



## Oppression on women during the trojan war in Pat Barker's *The Silence of The Girls*

Nisrina Mumtaz

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: [nisrinaamumtaz11@gmail.com](mailto:nisrinaamumtaz11@gmail.com)

Linusia Marsih

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: [linusia@untag-sby.ac.id](mailto:linusia@untag-sby.ac.id)

**Abstract.** This study discusses the oppression on women due to social structure during the Trojan War in Pat Barker's *The Silence of The Girls*. There are two problem statements proposed in this study i.e. the social structure described and the forms of oppression on female characters reflected in *The Silence of The Girls*. This study is designed as descriptive qualitative study with sociological approach. The sociological approach is applied because this study deals with social structure in society and feminists' point of view of oppression. The results of this study indicate that the social structure in Greek society are divided into several components, namely social structure based on class, gender roles, and culture. The social structure based on class indicates inequality between women and men. Women are inferior, while men are superior. The social structure of gender roles is based on the differences between men and women roles in society. Women are slaves and servants, while men are masters. The social structure based on culture is the social structure that has been formed in society, which positions women to obey men. The social structure creates differences between men and women. The position of women is under the men, so this leads to some oppression on women. The oppression on women occurs in two forms i.e. women as a sexual object and slaves. In Greek society, women always become sexual objects based on the behavior shown by men towards women, and men also enslave women. So this study reflects the oppression on women because of the social structure. The findings in this study indicate that the oppression on women during the Trojan War happens due to the social structure of the Greek society that makes women experience oppression.

**Keyword:** Oppression on Women, Social Structure, Sociology Feminist

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Oppression is an unfairness such as cultural standards, stereotypes and rules that have been formed for a long time that occurs when a social group is oppressed while other people get good treatment (Taylor, 2016: 1). Taylor defines oppression as condition in which a more substantial group gives a bad influence by maltreating the oppressed. In addition Frye (1983: 10) states that oppression is pressure from people who try to paralyze and humiliate other people. The oppressed do not have the power to fight against the ruling class. Ultimately, they must follow the rules made by the ruling class.

A group is categorized as an oppressor when it has a superior position based on social characteristics such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, economy and age (Kapur, 2018: 2). The social characteristics give rise to different social groups based

on race, class, gender, culture, etc. Social groups automatically form a social structure that connects groups through interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 298). Social groups consist of men and women, but in the social structure, gender differences greatly affect society's views of men and women. In the social structure, men are superior to women because women are seen as weak. Therefore, women always experience oppression.

Since ancient Greece, women have experienced oppression, so women have a stereotype as the oppressed. According to Stefanos (2012: 12), the Greeks had a long history of torturing and exploiting women. Women were not given freedom in their lives, such as not being allowed to leave the palace, serving men, being slaves, being concubines, etc. In Greek society, a woman was a sexual object who was often raped, and things got worse because of the war. The women whose cities fell would be made into slaves or servants of the invaders (Cartwright, 2016: 1).

The novel that discusses the oppression on women during the Greek war is *The Silence of The Girls* by Pat Barker. The novel has a similarity to the mythological history story of the Trojan War in ancient Greece, in which women were mistreated, repressed, abused, swapped, tortured, and imprisoned by kings and soldiers. This novel tells the atmosphere of the Trojan War from the point of view of Briseis, the wife of the king of Mysia, whose kingdom was destroyed and burned by the Greek soldiers. Briseis who was previously born into a royal family and became the wife of a king had to turn into an enslaved person for Achilles, one of the strongest warriors of Greece. Briseis was made as a gift for Achilles for his victory in destroying a part of the Trojan City. For almost ten years, Briseis was a sleeping slave of Achilles, and in those ten years, Briseis witnessed how the Greek colonialists carried out the oppression of women.

The writer is interested in analyzing the novel because the novel raises an issue involving women in society. The novel *The Silence of The Girls* tells the story of women who are victims of oppression. The oppression occurs because of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. This analysis will be developed through sociology feminism theory, which underlies several forms of social structure and oppression experienced by women. This research intends to reveal women oppression reflected in the novel. There are two points to be discussed i.e. social structure and the form of oppression on women during the Trojan war as reflected in *The Silence of the Girls*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Sociology

Sociology studies the relationship between humans and society. Sociology is a science that discusses the nature, behaviour, and development of society, social processes, and social system. Sociology comes from a combination of Latin and Greek which means to tell about friends or society (Doda, 2005: 3). Viktoriya & Lyudmila (1857: 95–96), Auguste Comte in his book *Cours De Philosophie Positive* in 1830 stated the symptoms of society based on rational thinking and that sociology is a branch of science that studies human instincts in life with other people. Comte leads people not to believe in superstition or the supernatural, which is illogical for humans.

