

The Representation of Slavery of the Characters in the Beautiful Novel is Luka by Eka Kurniawan

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Abstract

The issue of slavery is still one of the serious problems that reflects the dark side of social life in Indonesia. This phenomenon still continues to take root from the colonial to postcolonial periods. This research aims to represent the slavery of the characters in the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan using the perspective of Spivak's subaltern. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method with reading and recording techniques. The results of the study show that there are 15 data that represent physical, economic, and sexual slavery. The three forms of slavery show the loss of agency, freedom, and voice of the characters in the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan due to hegemonic or colonial power relations. The results of the analysis using Spivak's subaltern perspective, it can be concluded that the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan represents 15 data on slavery practices that cross the Dutch colonial era, Japanese occupation, and post-independence.

Keywords

Beautiful is Wounded, Postcolonial, Slavery, Spivak, Subaltern.



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of slavery is still one of the serious problems that reflects the dark side of social life in Indonesia. This phenomenon still continues to take root from the colonial to postcolonial periods. This phenomenon is not only related to crime or economic inequality, but also represents a subaltern condition, namely the position of marginalized groups so that they do not have equal access to power or space to express their aspirations or their voices are not heard. As a result, the experiences and voices of these groups are often not fairly represented because they are overshadowed by the interests of dominant groups and the cultural hegemony that dominates the public space.

This condition is illustrated in the case of 11 Indonesian citizens (WNI) who were victims of trafficking in persons (TPPO) in Cambodia. According to Damarjati (2023), the victims were initially recruited through high-paying job offers. However, after arriving in Cambodia, they were forced to work as online scammers under very strict supervision. They were placed in

locations surrounded by high walls, watched through CCTV cameras, and guarded by armed men so that they had no chance of escape. In addition to experiencing salary cuts, the victims were also forced to work long working hours accompanied by various forms of threats and intimidation if they did not meet the specified targets. As long as the power structure is not deconstructed to give voice sovereignty to this group, then the cycle of exploitation and injustice will remain a talk in the life of the nation.

The unequal power structure makes the practice of modern slavery still a serious problem that has a real impact on the lives of the Indonesian people. Although various regulations regarding the protection of human rights and the eradication of trafficking in persons have been enacted, the practice of exploitation of vulnerable groups continues in various forms. Modern slavery is no longer present in the form of direct human ownership as in the past, but has transformed into human trafficking, forced labor, labor exploitation through the provision of undeserved wages, and sexual exploitation. These phenomena show that humans are still treated as commodities that can be traded, controlled, and exploited for the benefit of others.

The position of subaltern in Indonesia did not disappear after independence, but continued to take root into human trafficking. The case of human trafficking in Thailand shows that modern slavery practices are still a worrying problem. Based on data published by McGeough (2022) referring to the Global Slavery Index, it is estimated that there are more than 600,000 victims of human trafficking in Thailand. Some of the victims were economic migrants who voluntarily accepted job offers because they were tempted by the promise of a better income. However, not a few are also victims of kidnapping and forcibly moved to locations far from their places of origin so that they lose the opportunity to return. In practice, human trafficking in Thailand generally leads to two main forms of exploitation, namely forced labor and sexual exploitation.

This reality shows that many victims of human trafficking were eventually transferred to countries such as Cambodia to be exploited in various forms of modern slavery. At their destinations, they are often subjected to detention, restrictions on freedom of movement, and forced to work in illegal industries under the threat of physical and psychological violence. This condition shows the relevance of Spivak's thinking in his essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Victims are essentially trying to voice their suffering and ask for help, but their voices often don't get a space to be heard. Spivak concluded that "the subaltern cannot speak".

Modern slavery is not only manifested through forced labor or the provision of undeserved wages, but it is also present in the form of sexual exploitation. In Indonesia, the practice is still ongoing through a network of trafficking in persons who traffick women for the purpose of forced prostitution. Victims are forced to serve customers under the threat of violence, intimidation, and economic pressure, thus losing the freedom to make choices over their bodies and lives. Praditya (2025) revealed that data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the practice of Commercial Sex Workers (PSK) is still found in various

regions. Based on a survey in May 2024, as many as 15 provinces were recorded as having prostitution locations, with West Java being the province with the highest number of locations.

