



SUBALTERN IN LYNN NOTTAGE’S DRAMA SCRIPT, *RUINED*

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Article History	Abstract
Submitted date: 2022-11-05 Accepted date: 2022-12-25 Published date: 2023-02-01	This study attempts to describe how the women are portrayed as subaltern, the discriminated group that cannot speak up to defend their right. This is proposed to reveal how the women characters are portrayed as subaltern and to uncover the impacts of subalternity toward the women. The writer uses the perspective of Subaltern by Gayatri Spivak (1988). This study applies a qualitative research method as the analysis is presented in the form of an essay. The result of the study shows that the women as subaltern are portrayed as a powerless and voiceless group of people. The second result is that subalternity brings negative impacts toward women, subversion and exploitation. They subvert the social norm by building a prostitution and exploiting the men’s sexuality to get her own advantages. The writer concludes that the discrimination toward the subaltern can cause a negative impact to the society, therefore, the reader should build awareness to decrease the discriminative action in the society.
Keywords: subaltern; gender; discrimination	

Introduction

Subaltern is a term that refers to a group of people that is marginalized. They are not able to represent themselves and often experience discrimination or oppression from the dominant group. Subaltern is an oppressed group of people that is voiceless. They cannot speak because they are not listened to by the other group. Subaltern is also defined as non-elites, because elites are dominant groups both outsider and indigenous. According to Guha (1983) Subaltern can be seen in society, class, race, gender or politics. Subaltern becomes an important issue to be discussed as it leads to discrimination and unequal treatment toward inferior group of people. Nowadays, subalterns are portrayed in China. Muslim in Uyghur as the inferior group experience the discrimination from the authorities in China. They are thrown out of society unless they leave their beliefs. Their homes are burnt and they become the “refugees” in their own country and trapped in camps made by the government. In that camp they are forced to do something against their religion such as consuming alcohol and eating pork. The Muslim women are raped and some of them even be burnt alive. These Muslims in Uyghur are voiceless. They cannot speak their aspirations because they are not listened to by the society. They are marginalized and do not have the same rights as other citizens in China. The subaltern is not only portrayed in real life but also literary work. In this study, the drama script *Ruined* written by Lynn Nottage is chosen as the material object to analyze the portrayal of women as subaltern. By using Gayatri Spivak’s perspective of subaltern, the writer will analyze how women are portrayed as a subaltern in *Ruined* drama script, and find the impacts of subalternity toward the women.

Methodology

In this study, the writer uses a descriptive qualitative method and descriptive data which means the writer needs to elaborate the data research. "Qualitative researchers purposefully examine and make note of small cues in order to decide how to behave, as well as to make sense of the context and build larger knowledge claims about the culture" (Tracy, 2013). In this study, the writer takes the primary data from Lynn Nottage's drama script entitled *Ruined*. The writer collects the data by either the dialogues of the characters and narratives of the script. The writer also uses *Can The Subaltern Speak?* essay by Gayatri Spivak. To get the available data, the writer must read the data, mark the data that are related to the issue, and explore the meaning of the sentences and words to analyze. To analyze the data, the writer takes some steps. The first step is, analyzing the data that has been collected before. In this step, the writer focuses on the issue that occurs on the surface of the drama script. The second step is finding the characters that are classified as subaltern in the drama script. In this step, the writer explores the correlation between the characters and the issue. The writer also describes how the subaltern is portrayed in the script and explores the impacts of subalternity toward the women.

Finding and Discussion

The Portrayals of Subaltern

a) Powerless

The first portrayal of women as subaltern in *Ruined* drama script can be seen by how women are portrayed powerless. It can be seen in the quotations below how a woman is portrayed powerless because they are emotional, dependent, fearful.

