Feminism and Gender Equality in Bali: A Cultural Perspective Through Simone de Beauvoir

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Abstract. *This study explores the intersection of feminism and gender equality in Bali, analyzing how patriarchal norms, media portrayals, and religious customs marginalize Balinese women. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the "Other," it examines why feminism faces resistance despite growing gender equality awareness. Through surveys and interviews with Balinese women aged 11–20, the findings reveal that many support gender equality but hesitate to identify as feminists due to cultural misconceptions and Western associations. The research highlights the need for educational initiatives and community discussions to integrate feminism into Balinese traditions, showing that culturally adapted advocacy is more effective than universalist approaches. It underscores the importance of feminist education, local leadership engagement, and promoting women's roles within traditional structures, demonstrating that feminism and Balinese traditions can coexist without disrupting social harmony. Future research should explore generational shifts, digital media's role in shaping perceptions, and comparative studies in other traditional societies to further bridge feminism and cultural values.*

Keywords: Balinese; Feminism; Feminist Education; Gender Equality; Patriarchal Norms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism refers to the support for women's rights on the starting point of gender equality, seeking to challenge systemic inequalities and promote social, economic, and political rights. A feminist is someone who actively supports this movement, attempting to take apart patriarchal structures and stereotypes (Beauvoir, 1949). Meanwhile gender equality focuses on ensuring equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights for all genders. While both concepts align in their goals, feminism directly addresses the gaps and social structures maintaining inequality, whereas gender equality emphasizes fair outcomes across genders (Crenshaw, 1989).

As a teenage girl who has grown up and lived within a society rich in tradition and culture in Bali, I have witnessed personally how patriarchal norms remain deeply ingrained, such as men leading religious ceremonies, women being expected to focus on family roles, limited career opportunities for women, and women having little involvement in political or leadership positions. Feminism and gender equality are often misunderstood, with feminism being perceived as a threat to family harmony and cultural traditions. However, feminism seeks to remove systemic unfairness that limits women's opportunities, while gender equality aims to provide fair access to opportunities, rights, and resources for all genders. Despite their shared goal of social justice, feminism often faces struggles in Bali due to its perceived denial of traditional values.

It is often seen how Balinese women bear a double burden such as managing household

responsibilities while fulfilling cultural obligation yet their voices are often disregarded in decision-making, both within the family and in public spaces. Many women struggle to access higher education because they are expected from a young age to prioritize marriage and domestic roles. I have seen friends with great aspirations forced to abandon their dreams to conform to familial and societal expectations. Gender-based violence is also a significant issue, frequently hidden from public view, as women are taught to endure rather than resist.

The root causes of these issues stem from three main factors. First, the patriarchal system, passed down through generations, prioritizes male authority within the family and society, restricting women's participation in leadership and public life. Second, the media often portrays feminism as radical and anti-family, making Balinese society hesitant to embrace it. Third, religious interpretations and customary rituals frequently place women in subordinate positions, limiting their roles in religious and social practices.

Efforts to address these inequalities have been undertaken by various groups. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality highlights that gender-based discrimination cannot be separated from other social factors such as class and ethnicity. In Bali, some localcorganizations advocate for women's rights by integrating feminist principles within cultural frameworks, such as using the Tri Hita Karana philosophy to emphasize balance in human relationships. Educational campaigns and policy reforms have also been implemented to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality.

However, the results of these efforts remain limited. Awareness campaigns have helped shift some perspectives, but structural changes are difficult due to deeply embedded social norms. The adaptation of Tri Hita Karana to promote gender equality has yet to effectively challenge the power imbalances underlying these injustices. Additionally, intersectional approaches are rarely applied, leaving the struggles of women from diverse social and economic backgrounds inadequately addressed.

