




Comparative Voices of Resistance: Gender and Power in Japanese and Balinese Novels (1989–2019)

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Abstract: The resistance to patriarchal domination in Japanese and Balinese societies between 1989 and 2019 is reflected in various literary works that portray women's struggles against restrictive social norms. In this vein, this study compares the forms and meanings of resistance depicted in the Japanese novels *Out* by Natsuo Kirino and *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata with the Balinese novels *Tempurung* and *Kenanga* by Oka Rusmini. Using qualitative research with a cultural studies approach, it identifies two shared forms of resistance: rejection of traditional gender roles and struggle for bodily autonomy. Differences appear in the forms, with radical resistance in the Japanese novels and subversive resistance in the Balinese novels, and in the backgrounds, where structural oppression shapes the Japanese texts while traditional customs influence the Balinese texts. Ultimately, these narratives critique both Japanese patriarchy and Balinese customary traditions that constrain women's identities and choices.

Keywords: patriarchy; gender resistance; deconstruction; Japanese and Balinese literature

1. Introduction

Comparative cultural studies is a theoretical and methodological approach emphasizing dialogue between various cultures, languages, literatures, and other disciplines. This study not only focuses on the dominant culture but also considers marginalized groups, minorities, and marginal cultures (de Zepetnek et al., 2013, p. 259). In literary studies, comparative cultural studies provide a broader space for literary texts from various cultures without being trapped in the dominance of one particular view.

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This study compares literary works from Japan and Bali produced within the same period, specifically between 1989-2019. In Japan, this period is known as the Heisei era, which was marked not only by the economic crisis in the early 1990s but also by the development and transformation of feminist movements (McClain, 2002, p. 615). This era, known as The Madonna Boom, signified a new phase of female leadership with Doi Takako's victory as the first female socialist leader, which significantly impacted the development of gender equality policies during the Heisei era (Murai & Kingston, 2020, p. 156).

However, despite these efforts, gender inequality still occurs in Japan (Charlebois, 2014). As a response, resistance emerged in various fields, such as politics, academia, and literature. In fiction, female novelists also respond to the gender injustice experienced by Japanese women. Several novels exploring resistance against patriarchal dominance emerged during the Heisei era, including *Out* by Natsuo Kirino and *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, which are also the focus of this study.

Meanwhile, in the same period as the Heisei era, the period in Bali can be categorized as the modern era (New Order and Reformation Era). This era was marked by economic growth driven by tourism and significant socio-cultural changes. At the same time, Bali also faces the challenges of cultural commercialization and changes in traditional, custom-based social structures (Picard, 1996, p. 179). In the context of gender, Bali faces the challenge of deeply rooted patriarchal traditions, showing that modernization does not necessarily bring gender equality to Balinese society. This condition is vividly portrayed in various forms of cultural representation, particularly in literary works that portray the experiences of Balinese women negotiating patriarchal structures. In literary works that emerged in this era, female characters were depicted as bravely challenging oppression (Putra, 2011, p. 187). This shows that resistance manifested as a response to the gender tensions in Bali, as seen in Oka Rusmini's novels, *Tempurung* and *Kenanga*, which are also the focus of this study.

This research aims to analyze the resistance of female characters to patriarchal domination in selected Japanese and Balinese novels and explores how cultural norms in each region, such as traditional gender roles and social expectations, shape the forms and strategies of that resistance. Previous research has been conducted by many researchers regarding the theme of resistance to patriarchal domination in novels by Kirino, Murata, and Oka Rusmini. For instance, research by Pertiwi, Putra, and Sari (2020) examined the deconstruction of gender ideology in *Out* and *Grotesque* by Natsuo Kirino. In addition, Vats (2023) analyzed the relevance of the title *Out* in exploring the female experience in turn of the century Japan, highlighting the precarious, oppressive conditions women face and the symbolism of being "out" of social norms. Similarly,

research by Alvionita and Hartono (2024) explored the superiority of female characters in *Tempurung* and *Kenanga* by Oka Rusmini. However, research on comparative cultural studies that compares resistance in Japanese and Balinese novels has never been conducted. This research fills that gap and may serve as a foundation for future research on gender dynamics in various cultures and how culture can shape narratives about women's power and identity.

2. Literature Review

The study of resistance to patriarchal domination in literary works cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and historical context in which the work was born. In Japan and Bali, the dominance of patriarchal values has shaped social structure and cultural production, including in literary works. Several studies have shown that the representation of women in literature has turned into an arena of contestation between patriarchal social structures and various forms of symbolic and ideological resistance (Moi, 1985, p. 8; Showalter, 1985, p. 4). In Japan, the development of literature has experienced dynamics along with social and economic changes since the post-war era. *Out* and *Convenience Store Woman* describe how women struggle against social pressures to conform to rigid gender roles and masculine work norms. For instance, Ifah et al.'s research (2024) highlights the female characters in *Out* can attain freedom after clearly understanding the oppression they experience. Meanwhile, Jassel and Gaur's research (2022) noted that the main character, Keiko, a freeter, struggles to meet social expectations regarding marriage, motherhood, and a stable career. This is also supported by Maisaroh et al.'s research (2022), which found four forms of gender inequality in the novel: marginalization, subordination, gender stereotypes, and double burdens.

In Balinese literature, *Kenanga* and *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini offer resistance against the patriarchal tradition through female characters that challenge subordination within the caste system and customary marriage. Rusmini's works play a crucial role in empowering female characters, particularly in voicing opposition to the caste system (Putra, 2011, p. 168). Furthermore, the discourse on cultural purity and the inherent nature of Balinese women is often employed as a hegemonic tool to maintain patriarchal structures. Creese (2004) argues that women who attempt to break away from traditional roles are frequently perceived as threats to the stability of traditional culture. Thus, the resistance displayed in Rusmini's work is a critique of custom and the hegemonic cultural construction that disguises gender inequality behind claims of preserving local values.

