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Hegemonic Discourse of The Cruise Industry in Balinese Society

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Abstract

Despite the long hours, hierarchical, and exploitative working conditions in the cruise sector, the rising trend among young Balinese to participate in the sector reflects that working in the cruise industry is not only considered a pathway to economic mobility, but also social prestige and modernity. This study examines how the discourse on the cruise sector is constructed and internalized in Balinese society. This phenomenon was analyzed through a cultural studies approach drawing on Foucaultian theory of power and knowledge. The data was collected through secondary sources, observation, and in-depth interviews with Balinese workers. The findings reveal that the hegemonic knowledge of the cruise sector promoting the idea of cosmopolitan experience, social and economic transformation, and intercultural interaction was constructed and circulated by many actors, such as training institutions, the government, and the workers themselves. These discursive constructions normalize the cruise industry as a prestigious and legitimate pathway to success while masking the unequal power relations and exploitative labor practices within it. This study provides a critical insight into how power operates through the production and internalization of knowledge, sustaining inequality within the transnational labor regime.

1. Introduction

Like other global industries operated by transnational corporations, the cruise sector embodies a fundamental paradox: it serves either as an instrument of exploitation or a

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development agent (Mingst, 2003). Beneath its polished image as a luxury tourism destination for travelers from developed nations, the cruise industry has drawn criticism for operating as a total institution—one that demands long working hours, heavy workloads, and physically and mentally exhausting conditions (Terry, 2017). The dominant narrative surrounding cruise ships, filled with imagery of social and economic mobility, conceals the harsh realities faced by most crew members from developing countries, particularly Indonesia (Nilan & Artini, 2014). In the Balinese context, the popular narrative surrounding cruise ship employment is closely tied to ideals of social status and financial advancement. The profession is often viewed as a quick path to elevate one's social standing and fulfill familial and religious obligations.

However, the reality of working on cruise ships can often be quite different from these presumptions. Employees often endure grueling conditions, including long working hours and immense pressure (Chin, 2008; Oyogoa, 2016; Teberga, 2021; Terry, 2017).Nevertheless, the positive discourse surrounding the profession tends to overshadow these difficulties. This contrast between the glamorous image of cruise work and its exploitative labor conditions illustrates the dynamics of power in the production and contestation of knowledge.

This dominant knowledge is eventually internalized and accepted as a 'regime of truth' by the Balinese community, influencing how individuals think and act within this industry. As such, this study aims to investigate how the dominant discourse surrounding cruise ship employment is constructed and internalized in Balinese society, and how this discourse shapes individuals' perceptions and decisions to pursue work in the industry despite its exploitative nature.

Literature Review

Previous works of literature on cruise ships in Balinese society have highlighted various aspects of the phenomenon. A study by Nilan & Artini (2013), for example, studied the motivations and hopes of Balinese youth to work on cruise ships. The study found that earning a high income and supporting the family had become the main motivation for the young Balinese to participate in the cruise sector. Before joining the cruise sector, they had equipped themselves with training in the tourism sector and improved their hospitality skills. Another study by Oka& Pugra (2017) examined the implications of working on cruise ships on the social and cultural status of Balinese women. This study found that the participation of Balinese women in the cruise ship industry shows the significant role of women in development. In the context of Bali, the role of women working on ships is crucial in maintaining Balinese cultural sustainability; besides, they also help introduce aspects of professionalism and broaden horizons due to global exposure. Similar to Oka, a study by Wastawa & Suwadnyana (2021) also underscored the contribution of Balinese cruise ship workers to indigenous communities. Working on cruise ships allows workers to carry out various traditional and religious ritual activities that are part of the indigenous identity of the Balinese people. The studies by Nilan & Artini, Oka, and Wastawa collectively highlight that employment on cruise ships significantly contributes to the enhancement of social and economic status among the Balinese community. This consistent finding underscores why the prospect of working on cruise ships is a dominant and appealing narrative within Balinese society. Although there are studies that discuss various aspects related to Balinese cruise workers, as shown above, there is still a gap in the literature that specifically analyzes how hegemonic discourses about cruise ship work are constructed and internalized in Balinese society. Therefore, research that focuses on this discourse analysis will make a significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of power and knowledge that shape Balinese people's perceptions of the cruise ship industry.