A decisive theoretical structure for solving these issues is Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949), in which she argues that women are often brought to the point as the "Other," a role forced by society that denies true freedom. Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy emphasizes that gender is shaped by society rather than biologically determined, which directly challenges the strict roles assigned to Balinese women. By applying her ideas, Balinese society can begin to deconstruct these oppressive norms and create space for women to redefine their own identities beyond domestic roles. One approach is to introduce feminist education into cultural and religious teachings, fostering an understanding that gender equality can coexist with Balinese traditions rather than opposing them. Furthermore, legislative reforms inspired

by de Beauvoir's advocacy for women's independence could ensure structural changes that support female leadership and protection from gender-based violence.

This research aims to bridge the gap between feminism and gender equality in Balinese society by analyzing how cultural practices shape gender roles and resistance to feminist ideals. By exploring ways to redefine feminism in alignment with Balinese values, this study seeks to offer culturally deep strategies that encourage broader community acceptance of gender equality. Inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex," this research emphasizes the need to take apart the social constructs that limit women's roles and advocates for a more inclusive redefinition of feminism in Bali. Ultimately, this study aim to demonstrate that feminism is not a threat to Balinese culture but rather a route to justice that respects and preserves traditional values while ensuring equality for all.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Simone de Beauvoir's motivations for writing "The Second Sex" were largely shaped by her personal experiences and philosophical beliefs. Living in a deeply patriarchal French society, she witnessed personally the systemic abuse of women and sought to expose the social structures that limited them to lower roles. Influenced by existentialist philosophy, particularly by Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas on freedom and self-determination, Simone de Beauvoir argued that gender roles were not inherent or biologically determined but shaped by the society.

She was particularly concerned with how society forces roles on women from birth, limiting their freedom and strengthening their dependence on men. This observation led her to challenge the traditional idea of femininity, which she saw as an artificial set up designed to serve male interests. By analyzing the ways in which women are conditioned to accept their secondary status, Simone de Beauvoir made a powerful case for women's release as a means to achieve true equality.

Her work was also a reaction to the philosophical and scientific discussion of her time, which often reinforced male superiority. By arguing that abuse is a product of historical and cultural forces rather than natural differences, Simone de Beauvoir seeks to shift the feminist movement from a biological determinism structure to a socio-cultural critique, laying the base for modern feminist thought.

Simone de Beauvoir's background influenced her feminist ideas. As she studied philosophy at the Sorbonne University, she became one of the few women to succeed in a male-dominated environment. This experience exposed her to the intellectual elite of France, but it also made her extremely aware of the gendered barriers that restricted women's

participation in academics and public life in general.

Her rational development was further influenced by her relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom she engaged in philosophical debates on existentialism, freedom, and ethics. This collaboration strengthened her belief that women's dependence was not a natural condition but a social construct that could be removed.

Besides academics, Simone de Beauvoir's personal experiences in 20th-century French society provided her with critical awareness of the cultural norms that maintain gender inequality. She saw how women were socialized into long-suffering roles, expected to prioritize marriage and motherhood over personal desires. These experiences led her to critique how patriarchal organizations such as family, religion, and education thoroughly limit women's activities and reinforces their status as the "Other."

The main argument in "The Second Sex" is that women have historically been positioned as the "Other," while men have been accepted as the default or universal subject. This division is strengthened by social, political, and economic systems that uphold and justify women's oppressions.

Simone de Beauvoir argued that women's abuse is not a result of natural weakness but of a deeply ingrained cultural structure that defines femininity in resistance to masculinity. This system denies women their independence, limiting them to passive, caring, and submissive roles, while men are given power, logic, and freedom.

To remove this structure, Simone de Beauvoir stated that women must reject assigned gender roles and claim their own independence. She challenged the idea that motherhood and housewifery are women's ultimate purposes, instead arguing that women should have the freedom to define their own identities.

Her critique continues to resonate in feminist analysis of patriarchal systems globally, providing the base for movements upholding for equal rights, self-ownership, and economic independence for women. By deconstructing the myth of femininity, Simone de Beauvoir settled the base for later feminist theories that explore the performative nature of gender and the intersectionality of oppression.

