

# Neo-Exoticism Discourses in Indonesian Online Media: Normalizing Cultural Tourism Regime amid Market Economy

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the construction of neo-exoticism discourses in Indonesian online news media. Drawing on online news media research, the authors show how the transformation of ethnic cultures in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia were positioned as the basis of various tourism events using the representation theory with the discursive-constructionist approach. The authors focus on how some Indonesian online news media reported and positioned Banyuwangi Festival through quotations of government's official's statements and descriptions of cultural events that emphasize the transformation of ethnic cultures to meet national and global tourism markets. In doing so, Indonesian online news media actively produced, promoted, and distributed discourses of neo-exoticism by emphasizing the beauty of certain of traditional rites, fashions, and arts in various carnivals and festivals. In addition, the media constructed neo-exoticism discourses as a formulas to popularize cultural and touristic events which proved to be beneficial, economically, for local people. However, the authors argue that broadcasting neo-exotic narratives also created online news media discursive subjects that normalize tourism regimes as managed by the cooperation of government and investors.

**Keywords:** *Banyuwangi Festival; cultural tourism; neo-exoticism; online news media; tourism regime*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Tourism industry utilizes online news media to promote destinations and events by providing information to influence potential tourists (Terzidou et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017a, 2017b; Williams-Burnett et al., 2016; St-James et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017; Kotsi & Valek, 2017). Media has a role in constructing tourists' imagination about destinations through semiotic potentials and discursive strategies (Crouch et al., 2005; Reijnders, 2011). In their effort to develop a cultural-and-natural beauty-based tourism industry, governments around the world maximizes online news media to disseminate information related to the uniqueness of their respective region.

In Indonesia, the government of Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, during the two periods of Abdullah Azwar Anas's (hereafter Anas) leadership in 2010–2020 has succeeded in boosting the tourism industry significantly by creating a glamorous tourism agenda, namely Banyuwangi Festival (hereafter B-Fest). It was reported massively, both through conventional media—such as television channels and printed media—and online news media.

The government of Banyuwangi first conducted B-Fest in 2011. The festival is an annual multi-events program, combining various cultural tourism, agricultural fairs, sports tourism, and many other events. It aims to

attract domestic and international tourists to come to Banyuwangi. The reporting of B-Fest through online news media mainly presented the uniqueness of local cultures which were being shown and transformed into various carnivals and festivals. The Banyuwangi government has achieved many national and international for their success in developing tourism in Banyuwangi.

This paper aims to examine the construction of neo-exoticism discourses in Indonesian online news media with a focus on the reportage of Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival—a fashion carnival based on the uniqueness of local cultures—as a part of B-Fest.

Historically, exoticism is a discourse with political interest represented by the colonial regime to name geo-cultural and community areas far from Europe (Said 1985, 2003, 2004; Marcuse, 2004; Elmarsafy et al., 2003). However, Huggan (2001) identified and criticized the interests of post-colonial governments to use exotic local culture to empower collective identity as a way to develop national awareness as well as tourism and cultural industries by creating various unique cultural events. Huggan called the condition as post-colonial exotic. Adopting Huggan's post-colonial exotic to analyze online media reports on cultural events, two of the authors formulated a concept called "neo-exoticism" to refer to discourses that emphasize the significance of transforming local cultures into glamorous products with new meanings to support the tourism industry (Setiawan & Subaharianto, 2018). In neo-exoticism, as the authors argued in our earlier work, media constructed various discourses about the efforts of post-colonial governments in producing extensive cultural events based on ethnicity to attract tourists. This paper discusses further by looking at how neo-exoticism discourse in online media is in line with the government's tourism policy.

Cultural representations through various discursive practices have a significant role in contemporary life. Foucault (2013: 162-163) argued that discourse is a group of statements that talk about a meaningful object. Discourse requires discursive practice, a set of procedures or systems in the process of forming that connects with power in society. Foucault (1981: 48-49) explained discursive practice or rules of discourse as a conceptual domain that produces a particular knowledge.

The authors use this Foucauldian perspective to understand various discourses about opportunities which utilize a variety of local cultures to support tourism activities to construct knowledge about cultural tourism.

Cultural tourism is a form of tourism that prioritizes and commodifies local cultures amid modernity (Salazar, 2012; Hsiao & Chuang, 2015; Croes & Semrad, 2015;

Lacy & Douglass, 2002; Croes et al., 2013; Yang, 2011). The Indonesian government also develops cultural tourism since the country considerably diverse ethnic cultures. Indeed, this policy follows the global trend as many other countries also prioritize cultural tourism to gain economic benefits (Grydehoj, 2012; Özel & Nazmi Kozak, 2012; du Cros, 2009; Kim, 2008; Zeppel, 2002; García et al., 2019; Kline et al., 2015; Lim & Bendle, 2012; Chianeh et al., 2018; Xie & Xu, 2004). Many studies expose the positive effects of cultural tourism, such as alleviating poverty (Anderson, 2015) and developing economic conditions (Loukaitou-Sideris & Sourelli, 2012; Mbaiwa & Sakuze, 2009). Furthermore, cultural tourism has been argued to be helpful for cultural conservation (Yun & Zhang, 2015) and empowering vulnerable indigenous communities (Wallace & Russell, 20014; Carr et al., 2016).