Historically, the practice of modern slavery is related to the pattern of exploitation that has been going on since colonial times. In that period, rodi work became the main instrument of colonial power in draining human resources while exploiting natural resources. The community was forced to work for the benefit of the colonial rulers, while the land and natural resources they owned were taken without providing commensurate benefits to the owners. From Spivak's perspective, the workers occupy the position of subalterns because they do not have the power to refuse or convey the suffering they experience. Their voices are silenced by colonial structures that place them as objects of exploitation, rather than as subjects with rights, dignity, and representation in the system of power. According to Spivak (Belitung, 2025) subalterns cannot speak and are not heard, when they speak, their voices are erased by various power systems that oppress them.

Injustice in Indonesia is still a serious ongoing problem, although its form has changed from physical oppression in the past to systemic marginalization and silencing in the modern era. According to Spivak's perspective, this condition reflects the existence of subaltern groups, namely marginalized groups that do not have equal access to power and space to voice their interests and life experiences.

The root of this systemic silencing is not a new phenomenon, but a continuation of the pattern of economic domination that has taken root since colonial times. During the colonial period, the colonial period took tribute, property, from the conquered countries, the people at that time were drawn into a complex relationship with the parent countries of the species, until there was a flow of people and natural resources between the colonial and colonial countries. This current worked both ways, slaves and contract laborers. Both the colonized and the colonizers migrated: the former not only as slaves but also as contract laborers, domestic servants, adventurers and merchants, and the colonial masters as government employees, soldiers, merchants, settlers, adventurers, writers, domestic staff, missionaries, teachers, and scientists. The important thing is that although the colonials used a pattern of domination, the most important thing was to produce a capitalist economy (Loomba, 2016).

Departing from this reality and history, literary works are often used as social institutions that use language as a medium to reflect the dynamics of life, both in terms of social, cultural, and women's space in society (Damono, 2020). As one of the mediums for recording cultural memory, literary works have a unique ability to reconstruct and critique various power relations inequalities that have escaped the official historical record. Through fictional narratives, modern Indonesian writers try to reclaim the single narrative of the colonial legacy by reviving the suffering of the marginalized whose bodies were once traded.

The literary work in question is a novel titled *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan. The novel boldly uncovers the darkest sides of human history in Halimunda. Eka Kurniawan constructs the storyline in such a way to show how the change of political power from the Dutch colonial, Japanese occupation, to post-independence always oppresses the lower class.

Of the various forms of exploitation presented by the author in the timeline of Halimunda's history, the most extreme form of oppression and the main driving force of the conflict is slavery.

The practice of slavery in the narrative of this novel is not only in the form of physical forced labor in a prison camp, but extends to the territory of cruel sexual slavery experienced by the female characters in the novel. Eka Kurniawan clearly shows that in war and colonial situations, the bodies of indigenous women were reduced in such a way as mere spoils and objects to satisfy the desires of the hegemonic soldiers. The system of slavery presented in this text ends up creating a social space that cuts off all the basic rights of its victims to determine their own destiny. It is this tragic condition in which the victims lose control of their own bodies and fate within the system of slavery that theoretically places them in the category of subalterns.

Spivak's view of the subaltern rests on a well-known rhetorical question: "Can the subalterns have a voice?". Spivak asserts that when the subalterns try to speak, their voices will never be heard by the hegemonic system because there is no equal space for dialogue for them in the social structure. In the novel *Cantik itu Luka*, this epistemological silence is evident when the enslaved characters have absolutely no legal or social space to defend themselves from the structural rape they experience.

Previous studies that are relevant to the novel *Rasina* by Ikhsaka Banu, namely a journal by Maharani, et al (2025) the results of his research write that forms of oppression include physical, verbal violence, degradation of dignity, and stupidity. Second, the novel *Lail wa Qudhban* by Najib Al-Kailani by Rahimah Khair (2020), the result of her research writes about the oppression of the marginalized Inayat character in the household and the silencing of her voice.