"The Second Sex" has been criticized for its Eurocentric view and lack of representation of non-Western women. Feminists such as Bell Hooks have argued that Simone de Beauvoir focuses on middle-class white women and overlooks how race, gender, and class intersect, which misses the experiences of marginalized women.

Some scholars argue that Simone de Beauvoir's focus on individual choice ignores the bigger barriers that keep many women from being truly free. While she encourages women to

reject their "Otherness" and claim their freedom, critics believe she downplays the systemic nature of economic and political oppression. For instance, women in poverty or facing legal discrimination can not overcome their subjugation through individual action alone. Marxist feminists argue that Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist approach overlooks class struggle, emphasizing that capitalism and material conditions are central to gender oppression. These critiques stress the importance of placing Simone de Beauvoir's ideas within a broader, intersectional, and global context, incorporating perspectives from postcolonial, Black, and indigenous feminist thought.

Simone de Beauvoir's theories have been widely used to examine gender relations in different cultural settings, including Bali. Although Bali is often seen as having a more balanced gender dynamic than other parts of Indonesia, traditional norms still position women in subordinate roles.

In Balinese culture, women are expected to take on domestic and religious duties, while men hold public and leadership roles, reflecting Simone de Beauvoir's idea of women as the "Other." Women are tasked with maintaining household responsibilities, performing religious rituals, and preserving cultural traditions, often sacrificing their personal and professional goals.

Simone de Beauvoir's focus on freedom and self-determination provides a valuable structure for understanding how Balinese women navigate societal expectations while asserting their independence. This study applies her critique to Balinese gender norms, examining how traditional customs reinforce women's subordinate roles. It also explores the ways in which Balinese women resist and challenge gender expectations, as well as strategies for integrating feminist principles into Balinese cultural contexts.

This thesis is based on Simone de Beauvoir's idea of gender as a social construct to explore the disconnect between feminism and gender equality in Bali. By examining how Balinese women are socially positioned as the "Other," the study aims to identify the main barriers to gender equality and suggest strategies for change.

Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist emphasis on freedom and self-definition offers a foundation for exploring how Balinese women can reclaim action within their cultural and religious traditions. The study also incorporates intersectional feminist perspectives to ensure that race, class, and cultural context are taken into account when discussing gender equality.

3. METHOD

This section explains the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used to understand how Balinese culture and tradition affect women's views on feminism. The study aims to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality while examining educational programs that encourage a better understanding of feminism.

It uses a Mixed-Method Research Design, which combines both numerical data and personal insights. Surveys will provide measurable trends, while interviews will give a deeper look into individual experiences. This approach helps to fully understand the topic by considering both patterns and cultural aspects.

Data will be collected using two main methods: surveys and interviews. The survey will include both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions to gather a range of views on feminism. Interviews will be semi-structured, allowing flexibility while ensuring key topics are addressed. Both methods will focus on attitudes toward feminism, barriers to gender equality, and opportunities for empowerment in the Balinese context.

Stratified random sampling will be used to select a sample of 15-20 Balinese women aged 11-20 from urban areas. A purposive sampling method will choose 3 interview participants, ensuring diversity in responses related to traditional values, feminism, and gender equality. These interviewees will represent different viewpoints, including those who see feminism as compatible with Balinese culture, those who feel it conflicts with tradition, and those who stress the importance of education and community efforts in promoting gender equality. This approach ensures the sample reflects diverse opinions on feminism and Balinese traditions.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using software like Google Sheets or SPSS to calculate basic statistics and identify differences between groups. Qualitative interview data will be analyzed by identifying themes through multiple stages of coding to reveal cultural influences, challenges, and opportunities for empowerment. Triangulation will be used to check the results from both data sources for accuracy.

Ethical considerations are important in this study. Participants will give informed consent, and their privacy will be protected. Data will remain anonymous and ethical approval will be obtained to ensure the research follows guidelines.

