

THE DEPICTION OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY'S UNHEARD VOICES IN *I MUST BETRAY YOU*: SUBALTERN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study addresses the power abuse oppressing the subaltern in the novel *I Must Betray You* (2022) by Ruta Sepetys. This analysis uses Gayatri Spivak's subaltern approach based on "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Spivak defines the concept of the subaltern as a marginalized group under the control of the dominant group so that they do not have access to their voice. In *I Must Betray You*, many oppressive acts of abuse of power occur through policies, rules, and even manipulations carried out by the Romanian communist regime in 1989 which put the Romanians in a position where they could not voice what they experienced. In collecting data, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method by taking excerpts from the narrative. The researcher used intrinsic elements to describe the conflict in the narrative. The findings and discussion of this research are divided into three main points: the depiction of characteristics, plot, and theme. These three main points cover other aspects such as setting and point of view. The depiction of these main points highlights how the government, as the dominant group, has abused its power against the Romanian people, depriving them of their voices.

Keywords: *Subaltern, intrinsic element, I Must Betray You, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*

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INTRODUCTION

The subaltern is an approach that analyzes the rights to voice. One of the critical theorists in subaltern studies is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who introduced the important concept of subaltern in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and emphasized that the subaltern is a group marginalized from the dominant discourse. They cannot represent themselves, especially when their voices are ignored. Groups that are marginalized from the dominant discourse indicate an abuse of power. This marginalized group is trapped in the pressure of control that makes them unable to do anything. This analysis focuses on the abuse of power by communist regimes that keep people under control.

The issue of abuse of power has been brilliantly portrayed by Lithuanian-American writer, Ruta Sepetys in her novel *I Must Betray You* (2022). This novel is based on a real story in Romania in 1989 when the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu was overthrown. This novel explores the central conflict experienced by the main character, Cristian Florescu. When Cristian struggles to fight and survive, he finds himself caught between loyalty to his family and his need to protect himself from government punishment. Cristian, his family, and the Romanian people can be considered a subaltern group, as they were forced to submit under the Ceaușescu regime. Any form of dissent or any mindset towards the government was considered an offense, and those who expressed disagreement or resistance were severely punished. However, as a new novel, *I Must Betray You* has not been studied by many other researchers. The researcher tries to explain several studies related to the topic that can be discussed which can become several references to support this research.

The article conducted research that focused on subaltern studies entitled "*The God of Small Things: Speaking Subalterns*" by Nimni, (2016). This article combines the two theories of Gramsci and Spivak and reflects on the definition of the subaltern based on Ranajit Guha's perspective. This research examines the situation of each marginalized subaltern character in the context of cultural, national politics, religion, gender, race, and economic issues.

Another article that analyzed the same novel is "Sovereign Power and Nuda Vita in Ruta Sepetys *I Must Betray You*: Unveiling the Struggles of Romanian Civilians In 1989" by Rizki et al. (2023) using Giorgio Agamben's political theory, that used concepts nuda vita, state of exception, and sovereign power. This study analyzed how *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys depicts the sovereign power that restrains the lives of Romanian civilians and how civilians escape from nuda vita and sovereign power.

Another article that focuses on psychological analysis entitled "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Ruta Sepetys *I Must Betray You* Via Lacan" by Mihailescu, (2022), uses Lacan's theory with the concepts of imaginary, symbolic, and real and Bohn's quantum theory. This article connects keywords in the novel with Lacan's theory, namely the listening device. This research shows that the listening device is a word trapped in the body and mind, which unconsciously causes fear. As such, it gives rise to symptoms such as helplessness, deep sadness, hopelessness, humiliation, and utter despair.

Another study about the subaltern approach in article research is "A Subaltern Study of Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* from the Perspective of Identity Crisis: A Postcolonial Analysis" by Gohar et al. (2016). This article explores the conflict between subaltern classes and hegemonic powers in many postcolonial countries. Postcolonial countries are now colonized not by foreign rulers but also by indigenous elite rulers who exploit and relegate non-elite classes to subaltern positions. In this research, the authors consider six points regarding the subaltern class as outlined by Gramsci.

Based on a review of previous articles, the articles collectively present an in-depth understanding of the subaltern approach. Some of these articles also review the same novel as the focus of the current research, *I Must Betray You*, which can provide a more diverse perspective on the topic and provide a strong frame of reference for this research. Therefore, as far as the researcher knows, the researcher has not found research on the novel *I Must Betray You* using a subaltern approach by Spivak. In both colonial and postcolonial settings, this approach provides a way to comprehend the struggles and contributions of both colonized and colonizing

groups to social and political change. It also helps to understand how colonized groups have attempted to express and protect their rights despite facing violence and exploitation.