Through this research, the author wants to achieve several academic goals that are expected to be able to accommodate science in the literary world. This research is focused on the analysis of the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan. The main focus that will be discussed is how the form of slavery experienced by the characters in the novel *Cantik itu Luka*. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this study specifically aims to describe and dismantle the representation of slavery of subaltern characters in the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan reviewed from the perspective of the postcolonial subaltern Spivak.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method as a research approach. Qualitative research is carried out to explore, understand, and describe a research object in a descriptive way in the form of Moleong words and language (Saputra, et al., 2023). Through this approach, researchers can interpret and explain the facts that are the object of study systematically based on the data obtained. According to Marshall and Rossman (Kholifatu, et al., 2020) qualitative research is research that is natural, descriptive data, process-oriented, inductive, uses multimethod, focuses on context, and emphasizes interpretation in order to find meaning.

Qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are not obtained from the results of the calculation. Meanwhile, according to Romdhoningsih (2019) The purpose of this descriptive research is to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description, description, or painting of the facts, properties, and relationships between the phenomena being investigated.

The source of data for this research is novel *Beauty Is Wound* by Eka Kurniawan. The data of this study includes descriptive data in novel writing *Beauty Is Wound* by Eka Kurniawan. The data used in this study was in the form of words, sentences, and paragraphs which were then analyzed based on the focus of the research, which was to reveal the form of slavery in the novel *Beauty Is Wound* by Eka Kurniawan. The data collection technique in this study uses the collection of reading and recording techniques.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

As a result of the research that has been carried out, researchers found as many as 15 data that show forms of slavery in the novel *Cantik itu Luka*. The data was analyzed using a subaltern study from Spivak. The results of the analysis show that the forms of slavery in the novel represent the oppression of the subaltern group who lose the space to voice their interests.

Table 1. Quotes Quotes Forms of Slavery

Yes	Slavery Form Quotes
1.	<i>They had to bow like that to all Japanese soldiers (68).</i>
2.	<i>They worked in turn, because the Japanese demanded that the cells be kept clean (69).</i>
3.	<i>The commander seemed to agree with the idea and without saying anything immediately pulled Dewi Ayu (p. 72).</i>
4.	<i>You are here to volunteer for the sick souls of soldiers." (p. 79).</i>
5.	<i>forced labor and gave part of the harvest to the colonial government (182).</i>
6.	<i>Works more than he earns (183).</i>
7.	<i>They work all year round, while the owners live in full comfort in their rest houses (183).</i>
8.	<i>All the prisoners began to imagine the horrible forced labor (p. 386).</i>
9.	<i>"They will tell him to cut down the wood without feeding it and he will die that way." (p. 387).</i>
10	<i>"I gave you this dumb boy. My son!" (p. 14).</i>
11.	<i>women there (33).</i>
12.	<i>The brothel at the end of the pier was actually built to meet the needs of the Dutch soldiers living in the barracks (p. 32).</i>
13.	<i>"The commander will give me medicine if I sleep with him" (p. 71).</i>
14.	<i>"I replaced the girl earlier, Commander" (p. 71).</i>

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15. *Work from five in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. He sold sugarcane and rice, as well as his body (p. 85).*
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According to Spivak (Loomba, 2016) the quote shows that slavery was part of a colonial system that exploited manpower and resources for the benefit of the colonial state. Slaves and contract laborers were treated as means of production, while all the fruits of labor and profits flowed back to the mother country. In Spivak's perspective, this condition places Third World (peripheral) humans as a subaltern group that loses their freedom, voice, and awareness of the exploitation they experience because they have been under the domination of colonial power structures (Spivak, 2021:4). Thus, slavery was not only in the form of forced labor, but also a mechanism of exploitation that maintained inequality between the colonizers and the colonized society.

Discussion

Subaltern in postcolonial Spivak (Wulandari, 2025) can be understood as a word that refers to people who have no power and will not be able to speak in public (voice opinions) and are also marginalized. Meanwhile, slavery according to Spivak's view (Loomba, 2016) was a practice during the colonial period. Slaves, such as contract workers, domestic servants, are treated as powerless in order to produce the capitalist economy, and are understood not only as physical domination over a person, but also as the loss of their voice or their voice not being heard. Meanwhile, according to (Fadhil, 2013) slavery is a state in which people control or own others.

