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FEMALE SUBALTERNITY IN HANNA RAMBE'S NOVEL MIRAH DARI BANDA

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Abstract

Subaltern reading begins with an author's view of the conditions that characterize subaltern groups. Subaltern falls within the realm of postcolonial feminism which is a form of alliance between postcolonial theory and feminism, seeks to beat back existing gender, cultural, or racial hierarchies, and rejects binary opposition to patriarchalism or colonialism's constructs of authority. This research tries to reveal the subalternity of women during colonialism in the novel *Mirah dari Banda*. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative, namely by examining texts that contain subaltern elements. The data in this study are in the form of text sentences or dialogues that reflect subaltern women due to the domination of colonialism. The findings of this study that there are several forms of subaltern experienced by indigenous women (Mirah), including degrading dignity, sexual harassment, physical/verbal violence, obedience to the invaders, and control over others. From some of the research findings, subaltern women do not have a conceptual language to fight against colonial groups or indigenous men, and also women do not have the power to carry out resistance to the hegemonic power of groups in power.

Keywords: subaltern, female subalternity, postcolonial feminism, resistance

INTRODUCTION

Mesogenic views on women have been started since the era of colonialism took place, especially in the archipelago. Restrictions on movement, patriarchal culture, and social construction, further strengthened the inferiority and subordinateness of women. In the colonial era, the position of women was increasingly powerless, they had to face two sides (forms) that supported their inferiority, namely from the colonizers and the indigenous people. Women's voices were not heard to fight the social systems and constructs that existed at that time thus positioning them as subaltern groups (Andriyanto, 2021). Spivak (1990) also reveals that Subalterns had no way of expressing themselves, not because they did not want to voice their hearts, but because their voices were never heard by colonial or indigenous men.

The basic concept of the subaltern is inseparable from the colonial discourse brought about by the West. It is based on the thought of Said (2003) who mentions that the discourse on the East is a source of knowledge based on colonial ideology and interests. This discourse was supported by traditions, powers, and institutions and disseminated as a new science that limited itself to the knowledge of the colonies. The discourse created new myths and stereotypes about the East that were later contrasted with the West. It is a negative mirror to raise the image of the West (Europe) as the pioneer of civilization. As the dominant group in The era of colonialism, the West will present dominance in any case and always tends to give birth to inequalities caused by Western domination that always wants to control everything else. This tendency will be seen from the superior and inferior positions between the two parties so that there is an unbalanced relationship, one of which occupies a subordinate position (Harum, 2017).

Wiyatmi (2012) reveals that subaltern falls within the realm of postcolonial feminism which is a form of alliance between postcolonial theory and feminism, seeks to beat back existing gender/cultural/racial hierarchies and rejects binary opposition to patriarchalism/colonialism's constructs of authority. The perspective of postcolonial feminism formulates that third-world women are victims of par excellence or forgotten victims of two ideologies of imperialism and foreign patriarchy (Gandhi, 1998). Therefore, the perspective of postcolonial feminism, through its article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak (1990) understands the position of women as members of subaltern groups. She posits that in the discourse postcolonial feminism is a sub-group of third-world women having disappeared because we never hear them talk about themselves (Spivak, 1990 & Gandhi, 1998).

This concern for subaltern women is important to talk about because it relates to the status of women in the third world which is a former European colony because if left unchecked, the definition of subaltern women will continue to be dominated by the West. Deconstructively about the presence of the subalterns by criticizing the representative parties who seem to know the subalterns. Moreover, by fighting for the voice and text of the minority group (Setiawan, 2018). Spivak indirectly opposes and challenges the various modes and motives of representation of the subalterns to disengage subalternity as a tool of their interests aimed at asserting dominance by silencing the voices of minorities.

The colonial heritage is deeply imprinted on the country that is its colony. Former colonies tend to glorify the West as trendsetters in various midwives and aspects of life, ranging from technology, culture, and ideology, so as to more or less influence the thinking patterns of people in the former colony, including in literary works (Patullah, Juanda & Syam, 2021). Literary texts of a particular era featured social and cultural realities describing the events of that time. The novel *Mirah dari Banda* reveals the darkest side of the human tragedy caused by war and slavery by the Dutch colonizers. The occurrence of European colonialism resulted in a human tragedy that caused many wounds and traumas, especially those experienced by women. Like Mirah, contract coolies, jugun ianfu, nyai (domestic women), and child laborers, are experiences that become a side and dark color for *Mirah dari Banda* and all the women who experience it.

