



SUBALTERN WOMEN, COLONIALISM, AND FEMINISM IN REMY SYLADO'S NOVEL *KEMBANG JEPUN*

Perempuan Subaltern, Kolonialisme, Dan Feminisme dalam Novel Kembang Jepun
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Abstract

This study is motivated by the plight of subaltern women who have never been given the opportunity to speak out and lack a space to voice their experiences within an oppressive colonial structure. This study aims to analyze the struggles of subaltern women in Remy Sylado's novel *Kembang Jepun* through James Scott's (1990) concept of the "hidden transcript," based on a postcolonial feminist approach. The concept of the hidden transcript was chosen because it can reveal the forms of subaltern women's struggles that are not always carried out openly. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive, with the novel *Kembang Jepun* by Remy Sylado as the data source. Data collection techniques involved careful and repeated reading, marking sentences that indicate subaltern women's struggles, and recording data on subaltern women's struggles into data cards. Data analysis in this study was conducted through data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The findings of this study include women's struggles through (1) elementary forms of disguise (3 data points), (2) breaking the silence (7 data points), and (3) breaking the charm (6 data points), totaling 16 data points. This study enriches feminist scholarship through Spivak's concept of the subaltern, which can be interpreted through the hidden transcript perspective to understand the struggles of subaltern women within the context of colonial literature.

Keywords: Feminism; *Kembang Jepun*; Women; Postcolonial; Subaltern

Abstrak

Penelitian dilatarbelakangi oleh permasalahan perempuan subaltern yang tidak pernah diberi kesempatan untuk bersuara dan tidak memiliki ruang untuk menyuarakan pengalamannya dalam struktur kolonial yang menindas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perjuangan subaltern perempuan dalam novel *Kembang Jepun* karya Remy Sylado melalui konsep *hidden transcript* James Scott (1990) berdasarkan pendekatan feminisme poskolonial. Konsep *hidden transcript* dipilih karena mampu mengungkap bentuk-bentuk perjuangan perempuan subaltern yang tidak selalu dilakukan secara terbuka. Metode dalam penelitian ini yakni deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber data novel *Kembang Jepun* karya Remy Sylado. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara membaca dengan teliti serta membaca secara berulang, memberi penanda pada kalimat yang menunjukkan perjuangan perempuan subaltern, mencatat data perjuangan perempuan subaltern ke dalam kartu data. Dalam penelitian ini dilakukan analisis data melalui pengumpulan data, kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian ini meliputi perjuangan perempuan melalui (1) *elementary forms of disguise*, terdapat 3 data, (2) *breaking the silence*, terdapat 7 data, dan (3) *breaking the charm*, terdapat 6 data, dengan total 16 data. Penelitian ini memperkaya kajian feminisme melalui konsep subaltern Spivak yang dapat dibaca melalui perspektif *hidden transcript* untuk memahami

perjuangan perempuan subaltern dalam konteks sastra kolonial.

Kata-kata kunci: *Feminisme; Kembang Jepun; Perempuan; Poskolonial; Subaltern*

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INTRODUCTION

During the colonial era, women were often marginalized; they had limited access to education and were unfamiliar with the concept of women's rights (Thompson et al., 2004). Colonial authorities dictated the course of women's lives and determined what work was appropriate for them to perform. Jugun ianfu and the practice of concubinage were examples of work commonly performed by women during the colonial period (Rehn, 2002). The forced labor practices imposed on women during the colonial era disrupted moral norms in a dangerous way, as they encouraged women to become sexually liberated (Grayzel, 2024). This assertion was subsequently substantiated in a study previously conducted by Bahardur (2020) titled "Subaltern jugun ianfu in the short stories Kapotjes and Batu yang Terapung by Faisal Oddang: A Postcolonial Review by Gayatri Spivak." The study highlights one form of oppression against women: the deprivation of women's freedom, as they were forced to become jugun ianfu; this domination resulted in physical harm and psychological trauma. The presence of colonial powers in Indonesia subsequently relegated women to a lower class, a group later termed "subaltern" (Dang, 2021). The concept of the subaltern refers to social groups that occupy the most marginalized positions within social, political, and colonial structures and thus lack the ability to express themselves freely within the dominant discourse (Spivak, 1988).

One literary work that addresses the issue of subaltern women is Remy Sylado's novel *Kembang Jepun*, which was inspired by Japanese colonial rule. As a member of a subaltern group, Keke experiences sexual exploitation, loses her freedom to make life choices, and is forced to follow rules that restrict her. The various constraints binding Keke did not make her remain silent; as a member of the subaltern class, Keke tried to fight back by, among other things, running away from Shinju and choosing to live with her lover, Tjak Broto. The story depicted in the novel *Kembang Jepun* is indeed based on reality. The setting in the novel can still be traced, as noted in an article on radarsurabaya.id (Purmadani, 2024), which states that prostitution in Surabaya has existed since the colonial era, and *Kembang Jepun* is the name of a legendary street in Pabean Cantikan District. This situation demonstrates that subaltern women are not always merely objects of suffering but can also fight for themselves amidst colonial power. The issue is that the strategies of subaltern women's resistance, as exemplified by the character Keke, remain rarely the focus of postcolonial literary studies, which tend to emphasize aspects of oppression rather than the forms of resistance enacted.

