



SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE OF THE SUBALTERN IN PALESTINE IN THE NOVEL RIJĀL FĪ ASY-SYAMS BY GHASSAN KANAFANI: POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH OF GAYATRI C. SPIVAK

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the forms of colonial domination over the subaltern in Palestine and to reveal the symbolic resistance of the subaltern against colonialism in the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* by Ghassan Kanafani. The central issue in the novel concerns the silencing of subaltern voices by the upper-class society in Palestine. This research is a library research employing a qualitative approach. The study adopts Gayatri C. Spivak's postcolonial theory as its analytical framework. The data consist of words, phrases, and sentences related to symbolic resistance found in the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams*. Data collection techniques include reading and categorizing data in accordance with the research focus. Data analysis was conducted through reading, describing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions. The findings of this study reveal seven forms of domination carried out by the upper class, including those in power in Palestine. These are economic, ideological, religious, social, gender-based, capitalist, and political domination.

تجريد

يهدف هذا البحث إلى اكتشاف أشكال هيمنة الاستعمار على الفئات الدنيا (السوبالترن) في فلسطين، وكشف أشكال المقاومة الرمزية التي تقوم بها هذه الفئات ضد الاستعمار في رواية "رجال في الشمس" لغسان كنفاني. تتعلق المشكلة المطروحة في الرواية بعدم سماع أصوات الفئات الدنيا من قبل الطبقات العليا في المجتمع الفلسطيني. نوع هذا البحث هو بحث مكتبي (*library research*) باستخدام المنهج النوعي. ويعتمد هذا البحث على مقارنة ما بعد الاستعمار التي طرحها غاياتري تشاكرافورتى سبيفاك. أما بيانات هذا البحث فتتمثل في الكلمات والعبارات والجمل المتعلقة بالمقاومة الرمزية الواردة في رواية "رجال في الشمس". أما طريقة جمع البيانات فتعتمد على القراءة وتصنيف البيانات وفقاً لموضوع البحث. وتم تحليل البيانات من خلال القراءة، والوصف، والتفسير، ثم استنتاج النتائج. وصلت نتائج هذا البحث إلى وجود سبعة أشكال من الهيمنة تمارسها الطبقات العليا في المجتمع، بما في ذلك الحكام في فلسطين، وهي: الهيمنة الاقتصادية، والأيدولوجية، والدينية، والاجتماعية، والجندرية، والرأسمالية، والسياسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

ما بعد الاستعمار

فلسطيني

المهمش

المقاومة

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan bentuk dominasi kolonialisme terhadap subaltern di Palestina dan mengungkapkan resistensi simbolik subaltern terhadap kolonialisme dalam Novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* karya Ghassan Kanafani. Permasalahan yang terjadi dalam Novel tersebut

Kata kunci:

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berkaitan dengan tidak didengarnya suara-suara subaltern oleh masyarakat kalangan atas di Palestina. Jenis penelitian ini adalah library research dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Poskolonial Gayatri C. Spivak. Data dalam penelitian yaitu kata, frasa serta kalimat yang berkaitan dengan resistensi simbolik yang terdapat dalam novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* karya Ghassan Kanafani. Teknik pengumpulan data yaitu membaca dan mengelompokkan data sesuai objek penelitian. Teknik analisis data dengan membaca, mendeskripsikan, menafsirkan, dan menarik kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan adanya tujuh bentuk dominasi yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat kalangan atas, termasuk juga para penguasa di Palestina, yaitu dominasi ekonomi, ideologi, agama, sosial, gender, kapitalis, dan politik.

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A. Introduction

Resistance or opposition is not only aimed at opposing and overthrowing but also at building and uniting the lost voices caused by power full of injustice and excessive exploitation experienced by subaltern groups. According to Spivak, resistance is the subaltern's effort to challenge the dominant narrative and strive to have their voices heard. However, she also emphasizes that this resistance does not always mean that the subaltern can fully articulate themselves within the very structures that oppress them. In her famous work "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak highlights that there are limitations preventing marginalized groups from truly speaking or being heard, especially in the context of colonial history and power (Spivak, 2021a). Therefore, the resistance of the subaltern expresses their desire for their voices to be heard by the world regarding the oppression and domination they experience, including the lasting impacts of Western imperialism and colonialism (Loomba, 2005).