Garrison & Wallace (2021) argued that media have an essential role in disseminating various positive discourses of cultural tourism. Various media narratives construct many discourses on the advantages of touristic destinations—including cultural tourism—in economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects that may influence policy makers, tourism investors, residents, and tourists (Rao, 2017). However, discourses in tourism mostly are found to have connection to power and interests, including the construction of neo-exoticism in online news media that supports cultural tourism activities.

Foucault (1980: 194-196) argued that discursive apparatuses and techniques have a role in regulating subjects, especially regarding what topics can be discussed, written, and disseminated as well as who (persons, apparatuses, and institutions) can discuss and disseminate certain discourses to the public. The existence of discursive formation which requires a set of procedures, particular individuals (who may speak or write), institutions, and the mechanism of their dissemination will lead to the formation of an episteme. Danaher, Schirato, and Webb (2000: 17) described episteme as the product of the organizing principles that relate things to one another (by classifying and allocating their meanings and values) and, as a result, determine how the authors make sense of them, what the authors can know and what the authors can say. Epistemes originates from a series of discourses that are interrelated to one another in a discursive practice over a particular historical period which will form knowledge.

Certain knowledge that continues to be disseminated will form individual and institutional subjects whose behavior and orientation will follow the order of that knowledge (Hall, 1997: 55-56). Foucault (1980: 194-196) explained that apparatuses and techniques connected with certain knowledge are useful for regulating other subjects

which are considered contrary to the existing regulations. Apparatuses involve a relational strategy of forces that support and are supported by certain knowledge. Thus, knowledge is a form of power. However, this does not mean that power does not determine knowledge. Power also has a very strong role in determining under what conditions knowledge can be applied or not; power and knowledge are interrelated and inseparable—power/knowledge (Hall, 1997: 49; McHoul & Grace, 1993: 59).

Following the Foucauldian framework above, the authors examine how various online news reports on B-Fest formed a series of discourses about the uniqueness of local cultures. In addition, the authors also look at how authoritative individuals and institutions produced discourses about the uniqueness of local culture displayed in B-Fest. Regent Anas, for example, made official statements—through press releases and speeches at opening ceremonies—about the significant events, both in cities and villages, which framed culture. Although delivered at different events, these statements formed connected meanings, centered on the efforts to transform the diversity and uniqueness of local culture into potential events that can attract foreign and domestic tourists. Those statements became the primary sources of online media coverage regarding B-

As institutions disseminate news to the public, online media had a discursive strategy to form discourses that attract public attention. The similarity of topics from many online media on B-Fest reportage formed a discursive connection that constructs the central discourse about the uniqueness of local culture as a creative source in holding many cultural-tourism events. With the spread of these discourses, the result was a rapid progress in cultural tourism in Banyuwangi, complementing natural-beauty-based touristic activities in several areas, such as Mount Ijen, Alas Purwo National Park, and Sukamade National Park. These discourses, once again, came mainly from the Government of Banyuwangi Regency through Regent Anas and his apparatus, who consistently gave statements to the media. As more parties acknowledged the success of Regent Anas in building the tourism industry in Banyuwangi, the production of knowledge about cultural tourism through many online media contributed to the strengthening of regional power in the far eastern of Java.

## METHOD

In this paper, the authors adopt a constructionist approach in representation theory (Hall, 1997), it suggests that the construction of discourses in online media constantly

intertwines with historical contexts and power/interests.

The authors have collected data from the news coverage of B-Fest published by Indonesian online media, which focuses on the most considerably luxurious event Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival (hereafter: BEC). The authors have selected national online media that report on BEC and the growth of Banyuwangi tourism in general, such as *detik.com*, *merdeka.com.*, *mediaindonesia.com*, *kompas.com*, *suaramerdeka.com.*, and *liputan6.com*, from 2013 to 2019. From 2013, the number of events in B-Fest has increased in number, to fifteen from ten events in 2012 and three events in 2011. In 2019, the events at B-Fest had reached ninety nine events, before being halted in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, These coverage were limited to BEC, including news report from both the official statements of Regent Anas and his apparatus and journalists' coverage during the event. In addition, the authors have analyzed the discursive strategies of the reports. In this paper, even though the authors do not give a linguistic account into detail, the authors analyze essential statements in the selected news of events in B-Fest; the news which provides a certain picture of discourses related to magnifying and privileging a variety of transformative cultural events, the presence of authoritative figures, unique narratives, and the noteworthy achievements of B-Fest. In the final part, the authors focus on the interconnection between the discourses constructed in the news with the socio-cultural practices in which interests/power are the main forces driving the formation of a particular discourse. In presenting our analysis, the authors classify news report according to the following themes: (1) magnifying and privileging a variety of transformative cultural events, (2) unique narratives, and (3) exposing the extraordinary achievements of B-Fest.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Neo-Exoticism as Discourses of Cultural Transformation