This is also reinforced by Sunarti's research (2016), which highlights the central theme of resistance to traditional Balinese culture in the three novels.

The results of her research show that the female characters in the three novels (Tarian Bumi, *Tempurung*, and *Kenanga*) resist patriarchal domination that restricts their bodies and life choices. Similarly, Aveling (2010) found that the female characters in Oka Rusmini's novels redefine the complexity of women's identities in Bali, challenging religious, caste, and customary norms. A comparative study between Japan and Bali, in this case, provides space to see patterns of female resistance in different societies but facing similar systemic domination. Both contexts show that literature is a form of cultural resistance, with female characters as subversive agents against dominant norms.

3. Method and Theory

3.1 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach within a cultural studies framework, focusing on literary works as cultural texts. In Cultural Studies, a text generates meaning through signifying practices (Barker, 2014, p. 288). In this study, literature is positioned not only as an aesthetic work but also as a discursive space where negotiations of meaning, power, and identity take place. This study analyzes resistance to patriarchal domination in Japanese novels from the Heisei era: *Out* by Natsuo Kirino and *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata. It compares them with two Balinese novels by Oka Rusmini, namely *Tempurung* and *Kenanga*. This comparison highlights similarities and differences in how patriarchal resistance is portrayed in Japanese and Balinese contexts.

The primary data consists of fictional texts of the four novels: *Out*, *Convenience Store Woman*, *Kenanga*, and *Tempurung*. The two Japanese novels were analyzed in their officially published English translations. This study also uses secondary data from academic literature such as books, journal articles, dissertations, research reports, and relevant online sources. Data collection is conducted through a literature study, involving close reading and in-depth analysis of the literary texts. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the text as a cultural medium full of ideological and symbolic meaning (Eagleton, 2012, p. 25). Intensive reading is undertaken to capture narrative structures, dialogues, symbolism, and character representations about issues of resistance against patriarchy.

The data is analyzed using a critical analysis method based on the deconstruction approach. In this context, this study identifies the language, metaphors, and symbols that reflect efforts to deconstruct traditional gender meanings and create space for more fluid and subversive articulation of female identity. Dialogues between characters are explored as sites where gender meanings are negotiated, questioned, and even destroyed, in line with Derrida's

concept of *différance* which states that meaning is always deferred and never final (Derrida in Caputo, 2021, p. 96). This analysis is also strengthened by Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory, especially the concept of women as "the Other". This theory is used to explore how female characters in the novel respond to patriarchal domination, as well as how their forms of resistance emerge in the socio-cultural context of Japan and Balinese society.

3.2 Theories

This study employs Derrida's deconstruction and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. In *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1967), Derrida presents a radical critique of the Western tradition of thought based on binary oppositions, such as written/oral, presence/absence, and structure/scope. Derrida states that written language has dominated and become the central authority in the Western tradition, while orality is often considered more original and authentic. He emphasizes the necessity of interrogating binary oppositions and expanding our interpretative frameworks.

Derrida initiated the concept of deconstruction as a way to dismantle the dominant language structure and reveal the diversity and uncertainty in interpretation. He emphasizes the importance of questioning binary oppositions and expanding understanding. Derrida also highlights the importance of reading texts with an awareness of language construction and the ideological forces embedded within. He urges readers to critically examine literary texts' structures and power hierarchies (Bloom et al., 1979).

The second theoretical framework is Simone de Beauvoir's feminism. A renowned French feminist and philosopher, de Beauvoir is best known for her seminal work *The Second Sex*. In 'The Second Sex' she comprehensively analyzes women's condition in patriarchal societies (Giroud, 1961). She proposed the concept that women are not born, but are formed into women through a process of socialization influenced by dominant gender norms and values in society. For Beauvoir, becoming a woman is not merely a matter of external labeling, but an active internalization of one's embodied existence. Some people become women as a matter of living an imposed social destiny rooted in and produced by specific historical, economic, and political conditions, as well as social and moral conventions. From this perspective, womanhood is simultaneously an invention and a lived, embodied reality (Philosophy, 2023).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Author Profiles

The selected authors represent distinct cultural and literary contexts, Japan and Bali, yet share a common focus on women's resistance to patriarchal

systems. Their works provide critical insights into how female characters negotiate traditional gender norms within their societies.

4.1.1 Natsuo Kirino

Natsuo Kirino is a Japanese author known for her work in the crime and thriller genres, through which she critiques social structures and gender inequality. Born in Kanazawa, Japan, on October 7, 1951, under the birth name Mariko Hashioka, her life experiences and professional background have significantly influenced the thematic concerns of her novels. Her breakthrough came with the novel *Out* (1997), as seen in Photo 1, which won the Mystery Writers of Japan Award (1998) and became the first Japanese crime novel nominated for the Edgar Award in the United States (Seaman, 2006). Beyond *Out*, she has authored other notable novels such as *Grotesque* (2003) and *Real World* (2008), which expose the complexity of female identity under patriarchal dominance.

In an interview with *The Japan Times* (2003), Kirino expressed her interest in exploring the dark side of women's lives and how they resist the social constraints that bind them. Through a realist style and meticulous attention to detail, Kirino deconstructs traditional gender boundaries and portrays bold, independent female characters. With this approach, she provides a critical voice against the social system that limits women's roles.