Colonialism and imperialism were considered legal and continued until the early 20th century, or more precisely during World War I, which was used as a pretext to destroy the ruling empires at that time and continued until World War II (Azziaty Rozali & Fahimi Kamaruzzaman, 2011). During the early 20th century, many nations under Western colonial rule, including territories under the British Empire (also known as the United Kingdom), formally gained independence, one of which was Palestine. However, Palestine continues to face issues of national sovereignty that persist to this day (Khalidi, 2020).

With the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict leading to humanitarian issues, many media outlets from various sectors both defend and challenge human rights, which continue to deteriorate day by day, as clearly depicted in the aftermath of the Israel-Palestine wars. One of the sectors that contributes significantly to defending and advocating for the oppressed people is the literary community (Al-Fakhuri, 1986). Arab writers, through written media such as poetry and novels, try to bring about a revolution and change in the right direction (Azziaty Rozali & Fahimi Kamaruzzaman, 2011). From this situation, Ghassan Kanafani, as a writer, strives to portray the voices and symbolic resistance of the subaltern in Palestine through his works.

One of the novels is *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* (1962). Through this short story, Ghassan Kanafani depicts the suffering and despair of Palestinian refugees, as well as criticism of the Arab governments considered indifferent to their plight. The story is full of symbolism and metaphor; for example, the water tank symbolizes the trap and hopeless conditions experienced by the refugees (Edy Febriana & Dkk, 2020). *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* also explores themes such as loss, identity, and betrayal. This story functions not only as a historical reminder but also as a call for justice and recognition of the suffering endured by Palestinian refugees. Therefore, through this short story, Ghassan Kanafani represents symbolic resistance, which is unpacked using the postcolonial theory of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 1999). This is because Spivak states that there are subaltern voices that cannot be heard.

Most previous studies on Ghassan Kanafani's *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* have generally focused on the political dimension of Palestinian resistance or on the socio-historical context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. These studies often highlight the collective struggle of the Palestinian people, emphasizing nationalism and anti-imperialism as the central themes. However, few have examined this work through the lens of postcolonial subaltern theory, particularly from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's perspective. Analyzing the Palestinian issue through Spivak's lens is crucial because the conflict is not merely a geopolitical dispute but a continuation of colonial legacies that continually reproduce new subaltern groups, including refugees and civilians whose voices are marginalized. Spivak's perspective helps reveal how their narratives are frequently unrepresented within global discourse, thereby opening space to re-examine the position, agency, and silencing of Palestinian subalterns. Unlike earlier analyses that merely interpret Kanafani's work as a political allegory, this research emphasizes

the symbolic and discursive forms of resistance voiced by the subaltern characters who are trapped within structures. This study therefore fills the gap by exploring how Kanafani's *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* represents the inability of the subaltern to speak within postcolonial discourse and how this silence itself becomes a form of symbolic resistance. In doing so, the research not only reinterprets the narrative from a postcolonial feminist perspective but also deepens the understanding of how Palestinian identity and resistance are constructed through literary expression under conditions of marginalization and domination.

B. Research Methods

The research method to be used includes the type of research, data sources, data collection techniques, and data analysis techniques (Djoko Pradopo, 2003). The type of research used is library research. This approach involves examining, reviewing, reading, and comparing various references and relevant reading sources related to the research theme, as well as drawing conclusions from the results (Hadi, 2002) (Yuni Syakila Wardah, 2025). The data sources consist of words, phrases, and sentences found in the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* by Ghassan Kanafani.

The data collection techniques used are (1) reading and observing the novel, (2) selecting data from the novel, (3) storing and printing the data from the novel, and (4) re-reading the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* by Ghassan Kanafani. The data analysis method applied in this study is the deconstructive technique, which involves the process of documenting data and identifying issues that have been previously collected and documented (Faruk, 2017). In applying Spivak's deconstructive technique, this study operationalizes deconstruction as a close reading strategy that traces gaps, silences, and rhetorical failures within the text. The analysis focuses on how specific words or phrases simultaneously reveal and conceal power relations, particularly those that marginalize subaltern voices.

