SUBALTERNITY IN MARIAMA DIALLO’S MASTER (2022) MOVIE: SPIVAK’S SUBALTERNITY

Subalternitas di Film Master (2022) oleh Mariama Diallo: Subalternitas Spivak

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Abstract

There are still subalterns in the contemporary world. Human rights campaigns are widely spread both online and offline. Nonetheless, even when it is not openly evident, discrimination and the subjugation of some races, also known as racism, still exist and are frequently faced on a daily basis. This study explores the racism and discrimination against subalterns that persist at the “inclusive and diverse” University shown in Master (2022) movie utilizing a postcolonial perspective. In order to examine the data, this study utilized Gayatri Spivak’s theory of the subaltern. The purpose of the study is to identify the real subaltern in the movie as well as the elements that conceptualize the subaltern. This research will be conducted by gathering data from the movie through screenshots, subtitles, and timestamps of the conversations. The researchers will specifically analyze the subaltern, mainly focused on the racial discrimination case. The findings of this study show that Jasmine is the subaltern and that race and social status are the elements that conceptualize her as the subaltern.

INTRODUCTION

There are still subalterns in the contemporary world, especially in the United States. Although slavery had officially ended on January 1, 1863, by Abraham Lincoln (History.com, 2021), discrimination and stereotype towards certain races remain to exist. As many racial injustice cases were reported in 2022, the US Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) concluded that the US failed to implement the international anti-racism legal
standards (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Colton Donner, 27 years old, a Kansas man, was sentenced on June 29, 2022 for threatening with knife, yelled racial slurs, and told his victim that Paola is a "white town" (Department of Justice, 2020). Another racial discrimination case was reported on December 13, 2022, a Michigan man was reported for committing death threats towards Black Lives Matter supporters who wore Black Lives Matter t-shirts (Department of Justice, 2022). Not long after the Michigan case, a Washington man was sentenced to two years of prison for threatening to shoot Black people in the stores in Buffalo by telephone (United States Attorney’s Office, 2022). Due to the mass amount of racism case, numerous people are engaged in both online and offline campaign for racial equality and human rights on behalf of the "historically" oppressed community. One of the most famous human rights movements is Black Lives Matter. About 15 to 26 million people in the United States participated in this movement due to George Floyd death case in 2020 (Buchanan et al., 2020). This movement successfully reformed the laws under police misconduct issues like chokehold banning (Catur Sembadani & Ade Risna Sari, 2022).

Nonetheless, when it is not explicitly evident, racism and other kinds of discrimination still exist even during and after the movement and are frequently experienced on a daily basis. Discrimination is caused by implicit bias, which makes humans a bit racist, although their minds keep telling them not to be racist (Desmond-Harris, 2016). Implicit bias can not be detected unless through a test. While formal institutional barriers faced by marginalized groups are easy to detect, informal barriers are frequently more subtle, making measuring discrimination difficult (United Nations, 2018). Most people falsely assume that racism and discrimination were eradicated with the end of slavery and the emergence of Black leaders in the white community. Obama, the first Black president of the United States, said in his interview with Black Entertainment Television (BET) that racism can not be solved overnight, for it is deep-rooted (Obama, 2014). An individual's lack of awareness of their thoughts is one of the factors contributing to racism and discrimination today. Individuals tend to favor forming relationships with those they share many similarities with and instinctively maintain mistrust for those who are unlike them. Racism cannot be eradicated, as it is ingrained in people's unconscious minds, despite efforts to raise awareness of it throughout society. The stereotypes people have are not the same as thoughts (Unite for Change, 2022). Thoughts can be controlled, while stereotypes cannot. When people talk about consciousness-raising to become aware of unconscious prejudice, that is an oxymoron because if it is really unconscious, we are unaware of it (Cooperman, 2017). Utilizing Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalterns, this research examines racism and discrimination against subalterns that persist in an "inclusive and diverse" university as depicted in the Master movie (Diallo, 2022).

Master (2022) is a psychological horror thriller directed by Mariama Diallo (Diallo, 2022). This movie tells the story of a Black freshman at an old elite University in New England, namely Ancaster. The freshman's name is Jasmine. Jasmine is an outstanding student, and she comes from the suburb. All the students of Elite Ancaster University got their rooms in the Ancaster dormitory, including Jasmine. However, there is a terrible story behind the old university. It is said that Jasmine's dorm room 302 is haunted by the ghost of Margaret Millett, a girl who was hanged for allegedly practicing witchcraft. The school's first Black student committed suicide by hanging herself in the same room in 1965. Jasmine assumes that Margaret Millett's spirit is haunting her as a result. The "ghost" haunts Jasmine in her nightmares and in reality. Jasmine shared a room with Amelia, and Amelia eventually revealed her deepest hatred for Jasmine. Gail Bishop, the dorm's master, did not know this because Jasmine kept it from her, but she later found out that Jasmine was not troubled by the "ghost." Jasmine got anxious and filed a complaint after realizing that her lecturer, Liv, was
targeting her and giving her poor grades. Liv's position was significantly impacted by Jasmine's report. Jasmine had noticed an increase in the number of ghosts in black robes chasing her ever since they had appeared. The story does not end there; Gail soon discovered that her best friend Liv is white after encountering "maggot disturbance" at home. Even though the university explicitly states that it embraces diversity, the history constantly repeats itself. Therefore, It is evident that there are still subalterns in today's society.

