



## **SUBALTERN WOMEN IN THE NOVEL *SING, UNBURIED, SING* BY JESMYN WARD**

**Muhammad Dandi Saputra<sup>1</sup>, Muhd. Al-Hafzh<sup>2</sup>**

English Department  
Faculty of Languages and Arts  
Universitas Negeri Padang  
email: [mhmd.dandi2109@gmail.com](mailto:mhmd.dandi2109@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This research is an analysis of the novel "*Sing, Unburied, Sing*" by Jasmyn Ward (2017). In this study, the author aims to reveal the issue of the subaltern woman faced by Leonie's characters as women who experience subaltern positions in their family and society. In this analysis, there are two forms of oppression as a part of subaltern women. The first is verbal oppression such as shouted, being sworn, humiliated, and threatened with harm. This action puts a woman in a subaltern position. The second is physical oppression such as being kicked, hit, pushed, scratched, or pinched. Physical oppression gives a wound or scar to the woman as a result of the act. This analysis uses the concept of "subaltern," a branch of feminism proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and supported by several other experts. The use of concepts based on the context of the novel and interpretation of the text. In this analysis, the elements of the novel that help reveal the subaltern toward women are character, setting, plot, and conflict.

**Key words:** Subaltern, Oppression, Women

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Gender and inequality issue continue to be crucial issues that must be discussed now, although the struggle for equality has been done in many places in the world. These are still hap happening today, because the struggle for equality wassted, especially for women. Women who have become an object of inequality have caused it to be inseparable from problems of social construction. This makes women's position limited to getting their rights in social life. Women have always been objects within the scope of patriarchy and are positioned as second-class humans after men. Women cannot be separated from their oppression and powerlessness to get a better life. Women are positioned as subaltern groups and also get marginalization, so they cannot articulate their sound to fight against the patriarchal system that has cornered them.

According to Antonio Gramsci (2005) subaltern is the inferior classes, by definition, are not bound together and can't join until they can turn into a "State": their set of experiences, subsequently, is interlaced with that of common society,

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<sup>1</sup> English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on June 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang

and along these lines with the historical backdrop of States and gatherings of States. It means subaltern is used to referring to the marginalized and lower class. Subaltern refers to the inferior group, namely the community group that becomes the hegemony of the ruling classes. In this case, women are positioned as an inferior class in a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, referring to Gayatri Spivak (1988) From the colonization era until now, women always consider is second - class in social life, even if they are sometimes put in subaltern groups. So, women cannot even make a voice when she fights against the signs of their culture. It means that women's position as inferior will not get a chance in social life. More, the woman loses her right to live life and is forced to follow the rules set up by society, especially by men. On the other hand, stereotypes that position women as second after men or under men make women people who are always marginalized and receive oppression from men. Men as a dominant role in their social life, always get access the oppression in their social life, especially the woman as an object of oppression. Other factors for some women are the possibility of oppression occurring throughout their lives, because of changes in marital status. Therefore, this phenomenon triggers men to oppress women.

Moreover, Ahmed, A.S. (2012 ) defines oppression or abuse has two main form. First is verbally, he was defined as being shouted at, sworn at, humiliated and threatened with harm. Second is physical, he was defined as being hit, kicked, pushed, scratched or pinched. It means verbal oppression is the oppression by someone through the medium of language or speech. Physical oppression is the oppression carried out by someone through physical contact and resulting in wounds or scars on the limbs.

This research exists to complete the previous research. Almost all previous research exposes any kind of issues, transgenerational trauma, Institutionalized Oppression, and discrimination against black men. So this research is different from others because this focuses on the subaltern toward women in the novel "sing, unburied, sing" by Jasmyn Ward.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

Expose the subaltern towards women and women's oppression in this research using a qualitative method. Moleong (2017) defines the qualitative method as the research method that intends to understand the phenomena experienced by the subject in the form of behavior, perception, motivation, or action with the appearance of words and language in written form. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter.

The qualitative method in this research engages the novel as the written text. The novel text was chosen to analyze elements of the novel such as character, setting, plot, and conflict. The elements of the novel in the text will contribute to exposing the issue of subaltern towards women, and women's oppression

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Research Finding

This chapter discusses the subaltern women in the novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by Jasmyn Ward (2017). The subaltern towards women refers to the character Leonie and other women in the novel “*Sing, Unburied, Sing*”. In the novel, the setting takes place in 1940 when physical and mental abuse was something that exist and happened to many women. This issue will expose the subaltern women in this novel and women’s oppression. This analysis is using elements of the novel: character, setting, plot, and conflict to reveal the issue of subaltern towards women.