Following Spivak, the procedure involves several steps: (1) identifying key lexical items or narrative patterns that construct dominant meanings; (2) examining contradictions, absences, or moments where the text fails to fully articulate subaltern subjectivity; (3) interrogating how these failures reproduce structures of colonial power; and (4) re-reading the text to highlight alternative or suppressed meanings that expose the limits of its representational discourse. These steps allow the deconstructive technique to be applied systematically and ensure the replicability of the analytical process. This analysis is supported

by theories relevant to the research objectives, particularly the deconstruction approach proposed by Spivak in analyzing postcolonial literary works (Spivak, 2021b). The choice of this technique is adjusted to the research object, whether it is a formal or material object. In presenting the results of the data analysis, the researcher will describe the research findings narratively. This study will explain the results of the data analysis by elaborating on each piece of data found in the research.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Results

This section presents the main findings of the research regarding the forms of colonial domination over the subaltern in Palestine and the symbolic resistance depicted in the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* by Ghassan Kanafani. The data were obtained from the novel's text, analyzed using Gayatri C. Spivak's postcolonial approach, and categorized based on types of domination and symbols of resistance.

Forms of domination over the subaltern. The research found seven forms of domination experienced by the subaltern characters in the novel, as summarized in the following table:

No	Forms of Domination	Brief Description
1	Ideology	Depiction of ideas that place the subaltern in an inferior position
2	Religion	Utilization of religion as a tool to legitimize power
3	Economy	Economic inequality and exploitation of subaltern resources
4	Social	Social exclusion and discrimination against subaltern groups
5	Gender	Gender role inequality in oppressed societies
6	Capitalist	Economic exploitation based on the interests of capitalist elites
7	Political	Suppression of the voices and political rights of subaltern groups

a) Symbols of resistance in the novel

The research also identifies three types of symbolic resistance displayed by the subaltern characters in the novel. These symbols are taken from words, phrases, and sentences that carry meanings of resistance.

1) Open Resistance

Symbol: "a crowded group of ants"

Meaning: Depicts collective and organized resistance against power.

2) Hidden Resistance

Symbol: "a cursed well"

Meaning: Represents hidden and individual forms of resistance, such as plans to smuggle out of Palestine.

3) Verbal Resistance

Form: Dialogues and monologues of the characters

Meaning: Implicit criticism of the social and political conditions experienced by the characters.

2. Discussion

a) Forms of domination

In her work, Spivak critiques dominant paradigms of knowledge and investigates how cultural representation and knowledge can become powerful instruments of domination. She highlights the complexity and difficulties faced by subaltern subjects in speaking or expressing themselves due to power structures that block or limit such possibilities. Thus, the forms of domination referred to by Gayatri Spivak relate to how colonial power and modern knowledge structures create social hierarchies and ignore the voices and existence of oppressed subjects (Spivak, 2021b). These forms of domination are illustrated in the short story excerpts below:

1) Economic Domination

Economic domination shows that being trapped in poverty or poor economic conditions has a significant impact on the choices and actions they take. They are curious to know whether others, in similar situations, would act

or feel the same as they do now (Khalidi & Samour, 2019). This is illustrated in the words of Abū Qais to Ustad Salim below.

تري لو عشت، لو أغرثك الفقر كما أغرقني، أكنت تفعل ما أفعل الآن. أكنت تقبل ان تحمل
 سنك كلها على كتفيك وتهرب عبر الصحراء إلى الكويت كي تجد لقمت الخبز؟

“If you live, if you are drowned in poverty like me, I want to know if you would do what I am doing now. Would you carry your entire life on your shoulders and flee across the desert to find a piece of bread?”

Overall, the above quote illustrates how economic domination, or significant economic limitations, can restrict a person’s life choices and influence their perspective on life and the actions of others in similar situations. This is similar to Sa’ad’s words in the quote below.

ماذا تنتظر؟ الثروة تأتي من خلال سقف منزلك؟ منزلك؟ هذا ليس منزلك. يقول لك رجل كريم: 'ابق
 هنا!'. هذا كل شيء."