METHOD

In conducting this research, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method. According to Wang, J (2018) by using qualitative research methods, human activity is examined, and its underlying meaning is explored, which is transformational for both the researcher and the participants involved. This method helps the researcher gain a deeper understanding and describes the results of the analysis found. Therefore, in this research, the researcher used the novel *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys (2022). These texts consist of dialogues, the author's narratives, as well as the behavior and thoughts of the characters. These stages refer to the identification of people's perspectives on the authoritarian communist government in Romania.

In this descriptive qualitative research, the researcher uses intrinsic elements by Girsang et al. (2023) to describe how the author narrates the conflicts in the story. The researcher also uses Spivak's subaltern approach to analyze the research topic. Through Spivak's way of thinking, the researcher explores the depiction of Romanian society under the control of President Ceausescu's totalitarianism system in the novel *I Must Betray You*. In this research, several stages are carried out. Such as reading the novel, identifying data, inventorying data, classifying data, analyzing data, and reporting the results of data analysis. In data analysis, the researcher selects some excerpts that are categorized into the concept of subaltern by Gayatri Spivak. By using the subaltern approach, the researcher analyzes the characters, characterization, plot, and theme obtained in the story. The results of the analysis are then explained and narrowed down into a conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Portrayal of the Subaltern in *I Must Betray You*

The researcher uses the intrinsic elements approach to depict the subaltern in the novel *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys. This approach is important for analyzing the character's experience. Intrinsic elements such as character, plot, and theme are crucial in understanding the narrative of a literary work. When depicting the subaltern, using intrinsic elements in the novel aims to provide a deep and complex understanding of the experiences and realities of marginalized or oppressed groups.

Analyzing Characters and Characterizations in *I Must Betray You*

Nouby et al. (2022) argue that the author of the novel can convey his views and messages indirectly through the characters created and how they are portrayed. Characterization is the way the author portrays the characteristics of the character. In *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys, Cristian Florescu's family becomes one of the representations of Romanian society in fighting for freedom of speech in the postcolonial context. Through the portrayal of Cristian's family, Sepetys wants to explore how the communist government in Romania colonized its society by limiting freedom and monitoring all aspects of their lives.

The family of Cristian Florescu is considered subaltern because they belong to a group that was controlled and oppressed by the communist regime in Romania at that time. Spivak generally defines the subaltern as a socially, politically, and geographically oppressed population by the group that controls them. In *I Must Betray You*, the Florescu family is depicted in a life of powerlessness, and close surveillance by the dictatorship of the government regime. They also face pressure and threats because of their political stance or views that are considered different from the government.

“Could outsiders understand? In Romania, we did as we were told. We were told a lot of things.” (Sepetys,2022, p.3)

Based on the excerpt above, Cristian mentioned “We did as we were told” which shows the powerlessness of Romanians to do anything other than what the communist government tells them to do. These actions reflect Spivak's idea of the

subaltern, where people do not have the right to speak either in criticism or resistance (Spivak, 1988), it also symbolizes the people's complete trust in the government because bound by larger forces that control and constrain their lives, they lose autonomy and lack the power to respond to or oppose policies that harm them.

“Mama was always distracted and worried, constantly making lists. I think she actually made lists of things to worry about.” (Sepetys,2022, p.13)

Cristian Florescu's statement about his mother, who always feels disturbed and worried illustrates that the unfreedom and limitations of the government have a psychological impact on everyone in Romania. When his mother always tells his family things to do and worry about, it indirectly shows that the influence of power from the authoritarian regime has affected and tortured her subconscious mind. The psychological impact that arises follows what Lacan said in Mihalescu (2022) that the unconsciousness gained from saying the same words repeatedly will enter the mind and turn into a torturous belief.

“Ceausescu wanted to increase the population, to breed more workers. Population growth meant economic growth. If you were childless, you were taxed.” (Sepetys,2022, p.33)

Spivak (1988) states that Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. Spivak asserts that the gender factor is an important factor in shaping and maintaining social structures that favor men, she also said that women as subalterns are even more submerged in the shadows so that men remain the dominant figures in society. In *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys, the representation of men as dominant can be seen from the leader of the communist regime at that time, the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu. His desire to increase the population by giving rules if women in Romania do not have children will be taxed is an act that not only violates human rights but also places women as slaves who do not have the rights and power to resist. As a result, women in Romania are trapped in a cyclical cycle of injustice that requires them to comply with rules that directly disadvantage them. Ultimately in this situation, women become victims who are

subject to immoral and unjust power. This policy reinforces the government's representation as the colonizer, especially for women who are subjected to inhumane policies.