Mirah as the main character in the novel *Mirah dari Banda* is a victim of an unbalanced relationship resulting from colonialism, as well as a concrete proof of the power of domination that breeds inequality because one party wants to control the other. In the tradition of colonial society, the space of domination occurred in the relationship between master and servant. The stronger party in this regard is the employer who internalizes their vision of mission and adapts it to their will (Kholifatu, 2020). Unbalanced social relations in this study, will dismantle the pratic of colonialism towards indigenous women (subaltern) which results in forms of violence and various unfair treatments, it will be revealed through her character named Mirah.

Studying subalternity in literary works means reading and interpreting an author's views on the conditions and identities of subaltern groups. The injustice experienced by women from third-world countries cannot be separated from the influence of colonial practices that view male superiority (western and indigenous) over women and modernity towards traditionality (Mutianingtyas, Upartini & Badri, 2020). The colonists distinguished the way of acting toward men and women in their colonies. Men are selected and involved in the system they create, while women are placed in the domestic sphere and are powerless. An attempt to dismantle the subalternity of women in the novel *Mirah dari Banda*, through the perspective of Gayatri Spivak's theory of postcolonial feminism, that is, by dismantling the complexity of the structure of domination, then the impact that women experience as victims of their domination of power.

Research on subaltern women in literary works is always interesting to talk about because the studies are dynamic, therefore, many previous researchers have taken a role to discuss this topic. Mutianingtyas (2020) and Andriyanto (2021) examine subaltern

elements in literary works. They say that the subaltern cannot represent itself because the patriarchal culture is too restrictive for women, resulting in many socio-horizontal conflicts. In addition, there are also fights carried out by subaltern women, although the forms of violence experienced by subaltern women are very tragic, such as slavery and torture.

Susilastri (2020) and Patullah et al. (2021) who examined the resistance of subaltern women, explained several things that become resistance of female subalterns, namely by conducting open fights and closed resistances, but this form of resistance strengthens the fact that subaltern women are increasingly powerless, and defeated by the dominant group. Not stopping there, Saputra (2011) traces subaltern women in Indonesian literary works. She revealed that there is a full awareness felt by subaltern women, that she is a second-class creature in the social system of society. Subaltern women have no space, either in the domestic or public sectors to articulate their voices. It also in particular further strengthened the patriarchal status in the culture of indigenous peoples and colonizers, so women were so distressed over the situation.

Based on the results of previous research searches, it can be concluded that attention to subaltern women cannot be doubted, many have expressed resistance to what the dominant group of colonizers did and the socio-cultural heritage they left behind which is still running today (Dewi, 2018). This research limits itself to systemic forms of female subaltern carried out by the dominant group (colonizers) focusing on the facts of the story contained in the novel *Mirah dari Banda* by Hanna Rambe which is the location of the incident in Banda Neira, Maluku. Through this research, it will also be known the ethical and systemic implications related to inheritance and cultural changes that occurred due to strong colonial domination.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method, namely by describing, analyzing, and studying texts in depth related to women's subalternity. The data was collected with the study of literature, namely through meticulous and repeated reading techniques on the novel *Mirah dari Banda* as well as a source of research data. The note-taking technique is used to display data in the form of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses related to the reading of female subalterns. The purpose of the validity of research data is to determine the quality of data and the accuracy of the methods used, namely through indepth discussions with fellow lecturers or researchers who have expertise in the study of Indonesian literature. Based on the data used, the study approach used in this study is postcolonial feminism.

