

BALANCING TRADITIONS AND TOURISM: THE DYNAMIC ROLES OF BALINESE WOMEN

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Received: October 21, 2023. Approved: November 28, 2023. Published: December 18, 2023

Abstract

Tourism significantly influences global economic, social, and environmental landscapes, with women playing a crucial role in its dynamics. Despite their substantial presence in the tourism workforce, women, particularly in Bali, often face disparities in benefiting from their roles. This article employs a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of Balinese women in the tourism industry, focusing on how they navigate their roles amidst the cultural values inherent to them. The study delves into the dual aspects of their lives, exploring their perceptions and roles in both public and domestic spheres. It aims to uncover the challenges these women face and the potential support mechanisms that could bolster their active participation in the tourism sector. By providing an in-depth analysis of the unique challenges and opportunities encountered by Balinese women, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of their indispensable role within the tourism landscape, set against the backdrop of Bali's unique cultural and social context. The results showed that there is gradual acceptance and encouragement of women in tourism, providing women with opportunities, and a discernible shift towards a more favorable societal view of women in significant positions. This study emphasizes the need for strategies to address the disparities they face regarding skill development and education, workplace flexibility, and community engagement and support, which are critical areas for policy intervention. It is a call for action, a script for empowerment, and a blueprint for greater involvement in an industry where their presence is not just important but indispensable.

Keywords: Bali, domestic spheres, tourism, women's role

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as a ubiquitous global phenomenon, exerts a substantial influence across diverse economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). Pertinent to its extensive influence, women emerge as a pivotal demographic, exerting a profound impact on the tourism industry. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has at an international level, underscored the centrality of women's issues within the ambit of global tourism development. A plethora of research endeavors have delved into examining the ramifications of tourism on aspects such as women's income, employment opportunities, and educational attainments, down to the individual level (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Nassani et al., 2019).

Women's contributions to the tourism sector are indispensable. Comparative employment statistics reveal a higher proportion of women engaged in the tourism industry relative to other sectors. Data from the UNWTO (2023) indicates that women comprise approximately 54% of the global tourism workforce, a figure that notably surpasses their representation in other economic sectors. Their roles in tourism are multifaceted, encompassing areas from guest relations and marketing to high-level managerial responsibilities, thereby highlighting their predominance in the sector's workforce.

Although women constitute most of the workforce in the tourism sector, they frequently do not reap the full advantages of their employment (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). This disparity is attributed to a range of factors, one of which is the proclivity of women to opt for seasonal and flexible job roles, often necessitated by their responsibilities towards family care (UNWTO, 2022a). The extent of women's substantive participation in tourism-related employment is impeded by the intricate interrelation of prevailing socio-cultural norms and expectations, which influences their career choices and opportunities within this field.

Tourism in Bali is not just an economic force; it is a tide that reshapes the shores of tradition and modernity, often leaving the women of Bali navigating uncharted waters. This article is dedicated to exploring the role of Balinese women within the tourism industry through a phenomenological lens. The primary objective is to unravel the lived experiences of these women within the realm of tourism, particularly in the context of the cultural values intrinsic to them. This study seeks to gain a nuanced understanding of how Balinese women perceive their roles in both the public and domestic spheres. In doing so, it aims to highlight the specific challenges they encounter and identify the support mechanisms that could facilitate their enhanced involvement in the tourism sector. Consequently, this research endeavors to offer a deeper insight into the role of Balinese women in tourism, delving into the unique challenges and opportunities they face within the distinctive cultural and social framework of Bali.

This article introduces a novel perspective by employing a phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of Balinese women in the tourism sector. By focusing on the subjective experiences and personal narratives of these women, the study provides a unique insight into how traditional cultural norms and the evolving demands of the global tourism industry intersect and influence their lives, beyond statistical numbers. The article breaks new ground by highlighting the ways in which Balinese women navigate

the dual expectations of preserving cultural heritage and adapting to the globalized context of modern tourism.