Banyuwangi is rich in ancestral cultural heritage and natural beauty, such as mountains, forests, and beaches. Those become a natural-cultural source to sustain cultural policies. Setiawan, Tallapessy, and Subaharianto (2017a; 2017b) identified some characteristics of cultural development had been carried out by the government of Banyuwangi from the New Order era to the Reform era. The government's desire to purge communist influence in society, has made the New Order regime developed *Using* cultures, one of the dominant ethnic cultures in

Banyuwangi besides Javanese and Madurese. Its main purpose was to construct a regional identity that supported Indonesian nationalism. After the 1998 Reform, Regent Samsul Hadi (the regent from 2000-2005) strengthened ‘cultural politicization’ by mobilizing *Using* identity for his political interests, besides trying to accommodate other ethnicities in Banyuwangi. Meanwhile, Regent Ratna Ani Lestari (the regent from 2005-2010) tried to treat all ethnic cultures in Banyuwangi equally, although similar to her predecessor, she still prioritized the empowerment of *Using* cultures.

Regent Anas positioned various unique local cultures as essential elements that could be transformed into events in the tourism industry, so that they could bring economic benefits for the government, local artists, communities and the private sector (Anas, 2019). This paradigm influenced many policies to create a tourism-centered economy.

The tourism industry in Banyuwangi is metaphorically has a role of an umbrella that covers several other sectors and becomes the node of the entire development process in Banyuwangi. B-Fest becomes an opportunity to bring ethnic cultures into a transformation formula that is in line with the tendency of the tourism industry at the global level (Tallapessy, 2018). The transformation formula in question is a formula to that creates new, more varied, and attractive cultural events based on local culture. Therefore, B-Fest, has various cultural attractions inspired by local tradition in the form of festivals and carnivals in glorified sense; *Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival*, *Banyuwangi Beach Jazz Festival*, the culinary festival, and several village festivals. From 2011 until to 2020, the government of Banyuwangi had created various programs based on local cultures. Successfully, In 2019, B-Fest had a hundred main events and twenty-two additional events from January to December. However, Due to covid pandemic, B-Fest stopped organizing many events. One of Anas’s strategies was to disseminate various events through online news media to attract potential visitors.

In analyzing the news of BEC, the authors found a discursive framework centered on a transformative cultural perspective, namely presenting exoticization. The result of such a framework was that the news about B-Fest constructed discourses which depicted local cultures glamorously to follow the general trend in the tourism industry. The authors identify such discourses as neo-exoticism. This discursive framework was inseparable from reciprocal relations between the government of Banyuwangi and journalists; one is impactful to the other and both shared a common interest.

For the government, bad news on about B-Fest would be dangerous for the development of Banyuwangi’s tourism industry. Meanwhile, for journalists, they need exciting news to report in the online media where they work. The principle of speed, immediacy, and attractiveness which determine online media viewers and advertisers encouraged journalists to write about various events in B-Fest. Thus, both parties mutually need each other.

The authors identify three discursive characteristics in the reports of BEC in online news media that contribute to the dissemination of neo-exoticism. Firstly, online media magnified transformative cultural events in the news and justified the strategic role of cultural events for participants and spectators. Secondly, online news media presented the quality of uniqueness to evoke readers’ curiosity. Thirdly, online news media exposed the outstanding achievements of Banyuwangi under Anas’ leadership through events in B-Fest. In all three, the authors found the presence of authoritative figures to be consistent in the news coverage. The authors argue that these three strategies successfully became a unifying framework in strengthening the discourses of neo-exoticism in news reports on BEC as an example of cultural tourism.

## Discourses of Colorful Transformation

BEC is one of the flagship events in B-Fest. The main idea of the event is a carnival performing spectacular, beautiful, and glamorous fashion based on local cultures. Journalists mainly used statements from Anas’, Banyuwangi Culture and Tourism Office officials, and the Public Relations Bureau staff. About BEC 2013, for example, *Merdeka.com* reported as follows.

