

Intergenerational Subalternity and the Resistance of Balinese Women in the Novel *Racun Puan*

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Abstrak

Novel *Racun Puan* karya Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini menghadirkan kisah tiga perempuan Bali lintas generasi, yaitu Ibu Aruna, Aruna, dan Samudra. Masing-masing mengalami pembungkaman dalam bentuk yang berbeda namun saling terhubung, sehingga membentuk rantai subalternitas antargenerasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori poskolonial Gayatri Spivak untuk mengkaji dua hal, yaitu identifikasi perempuan Bali sebagai subaltern dalam novel *Racun Puan* dan bentuk resistensi yang dilakukan tokoh-tokoh perempuan subaltern tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif deskriptif-analisis. Data dikumpulkan dari teks novel melalui teknik baca, simak, dan catat, lalu dianalisis menggunakan konsep-konsep utama Spivak, meliputi representasi politik dan kultural, kekerasan epistemik, serta resistensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa subalternitas beroperasi lintas generasi melalui internalisasi nilai-nilai patriarki, suatu proses yang dalam penelitian ini disebut sebagai subalternitas epistemik antargenerasi. Ibu Aruna, yang dibungkam oleh persinggungan antara stigma kasta dan kekerasan domestik, secara tidak sadar mewariskan ideologi kepatuhan kepada Aruna, yang kemudian dibungkam oleh keluarga besar suaminya dan narasi patriarki yang lebih luas. Aruna, pada gilirannya, mereproduksi pola pengasuhan yang mengontrol terhadap Samudra. Resistensi masing-masing generasi berbeda dalam bentuk dan jangkauannya: Ibu Aruna bertahan melalui ketahanan hidup dan menjaga akses pendidikan anak; Aruna melakukan resistensi melalui penulisan buku harian sebagai *counter-discourse*; dan Samudra menampilkan resistensi paling transformatif melalui pilihan profesi sebagai dokter jiwa. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perspektif analitis baru bahwa subalternitas bukan hanya bersifat individual, melainkan dapat direproduksi secara antargenerasi melalui mekanisme epistemologis yang halus, yang tertanam dalam sistem keluarga dan nilai-nilai budaya.

Kata Kunci: subaltern, subalternitas antargenerasi, perempuan Bali, poskolonial, resistensi

Abstract

The novel *Racun Puan* by Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini presents the stories of three Balinese women across generations: Ibu Aruna, Aruna, and Samudra. Each of them is subjected to a distinct yet interconnected form of silencing, forming a chain of intergenerational subalternity. This study applies Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory to examine two aspects: the identification of Balinese women as subaltern figures in the novel *Racun Puan*, and the forms of resistance enacted by those subaltern characters. A qualitative descriptive-analytical method was employed, with data gathered from the novel through reading, observation, and documentation techniques. Analysis was conducted through Spivak's key concepts of political and cultural representation, epistemic violence, and resistance. The findings demonstrate that subalternity operates across generations through the internalization of patriarchal values, a process this study terms "intergenerational epistemic subalternity." Ibu Aruna, silenced by the intersection of caste stigma and domestic violence, unconsciously transmits the ideology of submission to Aruna, who is subsequently silenced by her husband's household and the broader patriarchal narrative. Aruna, in turn, reproduces a controlling parenting pattern toward Samudra. Each generation's resistance differs in form: Ibu Aruna resists through endurance and preserving educational access for her children; Aruna resists through diary writing as counter-discourse; and Samudra enacts the most transformative resistance by pursuing psychiatry and consciously reclaiming her own subjectivity. This study contributes a new analytical perspective that subalternity is not merely individual but can be reproduced across generations through subtle epistemological mechanisms embedded in family systems and cultural values.

Keywords: subaltern, intergenerational subalternity, Balinese women, postcolonial, resistance

INTRODUCTION

This study employs Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial theory, particularly the concept of the subaltern as formulated in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). This theory builds upon Antonio Gramsci's expanded notion of the subaltern, which refers to non-hegemonic social groups that lack access to power. Spivak further develops this concept within the context of colonialism and patriarchy, asserting that the subaltern comprises groups whose voices are unrecognized by the dominant discursive system "the most oppressed and invisible constituencies" (Suryawati et al., 2021). Women situated at the lowest stratum of the social hierarchy endure the most extreme yet least visible forms of oppression within existing systems of representation.

