

Existentialist Feminism Reflected in Acevedo's "With the Fire on High"

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ABSTRACT

In patriarchal societies, women are typically considered inferiors, leading to feminist movements. There are many different schools of feminism, including liberal, Marxist and socialist, existentialist, radical, and so forth. This research focuses on existentialist feminism as it is presented in Elizabeth Acevedo's *With the Fire on High* (2019). This research looks at how Emoni Santiago's character portrays the domestication of women and how Emoni Santiago embraces her circumstances and being a woman in the novel. Existentialist feminism, advocated by Simone de Beauvoir is used to examine Emoni's portrayal as a genuine woman who can exist. Feminist theory is used in this descriptive qualitative research study. Due to her ability to do household and public activities, the outcome demonstrates that Emoni exemplifies existentialist feminism. She succeeds in overcoming her dependence on and subordination to men regarding her economic state, personal decisions, and marriage. All possible manifestations of Emoni Santiago's existence are referred to as the transcendence of women in modern society. Emoni can eliminate labels for women like second sex and the Other by attaining a level of transcendence. Existentialist feminism can be fully realized by women being able to do a variety of tasks or positions in the private and public spheres because they are aware of what it means to be present as a woman in society. Next, having a strong desire to do or create something can be used by women to justify their existence in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: existentialist feminism, transcendence, *With the Fire on High*

ABSTRACT

Dalam masyarakat patriarki, perempuan biasanya dianggap inferior, yang akhirnya memunculkan gerakan feminis. Ada banyak aliran feminisme yang berbeda, termasuk liberal, Marxis dan sosialis, eksistensialis, radikal, dan sebagainya. Penelitian ini berfokus pada feminisme eksistensialis seperti yang disajikan dalam *With the Fire on High* (2019) karya Elizabeth Acevedo. Penelitian ini melihat bagaimana karakter Emoni Santiago menggambarkan domestikasi wanita dan bagaimana Emoni Santiago merangkul keadaannya dan menjadi seorang wanita dalam novel. Feminisme eksistensialis yang dianjurkan oleh Simone de Beauvoir digunakan untuk memeriksa penggambaran Emoni sebagai wanita sejati yang bisa eksis. Teori feminis digunakan dalam penelitian kualitatif deskriptif ini. Karena kemampuannya untuk melakukan kegiatan di ruang rumah tangga dan publik, hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa Emoni mencontohkan feminisme eksistensialis. Dia berhasil mengatasi ketergantungannya pada dan tunduk pada laki-laki mengenai keadaan ekonomi, keputusan pribadi, dan pernikahannya. Semua manifestasi yang mungkin dari keberadaan Emoni Santiago disebut sebagai transendensi wanita dalam masyarakat modern. Emoni dapat menghilangkan

label untuk wanita seperti seks kedua dan Lainnya dengan mencapai tingkat transendensi. Feminisme eksistensialis dapat sepenuhnya diwujudkan dengan perempuan mampu melakukan berbagai tugas atau posisi di ruang privat dan publik karena mereka sadar apa artinya hadir sebagai perempuan dalam masyarakat. Selanjutnya, memiliki keinginan yang kuat untuk melakukan atau menciptakan sesuatu dapat digunakan oleh perempuan untuk membenarkan keberadaan mereka dalam masyarakat patriarki.

Kata kunci: Feminisme eksistensialis, Transendensi, *With the Fire on High*

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic Women are frequently positioned lower in patriarchal societies (Fauzia & Rahayu, 2019: 2). According to Bhasin (2006:3), the term patriarchal is now more commonly used to refer to male dominance, power dynamics in which men dominate women, and a system in which women are kept submissive in a variety of ways. The patriarchal system has become the feminist movement's most prominent reason. Feminism is a social movement dedicated to the end of sexism, sexist exploitation, and women's oppression (Hook, 2000: 1). This movement called out all of the citizens all around the world to fight a thing that calls women second class in society, which is known as the patriarchal system. Women's understanding of their rights has evolved in many countries throughout the world since the first wave of feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which establish to represent a movement aimed at achieving legal, economic, and social equality between men and women, as well as ending sexism and male oppression of women (Publishing & Mangan, 2019: 1). There are various schools of feminism such as liberal feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, existentialist feminism, radical feminism, and so on. But the one that is going to talk about in this research is existentialist feminism.