“He was an agent of the Securitate, Romania’s fearsome secret police.”
(Sepetys,2022, p.5)

The Romanian government does not only restrict freedom through policies but also by establishing a special security agency known as Agent Securitate. The propagation of Securitate as a feared figure shows the loss of the security system in society. Any individual who is considered or potentially a threat to the government will be punished or used as an informant to monitor other citizens. The purpose of the surveillance carried out by the Securitate Agent was to maintain the power of the Ceausescu regime and prevent things that could destabilize its power. This government surveillance refers to Agamben's concept of sovereign power in Rizki et al. (2023) argues that someone who has full control over leadership can determine the situation by making policies or rules to ensure the sustainability of the overall situation under his control.

“And you must be Mioara’s son. What’s your name?”
“Cristian. Pleased to meet you.”
Mr. Van Dorn nodded slowly, evaluating me.
“Nick Varn Dorn. Pleased to meet you too. Your English... it sounds pretty good, Cristian.”
“His English is better than your Romanian”
(Sepetys,2022, p.50)

Cristian's English proficiency was noticed by Mr. Van Dorn, an American diplomat in Romania, who complimented him. Mr. Van Dorn's praise shows how English became one of Mr. Van Dorn's ways to identify and research the political dynamics in Romania during Ceausescu’s reign. The sentence by Nick Varn Dorn, Mr. Van's son "His English must be better than your Romanian, Dad" shows Mr. Van's lack of effort to communicate with the Romanian people. This is in line with what Spivak (1988) said, which focuses on depicting the culture of subaltern communities as it is without containing elements of Western power. In this case, as an American diplomat, Mr. Van Dorn chose to maintain US interests in monitoring Romania's political situation.

"Yeah, apparently communism sucks," laughed another boy.
"It's not funny," said the woman. "Dan's father says it's very difficult in Romania." (Sepetys,2022, p.75)

Based on the excerpt above, the sentence "Yeah, apparently communism sucks," uttered by Dan's American friend reflects the general view in the United States towards the ideology. This view represents how outside countries, especially dominant countries like the US, view communism as an ideology that is detrimental to democratic freedom. This is also supported by Mr. Nick Varn Dorn's statement "It's very difficult in Romania" which shows the state of Romania makes it difficult for him as an American diplomat to review the political conditions that occur. This is in line with Spivak's (1988) criticism that subaltern representations are often organized or interpreted by dominant forces. In this case, the statements of his American friends Dan and Mr. Nick Varn Dorn influenced how the ideology of communism was understood and interpreted.

"Romania received a shipment of twenty thousand Bibles from the US-Ceausescu turned them into toilet paper." (Sepetys,2022, p.44)

Based on a draft essay titled Romania Funny written by Dan Varn Dorn in preparation for admission to an American university about Romania, it shows how the Ceausescu regime treated religion and religious freedom in their country. The shipment of Bibles from America to Romania shows the diplomatic relations between the two countries. America tried to support religious freedom in Romania. However, Ceausescu's act of turning the bible into toilet paper defied and denigrated religious values while controlling and regulating the beliefs of his people. The action is also in line with Spivak's (1988) idea of subaltern rights, Spivak argues that it is important to listen to the voice of the subaltern directly without the intervention of the dominant power. The act of turning the bible into toilet paper by Ceausescu was tantamount to depriving the Romanians of information that would have been received by them, which could have been information that had important values for them. Then Dan's action in writing the essay's title that will be sent for the requirements of applying to the university represents that the voices and rights of the Romanian people have been eliminated and misinterpreted.

“That’s because we’ve been ruled for decades with such totality that it’s impossible for most to imagine anything different. But I’m older. I’ve been exposed to more. I’ve traveled. I know what’s out there. But you, my dear boy-you’re young. This cult of communism, what is this life doing to you and people your age?” (Sepetys,2022, p.87)

Bunu, Cristian's grandfather's expression of concern for the younger generation who think it is impossible to imagine conditions different from those they are experiencing refers to Gramsci's concept of hegemony theory in Spivak (1988) shows how power is not only through politics and economics but through culture and ideology. The inability to imagine different conditions shows that the government's domination has influenced people's beliefs and ways of thinking. In this case, although Bunu has had different experiences compared to the generation below him, he is trapped in a dominant discourse that puts him in a position of not being able to speak. Therefore, his depiction of the communist regime is an attempt to free the perception that has been instilled by the government.