Spivak distinguishes between two modes of representation. Political representation, or *Vertretung*, is the act of speaking on behalf of another group within relations of power. Cultural representation, or *Darstellung*, refers to the ways in which a group is depicted within discourse, texts, or social media. Suryawati et al. (2021) explain that in both forms of representation, those in power determine how the subaltern is portrayed, such that the subaltern's voice is always mediated through others — and representation itself becomes an instrument toward more tangible domination.

The concept of epistemic violence within Spivak's framework refers to an invisible form of oppression that operates through systems of knowledge and representation. The dominant party constructs definitions of reality and truth without incorporating the voices of the oppressed, thereby stripping the subaltern of the right to define themselves. Puspita & Parmin (2025) affirm that epistemic violence is further compounded by patriarchy, which renders women unaware of the oppression they endure even when they are ostensibly granted space to speak.

Resistance within Spivak's framework is understood not merely as open confrontation, but as encompassing small, symbolic, and concealed acts that constitute rejection of the dominant system. Puspita & Parmin (2025) explain that the fundamental problem for the subaltern is not simply the absence of voice, but the absence of a space in which that voice can be heard. The resistance of subaltern women frequently takes the form of acts that do not immediately appear as resistance, yet genuinely constitute expressions of refusal. Damayati et al. (2025) define symbolic resistance as a form of opposition that is covert, unstructured, and generally not oriented toward producing large-scale change.

Spivak's theory was chosen for this study because of its strong relevance to the issues raised in the novel *Racun Puan*. Unlike conventional feminist approaches that tend to focus on women's explicit resistance, Spivak's subaltern theory directs attention toward the most marginalized groups of women — those who not only experience oppression, but also lose the capacity to represent themselves within existing discursive systems. Within the context of Indonesian literature, Kholifatu &

Tjahjono (2020) have demonstrated the relevance of this theory in reading the mechanisms by which subaltern groups are silenced within hegemonic power structures. Meanwhile, Dewanda & Parmin (2025) show that this theory is equally productive for analyzing the resistance of subaltern women in contemporary Indonesian literary texts.

The novel *Racun Puan* by Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini, published by Bentang Pustaka in 2023, presents the story of three Balinese women across generations: Ibu Aruna, Aruna, and Samudra. What makes this novel distinctive is its narrative structure, which incorporates three simultaneous perspectives, with the bulk of the story channeled through the viewpoint of Kawa, Aruna's husband, who reflects on his domestic life following his wife's death. Aruna's voice appears only through fragments of a diary that remain within Kawa's power to read and interpret. This narrative structure directly replicates the condition of subalternity at the textual level: women are rendered voiceless not only in social life, but also within the literary narrative that ought to serve as their medium of expression. Compared to other Balinese feminist works such as Oka Rusmini's *Tarian Bumi*, which portrays explicit and confrontational resistance, *Racun Puan* instead depicts a gradual and subtle process of silencing — one that is all the more dangerous precisely because it goes unrecognized by both perpetrators and victims (Dermawan et al., 2023).

Previous studies of this novel have been conducted from various perspectives. Agustin (2025) examines it through a feminist lens with a focus on the portrayal of women, while Putri (2024) approaches it through literary psychology to illuminate the dynamics of Aruna's character. Both studies enrich our understanding of women's condition in the novel, yet none has specifically integrated an analysis of subalternity with its intergenerational dimension. This study occupies a new position by employing Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory to examine how women as subalterns are presented, silenced, and yet strive to be heard across three interconnected generations. As such, this study is intended to contribute a new analytical perspective: that subalternity does not operate solely at the individual level, but can be reproduced across generations through subtle epistemological mechanisms embedded within familial value systems and patriarchal culture.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative method. The object of analysis is the novel *Racun Puan* by Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini. Data in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs relevant to the concepts of the subaltern, representation, epistemic violence, and resistance were collected through close reading, observation, and note-taking techniques. The collected data were then classified according to analytical categories and interpreted using Spivak's key theoretical concepts. The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive and argumentative manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The novel *Racun Puan* emerges within the socio-cultural context of Balinese society, which to this day remains marked by a patrilineal system and caste hierarchy. Rahmawati (2016) affirms that men occupy a privileged position in major decision-making, while women are placed as those who receive decisions. This system shapes the novel's thematic backdrop, presenting three Balinese women characters in a layered structure. Each represents a distinct stratum of subalternity, yet they are connected through a chain of intergenerational subalternity.