Foucault's Power and Knowledge

Power and knowledge are central concepts in Foucault's perspective, which assumes that power operates through knowledge distributed in society. Thus, power is not neutral because it

is always bound by power relations. Power, according to Foucault, works through various mechanisms of discipline, regulation, and discursive practices that shape individuals and society without having to rely on a single ruling entity. In other words, for Foucault, power does not only come from the state or the capitalist class, but also operates through institutions, norms, and discourses that shape human subjectivity in everyday life. Power does not belong to a particular agent, such as an individual or a state, or a group with certain interests; instead, power is spread across various places of social practice. Power should not be understood only as something that is oppressive, but also productive; power is discourse, knowledge, body, and subjectivity (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In Foucault's perspective, the function of knowledge is not only as an instrument for understanding social and world reality, but also has a crucial role in guiding, shaping, and regulating individual behavior and the social structure as a whole. As stated by Foucault (Foucault, 1980), as follows:

> *"What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression"*.

Therefore, it is evident that power operates through appealing means, such as knowledge and discourse recognized by society as truth, rather than always by conventional coercive measures. The idea proposed by Foucault will be the theoretical basis for examining the discourse on cruise ships that is circulated in Balinese society. Understanding how the hegemonic discourse about working on cruise ships is constructed and internalized in Balinese society is important to see how knowledge is accepted collectively without realizing that knowledge is attached to certain powers that may gain advantages.

2. Methods

Referring to what was emphasized by Barker (2008) that "cultural studies has favored qualitative methods with their focus on cultural meaning", for that reason, this study was designed with an interpretive qualitative approach following the characteristics of critical Cultural Studies. In general, it can be understood that qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups related to social problems (Creswell, 2013) which can be used to interpret, explore, or gain a deeper understanding of certain aspects of human beliefs, attitudes, or behavior. Primary data in this study is information, narratives, and statements obtained by researchers during the observation and interview process. Secondary data in this study comes from journal articles, books, reports, mass media news, research results, theses, and dissertations related to cruise ship workers. Secondary data can also come from the official websites of cruise ship companies and associations, audio-visual media such as the internet, television, personal documents, social media, and others.

In research, it is also necessary to use the tools used by researchers in the process of implementing research, both in data collection, data processing, and data presentation (Arikunto, 2010). So, in this study, several instruments prepared were in the form of a list of questions as a guide in interviews, a recording device/tape recorder, a camera, writing instruments, a laptop, and a cellphone to communicate with informants. The list of questions will help in the communication process with research informants. Recording devices, cameras, and writing instruments help researchers to remember and record information that is missed in the interview process.

The data analysis was carried out after the data began to be collected. In the data analysis process, the data was connected to concepts, further generalizations, and general trends that were identified as an effort to find existing patterns and connections (Newman, 2014). In principle, qualitative data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process. The data

analysis technique followed the stages in Miles & Huberman (1992), which include 3 activity flows that are carried out simultaneously: namely, data condensation, data presentation, and concluding. The answers to the research questions refer to Michel Foucault's power/knowledge theory as a theoretical basis.

3. Results and Discussions

The high preference of people in developed countries for cruise-based vacations shows a direct correlation with the increasing need for human resources working in this sector. To maintain competitiveness in a highly competitive industry, cruise companies require a large workforce with specialized skills in the fields of hospitality, culinary, entertainment, technical, medical, and safety services (Artini & Nilan, 2014; Schlingemann, 2015). The demand for a large workforce is not only due to the increasing size of ships but also to the complexity of activities and entertainment offered to guests. The development of the industry has created jobs in the sector. As a result, more and more ship crews are drawn from countries with relatively low wages and living conditions (van Fossen, 2016).

From the workers' perspective, in addition to the opportunity to travel the world by sea and meet people from various countries, the hope of improving welfare is the main motivation for working on cruise ships. Several studies have shown that working on the cruise is closely related to the intention of high salaries. In a study conducted by Bolt & Lashley (2015), it was found that even though cruise workers get higher income compared to working in their home countries, workers revealed that they had to make many sacrifices to work on cruise ships. Traveling far from their home countries, sacrificing time with family, and working on ships for long periods of time were just a few of the many sacrifices they would make if it were not for the higher salaries compared to what they would receive in their home countries.

