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**EXISTENTIALIST FEMINISM OF “WOMEN’S SITUATION”
IN PARK JOON-HWA’S *BECAUSE THIS IS MY FIRST LIFE***

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Abstract

Existentialist feminism is the idea of women being able to express themselves freely in both personal and social activities without being haunted by their existence as women. This can be seen in one of Simone de Beauvoir's concepts, "women's situations" which refers to the conditions, situations, and experiences of women in a particular society or culture. This research uses feminist theory by Simone de Beauvoir with the concept of Women's Situations. This concept is used to solve the first problem; a representation of “women’s situations” in the 21st century and the second issue; the women’s movement in dealing with the situation of women. The results of this research can be seen through a description of the "women's situation" faced by women in the 21st century, such as the challenges of married women and women in professional work environments. In addition, this research also points to the women's movement which tries to be authentic by maintaining its existence in accordance with its values and beliefs to get out of the "women's situations".

Keywords: existentialist feminism, women’s situations, South Korea

I. INTRODUCTION

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Existentialist feminism is the idea of women being able to carry out various activities both in private and social life. If women can express themselves as women, that is existential feminism. In another sense, existentialist feminism is an ideology which women can express themselves freely or have the power to not be haunted by being a woman. Existentialist feminism has a relationship with women's situations because it seeks to address this imbalance by examining how existentialist concepts intersect with the unique experiences and challenges faced by women. These challenges can be seen in the concept of women's situation by Simone de Beauvoir.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The researcher found two previous studies of the same literary work but with different theories and three previous studies with different literary works and concepts of the theory. The researcher takes five of these studies to be compared with the research the researcher does. The first research is entitled "Representation of Women in The Power of Patriarchal Culture in

Korean Drama entitled Because This Is My First Life (Helene Cixous's Patriarchal Binary Thought)." This research is written by Eka Herlina from Andalas University in 2022. The purpose of this research is to provide an overview of women in the challenges of patriarchy and the struggle to face discrimination as well as the challenges of themselves from the binary opposition of patriarchy. The researcher used the perspective of Helene Cixous through a cultural studies approach. The findings of this research are representative of the changing roles and views of traditional patriarchal values in South Korea, and binary patriarchal values are not fully compatible based on the patriarchal opposition of Helene Cixous.

The second research is entitled "Kriteria Citra Perempuan Ideal dan Krisis Identitas Perempuan dalam Drama Because This Is My First Life." This research is written by Moza Desy Azzari from Gadjah Mada University in 2021. In this research, Azzari discussed the existence of image criteria of ideal women and women's identity crisis experienced by Yoon Ji-ho in the drama. This research applied the feminist approach proposed by Betty Friedan: *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The results of this

research indicate that Yoon Ji Ho has to meet the criteria of the ideal woman's image and her own mother experiences a woman's identity crisis.

The third research is entitled "The Ambiguity of Woman Transcendence in Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of Geisha*." This research is written by Camelia Putri Zainil from STBA Prayoga Padang in 2021. This research discussed the process that triggers the ambiguity of the main female character. It applies the feminist approach proposed by Simone de Beauvoir. The result of this research is the ambiguity of the main character's transcendence.

The fourth research is "Existentialist Feminism Reflected in Acevedo's *With the Fire on High*." This research is written by Berya Kamayan Adi Martinus and Linusia Marsih from Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya in 2022. In this research, they discussed character portraits the domestication of women and how Emoni Santiago embraces her circumstances and being a woman in the novel. It applies the feminist approach proposed by Simone de Beauvoir and the result of this research is manifestations of Emoni Santiago's existence are referred to as the transcendence of women in modern

society. The fifth research is "Existentialist Feminism of Woman's Struggle in *Cigarette Girl Novel*." This research is written by Faidah Yusuf and Muh. Iskandar Susilo from UIN Alauddin Makassar in 2020. In this research, they describe the resistance of woman's struggle in *Cigarette Girl Novel* by using a feminist approach to Simone de Beauvoir's theory. The result of this research is all the things that are pointing to women as being inferior to males, such as having second sex, being retarded, limited, weak, hazy, and even disappear. At last, this research differs from all previous studies for several reasons. Firstly, the title of this research is "Existentialist Feminism of Women's Situation in *Because This Is My First Life* by Park Joon-Hwa." This research focuses on women's situation while the five previous studies focus on patriarchy, identity crisis, the ambiguity of women's transcendence, the transcendence of women in modern society, and the inferiority becomes superiority. The second reason is the method of research is the sociological approach with Beauvoir's concept which is women's situation. Meanwhile, one of the previous research used a cultural studies approach and the others used different

