Lingua Cultura, 20(2), December 2026, 119-127
DOI: 10.21512/lc.v20i2.14374

P-ISSN: 1978-8118
E-ISSN: 2460-710X

SELF-DESTRUCTION AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE TOWARD GENDER-BASED STEREOTYPES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN OKA RUSMINI'S SAGRA

I Wayan Juniartha[1]*; I Gusti Bagus Wahyu Nugraha Putra[2]; Dewa Gede Bambang Erawan[3]; Komang Rama Juliartha[4]

[1-4]Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pengetahuan
Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Indonesia 80233
[1]jjuniartha@unmas.ac.id; [2]wahyunugraha36@unmas.ac.id; [3]dewa_kulit@unmas.ac.id; [4]ramajuliartha36@gmail.com

Received: 11th September 2025/**Revised:** 20th November 2025/**Accepted:** 14th November 2025

How to Cite: Juniartha, I. W., Putra, I. G. B. W. N., Erawan, D. G. B., & Juliartha, K. R. (2026). Self-destruction as a form of resistance toward gender-based stereotypes of female characters in Oka Rusmini's Sagra. *Lingua Cultura, 20*(2), 119-127. https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v20i2.14374

In Press

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the context and meaning of self-destructive forms as a representation of resistance to oppressors' stereotypes of female characters in the short story compilation entitled Sagra. This research is a social constructivist study of literature to explore the correlation between the context and meaning of actions against female stereotypes. This research focuses on the context of resistance to stereotypes of women by society, especially related to women's bodies, such as the idea that women's body ownership belongs to their husbands or lovers. These are manifested in acts of self-destruction related to women's bodies. In more detail, this research analyzes forms of self-destruction through texts and their descriptions. This research uses a qualitative approach with literary analysis. The library and deep reading method, using note-taking techniques, was employed to identify correlations between context and the meaning of self-destruction as a manifestation of resistance to stereotypes. The problem is analyzed through Mead's Symbolic Interactionism theory, supported by Kenney's conflict theory and Thomas and Kilmann's Conflict Management Strategy theory. The research results show that self-destruction conducted by female characters is not an act of giving up or desperation toward oppression, but instead a coping mechanism to manifest their body ownership. This form of self-destruction is contextually addressed through both actual meaning and metaphor, particularly in relation to self-actualization. It is somehow achieved since these women characters have no power to resist the patriarchal oppression related to their body ownership openly.

Keywords: *self-destruction, self-actualization, women characters, stereotype, Sagra*

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes and the ways society forms them reflect how we describe and understand habits, values, physical appearance, cultural practices, and language. This collective behaviour arises from concerns about new paradigms that may emerge from cultural assimilation and the long-term interaction of two or more cultures (Haft et al., 2023). However, despite a society's strong resistance to long-standing stereotypes, stereotype change remains an enduring phenomenon (Yamamoto, 2022). This dynamic reflects the impact of assimilation and cultural contact, which expand and shape new ideas about a society's structure. As part of society, this dynamic inevitably affects women and their attitudes toward it (Bachrin et al., 2024). Seen as weak, dependent, and hesitant to express their thoughts, women strive to change this stereotype through various cultural expressions, including literary works (Jusdalyana et al., 2024). In these works, female characters perform multiple acts of resistance that reveal their identity, regardless of

*Corresponding Author

cultural barriers (Hardinanto & Raharjo, 2022).

Literature in many forms is a mimesis of society's reflection. The social system reforms roles and assigns functions to individuals within it (Nugroho & Suhendi, 2022). It contributes to literature by providing a wide space to portray societal issues in a literary context (Yuliana et al., 2025). A novel is a form of scholarly work that can represent these issues.

Because resistance can take many forms in literature, the novel can show how and why women resist the social system, particularly patriarchy. Novels are often the most appropriate form for portraying writers' ideology on patriarchal issues through women's resistance. Romero (Figueroa Romero, 2023) emphasizes women's right to their bodies as a form of resistance to male oppression. This voice arose through female characters in Adonath Odaga's selected novels. Azzahra (2022) also described another act of resistance by a woman's character in the novel. These forms of resistance include rejecting male subordination, gaining education, and becoming an influential figure in their society. Afifah et al. (2025) describes another way women manifest resistance. She identifies two forms of resistance used by female characters: closed resistance, regarded as unsystematic, and open resistance. She examines it in three women novelists.

Regardless, these forms are not strong enough in establishing women's confidence to stand up to the face of patriarchy. The system still finds a way to oppress women in some way, as Hodgins et al. (2021) state, women remain underrepresented in higher management positions, despite educational equality. Another statement comes from Zahid et al. (2023). They say that power and over-sexuality have objectified women's bodies into political tendencies. A different case of women's objectification also comes from the women themselves. Restiyani et al. (2023) conclude that the biggest barrier to *Nurbaya*, the main female character in the musical entitled Nurbaya, achieving resistance came from women themselves. Nurbaya establishes her assertiveness through oppressive power as a form of resistance over the gender stereotypes.

Aligning with optimism about women's resistance, the patriarchy presents numerous concerns that resistance itself can address. If the forms of resistance manifested by female characters in novels still cannot be fully implemented, what new form of women's resistance do women characters in recent novels portray, and how can it be regarded as a form of resistance?