Previous research aligned with this study has been conducted by Lestari et al. (2019), focusing on an analysis of subaltern efforts to resist colonial rule and Javanese culture in the novels of Soeratman Sastradihardja. The second study was conducted by Wijayanti et al. (2024), focusing on analyzing double oppression and forms of resistance by Chinese women under indigenous domination. The third study was conducted by Irmawati & Wahyu (2021), focusing on the analysis of forms of subaltern identity and resistance by subaltern women in the short story "Antara Kutukan Senjata." Through these three studies, it is evident that research on subaltern women generally focuses on forms of oppression and the resistance enacted by subaltern groups. However, research specifically examining the forms of hidden struggle (hidden transcript) of subaltern women in facing colonial domination based on James Scott's (1990) theory in the novel *Kembang Jepun* by Remy Sylado has yet to be found. Therefore, this

study aims to fill that gap and offers a novel approach by employing the concept of the hidden transcript to uncover the indirect strategies of resistance employed by subaltern women in confronting colonial domination. Through this concept, the struggles of subaltern women are not merely understood as forms of open resistance but also as hidden actions such as negotiation, veiled refusal, and various efforts to defend themselves amidst colonial power.

Given these issues, this study aims to describe the forms of struggle undertaken by subaltern women in Remy Sylado's novel *Kembang Jepun* through James Scott's (1990) concept of the hidden transcript, using a postcolonial feminist approach. The postcolonial feminist approach was chosen because it is capable of critiquing the colonial and gender power relations that shape the position of subaltern women and influence the forms of struggle they engage in.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of uncovering the forms of struggle waged by subaltern women, which are not always overt but can also be carried out covertly. Studies on the strategies of women's struggle carried out covertly in Indonesian literature remain limited, while these covert forms of subaltern women's struggle are crucial to understand as a response to colonial domination and patriarchy. Therefore, this research is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how subaltern women respond to power relations that place them in oppressed positions.

The results of this study are expected to enrich the study of postcolonial feminism in Indonesian literature through the interconnection between Spivak's concept of the subaltern and James Scott's (1990) framework for understanding the hidden resistance strategies of subaltern women. Furthermore, this study can serve as a reference for future research examining the resistance of subaltern women in literary works in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Subaltern Woman

The concept of the subaltern refers to social groups that occupy the most marginalized positions within social, political, and colonial structures, thereby lacking the ability to express themselves freely within the dominant discourse (Spivak, 1988). In the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," the central issue is not whether the subaltern can speak, but whether the subaltern's voice can be acknowledged and understood within a system of representation dominated by those in power. Although the subaltern may appear to "speak," their voice is often interpreted, filtered, or even supplanted by groups holding greater power, such as colonialists or local elites. Consequently, there is no possibility for the subaltern to truly have a voice, nor for others to speak on their behalf.

Subaltern women are the group most frequently disadvantaged, a situation that leads to double marginalization or double oppression. The double oppression experienced by these subaltern women is not merely that they are not treated as subjects, but also that they face control over their bodies, identities, economic circumstances, and social spaces (Fitri & Hartono, 2023). Control over women's bodies can take the form of restricting women's interactions with the opposite sex, physical exploitation, and sexual exploitation; during the Japanese colonial period, for example, this included practices such as geisha and jugun ianfu. Not only are their bodies controlled, but the identities of the subaltern are also controlled by the superior party; forms of identity control over the subaltern can include the erasure or disregard of local cultural identities and the forced adoption of the colonial language, values, and culture. An example of subaltern identity control in the context of double marginalization is that of geishas, who were indigenous women forced to learn the Japanese language and culture and to dress like Japanese women in order to attract men to visit the brothels established by the Japanese. Subalterns are controlled in the economic sphere and social spaces; in the economic

sphere, women's occupations are dictated to them. For example, the female characters in the novel *Kembang Jepun* are forced to become geishas and are forbidden from accepting tips or bonuses beyond their salaries from guests visiting Shinju. In terms of the colonial powers' restriction of social space, subaltern women are denied the opportunity to voice their opinions and access to education; furthermore, subaltern women are only acknowledged when they serve the interests of the dominant group.

Although subalterns often lack the opportunity to speak directly within the dominant system, this does not mean they have no voice at all (Spivak, 1988). The actions they take constitute a form of expression or speech, even if they are not recognized as legitimate speech within the power structure. Subalterns may not speak in formal spaces or through recognized languages, yet they still assert themselves through actions that are, in fact, forms of communication, even if they are often ignored or unacknowledged. This situation becomes even more complex when subaltern women face double oppression caused by the interplay of colonial power and patriarchy. Colonialism places women in the position of the colonized, marginalizing them within the social structure, while patriarchy restricts women's freedom, voice, and rights within both family and societal life (Rokhmah & Wardani, 2023).