Ibu Aruna as the Starting Point of Intergenerational Subalternity

Ibu Aruna's subaltern position is formed through the intersection of the caste system and domestic patriarchy. As a Sudra woman who married a Ksatria man, Ibu Aruna formally experienced a rise in caste status. However, this elevation did not bring equality; rather, it produced new forms of subordination. Pradnyawati et al. (2022) explain that lower-caste women who marry men of higher caste are typically kept in a symbolically inferior position. This is evident in the novel when Ibu Aruna's husband consistently blames her for all of the family's misfortunes.

"Ayah bilang menikahi kaum sudra seperti Ibu adalah malapetaka, awal dari kesialan, judi yang tak kunjung menang, kutukan, hingga kemiskinan yang beranak pinak ini." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 126)

"Father said that marrying someone from the Sudra caste like Mother was a calamity, the beginning of misfortune, a gamble that never paid off, a curse, and the source of this ever-multiplying poverty." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 126) (author's translation)

This passage reveals the mechanism of political representation (*Vertretung*). The husband defines the meaning of marriage and positions himself as the sole legitimate interpreter of the family's fate, while Ibu Aruna's perspective is given no space whatsoever. Women's bodies are even turned into an arena for proving social legitimacy within the patrilineal system. The birth of daughters is repeatedly framed as evidence of a curse.

"Saat aku lahir, lalu adik perempuanku lahir, mungkin Ayah masih berpikir menikahi Ibu adalah kutukan yang membuatnya tak kunjung mendapatkan anak laki-laki." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 126)

"When I was born, and then my younger sister, Father probably still thought that marrying Mother was a curse that kept him from ever having a son." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 126) (author's translation)

The epistemic violence inflicted upon Ibu Aruna operates through a cycle of physical violence followed by repeated apologies, causing her to lose the capacity to name what she experiences as injustice. Puspita & Parmin (2025) affirm that epistemic violence renders women unaware of the oppression they endure. The peak of this epistemic violence is manifested in Ibu Aruna's own internalization of stigma.

"Ibu justru membenarkan kata-kata orang bahwa dia tak pantas naik kasta. Dia tidak menunjukkan perlawanan atas ucapan itu. Dia merasa tidak pantas dan cenderung menerima bahwa dia bukan bagian dari kaum ksatria." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 127)

"Mother herself confirmed what people said — that she was unworthy of rising in caste. She showed no resistance to those words. She felt unworthy and tended to accept that she was not part of the Ksatria class." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 127) (author's translation)

This condition marks the culmination of hegemonic discourse's success within Spivak's framework: when the subaltern loses the capacity to produce a counter-narrative because she has fully absorbed the narrative of oppression as the truth about herself. The most significant implication of the epistemic violence experienced by Ibu Aruna is its reproduction in the next generation. The sentence *"Women must indeed accept"* (Suciartini, 2023, p. 129) (author's translation) spoken to Aruna is not merely advice, but a reproduction of the very ideology that destroyed Ibu Aruna herself. Ibu Aruna becomes, unknowingly, an agent who transmits subalternity to the next generation a mechanism this study refers to as *intergenerational epistemic subalternity*.

The dimension of cultural representation directed at Ibu Aruna is also evident in the way her body is positioned within the Balinese caste system. There exists a social belief that a Sudra woman who marries a Ksatria man should not give birth naturally, as this process is considered to carry the "contamination" of lower caste into the bloodline of the nobility. This belief is not merely a stereotype, but a form of representational violence that infiltrates the most intimate space of a woman's body —

the act of childbirth. As a result, Ibu Aruna feels not only socially inferior, but also senses that her own biological body is a source of shame for the family. This internalization of cultural violence is then passed on to Aruna not through direct words, but through the way Ibu Aruna regards herself and her own body in the presence of her children.

It must be emphasized that Ibu Aruna's subalternity is not only formed by external factors, but also by her absence as a direct voice in the novel's narrative. All of her experiences, wounds, and fears can only be accessed through Aruna's account. In other words, even within a literary text that should provide space for women to speak, Ibu Aruna is still not granted narrative authority over her own experience. This condition reinforces Spivak's argument that subalternity is not merely a social condition, but also a representational one: the most oppressed are those who do not even have control over how the story of their lives is told to others.