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological methodology is employed to delve into the intricacies of the lived experiences encountered by the participants. Phenomenology, as an epistemological stance, concentrates on elucidating the core nature of human experiences in relation to a specific phenomenon. The focal point of this study is the experiential realm of Balinese women engaged in the tourism sector. This approach facilitates an in-depth examination of both their personal and professional spheres, thereby yielding critical insights into their distinct experiences (Alkharusi & Segumpan, 2021). Nevertheless, the application of phenomenology within the context of tourism research predominantly revolves around comprehending the subjective experiences and perceptions of the tourists themselves. It endeavors to penetrate the quintessence of these experiences, placing emphasis on individual narratives and interpretations over the pursuit of objective quantification or the derivation of broadly applicable conclusions (Szarycz, 2009).

This study focuses on two Balinese women, both actively involved in the tourism industry. Ms. A, the owner of a tour and travel business, and Ms. B, who operates a boutique hotel, exemplify diverse personal and professional experiences. Ms. A's marriage to a local Balinese man contrasts with Ms. B's partnership with a foreigner, providing a comparative lens to examine the influence of cultural and social dynamics on their professional and personal lives. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of their multifaceted roles.

The primary method of data collection in this study is through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both participants. These interviews are designed to encourage the women to share their stories, thoughts, and feelings about their work in the tourism industry and their personal lives. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility, enabling the interviewer to explore interesting or unexpected topics that emerge during the conversation, while still covering a set of predefined questions. The interviews were conducted between November 1 to 10, 2023 in a comfortable environment for the participants, ensuring a relaxed and open dialogue.

In conducting an in-depth interview with a Balinese informant, five critical questions were explored to understand the role and perception of Balinese women in the tourism industry. Firstly, the interview sought to gauge the significance of Balinese women's roles in this sector, delving into both their contributions and the importance attributed to their involvement. Secondly, it examined the local community's perspective towards Balinese women holding prominent positions within the tourism industry, probing into societal attitudes and cultural norms.

The third question focused on the self-perception of Balinese women regarding their careers, seeking insights into how they view their professional endeavors and their impact on personal identity. This was followed by an inquiry into the challenges and obstacles faced by these women, considering factors from family, social, and cultural contexts that might impede or shape their career paths.

Lastly, the interview addressed how Balinese women navigate their dual roles in domestic spaces—as wives and mothers—and in the public sphere as professionals in the tourism sector. This question aimed to uncover the balancing acts, societal expectations, and personal strategies employed by these women in managing these often overlapping spheres of life.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations are strictly adhered to. This includes obtaining informed consent from the participants, ensuring their right to anonymity and confidentiality, and respecting their willingness to participate in the study. The participants are informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

The data collected from the interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis, employing a manual approach without the assistance of software. This manual method is preferred as it facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the data. Manual analysis enables the researcher to immerse deeply into the qualitative data, fostering a closer connection with the participants' narratives. This involves transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and identifying key themes and patterns in the participants' responses. The thematic analysis allows for the extraction of significant insights related to the experiences of these women, helping to understand the broader implications of their roles in the tourism industry and their personal lives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Feminism and Anti-Feminism

Discussions surrounding women's issues frequently intersect with broader discourses on gender and feminist movements. Academic inquiries have rigorously examined gender disparities across various domains, scrutinizing the inequalities confronted by women both in professional settings and domestic environments. Encouragingly, there has been a noticeable uptick in the number of women engaging in professional careers outside the household, concurrently navigating their roles as mothers and spouses. This phenomenon of dual role occupancy has been a focal point of scholarly research, with notable contributions from researchers like Lyness and Thompson (1997), who have sought to elucidate the career trajectories of women, including those who are mothers. Findings from such studies consistently reveal that within identical work or organizational contexts, women often hold lower positions of authority compared to their male counterparts and face greater obstacles in their career progression.