There is no research of subaltern in Master (2022) movie yet, although there have been several previous studies regarding the related topic. In their research Voice of the Unvoiced: Children as Subaltern in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye (Thilagavathi & Chandrasekar, 2014), Thilagavathi and Chandrasekar presented the first study. This study examines the novel about a Black girl who longs for the blue eyes of the marginalized society with trauma and complex realities of self-loathing of Black children to the outside world. The discrimination and racist environment causes the main character from The Bluest Eye to view herself as ugly and want blue eyes so that she can get love, attention, friends, family, and other things that white people have. Not only that, the novel's main character also gets terrible treatment from her own family as a result for racism and discrimination by people around them. This study shows that the marginalized community is the subaltern whose voice is not heard. However, the oppressed children in the community are spoiled, so they become the future oppressor. Thus, the influences of white value, which dwelt in the marginalized community since the colonization happened, remains. The second previous study is Buffalo Nationalism and Dalit Aesthetics - a Subaltern Study of Dhouli by Mahasweta Devi (Mandal, 2019). This study examines the story of Dhouli by Mahasweta Devi, which tells about Dhouli, a Dalit, the lowest social class in India, whose life is full of misery and suffering. In Dhouli, the state and society, through their hegemonic brutality, seek to annihilate the life and existence of Dhouli. Dhouli is a subaltern in both caste and gender. In the end, Dalits will never be heard if there is no progress from Dalits themselves; even the government cannot help their progress. The last study that discusses the subaltern is Investigating the Female Subaltern, Colonial Discourse and False Consciousness: A Spivakian Marxist-Postcolonialist Reading of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease by Mostafaee (Mostafaee, 2016). The author analyzes the women in the novel Things Fall Apart as the object of research. The women in the novel show that gender in Ibo society is unequal, and Ibo society shows the existence of toxic masculinity in their culture. The protagonist of this novel, Okonwko, strongly rejects all forms of femininity that lead to the abuse of his children and wives. Okonwko's abuse caused the Ibo woman to become a subaltern who could not speak her voice. The research found that women in this novel are seen only as tools to do crops, educate children, et cetera. It is normalized as toxic traits of masculinity are allowed in the Ibo society. Thus, the women of Ibo society could not speak their voices. The other things analyzed in this study are postcolonialism and false consciousness in the novel.

Based on existing studies, the researchers chose this movie as the object of the study to be analyzed. The reason why the researchers chose this movie is that the issues raised in this movie are highly pertinent to contemporary life. The oppression of Black people in this movie is indirectly depicted through the horrifying psychological experiences that terrify the main characters. Despite not being clearly depicted as slavery, the characters in this movie nevertheless demonstrate how discrimination and racism still exist. This movie is interesting to study, particularly when it comes to the subaltern. Thus, the author chose the movie Master (2022) as the research object (Diallo, 2022). The research will be conducted with the Subaltern theory by Gayatri Spivak.

According to Spivak, the subaltern is a person who is unable to speak up and be heard. The root of the subaltern is the unvoiced women who live in third-world countries. The
hegemony grants access, whilst the access itself imposes restrictions on the subaltern. Hegemony according to Gramsci is the relationship between culture and power under capitalism (Lears, 2016). Capitalism's power makes the oppressed unable to speak their voices. Hegemony is intricately related to power, ideology, and struggle (Herrmann, 2017). By adopting the same ideology as the hegemony, the subalterns occasionally do not realize they are being exploited as tools. The difference between subaltern in Antonio Gramsci's perspective and Gayatri Spivak's perspective is that subaltern in Gramsci's perspective only refers to the low-class people as known as the Other, while in Spivak's perspective, the subaltern is not all about class but also access, which is the issue in Edward Said's essay, Permission to Narrate (Said, 1984). Said wrote in his essay, "there are numerous UN Resolutions certifying the Palestinians as a people, their struggle as a legitimate one, their right to have an independent state as "inalienable." Such Resolutions, however, do not have the authority of which White speaks (Said, 1984)." In his essay, he stated that while Israel receives support from media outlets like TV, the Palestinians lack the freedom to express the truth about how brutal Israelis are. Subalterns are prevented from expressing their thoughts through the media as the access itself. The Spivak referred access is the intellectuals learning the subalterns. The historian transforms 'insurgency' into 'text for knowledge' (Spivak, 1988). They learn about the subaltern, but they are not "native" to the experiences that the subalterns suffer. They speak for the subalterns, but it only restricts them from actually speaking their voices. Thus, from Spivak's perspective about subalterns, this research has some objectives.