The next step is to note the existence of subaltern elements in women found in the novel *Mirah dari Banda*. After obtaining the appropriate data, data grouping is carried out to facilitate analysis. Then, the research data is processed by interpreting, reading collectively, coding, presenting it in the form of a narrative, and interpreting the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The findings in this study are presented informally, namely the presentation of the results of data analysis is carried out by pouring the results of the analysis into the form of sentences or words.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study show that there are five forms of subaltern experienced by indigenous women, Mirah as the main character in the novel *Mirah dari Banda* by Hanna Rambe, feels these forms, including degrading dignity, sexual abuse, physical and verbal violence, obedience to invaders, and control of others. The number of occurrences of the five female subaltern forms is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Representation of female subalternity in the novel *Mirah dari Banda*

No.	Title of a Work	Shape	Variant	Frequency		- Information
	of Fiction			Sum	Percentage	
1.	Mirah dari Banda	Subaltern	Degrading dignity	5	25	_
			Sexual harassment	3	15	
			Physical/verbal	3	15	
			stuttering			
			Obedience to the	5	25	
			invaders			
			Control of others	4	20	
Sum				20	100	

Table 1 presents the frequency of occurrence of subaltern data contained in the novel *Mirah dari Banda* by Hanna Rambe. Based on the information those contained, degrading dignity and obedience to the colonists have a high percentage of data appearances, it is because both behaviors are often carried out by the colonists towards indigenous women, the colonists have full control over their colonies, so they take advantage of both behaviors because they are considered easy to do and also not have too serious an impact on the physical. While the lowest percentage is sexual harassment and physical/verbal violence because if the behavior is often carried out will result in physical injury, and not infrequently it will also result in death, this is also taken into account by the colonizers to minimize the occurrence of resistance from the colonized community.

Discussion

Degrading Dignity

Often gender differences lead to unfair treatment, and often the victims are women. One manifestation of injustice against women is degrading dignity, which is what is captured in the *Mirah dari Banda* novel as quoted in the following citation.

Mrs. Mirah used to be a (nyai), mistress, a woman who was kept by a woman in Bandanera. He's a former contract coolie? Mistress marks? Not surprising, but ill-fated.

(Rambe, 2010)

Data citation describes Mirah's position as a nurturing woman (Nyai) from the colonizers, based on the culture that existed at that time the (nyai) were usually taken from former contract coolies imported from outside the area, (Nyai's) life was often treated inhumanely by her master who was a colonizer, for example, paid a low fee, by doing a heavy job. Often they are also seen as a lower class that has no dignity in the environment of indigenous peoples. As Mills (1997) points out, the relationship of the dominant group with women in the colonial era was vertical-horizontal, with women only as an oppressed group, as victims of male domination.

As a worker as well as a maid, who daily serves the colonizers, Mirah has an obligation to take care of all household affairs, for example taking care of all the needs of the legal wife of the colonizers, as well as the children of the colonizing nation. Mirah's situation is even more concerning when no indigenous people care about her fate and circumstances.

Duuh! A weak being who is not valued by his people, the man of the Banda or Javanese people, how is it valued by the Dutch? I was advised to just accept all of this.

(Rambe, 2010)

That citation illustrates that the life of a (Nyai) has always been looked down upon by the people, both indigenous and colonizers. On the other hand, the indigenous population

was also powerless to face the cultural situation that developed at that time, because there was a discourse or system instilled during colonialism. This is revealed by Ilma (2016) stating that practically speaking, the dominance of colonialism and patriarchal systems is carried out against the background of the masculine ideology of colonialism and the disrespectful view of indigenous women. In postcolonial theory, liyan is defined as a subject that is distinguished or marginalized due to imperial and colonial discourse, including distinguishing the behavior of the colonizer to a legal wife and a (Nyai), as revealed in the following.

Upon arriving home, the Great Master immediately cursed at me, his voice thundered, and I did not answer. What is the use? The dream of living freely has been shattered, my longing has never been fulfilled. I don't care about my next life.

(Rambe, 2010)

In the data excerpt, Mirah always gets unpleasant treatment from her master, when her master who is an invader is fighting with her legal wife, then Mirah will be targeted or as an outlet for her anger. This has always happened in Mirah's life as a (Nyai), a (nyai) can be said to have no rights whatsoever, including not having rights to her own position. At any time it can be abandoned by its master/employer without the assistance of any kind (Hellwing, 2007).

A woman who became (nyai), not on materialistic considerations, wanted luxury, or just on a whim, but the poverty and culture prevailing at the time made them "forced" to become (nyai), they were also victims of the system created by the colonial people, as illustrated excerpts as follows.

I became the mistress of the Great Master, I told her all with tears that could no longer be restrained, and I admitted to having been a cowardly human being and had let others choose and manage my life.

