

WOMEN SUBORDINATION AND STRUGGLE AS DEPICTED IN *QUEEN CHARLOTTE: A BRIDGERTON STORY SERIES*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse women subordination and struggle portrayed in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story Series*. This study employs feminism theory with qualitative descriptive approach. The study identifies 28 data: 18 of women subordination and 10 of women struggle. The subordination mainly manifests as men control over women with 14 data in total. Women's struggles are primarily shown through voicing opinions with 6 data in total. The series consistently depicts men's control over women across all social status, while also showing women's persistent efforts to maintain their identity despite subordination.

Keywords: *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story, Feminism, Women Subordination, Women Struggle*

INTRODUCTION

The world has made progress in treating women more equally. However, the long history of seeing women as inferior to men continues to affect the lives of women around the world. Women still face unfair treatment and are denied the same rights, opportunities, and freedom that men have, even in countries where women hold important political leadership roles as United Kingdom. Even though there have been efforts to create more equal society, the long-held beliefs and systems that give men more power and control over women are undeniable, as can be seen in a popular Netflix TV series *Queen Charlotte; A Bridgerton Story*, portraying how female figures are mistreated differently compared to the male, as subordinate in a society that is mainly influenced by the patriarchal system during the 18th century of Great Britain. The series set in 1761 in Great Britain. It is a time when the British Empire was greatly influenced by patriarchal ideology, which shaped the men's dominance system over women in many spheres and became the reason behind the subordination of women in the society, including the family, the workplace, and the state [1], [2]. The unique of the series is that it portrays how subordination faced by a powerful woman, like Sophia Charlotte as a queen, being treated as less important than men in the society. This is very relevant for understanding the problems women face in society today. Therefore, this study analyses how women subordination and struggle as depicted in the series *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*. This study employs feminism approach. Women subordination refers to the result of patriarchal culture that puts women as secondary in society, which later

results in manifesting many different ways of subordination [3]. On the other hand, women struggle refers to the way how women resist against patriarchal structure which may be manifested in various ways and not limited to specific forms [4], [5]. Moreover, this study engaged with historical approach. By referring to historical sources and evidences, the writer is able to draw conclusion based historical evidences that support the analysis of women subordination and struggle represented, namely the 18th Great Britain.

METHOD

This research applies the qualitative descriptive approach since it deals with spoken language and its context. Bogdan implies that the qualitative approach remains a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of words, sentences, speech, and behaviour of the object that is observed [6]. The results describe the representation of women subordination and women struggle in the series. The writer collects the primary data through observational with non-participant method, derived from the whole six (6) episodes of the series *Queen Charlotte; A Bridgerton Story*, which serves as the primary data source. Observational method is carried out by paying attention to both male and female characters dialogue and gestures made, this aims to classify the data obtained later. The data was generally gathered by screen-capturing the scenes in form of the picture. The first step in the observation process was to focus on the intrinsic elements in order to understand the plot. Following that, the data is examined using theories of women subordination and women struggle used in the study.

The writer refers to content analysis technique in doing the analysis. The analytical instrument used in the human instrument, since the writer focuses on the representation of women subordination and struggle through both male and female characters. Furthermore, this study engaged with historical approach to support the data analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings are divided into two sections that describe women subordination as well as women struggle depicted in the series. The data sample presented here are taken from several episodes; 1) Episode 1 “Queen to Be”; 2) Episode 2 “Honeymoon Bliss”; 3) Episode 5 “Gardens in Bloom”.

WOMEN SUBORDINATION

There are two types of women subordination discovered through the series, namely men control over women and disregard. This study finds four specific categories associated with men control over women, namely men control over women's body and sexuality, arranged marriage, women belonging to husband after the marriage, and lack of inheritance and property rights.

Men control over women’s body and sexuality can be seen from the mistreatment of Agatha Danbury, one of the queen’s ladies:



Fig. 1. Lord Danbury’s frequent sexual demand

Figure 1 depicts how Lady Danbury’s expression, indicating the disagreement and dissatisfaction that she has limited control over her body as she says “Mornings, evenings, middle of nights, and now tea time. I was having tea, I was embroidering a pillow! What if he puts another one of his gigantic babies inside me?” indicating her limited control regarding her body and reproductive choice, highlighting patriarchal ideology that exaggerates biological differences to ensure men have dominant role. In the 18th century of Great Britain around 1761, women had no legal right to refuse sexual relations with their husbands, due to religious teachings of the time emphasized wifely submission and obedience to the husband [7], [8].

Arranged marriage can be seen from Sophia Charlotte, as she is arranged into a political-based marriage by the brother, Adolphus:



Fig. 2. Charlotte’s marriage for political interest

Charlotte’s arranged marriage situation demonstrates how women having little control over their choice of partners, as Adolphus one-sidedly decides Charlotte's marital fate, stating, "You cannot. I am in charge...It is done," without considering her wishes or consent. Hansen denotes that Charlotte’s marriage was by no means an unusual affair even by eighteenth century standards: marriages among the nobility, after all, were political affairs concerning family property and dynasty, not the happiness of the individuals contracting it [9].