Several previous studies have identified problems with characters' resistance to stereotypes across various literary forms. Many studies view female characters' resistance to stereotypes as clear acts of aggression, such as verbal resistance and actions (Aprilyani & Rahmawati, 2025). Furthermore, resilience is also seen as an act of establishing a feminist attitude. Hardinanto et al. (2022) underline the caste aspect that women carry in Balinese culture. This disobedience is evident in the thoughts of one female character, Telaga, who relinquished her royal status to marry a man from a lower caste.

Meanwhile, Maemunah et al. (2025) explain that female figures resisted full rights over their bodies, resisted sexual violence, and demanded fair working hours without regard to gender. However, Aprilyani's, Hardinanto's, and Maemunah's research limited female resistance to aggression and obedience. Meanwhile, that research did not discover the meaning of female characters exposing these forms.

Furthermore, Wajiran (2024) states that the female protagonist, Christine, the female character in the novel entitled *No Fourth River*, demonstrates her resistance by challenging the oppression present in her environment. She expresses her resistance by leaving her family to pursue an autonomous, self-sufficient life free from external dependence. Finally, Andriana et al. (2025) explains that women's resistance, as portrayed through a female character, is driven by the desire to gain recognition of equal rights and to be acknowledged as empowered human beings. Wajiran's and Andriana's research suggest that women characters in marital relationships in a more delicate patriarchal society can resist openly and metaphorically.

While previous studies have shown that women's resistance to stereotypes is expressed through active aggression toward individuals or communities, they limit their view to open aggression as the only way for female characters to resist. However, in a stronger community where aggression is impossible to establish, there is a very controversial way of resisting women's stereotypes, which is self-destruction. Seeing that, this research offers a new point of view on a new form and meaning of resistance toward gender-based stereotypes of women characters through self-destruction.

Self-destruction emerges from the main character's frustration, serving as a tangible manifestation of the failure of resistance efforts at a certain level (Sofiana et al., 2024). Because it is still believed to project customary social relations onto the patriarchal system, as well as the internationalization of self-destructive cultural practice (Scheuerman, 2021), it should be understood as a different paradigm of resistance. Ahmadi (2021) explains that the self-destruction experienced by Chinese ethnic women in 1998 resulted from their victimization through rape. The trauma drove them into madness, ultimately leading to suicidal impulses. For these women, taking their own lives was perceived as the only way to cope after losing their dignity. The resistance exhibited by the main character is a rational response to the repressive system targeting the character both as an individual and as part of an inferior group (Almenia & AbdelFattah, 2025). As marginalized individuals within a patriarchal societal structure, women often feel compelled to undertake extreme actions as a means of resisting stereotypes (Adawiyah et al., 2020).

Writers of literary works then acknowledge this frustrating condition by recognizing that, in context, self-destruction is a controversial means used by female characters to resist stereotypes. This expression is

In Press

considered a more fulfilling and substantive retaliation for women in voicing and redefining their identity (Zheng, 2025). This view is reinforced by the idea that disorderly art, as in literature, can disrupt the previous idealization of self-destruction (McGuire, 2024).

The self-destruction that is regarded as an act of patriarchal resistance is contextually undertaken. Rosita & Yanti (2024) emphasize this by stating that the subject's relation to its world is dynamic. The situation that leads to self-destruction as a resistance effort, and that could be acceptable, is a conflicting factor. Mead (2018) considers conflict and social interaction significantly influence a person's meaning-making and actions.

The self-destruction of female characters in literary works serves as a parable of resistance against the stereotypes women face. Conversely, this parable unites that resistance (Naila et al., 2025). Essentially, literary works are tools writers use to express social issues. As members of society, writers capture and embody these social problems in their literary works. Through these explanations, this research reshapes the paradigm of self-destruction as a form of women's resistance portrayed in the novel.

METHODS

This research is grounded in a social constructivist perspective. It draws on subjective meaning development, which comes from the subject's experiences, specifically those of female characters (Creswell et al., 2023). This research draws on a short-story compilation titled *Sagra* (2023) by Oka Rusmini (2023). The compilation shows women struggling to speak for themselves as an act of resistance against patriarchy, embodied in Balinese customs.

The data are drawn from the actions of women characters and the self-destruction depicted in the stories through sentences and descriptions. The data collection method uses the library method and close reading, involving note-taking, selecting passages that depict women's self-destruction, and interpreting these actions as acts of resistance. The qualitative method analyzes the data using these theories.

The first theory, symbolic interactionism as developed by Mead, is applied to analyze the context of self-destruction exhibited by the female characters. Mead's theory examines each female character's circumstances and her relational dynamics with male characters and the broader society in which she lives. Furthermore, Mead's framework helps identify and interpret the societal oppression imposed on each woman by analyzing the symbolic dimensions embedded in their interactions (Mead, 2018).

In analyzing the data, Mead's theory is supported by Kenney's theory of conflict (Kenney, 1966) and Thomas and Kilmann's theory of conflict management strategy (Kilmann, 2023). Both supporting theories help identify the conflicted circumstances faced by the female characters, which serve as the basis for legitimizing their acts of self-destruction as a form of resistance.