Although the study offers valuable insights, there are some limitations. The sample size may not fully represent all Balinese women, and biases could arise from self-reported data. Future research could expand the sample and explore other methods to deepen understanding.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study reveal a complex relationship between feminism and traditional Balinese values. Based on survey data and interview responses, several challenges were identified. First, the lack of access to higher education, as highlighted in survey results, limits career opportunities and personal growth for women. Societal expectations on family roles, as expressed in interviews, reduce the time available for women to pursue education or professional goals. Furthermore, both data sources point to limited leadership opportunities for women, excluding them from decision-making roles and positions of influence
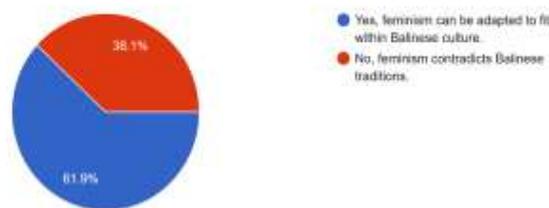
Picture 1. The Survey Results.

Table 1. The Interview and Survey Results.

Challenge Description	Source	Impact
Lack of access to higher education.	Survey	Limits career opportunities and personal growth.
Societal expectations on family roles.	Interviews	Reduces time for education or professional goals.
Limited leadership opportunities.	Both	Excludes women from decision-making roles.

Survey data shows that 38.1% of participants think feminism goes against traditional values, while 61.9% believe it can fit with traditional values if adapted properly. Interviews also revealed that traditional Balinese values often limit women's roles to the home, restricting their chances for leadership and education. Although many women support gender equality, many are reluctant to call themselves feminists because they feel feminism conflicts with Balinese culture.

The survey and interview results shed light on these challenges. For example, 38.1% of respondents see feminism as incompatible with traditional Balinese values, while 61.9% think it can work if adapted to local culture. This shows the conflict between progressive gender equality ideas and established norms. Interviews also found that resistance to feminism is partly due to its association with Western values and its perceived threat to family harmony.

The analysis used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the relationship between feminism and Balinese culture. Interviews showed themes like resistance to feminism because of its Western ties and potential impact on family harmony. Survey responses showed a strong link between education levels and views on feminism. Those with higher education were more likely to see feminism as compatible with traditional Balinese values. This suggests that education plays a key role in shaping views on feminism and culture.

Several trends emerged. Resistance to feminism often comes from concerns about its effect on family roles and social harmony. Education was a major factor influencing attitudes. These findings highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to promote feminism, especially through education.

The results back the idea that feminism can coexist with Balinese culture if adapted to fit local traditions. They also stress the important role of education in bridging the gap between traditional norms and feminist ideas. However, the connection between feminism and Western values and the view that it threatens social harmony were stronger than expected. These insights show the need to incorporate feminist principles in a way that respects Balinese culture while promoting gender equality.

Discussion

The findings in this study support Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the "Other," showing that women in traditional societies are seen more as caregivers than leaders. In Bali, cultural norms emphasize family and community harmony over personal goals. The study further corroborated Moghadam's (2005) argument that feminist movements tailored to fit local cultural frameworks tend to be more effective in promoting gender equality. However, it critiques the universalist approach of Western feminism, highlighting the importance of cultural adaptation in achieving sustainable and meaningful social change (Mohanty, 2003).

While traditional values provide a foundation for social cohesion, they simultaneously reinforce rigid gender roles that limit women's opportunities for education, leadership, and economic independence (Geertz, 1973). This study contributes to this critique by demonstrating how Balinese cultural norms act as systemic barriers to women's higher

education and leadership positions, echoing Nilan's (2008) analysis of gendered educational access in Indonesia. Additionally, it suggests that integrating feminist principles within existing Balinese cultural philosophies such as Tri Hita Karana can foster a more inclusive framework for gender equality (Wardani, 2012).