According to Panza and Gale (2008: 28), existentialism is a philosophical notion that allows people to live genuinely human lives in an absurd and pointless world. It is essentially a hunt for a person's condition of being, their state of liberty, and their continuous use of that liberty. Furthermore, a researcher named Raosaheb (2016: 13) explains that existentialists use the term "existence" to refer to human existence. The belief that only a concrete object may exist is commonly held. A person is described as a concrete individual capable of existence by existentialists. It can be concluded from the previous two statements that existentialism believes that humans can exist. It implies the existence of men, women, children, and adults. When it comes to women, a woman will demonstrate her existence by displaying her state of being, liberation, and continuous use of that liberty. When women can present themselves as what women are, this is what existentialist feminism is all about. Existentialism can define characters' existence in a novel, short tale, or other literary work. In this context, the writer of this study focuses on female literature that shows the presence of a female character. Women's literature and culture, particularly for women writers, can be a rich source of academic study in a range of works, including novels, novellas, short stories, poetry, and so on.

The data in this framework is taken from Elizabeth Acevedo's novel *With the Fire on High*. It depicts the hardship of a young mother named Emoni who is falling in love with cooking. Unfortunately, she became pregnant at the age of fourteen and gave birth to a child at such a young age. Her mother died shortly after giving birth to her, therefore she now lives with her grandmother. Her father is a busy man who hasn't visited her since her mother died. So, from that time, she lives with her grandmother. After her pregnancy, she lives for her child.

The only thing that she thinks about is only cooking and her child. She has to raise her child with her grandmother while she also has to go to school take the Culinary Art program, run for her dreams and she also has to work to earn money for herself and her child, and her grandmother. This novel takes the culinary's theme and existentialist feminism based on Simone de Beauvoir's concept. According to Simone de Beauvoir's book theory *The Second Sex*, existentialist feminism is more of a "reflection" than a prescription for how women should act. It contains existentialism simply because Beauvoir links to the notion that experience is the primary building element of self-discovery. So, existentialism feminism is a school with an in-depth examination of what being a woman means.

This study focuses on exposing existentialist feminism reflected in Emoni Santiago's character. It examines the domestic roles in Emoni Santiago's life and her transcendence to embrace women's destiny, history, and myth in *With the Fire on High*. Thus, this study has two objectives of the study which are to describes the domestic role of women that are depicted in Emoni Santiago's life and to explain Emoni Santiago's ways of embracing her conditions and exist in the public sphere through a state of transcendence in *With the Fire on High*.

METHOD

This study highlights a female character's existentialist feminism in the novel. It depicts a young, single mother accepting her circumstances for existence in both the private and public realms. In this study, qualitative research is used. The descriptive qualitative approach is intended to characterize anything that has an implicit or explicit connection to the study issue, according to Lambert & Lambert (2012: 255). This study deconstructs and strives to examine the feature of interest in Emoni Santiago's character and Emoni's struggle to achieve equality with men in Elizabeth Acevedo's *With The Fire on High*, hence descriptive qualitative methodology is appropriate. The researcher uses the extrinsic approach in this study to identify, classify, analyze, interpret, and evaluate a woman's journey to obtain her existence in the patriarchal society in the novel. The extrinsic approach, according to Wellek and Warren (1977: 139), is focused on topics outside of literary works, such as feminism, religion, culture, psychology, and so forth. The extrinsic technique is used in this case since the text of the novel, which illustrates how existentialist feminism is described in Emoni Santiago's character, serves as the principal instrument in the study. This research employs feminist criticism since the study examines women's issues experienced by Emoni Santiago, which is in line with Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women's lives today can transcend all boundaries in society that restrict women by doing a state of transcendence. Women can go beyond being equal to men through 4 tactics - women can work, become intellectuals, and play roles that make them transformative agents and independent.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

