

INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER

RUPKATHA JOURNAL

ON INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN HUMANITIES



ISSN 0975-2935

About the Journal

Journal DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha
Journal Home	www.rupkatha.com
Indexed by	Scopus Web of Science: Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) DOAJ
Journal Metrics	CiteScore 2020: 0.2 SJR 2020: 0.162 SNIP 2020: 0.193 JCI 2020: 0.50

About the Issue

Themed issue	Volume 4, number 1, 2022 (January-March) Contemporary East and Southeast Asian Literary and Cultural Studies
Guest Editors	Dr Jeremy de Chavez & Dr Zhang Yue, University of Macau, China
Issue DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1
TOC	https://rupkatha.com/v14n1.php
Peer Review	Under the responsibility of the Guest Editors

About the Article

Title	Precarity and Performativity in Post-Fordist Japanese Workplace: A Reading of Sayaka Murata's <i>Convenience Store Woman</i>
Author/s	Jaseel P* & Rashmi Gaur *Corresponding author
Affiliation	Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand, India
Funding	No funding received. Published free of any charge.
Article DOI	https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n1.03 Pages: 1-11
Abstract	https://rupkatha.com/v14n103
Full-text PDF	https://rupkatha.com/V14/n1/v14n103.pdf
Article History	Abstract received: 31 March 2021 Complete article received: 2 June 2021 Revised article received: 5 Dec 2021 Accepted: 16 Dec 2021 First Published: 05 February 2022
Article Impact	Check Dynamic Impact
Copyright	Aesthetics Media Services
Licensing	Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0

This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact editor@rupkatha.com.

Research Article

Precarity and Performativity in Post-Fordist Japanese Workplace: A Reading of Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*

Jaseel P & Rashmi Gaur

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Uttarakhand, India.

Abstract

The socio-economic phenomenon of post-Fordism strengthened the growing Japanese economy since the 1970s. However, the economic recession in the 1990s led to the birth of the precariat in Japan. A country known for permanent employment and long-term stability was replaced by policies that enabled a new class of temporary workers. These vulnerable part-time employees, also called freeters, are victims of anxiety and social pressure. They led a life of insecurity and hopelessness. This ontological vulnerability prevalent in modern workplaces has profound repercussions on gender relations and identity formation and attempts to resist and expose these hegemonic powers shape the central theme in Sayaka Murata's deadpan comedy *Convenience Store Woman* (2018). The protagonist Keiko, a freeter herself, struggles to live up to the societal expectations of marriage, motherhood, and a stable career. The workspace, which the protagonist of the novel considers as her safest place despite being a forcibly normalised environment, could not hold its illusion of stability for long as it becomes a precarious space of crisis. Precarity experienced under post-Fordist capitalism forces institutionalised forms of recognition where the performances of identities are regulated and constructed to ensure survival. The textuality of the workspace in the novel parallels the world outside of it, making the convenience store a microcosm for the capitalist world after globalisation. With Judith Butler's studies on gender performativity and precariousness, and textual analysis of the novel, the authors of this paper study how anxiety-ridden precarious living conditions can also become a foundation for alternative performances troubling gender categories, thereby transcending the narrow social scripts rooted in exclusion and inequality.

Keywords: Precariousness, Gender Performativity, Japan, Post-Fordist Capitalism, Resistance.

1. Introduction

Keiko Furukura, the protagonist of Sayaka's Murata's Japanese novel *Convenience Store Woman*, has worked as a part-time employee for eighteen years. She is unconventional, unmarried, unambitious, and asexual. Large scale feminisation of the working force is a significant feature of the Japanese style of labour management. However, the hired temporary workers require excellent social skills. Keiko, a unique character who is eccentrically pragmatic with a peculiar outlook, found it hard to adapt and was almost treated as an alien in her society. It was a struggle for her to come to terms with her culture's unwritten codes and customs. Despite being ostracised