MAMA. *I bet you were good at your studies. Am I right?*

SOPHIE. *Yes.*

MAMA. *A petit bureaucrat in the making. (Sophie shifts with discomfort. Her body aches, tears escape her eyes. Mama uses the cloth from her skirt to wipe Sophie's eyes.) Did they hurt you badly?*

SOPHIE. *(Whispered.) ... Yes (Nottage, 2009, pg. 12)*

The quotation above portrays a woman as powerless because she is an emotional being. The words her body aches, tears escape her eyes shows how a woman can only use her emotion to handle the discrimination that happens toward her. In this case a woman basically is not weak by her own nature, but because of the social condition that she experiences. It can be seen from the quotation that Sophie is actually a smart girl in her study, but she is weakened by the patriarchy system around her. In this quotation, Sophie represents an intellectual woman who is destroyed by the social system that causes her to be emotional and powerless.

SOPHIE. *What? Be thrown out there? Where will you go? Huh? Your husband? Your village? How much goodness did they show you?*

SALIMA. *(Wounded) Why did you say that?*

SOPHIE. *I'm sorry, but you know it's true. There is a war going on, and it isn't safe for a woman alone. You know this! It's better this way. Here. (Nottage, 2009, pg. 22)*

This quotation portrays how a woman is powerless since she is fearful because she cannot protect herself. The words "it isn't safe for a woman alone" indicates that Sophie is a fearful woman. This condition makes her afraid of being outside alone. She can only stay in the bar because she thinks that is the only thing she can do to be safe. She is afraid of the situation that can harm her because she is a woman. This quotation describes how a woman is portrayed powerless because she is fearful. It can cause a woman to get harassed because they are

considered powerless and do not have courage to protect herself. A woman is portrayed powerless not only because they are fearful, but also because they are dependent. It can be seen by how Salima needs her husband to protect her while she is powerless to protect herself. It is stated in the quotation below:

SALIMA: Oh God please give me that morning. "Forget the pot, Fortune. Stay... stay" that's what I would tell him. How did I get in the middle of their fight? What did I do, Sophie? I must have done something. (Nottage, 2009, pg. 46)

The quotation above portrays the woman as powerless since she is dependent on men. In this case a woman is violated because she is powerless and does not know how to protect herself from harassment. In the sentence *I must have done something* describes how powerless a woman is when she is alone. She is often to get discrimination and criminalized when they are alone. She doesn't know how to defend herself and it makes her dependent on a man. It can be seen in the words *Fortune, stay* how Salima wishes her husband to be there to save her. She is powerless when her husband is not around her to protect her. A woman is also portrayed powerless since she is not able to deal with her trauma about the violence she experiences. It can be seen in the quotation below how Salima is not able to deal with her trauma of the discrimination.

SALIMA: Five months. Chained like a goat. These men fighting ... fighting for our liberation. Still I close my eyes and I see such terrible things. Things, I cannot stand to have in my head. How can men be this way? (A moment.) It was such a clear and open sky. So, so beautiful. How could I not hear them coming? (Nottage, 2009, pg. 20)

The quotation above, shows that a woman is portrayed powerless since she is not able to deal with her trauma. In the words *Things, I cannot stand to have in my head* describes how the discrimination toward the woman creates traumatic memories. Those memories linger in her head and she does not know how to free herself from her trauma. Salima represents how a woman is powerless to handle her psychological trauma. In this case, Salima is traumatized by the soldiers who violate her for five months. In other words *How can I not hear them coming?* Describes how Salima blames herself because she does not realize that the men come to rape her. She cannot stop regretting the situation that she experienced. This quotation describes how powerless is Salima when she is stuck in her traumatic memory and blames herself for experiencing the abuse.

b) Voiceless

Second portrayal of the subaltern is voiceless. The word voiceless does not mean that the subaltern do not speak for themselves at all, it is because they are unheard by the dominated group.