4.1.2 Sayaka Murata

Sayaka Murata is a contemporary Japanese author renowned for exploring identity, social conformity, and women's roles in modern society. Born on August 14, 1979, in Chiba Prefecture, Murata worked at a convenience store for 18 years, a formative experience that inspired her acclaimed novel *Convenience Store Woman* (2016) or *Konbini Ningen* in Japanese, as seen in Photo 2. *Convenience Store Woman* received the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 2016 and has been translated into over 30 languages, establishing Murata as a significant voice in global literature (Kikuchi, 2016; p. 2019).

Beyond *Convenience Store Woman*, Murata has authored *Earthlings* (2018) and the short story collection *Life Ceremony* (2022). Murata's sharp writing style offers a sharp critique of the social systems that limit women's choices through depictions of women's resistance to social norms by presenting characters who boldly defy expectations. With her critical perspective, Murata is considered one of contemporary Japanese literature's most striking prose writers (Lærkesen, 2022).

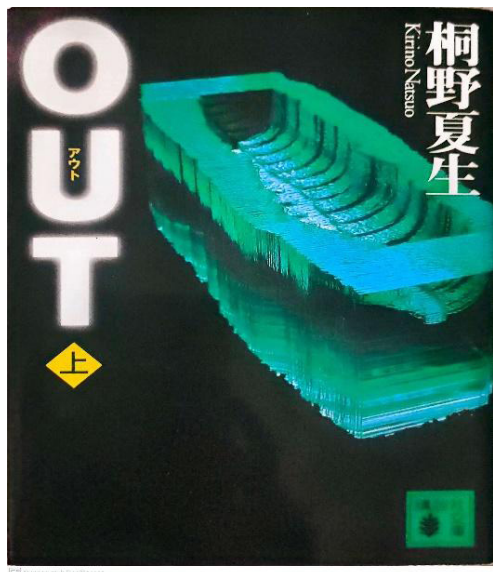


Photo 1 and Photo 2: Cover of *Out* by Natsuo Kirino and *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata (Photos: Pertiwi, 2025)

4.1.3 Oka Rusmini

Oka Rusmini is a Balinese female novelist known for her powerful and meaningful literary works. She was born in Jakarta in 1967 to Balinese parents. Her writings have been published in various poetry anthologies and collections of short stories in several literary journals and magazines. Oka married Arif B. Prasetyo, a Javanese-Muslim poet from East Java. However, this marriage caused tension within her family due to differences in ethnic and religious backgrounds, eventually leading her family to disown her (Allen, 2007). Over time, their strained relationship gradually improved as her family came to accept the situation and circumstances.

One of her most celebrated novels, *Tarian Bumi* (2000), was published in the early years of Indonesia's Reform Era, represents a major breakthrough in Indonesian literature for its critical examination of how the caste system in Bali shapes power relations between men and women. Her subsequent novel, *Kenanga* (2012), as seen in Photo 3, continues this line of inquiry by depicting women's resistance to social norms and patriarchal dominance in contemporary Balinese society. One of her later novels, *Tempurung* (2017), as seen in Photo 4, further deepens her critique of gender, culture, and power by exploring the struggles of Balinese women who seek freedom from social and patriarchal constraints. The novel presents complex female characters who negotiate their identities and autonomy amid cultural traditions and expectations. Through her work which offers a critical perspective on gender-based power relations

in traditional culture, she has received various awards, including the Literature Award from the Language Development and Fostering Agency in 2003 for her novel, *Tarian Bumi*, which has been translated into German under the title *Erden tanz* (Ensiklopedia Sastra Indonesia, 2016).

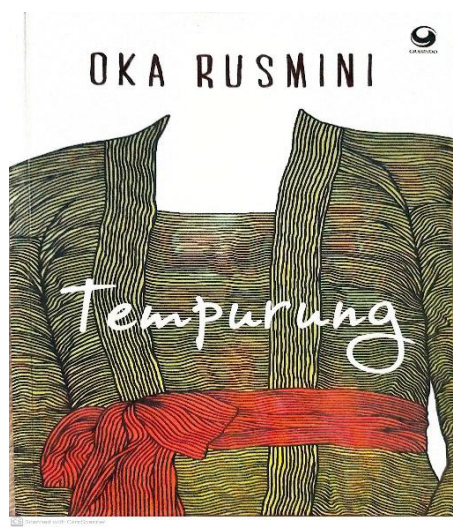
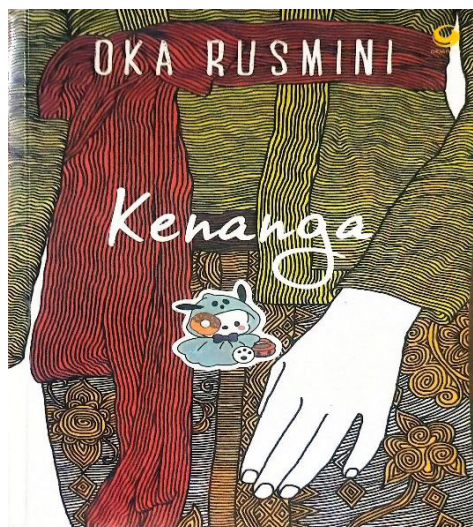


Photo 3 and Photo 4: Cover of *Kenanga* and *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini (Photos: Pertiwi, 2025)

4.2 Similar Forms of Resistance Reflected in Japanese and Balinese Novels

The resistance to patriarchal domination in literary works is a crucial aspect in exploring how gendered power structures are constructed, critiqued, and resisted in various cultural contexts. As Butler states in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999, p. 5), women's resistance to patriarchal systems is not merely a struggle for rights, but also a subversive act aimed at dismantling the hegemony that limits women's autonomy. *Out* by Natsuo Kirino, *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, and *Tempurung* and *Kenanga* by Oka Rusmini present complex portraits of women who attempt to negotiate their identities and rights in a patriarchal system that is deeply rooted in Japanese and Balinese society.