since childhood, she was perfectly content with her identity and lifestyle and was proud of her achievements at the workplace. As a convenience store worker, she thought of herself as a reliable and valuable employee for the store. Her complete disregard for advancement in personal life and career meant that she would be available for the store every day of the year, including all major holidays. This job, although part-time and poorly paid, ensured her survival in society. Keiko had to consciously brush aside her eccentricity and individualism to mould out of herself a perfectly 'acceptable' character of a middle-aged Japanese woman. She suppresses her distinct characteristics and sustains for years a gender performance imitating the admissible traits of her colleagues to present herself as *normal*. The novel depicts a phase in Keiko's life that reveals the impossibility of sustaining a performance accompanied by insecurities and anxieties of precarious life.

The concept of precarity addresses the ontological questions of abandonment and marginalisation. Precarious individuals are deprived of security and hope, especially people without regular employment. Philosophers like Judith Butler believe that social existence itself depends on interdependency—through the care and recognition of others. Apart from its usage in philosophy and anthropology, the term precarity is often associated with post-Fordist capitalism. Fordism refers to organisational and technological revolutions established by Henry Ford in early 20th century America. New labour control and management system were designed for manufacturing standardised products in huge volumes (Harvey, 1989). A strong dependency on heavy machinery required workers to be employed in assembly lines where simpler, specific tasks were performed repetitively. The immense popularity of this revolution was not limited to the factories as its aftermath transformed the cultural sphere resulting in commodification, privatisation of family life and social homogenisation (Jessop, 1992). Despite the incredible economic success, the fragmentation of tasks created inescapable angst amongst the workers. The underlying crisis of alienating working conditions led to the decline of the domination of Fordism in the 1970s. Attempting to resolve the pitfalls of Fordism, the post-Fordist era focused on new information and communication technologies to facilitate a versatile global economy. The new post-Fordist economy needed people with social and technical skills, and more and more women entered the workspaces. Features of post-Fordism were implemented noticeably early in Japan owing to its head start in the modern digital age (Kenney & Florida, 1989).

Japan received international acclaim for its post-war development with high economic growth and sustained productivity. But now it is struggling with issues of social connectedness, falling infertility rates, ageing population, and an everyday life skewed with isolation and loneliness. Among the resultant precarious working force, some are driven by a nostalgic aspiration and yearning for the old family-corporate system that existed in Japan before the economic recession of the 1990s, which is known today as the "Lost Decade" (Osawa & Kingston, 2015, p. 59). This hope for the traditional ways also meant a return to conventional identification of women as a weaker gender category limiting her role as a full-time housewife and bearer of children. Murata, in her novel, shows this stifling of progress in gender relations through sarcasm and irony from the perspective of freeter characters like Keiko. Although employment precarity and "relationless society" are prominent issues in Japan, similar tendencies of precariousness are beginning to be seen among the rest of the industrialised world (Allison, 2015, p.37).

This first-person narrative through the eyes of shrewd and dispassionate Keiko shows how the vulnerable working class in capitalist societies are commodified and reduced to their functions. Peripheral literature like this Japanese novel, when translated to English, can make visible the impact of capitalism on a global scale. The ontological condition portrayed in the narrative holds a mirror to other capitalist countries like the United States, marking a global expansion of precariousness among the working class. This paper looks at how Keiko redeems a semblance of an agency in her workspace without relinquishing her inherent precariousness and how this state of vulnerability can also become a foundation for transcending the social scripts for gender and identity rooted in stereotypes and exclusion.

2. Identity as an Imitation Game

Murata is known for characters who stand out from the rest of society. In the case of Keiko, her unconventional nature was seen as unusual and inappropriate, and it has been highlighted starting from the depiction of her childhood. Through Keiko, the novel ponders on human culture and identity formation with dark humour. As Keiko cannot easily reorganise her unique ways to acceptable social behaviour, Murata has created a keen yet alien investigator of human culture out of her central character. Therefore, her performative attempts to replicate people around her also demystify several problematic stereotypes enforced upon gender categories.