Thousands of residents and tourists thronged the streets to participate in catwalks for carnival talents. ‘Carnival is an effective way to promote regional tourism. Therefore, the authors held BEC,’ said Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas in the Regency Hall ... Anas said BEC was different from the carnivals in other cities. BEC exposed the theme of local cultures. While other carnivals using themes inspired by the outside culture, Banyuwangi is was the opposite, exploring the inside for the outside. ‘The authors want to share local culture with the global community,’ Anas said. (Andriansyah, 2013, translated from Indonesian).

The word ‘thousands’ is a common journalistic expression when a journalist wanted to emphasize a large number

of spectators of the cultural event. The actual number did not matter, the reality of the presence of many people was considered more important to report. The phrase, 'thousands of residents and tourists,' created more excitement and bombastic effect than hundreds. Of course, technically, it is challenging to identify the actual number of visitors, both Banyuwangi residents, and tourists. The use of 'thousands' aimed to bring out the unusual events that attract many visitors.

The significant legitimacy of the BEC was strengthened by direct quoting to Anas. According to him, the 'carnival' mode, which enabled transforming local culture into a glamorous visual mode, effectively promoted regional tourism. The carnival glamor based on local cultures, such as arts, wedding fashion, and traditional rituals in Banyuwangi, was believed to ignite. Thus, the promotion was constructed with ideal discourse, 'exploring' and 'introducing' cultural diversity outside while sharing local culture with the global society. The concept emphasized the paradigm flexibility of a regional leader familiar with globalization in the cultural and tourism industries. Anas wanted to connect Banyuwangi cultures with national and international networks with the primary goal of developing the tourism sector.

Online news media had consistently constructed the discourses of local cultural transformation and BEC's excellence. Regardless of the chosen theme of the fashion carnival, reporting with the purpose of blowing up with all frenzy and authoritative statements became the primary choice of journalists. Although there was a difference, as it merely became variant news, it did not come out of the framework of the district government. In reporting the preparation of BEC 2019, Liputan6.com quoted Anas as follows.

'The authors design BEC, not just a festival. BEC is a form of traditional cultural transformation into a new form that is interesting to enjoy. The authors are grateful that BEC got appreciation from the central government by making it the TOP 10 national event. The Minister of Tourism will do the opening,' said Regent Anas. BEC is a significant event in the Banyuwangi Festival series, which is always highly anticipated by tourists. (translated from Indonesian)

The reappearance of the phrase 'traditional cultural transformation' confirmed that the transformation discourse is the main formula. In this way, 'traditional culture' was presented in a 'new form' aligned with tourist demand. For example, costumes performed at the carnival were usually designed in a magnificent way

that represented the past's beauty and glory. Visitors were indulged in their visual desires for the luxurious exotic. The costume was no longer presented as an authentic-traditional form as the characteristic of exoticism in the colonial era, but a transformative-traditional form as the characteristic of neo-exoticism disseminated by online news media.

In the news above, the journalist showed no criticism of the carnival. It presented BEC's fairly prestigious fact as 'the TOP 10 national-tourism events. It also stated that the event was a big event that is 'always eagerly awaited by tourists.' The word 'always' was a way to reassure that a large number of tourists visit BEC. The majority of visitors were Banyuwangi residents from surrounding villages, towns, and cities. However, in the news above, visitors were not asked for opinions or criticism BEC it did not criticize Anas' claims regarding the greatness of BEC. Therefore, With the strategy of 'presenting' extraordinary and 'negating' the rebuttal of the claim, the news tried to convince readers that BEC was worth visiting.

During the 2019 BEC, by carrying out the theme 'Blambangan Kingdom,' visitors were invited to imagine a new exotic past. It was even more interesting when BEC 2019 created remarkable record with a fashion show with various forms of clothing and narration on the street catwalks. Nasruhak from Detik.com, for example, reported on how young creators within BEC created various glamorous and unique fashions based on clothes from the Blambangan Kingdom era as well as clothes depicting specific figures who played essential roles in the history of struggles in the colonial era. Because it was in carnival formula, the fashion depicting the Blambangan Kingdom's superiority and its influential figures was narrated magnificently in online media.