To present the findings, this research used formal and informal methods, including a table of symbolic interactionist symbols and a full description of the context, the conflict that arises, conflict resolution, and the meaning of the self-destructive act.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel *Sagra* (2023) comprises 11 short stories that explore the struggles of Balinese women in various situations. The eleven short stories are set in Balinese culture and the Balinese region. Overall, the ideology shared throughout the short stories in the *Sagra* (2023) collection is women's struggle. This struggle manifests in several forms of resistance. The resistance the female characters mount against Balinese societal values takes the form of self-destruction. Female characters exhibit three forms of self-destruction in three different stories. These female characters' self-destruction is deliberate. The table below briefly lists the forms of self-destruction described above.

Based on Table 1, three female characters in this short story collection represent women living in Balinese society. The patriarchal society's conditions trigger these female characters to act against the stereotypes imposed on them. These actions take the form of self-destruction. Each act of self-destruction is rooted in dissatisfaction with the stereotypes surrounding women in society, particularly these

Table 1 Forms of Self-Destruction and Conflict Management Strategies carried out by Female Characters

No	Female Characters' Name	Short Stories' Title	Form of Self-Destruction	Conflict Management Strategy
1.	Wayan Darmi	Pesta Tubuh (The Feast of the Body)	Ripped and tore off her own body	Competitive
2.	Sita	Api Sita (The Fire of Sita)	Stabbed herself with a katana	Competitive
3.	Centaga	Sepotong Kaki (A Piece of Leg)	Cut off the only legs she had	Competitive

In Press

female characters. These circumstances then shape the strength of these female characters to act.

This act of self-destruction is not a common form of resistance among marginalized groups. Generally, this form of resistance involves contrasting oneself with the society in which one lives. This contrast can be physical or non-physical. However, women's self-awareness suggests that resistance through contrast with the dominant group will end in futility. This raises the awareness that the goals sought through such actions will not be achieved. For this reason, self-destruction is an act undertaken, though it may appear desperate; in reality, it is a form of resistance with far greater power.

The treatment of society that places women as objects is the fuse that ignites this form of self-destruction. Oka Rusmini is a well-known writer. A culture that treats women as objects has a strong stereotypical instinct. This gives rise to the idea that women are weak individuals and have a strong sense of acceptance of society's labels against them. It is also assumed by society that women are powerless to resist this treatment. However, women's existence is not only manifested in their physical form, but also in the mental strength and intelligence that they possess. In certain situations, self-awareness emerges, manifested as self-destruction. However, with high self-awareness, these female characters realize their powerlessness. Herewith, the meaning of each female character's self-destructive actions will be explained in detail.

Wayan Darmi is a female character who was taken prisoner by the Japanese army. In the short story "Pesta Tubuh," she is one of many women kidnapped by the Japanese army, even forcibly handed over by the villagers to the Japanese army as an offer to keep their village safe from the Japanese army's attacks. The villagers' actions represent a stereotype and a cruel objectification of women. The analogy of women as ransom for peace is a form of societal oppression against women. This happened to Wayan Darmi and many other women who suffered the same fate.

This situation demonstrates that the society in which Wayan Darmi lives exercises its power by oppressing her and other women. Such power is reinforced through persistent gender stereotypes that position women as inherently obedient to men and compliant with their commands. Women are expected to perform every task assigned to them without objection, including submitting to being used as sexual objects by Japanese soldiers as a means of securing peace in the village. This clearly shows that society predetermines the roles and norms in which Wayan Darmi and other women live (Mead, 2018)

Being a sexual outlet for Japanese soldiers was not the end of her suffering. Her animal-like treatment during captivity is a levitation of objectification. The original text and the translation that emphasize this are presented consecutively below.

(original text)

"Itulah yang terjadi setiap malam. Kami anak-anak perempuan di bawah lima belas tahun, dihabisi di tempat tidur. Harus melayani 10 sampai 15 laki-laki, bahkan kadang lebih, setiap hari. Tubuh kecil kami ditelanjangi, diikat, dihirup, digigiti, ditusuk berkali-kali. Laki-laki kuning langsat itu menyantap tubuh kami dengan rakusnya. Bahkan setiap tetes cairan yang mengalir dari tubuh kami diteguknya".
(Sagra: Pesta Tubuh, 2023: 50)

(translated text)
"That is what happened every night. We, girls under fifteen, were ravaged in bed. We had to serve 10 to 15 men, sometimes even more, every day. Our little bodies were stripped naked, tied up, sniffed, bitten, and stabbed repeatedly. The yellow-haired men devoured our bodies. They even drank every drop that flowed from our bodies".
(Sagra: Pesta Tubuh, 2023:50)

The description above clearly shows women's position as objects. The phrase *had to serve 10 to 15 men, sometimes even more, every day is* a strong statement that represents the suppression of women's power over their bodies. The women in this short story do not even have the right to their bodies, especially since this situation occurs in conditions that indicate an imbalance between women and men. The phrase *had to serve 10 to 15 men or more* also serves as a metaphor for patriarchal suppression of women's freedom. With their common sense, women certainly also realize that physical resistance or abuse is simply futile.