Keiko's eccentricity is supplemented by her sharp sense of extreme pragmatism. Two incidents in particular from her childhood points to this. When two boys were fighting at school, and the other students were desperately trying to stop them, Keiko's solution was to use a spade from the tool shed and bash the unruly boys. She could never understand why the teachers were so enraged at her violent act. Similarly, she was seen as a "rather strange child" after she found a dead bird in the garden while she was playing with the other children, and her immediate reaction was that it would make an excellent grilled yakitori dish that her father liked (Murata, 2019, p. 6). The other girls wanted to give the bird a proper burial, and the parents were shocked to hear Keiko's opinion of eating the bird. This uncanny behaviour in the protagonist provides the author with the flexibility and versatility to place Keiko outside of existing social customs to provide the readers with a foreign yet advantageous perspective.

Keiko was born into an ordinary suburban family with affectionate parents. The teachers at her school or the therapist her parents found could not help her overcome the struggle with grasping normality. After a series of unfortunate events, she decided that she would no longer do anything of her own accord. Instead, she "would either mimic what everyone else was doing or simply follow instruction" (p. 10). This was the only way she could cope with the social pressure to succeed. When she turned eighteen and found a part-time job at a convenience store along with her university education, it was this same strategy of imitation that became her gospel for survival. She swore to eliminate the parts of her life that others find strange to effectively play "the fictitious creature called an ordinary person" (p. 93). This was a defensive tool of evasion from self-discovery and complete renunciation of her unique personality.

In the convenience store, there was a strange mix of equality, sameness, and repetition. The store's head office trainer ensured that all the employees wore the same uniforms, had no

accessories, and all the girls had to tie their hair to the back. A training video for the workers was accompanied by an instruction manual that dictates every tiny action a store worker is supposed to make – how to greet, smile, and bow before the customers. This excited Keiko as she does not have to struggle to learn what actions to replicate. She was thrilled at the idea that all kinds of people working at the store, from university students to job-hoppers and housewives, would “transform into the homogenous being known as a convenience store worker” (p. 16). She felt this transformation is like changing costumes to become a different creature at the store, and Keiko had no clue how to be a normal person outside of the store's environment, particularly in the absence of an authoritarian figure like the store's manager telling her what to do. These aspects of role-playing and theatricality in Murata's central character can be explained with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity.

Butler (1999) argues that gender is performative; what is considered as the essence of a particular gender is “manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body” (p. XV). Keiko relies on her supervisor Mrs Izumi as she copies her style of shoes, clothes, and cosmetics, and similarly, on another colleague from whom she imitates speech patterns and even how to express emotions. Upon successful imitation and improvisation of people's traits in the limited space of the store, Keiko believes that she finally “pulled off being a person” (Murata, 2019, p. 29). All of these add humour while presenting character development, but these anecdotes also serve a larger purpose contributing to the novel's message. Butler (2015) acknowledges that the self's agency that seeks to make itself will be challenged by social and discursive powers. As she was *playing* a person rather than being a real one with experience and emotions, Keiko would never open herself up to others to share her thoughts and fears, and consequently, she never made close friends, nor did she have any relationships. Voluntary celibacy followed this, and she considered herself “a part in the machine of society” (p. 19), troubling her gender category. The rejection of heteronormativity and the repression of the couple form with reproductive pressures is a theme repeated in Murata's latest novel, *Earthlings*. Murata reiterates that “alienation from the body is a foundational trait of the labour-relation under capital” (White, 2020).