Justifying the strategic functions became another high-value discursive strategy, it significantly strengthens regional and national public belief in BEC and other events in B-Fest. Suaramerdeka.com reproduced Anas's words as follows.:

'This carnival is also a creative display for youth to take part in a broader level without ignoring their local identity. This event is what distinguishes us from others. Although the carnival is in modern packaging, the ethnic atmosphere is very dense,' Anas said. He continued that the BEC presents a different theme each year, but still maintains its roots of local cultures. 'Indirectly, all participants and spectators will learn the history and philosophy of Banyuwangi's local tradition that as the authors choose it as its fixed theme every year. The authors

hope to teach history creatively,' concluded the Regent. (Suaramerdeka.com., 2019, translated from Indonesian))

The phrase 'a creative display' reminded us of culture on display (Dicks, 2008), which positions culture as a display shown to the public. Anas referred to various magnificent costumes in BEC as a 'creativity display' in which young designers could use as a medium to acquire a better level in terms of fashion. The work of the young designers embodied the theme as it presented 'modern packaging' with a very dense ethnic atmosphere. Transformation in BEC is ideally constructed not to leave local cultures. This expression was an ideological guarantee that the richness of local cultures remained alive as the creative young generation continued a take reference for the commodification of glamorous fashion. However, the authors can criticize this claim because most young people in Banyuwangi are believed to be progressively modern and only look at ancestral traditions for certain times, such as when they need creative resources to take inspiration to make fashion.

In the Suaramerdeka news report, Anas was also quoted with 'indirectly, all participants and spectators will learn the history and philosophy of Banyuwangi's local tradition.' Did Anas and his apparatuses base this claim on research? Was it just an assumption to gain the support of residents and cultural practitioners? Was it to campaign for the privileges of BEC to the readers of online news media? The authors have not found any research that could support the claim. The authors believe such a claim was as an effort to emphasize the discourse of BEC's cultural and historical impact with a particular theme each year. It was customary at the end of his statement; Anas said, 'the authors teach history creatively.' Indeed, the theme would echo the name of Blambangan Kingdom and encouraged fashion designers to re-read history related to figures and events. However, whether they and the spectators continue to learn history after the event, it needs further research, not just a claim.

### Discourses of Unique Event

Exposing the unique event during BEC also added to the excitement of the news narrative so that readers would click on online news media. In BEC 2016, Bangsaonline.com, based on an official statement of the Tourism and Culture Office, reported that in this event, 40 *bule*, a local term for white foreigners, would walk along the street catwalk wearing traditional customs. They were either tourists on vacation in Banyuwangi or employees of travel agencies in Bali. The official said, 'the authors

deliberately invited international travel agencies in Bali so that they could participate in promoting BEC as a tourist attraction of Banyuwangi. They are very enthusiastic' (Bangsaonline.com., 2016).

The Online media created the discourse on the significance of foreign tourists through official statements. Foreign tourists' presence would undoubtedly prove that the government was seriously working on cultural events that can attract international attention. For Banyuwangi residents and Indonesian readers, especially those who still positioned white foreigners as superior, the presence of 40 white tourists was certainly quite convincing. Meanwhile, for the government, the involvement of tourists and international travel agencies in Bali would positively impact BEC's national and international image. The authors believe It is not extraordinary when the official said the government 'deliberately' invited tourists who were said to be international travel agencies in Bali. If the claim was valid, their presence could promote B-Fest to foreign tourists. However, the authors do not have enough information about these travel agencies, where they came from, their reputation, and other important information to prove their impact on promoting the festivals in global communities. The strategy to accentuate uniqueness made online media journalists no longer pay attention to the important details because the most important thing was to strengthen the construction of neo-exoticism discourse through cultural-transformative events.

### Outstanding Achievements

Presenting the outstanding achievements of B-Fest and their contributions towards the lives of the people and the government also became a crucial discursive strategy with which it reinforces the discourse of neo-exoticism as truth in the tourism industry. The presence of various achievements, excellence, and essential contributions of B-fest in community life and the government's achievements were discursive forces that normalize the significance of transformative cultural events. One of the exposes conducted by online media was the coverage of the UNWTO Awards for Excellence and Innovation in Tourism in 2017. In the news, in addition to show the success, online media also stated positive things related to tourism in Banyuwangi. Kompas.com, for example, included some statements from Slamet Kariyono, Regional Secretary, regarding tourism's contribution to bring positive change in the district.

In the last five years, the tourism sector in Banyuwangi has continued to grow. The visit

of domestic tourists increased sharply by 161%, from 651,500 (2010) to 1,701,230 visitors (2015). Foreign tourists increased by 210% from 13,200 (2010) to 41,000 visitors (2015). The surge in the number of passengers at Blimbingsari Banyuwangi Airport reached 1,308%, from only 7,826 (2011) to 110,234 passengers (2015). Tourism also helped to drive the public economy. Banyuwangi's per capita income, according to the Central Statistics Bureau, increased 62% from Rp 20.8 million (2010) to Rp 33.6 million per capita per year (2014). (Rachmawati, 2016, translated from Indonesian)

The surge in statistics regarding the number of tourists, airplane passengers, and per capita income was publicized because it would generate public appreciation and admiration for the government's achievements under Anas's leadership, particularly in the tourism sector. All the more, these achievements had never happened before Anas's leadership. Indirect comparisons in the news plays a role to strengthen the discourse on the excellence of the tourism industry.

