

UNLEARNING THE VOICELESSNESS: NON-VERBAL AGENCY AMONG SUBALTERN WOMEN IN *THE KITCHEN DWELLERS'* TESTIMONY

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Abstract

This study examines how the speakers in Ladan Osman's poetry collection *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (2015) navigate the multiplied pressures of colonial and patriarchal structures through non-verbal actions as a legitimate way to "speak." It addresses the limited attention given to the non-verbal, embodied, and auditive forms of resistance that subaltern women employ when conventional speech is foreclosed to them. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and textual analysis, the study analyzes selected poems through the lens of Chandra Mohanty's postcolonial feminist framework, focusing on bodily gestures, the use of sound and noise, and strategic silence as alternative modes of communication. The findings reveal that subaltern women's resistance is neither absent nor uniform but takes shape through the body, sound, and silence. These alternative communicative strategies enable the speakers to negotiate colonial and patriarchal structures in ways that Western feminist frameworks often fail to recognize as legitimate political acts. The study concludes that resistance should be understood beyond verbal and collective protest and that Osman's poetry offers rich, underexplored material for understanding subaltern women's alternative communicative strategies, thereby contributing to postcolonial feminist scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

The current world, where Western ideology dominates the beliefs of many people, still creates pressure towards the minority who exist hand-in-hand with them. Black people possess the opposite portion of privilege from white people, as the Whites are positioned above the social hierarchy. This difference in treatment stemmed in colonialism, where usually the oppressor invades a certain land and takes over their whole society to change the existing customs into their own and make them obey it (Bachron et al., 2024). In the world's patriarchal nature, women also receive their own discrimination. Being seen as weaker, simpler, and more submissive than the opposite gender creates a space for them to be manipulated and subjugated to the point that all the opportunities in life were stripped away from them. Black women received multiplied pressure from outside (colonizers) and within their own society, making them considered the subaltern.

The term subaltern refers to anyone who does not possess the freedom to exist, those who are not in control of their own voice because of the power that tries to represent them (Spivak, 1988, as cited in Suryawati et al., 2021). No matter how close to the truth the representation is, the subaltern could not truly speak, as they are voiced by someone else most of the time. According to Spivak (1988), the real problem about subaltern voice is not that they cannot truly speak, but that the current dominant narrative does not have any space to listen to them as people who are capable of speaking. Under colonial and postcolonial perspectives, whereas the oppressed are treated inhumanely, magnified by the patriarchal thinking that offers insignificant consideration towards women's existence compared to men, these women have no space to be heard within their own spaces, as they were doubly ignored (Subhashini et al., 2025).

As part of the oppressed, subaltern women are under obligation to obey society's rules, the same rules that were made to diminish a woman's hope and capability. However, even if subaltern women cannot truly speak using their own voice, speaking verbally was not the only way to show resistance. Subaltern women have a disadvantage in verbal communication because they have no place in the Western narrative. They can always "speak" using other methods for the sake of rejecting, or to decline any effort of intimidation from any powerful sources; a woman could "speak" using her actions.

Subaltern women can express resistance by utilizing their bodies as a medium to communicate. In addition, conveying one's genuine thoughts is not impossible to do by using only sounds or noise created by a subaltern woman's actions. Screaming, singing, praying, or sounds produced by inanimate objects such as a boiling kettle or broken dishes are a legitimate

way for subaltern women to be able to truly speak with their own way. Silence might often be considered a sign of submission and acceptance, but it could also be a form of refusal. Despite the absence of voice, silence could act as an active refusal towards any demand from powerful groups; it also creates a power dynamic, as time, space, and information that are produced by speaking are fully under one's control (d'Astros & Morales, 2024). Doing non-verbal actions to send rejection towards her colonizers is still a form of resistance that could truly represent subaltern women as themselves.