The attractiveness of working on a cruise, combined with the high employment in the industry, has become the driving factor for the Balinese people to enter the sector. The requirement for highly skilled personnel and the availability of Balinese workers with tourism industry experience resulted in a mutual response. In other words, Bali's background as a tourist destination also plays a role in contributing to producing skilled workers in this sector. According to Anak Agung Naditya Wardhana from the Bali Provincial Office of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), the interest of Balinese workers in pursuing employment on cruise ships remains high compared to other overseas sectors (Interview, December 2, 2024). Data from the Ministry of Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers recorded the number of Balinese workers on cruise ships in 2021 at 3,224 people. The number of cruise ship workers increases when the data is combined with data from the Manning Agency, which shows that the number of cruise ship workers until 2021 was recorded at a total of 15,436 workers. This number had decreased in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but again showed an increase in 2022, reaching 12,664 people. When compared to other sectors such as hotels and spas, fisheries, mining, construction, plantations, and others with formal employment status, working on cruise ships is the tourism sector that is most in demand by Balinese workers. As stated by Ida Bagus Subawa from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection and Placement Agency, the cruise ship sector is the dominant choice for workers from Bali because of Bali's background as a tourism area (Lestari, 2015).

Unfortunately, since their strong desire to work on a cruise drives them, many prospective Balinese workers have hastily tried many strategies to realize their dreams. An informant from Tabanan City said that their family had to pawn and sell their inherited rice farms as starting money for their kid to board a cruise ship. The son's wish that was unnegotiable stemmed from several young people in his hometown having experience working on ships. The informant and his wife sought to secure a loan from relatives in order to meet the expectations of their only kid, but their efforts came back short. Afraid of disappointing his son, he finally pawned their rice fields. They could breathe a sigh of relief because now their son had successfully gone on a ship

for the third time, but in the end, he felt regret because the rice fields that they had initially pawned were ultimately not redeemed, as he said below:

> "This is what it's like to be Balinese, stupid and innocent, but desperate to work abroad. Many don't think twice, if they're promised work on a ship, they'll pay extra. But it's like this, the small rice fields no longer ours," (Informant A, 4 February 2024).

The fraud case involving I Gede Doni from Buleleng in 2020 exemplifies a great desire to work on a cruise ship despite a lack of information about the industry. Due to a lack of knowledge about the requirements for working on a ship, this family spent hundreds of millions of rupiah to send their child to work on a cruise ship. However, even after such a long wait, their child did not board the ship (Tabelak, 2020). This is only one of many incidents of prospective workers falling victim to the scam and being unable to board a cruise ship.

Although the high interest in working on cruise ships stems from a variety of factors, including the high employment opportunities on cruise ships and the increasingly limited number of prosperous jobs in Bali, the young generation of Bali is also motivated by the many narratives circulating that working on cruise ships promises extraordinary success. In other words, working aboard cruise ships is viewed as an appropriate strategy for overcoming the scarcity of job alternatives that promise success in the home region. The dominant perception of cruises as an appealing opportunity to enhance one's standard of living and travel the world has overshadowed other aspects of the industry, such as labor exploitation, environmental consequences, and the inequalities that underpin the sector. This dominant knowledge, frequently motivated by commercial and political goals, has evolved into a method for regulating how we see and comprehend the cruise industry, often marginalizing the negative aspects that accompany it.

The reality of cruise ships, like other social realities, is not something given, but rather a social construction. Referring to Foucault's ideas, social reality is shaped by knowledge that is produced and reproduced through the mechanisms of discourse and power (Mills, 2003). Certain knowledge is disseminated and controlled by certain actors to be accepted by society as an undeniable truth. To ensure that certain social realities are recognized as truth or fact, the mechanism of knowledge exclusion plays a role in eliminating, denying, or discrediting counter-knowledge that has the potential to disrupt the dominance of established knowledge. The discourse about cruise ships that is widespread in Balinese society can be identified through various forms of knowledge that circulate to shape and strengthen the public's perception of cruise ships as a profitable economic opportunity. Narratives about international experiences, free world travel, and high salaries are the main knowledge conveyed to shape public perceptions about cruise ships. In addition, the formation of knowledge about cruise ships must be understood as a result of power relations that control how information is constructed, distributed, and received by workers and the general public. Thus, knowledge about cruise ships is controlled by dominant actors such as cruise companies, recruitment agencies, training institutions, and governments, who direct the narrative to align with their economic interests.

Social Mobility Knowledge Construction by Manning Agency

The proliferation of cruise ship training schools and employment agencies in Bali reflects the high enthusiasm of the community, especially the younger generation, for this profession. The existence of these training institutions shows that working on a cruise ship is not only considered an ordinary job opportunity, but has become one of the institutionalized career aspirations in contemporary Balinese society. Nowadays, it is not difficult for young people interested in pursuing a career in the cruise ship industry to find schools or training institutions that offer specific skills programs, such as food and beverage service, culinary arts, housekeeping, as well as

language and international work ethic training. This phenomenon also emphasizes that this sector has become an integral part of the local social and economic structure.