Forms of Slavery (1)

*"That morning, the newcomers had to stand in the field, grilled in the sun, waiting for the camp commander. Children were crying, people were almost fainting, because no one was allowed to sit down. The Commander and his staff then appeared, he was a man with a bushy mustache and a samurai sword swinging around his waist. His boots glistened in the sunlight. Through a translator, he taught the prisoners the art of reverence by bowing deeply past the waist. He explained that **they had to bow like that to all Japanese soldiers** as soon as the order was spoken, Keirei!, and only if Naore!'s order had been heard. "It's a tribute to the Empire of Japan," he explained; through the translator. Those who do not comply will receive the punishment they deserve: sunbathing if not whipped and getting extra work. Some may have been killed in such a way (p. 68).*

The above quote shows the existence of a form of slavery experienced by prisoners during the Japanese occupation. According to Spivak (2021), subalterns are a group whose voices are not heard because they do not have power in a social structure dominated by other parties. Meanwhile, slavery in Spivak's view is understood not only as physical domination over a person, but also as the loss of agency or free will of a subaltern group due to systematic domination. Slavery can take place through coercion to obey the rules, ideologies, and will of those in power so that the subaltern loses the freedom to make choices or refuse treatment that is detrimental to him. This can be seen in the sentence *"they should bow like that to all Japanese*

soldiers" and "Those who do not comply will receive the punishment they deserve: being dried if not whipped and getting extra work" which shows that the prisoners were forced to follow all the rules of the Japanese army with the threat of punishment if they refused.

Dewi Ayu and the prisoners of the Halimunda residents when they arrived at Bloendkamp they were treated like slaves. The prisoners were forced to stand for hours in the hot sun, obey the rules of respect for the Japanese Empire, and receive threats of punishment if they did not follow orders. The treatment reflects the loss of freedom and the right of prisoners to determine their own actions. In a postcolonial perspective, this event illustrates how colonial power sought to instill dominance and obedience to the group it controlled through threats and violence. This perspective shows that slavery was not only manifested through the exploitation of power, but also through the elimination of the freedom, will, and agency of subaltern groups so that they were forced to submit to the colonial power system.

Forms of Slavery (2)

"They work in shifts, because the Japanese demand that the cells be kept clean. They divided their work schedules: cooking in the public kitchen, filling the water tanks, washing utensils, cleaning the dishes, even transporting sacks of rice and cassava and firewood and other things from the truck into the warehouse" (p. 69).

The above quote shows the form of slavery experienced by prisoners during the Japanese occupation. From Spivak's perspective, the subalterns are a group whose voices are not heard because they do not have power in a social structure dominated by other parties. Meanwhile, slavery in Spivak's view is understood not only as physical domination over a person, but also as the loss of agency or free will of a subaltern group due to systematic domination. Such slavery can take place through coercion to carry out work and obey the rules set by the authorities without any opportunity to refuse. This can be seen in the sentence *"The Japanese demand that the cells must be kept clean"* and *"They divided their work schedules: cooking in the soup kitchen, filling water tanks, washing utensils, cleaning the yard, even transporting sacks of rice and cassava and firewood"* which showed that the prisoners were required to do various jobs according to the division that had been determined by the Japanese army.

Dewi Ayu and other prisoners who had to undergo forced labor during the Japanese occupation. They are forced to carry out various jobs every day, such as cooking, filling water tanks, washing equipment, cleaning the camp environment, and transporting sacks of rice and firewood from trucks to warehouses. The work was carried out not of their own volition, but as a form of demand that must be fulfilled for the benefit of the rulers. In a postcolonial perspective, this event shows how the colonized groups were used to support the system built by the ruling party. According to the subaltern theory, Dewi Ayu and the prisoners were in the position of subalterns because they did not have the freedom to refuse work or determine their own fate.

Forms of Slavery (3)

"Hurry up, Commander, otherwise the woman will die soon" The Commander seemed to agree with the idea and without saying anything immediately pulled Dewi Ayu (p. 72).

