence that biopolitical gender thinking was born out of a desire to change (mode of becoming) the “essential” claim through two stages. First, the relational stage. At this stage, gender is formed

through interactions between individuals, institutions, and cultures, so that no “self” object is completely detached from these social relations. This stage clearly shows that if the social object of “women” becomes the object of a claim, then the relationship that is formed is not because of the individual. Second, the social stage. This stage attempts to prove that the social object of “women” in every claim must have an accompanying context. The existence of this social context cannot be fixed because it is always changing, thus it does not rule out the possibility that claims of “women” in every opportunity in life in terms of gender, can determine change with the aim of equality.

Butler thesis on to be gendered asserts that gender is politically constructed in its practice within social institutions and political discourse (Carver, 2022: p. 16). This thesis assumes that power relations are gendered. In this process, gender as a social object influences the determination of who is considered eligible to be a political actor, what issues are considered important for gender, and how policies should be formulated. Returning to the process of change (mode of becoming), this process risks political consequences for alternative actions so that political considerations are not only constructed in a “neutral” manner. Rather, other views become an arena for the formation and reproduction of gender roles through power and social norms.

Butler also criticizes the notion that women and men have fixed innate characteristics. On the contrary, gender repeatedly determines the biopolitical foundations related to ways of life that conform to or challenge prevailing social norms. Gender, which has become an identity, can change over the course of an individual’s personal experiences in a social and cultural context (Butler, 2004b: p. 42). Butler explicitly states that individual subjects formed through power relations and social norms “have nothing in common” with entirely deterministic subjects. In other words, when subjects that are never final can perform acts of resistance to achieve change (Webster, 2000: p. 8). Butler thinking explicitly shows that criticism of gender is quite abstract. In reality, gender is not abstract enough because it considers many social contexts to determine new norms. Therefore, Butler considers gender in gender biopolitics to determine the possibility for gender objects to live in politics without discrimination (Butler, 2004a: p. 8).

The discourse on gender is important in highlighting the political context that determines the exercise of power and public participation. The existence of the “biological body” becomes a political actor and object capable of considering “viability”. In terms of sexuality, men tend to dominate, resulting in gender inequality in politics. This reality cannot be ignored. Through Butler's biopolitical approach, this political reality can be processed to change. This process considers politics not only as processing gender issues but also as needing to contain gender in its operational definition (Carver, 2022: p. 55). In this political dynamic, Butler assesses that there are other relationships in the form of the domain of language, the maternal body, and paternal law. Butler borrows Julia Kristeva's thesis, which determines that the domain of language has the symbolic (regulated language) and the semiotic (language that can disrupt symbolic domination). Using Kristeva's thesis, Butler places the objects of life, namely poetry and pregnancy/childbirth, as semiotic moments

because they can appear without being “psychopathic”. In fact, these moments contain a symbolic framework. Butler deepens this thesis, formulating a critique that expression and gender are different. Expression wants rules to submit to culture. Meanwhile, gender cannot submit to culture. A critical reading of the domain of relations reveals the biopolitical position of gender that cannot be bound by language, the maternal body, and paternal law. This can occur because, in essence, the biopolitics of gender was born to create resistance against the politics of life that is unjust (Butler, 1989b: p. 110-111).

Returning to Butler's influence on Foucault, the assessment of the view of the “biological body” as an ontological basis must be clear. Butler begins by using Foucault's premise that the body is a “location” that determines discourse and power through inscription. The “biological body” is not a neutral biological entity but a meeting point between productive power and juridical power (Butler, 1989a: p. 601). In gender biopolitics, the “biological body” does not have a “pure” ontology outside of the socio-political sphere. Rather, the ontology of the body is a social ontology. This gender biopolitical thinking considers gender positions that are contrary to biological nature. The relationship between the “biological body” and gender forms a social construct that influences how it is recognized, regulated, and interpreted (Butler, 2016: p. 2-4). Butler's thinking on gender biopolitics seeks to develop the ethical and political dimensions of Foucault's concept of biopolitics. Butler defines her own biopolitical thinking by reading power as not only regulating life in the “biological body”. Rather, power also regulates the value of life itself, using standards of sexuality to determine who is considered “normal” and “abnormal” (Neumann, 2016: p. 3-6).