The alienation from intimacy did not stop Keiko, and the store worker in her insisted on doing the tasks required of her on repeat, making herself a “cog, going round and round” (p. 4). Understanding the process of iterability in Keiko's performative actions is crucial in interpreting her identity formation (Butler, 1999). Her everyday job gives her a function and an identity. This also shows that her performativity embodying an ideal convenience store worker is not a “singular act or event, but a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism” (Butler, 1993, p. 95). Keiko's repetitive act of imitation is animated by a desire to be treated normal and to make her life liveable, and this desire arises not from personhood but social norms (Butler, 2004). So, Murata's characterisation of Keiko asks the pertinent question of hegemonic norms and capitalist policies, leading to a life of precarity.

3. Post-Fordist Precarity in Capitalist Japan

Rapid social changes linked with the development of the market economy resulted in the rise of precarious jobs. Precarity describes a specific subjectivity marked by a strong presence of uncertainty followed by ontological conditions such as existential anguish and a total breakdown of social identity. It is also seen as a societal outcome of the economic forces which determine the living conditions under late capitalism (Rosario & Rigg, 2019). It can lead to a loss of pride and self-worth, alienating people like Keiko even further from fitting into society.

The dramatic growth of part-time employment was recorded after the economic crisis in Japan in the 1990s. Japanese firms, which were hitherto growing exponentially with post-Fordist labour strategies, were forced to adopt strict cost-cutting policies like reducing the number of regular workers and increasing part-time employees (Osawa et al., 2013). This led to a shortfall in social and economic security resulting in significant social backlash affecting family formation, fertility rates, and poverty.

Allison's (2013) well-documented ethnographic study *Precarious Japan* surveys the predominance of social precarity in 21st century Japan. She gives particular attention to hopelessness and alienation amongst the working class. Employees are also expected to sacrifice all elements of personal life for the company (Allison, 2013). Keiko is a perfect example of this as she describes herself as a plant growing on water and food provided by the store, surrendering every other aspect of her personal life. This form of resignation arises from her precarious living conditions where she fails to reproduce conventional gender roles, apart from surviving on a socially acceptable job. Butler (1993) despises a universal definition of womanhood and any other form of forced homogeneity. This template for social belonging in Japan is made with too narrow a structure that excludes weaker sections of the society. "The success story of the Japanese model of post-Fordism thus actually belongs mainly to capitalist corporations with their improved financial positions, but not to the majority of working people, peasants, and weaker people like the aged, the sick or many women" (Itoh, 1992, pp. 116-117). This contributed to the condition of what Allison (2013) calls "de-sociality" (p. 85).

The rise of the *konbinis* or the convenience stores in the post-Fordist era represents the recalibration of life that has occurred in the contemporary socio-economic landscape of Japan. The sheer popularity and the homogenising tendencies of these stores with standardised packages of products and services hold a remarkable influence over its consumers as an everyday institution (Whitelaw, 2018). There is a heavy dependency of the customers on these stores that are open without a break. Its vulnerable part-time employees like Keiko are long estranged from the post-war Japan renowned for its era of lifelong jobs. This new state of precarity has led to a "crimping of the soul in Japan" like a national disease (Allison, 2012, p. 349). In Japan, the origins of precarious employment are rooted in both country-specific factors as well as global processes. Nevertheless, one can also deduce a transnationalisation of similar precarious conditions. The severity of global precarity experienced in developing countries following the covid pandemic is an excellent example of this (Sumner et al., 2020). So, it is important to study the responses from the weaker sections to such vulnerable living conditions.

4. The Precarious Life of a Convenience Store Human

Industrialised societies have undergone dramatic labour market transformations over the last few decades, and gender relations are at the heart of such changes. Precarious employment restructures public and private power relationships between men and women. "The making of a new reproductive bargain between the state, capital and organised labour can destabilise the old gender order" (Gottfried, 2009, p. 89). Keiko's deceptive creation of stability did not endure as a foil character enters in the form of Shiraha, a new employee at the store. Her encounter with Shiraha is her first instance of forming a relational dependence on another human being, challenging her long-held beliefs and values, resulting in a crucial acknowledgement of her inherent precarity leading to a transformative introspection.