Aruna and the Mechanisms of Subalternity's Reproduction

Aruna's subalternity is a continuation of the subalternity of the previous generation. As a daughter-in-law who came from outside and entered her husband's family environment, Aruna was from the outset placed in a vulnerable position. Kawa, her own husband, acknowledges this condition.

"Kau sendirian datang ke rumahku. Kau sendirian berhadapan dengan Ibuku. Kau benar-benar sendirian ketika suamimu ini tak pernah merasakan seperti apa sendirian itu." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 16)

"You came to my home alone. You faced my mother alone. You were truly alone while your husband here had never once known what it felt like to be alone." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 16) (author's translation)

The solitude referred to here is not merely emotional, but also structural. Aruna had no allies within the family space that should have been her place of refuge. Cultural representation of Aruna operates through the construction of the ideal woman who must be capable of everything and bear all burdens without complaint.

"Aku beristrikan seorang perempuan biasa yang bisa lelah, mengeluh, menyerah, pasrah. Aku lupa semua itu. Duduk saja kau bisa salah, bisa jadi perkara." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 22)

"I had a wife who was an ordinary woman — one who could grow tired, complain, give up, and resign herself. I forgot all of that. Even the way you sat could be wrong, could become an issue." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 22) (author's translation)

This mechanism of cultural representation is destructive because it leaves no room for Aruna to be an ordinary human being who is allowed to be tired and to make mistakes. Political representation of Aruna operates structurally in the way the novel's narrative is constructed: Aruna's story is not delivered through her own voice, but mediated by Kawa, who reconstructs their domestic life after Aruna's death. Even the diary that serves as the only window into Aruna's voice remains within Kawa's power to read and interpret.

The epistemic violence experienced by Aruna operates through the rejection of her testimony and the delegitimization of her epistemic capacity as a woman. Kawa explicitly claims that male logic is more reliable than female sensitivity.

"Aku, kaum laki-laki dengan logika tinggi, selalu berpikir bahwa sensitivitasmu membuatmu memiliki penilaian yang salah dan cenderung tidak masuk akal." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 14)

"I, a man of superior logic — always believed that your sensitivity caused you to have poor judgment and to be generally irrational." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 14) (author's translation)

The binary construction between male logic and female sensitivity is a classic mechanism within the patriarchal system for maintaining epistemological dominance. The peak of epistemic violence against Aruna is her own internalization of the dominant discourse that diminishes her.

"Sejak gagal menjadi ibu, aku tidak percaya lagi pada diriku sendiri. Aku membenarkan perkataan orang-orang tentang diriku yang tak berguna. Ada atau tidak ada aku, semuanya akan sama saja." (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 116–117)

"Since failing to become a mother, I no longer believe in myself. I have confirmed what people say about me — that I am useless. Whether I am here or not,

everything will be the same.” (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 116–117) (author's translation)

The similarity in the pattern of internalization between Ibu Aruna and Aruna is no coincidence. It is direct evidence that the patriarchal epistemic framework reproduced by Ibu Aruna through the phrase *“women must indeed accept”* (Suciartini, 2023, p. 129) (author's translation) has shaped the way Aruna responds to oppression — by accepting it as truth. This is the mechanism of intergenerational subalternity operating without any visible physical violence.

Another aspect that reinforces Aruna's subaltern position is the way the broader social system also legitimizes her silencing. The advice Kawa receives from his friend — that women's complaints need not be taken seriously because “all women are like that” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 16) (author's translation) — reveals that distrust of women is not merely Kawa's individual attitude, but part of a broader epistemic framework transmitted through male social networks. In this context, Aruna faces not only her husband's family, but a discursive system that has collectively determined that women's voices carry no epistemic authority. Firdaus (2021) affirms that Balinese women are burdened by patrilineal cultural constructions that place them as those without equal rights in decision-making, even in matters concerning their own personal lives.

The greatest irony in Aruna's case emerges when her voice is discovered in her diary only after her death. Recognition of Aruna's testimony and feelings becomes possible only when she is no longer present to deliver them directly. This condition is the most concrete manifestation of Spivak's question: can the subaltern speak? In Aruna's case, the answer is that she could speak through writing, but her voice was only acknowledged after her death. This reinforces the argument that recognition of women's subjectivity within the patriarchal system often arrives too late — present only when the woman in question no longer has the opportunity to receive that recognition in any meaningful way.