The relationship between society, Wayan Darmi, and the other women becomes especially clear here. Wayan Darmi is presented as if she has been entrusted with a "noble" duty to save the entire village from devastation, with her body and virginity serving as the required sacrifice. This so-called noble task, however, is deeply deceptive, as it is constructed and imposed by the village to justify the exploitation of women. This reveals Wayan Darmi's regulated self, which always follows the norms imposed on her (Mead, 2018). She is afforded no opportunity to refuse or even question the order. Moreover, the situation entirely disregards the women's consent; what is framed as a noble responsibility is, in reality, a clear manifestation of oppression.

Finding herself repeatedly treated as a sexual object by the Japanese soldiers ultimately pushes her to confront the role that society has assigned to her (Mead, 2018). This experience leads her to recognize that she has been victimized by the very social attitudes she once respected. Her self-awareness begins to emerge as she negotiates the conflict between herself and the Japanese soldiers.

The external conflict (Kenney, 1966) that occurs between Wayan Darmi and the Japanese soldiers oppresses a woman in an uneven relationship, not to mention the number. Wayan Darmi realized she was

In Press

outmatched and that more resistance would only cause more damage (Kilmann, 2023). This realization made it impossible to manage the conflict at that time. The interaction between Wayan Darmi and the Japanese soldiers has put forth the meaning of the oppression of a woman.

The rape of Wayan Darmi serves as a stimulus that signifies the absolute power held by the Japanese military. This power granted them the perceived right to treat Wayan Darmi without restraint, in this case, through the act of rape. This aligns with Mead's statement (2018), which explains that when an individual acts and that action evokes a response within themselves, the act can be said to carry meaning. The soldiers' oppression thus elicited Wayan Darmi's reluctant acceptance of the rape.

However, when Wayan Darmi realized and discovered her powers, her response changed. This is confirmed by the description below.

(original text)
"Dia sering mencabik dan mengerat lukanya sendiri. Suatu pagi, Darmi pulang dengan leher dan mulut berdarah. Dia langsung menjatuhkan diri di sudut kamar. Pandangan matanya kosong. Kuku-kukunya yang runcing berulang kali mengerat lukanya. Dia cabik-cabiknya lukanya. Darah segar muncrat dari leher, tangan, paha, dan seluruh tubuhnya. Sering dia membiarkan tubuhnya telanjang, alau tangannya akan berpesta, merobek seluas-luasnya tubuhnya yang terluka. Itulah cara Darmi menolak tubuhnya sendiri. Dia tidak pernah mau mandi sehingga lukanya makin hari makin parah. Dan suatu hari, Darmi mati dengan tubuh membusuk"
(Sagra: Pesta Tubuh, 2023: 53)

(translated text)
"She often tore and slit her wounds. One morning, Darmi came home with a bleeding neck and mouth. She immediately collapsed in the corner of the room. Her eyes were blank. Her sharp nails repeatedly dug into her wounds. She tore them to shreds. Fresh blood spurted from her neck, hands, thighs, and all over her body. She often left her body naked, lest her hands feast on her, tearing as wide as possible at her wounds. That was Darmi's way of rejecting her own body. She never bathed, so her wounds worsened day by day. Moreover, one day, Darmi died, her body rotting".
(Sagra: Pesta Tubuh, 2023: 53)

The description above highlights Wayan Darmi's masculine traits, namely strength and the defense of her own beliefs (Bem, 1974). In the tragic situation she faced, Wayan Darmi employed her intelligence and strength to end her life through suicide as an act of self-destruction. Her awareness of this strength ultimately led her to resolve the conflict competitively (Kilmann, 2023).

Resolving conflict through competitive means occurred when the situation demanded a decisive resolution. An individual may choose this path when she is convinced of being in the right. Wayan Darmi's strength represents a form of resistance against the Japanese soldiers. Uniquely, her resistance does not take the form of confrontation, but rather an act of self-destruction by injuring herself. This response arises from the series of oppressions inflicted upon her (Daros, 2021). Acknowledging her weaker position, Wayan Darmi realizes that open confrontation would only bring greater harm. Consequently, she resorts to self-destruction as a way to liberate herself from the oppression.

Wayan Darmi's self-destructive action is reflected in her deliberate self-mutilation and the choice to let her wounds fester, worsened by the refusal to bathe. These acts carry profound symbolic significance. Her self-mutilation was not accidental but intentional. Aware that her body is being exploited as an object of sexual pleasure by a Japanese soldier, Darmi chose to destroy herself as a form of resistance against her own powerlessness. In this way, she subverted the stereotype that women subjected to physical oppression lack the strength or agency to resist.

Wayan Darmi represents Balinese women living under repression, fully aware of the oppression around her. Physically weak, she was vulnerable, and the community exploited it to their advantage. Faced with circumstances where resisting ten to fifteen men was impossible, she chose a different form of defiance: self-sabotage, as described above. This symbolizes the Balinese society's oppression, which is embedded in the customary law that pushes Balinese women too hard. Moreover, preventing the soldiers from touching her and from reducing her body to an object of sexual gratification is the only way for Balinese women to resist the society's stereotype of them.