The issue of role conflict is particularly pronounced for women who balance careers with homemaking responsibilities. While men also grapple with similar challenges, the spotlight remains on women due to their pivotal roles in family dynamics as wives and mothers. Research by Cinamon and Rich (2002) underscores that women who shoulder both professional and maternal responsibilities tend to experience more frequent conflicts between work and home duties. For most of these women, family priorities often take precedence, occasionally influencing their professional lives. This scenario is generally accepted as normative, in contrast to situations where work responsibilities adversely affect family life, which are less accepted and viewed as atypical.

An illustrative case of a public figure who exemplifies the significance of women's dual responsibilities as career professionals and homemakers is the American politician and former Governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin. Palin, who broke new ground as both the youngest and the first female Governor of Alaska, has actively engaged in the discourse surrounding women's dual roles. In her publication "America by Heart", Palin delineates her journey as a quintessential American woman balancing the demands of being a politician, public servant, wife, and homemaker. While she advocates for traditional female roles in domestic spheres, Palin has also identified herself as a feminist, a declaration she made in 2010. Initially perceived as a strategic move to resonate with her base, particularly conservative women, Palin's brand of feminism has been analyzed by Eagleton (2018) as a demonstration of her astuteness and intelligence, positioning herself as an anti-feminist with patriarchal leanings. Her approach to feminism aligns with the concept of post-feminism, which suggests that the era of liberal and radical feminism has concluded. Contrarily, Palin's conservative feminism is viewed as part of a right-wing, anti-choice movement seeking to redefine feminism (Sharrow et al., 2016).

Palin has lauded American women of the past for their struggles to secure recognition of women's talents and capabilities as equal to men, interpreting this as a natural and divinely ordained right. She draws on the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention on women's rights to argue that genuine feminists do not view men as oppressors or women and unborn children as mere personal choices. Palin holds the view that all humans, encompassing men, women, and unborn children, are deserving of love, respect, and affection. She notably opposes abortion, deeming it unnatural, unfaithful, inhumane, and contrary to feminist principles.

Palin's feminist stance is seen as a movement affirming and expanding the identity and roles of American women. Paglia (2008) notes that Palin's version of feminism heralds a new, vigorous form of American feminism, as articulated in her 2010 speech at the SBA-List. Palin characterizes her feminism as reflecting the pioneering spirit of historical American women, who balanced their adventurous endeavors with a commitment to home. She posits her movement as a novel conservative feminist wave, inspired by the pioneering ethos of early American women (Gibson & Heyse, 2014; Sharrow et al., 2016). This movement, according to Palin, epitomizes a resilient and independent feminist ideology, advocating for mothers with professional roles to value their domestic responsibilities equally.

Women and Tourism: Global Context

The UNWTO (2022c) revealed a notable phenomenon across various Asian and Pacific nations: a significant proportion of women attain education, yet there is a conspicuous discrepancy in leveraging this education into meaningful employment opportunities. The underrepresentation of educated women in the workforce can be attributed to a confluence of socio-cultural dynamics. These encompass societal pressures, expectations to conform to marital norms, religious constraints, and impediments in accessing employment avenues.

Focusing on the tourism sector in Asia, women encounter substantial obstacles in ascending to leadership roles (UNWTO, 2019, 2022a, 2022b). This challenge is not solely

a consequence of gender comparisons but is also influenced by intra-gender comparisons with women from higher social strata. Prevailing cultural norms in these regions often dictate that women should adhere to traditional feminine aesthetics and behaviors, and restrain from articulating their professional ambitions, thereby hindering their progress towards leadership positions.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNWTO (2023) underscored that women in the tourism sector were disproportionately impacted in comparison to men. The pandemic precipitated a greater job loss among women working in tourism. Female entrepreneurs in this sector, particularly those with restricted access to digital platforms, faced significant disadvantages owing to diminished networking opportunities during the pandemic. Furthermore, the escalation in caregiving responsibilities, compounded by cultural expectations and the closure of educational institutions, exacerbated the challenges faced by women in managing their enterprises amidst the crisis.