SOPHIE. Is that what you think? While I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone, but what those men did to me lives inside of my body. Every step I take I feel them in me. Punishing me. And it will be that way for the rest of my life. (Nottage, 2009, pg.23)

The quotation above portrays a woman as a silent group. In this case, a woman is portrayed silent since she is just able to deliver her hopes through singing. The words *when I'm singing, I'm praying the pain will be gone* describes how a woman can only pray for her suffering. It indicates that a woman is not able to act for her suffering. Instead, she just sings and hopes the situation will be better. In the words *live inside my body* describes how she can only keep her pain inside her and not be brave to speak. She is not able to describe her feelings and her desires

to other people. Through singing, she tells her hopes and releases whatever she feels toward the violence that the men do to her. This quotation represents how a woman is silent because she is not able to describe her feelings to the society and make an act for her suffering. Instead, she can only hide her hope and sing in front of the people to hide her pain. Not only portrayed silently because she keeps their feelings inside, a woman is also portrayed voiceless because she can only deliver her ideas through the songs. It can be seen by how Sophie sings a song that represents her condition as a silenced woman.

A rare bird on a limb sings a song heard by a few. A few patient and distant listeners. To be seen, is to be doomed It must evade capture, And yet the bird Still cries out to be heard (Nottage, 2009, Pg. 26)

The quotation above shows how women are portrayed as a voiceless group. In this case, a woman is portrayed voiceless since she is only able to deliver her ideas through song. It can be seen from the lyric, *the bird* symbolizes a woman who tries to speak up. The words *sings a song heard by a few* describes that a woman actually speaks her ideas but she is not listened to. The words *to be seen is to be doomed* describes how a woman always get a violence every time she tries to deliver her idea. It means that a woman is silent because she is oppressed for not to speak. The words *the bird still cries out to be heard* describes how the women suffer to be heard by the society. According to Spivak, subalterns are voiceless not because they do not speak for themselves, but because they are not listened to by the superior group. This quotation indicates that the women as subaltern try to speak for themselves but they are silenced by the society. They are not listened to and even discriminated against when they try to speak up.

From the analysis above, it can be seen that the bird becomes the symbol of a woman who tries to speak up. In the quotation below, a woman is portrayed voiceless because she must neglect her own way to speak up so she can be understood. In other words, a woman is limited to deliver her ideas toward society. It can be seen in the quotation below, how the bird represents the woman as a silenced group.

MAMA. Last Thursday. No one wanted the damn bird. It complains too much. CHRISTIAN. (Amused.) Yeah, what does it say? (Christian walks to the birdcage, and peers under the covering.) MAMA. Who the hell knows? It speaks pygmy.(Nottage, 2009, pg. 7)

The quotation above describes how the subaltern as a silenced group must speak their voice through the ‘language’ of the oppressor if they want to be understood. The words *It complains too much* describes how the women as subaltern are not accepted by the society surrounding them when they try to speak up for themselves. In other words, who *the hell knows? It speaks Pygmy* shows how the women as subaltern cannot be understood and cannot be listened to whenever they try to represent themselves. The superior group will act as if they do not understand their language and ignore them. According to Spivak, the subordinated people can only be listened to only if they speak the “language” of the oppressor. In this case, a woman as subaltern must ignore her own way of thinking to represent herself and adopt the oppressors’ way. In other words, a woman is limited to deliver her ideas, to act and to represent herself in the society. She is not completely free and still chained by the oppressors’ rules to be listened to. This quotation represents how the subaltern is voiceless not because they do not know how to speak, but because they are not being understood or listened to. A woman is also silenced because she does not have a chance to represent herself. It can be seen in the quotation below how Mama Nadi tells Mr. Harari that she wants to pursue her own liberty but she does not have a chance to fight like the men do.

MAMA: Everyone talk talk diamonds, but I ... I want a powerful slip of paper that says I can cut down forests and dig holes and build to the moon if I choose. I don't want someone to turn up at my door, and take my life from me. Not ever again. But how does a woman get a piece of land, without having to pick up a fucking gun? (Mr. Harari watches the soldiers.) (Nottage, 2009, pg. 19)

The quotation above shows how women are voiceless because they do not have a chance to represent themselves in the society. It can be seen from the quotation the comparison between women's position and men's position in the war that they do not have the same place. The words *how does a woman get a piece of land without having a fucking gun?* Describes how Mama Nadi does not have the same position of men. Mama does not have a chance to represent herself to fight for the land. This sentence shows Mama's position as an inferior group who does not have a position in the battle because she is marginal to the society. Meanwhile, the words *Mr. Harari watches the soldiers* show the men's position during the war. The men as a superior group are privileged to defend their land. They can represent their group in defending themselves by being the soldiers with weapons. The quotation above describes how the women are inferior and do not have the same position as men as superior. The men are able to represent themselves as soldiers with guns to protect their land, while the women are not able to represent themselves because they are a marginal group.