This section highlights two similarities in resistance across these novels: (1) rejection of traditional gender roles and (2) struggle for bodily autonomy and self-determination. In rejecting traditional gender roles, the female protagonists refuse to conform to social expectations, such as marriage, domesticity, or submission to male authority. This resistance is reflected in their choices to enter the public sphere or live independently. Meanwhile, the struggle for bodily autonomy and self-determination appears in the characters' attempts to control their own bodies and life paths, despite social pressures to comply with patriarchal norms. A detailed comparison of these similarities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Similar Forms of Female Resistance in Selected Novels

Number	Novel	Author	Similar Form of Resistance	
			Rejection of traditional gender roles	Struggle for bodily autonomy and self-determination
1	<i>Out</i>	Natsuo Kirino	Refuse domesticity and begin to enter the public space	Seek autonomy over their bodies.
2	<i>Convenience Store Woman</i>	Sayaka Murata	Reject marriage	Choose independence through work.
3	<i>Tempurung</i>	Oka Rusmini	Resist caste expectations	Choose love and personal freedom.
4	<i>Kenanga</i>	Oka Rusmini	Stay unmarried	Value education over traditional status.

4.2.1 Rejection of Traditional Gender Roles

Out is a thriller novel centered on the lives of four women working the night shift at a bento factory in Tokyo, Yoshie, Yayoi, Kuniko, and Masako. Yoshie, the protagonist, discovers her husband having an affair, and she murders him by strangling him with a belt. With the help of her friends, she hides the body and attempts to cover up the crime (Kirino, 1997). These four characters are portrayed as not merely confined to their domestic roles as housewives but also engaged in the public sphere by working at a bento company. As the novel is set in late 1990s Japan, this representation should be understood within the context of that era, serving as a form of resistance against the traditional Japanese ideology of *ryousaikenbo*, the idealization of women as “good wives and wise mothers”. Rather than submitting to the gender roles established by this ideology, the characters choose to break through domestic boundaries and enter the public space by working at a bento factory at night, as quoted below.

From midnight until five-thirty without a break, she had to stand at the conveyor belt making boxed lunches. For a part-time job, the pay was good, but the work was back-breaking (Kirino, 2005, p. 1).

Although the quotation specifically refers to Masako, the working conditions described are also experienced by three other characters who work in the same factory. Through their exhausting but relatively well-paid night shifts, these characters earn a living and build a path to independence and financial freedom. In this context, Masako, who technically works at night, can still perform domestic duties during the day. However, her participation in

the public sphere at night blurs the boundaries between public and domestic roles. She does not fully inhabit the domestic realm, and her engagement in public labor cannot be neatly separated from it. Her decision to persist in this demanding public work represents a form of continuous resistance, gradually shifting the boundaries of traditionally assigned gender roles. Her choice to work is further reinforced by Simone de Beauvoir's argument that employment is essential for women to achieve independence from traditional roles (Giroud, 1961, p. 641).

Thus, the involvement of Masako and her peers in night labor becomes a symbolic act of resistance against patriarchy, as well as a conscious effort to construct female subjectivity as autonomous individuals capable of defining their roles, especially within a society where women are expected to remain in the domestic sphere. Their persistence in this space challenges traditional norms and enables the construction of female subjectivity as autonomous individuals capable of redefining their roles.

Convenience Store Woman follows the monotonous yet fulfilling life of Keiko Furukura, a woman who has worked at a convenience store for many years. By age 36, Keiko begins to experience social pressure to marry and pursue a more conventional career. However, Keiko consciously rejects this norm, even though she knows it is part of the standard norms of Japanese society.

"Keiko, aren't you married yet?"

"No, I'm not."

"Really? But ... you're not still stuck in the same job, are you?"

I thought a moment. I knew it was considered weird for someone of my age to not have either a proper job or be married because my sister had explained it to me (Murata, 2018, p. 26).

Keiko's rejection of marriage sets her apart from most Japanese women and directly challenges the social expectations placed on Japanese women. Her unconventional life choices afford her freedom, yet these same choices are viewed as deviant through Japanese social norms. Thus, she constantly negotiates between her desires and the cultural standards she is expected to fulfill as a Japanese woman. In many cultures, including Japan, motherhood is considered a normative duty, and women are expected to fulfill their husbands' sexual needs and manage domestic affairs. However, in contemporary Japan, many young women increasingly perceive marriage as the end of personal freedom and tend to look for other options besides marriage for their future (Giroud, 1961, p. 451; Lebra, 1984, p. 79).

In contrast, the Balinese novels *Tempurung* and *Kenanga* by Oka Rusmini focus on women's resistance to the rigid traditional systems of Balinese adat (customary law). *Tempurung* tells the story of the lives of 14 Balinese women from diverse backgrounds, including Dayu, Saring, Glatik, Pidagda, Jelangga, and others. Their stories unfold in alternating narratives, giving voice to shared experiences of bodily awareness and struggle with religion, culture, and Balinese social norms (Rusmini, 2010). One of the characters, Jelangga, a Brahmana-caste woman (Ida Ayu), chooses to marry a Javanese man.

"So, you're marrying Agus?"

"Yes."

"How's the situation at home right now?"

"Your mother's stressed."

"I figured."

"Aren't you sad, like other kids who leave their families behind?"