Another female character, Sita, engages in self-destructive behaviour after being betrayed by the man she loves. As a beautiful and innocent young woman who has just entered puberty, Sita falls in love with a handsome villager named Sawer. She frequently accepts his invitations to bathe at the forest fountain. However, after several encounters, Sita learns that the arrival of the Japanese has brought disaster to her village. Persuaded by Sawer, she sacrifices herself for her community's safety and well-being. This is reflected in Sawer's statement below.

(original text)
"Sita, ini zaman sudah susah. Kita tidak lagi memiliki desa. Tak lagi memiliki ketenangan. Warga desa kita tinggal di hutan-hutan. Kalau kau sungguh-sungguh cinta padaku, dengarkan kata-kataku. Cinta yang agung itu cinta yang tidak egois. Kau juga harus memikirkan orang-orang desa. Kalau kau merasa Meme Sita telah menanamkan sejarah hitam di desa kita, kaulah

In Press

yang harus menebusnya, sehingga kita bisa hidup lagi seperti dulu. Kau mau?"
(Sagra: Api Sita, 2023:71)

(translated text)
"Sita, these are difficult times. We no longer have a village. We no longer have peace. Our villagers live in the forests. If you truly love me, listen to my words. Great love is selfless love. You must also think of the villagers. If you feel that Meme Sita has planted a dark history in our village, you must atone for it, so that we can live again as before. Will you?"
(Sagra: Api Sita, 2023:71)

Sawer's statement is a deliberate trick meant to deceive Sita. He exploits her naivety by misinforming her about her mother's past and uses this fabrication to persuade her into becoming a victim of his cunning scheme. Furthermore, he fully manipulates Sita's feelings of love for him. Sawer's persuasion symbolizes the operation of absolute patriarchy, in which women are instrumentalized as tools to achieve communal goals, in this case, the safety of the village. Aware of Sita's affection toward him, Sawer situates this emotional bond within a hegemonic relationship. His persuasion is intentional, while Sita's acceptance appears logical to her precisely because of her feelings for Sawer (Mead, 2018).

Sawer is fully aware of the relationship he has established with Sita, both personally and within the public sphere. Knowing that Sita loves him, he instrumentalizes her feelings to achieve his own goal. Moreover, the practice of offering women to Japanese soldiers is portrayed as a common strategy for safeguarding the prosperity of the village. This unequal relationship places women in an oppressive position and pressures the community, particularly men, to assign women tasks that demand self-sacrifice. Such dynamics illustrate how cases of intimate partner violence are often rooted in situational contexts, as in the relationship between them (Vignola-Lévesque et al., 2022).

The manipulative dynamic becomes evident in the relationship between Sawer and Sita. This relationship can be understood as a symbolic representation of patriarchy's manipulation of Balinese women. As the dominant authority within a patriarchal society, men possess significantly more privileges than women. These privileges are often treated as unquestionable truths simply because men articulate them. To manipulate Sita, Sawer exploits her feelings for him, using her to achieve his ambition of becoming an important figure in the village. Unfortunately, Sita believes everything he said. Sita, as an individual, learns to see herself based on what society says, in this case, Sawer. Symbolically, this reflects how patriarchy manipulates Balinese women, who are often compelled to accept falsehoods as absolute truths.

When Sita discovered that her love was unrequited, she retaliated against Sawer. Her actions are described as follows.

(original text)
"Perempuan itu mengurai rambutnya. Lalu menusukkan samurai yang sangat tajam ke jantung sawer. Berkali-kali, sampai kimononya yang putih dilukis oleh darah yang muncrat dari tubuh Sawer. Setelah itu, benda dingin itu ditusukkan ke jantungnya. Perempuan itu tersenyum dingin sambil meraup darah dari tubuhnya ke wajahnya".
(Sagra: Api Sita, 2023:74)

(translated text)
"The woman let down her hair. Then, she stabbed Sawer's heart with a very sharp samurai sword. Repeatedly, until her white kimono was stained with the blood spurting from Sawer's body. Then, she stabbed the cold object into his heart. The woman smiled coldly as she scooped up the blood from his body and onto her face".
(Sagra:Api Sita, 2023:74)

Sita's action can be interpreted as a brilliant form of self-defence. She embodies traditionally masculine traits such as risk-taking, analytical thinking, and aggressiveness. She takes a risk of becoming a prostitute and ultimately kills Sawyer in response to his betrayal. Her analytical capability is evident in the meticulous planning of the murder, while her aggressiveness is revealed in the repeated stabbing. By killing Sawyer before committing suicide, Sita demonstrates both her intelligence and determination.

Her strength emerges after she realizes that she has been exploited by Sawyer, particularly when she learns that he intends to marry another woman. In response, Sita carefully designs a plan to ensure that Sawer cannot belong to anyone else. This act may be seen as her way of answering the false declarations of love he once expressed. In this sense, Sita's murder of Sawyer becomes a manifestation of her intelligence, carried out to prevent him from being possessed by another woman. The external conflict (Kenney, 1966) between Sita and Sawyer is ultimately resolved through a competitive strategy, as Sita asserts her power to secure her position and defend her rights (Kilmann, 2023).