Based on the results of the analysis, the author pictures the subaltern in characteristics by exploring how the oppression carried out by the communist regime has limited freedom through comprehensive surveillance and control. The Florescu family's helplessness and fear represent the feelings of all Romanians, symbolizing the socially, politically, and geographically marginalized subaltern as defined by Spivak. The author also describes how the President of Romania is a symbol of the colonizer by providing gender-oppressive policies such as forced childbirth that further put women in an oppressed position. In addition, the author describes the characters of Mr. Nick Varn Dorn and his son Dan Varn Dorn's perspective and Western intervention, which further provides complexity between dominant and subaltern groups. Then the presence of Bunu's character who has a different experience provides dynamics in voicing the rights of the subaltern.

Examines Plots in *I Must Betray You*

Analyzing and identifying the plot of a novel is an influential component in learning how the author constructs the narrative. According to Kusaeri (2022), the

plot can be an outline for creating the narrative that the author wants. Plot analysis, known as the Freytag Pyramid by Gustav Freytag, divides the plot into five main stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (Abrams & Harpham, 2011).

In *I Must Betray You* the author has described the characteristics through the actions and behavior of each character. The actions and behaviors depicted represent how this communist regime has brought suffering to its people. Besides describing characteristics, the author also describes the conflict that occurs through structured and complex plots. Using Freytag's Pyramid to analyze the plot depiction of subalterns in this novel can offer a more methodical understanding of how the author develops a multi-layered narrative and how each phase of the plot contributes to the overall theme and message.

Exposition: Introduction to Cristian's Internal Conflict

As a teenager living in Romania under an authoritarian regime, Cristian Florescu is trapped in a deep internal conflict about whether to obey or betray his family. This internal conflict is a result of the dictatorial regime that restrains and creates tension in each of its people. This internal conflict can outline the complexity of the novel's narrative.

“Fear arrived at five o'clock. It was October. A gray Friday. If I had Known? I would have run. Trude to hide. But I didn't know” (Sepetys,2022, p.1)

Cristian's description of the atmosphere in the sentence "A gray Friday" based on the quote above is a symbol that he will experience unwanted things. Feelings of fear, ignorance, and wanting to hide indicate the beginning of his lack of power to avoid the conflict he experienced. This lack of power reinforces Spivak's (1988) idea that subaltern groups have no control over the threats or oppression they experience.

“You have an impressive stamp collection. You sold a vintage Romanian stamp. The transaction was with a foreigner and you accepted foreign currency. You are now guilty of illegal trafficking and will be prosecuted.” (Sepetys,2022, p.7)

Cristian's illegal transaction of selling old stamps and receiving foreign currency in return made him guilty and subject to punishment, representing the economic conditions of Romania at the time which prohibited every citizen from conducting foreign currency transactions. The prohibition of this transaction shows the economic instability in Romania which puts people in difficult conditions. The economic condition of the Romanians refers to the first point of objective formation of subaltern groups by Gramsci based on the subaltern class division by Gohar et al. (2016) that the difficult economic conditions in the first point put them in the position of a subaltern group. Those referred to in the analysis of the article are the people of Pakistan who are in the same position as the people of Romania. Gramsci's point of subaltern class division, emphasizes Spivak's view that it is not easy to voice subaltern groups without seeing the history of the lives of the subaltern groups to show the damage done by the dominant power. The history here refers to the economic situation during the communist regime that affected the lives of Romanians. The control of the government also made them unable to voice their conditions.

“It’s a generous proposal. We’ll work together. You give me information and I give you medicine for Bunu. He won’t suffer.”

“And that’s how it began. I was Cristian Florescu. Code name (OSCAR). A seventeen-year-old spy. An informer” (Sepetys,2022, p.10)

Agent Securitate's offer to Cristian to spy on other people's lives puts him in the same position as Agent Secu, who is portrayed as a figure feared by Romanians. This certainly causes inner anxiety because if he obeys the order he will certainly be hated by his family, friends, and those closest to him. Agen Secu's offer and threat represent power in the power, which means there is another power structure below the central power. This supports the idea of class or group division proposed by Spivak (1988), as a third class, the dominant indigenous group at the local level. When Cristian says “And that's how it began" shows the compulsion to become a spy because Agent Secu promised to provide medicine for his grandfather. Agent Secu's offer of medicine represents that access to medicine in Romania is very difficult. Providing treatment or access to medicine should be done by experts.