Butler's development of ethical and political dimensions determines who is recognized as a “legitimate subject” and who is difficult or even impossible to recognize (Butler, 2016: p. 5-6). Critically, these ethical and political dimensions reveal Butler's performativity, which views gender as the effect of a series of continuous normality. This influences the separation of sex and gender, which is considered a natural basis (Prielinger-Prokieser, 2012: p. 58). Butler re-examines sex and gender relationally to demonstrate that power plays a role in gender. As a result of this intervention of power, society becomes a political object that requires clear recognition (Prielinger-Prokieser, 2012: p. 57). When recognition is unclear, political resistance will be pursued to determine recognition. To reinforce this argument, Butler gives the example that the trap of power is quite dangerous and causes inequality, so that the existence of genders such as non-binary and trans is often not included in the framework of recognition (Butler, 2016: p. 5-6).

The series of influences caused by Butler's thinking in formulating biopolitics does not only consider sexuality. It is precisely because of the object of sexuality that Butler finds bias in biopolitics. Biopolitics essentially considers that biological life has some relation with politics. For Butler, this essence remains too superficial if it does not consider gender divisions. Using a gender approach, biopolitics is able to reveal society's need to respond to biopolitics by using resistance to determine equality. Butler's thinking provides a strong affirmation and standing position when biopolitics is understood only in terms of regulating life.

Understanding Sexuality as Discourse, Not as Gender

Butler follows Foucault's thinking which emphasizes that sexuality is not a "gender" and fixed identity. Rather, it is a discourse that discusses the substance of the body's chakras, desires, and behaviors that are regulated through mechanisms of power relations. Sexuality is not something "natural" to be emphasized or liberated. Rather, sexuality arises because there is a discursive process in the practice of power (Butler, 2006: p. 95). Ontologically, the "biological body" is based on the fact that 'sex' is a natural biological fact. However, Butler rejects this premise with the contradictory argument that 'sex' is never purely biological, thus becoming an object of discourse for regulating the body. Using Foucault's thinking, the term 'sex' is referred to as a "fictitious unity" that serves to unite anatomy, biological functions, sensations, and pleasures into one basic natural concept. Butler criticizes Foucault's thinking by arguing that humans never see 'sex' directly. What is believed to be 'sex' is actually the result of social construction within the framework of gender, norms, and language (Chambers, 2007: p. 51).

Butler argues that before the discourse on sexuality existed, the body and sexuality never existed. Indirectly, sexuality is not a pure category but a social object that is directly present in society and then translated using language, discourse, and social norms (Butler, 2011: p. x). For the sake of social management, the individual power uses biopolitics by reconstructing social dynamics through 'normal' and 'abnormal' states to explain sexuality that shifts into gender. Making sex a discourse creates a normative effect that supports the existence of normative mechanisms in determining bodily experiences and sexuality (Butler, 2011: p. 11). Historically, the existence of gender is a result of expressing something more fundamental and biological, namely 'sex'. If we see it from the 'sex' perspective, humans can be divided into women with feminine traits and men with masculine traits. Butler rejects this view because 'sex' cannot be understood as a 'natural' category that precedes gender (Lloyd, 2005: p. 38). This historical review provides sufficient understanding that the discourse began intensively from the process of social, historical, and political construction. This process can proceed to shape gender through cultural practices, politics, and scientific discourse (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: p. 20-23).

Butler's rejection of the view of sexuality is based on the existence of a 'biological instinct' that is deliberately shaped by culture. Sexuality functions more as an effect of discourses than as an extension of gender or biological sex. Taking Foucault's thesis that sexuality is a field of power production, Butler considers that the determinacy of sexuality requires humans to determine regulations based on who is entitled to live (Butler, 2004a: p. 39-40). Sexuality will never be neutral due to the ontological status of sexuality waiting to be discovered. The involvement of power in intervening in the "biological body" as management narrates biopolitical actions with political and cultural bridges. Biopolitics, which classifies the status of 'normal' and 'abnormal' life in sexuality, is a gender paradigm for Butler. Power requires a construction mechanism to regulate the "biological body" as an identity to make it easier for society to understand the social dynamics of sex (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: p. 26).