(Rambe, 2010)

As a consequence of the discourse of colonialism, women at that time consumed that women's sexuality and honor became unimportant, they were ignorant of their honor, while male sexuality was exaggerated, this often happened in Asian colonies including the Archipelago, in other words, women were usually used as commodities by colonizing men (Hellwing, 2007). As illustrated in the following citation.

Young women usually become domestic women (nyai) soldiers, become mistresses in people's land, their luck is bad, soldiers many women are few.

(Rambe, 2010)

Based on the citation, it can be said that it is normal for a young woman to usually be used as a mistress by the colonizers who come to her colony. Indigenous women would be their passion during their service in the colonies. It is almost in keeping with what Mills (1997) said who tried to formulate ways of analyzing power as it manifests itself and as it opposes the relations of everyday life, but it is futile because the social relations between the colonists and the native men reinforce each other in degrading the dignity and dignity of women.

Sexual Harassment

Undeniably, women's bodies, both as (nyai) and as coolies, are considered sites where traditional patriarchal power reigns, given that these struggles were waged by colonizing men against indigenous women in a situation of colonialism. As revealed by Ratna (2008)

that both historically and mythologically, from the middle ages to the present, the Western world is almost in all fields considered superior to the East. This includes matters related to gender discourse, sexuality, and female identity. These things often result in sexual harassment of indigenous people, particularly women, as revealed in the following.

It's hard to be this kind of woman mine, it's just a tool. The Great Lord's lust-mongering tool, a blackmailer rather than a contract laborer, used to be my colleague in the nutmeg forest.

(Rambe, 2010)

The citation illustrates that the existence of Mirah is nothing but a lust-monger of her master who is a colonizer. Female slaves, who were at the same time (nyai), usually came from the poorest strata of society. They are not in a negotiating position or can make any demands. Often they are resigned to any circumstances, including being treated inhumanely by their master. As a woman who is only used as a lust-monger for colonial men, often the paras are not very much the main measure, the main measure of being a (nyai) is the shape of her body size or physique, for example, shown in the following dialogue.

Actually, she is not beautiful, but she has a good figure, said the man in the bed. She was once the mistress of a wealthy Chinese living in Neira.

(Rambe, 2010)

The dialogue quoted indirectly suggests that Mirah is not a beautiful woman, but she is described as having a proportional body shape that is generally favored by striped-nose (colonial) men. Often also a (nyai) can be exchanged and replaced by another white male. Mirah is a former pet (nyai) of the colonizers which was then transferred to other colonizers because at that time the position of women (Mirah) became a means of exchange between the colonists themselves. Mirah's anxiety about the situation that befell her was not only felt by herself but also happened to other young indigenous women, as revealed in the following quote.

Indentured workers who come from Java, Bali, and Timor are always women, later after they work, they are proposed, to or raped by people around their employment.

(Rambe, 2010)

Mirah could have guessed that the fate of most young women would be the same as hers, that is, to get unfair treatment, only as a lust-monger of colonial men. The women were usually brought in from various regions in the archipelago, they were lured to work as freelance laborers, and then used as mistresses and devotees of white men (colonizers).

Physical and Verbal Violence

Physical and psychic violence against women in Indonesia cannot be separated from the ingrained patriarchal culture. In the era of Dutch colonialism, some indigenous women whose economies were weak (poor) experienced violence through the practice of slavery. Indigenous women were made (nyai) and had no freedom in their social life, they were exiled from society, and also the colonial government. As illustrated in the following data excerpt.

The woman was very young, seemingly full of suffering when she was captured by the allied forces that invaded Hollandia in Irian Jaya (now called Jayapura). He became a Japanese prisoner in that place, the baby in his belly belonged to a Japanese officer who was killed in the raid.

(Rambe, 2010)

Data citation describes the form of oppression by colonial people against subaltern women. But no matter how hard indigenous women try to seek help, they still occupy the lowest position. It was also revealed by Mostafaee (2016) that false falsehoods related to colonial discourse involving subaltern and domination, were evidenced during World War 2, which largely abandoned forms of domination and violence. In all aspects of the social environment, no one cares, because most of the people are subject to colonial rule, as quoted in the following citation.

No one feels sorry, and no one frees us because of our crying, so there is no need to cry.