Women belonging to husband can be seen from Sophia Charlotte as a queen for being obedient and subservient to the husband:



Fig. 3. Charlotte is ordered to live separately

Figure 3 illustrates the subordinate position of women in 18th-century England, even among royalty. It highlights how King George III's behaviour towards Charlotte reflects broader societal norms of male dominance and female subservience in marriage, indicating the common expectation for wives to be obedient and accept their husbands' decisions without question. Women often losing their independence after marriage and being treated as their husbands' property. These patriarchal norms applied across social classes, affecting even queens, and were reinforced by social customs and norms [10]. Underdown also underlines that “Now household manuals of the period, like Gervase Markham's English Housewife, naturally stress that the wife's duty is always to obey her husband” [11]. It indicates how Charlotte, regardless her status is affected by the social norms at that time, which patriarchy shapes. Lack of inheritance and property rights can be seen from Agatha Danbury, as her husband passed away:



Fig. 4. Lady Danbury being desperate for the inheritance issues

Figure 4 explains involving Agatha Danbury's meeting with a solicitor, illustrating the economic disempowerment of women in a patriarchal society. It highlights how Agatha, despite her status, must rely on male support to maintain her peerage and inheritances. Agatha's concerns about becoming penniless and homeless as she says "...I am to be left, what? Penniless? Homeless? What am I to do?" underscore the precarious position of women, after the husband's death, indicating the broader societal norm of male control over property and resources, typically passed from father to son. It exemplifies how women's social and economic security was deeply dependent on male connections, whether through family or marriage, in the patriarchal system. Inheritance rules in the 18th century of Great Britain were different for men and women. Property usually passed from father to children, not from mother [12]. On the other hand, disregard can be seen from Sophia Charlotte, as how disregard addressed by Adolphus:



Fig. 5. Charlotte thoughts being disregarded

Figure 5 depicts Charlotte and Adolphus in a carriage journey to the palace. Adolphus's response, characterized by a raised tone and dismissive attitude, is presented as emblematic of the broader treatment of women in their society. His statement "I am in charge" is interpreted as a clear assertion of male dominance, disregarding Charlotte's thoughts and opinions. This interaction represents the common societal view of women's thoughts as secondary, unimportant, and unworthy of consideration in thoughts. Lewis states that "A well-born lady was expected to be ornamental and useful to her husband, to produce heirs, manage the household and be accomplished in the arts of polite society. Her personal ambitions or intellectual pursuits were often seen as secondary or even irrelevant" [13]. This indicates that women are disregarded and subordinated by the society as Charlotte is subordinated and disregarded by Adolphus.

WOMEN STRUGGLE

There are five types of women struggle discovered through the series as follows; damaging properties, voicing opinion, threatening to perform self-harm, escaping and legal empowerment tactics.

Damaging properties as a form of struggle can be seen from Sophia Charlotte as an act of showing resistance and disagreement toward the arranged marriage.



Fig. 6. Charlotte's act of damaging property

Figure 6 shows Charlotte rebelling against arranged marriage planned by Adolphus. She expresses her anger and refusal by breaking a statue near Adolphus's room. This act symbolizes Charlotte's struggle against patriarchal control over women's choices, particularly in marriage. It demonstrates that women, regardless of their status, may resist oppression in various ways to assert their rights and identity. Simonton suggests that how women in the 18th century often used symbolic acts, including property damage, to express dissent when direct confrontation was not possible [14].

Voicing opinion as a form of struggle can also be seen from Sophia Charlotte as an act of showing resistance and disagreement toward the arranged marriage.



Fig. 7. Charlotte voicing her disagreement's opinion of the arranged marriage

Realizing that the first attempt of struggle (damaging property) went unsuccessfully, she began to resist for the second time by voicing her opinion to Adolphus, as Charlotte repeatedly says "Turn the carriage around," during the journey to the palace, showing her refusal to accept the arranged marriage. This represents women struggle against patriarchal norms, where men typically make decisions for women. By resisting, Charlotte challenges the subordination and fights for her right to choose her own husband. This demonstrates that struggle against subordination may take various forms, including voicing opinion. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the feminist big figure also underlines that women in the early 18th century were already challenging patriarchal norms through their writing and speech [15].

Realizing that Charlotte's previous attempts to resist have been unsuccessful, Charlotte escalates her struggle by threatening self-harm, which serves as a form of struggle found in the study.



Fig. 8. Charlotte's threat of performing self-harm

Figure 8 shows Charlotte's threat of self-harm in the carriage as she says to Adolphus "Brother, turn the carriage around, or I will bounce. I will bounce, and I will impale myself on this ridiculous corset and bleed to death", indicating an extreme form of resistance against her arranged marriage. It symbolizes a woman's struggle against patriarchal control and emphasizes the belief that women should have rights and power over themselves. While extreme, Charlotte's threat reflects the lengths some women felt compelled to go to fight for their autonomy in a male-dominated society. Vickery also denotes that examples of women in the 18th century who resisted arranged marriages through various means, including threats of self-harm or running away [10].

Realizing that Charlotte's previous attempts to resist have been unsuccessful, Charlotte escalates her struggle by escaping, which serves as a form of struggle found in the study.



Fig. 9. Charlotte's escape from the marriage

Figure 9 explains Charlotte attempts to escape her arranged marriage to King George III by climbing over a garden wall. When spotted by the King, she openly admits her intention to flee. This act of resistance, though unsuccessful, represents Charlotte's struggle against the societal expectations and political arrangements that deny her control over her own life and marriage. Her attempt to escape symbolizes a broader fight for women's rights and autonomy, even in the face of powerful social and political pressures.

CONCLUSION

The study shows how women's subordination and struggles were portrayed in the series. Women subordination is mainly shown through men control over women, especially after marriage when women belong to the husband. Women's struggles are primarily depicted through voicing opinions. The series presents instances of women subordination and struggle, aligning with historical evidence. The study suggests potential for further research using different literary approaches as psychology, and others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer would like to express deepest and sincere gratitude to Femmy Dahlan, S.S., M. Hum, as his amazing supervisor, who provides much guidances, motivations, suggestions, and comments. Gratefulness is also expressed to the examiners, Prof. Dr. Elfiondri, S.S., M.Hum, and Temmy Thamrin, S.S.. M.Hum., Ph.D., for comprehensive criticism and suggestions.

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