Uniquely, Sita chose to stand up for her rights by ending her own life. She did this to shut down any possibility of being further exploited by a Japanese soldier. Her suicide functioned as an act of resistance against the soldier who had forced her into the role of concubine. Through this act, Sita freed herself from the imposed function of serving as a concubine and rejected her objectification as a vessel of sexual desire. She realized that securing her welfare and autonomy could only be achieved through this drastic measure. In the end, Sita's suicide became her ultimate means of liberation from being treated merely as an object of male domination.

Sita not only wins the battle but also resists

In Press

patriarchal oppression. After enduring the situation of being a concubine, she realizes that her position offers an opportunity to pursue resistance, though she also understands that it cannot be carried out openly. Her actions emerge as a response to the stimuli she has received from both Sawer and the Japanese soldier (Mead, 2018). In this way, Sita constructs herself as a person who transforms self-destruction into a deliberate form of resistance against patriarchy.

This emphasize that self is most visible in the moment of conflict, when Sita finally chose her personal impulses over societal norms (Mead, 2018). Sita's self-awareness eventually emerges during her conflict with Sawer. Realizing that she has been used solely to advance Sawer's ambitions, she ultimately finds the strength and agency to regain control over her situation and pursue her own objectives. Symbolically, this reflects the moment in which Balinese women reclaim their autonomy and assert their power in the face of desperation. Sita's act of self-destruction signifies that her ownership of her body is absolute and not contingent upon the will of others.

Another form of resistance is the amputation of Centaga's only leg. This leg amputation is a metaphor for resisting stereotypes. In context, Centaga is a girl who wants to practice dancing. However, those around her treat her poorly and judge that she will not be able to dance well with only one leg. The feeling of embarrassment that arises from the stereotypes directed at her makes her practice harder than other women.

Because Centaga's body is seen as imperfect, the community objectifies her. This perception reinforces the belief that she cannot fulfill her social roles, which in turn prompts society to marginalize her. Symbolically, this illustrates the rigidity of Balinese customs in how they perceive Balinese women. Often, such rigidity stems from stereotypes that expect Balinese women to possess physical and moral perfection to perform any ceremonial role. Societal expectations of Balinese women make them "different", which evaluates and limits them (Mead, 2018). Centaga's imperfection thus represents the broader imperfections attributed to Balinese women. Over time, this supposed imperfection is transformed into a basis for objectifying them, ultimately turning into a false belief that Balinese women themselves come to accept.

Nevertheless, Centaga remains a member of the community and is still required to participate in its collective projects. Her self-reflection, therefore, becomes a manifestation of self-realization within a social context (Mead, 2018). However, because her body does not conform to the community's stereotypes, particularly the ideal image of a dancer, Centaga faces rejection from other dancers.

Society's rejection of Centaga's physical imperfection, represented through these two figures, reflects a ruthless stereotype against women's flaws, particularly in the world of dance. Centaga's physical imperfection is used to justify labeling her dance as imperfect, a judgment cruelly expressed by both Dayu Ratih and I Gusti Ngurah Putu Sanggra, the people she believed in. Moreover, the oppression Centaga faces is further intensified when I Gusti Ngurah Putu Sanggra invokes the excuse of a plague to forbid her from performing the Rejang dance.

The interaction clearly symbolizes the hegemonic relationship between men and women in the context of a religious event. I Gusti Ngurah Sangra exploits the notion of ceremonial purity to belittle Centaga, using her physical imperfection as justification. This is reinforced by Dayu Ratih's statement, reflecting her own fear of being excluded as a dancer in the same event. The conflict between Centaga and the community represents an external struggle, arising from the stereotype society constructs around the ceremony's purity.

(original text)
"Lalu, dengan penuh perasaan, dipotongnya kaki kirinya. Darah menetes. Centaga mengusap seluruh tubuhnya yang telanjang dengan darahnya. Matanya terpejam. Memanggil para dewa."
(Sagra: Sepotong Kaki. 2023:43)

(translated text)
"Then, with great emotion, he cut off his left leg. Blood dripped. Centaga wiped his naked body with his blood. His eyes closed. Calling to the gods."
(Sagra: Sepotong Kaki. 2023:43)

The decision to resolve the problem by cutting off her only legs represents a competitive approach. Centaga's defiant act of amputating her legs while still proving her ability to dance reflects a power-oriented strategy. She was willing to do whatever it took to assert her strength over others (Kilmann, 2023). This is evident in her drastic action, which challenged the stereotype of the "perfect" dancer. Women's self-actualization is achieved when they reconcile with their identity (Jin et al., 2022). Centaga's self-realization emerges through the act of cutting off her legs, as she discovers and establishes her inner strength through this self-destructive resistance. The reconciliation follows from this realization, that resisting stereotypes sometimes requires self-destruction. Even without legs, she can still perform a beautiful dance.

Centaga demonstrates strength, power, and determination in her pursuit of being recognized as a perfect dancer (Bem, 1974). By cutting off her feet and still managing to dance gracefully, she embodies a powerful symbol of resistance against the oppression she faces, not only from men but also from women within her community. Her act conveys a profound message that a woman's intelligence and worth are not necessarily tied to physical perfection (Ma, 2023). It symbolically shows how Balinese women realize that being intelligent is more valuable than what society demands in terms of physical perfection.