However, in this case, Agent Secu promises to provide medicine only in exchange for an agreement. This reflects how subaltern groups do not have any access to their rights. They need representation from the dominant group first for their wishes to be fulfilled which can represent the concept of subalternity according to Spivak (1988).

Rising Action: Opposition and Disappointment

Cristian Florescu finally found out why he was made an informant and made a different decision. This different decision serves to strengthen his character and make the storyline different. Of course, the decision to become an informant provided him with a solution to Bunu's health and the beginning of his guilt for disappointing his family.

“Romanian spy novels depicted the Securitate as defenders against evil Western forces. But if the stories were realistic, the agents were predictable. Maybe I could outwit them. Yes, that’s actually what I thought. I could beat the Securitate” (Sepetys,2022, p.13)

The portrayal of Agent Securitate in Romanian novels shows the goal of Ceausescu's communist regime to establish a dominant narrative through strong narratives and ideologies. The phrase "The Securitate as defenders against evil Western forces" reveals the manipulation of optimism and belief in Secu Agents as saviors even though the opposite is true. The phrase's existence not only serves to manipulate but also signifies the elimination of people's security rights. The attempt to manipulate through ideology is in line with the concept of "False consciousness" based on Gramsci's in Morton (2003) shows an element of manipulation, deception, and even coercion, whereas according to Gramsci hegemony depends on individual consent and agreement. This concept is also discussed by Spivak (1988), and developed by Althusser, both of whom characterize the concept of "False consciousness" as thinking that deceives people about what is happening. Cristian's action to outsmart Agent Secu is a form of betrayal of the government's rules.

“Yes,” he whispered. “An informer. In our apartment. Right here. Can you imagine that, Cristian? And suddenly medicine appears. But at what cost?”
“Bunu”

“Shh. Say nothing. I’m the only one who’s figured it out. It is too painful to discuss. Besides. I have no idea what I swallowed. For all I know, it’s the breath that blows out the candle.” (Sepetys,2022, p.88)

Bunu's statement to Cristian, who was surprised that the medicine for him had suddenly arrived. He suspects that this medicine is because one of his family members has become an informant or spy, which brings the storyline into tension. Although Bunu doesn't know exactly who the informant is, the statement "It is too painful to discuss" shows his deep disappointment. The betrayal committed by someone in the family is in line with Spivak's (1988) concept of dominant discourse, Spivak argues that dominant discourse not only manipulates and oppresses society at large but also in the lives of each individual. The betrayal that occurs due to cooperation with the government is also in line with subaltern studies through the third point of view of subaltern class division according to Gramsci in Gohar et al. (2016) the third point that the dominant group has the power to regulate programs from the government to control subaltern groups. The dominant group in this case is the Securitate Agent.

Climax: The Death of Mr. Bunu

When Bunu was disappointed that one of his family members had become an informant, Cristian felt that his intentions were indirectly known to Bunu. However, his decision had paid off because Bunu had gotten the cure. But suddenly he faced a shocking tragedy. This ironic tragedy caused Cristian to feel a deep sense of guilt because he felt that his decision had led him in the right direction. The tragedy brings the storyline to a culminating point that shows the protagonist's struggle was ultimately in vain.

“Mama pulled back the blanket covering his legs. A wave of nausea rolled through me. Bunu’s bare feet had been clubbed beyond recognition.”

“His chest. The same. All ribs broken,” she whispered in my ear. “They beat him to death.” (Sepetys,2022, p.144)

Based on the excerpt above, Bunu, who Agent Secu considered a threat to government power, was punished. Bunu's condition when he died was beaten by Securitate agents, not because of his leukemia, which reflects the cruelty of Ceausescu's communist regime. The agreement between Cristian and Agent Secu

to provide Cristian with medicine for Bunu was broken. The Securitate Agent's betrayal supports Spivak's concept of the subaltern in Nimni (2016) which analyzes a subaltern character (Velutha) who wants to express his disapproval of the social discrimination that occurs but is beaten by Inspector Mathew in the police prison. Velutha's situation is in line with Bunu's where he tries to give voice to his grandson (Cristian) but instead receives a punishment that takes his life. Bunu's beating death is a plot twist that brings the storyline in *I Must Betray You* into a tense and sad state.