Women and Tourism: Bali Context

Within the Indonesian context, tourism emerges as a sector possessing considerable potential for enhancing women's welfare. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that between August 2022 and February 2023, women constituted 59 percent of the workforce in Indonesia's accommodation and food and beverage service sectors (BPS, 2023). In Bali, specifically, the tourism sector is recognized as a significant source of employment opportunities. According to Central Bureau of Statistics (2023), this sector accounts for 12 percent of the employment in Bali. However, it is noteworthy that in February 2023, women represented only 47 percent of the workforce in Bali's accommodation and food and beverage service sectors.

At a more localized level, research conducted by Cukier et al. (1996) observed that in the village of Kedewatan, a higher number of local men were employed in hotels, while women predominantly engaged in entrepreneurial ventures such as food stalls, art, and souvenir shops. These entrepreneurial activities were seen as providing the necessary flexibility for married women with childcare responsibilities. The decision-making of Balinese women, with respect to their careers in tourism, is significantly influenced by their prioritization of marriage, family, and religious commitments.

A strong identification with the profound impact of religion and ethnicity on both the personal and professional lives of the Balinese community was observed (Tajeddini et al., 2017). Strong social, religious, and ethnic networks are often instrumental in providing essential financial and moral support to women embarking on entrepreneurial endeavors. In Balinese society, women are expected to contribute financially, albeit as secondary earners, while primarily fulfilling their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers. This societal expectation has led many Balinese women to venture into small-scale, informal hospitality businesses. Such enterprises offer a viable means of balancing work and family obligations, making them particularly appealing to women, especially after marriage and the onset of familial responsibilities.

The interviews conducted with Balinese women revealed several key insights into their roles within the tourism sector. Initially, there was a palpable reluctance towards the involvement of women in this industry, a sentiment shared both by the women and the

broader local community. This apprehension can be ascribed to the emerging status of the tourism sector at the time. However, as the industry evolved, marked by the proliferation of educational institutions dedicated to tourism and a growing demand for skilled labor in hospitality venues such as hotels and restaurants, perceptions began to shift. This transformation not only opened new professional pathways for women but also engendered a progressive change in societal perspectives regarding their participation in the tourism sector. In her own words, one of our informants remarks, *'Tourism didn't just bring visitors to Bali; it brought a wave of change that we, as women, had to either surf or be swept away by'*.

Behind every souvenir, every graciously offered cup of Balinese coffee, there lies a heartbeat, a dream, a struggle. These are the untold legacies of Bali's daughters, mothers, and sisters woven into the fabric of its thriving tourism industry. The participation of women in Bali's tourism industry can be seen as a microcosm of broader socio-economic shifts. The initial hesitance towards women's involvement reflects traditional gender roles and cultural norms, which have historically influenced women's participation in the workforce. The gradual acceptance and encouragement of women in tourism align with global trends advocating for gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. This shift not only symbolizes a break from conventional roles but also highlights the dynamic nature of cultural practices and societal attitudes in response to economic opportunities and educational advancements. The positive impact of women's involvement in tourism in Bali underscores the sector's role as a catalyst for social change, providing women with opportunities for financial independence, skill development, and greater societal recognition.

The second notable insight pertains to the local community's perception of Balinese women occupying prominent roles within the tourism industry. There has been a discernible shift towards a more favorable societal view of women in significant positions within this sector. This change in attitude acknowledges not only the contributions of these women to the tourism industry but also their integral role in supporting their families (Krisnadi & Maharani, 2021). This evolution in perspective is critical in comprehending the dynamic role of women in Balinese society.

In the context of Balinese women's self-perception regarding their careers, the informant underscored the significance of how these women perceive themselves in harmonizing their professional and domestic roles. There exists a nuanced pride in engaging in meaningful careers, which is delicately balanced with the adherence to traditional domestic roles. This equilibrium entails sustaining respect and authority within their professional domain while concurrently fulfilling their duties as homemakers.

These women face multifaceted challenges and obstacles, influenced by familial, social, and cultural factors, which may either hinder or shape their career trajectories. A primary challenge lies in the complex balancing act between professional commitments in the tourism sector, often demanding considerable time and energy, and their traditional roles as homemakers, caregivers, and supportive partners. This dual responsibility demands proficient time management and prioritization skills, leading to a challenging interplay of roles that can be both physically and emotionally demanding.