### 2. Discussion

#### 2.1. forms of subaltern towards women

The first part will be discussed is the oppression which woman character get after being a subaltern in the novel face after they life in United States. The term of oppression that women get are verbal oppression and physical oppression. Verbal oppression is an act of violence that occurs using language as its medium, while physical oppression is an act of violence committed by someone using the physical and resulting in physical injury. This happens because there is a power gap between the superiors (men) and the inferiors (women) whose aim is to maintain men's position and to keep women as inferior class. This oppression is carried out by men as a form of the condition of women who are subaltern in society. The differences act which is accepted by woman makes them in marginal position and also get oppression from environment and family. The oppression is an effect from subaltern position as woman in their life.

##### 2.1.1. Verbal Oppression

The first effect that subaltern toward woman to be analysed is verbal oppression. This leads to the problems of the subaltern toward woman that the character need to be faced. According to *Ahmed, A.S. (2012)* defines oppression or abuse has two main form. First is verbally, he was defined as being shouted at, sworn at, humiliated and threatened with harm. It means It means verbal oppression is the oppression by someone through the medium of language or speech. Verbal oppression can be found in both real-life situations and works of literature. There was a lot of verbal oppression during the novel that took place *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

“ I called his mama years later after Michael went to jail, thanked God when it was her that picked up the phone and not Big Joseph. He would have hung up in my face rather than speak to me, the nigger his son had babies with. I told Michael’s mother I needed work, and asked if she could put in a good word with the owner. It was the fourth conversation we’d ever had. We spoke first when Michael and I started dating, second time when Jojo was born, and third when Michaela was born. But still she said yes, and then she told me I should go up there, up to the Kill, upcountry, where Michael and his parents are from, where

the bar is, and I should introduce myself to Gloria, so I did. Gloria hired me for a probationary period of three months. You're a hard worker, she said, laughing, when she told me she was keeping me on. She wore heavy eyeliner, and when she laughed, the skin at the sides of her eyes looked like an elaborate fan. Even harder than Misty, she said, and she damn near lives here. And then waved me back out front to the bar." (P.25)

From the quotation above can be shown there is oppression in verbal towards woman in the job field. In the feminism, woman who can work outside thier field is not a problem but in terms of social and employment aspects, women who work as waiters, especially in a bar, are a form of verbal oppression given to women. This is also a proof that in terms of employment opportunities, women are limited and only given jobs as someone who prioritizes service compared to using the intellectual property of these women.

The quote also indicates that women experience pressure in the work environment, even though this only occurs in the form of verbal oppression. The verbal oppression that the female character in the quote receives in the work environment is by forcing the woman to eliminate her intellectual property and prioritize physical exertion even though the woman has an educational background.

Based on the quotation, when women working in a bar, especially as a waitress, are required to work hard in terms of serving and accompanying consumers, the majority of whom are men. We can see this based on the sentence "*You're a hard worker she said, laughing, when she told me she was keeping me on. She wore heavy eyeliner, and when she laughed, the skin at the sides of her eyes looked like an elaborate fan.*" this sentence is a proved that woman must work by physical power in the bar. Woman character in this quote is pushed to work hard by using their physical ability as waiter, this is the big sign that woman (Leonie) got the oppresion in verbal.

In the next quotation we can reveal that woman character already got verbal oppression since in the school. Verbal oppression which is got by woman in her school like insulting. It can reveal in the novel,

"When we were coming up, I couldn't count how many times he fought for us on the bus, in school, in the neighborhood when kids taunted me about how Pop looked like a scarecrow, how Mama was a witch. How I looked just like Pop: like a burnt stick, raggedly clothed. My stomach turned like an animal in its burrow, again and again, seeking comfort and warmth before sleep. I lit a cigarette."(P.29)

From the quotation above, it can reveal that woman character in novel got oppression in verbal way (insulting) with her school friends. It can proven in this sentence "*how I looked just like Pop: like a burnt stick, raggedly clothed.*" In this sentence , we can see woman doesn't have pride (honor) as a human. Woman character (Leonie) has been insulted and get verbal oppression not only because she is a woman but also by her skin color and her economic background.

Eventhought , woman in the education institution which should make them equal without think about gender diffrences, race or others. This is so ironic to think that woman is in educational envirotnment, they still got oppression in verbal, even woman character is descripted like burn wood stick which is not considered as human.

From the quotation above, From this quote, it can be revealed that the oppression that occurs against women in the educational environment has become a natural thing and is not of particular concern to be followed up as a problem that must be stopped.