For Butler, this discourse on sexuality is a perspective related to the workings of gender biopolitics in regulating society. The workings of gender biopolitics in Butler's theory require a deconstruction of the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' first. In her political view of gender, Butler uses historical foundations with early feminist theory. This theory narrates the difference between 'sex' as a natural and biological human being and 'gender' as a socio-cultural entity of human beings. When sex is viewed as something natural, feminism often uses political legitimacy to make it part of "women's nature". If this reality is viewed as a discourse, then no fixed nature results from the effects of discourse. Feminist politics should no longer be based on a 'stable identity' but rather on a process that is always open to redefinition. Thus, sexuality is not understood as a fixed core; instead, it is seen as an object for the battle of discourse over its very definition (Lloyd, 2005: p. 38).

Butler asks her readers to think broadly about sexuality from a social and political perspective. Additionally, Butler emphasizes that the active involvement of the subject in understanding sexuality in a complex manner can determine the crucial point of contradiction. With the thesis that if sexuality is reduced to gender identity, then the understanding will fail and lose the important aspects in exploring sexuality in a socio-political manner. This idea stems from a fundamental criticism that still considers sexuality to be merely a derivative of gender. In fact, the relationship between sexuality and gender is a product of power in gender biopolitics, which shapes norms, stigma, and power structures (Warner, 2000: p. 7-8). In the discourse of sexuality, the "biological body" becomes the key to social construction in groups, so that sexuality is consumed for the sake of power struggles in society rather than private matters. By reviewing contemporary feminist theory, the discourse of sexuality leaves subjectivity behind. This happens because subjectivity is not something essential, but rather an effect of discourse. In other words, the dichotomy of "sexuality" and "gender" in biology is not a biological category that is inherent from birth. Rather, it is a product of scientific discourse that is always open to resignification and dislocation (Mcnay, 2013: p. 2-4).

Discourse on sexuality and gender can not only dissect the biopolitics of gender by those in power, but it can also serve as a bridge for resistance. The existence of sexuality and gender that are not viewed as fixed is precisely where social problems are imposed by those in power (Mcnay, 2013: p. 4). Through norms, culture, and political mechanisms, the construction of power in sexuality and gender cannot be claimed as absolute truth. Instead, using the same logic of gender biopolitical analysis, social subjects can engage in political resistance to fight for justice through deconstruction. Butler opens up a critical space for viewing sexuality as a practice of power in legal and political discourse, thereby rendering sexuality as a shifting category. This becomes the basis for examining the extent to which the state reproduces regulatory mechanisms through social institutions in disciplining the "biological body" (Loizidou, 2008: p. 149-150).

Sexuality needs to be understood as a relational process, not as a substance or essence. Rejecting the discourse of sexuality as essential can actually determine the discursive effect of how gender can be understood in a particular power structure. Differences in thinking about sexuality that have implications for gender in each power structure show that the discourse of sexuality is never final because it can always shift and be reinterpreted (Nancy, 2021: p. 44-

46). Sexuality is not a “natural basis” that precedes culture. Rather, sexuality is constructed by mechanisms of discourse and power that are mediated by science in medicine, law, and religion. These mechanisms help regulate sexuality within the boundaries of “normal sex” and “deviant sex” as the basis for social constructions in creating these categories themselves (Zerilli, 2008: p. 36-37). Butler’s thinking emphasizes a radical shift in the classical understanding of agency. Butler highlights that the ability of autonomous individuals to make decisions is an illusion. This occurs because the discourse of sexuality in biopolitics makes agency a tool for dismantling social norms. With an orientation towards recognition, agency is used to break down social constructs that do not recognize different subject entities. This mechanism of agency acts organically and relationally to determine a new framework in the biopolitical discourse of gender in social recognition (Zaharitjecic, 2021: p. 27-28).