"I am. But I have to be realistic. I belong to someone else now. I'm fighting for the love I believe in. One day, you might meet a man you love with all your heart." (Rusmini, 2010, p. 162)

In Balinese social life, gender roles for women are heavily influenced by patriarchy and caste hierarchy. Women are expected to fulfill reproductive roles, bearing children to ensure the continuation of their clan. A woman from the upper caste is expected to marry an upper-caste man probably to preserve the purity of the caste. Jelangga's decision to marry a Javanese man based on love is a form of her resistance to the customary and caste rules that define their female identity based on the system. From Derrida's perspective, logocentrism refers to the metaphysical tradition that privileges speech as the site of immediate presence and authentic meaning, while relegating writing to a secondary, derivative status (Derrida, 1967, p. 18). In this context, the expectation that a Brahmana woman must marry within her caste is an act of logocentrism, while Jelangga's decision to leave her caste and marry a Javanese man serves as a deconstructive act that disrupts the strongly rooted hierarchical norms.

Similarly, *Kenanga* portrays resistance through the character of Kenanga, a brilliant and independent Brahmana woman who works as a lecturer. She is considered strange because she adopts Luh Intan, a child from the Sudra caste, as her own. Kenanga's sincere love for Intan triggers the dislike of her mother and her younger sister, Kencana, particularly because Bhuana, Kencana's husband, also shows a special interest in Intan. Beneath this love lies a hidden truth: Intan is in fact, the biological daughter of Kenanga and Bhuana, a product of a concealed past they have tried to hide from the *griya* (Brahmana

family home) (Rusmini, 2003). Kenanga's resistance is evident in her decision to remain unmarried and actively involved in public spaces, even though as a Brahmana woman, she is expected to be a good wife and actively maintain cultural harmony.

"A wife's job is to take care of her husband and children. And most importantly, she's always up to *mebraya*. You know how it is in Bali, when there's a ritual, it can take the whole day. There are so many traditional events, from funerals to tooth-filing (*potong gigi*) ceremonies. That's why being a wife is no joke. *Tuniang* nags you all the time for Gus. Imagine if Gus had to attend all the ceremonies alone while your wife's relaxing at the office. Bring your own bowl, without *rabi* (a wife). You'll go crazy, Gus!" (Rusmini, 2003, p. 208)

This passage highlights the dominant expectation for Balinese women to be ideal wives who actively participate in cultural and religious ceremonies. However, Kenanga chose to disrupt the rigid dichotomy of the ideal Balinese woman by refusing to confine herself to traditional obligations. Instead, she asserts her presence in the public sphere as a lecturer and remains unconcerned with marriage, even as she grows older.

4.2.2 *Struggle for Bodily Autonomy and Self-Determination*

In *Out*, the narrative does not solely center on the public roles inhabited by the four female characters but also highlights the domestic burdens they endure. Yayoi, one of the central characters, reaches her breaking point after years of physical and verbal abuse at the hands of her husband, Kenji. Despite her efforts to be a good wife and mother while contributing financially through part-time work, Yayoi continues to suffer mistreatment. Ultimately, she decides to end the violence and injustice by killing Kenji.

At that moment, her patience snapped. With lightning speed, she slipped off her belt and wrapped it around his neck. Kenji made choking sounds, trying to look around at her, but Yayoi pulled up and back, tightening the belt in one motion. Gasping, he tried to get his fingers around the belt, but it had already dug into his neck. Yayoi watched intently as he scratched at the leather and then yanked even harder. His neck bent back at an odd angle, and his fingers twitched meaninglessly in the air. He needs to suffer more, she thought. He's got no right to go on living like this! (Kirino, 2005, p. 61).

Killing Kenji gave her a sense of power and control over herself, something Kenji had taken from her for so long. She realized that she felt no remorse for what she had done. On the contrary, she believed Kenji deserved to die and to suffer for the way he had continuously mistreated Yayoi. In her attempt to dispose of Kenji's body, Yayoi turned to her friends for help. With the support of her friends, Yayoi transforms from being seen as a passive victim, obedient and powerless, to becoming an active subject who asserts control over her own life. This transformation shows that Yayoi's act of violence can be understood as a form of resistance against the deeply embedded patriarchal structures that have long confined her. By killing Kenji, Yayoi symbolically frees herself from the domestic violence and oppression that limits her existence. Her reliance on female solidarity not only challenges the isolating effect of patriarchal norms but also reveals the power of collective action among women who occupy marginalized positions. From a deconstructive perspective, Yayoi's shift destabilizes the traditional binary of victim versus agent, exposing the fluidity of identity and the possibility of rewriting subject positions through acts of resistance and transgression.

Meanwhile, in *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko repeatedly faces criticism and rejection from her family and friends due to her decision not to marry and to remain employed in a part-time position even as she approaches the age of 40. In Japan, it is common for women to leave their jobs in their mid-20s or 30s to raise children. When they return to work in their late 30s or 40s, many take on low-paid, part-time roles (Takemaru, 2010, p. 57). Keiko's choice to remain unmarried and committed to her job is considered unusual, even deviant. However, she stands firm in her decision, embracing a life that defies conventional expectations.

"No. It's not a matter of whether they permit it or not. It's what I am. For the human me, it probably is convenient to have you around, Shiraha, to keep my family and friends of my back. But the animal me, the convenience store worker, has absolutely no use for you whatsoever. I caught sight of myself reflected in the window of the convenience store I'd just come *Out* of. My hands, my feet—they existed only for the store! For the rest time, I could think of the me in the window as a being with meaning (Murata, 2018, p. 103).