One of the formulas in the discourse the transformation of local culture into neo-exotic products. Thus, the choice of transforming ethnic cultures into various festivals and carnivals was normalize as it positively impacted the government's achievements and the residents' economic development. Furthermore, focusing on tourism activities based on local culture is an appropriate strategy because it has given progress for Banyuwangi.

Nonetheless, it was not enough to expose B-fest's success and positive impact just by taking the bureaucrat's statement into account. Residents who get received a positive impact from their involvement in a tourism-related event also needed to get comprehensive coverage in the news. By Pursuing a more balanced coverage avoided the impression of government order in the news. By reporting on the successes of individuals, news about the positive impact of the tourism industry could bring balance to the discourse, so the public would consider it fair. Related to BEC 2019, *Merdeka.com.*, revealed a story of a local designer as follows.

BEC...is not merely an event to attract domestic and foreign tourists. Furthermore, many economic effects are not only received by big industries such as hotels, restaurants, and airlines. However, ordinary people also got the economic advantage, from homestay owners, street vendors, costume

designers, artists, iron welders, transportation services to parking attendants. Trisy Dewi Sartika (32) is one of the designers of carnival costumes. At first, she only made BEC costumes, but after she had achieved the best costumes in the event, she finally continued getting many orders for carnival events. Not only orders from Banyuwangi but also from outside the city, across the islands, and even abroad. (Albab, 2019, translated from Indonesian)

The news narrative convincingly constructed BEC's positive irrefutable impact, because it does benefit not only big investors, but also local residents. The story of Trisy Dewi Sartika, the costume designer, confirmed that BEC had impacted her fortune directly with "many costume orders", both from Banyuwangi and other cities, even abroad. This affirmation legitimized all the claims of success in the tourism industry, including the contribution to improve the welfare of ordinary people. The individual narratives of Sartika's success normalized the general truth of the policy for transforming local cultures into diverse neo-exotic forms to sustain the tourism industry.

From the explanation above, the authors can understand how the discursive strategy implemented by online news media in reporting and narrating the transformation of local cultures in B-Fest contributed significantly to the construct of neo-exoticism. Neo-exoticism in online media was a group of discourses that prioritize the greatness of local cultural transformation into attractive, elegant, and charming products through fashion carnivals to attract the presence of national and foreign tourists. Various local cultures were positioned as creative sources to create various events that use the carnival mode, reducing their richness of values and philosophy.

Nevertheless, neo-exoticism discourse always placed various transformative displays in the carnival, festival, and other modes as innovative products to introduce local culture widely to tourists and the global community. The ideal discourse complemented this positive claim that the carnival event could develop local cultural values and practices amid modernity and globalization while at the same time disseminating history, aesthetic beauty, and the good values of society from the past. Indeed, in a postcolonial society where modern and global values were the dominant orientation, the flexibility to imitate and adapt to them could help negotiate local culture (Bhabha, 1994). Adopting the carnival mode to transform local cultures was a flexible mechanism to develop them in modern life. However,

when the government prioritized transformative products for tourism purposes, local cultural diversity was only a marker to support their projects' success. As a result, to normalize these interests, wise discourses such as "creativity display" and "learning history" were constructed to show the carnival's contribution to society.

In the end, the three discursive strategies discussed here negated the function of media criticism related to deficiencies, weaknesses, and political-economic interests behind all events. The journalists of online news media appeared to be the 'spokespersons' of the event's successes, which it discursively benefited the ruling regime and marginalized the critical voices of NGO activists and intellectuals. Most online news media coverage used a framework of local cultural transformation as idealized by the government. The uniqueness of local cultures was not enough to be displayed in exotic ways in an authentic-traditional form. Therefore, the creators had to recreate the traditional quality to fit the visual formula by online media so that the exoticism presented can attract tourists to enjoy B-Fest and spend time in the district. Furthermore, this discursive strategy with a new framework of local cultural transformation reinforced the construction of neo-exoticism with the primary objective of promoting and supporting the tourism industry.

This raised concerns about the erosion of one of the press functions, i.e. to criticizing and controlling government policies. As a result, the government did not get criticism and continued to input on its programs. However, this fact showed that it was easier to strengthen discourse and practices of neo-exoticism under state control. It was no longer a taboo for local cultures to be transformed into various forms of fashion or carnival events, although they had been substantially changed. No matter how often the ruling regime said that transformation-based cultural tourism events would not reduce the substance of ethnicity, the reality proved that glamorous events, in the end, will only present visual beauty to support the tourism industry. Although The interest in neo-exotic displayed in transformative cultural events directed by the state regime and disseminated by online news media did indeed encourage the interest of tourists, mainly domestic, to come to Banyuwangi.