Before the arrival of Shiraha, Keiko was confident that her performative tactics were working effectively. Shiraha, despite being a new employee at the store, was unenthusiastic and indifferent about his part-time job. This is in sharp contrast to how Keiko perceived her job. The initial disinterestedness that Shiraha showed was soon replaced by his uncouth behaviour and misogyny, which the store deemed a threat to its stable environment. His short stint at the store came to an end as he was expelled for stalking a customer. However, his expulsion was guaranteed long before this incident due to his persistent non-compliance with the rules of the store. This confirms Keiko's belief that "a convenience store is a forcibly normalised environment where foreign matter is immediately eliminated" (Murata, 2019, p. 60), further justifying her relentless attempt to sustain a performance of normalcy to survive. Apart from his apparent sexism and frustration at everything and everyone, Murata has bigger plans behind introducing a villainous character like Shiraha. Shiraha himself is a misfit like Keiko and a nonconformist but not by choice. He was homeless, unemployed and came to the store, in his own words, for "marriage hunting" (p. 67). Shiraha's views on marriage represent the notion of a hopeful return to the traditional family-corporate system of Japan with a male breadwinner with a permanent job and a full-time housewife with children. Kano (2015) states that such a notion of family is "an ideology fed by biological essentialism" and should be discouraged (p. 98).

Keiko's encounter with Shiraha fundamentally alters her perception of her identity and her role in society. Butler's theory on performative subjectivity is not limited to normative identity politics but is extended to having an ethical dimension and relationality (Butler, 2009a; Shams, 2020). In her oeuvre, the theory of "performativity becomes linked with precarity" (Butler, 2009b, p. iv). Although critics like Boucher (2006) found Butler's turn to ethics problematic, there is a broader acceptance from scholars like Dean (2008) and Mills (2015), who argue that Butler's ethics and studies on subjectivity are grounded in a fundamental relationality to the other. There is a need to acknowledge and attune to an inherent presence of unknowingness and precarity, which is found in everyone.

When every other employee at the store was relieved at Shiraha's dismissal, Keiko was mentally disturbed at how easily misfits are replaced in a capitalist institution. For this reason, when she met Shiraha again in the streets in a miserable condition, she was kind to him. She bought him food and provided a place to stay. Despite his helpless condition, he was resentful and disrespectful towards Keiko, emphasising that she is a bigger misfit than he was owing to her spinsterhood and irregular employment. Butler (2009b) does acknowledge that people who do not live their gender in currently intelligible ways are always at a greater risk of violence and

harassment. Although a considerable part of the middle-class Japanese population has precarious jobs like Keiko, she is differentially exposed to unjust treatment and leads what Butler calls an “unliveable life” (Butler, 2006, p. xv). Furthermore, Keiko’s gender also placed her at a disadvantage, and this is marked by the inequalities found in the Japanese workspace. Women are highly concentrated in part-time and low-paying jobs in Japan. In 2019, 44.2% of employed women were part-time and temporary workers, compared to only 11.7% of employed men (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020). Despite remarkable economic progress, Japan’s gender pay gap is the second-highest among OECD countries. Japanese women earned 23.5% less than their male counterparts (OECD, 2020). So, Keiko’s fight against the odds is far more difficult than that of Shiraha’s.

Shiraha’s endless rants on marriage, career and society caused Keiko significant discomfort. Even then, they came to a mutual agreement that keeping him at her home would result in a better acceptance of Keiko as a *normal* woman, “from being triply handicapped as a single, virgin convenience store worker to being a married member of society” (Murata, 2019, p. 140). To add humour and irony, Murata shows how Keiko keeps Shiraha at her home as a pet, taking a jibe at the nostalgic yearning for the old ways and exposing the inherent sexism in it.