Spencer in Offer (2019: 8) stated that the main sociological objects are family, religion, industry, politics, and social control. Sociology is intended to understand society that social inequality is unavoidable or natural due to social evolution from a primitive society to an industrial society. Marx in Guy (2023: 1) proposed Marxism theory. This theory divide society into to the economic, social, and political system called Marxism. The study of Marxism is a social conflict between employers and workers. The employer class

is the Bourgeois, while the working class is the proletariat. Marx argued that economics is not natural selection that distinguishes between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but from this development, social class is very influential for society.

Sociological studies explain the relationship between humans and life, which studies groups, societies, traditions, beliefs, behaviour, and culture that form a social group. In the sociology study, there are institutional arrangements that make the interaction between people, which is called social structure (Porpora, 1989: 197).

## **Social Structure**

Social structure in sociology is the relationship of people interacting and living together. The components of the social structure are humans consisting of men and women. In society, there are differences between men and women in carrying out life roles. Social structure raises issues of class, gender roles, and culture as social constructions related to social structures (Martin, 2015).

### **1. Class**

Social class determines the position held by individuals or groups. The social class forms a prominent social inequality in society. Sheppard & Glassman (2011: 405) Karl Marx proposed the existence of social class creates inequality among people. In the social structure, men and women are impacted by inequality because of social class in society, especially women. Women are second creatures after men, so men are superior in social class. Many women became laborers and enslaved people because there was no justice for women.

### **2. Gender Role**

According to Blackstone (2003: 335) gender is the difference between men and women seen based on socio-cultural construction. Gender is also a cultural concept that distinguishes roles, behaviours, and emotional characteristics between men and women. Gender is often associated with sex, but the two are different. Sex is used to see the differences between women and men from a biological point of view, while gender focuses more on social and cultural aspects or the development of one's masculinity and femininity (Tollan & Evans, 2019: 6). Gender has a role in society, and this forms the social structure of gender role. According to Eagly & Wood (2016: 459) the roles between men and women in society are very different. Men and women are placed differently in social roles. Traditional women's roles place women to stay at home, take care of children and the house. Women's activities are very limited when outside the home. Women will be considered strange if they work or dominate a group because women's roles have always been limited. Only men are allowed to roam, and men will feel free to do as they please, whereas women more likely to fill household roles.

### 3. Culture

According to Rosaldo (1974: 19–23), socio-culture is a factor in the formation of social structures. Culture is a habit that shapes a society in treating its people. Culture is very influential for the social order and social structure in society. Culture shapes perspectives in society, just like women. Traditional women's culture has always stayed at home because of its position as the second creature after men, making women's perspective the second creature after men to become a culture. So culture is very influential for the social structure in shaping the perspective of society towards social individuals (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 201). In the Greek era, it shows the existence of an inferior and superior system in its society. So the culture that differentiates men and women has been applied since the Greek era (Persson, 2016: 4).

### Sociology Feminism

Feminist sociology theory develops from general feminist theory, which discusses human life, namely women as objects. The influence of feminists on sociology has encouraged sociology to relate issues to gender and women's lives. Sociology Feminism is a study developed in the middle of 1970s (Rosenberg & Howard, 2008: 675). According to Laurenson & Swingewood (1972: 84) the approach of feminist sociology in literary studies uses a feminist perspective, social issues and power that is not profitable for women. The study of the sociology feminism is formed based on the view that there is gender inequality which is a social construction in society that displays male dominance over women.

### Oppression on Women

According to Deutsch (2006: 10), oppression is a crime that is repeated, widespread, and systemic, such as slavery and sexual objects. As Fauzia and Rahayu (2019) despite numerous efforts to uplift and empower women, discriminatory practices against them continue to persist, and the root causes of such discrimination have not been fully eradicated. Everyone is being oppressed, but most of the people being oppressed are women. This is because men think women are weak, and because of that they cheat and take advantage of women because of their sexuality. Pramesti and Supsiadji (2022) women endeavor to advocate for their fundamental rights as individuals. This struggle begins with addressing minor issues like discrimination in their surroundings and extends to encompass a myriad of other challenges, including securing political rights, addressing economic disparities, and tackling various other pertinent matters. During the Roman and Greek eras, women were considered both the property of men and their sexual objects. The oppression of women is one of the most frequently mentioned problems, especially during the Greek conflict, because women became completely powerless under the oppression they suffered.

The oppression on women has occurred in Greek because women are always positioned below men. Women were already oppressed before the war by their society, but things got worse when the war happened (Tavassoli & Mirzapour, 2014: 30). According to Cudd (2006: 60), women always experience oppression by male society because they have been indoctrinated that men are the most dominant and women must serve men. In the end, women were objects of oppression and sexual objects of society and men in Greek times.

