Resilient yet Muted Feminine Depicted in Serat Centhini: A Contemporary Disruptive Era Reading

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Abstract. This paper presents the methodology, methods and philosophical basis for ongoing studies on domestic violence or intimate partner violence placing focus on women as victims of violence. Regarding the actual issues that are relevant to the situation of mitigating this pandemic, preliminary studies have been carried out on previous research with related topics and it is argued that little attention has been placed on the female subject herself. The study of research methods with a qualitative approach is a follow-up study of phenomenological methods in research that aims to describe (1) how women experience violence in their daily lives (2) how women perceive the violence they experience. The author argues that the description of experiences that are specifically designed according to the situation of women who are narrated, is a method that is in line with achieving goals which ultimately offers a solution about (3) how women can get out of violent situations, which will be presented as a result of research that utilized literary works as objects. Thus, this paper is intended as a dissemination in the hope of stimulating discussion about the chosen method approach.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Lived Experience, Literary Work, Phenomenological Qualitative Approach

1   Introduction

The oppression of women, which in fact has come a long way since the second wave of the feminist movement initiated Beauvoir [1] through her book *Le Deuxième Sexe*, is still looming. There have been many important roles and positions in the public realm that have been occupied by women. In addition to the increasingly real public role, women also taken up their roles and obligations in the domestic sphere by taking care of all the details of household affairs. However, with the increase in welfare in terms of equality, many faces of oppression against women still occurs. Then since the end of 2019 the Covid-19 virus emerged and rapidly spread globally and became a pandemic. An effective measure to contain the spread is to put distance between one individual and another and minimize activities outside the home. All family members carry out their activities at home. The intensity of interaction between family members, including husbands and wives, increased drastically from what was previously relatively intense in the morning and evening and on weekends to any time of the day. This sudden change in routine that immediately enforced, gives rise to new developments that can be positive or negative. One of the negative changes in the situation is the increase in domestic violence with female victims or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Numerical data from Komnas Perempuan shows 299,911 cases of violence against women in 2020. A decrease from 2019 but according to the Chair of Komnas Perempuan in his remarks

at the launch this "reflects more on the capacity of documentation than the real condition of violence against women during the pandemic which tends to increase" [2]. The fact that there is an increasing trend is also obtained from articles in numerous media networks, as also stated in the remarks of the Chairperson of Komnas Perempuan that the numerical 2020 data that was obtained is the tip of the iceberg, there are far more cases that are not reported due to various reasons and constraints. In connection with the increasing trend of domestic violence or IPV during the pandemic, various researches and studies are conducted to analyze and offer solutions [3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10][11][12][13][14][15]. IPV is indeed an important issue that urgently in needs to be immediately addressed by the government which is deploying all efforts to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is in connection with the overshadowing issue of IPV in contemporary women's existence (public and private) aspiring an ideal equality atmosphere, that indicate a necessary measure remains needed. A literature review conducted on various current studies focusing on IPV shows divers responsive ideas: a fast-moving special campaigns and programs to prevent domestic violence [10][11], assistance centers that are easily accessible to victims [4]; improving communication related to reporting unfavorable conditions in the household through the call center of the relevant agency [12][13]; innovations and alternative interventions to help victims of IPV by tele-health or communicating with psychiatrists online [14]; family members need a social management and the importance of each family member awareness of their respective positions in the context of an equal family [9][15]. The solutions offered have mainly proposed maximizing external assistance and intervention, only the last two authors propose self-reinforcement, the domain that is further related with this paper. Thus, in this project, the author conducts a study aiming to propose internal reinforcement by first, investigating and understanding the woman's lived experience. As underlined [16], investigating and understanding the everyday world of women's experience is paramount to feminist research. This endeavor then is carried out by applying phenomenological approach, a method to study experience as they experienced.

Interrelatedness between women and women's state of oppression as victim are brought together by Simone Beauvoir in literary works. According to Beauvoir [1], literature is a form of communication which in this issue revolves around the question of solitude and sorrow [17]. The author, in this study focus more in another question related, voicelessness. Utilizing 2nd volume of adaptation of *Serat Centhini* (a 19th century chef d'oeuvre) [18] focusing on the same issue, women as a victim of violence by their partner or family member, author reads the similarities in the lived-experience of the characters of resilient yet muted (voiceless) women. Therefore, the phenomenological approach in this study is applied to literature. A preliminary study conducted by the author in the form of literature communication related to the IPV issue shows that phenomenological research methods are still rarely applied. The application of the phenomenological approach to literature instigate a power that real life embodies yet does not usually consider, the power of creativity. This corelate Natanson [19] that in literature the next (future) is programmed and created based on what is experienced in the now (present) by this powerful question, 'What is the essential condition for there being a world?'