Keiko’s colleagues respond approvingly to her choice of keeping Shiraha to her surprise, prompting her to question the illusory nature of a dysfunctional society. Her hard work and commitment to the store are not appreciated in the least. Furthermore, the newest employee at the workplace, young Tuan, “was rapidly absorbing the store” (p. 126). He began to resemble all other workers, making Keiko wonder that she too, like Shiraha, could be easily replaced like disposable commodities at the store irrespective of her selfless dedication. This, aided by her sister’s pressure, led to Keiko’s resignation from the job.

The middle-aged woman with part-time employment who has opposed the “conventional expectations of marriage and childbearing will have to develop new strategies” to move forward (Thornbury, 2020, p. 74). Her job was the most cherished possession in her life. All those years of daily routine coming to an abrupt end rattled her. She always thought that “a convenience store is a world of sound” (p. 1), and now all that remains with her is an unsettling quietness and a life without direction or purpose, primarily due to an absence of an authoritarian figure dictating her actions. Be it the employee instruction manual or the gender roles that she had to fulfil, she was always on the lookout, compliant and imitating. Following a miasma of despair and breakdown, she joins another convenience store. In an epiphanic fashion, she recognises herself as a “convenience store animal” (p.162), sacrificing every other aspect of her life for this job, a complete surrender of her body and mind. This ending is heavily disconcerting for a novel filled with deadpan humour, teeming with the author’s pessimism and seething resentment about modern life under capitalism. However, Keiko’s sheer satisfaction at her defiant act of breaking away from the scheming clutches of Shiraha and bidding farewell to societies’ expectations of her for a nobler, altruistic cause inspire a different look at the ending.

Keiko was not given glorious salvation from the capitalist hold on her lifestyle. She will not be accepted for what she is, and people around her will still judge her for all her differences. However, there is something delicately optimistic about this dark yet rebellious ending. The last paragraph in the novel describes Keiko looking at her reflection, thinking about her identity after

her transgressive act, that for the first time, she could think of herself as "a being with meaning" (p. 163). This is followed by a description of a newborn baby, the memory of her nephew's birth, portraying to the readers a picture of Keiko's symbolic rebirth as a selfless and confident 'being'. In the everyday cycle of vulnerability and change, Murata drives home the message that what it means to be a woman cannot remain the same from one era to the next, and this is what Butler (2021) reminds in a recent interview, that "we need to rethink the category of woman". The conventional meaning of gender can change as its norms are refused and recreated.

The original Japanese title of Murata's novel is *Konbini Ningen* which translates to "Convenience Store Human Being" instead of the *woman* found in the title of the English translation (Nicolae, 2018, p. 49). This renaming was the publisher's decision and not of the author or the translator (Murata, 2018). The capitalist system can reduce people to numbers and figures supplemented by a repudiation of the affective domain, eventually leading to precarity. Without overcoming her precariousness completely, Keiko rose above her gender and societal roles prescribed for her by powers and conventions larger than her. Previously, she was compelled to imitate normality out of a profound sense of guilt and fear as she remained, owing to her *abnormality*, "an individual to be corrected" (Foucault, 2003). Beneath the larger regulative discourses of power pervading our lives lie innumerable everyday practices, tactical and resistive, which can escape hegemonic totalization. Michel de Certeau (2011), with his famous anecdote of walking in the city, explains this remarkable phenomenon. City planners carefully construct definite pathways for pedestrians and vehicles to move around. But people collectively do not follow the laid down path every time, often finding their way by taking shortcuts or different routes to reach their destination. An identity is realised in relation to a series of differences that have become socially accepted. These differences are essential to its very being (Connolly, 2002; Reicher, 2004).

Precarity is a socially and politically induced condition. The heightened state of precariousness is caused by institutions of power and is used for geopolitical and cultural predominance. The vehemence with which vulnerability is used for manipulation and subjugation, especially in advanced capitalist societies, restricts the ways by which flourishing of life can be promoted (Butler, 2009b). Analysing an individual's experience, with careful attention to gender performance and social life, would be incomplete without acknowledging the inherent precariousness in living conditions. This is why Murata became a Nietzschean diagnostician with an eccentric character like Keiko, completed with an unsettling yet thought-provoking ending. She subverts the imposed performances to engender alternative ethical responses. She effectively portrays the deeply problematic relationship between capitalism, work culture and identity formation.