Cultural beliefs, such as the notion that a woman's primary role is to maintain family harmony (Blackwood, 1995), often create obstacles for women seeking professional advancement. The findings indicate that educational initiatives emphasizing the intersection between feminism and traditional values can serve as effective tools for dismantling these barriers. For example, studies have shown that feminist programs emphasizing shared cultural values have been successful in Indonesia and India, suggesting that culturally embedded advocacy is more likely to gain community acceptance (Sperling, 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

When compared to previous research, this study reinforces earlier findings that feminist ideas can be integrated into patriarchal societies through education and cultural adaptation. However, this study adds to existing knowledge by focusing on Bali's unique culture, where family harmony shapes women's roles. It shows that feminist movements need culturally specific approaches, as universal models may not work in traditions that strongly influence gender roles.

The study addresses the research problem by demonstrating how cultural adaptation and education can bridge the divide between feminism and Balinese traditions. Specifically, it offers practical solutions such as community discussions on how feminist principles align with existing Balinese values, fostering dialogue and promoting grassroots-level acceptance (Sperling, 2021; Smith et al., 2022). This approach allows feminist advocacy to work within cultural norms rather than oppose them to achieve gender equality.

However, this study has limitations. The small sample size and focus on specific areas may not reflect all of Balinese society. Also, responses might be biased due to the topic's sensitivity. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples for a broader perspective on feminism in Bali. Additionally, exploring regional differences in attitudes toward feminism could provide deeper insights into the varying degrees of resistance or acceptance across different communities. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of educational interventions would also be beneficial in assessing the effectiveness of culturally adapted feminist advocacy.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that feminism and Balinese traditions can coexist when adapted to respect cultural norms. By addressing the barriers that hinder gender equality and fostering dialogue through culturally appropriate strategies, this research provides

practical steps for integrating feminist ideas into Balinese society. Ultimately, this approach promotes gender equity without disrupting the social harmony that is central to Balinese culture, offering a model for similar efforts in other traditional societies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that feminist principles can be adapted to Balinese traditions without disrupting cultural harmony. It confirms Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the "Other," showing how Balinese women are often seen as caregivers rather than leaders. Cultural norms, media portrayals, and religious interpretations reinforce resistance to feminism. However, educational initiatives and community discussions offer pathways to integrate feminist ideas into local traditions, making gender equality more culturally acceptable. The research addresses the disconnect between feminism and Balinese traditions, illustrating that education, cultural reinterpretation, and community engagement are key to fostering gender equality while respecting local values. This study contributes to the discourse on culturally adaptive feminism by emphasizing the need for gender equality advocacy that aligns with local traditions. It provides insights into how feminist principles can be introduced without cultural rejection. Drawing from Crenshaw's intersectionality framework, the study highlights how gender discrimination in Bali intersects with class and religious identity, further complicating efforts for gender equality.

The study has several key implications. First, integrating feminist perspectives into Balinese education can help future generations see feminism as a complement to cultural values. Second, involving local leaders and policymakers in gender equality discussions ensures alignment with cultural norms. Third, the study offers a model for culturally sensitive feminist advocacy in traditional societies beyond Bali. Additionally, the research supports developing feminist strategies that respect historical and cultural contexts to foster acceptance. Finally, understanding how gender, class, and religion intersect is crucial for future feminist research and activism. The study critically analyzed cultural, religious, and social dimensions affecting Balinese women. Using qualitative interviews and secondary research, it provides a comprehensive understanding of gender barriers and practical recommendations for feminist advocacy within cultural frameworks.

This study aligns with research on gender roles in Southeast Asia but expands on it by offering a detailed case study of Bali. Unlike studies that push for direct challenges to patriarchy, this research emphasizes the effectiveness of culturally embedded feminist approaches, making it a unique contribution to gender studies. Future research should explore

the long-term impact of feminist education in Balinese schools, conduct comparative studies between Bali and other traditional societies, investigate the role of younger generations in shaping feminism in Bali, and examine the influence of religious reinterpretation on gender roles. This study confirms that feminism and Balinese traditions can coexist. By addressing cultural barriers and promoting gender equality through dialogue and education, the research offers practical solutions to integrate feminist ideas without disrupting societal harmony. It highlights the importance of localized advocacy, demonstrating that feminist movements can thrive in traditional societies through strategic adaptation and community engagement.

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