Based on Keiko's experience, the idea of a "normal" female identity, one defined by her family, friends, and broader society expectations, never truly aligns with her desires. In contrast, the identity she chooses for herself, that of a convenience store worker, leads to a sense of alienation and opposes dominant

social norms. In this case, her identity is always in tension between what society wants and what she wants. Her resistance not only rejects social norms but also rejects a fixed definition of her meaning.

In *Tempurung*, resistance is shown through the characters' personal choices, which are full of meaning and consequences. For instance, Ida Ayu, chose to leave her caste and marry a Muslim man.

I have my own life. I've felt unwanted since I was a kid. So what's wrong with choosing my own path? I'm not sure if this is the right choice. Is this really the right decision? Does my sacrifice mean anything? I don't know. Life is still long. There are still so many things I want (Rusmini, 2010, p. 152).

In Balinese society, when a woman from the upper caste chooses to leave her caste and religion, she loses her noble status and social rights. However, Ida Ayu never sees her identity solely tied to her caste. Instead, she views herself as an individual with the right to shape her destiny. Her decision to go against customary norms represents a subtle form of resistance that author Oka Rusmini uses to critique a system that restricts women's autonomy. The narrative reveals that even seemingly rigid structures, such as caste hierarchies, are constantly disturbed by alternative possibilities that resist final closure. In this context, interfaith marriage becomes more than a social act; it is an action to seize the stability of meaning attached to women's bodies, caste, religion, and the family unit.

A similar dynamic unfolds in the novel *Kenanga*, where the narrative persistently explores the struggle between traditional customs and the lives of Balinese women. This tension is most clearly reflected in the character of Kenanga, who openly resists the rigid expectations placed on her as a Brahmana woman, though she does so through quiet and deliberate means.

During puberty, as she was forming her identity as a *bajang*, a young girl, not once did it ever cross her mind to have a husband, let alone children. Not even once. Because she was always haunted by a terrible phobia. Her soul was too fragile to accept reality. And the best choice, she believed, was to run. She had to study, study, and study. No one was allowed to touch her when she was immersed in her studies. Because only in knowledge could she pour all her dreams and hopes. By mastering knowledge, she felt safe. At the very least, she felt she had something that made her worthy of respect, not because she happened to be born a wealthy Brahmana girl, but because of what was inside her head (Rusmini, 2003, p. 122).

For *Kenanga*, education is not simply a means to acquire knowledge, but a strategy of resistance against a system that places women as objects. This perspective aligns with Bourdieu’s (1992) view that individuals can establish authority and social recognition through symbolic capital, such as intellectual knowledge. In this case, she negotiates her place in society not through inherited status but through her educational achievements.

4.3 Differences in Resistance to Patriarchal Domination in Japanese and Balinese Novels

The resistance to patriarchal domination in Japanese and Balinese novels shares some commonalities but reveals significant differences influenced by the social, cultural, and economic backgrounds that shape women’s experiences. This section discusses two key differences in how resistance is portrayed across the four novels: (1) form of resistance: radical vs. subversive, and (2) background of resistance: structural vs. customary tradition. A detailed explanation of these differences is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Different Forms of Female Resistance in Selected Novels

Number	Novel	Author	Different Form of Resistance	
			Form of resistance: radical vs. subversive	Background of resistance: structural vs. customary tradition
1	<i>Out</i>	Natsuo Kirino	Radical: commit crime to claim autonomy	Structural: Economic pressure and gender inequality in the domestic sphere
2	<i>Convenience Store Woman</i>	Sayaka Murata	Radical: Reject marriage, embrace part-time work	Structural: Marriage and career as success markers
3	<i>Tempurung</i>	Oka Rusmini	Subversive: leaves her caste, embraces “free religion”	Customary tradition: Brahmana women expected to marry within caste
4	<i>Kenanga</i>	Oka Rusmini	Subversive: seeks value through education	Customary tradition: women as caste preservers, tied to family roles

4.3.1 Form of Resistance: Radical vs. Subversive

Radical resistance refers to overt and confrontational acts that directly challenge established norms (Hooks, 1984, pp. 22–24). Female characters in *Out* and *Convenience Store Woman* exhibit radical forms of defiance against Japan’s

patriarchal culture. In *Out*, Yayoi, with the help of Masako, Yoshie, and Kuniko, commits a crime by mutilating Kenji's body and scattering the body parts across various locations in Japan.

'And if you want money as badly as you seem to, you can help us.' At the mention of money, Kuniko's mind shifted gears. 'Help you how?' 'When we get him cut up and put in bags, you can help us get rid of them,' said Masako (Kirino, 2005, p. 111).

Yayoi's self-liberation by killing Kenji stimulates the awakening of Masako, Yoshie, and Kuniko. These women are not only members of the working class but also victims of domestic violence and economic exploitation. Yayoi's action paved the way for their collective consciousness. This suggests that the murder committed by Yayoi and her friends did not result from lengthy deliberation but rather from a shared understanding that they had no other viable choice. In line with Beauvoir's view, female friendships do not discuss opinions but share experiences and knowledge. Women tend to create a meaningful world that is more valuable than the world shaped by men (Giroud, 1961, p. 518).

In *Convenience Store Woman*, Keiko enacts a form of radical resistance by completely ignoring the social norms that are expected of Japanese women.

I'd never experienced sex, and I'd never even had any particular awareness of my own sexuality. I was indifferent to the whole thing and had never really given it any thought (Murata, 2018, p. 27).