Samudra as the Heir to Subalternity

Samudra appears as the third generation who materially lives in a more modern context, yet demonstrates that subalternity does not disappear — it merely changes form and operates more subtly. If Ibu Aruna was silenced by domestic violence and caste stigma, and Aruna was silenced by her husband's family and patriarchal narratives, then Samudra is silenced through psychological control, the family's prestige expectations, and the internalization of an identity constructed by her parents from an early age.

Political representation of Samudra operates through the way Aruna consistently speaks on Samudra's behalf to the outside world, building Samudra's public identity without ever asking whether that identity reflects who she truly is. Samudra is aware of her own position.

“Sekolahku bukan tentang aku, melainkan tentang Ibu dan segala keinginannya untuk mendapatkan prestise.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 70)

“Selalu ada hal-hal baik yang harus Ibu ceritakan kepada keluarganya tentang aku. Aku selalu menjadi tumbal atas keinginannya yang abstrak itu.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 75)

“My schooling was not about me, but about Mother and all her desire for prestige.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 70) (author's translation)

“There were always good things Mother had to tell her family about me. I was always the sacrificial offering for her abstract desires.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 75) (author's translation)

The word choice *sacrificial offering* (*tumbal*) reveals Samudra's awareness that she functions as an instrument of representation rather than as an autonomous individual. The sharp irony here is that Aruna — who throughout her life was the victim of political representation by Kawa — now unknowingly does the same to her own child. This is one of the most powerful pieces of evidence for intergenerational subalternity: the victim of the system reproduces that system upon the next generation, not out of intent to harm, but because she knows no other way of relating to the world.

The epistemic violence against Samudra comes from the person closest to her. A pattern of systematic distrust is evident in Samudra's own statement.

“Ibu memang tak pernah sekali pun percaya kepadaku. Seumur hidup isinya hanya mencurigaku.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 59)

“Mother never once believed in me. Her whole life consisted of nothing but suspicion toward me.” (Suciartini, 2023, p. 59) (author's translation)

This mechanism is a reproduction of the mechanism Kawa enacted against Aruna, now repeated by one victim upon the next. The peak of epistemic violence

against Samudra occurs when her acknowledgment of trauma is actively denied by her mother.

"Aku tidak sakit, Bu. Aku hanya trauma. Ibu mengingkari ini semua. Ibu mengingkari bahwa dia juga salah satu dari sekian penyebab aku mengalami ini." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 82)

"I am not sick, Mother. I am only traumatized. You deny all of this. You deny that you are also one of the many reasons I am experiencing this." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 82) (author's translation)

Samudra has a voice and knows her own truth, yet has no space in which to place that truth so that it may be heard and acknowledged. Puspita & Parmin (2025) remind us that the subaltern's problem lies not in the absence of voice, but in the impossibility of that voice being heard within the prevailing discursive system. The three characters examined in sequence demonstrate that the process of erasing subjectivity is reproduced across generations — not through visible physical violence, but through the internalization of values, patterns of upbringing, and recurring epistemic violence.

What makes Samudra's case analytically most compelling is the paradox it presents: she grows up in a materially more modern context and has access to broader education than the previous generations, yet experiences subalternity that originates from the person closest to her — the very person who should best understand what it feels like to be silenced. Aruna, as a victim of the patriarchal system who never had a space to voice her experiences in a valid way, ultimately reproduces the same mechanism: closing off Samudra's space for expression and refusing to acknowledge the validity of her child's traumatic experience. Putra et al. (2024) show that trauma that lacks adequate space for expression tends to be passed on to the next generation through familial transmission. In this context, Aruna's denial of Samudra's trauma is not a deliberate act of harm, but a reflection of her own inability to process wounds that were never acknowledged throughout her lifetime.

Thus, the three female characters in this novel form a single chain of intergenerational subalternity that operates through hidden mechanisms. Each generation does not merely inherit the social conditions of the previous generation, but inherits an entire framework for understanding the self — what one is permitted to feel, what one is permitted to voice, and what must be silently swallowed. This mechanism is what this study refers to as *intergenerational epistemic subalternity*: the process by

which victims of the system unconsciously become agents who transmit that system to the next generation, not through malicious intent, but through the limitations of the epistemic tools available to them.

Ibu Aruna's Symbolic Resistance: Survival as Intergenerational Capital

Within Spivak's framework, not all subalterns are able to exit their subaltern condition — and they are not required to. Ibu Aruna is an example of a subaltern who remains within her subaltern condition until the very end, yet whose presence remains meaningful within the context of intergenerational subalternity. Her most significant resistance lies in her decision to ensure that her children continued to have access to education despite living in conditions of poverty and social pressure.