Moreover, these women are navigating an environment characterized by changing societal attitudes and expectations. The initial skepticism about women's participation in tourism, a sentiment echoed both by the community and the women themselves, has gradually shifted to a more positive outlook. Nevertheless, overcoming lingering biases and stereotypes, particularly for women in leadership roles, remains a formidable challenge. Crucial to their success is the support from their families, especially spouses, and in-laws, where a lack of endorsement can be a significant obstacle (Wardhani & Susilowati, 2021). Furthermore, the responsibility to engage in community roles and local social activities, while enriching, adds an additional layer of commitment.

The informant elaborated on the cultural barriers facing Balinese women, stemming from a societal view that still regards women as secondary citizens.

"Barriers for Balinese women, in my opinion, are related to the Balinese culture where women are still considered second-class citizens. This is partly due to unwritten customary laws where a woman, once she is married and starts a family, loses any rights in her parents' home (her original home)."

This is partly due to unwritten customary laws where, upon marriage and starting a family, a woman loses rights in her parental home and is considered to have transitioned fully to her husband's family.

"I am considered to have migrated and belong entirely to my husband's family, even though the emotional connection and obligation to care for my own parents cannot be completely severed."

There persists a traditional mindset that views women as overstepping men when they assume leadership roles or engage in decision-making, where men may invoke rules that devalue women's opinions and deny them a decisive role in dynamic processes.

"Often, women bear even greater responsibilities. So, in my view, there is still a traditional mindset that considers women as overstepping men when they take on leadership roles or make decisions, whereas men justify this through rules that state a woman's opinion is not valued. She cannot be a decisive factor in any dynamic process."

Indeed, in daily life and even in the modern era, like in the tourism industry, gender equality has been realized to a greater extent, valuing someone for their achievements. Another challenge for women is that they are also vulnerable to sexual harassment, both psychological and physical.

The interview also delved into the manner, in which Balinese women adeptly navigate their dual responsibilities in domestic and public realms. In the domestic sphere, they fulfill roles as wives and mothers, while in the public sphere, they function as professionals, notably in the tourism sector. These women are charged with the meticulous allocation of their time and energy between domestic duties—catering to their husbands, nurturing, and educating their children, and adhering to social responsibilities—and their professional pursuits in the public domain, such as careers in tourism. Mastering these

multifaceted responsibilities is not only a source of pride but also a testament to their capability to excel in both domestic and public settings.

The career trajectories of Balinese women are diverse and individual-specific. While some express profound satisfaction and pride in their careers, others engage in their chosen professions due to a lack of alternatives, or because these careers fall within their zones of comfort. Nonetheless, most Balinese women find fulfillment in their careers, as these roles provide them with avenues for creativity, social interaction, and the development of independence and self-confidence.

Navigating the role of Balinese women, who often juggle careers in the tourism industry characterized by irregular working hours, with their familial and communal responsibilities, requires a delicate balance. This balance involves prioritizing tasks and responsibilities, focusing on more pressing matters while deferring less critical activities. Furthermore, it is imperative for these women to allocate time for personal well-being, or 'Me Time', which is crucial for maintaining their physical and mental health. This strategy not only enables them to manage their professional and domestic responsibilities effectively but also empowers them to thrive in both these spheres, reflecting a harmonious blend of traditional roles and modern professional aspirations.

Consistent with Zhang and Zhang (2020) assertion, this study acknowledges the cultural determinants of gender roles in Asia. However, it also highlights a critical oversimplification in their generalization of gender inequality across the continent. The empirical evidence from Bali, as presented in this article, demonstrates the resilience of women in overcoming workplace inequality, despite the additional effort required. This resilience is a notable deviation from the overgeneralized narrative of passive acceptance of inequality. Furthermore, this study extends Tajeddini et al. (2017) research on the influence of communication and family support in aiding Balinese women's career success in the tourism sector. By showcasing the active agency of Balinese women in navigating their professional lives, this research contributes a nuanced perspective to the existing literature on gender roles in Asia's tourism industry.