feminist theories and concepts such as Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir's ambiguity and transcendence concept.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researcher used mimetic with a feminist approach because it refers to women's situation in South Korean society in 2017. A feminist approach requires support for the voice, agency, and empowerment of women and girls of all diversity and others facing discrimination and marginalization. Furthermore, the researcher used Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. The researcher will use the women's situations concept from Beauvoir's theory which is the married woman, women in childhood, women in social life, and the narcissist. This theory gives attention to showing and proving how the existentialist feminism of women's situations that appear in this series is based on Beauvoir's concept.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1) Women's Situations as Married Women

A woman's existence as a married woman is concerned with her identity and status in the context of marriage. When a woman marries, she assumes

her spouse's role in her married life, and her legal and social status changes accordingly. It is because she is legally recognized as a partner. Beauvoir stated (1949: p. 419) stated that when a woman is married to a man, the woman will take the man's name on the last name becomes his half. For example, a woman has their own name but when she gets married, her name changes into her husband's name. In this case, a woman's identity is often closely related to her marital status and becomes dependent on man. Being a married woman can affect how she is perceived and treated in her community, family, and social circles.

A dependent woman refers to a woman who relies on others for various aspects of her life, such as financial support, decision-making, emotional well-being, or meeting basic needs. Here, the woman depends on man due to her financial problems. These woman in this movie believe that getting married will stabilize their finances and meet their daily needs. Even they quit their job to get married for the financial support from man. The quotation below portrays this situation:

Ji-Ho [in her mind]: The
30-year-old Yoon Ji-Ho
who was born in 1988

didn't get to become a writer, but she took the hand of a man who gave her a discounted rent. I really got married because of housing. [sad tone] (Ep. 6 03:43 – 04:20)

The quotation shows that Ji-Ho chose her way of life to stop working and get married to get a place to live. She buried her dream to be a writer and get a comfortable home to live in due to her economic crisis. This is because society assumes that a man will earn more and be able to support his family at home. As Beauvoir stated (1949: p. 416), a man is mostly seen as a producer, whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group. In another sense, a man often primarily perceived as providers or breadwinners, expected to work outside the home to support their families financially. In addition, the phrase “discounted rent” indicates the reduced rental price of a home. This is common between landlords and tenants. In this context, the unemployed Ji-Ho gets a house with low rent due to his marital relationship. This relatively easy path is attractive to her due to jobs especially open to women are often unpleasant and low-paying. Marriage is, after all, a

more profitable profession than many others (Beauvoir, 1949: p. 420).

Besides Ji-Ho's own choice to stop working, there are also social demands from her parents-in-law who want an educated but unemployed daughter-in-law. This is captured through the quotation below:

Se-Hee to Ji-Ho: They want someone well-educated as the family of teachers. But they don't want to look up their daughter-in-law. You satisfied my parents' hypocritical needs unintentionally. (Ep. 5 27:53)

The quotation above reflects Se-hee's parents' desire to have a well-educated but non-working daughter-in-law. As Hadadian et al said (2015: p. 159), hypocritical means acting contrary to one's beliefs and values. Then, the phrase “hypocritical needs” indicates a situation in which an individual claims to have particular needs and priorities, but acts in a way that contradicts those needs. In other words, they are not sincerely committed to fulfilling these needs but are due to meet family backgrounds with a good education. Therefore, even though women become independent because of their education, in the institution of marriage they still be dependent on the men's family. An educated

daughter-in-law can increase the family's social status and be seen as a symbol of progress and modernity.

However, traditional gender roles assume that women are primarily responsible for household chores. According to Beauvoir (1949: p. 415), women's position due to economic development is about to shake the marriage system. In this case, when women work outside the domestic work, family responsibilities can be neglected and work-life balance can be compromised. Thus, Se-Hee's parents want Ji-Ho to focus on their roles as homemakers and caregivers. This condition is portrayed through the quotation below:

Se-Hee's mom to Se-Hee: You don't know anything about working in the kitchen. Our experts should take care of the housework. Right, Ji-Ho? [look intimidates to Ji-Ho] (Ep. 10 13:38)

The quotation above describes the situation in which Se-hee's mother forbade her son from working in the kitchen, which was designated as a women-only area. The word "expert" reflects a woman who is expected can do anything in the domestic area. As Beauvoir stated (1949: p. 440), housewives took their time in sugar

traps and trapped their lives in jars. In another sense, "sugar trap" may symbolize the allure of domestic life, especially the role of a housewife in the kitchen. The kitchen is often associated with traditional gender roles, and women have traditionally been expected to excel at cooking, baking, and other household chores, including using ingredients such as sugar. Moreover, it states that despite finding fulfillment in their domestic roles, some housewives might have felt confined or limited by societal expectations. A woman who dedicates herself to domestic duties may be unable to explore other opportunities and personal ambitions outside the kitchen.