Feminisme Poscolonial

In the 1980s, literature served as a bridge connecting feminism and postcolonialism through the analysis of colonial texts and discourses (Ballesterin, 2022). The fields of knowledge and cultural production, particularly literature, became fertile ground for feminist and postcolonial analyses focused on the processes of erasure, silencing, and subalternity produced by patriarchy and colonialism. Postcolonial feminist studies highlight the interconnection between patriarchy and colonialism and view colonialism as a form of domination that is also gendered.

Postcolonial feminism is a theoretical approach that emerged from the intersection of feminist studies and postcolonial theory, specifically examining women's experiences in colonial and postcolonial contexts while considering the interplay of gender, race, class, and colonial history. This approach emerged as a critique of Western feminism, which tends to be universal and ahistorical, thereby neglecting the diversity of women's experiences outside the Western context (Mohanty, 1984). In this regard, women in former colonies cannot be understood as a homogeneous category but must be viewed within specific historical and structural contexts. Epistemologically, postcolonial feminism rejects the assumption of the universality of women's experiences, which is often used as the basis for Western feminist discourse.

Feminism often portrays subaltern women as a homogeneous, passive, and oppressed group without taking into account differing social and cultural contexts (Mohanty, 1984). This critique highlights that the production of knowledge about women is never neutral but is instead shaped by global power relations involving colonialism and capitalism (Loomba, 2005). A postcolonial feminist perspective is then employed to understand the experiences of subaltern women living under Japanese colonial domination, which led to their oppression. Through this postcolonial feminist lens, the analysis helps reveal how the experiences of subaltern women in the novel *Kembang Jepun* are shaped by the intersections of gender, colonialism, and power.

The Struggle of Subaltern Women

Women's struggles are not always overt; they can also take the form of hidden resistance carried out through everyday actions. Resistance can take various forms; one of them is hidden resistance or the hidden transcript, a discourse that unfolds behind the scenes, serving as a

special space for dissidents and subversives (Scott, 1990). The hidden transcript is a strategic form of struggle for subaltern women, involving resistance carried out through non-systematic actions (Vath, 2025). In this struggle, women who feel oppressed do not necessarily have to take direct action. Those on the side of the dominated use the hidden transcript through veiled forms of communication to express their dissent.

The hidden transcript can take the form of gossip, sarcasm, complaints, curses, and so on, all aimed at making the dominant group feel criticized for the policies they have enacted. Scott (1990) classifies the hidden transcript into several types, namely, (1) elementary forms of disguise, which are basic forms of hidden resistance that include rumors, threats, and anonymous violence. In the struggle of the hidden transcript, gossip is a common form used to convey criticism; it is a relatively safe form of criticism against the colonizers because it is merely a rumor, and the source of the rumor is unclear, making it impossible to trace. (2) Breaking the silence is the moment when the subordinates first dare to express their opinions openly. This expression of opinion marks the moment when the truth is finally revealed, replacing the charade or lies that the subordinate group has long suppressed; (3) breaking the spell is the condition where the anger, dreams, and hopes that have long been suppressed erupt into the public sphere. What could previously only be discussed behind closed doors is now shouted out loud. Because subordinates rarely have the opportunity to appear in the public sphere, that opportunity arises when they have a great deal to express.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive research is a type of research that involves several complex stages (Creswell, 2012). The data for this study were drawn from the novel *Kembang Jepun*, which has 319 pages and was published in 2004. Through the novel *Kembang Jepun*, the data comprising words, sentences, phrases, and paragraphs in the form of dialogues between characters or responses from other characters, as well as the author's descriptions that carry meaning and contain information regarding the marginalization and resistance of women, will be examined as answers to the research questions in this study.

The data collection techniques used in this study are based on Sudaryanto (2015) and include the following: (1) carefully and repeatedly reading the entire novel *Kembang Jepun*; (2) marking specific sentences that illustrate the struggles of subaltern women in the novel *Kembang Jepun*; (3) documenting the struggles of women in the novel *Kembang Jepun*; and (4) recording all data obtained from these steps onto data cards.

This study employs the data analysis method proposed by Miles & Huberman (2014), which involves the following process: (1) data collection, during which data is selected and read intensively, followed by highlighting the sections that reflect the struggles of subaltern women; (2) data condensation. In this stage, the data obtained is selected, focused, simplified, and categorized in accordance with the research objectives, specifically classified based on the elementary forms of disguise, breaking the silence, and breaking the charm, and subsequently, data irrelevant to the research objectives is eliminated; (3) the third stage involves data presentation using a data classification table; and (4) drawing conclusions: at this stage, conclusions are drawn by interpreting the patterns of women's struggles found in the data.

The primary research instrument in this study was the researcher herself, or a human instrument, assisted by a data recording sheet. The researcher read the novel *Kembang Jepun* in depth, then recorded sections of text that illustrated the struggles of subaltern women into a data table. The table included data numbers, text excerpts, page numbers, data categories, and brief descriptions. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument in collecting and managing research data (Sugiyono, 2019).

Triangulation is used to verify the accuracy of data by making comparisons and interpreting research findings using theoretical concepts relevant to the research focus. Triangulation is conducted by interpreting data related to the struggles of subaltern women through the theoretical concepts employed, thereby making the research findings more objective (Moleong, 2017).

DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion in this study aim to analyze the forms of struggle waged by subaltern women in Remy Sylado's novel *Kembang Jepun* using a postcolonial feminist framework. In line with the view (Putri & Susanto, 2024) that the topic or issue addressed in postcolonial feminism is the problem of colonial construction regarding third-world or subaltern women and the rearticulation of the subject of colonized women, the focus of this study is on how subaltern women can engage in resistance even though they appear silent and accepting of oppression. These forms of struggle by subaltern women are based on Scott's (1990) theory of the hidden transcript, which refers to a form of covert resistance. These forms of struggle consist of (1) elementary forms of disguise, (2) breaking the silence, and (3) breaking the charm, as outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Classification of Research Findings

No.	Type of Hidden Transcript	Definition	Analysis Indicators	Amount of Data
1.	<i>Elementary forms of disguise</i>	A covert form of resistance carried out by subordinates through disguised behavior.	Gossip, rumors, or whispers are a form of criticism directed at those in power	1
			Everyday actions that express resistance.	2
2.	<i>Breaking the silence</i>	Efforts by dominated groups to speak out about the suffering, injustice, and rejection that were initially kept buried in silence.	Expressing opinions to criticize the dominant group	4
			Taking direct action against	3
3.	<i>Breaking the charm</i>	A form of resistance in which dominated groups no longer view the dominant group as a force to be feared.	The loss of fear of those in power.	2
			Those in power are beginning to be seen as weak	4
Total				16 data

The classification table outlines the forms of subaltern women's struggles according to Scott's theory (1990), which includes three forms: elementary forms of disguise, encompassing sarcasm, gossip, and refusal in everyday actions. Next is breaking the silence, which includes the courage to voice opinions, refuse, and act directly, followed by breaking the charm, which involves dismissing authority, losing fear and respect for the dominant group, and open sarcasm.

Elementary Forms of Disguise

Elementary forms of disguise are forms of resistance employed by the subaltern or oppressed groups, but expressed indirectly so as not to violate the rules of the dominant power (Scott, 1990). The resistance or struggle waged by the dominated depends heavily on individual creativity. The more repressive and dangerous the conditions faced, the more complex the strategies employed. The forms of resistance through elementary forms of disguise are outlined in the data below.

Gossip

Gossip is the most common form and a basic means of conveying criticism and a relatively safe form of social sanction. Gossip is a rumor with an unclear source; those spreading it claim they are merely passing on the news. Gossip is designed to damage the reputation of a specific person or group. Within the subaltern framework, gossip is commonly used because subaltern women rarely have access to direct forms of resistance; thus, by spreading gossip, it is hoped that colonial power will be weakened due to the negative labels resulting from the disseminated rumors (Van, 2003).

Data 1

“Mengapa pula lelaki bisa berganti-ganti perempuan, dan tidak hanya memilih satu istri saja? Pengalaman saya sebagai geisha menunjukkan, bahwa lelaki yang datang ke Shinju, tidak bermain dengan satu orang geisha, tapi mencicipi semuanya.” (Kembang Jepun, 11)

“Why is it that men can go from one woman to another, instead of choosing just one wife? My experience as a geisha shows that the men who come to Shinju don’t stick with just one geisha but sample them all.” (Kembang Jepun, 11)

Data 1, then, reveals Keke’s experiences as a geisha, which subsequently serve as a critique of male behavior. This quote from Data 1 illustrates a form of veiled criticism through personal experience. Keke’s remarks were directed at her fellow geisha. Keke’s question indicates a rejection of the patriarchal double standard that legitimizes men’s sexual domination over women. Furthermore, Keke’s remarks to her fellow geisha friend can be categorized as gossip because the question serves as a critique of gender relations and the exploitative practices experienced by women without openly resisting the dominant party. Gossiping by the inferior group occurs because they lack the power to resist the oppressive colonizers; thus, all they can do is talk about and slander the superior class as a form of subaltern existence (Zulfikar, 2023).

Resistance in Everyday Actions

Subaltern women often find themselves in a position of powerlessness, leaving them without direct power; one strategy they employ involves forms of resistance that appear ordinary or are not even recognized as resistance. The forms of resistance practiced by subaltern women can be expressed through symbols, feigning obedience, and circumventing rules established by superiors (Dayanti, 2026). In the novel *Kembang Jepun*, this is evident when the protagonist quietly makes decisions and evades male control through specific strategies, as seen in the excerpt below.

Data 2

“Apa boleh buat, saya tidak bisa berpura-pura dengan suara hati saya. Karena suara hati tersebut, untuk beberapa rangkaian pekerjaan saya harus berpura-pura.” (Kembang Jepun, 120)

“What can I do? I cannot go against my conscience; because of that conscience, for certain tasks I must pretend.” (Kembang Jepun, 120)

Data 3

“Kotaro Takamura bertanya kepada saya apakah saya terkena penyakit kelamin, sebab saya sering menolak ajakan tamu untuk ke kamar, untuk melindungi diri saya, maka saya mengiyakan prasangka Kotaro Takamura.” (Kembang Jepun, 121)

“Kotaro Takamura asked me if I had a sexually transmitted disease because I often refused guests’ invitations to go to the room; to protect myself, I confirmed Kotaro Takamura’s suspicion.” (Kembang Jepun, 121)

Data 2 reveals an attitude of resistance in Keke’s daily actions. Although Keke must pretend in the course of her work, these actions reflect an inner resistance to the colonial situation that binds her. The statement “for certain tasks, I have to pretend” indicates a discrepancy between the attitude Keke displays before the colonial authorities and her true inner voice. Keke’s compliance constitutes a form of pretense she employs as a daily act of resistance against Japanese colonial power; this can be understood as both a survival strategy and a covert form of struggle by subaltern women. In line with Mardhiyah & Wuryandari (2024), women’s efforts to defend their dignity against colonial power can be carried out through symbolic actions, which may take the form of a performance or the manipulation of superiors.