Modern literature has captured various portrayals of resistance of a colonized towards their colonizer; many of them focus on empowering and highlighting women's pain and their defiance, especially through films and novels. It cannot be denied that the current society is more familiar with modern media like film and novels, as their popularity keeps growing in time. However, for those who adore creative and lyrical writing, poems are still the most popular medium to witness the beautiful and illuminating art of words.

Poetry, as a form of art and literature that has been around for the longest time, often speaks to its reader through the delicate and emotional path of writing. It captures the writer's expression, thoughts, desire, defiance, and more. Ladan Osman's work of African poetry in which she compiled in a book titled *The Kitchen Dwellers' Testimony*, was a poetry collection published in 2015. Osman herself is a Somali-born poet who grew up in the United States; her works speak about what is frequently overlooked within society, its behaviour, alongside its disapproval towards difference, especially towards women's ability. She also communicates the feelings of her speaker using expressions of curiosity, confusion, resentment, and anger. This is because societal expectations and customs are seemingly able to limit one's actions from what their heart truly wishes for. In this African poetry collection, Osman talks about various struggles through her speakers, who are mostly women, in each poem about the struggle of living as a minority, finding existence within colonialism, coping with the pressure of displacement, and how to find one's voice through layers of troubling reality. In the journey to survive and to express the suppressed emotional burden, subaltern women often seek another possible way to communicate their state of mind.

In line with this, Osman's speaker represents resistance, the will to fight against the dominating powers that wish to keep women colonized and subjugated. Feminist study is very much suited to support the undying effort towards women's equity; however, subaltern women who experience double oppression that lack any privilege to begin with cannot have the same methods or circumstances as Western feminism thought regarding women under oppression. Feminism is a socio-political movement and ideology that demands equality between women

and men's rights in various aspects of life that actually matter, like politics, opportunity in making independent choices towards the world and their own personal life (Mohajan, 2022). In addition, Fotaki and Pullen (2024) also argue that Feminism seeks to end gender inequality and related violence which stems from sexual assault, poverty, and a lack of opportunities and acknowledgment. While long-standing gender inequality has existed and become the norm, feminism is alive because of this very same reason. Feminism exists not with the purpose of making women superior to men, but to achieve equal rights and acknowledge the wrongs between both genders. It was born from the fuel of unjust situations towards women in various aspects of their lives; from unfair treatment at home and in society, they are denied their own free will. Mohanty (1988) conveyed that the state of mind that Western feminism has taught society cannot always be equivalent to how to fight for each woman's struggle in the gender-biased society. She believed that the pressure towards third-world country women to live under each custom, whether it is culture, local beliefs, or religion, puts them in a more complicated relationship which cannot be judged solely as something that holds them back or prevents them from having freedom as women.

This study intends to highlight that the existing studies on subaltern resistance tend to focus on direct resistance such as verbal protest, written literature, or collective action, and in doing so, they tend to overlook the subtler, embodied, and auditive forms of resistance that women like Osman's speakers employ. This study examines the impact of multiplied colonial and patriarchal oppression on subaltern women, specifically analyzing how these pressures shape their behavioral strategies as they communicate their struggles and reclaim their rights. Furthermore, to highlight that, to resist the society in which women are forced to succumb to passivity and villainized at the slightest mistake, women can still fight indirectly using their non-verbal actions to express their thoughts in a raw, emotional, yet subtle way to critique the subjugated state they experience as women. In that regard, the findings of this study would broaden the perspective and improve the understanding of the importance of subtle resistance; moreover, it would increase knowledge around subaltern women's capability to create resistance and defense, especially through the lens of postcolonial feminism and subaltern studies.