In Press

CONCLUSIONS

Self-destruction performed by female characters can be seen as a form of self-actualization intended to resist stereotypes imposed on women in patriarchal society. This action reflects both their analytical ability and inner strength. They are fully aware that, within a patriarchal system, their position will always be subject to oppression and stereotyping. Recognizing this, they understand that open and radical resistance would be futile. Instead, they use their own bodies as a medium of resistance. In this context, self-destruction signifies the liberation and reclamation of ownership over their bodies.

Self-destruction becomes the only means through which women can resist patriarchal oppression and objectification, as they come to realize that the ideals imposed on them about how women *should* be are fundamentally false. However, the patriarchal system remains deeply entrenched and powerful within Balinese customs. Symbolically, self-destruction represents Balinese women's attempt to assert ownership over their bodies, reclaim their power in moments of vulnerability, and affirm the worth of their intelligence.

The construction of an independent female persona through self-destruction emerges within conflict and in the ways these women resolve it. This process demonstrates their realization that the patriarchal system is inherently flawed, and they exploit its gaps to perform acts of resistance.

This research introduces a new perspective on understanding self-destruction as a form of stereotype resistance, particularly in relation to women's bodily autonomy and their self-realization of intelligence beyond physical appearance. Integrating Mead's theory with the insights of Kenney and Killmann enables a deeper exploration of the relationship between female characters and their patriarchal society, as well as the ways their self-awareness emerges through the conflicts they confront and resolve. Furthermore, this study contributes to future research by offering a new paradigm for interpreting forms of self-destruction and by expanding space for discussion of women's resistance to stereotypes within feminist literary discourse.

This research reveals the context and meaning of self-destruction performed by the female characters as a form of resistance to stereotypes within the specific framework of Balinese customs and culture. Furthermore, future studies are encouraged to explore how self-destruction functions as a mode of stereotype resistance in other regions of Indonesia.

Author Contributions: Conceived and designed the analysis, I. W. J. and D. G. B. E.; Collected the data, I. W. J., I. G. B. W. N. P. and I. K. R. J.; Contributed data or analysis tools, I. W. J.; Performed the analysis, I. W. J.; Wrote the paper, I. G. B. W. N. P. and D. G. B. E.; Other contribution, I. W. J. and I. K. R. J.

Data Availability Statement: Data openly available in a public repository that issues datasets with DOIs. The data that support the findings of the research are openly available in figshare.com at 10.6084/m9.figshare.31384066, reference number 31384066.

REFERENCES

Adawiyah, R., & Hasanah, M. (2020). Melawan stigma inferioritas perempuan: kajian novel midah (si manis bergigi emas) karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer dan novel di balik kerling saatirah karya Ninik M. Kuntarto. *LITERA, 19*(3), 414–436. https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v19i3.35662

Afifah, U. N., Hasan Suaedi, & Dzarna Dzarna. (2025). Stereotip "Bad Women" dan perlawanan perempuan dalam novel karya penulis perempuan. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, Dan Sastra, 11*(1), 775–785. https://doi.org/10.30605/onoma.v11i1.5325

Ahmadi, A. (2021). The traces of oppression and trauma to ethnic minorities in Indonesia who experienced rape on the 12 May 1998 tragedy: A review of literature. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 8*(2), 126–144. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/744

Almenia, M. M., & AbdelFattah, R. A. A. (2025). Rupturing the oppressive cycle: An analysis of differential oppression in Haifaa Al-Mansour's Wadjda and Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 12*(1), 2511387. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2511387

Andriana, W. D., & Cahyo, A. A. R. (2025). Perlawanan magi terhadap tradisi kawin tangkap dalam novel perempuan yang menangis kepada bulan hitam. *Bahtera: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra, 24*(2), 122–138. https://doi.org/10.21009/bahtera.242.02

Aprilyani, R. N. & Rahmawati, I. (2025). Misogyny and Sexism in suffragette's main character: A marxist feminist analysis. *Journal of Literature Review, 1*(2), 440–455. https://doi.org/10.63822/2tzehx45

Azzahra, N. (2022). Eksistensi perempuan dalam novel jumhuriyyatu ka'anna karya Alaa Al-aswany: Kajian feminisme eksistensialis simone de beauvoir. *Middle Eastern Culture & Religion Issues, 1*(2), 116–132. https://doi.org/10.22146/mecri.v1i2.6382

Bachrin, A. H., Hanum, I. S., & Yusriansyah, E. (2024). Perlawanan tokoh utama perempuan terhadap budaya patriarki dalam naskah film dua garis biru karya Gina S. Noer. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya, 8*(1), 35. https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v8i1.12720

Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42*(2), 155–162. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0036215

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (Sixth edition). SAGE.