## **Neo-Exoticism: Normalizing Tourism Regime**

Implementing various local cultural-based tourism agendas, both in a visual transformation format that relied on the carnival model and the preservation prescribed, was an effort by the district and central government to

maximize the economic benefits of the tourism industry. The government consciously placed the tourism sector as one of the flagships to increase the country's foreign exchange. This choice was inseparable from the significant contribution of the tourism industry to the Indonesian economy. Institute for Economy and Society Research, Faculty of Economy and Business, University of Indonesia (2019) explained that in 2017, the tourism and travel sector directly contributed 19.4 billion US \$ to gross domestic income, with a growth of 5.2% in 2018. The total contribution of the tourism and travel sector in 2017 was 58.9 billion US \$ to gross domestic income, with a growth of 5.8% in 2018. Usually, the National Development Planning Agency launched the 2014-2019 Ministry of Tourism Strategic Design as a strategic reference for developing the tourism industry (Sujai, 2016, pp. 69-70). The types of prioritized tourism were nature tourism (marine, ecology, and adventure), cultural and religious tourism, ancestral heritage, culinary and shopping, city and village tourism, and MICE tours (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions).

The Indonesian government have been making strategic efforts to continue making policies, promoting potential tourism at national and international levels, as well as organizing various tourism agendas that can be economically beneficial. The government, thus, becomes a tourism regime that, with its authority, can make policies and carry out various tourism activities and move its apparatus to succeed in idealized tourism agendas that can provide welfare to citizens. Since the tourism industry requires significant funds, not just community support, the government often cooperates with private investors to support the provision of tourism facilities. On the other hand, private investors can also manage profitable destinations and tourism activities and increase income for both local and central governments. Thus, the tourism regime also brings together the interests of the State and private investors to maximize the benefits of various tourism destinations and activities. In this meeting point, the government and the private sector need promotion through various media to attract tourists.

Online media is one of the options to promote the diversity of natural and cultural tourism in an area due to its speed principle. On the other hand, online news media also requires advertising, both from the government and the private sector. This mutualistic relationship makes online media journalists quickly report various cultural tourism events and attractive natural destinations. Thus, online news media becomes discursive apparatus of tourism regimes that play a significant role in spreading neo-exoticism to attract the coming of tourists, both

domestic and foreign.

Adopting a monopoly of knowledge framework (Louw, 2001), the construction and mobilization of neo-exoticism discourse provide readers with information, in this case, about the beauty and greatness of various cultural tourism events held in Banyuwangi to bring more and more tourists so that the tourism industry can develop rapidly. Therefore, journalists must accept some conventions when reporting tourism activities in Banyuwangi. Thus, it was expected that in most online news media news about B-Fest, there were no shortcomings, weaknesses, or problems reported.

Not only reporting a variety of neo-exotic cultural tourism held in Banyuwangi, but online media also exposed the relationship between the government and the private sector as part of the tourism regime. An emerging characteristic is how strategic cooperation in investment continued to promote aspects of ethnicity in Banyuwangi. In the news about launching a 4-star hotel, El Royal Hotel, for example, Merdeka.com reported as follows.

Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas invited investors to campaign for local culture in his investment project. This campaign was conveyed by Anas while attending the soft launching of El Royal Hotel in Kabat Subdistrict Wednesday (5/24).

'The names of the rooms also use Banyuwangi, such as Using villa. The music is also Banyuwangi. So that it can become a campaign of Banyuwangi culture ...,' said Anas.

Meanwhile, the Supporting General Manager of El Royal Hotel, Iwan Sumantri, added that his hotel also served Banyuwangi culinary specialties.

'Almost in all aspects, the authors adopt the local identity of Banyuwangi. The authors also present Ijen Resto with a variety of culinary specialties Banyuwangi, so that it can be known to the people who come here,' said Sumantri. (Albab, 2017)

What is interesting about the news above is Anas's invitation to investors to 'campaign for local culture in his investment project.' The statement showed his partiality towards local culture amid the tourism industry investment which he was promoting at that time. He advertised the richness of local culture as a communal identity the hotel guests need to know and to get more information about the unique Using cultures. The image of a leader who cares about local culture emerged in the news. Moreover, Anas also signalled that private investment in the hotel industry was vital for society

because they obeyed to the "rules" to bring ethnic trinkets into their various activities.