2) Women's Situations as Working Women

Nowadays, working women can be found in almost every sector of the economy. They play an important role in stimulating innovation, economic growth, and social progress. Regardless of these advances, challenges persist. For example, misogyny practices such as underrepresentation in leadership positions, sexual harassment, and bias in the workplace are some of the issues gender equality advocates continue to address. Misogyny in the workplace

refers to the presence of prejudice, discrimination, and hostility towards women because of their gender. It manifests itself in many different forms, creating a hostile work environment that affects the career development and well-being of women. For example, when women dress up in the office, they will be exaggerated. She even wears a collared shirt and is polite, but is still looked down upon by male colleagues in the office. It can be seen through the quotation below:

Manager: Then why don't you stay for a bit? Soo-Ji: I have a really important meeting. I don't think I can go. I'm sorry.
Manager: What meeting? Who are you meeting? Ahh- [looking at Soo-Ji's body] Are you going on a date? Soo-Ji: [chuckles] No, I'm not.
Manager: Yes, you are. Seeing how you put on makeup and a nice dress says it all. She has a boyfriend [laugh to other co-workers] (Ep. 4 38:55 – 39:35)

The quotation above shows how male colleagues view women who dress up in the workplace. According to Beauvoir (1949: p. 505), "And, in the first place, she must 'make a good

show' where she is herself concerned; in the house, attending to her work, she is merely clothed; to go out, to receive, she 'dresses up'." In this case, a woman should present herself well when going out or attending social events. When she is 'dressed up' means that she puts effort into her appearance by wearing more formal to make a good impression. However, the manager here and other colleagues thought that Soo-Ji's act of dressing did not make a good impression on them. It is proved by the sentence "Are you going on a date?". It indicates that they rather think that Soo-Ji wants to attract the attention of the men around her.

On the other hand, objectification occurs when women are reduced to mere objects of sexual desire, devoid of personality, agency, and humanity. They are portrayed and viewed primarily as tools to please others, rather than as closed individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires. It is a kind of verbal sexual harassment. It can be seen through the quotation below:

Manager: Have you used that app? Someone like you should get at least a diamond rating.
Soo-Ji: Sadly, that didn't happen. Manager: I don't believe you. Isn't that because

you only uploaded pictures of your face? You should upload a picture of your head to toe.

CEO: Really? Are those pictures looking that good?

Manager: Not only smart, but she also has a great feature.

She's an ace. (Ep. 3 33:11 – 33:55)

The quotation above shows the objectification of male superiors to their female employee. The picture shows the manager's way of speaking by pointing toward Soo-Ji's sensitive body area. When Soo-Ji is trying to dress up to make her become an independent individual, she even becomes material objectification of men. The sentence "...she also has a great feature" indicates how men perceive working women. They do not make women their colleagues but make women material to be enjoyed for their beauty. According to Beauvoir (1949: p. 506), clothing that can camouflage the body, distort or follow its curves; in any case it highlights it. In this case, clothing that reflects an individual does not apply to women. Whatever clothes women wear, will only highlight the sensitive parts. Then, the phrase "diamond rating" reflects a compliment in a bad way for a woman. It is because Soo-Ji

who is praised and judged here is not about her quality of work, but the shape of her curves.

In conclusion, women will experience a different situation for women. According to society, women marry to help the economy. Instead, women will be objectified by their husbands and parents-in-law. Meanwhile, working women face challenges in the form of verbal and physical sexual harassment.

3) Women's Movement to Escape "Women's Situations"

The women's movement is intimately connected with women's authenticity. In existentialism, authenticity refers to living in balance with one's true self, values, and personality. As Beauvoir stated (1949: p. 597), narcissism is a clearly defined process in which the ego is seen as the ultimate goal and the subject takes refuge there. In other words, women are always placed next to the word narcissism as a form of self-assertion to become an authentic person. An authentic person takes responsibility for their choices, actions, and lives, and actively shapes their existence according to their own values and beliefs. With a woman's courage to make her own decisions, she succeeded to maintain her existence by

trying to be an authentic person. It can be seen through the quotation below:

Sang-Goo: Gosh, we finally finished market research. You worked hard. Soo-Ji: I still have a lot left to do. I have to prepare the website and discuss samples with the designer. (Ep.