Furthermore, the data on the three characters reveals that Keke also resists daily routines by feigning illness; she exploits Kotaro Takamura’s prejudice as the dominant party as a form of self-protection. By quietly refusing guests without Kotaro Takamura’s knowledge, Keke demonstrates a form of women’s resistance through daily actions carried out under the guise of mere compliance. Women affected by colonial oppression are those who are most likely to become empowered to do anything, including violating the values established by the colonial system (Anggita & Esther, 2023). This statement aligns with Keke’s actions, as she was able to refuse the request of one of the guests visiting Shinju; although serving guests is part of her job as a geisha, Keke felt uncomfortable with what she was doing.

Breaking the Silence

Breaking the silence is an act by subordinates to begin expressing suffering, criticism, or resistance that was previously concealed. Subordinate groups are often forced to remain silent within relations of domination. Therefore, the act of speaking out, sharing experiences, or expressing dissent becomes an important form of resistance (Scott, 1990).

Expressing Opinion

Feelings of satisfaction, pride, and joy are an inseparable part of the subalterns’ experience when they are able to express their opinions openly (Scott, 1990). Subalterns express these opinions openly in the presence of the rulers; this event marks the moment when the truth is finally revealed, replacing the lies or pretense that the subaltern group has long suppressed. The subalterns’ actions in voicing their dissent against the colonial system are evident in the data excerpts below.

Data 4

“Kalau betul kecurigaan saya, maka memang saya diingatkan terus untuk berhati-hati. Sementara itu, jika terus-terusan saya merasa tidak leluasa, boleh jadi pada suatu saat saya akan meledak, tidak tahan.” (Kembang Jepun, 49).

“If my suspicions are correct, then I am constantly being reminded to be careful. Meanwhile, if I continue to feel restricted, it’s possible that at some point I’ll snap and can’t take it anymore.” (Kembang Jepun, 49).

Data 5

“Jika itu terjadi, maka giliran hal yang wajar untuk menghadapinya adalah barangkali saya tidak diam jika ditampar; sebaliknya, saya akan balas menampar, dan jika ia menampar ulang, itu berarti saya akan berkelahi dengannya. Apakah itu akan terjadi? Belum terlintar dalam rasa curiga saya.” (Kembang Jepun, 36)

“If that happens, the natural way to handle it would be that I probably wouldn’t stay silent if slapped; instead, I’d slap back, and if he slaps me again, that means I’ll fight him. Whether that will happen hasn’t crossed my mind yet.” (Kembang Jepun, 36)

Data 6

“Nanti, pada suatu waktu kau akan membenarkan bahwa perempuan harus juga bicara, dan bicaranya harus didengar. Perempuan bukan hanya dilihat dari mukanya dan dinikmati badannya, tetapi juga harus didengar bicaranya.” (Kembang Jepun, 71)

“Someday, you will come to realize that women must also speak, and their words must be heard. Women are not merely to be looked at for their faces or enjoyed for their bodies, but their voices must also be heard.” (Kembang Jepun, 71)

(Data 7)

“Mana mungkin saya kembali ke Shinju? Kendati saya ini mirip tembikar yang gampang pecah, saya tetap mengharapkan kehidupan yang mapan.” (Kembang Jepun, 150).

“How could I possibly go back to Shinju? Even though I’m like a fragile piece of pottery, I still hope for a stable life.” (Kembang Jepun, 150).

The accounts of the four figures reveal their discomfort and the mounting internal pressure they continue to experience through the statement, "If I keep feeling this way, I might eventually snap and lose control," which indicates that Keke is beginning to recognize the injustice she faces and is feeling an urge to no longer keep it bottled up. Because she is in a restrictive situation, this drives Keke to speak out, even though it has not yet escalated into open resistance. In this context, Keke's actions can be understood as an initial form of breaking the silence, that is, when subaltern women begin to articulate their discomfort and rejection of power dynamics, specifically Yoko's stance as the colonial figure who restricts Keke, thereby forcing her into a position of silence. This indicates that the silence of subaltern women is not a form of acceptance of oppression, but rather a consequence of being restricted from voicing their refusal. In line with De Jong (2016), breaking the silence begins when subaltern female characters start to voice their own perspectives after previously only suppressing their fears and internal pressures.