CONCLUSION

In the context of Bali, the involvement of women in the tourism industry is pivotal for its advancement. The voices of the women in this study echo a sense of contentment and resilience, their career paths intertwining harmoniously with the complex socio-cultural fabric of Balinese society. Their narratives suggest that the further inclusion of Balinese women in the tourism sector is not just beneficial – it's a catalyst for growth and innovation. Achieving this requires the development of a supportive ecosystem encompassing family support, which plays a vital role in offering moral, spiritual, and financial backing to women. Such support is multifaceted, including accommodating the women's professional schedules, active participation of husbands in childcare and household responsibilities, and mutual understanding within the family unit.

In the heart of Bali's communities, effective communication acts as a lifeline, maintaining a delicate equilibrium between professional aspirations and familial duties. In Bali, societal expectations place significant emphasis on women's participation in

community activities (*'menyama braya'*) and active involvement in local governance structures like the *'banjar'* (community council). This multifaceted existence requires a ballet of time management and adaptability, as Balinese women gracefully pivot between their roles in the tourism industry and their indispensable positions within the community.

In the intricate mosaic of Asian feminism, with its rich hues and diverse textures, the empowerment of women in industries like tourism takes on a multi-dimensional significance. Asian feminism, in this case, Bali, with its unique blend of advocating for gender equality within the framework of cultural and traditional norms, highlights the importance of contextualizing women's empowerment initiatives.

The evolving role of Balinese women in the tourism sector, particularly in light of the increasing trend of solo female travel, highlights the need for comprehensive recommendations to inform policy and management strategies. Such strategies should aim to empower these women and simultaneously drive the broader development of the industry. The inclusion of perspectives from solo female travelers, who must negotiate the demands of exploration with safety concerns, adds a layer of complexity to these strategies. This situation is akin to a skilled artisan discerning the intricate patterns, colors, and textures of their textile. A deep, multi-dimensional understanding of Bali's cultural, social, and economic landscape is crucial. This understanding should be thoughtfully integrated with the broader context of the Asian region, which is being progressively shaped by the unique perspectives and contributions of solo female travelers, thus enhancing the overall tourism experience.

Firstly, skill development and education are critical areas for policy intervention. Policies should be tailored to provide women with comprehensive access to education and training, equipping them for a range of roles within the tourism sector. This includes not only technical skills pertinent to tourism but also leadership and management training. Such educational initiatives would empower women with the necessary competencies to excel in their careers and assume leadership roles, thereby contributing to the industry's growth and dynamism (Pickel-Chevalier & Yanthy, 2023).

Secondly, workplace flexibility is essential in managing policies. Recognizing the dual roles of women as professionals and caregivers, management practices in the tourism sector should incorporate flexible working arrangements. This could manifest in varied forms such as adaptable working hours, the possibility of remote work, and supportive measures for family-related absences. Implementing such policies would facilitate a work-life balance for women, enabling them to fulfill their domestic responsibilities without compromising their professional commitments.

Lastly, community engagement and support are imperative. Policies should aim to strengthen community support systems, fostering an environment that not only acknowledges but actively facilitates women's roles in both professional and domestic spheres. This involves engaging community leaders and members in dialogues and initiatives that support women's career growth and societal roles. Such community-driven approaches are particularly relevant in the Balinese context, where social and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping gender roles and expectations.

One notable limitation of this study is its reliance on a relatively small and specific sample size, as it focuses only on two Balinese women actively involved in the tourism

industry. This constraint may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of women in Bali or in similar socio-cultural contexts. Additionally, the phenomenological approach, while providing deep insights into individual experiences, may not capture the full spectrum of perspectives and experiences of Balinese women in tourism. The study's qualitative nature also precludes the derivation of broadly applicable conclusions, making it challenging to establish widespread trends or patterns. Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, possibly incorporating quantitative methods to complement and broaden the understanding of women's roles in Bali's tourism sector.

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