16 15:07 – 15:20)

The quotation above shows how persistent Soo-Ji is in preparing for the business she is about to start. The sentence “I still have a lot left to do. I have to prepare the website and discuss samples with the designer.” indicates Soo-Ji's efforts as the leader and founder of the company in building her business. This is a rare situation as a company is usually led by a male. Men are considered a perfect creation, never emotional, and cold enough (Beauvoir, 1949: p. 525). In this case, society believes that women are emotional creatures so they cannot become a leader. However, Soo-Ji managed to break this assumption. Beauvoir (1949: p. 597) stated that she is busy, but she does nothing; she is not recognized as an individual through her functions as wife, mother, and housekeeper. In another sense, she managed to escape from the situation of women who dropped in society by proving that she

can also become a leader and be recognized in society. She doesn't want to be an employee in a domestic area who just being nothing in society. In addition, women also try to be authentic when they can voice their opinions without the influence of others. They are able to make choices based on their own desires and values, rather than conforming to societal expectations that may not align with their original selves. Where it is usually the man who arranges the marriage, so women are reluctant to have an opinion. Here a woman can argue and take action according to what she wants. It is reflected in the quotation below:

Ji-Ho [in her mind]: We revise our contract every year. But the most important condition never changes. Our love is the first priority (Ep. 16 1:30:07)

The quotation above shows Se-Hee and Ji-Ho making a marriage contract that is revised every year. This reflects how Ji-Ho as a woman maintains her authenticity by participating in making marriage institutional agreements. According to Beauvoir (1949: p. 598) “If she can thus offer herself to her own desires, it is because she has felt herself an object since childhood.” This statement reflects Ji-Ho's past as a

girl who could not express her opinion, but after getting an education outside the home, Ji-Ho managed to be herself and live according to her wishes. It is proved by the sentence “We revised our contract every year.” which requires the agreement of both of them. In other words, Ji-Ho will no longer be an object because she managed to live with her attempt to be authentic. As women love themselves more than anyone else, they will put their happiness or desire first (Beauvoir, 1949: p. 597).

In short, women can escape from the women’s situations they live in by making a movement in the form of becoming an authentic person. An authentic person is someone who is themselves without considering the opinions of others. This can be done by having the courage to make own decisions and the courage to voice their opinion without feeling embarrassed by being a woman.

V. CONCLUSION

Existentialist feminism is an ideology when women can express themselves freely or have the power to not be haunted by being a woman. This freedom of women can be seen in the concept of women's situation by Simone de Beauvoir. Women’s

situation is the term that generally refers to the conditions, situations, and experiences of women in a particular society or culture. These include factors such as women's legal rights, economic opportunities, social status, access to education and health care, and freedom from discrimination, violence, and oppression. In this research, the researcher found that women in South Korea still experience challenges and differences through “women’s situations”. It makes the difficulties for women to maintain their existence in life. The representative of "women’s situations" can be seen from two sides; women’s situations as married women and women’s situations as working women.

Women’s situations as a married woman is concerned with her identity and status in the context of marriage which results in women losing their identity from being independent to being dependent on men. It includes society beliefs that getting married will stabilize their finances so they want to quit their job to get married. In return, women should be educated person to increase the family’s social status and be responsible for household chores. While working women can be found in almost every sector of the economy and play an important role. However,

challenges still exist; misogyny such as underrepresentation in leadership positions, sexual harassment, and bias in the workplace. Therefore, women made the movement that aims to create a world where women can thrive and prosper, free from the constraints imposed by traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Women is an authentic person who takes responsibility for their choices, actions, and lives, and actively shapes their existence according to their own values and beliefs. With a woman's courage to make her own decisions, she succeeded to maintain their existence in becoming an authentic person such as being recognized as a CEO with a big profit and voicing their own opinions. In short, women in the contemporary era still experience obstacles such as women's situations. Every woman will experience different women's situations that will threaten her existence as an individual. It makes women carry out movements by maintaining their authenticity by living according to their expectations and beliefs regardless of social opinion. It is because women love themselves more than anything. In the end, they managed to achieve its existentialist feminism.

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