Existing postcolonial and feminist studies have examined subaltern resistance through various forms of objection, and some attention has been given to non-verbal resistance through the use of the body and silence. However, sound and noise in a poem that the speaker produces as a form of resistance are still rarely discussed, especially within literary studies. This gap matters specifically for Osman's poetry, since her speakers frequently use sound, such as a

boiling kettle, breaking dishes, a scream, or a hum, alongside gesture and silence, as a way to communicate what conventional speech cannot. In that regard, this study does not simply add another example to an existing framework but extends that framework to include sound as a register of resistance that has not yet been given the same attention as the body and silence. The significance of this study provides insight into the flexible representation of subaltern women's resistance, as shown in Ladan Osman's poetry, as resistance can take shape not only through what they do with their bodies or what they choose not to say, but through the sounds they make, a form of resistance that Western feminist frameworks and even most postcolonial feminist scholarship have yet to fully recognize. In order to set a clear route for elaborating this issue, this study posits a research question: How do the speakers in Osman's poetry navigate the multiplied pressures of colonial and patriarchal structures through non-verbal resistance as a legitimate way to "speak"?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on subalternity, especially subaltern women, have responded beyond the speech itself. It has manifested in non-verbal resistance, the body, silence, and sound as sites of agency for women navigating colonial and patriarchal constraint. Several recent studies have examined embodied and non-verbal resistance among subaltern women, though this attention has been almost entirely concentrated in prose fiction. Silence and sound have also begun to receive more targeted attention as resistive indicators, rather than as incidental features of a broader embodied resistance.

For instance, Akhtar (2025) reads the female body and sexuality as sites of feminist resistance in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990), arguing that the protagonist's control over her own sexuality through rejecting shame and refusing emotional attachment allows her to reclaim agency of her own body where colonial and patriarchal structures cannot fully appropriate it. Working with a different genre, Dakshayani (2025) explores gendered subalternity in Mahasweta Devi's short stories "Giribala" and "Draupadi", examining how two tribal women resist patriarchal and state violence through silence, refusal, and symbolic bodily confrontation. Giri's silent departure from an exploitative marriage and Dopdi's refusal to cover her violated body both function as non-verbal enactments of agency that directly engage Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak. Dutta (2025) reads silence in Banu Mushtaq's short story collection *Heart Lamp* as a deliberate act of defiance rather than a symptom of submission, drawing on Mohanty's postcolonial feminism and Spivak's subaltern theory to argue that

Mushtaq's female characters use silence to preserve dignity and assert agency within patriarchal, religious, and socio-economic constraints.

This attention to embodied and vocal resistance has also begun to extend; Vatsala et al. (2023) trace how Indian English women poets use bodily and sexual candor, alongside the reclamation of mythological female figures, to resist traditional narratives of feminine submissiveness. Closer to the present study's concerns, Choudhury et al. (2026) examine women's poetry published in Bangla little magazines between the 1950s and 1970s, arguing that these poets used the female body and previously taboo subject matter to disrupt regulatory norms of gender conformity and establish women's poetry as a distinct literary category. Taken together, this body of scholarship confirms that non-verbal resistance enacted through body, silence, and sound is an increasingly active area of postcolonial feminist study. Sound and noise, by contrast, remain almost entirely untheorized as a distinct register of resistance within literary studies. No study to date examines body, sound, and silence together as a coordinated repertoire of resistance within a single poetic text. Ladan Osman's *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (2015), in which domestic sound making, embodied gesture, and strategic silence recur across multiple poems, offers exactly this configuration, yet remains unexamined through a postcolonial feminist lens. This study addresses that specific gap.

METHOD

The method this study used is a qualitative descriptive approach and textual analysis to examine various representations of subtle resistance as expressed by the speakers in Ladan Osman's African poetry book *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (2015). This research focuses on the practice of non-verbal actions, such as utilizing the use of women body parts and gestures, making noises like screaming, singing, praying, and noises from inanimate objects to convey the resistance of subaltern women towards colonial and patriarchal society. To further elaborate the analysis, this study uses the theory of postcolonial feminism by Chandra Mohanty (1988). The data were gathered by analyzing selected poems from Ladan Osman's poetry collection *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (2015). First, the researcher reads the entire poetry book as the primary source for the study's data. Second, the researchers focus on selected poems that emphasize subaltern women's resistance, especially in its subtlety, and the expressions the speaker uses to manage and reject the pressure of multiplied oppression from both colonialist and patriarchal viewpoints that only see women as insignificant. Third, by using the concept of subalternity from Gayatri Spivak alongside postcolonial feminism by Chandra Mohanty, the selected verse or lines that were collected will be analyzed.

