

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides five subchapters which are the background of the study, the research question, the objective of the study, the significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Women are often the object of oppression in various aspects of life, especially under repressive governments that tend to reinforce and prolong the cycle of gender inequality. According to Irmadani et. al (2019: 15), the oppression of women usually occurs in countries under patriarchal control, where social and cultural norms prioritize male power. This gender oppression often emerges through social, cultural, and political structures that regulate gender roles hierarchically, with men placed as the dominant group and women as the subordinate. This is supported by social constructs that consider certain roles as natural based on gender (Rahma et al., 2017:14). As stated by Winchester (1989), women are considered inferior and weak, so women are in a subordinate position which results in women having limitations in various aspects. Women are not given the freedom to be political, educated, work, and participate in public life, thus providing men with opportunities to maintain their dominance. In this position, men tend to create a system or structure that inhibits women, which leads to discrimination. Thus, women will be kept away from crucial positions, and only placed in domestic spaces such as being a wife, or mother, this condition can make women dependent on others (Tyson, 2006:85).

Feminism is a form of women's struggle to gain their full rights by opposing the patriarchal system that establishes men as superior. Feminism emerges as a social movement that seeks to abolish patriarchal power and fight for gender equality. According to Nisaq el. al, (2022: 544), the ideology of feminism aims to overcome gender injustice and encourages women to improve their abilities and potential in various aspects of life. Women exist in various forms by expressing themselves

through diverse movements and struggles (Pertiwi, 2018: 91). Existence is one form of women's struggle to overcome gender injustice. In this context, women struggle to gain full recognition of their existence as individuals. As stated by Webster (1828) existence is a state or reality that already exists, especially for those who can have independent consciousness contrasted with non-existence. In this case, existence is defined as the realization that one exists as an independent and self-aware being. By realizing and claiming their existence, women can demand their rights and fight against patriarchal structures that limit their freedom and potential. Thus, the concept of existence emphasizes the importance of real and conscious existence and distinguishes it from non-existence. That is why existence is something that must be owned by every individual, especially women, through which they can find their identity and purpose in life.

In the context of existentialist feminism, women have the freedom to be able to express themselves authentically without being limited by stereotypes and social restrictions. Existentialist feminism also seeks to address gender imbalances and fight for women's freedom and autonomy in every aspect of life. As Sarte (2007:22) stated, that the basic principle of existentialism is that individuals first exist and will then determine the meaning and essence of their lives through their choices and actions. In addition, from Beauvoir's (2011:330) view, individual freedom involves the ability to make decisions based on will and self-awareness, rather than simply following norms or external pressures. Thus, women gain individual freedom and responsibility in determining their own identity and life path (Silani, 2023: 1).

The issue of patriarchy and feminism is found in many literary works. Literary works are creative imaginative works that tell the life of the main character and the various conflicts and life events they experience. In literary works, female characters are usually given a less important role or position than male characters. Through their characters and narratives, novels can show how women are often victims of oppression in various aspects of life. Additionally, female characters are often portrayed as weak and do not have equal rights in the aspects of social life,

education, work, and politics, especially literary works with a patriarchal dystopia genre.

This study analyzes a novel entitled *Vox* by Christina Dalcher. *Vox* is Christina Dalcher's first novel, published in 2018. Christina Dalcher is an American writer and linguist. The novel *Vox* became her most recognized work and reached bestseller status on The New York Times Bestseller List 2018, and the novel was also translated into various languages. *Vox* is a dystopian novel that tells the story of a future United States, where a religious extremist government takes power and implements repressive policies against women. Under the new regime, women are limited to speaking only one hundred words per day. Every woman is fitted with a word-counting bracelet, which delivers an electric shock if the limit is breached. Dr. Jean McClellan is a linguist who previously had a brilliant career. However, since the new rules came into effect, she and all other women lost the right to work, read, write, and speak more than a hundred words. Jean is frustrated that her daughter grows up in an environment that regards women as second-class citizens who have no voice (Dalcher, 2018).

Jean is allowed to return to work when the US president suffers a brain injury that requires medical treatment. The government also needs her linguistic expertise for a very important research project. Jean sees this opportunity as a chance to fight back and try to change the oppressive system. She is forced to cooperate with the repressive government while looking for ways to free herself and other women from oppression. In addition to facing various challenges and dangers during this endeavor, Jean also finds unexpected allies among the scientists and activists who oppose the regime. They work together to plan a rebellion to reclaim women's freedom and stop government plans that could make things worse (Dalcher, 2018).

Several previous studies support and relate to this study. The first previous study, entitled *The Resistance of Women Toward Oppression in Christina Dalcher's Vox*. This thesis is written by Mardianti Riska (2021) and this thesis aims to analyze the women's oppression and resistance of women toward oppression. The second previous study was conducted by Risna Alfianingrum (2021) Entitled *A Women's*

Rebuttals and Struggles Against Patriarchy in Christina Dalcher's Vox This thesis aims to analyze the women's rebuttals and struggles against patriarchy reflected by the main characters in Christina Dalcher's *Vox*. The third previous studies are from Maria Pinakoulia (2020), entitled "*Female Struggle and Negotiation of Agency in Christina Dalcher's Vox*". This study discusses the concept of the female body as the site of power relations and constant negotiation for agency and freedom. The fourth previous study, entitled *Construing Acts of Voicing in Christina Dalcher's Vox Through Vulnerability Metaphors*. This study was written by Anatsaki et. al (2022), and this study explores metaphors in *Vox* that shape discourse(s) on voicing vulnerability and on voice as visibility through an interdisciplinary discourse analysis that draws on the fields of literature and linguistics.

This study and previous studies discuss oppression and resistance experienced by the main character but use different theories such as liberal feminism and post-structuralism. One of the previous studies even focused on exploring metaphors in the form of discourse. Meanwhile, this research focuses on women's freedom to express themselves authentically without being limited by stereotypes and social restrictions using the theory of existentialist feminism.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background above, the writer is interested in analyzing the problems that are formulated as follows:

1. What are the forms of oppression experienced by Jean McClellan in the novel *Vox*?
2. What are the forms of Jean McClellan's resistance as an existence conducted in the novel *Vox*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement on the problem above, the study has objectives that can be stated as follows:

1. To explain the forms of oppression experienced by Jean McClellan in the novel *Vox*.
2. To explain Jean McClellan's forms of resistance as an existence conducted in the novel *Vox*

1.4 Signification of the Study

There are two kinds of significance of the study, that are theoretical and practical.

Theoretically, the writer hopes that this research can provide an understanding of existentialist feminism to readers, especially English study program students. Thus, this study can be a reference for readers in studying women's oppression and struggle from the perspective of existentialist feminism. Through this study, readers will have a better understanding of existentialist feminism in literary works.

Practically, this study will help readers understand existentialist feminism in the novel *Vox*. They can recognize the suppression of personal freedom through language restrictions placed on women. Readers will also see the main character's struggle to regain control over her body and identity through this analysis. And they will see how this struggle reflects existentialist feminism's ideas of individual freedom and self-determination. This study can also inspire the feminist movement and individuals fighting against gender injustice in the real world by discovering the resistance strategies used by the main character in the novel.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study is to apply Simone de Beauvoir's theory (1949) to analyze the portrayal of women's oppression and women's struggle in the story as well as the character's response to the oppression. In addition, the writer also uses several books and previous studies to support the main theory. This study will be limited to the narrator's narration and character's utterances related to women's oppression and struggle in the novel.