Presenting the opinion of the Supporting General Manager of El Royal Hotel was also an attempt to construct a discourse about investors' concern for local culture. The Manager's statements, 'served Banyuwangi culinary specialties' and 'almost all aspects, the authors adopted the local identity of Banyuwangi.' were a discursive effort to strengthen the position of investors in the eyes of the Banyuwangi community and readers. Even though they were looking for profits from the tourism business, they still appeared to have a cultural awareness; even to campaign for it by presenting local culinary delights and adopting local identities. However, if the authors return to the trend of ethnicity and traditional colours in the tourism industry, government actions and investor concern for local cultures were economically beneficial. Many tourists would stay in hotels with Using nuances. in such a position, neo-exotic colors became a cultural power to realize economic motivation. In other words, a discursive strategy to construct the discourse of harmony between governments and private investors in campaigning for local culture and asserting their unity in the tourism regime also showed the normalization of exploitation and the commodification of local cultural assets that need not be a concern.

In the context of the tourism industry, which requires significant capital and synergy between investors and the government, neo-exoticism discourses flexibly use various forms of ethnic culture in society that originate from past expressions that were marginalized in the colonial period as a commercial formula to attract tourist arrivals. The government of Banyuwangi transformed local culture into carnivals and festivals. The owners of hotels in Banyuwangi used local culture as unique ornaments that could give an ethnic atmosphere. By revealing the logic of developing a local culture in the hotel industry, which is growing well in the tourism industry, commodification is a mechanism for investors to get government support and will also benefit from the industry's growth.

To further emphasize the importance of transforming localities into the tourism and hospitality industry, the government had always put forward the discourse on the economic benefits of increasing communal income. In public discourse written by many online media, Anas and the Banyuwangi government apparatus always said that the tourism sector and the service industry can have a direct economic impact on the community, so that they, too, can improve welfare and reduce unemployment (Akmal, 2017; Affandi,

2019; Tessar, 2018). This exposure played a vital role in informing the public that the tourism activities developed during Anas' leadership positively impacted the community. In addition, many studies with data sources from government officials, local government statistics, and individuals who benefited from the tourism sector in Banyuwangi also confirmed the increase in income received by the local government and individual service business owners. Many studies concluded that the growth of the Banyuwangi tourism industry, which combined cultural and natural tourism, could improve the welfare of residents (Fahad & Endrayadi, 2017; Mukaffi, 2020; Imaniar & Wahyudiono, 2019; Ardiansyah, Rizari, & Hamid, 2020; 'Aini, 2019; Sadi, 2019). The adoption of the government's public discourses on economic growth in online media news and academic research indicated that neo-exoticism, which emphasizes the use of various local cultures with the principle of transformation for supporting the tourism industry, became a regime of truth. This reality paved the way for strengthening and normalizing the tourism regime.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, the authors have shown how Indonesian online news media, based on the case in Banyuwangi, constructed neo-exoticism as a group of discourses on the transformation of local cultures by magnifying and privileging discourses related to cultural events. Our findings show that neo-exoticism was no longer limited to popularizing discourses of local cultures' authenticity, but discourses of commodified-transformative products which appropriated global modes, such as carnivals and festivals. Online news media contributed significant neo-exoticism discourses on the luxury of the transformative products of local cultures in the form of carnivals and the positive contribution of cultural tourism events to the preservation of local cultures. Further, online news media also constructed discourses on youth involvement in cultural events, the impact of the event on the improvement of the people's economy, and the direct economic impact of the tourism industry in improving the regional economy.

The massive dissemination of neo-exoticism through online media and academic studies was a part of the formation for socializing and normalizing cultural tourism with transformative mode and its cultural-economic impact. The dissemination of neo-exoticism discourse certainly had a practical purpose of informing the public about cultural uniqueness adapted to global patterns, so, more people would like and support various

creative works in the form of carnivals, festivals, and other forms of glamor. Furthermore, people would be more familiar with the tourism regime driven by the synergy of the government and investors. They would not question or criticize it, because of the positive discourses that continued to be constructed and disseminated through various online media.

The discourses of neo-exoticism in Indonesian online media intertwined with tourism's economic interests, which involved government and private sector's collaboration. In such conditions, various exotic cultural values and practices that should be a strategic and practical force to strengthen the national aspect amid post-colonial conditions (Huggan, 2001) turned out to be massively and transformatively commodified by government and private regimes in order to reap economic benefits. Arguments regarding the government's ability to collaborate with the private sector and cross-bureaucratic cooperation were often accompanied by the discourse on economic growth achievements (Fahad & Endrayadi, 2017; Harmawan et al., 2022; Irawan, 2015). However, when the media and academics focused too much on economic achievements in cultural tourism in Banyuwangi, the neglect of the substance of philosophical values as communal ties that had been existing in various local cultures will slowly but surely be neglected. Why? Because as shown in this paper, cultural tourism policies and programs such as BEC only created a visually appealing fashion look. At that point, the constructions of various local culture's philosophical values and knowledge will only serve as lip service to avoid accusations of commodification and exploitation of local culture.

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