Verbal oppression which also got in family area towards woman. It can reveal in this quotation ,

I clench my mouth, speak through my teeth. My jaw aches. "We'll be fine." Michael's been in jail three years now. Three years, two months. And ten days. They gave him five with the possibility of early release. The possibility's real now. Present. My insides are shaking. "You all right?" Pop asks. He's looking at me like he looks at one of his animals when something's wrong with it, the way he looks like when his horse limps and needs to be reshod, or when one of his chickens starts acting funny and feral. He sees the error, and he's dead committed to fixing it. Armor the horse's tender hooves. Isolate the chicken. Wring its neck. "Yeah," I say. My head feels filled with exhaust fumes: light and hot. "Fine." (P.30)

From the quotation above, we can reveal there is verbal oppression got by woman in family envirotnment. The victim of this oppression is Leonie, which did by her father name Pop. Based on the quote we can see there is low measurement towards Leonie. It can be proven in the sentence "*He's looking at me like he looks at one of his animals when something's wrong with it,*" in these sentence woman define as in human even they are in small envirotnment which got respect and don't get oppression but ironically woman got oppression in this condition.

Woman also can't speak up their argument or opinion. It shows in the sentence "*I clench my mouth, speak through my teeth. My jaw aches.*" there is fear which is kept woman in silent. In this quote proven woman has a fear even just to speak up their opinion about something even they think speak up is wrong act as woman.

According to the quotation, The family, which should be a home that can protect women's rights and self-esteem as human beings with the same equality, still gets verbally abused. This also proves that the condition of women as inferior started when they were in the most minor environment, namely the family. in this case, it can also be expressed that the harmony and mutual respect in the family environment have begun to fade or almost disappear.

Next , oppression that makes woman in subaltern is when man see woman as sexual object and this act did by adult man even teenager boy. This can be see in this quotation ,

“ I don’t want to go nowhere. I want to keep looking down Misty’s shirt. Her bra flashes bright blue again, the kind of blue I’ve only seen in photographs, the color of deep water off in the Gulf of Mexico. The kind of blue in the pictures Michael took when he worked on the oil rig offshore, and the water was a living wet plain around him, making a great blue bowl with the sky. “ (P.45)

From this quotation can shows how man see woman as sexual object, and this act done by teenage boy who is considered doesn’t have mindset to oppres woman. Based on quote we can reveal, man see woman by form of her body not because they are smart and intelect which as equal as man. It can be proven in this sentence “ *I want to keep looking down Misty’s shirt. Her bra flashes bright blue again, the kind of blue I’ve only seen in photographs, the color of deep water off in the Gulf of Mexico.*” this sentence shows man see woman because attracted with their body and it got worst when man interpreted woman body as nothing.

This statement also can proven by the sentence ” *the color of deep water off in the Gulf of Mexico.*” Gulf of Mexico is a isolated water area which marginalize by atlantict ocean, it proven woman get oppression in verbal and put in as subaltern.

In the next quote, it can also be stated that the subaltern position accepted by women made women always got inappropriate treatment by men. And this is proven in the following quote,

“ We’d talk around it, avoid it like a bad customer in the bar who’s too drunk for more, who smells like sweet alcohol fermenting and diesel, yet keeps grabbing my hand when I walk by, saying something fucked up to me like: One more, you sweet Black bitch.”(P.64)

The quote above can prove that women got verbal oppression by men. This was done by men because they always maintaince their position above women and did not respect women as human beings. In this case, it can be proven by the designation given by men to women in the quote. This can be established by the use of the word "One more, you sweet Black bitch." The use of this word was a form of verbal oppression by men. Men viewed women only as objects they can treat as they please, even women considered only prostitutes or servants who had to serve them and there was no self-respect that they should respect as fellow human beings. This shows that the subaltern position experienced by women made women got unfair treatment and always received oppression from men. Men always looked down on women and regard women as slaves.

In the quote above, it can be stated that women did not have the opportunity to defend themselves and could only avoid them even though they know that men verbally oppress them. This also shows that even though women are in a work environment, they still do not have dignity as human beings and have the same position as men. In this quote, it can also be proven that the oppression of women is not something to be questioned about and this also shows that men are superior.

#### **4.1.2 Physical Oppression**

The second effect of subaltern that woman got in this novel was physical oppression. The subaltern position experienced by women not only caused them to be bullied verbally but also made them physically oppressed.

In addition, the physical oppression received by the female character occurred when she wanted to visit the male family with the aim of giving the news that the husband (child of the family) will soon be out of prison, but the woman did not receive good treatment but was held at gunpoint. a rifle. This is evident in the following quote,

“ I press the gas and swerve out into the street, the car behind me skids and its horn sounds, but I don’t care. My transmission switches gears with a high whine. I sling the car around and go faster. The gray SUV has pulled into a driveway, but the driver is waving his arm out the window, and Big Joseph is passing under the tree, stopping at the mailbox I just abandoned, lumbering off his lawn mower, striding toward the box. He is taking something off the seat of the mower, a rifle that was strapped there, something he keeps for wild pigs that root in the forest, but not for them now. For me.” (P.41)

In the quote above, it could be seen that female characters were physically oppressed by men in her family. This can be expressed by the use of the word "gun" which symbolized violence. Weapons are only used when hunting with the aim of killing, ironically these weapons were used for women.