Sexuality, like marriage, is not something Keiko considers important or a priority in her life. Whether Keiko suffers from a sexual disorder is never clearly explained in the novel. However, her indifference toward sexual experiences sets her apart from most other women. In the Japanese context, her decision not to marry and to continue working a part-time job into her late thirties is a bold challenge to dominant gender expectations. As noted by Lebra, unmarried women in Japan are often seen as having lost their life's meaning, whereas men can still lead fulfilling lives without marriage (Lebra, 1984, p. 78). Beauvoir adds that a woman's femininity is frequently measured by her sexual appeal and fertility. When women lose these two things, they are considered to have lost their reason for existence (Giroud, 1961, p. 547). Despite facing ridicule and expectations that require her to follow social norms, Keiko firmly chooses to continue working at the minimarket, asserting that her happiness and freedom are more important than fulfilling other people's expectations.

In contrast, the resistance portrayed in *Tempurung* and *Kenanga* is more subversive and understated. According to Scott (1985), this type of resistance is a subtle, everyday strategy that avoids open confrontation yet still manages to challenge hegemonic power structures. In *Tempurung*, the character 'Ida Ayu' does not aggressively defy the traditional customs that restrict her gender role. Instead, she chooses to stay within the system while quietly undermining it by leaving her caste and marry a Muslim man.

The religion in our house is a free religion. He also never forced me to do the rituals according to his religion (Rusmini, 2010, p. 148).

Ida Ayu does not openly reject her own religion, nor her husband's. Instead, she redefines the concept of religiosity based on her own understanding. By describing the religion in her household as "a free religion," Ida Ayu quietly challenges the rigid religious norms that have long confined women to fixed roles. By refusing to submit to the religious traditions of her natal family or the religious expectations of her husband, Ida Ayu creates a personal space of autonomy. In this case, resistance takes place quietly, without rebellion, but through negotiation and reinterpretation.

Meanwhile, in *Kenanga*, the protagonist redefines and asserts her identity through a different path. Rather than seeking respect because of her Brahmana background, she claims it through her intellectual abilities.

She had to study, study, and study. No one was allowed to touch her when she was immersed in her studies. Because only in knowledge could she pour all her dreams and hopes. By mastering knowledge, she felt safe. At the very least, she felt she had something that made her worthy of respect, not because she happened to be born a wealthy Brahmana girl, but because of what was inside her head (Rusmini, 2003, p. 122).

For *Kenanga*, knowledge becomes her power and symbolic capital in society. Her deep commitment to learning is an act of resistance against the cultural expectations that define a woman's role in Bali as a good wife and mother responsible for maintaining religious and customary balance. Thus, her form of resistance is not radical but quietly defies the traditional norms that limit women's rights and self-determination.

4.3.2 Background of Resistance: Modern Social Structures vs. Customary Traditions

What distinguishes the resistance portrayed in Japanese and Balinese novels lies in their underlying contexts. The resistance in *Out* and *Convenience*

Store Woman is primarily rooted in Japan's modern social structure, while in *Kenanga* and *Tempurung*, it is influenced by customary traditions. After World War II, Japan experienced rapid economic growth from 1955 to 1973. Due to its defeat, the country required a significant labor force to rebuild. Traditionally working in agriculture or family-run businesses, Japanese men transitioned into salaried white-collar workers. Meanwhile, women were expected to manage domestic affairs. This division of labor based on gender eventually shaped rigid concepts of masculinity and femininity.

Gender roles became even more strictly defined during Japan's prolonged economic recession in the Heisei era, spanning the 1990s to early 2000s. The *ryousaikenbo* ideology, which promoted the role of women as devoted wives and mothers, continued to shape the normative ideal of full-time housewifery in this period. In *Out*, Yayoi finds herself trapped in a role that does not give her recognition. As a housewife who also works, she suffers domestic violence at the hands of her husband. For a long time, Yayoi remains silent until her love for him is gradually replaced by a deepening hatred.

Her silence is understandable in a context where domestic violence in Japan is often treated as an invisible issue despite its fundamental and harmful consequences. Cultural traditions and the lack of open discussion on the topic reinforce this silence. Moreover, domestic violence frequently operates as a form of control where one partner exerts dominance over the other. Japanese women are often taught to assume responsibility for the violence they endure, and to bear the pain quietly, an endurance that is socially framed as a sign of strength (Hall, 2012, p. 280).

In addition to domestic burdens, despite the introduction of legal frameworks such as the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, gender inequality in the workplace continues to persist. This is evident in the experience of Masako, as will be further discussed.

What bothered her much more was that the effort she put in all the other days was never recognised and after all these years she had never been promoted or given more than the rudimentary clerical work she'd done since the day she first came to work there. Though she punched in at 8.00 a.m. and stayed until 9.00 almost every evening, she continued to do the same boring work year after year; and no matter how hard she tried or how well she did her job, she played no more than a supporting role, with all the important decisions left to her male colleagues. The men who had entered the company around the same time she did had all received extensive training and had long since

been promoted to section head or better, and now even the younger men were being promoted to positions above her (Kirino, 2005, p. 201).

This inequality occurred because Masako is a woman, who was not trusted to carry out heavier and more complex tasks like men. Instead, she is relegated to administrative work, which is considered more “suitable” for her gender. A national survey conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun in April 1984 revealed that most respondents acknowledged the existence of gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Nearly 80% believed women were treated unfairly during the hiring process, and approximately 84% felt the same was true regarding job rotation and promotion (Brinton, 1993, p. 145). This survey serves as one of the historical foundations showing that the roots of systemic gender discrimination persisted into the Heisei era and are represented in *Out*.