## 1. Sexual Object

Women always become sexual objects for men. Objectification theory by Fredrickson & Roberts (1997: 174) explains that women are sexually widespread in society, because sexual objectification refers to women as sexual objects due to their sexual parts or sexual functions. Women are used as sexual objects not because they are beautiful but because women's body shape is their sexual object. Labelled as sexual objects in society is very detrimental to women. Women experience sexual harassment, rape and sexual violence in everyday life (Calogero, 2012: 574).

## 2. Slavery on Women

Slavery has been common since World War II. Slavery occurred because of differences in social class and inequality in gender, which eventually led to slavery. Sexual autonomy is attached to slavery, and men, forced labour, and deprivation of liberty control women. Slavery by men is to limit women's movement and force them to do sexual work without the word "rape", which is the work of an enslaved person is serving her Master (Argibay, 2003: 2).

## 3. METHOD

This research applies descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is a research that investigates the quality of materials, activities, situations, and relationships related to collection and analysis techniques, especially non-numerical (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010: 78). This research discusses oppression on women reflected in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*. The data are quotation taken from the novel and the analysis technique applied is descriptive. Therefore, descriptive qualitative method is suitable for this study.

Data collection in this study done by reading and understanding the plot of the novel *The Silence of the Girls*, marking the quotations that are relevant to the research objectives, taking notes and classifying the data based on the topics of the research so that the data analysis procedure is easier. In addition, this study applies extrinsic approach. According to Wellek & Warren (1949: 37) extrinsic approach includes sociology, psychology, ideology, moral values, and society which covers the broad outside of literary works. The extrinsic approach applied is sociology feminism. Sociology feminism is suitable to be applied in this study because the study focused on the form of oppression on women due to social structure.

Data analysis procedures in this research are divided in three steps. The first step is analyzing the list of data that has been grouped based on the topics of analysis. The second step is interpreting the condition of women who experience oppression based on the research problem. The last step is drawing conclusion based on the result of the analysis.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Social Structure in *The Silence of the Girls*

A society consists of men and women, who interact and eventually forms a different social structure based on status. *The Silence of the Girls* reflects the social structure of Greek society. The social structure of the society put women as the inferior and men as

the superior. Due to this structure, oppression to women happens. Women are treated as sexual object and slave by men. The novel reflects that the social structure in Greeks society occurs in three forms i.e. social structure based on class, gender role, and culture.

### **Social Structure Based on Class**

Different social classes are factors that are most identical to the social structure in society, which shows the existence of social inequalities between communities. The social class structure in *The Silence of The Girls* contains differences and class inequality between men and women. Men are first class, while women are second class. This class can be identified based on how the men treated women treatment shown by men. This is reflected in Achilles with his luxurious life, while the women live very badly at the camp.

Achilles dined off gold plates, rested his feet in the evenings on a footstool inlaid with ivory, slept under bedcovers embroidered with gold and silver thread. Every morning, as he combed and braided his hair—and no girl ever dressed more carefully for her wedding day than Achilles for the battlefield (Barker, 2018: 34).

The quotation shows Achilles' luxurious life, being able to eat in peace, having abundant possessions, sleeping in a comfortable place, and still looking good. While women have to go about their daily lives and sleep in slum camps.

That's what I could see, but the captive women—were confined to the camp. Fifty thousand fighters and their attendant slaves were crammed onto that strip of land. The huts were small, the paths between them narrow, everything cramped—and yet that space seemed infinite, because the camp was our entire world (Barker, 2018: 35).

The social class between Achilles and the women in the camp is very different. Achilles' position as a man is much better than a woman. Men as the first class, show a life of luxury and can do whatever they want. While women are second class, they have to sleep in cramped places with thousands of enslaved people and soldiers who have a bad life as slaves.

### **Social Structure Based on Gender Role**

Women and men have different roles based on social structure in society. Women's and men's daily lives, responsibilities, and duties are very different. When a society is differentiated based on gender roles, it will make the roles between women and men more visible. The role of women in social life is to serve all the needs of men, and they will be punished if they do not carry out their roles and duties properly. It can be seen in Achilles' camp.

But then I thought Achilles would have many slaves, all with different functions: weaving, cooking, preparing his bath, washing bedlinen and clothes...I'd be told soon enough what was expected of me. It was possible that very little would be required beyond what I'd already done. When I thought about my father's young concubine, the one he took after my mother's death, most of her duties had been discharged on her back (Barker, 2018: 27).

The quotation above shows that Achilles has many slaves and differentiated them based on their group and duties. The roles and duties of women are very clear, namely serving men at home, cleaning the house, cleaning the kitchen, washing the clothes, and doing housework. The role of women is to be servants and slaves, while men are free to do anything, and they can leave the house to do activities.