In the quote can be taken over if treated like a game animal that can be shot and killed. This shows that the subaltern position experienced by women made them very oppressed and even not done humanely by men, and the oppression received by women did not care about the status of the woman. Even though these women were family members of men, women still received oppression from men. This also confirmed if the oppression received by these women also came from their families.

Furthermore, the treatment that women received was very inhuman, and forced to become sex slaves by men. This is evident in the following quote,

“Was a gunman named Blue that did it. It was a baseball Sunday; there was visitors. Some good-time girls, some men’s wives came. But Blue ain’t never had nobody. Called him Blue because he was so dark he shined like a plum in the sun, on the line. But he wasn’t right in the head; that’s why none of the women would talk to him. Wouldn’t take no visits with him. So he caught one of the women inmates out by the outhouses, and dragged her off into a stand.”Pop stops, looks back at the house.

“What he do?” I say.

“He raped her,” Pop says. “She was a strong woman, hands near as callused as his from all the picking and sewing she did, but she wasn’t no match for him. Hit anybody in the head hard enough, it knock them out. Her face—you could barely recognize her. And maybe nothing would have happened to Blue for doing it if she hadn’t been the sergeant’s wife’s favorite. Always the one she called to hang wash and scrub floors or mind the kids. Blue had enough brains to know that. So he left her there, striped skirt up around her head, covering her bloody face, that fabric turning muddy and red.”(P.162)

In the quote above, it can be stated that the male character, Blue, treated women roughly and according to his will. In the quote, it can be stated that the male character raped and defeated the woman so that the woman can fulfill the desire of the man. In the quote, it can also be stated that the physical oppression carried out by men against women resulted in the woman losing her life.

Even ironically, after men felt quite satisfied with their actions, men didn't care about the effects that women received from their actions. Then in the quote, the man left the woman like a dead animal that had no dignity as a human being. This shows that women had always been the object of satisfaction of men and also received physical oppression from men.

From the quotation it can prove if men only make women as objects of sexual satisfaction and do not see women as human beings. even in this quote, the lives that are owned by women do not have an important meaning for men.

#### **4.2 Oppression still exist**

In this novel, it can be show that women are too dependent on men. This can be proven by the following quote,

“Don't nobody sit and stare for that long on something this clean without looking at something.” Misty waved her hand at the coke and winked at me. She'd tattooed her boyfriend's initials on her ring finger, and for a second it looked like letters and then bugs and then letters again. Her boyfriend was Black, and this loving across color lines was one of the reasons we became friends so quickly. She often told me that as far as she was concerned, they were already married. Said she needed him because her mother didn't give a shit about her. (P.27)

From the quotation above, It can reveal that when a problem occurs in a woman's life, women do not have the strength to face the problem themselves. They tend to depend on the presence of men, this can be proven by sentences “*Said she needed him because her mother didn't give a shit about her.*” Based on the sentence , it can show women really need men in their lives, and in this quote the condition of women who really need the role of men to survive and solve their problems is a supporting factor for the oppression of women to occur and there is no resistance by women.

Based on the quotation above , it can show how big the role and influence of male domination is as superior to women. Even in this quote, women indirectly claim that they are weak and cannot be independent. In this quote, it can also be revealed that the doctrine of women is weaker than men and that women need the role of men to prove to be very strong and this strengthens the position of men as higher than women.

Continually, this is very ironic because women who should have the ability to survive in life and solve any problems they have independently, must



depend on men for their lives. Even though the background and profession that women have can actually guarantee their lives, they prefer to depend on men. even though if they do that, they unconsciously position themselves more.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Conclusion and finding The author found two forms namely verbal oppression and physical oppression as the act of subaltern towards women. Based on the analysis of this research, the writer finds that women are positioned as a subaltern group by men in the novel “sing, unburied, sing”. This study focuses on the subaltern issue of women. The author finds that women are positioned as subalterns by means of oppression by men. In this study, there are two types of oppression experienced by women, namely verbal oppression and physical oppression. For verbal oppression, the researcher found that women in the novel "sing, not buried, sing" always get abused, demeaned, and even given the lowest position in the form of work. This action results in women having no self-respect in front of men, men always think that women should be below them. The second is physical oppression. physical oppression experienced by women in the novel "sing, unburied, sing" in the form of acts of sexual violence and even the use of weapons against women.

The impact experienced by women due to oppression in the novel “sing, unburied, sing” makes women in the subaltern position. Leonie’s character can’t fight because she doesn’t have the power and chance to get out of the situation. Therefore, she cannot do anything because men are superior.

So, subalterns toward women in the novel “sing, unburied,sing” still exist at this time. The act of this issue is very dangerous. It can make women always positioned as inferior and get other violence from men. Based on the research, women must be aware and brave to fight injustice action.

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