(Rambe, 2010)

The obligation of indigenous women to become mistresses of Dutchmen is limited to mere lust mongers. They often get violent but can't fight back because it has become a tradition that is also understood by the indigenous population.

It turns out that the Banda people, used to flee their hometowns during massacres by the Dutch.

(Rambe, 2010)

Data citation illustrates that the highest hierarchy was held by colonial men. They are free to do anything including exploitation and violence to the lowest hierarchy, namely the women of the colonies. Ilmi (2016) states that basically in colonial situations several hierarchies govern them in life. The top of the hierarchy is occupied by men (Europe), women (Europe), bumi putra (men of colonies), and liyan (women of colonies). Based on this position, the women of the colonies were colonized by Europeans as citizens of the colonies and as women of the colonies. They were dominated, exploited, and interiorized as citizens of the colonies along with the men of the colonies and then separately interiorized and marginalized as women of the colonies.

Obedience to the Invaders

The influence of colonialism on the control of a geographical area in certain areas affects the system and social order that exists in it, including the system of society, the system of social interaction, and various new constructions of colonialism to establish legitimacy over itself in the colonies and all these things are transferred to the exertions of the colonizing nation. The helplessness of colonized people or territories makes it easier for the colonizer to be more arbitrary about his actions. The action is shown in the following data excerpts of the novel.

The history of nutmeg and slavery, yes, the story of nutmeg, blood, and tears, because men who are not strong enough to withstand lust and ignorance".

(Rambe, 2010)

The data excerpt describes the atmosphere of the people in the Bandaneira region affected by colonialism, most of the people experienced suffering, both physically and psychically. Colonialism also made low-class people the sex slaves of the poor, giving rise to all sorts of social, economic, and political disaffections. This helplessness forced indigenous women to submit and be completely obedient to the invaders. This is following Setiawan's (2018) opinion that subaltern positions in the social, and political sphere and demographic distribution, their votes are ethically manipulated as part of a group's political practice of

dominating. In general, the subaltern is seen as a tool of hegemony practiced by the more dominant groups.

Most of the young women were made sex slaves with the legitimacy of the slavery carried out by the Dutch colonizers and this became a social activity that often occurred during the colonial period, as seen in the data excerpt below.

In that place there is certainly also the story of the son of man with all his joys and sorrows, serving the masters of the garden who deprived the Banda people of their independence. The mixing of the anthrax blood of white people and people of color, between slaves, between all sorts of races, and backgrounds seems to take place without impact.

(Rambe, 2010)

The quotation above depicts indigenous women becoming sex slaves of colonial colonizers. They had to obey the invaders without the slightest resistance, because if they resisted then the invaders did not hesitate to take actions that made them killed or thrown into distant places where they would eventually die.

Yu Karsih was employed in a nutmeg garden owned by a Dutchman. I will hear that he has become a contract coolie, meaning a nutmeg-picking laborer who works on a contractual basis".

(Rambe, 2010:141)

Nee (None), don't talk so, koweole pigisama Lajamu, bole go home to java, but this is little Noni kasi stay pa beta.

(Rambe, 2010:150)

The subaltern that occurs in indigenous peoples and colonial domination in texts that reflect what dimensions and the extent to which colonial domination works to weaken the power of colonized lands is analyzed using postcolonial literary criticism theory (Kurniawan, 2013). Those quotations illustrate that the position of indigenous peoples, especially those of women, arose as a result of oppression which led to obedience to the colonizers in the form of their obligations as a native who had to submit to Dutch rule. For example, in general, what happened was the obligation to submit to colonial and even indigenous men through their position as sexual appetite seekers or contract workers.

If I had said to bite him to death, first, would I have been able to fight his hefty body? Secondly, if I died I would have entered prison and been put to death.

(Rambe, 2010).

The data excerpt shows the condition of indigenous peoples who have begun to be furious with colonialism. However, they were powerless, even silent they were tormented let alone resisted. There had been resistance or plans from the indigenous population, but it was nothing more than a discourse from the indigenous people because they could not factually rebel. In the end, the inner battle was won by the invading group because, with the power of domination, they could do anything including severely punishing those who resisted. Because the relationship between West and East is dichotomous (Kurniawan, 2013).