“They poisoned Bunu. The poison caused symptoms that mirrored leukemia. It was a quiet way to get rid of someone. Mama wasn't angry at Bunu for being ill, but for being a dissident.”
(Sepetys,2022, p.147)

The information conveyed to Cristian from his friend Bunu that his grandfather did not have leukemia but consumed Agent Secu's poison, which had the exact symptoms of leukemia, brought another plot twist that made the storyline more complex. The statement that killing by giving poison is a subtle way to get rid of someone represents the Ceausescu regime not wanting to cause conflict on the surface. In addition, the information proves that the Agent Securitate Agent as the dominant group creates a narrative as if Bunu has Leukemia and needs medicine that can only be obtained through them, reflecting the actions of the dominant group who have manipulated and destroyed the lives of the subaltern groups, in this case, the Florescu family. Cristian's mother's anger symbolizes that even though subaltern groups know they have been oppressed and played with, because there is no access to voice their narratives, they only choose to remain silent. This inability to voice is in line with Mark's concept of class consciousness interpreted by Spivak (1988), who argues that the French peasant owners are aware of their class position. Still, the lack of expression of the narrative into the dominant discourse structure places the peasants in the structure of the subaltern group.

Falling Action: Another Informant

When Cristian discovered the reason, it turned out that Bunu did not have leukemia, but was poisoned and had died from a terrible beating. This tragedy was

a huge blow to him and it also resolved the internal conflict, ending on a sad cliffhanger. During his grief, he discovered a shocking truth that started all his problems.

“My sister jumped out of the car, and Paddle Hands drove off. Cici’s face burned plum. Her lipstick was smeared.”

” Pui, let me explain.”

“There’s nothing to explain. You became an informer, a traitor, for perfume and tampons.”

“No. you don’t understand. They were poisoning Bunu. They were serving him irradiated coffee! I had to help him. They promised me medicine and a passport if I would cooperate.” (Sepetys,2022, p.199)

The conversation between Cristian and Cici, after he caught his sister getting out of Agent Secu's car with her lipstick smudged, indicates that they had committed an act that led to sexual intercourse. Cristian's disappointment connects the storyline to another conflict. The act that led to sexual relations refers to Cici's statement that she was forced to become an informant and was rewarded with perfume and tampons, indicating that Cici had joined Agent Secu's minions. Agent Secu's offers to Cici using the same narrative, as he did to Cristian about Bunu's health, succeeded in making Cici want to become an informant. Moreover, as a woman, Agent Secu's oppression is not only through threats but also coercion of sexual intercourse which further puts women in a helpless position. In this case, the narrative constructed by the dominant group puts the subaltern group in a powerless position. The situation experienced by Cici puts her in the same position as the concept of sacrifice of a Hindu widow (*Sati*) who is willing to burn herself along with her husband's body in a pile of wood discussed by Spivak (1988), the willingness in this case is reflected through Cici's actions with Agent Secu to act almost sexually and be willing to become an informant.

“They came to me, said if I seduced Van Dorn, they would treat Bunu. But Van Dorn wouldn’t have me. He immediately knew what I was up to. The Secu pressured me. They suggested you might have better luck getting information for the son.”

“So, you framed me. You put the American dollar in my stamp album so they could blackmail me.” (Sepetys,2022, p.199)

The excerpt above emphasizes the results of the analysis of the previous excerpt, based on Cici's explanation, it is revealed that the one who made Cristian an informant was his sister. This brings the storyline to the point where Cristian's internal conflict begins. Although Cici had explained the reason behind her and Cristian becoming informants. It turns out that her willingness to do all this did not convey the message of her sacrifice. This is reflected in Cristian's reaction who felt betrayed by his sister, even though they were in the same position as informants. Cristian's reaction reinforces Spivak's (1988) view that the voices of subaltern women have been marginalized because women are often considered weak figures when women show sacrifice or struggle, they are often ignored. This is also in line with Bhubhaneswari's suicide which is also discussed by Spivak (1988), who states that Bhubhaneswari committed suicide as a sign of her commitment to her nationalism. This commitment is also reflected in the reason for Cici's sacrifice for Bunu's health.