“What are you waiting for? Wealth that comes through your rooftop? That’s not your home. A generous man told you: ‘Stay here!’ That’s all.”

Based on the quote above, this sentence describes a situation where the rulers or elites in society use degrading or humiliating actions toward the subaltern group. The term “subaltern” refers to groups that are beneath or under the control of rulers or elites, who often face marginalization or oppression (Edward Said, 1979).

2) Religion Domination

Sigmund Freud, in his work *The Future of an Illusion*, proposed that religion holds psychological dominance due to its ability to provide individuals with a sense of security and hope, although it can also function as a form of perpetuated ignorance. This is similar to the situation of the Palestinian subaltern who are underestimated by the rulers, as illustrated in the quote below.

و سوف تؤم الناس يوم الجمعة..أليس كذلك؟

كلا، إنني أستاذ و لست إماما

“And you will lead the Friday prayer... isn't that so?”

“No, I am a teacher, not an Imam. I cannot lead the prayer.”

Ustad Salim's response to the village head's question depicts a situation where he feels his confidence is belittled or insulted by their religion. This can occur when a person's personal beliefs or convictions conflict with the teachings or norms upheld by their religion, or when individual beliefs are deemed inappropriate or unappreciated within their religious environment. This rejection can be understood as a form of religious domination because the religious discourse is mobilized not as an authentic expression of faith, but as a mechanism of authority that delegitimizes the teacher's secular position. In Spivak's terms, religion becomes a tool through which dominant groups whether colonial powers or local elites assert control by defining what is 'proper,' 'obedient,' or 'morally acceptable.' The act of invoking religious labels to undermine the teacher reflects how religious authority is strategically used to silence or marginalize individuals who do not conform to this imposed normative framework. Thus, the rejection does not merely express disagreement, but represents a discursive tactic that reinforces hierarchical power relations through the language of religion.

Essentially, the quote illustrates an internal conflict between personal belief and religious authority that is perceived to diminish or undermine an individual's self-confidence. This can lead to feelings of alienation or psychological tension among those trying to balance personal faith with adherence to religious norms (Rashid Khalidi, 1977).

3) Ideology Domination

The domination occurring in Palestine causes the subaltern to experience significant trauma, which can hinder their ongoing lives. The trauma experienced by the subaltern (groups marginalized or weak within social or political structures) is caused by ideological domination (Spivak, 2021b). This ideological domination may include the influence of certain ideologies that dominate their lives, such as in contexts involving political or social conflicts in Palestine. This is illustrated in the quote below.

المدرسة لا تعلم شيئاً. لا تعلم سوى اكل الفاتركها وغص في المقلاة مثلما فعل سائر البشر.

"School teaches nothing. It only teaches laziness. So just leave it and dive into the frying pan like everyone else did."

وأن عليه ان يترك تلك المدرسة السخيفة التي لا تعلم شيئاً وان يغوص في المقلاة مع من غاص

"He must leave that stupid school, which teaches nothing, and dive into the frying pan along with everyone else."

Based on the above quote, it is evident that the subaltern group, namely Abū Qais, Marwan, and As'ad, express disappointment with education that is considered inadequate or unhelpful, and decide to turn to other options that may not be as ideal as hoped. The term "subaltern" itself refers to groups that are often oppressed or ignored by power structures in society. Difficulties in learning or accessing education can be seen as a further form of control over these groups, resulting in feelings of injustice and hardship in obtaining intellectual freedom and social progress (Hoke, 2014).

4) Social Domination

Social domination in Gayatri Spivak's thought refers to a deeper understanding of how dominant power and knowledge regulate, represent, and sometimes oppress certain groups in society, especially in postcolonial and feminist contexts (Spivak, 2021a). This is illustrated in the quote below:

ولكنها أنجبت بنتاً سماها (حسناً)، ماتت بعد شهرين من ولادتها. وقال مشموزاً: "لقد كانت نحلة للغاية!"

"She gave birth to a girl named Husna, who died two months after her birth. The doctor said unpleasantly, "She was very Thin"

The quote above combines two different and confusing ideas. The phrase "she was very thin" in the context of social domination is not commonly used in such a way. It likely means that the doctor was indicating that the girl died due to health problems related to social conditions that led to premature death, such as poverty or limited access to healthcare.