Cruise ship recruitment agencies in Bali deliberately create a narrative that working on a cruise ship is a road to social and economic mobility by using the media, recruitment pamphlets, and testimonies from employees deemed successful. As the image below shows, this story helps one to realize that working on a cruise ship is a means of financial advancement and a raised social level.



One of the training institution's billboards on the street. Photo by authors.

The picture above illustrates that training institutions share the knowledge that cruise ship workers have a superior position compared to people who do not work on cruise ships, such as the statement "Edik used to be an ordinary person like you. If you want to be an extraordinary person like Edik, join us (training institution)". The emphasis on the promise of social mobility invites aspiring ship workers to place their dreams on a career on cruise ships. This is in line with Foucault's idea that knowledge can influence people's behavior if it is internalized as a single truth. Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge elucidates this dynamic. He argues that power and knowledge are not separate entities but are co-constitutive; that is, power produces knowledge and knowledge produces power. In this context, the narrative constructed by training institutions serves as a form of knowledge that influences individuals' understanding of success and social mobility.

The Role of Government in Shaping the Discourse "Out of Poverty"

The perception of cruise ship employment as a pathway to improved welfare is strongly reinforced by community leaders and institutions in Bali. This positive image is not only perpetuated by training academies and recruitment agencies but also echoed by local authorities and societal figures. This, for example, is seen in former Governor of Bali Made Mangku Pastika's statement when reporting the results of his visit to the villages in a silakrama event as follows:

> "Every time I visit a village and see a house that is nicer than the others, it turns out that the owner is a family whose child works on a cruise ship,"(Rhismawati, 2018).

The statement above clearly implies that working on a cruise ship is considered a guarantee of welfare for the family. Not only Made Mangku Pastika, but also I Ketut Sudikerta, who at that time

served as Deputy Governor of Bali, also strengthened a similar narrative. Statements such as 'working on a cruise ship can free poor families from the trap of poverty' (Suyatra, 2017) became part of the discourse constructed to encourage Balinese youth to work in this industry. Pastika and Sudikerta at that time, initiated a training program for 1,000 prospective cruise ship workers each year starting in 2017. In various forums, the positive image of cruise ships continues to be built through the narrative of liberation from poverty and improving family welfare, thus instilling the understanding that working on cruise ships is an ideal economic solution for the Balinese people. The discourse on cruise ships is then strengthened through various actions that produce and normalize the dominant narrative.

As stated by Foucault, power not only works through words, but also through social practices, policies, and institutions that establish certain knowledge as truth. The research in this study found that the Bali government has initiated various training programs and strategic policies to encourage Balinese youth to work on cruise ships, intending to improve welfare and break the chain of poverty. Some of these programs include:

1. Free Training for Prospective Cruise Ship Workers: In 2018, the Bali Regional Government helped 1000 high school graduates to get jobs on cruise ships without additional costs such as passports, visas, and plane tickets. They give priority to students who come from poor families (Rhismawati, 2017).
2. Free Education and Certification for Prospective Cruise Ship Workers: Since 2012, the government has planned to cover the costs of education and departure for children from poor families to work as Indonesian migrant workers (TKI) on cruise ships, through the 2012 revised budget or 2013 APBD (Budhiana, 2012).
3. Cruise Workers Data Registration: Protection and the record of migrant worker data is a priority for the Bali Provincial Government in collaboration with the Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement and Protection Service Center (BP2TKI), Denpasar, to record migrant workers including those working on cruise ships, by providing electronic Overseas Worker Cards (E-KTKLN)(Agustini, 2012).

The Klungkung Regency government, for example, has made a job training program on cruise ships an innovation program to eradicate poverty. By providing a 'hook' in the form of skills and job opportunities, training and certification of prospective Indonesian migrant workers in collaboration with Job Training Institutions (LPK) such as Balindo Paradiso, are intended to accelerate the reduction in poverty rates in Klungkung Regency. As a result, in July 2022, Regent Suwirta released 4 poor heads of families to work on cruise ships(Website Resmi Pemkab Klungkung, 2023).

Thus, discourses about cruise ships are not only disseminated through verbal discourse but are also carried out through various social practices, policies, and programs that shape the way individuals understand and accept the reality of this industry as something normal and desirable. Repeated discourses that are reinforced by mechanisms of power produce the internalization of knowledge that gives birth to a regime of truth, as explained by Foucault below:

> "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault, 1980).