The quote above shows the existence of a form of sexual slavery experienced by Dewi Ayu during the Japanese occupation. From Spivak's perspective, the subalterns are a group whose voices are not heard because they do not have power in a social structure dominated by other parties. Meanwhile, slavery in Spivak's view is not only understood as physical control over a person, but also as the loss of agency or free will due to systematic domination. Slavery can intersect with physical and sexual colonization, when the bodies of subaltern women are controlled by the authorities so that they are forced to follow the will without having the opportunity to make a choice. This can be seen in the sentence *"The Commander seemed to agree with the idea and without saying anything immediately pulled Dewi Ayu"* which shows that Dewi Ayu's body is completely under the control of the Commander as the party with power.

Dewi Ayu handed herself over to the Japanese Commander as a condition for a female prisoner to obtain medicine and a doctor. Although this action seems to be Dewi Ayu's choice, it was born from a situation that forced her to sacrifice her body to save the lives of others. In postcolonial studies, this event reflects the practice of colonial domination that made women's bodies an object that could be exchanged to meet the interests of the colonizers. According to the subaltern theory, Dewi Ayu is in the position of a subaltern because she does not have the freedom to determine her own will. The power of the Commander makes Dewi Ayu's body an object that can be controlled without considering her rights and dignity as a human being. This perspective shows that sexual slavery occurs not only through the mastery of women's bodies, but also through the loss of agency and the freedom of subaltern groups who are forced to submit to the will of those in power.

Forms of Slavery (4)

"This is a rest house belonging to a lemonade factory owner in Batavia, I forget the name, but it makes no difference, now this house belongs to you."

"Why?" asked the Goddess.

"I think you guys know. You are here to volunteer for the sick souls of soldiers." (p. 79).

Based on the quote above, it shows the form of sexual slavery experienced by Dewi Ayu and the female prisoners during the Japanese occupation. This can be seen in the sentence *"You are here to volunteer for the souls of sick soldiers"* which shows that Dewi Ayu and other women were placed as sexual gratification for the Japanese soldiers using the term volunteers, even though they had no freedom to refuse.

Dewi Ayu and the female prisoners were transferred to a rest house that was used as a place to meet the sexual needs of the Japanese soldiers. Their designation as *"Volunteers"* is a form of language manipulation to cover up the practice of sexual slavery that actually occurs. In postcolonial studies, this event reflects the practice of colonial domination that controlled women's bodies as part of the colonial power system. According to Spivak's subaltern theory,

Dewi Ayu and the female prisoners were in a subaltern position because they did not have the power to refuse or determine the fate of their own bodies. Terms "Volunteers" removed the fact that they were forced to carry out the will of the Japanese army, so that their vote and approval were not taken into consideration at all. This perspective suggests that sexual slavery takes place not only through the exploitation of women's bodies, but also through the disappearance of agency and manipulation of discourse that makes the practice of oppression seem as if it is carried out voluntarily.

Forms of Slavery (5)

The natives are the most unfortunate people, unfortunately. After years of living under the liar of kings, suddenly Europeans came. Those who don't even know the madness of respect become excessive in the land of Java. The peasants, after having to work hard and give part of their crops to the colonial government, even had to squat in the street just because a Dutch noni passed by (p. 182).

The above quote shows the existence of a form of slavery experienced by the natives during the colonial period. This can be seen in the sentence "The peasants, after having to work hard and give part of their crops to the colonial government, even had to squat in the street just because a Dutch noni passed by" which shows that the natives were forced to work for the benefit of the colonial government while at the same time being obliged to show respect for the Dutch as a form of obedience to colonial power.

Native farmers were not only forced to do forced labor and hand over part of their crops to the colonial government, but were also obliged to squat when the Dutch passed by as a form of respect. This condition shows that the natives lost their freedom to determine their actions and were forced to obey the rules created by the colonial rulers. From a postcolonial perspective, the event reflected the existence of a power system that placed the colonizers as a higher group and the natives as the parties who had to submit.

Forms of Slavery (6)

There are no Marxas in this country, he says, who exist but the starving common people, working more than they earn, who have to bow down every time the great men appear, who know that the only way to be free from it all is to resist (p. 183).