### **Social Structure Based on Culture**

In the socio-cultural structure, Greece applies a culture that men are superior and women are inferior. Greek culture places men far more powerful than women, in which men are the ruling class in their social structure. Greek culture also makes women as gifts to kings who won wars and make them as slaves such as when the women from Lyrnessus are brought to the Greek camp.

We were lined up outside the huts and inspected. Two men, who never spoke except to each other, walked along the line of women, pulling down a lip here, a lower eyelid there, prodding bellies, squeezing breasts, thrusting their hands between our legs. I realized we were being assessed for distribution (Barker, 2018: 17).

The social structure system of the Greek nation can be seen when female captives whose cities fell will be brought to the Greek camp. The women are selected and sorted to become king's slaves, kitchen servants, or thrown into common women. Greek's social structure requires that every king has to get a gift when they fell a city, and women are considered as gift. The warrior who kills the most enemies and the highest Greek warrior will get the most beautiful woman. Meanwhile, women who are not selected will be servants or enslaved people who will be used in turn by soldiers, then abandoned. It is a socio-cultural structural system implemented by Greece for a long time. It also shows the position of men as superior who can treat women however they want, while women must accept the behavior of men.

### **B. Oppression on Women in The Silence of The Girls**

Gender has a relationship with class and inequality, where the oppression on women is considered part of the social structure that controls the system of power because apart from class and economic-based oppression, there is also oppression aimed at women. *The Silence of The Girls* reflects the form of oppression that occurred during the Trojan War. In this novel, Briseis tells about the actions and forms of oppression committed by Greek men from a woman's point of view. In the Greek era, formed an oppression on women regarding sexuality. Women were better known in the Greek era for their sexual objects and slavery. The positioning system of women under men makes the oppression on women happen.

### **Women as a Sexual Object**

Making women as sexual objects is an oppression on women. In *The Silence of The Girls*, men oppress women by being made sexual objects. Briseis sees the oppression of

women as sexual objects when Greek warriors defeat Lyrnessus and find female captives hiding in the basement, and then the men rape the women.

The slave women in the basement were dragged out first. Still watching from the roof, I saw a woman raped repeatedly by a gang of men who were sharing a wine jug, passing it good-naturedly from hand to hand while waiting their turn (Barker, 2018: 14).

The quotation shows the rape of women by Greek men as a celebration of victory for having brought down their city. Men torture women by taking turns raping them with other men until the woman dies. “Her two sons, lay wounded and dying a few yards away from her, she kept stretching out her hands and calling their names as first one and then the other died. I turned away; I couldn’t bear to go on watching (Barker, 2018: 14)”. The above quotation shows the sadistic and cruel actions of men against women. Raping them in turns and torturing women until they die is oppression based on women as sexual objects. Oppression and torture of women occur because men feel they are more powerful than women, so that men can be arbitrary to women.

### **Slavery on Women**

Slavery on women is a form of oppression on women based on gender. Slavery was common for Women in the Greek era, as reflected in Briseis and the Women who were the slaves of each of their Masters. They must obey their Master's orders to do whatever their Master wants.

I hated serving drinks at dinner, though of course it didn’t matter to Achilles whether I hated it or not and, curiously, it soon stopped mattering to me. This is what free people never understand. A slave isn’t a person who’s being treated as a thing. A slave is a thing, as much in her own estimation as in anybody else’s (Barker, 2018: 35).

The quotation explains how Briseis represents an enslaved person. For her, a slave is beyond help, even the voices of the slaves will never be heard. The slave only needs to be silent and not immediately refuse her master's orders. Briseis, who feels uncomfortable serving drinks, will ignore by Achilles because Briseis' status is only as a slave who is obliged to serve her master when asked. Slaves are objects that can be moved at any time and belong to anyone, so a slave can not expect much and obey the master's orders and remain silent.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Women experience oppression based on the social structure of society in the Greek era, as reflected in *The Silence of The Girls* by Pat Barker's. Social structure is a social component of society that combines the social structure of men and women in one community environment, but each has its position in the structure of society. This refers to the life between men and women who have different positions in society, even though they live in the same environment. Meanwhile, oppression refers to the position and role of women in society in the Greek era.

The writer found that women and men have different positions in social society, where men are social beings whose degree is higher than women. The needs of men must be prioritized, while women are ignored. The social structure in Greece makes women's position even lower because of the Greek system, which makes men a position of power while women are in a weak position. In the end, women tend to experience oppression, which is reflected in Greek society's daily lives. The findings in this study indicate that the oppression on women during the Trojan War happens due to the social structure brought by the Greeks that make women experience the oppression in society.

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