On the other hand, Japan’s modernization has significantly increased the number of women participating in higher education. With access to education, women have more opportunities to engage in employment. Keiko, for instance, feels no urgency to get married or seek permanent employment, as her education and sufficient income from working at a convenience store already provide her with autonomy. This aligns with Beauvoir’s view that a working woman regains her position in society when she becomes productive and active; she affirms herself as a subject through her projects, feeling responsible for the goals she pursues and for the income and rights she obtains (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 571).

In *Tempurung* and *Kenanga*, women confront the customary systems that limit their freedoms, particularly in terms of marriage, life choices, and their role in society. According to Geertz, culture (including customary tradition) functions as a set of control mechanisms that regulate human behavior. Humans, he argues, are highly dependent on external systems of regulation, namely, cultural mechanisms, to shape and direct their actions (Geertz, 1973, p. 44).

Tempurung describes the journey of Ida Ayu, a character who seeks to define herself outside the constraints of adat (customary law). She faces familial pressure regarding her decision to marry, but ultimately chooses to resist traditional expectations by leaving her caste and marry a Muslim man. Similarly, in *Kenanga*, the protagonist is pressured to conform to the caste system and the marital expectations associated with it, specifically, that a woman named Ida Ayu must marry a man named Ida Bagus.

An Ida Ayu is supposed to marry an Ida Bagus. But who made that rule? Who decided that’s how it should be? And why doesn’t it work the other way around? Men from the *griya* can marry whoever they

want. Meanwhile, so many Ida Ayu are willing to become a second or third wife, just so they don't lose their status. But what status, exactly? What kind of dignity is that? (Rusmini, 2003, p. 187).

This passage highlights how Balinese society's caste and customary systems are far from neutral; rather, they function as instruments to legitimize male authority. Brahmana women are expected to submit to the logic of lineage and social status, even at the cost of their dignity and autonomy. Dwipayana and Artajaya (2018) emphasize that these structures operate through a deeply rooted feudalistic ideology that is "egocentric, authoritarian, discriminatory, and biased", reinforced not only through customs but also through ethical sanctions within the family unit. Spivak (2010) supports this critique, arguing that women are often positioned as cultural representations rather than speaking subjects. They are symbolically cast as guardians of collective identity and purity, allowed to speak only within boundaries sanctioned by dominant power structures. In the case of *Kenanga*, customary tradition is wielded as a tool to sustain a social hierarchy that privileges men, and women's resistance to such expectations becomes a struggle against cultural hegemony.

4.4 The Meaning of Resistance Against Patriarchal Domination in Japanese and Balinese Novels

One of the key differences between Japanese and Balinese novels in portraying women's resistance lies in the social context underlying their struggles. In *Out* and *Convenience Store Woman*, critiques of the modern social structure that constrains women are conveyed through minor narratives, stories within the main plot that may seem secondary but, in fact reveal profound gender inequalities in Japan. On the surface, *Out* is a crime thriller centered on a murder committed by Yayoi, with the help of her friends. However, beneath its suspenseful plot lies a powerful subtext that subtly but firmly exposes the injustices faced by Japanese women, both in domestic and the workplace. *Convenience Store Woman* is more explicit in portraying how Japanese society constructs rigid social standards for women. Keiko's story reveals how Japanese women are often pressured to conform to socially prescribed standards, even in private domains such as marriage and career choices. In Japan, women are expected to marry before 25, otherwise, they are called "Christmas cake," meaning they are seen as undesirable after that age (Villa, 2019, p. 65).

In *Tempurung* and *Kenanga*, critiques of Balinese customary systems are more overt. In *Tempurung*, Jelangga marries a Javanese man and loses her noble status, affirming her bodily autonomy, but not representing absolute freedom, as she must endure familial exile and social disenfranchisement. The

critique here lies in questioning the fairness of a system that penalizes women for personal choices, while leaving her caste or interfaith marriage is not an ideal escape, as women still endure significant social consequences. *Kenanga*, on the other hand, highlights how social expectations shape women's roles from an early age, particularly regarding marriage and participation in customary duties. This aligns with Beauvoir's (1949) assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Beauvoir emphasizes that female identity is shaped through a long social process of internalizing patriarchal values, which leads women to accept their status as "the Other." This is a realistic critique, as the customary system imposes gender inequality, expecting women to marry within their caste, a rule not equally applied to men. When women attempt to resist, they will face significant social consequences.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that women's resistance to patriarchal domination in *Out*, *Convenience Store Woman*, *Tempurung*, and *Kenanga* manifests in two primary forms: rejecting traditional gender roles and struggling for bodily autonomy. Although the Japanese and Balinese novels share these forms of resistance, they differ in their acts' radical or subversive nature and the structural or customary traditions shaping them. Collectively, these narratives illustrate how female protagonists negotiate oppressive systems through overt or subtle means, challenging both social expectations and rigid cultural norms that seek to constrain their identities and choices.

The significance of these findings lies in highlighting the multifaceted nature of women's resistance across Asian contexts. By comparing Japanese and Balinese novels, this study demonstrates that women's efforts to redefine their roles not only question local patriarchal structures but also engage with broader discourses on gender inequality in Asia. These acts of resistance, whether through rejecting marriage, embracing inter-caste or interfaith relationships, or pursuing education, serve as critiques of hegemonic systems that limit women's autonomy and reinforce social hierarchies.

However, this research is limited by its focus on a small selection of literary texts from two cultural contexts, which may not fully represent the diversity of women's experiences in Asia. Future research could expand to other regions and literary works to explore how resistance emerges in varied social, economic, and cultural settings. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with ethnographic or historical perspectives may offer deeper insights into the evolving dynamics of women's resistance against patriarchy.

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