The above quote shows that there was a form of slavery experienced by the common people due to the oppressive system of power. This can be seen in the sentence "The starving common people, working more than they earn, who have to bow down every time the big men appear" which shows that the people are forced to work hard for disproportionate rewards and must show obedience to the group in power.

The people of Halimunda experience oppression due to social and economic injustice. The people of Halimunda had to work hard, but the results they obtained were not worth the effort they had expended so they remained living in poverty and hunger. In addition, they are also required to always submit to those who have higher positions, which indicates an unequal power relationship. From a postcolonial perspective, this condition reflects how small groups

of people continue to be placed in a position of weakness and have no access to welfare or power. According to Spivak's subaltern theory, the commoners in the quote are a subaltern group because their voices and interests are often ignored, so resistance is considered the only way out of the oppression they experience.

Forms of Slavery (7)

Think, he said, of the thousands of workers in sugar mills along the sugarcane-producing areas. They work all year round, while the owners live in full comfort in their retirement homes in the foothills. The workers only earn enough to live on until the next day of wage payment arrives. (p. 183).

Based on the above quote, it shows that there is a form of slavery experienced by sugar factory workers due to the exploitation of labor by factory owners. This can be seen in the sentence *"They work all year round, while the owners live in comfort in their holiday homes in the foothills. The workers only earn enough wages to live on until the next day of wage payment."* which shows that the workers continue to work to make a profit for the factory owners, but only earn the minimum wage which keeps them dependent on the system.

Kemerad Salim and Kliwon do not understand the way of thinking of people who have power, making workers not like workers. He has made two rebellions, both of which failed. The quote shows a form of oppression that led to the practice of economic slavery against workers in the sugar mills in Halimunda. The workers had to work all year round to make a profit for the factory owners, but the wages they received were only enough to meet the needs of daily life. This condition makes them continue to depend on the work and it is difficult to improve their standard of living, while the factory owners enjoy the fruits of the labor's work with a comfortable and adequate life. Workers are in a subordinate position because they have no power to determine the value of their labor or change a system that keeps them dependent on minimal wages. This perspective shows that slavery is not only manifested through the exploitation of labor, but also through the elimination of agency that keeps the subaltern group tied to a system that maintains dominance and injustice.

Forms of Slavery (8)

Shortly afterwards, all the prisoners at Bloedenkamp, all political prisoners of the communists, were immediately transferred to Buru Island in its entirety without any remains. No one knew what they were going to do there. Maybe a kind of Boven Digoel in colonial times, maybe a kind of Nazi concentration camps in wartime. All the prisoners began to imagine the horrible forced labor (p. 386).

The above quote shows the existence of a form of slavery experienced by political prisoners through the practice of forced labor on Buru Island. This can be seen in the sentence *"all prisoners began to imagine terrible forced labor"* which indicates that the prisoners realized

they would be forced to undergo hard labor under the control of the rulers without having a choice over their own fate.

Kemerad Kliwon and all the communist prisoners were transferred from Bloedenkamp to Buru Island, causing fear and uncertainty among the prisoners. They do not know the purpose of the removal, but imagine that the life they will live is full of hard work and inhumane treatment. Upon arriving there, Kemerad Kliwon and the communist prisoners were treated as if they were in their shadows. This condition indicates the existence of modern slavery practices, as prisoners lose their freedom and are forced to submit to any policy determined by the authorities. In a postcolonial perspective, the event reflects a colonial phenomenon that is re-excavated. Because at that time Halimunda was already independent. Political prisoners are in a subordinate position because they do not have the power to refuse transfers, defend their freedoms, or voice objections to their treatment. Their entire lives are controlled by the authorities.

Forms of Slavery (9)

"And look now, he was even sent to Buru Island," Alamanda said when Shodancho arrived home, "they would have him cut down the timber without feeding him and he would die in that way." (p. 387).

The above quote shows the existence of a form of slavery experienced by the prisoners on Buru Island through the practice of work. This can be seen in the sentence *"they will tell him to cut down the wood without feeding him and he will die in that way"* which shows that the prisoners are forced to work in inhumane conditions without the fulfillment of basic needs.