Some questions have been formulated to conduct this research. The first question is, who is the subaltern in the movie? The second question is, which elements conceptualize the subaltern? The two questions above will fulfill the study's objectives, including determining who the subaltern is in the movie and which elements conceptualize the subaltern. Nonetheless, this research has limitations. The limitation of this study is that the researchers analyzed the subaltern with only the theory of subaltern by Gayatri Spivak in general. Further analysis may be conducted from this study, such as social class and hegemony in this movie, which are not in the scope of the analysis.

METHODS

This research utilized a postcolonial approach and will be conducted by gathering the data from the movie in the form of screenshots, subtitles, and timestamps of the conversations. The researchers will specifically analyze the subaltern, mainly focused on the racial discrimination case. According to Spivak, a subaltern is a person who cannot speak up and be heard. This research aims to know who the subaltern is in the movie, the elements conceptualize the subaltern, and to share awareness of how the racial discrimination depicted in the movie still exists in real life. This research will use Master (2022) as the data source. In the movie, there was only one subaltern, Jasmine, as she was experiencing racial discrimination, like racial slurs but failed to be heard and chose to commit suicide. There are several steps in gathering the data. In the first step, the researchers will watch the movie several times to comprehend the plot and characters since it is a psychological movie. This step is crucial as it will affect the findings. The second step is to take screenshots and other supporting data that will be analyzed in the results and discussion. Last but not least, the researchers will connect all of the data with the theory of Subaltern by Gayatri Spivak. After gathering all the evidence through screenshots and other supporting data, the researchers will analyze the movie following the research questions. The researchers will analyze the first question; who is the subaltern in the movie? The researchers will try to find all of the evidence in the movie, explicitly shown or not, under the theory of subaltern, which states that no unrepresentable subaltern subject can know and speak itself. The way to find who the
Results and Discussion

Generally, the subaltern in Gramsci's definition is a group of people in the lower level of the economic or social aspect and those who are oppressed. According to Spivak, subalterns are the people who cannot speak their voices due to the access that is supposed to be their access for speaking their voices. There is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation (Spivak, 1988). In this movie, two characters feel the impact of racism the most.

1. The Subaltern

At the movie's beginning, the main character, Jasmine Moore, is a freshman at Ancaster University. On determining which room belonged to Jasmine in (1:30), her seniors inquired her name rather than directly giving her the number. A senior said, "She got the room." It confused Jasmine at first because they said it as if something was wrong with her room. In (3:27), Jasmine moved in with a white roommate, Amelia. She was nice to Jasmine, and everything seemed all right to Jasmine. However, she started to feel uneasy when she heard from Gail Bishop, the first Black dorm Master, in her first speech that there was an incident of Margaret Millett, who was executed for allegedly practicing witchcraft. She heard the story twice, and the second time was from Amelia's boyfriend. Jasmine started to feel discrimination the first night she was in her room (6:00). Her friend asked her to wipe the spilled drink and throw the cloth on her. She thought it was not a big deal. The next day when she wanted to get her food in the cafeteria (10:05), the cafeteria woman looked at her differently than her white friends. Jasmine experienced discrimination not just in the form of an unpleasant stare from the cafeteria worker, but also indirectly by her friends. She was told to buy her friends pizza, but her friends refused to pay her back (16:30). She was treated like a maid to them. Jasmine was triggered by Liv's statement (23:53). She spoke as if Jasmine was originated from a third-world country where people of color belong. Jasmine submitted the dispute as a result of what Liv did. Jasmine confided in her friend Cressida about her struggles regarding the poor grades. Cressida did not comfort Jasmine. Instead, she said that the task was easy and should not be an issue (28:30). This increases Jasmine's feelings about Liv targeting her. Experiencing discrimination made Jasmine dream a lot about it, and seeing people around them started to look at her differently. The discrimination started to become more noticeable.
Jasmine felt like everyone was staring at her at the dorm party as they sang a song about Black people using the racial slur "Nigga." Right before entering the party, Jasmine was also prohibited from going in while her white friends were welcomed (36:40). Things got worse real quick. Someone carved the word "Leave" on her door and hung a suicide rope on the door knob.

![Figure 2](image1.png)

When Gail found out about this, she asked Amelia if she knew what happened, but she responded, "It was probably just a prank" (42:25). Gail was already aware that Jasmine had been the victim of bullying and discrimination. After experiencing a lot of discrimination, Jasmine started to feel the psychological effects as she was subjected to both implicit and explicit discrimination to a far greater extent.