Data 5 of Keke's characters reveals that she would not remain silent if subjected to violence; she would even slap back. This statement demonstrates the character's emerging courage to resist despite being under pressure from the dominant party; Keke asserts her stance and rejection of repressive treatment. Although this resistance takes the form of a hypothetical scenario imagined by the character, the statement signifies a shift in position from passive to more active. In the context of breaking the silence, Keke's courage to articulate her intent to resist colonial power represents a form of struggle by subaltern women who have long been perceived as silent by the dominant group. The silence is not always manifested in direct action but also through the courage of subaltern women in expressing their thoughts, emotions, and will regarding the oppressive situations they endure (Seymour, 2006).

Data 6 is an expression of Yoko's opinion to Keke, stating that, no matter what, women must be able to speak up and their voices must be heard. Until now, Keke has lived as a subaltern woman who has had no opportunity to voice her opinions. Through the character of Yoko, Keke learns to speak up and express her views to the dominant group. Through Yoko's efforts to convey to Keke that she must be able to speak out and that her voice must be heard, this

represents an effort to advocate for the rights of subaltern women under the oppressive colonial power. Yoko's actions align with the view (Dang, 2021) that women must retain their strength and strive to fight, even within the confining bounds of colonialism.

The expression of Keke's inner turmoil is shown in Data 7. In Data 7, Keke's resistance, which had previously been kept silent, begins to shift toward "breaking the silence," with the expression conveyed to demonstrate verbal resistance (Scott, 1990). Keke's courage in voicing her hopes and anxieties demonstrates the emergence of an awareness to reject the domination that has long restricted her life and represents one form of the struggle of subaltern women. This is evident when the character Keke begins to realize that she cannot spend her entire life in Shinju working as a Japanese sex worker; she deeply longs for a stable life like that of other women out there. Keke's perspective serves as proof that, even in silence, subaltern women continue to fight for their lives in order to break free from the colonial shackles that oppress them.

Resisting through direct action

The focus on breaking the silence is not merely about voicing dissent but also about addressing subaltern groups who dare to take action because they have experienced oppression at the hands of their superiors. Subaltern women, often perceived as powerless, possess the potential to speak out specifically by resisting authority. This resistance constitutes a form of women's struggle in response to the injustices they endure (Susanto & Ardianto, 2021). Subalterns do not merely remain silent and endure; they can engage in direct resistance by defying rules, leaving oppressive situations, or even through physical acts of resistance. This is evidenced by the quotations below.

Data 8

"Saya tidak mencuri! Saya tidak mencuri, teriak saya seperti kalap mencakar-cakar mukanya. Kau memang dengki pada saya! Jahanam." (Kembang Jepun, 101)

"I didn't steal anything! I didn't steal anything," I screamed, frantically scratching his face. "You're just jealous of me! You bastard." (Kembang Jepun, 101)

Data 9

"Dan entah bagaimana saya memperoleh ilham, menerjangnya dengan menangkap kedua kakinya, lalu mengigitnya. Ia menjerit-jerit karena kehilangan keseimbangan badan di samping rasa sakit oleh gigitan saya itu." (Kembang Jepun, 107)

"And somehow I was inspired; I lunged at him, grabbing both his legs, then biting him. He screamed because he lost his balance, in addition to the pain from my bite." (Kembang Jepun, 107)

Data 10

"Saya akan tinggalkan Shinju tanpa sepengetahuan Kotaro Takamura, tanpa membawa apa-apa. Tekad saya sudah bukat menikah dengan Tjak Broto." (Kembang Jepun, 15)

"I will leave Shinju without Kotaro Takamura's knowledge, taking nothing with me. My resolve is set on marrying Tjak Broto." (Kembang Jepun, 15)

The data shows that eight characters engaged in both verbal and physical resistance, evident when they denied the accusations by shouting "I didn't steal anything!" while attacking their opponents. These actions reveal an emotional outburst resulting from the pressure and

humiliation they endured. The character Keke no longer chose to remain silent, as Kotaro Takamura's accusation, which degraded her self-worth by labeling her a thief, pushed Keke to fight back by screaming and scratching Yoko's face. Keke, who was perceived as a powerless woman without a voice, began to act boldly as a form of resistance to avoid continuing to live under colonial control. In line with Padmasari et al. (2025), the portrayal of women as gentle and meek is a form of gender construction; the existence of discrimination causes women to act to fight for their lives, thereby creating an equal relationship between the superior party and subaltern women.

Scene 9 depicts the culmination of Keke's struggle as a subaltern woman through direct resistance. Keke's actions, charging at and biting Yoko, serve as proof that she is no longer afraid and has moved beyond merely resisting in silence to fight for her life. Keke's resistance is a form of direct resistance because she has frequently been subjected to abuse by Yoko. The cruelty Keke has endured has driven her to take further action. Her actions demonstrate a shift in position from being perceived as powerless to becoming an individual capable of rejecting domination. This aligns with the view (Bahardur, 2020) that the attitudes and actions of the colonial powers led to the emergence of resistance from the subaltern as an effort to defend themselves and their dignity.