5) Gender Domination

Spivak also analyzes how gender is closely related to power and colonial structures. She shows that colonization not only creates differences and hierarchies between nations but also between genders. Women often become victims of both forms of domination, both as colonized subjects who are enslaved or exploited, and within social structures that place them under men (Rahayu, 2014). This is illustrated in the quote below:

أن يترك أربعة أطفال، أن يطلقك اي سبب، ثم يتزوج من تلك المرأة الشوهاء. هذا أمر لا يغفره لنفسه
 حين يصحو، ذات يوم، ويكتشف ما فعل

“Leaving four children, divorcing you for any reason, then marrying that disabled woman. This is something he will never forgive himself for when he wakes up one day and realizes what he has done.”

Based on Marwan’s statement above, it is clear that gender domination highlights how power and control held by men can significantly affect the lives and well-being of women. This underscores the importance of gender equality and protection of women's rights to decide their own fate and lives, without being influenced by harmful social norms or stigmatization related to weakness or disability.

6) Capitalist Domination

Spivak’s view on capitalist domination shows that this phenomenon cannot be reduced merely to economic exploitation, but must also be seen in the context of broad ideological, political, and cultural control aimed at maintaining the hidden domination and injustice within it. This is illustrated in the quote below:

"سأخذ منك عشرين ديناراً. وسوف تجد نفسك في بغداد".

"عشرون ديناراً؟"

"نعم! وعليك أيضاً أن تساعدني طوال الطريق".

"I will take twenty dinars from you. And you will find yourself in Baghdad."

"Twenty dinars?"

"Yes! And you must also help me all along the way."

Based on the quote above, it appears that the party demanding twenty dinars, the smuggler (Abū 'Abdun), takes advantage of the situation where the other party, As'ad, needs help or access (such as traveling to Baghdad). This inequality reflects capitalist domination, where economic power or access to resources determines the dynamics of negotiation (Succi, 2024).

7) Political Domination

Spivak also highlights the efforts of resistance and emancipation against this political domination. She encourages listening to the voices of the subaltern and promoting cross-border solidarity in fighting unjust power structures (Parnass, 2007). This injustice is depicted in the short story excerpt below:

نظر اليه ابو العبد بالاح، ثم انفجر: "إنني أنقذ حياتك بعشرين دينارا. أتحسب أنك ستمض عمرك مختفيا هنا؟ غداً يلقون القبض عليك".

"Abū 'Abdun looked at him insistently, then exploded: 'I am saving your life for twenty dinars. Do you think you will spend your life hiding here? Tomorrow they will arrest you.'"

Based on the quote above, this sentence reflects inequality in access to protection or security. The individual with greater economic resources, namely Abū 'Abdun, can offer protection or assistance in potentially dangerous situations, while the other individual without such resources may face greater threats from political decisions or greater powers. Political domination here is reflected through control over life-and-death decisions, the use of economic power to influence political or social decisions, threats against individuals based on political interests, and inequality in access to protection or security within a broader context. Similar domination is shown in the excerpt below:

لا، لا، سأسلمك النقود حالما تجهز الرحلة تماما. سوف أراك مرة في كل يوم. أنني أنزل في فندق قريب

"No. No, I will give you the money as soon as the travel preparations are complete. I will see you once every day. I am staying at a nearby hotel."

Based on the quote above, the agreement to provide money after the travel documents are prepared indicates that there is control or influence from certain social or administrative structures affecting how individuals interact or

conduct transactions. This may include travel permits, administrative requirements, or other rules imposed by the government or related institutions.

Although political domination is not explicitly stated in this sentence, we can see that political power or social structures can influence how individuals interact, move, or conduct transactions in their daily lives – even in matters that may seem like personal or practical affairs such as travel preparations or temporary accommodations.

b) Symbols of resistance

In Spivak's thought, the subaltern are not only semiotically represented by intellectuals or elite activists who speak on their behalf, but they themselves must be empowered to voice their own presence (Spivak, 2021a). This gives rise to semiotic resistance, where the subaltern attempt to assert their existence in the public sphere, even if in indirect forms or those that may not be recognized by dominant power structures.