The voicelessness of the oppressed women underlined in the study demand a specific phenomenological approach. An approach that could investigate and understand the women's experience on the situation when their voice is muted and unheard. The author then applies Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of husserlian phenomenology which focuses on individual experience through the experience of their body. This last thing was later adopted by Beauvoir [1] who discussed the differences in the existence of women and men first from the body in a biological sense, then experiencing social formation into gender. Phenomenology

Beauvoirian that lean more on the phenomenology of perception Merleau-Pontian, translates the muted voice of the oppressed women into bodily existence to be investigated and understood. Merleau-Ponty's notion on 'body' is primordial and general, before it is gendered, stratified or socialized [20], which consider the best, thus far, as theoretical frame and as guidance in navigating the research steps.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describes (1) the compatibility of Beauvoir-Merleau-Pontian existential phenomenology with feminist key values and principles, especially related to the muted feminine, and (2) its application to one of the characters in *Serat Centhini*.

1.1 Existential Phenomenology

Discussing about Beauvoirian existentialism, one does not disregard mentioning Jean-Paul Sartre, to whom Simone de Beauvoir's existential concept originated as she herself claims. The Sartrean concept related to this research is being-with-other or being with other people. More specifically, this last-mentioned concept is about the authenticity of the individual when he is with other individuals. As quoted by Taylor, Sartre stated that being true to oneself means being true to one's originality. Originality can only be articulated and discovered by the self. In the act of articulating, one is also defining oneself and realizing one's own potentiality. This is the frame of reference of authenticity to the modern ideal, and to the goals of self-fulfilment or self-realization. This understanding gives significance to the idea of "doing your own thing" or "finding your own fulfilment" [21]. In terms of being together with other people (socially), individuals are said to be authentic when their existence is original, in accordance with the real self which is defined in an articulative way. In other words, this authenticity also means freedom. Beauvoir [1] states this authentic state more specifically in relation to women, namely the state of women who are free and honest with themselves. "…*des Françaises les moins poupées,… frondent ouvertement les mœurs… se rit des conventions, des murs, des lois,… se jette avec ardeur dans l'intrigue et ne recule pas devant le crime*." "Women who do not obey are governed like puppets, who openly criticize customs that are no longer appropriate, who laugh at restrictive rules, customs, laws, who do not budge when faced with intrigue and crime." In essence, authentic women, who exist and phenomenologically perceived as free and honest with themselves and are responsible for their decisions.

Highlighting the authenticity which also means freedom, related to the oppression experienced by women, is not easy to apply. Simons [22] even adds that it is an impossibility. Regarding this matter, Simone de Beauvoir stated that women's freedom is not obtained independently (self-sufficient) but interdependent with other people, thereby contesting the sartrian's freedom. Furthermore, Beauvoir added that freedom cannot be applied equally in all situations. This Beauvoirian concept of freedom is closer to the Marleau-Ponty concept which states that individual experienced freedom is conditioned in social situations [20].

In line with the current study, Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe* also questioned the existence of women both in real life and in literary works. By using the works of five works of art, Beauvoir shows how women are presented as experiencing live as immanent Other, as opposed to male characters who are both immanent and transcendent and thus in a superior position. Beauvoir stated that the immanent and transcendent aspects in the way of life should not be separated. When women exist only immanently, without being given the opportunity for their transcendent aspects to exist at the same time, then the woman does not have a voice of her own and has no quality [1]. Soren Kierkegaard who is called the father of existentialism, among others stated that life is ongoing choice, and an inability to choose is itself a choice that demand consequences for which we need to be responsible [23]. With this statement it is underlined that

humans make choices throughout their lives and are responsible for those choices. Even if the choice is not made, there is still responsibility that accompanies it. In relation to feminine existentialism, Beauvoir [1] says it is important for women to know for sure who she is and what she wants then make choices and make decisions.

Synthesizing the existential focus on existence and the quest of phenomenology to examine existence, existential phenomenology strives to investigate and understand the meaning of phenomena in the life-world, the everyday lived experience. Therefore, existential phenomenology is well suited as feminist approach to gain knowledge of women's lives which is fundamental to feminism [16].