The form of subaltern women's struggle through breaking the silence is illustrated in Data 10. The character Keke, who secretly flees from Shinju, represents a subaltern woman's struggle in the form of direct resistance against colonial domination, which has long controlled Keke's life, body, and choices as a subaltern woman. Keke's decision to marry Tjak Broto also demonstrates an effort to reclaim the right to determine her own future. In the context of postcolonial feminism, this action demonstrates that subaltern women are not always in a passive position but also possess the ability to negotiate power relations, as expressed by Spivak (1988); although subalterns are often denied the means to resist, this does not mean they cannot speak out. This view aligns with Setiawan (2018), who argues that subaltern women, often perceived as those perpetually marginalized whose voices are never heard, can transform this into an opportunity for women's freedom to assert their existence.

Breaking the Charm

Breaking the charm is the process by which the allure, authority, or legitimacy of dominant power crumbles in the eyes of subordinates. The dominant party maintains its position not only through physical force but also through an image of superiority, authority, and myths about power. When subordinates begin to recognize the weaknesses, hypocrisy, or contradictions of the dominant party, the allure of that power begins to shatter. The shattering of the dominant party's authority can give rise to new courage among subordinates to question or reject that power (Scott, 1990). In the context of subaltern women, breaking the charm can occur when women begin to realize that the dominant party is not entirely strong, just, or right.

Disregarding the Rulers

When the relationship between the ruling class and the people begins to falter, all thoughts regarding gender equality, injustice, and revenge begin to surface. The collapse of colonial authority causes colonized groups to disregard the rulers so that the colonizers or occupiers no longer appear frightening, authoritative, or beyond challenge. The subaltern do not need the voices of others as a medium for resistance; they only need a space that allows them to speak. The subaltern's ability to speak arises when the image of the colonial powers is tarnished (Puspita, 2025). This is evident in the data excerpt below.

Data 11

“Kami bergerak cepat, sesuai dengan rencana. Saya buka pintu, lalu memanggil dengan kesan liar kepada kedua petugas tersebut.” (Kembang Jepun, 195)

“We moved quickly, just as planned. I opened the door, then called out to the two officers in a frantic tone.” (Kembang Jepun, 195)

Data 12

“Saya tidak akan menjawab kalau tidak ada jaminan, bahwa suami saya bebas.” (Kembang Jepun, 197)

“I won’t answer unless there’s a guarantee that my husband is free.” (Kembang Jepun, 197)

Data 11 illustrates Keke’s defiance of authority through her attempt to summon Japanese soldiers in a seemingly reckless manner; she used this tactic to deceive the Japanese soldiers so that she and her husband could escape. Keke’s actions demonstrate a shift in the authority of the Japanese military, which had previously been viewed as a powerful and feared entity by subaltern groups. Keke no longer views the Japanese soldiers as a force to be feared and respected but rather as a force that can be outwitted to achieve freedom. The loss of this fear serves as a sign of the collapse of the rulers’ authority in the eyes of the subalterns. More than just a strategy, Keke’s actions also demonstrate a form of struggle by subaltern women through efforts to undermine the superior image and authority of the colonial powers. Keke’s actions align with the findings (Massoumi & Morgan, 2024), which state that relations of domination depend on the maintenance of the rulers’ image of authority in a public sphere; thus, a shift in the inferior group’s perception of the superior can serve as an indication of the collapse of power.

Keke’s dismissive attitude toward the authorities is evident in Data 12, where she displays indifference, remaining silent and refusing to answer the questions posed by the Japanese soldiers. Keke’s statement, “I will not answer unless there is a guarantee that my husband will be released,” indicates that she no longer views the Japanese soldiers as the ruling authority that must be obeyed. Instead, Keke began to boldly negotiate by setting conditions for the ruling party. Keke’s actions represent her struggle as a subaltern woman through a stance of not fully submitting to colonial domination. Subalterns are often viewed as powerless or lacking the ability to fight for themselves; however, through a subaltern stance that rejects the notion that colonizers and rulers must be respected, subaltern women are able to engage in resistance (Lestari, 2020).

The loss of fear and respect for the dominant group

The loss of respect for the dominant group is one form of the struggle of subaltern women. The loss of respect for those in power does not mean that the subaltern acts rudely but rather that they no longer view them as figures who must be obeyed; thus, the subaltern no longer accepts the arbitrary treatment of those in power, and they come to realize that they are of equal value to the superior group (Scott, 1990). Examples of this attitude of loss of respect can be seen in the quotations below.

Data 13

“Mestinya saya bisa langsung menjawab tapi sekilas melihat muka Yoko membuat saya diganggu perasaan ingin menjambaknya dan akhirnya membuat saya tidak menjawab.” (Kembang Jepun, 100)

"I should have been able to answer right away, but just a glance at Yoko's face made me feel the urge to grab her by the hair, and in the end, I didn't answer." (Kembang Jepun, 100)

Data 14

"Sejak saat itu Yoko berubah. Dari tindak-tanduknya ia biaskan rasa damai. Ajaib nian." (Kembang Jepun, 108)

"From that moment on, Yoko changed. Her demeanor radiated a sense of peace. How wondrous." (Kembang Jepun, 108)

Data 15

"Kalau saja saya punya kesempatan, saya ingin membunuh opsir Jepang itu. Demi Tuhan, saya bersumpah." (Kembang Jepun, 194)

"If only I had the chance, I'd kill that Japanese officer. By God, I swear it." (Kembang Jepun, 194)

Data 16

"Tembak saja kami, biar kau puas melihat dua mayat di sini. Ayo, lakukan nafsu binatangmu itu. Kau sebetulnya tahu, suamiku tidak salah. Tapi untuk menunjukkan kekuasaan mu, kau tetap menuntut kematian." (Kembang Jepun, 196).