Resolution: Cici's Apology

In this section, Cristian's internal conflict and the challenges he faced have been resolved. Knowing that Cici is the main source of Cristian's conflict brings the thread of the problem to a clear meeting point. In this section with her guilt for putting Cristian in a complicated situation. Cici tries to make things right, with a heart full of regret Cici delivers a message to Cristian that shows her affection even though she has made a mistake.

“I'm sorry! I never meant for this to happen. I can help.”

“You want to help? Then help me rescue Liliana. They've got her locked up at a detention center on Aaron Florian. Find Alex or go there yourself. Hurry! (Sepetys,2022, p.248)

Cici's apology to Cristian brings the storyline to the end point of Cristian's internal conflict. Despite having made a mistake, Cici still tries to offer what help she can to Cristian. Cici's atonement of guilt refers to how women try to speak out through action. On the other hand, Cristian's decision to send Cici to the detention center alone, which is risky and dangerous even though Cici is his sister, reflects the inability to speak for subaltern women in Spivak (1988) Cristian's decision without

involving Cici's discussion and approval first shows that even though women have spoken through their actions, the voice of their sacrifice is still ignored or in vain.

"I assumed she hadn't been home since I saw her at the hospital. But that night, I found her locked box and key in my closet. Inside was a note: *Take care of yourself. And please be careful. Cristian. A revolution eats its heroes.*" (Sepetys,2022, p.260)

Spivak (1988) refers to the concept of subaltern women's sacrifice, suggesting that the act of women hanging themselves, as in the case of Bhubhaneswari, conveys an unrecognized message of resistance. This resistance message is evident in the context of Cici's disappearance after apologizing to Cristian. Despite her disappearance, Cici managed to convey a message to Cristian, warning him to be careful because individuals involved in acts of resistance often become targets of the authorities, who perceive them as a threat. Cici's message ultimately serves as a silent symbol of resistance.

Based on this analysis, the author describes the subaltern storyline by exploring Cristian's internal conflict. The internal conflict places him and his sister in a state of guilt and helplessness due to the narrative game played by the Securitate Agent. The disappointment, anger, and sadness of the Florescu family represent the feelings of all Romanian people who symbolize the subaltern who do not have power, access, and experience oppression following what Spivak stated. The author also describes how Agent Securitate symbolizes the communist regime's accomplices who not only oppress but also harass. In addition, using Freytag's Pyramid, which divides the storyline into five parts, helps to further explore the plot.

The theme of Subaltern in the Colonization Power and Human Rights Violations

In literature, the theme is the author's central idea that conveys their message both implicitly and explicitly. According to Abrams & Harpham in Umbara (2021), the theme acts as the main point that brings together all the different elements of

the story. Themes are divided into main themes and supporting themes. In this analysis, two supporting themes can be included in the subaltern concept.

In *I Must Betray You*, the author has described the plot narrative through the actions and behaviors of each character and the conflicts they experience. The actions, behaviors, and decisions taken by each character, depicted represent how the communist system in the Ceausescu era has made use of power to take away the freedom of their people. The author has described the narrative of the story through characters, characteristics, and plot. The analysis can contribute to describing the theme as the general concept of the novel and the overall message.

1. The Colonization of Power

The theme of colonizing power is very pertinent in this story, especially when Cristian as the main character confronts Agent Secu as the dominant group under the thumb of the communist regime. He is confronted with great power and tries to escape from it. The colonization of power by the Ceausescu regime through rules and policies made without involving the community and not prospering has put the community in a difficult situation.

“Everyone will live together! Everything is collectivized shared by the Party! Was the mantra. (Sepetys,2022, p.18)

The government's slogan that all people should live together in apartments and that the distribution is determined by the party shows that the authority of power is fully in the control of the party where the party is under the control of President Ceausescu. The policy is in line with the concept of totalitarianism, according to the opinion of Van Duzer & Arendt (1952) a totalitarian system is a system of government where the power of power is controlled by one individual in all aspects of life. Policies that represent the community through the party refer to the concept of representation *Vertreten* in Spivak (1988) *Vertreten* is a word taken from German that means political representation. This political representation voices the interests of other groups under its power. It often does not represent the true interests or the original voice of the subaltern, which is the Romanian people.