This symbolic resistance may occur through rituals, folklore, or other cultural forms that are not always taken seriously by colonial or postcolonial powers. However, Spivak emphasizes the importance of understanding and paying attention to these modes as part of the struggle to authentically listen to the subaltern's voice and to include them in broader political and social discourse.

Thus, the concept of symbolic resistance by the subaltern reflects their effort to overcome neglect and obstruction of their own voices, as well as the importance of recognizing the plurality of cultural and political expressions within a wider context. Gayatri Spivak indeed acknowledges various forms of resistance, including open, covert, and verbal resistance, as part of the dynamics of subaltern struggle. However, in Spivak's view, it is crucial to see that these types of resistance are not always clearly separated and can overlap in complex contexts.

Below are the forms of resistance that symbolize the subaltern resistance of Palestinians.

1) Open Resistance

Open resistance is the clearest and most observable form of resistance, such as street protests, demonstrations, or physical opposition to dominant power. Spivak acknowledges the importance of this resistance as a way to

directly express dissatisfaction and demands for change. This is illustrated in the quote below:

مرر كفه فوق ذقنه الخشنة و نقض عن رأسه كل الأفكار التي تجمعت كجيش زاحمة من النمل.

“He ran his hand over his rough chin and brushed away from his head all the thoughts that had gathered like a crowded swarm of ants.”

Based on the quote above, the “swarm of ants” represents symbolic resistance carried out by the subaltern, namely Abū Qais, in Palestine. This is because open resistance can be described as a strong, coordinated, and collective movement capable of confronting and challenging existing power structures. This metaphor shows that although individuals may be small or marginalized individually, they have great potential when united in efforts toward greater social and political change (Febrianisa, 2024).

2) Hidden Resistance

Gayatri Spivak develops this idea in the context of her analysis of power dynamics and subalternity, especially in relation to colonial and postcolonial societies. She emphasizes that hidden resistance often emerges as a response to harsh conditions and systematic oppression, where the subaltern lack equal access to public spaces or representation. This is illustrated in the quote below:

“ماذا تراك تحسب؟ تأتون إلينا من المدرسة مثل الأطفال و تحسبون أن الحياة هينة.”

“What do you think? You come to us straight from school like babies, thinking that life is easy.”

Based on Abū Khaizurān’s words above, within Gayatri Spivak’s framework, the metaphor “babies, thinking that life is easy” can be interpreted as a form of covert resistance to oppressive social or political conditions. This metaphor reflects an attitude or perspective that may be seen as naive or immature by dominant powers but actually embodies an unconscious potential to undermine the existing narrative.

Babies are often considered to lack sufficient or critical understanding of harsh or complex realities. In this case, the notion that “life is easy” can be viewed as a rejection of narratives dominated by power structures that

impose unrealistic or unjust norms or expectations. Thus, the metaphor “babies, thinking that life is easy” can be seen as a form of covert resistance because it represents views or attitudes not always taken seriously or deemed relevant within dominant power contexts. It reflects ways in which individuals or groups may express disagreement or dissatisfaction indirectly or implicitly regarding existing conditions or situations.

"انه بئر ملعونة. تعال!"

“A cursed well. Come!”

Based on Abū Qais’s statement above, the phrase “a cursed well” is more appropriately interpreted as a symbol of hidden or invisible resistance in certain contexts. To strengthen this interpretation, the phrase ‘*a cursed well*’ should be read alongside the narrative description that situates the well as a marginal, rarely monitored space. For instance, the text notes that ‘[insert supporting quote here],’ indicating that the well functions as a concealed area that characters deliberately rely on when planning their escape. Thus, the ‘curse’ surrounding the well is not merely a general danger, but a discursive device that marks the place as both feared and strategically useful precisely because its negative reputation keeps others away. This reinforces its role as a hidden route within the escape plan. Although it does not explicitly represent covert resistance, this term can be used in literary or figurative contexts to depict situations or conditions related to impossibility or unseen threats.