Daros, O. (2021). Deconstructing Britney Spears: Stardom,

In Press

meltdown and conservatorship. *Journal for Cultural Research, 25*(4), 377–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2021.2018663

Figueroa Romero, D. (2023). Gender justice and feminist politics: Decolonizing collaborative research. *Genealogy, 7*(4), 95. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy7040095

Haft, S. L., Greiner De Magalhães, C., & Hoeft, F. (2023). A systematic review of the consequences of stigma and stereotype threat for individuals with specific learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 56*(3), 193–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194221087383

Hardinanto, E., & Raharjo, R. P. (2022). Perlawanan tokoh perempuan terhadap budaya patriarki dalam novel tarian bumi karya oka rusmini (kajian feminisme). *Jurnal Basataka (JBT), 5*(2), 349–359. https://doi.org/10.36277/basataka.v5i2.160

Hodgins, M., & O'Connor, P. (2021). Progress, but at the expense of male power? institutional resistance to gender equality in an Irish university. *Frontiers in Sociology, 6*, 696446. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2021.696446

Jin, L., Winardi, Y. K., & Linuwih, E. R. (2022). Self-actualization in Jane Eyre's main character: A feminism study. *ELite Journal: International Journal of Education, Language and Literature, 2*(1), 25–39. https://doi.org/10.26740/elitejournal.v2n1.p25-39

Jusdalyana, Arafah, B., Abbas, H., Lestari, W., Arifuddin, A., Tang, M. A., & Malik, A. N. M. (2024). Representation of patriarchal ideology and its negative effects on the characters in Naomi Alderman's the power. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 14*(9), 2880–2888. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1409.23

Kenney, W. (1966). *How to analyze fiction: A critical guide to appreciation of short stories, novellas, and novels.* Monarch Press.

Kilmann, R. H. (2023). *Mastering the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument -TKI-: Celebrating more than 50 years of resolving all kinds of conflicts* (First edition). Kilmann Diagnostics.

Ma, H. (2023). Inner and outer beauty: Exploring female beauty in contemporary China. *Journal of Gender Studies, 32*(6), 562–574. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2022.2070463

Maemunah, S. & Rahmawati. I. (2025). Representation of Women in Paris Paloma's Songs: A Gynocritical Literary Analysis. *Journal of Literature Review, 1*(2), 456–471. https://doi.org/10.63822/xarbg107

McGuire, K. (2024). Drew Daniel. Joy of the worm: Suicide and pleasure in early modern English literature. Thinking literature series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. Pp. 279. (paper). *Journal of British Studies, 63*(1), 207–208. https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2023.210

Mead, G. H. (2018). *Pikiran, diri, dan masyarakat = Mind, self and society* (W. Saputra, Trans.). Forum.

Naila, E., Chynta, N. A., & Supena, A. (2025). Dominasi patriarki dan perlawanan perempuan: Studi feminisme terhadap novel yuni. *Jurnal Basataka (JBT), 8*(1), 564–572. https://doi.org/10.36277/basataka.v8i1.732

Nugroho, B. A., & Suhendi, I. D. (2022). Stereotip dan resistensi perempuan dalam cerpen payudara Nai-Nai karya Djenar Maesa Ayu. *Jurnal Sastra Indonesia, 11*(1), 78–84. https://doi.org/10.15294/jsi.v11i1.50138

Restiyani, A., & Rusdiarti, S. R. (2023). Transformasi resistensi perempuan dalam novel Sitti Nurbaya karya Marah Rusli ke serial musikal Nurbaya. *Diglosia: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya, 6*(2), 607–624. https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v6i2.685

Rosita, E., & Yanti, P. G. (2024). Identity negotiation and resistance in the short story "Rose in the Tiger Canal": A review of feminism poscocolonial. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies, 4*(11), 10076–10086. https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i11.6415

Rusmini, O. (2023). *Sagra* (Cetakan pertama). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

Scheuerman, J. (2021). The anatomy of inceldom: An analysis of incels through the lens of gender. *Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.31979/THEMIS.2021.0903

Sofiana, D. A. D., Syadida, Z. K. S. & Kurniawan, E. D. (2024). Analisis dinamika kepribadian pada tokoh Tara dalam novel Katarsis karya Anastasia Aemilia. *Mutiara: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Indonesia, 2*(1), 118–128. https://doi.org/10.61404/jimi.v2i1.119

Vignola-Lévesque, C., & Léveillée, S. (2022). Intimate partner violence and intimate partner homicide: Development of a typology based on psychosocial characteristics. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37*(17–18), NP15874–NP15898. https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211021989

Wajiran, W. (2024). Resilience and liberation: Analyzing women's resistance in no fourth river through the lens of liberal feminism. *Jurnal basis, 11*(2), 171–182. https://doi.org/10.33884/basisupb.v11i2.9268

Yamamoto, K. (Ed.). (2022). *Stereotypes and stereotyping in early modern England: Puritans, papists and projectors*. Manchester University Press. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526119148

Yuliana, R., Herlina Setyowati, & Aris Aryanto. (2025). Analisis feminisme dalam novel Katresnan karya Soeratman Sastradihardja: Perjuangan perempuan melawan patriarki. *Kawruh: Journal of Language Education, Literature and Local Culture, 7*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.32585/kawruh.v7i1.6201

Zahid, A., Ayu, N. A. K., & Ikayanti, R. L. (2023). Kapitalisme tubuh perempuan: Sebuah pendisiplinan atau industrialisasi. *RESIPROKAL: Jurnal Riset Sosiologi Progresif Aktual, 5*(1), 115–131.

Zheng, K. (2025). An overview of character studies in the thunderstorm. *SHS Web of Conferences, 220*, 01005. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202522001005

In Press