The discrimination Jasmine faced had a severe psychological effect on her. Both the implicit and explicit discrimination caused her to have hallucination about ghosts. She had a hallucination in (10:25) that a painting in her cafeteria turned into a hideous face, while it was just a portrait of a man.

![Figure 3](image2.png)

In (20:50), Jasmine had a dream that a creepy hand crawled near her, and when she woke up, she found her wrist bleeding like it had been cut. She started to feel stressed out in this scene. She believed the ghost was stalking her and was planning on choosing her as the next victim. In (45:50), she had another dream about white people seeing her asleep while a horrifying creature attempted to hang her in her sleep. From this dream, discrimination started appearing as a white woman asked in her dream, "Who is this?" Furthermore, the white man beside her replied, "This is a Black student asleep." The last but most traumatic hallucination
that Jasmine experienced was in (1:06:01) when she saw a ghost with a black cloak running after her on December 3rd at 3:33 in the morning. She thought it was a curse of Margaret Millett that caused a student to die on the same date and at the same time as when she experienced it. She finally escaped the ghost by jumping from her dorm room window resulting in breaking her hand.

In the end, due to the hallucination and terrors she experienced, she could not take it anymore and decided to run away from it by committing suicide. She took her life in her room while no one realized it except Gail. Gail walked down and saw her room's light was turned on. She decided to take a look at Jasmine. When she knocked on the door, Jasmine did not respond. Finally, Gail opened the door by force and found Jasmine's body hung up with a rope. Jasmine is one of the representations of a subaltern. Jasmine Moore is the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference (Spivak, 1988). Her differences caused her not to be able to speak for herself. Based on Spivak's essay, Jasmine Moore could not voice herself due to the access that should have been a great help for her to be noticed as a victim of discrimination. The access in this movie is the university where Jasmine studied.

The historian, transforming 'insurgency' into 'text for knowledge' (Spivak, 1988), became evident in this movie. Ancaster University turned 'insurgency' into 'text for knowledge.' They made a whole promotion video showing how inclusive and diverse the university is while discriminating against minorities simultaneously.

2. The Source of Inferiority of Jasmine Moore as the Subaltern

Jasmine being a subaltern, was not without any reason. Some elements caused her to experience discrimination. The first element is race. In this movie, Jasmine is not the only one experiencing discrimination. Gail was also the victim, and some events show how race plays the most significant role in discrimination. In (9:45), Gail found an old photo in her place. The photo was of white people taking a family photo while a Black maid looked at the camera.
At first, it seemed pretty normal to see the photo, but slowly, it got more explicit and worse. Gail was welcomed nicely at her first party with other professors, but suddenly Diandra asked something sensitive. She asked if she should call her "Barack" or not since Gail was the first Black master. What Diandra asked was offensive because they were referring to Barack Obama as the first Black president of the US, as if Black people should be distinguished from white people. At the party, Gail found a statue of a Black maid (16:10). After the party, she went to her friend's house, Liv, and told her what she felt. Instead of trying to calm her, Liv told Gail she had been treated like a "House nigger". This matter was a sign to Gail that white people were discriminating against her. However, she denied it (17:58). The last sign that opened Gail's eyes was the appearance of a ghost in the form of a Black maid crying (1:04:22). From this event, Gail realized that white people still see Black people as lower class beings. Historically, Black people were slaves to white people.

The second element was social status. At (23:46), Jasmine met her lecturer, Liv. Liv is a white woman who changed her identity into a Black person. When Jasmine talked about her essay with Liv, Liv said that Jasmine's essay was out of topic. She said something that shows how Liv did not like the idea of Jasmine's essay, which she saw as an attack on white people, and she saw Jasmine as someone with lower social status. Liv said, "Whiteness does not have to be the default, Jasmine. I get it, this is advanced stuff. It can be really hard to make an adjustment to a school like this, especially for a student of color." Hearing her lecturer's answer made Jasmine mad. This scene shows how in this movie, Liv saw Jasmine as a person with lower social status. Liv thought that Jasmine came from some developing country when she actually came from the suburb.

These two elements are what make Jasmine Moore inferior to her environment. Her inferiority makes her the subaltern who can not speak for herself, as her difference from people around her is how she is inferior (Spivak, 1988).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Jasmine was the subaltern in the movie. She had hallucinations and terrors as a result of all the discrimination she encountered. She is unable to speak for herself because of her difference, which also reflects her inferiority. Her race and social status are what make her inferior. Her access to speak up was restricted by the access itself, which was the university. The university was meant to be her platform for speaking out, but it covered the issue to maintain its reputation as a diverse institution. In the end, Jasmine decided to end everything by committing suicide.

REFERENCES


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