The Impacts of Subalternity Toward The Woman

a) Subversion

The first impact of subalternity toward women is subversion. The women must subvert the social norm because they do not have any other way to deal with subalternity around them. It can be seen by how they decide to be in the prostitution even though it is framed negatively by their society. The women subvert the social norm to save the other women, and to criticize the government.

MAMA: I didn't come to here as Mama Nadi, I found her the same way miners find their wealth in the muck. I stumbled off of that road without two twigs to start a fire. I turned a basket of sweets and soggy biscuits into a business. I don't give a damn what any of you think. This is my place, Mama Nadi's (Nottage, 2009, Pg. 57)

This quotation shows how a woman tries to deal with subalternity by subverting the social norm. It can be seen from this quotation, how a woman is in the prostitution to survive even though it is framed negatively by society. The words *I found her the same way miners find their wealth in the muck* describes how a woman tries to build her life after being ruined by society. The words describe how she shows her pride in building the prostitution after she struggles with her condition. The words *I don't give a damn what any of you think. This is my place. Mama Nadi's* shows how a woman subverts the social stereotype that says prostitution is negative. She tries to ignore people's stereotypes and defend her business. The woman also subverts the social norm to save other women that experience the same discrimination comes the discrimination to survive. It can be seen in the quotation below how Mama accepts the women with an open hand to stay in her bar.

MAMA. You men kill me. You come in here, drink your beer, take your pleasure, and then wanna judge the way I run my "business." The front door swings both ways. I don't force anyone's hand. My girls, ask them, Emilene, Mazima, Josephine, ask them, they'd rather be here, any day, than back out there in their villages where they are taken without regard. (Nottage, 2009, Pg. 57)

The quotation above describes how a woman subverts the social norm to save the other women. In this situation, prostitution becomes the way for other women to deal with their subalternity. It can be seen from the words *wanna judge my business* how society views prostitution as negative. The words *I don't force anyone's hand* describes how Mama Nadi as procurer, the owner of the bar, does not force the women to prostitute, they come willingly because of the brutality they experience. It indicates that a procurer does not always steal the women from their home and do human trafficking. It strengthens that prostitution becomes the way of the women to deal with subalternity. The words *they'd rather be here* shows how Mama's bar becomes their place to settle down after being abandoned by their own families and thrown out by the villagers. The women also subvert the social norm to criticize how the government with their patriarchy system violates the women. It can be seen from the quotation below how Mama Nadi criticizes the government for neglecting the women.

They're safer with me, than in their own homes, because this country is picked clean, while men, poets like you, drink beer, eats nuts, and look for someplace to disappear. And I am without mercy, is that what you're saying? Because I give them something other than a beggar's cup. (Nottage, 2009, Pg. 57)

This quotation shows how a woman subverts the social norm as critique to the government. In this case, a woman criticizes how the patriarchal society neglects women. The words *men, poets like you, drink beer, eat nuts, and look for someplace to disappear* describes how a woman criticizes the men, both from the government and from the villagers who abandon the women. She criticizes how the men can only discriminate against the women while the rest can only close their eyes when the women are discriminated against. It can be seen from these words how society cannot do anything for the women. The words *I give them something more than a beggar's cup* shows how Mama Nadi and the prostitution give the second chance for the discriminated women to have their lives while their society cannot do anything to save them. This quotation shows how a woman subverts the social norm to be in prostitution as critique to the government system that does not have a concern toward the women.

b) Exploitation

The second impact of subaltern toward women is exploitation. With their condition as subaltern, the women do not have a place among their society. They are subordinated by the government and also marginalized by their own villages. To deal with this situation, exploitation becomes one of the ways they have to survive. They manipulate both government and rebel soldiers to take their own advantages, they also use men's sexuality to gain their wealth. It can be seen in the quotation below how Mama Nadi as procurer tries to manipulate the government to protect her own business of prostitution.