The social pressure against women's education is reflected in the phrase *"What is the point of higher education? It will only make it harder to find a husband"* (Suciartini, 2023) (author's translation) — a normative voice that mirrors patriarchal constructions of womanhood. Despite this pressure, Aruna succeeded in obtaining a scholarship and pursuing higher education, an achievement inseparable from the domestic conditions established by Ibu Aruna, who never explicitly forbade Aruna from studying.

"Aku pun mendapat beasiswa untuk kuliah di Universitas keguruan setelah tes berkali-kali. Akhirnya nasib berpihak pada si miskin ini." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 131)

"I received a scholarship to study at a teachers' university after taking the exam many times. At last, fate was on the side of this poor girl." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 131) (author's translation)

The phrase *"fate was on the side of this poor girl"* carries a resilience that was not born from nothing, but is an inheritance from Ibu Aruna — who throughout her life remained standing even as she was continually brought down. Damayati et al. (2025) define symbolic resistance as a form of opposition that is covert, unstructured, and generally not intended to produce large-scale change. The most appropriate measure of Ibu Aruna's resistance is the intergenerational impact she left behind: Aruna had better opportunities than her mother, and Samudra ultimately found the most transformative way out. That chain of possibility begins with Ibu Aruna.

Aruna's Discursive Resistance: The Diary as an Alternative Space for Voice

Aruna's resistance takes two complementary forms: the writing of a diary as a space for counter-discourse, and silent refusal through the decision to end her own life. Her educational background as a literature graduate plays a key role in both forms of resistance. Kawa himself acknowledges this.

"Sayang, aku lupa kau menyangkal gelar sarjana sastra. Aku mempersunting lalu membawamu ke rumah ini dengan janji bahwa setiap hari akan menjadi puisi. Namun, ternyata, puisi kesedihanlah yang lebih banyak berlagu." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 28)

"My love, I forgot that you hold a degree in literature. I courted you and brought you to this home with the promise that every day would be a poem. But it turned out that poems of sorrow were far more plentiful." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 28) (author's translation)

The diary becomes Aruna's first and most consistent medium of resistance. Puspita & Parmin (2025) explain that subaltern women need a space to speak because the public sphere does not permit their voices to enter.

"Hal yang bisa kumengerti dan kulakukan adalah berdialog dalam tulisan. Yang kutulis dalam buku harian ini adalah perasaan-perasaan yang berkecamuk saat aku menghadapi masa muda, masa bebas, dan masa aku tidak setuju dengan apa pun yang mengerdikan perempuan." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 120)

"What I can understand and do is to engage in dialogue through writing. What I record in this diary are the turbulent feelings I had when facing my youth, my freedom, and the times when I disagreed with anything that diminished women." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 120) (author's translation)

The phrase *"the times when I disagreed with anything that diminished women"* demonstrates that Aruna was not passively accepting everything that happened to her. She possessed a critical consciousness of the injustice she faced, even though she had no public space in which to express that consciousness. This form of written resistance holds a significance that extends beyond Aruna herself: it is the diary that ultimately becomes the means by which Aruna speaks to Samudra after her death, serving

as a bridge that carries critical consciousness from the second generation to the third.

The diary as a medium of resistance possesses a quality that no other form of opposition available to Aruna could offer. Unlike verbal confrontation, which could immediately be dismissed with the claim that women are being irrational, writing grants Aruna complete control over the narrative of her own life. Within that space, she is the sole legitimate interpreter of her own experience — no husband can declare that her perception is mistaken, no mother-in-law can dismiss her complaints as unfounded. This is precisely what Spivak means when speaking of an alternative space for the subaltern: not a space that directly transforms the system, but one that allows the subject to preserve her voice even when no one is listening at the time. Aruna's diary is evidence that she never fully lost her subjectivity, even as the systems surrounding her worked relentlessly to erase it.

Aruna's educational background as a literature graduate plays an irreplaceable role in this form of resistance. The linguistic capacity cultivated through higher education gave Aruna the tools to name, articulate, and document her experiences with precision — something fundamentally different from Ibu Aruna, who lacked these tools and in the end could only endure in silence. The access to education that Ibu Aruna fought for indirectly became the resource that enabled Aruna to engage in a more conscious and documented form of resistance. This chain demonstrates that resistance within the context of intergenerational subalternity does not stand alone, but is built upon the foundations laid by the previous generation — even when that generation was not fully aware of the contribution it was making.