Alamanda's concern about the fate of prisoners on Buru Island shows the severity of the conditions that political prisoners must face after being transferred to the place. Images of logging work without getting enough food show the exploitation of labor that ignores basic human needs. This situation is indicative of the practice of modern slavery, as prisoners are forced to work in undeserved conditions without having the freedom to refuse or determine their own fate. In a postcolonial perspective, the event reflects how a group in power can control and utilize the power of a weak group for its own interests. The prisoners were in a subordinate position because they had no opportunity to resist the forced labor or voice their suffering. The phenomenon shows that slavery is manifested not only through the exploitation of labor, but also through the elimination of free will and the right to defend life, so that subaltern groups are forced to submit to a system that threatens their existence.

Forms of Slavery (10)

"I'm not going to pay you, but I'm giving you this dumb child. My son!"

(p. 14).

The above quote shows the form of slavery experienced by Rosinah when she was used as a means of payment by her biological father. This can be seen in the sentence *"I'm not going to pay you, but I'm giving you this dumb child. He is my son!"* which shows that Rosinah is used as a substitute for payment so that her existence is treated like an item that can be handed over to someone else.

The old man exchanged his daughter named Rosinah so that he could sleep with Dewi Ayu. Rosinah is a mute child who lives in a limited condition and has no power over herself. In the quote, Rosinah's father handed it over to someone else in exchange for a payment that he could not afford. This action shows that Rosinah is treated not as a human being who has rights and wills, but as an object that can be exchanged for the benefit of others. This condition reflects the practice of slavery, as Rosinah's freedom and rights are completely in the hands of those who have power over her. Rosinah is a subaltern group that does not have the space to voice its own desires, so its fate is determined by people who are more powerful.

Forms of Slavery (11)

*The times after that were the times when he became a true customer of the **brothel** at the end of the pier, **having sex with the women there** while muttering the name of the girl who had left him (p. 33).*

Based on the quote above, it shows that there is a form of sexual slavery experienced by women in prostitution. This can be seen in the sentence *"the women there"* which shows that women in brothels are positioned as objects of male sexual desire and their bodies become commodities that can be used by customers.

The quote above is focused on the figure of Ma Gendik who experienced deep disappointment after being abandoned by the girl he loved named Ma Iyang. This disappointment prompted her to frequent the brothel at the end of the pier as an escape from the feelings of loss she experienced. Even though he was with other women, his mind was still fixed on the figure who had left him, which could be seen from his habit of saying the girl's name. Women in brothels live a life that makes their bodies objects traded to meet the sexual needs of their customers. These women are in a subaltern position because they have no power to determine their fate nor are they free from a system that exploits their bodies. Their voices and interests do not gain recognition in male-dominated social structures. Sexual slavery is a legacy of colonialism that was reborn in the postcolonial period.

Forms of Slavery (12)

*At that time there was only one **brothel at the end of the pier, which was actually built to meet the needs of the Dutch soldiers living in the barracks** (p. 32).*

The above quote shows the existence of a form of sexual slavery experienced by women in brothels during the Dutch colonial period. This can be seen in the sentence *"The brothel at the end of the pier, was actually built to meet the needs of the Dutch soldiers living in the barracks"*

which shows that the existence of brothels was deliberately provided as a facility to meet the sexual needs of the Dutch colonial soldiers.

The existence of a brothel at the end of the pier was originally built to meet the needs of Dutch soldiers living in barracks around the area. This shows that women are used as a means to serve the interests of those in power, without considering their rights and dignity as human beings. This condition reflects the practice of sexual slavery, as women's bodies are used to meet the needs of certain groups in the colonial system. So, from a postcolonial perspective, this event shows how colonial power not only controlled territory and resources, but also controlled women's lives as a vulnerable group. The women in the brothels are a subaltern group that has no space to make their own life choices and is only an object in an oppressive power structure.

Forms of Slavery (13)

"The commander will give me medicine if I sleep with him" (p. 71).

The quote above shows the existence of a form of sexual slavery experienced by Dewi Ayu during the Japanese occupation. This can be seen in the sentence *"The commander wants to give me medicine if I sleep with him"* which shows that the Japanese Commander made the administration of medicine a condition for Ola or Dewi Ayu to hand over her body. This relationship shows that Dewi Ayu's body is under the control of those who have power.