EXISTENTIALIST FEMINISM IN EMONI SANTIAGO'S LIFE

Women always said to the inferior and weaker than men. Simone de Beauvoir states destiny, history, and myths about women have appeared in the patriarchal society for years. They assume women to be the inferior, the weaker, the 'Other', the 'Object', and the second sex from men. It is because some women's conditions make them look weak. In this chapter, some data

will explain how Emoni appears as the real woman who can exist in the domestic spheres through the women's roles of pregnancy, mothering activity and cooking activity.

PREGNANCY

The results This is evident from Emoni's life which decides to become a single mother. Her existence also appears women are human beings with genital aspects that, according to de Beauvoir, they are capable of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Emoni is pregnant and gives birth to Emma or Babygirl, her daughter, because of her intercourse with Tyrone, her ex-boyfriend. Some data in this section confirms that Emoni realises her existence as a woman. She knows that pregnancy is her identity in the female reproduction role.

The data number 1 in appendix 1 reflects existentialist feminism in Emoni's character. When Emoni knows she is pregnant, she keeps intercourse with Tyrone to make sure that their relationship is working well or not. Here, Emoni denotes her existence as a woman who knows what she wants to do with her body. It is her body, it is up to her if she wants to try to make her relationship with Tyrone go well or not, so several times they keep intercourse even though there is a baby inside her womb. She also denotes the existence of a woman who knows and can accept her genital capability, which can reproduce and get pregnant.

Her existence as a woman appears from her conscious if a woman and man, who had intercourse, it will consequence in pregnancy. This condition depicts Emoni's existence as a woman who is firmly in control of her decisions regarding how she should do even though Tyrone and her parents make things difficult. She has a choice of responsibility because it is her body, even though Tyrone and his family abandon her. She presents existentialist feminism from her capability in choosing to take responsibility for the new life in her womb, in her body. Emoni tries to embrace her afraid and deal with it even though she gets labelled weak and naughty because of her pregnancy. Existentialist feminism is reflected in Emoni Santiago's character because, in the end, she is okay with all that happened to her body and her life. She keeps trying to get the solution and know what to do with her body and life. Existentialist feminism appears in Emoni's character because she exists as a brave woman who deals with the conditions she must be faced once she becomes pregnant.

Furthermore, which is still related to the role of women in the domestic sphere, it can also be seen in Emoni taking responsibility for her baby's needs. She knows her existence of being a mother will come after the nine months of pregnancy. That is why she has to consider her readiness to have the baby and the baby's needs, so she is not suffering when she is born. It follows Simone De Beauvoir's theory that a woman's identity as 'the Other' is shaped by her biology, especially her reproductive capacity, and also her socially imposed child-rearing responsibilities (Tong, 2009: 244). Emoni's existence as a woman makes she is forced socially imposed to become an adult woman when Emma or Babygirl was born because she would be a parent. However, it is, being a mother is her new identity. As a result, Emoni must be ready and mature enough to accept the life of her kid, Emma or Babygirl, in place of her own. She knows with her new identity she must let go of her adolescent playing time and embrace her fate as a mother whose task is to give Emma everything, including her life. Emoni is in the same boat.

MOTHERING ACTIVITY

Emoni appears as a mother who has the job of mothering Emma, her daughter. Her existence in the domestication spheres includes not just pregnancy, but also raising kids. The majority of mothering has focused on maternal-child interaction or, more recently, mother-daughter interaction and its effects on child development (Debold, Wilson & Malave in Barlow & Cairns, 1997: 233). Data number 4 in appendix 1 shows the existence of a woman's psychology being a mother after nine months of pregnancy, bringing a new life wherever she goes, giving childbirth and raising her kid alone. This condition considers that Emoni is taking the domestic role in her life as a mother. The mental burden that arises in a woman whose existence is a mother seems very heavy. However, Emoni's life has reflected existentialist feminism because, with various ways women are present through work in the domestic sphere, she has succeeded, in carrying out these domestic roles very well as a woman.