The second form of Aruna's resistance is her decision to end her own life, which cannot be read merely as passive despair.

"Racun ini akan hilang ketika aku membawanya pada kematian. Biarlah saat itu sekujur badanku membiru untuk memastikan racun ini hanya bersarang dalam tubuhku. Tidak menular, apalagi menginfeksi orang lain." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 111)

"This poison will be gone when I carry it into death. Let my entire body turn blue at that moment, to ensure this poison remains only within me. Not contagious — let alone infecting others." (Suciartini, 2023, p. 111) (author's translation)

Aruna consciously chooses to carry the poison into death so that it will not spread to others — particularly Samudra. This decision is the most radical form of final

refusal: if the system will not grant her space to live with dignity, she chooses to no longer be part of that system, and in doing so simultaneously attempts to sever the chain of subalternity so that it does not extend to the next generation.

Samudra's Transformative Resistance: Education as an Instrument of Emancipation

Of the three Balinese women characters in this novel, Samudra displays the most explicit and transformative form of resistance. Her resistance occurs through active choices that fundamentally redirect the course of her life, with education as the primary agent of change.

"Di zaman yang terus bergerak maju, banyak orang yang jiwanya sakit. Mungkin ini yang membuatku memilih menekuni ilmu jiwa. Pada masa mendatang, orang-orang akan haus pengakuan, pandai menipu diri sendiri." (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 44–45)

"In an era of constant forward motion, many people's souls are sick. Perhaps this is what drives me to pursue the science of the mind. In the future, people will hunger for acknowledgment and will become skilled at deceiving themselves." (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 44–45) (author's translation)

This statement is not merely a passive reflection, but a declaration of critical consciousness from someone who has personally experienced how a social system can cause a person to lose themselves. Samudra's declaration to her mother is the most outspoken moment of resistance in the novel.

"Kukatakan kepada Ibu bahwa aku akan menjadi dokter jiwa sungguhan. Ibu tak perlu mengubah haluan, Ibu tak perlu malu dengan keadaan ini, Ibu tak perlu mengada-ada." (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 83–84)

"I told Mother that I would become a real psychiatrist. Mother does not need to redirect my course; Mother does not need to be ashamed of my condition; Mother does not need to fabricate anything." (Suciartini, 2023, pp. 83–84) (author's translation)

For the first time, Samudra explicitly refuses the representation imposed upon her by her mother, replacing it with an identity she has chosen for herself. Education is no longer her mother's instrument, but Samudra's own tool for reclaiming the right to define herself.

The significance of Samudra's resistance lies not only in the fact that she succeeds in exiting subalternity, but in *how* she exits: by using her own subaltern experience as a source of knowledge. Samudra becomes a psychiatrist precisely because she once lived through a psychological condition that those around her refused to acknowledge. The very experience that should have silenced her becomes instead her most powerful epistemic resource. This is what distinguishes Samudra from Ibu Aruna and Aruna: Samudra succeeds in transforming the poison inherited through the chain of intergenerational subalternity into an antidote.

The spectrum of resistance across the three characters exists along a single line of intergenerational subalternity. Ibu Aruna demonstrates resistance through survival, opening a space of possibility for the next generation. Aruna presents a more conscious form of resistance through writing, leaving behind a trace of critical consciousness that is reproduced in Samudra. Samudra displays the most active and transformative resistance, using education as a means of building self-awareness and severing the chain of intergenerational subalternity.

These findings carry important theoretical implications. In conventional readings of Spivak, the question "can the subaltern speak?" is often answered within the context of the relationship between colonialism and directly oppressed subjects. This study demonstrates that within the context of contemporary Indonesian literature, the question needs to be broadened: not only whether the subaltern can speak, but whether subalternity itself can be inherited and reproduced through mechanisms far more subtle than physical violence or visible colonial oppression. *Racun Puan* answers that question decisively: yes, subalternity can be inherited, and the mechanism of its inheritance operates most effectively when it functions through values regarded as natural — such as a mother's advice to her child, family expectations, or gender role standards internalized from an early age.

At the same time, the three forms of resistance depicted in the novel also demonstrate that the inheritance of subalternity is not a deterministic or irreversible process. Change does occur, but it requires more than one generation and demands an accumulation of resources — whether in the form of education, critical consciousness, or broader structural support. The fact that Samudra succeeds in breaking the chain does not mean her struggle was easy or is complete. Nevertheless, her success marks a possibility: that the system which produces intergenerational subalternity, however powerful, is not entirely closed to change.