Butler’s thinking in the discourse of sexuality uses the concept of disciplinary power in Foucault’s thesis. Through the mechanism of “discipline and punishment”, Butler orients her thinking toward the subjects of sexuality and gender. This framework is used to understand gender and sexuality norms to dismantle identity categories. Butler’s thinking here emphasizes that objectivity is always normative in nature and integrated into certain norms (Smith, 2008: p. 81-84). In addition, the existence of non-integrated social entities requires similar normative mechanisms to dismantle constructions and engage in resistance. Actions to obtain recognition from subjects are explicitly acknowledged in the democratic state model. Through the basis of political sexuality, the constitution presents a “biological body” that has a voice determine identity through connectedness. Sexuality relations in democracy present a voice that is not merely the language of individuals. Rather, it is a unique argument of gender identity to provide a rational discourse on the presence of the “biological body” and voices that are not approved by the state (Cacavero, 2021: p. 142-143).

Sexuality and gender are often treated as if they were identical by those in power, but these two dichotomies are different. Sexuality is not merely “biological” sexual orientation. Rather, it is a discourse of power, knowledge, and social norms that make desire, normality, and intersections seem real. Meanwhile, gender is a social classification that allows bodies to be understood by society through behavioral constructs. In other words, gender is a cultural device for giving a “reading” to the body (Auga, 2020: p. 42). Sexuality and gender are central to the way power and knowledge operate. In line with Foucault’s thesis that sexuality is a biopolitical field for controlling bodies and desires by regimes of knowledge. In other words, sexuality becomes an arena where power operates through the production and reproduction of discourses that connect bodies, desires, and subjectivities with social regulation (Lemke, 2011: p. 38). Sexuality as a discourse does not always prioritize historical foundations as a benchmark for the extent to which power and knowledge are dominated by politics. This discourse is key to the influence of moral constructs on sensitive issues such as ‘sex’. In addition, the intervention of power in ‘sex’ determines the opportunities and expectations related to the extent of rights and freedoms under the umbrella of social constructs (Richards, 2024: p. 38).

The relationship between the state and the regulation of the “Biological Body” in political implications

Butler's thinking on gender biopolitics uses historical and philosophical foundations related to how modern power regulates life with the object of the “biological body”. This way of regulating power intervenes in reproductive control, sexuality, health, and norms of living. Butler interprets the intervention of power by giving a special premise to the “biological body” which is considered non-neutral. This non-neutral view is actually considered an opportunity for the mechanisms of power to work through a series of regulations (Boustany & Timmenga, 2024: p. 5-7). This regulation is a biopolitical measure that creates implications between gender and politics. It is deliberately designed to determine the social legitimacy of life. The intervention of power in the “biological body” is the easiest way to power map social constructs, hence, that the resulting impact will lead to controlled social habits (Prielinger-Pokieser, 2012: p. 121).

The process of state implication in power is actually in line with the logic of power in Louis Althusser thesis. Althusser argues that the state belongs to the ruling class. By using ideology, the state reproduces class ideology within the state to control other classes. This ideological control is oriented towards the class to maintain its dominance, which is translated as the *Ideological State Apparatus* (ISA). To clarify the method of social control, Althusser ISA claim is broken down into a process of indoctrination mediated by religious ISA, legal ISA, cultural ISA, and so on (Althusser, 2014: p. 243-244). Althusser thinking has a hidden philosophical basis in the attempt to build the states as a social formation to reduce social contradictions. This action is part of structural capitalism, which is built based on historical materialism. When comparing the ideas of Althusser and Butler, there is a common point in that the subject of the state, which is dominated by the ruling class, has the freedom to control knowledge. In addition, the relationship between these two figures has another common point, which is that the foundation of knowledge in society, which is actually ignorance, is epistemologically formed by power. However, there is also a contradiction between the ideas of these two figures, which lies in their different social interests. Althusser thinking aims at social control and preventing social contradictions. Meanwhile, Butler thinking prioritizes the basic foundation of knowledge about gender that is not reduced, and when there is a reduction, the class subject in gender has the right to resist.

Biopolitical discourse on the object of the “biological body” tends to imply the regulation of life through formal legal and political aspects. These political implications are considered important because sexuality attached to the “biological body” is considered by the state to be the most vital factor in determining life in general (Foucault, 2006: p. 249). In modern political dynamics, state actions in determining regulations on power require the center of power itself as an object. In the modern state paradigm, the main object that becomes the target is the “biological body” that is part of biological life. This object is considered the center of power because historically, biological life determines who has the right to live and who will be excluded (Agamben & Sacer, 1988: p. 270). The state's argument regarding biological life becomes political rationality because the state considers its power to be the right to regulate universal moral considerations with any policy that directly targets biological life (Viriasova, & Calcagno, 2018). Referring to the critical reflection of the “biological body”

in political interactions, political implications need to explicitly consider gender. Political narratives and arguments in biopolitical studies need to equalize the influence on sexuality. Butler, as a figure who has renewed the understanding of biopolitics with this gender approach, has explicitly determined the basis of biological life that requires the disclosure of what is considered normal life.