Dewi Ayu was faced with a situation where the medicine needed by female prisoners could only be obtained if she met the sexual demands of the Japanese Commander. These conditions show that basic needs, such as access to medicine, are used as a tool to force women to submit to the will of the rulers. In postcolonial studies, this event reflects the practice of colonial domination that exploited power inequality to control the bodies of colonial women. Dewi Ayu was in the position of a subaltern because she did not have the power to refuse the conditions given or obtain medicine through other means. Her voice has no power to change the situation that oppresses her, so her body is used as an object of exchange for obtaining basic rights that should be unconditionally accessible. This perspective shows that sexual slavery occurs not only through the exploitation of women's bodies, but also through the elimination of agency and the freedom of subaltern groups who are forced to submit to the colonial power system.

Forms of Slavery (14)

"I replaced the girl earlier, Commander. You slept with me but gave her mother medicine and a doctor. And doctor!" (p. 71)

The above quote shows the existence of a form of sexual slavery experienced by female characters as a result of unequal power relations. This can be seen in the sentence *"I replaced the girl earlier, Commander. You slept with me but gave her mother medicine and a doctor."* The

sentence shows that the female character uses her body as a bargaining tool to obtain treatment for the girl's mother. The choice was not born of free will, but of social conditions that forced him to negotiate with the ruler in order to save others.

Dewi Ayu shows great sacrifice to help Ola who has a female prisoner who is sick and needs medicine and doctors. Knowing that the Japanese commander made sexual intercourse a condition for providing help, Dewi Ayu offered herself to replace the girl previously requested by the commander. Even though the action was carried out on humanitarian grounds, Dewi Ayu remained in a position where she did not have full freedom because her body was used as a medium of exchange to obtain medical help. This event shows the existence of sexual slavery, which is when women have to give up their bodies due to pressure and power owned by other parties. In a postcolonial perspective, the actions of Japanese commanders reflected the abuse of colonial power against weak groups. Through Spivak's subaltern theory, Dewi Ayu and Ola are a group of subalterns who do not have the power to make choices freely, so they have to accept adverse situations. Although in the end the female prisoner died, Dewi Ayu's sacrifice showed the magnitude of the pressure and helplessness experienced by women in the colonial power system.

Forms of Slavery (15)

He was told to work from five in the morning to eleven at night just to get a meal twice a day. He sold sugarcane and rice, as well as his body (p. 85).

The above quote shows the form of slavery experienced by Dewi Ayu while being a comforting woman for the Japanese army. This can be seen in the sentence "*He was told to work from five in the morning until eleven at night just to get a meal twice a day*" and "*He sold sugarcane and rice, as well as his body*" which shows that Dewi Ayu was forced to work for a very long time while exploiting her body to meet the interests of the Japanese army.

During the Japanese occupation, Dewi Ayu had to live a life full of suffering to maintain her life. He was forced to work from early morning until late at night just to get a very limited food ration, while at the same time he also sold his tuak, rice, and even his body to meet the needs of life. This condition shows the existence of sexual and economic slavery, because women's energy and bodies are used as a means to survive in oppressive situations. From a postcolonial perspective, this event reflects how women during the colonial period were placed in vulnerable positions so that they were easily exploited by the ruling system. So Dewi Ayu is a subaltern group that does not have many options to determine their own lives, so they have to accept various forms of oppression in order to maintain their survival.

CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis using Spivak's subaltern perspective, it can be concluded that the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan represents 15 data on slavery practices that cross

the Dutch colonial era, Japanese occupation, and post-independence. This oppressive practice manifests itself in three main forms, namely physical slavery in the form of forced labor, economic slavery through unfair wages, and sexual slavery that reduces women's bodies to commodities and means of exchange in unequal power relations. Figures such as Dewi Ayu, Rosinah, the workers, and the common people are in a subaltern position because their agency, free will, and basic rights are systemically eliminated, and their voices are not heard. The experiences of these figures confirm Spivak's thesis that "subalterns cannot speak", which means that they are always silenced, ignored, or manipulated by the discourse of the rulers, as well as a strong literary critique of the relevance of the issue of modern slavery today.

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