3) Verbal Resistance

Verbal resistance in Gayatri Spivak’s thought refers to the use of language, narrative, or rhetoric as a form of resistance against dominant power or oppressive systems. Gayatri Spivak, as a critical theorist focusing on postcolonial and feminist studies, highlights the importance of language in understanding and interpreting the experiences of the subaltern (marginalized or oppressed groups). This is illustrated in the excerpt below.

غير مأمونة العواقب! كأن الحياة شربة لبن! لماذا لا يفعل مثلنا؟ هل هو أحسن؟

“Who knows what the outcome will be! As if life is a sip of yogurt! Why doesn’t he act like us? Is he better?”

Based on Sa’ad’s words above, the term “yogurt,” s a fermented product, can be seen as a metaphor for a process of transformation or change that is unseen but important. In the context of verbal resistance, this may show how alternative language or narratives can develop and influence social or political change without directly opposing or confronting dominant power. In this context, the mention of ‘yogurt’ should not be interpreted as a metaphor for an invisible process of transformation, as such a reading extends too far from the textual function. Rather, the sentence operates rhetorically as a subtle critique of the dominant narrative that portrays life outside subaltern suffering as simple, effortless, or naturally comfortable. The casual reference to ‘yogurt’ becomes an ironic contrast to the lived reality of the subaltern, exposing the gap between official discourses of normalcy and the material hardships that remain unarticulated. In Spivak’s framework, this rhetorical move highlights how language can mask structural inequalities by normalizing comfort for the privileged while silencing the experiences of those positioned as subaltern.

In critical analysis, yogurt might be used as an analogy for language or other cultural symbols employed by the subaltern to convey or represent their experiences in ways different from the language or narratives controlled by dominant power.

الطريق! أتوجد بعد طرق في هذه الدنيا؟ الم يمسحها بجبينه و يغسلها بعرقه طوال ايام و ايام،

كلهم يقولون ذالك : "ستجد نفسك على الطريق!"

“The road! Are there still roads in this world? Hasn’t he wiped it with his brow and washed it with his sweat for days and days? They all say: ‘You will find yourself on the road!’”

Based on Abū ‘Abdun’s words to As’ad above, this phrase can be used to challenge or reject the narrative or truth imposed by the dominant power. It could refer to a call to see or understand something from a different perspective, beyond the view imported or imposed by the dominant power.

“The road” in this context can symbolize real experiences or truths that exist outside the control or influence of the government or power structures. It can serve as a way to convey that true truth or justice might not always be found within institutions or narratives dominated by power.

D. Conclusion

The results of this study show that there are seven forms of domination exerted by the upper classes, including the rulers in Palestine, namely economic, ideological, religious, social, gender, capitalist, and political domination. The domination experienced by the subaltern causes them to engage in symbolic resistance. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of postcolonial Arabic literary studies by offering a new perspective in reading the works of Ghassan Kanafani. Through the application of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s subaltern theory, this research expands the understanding of how marginalized (subaltern) voices are represented in Arabic literary texts, particularly within the context of colonialism and postcolonialism in Palestine. Overall, these findings suggest that even subtle forms of symbolic resistance can help expose suppressed Palestinian voices and challenge dominant narratives. This highlights the need for readers and activists to pay attention to small discursive acts that reveal ongoing struggles for visibility and agency.”

In the novel *Rijāl Fī Asy-Syams* by Ghassan Kanafani, three (3) forms of symbolic resistance by the subaltern are found: First, the symbol of open resistance, which refers to movements carried out systematically with coordination between leaders and members, such as the phrase “a crowded swarm of ants,” depicted as a strong, coordinated, and collective movement capable of confronting and challenging existing power structures, like protests and direct criticism from the subaltern against the rulers. Second, the symbol of closed resistance, which tends not to manifest visibly in the form of individual actions but is considered to influence a person’s inner order, such as the phrase “a cursed well,” which is more appropriately interpreted as a symbol of hidden or unseen resistance in a particular context – like subalterns planning to escape from Palestine to Kuwait through smuggling. Third, the symbol of verbal resistance, which is resistance against the rulers or elite groups expressed implicitly through dialogues and monologues of the characters, reflecting criticism of the political and social conditions they face as Palestinian refugees.

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