Using this critical review of gender biopolitics, the author believes that Butler formulates her ideas by dissecting the historical dimension. In the Indonesian context, it is also necessary to ground this gender biopolitics. Gender biopolitics in the historical dimension in Indonesia places women's struggles as agents of nationality. Unfortunately, however, the historical dimension in Indonesia tends to be written by narrating masculinity. Using this example, the gender biopolitics approach can critically reopen the historical dimension, especially regarding the role of women. The historical dimension that forms the basis of thinking requires a narrative of equality that can determine the relationship between sex and history to understand how biopolitics worked at that time. The importance of the narrative of equality in the historical dimension with this biopolitical approach lays the ontological and epistemological foundations for the goal of equality (Amini, 2018: p. 155-156). This biopolitical approach to gender in its political implications affirms that the development of a cross-border understanding of gender is important. This is particularly true when critically examining the extent to which the state intervenes in "sexuality" and the "biological body" in the exercise of political dynamics.

The state, in implying the relationship between the "biological body" and politics, plays a central role in shaping public knowledge, particularly regarding sexuality and gender. State intervention here helps determine the ontological basis of social norms that view sexuality and gender as equal. In social norms, the state's control mechanisms become the starting point for forming formal laws in government, society, and the state. The construction of knowledge about the "biological body" also determines how the state's discourse gives meaning to the roles of men and women in society (Irawaty, 2016: p. 157-158). The state's interpretation of sexuality should not be limited to the division between women and men. Instead, the state needs to equalize it as a biopolitical intervention. Using a contextual example in Indonesia, the government tends to use women as objects with full limitations. As exemplified by the Indonesian Ulema Council (*MUI*) and hardline groups that have been given the freedom by the state to determine the logic of regulating women in society. Critically, this regulation creates rigid social norms based on the moral assumption that women are social objects who are vulnerable to violence, thus forming the basis for legal regulations. Additionally, there is another example of state intervention in Indonesia through the construction of resistance to communism. During the New Order era, communism mobilized women through *Gerwani* (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*), and this situation posed a threat to the state. In order to restore security, the New Order regime constructed a political justification by presenting an image of "evil sexuality" to women. Using New Order social norms, it made it seem as if these women were disrupting the social order by creating a symbolic narrative of torture in the September 30 Movement (Irawaty, 2016: p. 158-159).

Based on the contextual example above and critiquing it, it should be emphasized that the state cannot be separated from determining social constructs in gender biopolitics through the involvement of ideology, social structures, and power relations. State intervention in the gender biopolitics paradigm also determines how gender can be understood as equal or, conversely, as a gradual neglect. The state does not merely regulate the “biological body” from the outside, but also plays a role in determining the boundaries of life that are considered legitimate. State regulations regulate the “biological body” as a political instrument that affirms the sovereignty of the state to form social constructs that are appropriate to political needs (Butler, 2005: p. 52). The relationship between the state and the “biological body” in political implications has become a discourse that determines the importance of everything controlled by the state in all fields that can target biological life. This interpretation of biological life confirms that anything that interacts with the “biological body” on a mass scale will be considered to determine political stability (Lloyd, 2005: p. 79). The political implications of gender biopolitics place Butler thinking as the basis for moral judgments about valuable and worthless lives. Butler considers state control over the “biological body” to be the beginning of dehumanization because it is deemed incompatible with the dominant standards of humanity. The state’s presence in relation to the “biological body” determines which lives and sacrifices are justified without being considered a political loss (Butler, 2004: p. 33).