Data number 2 in appendix 1 is evidence of Emoni's existence who can exist in mothering a child but also doing household tasks. The mothering shows Emoni's existence as a good mother. She is mothering her child and providing time to read fairy tales for Emma. Existentialist feminism reflects in Emoni's destiny as a mother to care for her child's life. She real longer had time to think only of herself. But being a mother is her new existence that she has been chosen so it is the consequence if she is not as free as she used to be because now her responsibilities have increased.

COOKING ACTIVITY

The The role of women in the domestic sphere in Emoni Santiago's life is not only seen when she is pregnant and raising children but also in her cooking activities at home. Emoni is considered a woman who has magic hands by Buela. It is her skill in cooking which makes every cook taste so delicious and unique. This means cooking activity is Emoni's identity she can exist as a good cooker.

Data number 3 in appendix 1 denotes Emoni's existence in the culinary field. She presents as a good cooker who has natural skills. She has magical hands like what Buela said from the way she learns about the feel and scent of every cuisine she creates by learning about the ingredients she uses in the kitchen. This denotes Emoni Santiago's existence in domestic spheres including her practice of cooking for her family. She cooks for Buela and Emma while she is practising the menu that she has learnt. She has existed as a woman with a good cooker's identity. She is aware of the fusion and beautification of cooking cuisine. She has realised that there is an art which is perfect for her. Cooking in the kitchen makes her happier than ever. At the same time, cooking makes she can develop her skill. She knows she is talented then she makes cooking become her identity to keep her existence.

Emoni has received some recipes from Aunt Sarah so she can practice the new menu for cooking. She sends the feedback on Aunt Sarah's recipe that she has tried. By emailing Aunt Sarah frequently, Emoni gets the stories about Aunt Sarah and Emoni's mother's childhood pastimes. Aunt Sarah tries to tell Emoni that just like her mother, Emoni is interested in cooking. Every recipe that Aunt Sarah presents to Emoni has enormous significance for Emoni, as evidenced by the letter written by Emoni. She has a natural talent for cooking, and thanks to Aunt Sarah's recipes, she has a better understanding of her mother's life, and the recipes assist Emoni in understanding her mother's family since her mother died shortly after giving birth to her.

EMONI 'S WAYS TO EMBRACE WOMEN'S DESTINY, HISTORY, AND MYTH

Emoni has existed existentialist feminism through her character. She is an existing woman who can present herself by carrying out the duties of a woman during her job as a woman in the domestic sphere. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women's lives today must be capable of transcendence of their role in the domestic sphere as a woman if they want to eradicate their labels in society as 'the Other', the second sex, the weaker or the object for men. Women have to show that they do not just exist in the domestic spheres, such as women taking the role of reproducing, taking care of children, and taking care of the house, but they also can exist and work in the public sphere. Beauvoir states that there are four tactics of transcendence if women want to erase their labels of 'the Other': women can work, become intellectual, play a significant role in a group or where they live, and become independent. Emoni Santiago appears to be working her way through all of these elements and has arrived at the whole of existentialist feminism in her life. The writer will go over each stage in these four sub-sections one by one to better comprehend Emoni Santiago's journey from her transcendence to embracing her condition and existing in public spheres.

THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN

Following Beauvoir's perspective, marriage is a type of slavery for women. Although the two sexes of men and women are dependent on one another, this dependence has never led to reciprocity (Beauvoir, 2014: 502-503). It is in line with what happened to Emoni. When she is declared pregnant, Tyrone and she tell their parents. But Tyrone's parents and also Tyrone himself, are cruel to Emoni. The condition of Emoni is defined as women's slavery. She is faced with the offer of the profession as a mother and a partner to Tyrone. Being a wife and a mother are two feminine roles that limit women's freedom, but at the same time, this role makes women get the professions where they can perform duties typically performed by women (Beauvoir, 2014: 503). It is true that after Emoni being a mother, she can exist and get the professions where she can perform duties typically done by women. But if she gets married to Tyrone at that time and takes the role of a wife, she does not get her existence and right to defend herself. It is because a woman's limited role in domestic and reproductive activities has not been able to grant her an equal sense of dignity (Beauvoir, 2014: 503).

The domination that happened to Emoni by Tyrone and his family is confirmed from data number 4 in appendix 1. She chooses to exist as a single mother, not a wife or girlfriend anymore. She realises that there is no benefit from Emoni's side if she continues her relationship with Tyrone let alone became his wife. Because when Emoni gets Tyrone's responsibility, she has to obey everything that Tyrone and his family say. Again, there is nothing to gain from taking on the role of a life's partner. The public's view of Emoni's pregnancy at teenage age will also not change even if she remains attached to Tyrone and his family. It is because they are not even admitting the guilt of their child and act like a righteous and dignified person, while Emoni seems to be the main suspect and not the victim. That is why Emoni's cornered condition prompted her to decide to exist as a single mother.

She wants to appear as a strong woman who has dignity. Being a single mother is the identity she has chosen. Being a single mother is the profession that makes her exist in domestic and public spheres. Her bravery is considered existentialist feminism. Therefore, Emoni makes a big decision to be independently responsible for her own life choices. She chose to raise the

child in her womb, to be a single mother, without begging Tyrone to be held accountable again. She wants to prove to them that she can be existed as a single woman by raising her kid alone. Emoni's identity is also an orphan since her mother passed away after give her childbirth. Her father, Julio abandons her after her mother is died. Since that times, Emoni lives with Buela, her grandmother. Unfortunately, Buela is disable to work since she gets injured. These conditions make Emoni have a must to work so they can live properly. After she has Emma in her life, her role increases. Emoni is not just an orphan but now also a mother. Her consciousness to work and survive in kinds of situation, confirm her existence as an independent woman who can manage her life alone in the domestic and public spheres.

BEING ABLE TO WORK

Working in patriarchal capitalism was repressive and exploitative, according to Beauvoir, especially if the work required women to work in two shifts: one in the office or factory and another at home. Nonetheless, Beauvoir feels that no matter how difficult and exhausting women's labour is, it still gives a variety of opportunities for women, which, if not pursued, will be lost entirely (Beauvoir, 2014). The phrase in data number 5 in appendix 1 explains that Emoni can work. She works at Burger Joint, a restaurant where she fulfils customers' demands for numerous burgers. She works there to provide for her family. This quotation denotes that Emoni can work even though she is a young mother, a grandchild, and a student. She is capable of working, even though she is required to perform a variety of tasks that are typically not assigned to teenagers. Teenagers normally just hang around and go to school, figure out their dreams, fall in love and expand their horizons, pursue their interests, and chase after their goals. When Emoni is a teenager, she takes on a different role. She must perform tasks that are normally performed by grownups. She has to live with different risks because she doesn't have a father figure or even a husband figure. Simply said, she can live and function normally without the presence of a man in her life. This demonstrates how, like men, Emoni can reclaim their transcendence by working outside the home. Emoni will formally establish their standing as subjects, as individuals who actively shape their future.

THE INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

Being intellectual or well educated is the next thing that important for women if she wants make a change for her life. Beauvoir's argument about why women should be intellectual or well educated. She says that women can become intellectuals and members of organizations that promote gender equality. When a person thinks, perceives, or defines anything, it is considered intellectual activity. Yet, when a person becomes the subject of thought, observation, or definition, it is considered nonactivity. It is in line with Emoni's character that she chooses to be an intellectual or well educated as a woman who left by her father and also her partner.