Phenomenology itself, is easily understood as the study of the things as it appears [24] or the science of appearances (phenomena) A further description of phenomenology is given by Van Manen [25], namely the acquisition of experience and awareness or the study of experience and how that experience is formed. Neubauer et al. [26] technically defines phenomenology more fully, namely the study of experience as it appears in individual consciousness, a study that describes how a person perceives, feels and recognizes phenomena in his experience. In simple terms, it can be concluded that phenomenology is a scientific approach that aims to describe phenomena (reality) as these phenomena are experienced by humans directly in their daily lives and because they are subjective, reality has different meanings for each person [27][28]. As a starting point, a phenomenologist positions himself to identify the phenomena experienced (what) and how the phenomena are experienced (how) and describe the similarity of these experiences to several individuals. The fundamental purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experience of a phenomenon to a description of its universal essence [29][30]. Applying these understandings to the focus of the current study, muted oppressed feminine, Beauvoir-Merleau-Pontian subjective existential phenomenology approach will be focused on the bodily feminine lived experiences.

2   Research Method

Literature can provide an important meaning for its readers through phenomenology. With the phenomenological method, the reader enters a real and living literary world. Each individual is unique but there is also a universal aspect. The journey of life is like an open book and is in the process of being created, there are times when the journey becomes complicated when tension occured between the existence of the individual self and the social sphere that tends to form. Individuals will also try to get out of this complicated struggle by empowering what is inside of them [31]. Creation does not only exist in literature, in fact creative power is life (life-significance), thus the essence of the individual. which is then presented by literature. Phenomenology explores deeply the meaning of reality which is presupposed and expressed by literature and social reality [19].

The application of the phenomenological method in literary works is rare. More than simply presenting novelty in the form of application to literary works which, apart from being carried out by its originators, are rarely applied in literary communication, the application of this literary phenomenological method also puts forward the power of a meaningful future tense projection, with the present tense as a starting point. In the creative process, when the author narrates one segment of the story, the next segment of the story is planned. By using data in the form of experiences in the present, the character will step into the future based on the narrative that has been channeled by the author and so on. In other words, the present tense experienced by the

character is the format ion of the past tense that he has experienced. Every detail of present-day experience is important in order to plan and shape future experiences/reality, where the potential for becoming a reality is endless [19]. Utilizing Beauvoir-Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is to understand the experience of oppressive women as they experienced it. Here, perception is not an event or a state in the mind or brain but an organism's entire bodily relation to its environment. The following is a step-by-step procedure on how themethod will be carried out to describe not only how female characters who are victims of violence see the violence they experience and how female characters interpret the violence they experience but also how female characters communicate their bodily existence in regard of the future by living the present. In this method (1) authors apply epoché or bracketing or reduction of ideas/concepts (preconception) as well as preconceived notions (presuppositions) and beliefs, namely pathriarchal belief that limiting women's existence (be it conscious or unconscious). It aims to (2) identify the existence experienced by the character essentially, then (3) describe the reality in the form of direct experience experienced by the character. (4) describe the character's intentions for the expected world.

3 Finding and Discussion

In *Serat Centhini* 2nd volume, there are women experiencing oppressive bodily action by men. They were subjected to repeated physical abuse on their bodies by male perpetrators. These women have strongly endured torture after torture. One of the characters, Kasanah, did not have any power to get herself out of this physically oppressive situation, she received various tortures on her body. Few words were spoken, but the description of her condition cite a lot. Merleau-Ponty states that "my body is my point of view on the world." In the case of Kasanah's experience, the condition of her body being torn apart by throwed stones as a punishment for the accusations against her which originated from her refusal to commit adultery. Kasanah only said two sentences and those sentences were not directed at the people who tortured her, but further underline the voicelessness regarding the oppressive experience she is accepting. The rest she kept muted and accepted the torture. Her view of the world she lives in is represented by the state of her body. The experiences perceived by the body are more primitive than what can be inferred in the mind and more direct, purer without being influenced by beliefs and before it is formed into words [32].

According to the theory and practice of feminism, that to overcome the social forces of male-oriented culture, here is represented by social failure in listening to Kasanah's voice as the accused and only hearing the masculine voice of the accuser, women must transform the accepted male-oriented value system of society that instilled in women's unconsciousness influenced by the cultural values of men [16]. By applying epoché (1) and to challenge the take-for-granted male oriented values of society instilled on Kasanah punishment, author need to bracket this natural attitude and launching the existential phenomenology study in order to be able to be completely susceptible, receptive and candid in listening and witnessing the Kasanah's lived experience then connect with existential consciousness [16]. Author then (2) identify the character lived experienced as unauthentic, underwent experience opposite of what is essentially desired, (3) describe the character's reality of direct bodily subjective lived experienced, and (4) describe character's intention, creating the desired, expected world by utilizing the lived bodily experience in the present.

4 Conclusion

As stated earlier, the writing of this article is intended to stimulate discussion by the application of phenomenological methods in literary research which is still rarely done. By doing *editic* reduction at the time of data collection and at the time of analysis, the author gains an authentic description of the lived experiences of muted feminine characters who are victims of domestic violence. This understanding of character's direct experience will then be used to map the expected desired life.

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