5. Conclusion

The institutionalisation of precarity has become a new form of domination that distinguishes the 21st century. Murata's central character shows a strong desire to live despite her precarious living conditions worsened by elements like capitalism. The desire to live is notably different from self-preservation. The psychic condition of insecurity and the breakdown of everyday life under

modern capitalism can be challenged with disruptive performative acts. By highlighting Keiko's failure at effectual imitation of acceptable gender norms and prescribed societal roles, Murata foregrounds the need for diversification and acceptance to emanate a growing awareness among the precariat.

Keiko's intriguing act of sacrifice for a convenience store and its customers is also a revelatory experience of alterity. Her initial way of acting in bad faith or the rage and self-pity displayed by Shiraha cannot impede the status quo and the stability simulated by institutes of power. An ethical act of acknowledging the responsibility to the other is the ultimate antidote to modern universality. The young population of Japan are not alone in facing precarity. There is a vast growing population around the world employed in precarious jobs as post-Fordist capitalism enters the personal spaces of its subjects. The absence of complete emancipation for Keiko at the novel's conclusion suggests that she will always be on the fringes fighting alone for everyday survival. Because such tactics are defensive and opportunistic and are only seized momentarily in spaces. It would take a collective agency with a shared sense of precariousness to fight the inequities of globalism. The post-Fordist era witnessed movements to end racism and discrimination against women's rights, signifying that revolutionary movements by vulnerable populations can challenge the blind destructiveness of global capitalism. An embrace of equality, multiplicity, and difference with care and support is needed to go beyond Japan's era of a relationless society and reclaim hope out of precarity. With its dark, deadpan humour, Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* makes a trenchant statement towards a new ontology of engaging with precariousness.

Declaration of Conflict of Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding

No funding has been received for the publication of this article. It is published free of any charge.

References

- Allison, A. (2012). Ordinary refugees: Social precarity and soul in 21st century Japan. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85(2), 345-370. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2012.0027>
- Allison, A. (2013). *Precarious Japan*. Duke University Press.
- Allison, A. (2015). Precarity and hope: Social connectedness in postcapitalist Japan. In F. Baldwin & A. Allison (Eds.), *Japan: The precarious future* (pp. 36-57). New York University Press and Social Science Research Council.
- Boucher, G. (2006). The politics of performativity: a critique of Judith Butler. *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 1(1), 112-141.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. Routledge.

- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2006). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.
- Butler, J. (2009a). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso.
- Butler, J. (2009b). Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. *Aibr-revista De antropologia iberoamericana*, 4(3), i-xiii. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11156/aibr.040303e>
- Butler, J. (2015). *Senses of the subject*. Fordham University Press.
- Certeau, M. de (2011). *The practice of everyday life* (S. Rendall, Trans.) (3rd ed.). University of California Press. (Original work published 1980).
- Connolly, W. E. (2002). *Identity\difference: Democratic negotiations of political paradox*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Dean, J. (2008). Change of address: Butler's ethics at sovereignty's deadlock. In T. Carver & S. A. Chambers (Eds.), *Judith Butler's precarious politics: critical encounters* (pp. 109-126). Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Abnormal: Lectures at the college de France 1974-1975* (G. Burchell, Trans.). A. Davidson (Ed.). Verso.
- Gleeson, J. (2021). Judith Butler: "We need to rethink the category of woman." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/sep/07/judith-butler-interview-gender>
- Gottfried, H. (2009). Japan: The reproductive bargain and the making of precarious employment. In L. F. Vosko, M. MacDonald, & I. Campbell (Eds.), *Gender and the contours of precarious employment* (pp. 76-91). Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Blackwell.
- Itoh, M. (1992). The Japanese model of post-Fordism. In A. J. Scott & M. Storper (Eds.), *Pathways to industrialisation and regional development* (pp. 102-118). Routledge.
- Jessop, B. (1992). Fordism and post-Fordism: A critical reformulation. In *Pathways to industrialisation and regional development* (pp. 42-62). Routledge.
- Kano, A. (2015). The future of gender in Japan: Work/life balance and relations between the sexes. In F. Baldwin & A. Allison (Eds.), *Japan: The precarious future* (pp. 87-109). New York University Press and Social Science Research Council.
- Kenney, M., & Florida, R. (1989). Japan's role in the post-Fordist age. *Futures*, 21(2), 136-151. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(89\)90002-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(89)90002-5)
- Mills, C (2015). Undoing ethics: Butler on precarity, opacity and responsibility. In M. Lloyd (Ed.), *Butler and ethics* (pp. 41-64). Edinburgh University Press.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2019). *Labour Force Survey (00200531)* [Data set]. E-Stat: Statistics of Japan. <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/roudou/index.htm>
- Murata, S. (2018, November 6). *Convenience store woman: Meet author Sayaka Murata* [Video]. Interview by G. T. Takemori. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Eag3-URh2I>
- Murata, S. (2019). *Convenience store woman* (G. T. Takemori, Trans.). Granta Publications. (Original work published 2016)

- Nicolae, R. (2018). The modern shape-shifter maiden in Sayaka Murata's convenience store woman. *Dialogos*, 18(35), 41-55. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=746776>
- OECD (2020). *Gender wage gap* [Data set]. OECD iLibrary. <http://doi.org/10.1787/7cee77aa-en>
- Osawa, M., & Kingston, J (2015). Risks and consequences: The changing Japanese employment paradigm. In F. Baldwin & A. Allison (Eds.), *Japan: The precarious future* (pp. 58-86). New York University Press and Social Science Research Council.
- Osawa, M., Kim, M. J., & Kingston, J. (2012). Precarious work in Japan. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(3), 309-334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212466240>
- Reicher, S. (2004). The context of social identity: Domination, resistance, and change. *Political Psychology*, 25(6), 921-945. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00403.x>
- Rosario, T., & Rigg, J. (2019). Living in an age of precarity in 21st century Asia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 49(4), 517-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1581832>
- Shams, P. (2020). *Judith Butler and subjectivity: The possibilities and limits of the human*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sumner, A., Ortiz-Juarez, E., & Hoy, C. (2020). *Precarity and the pandemic: COVID-19 and poverty incidence, intensity, and severity in developing countries*. United Nations University. <http://dx.doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2020/834-4>
- Thornbury, B. E. (2020). The thirty-something "Tokyo daughters" of Kawakami Hiromi's strange weather in Tokyo, Shibasaki Tomoka's Spring Garden, and Murata Sayaka's Convenience Store Woman = 川上弘美の「センセイの鞆」、柴崎友香の「春の庭」、と村田沙耶香の「コンビニ人間」における三十代の「東京の娘達」. *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, 57(1), 57-77. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwj.2020.0000>
- White, B. (2020). Broken Bodies: *Unravelling Alienation and Intimacy in Sayaka Murata's Earthlings*. Elephant. <https://elephant.art/broken-bodies-unravelling-alienation-and-intimacy-in-sayaka-muratas-earthlings-05112020/>
- Whitelaw, G. H. (2018). Konbini-nation: The rise of the convenience store in post-industrial Japan. In *Consuming life in post-bubble Japan* (pp. 69-88). Amsterdam University Press.

Jaseel P is a PhD candidate in the Department of Humanities and Social Science at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. His research interests include philosophy of literature, literary theory, postcritique and performance studies.

Rashmi Gaur is a Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. Her research interests include Professional Communication, Culture and Gender Studies, Media Studies, Digital Humanities, Modern Fiction, and Indian Writing.