"Just shoot us so you can be satisfied seeing two corpses here. Go ahead, act on your animalistic urges. You know full well my husband did nothing wrong. But to demonstrate your power, you still demand our deaths." (Kembang Jepun, 196).

Data Excerpt 13 indicates that Keke exhibits psychological resistance toward the dominant party. Keke's growing realization that Yoko is no longer a figure whose authority must be unconditionally respected and accepted, a realization that drives Keke's desire to grab Yoko by the hair, represents Keke's struggle as a subaltern woman who has long been submissive and lived under Japanese colonial rule. Although this impulse has not yet been realized in practice, it may indicate Keke's dissent and rejection of her position as a woman whose voice is disregarded. Furthermore, Keke's actions align with Piu (2023), which posits that subaltern is not merely a concept understood as women who are marginalized and silenced by dominant discourse but also as those capable of challenging the dominant party. This form of defiance is reflected in Keke's refusal to regard Yoko as the dominant party, as evidenced by her uncooperative attitude, specifically, her failure to respond to the questions posed by Yoko.

Data 14 reveals a shift in the power dynamic between Keke and Yoko, as indicated by Yoko's attitude toward Keke becoming more friendly and conciliatory. Keke's various struggles in previous attempts have begun to influence the way Yoko treats her, causing a shift in Yoko's previously domineering treatment of the geishas at Shinju, including Keke. This demonstrates that Yoko, as the dominant party, can be weakened by the struggles waged by Keke. The collapse of the dominant party's power means that one no longer accepts a harmful action as something that can be tolerated (Lewis, 1990). Based on this, Yoko's change in attitude can be understood as a consequence of Keke's agency emerging in response to oppressive power dynamics.

Although subalterns are often viewed as inferior, they possess the potential to fight for rights that have long been silenced and to stand on equal footing with superior groups (Julianti et al., 2024). The courage to fight for subaltern rights then emerges when the authority of the

superior class collapses in the eyes of the subalterns. This is evident in data excerpt 15, which illustrates the breaking the charm attitude through Keke's statement expressing a desire to kill a Japanese officer. The collapse of the rulers' authority emboldened Keke to openly demonstrate her resistance. Keke's statement can be understood as a form of subaltern women's struggle that reflects the loss of fear and respect toward the dominant group, as well as the emergence of the courage to challenge oppressive power relations.

Data 16 illustrates the struggle of subaltern women through breaking the spell, specifically, the loss of fear and respect toward the dominant party. Keke's statement, "Just shoot us," serves as evidence that she no longer feared the threats issued by the colonial authorities. As a subaltern woman, Keke's courage to criticize and challenge the Japanese soldiers is a form of struggle to reject the subordinate position that has long been imposed upon her. Her actions not only demonstrate the loss of fear toward the dominant party but also reveal the emergence of an awareness of her rights and dignity as an individual, which should not be treated arbitrarily. In line with Azhim (2022), colonial discourse is not something that can preclude the possibility of resistance; indeed, the discourse itself can produce effects contrary to the will of power. This indicates that Keke's courage in voicing her refusal directly represents the struggle of subaltern women to deconstruct the legitimacy of colonial power, which has long relegated them to marginalized positions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings outlined above, it can be concluded that the struggle of subaltern women can be realized through elementary forms of disguise, which demonstrate that resistance to domination can take the form of veiled actions, satire, pretense, and everyday behaviors that appear compliant but actually conceal inner resistance. This struggle evolves into breaking the silence, which occurs when female characters begin to dare to voice their rejection and dissatisfaction with the structures of domination that constrain their lives, thereby demonstrating an awareness of the need to move beyond a passive position. This study also identified breaking the charm, a condition where subaltern female characters no longer view the dominant party as a figure to be respected or feared, leading to a shift in power relations marked by the courage to challenge and undermine the legitimacy of the rulers. It can, therefore, be concluded that the struggle of women in Remy Sylado's novel *Kembang Jepun* evolves from a covert struggle toward courage and action yet remains constrained by the oppressive structures.

This study contributes to expanding the field of postcolonial feminism by demonstrating that subaltern women are not merely objects of colonial oppression but also subjects who exercise agency through various strategies of resistance. Furthermore, the findings of this study are relevant to Scott's (1990) concept of the hidden transcript in interpreting the dynamics of subaltern women's resistance in Indonesian literature, thereby enriching the application of this theory. The findings of this study also suggest that the struggles of subaltern women are dynamic, ranging from resistance through everyday actions to the courage to dismantle oppressive colonial power.

This study can be further developed by examining the hidden transcript in other literary works to observe patterns of subaltern women's resistance within different cultural and colonial contexts. Additionally, future research could connect this theory with postcolonial feminist perspectives to enrich the analysis of gender and colonial power relations in Indonesian literature.

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