MAMA. Please. (Whispered.) He's a very important man. So when he offers you a drink, you drink it. CHRISTIAN. Please, Mama. MAMA. He can help us, or he can cause us many problems. It's your decision. Remember, if you don't step on the dog's tail, he won't bite you (Nottage, 2009, Pg. 33)

This quotation describes how a woman manipulates the government to protect herself. It can be seen in this quotation, how a woman pretends to be on the side of the government to make her own advantage. The words *he can help us, or he can cause us many problem* describes how a woman sees two possibilities that can happen depending on her own decision. She decides to be on the government side and manipulates them to get her own advantages. In other words, if *you don't step on the dog's tail, he won't bite you*. It represents how a woman as subaltern tries to play safe to protect her own life. She knows how to deal with the government to take her

own opportunity. In this case, the exploitation that the subaltern does is manipulating the government to make her own protection. She pretends to be with the government and pretends to support them. Thus, she can take her own advantage to protect her own life.

Not only manipulating the government, the women also try to make their own opportunities by exploiting the men's sexuality. It can be seen from the quotation below how Mama Nadi tries to save a prostitute from her abusive husband by using sexuality to distract him.

MAMA. Young man, the woman you're looking for isn't here. But if you want company I have plenty of that. What do you like? (Seductively.) I know the challenges of a soldier's life, I hear stories from men every day. And there's nothing better than a gentle hand to pluck out the thorns, and heal the heart. (Mama runs her hand up her thigh and laughs. Fortune turns away, disgusted. Mama smiles.)(Nottage, 2009, Pg. 47)

This quotation represents how women use sexuality to control a man. It becomes one of the ways for women to deal with the social condition around her. *What do you like? (Seductively)* shows how sexuality becomes an opportunity for a woman to control the men. In this quotation, Mama tries to make a resistance in her own way, knowing that men are easily distracted by their sexual desire, Mama uses this opportunity to protect a prostitute from her husband that once abused her and throws her out of her village. In this quotation a woman is not being powerless because she becomes a sexual object in the patriarchy system, in order to create her own resistance, she uses sexuality to control a man to take her own advantage and protect another woman from an abusive family.

Men's sexuality is not only used to save another woman from brutality, but also used to take the men's money as much as they can. It can be seen in the quotation below, how Mama Nadi takes advantage of a man's sexual desire to drain their money.

MAMA. He pays me in gold, he pays me in Coltan. What is worth more? You tell me. What is their argument? I don't know. Who will win? Who cares? There's an old proverb: "Two hungry birds fight over a kernel, just then a third one swoops down and carries it off. Whoops!"(Nottage, 2009, Pg. 60)

This quotation shows how a woman uses sexuality to gain her own wealth. It can be seen how Mama Nadi made her wealth through prostitution. The words *two hungry birds fight over a kernel* represents two sides of colonization, the colonizer and the colonized, who battle for the wealth of the land. The words *a third one swoops down and carries it off* represents the subaltern who tries to take a chance of the situation to steal their wealth while they are distracted by their own arguments. This quotation describes how Mama Nadi as subaltern tries to make her own opportunity rather than be stuck between two sides of colonization. It can be seen in the quotation, how Mama takes the soldier's wealth such as gold and coltan through prostitution. Mama uses men's sexuality to make them give up whatever they have for pleasure.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, this study finds two results. The first result is about how women are portrayed as subaltern, this study finds that the women are portrayed as a powerless and voiceless group. They are portrayed powerless since they are emotional, fearful, and dependent. They are powerless because they do not know how to protect themselves and to defend themselves when they are discriminated against in patriarchy society. The women are also portrayed voiceless because they do not know how to speak for their right. They do not have the same opportunity as the men do to fight for their rights. The second result is that the

subalternity has two impacts toward the subaltern women, subversion and exploitation. The women subverts the social norm by becoming prostitutes to continue their lives. They also exploit men's sexuality to take their own advantages.

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