“Romania has one TV channel. And one brand TV set. The State broadcasts only two hours of bland television per day, mainly propaganda and salutes to Ceausescu.” (Sepetys,2022, p.23)

Based on the excerpt above, there is only one TV station in Romania and the station only spreads propaganda and respect for President Ceausescu, which is used as a tool to influence and manipulate public trust through narratives that only contain propaganda and respect to reinforce the concepts of epistemic violence and hegemony discussed by Spivak (1988). These concepts of violence and epistemic violence both surveillance and control the information and ideological insights received by the public. Where the use of media control and the spread of propaganda regulated by the government emphasizes the abuse of power as well as a way to maintain political power. This has an impact on the way people perceive and receive information.

2. Human Rights Violations

Human rights violations are also a theme that is closely related to the colonization of power in this story, the rules and policies made by Ceausescu by utilizing his power have led him to violate things that harm his society. The suffering of the Florescu family symbolizes the colonization of power felt by all Romanians. Propaganda through slogans and media generated from the colonization of power has an impact on the ideology of society.

“And if I spoke English, I could better understand song lyrics that I heard illegally on America broadcasts. Illegal, yes. Many things were illegal in Romania.” (Sepetys,2022, p.3)

Cristian's statement that many things are illegal in Romania including speaking English and listening to foreign songs explores more of the human rights violations that were committed under Ceausescu. The violation of the human right to speak a foreign language shows the government's attitude of fear that its people will obtain any kind of information about Romania from the Western world. The Ceausescu government's actions in determining the culture or language that can be accepted and studied by the Romanian people is an act of restriction of expression and cultural suppression. The government's attitude reflects the epistemic violence

developed by Spivak (1988). Epistemic violence refers to the dominant discourse, in this case, it can be government regulations that make policies containing cultural prohibitions that attempt to erase or control representatives of other cultures.

“Romanian people are intelligent, handsome, and welcoming, but forbidden to interact with foreigners”. (Sepetys,2022, p.3)

The tourist guide brochures printed by the British portray Romanians as handsome, friendly, and smart but forbid interaction with foreigners. The content of the brochure shows how Western countries view communist countries like Romania. Referring to the sentence "but forbidden to interact with foreigners" shows that Britain has spread information that contains a negative image of the country of Romania which has an impact on the tourism sector while eliminating the right of Romanians to gather. Through the tourist brochure, the dominant narrative is built to influence the public not to visit Romania. The existence of this narrative eliminates the actual information that is happening in the country so that people cannot voice the actual situation. Referring to Spivak's (1988) second concept of representation *Darstellen* is the same as *Vertreten*. The word *Darstellen* is taken from the German language, represented in an aesthetic and philosophical sense. Spivak further elaborates on the *Darstellen* representation as a tropological representation, which means, there is a hidden meaning behind the representation narrative created. In this context, the depiction of Romanians who have a positive image but are also given a negative image reveals a sense of resentment as well as internal conflicts that occur between these countries.

“Philips were listening devices and rumored to be everywhere: hidden in walls, telephones, ashtrays. So, all families followed the same mantra: At home we speak in whispers.” (Sepetys,2022, p.24)

The installation of these bugging devices puts people at risk of being denied freedom of speech. The issue of bugging devices is also explored in a deeper analysis using Lacan's theory (Mihailescu, 2022) concludes that bugging devices as words that enter the human body unconsciously to cause symptoms of fear and anxiety. Referring to Spivak's subaltern concept (1988), the dominant power that

puts a group in a depressed condition and does not have the power to fight and voice their conditions to anyone so as not to cause an opposition, the group is included in the subaltern group.

Based on this analysis, the author illustrates the subaltern theme through the regime's abuse of power and the human rights violations committed. Spreading propaganda and slipping bugging devices in every apartment are two symbols of how this communist regime has emphasized Spivak's concept of the subaltern by manipulating ideology and taking away the freedom of speech of its people. The author also illustrates the theme of human rights violations through the perspective of foreign countries, which indicates that the actions of the communist regime have spread internationally.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the analysis, the depiction of subalterns in the novel *I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys is through intrinsic elements such as character, characteristics, plot, and theme. Each of these elements has become a link so that the author can describe the subaltern from various perspectives and the concept of the subaltern idea can be understood. The portrayal of the Florescu family conflict as a representation of the subaltern group has shown how Ceausescu's communist regime in a totalitarian system through policies, rules, manipulation, media control, propaganda dissemination, economic instability, and oppression has led to the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" After the lack of access and assistance to them.

In further research, other researchers can explore the resistance of Romanians to the communist regime. This includes analyzing the signs of resistance from Romanians to bring down the regime. For example, researchers can further examine the resistance movements carried out by the people and the impact of these resistance movements on people's lives after the collapse of the communist regime.

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