Through the dichotomy. The West has always been identified as a superior, strong, intelligent, and superior race. On the other hand, the East is stereotyped as a weak, ignorant, and inferior nation. These types of relationships are also supported by the thesis of Said (2001) which states the relationship between the West and the East is a relationship of dominating forces. Colonization made physical actions in taking away human rights and life

on earth, the colonized had to obey the colonizers because of the fear of the indigenous population of unwanted actions such as being killed or alienated if they did not obey.

Control Over Others

The hundreds of years the archipelago was colonized, and the historical fact of being a colony provides a bad experience, especially for women, because colonialism positions colonized women in the most inferior position, as quoted in the following citation.

The place is called Neira, on the island of Bandaneira, I knew for a long time after I lived here and became the (nyai) or pet of the Dutch Lord who owns the nutmeg garden.

(Rambe, 2010)

The quote shows the plot of the position of Indonesian women during the colonial period as happened to the character Mirah in the novel MdB. When she was a teenager Mirah had to work in a nutmeg garden owned by a Dutch master, and as an adult, she was forced to become a (nyai) or pet of a Dutch master. The term (nyai) is the same as the use of the wording. The (nyai) are forced to serve all the needs of their master both physical, and psychological needs. Mirah had to take care of all the work of the white man and his legal wife.

While staying in the house of the great master gave me many memories, the new life was very different from the bed, kedati I am a Babu in, my most important job is to take care of the mistress of near aka the legal wife of the great master.

(Rambe, 2010)

Every morning I always prepare bath water in the bathroom tub for Noni because she is going to school, then for the Great Lady then help the two women to decorate.

(Rambe, 2010)

Data tips describe that during her time as a nyai in his master's house, Mirah did many things, including serving the needs of the great mistress (wife of the Dutch master) and Noni (son of the Dutch master). Oyewumi (2020) states that colonized women are dominated and interiorized by men of the colonies dishonorably. They work and serve the needs of their master without being paid. But even so, the indigenous people considered it natural. Even indigenous men and colonial patriarchy worked together to keep women in inferior positions.

Mirah occupied the position because of compulsion, she could do nothing but resign herself to her profession as a (nyai). These conditions put Mirah in a prolonged difficult time. He was oppressed by the system of colonialism and patriarchy. In those days, in addition to being oppressed, women also seemed to be silenced by their position (Pradani, 2021). They are not allowed to have a space to speak let alone manage their own lives.

Another dialogue also describes Mirah as having psychological confinement, when she gave birth to a child from her master, but her child's status was higher than her own. Mirah seems to have no rights to her child, it is evident in the following data excerpts.

In my environment, he became my son and also the son of the Great Master. But in public, she was treated as an Indo woman. The degree is higher than mine, the woman who gave birth to him. I don't think such a way of thinking is understandable. Maybe it's because I'm stupid, a mere contract person, that I can't catch such thoughts? I learned about that from the Great Master himself.

(Rambe, 2010)

Mostafaee (2016) views that in colonial societies, indigenous women were considered small subordinates when compared to men, either colonial or indigenous. They tend to submit to their power. In general, women who became nyai in the culture of colonial society tended to be very weak, powerless, and useless. This can be seen in the excerpt of dialogue 20 which illustrates that Mirah does not have the right to recognize a child born from a relationship of use as a child of an indigenous (her mother). Children born from these relationships will be categorized as white children, whose culture must also follow the culture of their nation (his father).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions carried out on the novel *Mirah dari Banda*, it can be concluded that the position of women in the colonial era did not get equality in their social environment, both in western and indigenous societies. As told in the MdB novel, Mirah has no right to herself as a whole person at all. There was a deprivation of the social independence of subaltern women experienced by Mirah, both consciously and unconsciously. Subaltern women remain the losers in voicing their rights, due to the patriarchal culture that is still thick in society, coupled with the discourse of colonialism that reinforces that status.

There are five forms of subaltern experienced by Mirah, which are the result of this study, namely, first, degrading, sexual abuse, third, physical or verbal violence, fourth, obedience to the invaders, fifth, control of others. These five aspects are representations of the subaltern form felt by the character Mirah in the novel MdB. Mirah experiences objectification in socio-cultural, she is considered an interchangeable item, not infrequently there is also frequent non-violence and oppression.

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