Additionally, this study is also supported with the help of scholarly publications, books, poetry reviews, theoretical works, and other sources that focus on subaltern women's struggles as a misrepresented group, the various portrayals of resistance within literary works, the concept of subalternity, and postcolonial feminism. Thus, the selected poems in Osman's work, which are tied to the behavioral aspect of subaltern women and their response to resist and represent themselves using subtlety, are the main focus of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The poems in Ladan Osman's *The Kitchen Dwellers' Testimony* (2015) reveal more about the difficulties under the postcolonial impact; it tells us to acknowledge and face the reality where there is no place for the presence of minority groups. Subaltern women are often portrayed as passive victims of multiplied pressure, so their voice, thoughts, and feelings can never be expressed accurately because of the constant limits they are subjugated to (Ghimire, 2023). The voice of the subaltern woman is not entirely absent but is instead localized within subtle resistance. This resistance manifests through a strategic use of body parts and utilization of internal or external voice and noise; even silence could be a form of resistance if used in accordance. Also, the reclamation of domestic spaces that once were their own, in which these actions are something that does not belong to any Western-centred idea of resistance, is becoming something that they could truly own (Benali & Villesèche, 2024).

Through the lens of literature and artistic features of Osman's poem, the subaltern woman portrays a consciousness that utilizes indirect and subtle defiance to negotiate her way around colonial and patriarchal constraints. Using an alternative medium to communicate refusal, like utilizing body parts and making noise as a method to protect their own peace. Gayatri Spivak (2023) famously questioned the subaltern's ability to speak within the structures of power; while it is verbally true that they are forced to submit, that does not mean the subaltern cannot "speak" at all. Traditional Western frameworks often correspond to the term "resistance" with loud, public, or verbal protest. However, for the subaltern, such visibility is often impossible or even dangerous. Chandra Mohanty's (1988) framework about postcolonial feminism stated that the Western idea of feminism often demonstrates women, when displaying their own struggles, as a monolithic and powerless object. They also frame third-world women who were doing something related to culture or religion as solely performing because of oppression. Mohanty rejects these stereotypical third-world woman tropes through her work.

Employing Sounds and Noises

The way of responding and behaving towards injustice was never easy and cannot be the same for everyone who exists under the subaltern reality. Through this study, as a researcher, we intend to understand that subaltern women have different responses, even if each corresponding reaction intends to convey rejection towards the unjust treatment. This section focuses on two selected poems from Osman's poetry collection: "Women Brewing" and "Intangible Quality" to elaborate on the employment of sounds and noises as a way of resistance. One of the poems from *The Kitchen Dweller's Testimony* (2015), titled "Women Brewing", captures a woman who utilizes loud noises, such as screams and broken dishes, to express her refusal in this stanza:

When my mother was mad she'd scream Wow!
like a wailing kettle,
(...)
Wow! from the kitchen
where she'd break the dishes (Osman, 2015).

The speaker describes a reaction and non-verbal action from her mother when she is overwhelmed by emotions, which she reacts to in an explosive way to let others know she is angry. Despite expressing her feelings of anger audibly, her scream does not seem to clearly communicate what makes her feel that way. Instead, she uses the word "wow!", which is repeated more than four times in this poem, to indirectly express her anger. The poem also uses "wow!" to represent the loud sound of the dishes she breaks; using fragile inanimate objects such as dishes is also another way for the speaker's mother to reject any pressure or expectation that was imposed upon her.