In terms of its broader contribution to literary studies, this analysis of *Racun Puan* reveals that the subaltern condition in postcolonial Indonesian fiction has shifted in form but not in substance. The chains of oppression that once operated through overt colonial power now function through intimate, familial channels that are far more difficult to identify and critique. This is precisely what renders Spivak's framework so productive for reading contemporary Indonesian literature: it illuminates not only the visible structures of domination, but also the invisible ones that are reproduced within the most private spaces of domestic life. The novel's greatest achievement lies in making these hidden mechanisms legible — transforming the personal into the political and the intimate into the analytical. As Indonesian literary scholarship continues to engage with the legacies of both external and internal colonialism, works such as *Racun Puan* serve as invaluable sites for tracing how power inscribes itself into bodies, voices, and the stories families tell about themselves across generations. Future studies that examine other Balinese literary works through a similar intergenerational lens, or that compare this mechanism across different regional literary traditions in Indonesia, would further enrich and refine the theoretical concept proposed in this study.

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CONCLUSION

This study finds that subalternity in Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini's novel *Racun Puan* is not individual in nature, but is reproduced intergenerationally through hidden mechanisms. The three Balinese women characters — Ibu Aruna, Aruna, and Samudra — each experience subalternity in different forms, yet are connected within a single chain of intergenerational subalternity. This process does not occur through direct coercion, but through the internalization of values, patterns of upbringing, and recurring epistemic violence. Ibu Aruna unknowingly bequeaths an ideology of compliance to Aruna through the phrase "*women must indeed accept*." Aruna, in turn, reproduces patterns of control upon Samudra as a result of trauma that never received adequate space for expression.

Political and cultural representation operate in layered ways to silence all three characters. Ibu Aruna's husband defines the family's narrative without allowing any space for his wife's perspective. Kawa dominates the narrative of their domestic life and positions Aruna as an object of memory even after her death. Aruna, who is

herself a victim of this representation, unknowingly reproduces the same mechanism upon Samudra.

The form of resistance displayed by each character reflects the structural conditions of her respective generation. Ibu Aruna resists through survival and by preserving her children's access to education — a form of symbolic resistance whose impact is only felt in subsequent generations. Aruna resists through the writing of a diary as a space for counter-discourse, as well as through her decision to end her own life as a radical refusal of a system that denied her dignity. Samudra displays the most transformative resistance through her choice to become a psychiatrist, turning her own subaltern experience into the capacity to help others who share a similar fate.

The central finding of this study is the concept of *intergenerational epistemic subalternity*: the mechanism by which victims of a system become, unknowingly, the transmitters of that system to the next generation through the internalization of values that have destroyed them. This finding extends the scope of Spivak's subaltern theory which has most often been analyzed in individual contexts — and contributes to a more critical reading of women's position in postcolonial Indonesian society, particularly within the context of internal colonialism operating through local customary value systems and patriarchy.

More broadly, this study demonstrates that the concept of internal colonialism operating through local cultural value systems deserves more serious attention in Indonesian postcolonial studies. If external colonialism left behind a legacy of visible power structures, internal colonialism leaves behind a far more difficult-to-identify legacy: a worldview that positions certain groups as unworthy, undeserving, and without the right to speak. It is this legacy that is transmitted from Ibu Aruna to Aruna, and from Aruna to Samudra — not through written documents or legislation, but through gestures, advice, and patterns of upbringing that appear ordinary yet carry deep ideological weight. Through its construction of three generations of Balinese women, *Racun Puan* succeeds in making this hidden mechanism visible and open to critical analysis.

SUGGESTIONS

Future research may develop this study further by examining other works of Balinese women's literature using postcolonial approaches, whether comparatively or within the context of different local Indonesian cultures. Additionally, aspects that have not yet been widely discussed, such as the role of language and ritual in the reproduction of epistemic violence may also serve as a focus for subsequent research.

For academics, this study is intended to enrich the application of Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory in Indonesian literary studies, particularly in relation to issues of gender and local culture. For the broader public,

this study is intended to encourage critical reflection on customary values and traditions so that they may be interpreted more inclusively, thereby allowing the voices and experiences of women to find a more equitable space within social and cultural life.

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