The “biological body” is understood only in terms of the political norms that govern reproduction, gender status, and kinship ties (Butler, 2000: p. 72). This claim shows that the state does not view the “biological body” as a “natural fact” due to political urgency. In politics, the “biological body” is actually confronted in the discourse of recognition with the assumption of normality. Sexuality, life, and kinship are all the result of political regulation. This claim also proves that the state is an actor in producing the construction of bodily understanding. The political implications of gender biopolitics take into account the existence of the population and how to regulate it. The state tends to use these population considerations to create divisions in life, especially in sexuality. The political implications of the “biological body” determine the regulation of sexuality, which is closely related to historical discourse mechanisms and does not occur naturally (Braidotti, 2016: p. 38). Using state laws that appear to regulate life, Butler shows that state laws are only the surface of a deeper and more widespread power. The “biological body” is not only regulated by law, but is first produced and framed so that it can be regulated. In fact, the relationship between the state and the “biological body” is dual in nature. This dual nature refers to the fact that the law acts as a regulator, but in reality, the law depends on mechanisms of power that have already shaped “what constitutes a legitimate biological body” (Butler, 1997: p. 94).

Biopolitical implications on the “biological body” determine the existence of power that is immanent in everyday life. Power shapes the normalization and standardization of the “biological body” as a social classification (Mills, 2017: p. 74). Using the construction of rationality of power determines the way politics works by merging all aspects of life. The “biological body” here is not only a personal matter, but also part of the “political calculations of the state”. These “political calculations” can be analogized with power relations when society is healthy. Thus, productive labor is available and ready to be employed for economic

and military strength. The “biological body” is considered the most valuable asset in politics. Control over the “biological body” becomes a form of control over what is considered valuable and a source of resources. With a materialistic orientation, the “biological body” becomes something valuable and worth fighting over (Prozorov & Rentea, 2016: p. 105).

To understand how political implications, work in gender biopolitics, it is necessary to compare real examples from various countries. First, the United States, with its policy of restricting gender affirmation care for adolescents (Dawson and Kates, 2025). This policy has had an impact in several US states, where certain genders have been criminalized, leading to an increase in legal cases. Second, Hungary Prohibition of legal recognition of gender change (Knight and Gall, 2020). This policy was enacted by parliament by establishing the recording of “sex at birth” as unchangeable on documents and ending rights for trans/intersex people. Third, Poland’s near-total ban on abortion (Sokolowski, 2021). The government intervened by using the constitutional court to establish the legal basis for fetal abnormalities. In addition, the enforcement of this regulation sparked massive protests among the public. Fourth, Indonesia’s new *Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana (KUHP)* or Indonesian Criminal Code criminalizes sexual relations outside of marriage (Kurniawan, 2022). This policy has sparked the criminalization of adultery and cohabitation, which is considered to limit bodily autonomy and impact vulnerable groups. Fifth, China’s three-child policy (Xi and Hongyu, 2021). This policy is the result of a shift from birth control policies to fertility promotion. The main objective of this policy is to increase demographic value by implementing a policy that regulates reproduction to a maximum of three children per family. Sixth, Scotland’s policy on free access to menstrual products. The Scottish government implemented this policy to provide free assistance to women who need menstrual products by stipulating that (Barry, 2022). Seventh, parental live policy in Spain. This policy is progressive in terms of gender equality and family support between mothers and fathers (Reuters, 2025).

The biopolitical implications of gender approaches through various political policy implications demonstrate a process of moral development in norms. Moral developments that become norms differ from one country to another. The existence of political implications that spark controversy and are well-received by the public shows that gender biopolitics has moral biases. The existence of this bias indicates a discrepancy between the government’s desire to regulate good governance and the reality. Therefore, biopolitics becomes the key with a series of power logics to determine the regulation of society in the needs of sustainable politics, whatever the risks.

Conclusion

The biopolitical thinking initiated by Michel Foucault was refined by Judith Butler with a gender approach. This gender biopolitics shows that state intervention in life also targets sexuality and gender. Butler considers sexuality and gender to be critical and sensitive points that are often exploited by those in power. This gender biopolitics has a dual role: in addition to regulating life, the gender biopolitics approach can foster awareness of gender rights, which can spark resistance to state regulations. This dual role clearly confirms that gender biopolitics

is capable of critically dismantling social realities. Thus, Butler gender biopolitical thinking represents a renewal of biopolitical studies that places gender as an important social object in life.

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