Western narrative often deems domestic space, such as the kitchen, as often associated with trapped and unfree women. However, this place, where the speaker's mother has the right to break her dishes and let her loud kettle boil too long, is the only place where the subaltern woman protects the only freedom and rights she owns. She uses anger, which developed into creating loud noises like screaming and breaking dishes, as a way to reject society's expectations as well as to prevent others from dictating to her how to act or how to feel. She utilizes her anger to fight stereotypical beliefs created by Western and patriarchal values in order to make her voice heard and reclaim herself as an individual (Pratidina & Pasaribu, 2023). The speaker's mother in this poem rejects any external reason or opinion to prevent her from feeling what she could feel if she kept all her emotions inside, so she resorts to screaming and breaking dishes, as anger often invokes fear and creates distance from others.

Sound is a very powerful and useful medium for communicating subaltern thoughts, as a creature that has the ability to hear, no human can ignore something audible even if it's not necessarily plausible. This is where subaltern women, as a group that receives double oppression, utilize this medium as a source of power to claim their space as a legitimate people that have opinions and beliefs. It has been mentioned earlier that the current modern narrative lacks space and the ability to listen to subaltern voices and tends to rely on verbally plausible speech and written narratives, which are dominated by Western ideologies. This is where subaltern women make use of the space where the dominant narrative often overlooks non-verbal actions. The use of sound and noise to express anger in order to reject pressure from society is well portrayed in the previous "Women Brewing" poem. However, utilizing sound and noise is not only used to declare anger, but this flexible medium could also be employed to simply assert existence. The poem "Intangible Quality" shows the speaker's unwillingness to submit and to be consumed by a man's ideals; this stanza captures her resilience and will to exist:

One of these days I'll take the light out of my eyes,
leave hollow globes.
I can make my voice birdsong in a graveyard (Osman, 2015).

If the previous data talk about the outburst of emotion of a mother, in this poem the speaker insists that her existence cannot be erased even though a man would not acknowledge her existence. The first two lines: "One of these days I'll take the light out of my eyes, / leave hollow globes." The speaker mentions the light in her eyes; that light is what makes a human being seem alive, and it is what makes her visible to the world. However, because throughout this poem the speaker communicates her resentment towards men that never consider women as visible and legitimate human beings in the first place, she would rather take the light in her eyes by herself. It is not because she accepted being considered invisible by a man, but because she owns her agency and believes that her existence does not need approval from a man. To achieve this level of self-actualization, a woman must have resilience in her situation (Belete, 2025). So, she became "hollow" instead, invisible on purpose, of her own will. This is not defeat. It is a deliberate strategy; if a man cannot see her, he cannot consume her existence. Being invisible does not mean that she does not exist; it is why she mentions in the next line, "I can make my voice birdsong in a graveyard"; her existence is flexible.

Subaltern women are familiar with the feelings of estrangement as they live alongside it in society. Isolation and injustice from the dominant group, whether it is Westerners or men within their own groups, is inevitable. As Djohar et al. (2023) argue, inside the patriarchal

society, where men are superior, they tend to interpret narratives based on patriarchal goals, not as they are, including women's wants and welfare. But it does not dishearten the women; rather, they create a newfound way to convey rejection and reclaim their existence. "Birdsong in graveyard" is a sound from flocks of birds that can often be heard in a graveyard, a place of silence and death; it cannot be understood as human language, but it exists, yet it still creates a sound; it shows existence. Her existence that was threatened to be taken by a man, actually never left as long as she believes in her own capability. In that regard, she decides to transform her own existence to be as haunting as the birdsong in the graveyard; the sound she creates exists inside a space of expected silence, both the graveyard and patriarchal society. It might not be plausible, but she insists on communicating it for the sake of emphasizing her existence.