In the context of cruise ships, workers and the public will adopt certain views about the industry because they are constantly exposed to dominant narratives, such as the following interview excerpt:

> "Working 7 days a week, no days off, long working hours, what else? That's the risk of working on a ship. Working there is your own decision, right? You just have to do it. There is no coercion. If you don't like it, don't work on the ship. This is called work, everywhere, anywhere, there are rules," (Informant B, February 25, 2024)

Internalization of dominant knowledge about cruise ships causes conditions such as hard work, exploitation, or poor working conditions to be considered normal or even accepted as part of the job. This process shapes workers' thinking so that they do not see these situations as injustice, but as the norm in the industry.

Instant Way to Financial Advancement Narrative by the Workers

Balinese workers directly involved in the cruise ship industry also play an important role in spreading knowledge about this job. Positive narratives about cruise ships are conveyed directly to family and relatives, which in turn influences them to consider working in the industry. This can be seen in the following quote:

> "The first time *Iwak* (my uncle) went on the ship. When he came home, he liked to tell stories about the joys and sorrows of working on the ship, but I noticed that there were more joys than sorrows. Iwak said that he had been to several countries, even to Alaska. I was still a teenager at that time, and hearing that story, I was amazed. At home, this big *merajan* (family temple) was renovated by Iwak from the results of working on the ship. It was renovated 10 years ago. So I can see that working on a ship has more benefits, right?" (Informant C, interview March 12, 2024).

With the development of media technology, knowledge about cruise ships is increasingly being shared directly by workers through social media. Several YouTube channels managed by Balinese workers, such as @gededarsana_25 and @WayanEkayana, have become a space for sharing information about life on cruise ships, work experiences, and the challenges faced by workers. Through videos, vlogs, and other posts, they help shape the public's perception of cruise ship work as a promising economic opportunity. In the vlogs they create, workers also provide motivation and encouragement to people who aspire to work on cruise ships by showcasing their success stories as inspiration.

Content that includes experiences visiting tourist spots in each location when the ship docks, as well as occasions when personnel calculate income or tips from cruise passengers, adds to the sector's attractiveness. In addition, workers who are also content creators display their success through uploading videos about renovating houses, buying vehicles, and building businesses. This narrative becomes a dominant narrative that we witness from the experiences of cruise ship workers.

This internalization of knowledge also gives rise to a rejection of counter-knowledge, which Foucault terms as knowledge exclusion. This means that narratives about labor exploitation tend to be ignored or denied because they contradict dominant discourses that emphasize economic benefits and social mobility. In some cases, workers themselves can reject the idea of exploitation by projecting an image that they are 'fine', for example, through social media or personal testimony, which further strengthens the legitimacy of the dominant narrative about cruise ships as a path to success. Information that reveals labor exploitation, excessive working hours, and structural inequality in the industry will be denied, reduced, or even considered as individual complaints that do not represent the overall reality. This process reflects how power works in defining truth, as explained by Foucault, where only narratives that follow the interests of the dominant structure are legitimized. Thus, alternative knowledge that tries to criticize the existing system tends to be sidelined or weakened through various discursive mechanisms. Ultimately, this further strengthens the hegemony of the dominant narrative that has been embedded in society, making exploitation something that is hidden and difficult to question collectively.

4. Conclusion

The way that discourse regarding cruise ships is internalized in Balinese society reflects the dynamics of power relations, as Foucault suggests, using the significant roles of knowledge. Moreover, Foucault argues that power changes people's aspirations, wants, and identities in an attractive way; it is not only repressive. In Bali, the hegemonic knowledge about cruise ship employment has driven many young people to dream of similar professions, usually without fully knowing the difficulties of the sector. Sometimes resulting from a lack of critical interaction with the material given to them, this internalization of dominant knowledge can lead people to make major financial and personal investments to follow these opportunities and occasionally fall victim to fraud. Dissemination of knowledge through narratives constructed by various actors, such as recruitment agencies, the government, and the workers themselves, strengthens the image of cruise ships as an ideal solution for Balinese people seeking a more prosperous standard of living.

In conclusion, the case of cruise ship employment in Balinese society illustrates how power operates through accepted knowledge, influencing individual choices and societal norms. Recognizing and critically examining these regimes of truth is essential for empowering individuals to make informed decisions and for fostering a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities and risks associated with such employment paths. Further research is needed to explore how counter-narratives may be developed and sustained to challenge these hegemonic perceptions

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