She considers that being left by a man figure is nothing wrong. The way men do their job, being the head of the family, earning money for the family, all of these activities can be done with women. She wants to do the masculine protest that without man, woman still live their life well. Despite all that, according to Beauvoir, this is a form of women's protest using the term of 'masculine protest' against the arbitrary treatment of men in women's lives. (Beauvoir, 2014: 483).

Emoni is in immense pain when she is pregnant. But she persists, however. She wants to demonstrate that, despite the challenges of being pregnant at the age of a teenager, she can still manage herself properly. She is a freshman, a student, and she performed admirably. Data number 6 in appendix 1 denotes that Emoni is well educated. She still attends the class even though she really hard to concentrate. The way she tries to hang on there, in the class, because she realizes that she has to responsible about the education to be pursued and since she has lots of absence, she tries her best to fulfil it. Moreover, the lines '...my hands still trembling after Culinary Arts...' refers to the excitement of Emoni in school program. She is just not well educated but she also wants to be someone who is mastering the culinary aspect. The Culinary Arts class is among the things that made Emoni want to go to school and stay in school. This program provides a variety of lessons and experiences for Emoni's life, which might vary depending on her cooking abilities and interests.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE AGENT

Emoni's character is that she is courageous, responsible, and a great cook. Her desire to achieve something with her talent and passion for cooking motivates her to be braver than she has been in the past. She also doesn't have time to be unhappy or angry about what has transpired in her life because she is focused on her daughter and also Buela. In the past, everything's been her mistake, and she recognizes that she must take responsibility for her actions. As a result, to realize her aspirations as a creative and fearless woman, Emoni aspires to find success for herself in the culinary arts. Emoni must face various difficulties on her journey to achieve her dream to keep her interest in cooking alive. Her willingness to fight and the fact that she wasn't trapped in a bad circumstance seemed to not affect all this. This demonstrates that if women can make decisions about their own life without being led or pressured by men or others, they can finally be themselves, not the 'Other' and the second sex. She became the central figure in her life, and her existence will soon be as common as that of men. This means, Emoni must have to play a significance role to transcends its boundaries.

Data number 7 in appendix 1 denotes that Emoni uses her passion for cooking to attend the Culinary Arts program. The way Chef Ayden praises Emoni's skills in making the first recipe that he gives to the class, explains that Emoni is playing her first role because she is becoming the centre of attention after being praised by Chef Ayden. She's becoming a role model for her classmates because her recipe is very unique. She even gets advice which advice can be applied by all of the Culinary Arts class members. When she finally finds herself following the instruction well, she has a courage more to give her voice in that class.

CONCLUSION

From the result of the analysis, it can be inferred that existentialist feminism is reflected in Emoni Santiago's life. It finds that as a woman living in a patriarchal society, Emoni can exist in the domestic and public spheres. She also achieves equality by achieving a state of transcendence. Emoni's state of transcendence is shown through four tactics – working, becoming an intellectual or being educated, playing a significant role in being a transformative agent, and being independent. Her passion for cooking and her life journey encouraged her to keep existing as a woman in all aspects. Her consciousness to make a change in her life and her passion for cooking becomes the instrument of her existence. She has thus established that she is an independent woman who can handle the responsibilities of working, being an educated

woman, and playing a big role in a group or community. As a result, Emoni Santiago is a woman who can appear as a real woman. Emoni Santiago's character presented the idea of existentialist feminism.

The writer finds that a woman must be extraordinarily talented and brave to transcend all boundaries to exist. It means women have to be capable to equal to men by doing tasks in the public sphere not only in the domestic, to exist. With the ability to carry out various professions or roles in the domestic and public spheres, existentialist feminism can be fully achieved because women understand what it means to appear as a woman in society. Next, having a strong desire to do or create something can be used by women to justify their existence in a patriarchal society.

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