Utilizing The Use of Body

In this section, this study focuses on two of Osman's poems: "Intangible Quality" and "Invocation" to elaborate on the usage of subaltern women's bodies as a way to reclaim their agency. The first data that we want to analyze in this section comes from the poem "Intangible Quality"; it is a continuation from the same poem in the previous section, where the speaker reveals her resentment towards men who objectifies women, men that does not consider the existence of women. This stanza captures that the speaker's existence does not mean she has to be visible; she exists nevertheless; it is an undeniable fact even if she is not considered legitimate:

or hair between floorboards.
Hair mingled with carpet-scalp,
hair in the space between mirror
and frame (Osman, 2015).

Hair is a part of a woman's body that is very precious and treasured, and it is a fragile part as it often falls. The first line, "or hair between floorboards," is intimate evidence of a person's presence; it is a trace that a woman is there; it persists; it cannot be denied. The hair might hide in the cracks of the floorboard itself, often overlooked by those who only look at the surface. Then it is followed by the second line, "Hair mingled with carpet-scalp," similar to the first line, but here, the hair fuses with the fabric and the fibre of the carpet itself; it is not visible at a glance, it needs to be carefully observed under watchful eyes. However, from these two lines, floorboard and carpet share the same fate; it is a domestic surface that is walked over underfoot, making it often overlooked. Subaltern women are often associated with domestic space, inside the house, as she rarely goes out. Their presence has become inseparable from the domestic space where she's confined, making the man overlook her and ignore her existence as if she

were invisible. In the last two lines, “hair in the space between mirror / and frame.” The speaker’s hair is placed between the mirror and frame. A mirror is where a person looks to see themselves, to gain self-recognition, even by herself.

At the same time, the frame is the boundary that contains the mirror, the thing that defines its edges. She has left evidence of herself in the margin of the very object designed for seeing. If a person is standing in front of the mirror, they would see their physical self, not paying attention to a piece of hair that stuck in between the frame. Yet, her existence is valid and undeniable. A Western feminist reading might see a woman whose only presence is her hair in the overlooked and unnoticeable place within a domestic space as a tragic image of a woman without identity, someone who cannot even fully claim her own visibility, reduced to fragments or hair. It is common for a woman to have long hair and men to have short hair; this is used to differentiate both genders. With the noticeable traces of a woman’s long hair, projecting Mohanty’s (1988) framework, she exists without the need to be visible; a subaltern woman’s existence does not depend on the understandability of the dominant frame about women’s recognition.

Making the most of one’s body is the thing that a subaltern woman has access to when they are denied of speech, of place in the dominant ideology, and of acting based on free-will, because they do not possess such thing. In the previous data, the speaker emphasized her undeniable existence; even if she is not visible under the dominant narrative’s gaze, she still exists in small parts of place that are truly hers. In this poem, titled “Invocation”, the speaker conveys her anger, hatred, and resentment towards the entity that she described as a little spider. This stanza captures her intention:

I’ve got something sharp under my tongue,
some shard. Black metal in both mouths.
I’m fashioning a weapon (Osman, 2015).

If the reader pays attention to the first two lines, “I’ve got something sharp under my tongue, / some shard. Black metal in both mouths.” The tongue is a body part that is located inside the mouth; it is a crucial part of a human’s process of creating sound and voice. The phrase “something sharp”, “a shard, black metal” can be interpreted as something, a sound or noise, that can metaphorically hurt those who hear it. The mouth, as the organ that produces sound and speech, is captured as a place where it is possible to carry something sharp and hard, indicating a harmful object. The speaker’s mouth is something that could wound rather than communicate in the usual sense. Additionally, the phrase “in both mouths” might suggest that there are two existences of her speech organ: the mouth that is expected to be quiet and only

able to work its way through non-verbal sounds, and the mouth that is capable of hurting with words that contains the shard. Finally, the last line, “I’m fashioning a weapon.” Indicates that the speaker is not just holding something sharp passively inside her mouth; she is actively making it into a weapon. The weapon itself is an ongoing craft that is slowly constructed inside her body.

From the lens of Western narrative, this image of possession of a sharp weapon is violent, unstable, or even self-harming. The framework of postcolonial feminism suggests that we look back to the background of pressure that ties subaltern women; they endure multiple oppression every day, the resentment towards the act of injustice which prevent them from having a place in the society is inevitable. Nayu and Djohar (2025) argue that women are the main victims of marginalization, where they are deemed lower in position than men, so they receive less recognition, power, and rights. The pressure is bubbling and slowly piling up until it cannot be contained by the body and mind anymore. This feeling is manifested into “a weapon”, the sharp shard that could hurt and injure the person that witnesses the sounds and words the mouth can produce. The weapon is not evidence of instability and desire to harm; it’s evidence of agency built out of necessity.

Strategized Silence as Refusal

In this section, the focus would be on the poem titled “Women Brewing”. If the first section captures the speaker’s mother and her tendency to make loud noises when angry, this stanza portrays the speaker’s grandmother that acts conversely:

When my grandmother was mad she’d say nothing,
her fists curled, a cool element.
She’d swallow the fire, she’d drink it like it was too-hot tea. (Osman, 2015).

The speaker in this poem talks about her grandmother who chose silence as a way to suppress her anger. However, silence does not mean that she remains in a state of enforced silence. Rather, it is more important to understand and analyze what the main reason is behind that lack of voice. Subaltern women experience so many disadvantages and criticism during their lives; this could happen because of the overall pressure and expectations they receive from a young age. The patriarchal society creates the standard that women should be calm and composed, and if she reacts otherwise, she would be deemed a disgrace (Sharma & Chauhan, 2023). The speaker’s grandmother embodied this expectation into a habitual behaviour, fearing that if she reacted visibly angrily, other people would dislike her and lose their respect for her. Djohar et al. (2023) argued that women who grow up in a strict and conservative society, often seen as servants for men, therefore have no freedom as they constantly oppressed. She

“swallowed” her anger, and the process is torturing her, like a fire burning the inside of her mouth and throat because she constantly suppressed her feelings. The speaker’s grandmother rejects societal pressure by making herself seem unaffected and does not let any emotion control her behaviour.

However, what can all these five data tell us about subaltern women’s resistance? As Spivak (1988) stated, “Part of our ‘unlearning’ project is to articulate that ideological formation—by measuring silences, if necessary—into the object of investigation.” Instead of trying to fill the silence of the subaltern woman with our own words, Spivak suggests we should measure the silence radiating from them. To understand the subaltern, we should investigate why they cannot be heard and what structures are keeping them quiet. The term “unlearning” refers to our privilege of speaking, meaning we must stop assuming we are the saviour who has the right to explain the subaltern’s life. From the representations of various speaker that uses different methods as a way to communicate their feelings and assert their existence in the discriminating world, Osman’s poem proves that when the subaltern is denied a space to speak her own words, she creates another way and reclaims her place in her own true way. She turns her very existence into a protest by using her physical ability to create an undeniable trace of her existence.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how the speakers in Ladan Osman’s *The Kitchen Dweller’s Testimony* (2015) navigate the multiplied pressures of colonial and patriarchal structures through non-verbal actions as a legitimate way to “speak”, and the five analyses of Osman’s poem show that subaltern women’s resistance is neither absent nor uniform, but takes multiple, context-dependent forms that exist outside what Western-centered narratives recognize as legitimate protest. These findings support Mohanty’s (1988) argument that Western feminist frameworks, in expecting resistance to appear as loud, public, or verbal protest, fail to recognize and continuously overlook the weight of subtler, embodied, and localized actions. What might be read through a Western lens as passivity is actually evidence of agency under conditions where verbal speech of subaltern women has no place in this narrative. This study therefore suggests that the subaltern woman is not entirely voiceless, but she speaks in a frequency and space where the dominant structure was never built to hear. This study contributes to postcolonial feminist scholarship by expanding the definition of resistance beyond verbal and outspoken protest while demonstrating that poetry, Osman’s work specifically, offers rich,

underexplored material for understanding subaltern women's alternative communicative strategies.

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